Percy Jackson, Ambassador of Hades

by Takara Phoenix

Summary

After Sally married Gabe, Poseidon could hear his son's pain. Unlike in canon, the god doesn't turn a blind eye on the man abusing his former lover and his only demigod son, so he goes and gets Percy out of there.

But where would he be safe? Amphitrite would kill the child if Poseidon brought him down under the sea and everywhere else, he'd risk Zeus' wrath.

So Poseidon goes and asks Hades for a favor. To take the boy in and hide him in the underworld, shielded from the curious eyes of others. Hades agrees, under the condition that one day, Percy would marry one of Hades' children.

So Percy grows up in the underworld, raised and trained by Hades and his underworld council. When the Titan War approaches, Hades frees Nico and Bianca from the Lotus Hotel, but Hades' and Poseidon's deal changes so many more than just Percy's life. Bianca becomes the head huntress and Nico becomes a celebrated hero at Camp Half-Blood.

What happens when Hades sends Percy to camp, as his ambassador, to help Bianca and
Nico in their quest for the Sea of Monsters...?
Prologue: Two Promises

Title: Percy Jackson, Ambassador of Hades – The Reign of the Underworld

Fandom: Percy Jackson and the Olympians / Heroes of Olympus; twisted version of PJatO

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Warnings: shounen-ai, fluff, explicit intercourse, anal, oral, mpreg, arranged marriage, canon divergent, brief mentioning of child-abuse, shoujo-ai, hetero, threesome

Main Pairing: Nico/Percy

Side Pairings: Frank/Hazel/Leo, Reyna/Annabeth, Luke/Octavian, Ethan/Alabaster, Jake/Will, Damian/Liam, Sirius/Aurora, Grover/Juniper, Chris/Clarisse, Charles/Silena, Shane/Lacy, Malcolm/Katie, Jason/Calypso, Nathan/Gwen, Dakota/Leila, Bryce/Drew, Hades/Persephone, Thanatos/Triton, Ares/Aphrodite, Zeus/Hera, Paul/Sally

Percy Jackson Characters:


Hunters of Artemis: Zoe Nightshade, Bianca di Angelo, Phoebe Burge, Celyn Richards, Naomi Walters, Thalia Grace, Hylla Ramírez-Arellano, Piper McLean

Camp Jupiter: Bryce Lawrence, Octavian Simmons, Hazel Levesque, Jason Grace, Gwen Ryder, Nathan McIntosh, Dakota Elle, Leila Fisher, Mike Kahale, Tempest, Arion

Mortal Characters: Sally Jackson, Paul Blofis, Laura Blofis (OFC)

Own (Greek) Demigods: Liam O'Riley (Hecate), Aurora Desrosiers (Hypnos), Sirius O'Rinn (Morpheus), Lilian Martin (Morpheus), Damian Sturm (Eris), Robyn Pryde (Hermes)


Summary: Poseidon knew about Gabe's abuse and he did not leave his son in the hands of this man. But he couldn't take Percy to the sea either, knowing his own wife would rather see the child dead than raise him herself. So he strikes a bargain with Hades – Hades would protect the child and in return, Percy would one day become the consort of one of Hades' hidden children, the di Angelos. Hades agrees and takes the boy in, raising him in the underworld.
When Percy turns thirteen, Hades sends him to Camp Half-Blood to aid Nico and Bianca on the quest in the Sea of Monsters. Percy Jackson, ambassador of Hades, changes the history, mixing things up that were not supposed to be mixed up at this point in time. Like Romans, for example.

**Percy Jackson, Ambassador of Hades**

*The Reign of the Underworld*

*Prologue: Two Promises*

1999 had an abnormally high number of storms and devastation caused by the sea, making many humans curse the weather. The reason for that was a simple one. Lord Poseidon, king and ruler over the sea and its storms, was seething. He had recently learned of his last lover's new marriage.

Apparently Sally Jackson had deemed it a good idea to marry a man named Gabriel Ugliano only a year ago. Normally, Poseidon didn't much care for the new love-life of his mortal lovers, just wishing them to find a happy ending of their own, keeping out of their business.

However, a couple of months after the wedding, Poseidon had been woken from his sleep by a merciless cry that had torn his dreams apart. The desperation of his only demigod son.

Following the call, he had ended up in a shabby, little apartment to find a disgusting man with a bottle of beer in one hand and a belt in the other, slurring insults at the merely six years old boy in front of him, who was already crying desperately. The little child, so cute and innocent, was curled together in himself, trying to hide from the pain and the insults.

Needless to say, the NYPD would be investigating a strange case of drowning on shore and inside a locked apartment the next day. A locked room mystery that would forever stay one.

Once the abusive man was taken care of, Poseidon's focus laid on the crying child. He leaned down, eyes filled with pain because of his son's pain, reaching out for the child slowly. He had the boy gathered in his arms all too soon, hugging him so tightly like he never wanted to let him go again.

"Sh, my boy, everything will be alright again, my little Perseus", cooed Poseidon softly.

He was clutching the little child like a life-line, trying to soothe the tears away. The young boy had already fallen asleep, but even in his sleep, he was still crying. Poseidon was furious. He knew demigod children were endangered in the mortal world, but he would have never thought that Sally would bring that danger into the house. What had she been thinking? That the disgusting stench of the bastard would cover Percy's smell so monster couldn't find him? Was that really worth it? Just so she could desperately cling to the boy and keep him close? No, Poseidon would not let his child be harmed and he would not let Percy stay one more day in this place. He couldn't risk Sally finding another ridiculous way of keeping Percy save from the mythological monsters. Not while there were other, very real monsters out in the mortal world too.

There was only one problem. Where else was Percy supposed to stay? Poseidon knew he could not bring his son down to the underwater palace near Atlantis. Out of various reasons. If Zeus were to learn about Poseidon breaking the oath of the three brothers, he would smite the boy right away, especially so if Percy was staying in the palace, because Zeus would get the impression that Poseidon was raising a powerful demigod heir. Not that Percy would live long enough to indulge in that wrath, because Poseidon's wife Amphitrite would most likely kill the boy at sight. She had never been too fond of Poseidon's affairs or children. Triton too posed a possible danger.
Poseidon's heir was more than only jealous of demigods.

So Poseidon did the only possible thing he could think of.

"You know it's polite to give a little warning before barging into someone's palace."

Poseidon looked up – he practically had to tear his gaze off his son at this point, because Percy had finally fallen into a peaceful slumber and he looked like an angel, snuggled up to his father's chest like that, drooling a little. When Poseidon finally did look up, he stared into the expressionless face of his older brother. Hades was slumped in his throne made of bones, looking bored.

"I need your help, brother", whispered Poseidon softly and walked up to Hades.

"I gathered as much. You never just come over for tea", teased the lord of the dead and frowned, noticing the child in his brother's arms. "Who is that? An offering? Oh, but you didn't have to!"

"That's... my son, Perseus Jackson", introduced Poseidon, observing the shift in Hades' face. "I—I know we had an oath, but I just... Now it's too late. He is here and... I need your help."

"I am not explaining that to Zeus", huffed Hades and shook his head.

"No! I don't want that either!", exclaimed Poseidon with panicked eyes. "I remember all too vividly how he had reacted to your last two children... even though they had been conceived before our oath. I come to you, because... I know that unlike our brother, you care for your offsprings. So do I. His mother was living with an abusive man and I can't let him stay there. But... I can't raise him myself either. We both know that Zeus never visits the underworld."

"You're asking us to raise your bastard", stated Hades, looking somewhere between amused and offended. "What would make you think that I would play part in this charade?"

"Because I know that when Zeus threatened to harm your children, you were willing to take them and their mother down here. I... don't know where they are now, but I'm certain you found a way to keep them safe, because you love your children. I know, even though no one else may believe that the heartless lord of the underworld would be capable of such a thing", continued Poseidon, his gaze firm. "I love Percy with all of my heart and I want to know him safe. I know he will be safe here, with you. I know you can protect him, I know as long as he stays down here, no one has to know that he even exists. I know... you will watch over him, like you watched over me once upon a time. I'm not asking this of you out of the goodness of your heart either. I'm aware that every favor has a price. I know your two children, a boy and a girl, they're still alive somewhere and I know you keep them hidden until the Great Prophecy will unravel itself. We all know that this day has gradually come closer. You want the children of the underworld to be the heroes, the grand victors. The kind that earned themselves godhood, like mine and Zeus' children before. I promise Percy to one of your children, as an eternal consort. Percy is my son, the son of the sea. He can bless either of your children with heirs, once the time arrives. And as their consort, he will fight at their side. The union of the sea and the underworld, if that is not a safe bet for them to become heroes, I don't know what else could be. That is my offer. Do you accept or refuse?"

Poseidon spoke with a firm voice, but Hades could see the fear in his eyes. The fear that Hades would say no. The lord of the dead frowned and took the boy that was offered to him like a puppy. Chubby cheeks of a young child, rosy lips, the most messed-up, dark hair and... The boy woke up, slowly, blinking a couple of times and staring up at Hades curiously. With those eyes. Those eyes that clashed somewhere between green and blue, like the raging sea during a storm, filled to the brim with endless emotions and the wonder that only an innocent, little child could ever truly express.
In all his years, Hades had met a lot of heroes who resembled their godly parents to various
degrees, but this boy was something else entirely. He was the splitting image of his father. The
way the child looked up at Hades was the exact same way as Poseidon had looked at him all those
many years ago, when Kronos had first swallowed Poseidon. Hades had been the first of the
siblings to reach the little boy and he had cradled him to his chest in a quite similar way as he now
found himself with Perseus. Back then, it had filled him with amazement and joy – after all, all he
had known until then had been his three annoying, big sisters. He wasn't the youngest anymore
and he wasn't the only boy anymore. Back then, he had promised himself to protect this little boy
under all circumstances. And now, looking into those eyes, he found himself startled to realize that
he was willing to do the same all over again. To once again raise a most likely stubborn, little brat
and do everything in his powers to keep this child happy and safe.

"Yes", breathed Hades, barely a sound to the word, but for Poseidon, it was like a scream in the
endless silence of his concerns. "I agree. I promise you, I'll keep your son safe and once he
reaches the right age, he will become the consort to either Bianca or Nico. Whichever of them
picks him."

Hades grunted at the sudden force of Poseidon's hug, but Poseidon really didn't care. He had
known he could rely on his brother. After all, Hades had raised him to be the god he was now.
Poseidon knew Hades had a soft spot for children, even though most may snort at the mere notion
of that.

"Thank you, I... can't express how much", whispered Poseidon as he released Hades.

"Don't thank me yet", warned Hades with a frown. "Thank me when Zeus finds out about our
children and I actually manage to keep them from certain death."

Poseidon offered his older brother a bitter smile before turning to Percy and leaning down to kiss
the boy's forehead. "I love you, my son. And I will always love you. I... won't be able to visit you,
because it may raise suspicions, but... I know you will be safe here. I hope to see you again."

The boy had long since fallen back asleep again, nearly the instant he had looked at Hades,
actually. Hades didn't know if he should be relieved that the boy wasn't threatened by his presence
or offended. As he watched his brother leave, there was a nostalgic and nearly bittersweet feeling
in the pit of Hades' stomach. It reminded him of the way he had left the Lotus Hotel all those years
ago, knowing that what he did, he had to do to keep Bianca and Nico alive.

"I will raise you to be a proper and good boy", declared Hades, shifting the sleeping child some.
"And one day, you will become the husband of Bianca. Or the wife of Nico. But let's not dwell
on that yet, it will be some years until you meet my children."

"You know you could at least ask me before you adopt a child", accused a voice from behind.

Persephone sauntered into the throne room, looking less than thrilled, but more than beautiful, as
she always did. Flowers braided into her long, hazelnut brown hair, her silken dress green as the
fresh grass on a spring's morning. Anger only made her look more beautiful. But only until she
cought sight of the adorable, little boy nestled against her husband's chest. The moment she laid
eyes on the child, her irritation melted away. Well, at least it wasn't one of Hades' bastards.
Stepping up to them, she combed her fingers through his messy but soft, dark hair. He was kind of
cute, even adorable in the way he was leaning into her touch, like a young kitten that wanted a
petting, looking all content as he was snuggled up to Hades. A child would make this gloomy
place more lively.

"If you want, I can also feed him to Zerberus", offered Hades, both knowing he wouldn't do it.
"Oh, Zerberus will love to have a new playmate", grinned Persephone. "And what little boy wouldn't want a three-headed dog as a pet? This boy is going to have an extraordinaire childhood."

"I'm sure of that", nodded Hades in agreement. "So, if that means you are okay with him staying here, would you mind calling in a council meeting?"

"Oh yes! To introduce our little prince here to the others!", agreed Persephone delighted.

"Not the best of ideas. We shouldn't overwhelm the poor child on his first day down here", countered Hades, shifting the sleeping boy. "Wouldn't you agree, Perseus?"

"Perseus? You are too cute to be a Perseus, little one", whispered Persephone amused. "But yes, you're right. We should take it slow with the boy, introduce him to things one by one."

"I'll just put him to bed and then I'll join you in the Great Hall", whispered Hades, kissing his wife's cheek briefly and adjusting Perseus again. "Let's get you to bed and hope you're not as much of a little trouble-magnet and mischief-maker as your father was at your age."

Zeus was not the only god with a council. The underworld was as important a realm as Olympus itself and just like Zeus, Hades too was a king. And just like Zeus, Hades had a council of twelve gods to rule with him and tend to the dead. Now he would have to explain to his fellow underworld gods why a little child – a child of the sea nonetheless – would be living down here, with them.

But before Hades could take care of them or bother to find an explanation for any of this, he had a sleepy, little demigod to tend to. And he had to change his drool-soaked robes, because the feared lord of the underworld could not walk around with a drool-stain on his shoulder.
Chapter 1: Prince of the Underworld

Hades frowned skeptically down at the sleeping child. He had taken Perseus to the empty chambers closest to his and Persephone's, anticipating that the boy would need a lot of care at the beginning. Now however, Hades found himself unsure how to proceed. He could hardly leave the child alone. If Percy was to wake up, he wasn't just in a completely foreign and strange place, no, there was also the chance of Percy running into a ghost or ghoul – and that could frighten the child for life, if he wasn't prepared for such an encounter first. However, he had a council meeting to attend.

“Brother. My beloved daughter just called me and told me you have a sudden case of parenthood. And that I was to keep it to myself. Needless to say, I had to see for myself”, interrupted the slightly irritated voice of Demeter him, though the irritation was replaced with astonishment when she saw the sleeping child. “He's... Poseidon's. There is no denying that. But…”

“I made a promise to our brother, to keep this child safe. I'd appreciate it if you would refrain from telling Zeus and Hera about the little one”, stated Hades in his most neutral voice.

The agricultural goddess placed a tender hand on Percy's cheek, the boy leaning into the soft touch. “Such a sweet, little angel. Of course not. Knowing our baby brother, he'll do something ridiculous and stupid. Throughout history, his and Poseidon's children have proven to be our strongest assets in any fight. The oath... I never fully agreed with it. It puts us into more danger than it does us good.”

Hades nodded in silent agreement before a thought occurred to him. “Would you mind staying with him and watching over him? I have a council meeting with the other gods and I'd rather not have a ghoul babysit the little one. The child has been asleep ever since our brother brought him here and I can only anticipate his reaction upon waking up…”

“Oh, it's been a while since I took care of a babe like him”, laughed Demeter, motherly fondness evident in her voice as she sat down on the bed next to the child. “What's his name, Hades?”

“Perseus Jackson”, replied Hades before he turned around and left the chambers again.

The Council of the Underworld considered, just like the Olympic Council, of twelve gods. The head of the council was the king himself – Hades. Together with his queen, Persephone. The other ten members were sitting in a circle on the smaller thrones in the meeting hall. Thanatos, god of non-violent deaths, was sitting at Hades' right. His right hand. The tall, dark-skinned god was frowning curiously at his king, intrigued what this may be about. After Thanatos came Olethros, the other side of the coin. The god of violent deaths. He had
something cruel in his eyes, a sneer on his sickly pale face as he looked at Hades interested.

Left to Olethros was Horkos, the god of oaths. Since all holy oaths referred to the underworld, it was only fit for the god of oaths to call the underworld his home. That aside, his Roman aspect Orcus was the god of punishment. He was a strict and solemn guy, always serious.

Morpheus next to him was playing with his nearly black blanket, deep in thoughts, as so often.

On Morpheus' other side was Hypnos, deep asleep as always. After all, he was the god of sleep.

The female round began from there on out, starting with Nemesis, the goddess of revenge.

She was followed by her sisters, first the goddess of magic, Hecate herself, and then the goddess of hatred, Styx, a river nymph but a goddess all the same. The three sisters were whispering to themselves, throwing glances at their king and queen while talking in hushed voices.

The last two members of their council were the daughters of Hades and Persephone – Melinoe, goddess of ghosts, and Makaria, a minor goddess of death. Both deadly and sadistic to a max.

“What are we all doing here?”, asked Thanatos, his voice a soft and dark rumble.

“Before I can tell you that, I will need Horkos and Styx to take an oath from all of you”, stated Hades, sitting tall and proud in his throne. “To never speak a word of what is being said in here to anyone outside of this circle. This secret must remain within the underworld forever.”

The minor gods exchanged curious looks at that. This level of secrecy was rare for their king.

“You're not going to pull a Disney after all, are you?”, asked Hecate with a frown. “Overthrowing your brother on Olympus and taking over the world. Because I'm not down with that just yet.”

It didn't even earn her a smile from the king or at least an annoyed eye-roll. They knew he was being serious. So the god of oaths took an oath on the river Styx, with Styx herself present to validate it. This was the highest and most unbreakable form of oath possible.

“My nephew Perseus Jackson will be living in the palace from now on”, stated Hades firmly. “He will be under my personal protection and thus, I also expect all of you to do your utmost to protect the boy from any harm. Or from being discovered. Zeus is not to know about his existence.”

“You're taking in strays now, dad?”, complained Makaria, wrinkling her eyebrows.

“Be nice. He's your new brother”, chided Persephone seriously, making it clear that she supported Hades in this unorthodox decision. “The boy is merely a child who has done nothing wrong yet and still life has already left him scarred. Protecting him will give us a great alliance with Poseidon. Losing him will bring us the full wrath of Poseidon.”

Understanding gleamed in the eyes of the other gods as they took in what was being said. Hades stood. He knew they needed to digest this. Never before had a demigod lived in the underworld. Attempted to break in, yes. But actually been invited to live here? A son of Poseidon at that. They needed to discuss this in private and he was itching to get back to the sleeping child.

/break/
Hades cursed his childish eagerness, wondering where it had come from to begin with. The boy was out cold and even three hours later, Hades was still sitting next to a sleeping boy. Still, Hades wanted to be there when the boy opened his eyes again. If only for the chance to look into them once more. It was true that Perseus was the splitting image of Poseidon, but he was also so much more. Nowadays, when Hades would look into Poseidon's eyes, he saw thousands and thousands of years of pain, fighting and losing his demigod-children. But this boy, he had the same eyes as Poseidon once had. Still filled with innocence and childish curiosity. And mischief. Hades had seen a startling amount of mischief in those sea-green depths. He knew the boy was trouble.

“Mommy...?”

Hades would forever deny it, but he jumped like a little girl who had seen a ghost. The sudden, soft voice had actually startled the scary god of the underworld. Frowning annoyed by that, he turned to the sleepy boy. The frown melted instantly. Percy was clumsily rubbing his eyes, looking around confused, his bed-hair even more of a mess than it had been before his sleep. He was adorable.

“Your... mother is not here, Perseus”, started Hades, unsure how to have this conversation.

“Where's she?”, asked Percy innocently, looking confused up at Hades. “Did Gabe sell me?”

“W—What?”, stammered Hades, thrown off by that casual statement.

“He says if I'm no good, he will sell me away”, frowned Percy, now rather upset.

“No, child”, interrupted Hades hastily, not sure if he could deal with the child if the boy was to start crying now. “You haven't been sold, Perseus. What a horrible notion. Do you perhaps remember the man that was with you before you fell asleep? The dark-haired one with the beard.”

“He smelt nice”, nodded Percy slowly, sitting up. “Like the ocean. I like the ocean lots.”

Hades made a mental note to see to it that Percy would get a tutor in English – age was no excuse for poor grammar, after all. “That was your father. He... saw that this Gabe treated you bad, so he took you away from there. To keep you safe. You'll be staying with me now.”

“You lie”, frowned Percy upset. “I don't have a dad. Gabe says I'm a bastard, that means I don't have a dad because my dad doesn't love me enough to want me.”

Hades felt the ice-cold rage only a god of death could build up flaring inside his chest – itching to kill the man who put such vile things into this innocent child's head. Instead of clinging to this rage however, Hades took a deep breath and scooted closer, putting a hand on Percy's head.

“He lied to you, Perseus”, whispered Hades, unusually tender. “Your father loves you more than anything. But... he can't keep you. That's why he left you with your mother, because he thought you'd be loved, protected and cared for. When he realized his mistake – that this horrible man did and said horrible things to you – he decided to take you away from there. He still... can't keep you, little one. That's why he brought you to me. I'm your father's brother. Your uncle. I promised your dad that I will keep you safe, little one. I promise you that I will keep you safe.”

Percy was still frowning, still looked distrusting. “But... mommy...?”

“Your mother is fine. This is the best for both of you”, promised Hades, pulling the boy into a hug that surprised Hades even more than it surprised Percy. “We'll do everything to fix this, Perseus.”

“We'll see to all of that at a later date”, said Hades cautiously. “For now, let's tend to you.”

Hecate easily became Percy's new favorite aunt, because with her magic, she redecorated the chambers to the very wishes of the boy. Percy was sitting on his bed, together with who had introduced themselves as his new sisters – Melinoe and Makaria, both in the eternal appearance of teenaged girls and both of a certain pale beauty. The goddesses were sitting on either side of him, slowly growing fond of Percy as the boy awed and owed at every magic trick, his sea-green eyes sparkling and gleaming with so much excitement. It was adorable.

“Blue!”, exclaimed Percy, clapping his hand. “Make it bluer!”

Which, basically, was the main-theme. By now everything was blue and the interior design had been fitted for a small child. Hecate smiled amused as she obeyed the boy's demand. She knew the boy would be dangerous one day, because she could see the way that bright-eyed little boy was already affecting the gods of the underworld and that after not even one day. Given the time, he would have them all wrapped around his little finger. A brilliant laughter rippled from the child's throat as Hecate animated the waves on the walls into moving.

“I don't wanna go to bed.”

It had been a month now that Percy was living in the underworld and so far, it had been relatively easy. Between Demeter (who had practically moved in to get to cuddle the little boy), Persephone, Hecate, Makaria and Melinoe, Percy was being coddled and easily distracted from worrying about where he was or why he didn't have to go to preschool anymore. Whenever the topic scratched his mother, the gods did everything to distract him again. Now however, Hades had reached a new barrier. Percy had nightmares. About his stepfather and what the man had done to him. Hades liked children, but aside from Melinoe and Makaria, he had never raised a child – and those two had been a couple thousand years ago too. He had no idea how to comfort a child.

“I know you have bad dreams, Perseus”, whispered Hades, caressing Percy's hair. “So I asked two friends of mine to help you. Those are Hypnos and Morpheus, don't worry, they won't harm you.”

Hypnos and Morpheus entered, albeit the god of dreams had to support the already half-asleep other god. Percy frowned and wanted to protest, but with a gentle touch from Hypnos, the boy was out like a candle. Hades wasn't sure if it was cheating or parenting, but he was the damn king of the underworld and he would not spend another council meeting accidentally falling asleep because his young charge had been sneaking into his and Persephone's bed for four days with nightmares. He was not above cheating. Morpheus smiled gently down at the child before he placed a special, dark-blue blanket over him, securing Percy's dreams to be sweet and good.

“This is a one-time deal, Hades”, warned Morpheus. “If he loses the blanket, or if you decide to take in more stays, I won't help you again. I'm only doing this because when an innocent child has
to endure nightmares like those, it... pains me.”

“Sleep must be peaceful”, yawned Hypnos in agreement.

Hades nodded and leaned down to place a last kiss on Percy's forehead.

Percy was frowning upset as he was laying upside-down on his bed, head hanging over the edge. Learning was boring, boring, boring. Uncle Horkos was always so serious and talking about boring stuff like books and things that happened so long ago. And math. Percy wrinkled his nose. He disliked math. Not as much as English though. Greek was easy, but Horkos also made him read English and that made his head hurt. He didn't like it.

“Perseus, are you listening?”, interrupted Horkos' voice the boy's thoughts.

Percy jumped slightly and stared at him startled. “Uhm... yes?”

Horkos arched one unimpressed eyebrow at that. The boy was a gentle and sweet soul, but a horrible student. He knew why Hades had requested him to be Percy's private teacher. Not just because unlike most other gods in the underworld, Horkos didn't have so many active duties and thus more free time, but also because like his oaths, he took everything quite serious. By now, Percy had been with them for half a year and Horkos couldn't believe how many basic things the boy was lacking. He was struggling to read or even speak properly at times. Hades had taken the boy in to protect him, but under the aspect of Percy one day becoming the consort of Hades' heir, he also wanted the boy to be well educated and trained in various aspects.

Another aspect, one that Percy enjoyed far more, was being covered by Nemesis. The goddess of revenge taught Percy how to fight. From one-on-one to swords and, if she would have a say in the matter, also guns. Persephone had forbidden her from teaching him how to shoot a gun because he was only six. Nemesis would say that this was a ridiculous argument, but she obeyed her queen.

“When it comes to fighting, it's always a rivalry. Which is my realm”, smiled Nemesis wickedly. “But it's not just about that. I'm the goddess of revenge, but you can not let it get to that point. Because when you seek revenge, you already lost the previous fight. Never let your opponent tip the balance of the fight. Always keep it even, or if possible, tip it to your favor.”

Percy nodded obediently, feeling the heavy weight of Riptide in his hands. Hades had given him the sword a month ago – a present from his dad, Hades had said. Percy accepted it happily. It was strange, after six months, he already felt like his life in New York, with his mother and stepfather, was no more than a faint memory, while this right now and right here was his real life.

“You're getting better, little prince”, praised Nemesis impressed as Percy dodged her.

He smiled brightly at that praise, brightening the whole area. It mesmerized Nemesis. She had valued the underworld for its darkness, but somehow the light Percy had brought into it was so different and refreshing that she couldn't help but love it.

And she wasn't the only one. Albeit the others may not have known it, but Styx was the one who valued Percy's presence the most probably. She and her sisters were the river nymphs of the underworld, separated from any other source of water. A river's yearning was to end into the ever-free ocean. To have the ocean's child here was literally reviving for the river nymph.
“This is fun, auntie Stick”, whispered Percy in total awe.

He couldn't pronounce 'Styx' properly yet so he had taken to calling her Stick. She only let it slide because his level of adorableness was downright ridiculous. Unlike Nemesis and Horkos, she taught the boy the one thing that was truly valuable. At least for a son of Poseidon. To control his powers. Hades wanted the boy to be clever and schooled, to be able to fight and defend himself, but he also didn't want to neglect that the most important part of a demigod was his legacy. The river nymph was the best bet to train Percy in using his powers. The raw might of a child of Poseidon was overwhelming and Styx knew that with the right guidance, Percy could become the most powerful demigod she had ever encountered. And she had encountered many.

It was on Percy's seventh birthday that he realized it. He realized that he would never see his mother or New York again. All those months, he somehow had still believed that he'd get back, or that he'd wake up and all this craziness with the powers and gods and ghosts and monsters would turn out to be a dream. But when he woke up on the morning of his seventh birthday, without his mother waiting for him with a blue cupcake, he knew this was forever.

What startled him the most was that he didn't regret this. He loved his mother more than anything and he knew not one day would pass without him thinking of her, but he also loved his new family. None of them had made him cry even once, none of them had hurt him even once, regardless of if he didn't do his chores or mess up in classes or accidentally hit uncle Thanatos with an arrow while Nemesis tried to teach him how to shoot ('It's not a gun, so stop fussing, Persephone!'). He had cowered in fear of a punishment back then, but all Thanatos had done was pull him into a soothing hug and rock him until he stopped crying, assuring him that everything was alright.

Those people – regardless of how angry and heartless they may be acting in front of others – they were soft on the inside and they loved Percy. And Percy loved them. More than he could express.

So on the morning of his seventh birthday, Percy sneaked out of his bedroom, clutching his comfy blanket that he had gotten from uncle Morpheus tightly to his chest.

“Did you have another nightmare, Perseus?”, yawned Hades, blinking a couple of times.

Percy frowned. Everyone had taken to calling him Percy, but Hades still insisted on Perseus. Persephone next to her husband stirred too when she noticed their little charge in front of their bed.

“Mommy used to give me birthday-cuddles”, stated Percy, hugging the blanket tighter. “Can I... have birthday-cuddles, mamma 'Phone? Papà? Please?”

Hades was frozen in a stupor at that. Percy had mostly called him 'uncle Hades' until now. It had been ten months now and Hades would be lying if he'd say the boy hadn't taken a certain spot in his heart by now. While Hades' brain had completely shut down, Persephone lifted the blanket.

“Of course you can have birthday-cuddles, my little birthday-boy”, said the Spring Goddess.

“Thank you”, replied Percy politely and crawled into the bed.
The little rascal was far from polite, so Hades cocked one eyebrow at that. He had a hunch that this was more than just a simple ‘Thank you for the cuddles’. It was a thank you for everything – for taking him in, feeding him, teaching him, loving him.

“You're welcome, Perseus. Happy birthday”, said Hades lowly, laying one arm around the boy. “You know, aunt Demeter is making your favorite breakfast – blueberry pancakes. So I don't know if we'll have a lot of time for cuddles before Melinoe and Makaria devour everything on their own.”

He wanted to tease the boy, because he knew that Percy's weakness was blue food, but Percy just hummed and snuggled up to him. “Is okay. They can have the pancakes if I can keep you.”

Hades blinked stunned. Had this little demigod truly managed to steal the hearts of the underworld?
Percy was laying upside-down (his favorite position, really, because that way he saw things differently than others would) on a giant heap of black fur. The occasional tongue swept over his face as he was cuddling his pet-dog, Zerberus. Mamma Persephone had said that little boys liked to have dogs. Percy didn't know if that was right for other little boys, since he hadn't met another boy in nearly three years now, but he surely knew that he loved Zerberus a lot.

Three years. It was strange, because that didn't sound like a large number at all, more like the opposite – and to his family, it surely only was a short time, considering the long lives of the gods – but it already felt like forever to Percy. The hooting of a beautiful, black barn owl interrupted him.

"Hey, Ace", greeted Percy with a grin, extending his arm so the owl could land.

He was always wearing a black leather gear on his right arm. Protection as much as for Ace to comfortably land without harming the boy. Percy reached out with his left hand and petted the owl's head. A letter was stuck to Ace's foot and Percy cautiously took it off. Percy had all four of the *Harry Potter* books and had devoured them various times by now, eagerly awaiting the fifth book (papà had promised that even if the author died before finishing the series, he'd summon the ghost to tell Percy the end, which was a very pleasing promise, considering that it had already been unreasonably long since the last book). Percy loved the idea of this school, a place where other special people were. He wished such a thing would exist for him. He also loved the idea of owls as means of communication. And while the gods had acted awkwardly around his first statement, they had been more than eager to fulfill the second wish. Percy guessed it was because they could hardly build a school just like that. Instead, they had given him Ascalaphus, or Ace as Percy preferred to call him. Apparently, he used to be a gardener in the underworld, but then auntie Demeter had turned him into an owl. Percy didn't question it. He had stopped questioning such things long ago.

"Ah, I spend too much time daydreaming again, it's no good", sighed Percy bothered and put the short letter away. "Of course the trio had to rattle me out to mamma. Come, Zerby, let's go."

The trio were some of Percy's teachers. Percy had a lot of teachers by now. Horkos had taught him basics, but now that he was older and had a more varying schedule, the god of oaths often consulted ghosts to teach Percy. English classes with Shakespeare had hurt Percy's head a lot in the past. Nemesis, and the occasional dead hero like Theseus or the first Perseus, taught Percy how to fight and win in battles. Styx was still teaching him control over water, even though Percy had a pretty good grip on that and he didn't particularly like her methods. Then again, she was the goddess of hatred so the 'strong emotion' that a demigod with powers like his needed to channel to truly control his element, to her it was hatred. Percy rather focused on love. Hecate had started to teach Percy how to manipulate the Mist about a year ago – this had made him more than antsy. Because down in the underworld, there was no need for this. There was only his family and the gods of the underworld where the hardest to fool with Mist. It meant they actually expected him to one day get back to the surface. And then last year, Charon had started giving Percy driving lessons with chariots and boats, which was just plain awesome. Charon disagreed.

And then there was the trio. The Moirai. Atropos, Klotho and Lakhesis taught him about humans. Percy smiled wryly at that. What human child got lessons about human behavior, he wondered.
The one who was being raised with the dead and by the gods, apparently. They gave him history lessons too. Human history and godly history. He knew a ton of stories about the gods, demigods and monsters. Not all, because there were just too many, but the truly important ones. Papá liked to say that knowing how to use a sword wasn't worth much if he didn't also know how to use his opponent. Knowing the enemy's weaknesses and strengths could decide a fight even more crucially than knowing how to use a sword. So Percy made sure to remember everything that seemed important, even though at times it was hard for him to concentrate because of his ADHD. Like now, where he had completely spaced out in the middle of playing with Zerberus and forgotten about his classes with the Moirai, who had kindly rattled him out to his mamma. Those traitors.

“You're late”, stated Lakhasis, throwing her measuring tape at his head.

They taught him more than just history though. Not that Hades or Persephone knew about that, they had only assigned that task to the trio. But with the sessions of watching them spin and do their work while talking to Percy about the fate of humankind in the past and such, Percy had grown increasingly sensitive to what they did. Lakhesis had caught up with this first and, just like she measured the life-span of a person, she also measured Percy's potential. Percy by no means had the powers or even options a child of Hades would have, but with how many threads of life he had already seen, he had grown sensitive to the little differences, asking for instance why some glowed in a different light than others. Somehow, living in the underworld and watching the Moirai had given Percy an insight into reading the aura of a soul. So Klotho had started to teach him how to spin, not himself, but how a soul was woven, why the aura or a thread glowed in different lights. Today would be one of those days, he guessed. That and titans. It was really their favorite topic, somehow. The titans' relations to the gods, their enemies and allies, their weaknesses, strengths and powers. But Percy didn't mind, he found it highly interesting to listen to the tales of heroism of his dad and his papá. Smiling a little, he sat down next to Klotho to watch her spinning, hand her wool. He had nimble fingers, as she liked to say. A good sense for what to put into a person's life.

“Ah, the brat. What's the brat doing here? I told you not to call me when the brat's here.”

Okay, so maybe Percy didn't get along with every god down here. Olethros didn't like him too much and he also edged on with Styx at times – she claimed it was because she represented hatred and yet there was not a spark of hatred inside Percy, which she found unsettling. And Olethros was just an old grump. Offering the bewinged god a toothy smile to piss him off, Percy waved some.

“Hey, uncle Ollie, how are you?”, asked Percy cheerfully, knowing the god hated the nickname.

“I swear, if Hades wouldn't value you so much...”, muttered Olethros under his breath, glaring.

“Percy, be a deary and hand me my scissors”, requested Atropos.

Percy frowned, an unsettled look on his face. He disliked this, because it meant someone was going to die. Lakhesis was holding the thread and Percy stared at it in awe. It was beautiful. Golden. Golden threads meant pure souls. Good people. Percy didn't like when good people died. Especially not when uncle Ollie came, because Olethros was the god of violent death. Which mainly meant murder or something like that. Percy didn't like that either. There was a lot about the underworld's daily business that he didn't like, if he was being honest with himself. But... this time, there was also something else. Just before Atropos could cut the thread, Percy grabbed for it.

“Wait”, requested Percy softly, fingers tracing along the thread. “What about this one...?”

Another thread was wrapped around the one that was supposed to be cut. Of course Percy knew
what that meant. Family, friends, lovers. Someone very close to the person who was supposed to
die. Most threads had that, were woven into a greater picture, but something about this other
thread picked Percy's interest. Hissing, he pulled his fingers back. It was as though the thread was
on fire. It was glowing golden, a very pure gold, but also a bit red like flames.

“Ah, poor little one”, hummed Klotho, playing with the loose end of the thread, the life that was
yet to be spun. “An orphan, poor child. Many hardships yet to come. So much misery...”

While Olethros was loudly tapping his foot to show his displeasure at being forced to wait, Percy
took all the time in the world to take the loose end from Klotho. She wouldn't be playing with it if
she hadn't wanted him to notice. He had watched how enough life-threads had been spun by now
to read the wool that was going into this thread. Abuse, distrust, loneliness, pain, isolation. But the
length of the thread – the boy was only seven years old! Two years younger than Percy.

“Please take me with you, Olethros”, stated Percy firmly and straightened.

A small, unnoticed smile was on Klotho's lips as she started to readjust the wool woven into this
thread and, without Percy seeing it, took a blue and silver glowing thread to rest against the red
one. Percy was too busy having a stare-down with Olethros to see what was happening.

“Are you fucking kidding me? You're not allowed out”, snorted Olethros, flapping his large, gray
wings in annoyance. “Hades would kill me if something happened to you, brat.”

“I'll stay out of your way for a whole year if you take me with you”, promised Percy and bowed
some, respectfully and devotedly. “Please. I want to see what kind of person that is.”

It disturbed Olethros immensely whenever the brat was well-behaved. But the prospect of not
having to put up with the mischievous pre-teen was nice. Last time the royal trio – Melinoe,
Makaria and Percy – had pulled a prank on Judge Minos, Olethros had been left to take care of the
remains. Not having anything to do with Percy for a year seemed like a good deal, especially
considering that this was an in-out-thing. Going to the world of the living, collecting the soul,
leaving again. There was hardly anything that could go wrong.

“Off to Houston then”, muttered Olethros unenthusiastically.

As so often before, Olethros was proven wrong. While the god collected the soul of Esperanza
Valdez, Percy was kneeling in a corner, in front of a crying, little Latino imp. Percy was
completely mesmerized by the child. A child. Another child. A human boy, just like him. Well,
not exactly since this one had curly hair and caramel skin and pointy ears.

“Hello, why are you crying?”, asked Percy concerned and started to pet the boy's hair.

He knew that papà always did that when Percy was crying, so hopefully it would help. “Mommy
is dead and it's my f—fault... I ruin everything... W—Who a—are you...?”

Percy frowned confused and looked around. There was a fire alright, but he didn't peck the little
boy as a pyromaniac who just played with matches or something like that. He continued the
petting.

“I'm Percy”, whispered Percy softly, offering the boy a smile. “Why do you think it's your fault?”
As though in answer, there was suddenly a ring of fire surrounding the boy, causing Percy to stumble backward and out of the way. “I—I... break everything... I'm dangerous... Stay away...”

Fire. Percy’s eyes sparkled with a completely new interest, something so intense that it actually scared Olethros for a second. This new turn was the only reason why the god didn’t just pull the brat aside and leave again. Something was happening here and he wanted to see the outcome.

“Fire doesn't scare me”, stated Percy and reached his hand out to continue petting the boy’s hair.

“N—No!”, exclaimed the younger boy panicked, but then he froze because Percy didn’t catch fire. “W—Why... aren't you... getting hurt? What are you...? T—The... fire should... it should...”

“You control fire, but I control water”, replied Percy simply, showing Leo that there was a thin layer of water covering Percy’s arm and keeping him from getting burned. “Fire doesn't hurt me.”

With a simple flick of his other wrist, he made the nearby pipes burst and effectively extinguished the fire in the workshop. It was such a simple gesture, done without even having to think about it. It was unsettling for Olethros, because he understood what it meant. Controlling larger amounts of water without even putting a thought into it. Back when the boy had started his training with Styx, he could hardly change the currents. Three years of hard training later and he did what would be a tremendous task for other children of Poseidon his age without any exhaustion.

“I—If my fire can't hurt you... a—are you my guardian angel?”, asked the little Latino shyly.

Percy tilted his head thoughtful for a second and then he nodded. “Yes. Yes, I am. The gods send me to protect you, now that your mother can't do it anymore. Will you tell me your name now?”

“L—Leo Valdez...”, whispered the child, staring at Percy with his large, dark eyes.

Percy was something ethereal, not from this world. Leo had never seen anything like this boy. He was nearly ghostly white, but not like when someone was sick, more like the foam of a wave when it was vanishing back into the ocean. Glowing, really. His eyes sparkled like two gems, green and blue at the same time, his chin-long, raven-black hair was a stark contrast to his skin. He was only an inch taller than Leo, even though he was obviously older than Leo. He was lanky and thin, but not in an unhealthy way, because he also was muscular, even though not much. He was surely beautiful enough to be a guardian angel, that much Leo knew.

“You already have Ascalaphus and Zerberus, you're not getting another pet, Perseus.”

Percy frowned upset, arms crossed over his chest as he stared up at his papà. His blue toga rustled a little as he shifted his posture. Olethros had brought him and Leo back to the underworld and to say that Hades had been pissed would be the understatement of the century. Not only had Percy left the underworld, no, he had also brought another mortal down here. This wasn't an orphanage!

“I don't want to keep him as my pet, he's human!”, exclaimed Percy annoyed.

“Yes. We’re going to have a long conversation about that one, too”, muttered Hades before straightening and raising his voice some. “Humans, regardless of if they're mortals or demigods, have no business down here. Not only did you disobey my orders to stay in the underworld, you
also disrespect me by sneaking a human in like that, Perseus. And you, Olethros, are in even more trouble. You know his stay here is a secret, bringing him up there was an unnecessary risk.”

Olethros flinched visibly, which made Percy wonder what kind of punishments there were for gods. Then he tried to forget about it, because he feared it would scare him for life. Instead, he concentrated on the cowering Latino behind him. Unfolding his arms, he reached out and grabbed one of Leo's hands in silent support. He knew that Hades and Persephone on their giant thrones could be intimidating, especially for someone who had never been to the underworld before. Even more so considering that the whole Underworld Council was lined up on either side of them, all angry at Olethros for taking Percy away, all having spend an hour looking everywhere for the boy.

“I do mean no disrespect, Lord Hades”, whispered Percy softly and took a deep breath.

He turned back to the gods and the atmosphere shifted gradually. Before, this had been an argument between an angry father and a child who was throwing a temper tantrum, but all of a sudden, there was an unexpected calmness surrounding Percy, his aura cold and even. He bowed deeply.

“I apologize for worrying you all and for causing trouble like this, but... don't get me wrong. I did not mean to disrespect any of you with my decision”, continued Percy and looked up again.

“When I held the thread of his life, I... knew that he is important. More than any thread I had ever seen with the Moirai. And when I met him, I couldn't turn away again. Just like you couldn't turn away when my father asked you to take me in. Leo's thread... his life would have led him down a road as bad as my life with... with Gabe. He's not much older than I was when you saved me. I— I... I couldn't just sit back and let him continue into a direction that would have meant so much pain for him.”

“The boy will stay, but he is your responsibility”, interrupted Persephone, surprising even Hades a little by her suddenly overthrowing his previous decision. “You are to keep him safe, out of trouble and educated. He can attend your classes, but I demand for you to find a solution about how to school his more... unique abilities. If you fulfill all those requirements, he can stay.”

“Thank you, mamma”, whispered Percy with a soft smile, before turning around to Leo – another sudden change of atmosphere. All seriousness was gone, the cold, calm aura replaced by the usual enthusiastic pulsing of Percy's ocean-like energy. “Come Leo, I'll show you my room! And you can have the room next to it! Oh, I need to do explain a lot. Have you ever heard of the Greek gods--?”

The son of Poseidon ran out of the throne room, pulling Leo along by the hand. Hades looked after them for a moment before he turned toward Persephone. So did the other gods.

“What in the world were you thinking?”, asked Styx sharply. “The boy has no place here-”

“The boy is a pawn of my stepmother”, interrupted Persephone with a frown. “I've overheard some things on Olympus the last time I was there. Stepmother dearest is up to something and I heard her mention a demigod who can control fire. You know how rare that ability is, even for children of Hephaestus. This boy that Percy brought home with him... Percy is right. He is very important. Important enough so Hera pays special visits to him and picked an interest in him.”

Hades gritted his teeth. Hera's plans always unfolded in Zeus' favor. Interfering may be beneficial for them, but Hades wasn't entirely sure. They could easily make it look as though the boy had died along with his mother in that fire, keeping him hidden here and finding out what kind of potential he truly had. It was still unsettling. How had Percy known any of this...?
“I think it's a good idea”, offered Thanatos. “Because you all seem to constantly forget one thing. Percy is a child. He's merely nine years old, yet all the contact he has is with immortal gods. I don't even think that he remembers what it's like to play with another child. We're doing our best to be a family for him, but we can't also replace friends. This boy Percy found, he can control fire. Not only is that a child around Percy's age and a demigod, he also carries the same burden as Percy. He has the control over an element. It's a strength, but it's also a curse to some, because it isolates them even from other demigods. I think that without knowing, Percy picked the perfect playmate for him. And I also think it may help settling Percy a little, to have another child around for him.”

Hades adapted a thoughtful look before nodding. “I suppose you're right. Sometimes, I forget that he's only a human child and that those require... a little more. Very well, but if that new friend causes any problems or endangers my boy, I have no qualms getting rid of him. The only one who is important is Perseus. Now, I wonder if Perseus can fulfill Persephone's requirements...”

“You wonder”, observed Morpheus curiously. “That means you believe there is a chance.”

“He's not a child of Athena by a long shot, but he's very resourceful when he wants something”, replied Hades cautiously. “And he is... powerful. More so than I had expected, actually.”

“You're... talking about the strange aura just now”, stated Melinoe, shifting a little.

“Yeah, sis is right. What the Tartarus was that?”, agreed Makaria with a frown.

“The... calm before the storm”, replied Hades, his voice dark. “Something I have seen on my brother a few times and on only the most powerful children of Poseidon.”

“What does it mean?”, pushed Makaria impatiently. “It was weird. He's never calm!”

“You know how the sea can be completely still before a great storm? That's it”, answered her father. “When arguments between Zeus, me and Poseidon reached the highest peak, he'd... get like this. Completely calm, collected and rational. That was always when I knew that what would follow was going to be devastation. War. Destruction. I think it was wise that Persephone cut this argument short. Perseus has a lot of potential and he has learned how to control his powers quite well, but he is far from perfect. I'm not sure what kind of consequences it would have for him to break the calm and reach the destructive point of the raging sea that lays behind it just yet. He's too untrained.”

Styx shifted her weight onto her other leg as she twisted her body to look away from the other gods. Percy was a son of one of the Big Three, those always came with great assets. Camp Half-Blood and Camp Jupiter trained demigods, but never specifically for their powers, at least not the strong ones. For reasons like those. That Percy was able to access such a state at this tender age was dangerous, because it meant the boy could grow even more powerful. One could even go as far as to say that Lupa and Chiron deliberately didn't train the children of the Big Three in their special areas because if a single demigod grew too powerful, the chances of them trying to take over the world were just too great – Napoleon, Hitler and others had tried it before. But not Percy. Styx, as the goddess of hatred, could feel and see it. There was no hatred or evil in this child. And that scared her even more, because hatred also made people vulnerable and easy to overthrow at times. What kind of power would Percy be able to access without such a flaw...?
“This. Is. Not. A. Race. Stop it! This instance!”

“Woeee!”, yelped Leo in a high-pitched voice as his red chariot passed Percy's.

“Don't spoil the fun, uncle Charon!”, called Percy, on hot pursuit.

Charon’s scowl deepened. He was probably the least happy about the newest addition to the underworld. That Valdez-kid was nothing but trouble. Makaria and Melinoe hadn't minded playing with Percy before, but this kid was full of mischief to the same extend as Percy. And at the same time, he was more resourceful than Percy. With a little scrap metal, he could build dangerous devices. Like the two flying chariots that he had made for himself and Percy. It had been about nine months now that the Latino was living in the underworld and he had taken to it nearly as naturally as Percy. The adventures that lay in the depth of the underworld were calling to the children and they explored it every chance they got. They pulled pranks on souls and the underworld judges and gods. Though while Percy viewed the gods as his family, Leo was a little more reluctant toward that. To him, there was Percy and only Percy. The gods scared him too much, so he hid behind his new big brother every chance he got. Which was all in Percy's interests too, because being the big brother instead of the baby everyone watched out for was actually pretty awesome.

“He's... happy”, observed Hades from the window of the throne room as the kids flew past it.

“You're slow, dear”, pointed Persephone out as she joined her husband. “Keeping Leo had been the right decision. We made him not-sad, but having Leo made him happy. We did everything we could, but there are things only friendship can give a child. Percy made a friend. It's vital for the development of a child to have friends. And if you want him to become the consort to one of your little... demigods, then he needs to know how to interact with demigods his own age.”

“I like it when he's happy”, continued Hades, not minding his wife, but rather startling her. “He looks even more like his father when he smiles. Poseidon used to smile a lot when we were kids. Is it ironic to say that our time in our father's stomach was the happiest we had? We played and laughed so much, but then Zeus cut us out and we were suddenly thrown into a war against the titans, followed by all the responsibilities of being gods and leaders. You're right, keeping the little pet was a good decision if it can make Perseus carefree. The underworld is his belly, the safe bubble that will burst all too soon and then he will be thrown into the middle of a war. He should enjoy it for as long as he can. Regardless of how much trouble that pet is.”

“If you'd only stop calling Leo a pet”, muttered Persephone affectionately.

“I can't afford to get attached to another demigod”, stated Hades firmly and glared at his wife.

Persephone's smile turned a little sad at that. What Hades said was true, probably. Getting attached to those who can die was dangerous. The only reason why Hades had allowed himself to get attached to Percy to this extend was the ultimate goal: Giving Hades' children immortality and making Percy an immortal and eternal consort. Persephone heaved a sad sigh.
Percy and Leo were laughing loudly as they crash-landed in the forges. It was strange, before Leo had arrived, Percy had barely wasted another thought on the forges. But Leo was a son of Hephaestus, a tinkerer. An inventor. Within the first week of Leo’s stay, Percy naturally had to show the younger boy the forges so they could realize the things inside Leo's head. Okay, Leo had been mighty intimidated by all the tall cyclopes there, but the urge to invent had been greater. And even for Leo's fear, they had found a solution. Or rather, Hades had. Not that he would ever admit it out loud. Percy was aware of the fact that Hades kept Poseidon updated. Sometimes, Percy gave Hades a letter of his own, using his very effective kitten-eyes to convince the Death God of also giving that to Poseidon. When Poseidon had heard of Percy's new-found happiness of being a big brother and of Leo's craving to build things, there had been a surprise waiting for the boys.

Poseidon’s forges under the sea were very famous, but all three realms had forges. Hephaestus’ forges on Olympus and the forges of Hades. To show good will and that they were allies, Poseidon send his cyclopes to either of the other two forges. Now, when three months ago the latest cyclopes had arrived, one of them had been different from the others. His name was Tyson and he was really just a child, like Leo and Percy. But unlike many other cyclopes who had a nasty and borderline cruel nature, this one was happy, friendly and curious. Leo and Percy had instantly befriended him.

“‘You broke them’”, stated Tyson with an upset frown.

“‘We didn’t mean to, big guy’”, sighed Leo, looking equally upset.

“‘What are you two moping about?’”, huffed Percy and slung one arm around either of them. “‘This only means we have to rebuild them. And improve them – make them even more awesome!’”

“‘Yes!’”, cheered both others enthusiastically at that.

For the first time in his life did Percy truly feel complete. Regardless of how much he loved his godly family and the pranks Melinoe and Makaria liked to play with him, they were still gods. Busy gods. It happened on a regular base that his classes were canceled or that Sorry, sweetheart, I really don’t have the time right now because of some godly business. They loved him, but they were gods and they had other priorities than spending all day with a child. But now he had two awesome little brothers who played with him as often as he wanted and who were just great.

“Percy! Where are we going?!”, called Leo loudly against the wind.

The trio was riding on Zerberus, each of them clinging to a different head as the guard-dog of the underworld transported them farther and farther away from the palace. Leo grew uneasy. He had never been that far away from home. Home. It was strange that this gloomy, dark and dangerous place had somehow become his home. And even though Lord Hades still called him a pet, somehow Leo felt like that was a bit affectionate, because even when Leo and Percy had gotten badly hurt four months ago when they had teased some poor soul who had been punished to constantly push some bolder up a hill just so it could roll down again, Hades hadn't fed Leo to...
Zerbe. He had even visited Leo's room to see how badly he had been injured and to scold him. Not in an angry-lord-of-death-fear-my-wrath way, but more in the way Leo's mother used to when he had gotten hurt and she had been scared because of that. And of course there was Percy, who Leo loved with all of his heart. He had always wanted a brother and Percy was so much more than just that – Percy was his guardian angel. Just like he had said when they had first met.

“I have to check something”, called Percy back.

Leo was not the only one growing uneasy. Even Zerberus slowed down the farther they went. When the three-headed dog downright refused to continue, the three children climbed off of him and continued by foot. Tyson glanced around nervously. The underworld wasn't the element of a child of Poseidon, but as long as he was at the forges, Tyson felt home. It were those parts of the underworld that were unsettling for him. He briefly wondered why Percy didn't feel it.

“It's creepy. Don't you think it's creepy, big brother?”, asked Tyson, sounding untypically small.

“Of course I think it's creepy”, huffed Percy and rolled his eyes, before pausing. “I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset the two of you. If you think it's too creepy, you can return back home and I'll go alone, but... there is something... calling to me these days. I gotta check.”

Tyson and Leo exchanged an uneasy look before huffing and straightening. They hooked their arms with Percy's and continued on, making Percy smile. There was no way Tyson and Leo would let their big brother go somewhere dangerous alone, regardless of how scared they were themselves. They regretted their bravery a little while later though. Because they reached a cliff. No, it was more than a cliff. It was the entrance to a seemingly bottomless pit of depression and darkness.

“This is a whole new level of creepy, Perce”, whispered Leo and tugged on Percy's hand. “Please don't make me feel like Nala by being in the shadow-realm even though the king told you not to.”

Percy blinked a couple of times in slow-motion before cracking a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. “I highly doubt that there will be hyenas jumping out and chasing a smile. "

“Still, Perce!”, hissed Leo with a pout, staring at the darkness. “These are bad shadows, even I can tell and I don't even wanna know what kinda heebie-jeebies they give you.”

“That's why I came here”, whispered Percy lowly, looking dead serious. “And besides, if something happens, I control water, you control fire and Ty is super-strong. We'll be fine.”

Out of habit, Leo flicked his wrist. A small flame started to dance around his fingers, circling each one of them before continuing to the next. A year ago and he would have accidentally set himself on fire, but thanks to Percy, Leo knew how to control his emotional link to his powers and thus, how to control his powers. Percy had spend about a week wrecking his brain when Leo had first arrived in the underworld. It had upset Leo greatly to be the cause of worry, but Percy had told him to shut up, because Percy wanted him to stay. So Percy needed to find a solution. Leo had inquired how Percy had learned to control his powers – and that was how Percy had come up with a solution. Percy was being taught by an underworld okeanid. Styx had many siblings, yet she only had four nymph-sisters, the five rivers of the underworld – Acheron, the goddess of pain, Cocytus, the goddess of wailing, Lethe, the goddess of oblivion, and Phlegethon, the goddess of fire. Phlegethon, a river made of fire. A water-controller couldn't learn much from her, but a fire-controller on the other hand would find the perfect teacher in her. For the last eight months, Phlegethon had taught Leo how to properly control the fire within him as well as the fire surrounding him. He was still far from Percy's level of control and power, but then again he was also two years younger than Percy and three years behind on training. Percy always praised him for learning so fast, so Leo was content.
“I know I'm gonna regret that question, but why did you think you have to come here?”, asked Leo.

“Something... has been calling to me...”, whispered Percy with a frown. “A voice, telling me to come here. I just... I needed to see what was here. And I... don't like it. Not one bit.”

“Does that mean we can leave again?”, asked Tyson hopefully.

Percy took a moment before he answered. “Yes. Let's head back home, brothers.”

Demeter was smiling amused as she was in her daughter's garden, knee-deep in dirt. Whenever Persephone returned from Olympus, her garden needed some redoing. After thousands of years, it was nice to have a little backup helping with the garden work.

“Look, I made a flower-crown for big brothers”, stated Tyson happily.

Percy and Leo giggled as Tyson placed white flower-crowns on their heads. Demeter's smile softened tenderly at that. They were such happy children, so beautiful. Percy looked like an Elvish prince, with his glowing, white skin and sparkling, green eyes. The boy was nearly ten years old now and he already possessed so much beauty. Demeter was sure that once the boy would hit his teenage years, he would break quite some hearts. Hopefully not those of Hades' children. Demeter saw one flaw in Hades' and Poseidon's deal. What if Percy didn't fall in love with either child of Hades? And they had yet to tell Percy about his already sealed engagement.

“Look, granny Demy!”, called Leo eagerly, patting the earth around a hibiscus bush.

“Oh, you did well, little one”, praised Demeter, patting Leo's head (mindful of the crown).

While Leo was still very afraid of the gods of the underworld, he adored Demeter, Persephone and Hestia a lot. Especially so Hestia, since the goddess of the hearth controlled fire to a certain extend too. Sadly, 'granny Hestia' didn't often come to visit. Not that it had been planned for her to know, but unlike Hera and Zeus, Hestia sometimes visited her other siblings, because she had always cared deeply about her family. So when one day, Hestia had visited the underworld, she had discovered the green-eyed, little secret that Hades tried to hide. Of course, Hestia promised to keep the secret. She loved children, after all. So did Demeter, especially when she looked at the three cheerful boys, digging in the dirt and planting bushes and trees.

Percy was sitting at the shore of the river Styx, staring thoughtfully at the reflexion on the rippling surface. He noted dully how a beautiful woman materialized behind him.

“Teach me how to hate”, stated Percy softly.

“W—What...?”, asked the minor goddess stunned and sat down next to the boy.
Percy turned toward her with his large, innocent eyes. “Papà always says that knowing the weaknesses and strengths of your opponent gives you an advantage. Hatred... motivates people, doesn't it? How am I supposed to fight something that I don't understand?”

“Where... does that come from?”, asked Styx cautiously.

“There is... this... voice in my head”, admitted Percy softly, frowning. “It... it feels dangerous and... a bit like you. Is that... what hatred feels like...? I... need to understand it to overcome it, right?”

Styx gulped slightly. She wasn't sure what to do. Percy was the purest being she had ever encountered and she had thought that hatred may hinder the boy's strength, be the flaw to keep him from becoming too powerful. The way Percy spoke though... *overcoming* hatred would make him close to invincible. What they did, it was more than training a future hero. They trained a god.

“I can't teach you how to hate”, stated Styx and shook her head. “If you don't feel it, I can't make you feel it. I can only intensify the natural feeling inside of you.”

“Then tell me how to hate, what to hate. What... triggers hatred?”, asked Percy interested.

“Something... bad”, sighed Styx, trying to find a way to explain this to the boy. “What your stepfather did to you. It *should* make you hate him. He hurt you, physically and psychologically. Because of him, you had to leave your home and your mother.”

“But if he wouldn't have hurt me, I would have never met my dad, or my papà and mamma and you all”, countered Percy confused. “I mean, yes, what he did to me was horrible, but without him, I would have never gotten what I have now. I would have never been there to save Leo.”

“It's hopeless”, stated Styx and shook her head. “If I can't make you hate him, I doubt there is anything that would provoke hatred in your heart. Why don't I teach you something you're capable of instead? I think we still have some unfinished lessons ahead of us.”

Percy frowned, displeased. What the voice had evoked in him, it felt similar to the discomfort he had felt when in Styx' presence at first. Hatred, or at least that was what Percy assumed that hatred must feel like when coming from someone else. The voice worried him, because it kept calling him to the dark pit, with lulling words. Percy thought if he'd learn how to hate, he may be able to overcome this voice, because hatred seemed the strongest asset of this voice.

“Perseus?”, asked Hades concerned, knocking at the door.

“Lasciami in pace”, was the reply.

“I'm not going to leave you alone”, countered Hades and opened the door.

“Cosa posso fare per te, papà?”, sighed Percy in defeat.

Hades had been teaching Percy Italian for over three years now. After all, Bianca and Nico had spend little time in the US before Hades had put them into the Lotus Hotel. Most of their life, they had spend in their home – Venice. If Percy spoke their mother tongue, they'd have something to connect them right from the start, to make forming a bond easier. That aside, learning a language
was good for a child. But Hades had noticed that Percy only used it when he was being emotional.

“Leo, Tyson and even Styx inform me that you have been... acting different in the past few weeks”, stated Hades and strode over to Percy's bed to sit next to the boy. “What's wrong, bambino?”

“It's nothing”, lied Percy and turned to look out the window.

“I do not appreciate being lied at”, warned Hades with a glare.

“But when I say that I don't want to talk about it, you'll keep asking”, huffed Percy.

“Then at least tell me why you're feeling Italian at the moment”, prompted Hades instead.

“Because it's mine”, stated Percy simply. “Leo and Tyson don't understand it and the other gods normally speak English too. It just... makes me feel special and... comforted...”

“Why won't you tell me what's bothering you, Perseus?”, asked Hades once more.

“Because... I... I think I'm going crazy”, admitted Percy, sounding rather tiny as he folded himself as small as possible. “I... can hear a voice. It keeps calling to me, calling me to the pit.”

“You're not going crazy, Perseus”, stated Hades firmly and pulled Percy into a tight hug, ruffling the boy’s hair. “That pit, it's the entrance to Tartarus. All evil monsters are caged down there. Sometimes, the souls down there try and call out to others to free them. The other gods and I have grown so accustomed to it, we barely even notice it anymore. You're not going crazy, but... please don't go near that pit ever again. Don't listen to the voice.”

“So it's not me...?”, asked Percy, turning hopeful eyes on his papà.

“No, bambino, no”, assured Hades, kissing the top of Percy's head. “Now promise me. Promise me to never approach Tartarus. It's a dangerous and dark place. I don't want you near it.”

Percy laughed softly. “Yes, Mufasa. I promise not to go to the shadow-realm.”

“Sometimes I regret that Hecate introduced you to Disney”, muttered Hades beneath his breath. “As long as you don't pull a Simba and disobey me here, because I'm very serious about this. There lays real danger in this place and I don't want you to get hurt, Perseus.”

“I promise, papà”, nodded Percy obediently, snuggling up to Hades.

Hades frowned concerned as he kept caressing Percy's hair, lulling the boy to sleep. He had a feeling that whatever the Great Prophecy had promised was approaching. Most likely, Hera’s plans for Leo had something to do with it. Now one of the prisoners in Tartarus tried to call to Percy. The way it looked, the time had approached. The time to get Nico and Bianca out of the Lotus Hotel. Well, Nico had been ten when Hades had brought his children to the safety of the Lotus Hotel, so he and Percy would be the same age then. It could be a bit of a problem for Bianca, since she was two years older than the boys. But if Hades was being honest with himself, he had plans for Nico to become Percy's partner. At first he may have claimed that the choice laid with his children, whichever one of them would want Percy would get him, like some kind of trophy, but by now Percy had grown to him like another one of his children. Percy's happiness was important. And Hades could already see the signs. He knew the son of Poseidon had a minor crush on Eric from The Little Mermaid, the handsome, dark-haired prince. Percy was gay, as far as Hades was willing to label anyone. He had never paid the pretty princesses any mind, if anything he wanted to be like them. Like Ariel, who broke free from the realm she knew to
discover the human world and find true love. Like Belle, who lived in her worlds of books, seeking own adventures.

It was time to level-up this game. Time to bring Nico and Bianca into this.

He could only hope that Nico would be interested in Percy too. Then again, looking at the beautiful and kind boy in his arms, he knew that it was impossible not to love Percy Jackson. If Percy would set his mind to it, he surely could bend even the straightest boy to fall in love with him.
“Perseus, we need to talk.”

Percy, Leo, Tyson, Melinoe and Makaria looked up from the board game they were playing. The teenage goddesses exchanged a curious glance, while Tyson and Leo looked worried. Percy grinned and kissed Leo's cheek cheerfully before he got up to walk over to his papà. Though his happy grin slipped off his lips when he noticed the serious look on Hades' face. They walked slowly to Percy's room where Hades decidedly closed the door, motioning for Percy to sit down.

“I told you how I took you in, back when your father brought you here...”, started Hades slowly.

“Ehm... Yes...?”, nodded Percy, growing nervous. “Papà, you're freaking me out here. D—Do you want to give me away again, or what is this about? You're so... serious...”

Hades looked over at the ten-years-old boy, reaching out to place one large hand on top of Percy's head, ruffling the soft, black locks slightly. “I love you very much, my boy. I'm not giving you away. Well... in a way, I suppose you could say I am, but... Oh, I'm the lord of death, I'm not meant for those emotional discussions. Perseus, when I took you in, it was not just a one-sided favor. He promised me back then that if I took you in, you'd one day become the consort to one of my demigod children. I have two, a daughter and a son.”

“So... that's it...”, whispered Percy shallowly. “You took me in to get a trophy husband for your daughter, or what? Son of Poseidon, powerful demigod, nice match...?”

“Perseus, listen to me”, stated Hades firmly, grabbing Percy by the shoulders. “That was the deal back then, but then I got to know you. And I hope that you know that you mean more to me than a pawn in a greater scheme. And... I'm not going to make you marry my daughter.”

“Mh?”, grunted Percy confused, still with tears shimmering in his eyes.

“I'm aware of your... preference”, replied Hades, looking mildly uncomfortable (praying that he didn't have to have The Talk with Percy too now). “And even so, I am not going to force you to marry my son. I would like to see that happen, yes. But if you don't find love in him, I am not going to demand for this part of the deal to be fulfilled. I'd like it though, to ensure that my promise will be kept to the end. I protected you as a child, am still protecting you, until you're old enough and then I'd like to give you away in marriage to my son, so he can protect you from then on.”

Percy blushed a little, his disappointment and fear vanishing. He knew Hades loved him like a son and to hear that Hades would like for that marriage to happen, not for the sake of his real son, but to make sure that Percy would stay protected and safe. Sighing softly, Percy leaned against his papà, wondering why he had never met those demigod-children, then asking himself if this boy would be nice or friendly. And then he was petrified that Hades had known he liked boys more than girls.
“Today, we're going to tell you about the children of Hades”, stated Atropos, snapping her scissors.

Percy's back straightened as he listened carefully. He was leaning against the wall, with Leo's head on his lap, his fingers combing through Leo's curls. The Latino too perked up. They were aware of the deal Hades and Poseidon had, but Hades had never really talked about his children.

“In the past hundred years, there had been four children of our master”, started Lakhesis slowly.

She did everything slow and it annoyed Percy beyond measurement. “What were their names?”

“Slow, young one”, warned Atropos, hitting him upside the head with the blunt side of the scissors. “Their locations. Even though the center of our power had moved to the US already, three of the four children of the underworld had been born in Europe.”

Percy nodded slowly, rubbing the now sore spot on his head. European demigods. Not that it meant much to him. He had ever only been to New York, so even the US were a wide and undiscovered territory to him. Europe was... like talking about Olympus itself. Something unreachable, unimaginable. A completely different world, really.

“Adolf Hitler was born in Austria. An... unassuming little youth, really”, continued Lakhesis, her voice still as slow as she toyed with her measuring tape. “But his strength. The most important thing about those four children of the underworld is that they all represented a different aspect of Hades. Adolf had a voice, mightier than Aphrodite's charmspeak. He could make people kill others. His speeches were so powerful that they led to a disastrous amount of death. He didn't particularly kill himself, he possessed the ability to make others kill in his name and execute his will, however cruel and unreasonable it may have been. He was stopped and killed by the sons of Poseidon and Zeus.”

Percy and Leo nodded sharply, exhaling a relieved sigh. Killed was good, it meant this one wasn't one of his suitors then, right? That was what Leo was wondering. Though something about the abrupt end of the story made Percy wonder. Poseidon and Zeus, together? Percy didn't understand, not really. Why would two of the three brothers team up against the other? Why didn't all three get along? It was something about Zeus though, something that made Percy curious, because Percy knew that under no circumstances whatsoever was he to ever meet this god. His own father was staying away from him out of this reason. So why was the son of a gentle god like Hades such an evil threat while the son of a cruel god like Zeus was a celebrated hero? Percy knew about the Second World War, well vaguely anyway. He didn't pay much mind to human history since he didn't particularly see himself as part of that world. He continued caressing Leo's curls.

“Bianca and Niccoló di Angelo are full-blooded siblings”, continued Atropos. “Born in Italy. They were young when the Three Brothers made an oath not to sire any more children. Even though the di Angelos had been born before the oath, Zeus wished to see them dead. Hades brought them and their mother to the US to save them, but Zeus stroke the mother down and ended her life.” For dramatic purposes, Atropos cut a thread of life at that. “Hades changed his plans and hid the children in the Lotus Hotel, a place where time is frozen. Since then, they had been living there, eternal youths like Pan's Lost Boys, waiting for the day they would be released...”
Leo’s eyes darted over to Percy curiously. The time had come, apparently. Only last month, Hades had told Percy about the siblings and the deal. Now the Moirai taught them about the children of the underworld. Apparently, it was time for the di Angelos to leave the Lotus Hotel.

“What about the fourth?”, piped Leo in, growing more interested. “There was a fourth, right?”

“Hazel Levesque, the one born in New Orleans”, nodded Klotho in agreement. “Died, years ago.”

“You said something about their powers”, interrupted Percy. “What are they?”

“Hazel controlled the earth and its riches, especially so metals”, replied Lakhesis. “Bianca's center of power lays with the darkness and shadows, most of all the creatures of darkness and night. While Niccoló controls a different aspect of death, not influencing others to kill, but rather controlling death itself. Ghosts, zombies and skeletons. Summoning them, controlling them.”

“Sounds like your Prince Charming is going to be a Prince Creeping”, stated Leo with a snicker.

“Shut up!”, exclaimed Percy embarrassed and blushed, hitting Leo upside the head.

“For the next half year”, interrupted Klotho their quarreling. “You two are under strict supervision and both of you are not allowed to leave your wing of the castle.”

Percy's breath stopped. Did that mean Hades wanted to actually bring his children down here? And then his heart sank some. Apparently, Hades didn't want them to meet yet. And as much as he itched to get to know them, he knew when to listen to the Death God. This was one of those times.

Hades had contemplated sending the Furies out to get his children out of the Lotus – knowing that seeing them would make him feel overly guilty about Maria’s death. But the Furies had a new and more tedious task. Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone were the designated babysitters of Leo, Percy and Tyson respectively. So Hades did it himself, getting in and getting out, with the children at his hands. He had been tempted to delete their memories, but tempering with those may make things more complicated. He wanted them to be heroes, they needed to know who and what they were.

“Papà? Where are we going?”, asked Nico, looking up at Hades with those large, dark eyes.

“The man who killed your mother, he... is still out there and if I take you home with me, you'd be in danger. I want to take you home and keep you safe there, but I can’t”, stated Hades firmly. “It would be a risk. You can't live with me, but... for a short while, I suppose I have to teach you certain things. So I'm bringing you away for a while, somewhere where you will be out of harm's way. I enrolled you in a boarding school. You will stay together and you will stick together.”

Nico stared up at his papà, blinking a couple of times, his dark eyes full of trust, love and admiration. His papà was his hero, after all. Especially now that his mamma was gone. He only had his papà and his sorellona Bianca. They were his only family, his whole world. His eyes turned to his sister, looking for confirmation. As long as Bianca was there to protect him, he'd be alright.
‘Certain things’ equaled an update on the last eighty years. Everything was strange. So much had changed in the past eighty years. Nico was still trying to wrap his head around that – his papà had explained it, that they had been somewhere without time and Nico remembered playing there, but... how could he have played for so long? That was impossible. Nico and Bianca spend a few months in a dark palace in the underworld – their dad was Hades, the god of the underworld! And other gods like Thanatos and Hecate and Nemesis taught them about what they had missed, what had happened. Brought them up to speed and taught them basics about defense and sword-fight.

Nico loved it. Everything. The palace, the black river, the gem-gardens, Zerberus the three-headed dog – how awesome was that, after all? Though he was feeling watched. Every now and then, he would hear laughter or whispers, like children. It was creepy, but also curious.

“Do you think they're ghosts?”, whispered Nico one night, sticking his head down from his upper bunk to look at Bianca. “Child ghosts who haunt the castle...? I mean, you hear them too, right?”

“Maybe”, sighed Bianca annoyed. “Go and ask Melinoe when you train with her tomorrow.”

Nico wiggled his nose at that. Melinoe was the goddess of ghosts and their half-sister. Since Nico apparently could control the dead (how freaking amazing and mind-blowing was that?!), she taught him to control those powers so once they’d return to the surface, he wouldn't drag a whole cemetery after him wherever he walked. But she was unsettling and kind of mean.

“I think I saw one the other day”, continued Nico thoughtful. “Because he was all trans... trans... what's the word, Bia? That thing that's nearly see-through and glowy?”

“Translucent, Nico”, chuckled Bianca amused, offering her little brother a small smile.

“Right”, nodded Nico in agreement. “But he must have been an angel. He was all beautiful, with those really intense eyes. They looked just like the sea we saw back home in Venezia. I'll never forget those eyes. But then he just ran off, or vanished, I dunno, when he noticed me.”

“That's what ghosts do, Nico”, laughed Bianca, shaking her head. “Now go to sleep.”

Once Hades deemed it enough, he took them by the hands and brought them out of the underworld again. Nico was upset. He had grown to admire his father even more now that he knew his papà was an awesome Greek god. But he was ten, too stubborn to agree with what Bianca obviously already accepted. It was too unsafe for the children to be down there, they were growing too powerful, the power-spike would alert Olympus and Zeus was the one who wanted to see the siblings dead. Hades brought them away to stay safe. Nico was depressed by this, he would have loved to explore the underworld more. But his father had made sure that the siblings mostly stayed in the palace – too much activity on their part could raise suspicions. They needed to keep a low profile. And now they would start a new life, for as long as they had to – Hades promised it wasn't forever, promised they would be able to be reunited, promised that one day, he would be able to claim them and they would be safe. For now, safety meant the outskirts of Canada, because it was out of the gods’ reach.
“Nico”, started Hades, his voice unusually soft as he knelt down in front of the boy. “I have a present for you, so you don't forget me or my promise. I know you like this game, but you're still missing one figurine. Mine. So I want you to take it so it can protect you in my stead.”

Nico’s eyes sparkled brightly as he was handed the miniature figure of Hades. This was going to be his new treasure, together with the other two items he had gotten from his father. A silver skull-ring with ruby-eyes and a one-edged sword with a black Stygian-iron blade that he had named Nightmare. Styx herself had taught him and Bianca how to wield Stygian-iron.

“Ti voglio un mondo di bene, papà”, mumbled Nico, sobbing a little as he hugged Hades tightly. [trans: I love you very much, daddy]

“Sono orgoglioso di te, bambino”, murmured Hades, his voice a dark rumble. “Stai attento.” [trans: I'm very proud of you, my boy. Be careful]

Nico nodded, to confirm that he understood and would obey. Grabbing his suitcase, he took a deep breath and entered the new room that would be his home for the next unbeknown time.

“Oh. Hey. You must be my roommate. Cool.”

Nico jumped slightly at that and whirled around. The room was rather spacious, with two beds on opposite walls, with a large window stretching between them. One half of the room was messy, with a chubby Asian boy laying on the bed. He offered Nico a grin.

“Si”, nodded Nico, before pausing. “I mean... yes. Hello, I'm Nico di Angelo, nice to meet you. I guess we're going to spend a lot of time with each other from now on, so I hope we get along.”

“Frank Zhang”, introduced the other boy, his grin turning into a smile with sparkling eyes when he caught sight of the tiny statue in Nico's hand. “That's Hades! Awesome! Do you play Mythomagic?”

Nico blinked a couple of times and put his stuff down. “Sure. I love it. It's the best.”

“Totally!”, exclaimed Frank eagerly. “Oh man, we so have to play together!”

Nico grinned some too now. He had never met someone who shared his enthusiasm for Mythomagic. Bianca disliked it, found it childish. Plunging down on his bed, he thought that maybe this wouldn't be too bad after all. Frank looked like an okay guy.

Unlike Nico, Bianca had a harder time adjusting, actually. Not that she really showed it. Especially not in front of Nico. She was his big sister, she needed to keep him safe. But she already felt like she had failed him. The past six months in the underworld had changed Nico and so had their mother's death. While in the Lotus Hotel, it had been as though they had simply forgotten about it and Nico had been that completely cheerful and carefree little boy who had started to develop an obscure obsession with this game called Mythomagic. Reality had changed that some.

Nico was still a brightly smiling and at times too loud boy, but he had dimmed down some. The underworld had that effect on others, Bianca supposed. Meeting the goddesses of hatred and revenge wasn't helpful either. Teaching a ten-years-old boy how to fight for his life? Not perfect
either. While all of this was more of the beginning of an adventure to Nico, Bianca was a little more serious about it. Then again, she was already twelve. Practically an adult, after all. Straightening her dress, she held her head high as she continued her way through the halls of their school.

She would protect Nico for as long as necessary, until their papà would get them back.

Percy jumped slightly when someone sat down next to him on his bed. He turned wide-eyed to his mamma, who had a knowing and amused smile on her lips. She handed him a hot cocoa.

“So, what's the verdict? What do you think about him?”, prompted Persephone.

“What about who?”, asked Percy innocently, taking the cocoa.

“My husband's little demigod”, stated Persephone, wrinkling her forehead as she said 'demigod', like she wanted to say something else entirely. “Don't think I don't know that you spend your time sneaking around, trying to catch a glimpse without anyone noticing. I know you well enough to know that you must have succeeded at one point. So what was your impression of him?”

“I... don't know”, replied Percy after a moment. “I mean, I didn't meet him, after all. We never spoke, I don't know his character, what he likes or dislikes or if he's clever. I only know what he looks like. Sure, he looks... uhm... cute, I guess. He looks nice, but... that doesn't have to mean that he actually is nice. But he's papà's son, so he has to be nice too, right?”

Persephone smiled softly and caressed Percy's hair. “You're probably the only being aside from me who would claim that Hades is nice and that someone related to him would have to be nice too.”

“Do you... Do you know when we're supposed to meet?”, asked Percy shyly and nervously. He was ten years old, the thought of being in a romantic relationship was weird and freaked him out. So on that account, he had been glad that Hades hadn't introduced him to the children of the underworld. But on the other hand, he would have liked to meet Nico, to get a feeling of how the son of Hades really was. What he could expect from his... husband. Percy's face brightened with a horrible blush at that. He was engaged. He was ten years old and he was engaged. Not that it was such a rare thing, he got enough history-lessons to know that especially when the gods were involved, marriages had often been arranged. It was still a weird thought. Percy had always hoped to find his own Eric one day, when he was older. Part of another world, to lure him into a new life.

“Later”, replied Persephone honestly. “As late as possible.”

“What does that mean?”, asked Percy confused.

“It means that... you will one day go to the surface again. That will be when you meet Nico, truly meet him. But it will also mean that you, both of you and so many more, will be in danger”, whispered Persephone, wrapping her arms around him to pull him closer. “And Hades and I, we hope that this point will be far in the future. Later.”

“Oh...”, nodded Percy in understanding, putting his cocoa down.
He wasn't stupid, he knew that he was being trained to fight so he could one day fight. He knew they were teaching him how to be a hero because they expected heroics from him. It wasn't all fun and games, one day he would have to put all the things he was learning from the gods to good use. One day, fate would be in his hands. His and Nico's. He dreaded that day, as much as Hades and Persephone did. Though somehow, the thought of not being alone then was comforting. As he had said, he wasn't stupid and he had known for a long time now that one day he would have to fight. But for the longest time, he thought he would have to fight alone.

Then Leo came into his life and became his brother. His fire-controlling, awesome little brother.

Followed by Tyson, who really could hold his own weight in a fight too.

And now he knew that when the day he would have to fight would arrive, he would also have Bianca and Nico di Angelo at his side. When Hades had promised him that the day Hades couldn't protect him any longer, Nico would, then Percy had believed it. Still did. If Nico was his father's son, he would keep his promise. Percy would be safe.

Percy just wished and prayed and hoped that aside from safe, he would also be loved, cherished and valued. He hoped that at the end of the road, there would be a happy ending waiting for him.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have a time-skip. There'll be bro-Frank-Nico, the sibling bond of the di Angelos will be explored and apparently EVERYBODY wants the di Angelos - may it be greedy manticores, the huntresses or Camp Half-Blood
A Huntress, a Satyr and a Kidnapping

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 5: A Huntress, a Satyr and a Kidnapping

The following three years had changed a lot of things. Had changed them. Nico was thirteen and had just entered puberty, while Bianca was fifteen. She was beautiful and swarmed by admirers. Which didn't sit right with her little brother, who had grown quite protective of his older sister.

"Dude, she's old enough to chose her own boyfriends", laughed Frank, clapping him on the shoulder as he caught up to Nico. "You need to stop it with the death-glares."

Even after three years, those things still made Nico snort. His best friend on the planet had no idea who he really was. But it was safer for them both this way. Nico had discussed it often with Bianca, had the urge to tell Frank the truth – the full truth. But no one could know the children of Hades were alive and a mortal would never understand anyway. It may drive Frank crazy.

"Can't help it, she's my sis", shrugged Nico casually. "Grab a burger before packing?"

"How you can hold your physique with all the junk food you eat is beyond me", snorted Frank. Nico straightened up some at that, grinning a little. He knew his destiny. He was meant to be a hero, so even now that they weren't living in the underworld anymore, Nico still kept his training up. He was on the swim team, on the football team, in the fencing club and he took martial arts lessons. There was no way he would disappoint his father once the time came. He and Bianca also trained combat and with their swords in secret. Three years of excessive training had paid off for Nico. He wasn't the tallest boy around, but he had a well-defined body, a cheeky and sarcastic attitude, toned olive-skin and an Italian accent. Or, in short: Ever since he hit his teens, the ladies were after him. He was considered the 'perfect mixture between a hot bad-ass and a cute nerd', however that was working. Then again, he was an accomplished jock with a thing for black clothes, while also playing Mythomagic with Frank and watching Star Trek and Firefly (still crying about the fact that they had canceled that show) and this new up-and-coming relaunch of Doctor Who (though Frank claimed that would never work out on the long run, especially now that Rose was off the show, since according to Frank, the relaunch had lived off the dynamic between Rose and the Doc. Nico was totally convinced they'd renew it for a third series). Frank himself was a nerdy jock too, working hard to rid himself of his baby-fat and he was by now only the slightest bit chubby anymore and that looked rather cute on him because he wasn't all muscle, which would look a little weird on a thirteen-years-old. The duo was practically inseparable – watching the same shows, playing the same games (video games too, mind you), being on the same sports-teams.

Sharing their first kiss, which both had sworn never to talk about again. Ever. Even under death-threats. It had happened last winter and while nearly everyone at the boarding school was going home for Christmas, but Frank had decided to stay at school this year. His mother was stationed overseas and she couldn't make it home for Christmas this year. Frank's only other relative was his grandma, but since she wasn't the youngest anymore, they had agreed that Frank would be attending a boarding school, so he wouldn't burden her so much – his idea back then. But now she wasn't well and even though he had wanted to come home and be with her, she had insisted she'd only drag him down, so instead he was supposed to spend Christmas with his friends. A mistletoe prank gone wrong had led to Frank and Nico awkwardly kissing and then wiping their mouths, swearing to never say a single word about the incident ever again.
Though it had helped Nico figuring some stuff out. When he was twelve, the first girl had told him that he was cute, he had just shrugged her off. This year around he had filled out more, with hitting puberty and the training finally properly paying off. He had kissed a few girls, holding hands. But it just didn't feel right. Not that kissing Frank had been ideal, because he didn't have that kind of feelings for Frank, but it had felt better than kissing a girl nonetheless. He started looking at people differently. Not the best thing to do in the locker rooms of the school, but that had made him realize that he was undeniably gay. And looking around, he figured out what he liked too. The football jocks were mostly broad, bulky dudes and that didn't do it so much for him. The swim team however had the leaner, lankier boys. Nico preferred himself a swimmer to a brute.

"So, what's the plan for this summer, man?", asked Frank curiously.

Nico grinned a little, head tilted some. "Dunno. What are you up for?"

The second summer at the school, Bianca and Nico had come home with Frank and met his grandma, stayed at his awesome mansion. Third summer and Hades had surprised Bianca and Nico by sending Missus Dodds, better known as one of the Furies or also as their math teacher (who scared the crap out of every student), money for a summer vacation. For four. That year, Bianca, Nico, Frank and Bianca's roommate and best friend Phoebe had gone to Italy and spend the summer in Venice, where Nico had been more than eager to show his best buddy everything.

"What do you guys think about visiting a summer camp?"

The friends turned around surprised to face a brunette boy with a goatee.

/Break/

Bianca was in the middle of polishing her bow when three boys burst into her room. She was glad her roommate wasn't there. Especially when she noticed the horns pointing out of the brown curls of the boy being dragged behind between Frank and Nico, who were both wide-eyed.

"He's a satyr! Like in Mythomagic! But the cards didn't say anything about an enchilada-obsession!", exclaimed Frank, in complete ramble-mode.

Nico hastily closed the door and the satyr looked uncomfortable. Bianca heaved a sigh and put the bow down. She was just glad that Phoebe wasn't in at the moment, the ginger would have a heart-attack. She was pretty awesome – especially with a bow – but Bianca wasn't sure how she'd react to being confronted with the supernatural nature of the di Angelo family.

"Please calm down, Frank. He's a satyr, they eat everything", deadpanned Bianca.

Which seemed to shock the satyr more than Frank. "H—How do you know that?"

"You're from camp, right?", asked Nico eagerly, bright, white grin on his face.

"I... How do you know that?", continued the flabbergasted satyr.

"Camp?", repeated Frank confused. "What camp?"

"This is going to give me a headache, so why don't we split it off?", suggested Bianca with a frown. "Nico, explain everything to Frank, satyr, you and I will have a talk."

"My name is Grover. Grover Underwood", introduced the brunette, a little miffed. "I don't go around, calling you 'demigod' either. Though you are one. And you know that."
"Have known it for a couple of years", nodded Bianca casually. "I'm Bianca, that's my brother Nico. So... did our father send you, or notify camp? Or did you guys track us down on your own?"

"Chiron, the trainer at camp, he send me. He was secretive about it all though, how he knew about you and stuff", admitted Grover, growing more nervous. "So... your father's the god then?"

"Our father is the king", corrected Bianca, tilting her head. "Lord Hades."

"Oh.. cupcakes", cursed Grover beneath his breath. "That can't be good..."

"Prejudiced much?", challenged Bianca, cocking one eyebrow.

"-Woah, the gods are real? Like, real-real?", could be heard from Frank from the other corner.

"Not prejudiced, but... bad experience. Got to bring a kid of one of the Big Three to camp before, didn't...", started Grover before his voice cracked. "How come he doesn't know about the gods?"

"Who? Frank?", asked Bianca confused. "Father told us not to let mortals in on the truth."

"He's not a mortal. He's a demigod", corrected Grover with a frown.

"I'm a what?! - "He's one too?!" - could suddenly be heard from both the other boys.

Frank and Nico stared at Grover with large eyes before exchanging a look of their own. Grover shifted some, Bianca grew nervous about how Frank would react. And Nico and Frank high-fived.

"Awesome, man!", exclaimed Nico giddy. "Since your mom looked very much mortal the last time we saw her, it has to be your dad. Let's get this done and narrow it down! Maybe it's one of the Olympian gods? Oh, I bet you're a son of Apollo! You're such a great archer!"

"You think?", asked Frank, sounding nearly shy. "That would be totally cool, man..."

"I'll never understand boys", sighed Bianca fondly and shook her head. "Anyway, so our father most likely contacted camp and camp send you to get us. I... suppose we better pack up then."

"Bianca! We need to hurry!"

And if that day hadn't already been weird enough, this one certainly topped it all off. Phoebe stormed in, green eyes wide. Her bow was shouldered, but her jacket seemed oddly silver. Bianca didn't remember her friend owning such a piece of clothing. She also looked quite jumpy.

"Phoebes, calm down", suggested Bianca, listening with half an ear how Frank and Nico in the corner were debating on who Frank's immortal father could be. "What's happened? What's wrong?"

"No time to explain, you gotta trust me on this one, but there's a manticore at the school and he's trying to kill you, so we need to get out of here", rambled Phoebe.

"...Is everybody you know magic?", asked Frank in total awe.

"Apparently", replied Nico with a deadpan. "Please tell me she's not a demigod too."

That was the moment Bianca's headache hit her full-force. She send the satyr to accompany Frank and Nico to their shared dorm room so they could pack – and so she could have a word with Phoebe. The other girl looked a little calmer, which was due to Bianca. The girl was good at
Phoebe. The other girl looked a little calmer, which was due to Bianca. The girl was good at evening the mood of a person out by using her shadow-powers. A shadow was linked to its owner and by controlling it, she had extended control over the emotions of a person.

"Phoebe, what's going on?", asked Bianca softly while packing the most important things.

"I'm... I was send here", started Phoebe, shifting a little. "By Lady Artemis."

"That... is unexpected", mumbled Bianca with a frown.

"A favor your stepmother called in. The illegitimate daughters of Zeus have quite a close bond and Lady Persephone wanted to... give you this option. She has been observing you and how much you enjoy hunting, so she talked to Lady Artemis. I transferred to this school by her orders, to keep an eye out for you. And now there's a manticore at this school."

"Persephone wants me to become a huntress?", asked Bianca stunned.

Truth was, she had been intrigued by it when she had first learned about them in Klotho's history-classes. A powerful hunting party, only with girls. That rocked. Phoebe nodded slowly.

"Look, I don't know all the details. You'd have to talk to my Lady about all of that", said Phoebe. "All I know is that your fate and your brother's fate are meant to separate here."

"That's not going to happen", snorted Bianca ridiculed. "I'll never abandon Nico."

It was a good thing that school was over for this year, because otherwise the five teens would have been a little suspicious as they left the school with their backpacks and in a total hurry – this way, they just looked like they had a plain to catch for their vacation or something along those lines. As soon as the three boys rejoined the girls, Bianca grabbed Nico's hand. He stared down at their linked fingers in mild surprise. Over the past year especially, she had been pushing him away – feeling too mature for his childishness, being so busy with her archery club and own classes.

"Va tutto bene, sorellona?", whispered Nico concerned. [trans: Are you alright, big sister?]

"Si", nodded Bianca stiffly, the word more a hissing sound really. "Non ti preoccupare, fratellino." [trans: Yes, don't worry about it, little brother]

"...If you say so...", muttered Nico beneath his breath, sounding not very convinced.

Frank frowned worried, knowing that if the siblings didn't share everything, something was definitely wrong. "So, dude, son of Apollo over here. Right? Or do we have other options?"

"H—How did you even meet?", interrupted Grover concerned. "I mean, you didn't just by accident wind up sharing a room with the only other male demigod at that school, son of Hades!"

"I think one of the Fates favors me and gave me a best friend to share my secrets with", grinned Nico. "Probably the cute temp, since the three real ones are... not so cute."

"Dude, there's a temp with the Fates?", asked Frank stunned and blinked a couple of times.

"Yeah, when we were living with father, I sometimes caught a glimpse of this beautiful ghost with the green eyes who seemed to hang out a lot with the Fates", replied Nico with a nod.

"Dude, you lived in the underworld?!", exclaimed Frank. "Tell me all about it, man!"

"I hate boys", groaned Phoebe irritated. "They give me a headache!"
"You better get used to it. It's a long bus-ride to camp", chimed Grover, munching on a can.

"Who said anything about us going to camp?", snarled the huntress irritated.

"The satyr who was send by my father's orders. I trust those more than my stepmother's", stated Bianca calmly. "I'm staying with Nico and we're going to camp, as father planned it for us."

"Look, just take a moment and talk to Lady Artemis", pleaded Phoebe. "If not for your stepmother, at least for my sake. We're friends, right? Trust me when I tell you Lady Artemis doesn't have bad intentions. Just hear her out, please. Do it for me, Bia."

Bianca frowned annoyed. Phoebe had transferred here last year and become Bianca's new roommate after her old one had graduated. They had hit it off right away and Bianca didn't want to believe that all had been a ploy to make her join the moon-gang. Her expression softened.

"Grover, will you stay with Nico and Frank and wait for me, please?", requested Bianca.

"Sorellona-", started Nico in an agitated voice and Bianca already knew what he wanted to say.

"Only for a moment, please", said Bianca and kissed his forehead. "I'll be right back."

They could see the group of silver-white dressed females standing at the forest-line. Nico knew what the huntresses were. He didn't like this, even if it would mean he'd never have to chase any suitors away from his sister again. He heaved a sigh and gave up. While his sister went off with Phoebe, Frank and Nico started to explain to Grover how to play Mythomagic.

/\break\/

There were two teenage-girls waiting in front of the tent. They greeted Phoebe friendly.

"Those are Naomi and Celyn", introduced Phoebe with a nod. "That's Bianca. Bia, go ahead inside, Lady Artemis is waiting for you. I gotta do some reconnecting with my girls..."

The girl introduced as Naomi grinned and ruffled Phoebe's hair affectionately. Bianca tilted her head curiously. They seemed close. Somehow, Bianca hadn't made any friends in the past three years, only Phoebe. Perhaps because she had been expecting their father to collect them any day, so what was the point in making friends? Only Phoebe, when she had become Bianca's roommate, she had been very persistent. Until the two girls were practically inseparable, very much like Nico and Frank. The thought of losing that one friend she had send a pang through her now.

"Bianca Francesca Elena di Angelo, I've heard a lot about you."

The young girl that had spoken smiled amused. She was cute, in a sweet-little-child way. That girl was younger than Frank and Nico, but that and her sweet face didn't fool Bianca. She had the connection to the shadows and those were very much like the aura of a person. She could read from the shadow how a person was, after all, a shadow was the reflexion of a person. And this girl, she wasn't a girl. She was a goddess. The sheer power of her was overwhelming.

"Bianca is enough, Lady Artemis", stated Bianca and wiggled her nose in distaste.

"Good girl", praised the older, stronger-looking girl next to the younger.

"You're... ancient too, but you're not a goddess", pointed Bianca out and shrugged. "Not much of a guess. Though your shadow's power and age... You are of godly descendant."
"Kids of Hades are creepy", smirked the older one. "I'm Zoe Nightshade, head-huntress."

"What am I doing here?", asked Bianca, not much for small-talk.

"My sister and I talked about you a lot", stated Artemis calmly. "There is a prophecy, the prophecy that your father had been awaiting. It's not my place to recite it, though..."

"A Half-Blood of the eldest gods shall reach sixteen against all odds and see the world in endless sleep. The hero's soul, cursed blade shall reap. A single choice shall end his days, Olympus to preserve or raze", recited Bianca, her voice completely calm, surprising the two physically younger girls a bit. "Father prepared us for something. I didn't idly sit by and do everything without doing some research. I found out about the prophecy when looking through his things in the palace."

"You are a clever one, your stepmother is right with that", acknowledged Artemis. "The prophecy warns of a war. A great war. The way my brother and I interpret it, whatever it is will happen when a child of one of the eldest gods turns sixteen. Our father and his five siblings are some of the eldest gods. There are gods older than them, like Aphrodite or Hecate and her sisters and brothers. But children of minor gods don't live as dangerously as those of the Olympians."

"So you narrowed it down to children of Zeus, Poseidon, Hades and Demeter then", nodded Bianca and shifted some. "I'm fifteen. What... do you want from me, though?"

"You're fifteen", said Artemis, nodding in agreement. "But the war that is approaching... It started, but it's far from breaking out just yet. Your father fears for your life. That you will not reach sixteen. It appears uncle Hades is quite upset about that prospect, so my sister asked me to save your life. Join my hunt and you will stop aging. You will never reach sixteen."

"You think I'm going to die", whispered Bianca, pitch-black eyes wide in fear.

"You don't want to leave your brother alone, but if you die, he will be alone. In my hunt, you can protect him from afar", offered Artemis casually. "Phoebe reports to me that you're an excellent archer, a good fighter and a reliable friend. And that you don't let the boys charm you. It's a vital part of our hunt that you vow to never lay with a man."

There wasn't much to think about – she knew the Fates laid the groundwork, but in the end, it was her own decision what would happen with her life. Was she to die, or to live. She hadn't really felt loved by Persephone, so she was a little touched that the queen was looking out for her like that.

"Very well", agreed Bianca, nodding stiffly. "As long as I can still protect my brother."

It was the next day that Nico woke up again. Honestly, he had no idea what had happened. He remembered sitting on the ground, playing Mythomagic with Frank and a satyr. Then... nothing. And now he was blinking awake to a smiling face, bright blue eyes and golden-blonde hair.

"Hey, Sleeping Beauty", grinned the blonde amused. "Congrats, you're the second to wake up. Grover is still hugging and chewing the pillow. Your friend Frank is already awake."

"W—What happened? My sister?", asked Nico and sat up, groaning a little.

"Slow down, handsome", chuckled the blonde, pushing Nico back down onto the bed. "Your sister is with the rest of the hunt in the Artemis Cabin. I'll send someone to fetch her."

"...Rest of the hunt?", whispered Nico, not understanding. "Who are you? Where am I?"
"Will Solace, son of Apollo", grinned the blonde, waving a little. "Welcome to Camp Half-Blood."

Nico heaved a sigh and collapsed back on the bed. "What about my sister?"

"Uhm... Bianca kinda joined that girl-gang, just before the weird lion-scorpion dude attacked and kidnapped two of the scary girls", supplied Frank from the bed next to Nico. "What is this place?"

"Camp Half-Blood is a safe haven for demigods", supplied Will amused. "Once you're feeling better, you're required by Chiron and Mister D, our directors. They want to know what happened."

They got attacked by that stupid manticore. Nico cursed beneath his breath, running one hand through his hair. All because of those stupid huntresses. They could have already been on their way if they hadn't interrupted them. Why would Bianca betray him like that and join them?!

Chapter End Notes

Yes, Bianca joins the hunt here too, seeing as she's too old otherwise. Next chapter will have Nico being introduced to the Hermes Cabin and a fusion of The Lightning Thief and The Titan's Curse happening.
Chapter 6: A Place for Weary Travelers

Will Solace was an annoying mother hen, that was about the first thing Nico learned about this camp. Something must have happened so Bianca couldn't come and visit Nico, but that blonde nurse-boy kept Nico from going out and checking. So he used a moment of distractedness from the blonde and escaped. Unlike him, Frank hadn't been hurt too badly. He had fainted from shock, more or less. So the Canadian had been released five hours ago, given into the care of one scary looking brunette girl by the name of Clarisse la Rue. Apparently Frank was a son of Ares, not Apollo. Since Nico had no idea where to look for either of them – Bianca or Frank – he just went up to the biggest house to snoop around some. Inside were a centaur and a tall blonde with dark, blue eyes.

"...A Roman shouldn't be here", stated the blonde concerned. "It throws off the balance."

"We can hardly send the son of Mars away again", countered the centaur. "The Fates send him here and we have to trust them. As long as he and everyone believes he's Ares' child, it will be fine."

"What about the other boy, Nico?", continued the blonde, dismissing the other matter for now.

"Check on him and take him to the Hermes Cabin", sighed the centaur. "Tell him about his sister." 

Nico stiffened at that. What about his sister? Why Hermes Cabin? He was the son of Hades and they knew it. And what was that about Mars and Ares? Too much information, too little time. He took off again, deciding to go looking for Frank himself. Those cabins weren't exactly secretive, he was pretty sure he could find out which one was Ares' cabin. Not the one with the flowers, or the one with the too much pink. But before he could reach his destination, someone grabbed his shoulder hard. Turning around, he came face to face with the grinning blonde with the scar.

"You must be the new kid, Nico right?", stated the blonde amused. "I'm Luke Castellan, son of Hermes and head of the Hermes Cabin. There's no easy way to say this, but... your dad doesn't have a cabin around, so you get to crash with me, my siblings and every other homeless demigod."

"Homeless demigod?", echoed Nico stunned, unwillingly following the older boy.


"Nice", snorted Nico with a frown and looked around. "So out of the hundreds of gods, only the ones with a throne on Olympus actually get beds for their kids? Great parenting."

Luke laughed and ruffled Nico's hair. "I have the feeling we're going to get along just great."

"Really? Wanna tell me about Romans? Or where my sister is?", countered Nico.

Luke's expression hardened. "Listen, it's important that you don't mention Romans. That wasn't meant for your ears. I'm the leader of Camp Half-Blood, a safe place for the demigod children of the Greek gods, so I have a couple more information than others and it should stay that way. For the safety of your friend. And about your sister... She left for a quest. There is a reason you and
your sister were brought here now. Your father, Hades, he apparently needs your help."

"Please, tell me all about it", inquired Nico annoyed as they reached a cabin. "And stop explaining everything. Assume I'm in the know about how our godly world works."

The place was crowded with teenagers. Luke led him to a bunk-bed and motioned for him to sit. Nico obeyed, albeit reluctantly. Two boys were sitting on the upper bunk, one a freckled brunette and the other a green-eyed Asian. Their conversation stopped the moment they saw Luke.

"The Master Bolt has been stolen and somehow the information of you two being alive was leaked. Lord Zeus is pinning the theft on you and your sister, but your father grew angry and countered that his Helmet of Darkness had been stolen too", started Luke to explain. "It was a bit messy, but somehow the huntresses took an interest in your sister and when Grover came to pick you up, one of the huntresses got abducted. And now your sister got a quest from the oracle."

"What kind of quest?", growled Nico, growing impatient with the stalling son of Hermes.

"It was a pretty big deal", piped the freckled brunette in, hanging upside-down from the bunk. "The oracle never leaves the attic, but she did to give your sister a prophecy. Wanna hear?"

"Yes, please, finally someone willing to give me more information", sighed Nico relieved.

"Five shall go west to the goddess in restrains. You shall find what was stolen and make a bargain. To forego Olympus’ greatest betrayal, campers and hunters combined to prevail. The Titan’s curse must one withstand and one shall perish by a parents’ hand", recited the brunette.

Death. Of course there had to be death in the prophecy. Wouldn't be a prophecy without it now, would it? Nico rolled his eyes at his own sarcastic thoughts. He needed to get a grip on it. Concentrate. Five, that meant Bianca at least hadn't left on her own. That was good, right?

"Who's on this quest, with my sister?", asked Nico concerned.

"A fair mix of hunters and campers. Bianca took the head-huntress Zoe with her, because they had lost contact to Lady Artemis and fear that the goddess in restrains is her", replied Luke, watching Nico with faint amusement. "And two campers. Clarisse, the head of Ares Cabin, and Annabeth, head of Athena Cabin. They're both great fighters and strategists. And they took Grover, as a kind of chaperone you could say. Don't worry, your sister will be fine. Clarisse is the greatest hero our camp has and Annabeth is a good friend of mine, I know she'll do her best."

Nico nodded stiffly and sat on the bed without saying a word until Luke left. The blonde returned with Nico’s bag with what little possession the son of Hades had grabbed in his haste and packed before leaving their school. He didn't say anything, just stare at the backpack. The two boys on the bunk above him tried conversation, but Nico wasn’t really listening to their attempts at cheering him up. Ethan Nakamura, son of Nemesis, and Alabaster Torrington, son of Hecate. Two other powerful underworld gods without cabins. Nico grew doubtful what good this camp was if it only recognized Olympian gods, but he tried not to dwell on that. He had bigger concerns now.

/break/

"This was a bad idea. A very, very bad idea..."

"I didn't force you to tag along!", countered Nico as they rounded the corner to the Smithsonian.

Frank just shot him a glare. "Like hell I'll abandon you. What was I supposed to say? 'Oh, you wanna risk your life on a potentially deathly journey to follow your sister around, sure go ahead. I'll just keep napping'. Not gonna happen, dude. But that doesn't change that this was a bad idea."
And perhaps Nico had to agree with Frank on that one when they finally caught up with the quest, the five of them surrounded by skeleton warriors. The tough looking brunette was holding her weight quite well, but the blonde girl seemed to be mildly injured already. That in itself wasn't a problem. They were skeletons, no match for Nico. But the roaring, giant lion creeping up on them was very much of a problem. No, nothing was a problem. Nico had decided to abandon this camp to protect his big sister and not even the Nemean lion would stop him.

"Frank, distract the kitten", ordered Nico as he approached the four girls and the goat-boy.

"H—How am I supposed to do that?! If I had a giant dog, I could take on the giant kitten!"

Nico wanted to comment on that, but when he turned to face his best friend, there was a giant and confused looking hellhound in Frank's place. Shapeshifting, okay, that was newish. He had read about it in his father's palace, but he hadn't expected to ever encounter a demigod with that power. The cute little Fate truly was in his favors then. Nico smirked, shushing the hellhound.

"Stop!", called Nico out in his most commanding voice as he turned to the girls, one arm raised.

Bianca stiffened where she was supporting a wounded Zoe. Her black eyes darted over to her brother. Annabeth and Clarisse, who both admittedly had grown a bit fond of the fierce daughter of Hades, followed her line of sight. The boy was a year or so younger than Annabeth, but the authority he radiated as he stood there was intense. The skeletons froze mid-attack and turned toward him. At first, Annabeth feared that whoever the kid was, he had just sacrificed himself for their sake, but the skeletons didn't attack. They knelt, like loyal soldiers in front of their king.

"That's my idiot baby-brother I told you about", whispered Bianca with a small smile, her voice filled with pride. "If I'm the Shadow Princess, he's the Ghost Prince."

Nico balled a fist and the skeletons just crumbled to dust. He aimed a glare at Zoe as he approached the group. Out of the corner of his eyes, he noticed a completely bewildered Frank following him, carrying a fur with him. Great, even more explaining. He was looking forward to everything settling to a nice relaxed calm again. Before he reached the group, he turned to his best friend.

"You okay, Frank?", whispered the son of Hades softly, checking for injuries.

"I—I was a dog. A giant dog. And now I'm not. And I just... ripped a giant lion apart..."

"Nemean lion", nodded Nico amused. "And you were a hellhound. It's called shapeshifting. Like with werewolves and stuff, just that you most likely can shift into any animal you can think of."

And he lost Frank again. The son of Mars looked in total awe as he contemplated that. The perfect moment to pay attention to the girls again. Three of those were currently glaring at him.

"What are you doing here, fratellino?", asked Bianca harshly, a disapproving look on her face.

"And bringing my newbie brother with you!", added Clarisse irritated.

"Boys have no business on this quest", spat Zoe angered.

"...Yeah, I could have as well let those skeletons and the Nemean lion kill you, don't thank me all at once", muttered Nico, crossing his arms over his chest. "I'm here because we are accused of stealing that stupid Lightning Bolt. And because I don't know these people, so I will not leave you alone, Bianca. Now, you can either get your act together and accept that Frank and I are here to help, or we can keep following you in the shadows as we did so far."
Quite literally, actually. While Nico wasn't as good at shadow-traveling as Bianca, he was still capable enough of carrying himself and Frank through them, following the unique signature of his big sister's soul. The four girls exchanged looks while Nico decided to check on the passed-out satyr. He knew the outcome of this already. If they were even half-way clever, they'd let him help.

By the time they reached San Francisco, Nico had learned quite a bit about his new comrades.

Zoe was a bitter, man-hating bitch. But she was a good fighter and loyal friend to her huntresses, to which Bianca belonged now too. Nico knew the older girl would take care of his sister.

Grover was fun. He wasn't brave or a fighter, yet he was still here to help. Nico liked that kind of courage. Apparently, he had also been the one to bring Annabeth and Luke to camp years ago.

Clarisse was awesome and kick-ass. She fought tooth and nail and he got why Luke had claimed her to be camp's biggest hero. She was loud, harsh and not girly. Which was good, because Nico didn't like girly girls, they annoyed him and reminded him of the brainless cheerleaders who tried to get him to date them. That aside, she was taking responsibility for Frank, as his new cabin-head (Frank all the while was still trying to get used to the idea of having demigodly half-siblings).

Annabeth was annoying and arrogant. Apparently, this was her first quest and she had been dying to go on one for years. She kept babbling on about architecture which had reached its peak when they were on the Hoover Dam, which turned out to be one of her favorites. Nico liked rambling like the next nerd, but please, about something with consistence, like *Star Wars*.

"My father lives here", whispered Annabeth as they all sat together that evening.

They were camping for the night, resting before the supposedly big fight. Frank and Grover were contently munching smores, while Zoe was polishing her arrows. Bianca, Annabeth and Clarisse were talking. Nico kept to the shadows and observed. It was his greatest skill, watching others and analyzing them. This way, he knew who he was forced to rely on.

"And why aren't you living with him?", asked Bianca kindly, resting a hand on Annabeth's knee.

Annabeth blinked owlishly at the beautiful Italian girl. She was so tender, a real big sister type. Somehow, she reminded Annabeth a lot of Thalia, which send a pang of longing and sadness through her. It was not hard to feel comforted by the daughter of Hades.

"He's married to a mortal and they have two sons. They... don't need me", muttered Annabeth. "I don't fit into their world. But it's fine. I have a new family now..."

Nico's eyes softened a little as he watched her. He couldn't picture abandoning his mother and siblings, or being abandoned by them. She was stronger than he had given her credit for.

"Family doesn't have to be blood. Those who love you, they are your family", said Nico softly.

"Yeah. Like me and Nico. We're brothers, even though we aren't", agreed Frank with a grin.

The titan whose curse was in question was Atlas. Nico disliked it a lot. The fight was harsh, Atlas had minions with him, more than just the stupid manticore. And they needed Artemis' help. Phoebe, the huntress that had been abducted, Bianca's best friend, she was out cold after having been forced to carry the weight of the world until Artemis had taken over for her huntress.
"Together we can do this", called Bianca out as she locked eyes with Nico.

Together they could do anything. Nico's face hardened as he joined his sister. Together, they took the weight of the world onto their shoulders to give Artemis the chance to help. It was an unbearable pain to carry this kind of weight and he wished he could actively help the fight – he was forced to watch helplessly how Zoe died at the hands of her father Atlas. But Frank intuitively used his shapeshifting and Annabeth and Clarisse were strong fighters. Grover all the while was tending to Phoebe, feeding her nectar and ambrosia to get her back on track.

The weight became more and more and Nico felt like this was it. They had gone through so much with this quest. Had visited the Junk Yard of the gods, encountered Aphrodite (who had promised him a big surprise in his future. He was not looking forward to it), followed a lead on Pan (who apparently was missing and Grover's mission to find him – that earned the satyr some of Nico's respect). Nico was thirteen, he was not ready to die here, that was the last thing on his mind.

"You know, this is the second time this week that you're here. I feel flattered."

Again, the first thing he saw upon opening his eyes was the grinning son of Apollo. "Hello, Will."

"I like your new look, son of Hades", commented the blonde before turning away. "Oh, you're going to be fine, by the way. Your sister too. But you got quite some visitors waiting for you."

Nico frowned confused and turned his head some. In the bed next to his was Bianca, out cold. The weight of the world must have knocked them out. He blinked surprised when he saw that aside from the long, black curls, there were two stark-white strands framing her face. At Bianca's bed sat Phoebe, her arm in a cast and a bandage around her head. The huntress looked at Nico briefly.

"Don't look so startled. You look the same", commented Phoebe with a small grin.

Lifting a hand, he grabbed for his own hair and pulled so he could see that yes, he had a white strand too. Muttered to himself, he turned back to the two girls. Phoebe looked worried as she stared down at Bianca. He knew she cared. They were best friends.

"Promise me you'll protect her", whispered Nico, his voice tight. "Promise me she'll be safe."

She looked at him surprised, but nodded. Before Nico had another chance to say something, people burst into the room. Frank, Annabeth, Clarisse, Grover, Ethan, Alabaster and even Luke. He blinked surprised as his and Bianca's beds were suddenly surrounded by the teenagers.

"Don't dare start rambling all at once now!", stated Will firmly before they could open their mouths. "Or I'll throw you all out of the infirmary again. Hushed voices. Not too much. They need rest."

"Hey, how are you feeling?", asked Frank softly, sitting down next to Nico.

"Like death warmed over", groaned Nico and froze. "Pun not intended."

"You got guts, man", grinned Alabaster amused. "Sneaking out like that."

"You are in trouble for that", nodded Luke gravely, glaring at him. "But your life is not in danger anymore. Lady Artemis returned the Lightning Bolt and the Helmet of Darkness. She convinced Lord Zeus that he owes you enough gratitude to let you live."
"Yay me", muttered Nico with a deadpan.

"Be grateful, brat", huffed Annabeth with a glare. "We... really thought you'd die. Don't do that."

"But you did good, punk", grunted Clarisse with a grin, ruffling Nico's hair.

It was three days later that the di Angelos got released from the infirmary (Will was stubborn when it came to that and not even his older brothers Lee and Michael argued with him on his orders). Nico's heart was heavy. Especially the last three days of basically only having Bianca for company made him realize how important his big sister was to him. But the hunt would leave camp now. The demigods stood there, in a half-circle, to bide the huntresses goodbye. Chiron and Luke in the center, together with Nico – because he had a personal goodbye to say. Chiron was shaking hands with Lady Artemis while Nico faced Bianca. She looked amazing in her camouflage gown, with the green sash with a silver half-moon on it, a thin, silver tiara on her head. After she had led the quest to save a huntress and the goddess of the hunt, after carrying the weight of the world for Lady Artemis, the huntresses had all agreed to make her the new head huntress, after Zoe's death.

"I will miss you, baby brother", whispered Bianca as she pulled him into a tight hug.

He had been bitter about her decision to join the hunt at first, but seeing her during this quest, with Zoe, the camaraderie between the girls. And during their stay in the infirmary, Bianca and Nico had discussed it thoroughly. Why Bianca had done it, that she feared death and obeyed their stepmother's request. That she would still watch over him and that they would see each other again.

"This isn't goodbye", whispered Nico back, fingers clawed into her dress.

His heart still felt heavy when Bianca followed Lady Artemis, with Phoebe, Celyn, Naomi and the other huntresses hot at their heels. A heavy hand clasped down on his shoulder and he turned to look at Frank. His best friend offered him a small grin. While Nico had been stuck in the infirmary, he had apparently gotten used to the Ares Cabin – not to Clarisse's harsh training though. Another hand came to rest on Nico's other shoulder and he turned to look at Luke briefly.

"Your big sister may have left, but you got a whole cabin of new siblings now", stated the son of Hermes softly. "And I'm responsible for you now. That means no stunts like that again. No running off without another word again, even if it made you a hero."


He followed Luke toward the Hermes Cabin as the gathered demigods dissolved. "Of course. You apparently crushed an army of skeletons and helped saving a goddess. Clarisse is praising you a lot and her praise means something around here. I wonder what you did to impress her."

"No idea", muttered Nico confused and frowned.

Sure, the two of them had fought well together and perhaps they had bonded a little during their trip, but he blamed Frank for this. Clarisse had taken to her new younger brother and apparently he had told her a lot about Nico. She also appreciated how he cared for Frank.

"This is your bunk", said Luke, motioning to the one he had previously spend half a night in.

Nodding briefly, Nico collapsed on the bed. He was still exhausted from the quest. Running a hand through his hair, he grinned. The white strand would forever connect him to his sister.
Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will have the poisoning of Thalia's tree, triggering the Sea of Monsters quest. Which means that Leo and Percy will arrive at Camp Half-Blood! Next chapter will also show how well Nico settled at camp over the by then past year!
Chapter 7: First Impressions Count the Most

"Guys. You should come. And... uhm, get dressed. It's serious."

Nico frowned as he looked up from his cards to glare at Chris. The son of Hermes stood in the doorway of the Hermes Cabin, staring at them mildly uncomfortable. Nico, Travis, Connor, Ethan and Alabaster were sitting in a circle, all in different states of being undressed. It was Strip-Poker Saturday, after all. But somehow, those hazel eyes looked rather serious and concerned.

"Okay, I'll bite. What exploded this time?", asked Nico as he grabbed his shirt.

Last week, it had been Jake's and Nyssa's attempts at fixing Festus the giant-ass metal dragon that Silena and Charles had found in the woods. Boom, their cabin was half-way gone. They knew better than to try again. Nico shook his head some. One year at this camp and he was already used to things exploding, he knew the it-couples around, he even participated in gossip. It was nice, really. He had never really tried to blend in at his old boarding school because of all the secrets – his parentage, the fact that he wasn't supposed to be alive and all of that.

"It's Thalia's tree. It's been poisoned", answered Chris after a moment.

Travis and Connor behind Nico stumbled a little. They had never met Thalia either – no one had, aside from Luke and Annabeth and crap, how were they taking the news? Were they alright? Thalia was a daughter of Zeus, aka Zeus not keeping it in his pants even though the Three Brothers had an oath. She had been traveling with Luke and Annabeth, they had been close. Really close. If Nico had to guess, she had been more to Luke than just 'a friend'. He'd say she was his first love. And then she nearly died and got turned into a giant pine-tree. Great parenting there, Zeus. The six friends arrived at the tree to find Luke sitting there, leaning against the bark, head hung low.

"Hey, how are you doing?", asked Ethan unusually soft as he approached his best friend.

"What sick bastard would do this?", countered Luke hollowly. "Sure, the guys who are responsible for stealing the Helmet and the Bolt last year, the ones wrecking havoc the past months, but... Thalia never did anything to them, did she? Why would anyone..."

"To weaken camp", interrupted Alabaster, frown on his face and hand resting against the bark. "Her magic is what protects camp boarders. Once the tree dies, the magic will die with it."

Nico glared and elbowed the other boy hard in the ribs. The brunette winced and realized what he had just said, his green eyes comically wide. When the tree died. When Thalia died.

"Well, means we just gotta save the tree before it comes to that", said Nico firmly. "Right?"

Luke looked up and Nico was pretty sure the older boy had been crying, his eyes were slightly red and Nico couldn't hold it against him, because if this were someone he held dear, he'd be bailing his eyes out too. "Yeah. Yeah, you're right, Neeks. We're going to save her."

"Don't call me Neeks, Lucas", grunted Nico with a disgusted face and wiggled his nose.
Bianca was sitting at a stream of ice-cold water, watching her reflexion thoughtfully when the IM call connected and suddenly, she was staring at a face so much like her own, with the same intense, dark eyes, high cheekbones, messy, black curls and the white strands hanging into his face.

"Nico", whispered Bianca, smiling a little. "Hey. Is it Sunday already?"

"Huh? Oh. No, Saturday", grunted Nico and shook his head, frown etched onto his face.

Bianca mirrored his expression. "What's wrong, fratellino?"

"It's that tree. Thalia's tree. The giant pine-tree, you know?", started Nico, running one hand absentmindedly through his hair. "It's been poisoned. But, well, it's connected to the campboarders. If it dies, we're pretty much left defenseless. That aside, she was a good friend of Annie and Luke."

Bianca's face fell a little. She was still in contact with Annabeth, trying to convince the blonde to join the hunt. She also knew that Annabeth was a good friend of Nico's. It must have been bad enough to watch a friend being turned into a tree, but now watching them slowly die as that...?

"Now they're trying to pick a quest. Well, Clarisse got it", muttered Nico, glaring a little. "Full out with prophecy and all that jazz. Wanted to bold off right away. But that's ridiculous. You don't go around taking on quests on your own. So the cabin-heads and Chiron are locked into the Big House, discussing who should take on this quest. It's like the most important quest we had since the whole lightning and helmet thing last year, you know? And I've been on a couple quests since then too. I want to go on that quest. Besides, one line of the prophecy said 'You shall sail the iron ship with warriors of bone' and hello, Ghost Prince over here! But Luke said it was his responsibility. She was his friend, he'd set this straight. Annabeth says the same and Luke is being all protective over her, not wanting her to attend because he's already risking Thalia here. And Clarisse is just mainly a pain in the ass because she wants to go alone. Frank and I try to convince her to take us with her, but she wants us to stay here, as her second-in-commands and all that shit."

Frank was the second-in-command of the Ares Cabin, Nico had already told her that before, all proud, bright eyes and stuff. It was endearing. And Nico, he had taken on a lot of quests over the last year, following leads on what the rebels were doing, helping out and saving demigods all over. He had become the biggest hero of Camp Half-Blood, next to Clarisse. Which Bianca had told Artemis and the others all proud, bright eyes and stuff. So Clarisse most likely wanted him at camp in case they failed and the boarders went down. Camp needed someone ready to defend them. Bianca could see it in Nico's face that he understood this reasoning too. That didn't change that he didn't do well with sitting around and doing nothing.

"The cabin-heads have been deciding these kind of things long before you joined camp. They know what they're doing", assured Bianca softly. "I'm sure it will be fine, even if you can't attend."

"I know", sighed Nico in defeat. "I know the enemy is probably going to wait for the moment that the walls go down and they can attack and I don't like the idea of camp laying unprotected either. That really doesn't change that I want to be there. I want to help. I've been on every big quest with Clarisse since last year and it doesn't sit right with me to have her waltz out there on her own. And Luke hasn't been attending quests in like forever, because he's full-on the leader of camp by now and I don't really know if he will be alright, but he's like a big brother to me, you know?"
Bianca nodded, soft smile on her lips. She did know. Luke listened to him and protected him, had taken him under his wing when Bianca had left and Bianca would be eternally grateful to Luke for that. It pained her to see Nico this concerned, but it also made her feel relieved, because it meant Nico wasn't illusioned about the situation, he knew how dire it really was. She just hoped they'd be alright. If the camp's protection weakened, her brother and his friends were in danger. So as the call disconnected, she made her way back to their camp-side. Bianca held her head high and proud – she never cowered, especially not when she wanted something because she knew it would seem as a sign of weakness. Demanding was more effective than begging – as she entered the tent of her lady. Artemis looked unusually troubled as she sat hunched over a map.

"I have a request", stated the daughter of Hades and bowed just a little. "I want to take Phoebe and go to the Sea of Monsters. She is the best tracker there is, if anyone can find the golden fleece-"

"Do not be foolish though", interrupted Artemis, not looking up. "The sea is dangerous."


"Don't assume I'm not aware of what is happening. The poisoning of my half-sister caused quite the ruckus on Olympus", replied Artemis, locking eyes with Bianca. "This pending war, I am aware that the little heroes Chiron trains are our most valuable asset. And I am aware of how much you worry about your little brother. I'll allow it, for now. Take Phoebe with you and go."

Hades took a moment to stand leaning against the rail, watching. Percy, Leo, Tyson, Melinoe and Makaria were playing hide and seek with three more than annoyed Furies. Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone looked ready to tear the kids apart and eat them alive. Percy giggled from where he was hiding behind one of the beautiful gem-trees of Persephone's.

"Tyson, I think it's time you return to the forges. Alecto, Megaera, Tisiphone, I believe you have other duties. The same goes for you, my darling daughters", interrupted Hades after a moment. "I need to talk to my boys. Perseus, Leonardo, come with me for a walk."

Leo wiggled his nose, as he always did when Hades called him that. He sometimes wondered if he wouldn't prefer for Hades to still call him a pet instead, because honestly, only his abuela ever called him that and only if she was angry with him too. Hades had leveled a glare at him the first time he had protested to being called by his full first name and the god had stated that Leo should be proud and stand true to his name's meaning – brave as a lion. Percy had agreed, with a teasing grin, but Leo suspected that it was just the joy of not being the only one bugged by Hades.

"What's up, papá?", asked Percy softly, shifting from one leg to the other.

Leo guessed that the son of Poseidon assumed they were being called out on their latest prank. Involving pink hair-dye and Olethros' shampoo. But Hades looked too serious for that (truth was, Hades had laughed the loudest when Olethros had shown up with pink hair and wings).

"Camp Half-Blood, as the Moirai already taught you, is protected by magical borders. Those are held together by a very special tree. A tree that used to be a demigod, just like you", started Hades. "This tree had been poisoned by one of my father's minions. Now the demigods have to find the golden fleece to cure the tree. To do so, they have to sail into the Sea of Monsters, the most vicious part of your father's realm, Perseus. No demigod since the Argonauts has ever come out alive."

"Sounds thrilling", muttered Leo beneath his breath, grabbing Percy's hand out of reflex.
"My children will attempt to find the fleece there", continued Hades, not minding the son of Hephaestus. "But those seas are too dangerous. I want you to go and help them, Perseus. If anyone can steer a ship through it, it's a son of Poseidon. I want you to pack your things and by noon, I want you on your way to Camp Half-Blood. It's time you meet my children."

Percy's eyes were so wide, Leo feared they'd fall out. "I—I... Really? Okay. Sure. Yes. Uhm..."

"Yes, he can come with you", sighed Hades, motioning for Leo. "Why else do you think I wanted him here now too? I know it's hard to separate the two of you. And he may be helpful."

The two teens high-fived and hugged, broad grins on their faces. They were getting out of here. Out to see the world. To attend a quest. Years of training would finally be paying off. They'd get to prove themselves, not just to the gods of the underworld, but also to a whole new group. Other demigods. A whole camp of them. And among them, Percy's fiance.

"Oh my dads, what am I supposed to wear?!", asked Percy wide-eyed, staring at Leo frantically.

And that was when Hades decided to hastily leave the party, because there were just things he did not like participating in. Leo all the while grinned broadly and tugged Percy along to his chambers. This was like the first impression Percy would leave on the guy he was most likely to spend the rest of eternity with – it had to be good. Percy felt his hands starting to sweat nervously.

"You, pack what you need for some tree-saving quest. I'll raid your closet", declared Leo.

Percy nodded numbly and went about. There was his armor, the black leathered one for his right arm, reaching from his knuckles up to his shoulder. He so needed that. The one for his left arm was shorter, only covering up to his elbow. Though that one turned into a Stygian-iron shield with a skull-motive, thanks to Tyson and Leo. Riptide, obviously. He'd need his sword.

"Okay. Done. I also packed clothes worth for like a couple days", stated Leo.

"How do you do that so fast?", asked Percy dumbfounded as he turned around.

"Magic, baby", grinned the Latino. "Now strip down and let your fairy godmother do the rest!"

"How about you let his mother help some too?", interrupted Persephone amused as she entered.

Percy turned grateful eyes to his mamma as he was down to his boxers and fighting with the impossibly tight black leather-pants Leo had gotten out for him. The Spring Goddess offered him as she looked at the equally tight dress-shirt that Leo was holding up. She deadpanned.

"It's nice to look at, but try to think of something that is practical for fighting too", argued Persephone and turned to Percy's wardrobe. "There. This is nice. Oh, and this one too."

A blue turtleneck without sleeves. Definitely better for using his arms and especially so considering his armor. It did hug his frame nicely too and if he bend the right way, it slid up just to reveal enough of his stomach to tease. He blushed brightly. Persephone helped him into the black leather vest that was loosely tied with a cord in front, silver embroidery lining it. Last but not least Persephone smiled as she reached for his brush and started combing his hair tenderly.

Leo had sneaked out at this point to get his own stuff packed. Percy stared at his reflexion, clearly pleased. His shoulder-long black hair fell perfectly straight, the fringes dyed dark blue.

"I really hope I'll leave a good impression on him", whispered Percy concerned.

"Honey, if he doesn't like you, he's not worth the trouble", stated Persephone, kissing his
It was exactly twelve o'clock as Percy and Leo reached New York through a secret entrance to the underworld after Charon had brought them this far. Tyson and the gods had all wished them good luck and there had been an awful lot of hugging, which hadn't helped their nerves. Percy took a deep breath as he found himself back in New York, for the first time in eight years.

"Mind if we take a detour?", asked the son of Poseidon, grabbing Leo's hand tightly.

Ascalaphus cooed curiously and turned his head in that weird way only owls could and if Leo could, he would mirror the gesture. They had agreed to take the bird with them, because in case Leo and Percy would be separated, the black barn-owl could track either down and deliver messages between them. The Latino obediently let Percy tug him along until they reached an apartment building. By the looks of it, Percy hadn't just randomly chosen to go here. They just stood there and waited and if not for the serious look in those sea-green eyes and the thin line of Percy's lips, Leo would have complained and asked what they were doing here. He felt as though he just had to trust Percy on this one and keep waiting, whatever they were waiting for. A beautiful brunette woman with long curls and kind, azure-blue eyes exited the building after about twenty minutes, a smile on her lips that reminded Leo a lot of Percy. She was holding a little girl by the hand and the girl's other hand was being held by a man with salt-and-pepper hair. The adults were laughing as they guided their daughter outside of the building. Leo watched Percy's reaction confused, until it dawned on him. Percy used to live in New York, before he had gone to the underworld. This woman, the woman with Percy's smile... she must be his mother. The woman who had married a reeking, abusive bastard to cover Percy's godly blood and its scent. The woman Percy hadn't seen in eight years, the woman Percy couldn't even talk about without teary eyes, filled with regret. Regret because he blamed himself for her being stuck in that horrible marriage; Percy had told him so once.

"Come now, Sally. We'll be late to the party", laughed the man, looking lovingly at the woman.

Percy choked on a sob as he watched the little family. A million and one thoughts racing through his head as he watched how happy his mother was with this man and this child. Something heavy settled in his stomach and it twisted and turned, making thinking and breathing hard as his jaw clenched tightly and something odd and new took over him. Something strong and primal. Hatred.

He lowered his eyes, clenching them shut for as long as he thought it would take the family to leave. He couldn't keep looking at them, looking at how happy his mother was. She hadn't been able to be happy while he had been around. She had been married to a monster because of him, had suffered for so long all because of him. It was his fault that she had to wait to be happy for so long. If he would have been a normal child, that wouldn't have had happened. He had made her life hell by being her son, had denied her the chance of a normal, happy family. It was his fault.

"Ouch", winced Percy as he got hit upside the head, then turning to a glaring Latino.

"Don't give me that crappy look, Perce", warned the son of Hephaestus unimpressed. "I know what happened with your mom and your old stepfather. It wasn't your fault, so stop looking like a guilty puppy who carries the weight of the world. Everybody is responsible for their own happiness and if she seriously had to lose you to be happy, then she's the one who did something wrong in her life."

Percy blinked a couple of times at Leo, but before he had the chance to say anything mushy in return, or argue with him, they got attacked by a giant, horned bull-man and all hell broke loose. Percy hastily got Riptide out and Leo had a fireball summoned in his hand within a second. The
Latino fired, using it to herd the beast out of harm's way. Away from the mortals. Percy went in for the kill, but fighting an actual monster was rather different from fighting Styx or Nemesis in training was something else entirely and before he could cut the Minotaur's head off in a clean slice, the beast got quite a few well-placed punches in on both Percy and Leo. But in the end, only a heap of ash remained as the monster collapsed in itself. Percy and Leo were panting hard as they locked eyes, the encounter with Sally Jackson already nearly forgotten as Percy looked at his little brother. What good was hating himself for the past if it distracted him from the now and thus interfered with his future? Gathering himself, he wrapped one arm around Leo's waist. The Latino had hit the ground earlier after jumping the Minotaur and apparently, his ankle hadn't quite enjoyed the impact.

Together, the two of them made their way, slowly and on foot. The closer they got to Camp Half-Blood, the antsier they both grew. Before they reached it, they had to fight off another couple of minor monsters and Percy started to realize why he had been hidden in the underworld. It was like he had a blinking set of letters saying SNACK HERE floating over his head.

And reaching camp didn't exactly feel like safety either. There was a buzz in the air, filled with nervousness and agitation, like they were expecting an attack. Like they were expecting Percy and Leo to be part of that attack. Then again, a couple of strangers stumbling into their home, it probably didn't exactly look good now, did it? Percy squinted his eyes a little as more and more demigods gathered around them. At first, it had only been that tall Asian son of Ares and a dark-haired son of Hephaestus who had looked quite startled before calling out to the others. More demigods came and Percy could instinctively tell whose children they were. The flickering of their auras was intense. The Asian had that angry, dark-red light surrounding him, the one Percy associated with Ares. While the other guard had the same rich, rusty brown as Leo's aura. Percy had studied life-threads of demigods, had taught himself to distinct between parentage. But the aura of a life-thread was so much calmer and smaller, the real aura of a demigod was stronger. Far stronger.

"Who are you?", asked a blonde son of Hermes – the leader apparently, judging by his posture.

He was flanked on the left by a daughter of Ares with a red bandana around her head, long, brown hair waving in the wind, a spear in one hand and a nasty glare on her face. On his other side was... was... Percy gulped, feeling all words fleeing his mind. The son of Hades. Tall, with broad shoulders and olive-skin, high cheekbones, dark curls, fascinating white strands in them. His aura was like Hades', the same black flicker of pure power. Life and death, pulsing, surging. The very first familiar thing in this to Percy foreign world and it seemed to call out to him. All this sunlight, all the monsters. He instinctively sought out the safety he knew, the safety of the underworld.

More demigods came forth and Percy started to feel dizzy. The aura of a living demigod was strong, but these were more than twenty demigods, all their pulsing energy assaulting Percy's senses, he didn't know where to look anymore, what to focus on. And then he collapsed face-first.

Chapter End Notes

Like any respectable author, I live off the pain of my readers - so suffer a mean cliffhanger. xD No, seriously though, the entire next chapter will solemnly focus on Percy's and Nico's first conversations, interactions and impressions of each other. I didn't want to cramp what are important feelings into a short passage, so that stuff gets an entire chapter.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 8: A Long-Awaited Meeting

After Nico, Chris and Frank had gotten caught sitting under the window of the Big House and listening in on the cabin-head meeting, Chris and Frank got send off to guard-duty at the camp-boarders with Jake and Michael. They had more guards these days, out of obvious reasons. They feared a traitor would use their distractedness to sneak in. Or the culprit would sneak out. Nico all the while got the brunt force of Luke's disappointed-dad-look. It was annoying not being a cabin-head, after all Luke was their leader, the leader of camp, while in a way, all the cabin-heads were his lieutenants. And Clarisse and Nico were his generals, the two greatest heroes their camp had. Clarisse was the cabin-head of Ares Cabin, Luke was the cabin-head of Hermes Cabin. After the meetings, Clarisse would normally give Frank and Nico the brief summary of it. Right now, he received a more detailed version from both Clarisse and Luke. At least until they could hear Frank yelling for backup. The trio exchanged a tense look before they ran up to the entrance of camp, Clarisse gripping Maimer hard, Nico's hand was resting on the hilt of Nightmare, ready to fight.

"Who are you?", called Luke out as they saw the two intruders.

Two boys, holding onto each other, both looking like they had been attacked. One was a small Latino with wild curls and almond eyes, his caramel-skin covered by a pair of tight, dark-brown leather-pants and a shoulder-free red shirt. The other however looked far more interesting to Nico. His skin was so pale, it looked nearly white, not in a sickly way though, but more in an ethereal way, glowing like this boy was something out of this world. His short, black hair had a cute blue fringe to it, framing a beautiful face. A face with eyes that seemed stunningly familiar to Nico in a way he couldn't quite put his finger on. Such a deep, green color like the sea in Venezia. Long legs were wrapped into tight black leather-pants, torso hidden by an azure-blue turtleneck, accented by a leather-vest that gave his upper body a nice v-shape. And then the pretty one just collapsed forward with a groan. Nico, who hadn't even realized that he had been walking toward them, together with Luke and Clarisse, found himself lunging forward and catching the unconscious boy before he could hit the ground. He twisted the limb body until he could comfortably cradle him to his chest, noting that he wasn't very heavy. The other boy, who had been leaning onto him for support, however landed on his butt with a little yelp and a curse.

"I'll ask one more time", warned Luke, arms crossed over his chest, focus a bit concerned on Nico.

"I'm Leo, he's Percy, we're demigods", answered the Latino hastily. "We were send here, we were told this is a camp for kids like us. But we, well, we ran into the Minotaur and nasty snake-legged ladies on our way here. Please... we just... We don't mean harm, honestly."

Luke regarded the boy one last time intensely, checking to see if the boy was lying. It was a gift of children of Hermes, seeing as their father was the god of trickery and thieving, lying was kind of in their realm too. They were great cheats (especially at poker) and they could see through a bluff or lie like living lie-detectors. Luke nodded once, sharply. Clarisse lowered her spear.

"Frank, bring him to the infirmary. Get both checked and do some explaining", ordered Luke.

Frank stared a little surprised and then he blushed as he helped the Latino up. "Uhm, hi. I'm Frank."
"Just carry him, please. With the size-different between you two, that would be the most awkward and wobbly hopping around possible", stated Nico and rolled his eyes. "Or do you mind, Leon?"

"Leo", corrected the Latino with a glare before turning to the Asian. "Uhm, I don't mind."

Nico spared one last glance at how awkward Frank was behaving as he lifted the light little impish boy up into his arms and followed the Italian toward the infirmary. The son of Hades however was soon too distracted by a soft groaning, catching his attention. The boy in his arms – Percy had it been – was burying his face in Nico's chest, eyes tightly squeezed shut.

"Hello, Sleeping Beauty", chuckled Nico. "Interesting entrance you had there."

"Oh gods, I made a total fool of myself", groaned Percy, hiding his face behind his hands. "He'll think I'm a total damsel in distress, fainting like a little girl..."

"He?", inquired Nico curiously.

"Yeah, I... there's this boy at this camp and I've been looking forward to meeting him and I wanted to leave a total badass first impression and all... and then I fainted like a princess", muttered Percy.

"If it's any consolation, I think it was pretty badass, I mean your friend said you had a run-in with the Minotaur. Not every camper, much less a newbie, could take the Minotaur on, you know?", offered Nico, feeling bad for the other boy. "There's no shame in being exhausted."

"I wasn't exhausted", mumbled Percy upset. "It was... I was overwhelmed. All those demigods."

"Overwhelmed?", inquired Nico confused, looking down at the boy who was still hiding.

"I can... kinda see the aura of a person. And the aura of a demigod is far more intense than that of a mortal and I've never seen so many demigods in one place, all that power...", whispered the boy.

Nico frowned stunned at that. He had never met a demigod who could see the aura of a person. Bianca could sense it over a person's shadow and Nico could feel the souls, but the aura?

"Well, makes it all the more impressive", grinned Nico. "That's one amazing ability you have there, after all. And I can believe that so many of us must have been overwhelming. But you're unharmed? Physically speaking, I mean. Not injured? Because I'm bringing you to the infirmary, if you were wondering about the weirdo carrying you around. My name is Nico, by the way."

"Oh. Uhm. Yes. Sorry", mumbled Percy embarrassed. "My social skills could use a polishing... Nice to meet you, Nico. My name is Percy. And no, I'm not injured. Just some scrapes."

Sea-green eyes were revealed to Nico and now, so close-by, he found them even more enchanting. Those special, deep and emotional gems widened startled as the boy looked up at Nico.

"You're the son of Hades!", yelped Percy, one hastily rushed out word, really.

"Last time I checked, yes", nodded Nico, confused for a second, before it dawned on him. "You... can tell my parentage by my aura? How... does that work? If you don't mind explaining."

But the boy in his arms seemed too preoccupied with blushing and gaping to answer. So Nico just continued into the infirmary and placed Percy on one of the beds, cautiously. Will was next to him within the second, looking curious and poking Percy's nose.
"What did you do to the poor boy, di Angelo?", asked Will concerned. "I told you, not everyone can handle your innuendos, stupid Hermes Cabin kids. He looks completely traumatized."

Percy was still fixated on Nico. Nico di Angelo. The son of Hades. His heart beat faster at that thought. This was his fiance. Well, at least he was handsome. And nice, what he had said earlier had been sweet and he had been willing to carry Percy to the infirmary to get him checked. Now Percy just needed to stop blushing and start behaving like a normal, human being again.

"Uhm, sorry", mumbled Percy and shook his head once. "Every aura is individual, a flickering glow that surrounds humans. But, uhm, the gods have strong auras. Colorful ones. And they pass part of that down to their demigodly children. Like, there is a specific... color to it. I've been studying the different kinds and by now I'm pretty good at reading which color indicates what god. Like, yours is a silvery-shining, intense black. But his is a golden-yellow like the sun. Apollo. Right?"

"Will Solace, son of Apollo", nodded Will amused. "Nice to meet you."

"Likewise", smiled Percy with a small nod. "My name is Percy Jackson."

"Leo Valdez over here and I could use some Apollo-help!", called the Latino from the other bed.

"Yes, please", agreed Percy. "I'm fine. Really. But my brother got hurt."

While Will turned his attention to Leo, others arrived to check the newbies. First came Chiron, Luke and Clarisse. They were soon followed by other cabin-heads; Annabeth, Katie, Charles and Silena. It was rare for a new camper to come here all on their own. Suspicious, especially the timing. Even though Luke had deemed their words to be true, that didn't mean they couldn't be spies anyway.

"Hello, I'm Chiron, the trainer around here", introduced the centaur.

"Dude! You're half-horse!", observed Leo wide-eyed and in awe. "That's awesome!"

"Sorry. He... doesn't get out much", smiled Percy apologetically. "I'm Percy Jackson, that's my brother Leo Valdez. Thank you for having us. We're sorry to burst in without further notice."

"Yes, we'd like to know how you knew about this camp", inquired Luke sternly.

Percy gave him a short once-over. Tall, muscular build, a prominent scar under one eye. He looked like a fighter, someone who already fought before. A leader, judging by his posture. A figure of authority even toward those around his own age, judging by the way the other teens stood behind him. A son of Hermes too. Interesting. Percy tilted his head curiously.

"My papá told me", replied Percy easily. "He send us here."

He knew he was being deliberately enigmatic. May they interpret his words however they deemed fit – most likely that his father was mortal and send them here. So his mother was a goddess. It worked in his favor for now, because he wasn't ready to reveal his parentage, neither the biological nor the adopted one, just yet. The son of Hermes was still staring intensely at him, reading him to see if he was lying. What Percy had said was the complete truth though. Percy smiled.

"Your... timing is just... questionable", threw the blonde girl in.

"Don't overthink things, daughter of Athena", countered Percy, still smiling.
She froze before stepping up to Nico. Tapping him on the shoulder, she leaned in to whisper something. He pulled her close enough to answer. Percy didn't like how close they stood.

"You... can tell whose child a demigod is by looking at their aura?", asked the girl surprised.

Percy nodded slowly. It was better to throw that out in the open now before Will would go around and gossip would start to spread. What was out should be put out fully to prevent misunderstandings. He still could see the doubt in their eyes.

"Son of Hermes", started Percy, pointing at the blonde leader. "Daughter of Ares, daughter of Demeter, daughter of Aphrodite, son of... oh. Leo! He's your brother!"

His finger was stuck on the broad, dark-skinned boy who had one arm wound around the gorgeous daughter of Aphrodite. The attention was finally diverted over to Leo. The Latino, who was in the middle of munching a piece of ambrosia, looked doe-eyed at the bulky demigod.

"Hi", stammered Leo shyly, wondering if he should say it out loud.

It being his godly parent. He never really talked about it, because he wasn't sure how far Hephaestus even cared. If it even mattered. But apparently, the god took that decision from him, because in the next moment, a glowing, reddish-brown symbol of a hammer hovered above his head.

"Hello", replied the dark-skinned guy. "I'm Charles Beckendorf. The campers are divided by godly parentage, so I'll be your cabin-head from now on while you stay at camp."

Percy froze at that. But he had been looking forward to sharing a cabin with Nico!

"So, two newbies for Beckendorf then", grunted Clarisse, eying both.

"No", answered Percy and shook his head. "We're not that kind of brothers. We're foster brothers. My papà took Leo in after his mother died. We're not actually related."

"Mh, then who is your godly parent?", inquired Annabeth, cocking one eyebrow.

"It's not like any god ever dropped by and was all 'Percy, you're my son'. And I can't see my own aura", answered Percy, smoothly keeping the truth obscure. "Sorry if that's trouble."

"It's not, kiddo", chuckled Luke and reached out to ruffle his hair. "You'll come with me and Nico then. Hermes Cabin is for the homeless and unclaimed ones."

"And those whose parents didn't get a cabin", muttered Nico beneath his breath.

Percy perked up at that. So he did get to stay with Nico. That sounded exciting. He wanted to get to know Nico a bit better before he'd tell the son of Hades who exactly he was. Leo was already swinging his legs over the bed, eager to get out and explore. It had apparently only been strained, not broken. Percy was relieved by that. He too went to get off the bed.

"Well then, come. We'll show you where you'll be staying", offered Nico with a small smile.

Most other cabin-heads already left the infirmary again and Luke, Nico, Percy, Leo and Beckendorf were the last ones. Percy could feel Leo's doubtful eyes on him and as they were to part ways, Leo grabbed Percy's hand, tightly on their way through camp. The Latino opened his mouth and Percy knew exactly what he wanted to say, so he pulled Leo into a tight hug, ruffling his curls.
"I'm sorry", whispered Percy into his ear when he saw other Hephaestus-kids exiting the cabin, clearly curious. "You have all this family and I selfishly kept you to myself for years."

"Idiot", hiccuped Leo, fingers clawed into Percy's vest. "You and Ty are the only family I need."

"Well, not anymore", countered Percy and took a deep breath as he pushed Leo off, holding him by the shoulders. "I'll always be your brother, but now I want you to go with them and meet your... other siblings. I'll be fine on my own. A dopo, mio fratellino." [trans: See you later, little brother]

"Yeah...", nodded Leo reluctantly. "Later. No rushing off and vanishing without me, you hear?"

Percy offered him a half-smile and a short wave as Leo followed Beckendorf inside. Nico stared at him in awe. This gorgeous creature could speak Italian? Had Nico somehow accidentally summoned the boy of his dreams with Lou's and Alabaster's magic last night, or what?

"Just a fair warning; the cabin is quite crowded. You'll have to either sleep on the floor or share a bed", warned Luke before they entered. "There are a lot of homeless demigods around."

Percy's face fell when they entered. More than half the demigods here weren't even kids of Hermes. But Percy already noticed that the cabins they had passed were only of the Olympian gods.

"You can totally share a bed with me, cutie", offered a cheekily grinning brunette.

"Back off, Cecil", warned Nico irritated and rested one hand on Percy's lower back. "Come."

A blush spread over Percy's cheeks as he was steered along. They were heading toward a bunk-bed, on the upper bunk were a son of Hecate and a son of Nemesis rather busy making out.

"Those are Alabaster and Ethan", introduced Nico. "Guys, this is Percy. He'll be staying with us for now, until he's claimed, or, well, more permanently. This is my bed, you can crash here. If... you want. I mean, Cec is kind of a perv and the floor is uncomfortable. Uhm. This is awkward, sorry."

An amused smile tugged on Percy's lips. "It's alright. Thank you very much. And I don't mind. My brothers and I often shared a bed. They tend to sneak into mine when they have nightmares."

"They?", inquired Nico curiously as he sat down on the bed, resting against the headboard.

"Leo and Tyson", nodded Percy slowly. "But Ty stayed at home. It's safer there for him. Can I...?"

Nico nodded hastily and scooted over. Percy sat down and turned toward the wall in awe. This wasn't just a bunk, it was Nico's home, Percy could feel it. There was a little shelf put up, held by the upper bunk, where Nico stored his clothes as well as a set of cards and a figurine of Hades. Nico tugged his Stygian-iron sword in between the laths of the upper bunk. There were a lot of pictures decorating the wall and Percy felt his eyes drawn to them, his curiosity picked.

"Those are Connor and Travis. They're currently... most likely pranking the Demeter Cabin", started Nico to explain, pointing at a photo of two nearly identical brunettes. "And that right there is my big sister, Bianca. She's... a huntress now. But the hunt occasionally visits, for a friendly game of Capture the Flag. Better known as: Them showing us boys we can't compete with them."

He snorted a little amused. Percy was in awe. Bianca was beautiful, with those long, dark curls, the black eyes and the kind smile. She stood together with a ginger girl in similar attire, most likely
another huntress. Luke, Cecil, Ethan and Alabaster were on most other photos. And that blonde daughter of Athena. The head of Ares Cabin and the son of Ares who had carried Leo earlier too.

"Frank is my best friend", continued Nico his explanation. "We went to boarding school together before we came here. And Annie and Clarisse are, well, we had our first big quest with them. That's the kind of bond that's hard to break, you know? Well, you probably don't."

"No, I really don't", admitted Percy softly. "My brothers are the only other teens I ever met. I don't... spend a lot of time outside. Much less for quests. This, all of it, is quite exciting. Say, what is this Capture the Flag thing you mentioned? Some kind of game?"

"You'll learn tonight", grinned Nico. "Everyone is a little agitated about a pending quest, so we decided to take the edge off with a game. Don't worry, it's not dangerous. I'll protect you. Uhm, not saying that you need protection, I just mean, uh, I'll explain it to you and help you through and..."

"Wow, you are so freaking bad at this", commented a purple-haired punk girl from another bed.


She looked a lot like her mother, which made Percy instantly like her. He offered her a smile as she waved lazily at him. But right now, Nico was far more interesting than getting to meet his aunts' children. They were sitting so close now. Percy took a moment to look at Nico, properly this time. The first time, he had been too busy fainting and the second time, there had been too many others demanding his attention. Nico had high cheekbones and a strong expression in his deep, dark eyes. They reminded him of Tartarus, like endless, dark pits that seemed to swallow every soul that dared to come close. He was wearing black jeans with holes in the knees and combat-boots similar to Percy's. And the apparently obligatory orange shirt that read Camp Half-Blood in bold letters. The way it hugged his torso showed Percy what kind of abs were hidden beneath, the sleeves showing off the nicely trained arms. Nico was surely nice to look at, that much was obvious. Percy's eyes caught the snow-white strands hanging into Nico's face. Percy leaned forward, intrigued, not minding personal space at all as he grabbed the hair, feeling how soft it was.

"Is it a sibling-thing?", asked Percy curiously, pointing at a photo of Bianca.

"No", laughed Nico amused. "Well, maybe in a way, after all we never dyed them. We got them when we carried the world to save a goddess. Usual Monday morning, I guess."

Percy blinked astonished. Those kind of things sounded so surreal to him, like out of a fairy tale. Then again, if he was to tell Nico about his life, it would probably sound as surreal to Nico.

"Dude, just tell him you think he's pretty and be done with it", groaned a voice from above them and seconds later, a freckled face was hanging upside-down in front of them. "Seriously, this down-playing while bragging at the same time, it's a really cheap macho-move, man."

Percy blinked surprised and turned toward the blushing Italian. Oh. So Nico was trying to impress him? That was sweet. A small smile lit up Percy's face at that. What a cute thought.

"Do you?", asked the son of Poseidon curiously. "I mean, think that I'm pretty?"

"Fishing for compliments, huh?", asked Alabaster amused. "Or don't you own a mirror? Of course you're pretty, with those big eyes and the bow-shaped lips and all."

"You are pretty", muttered Nico, rubbing his neck. "I mean, cute. Handsome, right?"
"You're awkward", giggled Percy amused and delighted. "Thank you."

"For being awkward?", asked Nico confused and made a face.

"For the compliment", smiled Percy and tilted his head. "I never got a compliment. Well, at least not from someone who wasn't my brother or otherwise my family. It feels... nice."

"You must have been living in a cave then", declared Alabaster. "Fair warning, the older guys around here are horny bastards and the girls are chasing after every cute guy too, so get used to the compliments. And other kind of attention. Or get a girlfriend-slash-boyfriend to defend your honor."

Nico groaned, annoyed that his friend was so set on embarrassing him. So he stood up and grabbed Percy's hand, pulling him along. The other boy yelped a little started, looking up at Nico.

"Come, let's get to the armory. We can pick a sword or something out for you", declared Nico, tugging a little on Percy's hand. "Get you all decked for the game later."

"Wait, we... need weapons? For a game?", asked Percy concerned. "So it's not like chess, huh?"

"You'll be surprised", laughed Nico amused.

Percy nodded slowly, fidgeting with Riptide. "But I already have a sword."

"Oh. Well, then... How about I show you around a little?", offered Nico nervously.

He really wanted to spend more time with this newbie. Something about Percy seemed so familiar.

"I'd really like that!", exclaimed Percy, offering a bright smile. "Thank you, Nico."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will feature Capture the Flag! As in, Percy being a badass, but not in the same way as he was in canon. ;) Also, the crew will be picked!
Leo was high on adrenaline. This whole day had been pumping him up and he knew that by tonight, he'd just collapse knocked out on his new bunk-bed. First the news of them leaving for Camp-Half-Blood, then the strange encounter with Percy's biological mother – seeing Percy so guilt-written and sad had broken Leo's heart – then the fight against the Minotaur, which he could still not fully grasp because they had won and then camp itself. Frank was so strong and so sweet, all stammering embarrassed while carrying Leo to the infirmary. But meeting his new siblings was hands down the most exciting thing that had happened to Leo ever since Tyson. Beckendorf was great and Nyssa and Jake had taken a liking to the 'cute imp' too and the others were all so nice too.

Right now, he was putting his adrenaline to good use, because they were in the middle of a game called Capture the Flag. Apparently, camp split up into two teams and each got a flag. He'd make his new siblings proud and protect their flag. The upside of this was that they were teaming up with the Hermes Cabin, which was where his Percy was staying.

"So, how is this Hermes Cabin situation?", asked Leo curiously, voice hushed.

The two of them were stuck as guards of their team's flag, together with Ethan Nakamura, who did not look interested in their conversation at all. Both knew it was because they were the new kids and the others didn't trust them to last long in a fight and search mission.

"I don't like that the Hermes Cabin is basically where all kids of the underworld are stored – children of Hecate, Nemesis, Hypnos, Morpheus, the son of Hades himself...", sighed Percy with an upset frown. "I thought this camp was for, well, all demigods. But it surely favors the children of the Olympians. Not that I mind too much, it feels kind of like home, they resemble their parents a lot and I even get to share a bed with Nico – because the cabin is so crowded!"

"You shouldn't take your boy to bed before the third date", teased Leo with a grin. "So, how is Nico? I mean, did you get to talk to him already? Do we like him, or do we hate him?"

Percy smiled softly at that, nudging his brother. "You're a good brother. But we don't hate him. He's... very charming. And he thinks I'm cute! You know, it's kind of a bummer that we're stuck here. I'd really like to prove to him that I can do more than just faint..."

"You can't even guard a flag properly. Don't think you can prove yourself to Nico. Why do you even want to? You don't know him", interrupted a new, annoyed voice. "I don't trust you two."

Leo and Percy yelped as suddenly, a blonde girl materialized in front of them after removing a blue Yankees cap from her head. The daughter of Athena. The one who had been standing entirely too close to Percy's man earlier. Percy frowned. What did the blonde want? Did she want Nico...? The blonde pulled out a sword and Percy's thoughts halted. He only then noticed the other two who must have come with the blonde – Clarisse and Frank. Leo and Percy exchanged a look.

"I'll be over there, helping out against the angry Ares kids", stated Leo. "You, take out blondie."

Percy nodded, smirking a little as he straightened his back. "Sorry, daughter of Athena, but Luke
Percy nodded, smirking a little as he straightened his back. "Sorry, daughter of Athena, but Luke told me to protect this flag, so I can't let you take it with you. Fight me."

"I have a name", growled the blonde annoyed. "It's Annabeth. And don't be so cocky!"

Smiling a little, Percy uncapped his sword, revealing Riptide as he lunged for the blonde.

"If you don't stop pouting, I swear I will hit you hard, di Angelo", warned Luke irritated.

"I wanted to be with Percy. He's new at camp and you know the Ares and the Athena Cabin like to roughen the new kids up some", huffed Nico annoyed. "Percy is too sweet to be roughened up and I promised him I'd lead him through the game, help him out."

"Yeah, yeah, you're horny and want to get into his pants. What else is new?", teased Alabaster.

"I am not trying to get into his pants", hissed Nico, glaring at the brunette.

"Oh come on, how long has it been since you and Mitchell broke up?", snorted Alabaster, rolling his eyes. "Not counting that fling with Will, because... that was just weird."

"He has a nice ass and I mainly agreed to get him off my case", shrugged Nico casually. "Besides, this is different! I mean, he's a newbie and I just want to keep my promise and all, okay?"

Luke took a deep breath and whirled around. "Stop chatting, girls! Everyone at camp aside from Jake Mason knows that Nico and Will were only a ploy to get Jake jealous. And Jackson is perfectly fine because we left Ethan with him. Now get moving!"

He hit them both with the flag he was carrying. Nico offered him a sheepish grin and nodded. They managed to steal the flag from the other team and now, with other groups from their team distracting the opposing team, they were making their way back to their base. When they reached the vacancy where their flag was hidden, they were in for a surprise though. All three stumbled a little. Ethan and the two new kids were holding their stance against Clarisse, Frank and Annabeth – the three best fighters their camp had to offer. The six of them actually had quite the audience from both teams already. And they quite deserved it too. Ethan and Frank were stuck in a duel, nothing new or too exciting there. The interesting part were the new kids.

Leo was actually doing pretty well against Clarisse, which only pissed the daughter of Ares off even more and made her go harder against the little Latino. And then there were Percy and Annabeth. Their fight was more like a graceful dance. They were en-par. Percy's movement was like a river, flowing gracefully along. His power washed over Nico like the mighty waves of the ocean. It was just a normal sword-fight, but it was still the most enchanting thing Nico had ever seen.

"I swear, di Angelo, get your act together or I'll put that flag up your arse!", called Luke out.

Nico found himself ripped out of his thoughts, looking around startled. Due to Silena's charmspeak, most of their team was a drooling mess, while Lacy and Mitchell had teamed up against Alabaster. Luke was fighting off Malcolm, trying to protect their newly stolen flag. They were so close to their own base and Nico was getting distracted. Damn it. Ethan was taken out and Frank was ready to take the flag. Nico couldn't let that happen. He smirked as he came face to face with his best friend. Frank returned the smirk and their swords clashed. This was the kind of Capture the Flag that he loved. The unexpected ones with a twist. Fighting against Frank was a rare occasion, most of the time, Capture the Flag was his and Annabeth's outlet for their 'sibling rivalry', as Luke liked to phrase it (Nico preferred the method of putting zombies under Annabeth's bed and skeletons into her closet, but apparently others found that less funny than he
did). But watching the newbie kicking Annabeth's ass was so much better – especially considering how hot the newbie looked while doing it. Truly enchanting. And there he was, once again distracted by Percy Jackson.

"Pay attention to me, mh?", suggested Frank as he knocked the hilt of his sword into Nico's spline.

Nico winced, breath knocked out of his breath. The ring of fire around their flag vanished as Leo went down – and wasn't that a new kind of Hephaestus-power right there? But this left two problems; One, the flag was unprotected, two, their team was completely taken on while Clarisse was now free from fighting and ready to take the flag and bail on them.

"No! Claire, you do not take that flag!", called Nico out, cursing beneath his breath.

"Niccoló, you do not call me that!", countered Clarisse with a glare.

Frank snickered a little. Between Frank being Canadian and Clarisse and her best friend Silena being French, the trio often talked in French. Frank and Silena had started calling Clarisse 'Claire', as a nickname, sometimes. Nico loved to use it to tease the brute. Percy took his attention off from Annabeth for a second as he twisted her arm so she went down onto the ground. The flag was unguarded and as it looked right now, Clarisse could take it and run off because everyone else was occupied. The other team had an opening to win. Percy wouldn't let that happen. Their team needed to win. He needed to prove that he wasn't a faint-y, useless princess. He needed to prove he was strong. He needed to prove to Nico that he was worthy and equal to the Ghost King. Just before Annabeth could break free from the grip, Percy lifted his fingers to his lips to whistle a strange and creepy tune that send shivers through everyone on the clearing, including Mister D and Chiron. They had come when the game seemed to drag on longer than expected. Both were surprised to find everyone evenly matched, the new guys fitting right in and doing more than good. A loud bark tore through the woods as a giant, three-headed dog ran out of the shadows of the forest.

"Seriously, Nico? Bringing your pet into this? Awesome idea!", exclaimed Alabaster eagerly.

"Not my doing", stated Nico calmly, turning his head to stare at Percy. "He whistled for Zerby."

Percy grinned and turned to the happy-looking dog. "Good boy. Protect the flag."

Clarisse froze up in front of Zerberus. The three-headed, gigantic monster growling down at her. The whole of camp found themselves paralyzed for a moment at the intruder. Summoning anything inside of camp-borders was hard, but summoning the guard of the underworld itself? Nico could probably do it, not that he had ever attempted to. But Percy was just standing there, grinning like a maniac as he twisted Annabeth's arm and disarmed her. Taking her sword, he turned to Clarisse, one sword in each hand as he challenged the daughter of Ares, smirking.

"H—How did you...", started Clarisse, spear pointing at Percy.

Percy tilted his head. "I'm sorry. I didn't introduce myself properly. I'm Percy Jackson, the ambassador of Hades. My lord sends his regards. Now fight me, daughter of war."

At this point, weapons dropped everywhere. The game seemed nearly forgotten as Percy fought against Clarisse, in the shadow of Zerberus himself. Above Percy's head, as though it was trying to prove his words true, was a symbol glowing. A skull with ruby-glowing eyes. The symbol of Hades that had claimed Nico and Bianca when they had first entered the camp. For a moment, lead seemed to settle in Nico's gut as a horrifying thought crossed his mind – the cute boy he had been awkwardly flirting with early was his brother. But then he noticed. Ambassador, not son.
Nico breathed out in relief. Not his brother then. But... what else could this boy be? As Percy fought against Clarisse, his sea-green eyes sparkled in excitement. Nico frowned. Those eyes that had seemed so familiar right from the start, now coupled with the notion of Percy having been send by Hades, it clicked. It literally fell into place in Nico's mind. Hades, that was where Nico had seen those eyes – in the palace of Hades, with the Moirai. His cute little Fate! The temp, the one Nico had convinced himself to be his personal guardian angel. Excitement bubbled in Nico's chest. It made perfect sense. After what Percy had said about his father sending him here, his mother must be a goddess – one of the Fates. A Moira was his mother, that was why he had been down there, that was why he could read auras. Because he was the demigod son of a Fate. And if Nico's mind hadn't been blown by that, it surely was when Maimer hit the ground and Clarisse found herself next to it, with two swords crossed over her neck, a victoriously grinning Percy leaning over them.

"All hail Percy Jackson, ambassador of Hades", called Chiron out loudly. "The blue team wins."

The statement tore them all of their haze, making them remember that they were in the middle of a game. Apparently not anymore, because Leo, who had been knocked out by Clarisse, had regained consciousness and grabbed the flag that was laying forgotten somewhere behind Luke. He had brought it back to the base and rammed it into the ground, grinning like a lunatic. The moment was ruined when Zerberus leaned down to lick square over Leo's and Percy's faces with two of his heads. The third one was turned to Nico, staring eagerly at the son of Hades.

"Young prince! We haven't seen you in long. Little, blue master did good, yes? And little, red master too! You have to protect them, they're our precious pups", declared the head turned to Nico.

Nico nodded numbly. Little masters? What was that supposed to mean? That Leo too had spend time in the underworld? He had a lot of questions. And apparently, he wasn't the only one.

"What the fuck is an ambassador?", asked Alabaster. "I mean, I know what an ambassador is, but how can you be the ambassador of a god? What does that mean?"

"How could you as a newbie beat Clarisse?", hissed Travis stunned.

"And how did he summon Zerberus?", added Connor surprised.

"All good questions", interrupted Chiron loudly and approached. "Questions that will be answered in the Big House, now. Percy, Leo. If you'd come with me and Mister D, please."

Leo and Percy exchanged a concerned look, grabbing each other's hands, holding tight and following the centaur. The other campers were left to their own devices and all too soon all aside from the Hermes Cabin, who started to gather around Nico. Within moments, Alabaster was climbing onto the by now laying Zerberus. Ethan glared concerned at his boyfriend. His glare re-directed at Alabaster's best friend Damian, not that the son of Eris minded. With mischievous, dark eyes did Damian climb after Alabaster. All too soon the whole Hermes Cabin was somehow leaning against the soft fur, patting a head or sitting on the beast's back. Cecil and Lou were whispering with Lily, a daughter of Morpheus. Knowing those three, they were up to no good.

"What now, Nico?", asked Luke, turning to his second-in-command. "He's an ambassador of your father. What's the meaning of this? Also... let's talk about the giant dog in the room."

"I don't know about you, but I'll go and spy on Chiron", shrugged Nico and turned.

He gave Zerberus a whistled signal to return to the underworld where he belonged, leaving the other members of Hermes Cabin with pouts and complains. He was aware that he was being
followed by Luke and Ethan, but Liam came as a bit of a surprise. He was a younger brother of Alabaster, a son of Hecate. His magic was powerful, not quite as powerful as Alabaster's, but pretty close.

"He knows magic", stated Liam. "Not... proper magic. But... this thing with the aura, how he just summoned Zerberus. Something about that boy is off, because he's not a child of the underworld."

"What do you mean?", asked Nico confused, turning toward Liam.

They were aware that most demigods in the Hermes Cabin were children of the underworld – Hecate, Nemesis, Hypnos, Morpheus, even Eris (though she never really stayed long at one place, but the underworld was where discord felt the most comfortable). Liam was sensitive to the heritage, the demigodly magic so to speak. To him, children of the underworld felt different from children of Olympus. He looked equally thoughtful and confused as he tried to answer.

"I don't know", admitted Liam frustrated, combing his fingers through his black, unruly hair. "He doesn't feel like one of us, but... weirdly enough, he also doesn't feel like he's from Olympus."

"Now you're not making any sense at all anymore, Liam", grunted Luke, patting his back.

"W—What are you doing here?", hissed an irritated voice as the trio reached the Big House.

Clarisse, Frank and Annabeth were hiding beneath the living room window, the girls looking pissed and Frank looking like he had been forced to be here. Luke chuckled amused and crouched next to them, together with Nico and Liam. Everyone turned toward the son of Hecate in expectation and after a moment, Liam realized why. Grinning sheepishly, he used his magic to enhance the voices inside so they could hear them as though they were in the same room. The noises attracted other curious demigods all too soon. Nico grunted as he found himself stuck between Travis and Connor, both Stolls grinning mischievously at him, always in for a good eavesdropping.

"...Why wound uncle Hades send the two of you? A tinkerer and... an unclaimed one", drawled Mister D in a mocking voice. "And at times like these. Father would suspect something... else."

"Don't go around accusing Lord Hades of such things, not even lightly", growled Percy. His voice was honest and serious and Nico found himself impressed that Percy would defend Hades in front of another god. It had always been easy for the Olympians to accuse his father of the dark deeds, just like it had been with the theft of the Master Bolt and it made Nico so angry.

"Now, now, calm your temper, both of you", chided Chiron in his soothing voice.

"You're right, sir", muttered Percy and turned toward Mister D. "I'm sorry, Lord Dionysus. I was out of line. But so were you. While Olympus is running around like a headless chicken, Lord Hades intends to aid help in this quest to save camp – to save the heroes that will save Olympus. If camp falls, the heroes will fall and without heroes, Olympus stands no chance."

Dionysus gritted his teeth at that. "Fine. So what kind of help can you provide?"

"I can provide save passage through the Sea of Monsters. I'm here to attend the quest, together with my brother Leo here", stated Percy casually. "I know my way around navigation better than anyone and Leo is an expert when it comes to all kinds of engines. He'll be vital in case the ship gets damaged, which it will because let's face it, we're talking about the Sea of Monsters here."

"It was very generous of Lord Hades to send you then", started Chiron. "And something tells me that you also have a plan for... other crew members. Be aware that this is Clarisse la Rue's quest
though. She received the prophecy, she is the leader. But camp had been divided by a fight for who gets to be part of her crew. If a god sends a request, I'm all ears to settle this."

"I wasn't just send to help camp. I was send to help Nico di Angelo. I'm his guardian", said Percy calmly. "I was send to make sure he succeeds in this quest. And... two more should suffice, because three may be a sacred number, yet there were six children of Kronos, six ancient first deities."

"Who?", asked Chiron, while all their secret listeners were growing antsy and curious.

"The son of Ares, Frank. He's though. And the cocky blonde", grinned Percy. "She fought better than I expected from a bookworm and she's passionate. The wisdom of Athena will be helpful. Both also seem dedicated to Nico and that's what I'm looking for, because his safety is my priority."

"I am not dedicated to you!", hissed Annabeth with a fierce glare directed at Nico. "You're an annoyance, di Angelo! No more than a little brat that puts skeletons in my closet!"

Nico returned the glare and stuck his tongue out at her in a childish but appropriate manner. While the two of them bickered like the annoying siblings everyone knew they were, Frank was panicking. Another important quest. What if he screwed up? But at least Clarisse would be there again.

"Very well. Then let's go and tell our not so secret audience", announced Chiron.

Everyone exchanged concerned looks and scattered hastily before the four inside could exit. Everyone aside from Nico, Frank, Clarisse and Annabeth. Luke was herding his own cabin back home to get changed and showered. Nico straightened his back as Percy approached him. Before he could open his mouth to tell them anything, Nico grabbed his hand and pulled him away, leaving Leo to do the explaining to the others. But this one was his right now. They stopped at a clearing.

"You're mine", whispered Nico, his voice dripping with excitement, before be blushed furiously. "Uhm, that came out entirely wrong. I'm sorry, of course you're not mine, you're not a thing or a pet to be owned, I mean, you said you're my guardian. You're the Fate, you're my Fate, right?"

"Fate...?", asked Percy, honestly lost, but with a blush of his own on his cheeks.

"Yes!", exclaimed Nico, never having felt so hyper as he did in that moment when he realized that all the good things that had happened in his life could be summed up by this one beautiful creature. "You're the one who let me meet Frank, it wasn't a coincidence that the only two male demigods in that school shared a room, was it? And I'm sure you protected Bianca and me during the quest."

"I...That's supposed to be my secret", whispered Percy timidly. "I'm not allowed to meddle, but when I first held your life-thread and I... just wanted you to be happy. I saw that you and Frank were bound to meet in the future, I just... made it happen earlier. H—How do you know about me?"

Nico laughed, a full-blown happy laugh that would probably scare half his cabin because it wasn't the most common sound to come from the son of Hades. In all of his excitement, he bend down and picked Percy up, lifting him off the ground, holding him by the thighs and whirling him around.

"Your eyes. I saw those eyes before, in the underworld. How could anyone forget those eyes?
They're so... brilliant and beautiful... and their color, like the sea of Venice", whispered Nico in total awe, reluctantly letting go with one hand to cup Percy's cheek. "Mio bell'angelo custode." [trans: My beautiful guardian angel]

Percy's arms were around Nico's neck, their eyes locked. But the moment was ended all too soon.

"Di Angelo! Stop flirting with the new kid and get showered before dinner!", interrupted Chris.

Chapter End Notes

Main reason why Percy won against Clarisse were that a) she had already been through a rough fight against Ethan right before and b) Zerberus looming over her kinda distracted her a bit. He's well-trained by the gods, but his swordsmanship is still not en par with that of a longer-trained daughter of war. Still, one victory will cause some... tension between them.

Next chapter will have Leo and Percy settling in camp; dinner and bonfire and spending the night in their new cabins, before they leave for their quest in the morning!
Chapter 10: First Night at Camp

Frank was only a little bit freaked out by the giant grin on Nico's face. By the time Leo and Chiron had finished giving Frank, Clarisse and Annabeth all the details and instructions they had, most other campers were already cleaned up and heading for dinner. When Nico and Percy finally returned to join them, Frank and Leo had just been on their way to the showers. Percy ran up to Leo and grabbed the Latino, both starting to whisper something to one another, leaving Nico and Frank behind. Frank, alone with a creepily happy son of Hades.

"Okay, seriously. What is going on?", asked the son of Ares disturbed, starting at his best friend.

"He's my Fate", whispered Nico urgently, pointing at Percy. "You know how I always told you about the cute temp that was with the Fates when I was a child, right? It's him. He even admitted it. That he's the one who let you and me meet. He protected me all those years."

"Would explain why he's here now, send by your father", mumbled Frank thoughtful. "Huh."

"Yeah", nodded Nico with a nearly dreamy expression on his face as he looked at Percy.

"You... think your dad send the other one for me?", asked Frank reluctantly, staring at Leo. "I mean, if they're both brothers and both send by your father... I mean, he could be a guardian angel too?"

Nico grinned amused, raising one eyebrow at his friend. "Is someone having a crush?"

"What's a crush?", asked Leo curiously as the four boys entered the baths together.

"N—Nothing", grunted Frank awkwardly, blushing. "Wait. You don't know what a crush is?"

"We probably don't know a lot about your... culture", drawled Percy. "Like this, for example. How come everyone shares one bathroom? That is... depressing. Everyone needs their own bath."

"Depressing?", repeated Frank ridiculed. "Why? It's just... showers."

"Percy loves his showers", snickered Leo, patting Percy's back. "He's like a fish out of water."

Both Nico's and Frank's faces were aflame when, once inside, Percy and Leo just casually shed their clothes, not a spark of modesty. Glowing in the faint light of the setting sun made their bodies look even more enchanting to the older campers. Percy frowned confused when he turned toward them.

"Are you feeling alright?", asked Percy, naked and gorgeous and completely clueless.

"T—Totally. We should get showered before dinner", nodded Nico hastily and awkwardly.

"Absolutely right", agreed Frank, walking stiffly toward the shower-cabins.

The shower-cabins were far too small, but water was water and water was life for Percy. So it was
refreshing nonetheless. The only thing odd seemed to be Frank and Nico. He had noticed how
Nico kept staring at him, but he had no idea why. They were both boys, after all. And with those
open showers for everyone, surely Nico had already seen plenty of naked boys. Leo, Percy and
Tyson often ran around naked, they had done so as little children and rascals and even now when
they'd go swimming, they had no qualms about being naked together. It was utterly confusing.

"How do you decide who gets a bed?", asked Percy as he sat down on Nico's bed in the cabin.

The majority of the cabin had already left, Nico was still lingering in the showers – he had said
something about some problem he had to take care of, but Percy had no idea what kind of
problem Nico would have to take care of in the showers. Percy was sitting on the bed, brushing
his hair and looking at the pictures on the wall. He was trying to get a feeling for the people close
to Nico.

"The cabin hadn't always been that crowded", started Robyn, a son of Hermes. "Back then,
everyone could have a bed. But then more got claimed. Now you just need luck, I guess. Ethan
has been around for a while, when he and Alabaster became friends, he offered to share a bed. His
motives weren't pure at all, obviously, but still. It started something. Nico for example got lucky.
Connor and Travis were all too eager to share a bed with each other, giving the resulting empty
bed to Nico. I guess that's how things figure themselves out when you're stuck in a situation..."

"What do you mean his intentions weren't pure?", asked Percy confused, tilting his head.

"Because obviously Ethan just wanted to get into Alabaster's pants", snickered Cecil.

The two sons of Hermes high-fived while Percy frowned, even more confused. "But Alabaster is
far slimmer than Ethan, Ethan wouldn't fit into Alabaster's pants. That doesn't make sense."

"How can you be that dense?!", exclaimed Alabaster from above Percy.

The son of Poseidon startled a little as Alabaster hung upside-down off the upper bunk. Percy
glared annoyed. He disliked insults to his intelligence. He wasn't the fastest learner in many
aspects, but he wasn't dumb. Before he could retort, Nico entered the cabin, together with Luke
and Lou.

"Why does Percy look upset?", inquired Nico displeased. "I told you to lay off the pranks."

"No pranks. It just appears that he's a cute, little virgin who has no clue about sex", snickered
Cecil.

"Oh. Sex", echoed Percy, nodding slowly. "No, I know about that. I don't know what that has to
do with Ethan trying to get into Alabaster's pants, seeing as they wouldn't fit..."

"It's an... expression", said Ethan, half-amused. "A euphemism. Metaphor. It means sex."

"Well, then I'm happy for you", smiled Percy brightly.

"Thanks", chuckled Alabaster, arching one eyebrow. "Never had someone congratulate me on
getting laid quite that enthusiastically. You sure you know what sex means, kiddo?"

"Of course!", exclaimed Percy with a glare, displeased that he was being doubted. "My papà
explained it to me, albeit he called it... uh, something else. Anyway, I know that sex is a very
special bond that you share with your one, true love and then it feels totally amazing."

If not for the fact that Percy looked completely serious and rather proud of himself, they would
have all burst out into laughter. Everyone turned their attention to Nico with judgmental looks.

Nico blushed and glared at the same time, coughing a little. "Fascinating. Let's go and get dinner."

Now Percy was even more confused. Teenagers were so complicated. They had their own weird language – what did crushing things have to do with love and why did switching pants have to do with having sex – and their behavior was difficult too. All the blushing at strange situations. For now, he was hungry and decided to just follow Nico to the dining hall. Once there, he was eager to sit with Leo, just to be pulled along by Nico, which was a little confusing.

"Can I sit with my brother?", asked Percy as he saw the overcrowded table of the Hermes Cabin.

"I'm sorry, but no. Just like the cabins, the tables are also divided by godly parent", replied Nico.

Percy frowned upset, his eyes trailing over to the entirely vacant table of Poseidon. He knew it was only a matter of time before he would find himself all alone there. He hated being alone, more than anything else, even more than physical pain. The thought frightened him and so did the pressure. Once they would know he was the son of Poseidon, they would expect things from him, things that had always been expected of children of Zeus and Poseidon.

"Don't worry, you'll get used to not having a place where you truly belong", stated Damian.

The son of Eris looked at Percy affectionately, ruffling his hair. Percy tilted his head thoughtful.

"I think Hermes and Eris are the only ones to truly know that feeling", whispered Percy.

"What would you say that?", inquired Luke at the head of the table.

Conversation around them died down as others grew curious too, the two children of Hypnos – Clovis and Aurora – both looking tired but intrigued, the children of Hermes grinning amused by Percy's cautious words, the children of Hecate still trying to figure out what Liam had felt earlier. Where exactly Percy belonged, the boy that didn't feel like either underworld or Olympus.

"Hermes is always traveling, bringing messages between all of Olympus, to the underworld and even the oceans. He never stays too long anywhere, not long enough to call it home. Some consider Hermes, in a different form, as part of the underworld. And Eris, she's... discord in person and discord is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Lord Hades asked her before to permanently stay in the underworld, but she always refuses", answered Percy simply.

"How come you know those things about the underworld?", asked Luke seriously, putting his cutlery down. "Something about you is... off. You're not who you say you are."

"I am the ambassador of Hades", was Percy unaffected answer. "I was raised in the underworld, there is no other demigod with more knowledge about the underworld than me."


The interrogation seemed far more interesting than dinner and Nico grew uncomfortable. He didn't like the distrust his brother-figure was displaying toward his guardian angel. What he disliked even more was that part of him agreed with Luke. These days, where people in their own ranks could be spies, two new kids appearing out of nowhere as some kind of salvation, it was highly suspicious.

"I was raised by Lord Hades", whispered Percy softly, eyes guarded. "Raised to protect the children of Hades and all of Olympus. If you choose not to trust me, then that is your decision, but
I will swear on Lady Styx that I have no dark intentions. I truly only wish to help."
"My... father raised you?", asked Nico slowly, frowning a little displeased.
"Gods don't raise their children", grunted Luke with a bitter edge to his words.
"I am not a child of Hades and I have never consciously met my own... godly parent", stated Percy truthfully, well-aware of the fine-tuned ears of the children of Hermes that listened to his words. "The underworld was my Camp Half-Blood, I suppose. When I couldn't stay in the mortal world anymore, I was... given to the underworld. As a sacrifice, you could say. An offering."
"So what, you're like... Lord Hades' property?", asked Travis confused and made a face.
"I suppose in a way", nodded Percy thoughtful. "You see, gods can not raise or interfere with their children's lives to a greater extend, but... when a god gives one of their own children to another god, it's that god's choice to do as they wish. Lord Hades trained me to fight at Nico's side."

Nico's blush returned. If only Percy would stop so casually being adorable. It was embarrassing. And it didn't help any that Percy was half-way sitting on his lap due to the limited space around the table. It was still unsettling to think that Percy had been raised by Hades, for Nico.
"I hope he trained you well then", stated Luke and ended the discussion at that.

Bonfire was far more appreciated than the dinner interrogation, because the bonfire was beautiful. The companionship and laughter of all the carefree demigods. Percy was sitting with Leo, Frank and Nico, just listening as Leo interrogated Frank and Nico about their past.

"So, you guys do this on a regular base?", asked Leo after a while, looking around. "Because it is awesome – and I am not just saying that as a pyromaniac. But what's its purpose?"
"Just fun", shrugged Frank thoughtful. "Well, most use it for hook-ups too..."
"And what's that now?", asked Percy very confused.
"I get a feeling that my father deliberately did not teach you a lot about sex", stated Nico seriously. "Hook-ups are... you know, when you just meet someone and kiss and make out some, generally leading to sex. Demigods are a horny bunch, to say the least."
"I... don't get it", admitted Percy with a frown. "They just go around, kissing people who aren't their one, true love? H—How can they do that? Do you do that too?"

Nico's eyes widened in a ridiculous way as he saw the kicked-kitten eyes Percy was giving him, as though it personally hurt Percy to even think Nico went around, kissing others. Was moral really that highly valued by his Fate? He didn't want to disappoint or insult Percy with his low moral. If having one boyfriend and a casual mostly-fake hook-up counted as low moral.
"Well, Nico met his first boyfriend at the bonfire", shrugged Frank. "It's the best opportunity to loosen up and work up the courage to ask someone out, you know?" When Percy stood after throwing a nearly heartbroken look at Nico, followed by Nico glaring at Frank, the Canadian frowned confused. "What? Did I say something wrong? Nico! Where are you going? What...?"

Nico stormed after Percy, leaving Leo and Frank alone. "My brother believes in true love and that, you know, first kiss belongs to your one true love. He's been eating those fairy tales up all his
"But what does that have to do with Nico...?", asked Frank. "Oh. Wait, so Percy is disappointed in Nico because he thinks Nico broke his true-love-thingy because he already had a boyfriend?"

"Something along those lines", chuckled Leo and patted Frank's back. "You're really cute."

Lou, Lily and Aurora were watching Percy curiously. They had formed a kind of triad as the only girls in the cabin. The daughters of Hecate, Morpheus and Hypnos were doing witchy-things, as the boys liked to call it. Usually while others were busy with the bonfire. But now Percy was back and he looked upset. He was laying on his bed, curled together and facing the wall.

"What happened?", asked Lily, the youngest of them.

The brunette girl climbed down her bed to join Percy, crouching down in front of him. "Nothing. I'm being stupid. It's not like I have any right to feel those possessive feelings, do I? And... I start to realize that the real world is not like the fairy tales my parents told me..."

"It is not", confirmed Aurora with a mystical smile. "Let him rest, Lily. Sleep makes things better."

"Of course a daughter of Hypnos would say that", muttered Nico as he entered the cabin, a little out of breath. "Look, Percy. I... Actually, there's no reason to apologize because I didn't do anything wrong, but I still kinda feel like I... failed you. Which is just... weird."

"I know. I'm sorry", sighed Percy and turned to face Nico. "This world is just... so upsetting and different. For years, I dreamed of leaving the underworld and seeing this wondrous place where demigods of all kinds lived together. It's... nothing like how I pictured it. I guess that's kind of... disappointing, but that is not your fault. This is how this world works, mh?"

Nico nodded slowly, ruffling his own hair sheepishly. "I... guess so. I'm sorry, still. I'm sorry because the world disappointed you. Maybe Aurora is right and we should sleep. We're going onto a long and exhausting journey tomorrow. Do you have... uhm... pajamas?"

Percy nodded shyly and grabbed his backpack that laid discarded under the bed. Getting his oversized, black shirt with an imprint of Disney's Hades from the Hercules movie on the front, he started to change. Nico grinned a little when he saw the shirt and he blushed some more when he caught sight of those long, pale legs, only wrapped into quite adorable Little Mermaid boxers.

Getting changed into a black wife-beater and plain, black boxers himself, Nico joined Percy on the bed. He was feeling a little awkward at first, not knowing if he should stay as far away from Percy to give him space, or if that seemed offensive. The question was taken out of his hands when suddenly, Percy was all up against him, head resting on Nico's chest, arms wound around Nico's neck and legs around Nico's waist, like a clingy, little monkey.

"U—Uhm, P—Percy...", stammered the son of Hades a little lost.

"Buona notte e sogni d'oro, Nico", whispered Percy, snuggling up to Nico some more. [trans: Good night and sweet dreams, Nico]

"S—Si...", was all Nico could get out. "Buona notte... mio angelo custode." [trans: Y-yes. Good night... my guardian angel]
Percy decided that as good as abs looked, they felt far more impressive. His right hand was spread out on top of Nico's stomach, feeling the firmness of Nico's sixpack beneath the thin shirt. Percy liked it. A lot. His eyes fluttered open and he tilted his head to look up into Nico's face.

"Hello", whispered Percy with a small smile.

"Hello", replied Nico amused, caressing Percy's hair. "Are you ready for an adventure?"

Percy nodded slowly and stood. The two boys got ready without another word while most of their cabin and most of camp were still asleep. Mister D and Chiron were waiting for them at the borders of camp, together with Annabeth, Clarisse, Luke and Frank. Percy looked around nervously, waiting for his brother. He could hear with one ear how Luke, Annabeth and Nico talked to each other.

"I want you to watch out for each other", said the son of Hermes in a serious voice. "Even if you can't accomplish this quest, make sure you return home safe, you hear?"

"Yes, dad", chimed Annabeth and Nico, their voices laced with a teasing tone.

"I'm sorry I'm late!", called Leo as he ran up to them, panting hard. "I kinda overslept..."

"You need more discipline", stated Clarisse displeased. "This is my quest, you are under my command and you will not slack off. Frank, you're responsible for the imp."

Frank stared at his big sister with large, ridiculed eyes. He was supposed to take responsibility over Leo? What if he failed? And gods, there were those cute puppy eyes, staring up at Frank from beneath the wild curls. How did this one tiny demigod make him feel so nervous?

"But Leo is mine", protested Percy with a frown as they left camp after some parting words.

Argus would drive them to the harbor where a ship – courtesy of Lord Ares – would await them. Inside the van, Percy looked around thoughtful. Luke had ordered Annabeth and Nico to watch out for each other, Clarisse had just ordered Frank to watch over Leo. Where did that leave him?

"You two, I don't know you yet, so I don't trust you", stated Clarisse simply, glaring him down. "I do trust Frank though, so he'll watch over the imp. Your ass is mine, Jackson. You beat me in in front of the whole camp and this quest is your chance to prove to me if you either earned my respect with that or if I'm going to squish you like an insect for it."

Annabeth snickered and Nico sighed. They knew Clarisse and as long as one was not acquainted with her, she could be scary as the underworld itself, but once they were friends, she could actually be quite caring. Nico just hoped that Percy could prove himself, because being on Clarisse’s bad side was the second worst possible thing at camp. Right after being on the bad side of the Hermes Cabin, because a life filled with pranks was even worse than Clarisse's training.

"I can live with that", shrugged Percy nonchalantly before turning to Annabeth. "I just hope she does her job, because – to make that clear – I'm here on behalf of Lord Hades, to make sure his son succeeds in this. And Leo is my baby brother, so I hope your baby brother is well-trained."

"I'm sure Frank will do good", grinned Leo amused, staring over at the hunky Asian. "I mean, he fought really well against Ethan and Nico, right? Besides, you know I'm not helpless either."

To prove a point, he flickered his wrist, causing a small flame to dance around his fingers. Everyone seemed captivated by this. They knew children of Hephaestus, but they had never met any who could control fire. Clarisse was at the very least a little pleased by that. If her little brother was drooling over a tinkerer, it at the very least had to be a strong tinkerer.
"So, what's the game-plan, coach?", asked Annabeth, turning the attention back to Clarisse.

"I want you to stick to your designated partners", ordered Clarisse with a glare. "The Sea of Monsters is a vicious mistress and if we want to make it out alive, I need everyone to have their heads in the games, so watch out for your partner so I don't have to constantly supervise everything. We take a ship, apparently Jackson is our navigator. We go in, kick some monsters’ butts, take the golden fleece and get out there alive. You think you can handle that?"

"Yes, ma'am", chorused Annabeth, Nico and Frank half-amused.

Leo and Percy exchanged a concerned look though. The others seemed like a well-oiled machine, had already been on quests together, trained together, knew each other. They were a team. Percy just hoped that their addition wouldn't ruin that, because Clarisse had a point. They didn't know Leo and Percy, not how they fought or who they were. He just hoped that wouldn't be a disadvantage.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have them encountering the Princess Andromeda and finding out who exactly poisoned the tree to begin with. They'll also meet up with Phoebe and Bianca before finally entering the Sea of Monsters!
Chapter 11: Two Ships Crossing Paths

The six teens arrived at the beach and while Clarisse wanted to get going, her newest responsibility was stalling though. Percy stood there, with the water lapping at his feet, staring out at the horizon in a mildly concerning way. Annabeth, Nico and Frank came to stand somewhere between Percy at the beach and Clarisse half-way on the ship. Clarisse glared annoyed and stalked back to them.

"What. Is. The. Uphold?", gritted the daughter of Ares out with a glare.

"It's... this is the... ocean", whispered Percy in awe, staring at the blue water.

"Congratulations. You're a fast one", snorted Annabeth mildly amused.

"He's never been to the ocean before", grunted Leo and glared at the blonde.

"He didn't miss much. It's just a lot of water", frowned Frank a bit confused.

"No, it's... different for him", whispered Leo before turning to Percy. "Get in. Swim a round, but do not lose the ship out of sight and be back in half an hour. No 'five more minutes!'".

"What did I leave the underworld for if you play papá?", whined Percy with a pout.

Before Leo could say anything more, Percy ran straight into the ocean and dove in head-first. Nico frowned a little concerned – if this was Percy's first time at the beach, what if he didn't know how to deal with the currents, or the creatures of the sea? He couldn't worry any more because Leo pushed them all toward the ship, much to Clarisse's delight. Maybe there was hope for the Latino.

"You, explain", ordered Clarisse as they got the ship ready.

"Can that explanation wait until we rescued Percy, because he's been diving for about four minutes now and I start getting worried", interrupted Nico, eyes scanning the ocean. "He didn't resurface."

Leo contemplated waiting some longer, just to see a son of Hades diving into the ocean to save a son of Poseidon from drowning. "No need for that. He can't drown, he's the son of Poseidon."

"...Say that again", demanded Annabeth, turning to face him. "And with more words."

"What other words do you need?", asked Leo confused. "Percy is the son of Poseidon. That's it."

"That's what Luke warned me about. That Jackson is hiding something", grunted Clarisse with a rather intimidating glare. "Why are you telling us now? Why not before?"

"If we had revealed it at camp, Percy may have gotten claimed by Poseidon. Things on Olympus are tense enough right now, with the immediate threat to camp. If it got out now that Poseidon broke the oath of the Three Brothers, Zeus would throw a fit and try to fry Percy in an instant. It would waste precious time that we need to get the Golden Fleece", explained Leo slowly as the
ship hit the waves. "But we're a team. We need to do this together and for that, you need to know the extend of Percy's power. Though, honestly, I don't think even I know the full extend of his powers."

"Oh, so when we return to camp victoriously and with the Golden Fleece and Percy gets claimed then, Zeus can't fry him because he helped save camp and proved he's not the traitor Zeus would suspect him to be", concluded Frank wide-eyed, nodding slowly. "Solid plan."

"Thank you", chimed Leo with a bright grin.

"At least that explains why he's our navigator", muttered Annabeth.

"Okay, now let's get a move on!", ordered Clarisse, ending the discussion.

They were on the water for a good hour, everyone had found their spot. Frank and Annabeth were below deck, Frank preparing lunch for them and Annabeth buried in books, Leo was in the crow's nest, Clarisse was at the steering wheel, barking orders out at the skeleton crew of former warriors while listening to Percy. Nico was leaning against the rail, observing the skeletons. It made him feel comfortable and at home to have the dead surrounding him. It helped immensely, considering the fact that they were on the ocean and children of Hades didn't do well on the ocean or in the sky.

"Percy. A word", called Nico out as Percy wanted to go below deck.

Percy was in a brilliant mood. He had been in the ocean for half an hour and the saltwater felt so much better than the murky waters of the underworld. It was reviving, like an extended part of his body. And now he was on a ship and got to prove to Clarisse that he as worth something. He could see the coordinates they were, like a map drawing itself over the water. Giving her the right coordinates, he thought he could go below deck and get a snack, but apparently Nico wanted to talk to him, so that day kept getting better. Smiling, he walked over to the son of Hades.

"You're a son of Poseidon", stated Nico as the two of them were alone (aside from skeletons).

"I thought Leo already clarified that while I was chatting with the dolphins?", asked Percy.

He looked adorably confused, causing Nico to shake his head. "He did. I think Clarisse is still suspicious and Annabeth is short of a war-path, but what I'm getting at is... You're a son of Poseidon, but you got raised in the underworld. By my father. There is something else you're not telling, because there has to be a reason Poseidon and Hades are working together. And I'd rather know now if our fathers are plotting to overthrow Zeus, or something like that."

Percy's eyes flittered around before he grabbed Nico by the arm and pulled him along into a farther corner of the ship. "No such things. Really not. Your father just... The underworld had always been the bad guys, always been the outcasts of Olympus. All Hades wants is recognition. He wants for a child of his to be the hero for a change. To be en par with Zeus and Poseidon."

"How do you come into play?", inquired Nico, arching one eyebrow. "And your father."

He observed how Percy averted his eyes, looking at the horizon with sad eyes. "My mom had gotten married to an... abusive man. One night, when I was six, he beat me. Badly. I prayed hard for someone to save me and Poseidon came. He didn't know what to do with me though... He couldn't keep me, he knew his wife would have drowned me at sight. He couldn't claim me, because then Zeus would have blown something – most likely me – up. So he went to the big brother he used to trust and made a deal. Poseidon wanted me safe and Hades wanted you to
succeed. Throughout history, the succeeding one was always the one with backup. When Zeus teamed up with Poseidon, they won every time. So Poseidon promised an alliance, through you and me."

"All of it", demanded Nico with a slight frown, noticing that there was still something left unsaid.

"I... There's more to the alliance than just a handshake and a promise", mumbled Percy awkwardly, unsure how to say it before he just blurted it out. "We're kind of engaged. If you want to. I know I should have told you about it right from the start, but I wanted to get to know your real you first and not the nicer version you'd put up if you'd be interested or the nastier version you'd put up if you'd not be interested and I know it was unfair of me because you don't get the same chance, but I guess I was just being selfish and... I should stop talking now. Please don't hate me for lying?"

Nico stared with large eyes at Percy and took a moment to let that information sink in. Then he stared some longer, with the knowledge that if he wanted, all of that could be his. That being the adorable mess of cheeky, beautiful, powerful, skilled son of Poseidon. Nico's heart sped up.

"That's a lot to take in", whispered Nico a little hoarsely. "I mean, you're a son of one of the most powerful gods around and you've been trained and raised by my father so... so... so you can fight at my side until we're... getting married? Yeah, I'll need some time to digest that."

"I understand", nodded Percy and bit his lower lip. "Look, I'll go and grab lunch. You... think."

Nico didn't feel good about the way they parted, but he really needed time to himself to think about everything he had learned in the last twenty-four hours. As important as everything Percy had said was, as important was the mission. He couldn't let anything cloud his judgment and thoughts.

/\break\/

"There's a ship ahead!", called Leo loudly, nearly falling out of the crow's next.

Clarisse looked up sharply. There was, a cruise-liner. The *Princess Andromeda*. It didn't look up to date, not really. Ratty, really. And the name was suspicious. Maybe she was just being paranoid.

"Get the others, Jackson", ordered Clarisse grumpily.

Percy obeyed and moments later, the six teens were amidst the skeletons, looking at their captain. Leo told them about the ship, how he had seen weird creatures aboard from above. They got antsy.

"Three of us will go over there to check that out. The other three will remain here, guard the ship and stay alert in case we need a fast get-away", declared Clarisse seriously. "Di Angelo, you take the two newbies with you, see how they hold up. Check what's going on, no fight."

"Yes, ma'am", replied Leo and Percy and saluted with broad grins.

/\break\/

There was something up with the ship. It was hard for the trio to hide from the monsters, but somehow they managed to slip further and further into the belly of the ship. There were demigods on this ship – wearing torn-up Camp Half-Blood shirts, some faces Nico even recognized.

"We need to follow those", whispered Nico as he saw a group of armored demigods.
"Why?!", asked Leo a little panicked. "Wherever they're going must be top secret and dangerous."

"Exactly why we're going", grunted Nico, glaring at the Latino. "Someone from inside of camp poisoned Thalia's tree. We need to find out who's behind all of this."

Percy and Leo exchanged a look and Percy actually convinced Leo to continue. They managed to sneak around until they found an office with a golden coffin inside. Nico's heart was thumping in his chest as he had his arms around the other two demigods, holding them pressed close against his chest so he could use the shadows to cover them, making them blend into the darkness and go unnoticed. And even though there were two demigods pressed to his body, it was Percy's skin that felt so warm and soft, Percy's breath puffing against his neck, Percy's soft hair that smelt like salt. It was Percy he was hyper-aware of and for a moment, he even forgot that Leo was there, until he heard the Latino making a sharp intake of breath. It redirected his attention to the office.

"Fuck", whispered Nico as he watched with wide eyes who was behind all of it.

Drew Tanaka, daughter of Aphrodite. She had always been jealous of Silena, her beauty and her status as head of the cabin, had always disapproved of her way of leading the children of Aphrodite. She had always been manipulative and borderline cruel in the way she acted around her half-siblings. The way she sat sprawled on the golden coffin was rather obvious concerning her role in this. But she was rather busy making out with a guy with mud-brown and dead eyes, one that gave Nico an eerie feeling. He could only assume that Drew had poisoned the tree, but this guy, he must have been behind it all. The way he held himself, like he was in charge.

"We need to get out of here now", hissed Leo, tugging on Nico's shirt. "Please."

Leo's heart was exploding in his ribcage. Bryce Lawrence is bad news. Bryce Lawrence is bad news. Bryce Lawrence is bad news. Jason had practically beaten that mantra into him and he had made sure to memorize it. Leo's heart skipped a beat. He needed to tell Jason and Hazel. Soon. As soon as this mission was done, he needed for Nico to distract Percy long enough so he could slip away and visit Camp Jupiter, because his two favorite praetors needed an update on this.

"Okay. Let's move back-", started Nico with a sharp nod.

"No. No, when we walked down, I saw... I saw those... beautiful pegasi, chained down. I could hear them call for help, I can't leave before helping them. Please, Nico", interrupted Percy.

It was then that Nico knew Percy wasn't good for him. Rational thinking and logic told him that through the shadows right now was the right course of action. Ten minutes later and the trio was freeing pegasi and fighting off monsters who caught them doing so. This had not been part of the plan. But Percy most likely had never seen a pegasus – or a horse in general – before. Leo had an easy time cutting the chains with his fire, but Percy was struggling with it while Nico was fighting.

"W—What are you doing here?!", exclaimed a well-known voice behind Nico.

Nico froze up and whirled around to come face-to-face with his sister. She looked as stunned as he did, while Phoebe continued pulling on the chains of a silver deer. Nico took a moment to look from the deer to the pissed-off ginger and then to Bianca. The next second, the air got hugged out of him.

"Quest. You?", asked Nico slowly, blinking and returning the hug. "Peta mission?"

"Ha, ha, ha. Funny, punk", grunted Phoebe annoyed and rolled her eyes. "Same quest as yours, but no means of transportation so we decided to hijack the cruise. Then we noticed the doe. She's a holy animal of Lady Artemis, so we have to free her. What's your excuse?"
"Nico! Less chatting, more helping!", demanded Percy, not looking up. "Wait. Who are you chating..."

Nico took an unsure breath as he interrupted Percy. "My sister. Bianca, those are Leo and Percy. Bianca and Phoebe are huntresses. Leo, hurry up, free the silver deer too. And then we move this."

"Bossy", teased Bianca amused and returned to helping Phoebe.

Shaking his head, Nico turned away from his sister to help Percy. Percy was currently busying himself with a black pegasus. Patting the pegasus' neck, Nico started to loosen the chains there.

"You're a beauty", muttered Nico softly, trying to calm the horse. "Sh, relax. We'll get you out."


"An advise I'd like to take for ourselves", stated Nico seriously.

Bianca heaved a relieved sigh as she and Phoebe managed to free the deer. The sacred animal vanished out of sight as the Celestial bronze chains came off. It had been luck that they had spotted a ship close by when their own little vessel had broken down, but to find a sacred animal here? She hoped it was a good sign. It had led them to her baby brother and two strangers. Cute, but she had never seen them before. The five of them formed a circle at the instruction of the di Angelos so Bianca and Nico could shadow-travel them to Clarisse's boat.

"How did you bring two huntresses back from a scouting mission?", asked Clarisse unimpressed.

"I don't like the odds of Nico's mission, so I asked Lady Artemis to let me and Phoebe come too. She knows that Olympus needs the heroes, the gods can't afford to lose camp'", replied Bianca.

"Bia!", yelped Annabeth and ran over to hug her. "Can I keep you and send your brother away?"

"...Can you take her with you when you leave?", asked Nico to Phoebe.

"Been trying for years", sighed Phoebe and shook her head. "So, who are the newbies?"

Clarisse and Percy were getting their ship on course with the help of the skeleton soldiers while Annabeth and Bianca were still hugging. Leo stood back some, feeling a bit awkward and out of place because he had no idea what was going on – and because he really needed to see Hazel and Jason. Frank leaned next to him, grinning a bit as he observed Phoebe, Bianca, Nico and Annabeth.

"Bianca is Nico's sister", explained Frank to Leo. "And Phoebe used to be her roommate back when we all went to the same boarding school. Apparently, Lady Artemis had send her out because she wanted to recruit Bianca for the hunt. It worked, now they're immortal feminists."

Leo laughed a little. He liked Frank's humor. He liked Frank in general.

"Now you know who we are, but who are you?", inquired Bianca, looking from Leo to Percy.

"Leo's a son of Hephaestus, Percy... is a son of Poseidon. They're new at camp and came to help the quest", replied Nico and took a moment to think. "And Percy is my fiance. Apparently."

"Oh, I miss visitation day one time and you get yourself a fiance?!", exclaimed Bianca loudly.
They had a tradition, every first Saturday of the month, Bianca would visit Camp Half-Blood to check in on her brother. This month she hadn't been able to, what with everything going on. She stared scandalized at Nico before turning to Percy and grabbing him by the upper arms to hold him in place before critically looking him up. Percy's face was red as everyone stared at him.

"How come that didn't come up this morning?", inquired Clarisse with a glare.

Nico just shrugged and didn't look at her. After Percy had talked him into saving pegasi instead of leaving, he knew. He knew there was no chance he'd escape that siren. He didn't really know how to deal with all of that and they'd have to sit down and sort it out once the quest was done, but for now he needed Percy focused too. He needed Percy reassured that everything was fine. They were fine.

"You're cute", stated Bianca firmly. "Son of Poseidon? Are you trained? Family? Age?"

"Hello, Bianca, it's nice to formally meet you", smiled Percy, trying to keep calm. "Your father talks highly of you. I'm Percy, the son of Poseidon. I was trained by Lady Styx and Lady Nemesis. The underworld is my family – and the Latino imp over there. I'm thirteen and you're actually making me nervous a little. Would you mind letting go of me, please?"

Bianca's black eyes were sharp as they looked Percy up and down again. "Okay. Let's catch up."

They did catch up. Nico relayed all the things they had seen on the ship to the others during dinner, after that, the teens went to rest, leaving the skeletons to the night shift. There were bunks below deck, only two cabins, each with two bunks. The girls were sharing one cabin, the boys the other. Nico and Frank had a hard time sleeping because with both of them in one bed, it was entirely too tight. They both would have enjoyed a different bunking arrangement, but apparently Leo had been on Percy-withdraws after last night, so he kept Percy all to himself in the upper bunk.

"So, you're engaged, man?", whispered Frank, knowing Nico couldn't sleep either.

"I don't know", admitted Nico emotionally exhausted. "I mean, Percy is gorgeous and lovable. But we only just met yesterday and I could picture dating him, but already thinking marriage...?"

"I hear you", laughed Frank softly. "Well, then try dating after the quest? See if you work?"

"If he doesn't even give Percy a shot, I will fry him", came Leo's sleepy input from above.

"Duly noted", grunted Nico and rolled his eyes.

"Can't you all shut up?! I'm trying to sleep here! I've been using powers I didn't know I had all day long, I'm exhausted", groaned Percy. "And stop talking about me like I'm not in the room."

Nico and Frank fell silent and blushed embarrassed. They had assumed the others were asleep.

Most of the night was used to recharge and sort thoughts. Much had been revealed in that one day, much that needed more mulling over. Percy's heritage, the engagement, Drew's betrayal, the aid of the hunt. They all could have used some more hours to contemplate and rest, but the attack of a sea monster woke them all quite rudely. On deck, they soon noticed that they had reached their destination. The Sea of Monsters. And the first monster had already found them. The heroes went to work to fight it off and even though the six campers and two huntresses were fast at work, the
giant beast had already bitten off and damaged a good part of the ship.

"The engine is overheating, captain", informed one of the skeleton soldiers.

"Fix it!", grunted Clarisse irritated, trying to get monster-dust out of her hair.

"Too hot, ma'am", replied the skeleton soldiers.

"Oh, nothing is too hot for me", grinned Leo eagerly. "That's what I came along for."

Frank watched in amazement how Leo just sauntered off to the engine room, even though they had just slayed a monster after being ripped out of their dreams. He was still half-dazed himself, but the hyperactive Latino was apparently already fully functioning. He was amazing.

"Leo takes care of that, I'll get some more sleep", yawned Percy.

"I second that", agreed Annabeth and stretched languidly.

Before anyone could tease them about their first agreement, the engine blew up and with it the ship.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know. I'm a tease. But Leo's keeping a big, big secret from Percy and since most of this story was around Percy's and Nico's POV, he has been keeping a big, big secret from you guys too. Once the quest ends, Leo will get a whole chapter to himself to explain his connection to the Romans. ;)

Next chapter will have them being separated! Annabeth, Bianca, Percy and Nico crash-land in CC's Spa and meet Reyna and Hylla (and half of them get turned into adorable, cuddly guinea pigs)~
Chapter 12: A Spa Day with Guinea Pigs and Pirates

Percy's mind felt a little fuzzy as he woke up. He remembered how the ship had blown up, but nothing after that. He must have passed out. What he saw when he opened his eyes was more than scary. He must have hit his head hard, or maybe he was just delusional. Either way, he squealed in surprise as he came face to face with a gigantic guinea pig. It had black, curly fur and the darkest eyes possible as it sniffed Percy. Still, its sheer size frightened him.

"You're finally awake. I started to get worried", whispered what was obviously Nico's voice.

The problem? The voice came from the giant guinea pig. Percy tried to sit up, but found himself unable to. Confused, he looked down at his hands. Which were long, hairy paws with sharp nails. He squealed again and this time, he noticed how unusual the squeal sounded.

"W—We're... guinea pigs... W—What...?", stammered Percy nervously.

"We were stranded at this island. You were unconscious, I was carrying you. There was a spa... CC, the owner, she offered me to help you and had two girls escort Bianca and Annabeth off. I don't know what happened to the others. CC, she... turned us into guinea pigs and voiced her dislike of men. I have the suspicion that CC's real name is Circe", explained Nico.

He waddled over to Percy and licked the smaller guinea pig's cheek soothingly, curling together half around Percy. Percy was the cutest little thing Nico could picture. Black, long fur that pointed up wildly, but he still had his startling sea-green eyes. Nico wished he would still be human, because then he could just cuddle the fluffy creature. This way, he could at least snuggle up to Percy. And it was probably better, because the dangerous son of Hades cuddling with a guinea pig? Yeah, there went his reputation out the window. He was glad Percy was the only one who saw him like that, because somehow, Nico felt as though him being a guinea big, that would stay safe with Percy.

"Circe, that's the sorceress who turned Odysseus' crew into pigs during the Odyssey, right?", murmured Percy with an upset frown. "That's... really not good. And we're in a... cage?"

Nico nodded sharply, glaring a little around. They were in a cage, together with dozens other guinea pigs. Men who had been here far longer than them. Nico was nervous. He hated being helpless like this and apparently, Percy was still a little out of it too. He could just hope that his sister would pick up on things fast and free them. Hopefully, Bianca would catch on before Annabeth, because if Nico would have to get his furry hide saved by Annabeth, he'd never hear the end of it...

Annabeth was laying on her stomach, with her arms folded under her face as she got a massage by a gorgeous Latina. This was Elysium. Nico wasn't here to bother her or hog Bianca's attention, instead Annabeth got Bianca all to herself. For Annabeth, who only had Luke, Nico, Malcolm and Frank around normally, the female company was amazing. Sure, she had Clarisse, who was not exactly one for girl-talk, and Silena, who was too girly. Bianca, she was the kind of big sister Annabeth had always craved for. And then they got free massages from two pretty girls, to top it
all off.

"I always wanted to spend a spa weekend with you, Bia", mused Annabeth fondly.

"You know, if you'd finally agree to join the hunt, we could do these kind of things all over the world", offered Bianca with a teasing tone to her voice. "You'd fit right in with us."

"The hunt?", repeated the girl massaging Bianca. "I've heard that term before..."

"You did?", inquired Bianca curiously, craning her neck a little. "Where did you hear it?"

"A lot of people pass through here", stated the gorgeous girl massaging Annabeth. "Some girls wore clothes quite similar to yours. The camouflage clothes and star-motive and the bow. A little... suspicious. What kind of hunt is this? What do you do?"

"Reyna, don't be nosy", chided the older girl with a glare.

Reyna huffed and Annabeth couldn't help but think that she looked cute when she pouted. Blushing a bit, Annabeth adjusted to look down again, trying not to think about Reyna's hands on her body.

"We're the huntresses or Artemis", replied Bianca nonetheless. "What's your name?"

"Hylla", answered the older Latina. "Artemis? The Greek goddess? Does that mean... you're demigods? We've had other demigods around here too. Lady Circe is one herself, after all."

"Lady Circe?", echoed Annabeth slowly, frowning thoughtful to herself.

"Wait, you two know about the gods?", inquired Bianca instead, looking at Hylla.

"We're demigods ourselves", replied Hylla. "Our father was always proud of our heritage."

"We're daughters of Bellona", added Reyna, a little more distant. "What about you? What are you? There are many ordinary girls here, but you two... you aren't."

"I'm a daughter of Hades, but also a huntress of Artemis. We're an all girls group about female power, you could say. We hunt monsters all over the world, pledged our loyalty to Lady Artemis, the goddess of the hunt", answered Bianca amused. "It's a strong and honorable mission."

"What about you?", asked Reyna, looking down at the blonde beneath her.

"Daughter of Athena. But I don't understand... why Bellona? Why not Enyo?", inquired Annabeth confused. "I'm not a huntress. I'm from Camp Half-Blood. It's not just for girls, but for all demigods. We are trained there, live there together as a community."

"Because our father always told us our mother was Bellona", shrugged Reyna with a frown. "Does it really matter? Roman and Greek gods are the same after all. A rose by any other name, right?"

"I... suppose so...", nodded Annabeth reluctantly, still frowning.

While she mulled over the possibility of any hidden meaning in calling Ares' twin-sister Bellona instead of Enyo, the two daughters of Bellona/Enyo were contemplating things themselves. To Hylla, the thought of an all-woman power-team filled with adventures and honor was appealing. To Reyna, the thought of a community – the notion of finding a home – was more than intriguing. And so was the gorgeous blonde daughter of Minerva. Athena. Somehow, the Roman name came
easier to Reyna, but she wasn't quite sure. She had never thought a lot about the gods. She had never questioned being a daughter of Bellona, or that the Roman and Greek pantheon were one and the same. She knew Circe was a daughter of Hecate, which was the name of a Greek goddess, while Reyna and her sister shared the blood of a goddess identified as Roman. She wondered if there was anything behind it, really. Or was it just a matter of preference? Tomato, tomato, potato, potato.

"Tell me something about you", prompted Nico as he found himself grooming Percy.

"Mh?", squealed the long-furred guinea pig who had spend the last half hour staring around.

Nico noticed that Percy was growing agitated. There was truth in the saying that one couldn't cage the raging sea. The problem was they had no idea how to get out of here and needed to stay patient.

"It's not like we have anything else to do right now and I'd like to learn more about you. And what your childhood in the underworld must have been like", explained Nico, nudging Percy.

"Oh. Okay. Right", nodded Percy in agreement, chirping softly. "Well, papà was struggling at first. It's been a couple thousand years since there had been a kid. And even though he doesn't believe he's good at it, he's actually pretty good at being parental. And I really love my aunts and uncles. Uhm, the underworld council. Gods, this must be weird for you."

"It's alright. Just tell me. Tell me about Persephone. I get she doesn't like me", stated Nico.

"She's amazing. She loves me very much. I... I know she's not been too nice to you, but I'll talk to her, I swear", chimed Percy, pushing his head against Nico's. "She's a good mom."

"Then tell me your favorite story about her", prompted Nico skeptically.

"Okay, so... the first time she left for Olympus, I had no idea what was going on...", started Percy.

Percy had been living in the underworld for half a year and he didn't know if he was really happy just yet. Uncle Hades could be scary and awkward, whenever Percy was alone with him. Like he didn't know what he was supposed to do with a child. And Horkos and the others made him learn silly, boring things. He didn't want to learn silly, boring things. But auntie 'Phone was great. She was loving and caring and baking cookies with him. She reminded him a lot of his mommy. She made him feel content and safe here, because even though he liked being with uncle Hades a lot, he still wasn't sure if uncle Hades liked it as much. The king was always a little awkward, but he was better when auntie 'Phone was there too. So when she packed her bags, he was devastated.

"I'm sorry!", blurted Percy out, eyes large and teary.

"Why are you apologizing, my little prince?", asked Persephone confused.

"B—Because you're leaving. Are you leaving because of me? Was I bad?", asked Percy.

"Oh, sweetheart, no", cooed Persephone softly and closed her suitcase, turning around to kneel beside the little child. "You know auntie Demeter, right? And that she's always only visiting, because she's living somewhere else. Auntie Demeter is my mom and every year, I go and visit her and my siblings. I'm always very, very sad to leave, but also happy, because I get to spend time with my mother and the rest of my family. Me leaving has absolutely nothing to do with you."
"...Really?", asked Percy unsure, lower lip quivering. "B—But I'll miss you. What if uncle Hades doesn't want me anymore while you're gone? He never knows what to do with me!"

"Really", promised Persephone and kissed his cheek. "And while I'm gone, I have a very important job for you. You need to be there for uncle Hades. I know he's often grumpy, but he's very kind and he has a lot of love in his heart. He just doesn't always know how to show it. But you, my little sunshine, you always show your love. So while I'm gone, I want you to take good care of uncle Hades, because he always gets very sad when I'm not there. So I need you to be extra bright, mh?"

"Okay", nodded Percy obediently, hugging her tightly. "A—And you'll come back?"

"I'll be back for your birthday", promised Persephone, returning the hug. "And until then, you will attend all your lessons and be good and listen to the others. And don't be afraid to go to uncle Hades if you have problems. Just because he looks grumpy doesn't mean he doesn't love you."

"Yes, the little one will be safe. Now hurry up, I'm meeting Eris and Iris for tea", stated Nemesis from the doorway, looking impatient. "And you, little one, stop whining. I promise, we'll make this summer super awesome for you. I'll teach you how to shoot a bow, mh?"

"I told you, you will not teach my little prince how to shoot!", exclaimed Persephone displeased.

"It's not a gun, so stop fussing, Persephone!", huffed Nemesis, rolling her eyes.

Hylla and Reyna were exchanging a look as they were leading the way for Bianca and Annabeth. The two girls hadn't been fooled for long by Circe's magic, the concern for their boys too great. Neither of the sisters had ever contemplated helping one of the captives here. Normally, they were all about recruiting the girls to join the island, leave their mortal lives behind. For the first time, they felt as though they were being recruited. The stories Bianca had told Hylla about the hunt by now, they were tempting. Reyna all the while was completely captivated by Annabeth's intellect and the stories she had told about great heroes like Clarisse and Luke, being taught by the most famous trainer of heroes there was – Chiron the centaur. Serving the gods, having a home. While Bianca and Annabeth had been in the sauna, Hylla and Reyna had discussed it quite heatedly. They were daughters of war, so serving in a spa to pretty up other girls and do entirely nothing of value, it was against their very nature. They came to the compromise of helping the two girls and then parting ways – Hylla would go with Bianca to join the hunt and Reyna would follow Annabeth to camp.

"You're telling me Nico and Percy have been guinea pigs all this time?! And you let us get a hot stone massage?!", exclaimed Annabeth irritated, eyes hard and fierce.

"We are telling you now. And we're helping you now", argued Reyna. "See it that way."

"If my brother is harmed, you will still regret it", warned Bianca calmly.

"I like how fierce you are, Bianca", noted Hylla a bit impressed. "Are all huntresses like this?"

Bianca didn't answer though, because they reached the room with the guinea pigs and Bianca was too concerned to get her brother and his fiance – still trying to get used to that – back. It wasn't hard at all to find them. They were the only guinea pigs cuddling with each other, both black, one with curly fur and the other with long, messy fur – the messy-furred one had startling green eyes at that, something Bianca had never seen on a guinea pig before, but remembered quite well about Percy. Even as little rodents, they looked adorable with each other. Truth was, Bianca had seen it
from the first moment on the Princess Andromeda. Nico was willing to follow Percy around, do as the son of Poseidon said. He had it bad, really bad. And Bianca thought it was adorable, but she was also concerned because having a serious crush and being engaged were two different levels entirely.

"Here. I found them", announced Bianca and opened the cage, taking both out.

"Oh! Gimme!", demanded Annabeth eagerly, taking the guinea pigs from her and in return handing her a camera. "And take photos. I need blackmail material against your brother. The Stoll will pay a good price for pictures of the mighty Ghost Prince as a fluffy ball of fluff."

She held the guinea pigs up so one was pressed to each of her cheeks, her broad grin between them. Bianca smiled fondly and took the picture as instructed. She would want copies of them too, because her little brother was one incredibly adorable guinea pig. Annabeth hissed and nearly dropped Nico as the annoyed son of Hades bit her finger. Rolling her eyes at him, she handed them back to Bianca and got something out of her backpack instead.

"Here. Eat up. Luke gave me those before we left for the quest. He said those are very special multivitamines that basically heal everything – he once stole them from his dad", explained Annabeth, watching amused how the little guinea pigs nibbled on them.

"Good", nodded Bianca pleased as she watched them slowly turn human again. "How do we get back from here? And more importantly, how do we get back without Circe noticing?"

"We'd need a good distraction", supplied Hylla with a frown. "Our best chance of getting away are the ships – most who came to this island came on a ship and CC keeps them in a harbor."

"And CC keeps the owners of those ships in those cages", added Reyna with a smirk.

"How is that in any way helpful? And who are you two?", inquired Percy, shaking his head.

"Because just like us, the owners of those ships want to get away", answered Annabeth, catching up with what Reyna was talking about, turning bright, giddy eyes on her. "There would be a ruckus and that would serve as distraction during which we can easily slip away."

"On top of that, most of the captured men are pirates", added Hylla this time. "Free them."

Bianca smirked and while Nico and Percy were still sorting their limbs, the four girls opened the cages and laid out a line of the magical multivitamines. After that, Hylla and Reyna ran, taking the lead. Reyna grabbed Annabeth's hand to make sure the fascinating blonde followed. Bianca smiled to herself as she noticed that. She took her still disoriented brother by the hand, as she had done so often in Venice when they had been little children, so her baby brother couldn't get lost. And just like Reyna, differently than Bianca, Nico took Percy's hand, pulling the son of Poseidon after him. Loud screams and fighting sounds rang through the halls as more and more of the pirates turned back to human. Alarm bells rang and about a dozen of other maids, dressed just like Hylla and Reyna, ran past them, not minding them what with the whole chaos going on. Sadly the six of them weren't the only ones to reach the harbor though. Some of the pirates had made their way there too and while most ships had been laying here for too long to be of use – one look from the son of Poseidon and he could easily see whether or not they were still seaworthy – one of the larger ones was already boarded by a crew of pirates, their captain wearing his long, black beard proudly.

"This one is perfect", declared Percy, eyes sparkling as he fixated the pirate ship with the black sails. "After all, we gotta find the rest of our crew again, so the small ones won't do."
"You just want to battle Blackbeard", snorted Annabeth and rolled her eyes.

She pulled out her dagger, while Bianca readied her bow and Nico and Percy got out their swords. Hylla and Reyna couldn't do much but follow them on board and watch in amazement how the four demigods fought. Only on the ship did they gain weapons too – stealing from the pirates. The six of them easily held their weight and Reyna found herself impressed not just by Annabeth, albeit the two danced in their own rhythm as they fought back-to-back, but also by Nico, who raised the dead to support their fight, and Percy, who raised the sea to fight for them. A giant waved build up out of nowhere and swept over the ship once, not harming the six teenagers but washing off any pirate who didn't have a good foothold. Reyna was practically glowing as she fought. She had nearly forgotten the rush of adrenaline that a good fight could give the daughters of war.

"That... was... intense...", panted Hylla, looking no less satisfied than her sister.

"Back to the point where you explain who you are", requested Nico with a frown.

His frown disappeared as Percy distracted him. The boy flicked his wrists a few time, moving his hands like he was conducting a concert, moving the ropes and poles and sails with his sheer will.

"Those are Hylla and Reyna. They helped us. And they're demigods", explained Bianca softly.

"So, take us to the others, captain", ordered Annabeth, picking up the discarded hat of Blackbeard.

Percy started doe-eyed as Annabeth placed it on his head. He hadn't felt as though she liked him much, or trusted him. She offered him a small grin as she leaned against the rail, next to the sisters. She still wasn't entirely sure what to think of him, but he had amazed her in the fight here and he was the son of Poseidon, the most competent to sail this giant ship and find their way.

"You know the coordinates, you know how to navigate a ship, you're the son of Poseidon", pointed Bianca out, looking a little amused. "Now, prove yourself to me. Are you worthy of my brother?"

Percy flushed, eyes growing wide and he got nervous. Annabeth snickered, patting his back hard.

"You heard her, Captain Seaweed Brain. Prove yourself", ordered the daughter of Athena.

"W—What did you just call me?!", objected Percy with a crestfallen look.

"A seaweed brain. Because you seem a little slow on the intake", snickered Annabeth.

"Are you sure you want to stay with those people?", whispered Hylla to Reyna, frowning.

Reyna nodded sharply. She and Hylla, they had been stuck too close together for too long now. Things between them had been strained before they had come to this island and now that they left and felt different things calling out to them, maybe it was better to part ways. And as she watched how Annabeth and Bianca laughed while the son of Poseidon blushed and the son of Hades patted his back tenderly, she saw something she wanted. Camaraderie. And something she needed. Humor. They seemed carefree and friendly with each other and after her life, she needed that.

"What did you mean with getting your crew back?", inquired Reyna as she sat down with the girls.

"Right. We haven't reached the point where we tell you about the mission yet", grinned Annabeth
sheepishly. "We're on a quest to find the Golden Fleece, but we got separated from the others..."

Nico frowned as he watched how close Reyna and Annabeth sat next to each other and how easily they laughed with each other. He may not like Annabeth, but he still considered the blonde his sister so he felt a certain degree of protectiveness over her. And the older Latina kept glaring at him and Percy like their existence was already offensive. He knew those looks from huntresses, so he had a hunch why she had agreed to come with them. Still, the most important thing was Percy, with the pirate captain's hat on, steering a pirate ship. He looked absolutely adorable and stunning.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will reunite them with the rest of their team, to finish up their mission and return to camp, because there's a tree waiting to be turned into a demigoddess! Oh and, that memory was Percy's favorite, because it had encouraged him to be more persistent around Hades and butter the king up, until four months later, Percy came to accept them as his new parents~
Chapter 13: The Daughter of Zeus

Frank was short of going crazy. Nico, Annabeth, Bianca and Percy were gone and Leo was... Leo was most likely dead. He had been in the engine room when it exploded. There was no way the Latino was still alive. And now he, Clarisse and Phoebe were drifting around on the remains of their ship, lost at sea. They were basically doomed too. The Sea of Monsters was dangerous enough when one had a vessel, but without as much as a ship? There was no way they could survive this.

"Snap out of it, Zhang!", grunted Clarisse irritated, hitting him upside the head. "Your lost puppy look does not help the situation any. Get a grip. Di Angelos are like weed, you can not get rid of them. So stop worrying what happened to them and help saving us."

"Right. Sorry, sis", muttered Frank, rubbing the back of his head with a pained expression. "How?"

"Well, you're a shapeshifter. Shift into a pelican or something and check if there's an island anywhere close by, or if you can find the others", ordered Clarisse, raising one eyebrow.

"Oh. Right. Good plan", nodded Frank embarrassed.

"That's why I'm your older, wiser sister and the cabin-head", grunted Clarisse, rolling her eyes.

"Boys", sighed Phoebe from where she clung onto their floating wall of boat-rest.

Frank stuck his tongue out at the huntress stubbornly before turning into a seagull. He had gotten pretty good at shapeshifting over the past years. Not perfect yet, but at least he didn't wake up as a rabbit anymore. Searing through the blue sky, he made his way, trying to remember where he came from so he wouldn't also get lost. He came to an abrupt halt when he saw Leo drifting unconscious – or dead, please don't be dead, be unconscious – on a piece of wood. He tried nudging the Latino awake, but all he got were groans – groans were good, groans meant he wasn't dead, Frank preferred Leo not-dead. He didn't manage to wake Leo up though, so he decided for a change. Literally. He turned himself into a griffin and adjusted Leo in his claws to carry him back to the others. In the distance, he saw a pirate-ship. This could not be good. Pirates were never good.

"That is something you could have come up with earlier!", exclaimed Clarisse a bit annoyed as Frank hovered beside their raft. "Turn into something larger so Phoebe and I cam climb onto you and we find our way together. Also, where did you find... that?"

She cautiously took the unconscious Latino from Frank so the son of Ares could shift into a larger animal. Phoebe reluctantly got the nectar out of her backpack to feed it to Leo, not very keen on hand-feeding a boy. Frank all the while turned into a dragon, a bit embarrassed that he hadn't thought of this earlier. Only when he had found the wounded son of Hephaestus.

When Leo woke up, the scene in front of him seemed surreal. He was on an island, being carried by a Huntress of Artemis – even though those are known to hate men – while Clarisse was talking
to a dragon. Yeah, that was a delirious dream alright. As soon as he groaned, Phoebe basically just dropped him. Not a dream, then, because this hurt. Groaning again, he sat up and rubbed his butt. That moment, the dragon turned into Frank and rushed over to him, looking at him with the kind of worry he had only ever seen in purely-golden eyes. It was strange, really. Growing up with Percy as his big brother, he had always thought he'd just stand at the sidelines while the glorious and amazing son of Poseidon took all the fame and adoration from others. But this wasn't the Percy Jackson Show, this was life and life concerned everyone. He offered Frank a shy smile, at least until Clarisse hit him upside the head – hard. Wincing, he rubbed that sore spot too.

"Do not ever do such a reckless thing again when you're under my command, Valdez!", growled Clarisse with a sour expression on her face. "Once we're back home, you will run laps around camp until you puke and then some more until you drop and then, just for good measure, you'll do push ups until you throw up again. Are we understood, Valdez?"

Leo nodded meekly. "Yes, ma'am. Where's my brother? And the others? And... uh... where are we?"

"We don't know where the others are, they're most likely drifting around on the ocean like we did. Phoebe and I already checked the island before we got you and Frank", replied Clarisse, still looking constipated as she glared at him. "I think we found our destination. There's a cyclops in the cave over there and we caught a glimpse of the Golden Fleece. We just need a game plan now."

"And sheep", noted Leo as he looked over the greenery. "Not weird at all, nope."

"Cyclopes eat sheep", stated Phoebe, staring him down like he was a dumb-ass.

"My little brother does not", objected Leo with a frown. "At least not uncooked."

"That sounds like a conversation for later times", grunted Clarisse, raising one eyebrow. "I'd like to see a family tree at some point, son of Hephaestus, brother of a son of Poseidon, adopted son of Hades and brother of a cyclops. Did I miss something?"

"Nope", grinned Leo broadly. "But, uh, if there are so many sheep because the dude is eating them and we have a shapeshifter who can turn into any animal... don't we have a plan right there?"

Clarisse and Phoebe exchanged a surprised look before turning to stare at Leo like he had grown another head. Thank you very much, he was not an idiot. Pouting a bit, he crossed his arms over his chest and deliberately turned toward Frank who looked a bit doubtful.

"You go in, as a sheep, distract him while we three sneak inside to steal the Golden Fleece", stated Phoebe firmly, looking a bit grim that a boy had come up with the plan. "Any objections?"

Nico was turning into a total fanboy and Bianca had the time of her life teasing him about it. The way he stared at Percy, like the son of Poseidon was the most amazing thing ever created since the color black, it was adorable. Grinning fondly, Bianca ruffled her brother's hair, which gained her a glare from the embarrassed Ghost Prince. For the last hour, Nico had just sat there, with his legs crossed, staring up at Percy, who steered the ship all on his own. He was wearing a proper coat from the nineteenth century too, befitting for the pirate hat he was already wearing. He looked like the cutest pirate ever, but also impossibly powerful as he urged the currents on to carry them faster. The sheer force of Percy Jackson was enough to knock Nico back. He had caught a glimpse of it during the fight against Blackbeard's crew and he knew that it was barely a fraction
of what Percy was truly capable of. It was an incredible turn-on for the son of Hades, if he was being honest. What scared him was that it did more than just turn him on. He could feel himself falling for Percy and the more facets of the Sea Prince that he saw, the faster and deeper he fell.

"Will you please focus instead of day dreaming about your pirate prince?", requested Bianca.

Nico blushed and turned back to his big sister. He could hear the other three girls snickering in the background. The two children of Hades was trying to find a lock on the life-forces of their missing crew-mates. It was hard, especially because the two had never tried such a thing and it didn't help that Percy constantly distracted Nico. Not that Percy was aware of it. He was completely focused on his task at hand – steering the ship, controlling all its parts, forcing the waves to obey him and keeping tabs on where they were. He was already multitasking enough as it was.

"We found them!", exclaimed Bianca after another ten minutes of intense focus.

"Then give me directions!", ordered Percy with an authority that startled the huntress.

He had appeared to be a more shy and cute thing, but apparently he could really man up when he had a task to accomplish and he could be serious when need be. The more she saw of him, the more he impressed her. Bianca was still skeptical if Percy was Nico's happily ever after, but he surely was a sweet guy and he may be good for Nico. The next half hour was spend with the children of Hades and Percy barking at each other and more or less bickering while trying to figure out where to go – Percy went by longitude and latitude, while Bianca and Nico knew squad about those things. It was amusing to watch for Annabeth, Reyna and Hylla, that much was for sure.

"You're an interesting bunch", noted Reyna. "I... like the dynamic between you. You're a team."

"A very strange and undisciplined team", added Hylla with a stoic expression.

"We're not a team", argued Annabeth, smiling as she looked at the di Angelos. "We're family."

"Attention, attention! Thank you all for boarding the MS Blackbeard! We've reached our destination and hope you will chose our cruise-line for your next trip too!", announced Percy loudly.

"Dork", muttered Annabeth and shook her head. "You and Nico are a match made in hell."

Nico scrunched up his nose and stuck his tongue out at her. No one provoked him the way the blonde did. Bianca grinned to herself as she watched the two bicker like siblings. It made her happy to see that Nico wasn't alone, but it also hurt a little not to be the sister he spend so much time with.

"Okay. They're on this island. And there's something else that feels like pure life", explained Bianca. "I think it must be the Golden Fleece and they found it. But there are several other life forces and we're not sure if they're enemies or not. Nico, Percy, Annabeth and I will go to help our friends. I know you two as daughters of war want to march into this battle too, but our friends don't know about you and it may be too much of a surprise or distraction and tip off the balance. I want to play this safe. I want you two to stay here, keep the ship at the ready for a fast escape."

Hylla nodded grimly. She understood Bianca's reasoning and recognized the strategy of it, but it didn't make it any better for her. The adrenaline from their fight earlier had been intense and she wanted more of it. But she stood back, together with Reyna, waiting attentively for their return.
A plan was a nice thing and it would be even better if it’d work out as intended. Of course it didn't. Frank managed to distract Polyphemus by running circles and chasing him through the cave, but when Leo, Phoebe and Clarisse went to fetch the Golden Fleece, they got thrown off their game a bit by the fact that there was a satyr being held captive in the cave.

"...Why's the satyr wearing a wedding dress?", had Leo asked, both confused and amused.

That question had thrown Clarisse off. When she recognized Grover, she had the intense urge to beat him up. He was supposed to be on the search for Pan, not play dress-up with a cyclops!

"Okay, change of plans", hissed the daughter of Ares to her two companions. "Phoebe, go and help Frank with the distraction before he gets eaten alive. Valdez, get the Golden Fleece. I free Grover."

"Assuming Grover is the crossdressing satyr", mumbled Leo. "Okay. Can get down to that plan."

Phoebe nodded sharply and readied her bow. And then everything escalated pretty fast. Frank turned back to human and he and Phoebe tried taking on Polyphemus. Leo got stuck in a trap while Clarisse had to listen to Grover rambling on about having mistaken the presence of the Golden Fleece for Pan and having pretended to be a female cyclops to survive. Phoebe was holding her own weight relatively well, even when Frank was already laying unconscious on the floor after having been knocked back against the cave-walls. That was the situation into which Percy, Bianca, Nico and Annabeth stumbled. Lucky enough, they really were a good team.

Annabeth went to join Grover, who now freed had gone to check on Frank and get him out of harm's way first of all, while Bianca and Nico joined Clarisse and Phoebe in their struggle against Polyphemus. Percy all the while got Leo unstuck from the trap and then proceeded to hug the air out of his brother.

"If you two are done cuddling, help!", barked Clarisse as she swung her sword at Polyphemus.

Nico nodded in agreement, feeling himself somewhat eager to fight side by side with Percy. What he did not expect was for that to be a total disaster though. After all, he had seen how amazing Percy had been against the pirates. The thing was – and Nico only noticed that with horror the longer their fight against Polyphemus dragged on – neither Percy nor Leo knew how to fight in a team. Sure, Percy had been amazing against the pirates, but there had been enough pirates to go around for everyone to fight their own fight. Now, in a team against one enemy, Percy and Leo sucked. Individually, they did well, but they were so horrifyingly uncoordinated with the others that Percy actually ended up with one of Phoebe's arrows in his shoulder, because he had completely forgotten that she was there too and hadn't watched out for what his comrades were doing. Needless to say, Phoebe was cursing all men for being dumb right now. Still, thankfully enough it still worked out somewhere. Leo setting a circle of fire around Polyphemus trapped the cyclops and made killing him easier for the combined force of Nico and Clarisse.

"You're an idiot", hissed Nico irritated when he pulled the arrow out of Percy's shoulder.

The son of Poseidon whimpered at the pain, but bit back the comment. He had been looking forward to this for so long, to see Nico in action and fight at his side. In his mind, it had been amazing and they had worked like a well-oiled machine. Sadly, this didn't work out well.

"I—I have no idea what happened", whispered Percy confused. "I swear, I'm a good fighter!"

"I know", sighed Nico and shook his head a little. "But you don't know how to fight in a team. You're like... Tony Stark when he was just Iron Man. A great hero on his own, but without any
knowledge on how to work in a team. He didn't know how to be a part of the Avengers right from
the start either and it took some time to adjust the individual heroes to be a team, you know?"

Percy bit his lower lip and ducked his head as he looked at Nico with the faintest blush on his
face. "You're cute when you talk nerd. But... uh... I think I know what you mean. You're right.
I'm... I'm a good fighter, but I always trained on my own. I think... I have to learn how to be part
of a team."

"Oh, you damn well have to", grunted Clarisse as she glared fiercely down at the boy.

Percy flinched where he was leaning against the mast while Nico was bandaging his shoulder
with tender fingers (very tender fingers. Percy liked those fingers). Clarisse had taken over the
steering wheel, Annabeth was tending to Leo, Frank and Grover below deck, while Bianca,
Phoebe, Hylla and Reyna were manning the ship. Percy closed his eyes tightly and leaned against
the mast. His head was aching with the pain pulsing through his body from the shot-wound and
the possibly broken ankle from his fall. He would be downstairs in their improvised infirmary, but
they needed his navigational skills to get out of the Sea of Monsters. He couldn't use his powers to
stabilize the ship right now, which was where Bianca, Phoebe, Hylla and Reyna came in. Right
now, Percy felt useless. He had wanted to be the shining hero of this mission, to prove himself to
Nico and to Bianca too, to show that he was good enough for Nico. But he nearly had gotten
himself killed by one of his comrade's arrows and also nearly screwed the whole mission. Bianca
noticed the pained look on Percy's face and it didn't take a genius to figure out that it wasn't
exactly physical pain.

"How about you tell Hylla some more about the Hunt, Phoebes?", suggested Bianca.

Patting her best friend's arm, Bianca turned away from the other girls to get over to the boys.
Clarisse and Phoebe had been asking about the two sisters ever since they had left the island and
boarded the ship. Bianca had a feeling that the daughter of Ares could give Reyna a better feel of
what Camp Half-Blood could be like, while Phoebe may help Hylla understanding the Hunt.

"Hey", whispered Bianca and sat down next to Percy and Nico. "Stop beating yourself up."

Nico frowned, confused by his sister, while fastening the bandage. "What are you talking about?"

"You're not used to failing", observed Bianca as she looked at Percy.

"Not... really", shrugged Percy, then winced because of his shoulder. "Hades is a great dad, but...
his made me feel like I could never fail. And now I... did. This was the moment I've been waiting
for years, to fight with you. And I totally sucked. That much for proving myself to you, huh?"

Bianca laughed softly and leaned over to pat his hair like he was a puppy who had performed a
cute trick. "You did good. But Percy, you're only what, twelve years old?"

"Nearly fourteen!", corrected Percy a little miffed.

"Pardon me", chuckled Bianca amused. "Nearly fourteen then. No one expects you to be perfect
and know all answers. You did the best you could. Without you, we wouldn't have made it from
Circe's island to Polyphemus' island in time. We wouldn't even have made it that far in the Sea of
Monsters to begin with. No one aside from you expected you to do all of this on your own. That's
what a team is for. So when one is in a tight spot, the others can jump in. But... you're not a bad
guy. You didn't fail working in a team because you think you're too good to rely on others, you're
just simply not used to it. I'm confident you will learn, with time and a good teacher. So stop
worrying about it."
Percy stared at her in total awe for about a whole minute before nodding. "You're kinda awesome."

Nico smiled a little as he saw the way Percy looked at Bianca – with the same kind of adoration and awe as Annabeth had the first time she had connected with Bianca. "Believe me, she's aware of that. In fact, she loves flaunting it right in my face, how awesome she is."

Bianca grinned at him and kissed his cheek, just to embarrass him some more. Nico's ears turned red and he glared at his big sister. Percy laughed as he watched them. They were both amazing. Bianca patted his hair and left to check on Annabeth downstairs. Percy smiled after her and leaned a little against Nico for support, looking up at the son of Hades from beneath his lashes and noting the blush on Nico's cheeks. Maybe Bianca was right. He still had a lot of time to prove himself.

"How do you go on a quest to get the Golden Fleece and return with a satyr, two huntresses and two daughters of Enyo – on top of the Golden Fleece?", asked Luke astonished.

He was half-hugging Nico with one arm and Annabeth with the other while the victorious demigods led the way toward Thalia's tree. Katie Gardner was expecting them there, the daughter of Demeter trying to slow the dying of the tree down. Hylla and Reyna were staying back some, looking at everything in total awe as they were led through Camp Half-Blood. Clarisse was carrying the Golden Fleece, chest pushed out in pride as more and more campers joined the sidelines to cheer them on. Frank was obediently updating Chiron on how the quest went, while Leo and Percy curiously followed them toward that ominous tree to see what was going to happen.

"Uhm, so, this will probably sound dumb to you guys, but... what now?", asked Leo as they reached the tree. "I mean, how's the golden sheep-fur going to heal that tree? Is there like a magic spell?"

"We'll try the classic method of just putting the fur onto the tree", supplied Bianca amused.

"If you need magic, we good a pretty powerful trinity right over there", added Luke.

He jerked his head toward Alabaster, Lou and Liam, who offered the Latino matching mischievous grins. Leo's eyes lit up when he realized that those were children of Hecate and about a hundred different awesome pranks ran through his head and how to put their magic to good use. Clarisse all the while handed the Golden Fleece over to Luke with a look that conveyed one certain message. Respect between them and respect for the friendship between Luke and Thalia. He placed the fleece on the bark of the suffering tree, with the demigods from the quest in a circle around him and dozens other campers surrounding them, curious to see what would happen. What happened was not anything either would have expected. A glow surrounded the tree and under the amazed and shocked eyes of all of camp, the tree turned into the form of a teenage girl.

"So, I'm new to all of this, but... is that normal?", inquired Leo in awe, half-supporting himself by holding onto (a heavily blushing) Frank's upper arm. "I mean... is she like a tree nymph?"

Grover on Frank's other side bleated offended and looked past Frank to glare at Leo. "Tree nymphs are far more impressive! That's not a nymph. That's... That's Thalia Grace. The daughter of Zeus."

Chapter End Notes
So... Percy's not perfect. He still has a lot to learn and I'm excited to write about his journey. But for now, we'll get a bit more about Thalia's awakening than Rick gave us, Hylla and Reyna have a decision to make and the long-awaited meeting between Percy and Poseidon is just around the corner in the next chapter too. Stay tuned. :)}
Chapter 14: Poseidon's Claim and Percy's Cabin

The unconscious daughter of Zeus had been moved to the infirmary, where the Apollo Cabin was trying to tend to her and see if she was physically speaking alright. Luke and Annabeth were sitting beside Thalia, both completely overwhelmed by what had happened. Seeing as both were cabin heads and Annabeth had participated in the quest, Chiron had decided to move the post-quest-meeting to the infirmary this time around. Bianca, Phoebe, Hylla and Reyna were sitting on one of the beds, opposite of Nico, Percy, Clarisse and Frank. Grover was with Luke and Annabeth, while Leo stood behind Percy, arms wrapped around his brother's shoulder, nose buried in his hair. The other cabin heads had joined them and more than half of camp were standing gathered around the cabin, trying to get a look at the daughter of Zeus through windows and doors.

"Okay, so you invaded Circe's Island and found two demigods?", asked Katie slowly.

"Reyna and Hylla. Daughters of Enyo", replied Clarisse, motioning toward the two girls.

"And then you reached your actual destination and found Grover there?", continued Silena stunned.

"The fleece feels a lot like Pan", mumbled the embarrassed satyr. "I was... misled."

"Right. Sure. I'd be more interested on how you even managed to navigate the Sea of Monsters", grunted Beckendorf, arms crossed over his chest. "That hasn't been done since the Argonauts."

The teens in question exchanged looks. Percy ruffled his hair, unsure if he should say something. Then again, Hades had two kids out and living and now Percy had helped bringing Zeus' kid back to life, so surely Poseidon had one kid free at the moment, right?

"I'm the son of Poseidon, so... we kinda did it like the Argonauts. Leave the wheel to the son of the Sea God", shrugged Percy and ducked his head a bit. "It's not that hard to navigate, really..."

Apparently, Percy's father approved, because after his little announcement, a blue trident glowed above Percy's head, catching everyone's attention. There were a lot of gasps and even more whispering. Percy felt sort of relieved. One secret less to carry. No more hiding.

"All hail Percy Jackson, son of Poseidon and ambassador of Hades", announced Chiron, looking somewhat exhausted and troubled as he stared at Percy. "I think it's been a long journey for you all. Come with me Percy, I will show you to your new cabin."

"My new... what?", grunted Percy, not moving an inch from his spot.

"Congratulations, you won yourself your own cabin", grunted Clarisse. "You're claimed. No more Hermes Cabin. That's only for Hermes' kids, unclaimed ones and children of minor gods."

"You, however, are a child of one of the two recognized Big Three", added Nico a bit bitter.

"Please don't start with that again, Nico", sighed Chiron and shook his head. "Those are things out of my jurisdiction. Now come Percy. They are right, Cabin Three is from now on yours."
Luke tore his gaze away from Thalia to look up at Percy. It was always a weird moment, Luke knew that. He had made enough campers feel at home in the Hermes Cabin just for them to be claimed and to be torn away again. Fitting in at camp was hard enough, change like that was even harder and Luke couldn't quite picture how it must feel for Percy. He would be all alone. Even Castor and Pollux at least had each other in Dionysus Cabin, but Percy would have the entire cabin to himself.

"That's brilliant!", exclaimed Percy and jumped off, eyes sparkling. "Come, Nico!"

"I... uh... what?", grunted the son of Hades as he was tugged up from the bed too.

"Well, you heard it! I have an entire cabin to myself now. That's perfect. You and the unclaimed ones and the kids of minor gods could just move in with me. No one would have to sleep on the floor again, the Hermes kids could all have their own beds in their own cabin and you guys would have more room and own beds too!", rambled Percy hastily, eager and excited at the same time.

Luke blinked in slow-motion as he stared at the boy surprised. "Percy, that is... not how things work. Hermes takes in the lost ones because he's the god of travelers."

"Yeah, well, and now I invited them to live in my cabin", shrugged Percy, frowning confused. "I've been thinking about that during the quest. I mean, I knew my father would claim me at one point and I saw Cabin Three. I thought you'd like that idea most. I thought... it was a good idea?"

"It's a very generous idea, Percy", assured Chiron, offering him a small smile and resting one large hand on Percy's shoulder. "But it is not your cabin. It's your father's cabin. We can't disrespect the gods by just rearranging the rooming arrangements like that. Only children claimed by Poseidon can live in Cabin Three. There are rules and we can't break them and anger the gods."

Percy frowned deeply and stared up at Chiron with his mouth hanging a bit open, as though he wanted to argue. "That isn't fair. Nearly all beds in Hermes' cabin are double-booked and there are still kids sleeping on the ground. Kids who live here, not just during the summer but all year. That isn't right! That isn't a way to live. So why should I live all alone in a cabin for twenty people while my friends have to sleep on the floor, even though I have nineteen unused beds to offer?!"

Luke's eyes softened as he shifted a bit. Those were things that had gone through his head so often by now. Three entirely empty cabins, one cabin where only two boys lived and still Luke's cabin had to host so many children. It truly wasn't fair and it had made him feel bitter and lost and unimportant on so many occasions already. It was sweet that this boy who had only been here for a few days wanted to help, but Luke knew it was futile. A sudden flash of blue distracted him from his thoughts and he stared completely confused at the son of Hades with the blue trident above his head. It was smaller and dimmer than the one that had been spiraling above Percy's head, similar to the skull that had been above Percy's head before. Not a father's claim, but an honorary claim. And much to Luke's surprise, Nico wasn't the only one. Reyna opposite him had the same sign above her head and judging by the gasps from outside, they weren't the only ones.

The cabin heads and Chiron made their way outside to see what all the commotion was about. With one glance, Luke saw Ethan, Alabaster, Liam and Lou rushing over to him, all with tridents over their heads.

"What is going on here?!", exclaimed Alabaster, swatting at the trident in irritation.

"As all of you eavesdroppers already heard, Percy suggested to let those unclaimed and those born to the minor gods live in Cabin Three. This... looks like Lord Poseidon approves of his son's plans", announced Chiron, looking closely at those now claimed. "It's the will of Lord Poseidon."

"Wait. Does that mean we're... moving?", asked Sirius, son of Morpheus.
"As in, to somewhere where each of us gets their own bed?", added his younger half-sister Lily.

Chiron nodded slowly, his eyes fixed on Percy Jackson. The son of Poseidon and ambassador of Hades. The boy who had two of the Big Three wrapped around his fingers. And now also a majority of Camp Half-Blood. This boy held a special kind of power, unlike anyone Chiron had met in too many centuries. It nearly made him regret Camp Half-Blood. This kind of potential was the old kind, the one he had encountered in Theseus and Jason and Achilles. The one he had nursed personally, with only him as their teacher and the loving touch of his wife to nurture their hearts and souls as much as Chiron would nurture their minds and bodies. Chariclo would like this boy with his large heart, willing to take in those who needed a place, just as she had always opened her home to the heroes who had been abandoned by their godly parents and the mortal world to fend for themselves. A faint, pained smile laid on Chiron's lips as he thought of his beautiful wife. As the trainer of heroes he had been forced to move with Olympus to the US, but she was a mountain nymph, bound to her mountain in Greece. Shaking his head to clear it, he decided to return to the Big House. The demigods would be busy for now, those moving from Cabin Eleven to Cabin Three, those tending to Thalia, those planning the celebratory bonfire for the victorious returners.

Percy was sitting at the edge of his new bed, in his new cabin. Everything was blue and decorated with shells and sea-stars. It was beautiful. He had chosen the bed next to the door, with another one next to it, in the first corner of the long cabin. From the corner of his eyes he could see Nico on exactly that bed, pinning his precious photos to the wall and setting his belongings.

"I can't believe you did this", whispered Nico and shook his head a bit.

"Oh, I can", laughed Leo delighted as he bounced beside Percy on the bed. "That's just so Percy. I mean, it's how we met too, kinda. When my mother died and I had no one, Percy brought me to the underworld and offered me a home too. It's just what Percy does, I guess."

"You're one weird kid, Jackson", grunted Alabaster from the bunk above Percy. "But... thanks."

Nico smiled fondly as he saw the broad grin on Percy's lips. How could this boy be so brilliantly perfect, in lack of a better word? He was so pure and beautiful, it was hard to believe he was from this world and not right out of the Disney-world. Nico shook his head and turned to look at the bed behind his where Reyna was silently setting her few belongings onto the shelf at the wall.

"I don't understand why your sister hadn't been claimed though", mused Nico curiously.

"My sister... chose her own path...", whispered Reyna, decidedly not looking at him.

Annabeth wasn't comfortable on the celebratory bonfire, she would have preferred to stay at Thalia's side. The daughter of Zeus looked exactly as she had back on that fateful day when they had arrived at camp. She would have never thought she'd get to see the girl that had been like a mother to her ever again. But there she was, alive. Still unconscious, but alive. That was why Luke had send her out, ordered her to celebrate. He had promised to get her as soon as Thalia woke up, but he thought she should enjoy being celebrated for her victorious quest. She wasn't exactly feeling it though, because the new inhabitants of Cabin Three were celebrating with far more enthusiasm.

"Could you at least try to put a smile on?", requested Nico next to her and rolled his eyes.
"Shut up and keep staring at Jackson's ass", muttered Annabeth with a glare.

Nico had the decency to blush. For them, camp bonfire was something regular and always kind of the same, but for Percy and Leo this was the first party they ever attended, the first time they got to celebrate with others their own age. The two were dancing together cheerfully, their bodies moving in ways that had Nico's and Frank's eyes glued to them. Nico and Frank both sat at the sidelines with Annabeth, looking like love-sick puppies as they watched.

"But Nico is right. You should be happy. You told me about the tree on our journey back here, that she used to be like a sister to you", countered Reyna from Annabeth's other side. "You told me you thought she was dead and that the tree is the only physical reminder of her. Now she's alive."

Annabeth blushed a bit as she looked at the beautiful Latina. "Uhm... Where's your sister?"

"She isn't much of a fan of parties. And... she's being initiated or accepted or something along those lines to that sisterhood of the moon", sighed Reyna, staring up into the starry sky.

"Nico! Dance with me!", exclaimed an overly enthusiastic Percy, all up in Nico's personal space.

"I'm not—I don't dance", stammered the embarrassed son of Hades.

"Did my brother sound like he was asking?", inquired Leo with a grin as he went to push Annabeth and Reyna off their seats from behind. "You two too. Even Clarisse the Brute is dancing! We're the winners, we get to party and dance, so you two will dance! And you, Frank, dance with me!"

Frank's eyes widened so much that Nico feared they'd fall out of the sockets as Leo grabbed his hand and pulled him to the dance floor. Not that Nico had much of a chance to enjoy his best friend's suffering, because all of a sudden, Percy had his arms wrapped around Nico's neck, all flush against the Italian's chest. All warm and firm yet soft and the way he smelt... Nico blushed. He wanted to argue that the music didn't fit for a slow-dance, but Will the traitor decided to switch it up to a Disney-song of all things. Kiss the Girl. Nico turned to throw a death-glare at the son of Apollo but Will just grinned broadly and innocently at him. Nico heaved a sigh and gave in to his fate, arms around Percy's waist to keep him close as they swayed to the music.

"This is finally how I imagined it", whispered Percy, sounding very happy.

"Yeah?", asked Nico, smiling fondly against Percy's neck. "How so?"

"It's like a perfect ending to a Disney-movie", replied Percy shyly. "We won against the bad guys and now I'm dancing with my Prince Charming under the stars..."

Nico was incredibly glad that Percy had his cheek resting against his chest, because Nico's cheeks were as red as tomatoes, ready to burst. He was the son of Hades and sure, he was a hero, but he was not Prince Charming material. How could Percy say such a thing so casually? That boy was going to be his death. But right then, with the soft voice of Will in the background, everything aside from Percy seemed to fade. Nico found himself smiling as he inhaled Percy's ocean scent.

/\break/

It was later after about half an hour of dancing that Nico and Reyna walked into the woods, following their older sisters. Hylla was wearing a camouflage-colored summer-dress as she and Phoebe flanked Bianca. Nico looked over at Reyna, trying to read the daughter of Enyo.

"Mi mancherai, mio fratellino", whispered Bianca against his hair as she hugged Nico tightly.
"Buona fortuna, sorellona", countered Nico, smiling a bit as he returned the hug. "Good luck, big sister"

While the di Angelos hugged tightly and oozed familiar sweetness, the Ramírez-Arellano sisters were a bit more awkward. They looked at each other for a long moment and hugged briefly.

"I know you will do... what's the right thing for you", said Reyna softly. "Enjoy your hunt."

"And you... enjoy what this has to offer", replied Hylla, kissing Reyna's forehead. "Stay safe."

Reyna crossed her arms over her chest as she watched the three huntresses left. After a while, Nico stepped up to her and laid one arm around her shoulders, rubbing her upper arm to warm her up.

"She'll be safe", promised Nico. "My sister will keep her safe."

Reyna turned her head to look at him, admiring the honest love reflected in his eyes when he talked about his big sister. She wished she would have this kind of relationship with her own big sister.

Percy grinned to himself as he watched how Leo danced with Annabeth to cheer her up some more. Both were laughing happily, apparently getting along better now. Clarisse and Frank were dancing next to them, having a lot of fun. He had lost track of Nico and Reyna at some point and even though he was now sharing a cabin with the kids of the minor gods, they were currently partying together so happily themselves and they had known each other far longer that it felt as though he'd be an intruder, so he decided to take a little walk. His legs brought him to the lake and he smiled. With the moon reflecting on the surface, the ocean looked even more beautiful.

"Thank you, father", whispered Percy as he faced the water.

"You're welcome."

Percy turned around very slowly, half-afraid that what he had heard wasn't really there. But there he stood, a man who looked so much like him, it was hard to deny. Black hair, lean body and sea-green eyes. He wore a Hawaiian shirt and shorts, stubble on his chin and a smile on his face.

"A—Are you... I mean...", stammered Percy unsure, gulping hard. "You're... my father. You're the man, the one who had taken me away from the bad man hurting me. You're the one who promised me that everything would be alright and then brought me to papà and mamma."

"You... remember", whispered Poseidon with a pained smile. "I'm sorry I couldn't keep you, but..."

"You did it to keep me safe", interrupted Percy and shook his head, eyes closed tightly to keep the tears away. "I remember the man who had hurt me. If you hadn't come, he... he may still hurt me and my mom. You brought me to a family that loved me and I'll always be grateful for that. And now... now you helped me helping my friends. Thank you, for... everything..."

He tried to stand strong and keep his voice even, but this was his father. This was the god who had risked Zeus' wrath by even having him and even more by saving his life and making a deal with Hades. With shaking shoulders, Percy ran up to Poseidon and hugged the god tightly. Poseidon, first surprised, soon reacted and hugged the boy back, embracing him just as tightly.
"I love you, Perseus", whispered Poseidon against Percy's head as he placed a tender kiss on top of it. "I want you to live a happy and good life. In the underworld as well as here at camp."

"I—I know", mumbled Percy back, voice muffled by Poseidon's chest. "I know, dad."

Poseidon's smile turned from sad to happy at that word and he tightened his grip on the boy, not wishing to ever let him go again. But gods were generally speaking rather busy and after the things that this quest had revealed – Poseidon having a son, Zeus' daughter being alive – the gods had an emergency meeting on Olympus. Reluctantly letting go of his boy, Poseidon kissed his forehead.

"Stay safe. Don't be reckless. Listen to my brother", listed Poseidon sternly. "And let that Hades-kid treat you right. If he's not good enough for you, I'll find a way to bail out on my promise."

"Nico is wonderful, dad", objected Percy with rosy cheeks. "Give me a chance to get to know him first before threatening him, please. And... you too. Stay safe and don't be reckless."

Poseidon chuckled softly at being lectured by a demigod before he returned to Olympus. Percy stood there and watched the lake for a little while longer before he decided to return to his cabin. It was dark inside and those inside were already snoring, the others most likely still at the bonfire. Percy's eyes widened surprised when he found his bed and Nico's bed pushed together.

"Alabaster and Ethan", grunted Nico from his own bed in reply, pointing up.

Percy stood on his tip-toes to look into the upper bunks and really, Alabaster on the bunk above Percy's and Ethan on the bunk above Nico's laid curled together in the middle of the now double-bed, contently sleeping and cuddling. A fond smile found its way onto Percy's lips as he left the happy couple alone and went to get changed into his Captain America pajamas before crawling into his own bed. His cheeks heated up again when he saw Nico only wearing boxer shorts and a ratty black band-shirt of sorts. Laying down on his bed, Percy stared past Nico at the wall beside Nico's bed that was now decorated with all the pictures that documented Nico's life so far. Percy's smile brightened even more when he spotted two new pictures, one of Annabeth holding Percy and Nico as guinea pigs, grinning broadly into the camera and the other of their crew on the way back to Camp Half-Blood, Percy wearing his pirate hat and coat, half-hugging Leo and Nico, with Bianca having her arms around Nico and Annabeth, Hylla and Reyna squeezed in at Annabeth's and Bianca's side together with Phoebe, Frank and Grover somewhere between Leo and Nico while Clarisse stood as their proud leader somewhat in front of them all, holding the Golden Fleece into the camera. Percy liked the picture, because they all looked genuinely happy.

"I'm glad I met you, Nico", whispered Percy into the darkness.

"So am I", whispered Nico back and reached out to push a blue strand of hair out of Percy's face. The touch was tender and warm and Percy couldn't help but lean in. Before Nico could take his hand back, Percy grabbed it and intertwined their fingers. Their linked hands came to rest between them, Nico rubbing circles on the back of Percy's hand with his thumb.

"Your sister left again", stated Percy softly. "She said goodbye before she left."

"I think she likes you", said Nico lightly, grinning a bit. "So stop worrying about her."

"It's hard not to", countered Percy with a frown. "Your father told me a lot about you two and for years, I've been hoping to meet you two. It was all a bit different than expected but... good..."

"Mh", grunted Nico amused. "We should sleep some. Buona notte." [trans: Good night]
"Buona notte, Nico", replied Percy with a smile, squeezing Nico’s hand softly.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, we will hand the spotlight over to Leo! He'll reveal his best-kept secret to you guys and you get to meet Hazel and the Romans for the first time!

Oh and I added Triton as a character and Thanatos/Triton as a pairing in the header, for those who hoped for it. :)

Chapter 15: Leo Valdez, Ambassador of Pluto

Leo loved the Hephaestus cabin. Sure, he loved his Percy and his Tyson, but there was something he shared with those demigods that he didn’t share with his chosen brothers. The bonfire was still going, but his new ‘mom’ and ‘dad’ had insisted that the younger ones should head to bed. Nyssa had told Leo how Charles Beckendorf and Silena Beauregard were acting as parental figures to the Hephaestus and the Aphrodite kids and judging by the way they had pampered him during dinner and were now ushering him and the others toward the cabins. Leo was walking with his half-siblings Nyssa, Jake and Shane, as well as the younger Aphrodite-kids Lacy and Mitchell. Lacy and Shane kept giggling with each other while being fondly watched by Beckendorf and Silena.

"Ah, young love", sighed Silena with a smile, barely audible, leaning against Beckendorf.

Leo frowned. Shane and Lacy were a year younger than him and he doubted they had any intentions of being a couple or anything. Maybe in a year or two, but not right now. Leo turned toward the older teens, staring quizzically at the head of Aphrodite's cabin. An expert of love.

"Uhm, Silena, can I ask you something...?", asked Leo shyly.

They had reached Cabin Ten and got comfortable on the pink garden furniture set out on the porch, curious about Leo's question. Leo shifted awkwardly as he was sitting between Jake and Nyssa, both nudging him curiously. His ears caught a little fire in embarrassment.

"Of course you can, honey", assured Silena with a smile. "What is it?"

"Do you think... you can love more than one person?", asked Leo, face red.

"Of course", chuckled Silena amused. "Aren't we proof of it? Some may say that it's just about the sex when the gods conceive us demigods, but I don't think so. Some of the gods go all out to court the mortals. I believe that they love our mortal parents as much as their immortal consorts."

"Why would you ask that?", grunted Beckendorf with an inquisitive frown.

"It's just... I... uh... W—When Frank and I danced and I think... I may... like him", mumbled Leo.

"Yeah, I think that's as obvious as that Nico-Percy-thing", snickered Nyssa amused.

"B—But I kinda... have a girlfriend already", stammered Leo, hiding his face behind his hands.

While his half-siblings wanted to bombard him with questions (and did so, all at the same time, making it impossible to understand them), Silena decided to usher them all to bed. The most prominent question thrown at Leo was how he had found a girlfriend in the underworld. There was no way he could explain it to them without revealing the one secret he had even kept from his brothers. His underworldly brothers. Laying down on his bed, Leo closed his eyes with a small smile playing on his lips as he thought back to how he had first met his girlfriend.

/flashback\
It had started when Leo had been eight years old, living in the underworld for a bit over a year now. Percy was ten and Hades had deemed it right to tell Percy about his engagement and the four children of the underworld. Percy, of course, had been most curious about the di Angelos.

"What about the fourth?", piped Leo in, growing more interested. "There was a fourth, right?"

"Hazel Levesque, the one born in New Orleans", nodded Klotho in agreement. "Died, years ago."

Something about that sentence had bothered Leo immensely. Four children of Hades born in the past hundred years, one a tyrant whose death was celebrated throughout the world, two safely tugged away by their father and the fourth just dropping off without another note. The thought got stuck in Leo's head, even more so when he and Percy were grounded for the next half year to prevent them from meeting the di Angelo. Not just because he was too hyperactive to be stuck inside for long, but also because part of him found it unfair. Hades had managed to save Nico and Bianca, why hadn't he saved Hazel? Hadn't she been worth saving? Or had she just died of old age after having lived a long life? Needless to say, Leo's curiosity was a hungry beast that only grew over those six months of being grounded in the palace.

It wasn't helpful that he had too much free time at his hands. Sure, he got his classes with the gods and he had Percy and Tyson, but Percy had special classes. He wasn't just a charge, he was the future consort of Hades' heir. He got taught how a god properly behaved and how the underworld worked from within. Tyson all the while also had to work in the forges and couldn't play all the time either. So there were whole days Leo had all to himself and after the di Angelos had been send back to the surface and Leo and Percy were allowed outside again, Leo only took a few weeks before his well-fed curiosity and the nurtured boredom of being on his own had led to his own adventures.

Leo decided to spend his days off roaming the Fields of Asphodel, seeing as he had absolutely no leads. Had she been a good person? Was she in Elysium? Had she been a bad person? Was she in the Fields of Punishment? Or had she maybe chosen rebirth and Leo's quest was for naught?

Leo wasn't Percy. Percy had spend so much more time with the Moirai and grown very sensitive to the life-threats and thus the auras of people. Now, Leo wasn't Percy, but he at least had some kind of feel for those things too. It just took him longer than it would have taken Percy. But Percy had so much to do and he had his own children of Hades. Leo wondered if it was weird that he considered Hazel his child of Hades? His very own obsession. Hobby, really. Something to do when he had nothing else to do. Finding the daughter of Hades that had slipped from history.

Leo was nine when he saw her for the first time. The daughter of Hades was easily the most beautiful thing Leo had ever seen – even more beautiful than his guardian angel had seemed the first time he had seen Percy. Chocolate-skin, long, dark curls flowing behind her body, her eyes a piercing gold, her body surrounded by the black aura Leo recognized from Hades, Thanatos and Olethros – the aura associated with the gods of death. There was no doubt, this was her.

"Hello", smiled Leo brightly, proud that he had found her all on his own, without Percy's help.

For someone who had lived in the shadow of Percy Jackson for nearly two years now, it felt oddly accomplishing to having done such a thing all on his own. The half-way see-through ghost turned to look at him, tilting her head like she didn't understand. Right. She was a lost soul, memories wiped and left here to wander. It took him many months of coming back and talking to her for her to regain enough of her human sense to reply. But to Leo, it was like one of his inventions. Something that required time and for once, Leo was patient enough to give that time.

"You're not a lost soul, why do you wander these fields?", asked Hazel confused.
"Maybe in a way I am a lost soul", mused Leo as he sat down with Hazel. "I don't have anyone on the surface and the... the underworld took me in. What about you? What's your story?"

"My... story...", whispered Hazel, golden eyes clouded. "My story is a long one, I suppose..."

"If there's one thing I have, it's time", grinned Leo broadly, before faltering. "Well, uh, not right now, because grandma Hestia is waiting with dinner. But I'll be back, I promise."

"I know", smiled Hazel, looking at him tenderly. "You always come back."

There was a story that Persephone held dear and that she liked to tell Percy and Leo before they went to bed. It was the story of a princess named Sheherazade, who got married to a sultan. The sultan was known to only spend one night with his wives before killing them and remarrying another. Sheherazade delayed her death by telling him mesmerizing stories, always ending on a cliffhanger so the sultan couldn't kill her for he wanted to know how the story continued the next night. This lasted for a thousand and one nights until the sultan had truly fallen in love with her and wouldn't kill her anymore. Death aside, Hazel was his Sheherazade. She told Leo stories of the thirties and of New Orleans, no less amazing than ancient Arabia. Her life, her curse, her death.

When Leo was ten, roughly a year after he had first gotten her to talk to him, he considered Hazel Levesque his best friend. Which meant that he wanted more for her than imprisonment in the Fields of Asphodel. Leo was clever, but it still took him months to figure out a plan and some longer to execute it. He was living in the palace of the king of the underworld. Stealing the keys of Hades took time to find the right moment, but it wasn't impossible. Figuring a way from the Fields of Asphodel to the guarded Doors of Death wasn't as hard as anticipated. The real problem were Thanatos and his twin-brother Olethros however. The guards of the Doors of Death. They had shifts, so all Leo needed was for Thanatos to be on duty and then distract him somehow. This was what cost some time – finding something that would actually be a worthy distraction for the Death God. Whenever Eris was down to visit her sisters, she also ran the local rumor mill. And she never said no to causing mischief and mayhem. The goddess agreed to aid Leo in his mission, knowing she would get a laugh out of it. The greater scheme of it involved an anonymous invitation to Triton, the son of Poseidon who ruled the mermen, to the beach where Hercules guarded the old world. Once those news were delivered to Thanatos, the bewinged god took off with an expression of fury like Leo had never seen it on the normally gentle god before. It confused the child greatly.

"Now is our chance, Haze", whispered Leo urgently, tugging on Hazel's hand.

Thanatos had left in such a rush, he hadn't even notified Olethros to take over for him, leaving the Doors of Death unsupervised. Surely not for long, but for now. Hazel was worried though, knowing that if word got out, Leo would be in huge trouble. Not that Leo cared – and that was what Hazel found so utterly endearing about the Latino. He was willing to risk it all for his friend. So much like Sammy, yet still so different. When she had first started to remember her life, Leo's face alone had sent her into flashbacks and started forcing her memories back to her. But over the years she had now been friends with Leo, she had learned to cherish him for who he was, not who his ancestor was. The sensation of going through the Doors of Death was breathtaking – or rather breathgiving. She could feel how her body was restored, how she came back to life.

"What in the world were you thinking?!!"

Leo and Hazel cowered at the feet of Pluto and Proserpina. Leo had seen it before, a shift in both looks and personality. All gods could do that, it was something Percy and Leo had long since gotten used to. Sometimes Hades wore old Greek robes and was thin and pale, other times he wore leather and looked like a rocker from the eighties. Gods changed shape – Zeus himself had
seduced a woman in the body of a swan to sire Helen of Troy, so *this* was entirely less weird. That day, Leo learned that it wasn't as normal as Leo and Percy thought. Greeks and Romans were not supposed to mingle. Great wars had been flared by it, it had never ended well. And Hazel, as she had told Leo, was a daughter of Pluto. Apparently, that mattered. Leo had just assumed that whether you called him Hades or Pluto, it referred to the same god – it didn't.

"What has been done can't be undone", whispered Proserpina, resting one hand on Leo's cheek to get his attention. "But Percy can not know about this. *No one* can know. This is the secret of the gods. And now it is also yours. You need to keep it, Leo. You too, Hazel Levesque."

"There is a camp", grunted Pluto, looking more constipated than Hades when he had to deal with Leo. "Not the one we send Bianca and Nico to. They are at a camp for the Greek children of us gods. Leo, you will bring Hazel to Camp Jupiter – a place for Romans. You can't let anyone know that you aren't Roman, Leo. Just like you became Percy's responsibility, my daughter hereby becomes yours. You will watch over her. And *never* let Percy know about this, you hear me?"

"But... if they can't know I'm Greek... w—what do I say?", asked Leo shyly.

"You're the ambassador of Pluto and *I* send you", answered Pluto grimly. "Now go."

Leo paused as he watched how Pluto, still looking grumpy, pulled Hazel into a hug, kissing her forehead in what was their first interaction in seventy years. Leo took a dazed Hazel by the hand and they left together. They rode into Camp Jupiter on the back of Zerberus, which left quite the impression on the Romans. Within seconds, they were circled by armored Romans.

"Who are you?", asked a blonde with a nicked lip sharply.

"I—uh...", stammered Leo wide-eyed as a sword was pressed against his throat.

"I vote for cutting first and asking later", drawled another blonde with a thick British accent.

"Jason, Octavian, enough!", barked a beautiful girl out. "Lower your weapon. They're quite obviously demigods. Now, you two, answer those questions, or we will go with Octavian's plan."

Leo locked eyes with the blonde named Jason, still staring a bit fearfully and trying to hide Hazel behind himself. "I am L—Leo Valdez, I'm the ambassador of Pluto. Lord Pluto send me to... uh... to guide his daughter here. This is Hazel Levesque, the only demigod daughter of Pluto."

Gasps and whispers followed from the bystanders and the beautiful girl was joined by another older teen. "I'm Nathan McIntosh and this is Gwen Ryder, we're the praetors of Camp Jupiter. The leaders. Your entrance was quite... ah, convincing. But we'll have a meeting about this."

Romans like bureaucracy. Leo kinda hated it. Apparently, the Romans didn't like the underworld much and Octavian, the augur aka seer of the Romans, didn't like anything much, so the meeting dragged on. The praetors, a son of Mercury and a daughter of Venus judging by their auras, were level-headed people though and a boy named Dakota, who claimed to be some kind of leader of a cohort that wasn't wildly liked (judging by the looks from the others) ended up accepting Hazel. She had a place among the Romans and Leo's work was done for the day. He needed to return home before Percy would grow suspicious about his whereabouts. But before he could climb Zerberus again, Hazel caught his wrist and pulled him back to the ground. He turned to her to ask, but then she kissed his cheek, her lips warm and soft on his skin, causing her ears to smoke.

"H—Hazel?", yelped Leo, cheeks red and eyes wide.

"Thank you for everything you have done for me", smiled Hazel shyly, her cheeks dark too as she
decidedly looked at the floor. "I—I... owe you very much. And I like you very much."

"I like you too", grinned Leo, relaxing a bit.

"Good", smiled Hazel brightly. "Then we could be sweethearts, right?"

"Sweethearts?", echoed Leo, back to confused. "What does that mean?"

"Well, it means that I like you very much and you like me very much and we could hold hands and kiss, like we just did", explained Hazel thoughtful. "And you'd have a... reason to come visit."

"I don't need a reason to visit", frowned Leo. "But I think I like being sweethearts."

He grinned broadly and leaned over to kiss her cheek innocently, causing both of them to blush. She was thirteen and from the thirties and he was barely twelve and pure to the core. It had been half a year before Percy and Leo had been send to Camp Half-Blood and Leo had frequently visited his sweetheart since then (and cautiously investigated with Persephone what 'sweethearts' exactly did).

/flashback

By the time Leo was done reminiscing the past, it was deepest night and even Charles Beckendorf was snoring deeply. So Leo tip-toed out of the cabin, sneaking around. Avoiding the harpies wasn't hard for a boy who was trained in avoiding the furies. Once he was a safe distance from camp, he started whistling a tune Hades had taught him and Percy to call upon Zerberus. The three-headed dog appeared, tail wagging and heads butting to lick Leo eagerly.

"Easy, boys", laughed Leo softly, ruffling each head. "Come, time to visit Hazel and Jason, mh?"

Zerberus looked happy – Leo knew the dog loved Hazel. The Latino climbed onto the guard-dog’s back. Shadow-traveling was super exciting and Leo totally loved it, so by the time they reached Camp Jupiter, he had a giant grin splitting his face. Now that Leo knew Camp Half-Blood, Camp Jupiter seemed even more impressive than before. How could the Greeks – the ones who were around longer, the foundation of everything – be stuck in a summer camp, living in cabins, while the Romans got a proper city and an actual democracy, while Greeks went by ‘the oldest leads’?

"Leo! Oh, I didn't know you'd come visit!"

Seconds later and Leo found himself tightly hugged by his girlfriend of six months. He grinned as her dark curls tickled his nose. She always smelt like earth and he really liked that. Returning the hug, he placed a chaste kiss on her lips. They had moved from kissing cheeks to pecks on the lips about two months ago, albeit both still blushed brightly whenever they did that.

"I'm not here for holding hands...", mumbled Leo with a small pout. "T—Though we could still do that, I guess. But I'm here on kind of... uh... serious business. Praetor business."

"Shall I call a meeting?", inquired Hazel concerned, straightening her robes.

"No. It's... let's keep it small for now. Praetors and augur only", whispered Leo, looking around.

Gwen and Nathan had retired their positions as praetors not too long ago, having to focus on finishing high school. Hazel linked fingers with his and tugged him along to the house of the praetors. Leo's smile broadened when he saw a tired and half-asleep Jason sitting at the table. Hazel had become his girlfriend and over the past months of visiting her, Jason had become Leo's best friend. The blonde looked surprised when he spotted the Latino and went to hug Leo.
"Go and get Octavian. Apparently, Leo has some kind of urgent information", said Hazel.

The two children of the Big Three had been elected praetors when Nathan and Gwen had retired. The Great Prophecy, as received and interpreted by their augur, made Romans uneasy, but it was obvious that a child of the eldest god referred to a child of the Big Three. They now had two of those and it was clear to the Romans that the children of the Big Three would lead them into a victorious war – regardless of how much they may dislike the rebellious son of Jupiter, or the fact that Hazel was a child of the much feared underworld. Hazel and Leo set down when Jason left.

"What's going on, my little lion?", asked Hazel concerned. "You look winded."

"I... visited the Greek camp for the first time and learned something that you Romans have as much a right to know about as the Greeks do", explained Leo, rubbing his face exhausted.

Hazel nodded in understanding and linked their little fingers again in silent support. Together, they waited until a still tired Jason and a rather irritated Octavian entered the house. The blondes joined them in the living room and sat down opposite the young couple. Leo bit his lower lip nervously.

"Well, what the bloody hell is going on?", huffed Octavian. "Because I have better things to do."

"It's about the war", sputtered Leo, shifting some. "I... I was on a mission, in Lord Pluto's name, and I learned something very... very valuable... something I need to tell you."

"Spit it out, oh great ambassador", grunted Octavian, crossing his arms over his chest.

"The prophecy, the one you guys assume is about a great war, I think... no, I know, that Bryce Lawrence is involved", replied Leo, playing with his hands. "I—I saw him on a ship with others, with... traitors. And a weird, suspicious golden coffin that feels... not right."

"What did the coffin look like?", asked Jason concerned, looking at his best friend.

"Golden, weird. With engravings of, I think, the war against the titans. I've seen enough reliefs of the titan war to recognize it, so I think... I think it may be...", whispered Leo, shifting worried.

"Gods, just spit it out, Valdez!", urged Octavian on growing impatient.

"I think it's Lord Saturn. He had been the only titan to be cut up", muttered Leo. "I dunno what they were doing with it, maybe channeling his energy or something, but... they're up to no good."

Jason sagged back against the couch while Octavian frowned and glared. Hazel caressed Leo's thigh soothingly. It was hard for him to tell them things when he was force to stick to half-truths and she knew how much it upset him that he couldn't tell Jason what was really going on and who he truly was. But Romans were aware of Greeks and there was a deep-seated hatred between them.

"You're gonna be the death of me", muttered Octavian, shaking his head and standing. "I will go and read what the augury has to say about this. Keep your... eyes open, Valdez."

"I—I'd like to stay some longer, but, uh...", mumbled Leo, looking even more troubled.

"Your brother", guessed Hazel with a smile and kissed his cheek. "Come back soon, my little lion."

Leo grinned relieved and hugged Jason and her goodbye before heading back to Zerberus.
Next chapter will have lots of bonding-time! Thalia awakes, I shall get my Reyco-bromance and Percy gets to know his new cabin-mates better! Also, Olympus shall discuss the whole "we got a lot kids of the Big Three running around"-situation!
Chapter 16: A Fresh Breeze and an Old Feud

Percy liked his new cabin. When he woke up in the morning, right with the first rising of the sun, because he was still not entirely used to the sun, he woke up with his head on Nico's chest. He must have snuggled up to the warmth of the other demigod in his sleep, but apparently Nico didn't mind too much, seeing as the Italian had his arms possessively around Percy's waist. Smiling to himself, Percy sneaked out from the embrace. His eyes surveyed Cabin Three and in the faint red light of morning, checking on his cabin-mates. A grin split his face. He had cabin-mates. Thanks to his father, he didn't have to live alone in his cabin. There were Alabaster and Ethan in the bunks above his and Nico's, cuddled close together and snoring contently. Liam the son of Hecate, Damian the son of Eris, and Sirius the son of Morpheus were laying in the upper bunks of the next three bunk-beds, with Clovis the son of Hypnos and Butch the son of Iris in the bunks beneath Sirius and Damian. The four girls were laying in the bunks on the other end of the cabin, with some still-empty beds between them and the boys for privacy. Reyna and Lou were peacefully asleep in the lower bunks and Clovis' half-sister Aurora and Sirius' half-sister Lily were laying in the bunks above. This was his new family. He was the cabin-head, he was responsible for them. They were the children of the underworld – well, and Iris, but Iris and Hermes were the messengers of all three realms, so they didn't really belong to any of them. In a way, this felt as though he was showing his gratitude to the gods who had taken him in when he had no place and no family.

"Why are you awake? It's like... night...", yawned Liam confused and stared down at Percy.

"I'm always up early", shrugged Percy with a sheepish grin. "But you can sleep some longer?"

Liam just grunted in agreement and turned his back on Percy, out like a candle within a second. Grinning to himself, Percy sneaked out of the cabin. He didn't quite know what to do or where to go, but exploring sounded about right. He felt especially drawn to the lake, so that was where his feet carried him. Shrugging out of his shoes, he sat down on a large rock and let the waves wash at his feet. This was beautiful. He could probably sit there all day. If not for Annabeth.

"There you are", grunted the blonde irritated as she approached him. "Lou Ellen threw a shoe at me when I woke her up because I was looking for you. Come on now, we have a cabin-head meeting."

Percy frowned confused, but he put his shoes on and made to follow the bossy girl. "Why? I mean, didn't you have one yesterday after the quest? Are those meetings a daily thing?"

"No, they're not, seaweed brain", huffed Annabeth and rolled her eyes at him. "But it so happens that the gods are having a meeting of their own, concerning the whole... children of the Big Three situation. Chiron thought we should discuss what to do in what case too."

Percy was definitely panicking. A cabin-head-meeting. His first cabin-head-meeting and then it was about him. He slowed down, let Annabeth walk past him as she caught up with Clarisse. He waited outside the Big House, staring with large, concerned eyes at it as though it was the most terrifying thing he could imagine. He nearly jumped out of his skin when a large hand came clapping down on his shoulder. Whirling around, he faced a more than amused Luke.
"Relax some", said Luke, raising one eyebrow. "You look ready to faint."

"W—Well, I am ready to faint!", huffed Percy embarrassed, gesturing wildly with his arms. "I mean, all I've ever known was my family in the underworld. Gods and Leo and Tyson. But Leo and Ty are as mischievous troublemakers as I am, so being their leader wasn't a problem. Now I'm supposed to be the leader of all those others, who I don't even really know and I'm supposed to make decisions for them and be proper and responsible and it's just... it's..."

"Overwhelming?", supplied Luke, a certain fondness in his eyes. "Listen, kiddo, it's alright. Yes, being cabin-head is a lot of responsibility and also a lot of work, but you'll find your way."

Percy stared at him incredulously. "I'll find my way? Seriously?! I'm having half a panic attack and the best advise you can give me is that I'll somehow make it work?! Man, you suck at motivating..."

Luke burst out into laughter and shook his head. "You're something else alright, Percy Jackson. There is no definite advise that I can give you. Clarisse, Beckendorf, Silena, Annabeth and I, we all just... became cabin-heads. It wasn't like we got taught what to do and how to do it. It was as sudden and overwhelming for us as it is for you. It's intimidating and the fear of failing – not just for yourself, but for all of those who rely on you – it's a strong one. But all of us made it work, we made being cabin-head our own thing. Beckendorf may be a silent, brooding guy, but he's a father-figure to his cabin and they all know they can turn to him and rely on him when they have problems. Silena watches over her cabin like a good mother. I've taken more of a brotherly approach, offering advise but not demanding as much authority as they do. Annabeth makes plans, she has her regularly scheduled cabin meetings, discussing anything of importance, making notes, taking issues to Chiron if the need arises. And Clarisse is the general of her cabin, she demands absolute loyalty, but she also leads with that same faith. You will find your path, Percy."


"That was some inspirational speech, Luke", praised the daughter of Demeter amused, arms crossed over her green dress. "You really believe in his ability to do this right, don't you?"

"I don't know", answered Luke with a light shrug. "We all have one advantage over him. Our cabin-mates are our siblings. There's an unspoken bond and even more than that, we have... matching personalities. The Ares Cabin accepts Clarisse's absolute authority because they all have the blood of born soldiers. Percy however... he's going to face a real challenge. I know that better than anyone. Leading my siblings was always different from leading the others. There will always be some kind of lingering resentment about why this kid of another god got to lead them. And all those different personalities. The Hypnos kids, who sleep all day and never do their chores, the Hecate kids, who can do so much more mischief with their magic than any of my siblings ever could... Finding a place for all of them is hard, keeping them all under control is nearly impossible."

"So... you think he'll fail miserably?", inquired Katie, raising one elegant eyebrow.

"Oddly enough, no...", replied Luke honestly, looking a bit surprised himself. "He has something that I've never seen before. An unbound belief and trust in the good of people. And... most of those who have never been claimed or who have never been recognized just because their parents aren't Olympians, they... they need someone to look at them the way Percy does. Like they're special, amazing and just completely perfect the way they are. If anyone can make it work, it's him."

Katie made a nonchalant sound in the back of her throat and passed him without another word.
Zeus opened his mouth, thunder roaring in the background as he prepared for one of his angriest outbursts, just to be cut off by an even angrier Demeter. "You don't get to say a word!"

Backing down surprised, he stared at his older sister. "W—What...? I didn't even start yet!"

"Oh, brother, I know you well enough!", huffed the brunette goddess irritated. "You're going to be a drama queen about this – woe is me, my older brother betrayed my trust and broke the oath?"

"And they conspired against me!", spat Zeus enraged, feeling ridiculed by Demeter.

"You broke that damn oath twice. With the same... mortal", hissed Hera, spitting the 'mortal' like it was a vile insult. "I think you're in no position to berate our brother for his one time slip. Not that he is off the hook, but you are the last person who gets to say a word."

And his sisters were ganging up on him, just wonderful. "Hades knew! And he hid the brat!"

"Because the child is innocent", chided Hestia, looking at him with disapproving eyes.

When even Hestia was voicing how wrong he was, he knew all battles were lost before they were fought. Slumping in his throne, he sulked like a teenager, glaring at his five siblings viciously.

"Why did you hide the child!", demanded Zeus to know, anger replaced by a sense of rationality.

"Because I knew you'd react like that", admitted Poseidon with a glowering expression on his face. "You always take everything so personal, brother. Me sleeping with a mortal woman has absolutely nothing to do with you, I assure you. I knew Hades would protect my son until his time."

"His time for what!", interrogated Zeus, knuckles white as he clung to the table-top.

"To become the great hero he is meant to be!", exclaimed Hades now, for the first time offering his opinion on the matter. "A hero trained by the gods. He will defend Olympus."

"He will defend the underworld", argued Zeus with a mistrusting glare. "Trained by your council."

"He retrieved the fleece that saved your daughter and all of camp!", countered Demeter annoyed.

This debate was as old as the gods and Hestia knew it normally lasted for days and days to come.

Cabin-head meetings were exhausting. There was so much arguing and discussing and so little agreeing. Percy had a headache and he really, really hated those. Seeing the grimace on his face, Clarisse wound her arm around his shoulder, laughing at him. He stuck his tongue out.

"I for my part hate sitting still and debating. That's for Athena-wussies. I'm more a fan of action and using your fists, not your wits. How about you, little mermaid!", asked Clarisse with a smirk.

Percy frowned, arching one eyebrow. "You mean like... sparring with each other?"

"Oh, the genius. He catches on so fast with things!", gasped Annabeth in mock-surprise.

Percy wasn't used to harsh words – had not heard them in too many years – so he didn't know
how to take the girls' teasing, but when he saw the amused and fond expression in both their eyes, he assumed it to be on a friendly base. At least he hoped so. All of this was still very confusing.

"Sure. I'd love to", replied Percy and nodded with the smallest smile.

"You joining us, princess?", inquired Clarisse, raising one eyebrow and looking at Annabeth.

"No. Luke and I, we wanted to... well, to check on Thalia", declined Annabeth softly.

"Raincheck?"

"But it's not raining?", grunted Percy confused and looked up at the sky.

"Oh, your innocence is to equal parts endearing and irritating", snorted Clarisse, shaking her head.

Percy just frowned at her in utter confusion and followed her lead toward the training arena. Reyna, Frank, Nico and Leo were there, sparring in pairs. Reyna and Nico had a flow to themselves that made them look like two exotic dancers. It was completely mesmerizing. And Frank and Leo on the other hand were more or less stumbling over their own feet, causing Percy to snicker.

"Okay, shift gears, guys. Nico with Leo, Reyna with me, Frank with Percy!", ordered Clarisse.

She wanted to asset the new daughter of war herself. See what Reyna was truly made of. And the combo of Leo and Frank seemed to be too awkward to be true. Percy and Frank however seemed to get a pretty good hang of each other's movements all too fast. It was a good steady pace for all three pairs, at least until a bench caught fire and Leo screamed like a little girl.

"What – in the name of my father – was that, Valdez?!", barked Clarisse out.

"I just—He just... threw fire at me! He at me, not the other way around", sputtered Leo scandalized.

"I thought we could mix this up a little", shrugged Nico with a wicked grin on his lips as he produced a green ball of fire in his palm. "You and I, we have more than strength, we have powers. Powers we need to school just like our muscles. So why not make it more interesting?"

"How do you do that?", whispered Percy in total awe, suddenly all up in Nico's personal space.

Nico's cheeks dusted red at the cute expression on Percy's face. "It's... part of my powers. I mean, I'm the son of Hades, I control the elements of Hades. Death, darkness, earth and the rather distinctive fires of the underworld too. It's pretty hard to grasp at first, what's the actual extend of our powers, so I, well with the help of Annabeth I guess, kept studying what could be possible and then I tried it out and trained until I was satisfied. You probably did that too, with the gods."

Percy nodded shortly. It was true. There had been things he had learned, he would have never associated with the Sea God. Grinning sheepishly, he backed off some and their little group returned to their training session. Though in the end most of their concentration was on the amazing display of dancing shadows and moving fire that Nico and Leo put up. The Latino was laughing like a maniac and sweating like a waterfall by the time he collapsed on the ground. Training with the gods had always been rather strict and there was that mental pressure not to disappoint, but like this? It was freaking amazing and just so much fun! He still felt like he was gonna die every second now.

"Mh", grunted Clarisse thoughtful, frowning a bit. "I'll talk to Annabeth about this."

"About what?", panted Nico, brushing the sweat-soaked hair out of his face.
"It's just something... I've never thought about. We spar, train with weapons, regardless of if our
demigodly powers lay in the mind, body, or... whatever you call yours", replied Clarisse. "For
everyone and most of all for those of us who have additional strength, Athena, Ares, Enyo, it
makes sense to school our physique. But those special abilities of the children of the eldest gods..."

She let the rest of the sentence hang in the air as she left for the showers. Something about that
particular phrasing was unsettling too, but it was right. The eldest gods, the children of the titans,
they often had special abilities. The children of Eris could manipulate someone's emotions into
such a blinding discord that they couldn't even sort their own thoughts anymore and faltered
before any fight had a chance to break loose. Children of Hecate had their magic to cheat.
Children of Morpheus could send their opponent into deep sleep without having to lift a sword.
Some children of Aphrodite, like Silena and Drew, could charmspeak their enemies into not
fighting at all and leaving. And then there were the six siblings, or rather the four who had
children. Hades, Zeus, Poseidon and Demeter. Their control over the elements could be a
frightening display, yet they never trained it. They never trained it and that was a frightening
thought. Why didn't they train it?

Thalia's head was reeling. There were entirely too many impressions being thrust upon her. All the
light and the voices, the loud voices asking questions, questions she didn't know to answer. Will
Solace was at the forefront of it, babbling on about possible head-traumas and such. She
remembered Will. He and his boyfriend Jake had confessed their feelings under her branches. She
didn't have branches anymore. Her electric-blue eyes wandered to her arms and she cautiously
lifted one, turning it to look at her fingers then. And in the sea of worried children of Apollo, there
were two faces that stood out. When she lifted her head again, she instantly found Luke and
Annabeth. Both were sitting next to her bed, in a similar manner as they used to sit by her trunk.

"H—Hello", whispered Annabeth softly, as though she was afraid to startle Thalia. "I'm... It's me,
Annabeth. I know we changed a lot since you last saw us and I don't even know if you remember-
"

Before she could finish the sentence, Thalia had her arms wrapped around them both and pulled
them into a bonecrushing hug. "I remember everything. Everything."

Relief flooded Annabeth and she started sobbing silently as she clung onto the older girl. Since
Thalia had turned back into a human, Chiron had cautiously warned them that it was possible she
had no recollection of her life before being a tree at all. But she remembered. She remembered
them and they had their Thalia back. Chancing a glance at Luke, she saw that he too was crying.

Nico had been sitting on his bed in his new cabin for about three hours, playing cards with Cecil,
Lou and Reyna. After sparring, he had taken a shower and wanted to spend time with Percy. That
was before Percy had discovered the stables. Probably the most adorable expression ever had
spread over his face and the boy was gone. So Nico had left him to the pegasi and decided to hang
out with his friends. Regardless of just how cute and endearing Percy Jackson was, the world did
not resolve around him and Nico was more than eager to get to know Reyna better. They fought
well together and against each other and there was some kind of silent connection. Nico
understood better than anyone how Reyna felt at the moment – and both of them were aware.
Being thrown into this demigodly world, torn away from the only family they had, an older sister
who left them for the sake of the hunt. It also helped that they had the same kind of dry humor.

"Stop cheating, Cec", hissed Nico irritated, swatting at the son of Hermes.
"I can't help it, it's in my genes", declared Cecil with the largest grin.

He had come over to check out the new home of his friends and then stayed for a poker game. Butch, Clovis and Sirius had been playing with them, but had one by one dropped out. Granted, Clovis had fallen asleep on top of the cards. Typical Hypnos-kid, but it had startled Reyna immensely. When Nico put down his cards and gathered his wins, the door opened.

"How's he doing?", asked Nico without looking up, sensing the presence of Ethan.

The son of Nemesis had been with his best friend Luke to see how Luke was handling the whole return of the daughter of Zeus situation. While shuffling the cards for the next round, Nico looked up to check on the Japanese boy. He looked worn out and a little constipated. Alabaster climbed down from their joined bed to sit with the others, motioning for Ethan to join. The son of Nemesis sat down next to his boyfriend, one arm around Alabaster's waist as he kissed his brunette.

"It's... weird", offered Ethan with a frown. "She remembers. Not just her life before being a tree, but also her life as the tree. Everything that happened around her, she saw and heard... She confirmed that it had been Drew Tanaka who poisoned her, apparently. Luke only left her side to get at least a little food in. After dinner, he rushed back to check on her, like he's afraid she'll disappear again."

"Was... there ever anything between them?", inquired Reyna curiously. "The way Annabeth spoke of both... like they were her parents... It made me wonder. Were they romantically involved?"

"It's a big, messy could-have-should-have-whould-have kind of situation", supplied Ethan. Nonetheless, Reyna nodded in understanding. Nico arched one eyebrow. That girl was quite amazing. She had an analytic mind that was only matched by Annabeth, as far as Nico could judge it from the little time he had spend with Reyna so far. His musings on the daughter of war were interrupted when the door opened again and a zombie-like Percy stumbled in. He had given it his all today during training and during the rotations he had taken on Clarisse, Reyna and Frank. And after that, instead of resting, he had gone to help cleaning the stables to be close to 'those beautiful, amazing creatures'. If Nico were a gambling man, what he was, he'd say Percy had most likely also spend quite some time just mindlessly flying around. He hadn't been at dinner either, after all.

"You look like shit, Jackson", commented Alabaster, raising one eyebrow as he picked up his hand of cards. "Want us to vacant the perimeter so you can go to sleep?"

They were playing on Nico's and Percy's joined beds, after all. The only comfortable place where all of them fit on together. Nico wasn't sure if Percy had heard the brunette, because Percy just shrugged out of his jeans and collapsed face-first square over both their pillows, the only place where there was no teen cramped in to play. Making a cute, little whining sound in the back of his throat, Percy stretched his arms out and grabbed Nico's waist. Nico's eyebrows shot into his hairline as Percy pulled himself closer to Nico until his head was resting in Nico's lap. Making a far more content sound, Percy seemed to instantly fall asleep, tightly clinging onto Nico.

"...Or you just use Nico as a pillow and we continue playing", snickered Lou amused.

Nico blushed and glared at her, but his fingers still found their way to pet Percy's hair. He loved how simple Percy was. Not simple as in dumb, but simple as in uncomplicated. He was tired and wanted cuddles, so he got himself cuddles. No fear or worries about social standards. Simple.
Chapter End Notes

Now that the dust is slowly setting in the aftermath of their quest, Nico is going to face the hardest quest of his life. Gathering the courage to ask Percy out on a first date and then successfully surviving said date. Because it would be boring if everything went smoothly, wouldn't it? ;}
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 17: The Cat-astrophic First Date

Nico wasn't sure if he had been asleep at any point at all during the night. He remembered the game and how one by one the others went to bed until it was just Nico and the boy abusing him as a pillow. It had taken some time to adjust himself to lay comfortably, with Percy neatly tugged under his chin, the wonderfully calming sea-scent filling his nose. He had come to love that scent pretty fast. And the way Percy fit into his arms like that, the warmth he provided.

"You have feelings for him, mh?", whispered Reyna as she got up.

Nico grunted and glared at her. She was wearing a tank-top and jogging pants, just in the middle of putting her hair up in a ponytail as she watched the two boys. Sighing, Nico sat up some.

"I don't know", admitted Nico softly. "It's all way more complicated than anything."

In reply, he just got his own shoes thrown at him. He glared at the Latina, who just shrugged.

"Walking helps clear the head. Come on, let's go and talk about it", offered Reyna.

Nico nodded reluctantly. His thoughts had been circling in his head for hours now and as much fun as laying there and cuddling Percy was, maybe getting an outside opinion on the matter would be good. He cautiously peeled himself off the son of Poseidon, not without kissing the top of Percy's head a last time when Percy made an especially cute whiny sound. Getting changed and putting on his running shoes, he left the cabin together with Reyna. He liked her and she had a certain distance to both Percy and Nico, so she would be a good person to consult for this.

"Hey, you two. Haven't seen you up so early in a while, Nico", called Frank out, waving at them.

Right, Nico had completely forgotten that Frank was forced on a morning run with Clarisse every day. The two children of war jogged over to them and paused for a moment. Clarisse looked them up and down curiously as she took a sip from her water-bottle, wiping the sweat from her forehead.

"You just got a gold star for dragging di Angelo out in the morning", stated Clarisse, patting Reyna on the back. "You two joining us? A run around the lake. Come on, move your lazy asses."

"So, what got you up so early, Nico?", asked Frank as the four of them started their run.

By the looks of it, Frank and Clarisse had already done at least one laps around the lake. Nico sighed as he tried to keep up with Frank. He had no qualms training, he trained a lot, but not before dawn. That was just wrong. Physical exhaustion however helped calming his mind and the company of friends was always good. Nico sighed as he stared at his oldest and best friend.

"Percy Jackson", supplied Reyna as Nico failed to answer for a while.

"I'm gonna smack them both upside the head if they don't work something out soon", grunted Clarisse irritated as she slowed down to join the gossip (not that she'd ever admit to that).
"You and me both, sister", chuckled Reyna and the two girls high-fived at that.

"So, what's the problem at the Sea Prince Front?", grunted Clarisse reluctantly after a moment.

"He's so... sweet...", sighed Nico with that love-sick-puppy-look. "I mean, he's so refreshingly honest about everything. He's so nice and lovable and... incredibly strong..."

"Yes. We've already had that. You really like him", nodded Reyna, raising one eyebrow. "But that doesn't exactly explain what the problem is, Nico. Because you obviously like him."

"Well, how about the fact that he was raised by my father. With the purpose of him becoming my fiance. Which he is, even though we barely know each other", supplied Nico agitated.

"Okay, I can see how that is awkward", nodded Reyna with a thoughtful frown.

"No kidding. Don't forget, his father is Lord Hades, of all the gods", grunted Frank.

"So you can see my predicament", sighed Nico with a glare.

"And I know just the one who can help you", declared Clarisse with a wicked smirk.

Percy was in a brilliant mood. He, Liam and Damian had a most mischievous breakfast. He liked the son of Hecate and the son of Eris and they were a really cute couple. Up to no good, but cute. When Damian ran off with Sirius, Percy found himself trailing after Liam. The triad of witches was brewing something and Percy thought it could be interesting. Liam, Lou and Alabaster were dangerous. Could be dangerous. They possessed magic, how could anyone think them any less just because their mother was not a member of the Olympian gods?

"Take a sip", ordered Lou with a very insane grin on her face.

"What... will it do?", asked Percy half-afraid taking the cup.

"Nothing. Nothing bad", replied Alabaster, snickering lowly. "Just show your... true nature..."

"Just drink it. It's perfectly safe, I swear", assured Liam with a sincere smile.

Percy's eyes flickered between them, before he took the cup. Surely his cabin-mates would not do anything to harm him. It tasted incredibly delicious, like everything Percy loved all at once. When all three around him started cooing, Percy grew a bit suspicious, but there seemed nothing wrong with him. He felt fine, if not better than before. His sight was sharper, he could smell better, hear better. Very odd. What kind of magic had those three conjured there?

"It's meant to summon one's guardian animal. Spirit animal. Whatever you want to call it. The animalistic core of one's soul is what it is. Apparently... it works differently than anticipated. Sorry about that", admitted Alabaster, trying to keep a straight face. "Well, we'll work on it."

Percy was still staring at them in confusion. "Anyway, I wanted to meet up with Leo, so... See you."

The three waved him off innocently. When others kept staring at him and giggling and whispering, Percy knew something was wrong. He only realized what it was when he found Leo in the forges, together with Charles, Jake, Nyssa and Shane, building... something. Not that Percy could figure it out. He knocked against the wall to gain their attention and all five started laughing.
"Oh, you are the cutest thing ever", snickered Nyssa and fetched a polished piece of metal.

Percy stared and hissed, ears and tail erect. And weren't those the problem? He had cat-ears and a cat-tail, both in silky black just like his hair. He hissed at it in a very cat-like manner, though he relaxed when Leo started petting him between the ears, grinning at him.

"You had a run-in with our local witches, eh?", asked Jake fondly. "Not to worry. The effect only lasts a bunch of hours. And don't look so upset. It's like an... initiation, a rite of passage. That means you're accepted among their ranks. They did it to all the new kids at Hermes cabin when they really got accepted by the witches. So... be... happy about it, I'd say."

Percy perked up at that, purring loudly. So the three witches played pranks on those they cared about? Percy was quite familiar with that. And surely he could handle a couple of hours as a catboy. It could maybe be fun, seeing as no one seemed to think it weird. The witches did it a lot, apparently. Tilting his head curiously, he turned toward his brother. He had those famous kitten-eyes, they had always said. It was time to try them with additional kitten-features.

"Leo", whined Percy with large eyes. "Can we go to the arena and train, please? Please?"

"Wow", whispered Nyssa in awe. "This is... intense... We need this as a secret weapon."

"He'd make the titans roll over onto their backs in submission", snickered Shane delighted.

"Well, guys. You need to continue without me", sighed Leo in defeat. "Kitty wants to play."

Percy grinned largely and leaned in to lick his cheek. Leo wiggled his nose in amusement.

Nico was not a fan of any of this. The color of the cabin, to begin with. Too sugary tea, as a second. Having the children of Aphrodite scheme his love-life, as the biggest problem at hand. Sighing, he took another sip of his tea. Their morning run had run longer than intended and they had missed breakfast, just to go and shower before they met up in the Aphrodite Cabin. Now Nico, Reyna, Frank, Clarisse, Silena, Lacy and Mitchell were sitting around a round table. Nico's friends had been kind enough to explain the situation and problem at hand and since then, the kids of Aphrodite had been plotting and planning and giggling and whispering. It was quite terrifying.

"Oh, deary, it's quite simple", declared Silena after about half an hour.

"Then please, enlighten me", sighed Nico frustrated, slumping in his seat.

"You ask him out to a date. A perfect date, without distractions such as movies. Just the two of you, so you can get to know each other. You said you share an affliction toward Italy, so go to an Italian restaurant with him. In Italy", replied Silena simply. "At the beach, so you can subtly ask about his father, about his story. This will be the perfect way to get to know each other. That's what worries you, after all. That you wouldn't get along as a couple. So go and see."

Nico frowned a bit surprised and nodded slowly. This did sound like the perfect date for them both. Percy had expressed the joy of speaking Italian with someone who understood – so why not Italy? He could shadow-travel, after all. Smiling an unusually bright smile at Silena, who gasped in awe at it, he stood and bolted out of the room with a hasty thank you to them all. He would ask Percy out and it would be a perfect date. Yes, quite so. He was still smiling like a maniac as he entered their cabin – but the only ones there were Clovis and Aurora, both children of Hypnos already asleep.

"Damn it. Where is Percy?", sighed Nico depressed, looking around.
"That little stray is currently in the arena", replied a voice from below a bed.

"What are you... doing there...?", asked Nico as he leaned down to look at Damian.

"Searching, quite obviously", huffed the son of Eris irritated. "Sirius and I had a pillow-war – yes, quite a war, not a fight, mind you – but we seem to have knocked one of Lily's rings off her nightstand. You know how much Sirius' sister values her rings. He's currently gone to distract her while I am searching for the damn thing. Anyway, so your kitten is straying in the arena."

"He's not my anything, especially not my kitten", huffed Nico a bit disturbed.

His ears were dark red as he stomped away. Was that what camp gossiped about them? That Percy was his? That Percy was his kitten? Where did they come up with something like that from?! Sure, the boy was endearing and as cuddly as a kitten could be, but surely Nico had not called him that! At least not out loud. Right? Frowning upset, he entered the arena. Standing in the entrance, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. No point in being irritated when asking Percy out on a date.

"Nico! Nico, did you come to practice with me? I love sparring with you!"

Nico grunted as he was hit by a heavy weight. Opening his eyes, he looked at Percy, who sat on top of his chest, pupils slit-like, car-ears erect on his head and cat-tail whipping left and right. In fact, looking at it now, Percy had pounced at him like a cat would on its prey. A kitten, actually.

"W—What happened to—Oh never mind, Alabastard", muttered Nico beneath his breath.

"Uhu. But they say it'll go away again", replied Percy with a delighted grin. "Play with me? No. Train. Argh. Annabeth has already been teasing me with a sparkly little ball..."

"Isn't he the cutest kitten?", called Annabeth out, laughing loudly.

Nico rolled his eyes as he glared at the daughter of Athena, who was sparing with her brother Malcolm. He tried sitting up, but there was still a catboy sitting on his chest. Nico blushed at that.

"If you... Uh... Could you perhaps get off me, Percy?", requested Nico awkwardly.

"Right. Sorry", sighed Percy and stood. "This comes with... weird animal instincts..."

"I know. I remember. Luke played fetch with me", muttered Nico and made a face.

"Oh! You're a puppy", giggled Percy as he bounced on the balls of his feet.

"A hellhound, thank you very much", huffed Nico, raising one eyebrow at the cute catboy.

Percy was still giggling though. "So. Are you sparing with me? Or did you want something else?"

Nico grew nervous again, eyes darting around the arena. There were so many people here. And Annabeth had apparently picked up on something going on here, because she and Malcolm stood very close by, watching them. Leo, followed by Luke and Ethan, also approached them.

"Well, di Angelo?", asked Luke with a knowing smirk. "You're disturbing my class."

"Uhm... I... Percy... That is...", started Nico, trying to focus on the son of Poseidon. "I thought, maybe, since... well, the quest is over and everything settled a bit, I thought maybe, uh, that is, if you want to only, we could, perhaps, I mean I would pay since I'm inviting you and, uh..."
Percy's eyes crossed in confusion and he wiggled his nose before turning to the others. "Wise girl?"

"He's asking you on a date", supplied Annabeth with a fond expression in her dark eyes.

"A... date...", echoed Percy before his whole face turned dark red. "Me? And you? Together?"

"I mean, we are kind of engaged, right?", shrugged Nico and shuffled around a bit nervously. "I figured we could at least... try, you know? If you want, only. I thought... lunch, maybe?"

Percy's face lit up in a way that surprised everyone watching. "Yes! I'd love to! When? Where?"

"Calm down", chuckled Nico, blushing a bit himself now. "It's a surprise. How about after your class finishes, you go, shower, dress nice – and, uh, wear swim-shorts – and then I pick you up."

Percy bit his lower lip and nodded slowly. "Okay. I'm... looking forward to it."

Nico nodded stiffly and left again, determined to prepare everything for the big date. Percy all the while got jumped with the full force of an eager Leo, who seemed as happy about the date as Percy.

"I knew he liked you", declared Leo, grinning widely. "Oh, this is so exciting!"

Percy was bouncing on the balls of his feet, dressed as nicely as he could. He wore his blue *Captain America* swim-trunks under his tight, black jeans and a sleeveless blue shirt that hugged his frame nicely too. He was a nervous wreck on the inside though. All dates he had seen so far were on TV. And now Nico would take him out – Nico, who was supposed to be his Prince Charming. So Nico wasn't opposed to the idea of being Percy's sweetheart. That thought made him smile brightly.

"You look stunning. As always", complimented Nico with a smile as he emerged from the shadows.

"Oh. I was wondering where you are", grinned Percy, blushing at the compliment. "Thank you."

"Well then, alons-y, mon cherie", said Nico with a teasing smirk, offering his arm.

Percy held on tightly and closed his eyes. He loved shadowtraveling as much as he hated it. It was exciting and fun, but also dangerous and left him completely out of his element. He was also not the biggest fan of having to rely on someone else like that. But it was somehow more exciting to share the experience with Nico. And when they exited the shadows, Percy could only gape. There laid the ocean, a beautiful white sand-beach. But something seemed off about the sun in the blue sky.

"Did we travel through time?", asked Percy astonished, looking around confused.

"We didn't travel through time. It's dinner time in Italy. And we are going to dinner now", declared Nico with a smirk. "Afterward, we take a swim and wait for the sunset, mh?"

Percy yelped eagerly, eyes sparkling as Nico led him to a pretty little Italian restaurant.

"Buona sera!", greeted a chipper waiter. [trans: *Good evening!*]

Nico nodded in greeting. "Un tavolo per due, per favore." [A table for two, please]
The waiter led the way and Percy could only drink in the sight of the place and the chatter in the language he loved so much, he had only been able to share with his papà. Nico smiled and pulled the chair back for Percy and the boy blushed pleased as he sat down. It was cozy and beautiful and very romantic, with a candle and roses standing between them. Percy bit his lower lip.

"Posso vedere il menu, per favore?", asked Percy shyly. "C'è una specialità della casa?" [Can I have a look at the menu, please? Is there a speciality of the house?]

Nico smiled pleased as he sat down and observed Percy, listening to him chatting with the waiter about the house specialty and what else there was. He could see how much Percy enjoyed getting to speak Italian with someone else. When the waiter left with their orders, Percy's attention was back on him and those intense eyes were sparkling so beautifully.

"This is amazing. I was never... uh, anywhere, I guess", admitted Percy with a grin. "But you. You were born in Italy, weren't you? Do you... remember it?"

With that, they spend dinner talking about Nico's early childhood in Venice and then in the boarding school with Bianca, Phoebe and Frank. Percy listened avidly, here and there asking questions or telling a story from his own childhood in the underworld, which gained great interest from Nico. By the time their antipasto appetizer had been devoured and their pizza and pasta arrived, they were in the middle of how Leo and Tyson had come to the underworld, Percy's face lit with a smile that proved how much he loved his brothers. Honestly, Nico could listen to Percy's voice all day.

"Do you want to share a desert?", asked Nico as he put his napkin down.

"No! I'm ready to burst!", groaned Percy, both hands on his stomach, pleased look on his face and purring loudly. "It was absolutely delicious. I've never eaten a pizza quite like it."

Nico nodded, relieved by that, and waved the waiter over. "Il conto, per favore."

/break/

Percy was smiling brightly as he splashed about in the ocean, but he noticed that Nico looked a little upset. "What's wrong? You were way happier in the restaurant. Is it the ocean?"

Nico huffed and swam up to Percy. "No. It's... I'm embarrassed, okay? I shouldn't have made you pay. How in the world could I forget my wallet?! I completely ruined..."

"Nothing. You ruined nothing", interrupted Percy with a frown, tilting his head. "I may have been raised on Disney-values, but that doesn't make me a girl. I don't expect you to pay for me. We're equals in this relationship, are we not? So I can pay as well as you can, Nico."

"Yes! Of course!", agreed Nico hastily and made a face, feeling like he had just made matters worse with his comment. "But I invited you. This date was my idea, so I should have paid."

"Well then, you pay on our next date", shrugged Percy with an easy grin.

Nico stammered a little, face red. So Percy wanted a second date. That meant Percy had enjoyed it as much as Nico. Learning more about Percy, sharing food with him and joking, listening to his voice, now playing in the soothingly cool water of the ocean, Nico enjoyed every second of it. He knew he liked Percy, certainly more than just a friend. He still didn't know about marriage, but it was a beginning. Smiling at the son of Poseidon, Nico grasped his hand and pulled him along. Percy followed reluctantly, not a fan of leaving the salty sea, but he rather wanted to be with Nico than the ocean. And he was pretty sure that this discovery implied something pretty heavy. He hummed contentedly when Nico sat down on the large blanket he had prepared for them and pulled
Percy along. The son of Poseidon was more than happy to snuggle up to Nico as the two faced the sunset over the ocean. Seeing this was worth getting out of the water, especially since it meant getting free Nico cuddles. He enjoyed the way their bodies fit together.

"I had a great time today", assured Percy softly, looking up at Nico from beneath his lashes.

"Me too", nodded Nico, getting lost in those beautiful eyes again. "Do you... think... Are we... Do you want to be... urgh, this sounds awful and so silly, but... do you want to be my boyfriend?"

"Yes. Very much", giggled Percy, enjoying this flustered side of the son of Hades.

Nico sighed relieved and leaned back some more. Percy followed tail, resting his head on Nico's chest as they watched the beautiful colors in the sky being mirrored on the sea. This was perfect. Nico had been a gentleman and he had been so considerate. Percy got to see another country, could swim in the ocean, had eaten delicious food and all of it in pleasant company. He and Nico had gotten along so well. Percy adored the stories Nico had told, of his and Frank's adventures of joining Camp Half-Blood and the quest to retrieve the Helmet of Darkness and the Master Bolt. Nico truly was a knight in shining armor. The kind Percy had always dreamed of. And they had fought so well together during their shared quest. Together, they could probably do everything.

Chapter End Notes

Next date will be Percy's responsibility to plan - and they will share their first kiss. In Atlantis (because being fiercely glared at by your boyfriend's big half-brother the king is sooo romantic, isn't it, Nico?)
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 18: A First Kiss in Atlantis

"And you're sure that sneaking out of camp again is a good idea?", asked Leo doubtfully, looking around while packing the basket with his brother. "I mean, you disappeared four days ago too."

"A date at camp wouldn't be very romantic", chided Aurora tiredly as she watched them.

"Point for the daughter of Hypnos", declared Liam from where he was laying on his boyfriend.

"Is that a subtle hint that you're displeased with our dates?", inquired Damian sharply.

He caught Liam's collarbone between his teeth, earning a yelp from from the son of Hecate. Percy blushed brightly and averted his eyes from the young couple. Damian and Liam were very affectionate. Aurora laughed, snuggling back into her pillows and Percy tried to also ignore her.

"Nico took me to Italy for our first date", pointed Percy out and glared at his brother. "I have to do good for our second date. I want this to be amazing and special and wonderful, because...

"Because you want him to like you", supplied Reyna, looking up from her book.

"What are you reading there? The book Annabeth recommended you?", countered Percy.

He grinned pleased as the Latina blushed and returned her attention to the book. Percy was a fan. He thought Annabeth and Reyna were a great fit. They confused him, yes, but he adapted. Even though they were both girls, neither was the princess in their tales. They were more like two Mulans (even though Percy also saw Annabeth as Belle). Percy hummed to himself as he continued packing their picnic basket. He had asked Nico this morning if he'd want to go out today.

"Don't worry so much, he already likes you", muttered Reyna behind her book.

"That, I second", agreed Leo with a broad grin. "It'll be awesome, I just know it."

"And when will you take Frank on a first date?", inquired Damian as he resurfaced from another heated kiss with Liam. "The poor guy ran into approximately eight walls in the past week because you distracted him. He's like a lost puppy. Literally. Yesterday, he actually accidentally shifted into a puppy and kept howling pathetically. Silena and Luke had to physically restrain Clarisse to keep her from giving him to a dog shelter. I mean, throw the guy a bone, at least. Something."

"Even if it's a rejection", offered Liam softly, looking down at the Latino. "Believe me, getting your heart broken is sometimes kinder than not knowing, because then it has a chance to heal."

Percy frowned as he closed the basket and looked at Leo. Something about the Latino had been bothering him for a while now. Leo was clearly troubled, but he also clearly refused to talk about it. Which was an odd sensation for Percy, because normally Leo told him everything. Was it because of the cabins? Did Leo feel as though they weren't brothers anymore? Didn't Leo trust him anymore? Or was it because of Nico? Did Leo feel as though Percy was too busy for him? Time to interrogate a little lion cub, because if Leo thought Percy had no time for him, he had another thing coming. There would always be time for Leo's troubles in Percy's life.
"You'll come with me, settle everything", ordered Percy and grabbed Leo's hand. "Come on."

By the time they reached the beach, Leo knew that Percy was up to something. While they spread out the blanket and set everything for the picnic, Percy kept glancing at the Latino unnervingly.

"Why don't you trust me anymore? Because I know you're hiding something. You've been acting strange ever since we returned from the Sea of Monsters, but I thought I'd give you time to approach me and tell me. But you don’t", blurted Percy out after a while. "Is it because of Nico? Do you think I don't have time for you anymore now that I'm wooing him? Or because of the cabins? Do they make you feel like we're not siblings anymore? Because that's not true. You're my brother and I love you and even when Nico and I are married and rule the underworld and have a dozen little kids running around between our legs, I will still always have time for my baby brother."

Leo blushed as he looked at Percy. It was a bashful and shameful blush. Of course Percy would notice that something was wrong now that they actually had contact with others and there was something between him and Frank – which confused no one more than Leo, really.

"It's not that I think you don't love me", mumbled Leo and helped set the picnic. "It's just... It's a secret, but it's not my secret and I promised to keep it so I couldn't tell you – still can't..."

"Not... at all?", asked Percy with that kicked-kitten look on his face. "I'm not asking you to spill someone else's secret, lion cub. I'd never ask you to betray someone's trust for my sake, but you're my brother and something is... bothering you and I want to help you, little brother."

Leo frowned with a conceding look on his face. "I... like Frank. A lot. He's funny and cute and nice and kind of like a giant fluffy teddy bear. I'd really like going out with him."

"So... what's the problem?", inquired Percy while lighting up the candles he had brought.

"I have a girlfriend", blurted Leo out and took a very relieved sigh. "Oh gods, I wanted to tell you that for so long now! But I really can't tell you how I met her and I can't even introduce her to you, but she's the prettiest and nicest and sweetest and most caring girl on this planet and I love her and I would never ever betray her trust, but my feelings for Frank start confusing me!"

Percy stared wide-eyed at his brother, blinking slowly. That had not been what he had expected. His little brother had a girlfriend he couldn't tell Percy about, not even where Leo had found her. That was truly weird. Where could Leo have met someone that he wouldn't be able to tell Percy about? But he had promised Leo that he wouldn't make Leo break a promise – to whoever he had made that promise. Percy just hoped all of this was safe and Leo wasn't in some kind of trouble.

"If you have someone you love, you owe it to her that you stay away from Frank", whispered Percy after a while, thoughtful frown on his face. "Because otherwise, that will lead to heartbreak for all three of you – you, Frank and that girlfriend of yours. Wouldn't you agree?"

Leo didn't look happy about it, but he nodded in agreement.

"You've done your hair like five times now. It's totally okay the way it looks. You do not need to waste another bottle of – hey, that's my hair-care product!", yelled Robyn agitated.

Nico hastily dodged the son of Hermes while he could hear Travis, Connor and Chris snickering in the background. It was a bit awkward to get ready for a date when they were both living together, so Nico had fled to his old home. Luke had only raised one eyebrow at him before
beckoning him in.

"You look like a nervous wreck. Haven't you and Percy already gone out on a date?", asked Luke.

"We did", nodded Nico and made a face. "He said it was perfect, but he was a catboy and I forgot my wallet and after we watched the sunset, we got attacked by a giant water-snake and I don't even know if the date was a real success, because we didn't even kiss. I mean, all my previous first dates ended with at least kissing, but with Percy, it feels so different and when we returned to camp, things were kinda awkward because I couldn't drop him off at his cabin and get a kiss out of it, because we share a bed. Like, how much more weird does it get?"

"Wow. This boy is truly driving you crazy", whispered Cecil in awe, staring at him. "You like him."

Glares at his mirror-image, Nico deemed himself okay looking enough, so he left. No need to get grilled by the sadistic children of Hermes. They had always loved poking fun at others, especially when it concerned feelings. He was wearing black skinny-jeans and a black shirt with a skull motif, as well as his black combat-boots. By the time he finally found Percy, the son of Poseidon sat on a blue blanket, with a feast spread out in front of him, enough to feed two cabins at least.

"Uhm... is this... a group outing?", asked Nico confused as he stared at the food.

"I wanted it to be special and couldn't decide so I kinda... cooked everything I like", shrugged Percy embarrassed and blushed, ruffling his own hair. "Sorry I went overboard..."

"No! It's... great. I mean, it all looks delicious and I can't believe you went to the length of cooking all of this", rushed Nico out hastily. "So, uhm... Can I sit down? Or do we need something else?"

"Nope. Last thing missing is you", declared Percy with a large, happy smile.

Nico blushed a bit when he saw that sparkle in Percy's eyes. The other guys were right. Nico really had it bad. Never before had he met anyone who made him feel the way Percy did. At first, Nico had thought it was just attraction, because Percy was drop-dead gorgeous, but Percy was a good person – the best Nico had ever seen. He doubted there was even a speck of darkness in his heart and it was just so refreshing in this world of monsters and misguided desires. So much envy and hatred and jealousy, but Percy saw good in everything. He was so bright and beautiful, outside and inside. Nico could spend all day just talking to the boy, really.

"So, do you have anything else planned, aside from all this food?", asked Nico teasingly. "I mean, not that I'm not totally cool with spending the next few hours here, trying to eat all of this..."

"We're going on a trip", declared Percy with the most mischievous expression.

"And you're not telling me where to, huh?", chuckled Nico.

"Nope", declined Percy, shaking his head and popping the 'p'. "Now eat up, di Angelo."

And how could Nico say no to that? Because Percy really was a good cook. He kept asking Percy about his time in the underworld, learning more not just about his father but also the other members of the council. Even though Nico had spend half a year in the underworld himself, Percy had a different experience with them. Besides, the expression on Percy's face when he talked about the people he loved was one of the most beautiful things Nico had ever seen and he was pretty sure he rarely ever wanted anything as much as being one of those people Percy talked about with that look on his face. Not just because he knew he was falling for Percy, but also because he felt that being loved by Percy Jackson in itself was something to be proud of, really.
"If I eat even half an olive, I will burst", warned Nico and collapsed back against the grass.
Percy laughed and followed tail, resting his head on Nico's chest. "Well then, time for a swim."
"You're not supposed to swim after you eat", reminded Nico, playing with Percy's hair.
"Yeah, like I care!", declared Percy and sat up hastily, grabbing Nico's hand. "Come on up!"
Nico groaned playfully, but obeyed. "Wait, I don't even have swim-shorts on!"
"Doesn't matter", chimed Percy and gave Nico the last push.

Nico yelled as he was pushed off the dock and into the lake. He could hear Percy laugh until the son of Poseidon also broke the surface. When Nico wanted to swim up and take a breath, Percy grabbed his hand and pulled him deeper. Nico panicked when instead of up to the much needed air, he was pulled into the cold darkness. But then there was a warmth, spreading from the point where their hands were joined and in a bizarre turn of events, Nico took a deep breath under the water, knowing he would be fine. And he was. He instantly repeated the motion, sucking as much air into his lungs as he could. Percy next to him was giggling like a little school girl. Wait, how?
"You travel through shadows, I travel through water. You control darkness, I control water", replied Percy, properly linking their fingers. "I can, uh, suck the air out of the water so it surrounds us like a shield. That's why you can breath under water. Because our second part of the day is a trip to Atlantis. Thanys always told so many amazing tales of the city ruled by my half-brother."
"...Why?", asked Nico a bit confused. "I mean, what does the guard of the Doors of Death have to do with the king of some mythical mermaid city? I'm kinda lost here, Perce."
"Triton is Thanatos' boyfriend", chimed Percy with a broad smile as he started leading the way. "He has been fancying Triton for centuries now, apparently. Makaria and Melinoe decided to play matchmaker when me and Leo were little and watching The Little Mermaid with them, because I asked if the real Triton is like that Triton, so they told us more about Triton and then roped us into helping them with setting Triton and Thanatos up. They're a cute couple and Tri is awesome. At first I was all afraid that he'd hate me for, you know, being a bastard child of our father and at first I was right, he didn't seem to like me. But when me and my siblings helped setting him and Thanatos up, I guess he... grew fond of me or something? Anyway, he told me that when Hades lets me out of the underworld, I should come over. And I want to spend my first visit in Atlantis with you."
"With... me...?", mumbled Nico, feeling oddly honored. "Why not with Leo though?"

Percy raised one eyebrow and gave Nico a ridiculed look. "Leo controls fire. He is not a fan of water, especially not if he has to spend like hours under the surface. He'd never go."

Nico ducked his head and nodded in agreement. That made sense. Before he could make any more of a fool of himself, they reached it. It didn't look like the Disney version though. More natural, like it was carved into the stones, houses and towers seemingly growing out of an underwater mountain, everything decorated with shells and corals. There were fishes and mermaids and mermen swimming around, chatting and laughing. It was absolutely amazing.

"So you decided to follow my invitation. What is that attached to your hand though?"

Both boys turned toward the voice. The merman looked a lot like Percy, just with green skin and a
tail. Stern sea-green eyes were glaring fiercely at their joined hands. Nico reflexively wanted to let go, but thankfully enough Percy tightened his grip, because Nico feared he would probably die this deep below the surface. Percy offered him a reassuring smile before turning to the merman.

"Hello, big brother", greeted Percy with a brilliant smile. "That is my underworld-boy. Mine just doesn't come with feathers, unlike yours. And you never said I'd only be allowed to come alone."

Triton huffed and rolled his eyes before swimming up to them. He flickered his wrist and then pulled Percy into a hug – in the process separating their joined hands. Nico panicked for a split-second, but then he realized the god had worked some magic on them. Nico stared in wide-eyed wonder at his silvery-black shimmering tail that replaced his legs. Then his eyes were drawn to Percy and he felt his cheeks heating up, because Percy looked absolutely and positively stunning with his light-blue and sleek tail. He was the most beautiful creature on this planet.

"Don't think I did this for you, human", warned Triton with a glower. "I only did this so my little brother won't have to hold your hand the whole time, because that just may make me puke. And you better treat my little brother good, or else you will be lost at sea, brat of Hades."

Being a camper meant dating other campers, which meant that he already ended up getting eight big brother speeches at once, yet all of them combined did not even remotely compare to the fierce look on the god's face, so Nico just nodded numbly, not trusting his voice. No quest or battle had prepared him to date Percy Jackson, not when the boy came with protective gods. Yet Nico di Angelo was not one to back down from a challenge and Percy surely was worth the heart-attacks.

"Well then, off you go. But dad and I expect you both for dinner at the palace", ordered Triton.

"Okay, Tri", agreed Percy with a carefree grin and kissed Triton's cheek.

The look on Triton's face softened when he looked at Percy and in that moment, he looked far more human to Nico. The king of Atlantis swam off, leaving the young couple on their own. For a few minutes, Percy simply swam in circles around Nico, flapping his new tail and testing it.

"Having fun, Perce?", asked Nico amused, arms crossed over his chest.

"We are so going shopping", declared Percy with the largest grin. "I want to see what you can buy under the sea. We still have a few hours before dinner and I want to see as much as possible."

Nico couldn't help but return the grin. It was exciting, after all there weren't many who could claim to having seen the great city of Atlantis. The grin softened into a smile when Percy took his hand again, like it was the most natural thing to do. Together, they swim through the narrow up-down-left-right of the strange streets. It was different, because unlike walking, they could just swim over the houses. Other mermaids and mermen greeted them with friendly looks, some seemed to recognize the family resemblance between Percy and their king and bowed to them, much to Percy's utter embarrassment. Said embarrassment was utterly adorable, because his blue-tinted skin turned an interesting shade of purple now when he blushed. The two of them browsed various shops, laughing and joking as they tried on merman-fashion – mixtures of pearls and shells and sea-weed, yet mostly consisting of silk that floated beautifully in the ocean. They ended up buying some for themselves as well as for Bianca, Annabeth and Leo. They got matching shell-amulets in one of the various jewelry stores they visited, brilliantly purple shells adored with sea-green pearls.

"All of this is pretty much amazing", whispered Nico as they headed toward the palace. "And you're sure you want to follow my father's footsteps and not yours? You seem happy here."

"Oh, it's beautiful and amazing, yes, but it's not my home", replied Percy, blushing as everyone
once again bowed when they entered the palace. "I want to come here again. And again and again, but I don't think I could live here. The souls and gems and dark rivers of the underworld are my home, the garden of mamma, the palace of papà, the forges of the underworld and the beauty of Elysium. I love it, it's my home. And it's my destiny. Besides, I wouldn't be tied to the underworld, I could always visit my brother here and you could come too. Atlantis looks good for vacations."

"Yes. Especially for family vacations. I can't wait to have little guppies swimming around me."

Nico gulped slightly as they reached the banquet hall. If Triton alone had seemed intimidating, both him and Poseidon were something else entirely. This surely was an odd second date, getting to meet his future in-laws right away. Then again, all of their relationship seemed to be a bit curious.

"Lord Poseidon. It's an honor to meet you", said Nico politely, bowing his head.

"No need for formalities. We're family, after all", declared Poseidon and pulled Nico close.

Nico stiffened as he was hugged by the king of the ocean. This was not what he had expected. Percy all the while was hugging Triton again. The table in front of them held probably as much food as Percy had dished out for their lunch-date earlier. Nico knew he'd have a major stomach ache tonight, but how could he decline this offer of traditional Atlantian cuisine?

"Now, how did you like Atlantis?", asked Poseidon with a friendly smile as they sat down.

"It was amazing", gasped Percy, eyes large and sparkly and excited.

Nico kept to the background during dinner, settling to occasionally agreeing or praising the food. He knew Percy hadn't gotten to see his father so far, so he wanted to give Percy this dinner with his dad. It was a bit weird to have his date being hijacked by his boyfriend's family, but he enjoyed the animated chatter coming from his Sea Prince. Poseidon asked a lot about the quest too and Nico willingly retold the tale with Percy, starting to share Percy's excited enthusiasm.

"Well, as nice as it was to have both of you here, I do think you should return to camp before Chiron decides to send out a search party", stated Poseidon after the desserts.

The lord of the ocean pulled them both into a tight hug and placed kisses on top of both their heads. Nico blushed at that. What was that? Was he now officially accepted, or what? Then again, it had been Poseidon who had arranged this engagement. Apparently, today meant that Poseidon approved of Nico. The thought was as relieving as it was unsettling. Sure, he was head over heels for Percy and Percy seemed very much into Nico too and both loved spending time with each other, but so far they only had two dates and hadn't had any real test to their relationship, if it could be called that just yet. Sighing softly, Nico instinctively grasped Percy's hand for support.

"The spell dissolves when you break the surface", stated Triton, patting Percy's head and glaring at Nico for a last time. "You better watch over him. He's very naive and not used to how harsh the real world is. Don't give me that pout, Perseus, it's true. You were raised to believe the human world is a realm of fairy tales, but it isn't. Humans aren't pure or good and someone has to protect you."

"I think... we'll protect each other", stated Nico firmly, rubbing his thumb over Percy's hand.

Percy smiled at that and waved his father and brother goodbye. He liked what Nico had just said. He knew he was a bit naive and the world wasn't what he had expected it to be and he knew everyone thought he needed protecting because of that, but that Nico thought Percy was just as
capable of protecting Nico as Nico was of protecting Percy was a sweet sentiment. When they left Atlantis behind, Percy tugged on Nico's hand, pulled him closer until they collided. Nico looked confused for a moment until their lips connected in a brief, yet chaste and loving touch.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to feel bad for Bianca in the next chapter, because the poor girl has to listen to her brother's love-sick puppy version of the dates! Next chap will also introduce Piper and have some focus on Thalia, so stay tuned ;)
Chapter 19: Sisterhood of the Moon (Part I)

The hunt was catching a break at a Californian beach. After the demigods had returned from the quest in the Sea of Monsters, there had been a lot of wayward sea monsters at all coasts and the hunt had been pretty busy. Sometimes, Bianca wondered if the demigods even knew or appreciated how much cleaning up the hunt did for them. Heaving a sigh, Bianca collapsed on the shore, dipping her toes into the water. A small smile found its way onto her lips as she watched Phoebe and Hylla battling Naomi and Celyn in a heated game of water ball. They still had a lot of work to do, but if they continued hunting without a break, they'd run empty soon.

"Hello. You look kind of exhausted. Would you like an ice?"

Blinking a couple of times, Bianca pushed her sunglasses up and turned to look at the source of the voice. She blinked again as she let her eyes slowly wander over the figure in front of her. A native American girl with chopped brown hair that had blue glass-pearls braided in. She was already a little curvy and also a bit muscular, as though she had basic training down.

"Right. Looking like a weirdo, you're doing it right, McLean", muttered the girl to herself embarrassed, cheeks heating up as she thrust one of the two ice she was holding out to Bianca. "It was for my dad, but... he got a business call and had to leave suddenly, before I could return. And before it melts and goes to waste, I figured I'd... lift your spirits, because you look kinda down."

Bianca grinned amused by the flustered girl and took the ice cream. "Thank you. What's-"

"If it isn't my favorite sister!", was the only warning before she got clomped.

Blinking a couple of times, Bianca turned around in the embrace to look at a widely grinning Nico. The kind stranger was fast forgotten as Bianca got to hug her baby brother. Smiling, she buried her face in his curls. On some days, IMs weren't enough. And all the physically draining hunting had affected her psychologically too. She was exhausted, in body and mind. Seeing her little brother was calming her nerves and it instantly made her feel happy. He grinned at her widely as he got comfortable next to her, taking a bite off the ice Bianca was holding. Right, the ice. Bianca looked around to say thank you properly, but the other girl had left, most likely felt a bit awkward at the family reunion of two strangers. Oh well, for now Bianca had more important things to focus on.

"Mi sei mancato molto, mio fratellino", said Bianca fondly. "What brings you here? Did anything happen? Please tell me not another quest, we're still busy cleaning up after the last one, you know." [trans: I missed you so much, my little brother]

"Yeah, you lot look plenty busy", snorted Nico teasingly as he looked out into the ocean and at the four huntresses playing water ball. "No, no quest. I have a boyfriend now. I think it's serious. More serious than anything I've had so far. Well, then again, we are engaged, so there's that...

"You and Percy Jackson?", inquired Bianca, frowning at her brother.

"Don't look so worried", huffed Nico embarrassed and rolled his eyes. "He's amazing. He's so
kind and filled with love. And... so... so strong. I love sparring with him, I can unleash so much more power than when I spar with anyone else. And he looks so hot when he's all focused and fighting."

"Things I didn't quite need to know", muttered Bianca, cheeks rosy. "So, how long have you been dating then? I mean, you two only know each other... two weeks now?"

Nico shrugged and huffed. "We were on two dates. I know it's not much, but... every single minute I get to spend with Percy is just so... precious. Makes me feel complete. On our first date, we went to Italy and ate at the beach and it was so amazing to just... be with him and talk with him and enjoy the same things I loved with him. And on our second date, we went to Atlantis! As in, that awesome underwater city from Mythomagic! It was... It was so beautiful and he was so beautiful! We were both mermen, thanks to his half-brother Triton, who is freakishly protective over Percy, but that's okay, because I guess I kinda start getting freakishly protective of Percy myself, so I appreciate that they're looking out for him. Anyway, it was just... it was so amazing..."

Bianca had to smile a little. She hadn't realized how much she had missed this side of Nico. Ever since the quest for the Helmet of Darkness, Nico wasn't quite the same anymore. Killing, even if it was a vicious monster that threatened to eat them, it changed a person. All the quests, all the responsibility, the fighting – it had forced Nico to grow up far too fast. Nico was only fourteen, he should enjoy life and have fun, yet far too often, he was forced to be serious. Right now, he reminded her so much of her carefree little brother, who was just obsessed with Mythomagic and playing imaginary games. Smiling fondly, she cupped his cheek and kissed his forehead.

"He... seems to bring out the best in you", whispered Bianca after a moment.

"You think so?", asked Nico a bit confused, not aware of his change himself.

"Come and swim with me", ordered Bianca suddenly, taking his hand. "We don't get to spend enough time with each other anymore. And I don't know when we'll leave again."

"When you get around to New York, you and the hunt should stay to rest", suggested Nico.

Bianca grinned and nodded in agreement, ruffling her brother's curls affectionately.

Thalia was exhausted. Not bodily so, she knew she could still run a marathon or something, but emotionally. So much had changed since she had been changed into a tree. And even though she still had her memories of her time as a tree, there was so much she had missed, so many memories Luke and Annabeth had made without her, friends and adventures and hardships.

"Hey. You alright, Thals?"

Groaning a bit, she cracked one eye open and turned onto her side to look at the looming blonde. Luke entered Cabin One and sat down next to her on the bed. His eyes wandered over the cold and empty cabin. It was a bit freaky, especially because of the giant Zeus statue in the middle of it.

"It's a lot to take in, Luke", sighed Thalia and sat up to lean against his side.

"I know", admitted Luke and laid one arm around Thalia's waist, resting his head against hers.

"I know Annabeth has good intentions, but if she introduces one more person to me with name and what they've been through together, I'll scream my head off", admitted Thalia with a huff.
"She's just so happy that you're finally a part of her life again", offered Luke softly, tilting his head to look down at her. "We both are, you know. Losing you was... horrible. For both of us. I felt like someone tried to rip me apart. You're my best friend, Thals. You're... You're like my sister, more than any of the other Hermes kids are. I'm so... Gods, it's so good to have you back."

"Yeah, yeah, enough with the mush", huffed Thalia embarrassed, hitting his chest.

"Thalia! Do you...", exclaimed an excited voice from the doorway, just to pause in surprise. "Oh. Hey! No family cuddles without me! How dare you!"

That was about the only warning Luke and Thalia got before Annabeth collided with them. They used to huddle together on cold nights, seeking warmth and comfort when camping out in the wild. This was good, it was comfortable and something Thalia knew. Better than all the new things outside and inside. She had a body back, simple things like walking around and being able to lay were odd to her again. But this, it felt natural right away.

"What did you want, Annie?", asked Thalia with a small grin.

"I wanted to ask you if you want to spar with me, Reyna and Clarisse", replied Annabeth, buried in the embrace of the two people who were closest to being her parents. "But this is definitely better."

"Definitely", agreed Thalia amused, brushing the blonde curls out of Annabeth's face.

Cabin Three was at the lake canoeing. Quite obviously, Percy and Nico were in the lead, though Nico looked adorably mortified by the speed Percy could reach, it made the son of Poseidon laugh.

"S—Stop staring at me and concentrate on the road! Or the lake, or whatever!", yelled Nico.

"Aw, but it's more fun to watch my cute boyfriend!", declared Percy with a large grin.

"You're a dork!", huffed Nico embarrassed, clinging onto Percy's waist. "But... my dork."

That earned him the most beautiful blush from his boyfriend and he felt more than pleased. By the time they successfully won the race and Nico was appropriately whirling Percy around to celebrate said victory, the others started to gather around them, looking various degrees from pissed to pouty. All of them got comfortable at the beach to relax together afterward, Nico having Percy on his lap, his arms around Percy's waist and his chin on Percy's shoulder. Percy was playing cards with Lou, Liam, Alabaster and Damian, but Nico was more than content just snuggling with Percy.

"Well, well, well. It seems the new kid really did tame you, di Angelo."

Nico lifted his gaze off of Percy's collarbone to glare at Phoebe. The brunette huntress smirked at him wickedly. Though her superiority was diminished by Naomi and Celyn nearly running her over as they rushed to the beach and jumped in head-first. Bianca smiled as she patted Phoebe's back and headed over to her brother and his boyfriend. Percy in Nico's lap stiffened as she sat down.

"So you decided to follow my invitation", grinned Nico and reached out for a one-armed hug.

It had only been three days since he last saw her and he had hoped she and her huntresses would decide to take a break at camp during their clean-up. Bianca got more comfortable, eyes boring
into Percy's, making the poor boy even more uncomfortable. Somehow, he felt as though he had to live up to her expectations, be good enough for her brother. She smirked knowingly.

"Walk with me, Percy", requested Bianca after a moment and stood again.

Percy started at Nico with wide eyes, causing him to laugh and pull Percy into a short kiss as though to reassure him that everything would be alright. It did not reassure Percy the least. Yet he still got up to follow her. At first they walked in silence. Both of them greeted Grover as they saw him awkwardly flirting with Juniper the tree nymph he had been fancying for months, then they watched in shared amusement how Frank and Leo were playing ping pong against their older sisters, though Nyssa and Clarisse were quite obviously beating their sorry asses.

"You make my brother incredibly happy", stated Bianca as they neared the first cabins.

"I... try my best", offered Percy a bit confused, shrugging. "Because he makes me really, really happy. I could spend hours just talking to him about cartoons, or playing games with him and the others from our cabin, or sparing in the arena with him – I love the way his powers work against mine! He... He feels like home. Probably because he's the son of Hades and I grew up in the underworld, so the vibes and feelings he gives off remind me of home. But I think it's more."

"You really are cute", chuckled Bianca as she watched how animatedly he talked and how his cheeks flushed. "I just want you to know that he cares deeply for you and... I'm his big sister, ever since our mother died, I was the one protecting him. I just want to know... will you do it? Will you protect him now too? Because even though he's so strong, he's such an experienced hero, he's still just... my baby brother. He needs someone at his side that he can trust. For the longest time, that was me. Then it became his best friend Frank. Now I wonder about you."

"I'd do anything for him!", exclaimed Percy with a frown. "He's... not just my fiance because of your father, he's also my friend. Sure, we haven't known each other for long, but I really, really, really like him. A lot. I like that he's my boyfriend. And I want to protect him, because he's been protecting me too. He... said to my dad that we'd protect each other and I like that."

"Father chose well when he picked you", stated Bianca, eyes dancing in amusement.

"T—Thanks", muttered Percy, flushing with pride at the praise.

"Ah, Bianca di Angelo, there you are. You know, Chiron send me to greet you, but you guys slipped past me", interrupted Luke as he approached them, Thalia and Annabeth at his tail.

"Bia!", exclaimed Annabeth as she pushed past him to hug her. "Let me guess, you had to coddle Nico first? You should have come to me instead, because he's being coddled enough by this one."

Percy's blush darkened and he ducked his head. Annabeth smirked teasingly and Luke and Bianca laughed at that. Thalia however was curiously intrigued. She had heard about Percy Jackson, the son of Poseidon and ambassador of Hades and pain in the ass of Zeus. She had also heard of Bianca di Angelo, the daughter of Hades and lieutenant of Artemis and good-as-sister of Annabeth. A gorgeous Italian girl. While Percy and Annabeth were bickering, Thalia locked eyes with Bianca.

"Hey. I'm Thalia Grace", greeted Thalia a bit awkwardly. "You mind if we sit down for a moment?"

Bianca frowned confused, looking over at Annabeth, just to receive the most sparkling eyes possible. "Sure! Go, go, go! We'll just go ahead to the beach. I have my daily quota of embarrassing Nico to fulfill! Take all the time you need, you two!"
"Haven't you just been complaining that you didn't get to see Bia before?", argued Luke.

Annabeth huffed and grabbed both Luke and Percy by the wrists. "Sure, but that was because Bia went to spend time with Nico instead of me. But this is different! This is my two big sisters bonding with each other! This, like, needs to happen. So come on, leave them alone."

Bianca smiled fondly as she watched the trio leave. She then turned to the punk girl. Thalia Grace, the one Bianca had helped to turn back to human. The girl had messy black hair in a side-cut, with a blue-dyed fringe, she wore a black leather-jacket over her camp-shirt and black combat-boots. All in all, Bianca really could picture this girl and Nico sitting together in a corner, talking about punk bands and which shade of black is the prettiest. She grinned at her own thoughts.

"So, you're the famous Thalia Grace", stated Bianca casually as she headed toward her original destination, Artemis' cabin. "Annie told me a lot about you over the past months."

"And you're the famous Bianca di Angelo", countered Thalia amused, cocking one eyebrow. "Considering that you and your brother have only been part of Annabeth's life for a bit over a year, you both seem to mean a lot to her. Thank you, for... taking care of her while I was gone. And, uh, I guess, thanks for saving my life. You were part of the quest too, weren't you?"

"I was", confirmed Bianca as they entered the cabin. "Lady Artemis is... in cohorts with her half-sister Lady Persephone and she seems to start valuing the campers too. As her lieutenant, I was more than glad to take the quest and help out. Especially for my brother's sake."

"I... I heard that Zoe is dead", whispered Thalia and looked away. "We met before, you know. When Luke, Annie and I were still homeless and on the run. We met the huntresses, seeing as they hunt monsters for a living and we were three defenseless demi-gods on our own. Basically, monster bait. She made me the offer to join the hunt a few times, but... I could never abandon Luke and Annabeth. She offered that Annie, once she was a bit older, could join too. But I couldn't."

"I understand that", replied Bianca while rummaging through her things. "I know it may not seem that way to you, considering that I left my brother behind here, but... it was a hard decision. It was also the right decision. I knew Nico would be safe here and I... Do you know about the prophecy? The prophecy about the end of the world, involving the sixteenth birthday of a child of one of the eldest gods? I was fifteen when we encountered the hunt. I would be sixteen now, if I had lived to reach the age. Either I would have triggered the end of the world somehow, or I would have died before turning sixteen. This way, I could avoid both and I'm now able to watch over my little brother and our friends. Hylla, our newest recruit, left her younger sister at camp too. Sometimes... leaving them is the best we can do for them, even though it seems harsh."

Thalia nodded numbly, frowning as she turned away a bit to give Bianca the privacy to get changed (though she could not help but sneak maybe a glance or two. Sheer curiosity and nothing more, of course!). "Well, I'm fourteen. Plenty of time to figure out a better solution than abandoning them."

"I can respect that, but once your... time is up, know that Zoe's offer still stands, that it's my offer now", stated Bianca as she turned her back to Thalia and lifted her long, black curls up against the back of her head. "Would you mind helping me out here?"

Thalia blushed despite herself and tied the bikini before the two girls left for the beach again.

After yet another relaxing day at the beach with her little brother, Annabeth, Frank, Clarisse, Leo
and Percy, as well as a comfortable night in an actual bed in the Artemis Cabin – the real reason why the hunt had decided to rest at camp – the huntresses were finally free for an actual hunt again. It was, as always, a tearful goodbye for Bianca, but this time around, she could be a hundred percent sure that those she loved were taken care of. Annabeth had Thalia back and Nico had Percy to take care of him. For the first time, Bianca left with a truly good feeling. With said good feeling did Bianca literally crash into California. To be more precise, she crashed into the park-like backyard of one of the fancy mansions in Los Angeles. The stupid manticore had escaped her, but she had send her huntresses after it while taking a moment to gather herself.

"Uh... are... you alright?", asked a concerned, female voice. "I, uh, saw you... crashing into our pool after that... scorpion-lion-thing tore down dad's favorite apple tree..."

Bianca frowned as she looked up at the worried and a little freaked out native American girl standing at the poolside and watching her. Heaving a sigh, Bianca swam up to her and climbed out. While wringing the water out of her hair, she looked the girl up and down, frown deepening.

"Wait, I know you", muttered Bianca to herself, thinking hard. "Oh. The ice-cream girl!"

"Piper. Piper McLean", nodded the native American with a small grin. "Hello again. So... When you and your gang don't roam the beach, you break and enter with a bow...?"

"I'm not breaking", objected Bianca offended and straightened her back. "I was on the—Wait. You... saw the manticore? You saw it for what it truly was?"

"Manticore? That's what it is?", questioned Piper curiously, tilting her head. "Sure I saw it. What was it? Some kind of... promotion for a fantasy movie, or what? Are you an actress?"

"I'm a huntress", replied Bianca wearily, turning her back on Piper. "But I'll be gone now."

"No! Wait!", called Piper out, sounding a bit desperate.

Bianca felt herself freezing up, even though she had every intention to leave just a second ago. She frowned worried, feeling the desire to stay blooming instantly. This odd sway of emotions, she had experienced it before, when Lady Artemis had been brawling with Lady Aphrodite.

"Who are you, Piper McLean?", inquired Bianca sharply, turning to the girl again.

"I'm just... lonely?", replied Piper, averting her eyes to stare at the ground. "My dad, he's... Tristan McLean, the big movie star. And and I'm all alone most of the time, but... I'm not really good at making friends, I guess. They either want to befriend me because of who my dad is, or they hate me and badmouth me because of who my dad is. And because I see weird things. Like manticores."

Bianca squinted a little, making a sharp motion with her hand to intensify Piper's aura. It had the normal flicker or mortals – so she wasn't a monster or nymph – but there was a distinctive pink rim to it, flaring up every now and again. Bianca had seen it before, on Silena Beauregard. She smiled.

"Believe me, I know what it feels like to have to live up to your father's name", said Bianca.

"Why? Who's your father?", asked Piper curiously, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

"Hades, lord of the underworld", answered Bianca casually, smirking to herself as she straightened up some. "I guess that's part of why I joined my little 'gang', as you call it. Because with us, it doesn't matter who your parents are or from what background you come from. We're one, we're all united by the same cause. Helping others, making the world a safer place and by our
friendship."

Her smirk softened into a knowing smile as she saw the sparkle in Piper's eyes. Before the daughter of Aphrodite could charmspeak her again did Bianca leap up onto the wall and wave goodbye.

"I'm sure we'll see each other again, Piper McLean", called Bianca out before disappearing.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, it's part 1, because there will be a part 2 where we see Piper again. It'll just take a while. Next chapter will focus on Nicercy's third date - and someone very special will totally crash it!
Chapter 20: Unexpected Reunions

Percy was laying on his side, one arm folded beneath his head and the other stretched out so his fingers could play with the white strands of Nico's bangs. They had been tickling Nico's nose when Percy had woken up, causing Nico to wiggle his nose in an adorable way before Percy pushed them out so they wouldn't wake the son of Hades. Somehow, Percy was fascinated by them.

"Buongiorno, mio gattino", whispered a sleep-rough voice softly. [trans: Good morning, my kitten]

A red tint spread over Percy's cheeks at the nickname. So having been a catboy during their first official date and generally being 'very cuddly', as everyone liked to put it, had earned him the nickname 'kitten' from Nico. It send a special kind of warmth through Percy to have a personal nickname from his Nico. Nico offered him a tender smile, taking the hand that had been playing with his hair and kissing it, which only made Percy blush even harder.

"Buongiorno, mio principe dei fantasmi", replied Percy, voice just as soft. "Had a good night's sleep?" [trans: Good morning, my Ghost Prince]

"Mhmh", hummed Nico in agreement, slipping his hand down to rest on Percy's waist.

"So... today...", drawled Percy out slowly. "Third date's the charm, right? I'm sure nothing is going to interrupt or disturb our day this time. Now, will you tell me what kind of plans you have?"

"No", chuckled Nico and sat up some. "I told you, it's a surprise. Just... be pretty and ready."

"Ready for what?", huffed Percy with a slight pout. "This is not helping me with my wardrobe choice, you know that, right? At least tell me if it's outdoor-sy or restaurant chic. The beach or a snowy mountain or whatever? Because you and your shadow-travel aren't helpful either."

"A snowy mountain?", echoed Nico thoughtful. "That's... That's a very good idea. You've never seen snow before, have you? We'll mark this down for later usage. Maybe we could take Bianca, Annabeth, Leo and Tyson with us? Pretty sure your brothers never saw snow before either and my sisters are... really darn good at snowball fights. It'd be fun, I'm sure..."

Percy beamed at him and nodded wildly. Snowball fights looked like so much fun in the movies and Leo would build the most awesome sledge ever. Now successfully distracted from his prodding, Percy got changed into jeans and his camp shirt, looking around the cabin. Clovis, Aurora, Sirius and Lily were still asleep, no surprise there. Children of Hypnos were the kings of sleeping and the kids of Morpheus weren't pretty far behind them. Alabaster and Ethan in the bed above Nico's and Percy's were also deep asleep, one tangle of limbs. Damian was laying in Liam's bed, arms around Liam's waist as they were spooning. The only one awake aside from Nico and Percy seemed to be Lou, who was writing into her Book of Shadows, as Percy liked to call the creepy black leather-book with the pentagram branded into the cover. She looked up as though she had felt his eyes.

"Good morning you two disgustingly cute love-birds", greeted Lou amused.
"Morning", grinned Percy. "Have you seen Reyna? Did she head out to the showers?"

"She’s been gone for like an hour already", shrugged Lou and frowned. "Said she had a sparring session with Annabeth scheduled. I start thinking that 'sparring session' is lesbian for 'make-out session', considering how much time those two spend with each other. They're worse than you two."

Percy blushed and ducked his head, feeling oddly proud at that. Because yes, he and Nico were cute together. He grasped Nico’s hand and tugged him closer so he could place a chaste kiss on Nico’s lips. Ever since they had kissed in Atlantis, this had become Percy's second favorite thing to do. The first was still cuddling though, because holding Nico and being held by Nico, surrounded by his warmth and scent, that was the very best feeling Percy had ever experienced. Though kissing was nice too. Maybe not as epic as Disney movies made it out to be, but still pretty awesome.

"Dis-gus-ting", muttered Lou and made gagging-noises. "Can't a witch hex without disturbance?"

"Let's get out of here", whispered Nico against Percy's lips, grinning. "Sparring?"

And that was Percy's third favorite thing to do with Nico. Sea-green eyes sparkled with excitement.

After a good, long and intense sparring session with Nico, followed by a nice, long, hot shower, he made his way to the beach. The end of summer was nearing and the campers were using every warm day as good as they could. So Percy ended up on a beach volleyball team with Beckendorf, Leo, Frank and Luke, losing big times against Clarisse, Reyna, Annabeth, Thalia and Katie. Percy hadn’t known Thalia for long, but he saw how important she was to Annabeth and Luke, she also seemed to a good and kind person, albeit a bit mean at times. Basically, a good match for Clarisse. The two girls got along great. Silena sat at the sidelines with Nico, catching a bit tan while she still could and occasionally looking at her boyfriend and the others. After taking such a horrific loss, the boys decided to join them on the blanket, while the girls did a little celebratory dance. Stuck between Reyna and Thalia, Annabeth looked happier than Nico had ever seen her.

"I'm glad for you", whispered Nico as Luke sat down next to him. "She's clearly not a bright person like Silena or Percy, more on the doom and gloom side of things like, well... me or Reyna, but... somehow she seems to brighten you and Annabeth simply by being here."

Luke grinned lopsided and nodded as he watched his two girls jumping up and down. "She's not carefree, yes, but... that's because life made her that way. The... The only good time she had in her life was when it was just the three of us, on the run, being our own kind of family."

Nico nodded slowly, wrapping his arms around his legs. He understood that. For a big part of his life, it had only been him and Bianca and they had been their own small kind of family. He was ripped out of his thoughts when he was kissed on the cheek. Blinking, he turned to look at Percy.

"Can we go on our date now, please? The suspense is killing me", asked Percy with kitten-eyes.

He had tried to distract himself from being curious by spending time with Leo and sparring with Nico and now by playing beach volleyball, but he was dying to know by now. Nico chuckled amused, eyes sparkling as he saw how eager Percy was for their date.

"Sure. Go and get changed. Something casual, maybe a light jacket because I think it'll be a bit windy", instructed Nico and got up from the blanket himself.
"Casual? Light jacket?", echoed Leo curiously. "Well, that's at least some kind of hint. Maybe I'll join the Stolls' betting pool after all... Care to give me a bigger hint, Nico? I'd like to win."

Nico just gave the Latino a stern glare, causing Frank to laugh. The Canadian knew first-hand how hard it was to wretch information out of Nico's brain if Nico didn't want to share it. So instead, he laid one companionable arm around Leo's shoulders and steered the son of Hephaestus into the direction of Hermes Cabin. Leo had been kind of weird around him in the past week or so, so he was determined to spend time with the cute tinkerer and fix whatever had gone wrong.

"Best. Date. Ever", gasped Percy with the widest, most sparkling eyes possible.

Nico wanted to agree, because he hadn't seen Percy this amazed before, but then there was the fact that Percy seemed to always be ten steps ahead of him. Literally. The ambassador of Hades had reached a new level of jumpiness, rushing from one side of the path to the other back as though he was trying to take everything in. Basically like every little four-years old who got to go to the zoo for the first time in their life. Which was kind of the reason why Nico had chosen this particular location for their third date. Percy expressed amazement and wonder in such a pure and contagiously happy way that Nico wanted to witness it as often as possible and what with Percy having lived in the underworld since he was six, Nico doubted that Percy even remembered his last visit of a zoo, if he had ever visited a zoo to begin with. And considering how much Percy seemed to love animals, this was a match made in heaven. Seeing Percy interact with Zerberus before and with Ascalaphus the owl, who had taken up residence in Camp Half-Blood's forest and a tree belonging to a nymph called Juniper, made Nico curious to see how Percy would act with other animals, so he had chosen the New York zoo as the perfect location for this perfect date (this date had to be perfect. Something had always disturbed all other dates, but not this one).

"Did you know that zebras talk like horses but with accent?", asked Percy eagerly.

Nico smiled as he finally caught up with Percy and came to stand next to his boyfriend, laying one arm around Percy's waist to hold him close so the other couldn't just bolt off to the next animal again. Percy stared in awe at the herd of zebras, before pausing and squinting.

"Percy? Everything alright?", asked Nico, before one of the hooved animals stomped up to them and came to stand right in front of them, close enough to touch. "Uh. That's not... not a zebra."

"No! That's the pegasus we freed on the creepy ship!", exclaimed Percy, eyes growing even wider if possible as he reached out to pat the black pegasus. "I'm so glad to see you're fine! I was afraid you would have been captured again or something. But why are you here?" Nico watched in fascination as Percy seemed to hold an actual conversation with the winged horse. "Oh, that's sad. No, you shouldn't live on the streets, or, well, in the zoo. You know, you should come to Camp Half-Blood with Nico and me." Percy paused again as he listened to what the horse was saying, freaking Nico out as much as he amazed him. "...W—What? Oh, uh... I wouldn't, I mean we call that being boyfriends, not, uh mates. But yes, this is Nico. Yeah, I think he's a fine human stallion too." At this, Percy giggled while Nico blushed, grateful that he didn't hear the other side of the conversation. "There are other pegasi at camp and they're safe. You should come with us there, Blackjack." Then, finally, Percy turned his attention to Nico, smiling brightly. "Nico, this is Blackjack. He says he'll be forever grateful to you and me for saving him and that he wants to come with us."

Nico felt only slightly awkward when he turned to face the pegasus. "It's a... ah, a pleasure to meet you, Blackjack. I'm sure you'll like camp, but there's no need to thank us. Of course we'd help."
"Blackjack says he doesn't know where camp is", explained Percy to Nico, waving his arms a bit before turning back to Blackjack. "Can we bring him real fast? It'd mean we could fly!"

Nico frowned as he watched Blackjack fly over the fence to come and stand next to them. The only upside of flying on a pegasus was that Nico got to hold tightly onto Percy and be pressed up to Percy's back. And the joyful laughter from Percy, that was also a clear plus. Other than that? Nico was not a fan of flying. Not at all. He was relieved when they arrived at the stables and could drop the pegasus off and he was even more relieved that they could take the decidedly faster route of shadow-traveling back to the zoo. Next was the aquarium, so Nico had to pray that there were no fishes or anything to distract Percy too much. There was an awestruck expression on Percy's face as he tried to look everywhere at once, with his nose practically pressed against the glass. The fascinating thing was that wherever Percy was, the fishes followed. When Percy pressed his nose against the glass, the fishes circled him and bumped their heads against the glass.

"The fishes like you! Do you like the fishes too? I like fishes, they're all colorful and pretty!"

Nico, who was not that much of a fan of being surrounded by water that could easily kill him if all the glass gave in, stuck close to Percy, keeping his hand on Percy's lower back or at least having their hands linked. The son of Hades blinked and turned to the high-pitched voice. On Percy's other side stood a little girl, maybe four years old, with two pigtails on the sides of her head, staring up at Percy in awe with her large azure eyes. She was wearing a cute, purple dress.

"Yeah, I love fishes", replied Percy in a kind, sweet voice. "They really are colorful and pretty."

"Uhu", nodded the little girl, turning to look at the fishes. "But mommy doesn't like fishes, they make her sad. But I wanted to see fishes. Look! That's my favorite! It's all sparkly-purple!"

"Yeah, she's a really pretty one", agreed Percy with a grin. "I like that one. It's really, really blue."

Nico snorted amused at how Percy was talking with the little girl, until he noticed something.

"I dunno", shrugged the girl with a frown. "I left mommy and daddy with the big kittens, so I could go and look at fishes, because mommy doesn't like them."

Nico heaved a long-suffering sigh at that. He was not going to let a little kid wander around unsupervised and knowing his boyfriend, neither would Percy. The son of Poseidon was already kneeling down in front of her, looking at her tenderly and opening his arms wide.

"Come on, we'll go and bring you back to your parents, kiddo", offered Percy, smiling reassuringly at the little girl. "I'm Percy and this is Nico. What's your name?"

"Laura", replied Laura, climbing onto Percy's back to get a piggy-back-ride instead.

"Demanding", muttered Nico amused as he watched Percy cautiously getting up with her. "Okay, let's go and get you to the next information center. They can make an announcement, mh?"

Laura just nodded obediently and clung to Percy's neck, offering Nico a toothy grin. Nico heaved a sigh. They would drop the kid of at the info stand so the staff could make an announcement for her parents and then Nico and Percy would be back on track with their date. There was still ice-cream and dinner on the plan, maybe even a movie. Though the pegasus had already taken so much time away, so Nico guessed they'd have to skip the movie. When the three of them approached the next info stand, there was a couple talking to a member of the zoo's staff, a woman with brown hair, crying borderline hysterically while who seemed to be her husband – a man with salt-and-pepper hair who had his arms around her – talked to the staff-member. Hopefully, those
were Laura's parents and the matter would be dissolved before Percy and Nico had to get too involved.

"Mommy! Daddy!", yelped Laura happily, waving her arms around wildly.

Nico heaved a relieved sigh, though then he noticed that Percy wasn't next to him anymore. He had just frozen up and was staring at Laura's parents with what could only be described as total horror. This was a new and frightening look on Percy's face and Nico instinctively wanted to draw his sword. Things only got really abstract and weird when Laura's parents turned to them and while the dad's face filled with relief, the mom took a sudden turn first to relief and then to frightened disbelief that seemed to border onto pure fear. Okay. Nico felt like he had just walked into an awkward situation without being aware of it. At least he wasn't the only one, because the dad seemed rather oblivious of it too. He just beamed at seeing his daughter and marched over to them.

"Laura! How often did we tell you that you shouldn't wander off like that?!", exclaimed the man, sounding incredibly relieved. "Who are you boys? Thank you for finding our daughter."

"I'm Nico, that's my boyfriend Percy. We found your daughter in the aquarium", explained Nico. "Thank you, really", repeated the man, shaking Nico's hand. "Paul Blofis. That's my wife, Sally."

While Paul took Laura off of Percy's shoulder and whirled her around, Nico observed in curious confusion how Sally and Percy stared at each other like prey at hunters, both frozen in stalemate.

"It... It c—can't be... P—P... Percy...", whispered Sally, voice broken and fearfully hopeful.

Percy looked like he didn't want to say anything, eyes impossibly wide, yet his mouth betrayed him and spoke before he had a chance to filter anything. "M—Mommy..."

As one, both collapsed on the ground in tears, with Paul, Nico and Laura standing beside them and watching in utter confusion what was happening. Laura started sobbing, not understanding why her mommy was crying. It took Nico a moment to put one and one together. Sally. Living in New York. Percy, sitting there on the ground, crying, calling her 'mommy'. Okay, so maybe it didn't take a genius to figure out that this must be Percy's mother. Nico hastily approached Percy, grasping his shoulder to get his attention and giving one look that said enough.

"N—No!", exclaimed the woman on the ground, reaching out and grasping Percy's shirt, clawing at it like someone drowning. "P—Please don't leave! You are him. You are my Percy. My son. You are. Please don't leave like that. P—Please don't leave me again... I—I.. I already lost you once, I can't lose you again. Percy. Please, Percy. Please stay."

Percy stared at Nico in awe, blinking slowly. Nico was amazing, really. Somehow, just hearing...
those words made Percy actually feel braver. Maybe he could stay. Just for a little bit. To talk to his mother. Suddenly, that thought filled his head. He could talk to his mother. It had been eight years since he had last seen her and if he was being honest, he only had the faintest of memories of her. Of her smile and laughter, the sparkle in azure-blue eyes, the shared joy over blue candies and an overwhelmingly warm feeling of love and home. Resting one hand on Nico's chest, he slowly pushed the son of Hades away and turned toward his mother, kneeling down next to her.

"Do... Do you want to... to... talk...?", asked Percy unsure, blinking slowly.

Sally looked at him as though he had just pushed the clouds away to reveal sunshine after a rainstorm, as though he had just offered her a billion bucks and a villa, as though he had just solved world poverty and hunger. As though he was the solution to literally everything. It was unnerving.

"Y—Yes. Yes, please", nodded Sally and took a shaky breath, slowly getting.

"Sally, are you alright? Who is this? What is going on here?", asked Paul concerned.

"I... I... This is my... Percy...", whispered Sally, not taking her eyes off of Percy.

Realization dawned on Paul – apparently, he had heard of Sally's son – followed by utter confusion as he turned to stare at Percy as though he was a unicorn. "But... You said he..."

Nico decided to step in here, because this was already messy enough. "Laura, would you like some ice-cream? I saw an ice-cream stand a bit back. What do you think, Mister Blofis? I think your daughter looks in dire need of some ice-cream." And your wife and her supposedly dead son look in dire need of a conversation between four eyes, rang silently with it.

Paul seemed doubtful, so he exchanged a look with his wife, who seemed to plead with him to give them a moment. Heaving a sigh, Paul took Laura's heart and turned to smile at his daughter.

"How about we invite Nico to ice-cream as a thank you while your mommy talks a bit with... with Percy?", suggested Paul strained. "And then we come back and pick mommy up, okay princess?"

Laura nodded wildly and rubbed her eyes, tears forgotten at the prospect of ice-cream. Sally and Percy took another moment to gather themselves before they stood and made their way over to a vacant bench, sitting down next to each other. The silence caused by their respective inner turmoils turned into an awkward one as both didn't know where to start. There was so much to be said.

"H—How are you... alive?", asked Sally after a little while, eyes not once leaving Percy. "When... When I came home and found Gabe dead, with no trace of you, I thought..."

"I think... dad killed him", mused Percy, never having really thought about this. "The bad man... Gabe...? I... I don't remember his face, or name. I just remember the smell and the pain. I remember that he hurt both of us, you and me. And that night, he was... hurting me, badly. And I begged for it to stop and dad heard my pleas. He took me away, because he wanted me to be safe. Both... Both of us to be safe. I'm the son of Poseidon, I smell... delicious to monsters and as long as I'd have lived with you, you would have been endangered too. But... But I was kept safe."

"Where?", asked Sally next, frowning confused. "Did... Did Poseidon take you with him?"

"N—No", answered Percy and shook his head slowly. "He brought me to his brother and his sister-in-law. They agreed and took me in. They raised me as their own."

"...I—I... understand", whispered Sally and averted his eyes for the first time since realizing who
this boy was. "I'm sorry I failed you. I'm sorry I failed as your mother. B—but I'm better now! Paul, he is not like Gabe, he is a truly good man. A teacher. Very kind. And Laura, oh, you will love her. Please, please give me a second chance. I understand why you never turned back to me after... what you have been through because of me, but I'm doing better now. I can be the mother you deserve."

Percy frowned, now utterly confused. "I don't understand."

"Please come back to me, Percy. Please let me be your mother again", pleaded Sally as she looked up again, tears streaming down his cheeks. "Not one day passed without me thinking of you. You're my son, my beloved little boy. I thought I had lost you, but... but here you are, alive. Please, Percy."

The frown on Percy's face deepened more as the confusion clouding his mind took fog-like qualities. "But... You were stuck with the bad man because of me. Papà explained it to me, explained why you married him. Because his disgusting smell covered my smell so monsters won't find and eat me. He hurt us, both of us. He hurt you. Because of me. Why... Why do you want me? All I brought you was pain. Now that I'm gone, you're far happier. Your life... is better. I saw where you live. It's a nice, family friendly place. You finally have a nice, kind man, someone you can love and who you didn't have to marry because of... me. And Laura is cute. She doesn't cause problems like I did. Everything... is better for you, now that I'm gone. Why would you want me back?"

Sally's head snapped up as she stared at her son in utter disbelief. His sea-green eyes, those she remembered so clearly as bright and joyful and innocent, they stared at her in utter confusion. Was this why he had never contacted her, even though he was now thirteen, old enough to do so? Not because he blamed her, but because he blamed himself? Her heart felt as though it broke even more, something she had not believed possible, because the supposed death of her son had shattered it into a billion pieces, yet in a shared effort, Paul and Laura had put it back together again.

"No, Percy. Nothing is your fault", whispered Sally, voice as broken as her heart. She grasped his neck and pulled him into a tight hug, as though she intended to never let him go again. "What I did was my own decision. Poseidon, your father, he had... had warned me about the dangers. He had offered me this safe place, some kind of camp, but it would have meant losing you. And I... I was so, so very selfish. All I wanted was to keep you close to me, because I love you, because you're my son and I will always love you, but... I ended up putting you through so much. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is your fault though. I would have endured worse if it had meant I'd have gotten to keep you, but... I regret that you had to suffer, Percy. I really do. I never... wanted to cause you pain. Please forgive me, Percy. And please believe me. I love you, Percy. I love you so much."

At first, Percy laid stiff in her arms, but something about the tone of her voice reminded her of the past. A hazy memory of being held by her and soothed after a nightmare. He melted into the embrace, sniffing a bit and thus inhaling that oddly familiar scent of his mother. Somehow, that broke the dam and Percy started sobbing. He clung onto his mother and cried, tears he hadn't cried since his first year in the underworld, back when all he wanted had been to go back to his mommy. Tears of relief. He could feel her frame shaking and could only assume that she was crying too.

Eating ice-cream with his boyfriend's little half-sister and stepfather was not entirely how Nico had pictured his third date with Percy. Though he had to admit that Laura was cute. She reminded him a lot of Percy. Not physically, because her eyes were blue and her hair was brunette and her
complexion was decidedly more tanned than Percy's (even though Percy had been catching up on
tan over the past weeks). But her carefree and happy smile and that unbound love with which she
regarded her father – the same kind Percy radiated when he looked at Leo or talked about the
underworld. Still, looking at his watch confirmed that their dinner reservation had already gone to
waste. He had been in the little café down the road for two hours now. At first, they had only
gone as far as to the ice-cream card, but when Paul and Nico chanced a glance back, they saw
Sally and Percy hugging and crying and figured they'd need a little more time than that.

"Can we go and get mommy? I wanna go home", asked Laura, dangling her legs back and forth.

While Laura had been distracted by her ice-cream, Nico had more or less explained the situation to
Paul. Minus the gods and monsters. That Percy's biological father had saved him from the abuse
and Percy had been staying with his father's family since then. Paul smiled at his daughter and
noded.

"Yes. Let's go and see how mommy is doing", agreed the man and took her hand.

Nico followed, not all that willingly. He had already talked to Percy about his mother before. How
much Percy regretted everything she had to go through because of him. It was a sore and painful
subject and Nico just really wanted for Percy to get a chance to rekindle with her.

"Mommy!", yelped Laura and pulled away from her dad to run over to her.

Nico's frown slowly melted from his face as he saw how happy and carefree both Percy and Sally
looked as they sat together and chatted. Sally laughed as she accepted her daughter into her arms.
She still smiled brightly as she looked at Percy, one arm around Laura and the other stretched out
so she could caress his hair. Percy returned her smile in that same bright way Nico loved so much.

"You want to go home, Laura?", asked Sally amused before turning to Percy. "Are you... coming
home with us? You said you'd want to meet Laura and Paul. And I told you, I can... I can take
care of you. I think we... cleared things now, right? You thought I'd blame you and I thought
you'd blame me, but... in the end... we were just both hurt. Now... Now we can just be happy.
Together."

She stood, holding onto Laura's hand as Paul stepped up to take her free hand. Together, those
three really looked like a picture-book family. Percy frowned as he took it all in, while Nico came
to stand beside him and took Percy's hand into his. This just took an interesting turn. Apparently,
they had spend the past two hours talking things out and judging by the atmosphere into which
Nico, Paul and Laura had walked in, they had cleared a lot of things. It was a logical conclusion,
in a way. Sally had apparently assumed the same as Percy, just in reverse. That he'd blame her,
that he didn't love her anymore because of what he had put her through. Just as he had thought
she'd think of him. But now that both finally realized that they still loved each other and didn't
harbor any negative feelings, she wanted her son back. It was understandable, especially
considering this was Percy they were talking about. How would anyone not want Percy in their
life? Nico completely understood.

"I... I can't come live with you", whispered Percy and frowned, shaking his head slowly.

"...W—Why not?", asked Sally, fear creeping up on her.

Percy took a soft breath and smoothed the frown over to smile at her. "I'm glad you don't blame
me. And I want to get to know Paul and Laura. And I want to get closer with you again, because
my mother, but... but when I told you dad brought me to his brother and he took care of me... He
didn't just take care of me. He took me in, he raised me, clothed me, fed me, but most of all, he
protected, loved and cherished me. I love you, but I also love my mamma and my papà, because
they loved me when you couldn't be there. I can't turn my back on them and I don't want to. When I told you earlier that I spend the summer at the camp dad told you about, I really meant just the summer. I'm looking forward to the end of summer, when me and my brother can go back home. Home to the underworld. Home to mamma and papà and our brother and sisters. I... I have this family, this home, and I love them and I'd never want to lose them again." He paused to take a shaky breath and offer her a soft, painted and apologetic look. "I love you. I remember, back in my mind, like it's always been there, that I love you. And I want to get to know you. You and the family you made while I was gone. But I can't trade one family for the other. I—I hope you... understand."

Slowly blinking, Sally looked at Percy. And then Laura tugged on her hand, redirecting her attention. In that moment, she did understand. When she hadn't been there, Percy had found parents who didn't just take him in but loved him. When he hadn't been there, Sally had found a wonderful husband who had given her a beautiful and sweet daughter. She loved Percy, but she could never chose between him and Laura. Neither could be between her and the family he had found. A sad, little smile found its way onto her lips as she pulled him into another hug, kissing the top of his head and inhaling that unique sea-like scent that hadn't changed a bit in the years.

"Promise to come back", whispered Sally against his hair. "Promise to come and visit us, yes?"

"Y—You gave me the address and the phone number and your cellphone number and I can always easily come to New York", nodded Percy, smiling relieved that she understood. "I promise. Mom."

Nico and Percy just silently stood there and watched the little family leave. The son of Hades wasn't sure what he was supposed to do or say now, but he knew that both dinner and the movie had died at this point. The mood just wasn't right anymore. So he just squeezed Percy's hand and tugged on it until Percy followed him. Sure, Nico could shadow-travel them to camp right now, but somehow he felt as though Percy needed another moment to digest before facing everyone— at this point, they were used to the routine of Annabeth, Leo, Silena and Luke asking how the date went and teasing.

It was only after about twenty minutes of walk that Percy spoke up. "She loves me. She still does."

"Yeah. I heard", nodded Nico, smiling a little as he saw the ridiculously happy expression on Percy's face. "I'm glad. That... That everything worked out well."

"I'm sorry our date got hijacked again though", said Percy with a troubled expression.

"I'm not", replied Nico and he could feel that it was the truth. "Don't get me wrong, I'd love to go on at least one perfectly calm date where it's just you and me, but... I know how much the situation with your mother has been troubling you, especially since you and Leo ran into her when you first came to camp. So I'm really glad that you had this chance to talk to her again like this."

"Me too", nodded Percy, ducking his head a little. "She told me about her husband and her daughter. My... half-sister. And her life. Apparently, the life-insurance of her first husband, she used it to turn her life around. Enrolled in evening classes at college and that's where she met Paul. They became friends and she could... talk to him, about, well, about losing me. And then they fell in love and got married and now she's happy and they have Laura. But she said she still missed me every day. Every day, Nico. I thought... I was so sure... But I was wrong. And I'm... happy I was wrong."

"Me too", chuckled Nico fondly, tugging Percy a bit closer so he could lay one arm around Percy's waist and kiss his cheek. "Want me to distract the hyenas so you can have a bit peace?"
"You're kind of totally amazing", mumbled Percy, resting his head against Nico's shoulder. "Yeah, please. That'd be... great. I mean, I really love our friends, but they're a handful. And I want to... I have to... think and all and I don't know if I can handle them prodding and asking questions."

"Yeah, I figured", hummed Nico, tilting his head to rest it against Percy's. "It's okay. I'll always be there so you won't have to deal with everything alone. And if you want to be alone, then I'll be there to make sure no one bothers you. Because I kind of... love you."

Percy stumbled a bit and felt as though his heart just skipped a beat. "B—but we only were on three dates and you said they were all somehow messy and we've only known each other a few weeks!"

"And I've been falling for you since we were on that quest in the Sea of Monsters", shrugged Nico, blushing a little bit. "But with every day I spend with you – I don't need the dates for that, I just need to wake up to your smiling face or see you laughing and chatting with Leo and Annabeth or spar with you or have a swim-race with you – I feel like... like I get more addicted to you."

"...Addicted?", asked Percy with an adorably confused expression on his face.

Nico walked around him so he could stand in front of Percy, he then grasped his chin and tilted his head up, lowering his own face until their lips were barely a breath apart. "Addicted to you. To the way your body fits against mine when we cuddle, to the way your hand fits into mine, to the way you say my name, to the way you smell of the beach and ocean and freedom, to the way you laugh and smile, to the way you're always kind and helpful toward everyone, to the way you love others, to the way you taste salty and sweet and amazing. Addicted to all of you."

Percy was pretty sure his face would explode with all the blood suddenly in his cheeks. And it didn't help when Nico's lips covered his in a warm and soft kiss. This was just so perfect, so much how he had always dreamed of it. He laid his arms around Nico's neck and pulled him closer. Of course the moment was ruined by the roaring of what looked like a very ugly and very big red bull. Instinct made both boys push the other away and grab their weapons. They were side by side as they faced the beast charging at them and as they slashed away at the monstrosity and dodged its fiery breath, they were nearly one. They knew how the other moved and fought. As Nico stabbed the beast's back, Percy summoned a wall of water to shield his boyfriend from the fire breath. The beast stood no chance at all and as it whined pitifully and crumbled to ashes, Nico and Percy exchanged victorious grins. Yes, this truly was as perfect as Percy had always pictured it.

Nico stood true to his word and as they reached camp, they split up so Nico could distract their prying friends while Percy sneaked in through the forest. He found a secluded clearing where the stream was running through and sat down on a large, moss-covered stone to watch the sun set and the moon rise. Only when it was slowly getting dark and he could hear the sound of the bonfire in the distance did his mind truly feel at ease again. So much had happened in one day, it had been a lot to take in. In the back of his mind, he had to think of the friendly pegasus who was most likely waiting in the stables for Nico and Percy to properly welcome him here. Yet there was someone more urgent he had to talk to. Closing his eyes tightly, he started to chant in his mind. Mamma.

Persephone appeared in a gush of wind that transported well-smelling flower-petals. She was looking around concerned, brushing her long, soft-brown hair behind her ear just as she spotted him and looked him up and down. She approached him fast and grasped him by the upper arms, holding him on arm's length to look at him closely. "Percy, are you alright? Did something
"I—I'm fine", answered Percy a bit startled by her concern, subconsciously rubbing at the little scratch on his cheek that he had gotten during today's battle against the red bull. "Really. No harm done. Just... a silly monster that attacked us. But I'm fine, mamma."

"Oh. Good, good", nodded Persephone, hands coming to rest on his cheeks. "Then why am I here?"

She smiled at him and pulled him into a hug, happy to see her son after more than a month. Percy also had to smile as he laid his arms around her and returned the hug. She always smelt like a dozen pretty flowers and fresh grass and she was warm like a spring day.

"I... met my mother. My birth mother, I mean", whispered Percy into Persephone's shoulder. "She... told me she loves me. She asked me... asked me to move in with her and her new husband, because she's doing better now and we could be a happy family now."

Persephone's grip on Percy tightened unconsciously, as though she never want to let go of him again, clinging tightly onto him. "O—Oh... That... I am... happy for you, my boy. I remember the nights you... cried for her. Did you summon me... to tell me that, Percy?"

"I told her I can't", added Percy, biting his lower lip.

"Why not?", asked Persephone a bit confused, reluctantly pushing Percy off enough to look at him.

"I can't, because I want to go back home when camp is over, because even though she's my mom, you're my mamma", replied Percy, looking at Persephone with those honest, kind and loving eyes of his. "I guess... I guess that's why I summoned you, mamma. Because I love my mom, she's the one who loved me and changed my diapers and taught me to walk and talk and love. But I also love you, because you're the one who took me in and loved me like your own and taught me so much more. I just... wanted to tell you that I love you, mamma."

Persephone stared at him with wide, surprised eyes. She blinked, blinking the tears away, as she grabbed Percy again and pulled him into an even tighter hug. How could this boy be so sweet?

"I love you too, my boy", whispered Persephone, kissing the top of Percy's head.

After a moment of holding each other, they sat down on the rock that Percy had rested upon earlier. Both stared up into the sky, at the full, beautiful moon, with their shoulders bumping.

"Now, aside from being utterly adorable and the best son ever, how have you been?", asked Persephone with a grin, laying one arm around her boy. "How are things with... Ni—ico?"

"Don't say his name like that!", groaned Percy embarrassed, blushing a bit. "A—And things are good. We were actually on a date when we ran into my mom. Our third date, that is. And, uh, I... really like spending time with him. Even if it's just sparring, or sitting together during lunch, or being on a date, or falling asleep in his arms. A—And today, he said... he said he loved me."

"Don't say his name like that", smiled Persephone's lips slowly turned into a stunned expression. "He did? Wow. My little heartbreaker, I did not think you'd only need a summer's time to make him fall for you."

"D—Don't say it like that!", complained Percy and hid his face. "I didn't do anything, I swear! I have no idea where it came from! I mean, when he first asked me out, he made it clear that he thought to give me a chance and see where things were going and this was only the third date and suddenly, he says all those embarrassing things to me! ...B—But it was kinda sweet. I just... I
didn't know what to say. So I kinda... I kinda dodged it... And now I feel like a jerk..."

"Why did you dodge it?", asked Persephone, tilting her head. "You don't return his feelings?"

Percy heaved a sigh and turned to look at the stream. "Ever since this quest started, my whole life has been turned upside-down, mamma. It was fine in the underworld, where I had all of you guys and knew how things worked. But here? Everything is new and different and complicated. They use all those weird words and phrases that I don't understand, they do things that I don't understand. Everything is just... not how I expected it to be and now I'm... not sure anymore, if... love is what I expected it to be. I mean, if what I feel for him really is... good enough? It's just... When I came here, I expected to meet a Disney prince, I expected there to be a spark and for us to instantly fall in love and share our first kiss. But he already kissed others. And... And did... m— more with them than just kissing. I know, I asked around. I always thought that the first love is the true love, but now I see that... things are different and now I don't know what I am to him or what he is to me. Or... Or what he expects of me. I do. I do love him. But to me, those words hold a different meaning than to him. To me, they mean *everything*. I mean a Disney love, the first love that shares their first kiss and first hardships and stay together forever. But he already... shared those things with others. He means... something different when he says 'I love you' so I don't... I wanted to say it, but at the same time, I felt as though... saying it would leave me... vulnerable. Does... that makes sense?"

He turned pleading eyes on Persephone, silently begging her to explain his own feelings to her. She looked at him contemplatively and brushed his hair out of his face tenderly.

"I suppose it does", reckoned the goddess after a moment. "Nearly everything you believed to be true and fact turned out to be not that written in stone after all. You met many new people, made many new experiences and now you also... met your mother again. A lot happened in those past weeks and it's not a weakness to admit that you've overwhelmed by it. I understand that you may need more time to asset the situation and to see where you and Nico truly stand before you say such heavy words. But have you thought about talking to *him* about this? Because I think maybe you should. You say you're confused as to where he really stands. The only one who can tell you that, however, is Nico himself." She stood and smoothed her dress before smiling at him. "I'm very proud of you, my boy. You grew over this summer. I think those demigod friends you made here, they did you some good. Enjoy the rest of summer and follow your heart, Percy."

She leaned down to kiss his forehead before she dissolved into a whirlwind of blossoms. Percy stared at the spot she had been in with troubled eyes. She was probably right. He would have to talk to Nico in person about this, otherwise he'd only cause both of them pain. Now he just needed to figure out *how* to approach that topic. Heaving a sigh, he decided to go to bed for now.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is actually twice as long as the usual chaps, because I felt that Percy's reunion with Sally deserved more attention.
Chapter 21: Percy Jackson, Private Investigator

It took Percy a day to gather his courage and approach Nico. Things between them had been kind of awkward after they had returned from their date yesterday and Nico looked honestly relieved when Percy approached him after they had successfully won Capture the Flag. Reyna, who had just high-fived Nico, gave the son of Hades a knowing look before retreating into the other direction, pulling Lou and Cecil with her so Nico and Percy could have some privacy. Percy ducked his head, unsure how to start this conversation, helmet tugged under one arm.

"Can we... talk? Somewhere a bit more... uh... private?", requested Percy, looking kind of nervous.

"Of course", agreed Nico hastily, eyebrows knitted in concern.

Was this it? Was Percy going to break up with him? He should have known that dropping the l-word that early on was ridiculously dumb. Dumb, dumb Nico. They had only known each other for a few, short weeks, had only been on three dates. It wasn't his fault that he weirdly enough felt as though he had found his other half, like he was finally complete. But he should have probably kept it to himself. Now he had freaked Percy out and Percy would flee and Nico would be – kissing Percy passionately in the middle of the woods. Okay. Blinking slowly, he looked down at the son of Poseidon attached to his lips. Percy's fingers were curled into the collar of Nico's camp-shirt, holding onto it nearly violently so. Both of them relaxed against each other. They hadn't really come far from the side of the game, Nico could still hear the distant chatter of the other campers.

"Uh, okay, not the conversation I had expected", whispered Nico surprised.

"Sorry. I just, uh, I'm sorry I acted so weird since yesterday and I kinda missed... you", replied Percy softly, licking his lips. "I guess I kinda... needed this right now. Okay. Now I feel... braver. I wanted to talk to you about yesterday. About... uh... what you... said. And what I didn't say."

"Right, yeah", nodded Nico, shifting awkwardly. "It's okay. I mean, I said it rather early into our relationship and I don't expect you to say it back, it's okay if you're not in the same place as I am."

"That's... the thing", interrupted Percy with a half-shrug. "I'm not sure if we're in the same place. I do. I... love you. But I'm unsure if those words mean the same to you as they do to me."

"What... does that mean?", asked Nico a bit confused, tilting his head like a puppy.

"I'm aware that the things papà taught me, the fairy tale dreams I spun in my head when all I knew was the underworld, they're unrealistic, but they're how I feel. I still firmly believe that love is true and lasts forever, as it does for mamma and papà", explained Percy, wringing his hands nervously. "So when I say I love you, I mean I want to spend eternity with you. But you... you had boyfriends before. I shared my first kiss with you, but I know it wasn't even the tenth for you. You shared so much already with others, probably also those... words... It's why I couldn't say it back yesterday, because I don't feel like you mean the same thing as I do. But mamma said that the only one who can tell me if that's the case, well, that's you. So I want to talk to you. About this. About us."
At first, Nico was speechless, because he hadn't expected to hear those words at all just yet, much less with so much meaning loaded upon them. "You... heard stuff... about me. Huh."

"I'm not an idiot, Nico", huffed Percy, looking a bit offended. "I caught on with the difference in moral between me and... this camp. This world, I guess. So I asked Alabaster about those past relationships of yours. I thought, I still think, that sex is something... special. Very special. And I don't know what to think about you having already shared it with someone else."

An uncharacteristic blush painted Nico's cheeks as he averted his eyes and rubbed the back of his neck. "I've never... said that. To anyone. I mean, aside from Bia, but that doesn't count, because it's a different kind of love, right? I just... I liked them. We started dating. I hoped it'd... become more. It never did. I guess that's kind of why my relationships ended. Aside from Will. Will was just to make Jake jealous, I swear. We never even did more than holding hands, because Will just wanted Jake to man up and confess. So, that... totally doesn't count like at all, right?"

"But that's another thing", argued Percy with a frown. "I don't understand how you can pretend to be someone's sweetheart just like that. It's just... It's like all those things mean... less to you than they do to me. I'm sorry, I don't mean to sound arrogant, but I feel like I do right now, but that's not how I mean it. I just... That's just how it feels to me. Like I take things more serious than you."

Nico looked up to glare at Percy a bit, though that lost its effect due to the now even darker blush. "I'm not a whore, okay. I'm fourteen. I'm... I never had sex, okay? Me and Mitch, we only... we only jerked each other off, that was all there was. Al talks shit, but... it didn't exactly hurt my reputation to think I fucked Mitch six ways to Sunday. Everyone was so in awe with me when the rumors started, so I just... I just ran with it. Nico di Angelo, hero of Camp Half-Blood, stud." Nico took a shaky breath, feeling awkward and embarrassed. "I may not value those things as highly as you do, but they're still important to me. I don't just jump into bed with a guy I like. I may have started having sex with Mitch if I had fallen in love with him, because I do think that sex, especially the first time, should be shared with someone you love. So I've had boyfriends, so I kissed others and yeah, I jerked someone off before, but... When I say I love you, I mean it. I love you. It's the first time I said it like that. And if... if we have sex, it'd be... the first time for both of us too, okay?"

"...Oh", mumbled Percy, face beet-red as he stared wide-eyed up at Nico. "That... uh... okay."

"But please don't tell anyone", requested Nico and made a face. "I'd be a joke."

That made Percy laugh softly. "Aw, my poor... stud. Wouldn't want your reputation to suffer."

Percy offered his boyfriend a cheeky grin before pulling him down to kiss his cheek. This was somehow not what he had expected, yet it was a huge relief. It wasn't even just that Percy wanted Nico's first time for himself, it was more a question of age. It had worried him, to think that Nico already felt mentally prepared to have sex. Partially also because it would have somehow pressured Percy subconsciously to have sex soon too. Now, however, he felt far more at ease in total.

"We're good, right?", asked Nico, stealing a kiss. "I'll go and hit the showers. See you at dinner?"

Percy nodded and waved his boyfriend off. He decided to stay back a little longer, because seeing Nico change and shower had started to have a certain, slightly worrisome effect on Percy. What he felt for Nico was more than the pure love he had always dreamed of. Way more. Blushing a bit to himself, Percy sat down on a fallen tree trunk and decided to watch the stream for a little while.

"Ah. Percy! Good you're here!", called Frank out from behind him, approaching slowly.
"Nico left a couple minutes ago to shower", informed Percy, turning toward Frank.

"Uh, thanks for the info", grunted Frank, blinking. "Not what I came here for..."

"I don't know where Leo is. Haven't seen him since I stole the flag from him earlier", said Percy.

"Also not what I came here for, but... close enough", muttered Frank and approached Percy. "I actually kinda... I wanted to talk to you. About Leo, yeah. But with you."

"...Okay", nodded Percy slowly and scooted over to make room for Frank. "What is it?"

"I just... I think... Something about Leo is off", said Frank, shifting a bit on the trunk. "I mean, he... I think he's avoiding me. I felt as though we were getting pretty close, but then he started pushing me away. And that kind of... confuses me, I guess. So, I wanted to ask you about it."

Percy nodded shortly, now shifting a bit himself. "He likes you. A lot. It's not your fault, Frank, but... Leo has someone else. A... girlfriend. I guess he's just trying not to hurt you."

"...Girlfriend?", echoed Frank, looking like a devastated little puppy.

Percy knew it wasn't his to share, but Frank deserved a chance to sever things. He would be chasing after Leo and in the end, both of them would get hurt. Now they'd have a chance to become friends. Yet over the course of the evening, one nagging thought just didn't let go of Percy. His little brother was keeping a secret, one that was clearly weighting him down. Maybe Percy hadn't quite caught on with it before, perhaps because he didn't want to see Leo in distress or because he had been too preoccupied with his own troubles and the relationship with Nico, but Frank was right. Something about Leo was definitely off. Percy kept watching his brother during dinner and later on when they sat together at the bonfire. Aside from obviously dodging Frank, Leo was behaving relatively normal (for Leo, anyway), but knowing Leo better than anyone else, Percy picked up with the little things now that he watching closely. And even though Leo was joking around with his new half-siblings and nearly got himself killed when he tried to convince Clarisse to dance, there seemed something heavy to weight him down. Sure, Percy had promised Leo not to pry, but now that he knew that this secret was not healthy for his brother, surely it was Percy's brotherly duty to make sure it wasn't anything dangerous, right? And technically, Percy was keeping his promise since he wasn't going to bug Leo further. He was going to investigate, all on his own. He wouldn't call it spying, or snooping. He liked investigating better. The idea settled in his mind at dinner and it manifested more and more the further the day went on. By the time everybody in Cabin Three was getting ready for bed, curling together under the sheets, Percy was determined and had a plan.

"You're scheming", accused Nico softly as they laid face to face in their bed.


"For one? You are a ridiculously bad liar", snorted Nico and raised one eyebrow as he reached out to brush Percy's hair out of his face, caressing his cheek tenderly. "That aside, I've been... acquainted with the Hermes cabin for over a year now. I know scheming when I see it."

Percy ducked his head, looking at Nico shyly. "I don't... want to get you involved, Nico. I don't know what all of this is leading up to. But I promise I'll tell you if it's dangerous, okay?"

Nico's hand slipped around Percy's neck to pull him into a kiss. "You're so cute. It's okay, you're entitled to your own scheming too, just... be careful, mio gattino? Buona notte."

Percy blushed and nodded shortly, heart fluttering a bit. He was really sure that Nico was his one true love, it was as though Nico knew exactly what to say and what to do. Smiling softly to
himself, Percy watched how Nico drifted off to sleep. Only when he was certain that even the whispering witches had fallen asleep instead of planning their next hex did Percy crawl out of bed. Tip-toeing to the shelves with their clothes, Percy grabbed a pair of jeans and Nico's black hoodie which he had borrowed without the intend to ever return it because it smelt like Nico and it was slightly bigger so it was really comfortable. Getting dressed, he made his way over to the woods. Once out of hearing range from camp, Percy whistled that one tune that made everyone shudder.

"Weeeow?", whined Zerberus confused, tilting one of his heads while another licked Percy's face.

"Hey, my boy", whispered Percy with a fond smile, patting the three heads. "Listen, you need to do me a favor. You need to take me to the place you take Leo, okay? Can you do that?"

It figured. Wherever Leo was hiding that mysterious girlfriend of his, there was only one way to get there for the Latino. The shadow traveling three-headed guard dog of the underworld. Zerberus tilted his left head, while his right head nodded in agreement and the middle head grasped Percy by the hood to carry him off. Percy yelped in surprise as they suddenly shadow-traveled.

Hazel was sitting at her vanity, brushing her hair. Today had been exhausting. Well, if she was being honest, the past weeks had been rather exhausting. Hazel was aware that some great prophecy had been received by their augur even before she had been brought to camp by Leo. And according to Octavian, that prophecy concerned a child of one of the Big Three – Jason or Hazel. Now over the past months already, things have become rather dire. The demigods were pretty sure that the prophecy would soon be fulfilled. The more time passed, the more antsy they grew. And the antsier the campers grew, the longer the senate meetings became. Not that they ever had a real solution.

"Haze!", yelped Jason as he stumbled into her bedroom.

Hazel, only wearing her pink nightgown, yelped and pulled her bathrobe off its hook, hiding herself and staring at the blonde completely scandalized. "Jason Grace! How dare you barge into a lady's room without knocking at such an hour! The only reason I agreed to move in with a boy like this was that you promised to behave civilized! By your praetor's honor!"

The son of Jupiter blushed bright-pink and covered his eyes. "S—Sorry. Wait, I didn't even see anything. You're wearing a dress, it's not even like there's anything to see! And anyway, that's not even close to why I'm here! Urgh. Anyway, Leila said she saw Zerberus sniffing around!"

"Oh!", exclaimed Hazel and jumped over to her closet. "Oh, that's amazing! Leo said he didn't know if he'd have time to come over again before summer ends!" Just as she was about to shed her bathrobes, she turned to Jason. "Thanks for telling me, but now's the time to leave."

"Right. Yeah. Leaving now", agreed Jason beet-red and hastily fled the room again.

Hazel got into her nicest shirt and her dark jeans so fast, she nearly got dizzy. She was half way out the room before she remembered to check her hair again and see if she was presentable. It was silly, she knew that, because Leo had seen her when she was a ghost, but it still meant a lot to her to look her best for her excitable lion cub, especially considering how cutely Leo would blush. When she stumbled out of the praetors house, her friends Dakota and Leila were already waiting for her, grinning amused. Leila was wonderful, it was so nice to have a girl to get along with.

"Zerberus was seen, but it did not look like your little ambassador was with him", said Dakota.
He emptied his kool-aid, staring at Hazel skeptically while Leila just rolled her eyes and led the
way. Hazel was mildly aware of Jason trailing after them. It seemed that after Jason had informed
her, Dakota had told him about Zerberus coming with someone not Leo. As of now, Hazel didn't
believe that. Leo was keeping them a good secret, he knew how important that was. Though as
the four of them walked toward the field where Zerberus laid spread out, Hazel saw that Dakota
was right. The figure standing next to Zerberus was certainly not Leo, the boy was taller and paler
and missing the adorable curls. The four slowed down until they stood in front of the stranger.

"Who... are you?", asked Hazel cautiously, straightening her back in a proud manner.

The boy blinked with those large, admittedly beautiful green eyes. "Not sure what the safe answer
is, to be honest. You guys seem a bit... aggressive. Or do you greet everyone with golden
swords?"

Jason grunted, not lowering his sword. "Well, considering that the only one who usually uses that
dog to visit us is my best friend, I am more than interested who you are and what you did to Leo."

"...Best friend?", echoed the stranger, looking a bit stunned. "I'm... his brother."

Percy stared at the blonde boy in surprise, looking him up and down. So Leo didn't just hide a
girlfriend here? He had a best friend, maybe even a whole life? What was going on here? There
was something upsetting about the four in front of him. The blonde had a steely-golden aura to
himself, something that commanded authority – something very Zeus. Like Thalia, but more
serious. The boy next to him gave off a deep purple vibe like grapes that Percy knew from Castor
and Pollux. Dionysus, but again, there was something different, more serious and... like a faulty
buzzing. Same went for the girl next to him – a beautiful lush and calm dark-green, clearly
Demeter, like Katie, but faulty, off. He recognized that faulty buzzing, it was what always gave
Percy a slight headache when he spend time with Reyna and Frank, but he had always assumed
that was from their war-blood. Then again, Clarisse didn't give him that kind of headache (she
gave him an entirely different kind of headache most of the time). The strangest however was the
chocolate-skinned girl with the golden eyes that stood in front of the other trio. Her aura too was
one Percy recognized, but it was also buzzing oddly. Then again, her aura shouldn't even exist,
because it was the pitch-black aura of Hades. Bianca and Nico were the only children of Hades.
And in the past hundred years, Bianca was the only daughter of Hades. Aside from another one, a
name from his history classes.

"Hazel Levesque", whispered Percy as he remembered the name.

Hazel's eyes widened and she looked around a bit panicked. If this was truly Leo's brother, then
what was he doing here? And the look in his eyes, as though he had seen a ghost – as though he
knew she was supposed to be dead. She gulped and turned around to smile at the others.

"It's fine. You should probably return to camp, before we draw attention", suggested Hazel.

Jason frowned concerned and grasped her upper arm, looking her into the eyes to get confirmation
if she would truly be fine. Hazel watched Jason, Dakota and Leila leave again before turning back
toward Leo's brother. Sure, she knew Leo and his brothers weren't related, but somehow, she had
always pictured his brothers to at least share his elvish features or something.

"H—How are you alive?", whispered Percy confused. "And why is your aura off? What is going
on here? How did Leo end up dating a daughter of Hades and being best friends with a son of
Zeus? And what are you doing here? I thought all demigods live at Camp Half-Blood! I don't
understand!"

"I'm... dead", offered Hazel troubled, shifting some. "Leo brought me back, but he wasn't
supposed to, but father, well, he couldn't bring himself to... undo it. And this is the reason why we're keeping it a secret, because... I'm not like you and Leo. I'm Roman. I'm a daughter of Pluto, not Hades. But Romans and Greeks aren't supposed to know about each other, so Leo and I, we had to promise that we would never tell anyone. No one at my Roman camp knows that Leo is Greek and Leo swore not to tell you Greeks that we exist. I can't believe he broke his promise!

Now it was Percy's turn to shift. "He didn't break it. I... well, I asked Zerberus to take me to wherever he is taking Leo, because I'm worried about my brother. This secret has been hard on him and I wanted to make sure it's nothing dangerous, because I have to protect my baby brother. And, well, I guess I wanted to know what kind of girl got my brother's heart. I would have never thought... a daughter of Hades. Pluto. Roman. Romans are... What are Romans?"

Hazel smiled a little, recognizing that eager curiosity from Leo, glad to see some Leo in him. "Would you like to come inside for a hot chocolate so we could... talk? I'd like to hear more about Leo's brother. You must be... Percy, right? Because Tyson is younger than you two. And a cyclops."

"...So, Leo talks about us?", asked Percy, a bit proud, wiggling his nose. "Yeah, I'm Percy."

"He talks about you all the time", laughed Hazel and shook her head. "It's all he did when we first met in the underworld. He... loves you very much. And I know that if he could have, he would have loved to introduce you to me and Jason, to come clear with everything, show you around."

"I can't believe he managed to keep it for me for... h—how long?", asked Percy, following Hazel. Hazel smiled as she led the way to the praetors house. "We've known each other for three years now. Though we've only been dating for a few months, really. He's... very amazing. So bright and cheerful and he never failed to make me laugh. He changed my life. Not just by bringing me back."

"Yeah, that sounds like Leo", agreed Percy fondly as they entered the house. "So... What are Romans? I mean, you have the same aura as Nico and Bianca, so papà is your father, but there is something off about it. That... off... what does it... mean?"

Hazel frowned confused. "I'm sorry, I don't know if I can really help you there. I'm not familiar with auras, or souls. My... powers root in the wealth and riches aspect of father's realm. But if I'd have to make a guess, I'd say it means that we're from a different aspect of the gods than you are. If you were Roman, the Greeks would probably have this off feeling for you. Because Romans and Greeks are two sides of the same, but we were never meant to get along."

"That sounds... awful", declared Percy with an upset frown. "But then you and Leo are together."

"I suppose that maybe, there's always an exception to the rule. Or perhaps... all that hatred had just been too infused into them and we, who we didn't know we were supposed to hate each other, simply didn't", offered Hazel thoughtful. "Now, would you like a hot chocolate?"

"Yes, please. With cinnamon?", asked Percy, eyes large and begging.

Hazel grinned amused, feeling very much reminded of her Leo. Percy seemed like a nice guy, really. And he must care a great deal for Leo, if he had come to make sure Leo wasn't endangering himself. Not that Hazel could blame him for the curiosity. She herself had been itching to meet Percy, Tyson, Nico and all those Leo had told her about for a while now. It was time for change.
Peeercy knows! Now, next chapter will feature a confrontation between Leo and Percy concerning Percy's part-time investigations. Also, the end of summer is rolling around. Which means there will be departure. And the return of my favorite underworld gods!

Next update, according my schedule of updating/posting on Wednesdays and Saturdays, the next update will be "A to Z with the di Angelos" on Saturday!
"Yo, Nico!", called Leo out as he jogged over to the Italian.

Nico frowned a bit as he watched the fire-bender wearily. He motioned for Annabeth to pause, which made the blonde huff annoyed. She did not appreciate being interrupted during training.

"Can I... do something for you?", inquired Nico a bit confused.

"Well, the end of summer is coming up very fast and I figured, knowing my big brother, that he hasn't told you that with the end of summer, his birthday is coming around too", chimed Leo with a broad grin. "I figured you could use a heads-up to get your fiance a birthday-present."

Annabeth chuckled softly as she observed how Nico's skeptical look turned into one of utter shock and panic. Now, that was going to be a lot of fun to watch. Nico searching for a present was already entertaining enough when it was for Bianca's birthday, but the first ever present for his oh-so beloved Percy? Annabeth predicted at least three panic-attacks. Leo grinned as he winked at her knowingly before turning around again. It was already a done deal that Leo and Percy would be leaving camp again the day before Percy's birthday, so they'd be on time for the full underworldly birthday-package. Though this year's birthday-dinner would feature a couple more guests; Leo already talked to Persephone, planning everything with her. This year, Poseidon and Triton would come too. As well as the di Angelos, of course. Leo was really looking forward to it. Now all Leo had to do was find the perfect present for his big brother. And seeing as he was a little lost himself this year, he was going to consult the cleverest person he knew. His wonderful girlfriend.

Percy was humming to himself as he folded his clothes. Tonight, he and Leo would return back to the underworld. Tomorrow would be Percy's birthday and he was looking forward to celebrating it with his family at home. He couldn't wait for mamma's cooking and to see Tyson again.

He had already talked to Nico about things and sadly enough, the Italian had declined his offer to go to the underworld with them. Camp was Nico's home and someone had to watch over Cabin Three. Percy understood, it reminded him of the conversation he has had with Sally Jackson – that even though she was his mother, he couldn't leave the family he had found for himself. So the couple had talked to Chiron, cleared that Nico would be stand-in cabin-head while Percy was gone. And in a way, it would probably be for the best if Nico and Percy got some time apart to think things through on their own. Being together 24/7 was a little straining for their new relationship.

When Percy and Leo met outside in the woods, many of the campers had come to send them off. Leo was being swamped by his half-siblings while Percy was being handed around between his own cabin and the Hermes Cabin. There was a lot of hugging and ruffling his hair and kissing his cheeks from some of the girls, like Aurora and Lily. The last one to send him off was Nico, just as Annabeth and Luke released Percy again. The couple stared into each other's eyes for a long moment before Percy pulled Nico down into a deep kiss. Far deeper than what they had before.
"I'll miss you", whispered Percy softly. "You're... gonna come visit, at least some time, right?"

"I guess it would be nice to get to know my family better", agreed Nico thoughtful. "And see my wonderful fiance, of course. Besides, there are IMs, right? We'll talk, a lot. Promise."

Percy smiled and nodded, stealing one more kiss before climbing onto Zerberus' back. Leo followed tail and both of them waved at their friends before leaving through the shadows. It was like stumbling from one hug into the next one. As soon as the two demigods were off Zerberus, they were pulled into tight hugs. Hades had his arms tightly around Percy, while Tyson was cuddling Leo like a little teddy bear, before they switched. Makaria and Melinoe got in too.

"Aw, my two itty-bitty little brothers are back", cooed Makaria, ruffling both their hair.

"I missed you so much, brothers!", exclaimed Tyson, grabbing the both of them and whirling them around wildly. "You have to tell me everything about the demigods and camp!"

Percy laughed as they were put down again. His eyes found Hades' and he blushed a little at the pride sparkling in his papà's eyes. It was a good feeling to know he had made the god proud.

"Now, now. Why don't you let them get settled first, Tyson?", suggested Hades amused.

"And your fiance!", continued Tyson, too hyped to acknowledge Hades. "You said you met him! And that he's coming to your birthday dinner tomorrow! I wanna hear everything about him!"

"Why don't we help Leo and Percy get settled and they can tell us?", suggested Melinoe annoyed.

With that, the two goddesses, the two demigods and the cyclops headed upstairs to put the boys' things away. Hades watched them go, an amused expression on his face. It seemed camp had been good for his boys. And he was more than looking forward to having Nico around tomorrow. It had been a while since he had last spoken to Nico. Somehow, it seemed so much harder to establish a relationship with that boy than it was with Percy, Leo or Tyson. Persephone claimed it was because those three were living with them and Hades had no way to run or hide from the children and their affectionate ways, while he had been able to avoid just that part of Bianca's and Nico's lives. In a way it was guilt, for what had happened to Maria, for the fact that the di Angelos had to spend so much time locked away in a hotel. Not that Hades would ever admit to guilt.

Something was wrong. Percy may not have noticed at first, because he was so distracted by their family constantly asking questions and wanting to hear every single detail. But the more time they spend retelling the story of the Sea of Monsters and the rest of summer, the more Percy realized that Leo was avoiding him. When Percy would supply something to the story and ask Leo to confirm, somehow the Latino seemed to not even notice Percy speaking. By the end of the night, after dinner, Percy knew he was right. Leo had barely even looked at him.

Percy had time to mull that over when he sat with his papà in Hades' study after dinner. The king wanted to hear from Percy in person about what he thought of Nico. It was nice sitting next to Hades on the couch, with Hades occasionally patting his hair like he was a well-behaved kitten.

"So, you and Nico came to the conclusion that you want this engagement then?", asked Hades.

"Uhu", nodded Percy, blush bright on his cheeks. "Nico is my Prince Charming. I wanna keep him. I wanna keep him and I wanna be his Prince Charming. I want to return to camp next summer, so I can... train. I know you guys trained me well here, but... it's different. Getting instructions from gods and thinking of most things as theoretically, it's so different from actually sparring with other demigods, powerful demigods at that. Things are more... hands-on. It's good."
"Good. Good, as long as you like it", nodded Hades, not looking pleased at all.

Percy laughed, startling Hades. "Mamma is right. You're a really bad liar, papà. You'd just want for all of us to stay in the underworld permanently. Me, Leo, Ty, Nico, Bianca..."

Hades ducked his head, decidedly not blushing. "Shut up, you brat. Where did your manners go?"

"I dunno. Must have lost them in the Sea of Monsters", chimed Percy mischievously.

All Hades did was smile at him, even though it was only a small smile, it was quite clearly a very loving one. Having Percy back in the underworld reminded Hades of the light the boy had brought. Tomorrow, Persephone would return too and then Hades’ family would be complete again. Nearly. Well, tomorrow it would actually be complete, because Bianca and Nico would be there too. Now all Hades had to do was figure out how to talk to them. How to establish a relationship with them. He had already asked Hecate and Morpheus for advise there, but they had proved to be pretty useless. Well, maybe Percy could help him. He seemed to get along with the siblings...

"Leo, are you... alright?", asked Percy softly as he knocked on Leo's door and entered.

"You know, you could wait until the other person says 'come in'. It's called privacy and some people respect it", grunted Leo from where he laid on his bed and stared at the ceiling.

"O~okay", nodded Percy slowly, raising one eyebrow. "So, not alright then."

"Oh, I'm fine. I'm perfectly fine. Hazel is perfectly fine too, if you were wondering. But I'm sure you're going to ask her yourself the next time you visit her, right?", huffed Leo angrily.

"Oh. Uhm...", mumbled Percy awkwardly and shifted some.

"Yeah, 'uhn'", snorted Leo and bolted up, glaring openly at Percy. "You know, when I woke up this morning, I was wondering what kind of gift I should give you. So I went to ask Hazel for help, because she's amazing. But then she suggested something because she thought it'd 'compliment Percy's eyes'. So, I was wondering how she knew what your eyes looks like. Turns out you went and visited her. Even though you promised me that you'd leave it alone. That you understood that this was mine. The one thing that is mine." Leo was gripping the foot-end of the bed so tight, his knuckles were white and smoke started to rise from his skin. "I asked you to trust me that my secret was safe, that Hazel is good. And you agreed. You said you trusted me. Apparently, you don't, since you had to go and check for yourself if it's really safe. Because you don't trust me. Well, apparently I can't trust you either, since you made a promise. A promise that made me entrust something to you that I wasn't allowed to tell. I trusted you and you, you broke that trust!"

"Leo...", started Percy softly, watching concerned how the smoke seemed to thicken. "I know you're mad and... you have every right to be mad. But... I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't... I didn't mean to break your trust, Leo. Please calm down. I'm really sorry, I was just so... curious and worried."

"And that's it!", snorted Leo and shook his head. "You don't need to worry about me. You may not see it, but I'm actually not useless, you know? I can watch out for myself!"

"I know that!", exclaimed Percy hastily, lifting his hands in surrender. "I just... I mean, we're brothers, we should watch out for each other! I was just trying to watch out for you!"
"By breaking your promise? By going behind my back? By acting like I'm an incapable little child, who can't even tell when something is dangerous, or what?", snorted Leo, glaring at Percy. "I don't know, Percy. Maybe... Maybe we aren't brothers. You... You just can't let me have anything for myself, you can't accept that I'm able to access a situation and tell if I'm in danger, you apparently don't trust my judgment and I now know that I can't trust you. Maybe... Maybe it's time to evaluate if we're actually brothers, or if it'd be better that we go our separate ways now."

Something in Percy's chest tightened painfully. "Leo, you don't mean that!"

"But I do, Percy", muttered Leo with an upset frown. "I need some time to think things over."

A heartbroken look was etched onto Percy's face as he watched his brother leave the room.

"Percy?"

The sulking son of Poseidon looked up to see his sister entering. Not Melinoe, she didn't really have time for their 'childish dramatics'. Makaria had always gotten along better with the boys, because she was the more mischievous one of the sisters. Walking over to the bed, Makaria sat down next to him. He offered her the sad kitten eyes that always worked on his family. She instantly cooed and pulled him over so his head was resting in her lap and she could pat his hair.

"What's wrong, Percy?", asked Makaria softly. "You know I'm not as good at this as mom, but... Something is definitely wrong and I haven't seen Leo since you two arrived here yesterday."

"I... don't think Leo is going to stay", admitted Percy, burying his face in her lap and clawing at her toga desperately. "We had a fight and he said he doesn't know if he still wants to be my brother and then he just left. I dunno if he'll come back at all and I dunno where he went, but he left..."

"It's Leo", snorted Makaria and rolled her eyes. "You two are like inseparable. Of course he'll come back. What did you fight about anyway? You two never fight, not even when you break one of his precious inventions. He only gets starry-eyed and babbles on about 'improving it'."

"Not this time", whispered Percy and shook his head. "I broke something... more important than an invention. I... I broke a promise. I broke his trust. I don't know if he'll ever forgive me."

"Well then, go and fix it", offered Makaria with a frown.

"I wouldn't know how. I don't know if he'd even be willing", sighed Percy depressed.

"Shut up", huffed Makaria and hit his shoulder. "Dark and gloomy doesn't fit you at all. Leave that up to Melinoe. Come on, you two have to make up again." The goddess of death paused for a moment, giving him a concerned glance. "You... need to make up with him again."

"Uh?", grunted Percy, confused by her seriousness.

There was another pause as Makaria thought what to say. "There is... a prophecy."

"Yeah. I know the Great Prophecy", interrupted Percy, frowning a little.

"Not that prophecy. Another one. You know, there had been hundreds of prophecies. Some more important than others. Some resolved while others are still... up for interpretation", answered Makaria slowly. "One of the biggest is the so-called Great Prophecy, but there are others. Others
that are great, or could be great. Many prophecies include lines about the end of the world and such. It's just that, right now with how many children of dad and his brothers are around, the one you call the Great Prophecy seems to be the most likely one. Anyway, that's beside the point, so there are other prophecies about the end of the world and one of them has a line – *To Fire or Storm the World will Fall.*" Makaria took a slow, soft breath. "Ever since you and Leo came into our lives, this particular prophecy seems to weight a lot to the underworld. You are the son of Poseidon, the god of storms. Leo is the son of Hephaestus and one of the very few who can control fire."

"So... our family thinks that Leo or I will cause the apocalypse?", asked Percy confused.

"We don't know. We don't know anything. This prophecy is old, very old. It has been written down in the Sibylline Scrolls. There have been many demigods speculated to be it", replied Makaria lightly. "Heck, we can't even tell if what is happening right now is really related to that 'Great Prophecy', since the only line that can be related to right now is that we have a couple kids of the Big Three running around. No endless sleep for the world, no cursed blade, Olympus hasn't fallen yet. So... Don't interpret too much into what I just said. I just... Everyone just wants you two to stand on the same side. It's better that way. Both, in case of prophecy, and in general. You're both adorable and you love each other. It'd break both your hearts to lose each other."

Percy nodded numbly and averted his eyes. "I guess... I hope so..."

"Well, I know", chimed Makaria and ruffled his hair. "Just give him some time to cool down. I don't know what exactly happened between you, but I know your love is stronger than a quarrel."

Hazel was utterly delighted. Yesterday evening, Leo had arrived at Camp Jupiter and asked if he could stay for an indefinite time. Seeing as he, as the ambassador of Pluto, was a member of Camp Jupiter, there was absolutely no problem with that. And when Hazel had brought Leo home with her, the blonde hadn't stopped grinning for an house. Jason and Leo were basically inseparable, so the son of Jupiter was more than happy to know Leo would stay at least a couple of days.

"And you're sure you're fine if we have our poker night here?", asked Jason worried.

He was in the middle of setting the living room table for a poker game, while Hazel was in the kitchen preparing fresh lemonade and tea. They had been planning this night for a while now. Celebrating the end of summer with their friends, enjoying the last warm day. But seeing as Leo was crashing at their place and thus sleeping on the couch, Jason was concerned that they'd bother the tinkerer. Hazel however had a hunch that her boyfriend would love to join in.

"But Leo could play with you, can't he?", asked Hazel lightly.

"Aren't you going to play?", wanted Leo to know, tilting his head like a confused puppy.

Hazel cooed softly and ruffled his hair. "You're so cute, my little lion. No, there was this new Disney-movie that got released this year, direct-to-video, and Gwen bought it. I'm having a girls night and we're going to watch *Cinderella 3: A Twist in Time.* You can join, if you want."

Leo squinted and wiggled his nose. "Naw. I think I'm good with a game of poker."

"Awesome, man!", exclaimed Jason excitedly and hugged him. "I'm so glad you're gonna stay for more than just a few hours, because that means Hazel won't hog you all the time and I get to spend time with you too! And you can meet the guys properly. It's gonna be great."

There was a knocking on the door and Hazel left the boys on their own so she could open their
friends. Their former praetors and Jason's mentors Nathan McIntosh and Gwen Ryder stood in front of her. Gwen grinned broadly and pulled Hazel into a hug right away. The daughter of Venus had always been like a big sister of sorts, tending to Hazel as she had done to every newbie during her time as praetor. Hazel worked hard to live up to Gwen's legacy. A bit down the street, Hazel could already see their other guests approaching – Mike Kahale, Dakota Elle and Leila Fischer.

"Come on inside", offered Hazel with a smile as the other three were close enough. "Oh, we got a special guest, guys. Leo is going to join your game. Please don't be too hard on him, Nathan."

"Hey, why do you say it like that?!", exclaimed the former praetor, sounding wounded.

"Because you're a crook and a son of Mercury, Nathan", chimed Gwen fondly.

"And you're okay if we invade your home and steal your boyfriend?", asked Mike curiously. "We could postpone it so you can spend the evening with Leo alone."

"You children of Venus are way too sweet", smiled Hazel softly. "No, it's fine. Besides, Leo is going to stay for a few days, so I can enjoy tomorrow with him. Besides, I have plans too, after all."

"I am dying to see that movie!", exclaimed Leila, eyes sparkling. "I mean, seriously. Cindy is my favorite Disney-princess and what I heard about this movie, it sounds actually pretty decent."

"For a third movie and a direct-to-video anyway", muttered Dakota beneath his breath.

"Oh, shut up. You don't have to watch it. You can play your game", huffed Leila with a glare.

"And we will", declared Nathan with a large, wicked grin. "Have fun, girls."

Hazel smiled as she pulled Gwen and Leila upstairs to her room while Nathan, Mike and Dakota went to join Leo and Jason in the living room. She could hear how the boys greeted each other and laughed as they settled down. Somehow, it only made her smile wider. She loved Leo dearly and she was happy that he got along with Jason, but ever since she had moved to New Rome and made her home there, she had wished for Leo to be part of it. To know her friends and New Rome.

/HB/  

"Honey, I'm home. Summer is officially over!" Hades smiled pleased as Persephone materialized in front of him. She instantly hugged him and kissed him. This was exactly what he had needed. She hummed curiously into their kiss as they settled down more comfortably on their bed.

"When our boys returned yesterday, they had a fight. Leo... left, he said he will be staying in New Rome with Hazel for a while. He promised to call", explained Hades after a few moments.

"Oh dear", sighed Persephone. "I can't leave you men alone at all, can I? Very well. Five more minutes of cuddling, before I have to hug Tyson and Percy for the next hour or so. And then I'll check on Leo. Cease the frowning, love. I will take care of this and fix it again."

Chapter End Notes

Well, this chapter kinda ran away from me. It was supposed to cover Percy's birthday
dinner, but then I decided to add a little more drama and conflict because the whole secret-of-Leo-situation couldn't simply be resolved like that and everybody is happy and it also turned out to be a good reason to bring in more Roman stuff... So the NEXT chapter will feature the party in the underworld, Thanatos/Triton will be there, Nico will have the MOST epic birthday present ever - like, seriously, I'm totally proud of what I came up with there - and lots of more!

Next update will be "A to Z with the di Angelos" on Wednesday! :)

Chapter 23: Percy's Parents, Party and Presents

Persephone had spent about an hour cuddling Percy, silently listening to the boy's complaints. She knew how awfully guilty he felt and she saw he understood his mistake, but she also understood why he had done what he had done. Never before in her long life had Persephone met another human with that big a heart, who worried that much about his family, his team. Once Percy had fallen asleep in Persephone’s lap, cuddled up between Zerberus and Tyson, the Spring Goddess left, after tugging her boys in and kissing their foreheads. She reappeared in a wave of blossoms in the garden of the praetors' house in New Rome, startling her half-sister Leila into stumbling backward. The Roman demigoddess was tending to the flowers together with Dakota, the son of Bacchus.

"Life in New Rome sure got more interesting since we got those two praetors", muttered Dakota.

"Well, there is a little ambassador of my husband's up here and I'm here to relay a message to him", stated Proserpina amused, arching one eyebrow. "Where do I find Leo Valdez?"

"M—My guess would be wherever Hazel is", offered Leila after a moment. "Though Hazel went shopping with Gwen, so... not sure if he went along. He's probably inside with Jason?"

"Thank you", hummed Proserpina and nodded before turning toward the city.

The demigods looked after her confused, but right there, the goddess changed her plans. Sure, she could go to talk to Leo and basically repeat this morning's sit-in with Percy but from the other side. Or she'd employ some help. It was easy to find Hazel and Gwen once Proserpina reached the shopping mile of New Rome. The former praetor and the current praetor paused as they noticed the beautiful goddess literally trailing flowers after her. Proserpina smiled as the girls bowed.

"W—What can we do for you, Lady Proserpina?", asked Hazel nervously.

"I'd like to talk to you. About your boyfriend. Oh, that dress is gorgeous! Your father would love it on me!", exclaimed Proserpina and pulled Hazel and Gwen inside. "Come, come. We can talk and shop at the same time. You are in dire need of fashion advise, my dear."

So, going shopping with her stepmother while talking about her secretly Greek boyfriend? That ranked as Hazel's new number one of weird experiences. Gwen seemed to share the sentiment.

"Jason. Could you go and make dinner?", requested Hazel with a sweet smile.

The son of Jupiter heaved a depressed sigh. "Yeah, I was losing anyway..."

He handed the controller over to Hazel, who willingly dumped her shopping bag on the floor and
sat down next to Leo. For a couple rounds, they just raced each other in companionable silence, resting shoulder against shoulder. As much as Leo enjoyed it, it was a little suspicious.

"So, what did you and mamma talk about?", asked Leo softly when he couldn't hold it anymore.

Hazel laughed delighted, kissing his cheek without losing the screen out of sight. "Ah, it's so much fun making you squirm, little lion. Proserpina came by and asked me to talk to you about your brother. Honestly, I had planned on doing that anyway, I just didn't know how to do it, since I know only little about your relationship with Percy. Proserpina helped me with that."

"I love you, Haze, but I don't wanna hear it", sighed Leo with a frown.

"Oh, Leo Valdez, if you think you can avoid the united force of your mother and me, you have another thing coming", huffed Hazel amused. "Listen, and listen well. She told me what your fight with Percy was about and... and I understand. I feel flattered that you don't want to share me – to share New Rome – I understand that you want... something of your own. You always stood in his shadow, you always talked of him like he was one of the gods. And, let's face it, around here, you're the big shot. And you're... you're probably afraid that if Percy starts coming around here, that New Rome will fawn over him like the underworld did, like Camp Half-Blood did as you told me. I understand that fear, I understand the disappointment that he broke your promise and trust."

"So... what's there to talk about?", asked Leo a bit confused, tilting his head like a lost puppy.

"I also understand that you love him more than anything else in the world", continued Hazel, giving Leo a stern look for interrupting her. "You told me how he saved your life, how he brought you into the underworld and introduced you to those who became your family, how he made you part of something. I understand how upset you are right now, rightfully so, but you still love him and you will always love him, because he's your big brother and your biggest hero. And tomorrow is his fourteenth birthday. And regardless of how upset you are with him at the moment, you love him and eventually, you will rekindle with him and then, you will forever regret that you were too busy sulking instead of spending his birthday with him. So you will get your act together, go back home tomorrow, give him that blue package in my shopping bag and celebrate his birthday with him. If you're still upset with him afterward, you're free to come back here, you're free to spend as many weeks here sulking and contemplating or whatever you may call it, but not tomorrow. Understood?"

Leo was surprised, because he actually could hear his mamma out of Hazel's words. But somehow, deep down, he was glad that Persephone hadn't spoken them. Regardless of how utterly stupid it sounded even in his mind, it would have felt like Persephone would be taking Percy's side instead of Leo's, because right now his mind was locked on all the times Percy came in first, all the ways he seemed to matter more and be more loved. But hearing it from Hazel, who he knew loved him and was on his side and said essentially the same thing, but still with Hazel he knew she was saying it out of concern for Leo and not out of favoritism for Percy.

"What's in the blue box?", asked Leo and heaved a sigh.

"A birthday-present for your brother, from you and me", chimed Hazel with a smile.

Percy was about ninety percent sure that so far, Tyson was enjoying his birthday more than Percy himself was. The cyclops was on his third plate of pancakes. Percy was just poking them.

"That looks like at least one of you is saving me some pancakes."
The voice got Percy's attention and his spine straightened as he turned to look at the grinning Latino. Within a second, Percy hung all over Leo, hugging the life out of him. Even Tyson abandoned his pancakes to lift both his brothers into his arms. Hades put down the newspaper to smile gratefully at his wife across the table. Persephone just straightened her new dress and winked at the king of the underworld. Makaria and Melinoe rolled their eyes at their parents' antics.

"Oh my gods, you came back", gasped Percy, clinging onto Leo for dear life. "I'm so sorry, I-"

"I came because today is your birthday and... even though I'm still angry with you, I'll not miss that", sighed the Latino, looking up at Percy seriously. "I haven't forgiven you yet, but... I also don't wanna regret missing today. It's gonna be your first birthday with your fiance, after all."

Percy blushed brightly at the mention of Nico, but he still looked a little upset. "O... Okay. I... get that. Yeah. I... Thank you, for coming. I really... it wouldn't have been the same without you."

"I don't like it when you fight", declared Tyson with a frown. "Mamma, make them stop."

"The way I see it, I'm already in the middle of doing that, Ty", assured Persephone softly.

"Okay now, who wants another serving of pancakes?", asked Hestia with a bright smile from her place behind the stove. "Because there's another heap ready to be vanquished!"

Percy sat at the head of the long dining table, grinning broadly. Hades and Persephone sat opposite of him. All of the underworld council were there – Hecate, Horus, Morpheus, Hypnos, Makaria, Melinoe, Styx, Nemesis, Olethros and Thanatos. Aunt Hestia had come, she had insisted on baking Percy's birthday cake. Granny Demeter was there too and with her sat none other than Poseidon. Percy's dad was there, for his birthday. When the god had appeared in front of him, Percy had hugged him for ten minutes straight. Only the underworld council bribing him with presents had eased him off his dad. With Poseidon had also come Triton, though Percy felt more like false pretense, because Triton was practically sitting on Thanatos' lap. Triton had given Percy an aquarium with a tiny little clown-fish who had recently lost his parents and told Percy to take good care of the little fella, so Triton was free to make out with his boyfriend however long he wanted, because Percy now had a new little friend called Nemo, which was so far the best present. There were two other special guests aside from Poseidon and Triton though. One of them sat right next to Percy, holding his hand beneath the table and watching with large, loving eyes how happy Percy was about every single present he got. It was borderline embarrassing how happy Percy's smiles made Nico. Bianca didn't fail to point that out. Repeatedly.

"So... this is from me and Hazel", mumbled Leo and pushed a blue box over at Percy.

Nico hung over Percy's right shoulder where he sat, while Tyson, too eager to sit still, hung over Percy's other shoulder. Inside the box were two pendants, a split yin and yang symbol, one half blue with a ruby and the other red with a sapphire. Biting his lower lip, Percy took the blue one out and laid it around his neck, where the pendant dangled next to the small silver trident he had gotten from his dad – one that would actually turn into a real-sized trident if he pressed the small sapphire in the middle. Biting a little harder, Percy pushed the box back to Leo with a pleading look.

"It's beautiful. Thank you", whispered Percy with hopeful eyes.

Leo hummed and nodded, taking the other pendant out and stowing it in his own pocket for now. It had been his idea, a couple months back already. He couldn't believe that Hazel hadn't
forgotten.

"Okay, I'm next", chimed Bianca mischievously and got up, taking a blue ribbon out and placing it on top of Nico's head. "Here you go, Percy. Happy birthday."

Both Percy and Nico blushed so horribly that everyone laughed at their demise. Poseidon smiled warmly as he watched the boys and leaned over to his older brother. Before he even could say something, Hades clasped a hand onto his shoulder and squeezed, as though he wanted to say it's okay, I know. This life, this happiness of his son's, Poseidon owed it to his brother.

"I think this only leaves one", hummed Hades, staring intensely at Nico.

It felt so weird to have his own father – his biological father – to watch so protectively over Nico's boyfriend. Then again, if he was being honest, he didn't have the deepest family bond with Hades anyway. Yes, he owed Hades his and his sister's life and he fondly remembered the short months spend in the underworld, but Nico wasn't fool enough not to know that Hades held more fatherly feelings for Percy than for him at this point. And Nico couldn't hold it against either of them. Nico's life may have been a constant up and down, but somehow he had always managed to make a family of his own. With Bianca and Frank and Phoebe at the boarding school and now at camp.

Percy never had that, he had what he had thanks to Hades – and Nico was grateful for that, grateful because he didn't know if Percy would even be in his life if things were different. Nico fidgeted a little as he handed the two presents he had for Percy over. A fond smile laid on Percy's lips as he watched the unusually nervous behavior of his boyfriend. The fond smile was replaced by a slightly embarrassed look as he realized that Nico apparently had two presents for him.

"You didn't have to", argued Percy instantly. "You didn't have to get me anything, much less two anythings! That's... That's... I'm just happy that you're here, really."

"No, uhm, it's, I mean... I kinda had help with both so I figured I should get you two. And they actually kind of belong together", replied Nico, first handing a long, cylindrical present.

"He didn't get my baby-brother a dildo, right?", hissed Triton beneath his breath, seething.

"Sit and wait", laughed Thanatos softly, patting Triton's knee soothingly.

Everyone watched curiously as Percy unwrapped the present. As all the blue paper hit the ground, Percy squealed. In a very excited and very high-pitched tone. Seconds later and he was hanging off Nico's neck, hugging the air out of the Italian. Nico grunted at the impact and wrapped his arms around Percy's waist in support to keep them both from falling over.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!", exclaimed Percy excitedly. "It's totally amazing!"

Nico blinked slowly as he looked at his fiance. "But... I haven't even told you what it does."

Percy blinked doe-eyed and returned Nico's look. "It... does something? Really?"

"Of course it does", grunted Nico. "Wait. You're that happy just about a piece of wood?"

"It's Harry Potter's wand!", exclaimed Percy scandalized. "That's all it has to do!"

Now Nico looked just a little bit disturbed. "Uhm, okay. Well, I had help from Beckendorf to get the carvings and all right and I had the help of Alabaster, Liam and Lou, so yeah, it does something. Not, uhm, much. But they cast a few spells on it." Nico grasped Percy's hand that was holding the beautifully detailed wand and adjusted it. "When you hold it like that and say lumos maxima, the tip glows. Kind of like a flash light. I figured that could be handy."
"Lumos maxima", echoed Percy and squealed when the tip of the wand indeed lit up.

"And when you swing it a little and say wingardium leviosa, it makes light stuff float. Not high and not for long and nothing large, but since that scene was like my favorite in the movie, I thought it would be kinda funny", continued Nico, a slightly embarrassed blush on his face.

"Wingardium leviosa!", exclaimed Percy, making sure to pronounce it right.

Again, he squealed delighted as the wrapping from the wand floated off the ground for a foot or so. Nico could already tell that Percy wanted to hug him and kiss him again, so he hurried up.

"And", interrupted Nico shortly before a kiss, only half an inch between their lips. "One more. It's just... well, it's really silly and doesn't actually do anything, but I know how much you love that part of the movies—eh, the books, I mean. So... say expecto patronum."

Percy's eyes were so large, Nico feared they'd fall out, and they sparkled in such a beautiful way that for a second there, Nico forgot how to breath. As Percy repeated the words, blue sparkly mist seemed to form and a luminescent, majestic horse appeared in front of them.

"This is – officially – the best thing on the planet!", exclaimed Percy and ran Nico over. "And you, you are the best fiance and boyfriend on this entire planet!"

This time, Nico couldn't hold Percy and both landed on the ground. Not that Nico minded, because there was a Percy on top of him who was showering him with kisses and thank yous. The gods of the underworld were all a bit stunned and kept looking at each other.

"How... How did none of us ever think of this?", asked Morpheus surprised.

"We literally have the goddess of magic among us, so yeah, how indeed", grunted Nemesis.

"Where do we get a broom? And can you make it fly?", inquired Horkos.

"Oh, we could build his and Nico's castle Hogwarts-style!", suggested Makaria giddily.

"How about we let Percy unwrap the other gift?", suggested Demeter kindly.

Percy's cheeks were flushed and the grin on his lips nearly split his face. He yelped delighted as he held the Griffindor robes up and whirled them around before putting them on.

"I wanted to get you the blue ones, because blue's your favorite color, but Silena told me to trust her and just 'let her make it'", explained Nico awkwardly. "Is it... Is it right?"

"It's not alright, it's perfect!", exclaimed Percy and threw himself at Nico.

Leo smiled a little bit as he fidgeted with the pendant in his pocket. Now he was glad that he had come here after all. Seeing Percy like that was adorable, it was also nice to get to know Poseidon a little and to see his underworld family again. Though it was utterly disturbing how Thanatos thought he was actually hiding his make-out-session with Triton behind his wings and no one would notice. Well, most were too distracted by cooing over Percy. Leo was glad he had Hazel to watch out for him and to nudge him into the right direction here. Looking at Percy and how he hung off Nico's neck, Leo realized that maybe Hazel was right, maybe Leo did fear to lose that special thing only he had, but he also realized that Hazel, Hazel was his, the same way Nico was Percy's.

/break/
After dinner, things calmed down a little and Percy spend the better part of the evening in the company of Nico, Poseidon and Hades. It was a little awkward to watch the interaction between Hades and Nico, but the longer they talked, the more they seemed to relax around each other. Percy and Poseidon just ignored them and gossiped about Thanatos and Triton until Hades and Nico warmed up to each other. Bianca was bonding with Makaria, Melinoe and Persephone. The gods, sadly enough, had other obligations too, so Percy, Leo, Tyson, Bianca and Nico decided to play Monopoly with each other. In the end, Bianca had to leave to head back to her hunt and while Tyson begged Leo to come to the forges with him to look at Tyson's latest project, Percy kissed Nico goodbye, still wearing his Griffindor robes and grinning like the biggest dork ever.

"Thank you again", whispered Percy, peppering Nico's face with kisses.

"Nothing to thank me for", replied Nico embarrassed. "I love you and wanna make you happy."

"You did", assured Percy as he watched Nico leave through the shadows. "I'll see you soon."

And with that, Percy found himself alone in the castle. It was an oddly melancholic feeling. Tilting his head, Percy made a spur of the moment decision and climbed on Zerberus. The obedient hound carried Percy through the shadows to the destination he whispered into his companion's ear. Getting off the guard-dog, Percy cautiously climbed the fire-escape to stand in front of the kitchen-window of a specific apartment. He didn't even need to know which one it was, he could feel it. There was a slightly sad smile on his lips as he watched the two females inside decorate cupcakes. The little girl suddenly looked up, as though she could feel his presence, her pigtails bobbing.

"Look! Look, we summoned him!", yelped Laura loud and excited.

Percy ducked his head embarrassed as Laura and Sally stared at him. "I—I'm sorry I drop in unannounced. I didn't want to disturb you, I just... uh..." He paused. "What are you doing?"

"Blueberry cupcakes with blue topping! Mommy always makes it today!", explained Laura and waved her arms wildly. "Come in, come in, come in! You have to try this, I made it alone!"

She offered Percy a single cupcake, proud smile on her face. Looking at Sally for another moment, Percy slowly climbed in through the kitchen-window. Sally looked surprised, happy and pained.

"I... remember", whispered Percy as he took the cupcake. "You used to make them on my birthday."

"I still do", admitted Sally with an agonized smile. "Somehow, it helped me when... when I was alone. It... became a kind of memento for me. To... remember you by... What are you doing here?"

Munching the cupcake and slowly sitting down on the kitchen-counter, eyes wandering to take in the kitchen, Percy shrugged. "Papá and mamma threw me a party. Dad was there too. And my half-brother Triton. And it was great. But... when everyone left, I... I guess I wanted to see you."

"I'm glad", replied Sally, voice strangled. "Can... Can I hug you?"

Licking the cupcake-topping from his nose, Percy jumped off the kitchen-counter again and opened his arms in invitation, biting his lower lip. Sally hugged him tightly, kissing his forehead. After only a moment, Laura threw herself at them, wanting to join in. Percy grinned broadly, feeling warm as he laid an arm around his little half-sister. After a long hug, Sally ushered them both to the living room and promised them hot chocolate and a Disney movie to the cupcakes.
Next chapter will bridge between this summer and the next summer, showing you what adventure will await them next year, it'll also include the return of Piper and the introduction of Rachel!

The next update will be "A to Z with the di Angelos" on Wednesday!
The end of summer officially meant the beginning of a new school year. And thanks to Tristan McLean filming his new movie in New York, Piper found herself yet again attending a new school. Sure, she could go to some boarding school, or stay at home with a kind of babysitter, but she wanted to be with her dad, especially now that the evil stepmom was out of the picture. And Piper knew exactly who to thank for that. A gorgeous and mischievous Italian girl who had been working as an intern for only about a week, but somehow managed to show Tristan what a monster his soon-to-be-wife was. Well, not literally but figuratively at least. Bianca was damn creative. And before Piper could even say thank you, Bianca was gone again, off with that hunt of hers.

It was too bad, really. Bianca was the first person Piper had met who also saw what Piper saw. Who saw the world for what it truly was. And if every girl at Bianca's hunt was that way, it must be one amazing group. Did they just go around, hunting monsters all the time? It sounded like one adventurous life. Piper wasn't sure about wanting adventure, but she sure wanted someone who understood. Someone who didn't think she was crazy for the things she saw.

So distracted by her own thoughts, she didn't notice the redheaded girl she was running into. Both of them landed on their behinds and some of the bystanders started giggling immaturely, because it was oh-so funny when someone fell down. Piper rolled her eyes annoyed by this. A slight blush colored her face in embarrassment as she turned to face the girl she had run into.

"I am so sorry", apologized Piper as she offered the redhead her hand.

"It's alright", grinned the other amused, her green eyes sparkling as she took the offered hand. "I wasn't watching my way either. You okay, or did you get hurt?"

"No. No, I'm fine", replied Piper, dusting off her baggy jeans.

Her eyes wandered over the redhead, noting how her own clothes were stained with what looked like acrylic colors, her wild red curls were put up in a messy bun with a paint brush sticking out of it. Somehow, Piper instantly liked the redhead. All other girls Piper had seen in the halls so far had been pretentious princesses, but this one seemed very natural and true to herself.

"I'm Piper", said Piper in ways of introduction, smiling a little. "It's... well, my first day here."

"Coincident, huh? It's my first day too", sighed the redhead. "I'm Rachel, by the way. Rachel Elizabeth Dare. It's nice to meet you. There are way too many Barbies here."

"Yeah, there really are", agreed Piper. "So, I'm having literature with... uh, Mister Blowfish now."

"I think it's pronounced Blofis", laughed Rachel. "And I'm heading there too for my first class. Wanna head there together? It's always nice to already know a face."

Piper's face lit up as the two girls headed there together. Maybe Goode High wouldn't be as bad as she had feared at first. And she could still continue her research on Bianca and the hunt at the sidelines, since her dad would be very busy filming his new movie.
September and October had passed in the blink of an eye, really. Between exchanging stories and bonding with his sisters, Tyson and his parents again, getting back into his classes with the gods, getting to know his biological mother, stepfather and half-sister and squeezing in a few dates with Nico, he barely noticed how time passed. He had only seen Nico all of seven times in the past two months and only three of those had been long enough to be turned into actual dates and not just hugging, cuddling and kissing, but it was okay. At first, he had been a bit worried that they wouldn't be able to keep their relationship up if they weren't at camp together. But with regular IMs and the dates they did manage to have, it worked out pretty well. Percy realized that he didn't need to see Nico every single day all day to still love him and the same went for Nico. After all, Nico was busy with camp and schooling too and their schedules didn't really agree with each other, but that was fine. Sometimes, Percy would return from a sparring session with Nemesis to find a sweet note and a box of chocolates on his pillow, indicating that Nico had been dropping by but they had missed each other. Other times, they would IM until both of them fell asleep. All in all, Percy was really happy at the moment. He was even working on rekindling things with Leo. Their relationship had turned for the better since Percy's birthday. Being apart for a while was a good change between them, since they had been sitting on each other for years now.

"Hey, Perce. You, uh, busy? Mamma said you just returned from classes with auntie Hecate."

Percy blinked surprised as Leo entered his bedroom, looking a bit bashful. "Can I come in?"

"Sure. What's up, firebug?", asked Percy curiously and sat up. "Didn't know you were home."

They had spend time together, with Tyson. It had still been a bit tense, but Percy thought they were on the right way. Leo offered a nearly shy grin as he walked up to Percy's bed and sat down on it.

"I... wanna start with apologizing?", said Leo slowly, writhing his hands nervously and staring down at his lap. "I love you, you know that, right? I love you a lot, but... when you came to Camp Jupiter, I got really angry and scared, because... and I know you're not doing this on purpose, but you manage to easily steal the spotlight and becoming everyone's sweetheart. I know our family loves me too, but I also know that they love you more. We came to Camp Half-Blood and you instantly became a big star while I was more... like your sidekick. And at this camp? I'm kind of the sweetheart. Everybody loves me and all. And I was afraid... afraid that they might meet you and love you more than me and... and I know I was being stupid. Deep down I even knew it back then, but I was too afraid to admit that. But the past few weeks of being with them and also being apart from you made me realize that I miss you way too much to keep worrying. And Hazel and Jason were great at reassuring me that they love me. They're great, you know. And... and you're great too and by now, I really want you to meet them, properly. Because Hazel told me that I need to get my act together and that I can't keep going like this and try to, uh, to hoard what I love and try to keep it all separate out of fear of losing them, I'll only make others and myself unhappy."

"Okay. That's... That's very... Damn it, I'm happy", grinned Percy and hugged Leo tightly.

Leo laughed softly, clearly relieved as he returned the hug. "Okay, good. Because Hazel and Jason are throwing a Halloween party today and I asked if I could invite my brothers."

"Oh my gosh, Roman Halloween party and meeting your Romans?", asked Percy excited.

"Yeah. And mamma got you and Ty costumes already", grinned Leo mischievously. "So go and get changed. Mamma is helping Tyson change and we should get there in about half an hour."

"Uhm, okay? What costumes?", asked Percy curiously.
The grin on Leo's lips was wicked and the next half hour was spend squeezing into costumes and getting ready before meeting up with Tyson. Before the three of them could leave, Hades and Persephone took a couple of pictures while gushing over how cute they looked. Well, Persephone was gushing, while Hades just looked pleased that the boys were getting along again. The broadest grin possible was on Percy's lips as he looked at his brothers. Tyson was wearing purple pants and a ton of green make-up all over his body, while Percy wore a Captain America costume, even including a real-looking shield that Leo must have forged. The best costume however was Leo's, because his Iron Man armor was really authentic looking and Percy wouldn't be surprised if it could actually fly and shoot impulses. The trio arrived in the backyard of the praetors' house thanks to Zerberus. The party was apparently already going, there were a lot of Romans all over the place, music was blaring and everyone was eating and drinking something. Tyson was totally excited, since he had never been to Camp Jupiter, or any other camp.

"Wow. This is so... big and it looks like fun", hummed Tyson in awe.

"Next summer, you could come with me to Camp Half-Blood", whispered Percy with a smile. "But no mentioning it or Greeks here. Only Roman, yes? And now let's meet Leo's girlfriend."

Leo's girlfriend was inside in the kitchen, leaning against the counter while talking to two blondes. Hazel smiled brightly as she saw her boyfriend and his brother, waving happily at them. She was dressed as Black Widow, looking utterly amazing in the black suit. The two blondes were dressed as Thor and Loki respectively, though Loki didn't look like he was there willingly.

"Hey, guys!", exclaimed Leo and hopped up to them to peck Hazel's lips. "Meet my brothers! Hulk is Tyson and Captain America is Percy! Brothers, those are my friends. This amazing, beautiful, gorgeous Black Widow is my girlfriend Hazel. That Thor is my buddy Jason and the grumpy Loki is Octavian. Don't mind him. He plans world-domination in his mind. Which is why we chose that costume for him. It fits him kind of perfectly. He's also always jealous of Jason."

"There is no need to be jealous of the sparks throwing son of the king of gods", huffed Octavian and paused for a second. "...There may actually be some parallels here, I admit."

"Hello, it's very nice to meet you", greeted Percy with a kind smile.

"It's so awesome to meet you! Leo talks about you to often!", exclaimed Jason with a grin, pulling him into a half-hug. "So, I'm a son of Jupiter. Are you sons of Vulcan too, like Leo?"

Percy paused for a moment to wreck his brain. He couldn't say Neptune. It'd put him in the spotlight, which would upset Leo. He also wasn't really planning on drawing attention on them like this, considering that they were lying about being Romans to begin with.

"Oh, no. I'm just a kid of an Naiad", replied Percy with a small grin. "And so is Tyson, which is why he turned out to be a cyclops. You know how things are for our family."

"Yeah. Octavian here is like a multiple generations descendant of Apollo", agreed Jason.

"Please don't bring me into your conversations", grunted Octavian displeased.

Despite the grumpy augur, they were actually having a lot of fun. Food was delicious, they spend a lot of time dancing and even more so on eating candy. It was nice seeing Leo with Hazel, the two of them looked really happy and were actually pretty cute together. It made Percy want to go on a double date with his brother and their respective underworld kid. All in all, the night had been great and Percy was happy to have his relationship with Leo back. He was also very intrigued by New Rome and he'd like to see more of it, but he wasn't going to push things. Mostly so because he wasn't looking forward to making lying a habit and he wondered how Leo did it.
The next time Percy saw Leo was when Leo finally returned home. As much as he had enjoyed being in New Rome, Leo still missed his home and after three months with them, he was happy to return home in time to Thanksgiving. Mainly so because Demeter made the most amazing Thanksgiving dinner anyone could ever make. There were so many different vegetables, the most gigantic turkey with a basically addicting filling. There would also be cake later, thanks to Hestia. And Leo wasn't the only one coming to the underworld for Thanksgiving, so were the di Angelo siblings. And no one was happier about that than Percy, who instantly found himself curled together on Nico's lap, snuggling up to the Italian. He hadn't seen Nico all November so far.

"I missed you", murmured Percy, kissing along Nico's neck. "And I miss the others. How's camp?"

Nico blinked slowly, trying to concentrate on the conversation and not the Percy on his lap, with his warm lips on Nico's neck. "Yeah, uh, we miss you too. Let's see... where to start...?"

"With our cabin", offered Percy amused, adjusting to sit more comfortably.

"Yeah! I wanna hear about how the others are too!", exclaimed Leo from where he sat.

Leo was on the couch with Tyson, Bianca, Melinoe and Makaria, facing the armchair that Percy and Nico were curled up on in the living room. Bianca smiled and brushed her hair out of her face while watching her brother. She had dropped by at camp once during autumn and he had been kind of displeased and fidgety, but right now he looked very much at ease.

"Reyna is having a very... competitive relationship with Clarisse at this moment. The two of them are keeping a score and the Stolls are taking on bets on which one will win their next competition. Reyna and Annabeth on the other hand, well, they're... dancing around each other. They're spending a lot of time one on one, but it's not like they have asked each other out or kissed. They're still in denial, according to Silena, who is very frustrated with them", started Nico thoughtful. "I think there's something going on with Thalia though. She's being rather closed off, spending a lot of time sitting beneath her tree and staring at the horizon. It's worrying Luke a lot."

"Yeah, I offered Thalia to join the hunt and when I visited last month, we talked about it again", interjected Bianca casually. "What with the whole prophecy and her being nearly sixteen now..."

"...Thanks for sharing, sis", grunted Nico with a glare. "You could have mentioned that earlier."

"I figured it's her thing to share", shrugged Bianca. "So, how's Frank doing?"

"Missing Leo a lot", declared Nico with a slight smirk on his face as he noticed Leo's blush. "But you two have been IMing according to Frank. And he's also kind of relieved that camp calmed down again some. Me too. And so is everyone else, I guess. The Hephaestus Cabin are seriously missing you too, Leo. Nyssa and Jake are pouting a lot, according to Will, who's really annoyed."

"Yeah, I miss them too. Can't wait for summer", agreed Leo with a slight pout.

"Oh, Grover got a girlfriend!", added Nico, nearly as an afterthought.

"No way!", chorused Percy, Leo and Bianca surprised. "Who?!!"

"Juniper. One of the nymphs", answered Nico with a grin. "And they're being disgustingly cute."

"I can totally see that", giggled Percy amused. "Man, I can't wait to tease him about that!"
"Okay, you gossip queens, time for dinner!", announced Hades as he interrupted them.

Within the blink of an eye did all the kids rush past Hades, leaving the king of the underworld alone and stunned. By the time he entered the dining hall, all of them were obediently seated and waiting impatiently. Demeter, Hestia and Persephone had outdone themselves again, like every year. Only that they got to make even more than normally, thanks to their additional guests. Hades smiled fondly as he watched Nico and Bianca. Bianca was getting along so well with her godly sisters that it warmed Hades’ heart and seeing the loving glances and tender gestures exchanged between Nico and Percy made Hades to equal parts proud and pleased.

"Well then, let the turkey cutting begin", stated Hades loudly and walked up to his place. "But first, all of you have to say what you're grateful for this year. I, for my part, am very grateful to have my children back and to see how well you are doing, Bianca, Nico."

"I'm grateful my boys managed to rekindle again and I'm proud to see how much all three of you have matured this year", continued Persephone, looking lovingly at Percy, Leo and Tyson.

"I'm grateful that our stubborn, little brother has been behaving himself, despite the ruckus caused by certain demigods at this very table", stated Demeter with a smile and a pointed look.

"I'm grateful that we all could come together like this", smiled Hestia, looking very pleased.

"I'm grateful to have another sister", hummed Makaria and grinned over at Bianca.

"Can I just second that?", sighed Melinoe and looked a little bored.

"I'm grateful for Percy", said Bianca, surprising some of the people at the table. "Because I've never seen Nico more happy than he is with you, Percy. So I'm grateful that he has you."

Nico had to continue, though he was a little busy trying to fight the embarrassed blush that lit up his entire face. "I'm grateful that we finally have the chance to... be here. In the underworld, with our family. That... things changed, for the better, this year."

"I'm grateful to everyone at camp for accepting me", admitted Percy a little shy before pausing. "And I'm... I'm grateful that I finally got to meet my biological parents and that they love me."

"I'm grateful that I got to meet this cabin filled with amazing half-siblings of mine that makes me feel like I have another home and family with them", grinned Leo broadly.

"I'm grateful that my brothers are back home after having been gone for so long", stated Tyson with a slight pout. "And that Percy promised me that I could come next summer too."

Everyone laughed at the pout on Tyson's face and the pleading look on his eyes as he stared Hades and Persephone down until they were squirming in agreement. Hades then proceeded to cut the turkey while everyone passed around the various other foods present, everything with a soft and comfortable chatter. Bianca talked about how the hunt was doing, while Nico reported about Camp Half-Blood some more and the kids started planning their next summer already. It was the kind of homey feeling that Hestia cherished so much and she couldn't express how happy she was for her brother to have found such love and such a wonderful family.

/Christmas/

While Christmas Eve was spend in the underworld and with his godly family in a similar though far louder and a bit more animated way than Thanksgiving, Percy had different plans for the day of Christmas. He had already talked it through with Hades and Persephone a few weeks ago. It took him a little longer to gather the courage and actually ask the ones he wanted to have plans
with. It was one thing to occasionally drop by and watch movies with Laura, or bake with Sally, or go to the park with all three of them, but asking if they wanted him over for Christmas...? Part of him had still feared they didn't want him. But Sally and Laura had been practically overjoyed at the idea. And since Hades and Persephone were going on a fancy Christmas party on Olympus, while Leo had taken Tyson with him to celebrate in New Rome with Hazel and Jason, Percy figured he could as well go and spend today with his mortal mother.

"And you're... really fine with this? I'm sorry I'm not spending it with you."

Nico, who was very comfortably sprawled out on Percy's bed while playing with a blue box, just rolled his eyes. "Perce, I love you. And I'm seeing you, right now. There's no reason for you to tag along to camp Christmas, babe. Go and spend the day with your mom."

Sighing softly, Percy collapsed right next to Nico on the bed. "I guess I'm nervous? I mean, Christmas... everyone has their Christmas traditions. I'm afraid I won't... fit in."

"Perseus", huffed Nico and grasped his boyfriend's face. "It was my first Christmas with you guys yesterday and I was nervous too, okay? Watching you and Leo fight over who got to put the star on top of the tree after we all decorated it together, the delicious cookies that you and Hestia baked, that you actually have the tradition of watching Nightmare Before Christmas on Christmas Eve after dinner... Every single step of this, I felt awkward, watching you and waiting to see what was to come next, because while it's fluffy routine for you guys, it was totally new for me. And I know you'll feel that way today too, but I also know that at the end of the day, you will be as happy as I was yesterday. Because even though it was all new, it was also fun and warm and amazing."

Percy bit his lips as he stared at Nico thoughtfully before he just leaned in and kissed his boyfriend. Nico was a bit startled at first, but more than willing to participate. He grinned into their kiss as he laid his arms around Percy's waist in a possessive manner and pulled his boyfriend up close.

"Thanks", whispered Percy against Nico's lips as they parted. "That... actually really helped."

"So, you wanna open your present before I drop you off?", suggested Nico with a pleased grin.

"Ah, you open yours first!", demanded Percy eagerly and scrabbled off to get the little black box out from his nightstand drawer. "Here! Open, open, open!"

Nico snorted amused, unable to suppress the honestly happy smile at seeing his eager Percy. He gladly took the black box and curiously opened the lid. A frown adored his face as he took the framed picture out of the box. The photo was from Thanksgiving, with Hades and Persephone left and right, Makaria, Melinoe, Bianca, Nico, Percy, Leo and Tyson squished between them so they all could fit onto the picture. They had been fooling around while Hestia busied herself with dessert, but then Demeter had declared they'd need a nice family picture. Nico had totally forgotten about it. The picture frame was decorated with shells, shells that Nico and Percy had found together on their very first date in Italy. This was beautiful and thoughtful and a nice reminder that now, Nico had a family as well as a wonderful lover. He couldn't help but pull Percy into another kiss.

"So, you like it?", asked Percy relieved. "I thought it was too little. Especially after what you got me for my birthday. I was wrecking my brain what to get you for Christmas and I was thinking about all the things you like, but then I remember you're not exactly the worldly possession kinda guy and that the only really important and treasured things you possess are your photos, so..."

"It's perfect", assured Nico before Percy could suffocate from not breathing and too much talking.
Percy grinned, very pleased by this, before he opened his own present. He squealed delighted as he got the very squish-able Flounder plushy out of the blue box and hugged it tightly. The smile on his face was practically blinding as he looked at Nico, who instantly blushed upon seeing it. "I was kinda afraid that this is too... childish? But you looked incredibly jealous of that little kid from Apollo cabin who spend all summer running around with his plush Flounder...", said Nico.

"It's amazing", grinned Percy embarrassed, hiding his face in the plushy. "You know those things that you don't realize you want until you have them? That's this one! I never even knew they existed, but when I saw it, I really really really wanted one for myself."

"Yeah. Because you're adorable", declared Nico with a grin and kissed Percy's nose. "Now, shall we leave? I'll drop you off at your mom's before heading back to camp."

Percy nodded, took the backpack that stood leaning against his bed and wrapped his arms around Nico's neck, holding on tightly as Nico shadow-traveled them to New York, right in front of the door of the Blofis household. Once there, Percy clung onto Nico's neck for a couple more moments, still not really sure how he'd fit into this normal, mortal family. A man clearing his throat interrupted the hugging though and as they parted, they came face to face with an unimpressed middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair. Paul Blofis looked them both up and down slowly. "Hello, Percy", greeted Paul fondly. "Your boyfriend, right? Are you two planning on coming in?"

"Uhm, no, sir", grunted Nico and shook his head, fidgeting just a little bit. "I gotta be some place. And this is your family dinner. I'm not going to intrude, I want Percy to enjoy some time with you."

Paul nodded with an appreciating look in his eyes. "Well then, I wish you a merry Christmas, Nico. And you, go and get inside, Laura is pacing a hole into our living room."

Percy smiled and nodded slowly before turning to kiss Nico a last time. "Goodbye. Tell the others merry Christmas from me, will you? And when you come to pick me up tonight, you and me could maybe go ice skating in New York before you bring me home...?"

"I'd like that", grinned Nico, stealing another kiss before leaving.

Percy barely made it into the living room before Laura collided full-force with him, hugging him so tightly that he could barely breath. Smiling happily, Percy ruffled his little sister's hair. Sally smiled tenderly as she entered the living room from the kitchen, carrying a tray of cookies. "Percy! You made it. I'm... I'm so happy", exclaimed Sally, sounding relieved.

"Me too! Me too! Me too!", yelped Laura and grabbed Percy's hand. "Come! Presents!"

Sally put the cookies down and the four of them gathered in front of the Christmas tree that looked kind of like a unicorn threw up all over it. It was rather obvious that this was the home of a small child and Laura looked mighty proud of that tree. Grinning at his sister, Percy got the blue-wrapped present out of his backpack and handed it to her. Her eyes were large.

"You got me a present?!", gasped Laura, fingers itching to unwrap it.

"Sure", grinned Percy. "Go on, open it. I hope you'll like it."

Within seconds, there was blue paper flying around as Laura tore it off. She squealed as she held the pink plushy penguin up to show it to Sally and Paul. Both smiled fondly at their daughter.
"It's so, so, so fluffy!", gasped Laura and hugged it tightly. "And it's pink!"

From her parents, she got the newly released *Surf's Up* movie and cute penguin-themed earrings. Percy had soon learned that his sister's favorite animal on this entire planet were penguins, because 'they look like fluffy little gentlemen!'. Percy in return got a cute drawing of himself and Laura, one of which Laura was truly proud. From Paul and Sally however did he get a very cute and cool toy set from Disney's Hercules, consisting of Hercules, Pegasus, Hades, his chariot and Panic and Pain. Sally with her artistic streak however had hand repainted the Hercules and Pegasus figures to look like Percy and Blackjack. The brownish-golden armor was blue and silver, the hair black, the eyes sea-green. It was absolutely awesome and cool and Percy couldn't wait to show it to his papà.

Dinner was more comfortable than Percy had feared. But then again, over the past months, he had spend a couple days with them already. Still, he had thought Christmas would be different. It was comfortable, funny, warm and of course also messy. Once all of them were round and full, they moved on to the living room again to watch *A Christmas Carol.*

/New Year's Eve/

To welcome the year 2008, Percy and Leo went to visit Camp Half-Blood. Part of Leo wanted to spend it with Hazel, but then again he had already spend Halloween and Christmas with her and he wanted to see his half-siblings again, who had told him via IM that there would be a gigantic and amazing fireworks and a barbecue party. Seeing as they had taken Tyson to meet the Romans on Halloween, they decided that New Year's would be a good time to introduce him to the Greeks. Many were weary and skeptical at first, since, well, Tyson was a cyclops and those were normally demigod killing monsters. But when Leo claimed that Tyson was his brother and that he trusted him and then continued to show Tyson the forges, where Tyson instantly went full on nerd on everything in there, he had easily won over the Hephaestus Cabin.

"You shouldn't expect Annabeth, Thalia and Luke to react that way though", stated Grover casually and sat down next to Percy on a log from where Percy had been watching his brothers.

Leo and Tyson were helping the Hephaestus Cabin with setting everything for the fireworks that night. Jake and Nyssa were chatting away happily, telling Leo all about how Shane had finally gathered the courage to ask Lacy from Aphrodite Cabin out on a date. Shane was blushing incredibly hard, trying to make his older siblings stop teasing him. After all, Nyssa, Jake and Leo trying to give them first date advise was doomed to end in a catastrophe.

"There was an incident, with a cyclops, when they got to camp, right?", whispered Percy softly, frowning slightly. "Nico told me. When he first met Ty, that Annabeth wouldn't like him. But... once Annabeth and the others can get past what he is, they're gonna love him. Tyson is kind and sweet."

Grover chuckled as he watched how Tyson easily carried both Leo and a box of fireworks, making the Latino yelp in protest. "Not doubting that. It's still... hard, to get past such prejudices. Especially considering what they faced. And what we faced this summer."


Instantly, Grover beamed at him and the mood changed. Percy gladly followed his satyr friend into the forest to meet Juniper the tree nymph. After a nice short chat with Grover and Juniper, Percy finally got to head to his own cabin. Once inside, he was nearly suffocated in hugs from his cabin mates. It made him so insanely happy to see that they had missed him as much as he had missed them. Grinning, he looked up at Ethan, Alabaster, Liam and Damian on top of him.
"Poker!", exclaimed Alabaster excited, smirking wickedly. "We're gonna play poker!"

"Strip-poker!", upped Lou and high-fived with her big brother.

"Oh I am all in on embarrassing Nico's little Sea Prince", declared Reyna with a smirk of her own.

They sat together down on the ground and started playing and talking. Sure, Percy had heard from Nico how the others were doing, but hearing from them directly was even better. They were all excited to see him and looking forward to having their cabin-head back in summer.

"What... is going on here?", asked Nico disturbed when he entered half an hour later.

"We're playing strip-poker", grunted Ethan displeased and with a deadpan.

Alabaster, only wearing his left sock, looked very pleased next to Ethan who was down to his boxers. "How is your innocent little angel such a devil with the cards?"

Percy, still fully dressed, smiled innocently up at Nico. "I grew up in the underworld. Dunno why you guys think that I'm all innocent. Hades holds a poker night every month where Apollo, Eris and Hermes drop by too. I learned how to play poker as soon as I could count."

Putting his cards down, Percy stood to walk over to Nico and pull his boyfriend into a slow, delicious kiss. Nico hummed pleased and laid his arms around Percy's waist to pull him slowly into the direction of the door. The others groaned loudly and started to get dressed.

"Yeah, yeah, you're gonna steal our Percy again", huffed Liam and rolled his eyes.

Nico gave him a thumbs-up in agreement as they left the cabin. Once outside, they parted again, both panting softly. Percy blinked slowly when he noticed that Annabeth, Luke and Thalia had been waiting for them. A bright blush lit up his face at the teasing looks on their faces.

"Uhm... so, I didn't get abducted for a romantic walk, mh?", sighed Percy with a frown.


The frown turned darker when Percy noticed that Annabeth was playing with her knife and Thalia and Luke had their weapons with them. Back straightening, Percy followed them toward the woods, a farther off end of the woods from where they couldn't even hear anything from camp.

"We've had some... problems since the end of summer", stated Luke. "Campers keep disappearing, monsters keep appearing. We think we have a... leak. Weak link. Something."

"We think something is coming", continued Annabeth, looking Percy up and down.

"Something...?", echoed Percy concerned, locking eyes with Annabeth.

"Something like when someone tried to poison Thalia's tree", elaborated Annabeth darkly.

Thalia next to her smiled softly and laid one calming hand on her shoulder. "But it'll be fine. Since we're gonna take care of whatever the problem is. We just figured you should know."

"Thanks", nodded Percy honestly. "And... Leo?"

"Frank, Clarisse, Silena and Beckendorf are with him. They're telling him", answered Nico.

Percy nodded relieved, though the relief didn't last too long considering that they were attacked by
a giant, furious hellhound and a drakon. While Thalia, Annabeth and Luke surrounded the drakon with easy teamwork that came from years of knowing each other, Percy and Nico faced the viciously snarling hellhound. Frowning, Percy put his weapon down, making Annabeth who saw it from the corner of her eyes scream loudly. Percy held his hands up.

"There, there boy. No one wants to hurt you", cooed Percy softly and approached him.

Nico smiled softly, shaking his head and obediently also putting his sword down and approaching the angry hellhound. "He's right. Sniff us. We're from the underworld too, right? We won't hurt you. Whoever brought you here, they want you to get hurt when hurting us. Let us bring you home."

Their voices were calm and their approach was very confusing for the beast. He stopped snarling and tilted his head. When the teens were close enough, he let them pat him while Thalia and Luke were wrestling the drakon and Annabeth served the final blow.

"Okay, I'll bring him back down to the underworld and then I'll meet you at the lake for the barbeque, yeah Perce?", asked Nico, caressing the hellhound's head.

"I'll prepare picnic for us", grinned Percy pleased and pecked Nico's lips. Annabeth snorted and rolled her eyes as she brushed off monster dust. "You two are disgusting."

"Really? According to the others, so are you and Reyna", chimed Percy teasingly.

"Oh. Good one", praised Luke and snickered as he ruffled Percy's hair. "Come on, let's get going."

Percy followed Luke, Thalia and Annabeth back to camp, the three others teaming up on Annabeth until her head looked ready to explode. Once back at camp, they helped everyone setting things for the barbeque. Tables, benches, blankets and pillows were set out at the beach, multiple barbeques and set tables with the raw meat and vegetables, as well as coolers for drinks. Percy was already sitting on a large blanket with lots of pillows, together with Leo, Frank, Annabeth and Reyna. When Nico joined them, he offered Percy a burger and a kiss when he sat down. The six of them spend the time until midnight with easy chatter, laughter and delicious food thanks to the Hephaestus Cabin. As the countdown to midnight went down, Percy inched closer to Nico, blushing.

"...Five, four, three...", was chanted around them as their lips nearly touched.

And at zero and loud cheering, when the fireworks were send off by Leo and his siblings, their lips touched in a tender and beautiful new year's kiss, lips moving lovingly in a promise for this year.

\[\text{\textup{\textbackslash Nico's Birthday}}\]

It was the twenty-eighth January when Percy saw his Greek friends again. Nico's fifteenth birthday. Luke, Frank and the others were throwing him a gigantic birthday party, together with all of Hermes Cabin and of course the Poseidon Cabin where the thing took place. Leo was invited too and of course Bianca had also come to celebrate her 'adorable, little baby-brother'. Bianca's goal was, quite obviously, to embarrass Nico. Percy's however was to cheer Nico up and kiss him as often as humanly possible. They had sodas and every single item that McDonald's had to offer. Percy and the others had taken their time to order three of everything and carry it via Zerberus from New York to their cabin, arranging it as a giant buffet. Nico had been holding his stomach in laughter at that. It was odd, Percy had thought they'd throw a party with blaring music
and smuggling in booze, but instead they drank milkshakes until their brains froze and played Monopoly all day long.

"So...", whispered Percy softly, sitting curled together on Nico's lap as Leo was just complaining how he had to spend too much fake money right now. "You like your present?"

Nico grinned like a maniac as he turned enough to ruffle the fur of the hellhound Percy and Nico had rescued a month ago. He had a large black bow around his neck and stared at Nico adoringly.

"Plutonius is awesome. Thank you, Perce", laughed Nico and kissed Percy softly.

After New Year, Percy had gone to the underworld to track down the hellhound they had rescued. After all, Nico had run very late considering he had just dropped the animal off in the underworld. Apparently, he had been playing fetch with the mighty beast before coming. Percy figured maybe Nico wanted a companion and playmate for himself. After all, Percy had Zerberus and Ascalaphus. Nico had jumped Percy and showered him with kisses as he saw the hellhound obediently sitting in front of Nico's bed, with the bow and the tag that showed a smiling skull. Out of whatever reasons, probably to annoy his dad, Nico decided to name the hellhound Plutonius – Pluto, for short. So now, Nico got to cuddle his new, happy pet and his beautiful, amazing boyfriend while beating his friends and sister at a game of Monopoly while eating way too much McDonald's. Perfect birthday.

/Valentine's Day/

Their first Valentine's Day together was supposed to be perfect. Percy was determined to make it absolutely perfect. First, he had to send Leo off, who had been ranting and rambling about his plans with Hazel. Apparently, he had gotten Jason to coax her out of the house long enough so he could decorate everything with flowers and hearts and chocolate pieces. Percy smiled fondly at his little brother's enthusiasm. Checking his own appearance for a last time, Percy left his room. He blinked surprised when he found Nico waiting right in front of his door, sitting on Plutonius' back with his arms crossed on the fluffy hellhound's head, both boys staring expectantly at Percy's door and lighting up the moment Percy exited it. Snorting amused, Percy walked over to them to pat Pluto's snout and grab Nico by the collar to pull him down into a heated kiss. Nico grunted surprised and very pleased by this, returning the kiss just as passionately. They exchanged chocolates – they had agreed that after the lengths they went to for birthday and Christmas presents that Valentine's was not allowed to be more than chocolate and flowers. Grinning happily, Percy climbed up behind Nico, laying his arms around Nico's waist to hold onto, shamelessly feeling Nico's sixpack up.

"So, where are we going?", asked Percy curiously, chin resting on Nico's shoulder.

"Honestly? I figured we'd do something totally boring and normal, like eat a pizza in New York and then maybe go to the zoo so you can fawn over penguins and dolphins?", offered Nico with a shrug.


They've nearly broken their necks in the past, trying to create perfect and overly romantic dates. But at this point, they realized that just laying curled together was already perfect. And after all, something would always come up and interrupt their dates anyway. Like the two girls in the booth next to theirs at the restaurant. A native American and a redhead, both hanging over a notebook with pictures – very detailed and good drawings of various monsters. Pegasi, hellhounds, drakons.

"You saw the girls next to us?", whispered Nico casually while stealing a bite from Percy's pizza.
"Uhu", nodded Percy slowly, sneaking a glance over Nico's shoulder, focusing his gaze on their auras. "One's a daughter of Aphrodite, the other is... weird. Flickery, but mortal. Definitely."

Nico gritted his teeth, squinting in that thoughtful way he sometimes did that always made Percy want to kiss him between the eyebrows to ease the frown away. So Percy did just that, because another thing he had learned over the past months was that reacting on his impulses was best. Though when the two other girls were approached by two very nasty looking cheerleaders who started picking on them, Percy joined in on Nico's frown. Percy hated bullies.

"Tammi, Kelli, why don't you go and fawn over some jocks instead of bothering us?", asked the native American with an annoyed look. "What? Too much frustration because you're single on Valentine's Day? Don't worry, I can assure you it's only because of your personalities."

Percy grinned at the outraged looks on the cheerleaders' faces, but shock took him over when he realized they weren't human. Percy could tell that they were some kinds of monster. He motioned for Nico to follow as the two cheerleaders stomped out with sneers on their faces. Sighing in defeat, Nico dumped the money for their food plus a large tip on the table before getting up and obediently following his lover outside, where they cornered the two girls in an alley. Percy got Riptide out and Tammi and Kelli's sneers transformed into something else entirely.

"Empousai", hissed Nico very annoyed, grabbing his own sword.

They split up without another word, each taking on one of the monsters and easily fighting them into submission. The real question however was why two empousai were bullying those other girls. It didn't look like they were hunting for a meal and planned on eating the demigoddess. There was something very off here. Percy dodged Tammi elegantly and landed an easy hit. Nico was already straightening his clothes again and dusting off the remains of Kelli. And Percy would have won his fight too, if not for the scandalized gasps coming from the alleyway. Percy was distracted long enough for Kelli to escape. Glaring, Percy turned toward the two girls from earlier.

"You!", exclaimed the redhead, pointing her finger at Percy. "I've seen you in my dreams!"

"Why do you look like Bianca?!", yelled the native American girl, pointing a finger at Nico.

Gaping very confused at that accusation, Nico turned toward Percy with a questioning glance. The son of Poseidon nodded sharply and grabbed Nico's hand tightly.

"Sorry. We got some other plans. Have a fun day!", chimed Percy mischievously.

And with that the two boys ran through the shadows on the next wall, leaving Piper and Rachel stunned and alone. Rachel frowned as she clung tightly onto her sketch book, staring down at the drawing of the boy who had just run off, the intense green she had used on his eyes.

"He's not fictional..., whispered Rachel in awe, staring at the wall the boys had left through.

Chapter End Notes

Fast forward all the way up to next summer! But I didn't want to skip this time between summers, because frankly enough that's always what I'd been interested in when reading PJatO. What happens between the quests. So, here you go. Next chapter, summer arrives and Leo, Percy and Tyson are back at Camp Half-Blood to begin the quest of the Labyrinth! Prepare to meet Quintus, Mrs. O'Leary and see how
the Romans handled the labyrinth problem too!

Next update is gonna be "A to Z with the di Angelos" on Saturday! Have fun until then!
Chapter 25: Into the Labyrinth

Percy blinked owlishly, staring a bit suspiciously at the new sword-master as Cabin 3 gathered in the arena. Damian and Liam were whispering and making out, Lou, Aurora and Lily were quite obviously planning a prank and much to Percy's pleasure, Sirius, Butch and Clovis were making an effort to get to know Tyson better, who had been all broad smiles and eagerness ever since this morning during breakfast, right before they had packed and left for camp. Persephone and Hades looked somewhat relieved that Percy had agreed to take Tyson with him to camp, like it was not the obvious thing to do. Of course Percy wanted to share this summer and his cabin with his brother.

At least with one of his brothers. After a lot of contemplating, Leo had decided to try spending a summer in New Rome. They had talked about it, as a family. The war that was brewing would affect both Romans and Greeks, but neither side was aware of the other, so Hades, Persephone, Percy and Leo had agreed that it would be safest to have one demigod in the knowing in either camp. Leo had more than eagerly volunteered to go and visit Camp Jupiter for the summer.

"Why are you looking at Mister Quintus so suspiciously?", whispered Nico.

Percy, sitting right in front of Nico, jumped slightly as his fiance wrapped his arms around Percy's shoulders from behind and rested his chin on Percy's head. Grinning a little, Percy kissed Nico's arm where it was right in front of his face before leaning back against him.

"Dunno. Something about his aura is... whacky", shrugged Percy with a frown.

"Pluto likes him", pointed Nico out with a shrug.

Percy's eyes were drawn over to Nico's hellhound Plutonius who was happily running around camp's new sword-master Quintus while chasing Quintus' very own hellhound. Plutonius seemed happy to have another one of his kin to play with. Quintus' lady hellhound was called Mrs. O'Leary and she was a kind, cute oversized puppy. Percy grinned a little. Nico was probably right. If Pluto trusted Quintus and his dog Mrs. O'Leary then maybe Percy was just a bit too much on edge due to all that war brewing over their heads. Sighing, Percy leaned back some more.

"Where's Leo?", asked Nico softly, kissing Percy's temple. "Frank was so looking forward to seeing him again, but when you and Tyson came without Leo..."

Percy winced a little. Maybe Leo's blossoming feelings for Frank were another reason why Leo was eager to go to Camp Jupiter, where his girlfriend was living. Grinning, he turned toward Nico.

"Leo's not feeling too well. Maybe he'll come later on, but for now he's on bed rest", replied Percy softly before kissing Nico. "So, what else is new around here?"

"Grover got a deadline for finding Pan. One week to find him or he'll lose his searcher's license", informed Nico with a frown, chin on Percy's shoulder now. "It sucks. He's pretty down."

"I'll go and cheek him up later", declared Percy before getting up. "But first I gotta kick my boyfriend's butt in a fair and square duel. So move that butt of yours."
Nico grinned as he took Percy's hand and let him pull him along to the center of the arena once Quintus clapped loudly and ordered them to pair up and show him how far they were.

"A quest?", yelped Leo wide-eyed and stared at the senate. "T—To the labyrinth? The labyrinth?"

"We discovered the entrance not too long ago", replied Hazel with a frown. "We've been discussing this ever since, but we came to the conclusion that... we need to investigate it."

"We suspect that the traitors entered and fled that way", added Jason. "And... we agreed on a team. If you... want to come with us. You, me, Hazel and Mike. We'll leave this evening."

Somehow, Leo had a feeling that this was what mamma and papà had been talking about. The Latino frowned and nodded sharply. After that moment, the rest of the day seemed to pass far too fast. He didn't have a single moment to call Percy and update him on what was happening. No, it was packing, eating, planning and then the four were already off into the labyrinth.

"This is scary", whispered Leo and grabbed Hazel's hand subconsciously.

"It's the place where Minos kept the Minotaur. The monster that ate teens. Yeah, scary", agreed Jason and grabbed Leo's other hand, frowning. "I mean, we need to get rid of this."

"For that, we need to find the power-source of the labyrinth. Aka Daedalus", stated Mike.

"How... do we do that though? Are we going to like ask for the way?", asked Leo ridiculed.

Of course that was when they literally ran into the god of ways and decisions at a crossroads. The two-faced god Janus was smirking at them as they reached two doors. Either left or ride.

"You need to make a decision", stated one head before the other continued, both looking at the four demigods. "Either way will lead to your doom though."

"How... are we going to do this?", whispered Hazel concerned, looking over at the boys.

"We could split up, two go left and two go right?", suggested Jason, just to be glared at.

"Yeah, splitting up. Great plan", grunted Mike and shook his head.

"You know, we should... We should flip a coin", offered Leo, earning himself a doubtful look from each his companions before he shrugged. "Why not? What else are we supposed to do?"

Mike gave him a ridiculed look. "Where are we supposed to go?", asked Mike, his voice deep and low as it lulled them all in, brown eyes looking at Janus. "What are we looking for?"

"You seek the workshop of Daedalus", answered one head, before the other buttered in. "To find it, you seek the workshop of Vulcan himself. He will show you the way."

Mike smirked in a victorious way while Jason and Hazel tried to shake the effect of Mike's charmspeak off. Even they wanted to tell him where to go, even though they had no idea where to go. Charmspeak was a very handy power of the children of Venus and as Janus willingly motioned for them to go left, the four headed over without a second's doubt.
Percy started to see where the whole worry on New Year's Eve had come from when he and Annabeth were frantically running for cover when two gigantic scorpions interrupted a game of Capture the Flag. They were in danger. Camp was in danger. All those months and there were still monsters being leaked into camp by the traitors. They needed to find where they came from. And as luck would want it, Percy and Annabeth managed to do so by accident. They hid from the scorpions in the entrance to the labyrinth – Daedalus' labyrinth.

"This is big. We need to investigate. Take care of this problem", declared Clarisse annoyed as the cabin-heads met past the game (and past taking out the scorpions).

"We need a quest", agreed Katie with a frown. "Any volunteers?"

"With the increase of monster appearances, I'd prefer if Luke and Clarisse stayed here. We need our strong senior heroes", pointed Silena out, braiding her hair absentmindedly.

"I actually second that", agreed Luke displeased. "But if this is really the labyrinth we're talking about, we should send our... young big guns. Thalia, Nico."

"Percy", added Annabeth, earning a few confused looks. "He proved himself last summer and the last one to successfully navigate the labyrinth was a son of Poseidon. Theseus."

"What we'd need is a bit more-", started Will to complain.

After both his big brothers had turned out 'missing', he was the default cabin-head of Apollo Cabin and even though he did not like it, he tried his best. So one could see it as ironic that his complain about a lack of information was interrupted by his father's oracle literally stumbling in.

"You shall delve in the darkness of the endless maze, the dead, the traitor and the lost one raise. You shall rise or fall by the ghost king's hand. The child of Athena's final stand.

Destroy with a hero's final breath, and lose a love to worse than death", declared the oracle in its crooked voice, staring Annabeth dead in the eyes like the creepy zombie it was.

"...Well, there you go, have some cryptic information", grunted Luke and blinked slowly.

"Okay, so... Annabeth leads the quest", stated Thalia slowly. "Who do you want to take with you?"

"Nico, Percy, Thalia and Reyna", declared Annabeth after a moment.

Or at least that was what Annabeth decided on inside the Big House. Of course, camp-life liked to throw everything upside-down. Instead of getting to IM Leo and tell him about the quest they got, Percy somehow got stuck negotiating between crazy friends once Grover overheard about the quest.

"No, you don't get it", declared Grover, pacing Cabin Three. "If Pan is anywhere, it has to be the labyrinth! It's the perfect answer, you know? I mean, he literally disappeared from the surface of the world! Of course he did if he's stuck beneath the surface in the labyrinth! I have to go, man!"

The satyr had been pacing the cabin ever since Percy had told his cabin about the quest. 'Talking' to Grover yesterday to cheer him up had ended with the upset satyr practically moving into the cabin and whining about everything to Percy, Nico and Tyson, who had grown very fond of the
"Grover, man", started Nico with a sympathetic look. "You can't..."

"You can't go alone", offered Percy with a smile. "How about we just... do a second quest?"

"Percy, I love you, but you can't just-", started Nico doubtfully.

"I'll come too!", declared Tyson with sparkling eyes. "If big brother goes, I wanna go too!"

Nico stared after the two brothers as they led the satyr out of the room. Reyna snorted as she pat him on the back while most others in the cabin laughed at the face Nico was making.

"You should have realized that nothing's gonna stop Percy at this point", stated Ethan.

"I want Percy with me on this quest, at my side. So I can watch out for him", grunted Nico with a glare. "This is a fucking maze we're talking about. I don't want him to get lost..."

"Stop worrying about him like he's a damsel in distress. He wiped the floor with you yesterday", snorted Alabaster and threw a pillow at Nico, who barely managed to dodge it.

"I know", huffed Nico defensively. "It got nothing to do with me thinking him unable to defend himself. I just... prefer him at my side, you know? You like it better when Ethan's close too."

"...Point taken", muttered Alabaster amused. "Well then, try to survive, huh?"

"Yeah, thanks for nothing, Alabastard", muttered Nico beneath his breath.

Hazel was immensely glad that they had Leo with them. Between herself and Leo, they were coming along well. Hazel was, due to her heritage, perfect to navigate underground, while Leo was good at finding little tracks leading toward Vulcan's forges – hidden signs, left-over devices and broken toys that marked how close Vulcan's forges were. Yet actually entering the forges and coming face to face with the grumpy blacksmith. Jason gulped and pushed Leo forward like a sacrifice. The tinkerer turned to glare at his best friend who just shrugged.

"He's your dad, Leo", hissed Jason, looking at Mike and Hazel for support, who also nodded.

"Thanks. I'll keep that in mind for when we ever encounter Jupiter", muttered Leo beneath his breath before turning toward his father. "Uhm... Hi? I'm Leo. Your son. Well, one of them."

"I know who you are", grunted Vulcan as he stared at Leo with somewhat troubles eyes (most likely wondering what his Greek son was doing with the two Romans). "You have your mother's eyes."

Leo instinctively flinched at the mention of his mother. Part of him was still suffering harshly from the guilt over her death, regardless of how often Percy told him that he wasn't at fault for what had happened. Vulcan reluctantly put down his hammer to approach Leo, a very heavy hand coming awkwardly down on Leo's head, resting on his curls to ruffle them roughly.

"It was not your fault", stated Vulcan gruffly. "Esperanza was a... good and kind woman. She died trying to protect you. She... wouldn't want for you to blame yourself."

Leo could feel tears pricking in the corners of his eyes upon hearing not just his father's voice for the first time, but hearing him talk that way about his mom. Even though he didn't know
Hephaestus at all, Leo couldn't keep from throwing himself into his father's arms, hugging him tightly. For a moment, Vulcan looked awkward and lost before wrapping his arms around Leo as though Leo was a precious and easily breakable glass figurine. Jason awkwardly cleared his throat. As Vulcan turned to glare at him rather viciously, Jason instantly took a step back, getting elbowed by Mike.

"You should stay back, brother", warned Vulcan with a vicious look. "Even though you are my father's son by one of his countless mistresses, my mother who abandoned me and threw me over Olympus for my imperfection seems to favor you, golden-locked Ken doll."

"...Right. Staying back", nodded Jason sharply as he could practically feel the hostility.

"We... We need your help, Lord Vulcan", requested Mike, voice soft and tinted with charmspeak.

"Do not try your little trickery on me, outcome of my wife's unfaithfulness", warned Vulcan, the anger in his voice rising as he looked from one boy to the next. "I have lived with your mother and her charmspeak for long enough to know how to avoid it."

"Please, Lord Vulcan", interrupted Hazel, stepping in front of the two other boys.

Vulcan's face softened, only barely so but it did. "Your father has taken in my son and cared for him as though Leo was his own. I have never received that... kindness from any of the Olympian gods, so I owe your father. And I will make an exception for... Leo. What do you want?"

"We... need to find Daedalus' workshop? We tried tracking it down, but unlike yours, it seems impossible to find because as soon as we have a lead, it just... shifts away", explained Leo.

"Very well", nodded Vulcan. "I will help you, if you do something for me. We gods never hand out any favors for free. I am a very busy god, unlike others, so I don't have the time to go and investigate myself, but someone or something has invaded my forges beneath Mount Saint Helens. Go and take care of this problem for me and I will guide you to Daedalus' workshop."

"Mount Saint Helens? Sure. We'll take care of it! Thanks, dad!", exclaimed Leo with a bright smile.

Vulcan frowned for a moment as he marveled at just how much Leo resembled Esperanza, before the four teens practically fled out of the forges, in such a hurry to take care of this and continue their quest. Vulcan knew the main war at the moment was between the titans and the gods, but he could see all around him that beneath it all, Pluto and Jupiter were once again edging on. This time however, it was obvious that the odds were in Pluto's favor and not Jupiter's. This time, Pluto had managed to draw more of the gods on his own side. Vulcan included, for what he had done for Leo.

/GREEKS/


"Will do, cabin-head", chuckled Reyna with a salute and a smirk.

She had one arm casually wrapped around Annabeth's shoulder, drawing the blonde in. Honestly, Reyna felt honored that Annabeth wanted her on this quest. Thalia? The big sister mentor and oldest friend, also daughter of the most powerful god? Yes, that Reyna understood. Nico? The so-called Ghost King, just like in the prophecy, he was also very powerful and a son of the
underworld, while they wanted to go beneath the surface here. Then there was the other half of
the quest. Part of Reyna still wondered why Annabeth had agreed to let them split off the quest.
She understood where Grover was coming from, of course. Pan had not been seen anywhere on
the surface world in too long – all the satyr scouts and the huntresses looking and not finding
anything. Reyna may only have known Grover for a year now, but he was a good guy and being
a searcher was his biggest dream. He deserved this last chance. And Percy, always the generous
guy, had agreed to join Grover on his search together with Tyson. They had managed to rope
Frank into this too somehow. As far as Reyna knew, Frank was too grumpy and gloomy about
not getting to see Leo and the fact that now his best friend Nico was going on a quest hadn't
helped, so he easily volunteered.

"Frank", growled Nico while still staring deep into Percy's eyes. "If something happens to Percy,
I'm going to cut you up and drop you into Tartarus, am I clear?"

"...Can I still change my mind?", asked Frank disturbed, turning toward Grover.

"No!", exclaimed Tyson with the largest grin, grabbing Frank and Grover each in one arm and
carrying them over to the entrance to the labyrinth. "We're going on an adventure, right brother?"

Percy perked up a little, very happy that his little brother would be there to partake in this
adventure. And if he was being honest, he had chosen to split from Nico on purpose here. Yes, he
had enjoyed fighting at Nico's side last summer, but part of him had been so preoccupied with
trying to impress Nico that it had distracted him in the end. The eight of them entered together and
they walked the creepy halls together until they came to their first fork in the road.

"Well...", drawled Annabeth with calculating eyes. "This is it. You going to be okay?"

Grover locked eyes with her and nodded determined. "This is it. I can... sense something. Right.
We're going right. You take left? Go and find Daedalus. Shut this place down."

Finding the forges of Vulcan wasn't too hard. Hazel could easily navigate toward Mount Saint
Helens now that Hazel had an actual destination to head for. Finding it wasn't the problem.
Dealing with the crazy little seal-creatures – telekhines, as Leo called them. So maybe their fight-
plan was a bit all over the place and they were uncoordinated. Jason zapped them, Leo burned
them, Mike slayed them with his sword and Hazel cracked the Earth open to swallow them.

"There's too many of them", pointed Jason out, rubbing monster dust off his cheek.

"We need a plan", pointed Mike out, looking annoyed. "This is a workshop. There must be
explosives around here, right? Hazel and I draw them out, distract them, Jason use your wind-
powers to herd them together where the explosives are, Leo sets the whole mess on fire."

Leo took a quick look around and his eyes practically zoomed in on said explosives. "Got it."

Jason took off into the air so he could oversee everything everything. Hazel and Mike worked
well enough together as they lured the telkhines away from their task of whatever the titans
wanted them to do here. Manipulating currents was basically Jupiter Powers 101, so summoning
the air to swirl around them and cage them, herding them together tighter and tighter until all the
little seal-monsters were stuck together and then Jason gave the signal to Leo. The little firebug
had an easy time lighting the explosives on fire. There was only a teensy-tiny little problem here.

Jason was still flying around right above the now happening explosion and it literally knocked him
into the air. The last thing he heard before passing out were the frantic screams of Hazel, Mike and
Leo and then there was just blackness and a world of pain as he got blown farther and farther away.

He didn't know how long he was out of commission, but when he came to it again, he instantly knew something had gone horribly, horribly wrong, because there was the ocean and there were palm trees and there, right in front of him, leaning over him, was an angel with caramel-curls framing a beautiful, kind face, smiling gently down at Jason. Jason blinked sluggishly.

"Welcome to Ogygia, young hero", stated the caramel-curled angel softly. "My name is Calypso."

Chapter End Notes

Hah, not the update I last announced, buuut I guess I will still with the original routation because I saw how long it's been since the last update. So, "A to Z with the di Angelos" on Saturday.

Next chapter will feature the re-appearance of Piper and Rachel, Jason's time on Ogygia and other such BotL related plot-thingies ;)


Battle of the Labyrinth I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 26: Battle of the Labyrinth I

Calypso was an angel. Well, technically she was a titan, but Jason was very willing to overlook that one. After all, not all titans had to be bad. Just like not all gods had to be good. She was sweet, gentle and personally took care of all of Jason's injuries even though she wasn't obliged to do so. But apparently it was what she did, always did. The gods were cruel, sending her heroes to tend to, heroes to fall in love with. They never stayed though. Calypso told him all about it, about the great heroes that had visited her, the great heroes she had fallen in love with. The great heroes that broke her heart. And it broke Jason's heart to hear it. She was so amazing, funny and cute. How had no one ever chosen her? He didn't understand it. She was selfless and good, being punished for the deeds of her family and not even her own. All she had ever done was be the daughter of Atlas and that was hardly her fault; after all Jason wasn't at fault for being a son of Jupiter either.

"You're very different from anyone I ever met", whispered Calypso as they sat together.

They sat on the beach and stared out into the sunset together, Jason having one arm wrapped around her. His injuries were nearly healed and Calypso's eyes had grown sadder and sadder the better he got. After he had declared he'd be good to go today, she had barely spoken at all.

"Yeah, how so?", asked Jason softly, caressing her side with his thumb.

"Most other heroes were... very centered around themselves. Boasting about their parentage and their heroic deeds. You... talk more about your friends than yourself", stated Calypso slowly. "Hazel and Leo and Mike and the others you told me about. What great heroics you all did together. You're also unusually cute, you know? Especially when you blush like that."

She giggled softly and it was a sweet sound that made Jason instinctively lean in and just kiss her. She stiffened at first, clearly surprised, but then she just melted into his touch, eyelids fluttering shut as she rested her hands against his chest. He offered her a dopey grin when they parted, but the look in Calypso's eyes was heartbreaking. Frowning confused, Jason followed her line of sight over his shoulder to spot a raft at the beach. His confused frown turned a little more confused as he felt her hands grasp his shirt very, very tightly. She sighed and rested her forehead against his chest.

"...You will go", whispered Calypso, not even bothering to phrase it like a question. "Everyone always leaves. And I will be alone, for... years. Maybe centuries again. But... you must go. Your friends, they... need you. They were in danger when you left, they will still be in danger..."

"You're right", agreed Jason and stood, stretching a little to test how well he could move around. "It really is due time to go. Knowing Leo, he managed to get into trouble somehow... Okay, let's go."

"Beg your pardon?", asked Calypso startled.

"Well, unless there's something here you really wanna keep?", offered Jason confused. "Then you should probably really get packing so we can leave. Hazel's gonna like you."

Calypso blinked a couple of times before frowning. "I can't leave. You... know I can't leave. The
Calypso blinked a couple of times before frowning. "I can't leave. You... know I can't leave. The raft appears when... I fall in love with the hero, the hero has to make a choice between staying at my side or leaving to get back to their important quest. Then the hero chooses the quest over me and I am... left to myself and my broken heart, until the circle repeats. I can't leave with you, Jason."

Jason returned her frown, looking very confused. "I... thought I made it clear that I'm not like the others. I refuse to accept this, Calypso. I'm not going to leave you here on your own."

"H—How...?", asked Calypso unsure.

Jason grinned, broadly and very sure, as he wrapped his arms tightly around her waist. "I'm a son of Jupiter. I control the air-currents, I can fly. Just hold on tight and I get us out of here."

Calypso's heart skipped a couple beats as Jason – revitalized and energized from the rest and care he had gotten from Calypso – took off into the air, holding her safe and secure. Her eyes watered as she saw Ogygia growing smaller and smaller in the distance, hope speeding up her heart.

Percy liked Grover. Over the past hours – or day, telling time down here was a bit hard – they had bonded well. He was fun and he knew awesome stories about Nico; and so did Frank. It was awesome listening to embarrassing stories about his boyfriend. And he also enjoyed how well Grover and Tyson got along with each other. It had been a rocky start when they had first met, because naturally satyrs weren't too fond of cyclopes, but they were getting along real well.

"You think Briares will come around?", asked Grover concerned.

"Yes!", exclaimed Tyson determined. "If we need him, he will be there."

Their so far fruitless chase through the labyrinth had led them to Alcatraz not long ago. Among captive monsters, they had met Briares the Hundred-Handed. Tyson had been adamant to free the other cyclops, but Briares had denied them. It upset Tyson, but the young cyclops was also very determined that if push came to shove, Briares would be there for them. Who was Percy to destroy his baby brother's hopes? If anything, he too hoped that Tyson was right with it.

Of course those thoughts were only secondary at best when the four of them found themselves captured by a scary three bodied giant – on Percy's list of things he could have done without meeting, it sure ranked very high up. The bad thing, well aside from them getting captured, was that Nico, Thalia, Annabeth and Reyna were locked up in cages and not looking impressed.

"Well, at least they got captured before us", offered Frank helpfully as they got pushed into a cage.

"Gee, thanks, Frank", grunted Nico as he stared pointedly at his best friend.

"What? Means you guys failed before us", shrugged Frank with a half-grin.

"H—Hold on!", called Percy out loudly as he was practically pushed into Grover's lap.

"What is it you want, dinner?", inquired Geryon unimpressed.

"I've heard your name before. Geryon", stated Percy, face screwed up. "In mom's bedtime stories."

"The labors of Herakles", supplied Annabeth and heaved a sigh. "Stables. Need cleaning. At least someone has been paying attention to their history. I've tried to tell those for a while now."
"Well, it's not like we're fire-proof or anything", muttered Nico, hand sticking out of the cage.

Percy grinned as he reached out and linked fingers with his boyfriend, while Reyna grunted in agreement. "I'd try, but Annabeth disagrees. Says that Hercules and his superpowers barely could."

"Herakles", corrected Annabeth a bit irritated – seriously, Reyna kept slipping into Roman names.

"Same difference", huffed Reyna with a teasing grin. "I mean, they are the same, right?"

"I'll do it", blurted Percy out, interrupting the banter as he glared fiercely at Geryon.


"Watch me", grinned Percy with a wink before staring Geryon dead in the eyes. "I'll clean your stables and you'll let me and my friends go. Pretty sure they're a mess after two thousand years."

"...You could say that", hummed Geryon intrigued and nodded. "Very well, little demigod."

Nico watched with horror written all over his face as the monster took his Percy out of the cage again and pulled him along. In here, they were at least together and could somehow find some way out. Now Percy was out there, all on his own and the thought terrified Nico. He had been on edge since parting ways with Grover's group, because he couldn't help but worry about Percy. At least then he had known that Frank, Tyson and Grover would be with Percy. Now Percy was alone, with a stable full of man-eating horses. All on his own. What if something happened to Percy? What if he got eaten? Either by the horses or Geryon decided to have a little demigod snack?

"Will you stop it with the fretting already?", sighed Thalia annoyed and elbowed him. "Seriously. It's your fault we got captured by Geryon in the first place, because you're off your game, cousin."

Nico just grumbled, because he had no witty reply to that. He knew it was his fault. He knew he was being irrational. He knew Percy was strong. That didn't change that he worried about Percy though and that he wanted to be there and help Percy. Make sure Percy would be alright.

"At least now we have a chance to get out of here", stated Annabeth in a whisper.

Now that Geryon was out with Percy, they had a moment to talk freely. Everyone turned toward Annabeth and looked at her like she had gone crazy. The daughter of Athena rolled her eyes. At least they had one person with brains here, otherwise they'd be dinner.

"Frank", said Annabeth pointedly. "Turn into a rodent or something and escape. Look for weapons. Or the keys to the cells. Preferably both, so we can take Geryon out."

Frank had the urge to hit himself upside the head. He tended to forget how useful he could be. Concentrating hard, he turned himself into a rat and escaped through the bars. He started searching the place frantically for the keys until he realized that Geryon had taken them with him when he had left with Percy for the stables. Okay. Second best thing: Weapons. He greatly disliked the pressure of being the one who had to save his friends on his own at the moment and he really wished Leo would be there. Which was weird and annoying, because he had only known Leo for a year now, but the Latino was so easy-going and funny. He's make a dumb joke or something that'd manage to distract and relax Frank and then everything would seem just that much easier. He wondered why Leo hadn't come with his brothers to camp this year, but the thought was interrupted by a find – a bow and arrows. Finally. Something he could work with too. He turned human again and hid with the weapon, waiting for Geryon. This was going to be an incredibly
hard shot; Geryon had three bodies – three hearts. Taking out one won't dissolve the monster. Frank would have to do three perfect shots in a row – each hitting one heart and that fast enough to kill Geryon – or one single shot through all three hearts. That was going to take a lot of luck. Or divine help. Over the past year of living at Camp Half-Blood, Frank had particularly bonded with Thalia; they had met by chance a couple times at the shooting range before opening up to each other and training together. She talked a lot about her friend Zoe who had gotten killed, about the offer of the hunt, about Lady Artemis. Lady Artemis, goddess of hunting. Frank closed his eyes tightly and started praying harder than he had ever prayed before, begging the goddess to help him, if not for his own sake but then to save Thalia, Reyna and Annabeth – since she was favoring girls and since Thalia seemed to mean something to Artemis. Surely the goddess would not wish for Thalia to die this way.

"This one time I will help you, boy. It's always good when my uncles owe me."

The voice was soft yet sharp like the winter wind and gone just as fast. As soon as Geryon stepped into his line of sight, laughing maniacally as he pulled a messy Percy into the house, Frank took a last deep breath and let the arrow soar. Geryon roared as the arrow pierced his hearts one by one before he collapsed in a pile of dust. Percy frowned a bit confused, rubbing the monster dust off his cheek and bending down to pick up the keys. Frank heaved a relieved sigh as he stepped forward.

"Didn't take you for such a good shot", commented Percy impressed.

"A bit of praying worked wonders", muttered Frank awkward. "Let's go get the others."

They went to unlock the cages and let the other Greeks out. Nico instantly pulled Percy into a tight hug, squeezing until Percy was wheezing to get his attention. The Italian looked embarrassed as he let go, receiving teasing pats on the back from Reyna and Annabeth.

"You reek, Jackson", noted Thalia and wiggled her nose. "What did you do?"

"I cleaned two thousand years worth of horse shit and tried not to get eaten", huffed Percy offended. "But yeah. I'd love to get like... a bath or something. You guys mind if we go look for a river? Different river than the one I just used to clean the stables, please."

"We'll find you something, man", laughed Grover and laid an arm around Percy's shoulders. "Because if you continue smelling like that, there's no chance for me to find Pan."

"Jeez, I feel the love", drawled Percy pointedly.

"Here, take this. It will give you all the love you can't feel", stated Annabeth and pushed Nico.

"No kidding. He spend the entire time you were gone brooding and worrying", snorted Reyna.

"You'd think you jumped right into a volcano with sharks", added Thalia and rolled her eyes. "Like you went on a one hundred percent suicide mission there, seriously..."

"Nico", chided Percy with an upset frown. "You... know I can watch out for myself... right? I mean, do you... not trust me? Do I look like a damsel in distress to you, Nick?"

As the eight of them left the farm and started to make their way deeper into the labyrinth, Nico eagerly grasped Percy's hand and pulled him back against his chest, looking like a lost puppy. "No. Percy, no. I... I know you're capable. Heck, I'm pretty sure you'd be capable to beat me if we'd be pitched against each other in a serious match. I... I just worry. Because I love you. I'd be happier if I could just... be there. Fight with you. I'm trying, Perce. I am. It's just... hard..."
Percy heaved a sigh as he tilted his head up to kiss him. "I know, Nick. It's why I chose to go on a
different quest than you. So we can get used to... to the fact that we're both heroes and that we
won't be able to stand side by side throughout the entire war that is yet to come."

"So wise", whispered Nico in awe as he kissed Percy's temple. "My clever little Sea Prince."

"Urgh. They're awful. Are they always this bad?", sighed Thalia and made a face.

"No. They're worse when we're in our cabin", snickered Reyna.

/ROMANS/

"You disappear for like two hours and then you come back – w—with a
girlfriend."

Leo was gesturing wildly as he looked pointedly from Jason to Calypso and back. The caramel-
haired beauty blushed a little shyly as she looked at her new companions. It had already been
centuries in Ogygia's time since she had one companion. The years that had passed since she last
was with a group of people? They were countless. Hours in the mortal world were already weeks
in Ogygia – yet it had been actual millennia in the human world. The dark-skinned girl with the
kind, golden eyes stepped forward and offered Calypso her hand with a friendly smile on her lips.

"Hello. What my socially awkward boyfriend was trying to say was 'nice to meet you'", supplied
the girl amused. "My name is Hazel Levesque, that's Leo Valdez and this is Mike Kahale."

"Nice to meet you too", replied Calypso and shook the offered hand. "I'm Calypso. The... sea-
nymph. Daughter of Atlas. I'm... a little out of the loop with this world, because I have been gone
for a while. Long while. The gods kind of banished me to an island."

"You're dating an actual person from the myths?", asked Leo dumbfounded, staring at Jason.
"Like, Calypso the ex-girlfriend of Odysseus? Man, you... you got to do some living-up-to to do
there."

"He does not", disagreed Calypso with a displeased frown. "Odysseus abandoned me and chose
Penelope over me. Jason chose me. Jason saved me. No one can live up to that."

Hazel giggled as she noticed how red Jason's ears had turned at that. This sure was an unexpected
turn of events – but she was happy for her co-praetor. Aphrodite knows the boy deserved some
love after all the losses he had been through. He rarely spoke of it, but he had lost his mother and
his big sister somehow, before ending up with Lupa at a very tender age.

"Right. Hate to be the one to break up the love-birds here, the irony of that actually, but we should
continue on our way. We have work to do", interrupted Mike. "Not... that Lord Vulcan was
helpful."

"Huh?", asked Jason confused and interested as the now five of them resumed walking.

"Dad said that what helped Theseus navigate wasn't just Ariadne's string; it was the princess
herself. A mortal. A mortal with sight", replied Leo and made a face. "So... where do we get one
of those?"

/MEETING/

So, Percy taking a swim to clean himself up had not been the best idea, because somehow that got
them captured by the monster forces of the Titan Army. They had fought back, but the element of
surprise had been too strong, so all of them found themselves shackled and held down in the
middle of a freaking arena like they were Gladiators in Rome, offered to Caesar. Caesar, in this
case, was the giant Antaeus, flanked by the two demigods they had already encountered on the 
_Princess Andromeda_ – Bryce Lawrence and Drew Tanaka. Percy stared at them worried.

"There will be a fight", declared Antaeus cheerfully. "My troops told me they captured a group of 
Roman demigods. This will be the fight of fights! And you, brother, will do the fighting. Keep the 
frail ones, to motivate our friends to do the fighting. Then bring in the Romans."

"...What does he mean by Romans?", asked Frank very confused.

There was only a split-second for Percy to decide what to do – and it wasn't that he had much 
chance to as he saw Leo and others being dragged in. "Uh, thing is... Greek demigods aren't the 
only ones in existence. The gods also sire kids in their Roman forms. Romans got their own camp, 
that's where Leo went this summer. And uh, those... are Leo's friends. Romans."

"Wonderful!", roared Bryce delighted as he saw Jason and Hazel. "Jason, he is a son of Jupiter! I 
wish to see a fight between him and the son of Poseidon! It's perfect!"

Some of the underlings handed out weapons to Jason and Percy, while the demigods were going 
through a ton of emotions at once. Nico felt betrayed that Percy would keep _such_ a secret from 
him, Frank was utterly confused but also delighted to see Leo, Leo looked horrified, Hazel looked 
forgotten and betrayed, eyes darting from Percy to Leo and back, while Thalia was stuck staring at 
Jason with an unreadable expression and like she was frozen to the spot.

"Right. Uh, short version: All of _those_, started Percy, pointing behind himself. "Are Greek 
demigods. Friends. All of those however-",- Percy paused to wave up to Antaeus and the 
bystanders. ",-are the monsters and enemy. But they want us – Romans and Greeks – to fight each 
other. Got it?"

"...No", grunted Jason, trying to lung after an enemy demigod as he pulled Calypso away.

"Perfect", grunted Percy and sighed before raising his voice a little. "Okay. Listen up. There is 
absolutely _no_ time for all the accusations and soap-opera drama currently going on in your heads. 
We can have all the heartfelt conversations later. After we fought our common enemy."

Calypso, Grover and Annabeth were being threatened by some of the traitorous demigods serving 
Kronos. Their mistake was to think that the pretty blonde was the type of girl that could be held 
captive. She easily served his captor a knee to the groin and took his weapon. She was a daughter 
of Athena, a rational thinker – and as clogged as her head was with this revelation and the 
possibilities, she also knew how to turn off her feelings and do the logical thing. Which, in this 
case, was to fight the enemy. The others were slowly pulled out of their stupor by her actions and 
by the roar of Antaeus, who was not a fan of what was happening. Percy grabbed Nico by the 
hand and locked eyes for a moment – long enough for Nico to see an apology, love and trust in 
them. Shaken from his previous thoughts, Nico attacked the closest captor of theirs and stole his 
weapon.

"Jay", called Percy out, elbowing the son of Jupiter _hard_. "Snap out of it. We're your friends. All 
that's changed is our parentage. Now, you gonna help me and my boyfriend bring down a giant?"

Annabeth all the while – with the aid of Thalia and Reyna – had managed to free not just Grover 
but also Calypso and upon seeing her safe and protected, he felt himself a little more willing to 
agree. There was the stinging feeling of betrayal, as though Leo – his best friend on this planet – 
hadn't trusted him, but... there was also the feeling of responsibility, of wanting everyone safe.

"You have a boyfriend, Jackson?", snapped Jason teasingly. "Who's insane enough for _that_?"

To drive his point home, he knocked an empousa down and turned her into dust. Percy had to admit that it was insanely hot seeing his boyfriend slay monsters. Blushing a little, he surveyed the field.

"Okay", called Annabeth loudly after having done the same. "Everyone, take out the minor threats. The kids of the Big Three – head for the leader. Go kill a giant."

Nico stumbled only a little when aside from Thalia, a pretty dark-skinned girl also joined them.

Chapter End Notes

Gotta admit, there was a bit more Jalypso than planned, but I for my part really ship it, because he's the kind of hero Calypso falls for. Noow, aside from that - meeting! Romans met Greeks! Next chapter, they're even going to talk. Thalia and Jason, Frank and Leo and Hazel, Hazel and Nico - there's gonna be a whole lot of talking. And Rachel and Piper will finally properly join in on the action!

Next update is going to be "A to Z with the di Angelos" on Saturday!
Killing Antaeus was really easy when you have two kids of Zeus/Jupiter, two of Hades/Pluto and one of Poseidon. The traitorous demigods easily fled the scene, clever enough to run before being caught. The Greek teams and the Roman team left together, for now retreating to check out each other's injuries and more importantly so they could answer some questions.

"Okay. What in the world is going on here?", asked Nico impatiently as soon as they sat down at the foot of a river, cleaning themselves and their injuries. "What... are they? Who are they?"

He was quite pointedly glaring at Jason, Hazel, Mike and Calypso, one very possessive arm around Percy's waist to keep him away from the strangers. Percy sighed and gently pried himself free from Nico's grasp to step up to Leo, who stood a little lost between Romans and Greeks.

"The gods, in ancient times, were worshiped in Greece first and then in Rome, right?", started Percy slowly, waiting for confirming nods from everyone. "The gods in their Greek form sired demigods and still do so – I'm a son of Poseidon, Leo is a son of Hephaestus. But after the Romans adapted the gods, they also... took on a second form and started siring children in Roman form too. But just like in ancient times, Romans and Greeks never quite got along. They always competed with each other. So with the time, the gods decided it would be best to separate their Roman and Greek children, to prevent further war. Actually, the Civil War was mainly Roman demigods against Greek demigods and it was... well, the reason they separated us. They simply stopped telling us Greeks about the existence of Romans and let Romans believe that no more Greek demigods had been sired since the gods moved on to their Roman forms." Percy paused for a moment to let that sink in, before turning toward the Romans. "Leo learned the truth while we were living in the underworld. He met the Romans before we met the Greeks and he... He never meant to lie to any of you."

"But he did", grunted Jason with a frown. "I mean, I get that the gods didn't want us to learn the truth, but... dude, you're my best friend in the world and you lied, man. To Hazel too!"

Hazel shifted a little and stared at her hands, before she sighed and looked up at Leo. "I understand. I don't hold it against you, Leo. I'm not... angry at you or anything. Some secrets..."

She let the sentence hang open and Leo knew what she meant. Still, he was very relieved, so he stepped up to her and took her hand. She smiled a little as she pulled him closer for a short kiss.

"And what about you, Percy?", inquired Annabeth sternly, arms crossed over her chest.

"Leo was lying to me too", replied Percy, staring her dead in the eyes. "He had been lying to me for four years. I only noticed last year that something was... wrong. So I started snooping around. That's why we were... fighting last year. I was disappointed that he lied to me, he was disappointed that I didn't trust him and snooped around. We worked things out, but I had to keep the secret too, just like he had to. Because it's not our secret, it's the secret of the gods. However, there is one significant reason why papà was... not entirely against Leo and me knowing." Again, Percy paused to take a deep breath, watching carefully for reactions. "All of us – Romans and Greeks alike – are battling the same foe. Bryce Lawrence, a Roman son of Orcus, and Drew Tanaka, a Greek daughter of Aphrodite, pledged their alliance to the Titans, more specifically to
Kronos/Saturn and Rhea/Opis. They want power, crave to rule and for that, they allied themselves with the former king and queen of Olympus. We're battling them from two fronts though and someone – namely me and Leo – has to keep tabs on who knows what, so at least someone has all information. That's the reason why I chose to spend this summer at Camp Half-Blood with the Greeks and Leo chose to spend this summer at Camp Jupiter with the Romans. Neither of us enjoys lying to you guys though."

Percy slowly, carefully, stepped up to the Greeks, reaching a hand out for Nico. The son of Hades however shied away some, still glaring fiercely at the ground. Percy blinked, obviously hurt.

"Don't hold it against them", said Grover seriously. "I... knew too. Chiron, our leader, and Lupa, the leader of the Romans, they do too. Since it's hard to tell if a demigod is Roman or Greek when we first look for them. It's the reason why we attend school with demigods for a while before bringing them to camp, because we need to learn not just that they're really demigods but also that they're indeed Greek. If we realize they're Romans, we contact Camp Jupiter. We're forbidden to tell."

"Okay", nodded Annabeth slowly, looking at the Romans. "How about some... introductions?"

"Good start", agreed Hazel with the smallest smile. "I'm Hazel Levesque, daughter of Pluto and leader of our camp. This is Jason Grace, son of Jupiter and my co-leader. Mike Kahale, son of Venus, and this is... Calypso, we collected her during our quest into this labyrinth."

"Annabeth Chase, daughter of Athena", countered Annabeth, returning the smile with a grin as she shook hands with Hazel. "Those are Nico di Angelo, son of Hades, Thalia Grace, daughter of Zeus, Reyna Ramirez-Arellano, daughter of Enyo, Frank Zhang, son of Ares, Tyson here is Percy's half-brother and the satyr's name is Grover – though he's technically speaking on a different quest."

"So you send two different quests into the labyrinth?", asked Hazel interested.

"Yeah. Grover, me, Tyson and Frank are actually looking for Pan – for Faunus. The god of the wild has been lost for a while and we're looking for him", explained Percy before rubbing the back of his neck. "Uhm, also... for the sake of truth, I think we should... There's something I need to tell you. I've noticed it in the beginning, but I didn't understand it back then. I only understood it after I met the other Romans. Frank and Reyna, they're... you're not Greek. You're Roman. But because you were already friends with demigods who then brought you to camp, it would have been too suspicious to move you to Camp Jupiter, so... the Greeks kept you here."

"Uhm...", grunted Frank very confused and sat down slowly. "But... does that mean I have to... leave Camp Half-Blood, now that we know this...? Because I don't want to leave Clarisse and Mark and Sherman and the others behind. I like my cabin. And... and the rest of camp."

"No. You're part of Camp Half-Blood, you don't have to leave", assured Percy. "And... And I for my part hope that now that it's semi-public knowledge, we can... bring Romans and Greeks together. All of us. So we can fight the Titans as one united front. But I think those are things we need to talk about once we found Daedalus' workshop and closed the labyrinth up. Do you... Do you guys think we can put this aside for now so we can work together and do the job we all were send here to do?"

"I have no problems with that", nodded Annabeth slowly, eying the others. "Thals? You're so quiet."

"They took you away from me", blurted Thalia out, staring at Jason – something she had done since his name was first mentioned. "They took you away from me because you're Roman..."
"...What's she talking about? Is she having a stroke?", whispered Leo confused and concerned.

"I... I had a little brother. Seven years younger. When... he was two, he... I thought he died. I thought my little brother died and then my mother died and I ran away. But... Jason Grace. Your eyes. The... the scar on your lip. You're my Jason", whispered Thalia and stepped up to Jason. "You're my little brother and they took you from me because I'm Greek and you're Roman."

Jason stared at her, completely overwhelmed. "I... remember your face..."

The others were a little shocked by this revelation, but Annabeth – always the strategist – sighed and cleared her throat. "Okay. Let's give those two... a little space. Come on, let's talk plans."

The others huddled together, a bit farther away from Thalia and Jason so the freshly reunited siblings could catch up a little. Romans and Greeks started exchanging stories and progress.

"So, my dad said that we need a GPS system like Theseus had in Princess Ariadne; a mortal with sight, whatever that means", concluded Leo frustrated.

Nico and Percy blinked surprised before exchanging a look. "We... know what that means."

"Care to let us in on the fun?", asked Hazel a little impatiently. "Because we're lost."

"Okay, so, on Valentine's Day, we met those two girls", started Percy, gesturing a little. "One's a daughter of Aphrodite, the other was a mortal, but both could quite clearly see the monster Nico and I were fighting outside the restaurant. So, the other girl must be a mortal with sight."

"And how do you suggest we find them?", asked Reyna with a frown, shifting a little.

"...I know where the daughter of Aphrodite lives", admitted Nico reluctantly. "Her name is Piper McLean. She, when she saw me, she asked me why I look like Bianca, so I asked my sister if she knows a daughter of Aphrodite. Apparently, she has been trying to recruit Piper for the Hunt."

"So, we go to this Piper girl and find out who her friend is?", inquired Mike curiously.

"Sounds like a plan?", offered Percy, receiving nods from most.

Due to the sheer size of their quest, they split up some again. Mike, Jason and Calypso returned to Camp Jupiter to bring the news of the Greeks and discuss the matter with the senate – since everything had to be discussed first with the Romans. Jason also needed to clear his head and he wanted to know Calypso safe. They promised to return with reinforcement though. Frank left to inform Camp Half-Blood and the cabin-heads of the Romans and suggest a proper meeting; he needed a little time to digest the news of not actually being Greek. Reyna volunteered to accompany Grover and Tyson deeper into the maze on the search for Pan since Percy preferred to aid the main quest since him and Nico were the ones who had met the two girls before. Hazel, Leo, Percy, Nico, Annabeth and Thalia went to Piper's place to ask for her redheaded friend. They were ridiculously lucky, because the redhead was actually there by the time they knocked. First impression was probably a bit dangerous, considering there were six strangers who looked mildly beat up in front of their door at that moment. But they easily lured the girls out with the promise of answers and considering that time was all they had once they were inside the maze, the girls finally got their answers. It turned out that Rachel Elizabeth Dare, as the redhead was called, was indeed just a mortal, but she could see beyond the Mist – and she saw the right path quite clearly as a faint glow on the floor. She was majorly excited to learn about the monsters now.
"So, all of you are demigods, huh? And Piper is one too?", asked Rachel curiously.


His hand was swinging a little, swinging closer to Percy who walked next to him. Percy watched the movement carefully, until their hands brushed and brushed again – and then finally Nico linked their fingers and gave Percy's hand a slight squeeze. It made the son of Poseidon smile.

"Bianca told me about it, that monsters are real and gods are real", added Piper excitedly.

"Excuse me, but who is this Bianca?", asked Hazel confused, looking to Leo for an answer.

"Bianca is Nico's older sister – full-blood sister, that is. She's also the head of the huntresses. Uhm, that's like the Greek version of the Amazons? And Bianca is the leader, like Kinzie is the queen of the Amazons, right? So, she's a daughter of Hades and leader of the hunt", explained Leo.

"I'm not sure if I like that Bianca deliberately kept a demigod from kept", pointed Annabeth out with a glare and a shake of her head. "She should have brought you to Camp Half-Blood, so you could be safe and make a proper decision about your future."

"She told me about that summer camp", answered Piper and blinked a couple times. "But I'm not interested in that. I mean, I kinda was, but then I changed schools and met Rachel and finally had a... friend. So I decided to learn and investigate together with Rachel, you know?"

"And have you made a decision?", asked Thalia, looking the younger girl up and down.

"I don't know", shrugged Piper with a frown. "I like Bianca. She introduced me to some of her friends, Phoebe, Naomi and Celyn. They're interesting and amazing and I like the idea of being a hero. She also told me about the reputation kids of Aphrodite have. Being pretty but also kind of useless. I want to be more than that and Bianca said it doesn't matter where you're from and who your parents are when you're a huntress. It sounds... empowering."

Thalia hummed and nodded slowly. She had seen that angle herself before too.

"Okay, enough with the chit-chat", hissed Annabeth. "I think we're getting close."

What they found when they found it was not entirely what the demigods had expected. Quintus – the nice, new trainer at Camp Half-Blood – turned out to be Daedalus. He had been a fool and entrusted Drew Tanaka with Ariadne's string, which was how the rebels had managed to sneak around in the maze and smuggle monsters into both camps. Sadly, they had their very own Ghost King guarding Daedalus' workshop – King Minos, the original owner of the labyrinth.

"You are not the Ghost King", growled Nico and straightened his back, reaching out for control over the undead. "I am the heir of Hades and I am the one true Ghost King!"

The ghost and ghouls surrounding the demigods whined and groaned as their command changed and they started turning on Minos at Nico's orders. Percy gulped hard as he watched his boyfriend was practically radiating power. This was probably the biggest turn-on the young teen had ever seen in his entire life and Percy was surprised by the shock of arousal coursing through him. Sadly, he got ripped out of the sensation as they had to flee. At Daedalus/Quintus' suggestion, they took the metal wings – improved versions of what had killed Daedalus' son Icarus – and flew away.
Of course did they get separated on their way.

And of course did Percy somehow end up with a golden sarcophagus and a psychopathic demigod. He gulped drily as he witnessed how Bryce Lawrence got possessed by the essence of Kronos. This was so not good. Not good at all. The now probably former demigod turned to look at Percy with deep golden eyes, cruelty level risen to a max. Percy felt frozen in place, unsure how to fight off a Titan Lord. Thankfully, the one person he had been stranded with apparently had better reflexes than he did, because Rachel seriously and honestly threw a pink plastic hairbrush at the Titan. Only newly reformed and highly surprised, Kronos was thrown off his game – long enough so Rachel and Percy could start running. And they ran fast. At least Percy had their very own compass with him. Sure, he had only spend about two hours with the redhead so far, but he somehow instantly liked Rachel. The redhead was refreshing, amusing and she apparently had guts.

"You think you can find the exit?", asked Percy loudly as they ran as fast as possible.

"I can, the question is if your friends can too", called Rachel loudly.

"Wait up!", exclaimed Percy and grabbed her by the arm. "There's... something off here."

Rachel frowned confused as Percy stopped her and led the way into a chamber. He could see a lush, living aura of pure, deep grin – something like he had never seen before. It wasn't hard to guess what was hidden in there and he was right. Pan laid sprawled out on a bed, clearly weak. Grover, Tyson and Reyna stood in front of it, solemn and respectful. Rachel took a step behind Percy.

"What... is this?", whispered Rachel softly, clearly confused.

"Pan, the god of the wild and nature", replied Percy as they slowly stepped up to the others.

"He's... dying", said Grover, pain evident in his voice. "We're... paying him our respects."

Percy and Rachel nodded as they came to stand with the others. With his dying moments, Pan only had one request. He wanted for them to pass on the message that Pan had died, they needed to remind people of the situation their planet was in and the dying of nature. The atmosphere was solemn by the time the five of them left the cave and made their way to the nearest exit.

"Hey", whispered Percy, nudging Grover. "You found him. There was nothing you could do."

"I... know, man. But still...", groaned Grover upset.

"You did good. You found him! Now you will spread his message and will!", exclaimed Tyson.

Grover turned to smile a little at the big guy. Percy all the while walked a step faster to catch up with Rachel, who had been rather silent too, which was a bit confusing considering.

"Are you alright?", asked Percy concerned. "I know the whole Titans and ghosts and monsters thing must be overwhelming and all... But we'll bring you home safely, okay?"

"It's not that", sighed Rachel and shook her head. "It's... My father, he's a rich land developer. He... helps killing nature. Killing... Pan. He died because of us humans..."

"That's not your fault though", frowned Percy. "And you can still do better than him."

"I guess I can", agreed Rachel slowly.
Discussions and debates were always very dragging in New Rome and many voiced their distrust for the Greeks – but most had gotten to know Leo, Percy and Tyson and had grown fond of them, so democracy was on the side of Mike and Jason. In the end, one argument won them all over; this war was happening and they were battling the same enemy – they needed to close the labyrinth for good. So the Romans armed themselves and manned the chariots and pegasi to travel all the way to Camp Half-Blood – they had agreed to chase the enemy forces to the Greek camp. 

"I still think this is a trap", declared Octavian with a constipated look.

"Yeah, sure. The Greeks are luring us, armed to our teeth, into their camp", snorted Jason and rolled his eyes. "You don't have to come along. In fact, please stay here."

Octavian huffed and straightened his back. "If Greeks are alive, I wish to see so for myself."

"I'd prefer if you'd stay", sighed Calypso as she stepped up to Jason and grasped his face to pull him down into a slow, soft kiss. "But... you're a hero. So... be heroic. And then return to me."

"I promise", smiled Jason dazed. "You could... look around and stuff?"

Calypso smiled amused by her new boyfriend as she watched him and the others fly off.

Frank sighed a bit frustrated as he and the other kids of Ares were arming themselves. There hadn't been a big discussion about this; the enemy was coming and they needed to protect camp. Roman reinforcements were coming – and that was something they'd only believe once they saw it. For now, they needed to prepare themselves for what was yet to come.

"What's wrong with you, Zhang?", grunted Clarisse with a frown as they put on their armor.

"It's... It's... something Percy said", admitted Frank slowly, looking around the other Ares kids and the cabin heads. "He said he saw it in my aura, that... I'm not like you guys. I'm Roman. Not Greek, so... so I don't actually belong here... And I don't..."

"Bullshit", huffed Clarisse, boxing Frank's upper arm hard. "You're a member of Cabin Five. You're my little brother, I'm responsible for you. Whatever your blood, you're part of this camp."

Frank smiled faintly. He had a place he belonged to, right here. Now there was only one thing nagging on him. Leo had a girlfriend. A very gorgeous Roman girlfriend. It explained why he had been dodging Frank in the past months and the thought made Frank sad.

"Okay, girls, stop gossiping! Let's prepare for our Roman guests of honor", declared Luke loudly, clapping once. "Everyone, grab your weapons, position yourself in the forest and at the borders of camp. Clarisse, I want you with me at the Big House, to wait for the Romans."

"You're the boss, Castellan", grunted Clarisse and straightened her back before turning toward Frank for the last time. "Listen up, Zhang. While I'm not there, you're in charge. Lead your cabin, in case the Titan's forces invade us before the Romans reach us, you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am", nodded Frank hastily and saluted her.

Clarisse snorted and rolled her eyes before she followed Luke and Chiron toward the Big House, where they were expecting the arrival of the Romans hopefully soon.
Next chapter will FINALLY unite Romans and Greeks! Which means Luke and Octavian are going to meet and you have no idea how much I've been looking forward to writing that!

My updating schedule can from now on be found on my profile, if you want to know when this or any other of my stories will be updated.
Chapter 28: Where Romans and Greeks (Officially) Meet

Jason was useless as a praetor. Not only did he bring home a stray titan – because they weren't in the middle of battling titans, for the love of the gods – no, he decided that it would be a great idea to team up with the Romans' arch nemesis, the Greeks. Not only did he decide that, no, he also just ran off into battle as soon as they reached this ominous Greek camp, leaving Octavian to deal with the Greeks even though heaven knew how Octavian felt about the Greeks.

He didn't hate the Greeks per-say, considering he had never met a Greek before, but he hated what they stood for. A race superior to the Romans? No. Not possible, not acceptable.

He did however appreciate now being the representative of the Romans; he had put Mike in charge of watching over the troops while Jason had run off to do his hero-thing. Like Octavian had said; Jason wasn't fit to be praetor – to be a leader. He was a hero, yes, quite, he was also powerful of course. But he wasn't a politician, he wasn't democratic. Not fit to be praetor.

"Lord Chiron, I presume?", inquired Octavian as he was approached by an elderly centaur.

He wasn't stupid; he knew how Greeks worked. They had been trained by the centaur Chiron in the old days, so the centaur now approaching Octavian could only possibly be Lord Chiron.

"Ah, I can't remember the last time I was called 'lord'", laughed the centaur amused. "Chiron is enough, please. And I presume you're one of the praetors then?"

"The augur", corrected Octavian and offered his hand. "Octavian Simmons, legacy of Apollo. Our praetors both... ran off to fight. As they always do; saving the day and protecting our people."

Without the praetors, the augur was the default leader, at least for now. On either side of the centaur did one demigod step up. One was a brunette girl, looking like a brute around eighteen years old. Surely she would be fit to be an Amazon warrior. The other was a boy around twenty with messy sandy-blonde hair, deep dark-blue eyes, the cheekiest grin Octavian had ever seen, tall and fairly muscular, with a scar running down his face. Octavian had never seen someone as appealing, the perfect mixture between rough, hero and handsome. Octavian also appreciated the age; finally someone his own age and not a child. Hazel Levesque and Jason Grace were only just fourteen – how it seemed like a brilliant idea to put children in charge or an empire was beyond Octavian, really. A leader shouldn't be defined by his heroics – or rather idiocy of simply charging into dangerous situations and somehow being lucky enough to come out alive again – a leader should be a figure of authority, with something like a minimum age of being an adult.

"Our leaders, Luke Castellan, son of Hermes, and Clarisse la Rue, daughter of Ares", introduced Chiron, taking a step back for the three humans to stands close. "We're pleased to have you."

"I can believe that", stated Octavian with a sharp look. "It must be nice to know about everything and only let others in on your secrets when it becomes convenient to you, yes Lord Chiron?"

The centaur at least looked a bit sheepish at that and Octavian sighed. The daughter of Ares looked personally offended and ready to punch Octavian, but the handsome blonde stepped in between them with a pleasant and charming smile, one hand lifted up in a pacifying manner.
"Yes, there is a lot to discuss. For now, why don't we move this to the Big House to talk in peace? And we'll discuss all the details once our other leaders return", offered Luke.

The guy could probably sell an axe to a tree nymph with that smile of his. Octavian sighed and nodded before following the three Greeks over to a large white house.

/break\

When Annabeth, Nico, Percy, Rachel, Piper, Grover, Thalia, Reyna, Hazel and Leo all returned from the labyrinth, they were greeted by Jason, Mike, Frank and the forces of Camp Jupiter and Camp Half-Blood. They build the first front against attacks, with the camps being the perfect back-up. Mrs. O'Leary joined them, together with Plutonius, both hellhounds growling and barking. Kronos' army was strong and large, but so was theirs. They were prepared, thanks to sending scouts out to warn the camps. Even Daedalus tried to help them out, but in the end, there was only one way he could help. He looked firmly at Percy and Annabeth, eyes soft and apologetic.

"Annabeth, you're... one of a kind. I haven't met a sibling of mine with that kind of mental strength. I want you to take my laptop, it will be in good hands with you", said Daedalus with a wavering voice before turning to Percy. "Percy. I can't think of anyone kind enough to take care of Mrs. O'Leary for me. Please. She's a good girl."

"Why's he saying goodbye?", asked Frank with a concerned frown.

"Because the only way to destroy the labyrinth is by releasing Daedalus' spirit, because it's tied to him", explained Percy softly. "They're linked. As long as he's here, so is the labyrinth."

"And what will we do?", asked Piper confused, awkwardly holding a sword.

Thalia chuckled amused as she adjusted Piper's hold on the sword while Nico put his own sword away and closed his eyes in concentration. "Son of Hades. I can release a spirit. If he's sure."

"I am, it's the only thing I can do", whispered Daedalus.

The group of the quest surrounded Nico and Daedalus to protect them, but without the bigger fighters, the others were struggling a bit. All the monsters attacking. In the end, it was Grover's last defense – releasing panic, the last gift of Pan – that blew them away. They managed to fight the enemy off just in time for Nico to release Daedalus' spirits.

/break\

"Carry me...", repeated Percy, cheek planted against Nico's shoulder.

"How about you carry me?", huffed Nico, one arm around Percy's waist. "I just released an ancient spirit. I'm dead on my feet, Perce. Well, at least I get to shower and rest now, unlike you."

"Don't tease", frowned Percy with a slight pout. "Damn that big, important meeting..."

He leaned up to peck Nico's lips before the group of the quest split up. Annabeth, Thalia, Percy, Jason and Hazel headed to the Big House for the meeting of the leaders. Nico, Reyna and Tyson headed back to their cabin, with their other cabin-mates to check up on them. Mike went to oversee his fellow Romans. Grover took Piper and Rachel under his wing and offered to show them around camp. Leo all the while took Frank aside to really talk to him.

"I'm sorry", whispered the Latino as the two sat down on a bench. "About lying to you."
"It's okay. I mean, you apparently lied to everyone", chuckled Frank softly. "What... does it mean to be Roman? Is it different from being Greek? Do you... think I'm different from my cabin?"

Leo smiled a little. "Greeks and Romans aren't really different. Romans have a bit more... military in them, more discipline. But since you're a son of war, that's already a given anyway. The Romans are great. Hazel is, she's beautiful inside and out and she's amazing. Jason is so funny, I'm sure you'll like him too! Look, it's going to be okay. You could just get to know them. I promise, I'll be there. I'll show you around Camp Jupiter and introduce you to the Romans. You won't have to stay there. You're part of Camp Half-Blood, you won't have to move, I promise."

Frank smiled in a dopey way as he looked into Leo's honest almond eyes. He trusted Leo. Knew he could trust Leo. Hearing the Latino's reassuring words was really helping. And he was also glad that he hadn't chased Leo away or anything, but that it had been Leo's secret to keep him away.

Octavian raised one eyebrow as the three Romans looked at the ten Greeks, the heads of most of the cabins. Lucas had been so kind to explain to him the structure of Camp Half-Blood. Instead of the even cohorts, the Greeks were leaning heavy on heritage. There were twelve housings, one for each of the main Olympian gods. Even though one cabin was most of the time empty because it was the cabin of Lady Artemis, who sometimes visited with her hunt, apparently. And another cabin was always empty, that of Lady Hera who didn't have demigod children. It didn't make much sense to the augur to build a cabin without intentions to use it. Children of minor gods were all cramped into the Poseidon Cabin, apparently, thanks to Percy Jackson. Something about that kid was weird.

"Before we start our meeting; the Huntresses of Artemis are on their way here", announced Annabeth. "When we called Bianca for the address of Rachel and Piper, she said they'd come to help and with all the monsters we chased off that are now headed for New York, their help would be very much appreciated. Piper is a daughter of Aphrodite, so Silena, she will be your responsibility. And Rachel... we don't know who or what she is yet. We should discuss that too."

Percy snuggled up against her in a tired way. Annabeth laid an arm around his shoulders and patted his hair in that soothing way as they started their meeting. Romans and Greeks exchanged how their respective society worked, Chiron explained why they had been kept apart, Percy explained how he, through Leo, learned about it. Those who were on the quest talked about what they had done down there, mission reports about the fight was given. The story of Pan's passing was passed on, the true identity of Daedalus was revealed to all and of course Jason and Thalia got to bring up the topic of their family and how they had been separated. Needless to say, the meeting was long.

Bianca smiled as she was hugged tightly by Nico as soon as she reached Camp Half-Blood late in the evening. Due to taking care of the monsters that now roamed New York, the huntresses had decided to stay the night at camp to rest. Only to find that there were Romans at camp. They were split up between the cabins, filling Hera's cabin and the Big House. Basically every bed was double-booked for the night and Bianca was a bit surprised by that.

"Bianca!", exclaimed another voice and moments later, a brightly smiling Piper stood before her. Bianca blinked surprised and then she smiled and offered the girl a hug. "How are you?"

"Great. I mean, I'm currently bunking in the Aphrodite Cabin with my siblings and Silena is very
nice, but I think I don't like most of my cabin to be honest. They just talk about clothes and make-up all the day and it's weird", replied Piper hastily. "You have to meet my friend Rachel."

Bianca chuckled amused as she was pulled along. She was introduced to Rachel, a nice redhead with an artistic eye. Then she got to meet Thalia again, together with Annabeth. The girls sat together for a while to talk and laugh, before they headed to the bonfire.

"Who's the girl sitting with Nico, Percy and Leo?", asked Bianca confused.


It didn't take Bianca five seconds to sit with Nico and the pretty golden-eyed girl. "Niccoló Antonio di Angelo, how dare you not introduce me to our new sister."

Nico frowned and ducked his head. "Well, you basically ran off with Piper earlier. What am I supposed to do when you're so popular, lieutenant of Artemis? That's Hazel. Hazel, Bianca."

Hazel smiled nervously. She had to admit, she liked Nico. They had gotten along well during the quest and ever since the meeting between the leaders had ended, Percy, Leo and Nico had shown her around and introduced her to others. She was also staying at Poseidon Cabin tonight, or so they told her. But now Hazel was also supposed to meet her new big sister.

"It's nice to meet you", smiled Bianca kindly and pulled Hazel into a short, warm hug.

"She's also Leo's girlfriend", added Percy mischievously from where he was snuggled against Nico.

"Ah. Interesting", chuckled Bianca and squeezed in between Hazel and Nico. "Tell me about you."

Leo sighed depressed and leaned back against Frank a little. First Nico stole his Hazel, now Bianca also stole his Hazel. Frank grinned amused and patted Leo's curls. Well, Leo was actually grateful that everyone seemed to get along with his Hazel. Even Frank and Hazel, though somehow Leo didn't really know how to feel about that. The two basically hit it off instantly.

Luke was tired. More than tired, even. As the leader of camp, he had been more than busy today. After the hours-long meeting with the cabin heads and Romans, he had to help organizing places to stay for the Romans. Then, of course, more meeting. Him, Annabeth and Chiron had tried to figure out what exactly Rachel was. Chiron knew. She could see through the Mist, like many of their mortal parents could, but her ability was amplified, stronger than normal. She had the potential to become the Oracle of Delphi, so for now camp had the priority to make her feel welcomed and maybe make her feel like staying here and becoming the oracle would be a good path. Luke put it on his ever-growing to-do-list. He collapsed face-first onto his bed.

"Someone looks a little exhausted", noted a heavily accented voice.

Luke rolled over onto his side to see Octavian sitting on the bed right next to his. He grinned a little bit. Somehow, he liked the augur. He was... different. Dry and sarcastic, easily irritable, which meant he was going to be fun to tease. Luke stretched out before rolling together again.

"It was an exhausting day. And to top it all off, apparently we have a potential Oracle of Delphi at our hands, something that hadn't happened in... since...", started Luke before stopping.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His mom. His mom could have been the oracle too.
What if the same thing would happen to the nice redhead that seemed to have befriended Bianca and Percy? He startled a little as someone started brushing his hair out of his face.

"You're remarkable", noted Octavian softly. "Quite fascinating indeed. I do not understand how you Greeks manage to work with this messed-up system of a summer camp divided by godly heritage, but still you are the one holding it together. You must be remarkably strong."


Octavian chuckled amused. "Maybe you should go to sleep, Lucas. Rest some."

Luke hummed, slowly closing his eyes as he snuggled up to his pillow. "You Romans are interesting. I think... I think together, we can win this war..."

"Together", echoed Octavian curiously, contemplating the idea.

Thalia and Jason sat huddled together on Thalia's bunk, both facing the wall with the photos, a blanket thrown over both their shoulders, covering their heads a bit and allowing them to hide away a little. They had been exchanging stories about how their lives had unfolded ever since they had been through dinner. There were a couple other Romans assigned to share their cabin for this night, due to a total over-crowding and the special occasion.

"I'm glad to have you back", whispered Thalia, resting her head against her baby brother's shoulder.

"Me too", hummed Jason, leaning his head against hers. "I missed you so much. I can't believe I finally have... a family again. I mean, Hazel and Leo and Mike and Leila and Dakota, they're kind of like a family to me now, but... we're blood. And..."

"I know", grinned Thalia faintly. "Luke and Annabeth are my family too. I love them. I love them so much. But... They moved on, without me, while I was... gone. They built new attachments to Nico and Percy and those others. Half the time, I feel as though I'm just watching from the outside."

"Yeah?", asked Jason with a frown. "And what do you want to do about it?"

"I don't know", shrugged Thalia, chewing her lips. "Bianca, Nico's sister, she's the leader of this club of girls, traveling and kicking butt. She asked me before, to join. I've been thinking about it."

"You want to leave?", asked Jason concerned. "I mean... They do seem to rely on you, love you."

"They do. And I love them", confirmed Thalia. "But... I feel like I have to find my own way too, you know? And it's not like I'd never see them – or you – again. Bianca, she's the leader and she still always finds the time to see her baby brother Nico."

"If you really want it, you should go for it", declared Jason as he nudged his sister.

Percy grinned where he was curled against Nico, both laying on their bed. Nico was laying on his stomach, facing Hazel and Reyna as he animatedly talked to his half-sister and his best friend. Hazel and Reyna were laying on the bed next to theirs. Percy didn't have enough motivation to participate in the conversation, he just laid with his face plastered against Nico's shoulder-blade, occasionally kissing his boyfriend's neck. Tyson was sitting with Rachel, talking to her. She
seemed very fascinated by a good 'monster', since all she had encountered were the kind that tried
to eat people, yet she found Tyson utterly adorable. Percy smiled faintly.

"You should definitely stay the rest of summer", advised Reyna, looking over Nico and Percy to
lock eyes with Rachel. "Get to know us, learn more about what being the oracle would mean."

"You should come and visit our camp", countered Hazel, turning to face Reyna. "I mean, your
heritage is Roman. You should at least go and see what it's like."

"Maybe, a week or so. But I can't leave those idiots alone", huffed Reyna, pointing at Nico.

Hazel grinned amused as she sat up, watching Percy and Nico. It was nice seeing Percy so happy.
She had gotten to know him a bit, but seeing him here, in his home, it was different. He seemed
far more comfortable here and she understood why. Somehow, Camp Half-Blood felt more
homey than Camp Jupiter with its strict rules. She also adored how much Leo loved his cabin; Leo
had been so proud when he had shown her the forges and his fellow tinkerers. Finally, she got to
meet them. Though she was maybe a little concerned about this Frank fella. Sure, he was one
handsome hunk, but apparently Leo thought so too and this Frank had been looming around Leo a
lot.

"I'm glad I finally got to meet you, Nico", smiled Hazel softly. "Leo has been telling me about
you, but it's something else getting to know you. And Bianca too."

"No kidding. Those underworld kids are pretty awesome", grinned Alabaster mischievously.

Percy craned his neck enough to look at Alabaster, who was sitting with Liam and Lou in a circle.
They had that magenta-purple gleam to their auras, identifying them as Hecate's off-springs.
Tilting his head, Percy turned toward Hazel again, noting that very faint magenta-purple around
her.

"You guys should hang out", stated Percy ominously.

"Okay?", asked Lou curiously and amused. "Nothing against Nico's sister, but there a reason?"
Percy nodded slowly. "Her aura. Hazel got the faintest magical aura. Hecate told me before that
sometimes, other demigods can be inflicted with magic too, just like I have powers beyond the
heritage of my father. I think... maybe Hazel has some powers over magic."

"Really?", asked Hazel surprised, turning toward Nico.

"Well, apparently you and I have such vastly different powers; me the dead and shadows, you
gems and the Earth", replied Nico amused, carding his fingers through Percy's hair. "So, why
not?"

Hazel's eyes gleamed eagerly and Percy hummed pleased. So maybe Percy was trying to make
Hazel stay, if only for a couple days longer, because then Leo would stay here too and Percy
wanted to spend some of his summer with both of his brothers. Turning around some, Percy
pulled Nico's shirt up to kiss his shoulder-blade. Nico hummed and rolled over, so Percy could
instead kiss his sixpack. Percy grinned pleased and got more comfortable, snuggling up more to
Nico.
Next chapter will give Nico and Percy a bit more focus. It'll also give more spotlight to Piper, Thalia and Bianca, as well as Rachel and her confusing and concerning new possible powers!
Chapter 29: Sisterhood of the Moon Part II

Nico was laying comfortably under a tree at the beach, down to his swim-shorts. After the hectic and exhausting quest, Chiron had declared today to be a day off. No responsibility, just a chance to bond between Romans and Greeks. Nico for his part was sitting together with Hazel, Jason, Reyna and their big siblings – Bianca, Thalia and Hylla. Jason really hit it off with Nico and Reyna, asking a lot of questions about how they handled having their sisters be part of the hunt, while Nico enjoyed the stories Jason had about Hazel and Reyna investigated what being Roman was like.

"Aren't our cute little siblings adorable?", cooed Bianca teasingly.

Hylla hummed absentmindedly. She was still digesting the whole being-Roman-thing. Bianca smiled kindly and rested one hand on her knee, squeezing it in a supportive manner. The head-huntress then turned to survey the area. Phoebe, Naomi and Celyn had roped Piper and Rachel into playing a game of water-ball against Percy, Tyson, Grover, Leo and Frank. Bianca saw the potential. She knew Piper had been intrigued by Bianca the moment they had met. And even though Silena was giving it her best, this place was strange and uncomfortable for the young daughter of Aphrodite. Bianca wasn't sure about Rachel yet; camp needed an oracle.

"Would you mind going on a walk with me, Bianca?", asked Thalia softly.

Ah, and there was the other shoe that Bianca was waiting for to drop. The daughter of Zeus had hinted at being interested in joining the hunt before, but now that they met again, Bianca could see clearly that this interest had only grown. Smiling, Bianca nodded and got up to join Thalia. The two of them walked down the beach. Thalia grinned amused as they passed a more than mischievously smiling Luke, laying sprawled out on a blanket with a very flustered Octavian rubbing sun-blocker all over Luke's back. Honestly, Luke looked like the cat short of devouring the canary.

"I feel kind of bad for that augur. Even though he's a jerk", snorted Thalia amused. "But Luke is... When he sees something he likes and puts his mind to it, he gets it."

"What about you?", asked Bianca, voice soft yet prodding. "What do you do when you want something? Do you... spend months contemplating without making a decision...?"

Thalia gave her a pointed look, making Bianca laugh. "Very funny, head-huntress. I'm just... It's a big decision. Can't really make it overnight without thinking. How did you do it?"

"Pretty much overnight without thinking", shrugged Bianca casually. "I didn't want to be the child of the prophecy, maybe because deep down I knew Nico was far more fitted for that job. But I still wanted to be able to protect Nico. Being a huntress? It doesn't just make you young for eternity. It gives you powers – and support. We are an elite team of hunters and fighters. When the war comes, I will be there, fighting by my brother's side and leading the huntresses into victory."

Thalia hummed, not giving an answer of any kind, just staring back to where they had come from. Annabeth had run out of the water, laughing and grabbing Reyna's hand to pull her along back in. The Latina tried to protest, but really it was only half-hearted. She smiled at Annabeth like
Annabeth was a goddess who had just granted her a trip to Elysium. Honestly, that blossoming romance was just adorable. Shortly after Annabeth, Percy also ran up to the tree to grab Nico. Nico however didn't even pretend to protest, because when Percy wanted his time and attention? Nico would give him his time and attention. Annabeth and Percy high-fived in the water as they teamed up against Nico and Reyna in a water-ball match. When the four started splashing about and being loud, they effectively managed to chase some others out of the lake. Silena led a little group, consisting of her Roman half-sister Gwen as well as Calypso. Thalia smiled just a little bit as she watched how Jason's face lit up as his very new girlfriend approached him.

"They're happy", whispered Thalia mournfully. "I was... lost, for so many years. And they moved on. Made new friends, made names of their own as great heroes, fell in love... I know they love me, but so often when I'm with them, I feel so... left out. Out of place."

"I understand that feeling", assured Bianca with a pained smile. "When Nico and I got out of the Lotus Hotel, I felt very misplaced too. Father, he... brought us to the underworld and taught us some things, but it had only been for half a year, then we needed to fend for ourselves in a boarding school. We made friends there. Best friends. Nico met Frank and I met Phoebe. In the end, I suppose, we both chose to stick with the friend we made and to go on our own path."

"And you think it's my turn to chose my own path?", asked Thalia unsure.

"I think that you can't keep standing at the sidelines of your own life", offered Bianca.

Nico smiled softly as he brushed Percy's hair out of his face to kiss his forehead. The son of Poseidon grunted and stirred, curling together tightly and clinging onto Nico. Nico snorted amused, adjusting Percy a little to lay more comfortably spread over his lap.

"C'mon, Percy. It's time to get up. We have things to do", whispered Nico.

After having spend the whole morning at the beach and in the water, Percy had finally tired out a little. So many new people to meet and get to know, games to play and places to show off. But while his very adorable boyfriend had been off doing those things, Nico had spent most of his morning discussing things with Bianca and Hazel. Well, whenever Hazel wasn't off spending time with her Romans or with her Leo and whenever Bianca wasn't with her huntresses or Thalia (Nico wasn't sure what to think about that one). Bianca was surrounded by girls anyway – not just the huntresses, but also Thalia, Piper and Rachel. One of them being the reason for their talks. Chiron had made it clear that he'd want for Rachel to stay here and Luke agreed, apparently.

"The oracle is our best shot at learning more about the war", stated Octavian from where he sat next to Luke. "My augury... it has been messed up, admittedly. Perhaps an oracle may provide a clearer picture. As Lucas tells me, your oracle is... rusty, so to speak."

"Time for an upgrade", hummed Leo in agreement, head resting against Hazel's shoulder.

"Well, I've been asking around since yesterday too", argued Rachel, looking uncomfortable and scooting a bit closer to her best friend Piper. "Your current oracle is a decades old mummy. I don't want to end up a walking corpse just because things go wrong. Or go insane like Luke's mom."

Luke grunted in agreement, face dark. "Believe me, Rachel. We don't want that either."

"Why are you people so loud?", groaned Percy, face buried in Nico's stomach.

"Things to do, love", chuckled Nico, caressing Percy's hair. "Curses to break, fathers to visit."
Instantly, Percy shot up, eyes wide open. "What? We're doing what? What did I miss?"

"I kinda feel like I missed something too", admitted Piper confused, braiding Rachel's hair.

"The reason... The reason why Luke's mother went insane", started Bianca, gaining the attention of all demigods gathered at the moment. "Father put a curse on the oracle, because he was angry that Zeus killed our mother. The oracle's gift is locked inside the corpse because of a curse."

"A curse put there by our father", emphasized Nico. "So we're going to talk to him."

"...What?", asked Thalia surprised. "You... want to go and just... talk to Hades?"

"Well, he is our father", shrugged Nico amused. "And with our united force of puppy-eyes and kitten-eyes in some cases, we're going to convince papà to lift the curse."

"...That is the Greek equivalent to a master-plan then, yes?", drawled Octavian unimpressed. "Send the children of the underworld to make big, hopeful eyes at daddy dearest?"

"It's how I got to keep Leo", shrugged Percy and stretched out like a cat. "And how I got signed pre-copies of the Harry Potter books before they were released. And a talking owl."

Everyone stared a little dumbly at him as he just shrugged and got up. Then, Percy whistled loudly. Ascalaphus came circling from the forest and tilting his head down at Percy.

"Ace! Go and get Ty? We're going to visit papà", called Percy out.

The owl screeched and flew off. Only moments later, Tyson came running toward them. While the other demigods backed off a little, the six children of Hades took each other's hands and closed their eyes in concentration. Bianca and Nico did the shadow-traveling, bringing them right to the throne-room of palace. Hades didn't look startled or surprised by their arrival. The first one to hit him face-first against the chest, hugging him tightly, was Percy, closely followed by Tyson and Leo. The god of death smiled a little as he hugged them all close, ruffling their hair. He eyed his biological children with slight skepticism, because they stood awkwardly around. Hades opened his arms a little, looking at them questioningly. Bianca and Nico stepped up and joined the group hug, encouraging Hazel to do so too. This was the first time Hazel really saw her father.

"You've... grown, little one", whispered Hades, tilting Hazel's head up.

"I'm not that tall", mumbled Hazel embarrassed.

"Emotionally", corrected Hades fondly. "You've become quite the impressive young woman. But something tells me that the lot of you aren't here just for a family reunion."

"Father. We need to request a favor from you", declared Bianca firmly. "Leo? Percy? Do it."

She grabbed her somewhat-stepbrothers by the necks and pulled them closer so they were in front of her. Percy used his famous kitten-eyes and Leo used his equally effective puppy-eyes. Hades raised one eyebrow. Tyson was doing the quivering-lower-lip thing that always got him extra cookies from Demeter. Bianca and Nico were just staring pointedly at Hades.

"What is it you want from me, children?", inquired Hades, trying to stay firm.

"The curse you put on the oracle. Remove it", said Nico, making it sound more like an order than a request. "We need the oracle. At full capacity. The old mummy isn't as helpful as a living oracle would be. We found a vessel but no one is stupid enough to even try moving the oracle's gift as long as your curse is in place. You want us to save the world? Help us, father."

"The curse you put on the oracle. Remove it", said Nico, making it sound more like an order than a request. "We need the oracle. At full capacity. The old mummy isn't as helpful as a living oracle would be. We found a vessel but no one is stupid enough to even try moving the oracle's gift as long as your curse is in place. You want us to save the world? Help us, father."
Hades chuckled amused and shook his head. "Oh boy, you have more of me in you than you'd like to admit. You make a good point, however. This once I will do something for free, but tell my brother that his little camp can't expect more help from me."

"We will tell Chiron so", promised Percy with a bright smile, kissing Hades' cheek. "Thanks, papà."

Hades heaved a sigh. "Like I have ever been able to resist those eyes, Perseus. I told you before, you are... far too much like your father than is good for me. I have never been able to deny Poseidon anything either when he used those eyes against me."

Percy's smile brightened even more, because he knew exactly that this was true. "Can we stay a little bit, please? I missed everyone. Just a bit, maybe an hour or so, please?"

"Yes! I wanna show Hazel around?", pleaded Leo eagerly.

Slowly, Hades nodded, but before the kids could run off, he grabbed Nico by the shoulder. "Not you. You stay here, talk a bit with your old man, will you?"

Nico looked uncomfortable but nodded, watching how the other five practically fled the room. Sighing softly, Nico turned to look at his father doubtfully. Whatever it was, it couldn't be good.

"Is this a lecture about treating Percy right?", asked Nico lightly.

"I was planning on asking how... things are coming along", drawled Hades slowly. "But no lectures. I trust both of you to treat each other right, because you're both good boys. I've seen the way you fight side by side; I know. But I did want to know... if... I mean, aside from the... ah... good camaraderie, if there are... things between... Good underworld, don't make me actually say it."

Despite himself, Nico had to grin. "I definitely got your awkwardness. You want to know if your engagement plans for Percy and me are on or off, huh?"

"...Yes", muttered Hades disgruntled, glaring at his son.

"We're not exactly making wedding-plans, but...", drawled Nico with a slightly dreamy look. "The thought of having Percy at my side for eternity? Sounds like a pretty solid motivation to make it out of this war alive. He's the perfect partner. I mean, not just because of the... romance-stuff, also the way we do fight side by side. I love spending time with him, I can trust him. He's my best friend, but in an entirely different way than Frank or Reyna are. I... adore him."

Hades looked both pleased and amused as he nodded. "Sounds like a good foundation. Now, about the getting out of this war alive... There is one thing I wanted to discuss with you too."

Bianca enjoyed the tour of the underworld, even though she had already gotten it before. But Leo, Percy and Tyson were very enthusiastic and adorable guides. And seeing how excited Hazel was, with sparkling eyes, as she took everything in, it was endearing. But after they returned to the palace to fetch Nico, Nico and Percy split again, sending Hazel and Bianca to bring Tyson and Leo back on their own. Bianca wasn't going to question them; she also had a full plate anyway. Bianca sent Hazel, Leo and Tyson out to inform Chiron and the others, telling them she would be taking care of Rachel herself. She knew exactly where to find the redhead, following the call of her shadow. It was probably Bianca's favorite aspect of her powers; that she could track people by sensing their shadows due to her link to darkness. She was a bit amused to find Phoebe, Hylla,
Thalia, Piper and Rachel gathered in the Artemis Cabin, playing cards. It made Bianca smile a bit in amusement. She had discussed this with Phoebe, that she was thinking about recruiting Piper as well as Thalia. The girls looked up at Bianca with variations of grins.

"So, how did the visit to the basement go?", asked Phoebe in a chipper voice.

"Good. I suppose", drawled Bianca as she sat down herself, facing Rachel. "We fixed the curse-problem. So if – and truly only if – you want, you can become the oracle. Your keen eye to see past the Mist is only part of it. You could be... vital to saving the world. But we don't want to force you. You have choices. You can go back to your mortal world, you could stay here to get a grip on this world and decide whether or not you want to become the oracle, or you could... join us."

"Join you?", echoed Rachel a bit surprised.

"The huntresses of Artemis", clarified Bianca patiently. "We are a girls-club. Hunting monsters throughout the world. Eternal youth is another perk of this."

Rachel frowned, eyes wandering over to look at Piper quizzically. The redhead could see the amazement in Piper's eyes. She knew her best friend was dreaming of this. They had spent hours talking about this and as enthusiastic as Piper was about finding Bianca again and joining this hunt, it just didn't quite sound like something Rachel wanted for herself.

"I think... I think I'd like to stay here for the summer", answered Rachel softly. "I still don't really understand what it means to be the oracle. I don't even understand what this... this world is. But Annabeth already offered to show me around here, help me out if I'd decide to stay. And Octavian said he would provide me with all the knowledge I'd need about sooth-seeing."

"You'd really want to become some oracle?", asked Piper curiously, scooting closer.

"I don't know", shrugged Rachel, scratching her head. "I mean... This world? This fantastic world? I would like to be a part of it. Being the oracle? It's... being important, right? I want to help."

Piper nodded in understanding, biting her lips as she turned to look at Bianca. "I... want to help too. But to be honest, after meeting my cabin, I don't feel like this is... my place. The right place."

Rachel heaved a sigh and rolled her eyes. "Are you ever going to flat out say it? You want to join Bianca's girl-gang. You've had a crush on her for like a year."

Piper blushed wide-eyed while Phoebe snickered and elbowed Bianca. Bianca opted to ignore her best friend, instead smiling encouragingly at Piper. The war was dawning on them. It was time to put all the pieces on their spots on the chessboard. All of them. Her eyes wandered to Thalia.

"Now is as good a time as any, I suppose", sighed Thalia as she noticed the look, nodding. "What you said is true. It's time to find my own path. Maybe that path is to follow you."

Bianca smiled pleased and nodded in acceptance before getting up. 

Nico gasped breathlessly as he collapsed on his bed, the boy in his arms groaning in protest before adjusting to lay more comfortably sprawled all over Nico. They had somehow managed to support each other on their way out and the only reason they weren't dripping wet was because Percy's powers had dry-willed them. Percy groaned again, nose buried in Nico's neck.
"This hurt", muttered Percy displeased. "It hurt far more than you said. Jerk."

"Nico di Angelo, did you dare take precious Percy's virginity?!", gasped Alabaster in mock-teasing.

"No. Jerk", muttered Nico and rolled his eyes, not physically able to do more than that. "I made sure Percy would live through this fucking war. That's what I did."

"How so?", asked Reyna surprised, looking up from her sword.

Hazel next to her frowned concerned. "You did what father suggested? And... you're... okay?"

"Far from okay", muttered Percy as he rolled onto his back, glaring at the ceiling. "Every single muscle in my body feels like I tore it. I nearly drowned. I'm a son of Poseidon and nearly drowned."

"What in the world did you do?", asked Ethan skeptically.

"Oh, nothing much. Just took a bath in the River Styx. You know, goddess of hatred and all", chimed Percy sarcastically. "It was a lot of fun. Tried to literally tear out our souls, you know."

"Only one person ever survived it", whispered Hazel concerned, reaching out to grasp Percy's hand. "Achilles. Anyone who tries risks dying by being torn to shreds, starting with the soul. If you don't have an anchor to focus your mind, emotions and soul, it will pull you apart."

"...And you guys risked that for what exactly?", asked Reyna while smacking them upside the heads. "I swear, I will tell Annabeth and Luke about this and you will be in trouble!"

"It makes invincible. More powerful, faster, keens your senses", answered Nico sharply. "It makes both of us stronger and it won't allow weapons to hurt us. The war is coming. Soon. We need to be prepared. But we... barely made it out of there alive."

The Italian looked at Percy with soft eyes, easily conveying that he had been thinking about Percy to anchor him to this world. Percy blushed a little and smiled as he leaned up to kiss Nico.

"Ah. You're back. That's wonderful", called Bianca out as she entered the cabin. "Don't look at me like that, Hazel. I've known them a bit longer than you, I knew they'd make it out. They have each other. Now, everyone who's my sibling in one way or another, get here for a goodbye hug. Reyna, Hylla is waiting outside for you. We're leaving. I have two new huntresses to introduce to Artemis."

While Nico, Percy and Hazel were obediently gathering to get a hug (even though Nico and Percy were still wincing), Reyna rushed past them, cursing a bit beneath her breath because of course her sister couldn't tell her herself. Nico looked concerned as Bianca kissed his cheek.

"Who?", asked Lou surprised, eying Bianca suspiciously.

"Piper and Thalia", announced Bianca while pulling her siblings as close as possible, feeling like they wouldn't be seeing each other in a while. "I've been recruiting Piper for a long time now and Thalia has been thinking about this too for long. She's... currently explaining things to Luke and Annabeth and she expects them to not take it too well, so we're leaving."

"I'd love to spend more time with you", whispered Hazel, hanging onto her. "I... think I like having a big sister. But... we're going to see each other again, right?"

"Of course", smiled Bianca, kissing the top of Hazel's head. "Nico, watch over her for me."
"Obviously", huffed Nico nearly offended, one arm around Hazel and one around Percy. "I'll watch over them all for you. Even Annabeth, if I absolutely must."

Bianca smiled, just a little pained. She just hoped they'd all see each other again.

Chapter End Notes

...I kinda spaced out on Tuesday. Like, I was unaware I missed that there was Wednesday somewhere between right now and Monday... I was sooo sure yesterday was Tuesday and not Wednesday. Sooo, sorry for the sorta late update, but when you've had semester break for roughly a month, the days start blurring into one another xD"

Anyway, next chapter is gonna be extra long, because it'll cover the time-jump ahead to the Battle of Manhattan, including negotiations between Romans and Greeks, how our new huntresses settle in, how Rachel feels at camp, how Luke seduces himself an augur and I plan on including more Nicercy in the next chap too ;)}
Let's Get Down to Business

Chapter Summary

Next chapter, we're going to take care of "The Last Olympian"; I'm not sure how and which elements I'll keep, but that's on the schedule. Big show-down. Prophecy unraveling. Fighting. All that stuff.

Chapter 30: Let's Get Down to Business

Jason jumped slightly as an arm was laid around his shoulders. He had been so deep in thought that he hadn't even noticed anyone approaching him. He sat beneath a pine-tree. He knew what this tree was — who it used to be. The thought was pretty much insane, but then he remembered that he had been raised by wolves, so yeah. Turning, he looked at the taller, older blonde.

"Uhm, hello... Luke?", greeted Jason a bit unsure. "Can I do something for you?"

Luke was one of the leaders of the Greeks. Luke Castellan, son of Hermes. Clarisse la Rue, daughter of Ares. Not praetors though. They didn't have a term for their leaders, because most the time their leaders were just like them. Greeks were so weird. Which was why he was still here, he guessed. Most of the other Romans had left for Camp Jupiter the day after the Battle of the Labyrinth, as they came to call it. But it was important that they'd learn about each other. They needed to form a real bond, strengthen this alliance as soon as possible. Jason, Octavian and Hazel had sent their comrades back home, with strict orders to rebuild, make sure that all entrances to the labyrinth were truly gone and to continue training. The three leaders weren't the only ones that had remained at Camp Half-Blood — about half a dozen other Romans were also curious to learn more. Together, Romans and Greeks had agreed to start a bit of an 'exchange program'. The Romans that had stayed behind would stay with the Greeks for a week and when they would return to New Rome, they'd take a group of Greeks with them. At the same time, a new group of Romans would come to Camp Half-Blood. Jason was looking forward to spending a week here and learning about the place his big sister had called home and his Leo called home.

"Hello, Little Grace", grinned Luke pleased. "I'll be your Fairy Godmother during your stay."

"W—What? Why?", asked Jason surprised, blinking a couple times.

Luke laughed and ruffled Jason's hair. "Because you're the Little Grace. You're Thalia's brother. And Thalia... she's my best friend. She's my family. And..." Luke paused and stared out at the sunrise with a nearly painful look. "She's gone now. She won't be gone forever, but... she won't have a whole lot of time now that she's a huntress. So she can't be there to protect you, which means I will protect you from now on. Because... she lost you once and it would break her heart to lose you again, so it is my duty as her best friend to protect you in her absence."

"I'm the praetor. I'm the strongest Roman hero of our time. I don't need protection", huffed Jason.

Luke cooed and pinched Jason's cheek. "You're so cute. Of course you need protection. Everybody does. Even the great heroes of the old usually had sidekicks and teams and armies with them. I will fight by your side and I will have your back. I won't allow anything to happen to you."
Jason couldn't help but blush a little in embarrassment. Romans were an army, with hierarchy. Rules. But Greeks were... basically just a bunch of friends who'd do anything to protect each other.

"Thanks, I guess", whispered Jason, rubbing the back of his neck.

"She talked about you. A lot", stated Luke, voice soft and gaze in the distance. "When we first met, she... often had nightmares. She didn't tell me at first, of course, because she didn't trust me too much. But then she opened up and told me about you. How much she loved you. How she had protected you for years. How... much it hurt to be helpless, to know you died because she couldn't protect you. It had really destroyed her to lose you once. I honestly don't think she'd bear it again."

Jason remained silent and if he leaned up against the other blonde a little, neither of them would mention it. The Romans were harsh. There was not much tenderness and softness. The tender and soft ones were the ones dying, being eaten by the wolves or getting killed by monsters later on. But if Jason was really honest with himself, he liked this. This familiarity and warmth.

"So, you'll show me around? Can you... tell me more about the other Greeks? The ones that mean so much to Leo, I mean?", asked Jason with a frown. "I mean, I already met Percy before..."

"I'll show you around, I'll introduce you to everyone interesting and by the end of the week, you won't even want to leave anymore", declared Luke with a broad, mischievous grin.

Jason wasn't the only one welcomed with open arms. Hazel smiled gently as she picked strawberries together with her Greeks. Leo was, as usual, hyper-excited and talking a mile a minute, constantly rushing back and forth to show her awesomely shaped strawberries, while she hung back a little to talk to her new big brother. Nico was impressive. Today was the third day of the Romans' stay at Camp Half-Blood and Hazel thoroughly enjoyed living at Cabin Three. She had gotten to know Nico quite a bit by now. She wanted to learn more about him and about Bianca and their lives. She wanted to be part of their family, because family was the one thing Romans didn't do. Not like Greeks. For Greeks, their godly heritage was a badge of honor. It didn't matter that they had different mortal parents, they were siblings. They were family. That was a mindset Hazel hoped the Romans could adapt. Sure they had their loyalty to their cohorts, but that was it. No, what Hazel wanted out of their little Graeco-Roman exchange program was that Romans could learn this sense of family. And, of course, she personally wanted to spend more time with Leo and Nico.

"Are you... going to come and stay with us in New Rome too?", asked Hazel hesitantly.

"Not right now. We, the strongest of Camp Half-Blood, want to take turns. We don't want to send all our best people over to yours just to leave camp unprotected", explained Nico with a small smile. "Next week, Clarisse, Reyna and Frank insisted. They're our three strongest physical fighters, so us elementals have to stay here. But I'll definitely come to see where my sorellina lives."

Hazel preened a little bit at the Italian nickname. It meant little sister. To Bianca and Nico, she already was part of the family and after all those long, long decades without a family, it warmed her heart to the point that sometimes, just thinking about it brought tears to the corners of her eyes.

"Are we going to be fine?", asked Hazel softly as she stared over to where Percy, Tyson and Leo were chasing each other through the strawberry fields, laughing loudly. "I'm sorry. I don't know where that came from. Didn't mean to ruin the mood, it's just..."
"There's a Damocles Sword dangling over our heads, having WAR written all over it", stated Nico gently, resting a hand on he shoulder. "It's alright. When... When it gets dark and the cabin falls asleep and I have Percy tugged against me, I think about it too. I'm... afraid I might lose him, or anyone else from our cabin. I wonder if we'll make it. But I think this helps. This... bonding between Romans and Greeks. It's what we need. It's a new hope to all of us. And hope is what we need right now. That and a whole lot of training."

He smiled teasingly and nudge her, making her laugh a bit.

Calypso had liked the Greeks. She had stayed with them for a week because Jason had stayed – and so far, he was the one she trusted. By now, she had a few others she trusted. Friends. The thought made her smile a bit to herself. It had been so many millennia since she last had friends. But she enjoyed Annabeth's company a lot – was already missing the blonde Greek – and she liked Percy and Leo a lot. She liked Leila and Gwen the most though and that was good because they were both Romans. They had shown her around New Rome and Camp Jupiter once they came 'home'.

There was a big difference between Greeks and Romans, one she noticed very fast and got confirmed by Hazel. There was a lack of warmth, of family and nurturing. Where the Greeks looked at Chiron as a mentor and a father-figure, where their leaders were like big siblings, Romans kept things more business-like. She was set on changing that. After all, if there was one thing people could say about her, it was that she was a nurturer. She had nursed dozens heroes back to health, tended to them and doted on them. It was what she was good at. And after fending for herself for so long, she was a pretty good leader of the household. She was going to bring warmth to the Romans.

"Thank you, my dear. It was something I have... regretted for many years now."

Startled, Calypso looked up. She was kneeling at the temple of Vesta, trying to ask for guidance from the goddess of hearth and home. She had not expected for Vesta to make an actual appearance. The gentle goddess smiled kindly at Calypso as she stepped forward. Calypso hesitated for a moment. But Vesta just rested a reassuring hand on Calypso's shoulder and continued smiling.

"I... L—Lady Vesta", stammered Calypso, unsure how to handle a god.

The gods were who had thrown Calypso onto an island. What if they didn't like that Jason had broken her out? What if she got sent back to Ogygia? What if she'd never see Jason and Leila and Gwen and Hazel again? What if this was all the freedom she'd ever see? What-

"Please calm down, Calypso", requested Vesta, not unkind. "I'm not here to punish you. I'm not my little brother. I never agreed with this collective punishment of all titans. It was wrong, but... I'm not a council member. My input has little sway. There is something I can do now however."

"And... And what is that?", asked Calypso unsure, frowning.

"What you want for Camp Jupiter is generous", smiled Vesta and tilted her head. "And I fully support you. You will carry out my will here, among the Romans. Bringing warmth and the feeling of home back to the Romans, something they direly need. And as you work in my name, there is nothing even Jupiter can do about it. I'm still his older sister and he still respects me. You are under my protection, Calypso, daughter of Atlas. Guardian of Romans."

She gently grasped Calypso's face and kissed her forehead, causing a warmth to spread
throughout Calypso’s body. A warmth that came from deep within. Calypso felt a relief settling in the depth of her stomach, one she hadn’t realized she was missing. Ever since Jason had taken her away from Ogygia, a nagging voice in the back of her head had insisted she would end up back there.

"Thank... Thank you, Lady Vesta", whispered Calypso with a bow.

"Are they still going at it?", sighed Calypso with a fond look.

She approached the stands in New Rome’s Colosseum where Hazel and Frank were sitting. When she reached them, she handed them two sandwiches, which the two took with grateful looks.

"Yeah. Neither of them is even giving an inch", commented Hazel with a smile. "Thanks, Calypso."

Calypso returned the smile before she sat down next to Hazel and turned to watch the scene in front of them. Reyna and Jason were fighting. Training. Swords clashing as they dodged each other and gracefully moved along. They were very equal, which was why the fight had been going on for an hour already. Calypso chuckled amused by that. She loved Jason. Not just that initial love of having another handsome hero on her island, no, over the past weeks she had truly deeply fallen in love with him. She had moved in with Hazel and Jason into the praetors’ house, had her own room there. He took her on dates, introduced her as his girlfriend, listened to her and smiled at her like she was the moon of his night sky. He was the kind of hero someone simply had to fall for. And when she had told him that she had taken on a job given to her by Lady Vesta, he got excited. For her. He got excited because she found her own calling, instead of just aimlessly wandering around New Rome.

"How are you liking New Rome, Frank?", asked Calypso curiously.

He had been here for five days now, together with Reyna, Clarisse and some other Greeks. Grinning broadly, Frank swallowed down the large bite of his sandwich that he had taken.

"It's pretty awesome", declared the son of Mars. "I mean... I don't think I could really live here. All this... legion-stuff. I like my cabin too much. I guess, maybe in my heart I am Greek after all. But it's good to see this other side. And I like Jason and Dakota and... you guys."

His eyes flittered over to Hazel for only a second and he blushed just a bit. He should not like her. He really shouldn't. She wasn't just in a relationship, she was in a relationship with the boy Frank had been in love with for nearly a year now. That was unnecessarily complicated, really. But she was kind and beautiful and charming and sweet and just the kind of person Frank would want to be with Leo, if Leo wasn't with him. So Frank was happy that Leo and Hazel were happy, but he also felt lonely. And over the past five days he had been in New Rome, she had been his guide, she had been the person he had followed around like a lost puppy. He had already gotten along real well with her when she had stayed in Camp Half-Blood. But he could so not develop a crush on Leo's girlfriend. He absolutely could not. Even though she had the gentlest smile and the most beautiful golden eyes and her frizzy curls were as adorable as Leo's a bit broader fluffy curls.

"I'm just kind of afraid what kind of lessons Clarisse will bring with her from here", grunted Frank as a bit of an afterthought. "She is really into this legion-thing. I fear how hard training is going to be from here on out when she turns into a drill-sergeant..."

"But isn't that a good thing?", offered Hazel confused. "I mean, we're short of marching into a war. Hard training is exactly what all of us need. And Clarisse? She's a good trainer."
"I know. It was a bit of a joke. I'm still afraid though", grinned Frank sheepishly.

It made Hazel and Calypso laugh and Frank really liked the way Hazel laughed. He jumped a bit when a towel was thrown at him. Moments later and Reyna sat down next to him and stole the rest of his sandwich to practically devour it in one go, while Jason collapsed next to Calypso with a whine, resting his head in her lap. Calypso smiled gently down at her boyfriend, caressing his hair.

"So, who won?", asked Hazel curiously, looking from Jason to Reyna and back again.

"...Jason", huffed Reyna miffed. "But I blame the fact that he has had many more years of training."

"You're a machine", panted Jason, looking short of fainting. "A—And brutal."

"And you're a wimp", grinned Reyna pleased as she threw the empty sandwich-wrapper at him.

She was having fun. Not that she wasn't having fun at Camp Half-Blood. She loved it, she considered it her home, she wouldn't leave it for the world. But this was kind of like a vacation. And she really liked Jason and Hazel. But she was also looking forward to the end of said vacation, because she missed her girlfriend dearly. Annabeth just couldn't be convinced to leave camp this week, she said she had a lot to do – putting together new training plans and with Reyna and Clarisse gone, someone had to take charge of training, so Reyna couldn't blame her. It still kind of overwhelmed her how much she missed Annabeth after only a week.

"I'm looking forward to going home", admitted Reyna softly. "I think I learned a lot that I want to apply to Camp Half-Blood. And I miss my own cuddly blonde..."

At that, she pointedly looked at Jason in Calypso's lap, causing the others to chuckle. Hazel sighed softly as she leaned back some, looking at the sky in contemplation for a moment before turning to Frank with a serious look on her face that had Frank on edge right away.

"When you leave again, can you do me a favor?", asked Hazel softly.

"Anything", blurted Frank out before blushing. "I mean... Sure. We're friends, after all."

Hazel smiled a bit amused at that. "Can you keep an eye on Leo? I just... I never knew anyone from his life, aside from his brothers. And I haven't known them for long either. But my little lion is prone to get himself into trouble and I'd feel better knowing someone was looking out for him."

Frank's eyes widened surprised, especially when he saw a twinkle in her golden eyes, like she was in on a secret that she wasn't going to share. But if she asked him to look out for Leo, he'd do that. Not that he wasn't already doing it anyway, because Leo was damn cute.

"Sure. I thought... isn't he coming here?", asked Frank confused.

"He's not", said Hazel with a sigh. "Leo and Nico talked about it, apparently. They decided to come at different weeks, so they wouldn't have to share my attention during that week. Next week, Nico promised he'd come, together with Luke and Rachel and some others..."

"Luke and... Rachel?", asked Reyna surprised, one eyebrow raised. "No Percy? You mean to tell me we're separating Percy and Nico? I thought that was impossible. I'm shocked."

"Percy is a sweetheart", smiled Hazel pleased. "He IMed me and told me that he'd hand over his fiance to me for a week for sibling-bonding and if Leo stayed behind so I wouldn't be torn between my new sibling and my boyfriend, then Percy would stay behind so Nico wouldn't
either."

"Luke's coming?", asked Jason like a hopeful puppy, sitting up some.

"You grew way too attached to him", laughed Reyna amused.

"I... never had this... older brother figure in my life", shrugged Jason defensively, blushing a bit. "And okay, I thought it was weird at first when he declared he'd be watching out for me because of Thalia, but... he's pretty awesome. He taught me so many tricks and... even things about leadership, from a different perspective. He also knows tons of stories about Thalia."

"Have you... spoken to your sister recently?", asked Hazel softly, eyebrows knitted.

"Yeah", nodded Jason with a broad grin. "We IMed last week. She said they're in Europe, were in France when she called me and on their way to Russia. She's actually pretty happy and getting along great with your own new found sister, you know."

Hazel smiled at that and relaxed some, relieved that her best friend was developing a relationship to his big sister. She herself had IMed Bianca a few times to get to know her and the huntress had promised they'd come visit New Rome some time this year, definitely.

"But why is Rachel coming? I thought her role was to be the... oracle?", asked Calypso curiously.

"She's freaked out by the mummy", provided Reyna casually and grinned. "And there's not too much they can teach her about it at camp. Annie said they did all they could, they got her a comfy room at the Big House and got her integrated into camp-life, but they don't have anyone to teach her about reading and seeing the future. So... Luke volunteered to accompany her to New Rome so she could spend some time with your augur and learn from him."


"There's no accounting for bad taste", shrugged Reyna mischievously.

Jason made a face and groaned, shaking his head wildly in denial.

Percy was furious. His eyes were dark like the sea during a storm as he straddled his boyfriend's waist, sword to Nico's throat. Very close to Nico's throat. Little triplets of blood were running down the blade and Nico slowly started to look majorly concerned.

"Perce? Uh, you... won? Please... remove the sword from my throat?", asked Nico unsure.

"Of course I won", spat Percy angrily. "I have done nothing but win for the past weeks! Because you're pulling your punches, di Angelo. And frankly, I'm very tired of that!"

"Oh...", grunted Nico, grasping his throat as the sword was eased off. "Look, Percy, I... I'm sorry, but I don't... I don't want to hurt you. Because I love you, mio gattino."

"Oh", drawled Percy mockingly before punching Nico's shoulder. "I'm sure grandpa Kronos is gonna be all sweet and tender too during the war because he doesn't want to hurt his grandkids. I'm sure the monsters are going to be extra-careful with me too, because I'm so loveable." Percy took a deep breath as he lowered a glare at Nico. "What is the point in training if you don't take me seriously?! I thought... I was pretty happy when you offered that we should train together, powers of the Big Three and all, but... If you think I'm weak, then I don't... think this was a good idea."
"I don't think you're weak!", protested Nico loudly, frowning. "You're one of the strongest people I know Percy! I just... love you and I don't want to hurt you. That's all."

"If you don't think I can hold myself in a fight against you, then you do think I'm weak", corrected Percy with a disappointed look on his face. "It was one of the first things I learned from aunt Nemesis. You need to take every fight serious, even training-fights, because otherwise you can't improve yourself. And I think you and I shouldn't train with each other."

Nico frowned and gritted his teeth as he watched Percy stomp off toward where Annabeth was training, asking the blonde to train with him instead. Urgh, this relationship-thing was frustrating! Huffing through gritted teeth, Nico walked out of the arena and toward Aphrodite Cabin.

"...Someone isn't in a good mood", observed Mitchell teasingly. "Trouble in paradise?"

"I don't know", growled Nico and let himself fall onto Silena's bed.

The currently redheaded leader raised one eyebrow at him. She had been experimenting with hair-coloring over the past year – from brunette to black and now a bit red. She put her wedding-magazine down and sat up to look him up and down critically.

"What did you do?", asked Silena sharply, knowing the look on his face. "You upset Percy, right?"

"I didn't mean to", groaned Nico, fingers curling into his hair. "I just... don't want to hurt him when we train, because I love him and the thought of hurting him in any way frightens me, but now he thinks that I think he's weak because I'm 'pulling my punches'."

"Then maybe you shouldn't train with each other", offered Silena amused.

"That's what he said", sighed Nico annoyed. "But... I don't want that either."

"You have to make up your mind", stated Silena simply. "You're not the only children of the eldest gods, you're not even the only elementals. With your Earth-bound powers, it would make sense to pair you up with Katie for training. For Percy's water-powers her plant-powers would be a good counter too. We have Jason and Hazel now and you can train with them."

"But what do I do to make him stop thinking I think he's weak?", asked Nico with a frown.

"Apologize. Tell him you agree that you shouldn't train together. Make suggestions to fix your problem, because that's what a relationship is about. Trying to figure out your problems together and working on them together", replied Silena with a smile, patting his head. "You two have been dating for over a year now. So far, you didn't actually fight. You need to stand together on that, not turn tails and avoid your problems, okay? You think you'll be fine?"

Nico sighed and nodded. "Thanks for the advise, Silena."

She smiled at him as he left. For the next two hours, Nico paced around camp, patrolled the forest and in the end went to feed Mrs. O'Leary and Plutonius. He was angry and angry was the wrong emotion to feel when facing Percy again. He didn't want them to keep screaming at each other. Both of them needed to calm down before they could talk about this. The two hellhounds whined pleased as they practically smothered him in black fur, coating him in saliva as their tails wagged.

"Hey. Someone looks happy."

Nico stiffened at the voice and peeked past the mass of hellhounds on top of him to see Percy approach them with a bag of dog-food. Apparently, he has had the same idea as Nico. Percy put
the bag down and sat on top of it, watching them. Sighing, Nico crawled out from beneath their pet-dogs to go and sit next to Percy on the bag, with a bit distance between them, both demigods looking at the dogs. Pluto and Mrs. O'Leary curled together and yawned, sated and happy.

"I'm sorry", whispered Nico at the same time Percy muttered it.

Both turned to look at each other in surprise, before Percy sighed. "Look, I... overreacted. It's a weakness of the sea, dad said. We're temperamental. I shouldn't have lashed out like that."

"No. You're right. I probably would have been angry too, feeling patronized", said Nico and shook his head. "And I didn't mean to patronize you. I've seen you fight. I know you're my equal, if not even my superior when it comes to fighting, Perce. But there's been... so much violence and pain and hurt and after the labyrinth, I kind of... I just don't want to see you hurt, not at my hands. Maybe you're right. Maybe we really shouldn't train together. For the time you're at camp, it may be better if we pair up with other people for training. Just because we love each other and want to be together as often as possible doesn't mean that we need to be together at all times."

"You're right", agreed Percy with a sigh. "I mean, next week you're going to be in New Rome anyway, so... I guess I'll train with Frank? Or Leo? Or someone? Maybe... Maybe it'll really be good if we spend a week apart. We have this habit of sitting on each other when we actually get to spend time together. Which doesn't mean I don't want to spend time with you!"

"I know", laughed Nico softly. "I know. It's hard to find a balance, I guess? But... I know we'll manage, because I love you and living my life entirely without you sounds... terrifying."

Percy sighed softly as he rested his head against Nico's shoulder. "I'm glad you feel that way. I do too. That's why both of us need to get stronger on our own so we can protect each other."

"That sounds good", hummed Nico in agreement, laying an arm around Percy's waist.

"I'm going to spend a week at Camp Jupiter with Annabeth and Leo a week after you return", stated Percy softly. "So when you come back, we can spend another week together before I leave?"

"Sounds good", grinned Nico and kissed Percy's forehead. "What about your birthday?"

"Mom insists that she's throwing a birthday-party for me because she wants to meet all my friends, so... you and the others are officially invited to a mortal party? I asked mamma and papa if they're okay with it and they said it'd be fine. I'll return home to the underworld after my party, so they're probably going to throw a little something for me in the evening too", answered Percy before he leaned in to kiss Nico's cheek. "I'll miss you. Tell Hazel and Jason they're missed, okay?"

Nico just smiled slightly as he pulled Percy even closer until the other was nearly sitting on his lap.

Luke loved the Romans. He genuinely loved this idea of a city – a real, proper city, with a school and shops and actual houses. Not staying in an overcrowded cabin all year long. With his little turquoise notebook in hand, he took notes about the city, even some sketches. He knew Annabeth planned on coming here herself together with Percy and Leo, but he definitely needed to tell her beforehand what to watch out for. The little architecture-freak would love this city and Luke hoped it might inspire her. Maybe, when this war was over, they could have such a thing themselves, just for the Greeks. A real, actual home. He smiled softly as he sketched the temple.

"You're very skilled, Lucas", noted a British-accented voice interested.
"Thanks, Tav", grinned Luke pleased. "I'm very skilled in a lot of things. I could... show you later?"

The augur blushed a pleasant shade of red and Luke jumped off the bolder he was sitting on to instead follow Octavian into the temple. He had been very obviously hitting on Octavian ever since he got to New Rome. That was one fine piece of Englishman, but damn Octavian was good at ignoring him. Not that that deterred Luke in any kind of way. They were going into war probably soon and if that was to happen, he planned on getting laid before. He was not going to die lonely.


"Very good. She is like a sponge for knowledge", sighed Octavian. "She wants to learn more about augury, about the origins of the Oracles, about Apollo and his gifts. It's... a nice change to have someone interested in what I do beyond 'be useful for us'."

Luke smiled softly and leaned up to kiss Octavian's cheek. "I find you interesting past that too."

"Would you please stop with your little... games", requested Octavian annoyed.

"It's not a game", frowned Luke a bit annoyed. "I like you. I find you interesting. I want to get to know you better. This city? It has restaurants. I want you to take me out to a restaurant. On a date."

Octavian blinked very slowly as he stared at Luke. "You're... serious? You're not mocking me?"

Luke raised one unimpressed eyebrow. "I'm a prankster, but I'd never pull a cruel prank like that, Tav. Why don't you go back to your classes with Rach, because I was invited to cake and coffee at the praetors' house. If you make up your mind, you could pick me up later and take me out."

With that, Luke very casually walked out of the temple again, with maybe a bit more of a swing to his step than normal, knowing fully well that Octavian was staring at his butt. Luke was very pleased with himself by the time he reached the praetors-residence and had another one of his favorite blondes standing in front of him. In a somewhat better world, Luke and Thalia would have raised Annabeth and Jason together. All four of them. But now Jason was already a teen and Luke only now got to know him. Smiling, Luke instantly pulled Jason into a hug.


"Dude! You were over for brunch this morning!", complained Jason with a blush.

Luke grinned. He knew Jason wasn't really annoyed, he knew Jason relished in having someone dote over him and care for him. Essentially, Jason was still a kid, after all, but he had never really gotten a family to care for him. Luke smiled as he followed Jason inside to the dining room, where Nico and Hazel were already sitting and chatting animatedly.

"So, di Angelo...", drawled Luke playfully. "Silena tells me to keep an eye on you because you managed to have a fight with Percy before we left. That right? You really suicidal enough to upset Percy Jackson? That could get you killed in your very own cabin already."

"It was barely an argument and not a fight", huffed Nico and rolled his eyes. "We just... disagreed for the first time. Happens. But what happens in a good relationship is that you can talk about that stuff and work it out together, instead of falling apart over that."

"Man, you really do sound like a mini-Silena", teased Luke pleased. "So you two are okay?"
"Yeah", nodded Nico and sighed. "We decided that maybe not sitting on each other all the time could help. Hence the me being here without him. We just... When we're at camp, we're constantly together. I guess that's not the healthiest thing either."

Luke grinned and nodded. He liked Nico a whole lot and he had grown attached to Percy too, very much. Maybe Clarisse's teasing that he was the 'camp dad' was right after all, but he couldn't help it. Hazel and Nico had baked a delicious strawberry-cake and Luke made them all hot chocolate. It was nice, just sitting together and talking. Most of the time, their conversation drifted to the huntresses and what they were up to these days. After a long day of training with the Romans, this was a very nice way of relaxing. When the cake was gone and the left-over chocolate was cold, the doorbell rang. Jason frowned confused as he got up, followed by displeased words.

"Luke! Our annoying augur is here to see you! Can I send him away again?", called Jason.

"You little brat", muttered Luke amused beneath his breath before he got up and walked to the main door where an awkward Octavian was shuffling around. "Came to pick me up for our date?"


Luke snorted and flicked Jason's forehead. The kid really was a brat when he wanted to be; strong Roman praetor forgotten for the sake of whining and pouting. It was adorable and Luke enjoyed that side of the younger blonde. When all Octavian did was blush, Luke grinned victoriously.

"I'm feeling Italian tonight. When in Rome, right?", chimed Luke before he turned to Jason a last time, kissing his cheek like a doting mother, knowing it drove Jason insane. "Be good and be in bed by ten, you hear me, young man? And no video-games before bed-time!"

Jason was grumbling as Luke left together with Octavian, who just kept glancing at Luke doubtfully. It didn't stop Luke. Luke was rarely stopped by things. He had seen enough and lived through enough to not get caught up in the small stuff when he had to see the big picture. And the big picture in this case was; get Luke a boyfriend. An awkward, emotionally constipated, grumpy boyfriend, but oh well, Luke had always like a challenge. Besides, even that first weekend when the Romans had been over, Octavian had shown Luke a caring side and that side? That was what Luke wanted. What he craved. He was the camp dad. He took care of everyone. He watched out for everyone. He had felt his heart warming when Octavian had been concerned for him.

"Why do you want to date me?", asked Octavian unnerved by the time they sat in front of their salads in the restaurant, after a long time of silence. "You realize basically no one likes me, right?"

"I like you", shrugged Luke casually, poking a tomato. "And Rachel, who is a very bright and very sweet girl, seems to like you too. And I think somewhere in your bickering little relationship, even you and Jason like each other. I think you just like not being liked, because it's easier than getting hurt. But if you don't let anyone close, well... doesn't that hurt too?"

Octavian stared at him in surprise, blinking a couple of times while Luke casually ate. The son of Hermes knew this was the start of something maybe not perfect or beautiful but surely entertaining and amazing. He offered the other blonde a bright, mischievous smile.

/break/

After their stay at Camp Jupiter, Rachel felt confident enough to accept being the Oracle. She'd return to school after the summer, but she felt good about this. About helping. Octavian had helped her there and so had the other friends she had made at Camp Half-Blood.
A week later, Percy, Annabeth and Leo went to stay with the Romans for a week. Due to Annabeth and Percy having become her best friends at the Greek camp, Rachel spent a lot of time IMing her still best friend Piper, who was currently somewhere in Scandinavia. But she also got to bond with an utterly bored and frustrated Reyna, who really wanted Annabeth back.

The nice surprise came when the trio returned from New Rome and Percy invited her to his birthday. She had never made too many friends; many people thought her weird for one reason or the other. But Percy and the others? They were... her friends. Which brought her to the now; sitting at the living room table of the Blofis-family-home, singing *Happy Birthday* in a chorus with Mister and Missus Blofis, little Laura Blofis, Leo, Tyson, Nico, Annabeth, Reyna, Jason, Hazel and Calypso. They all stood in a half-circle around a glowing and happily blushing Percy, who blew out the fifteen candles on his birthday-cake. There had already been a bit of a pre-birthday-celebration thrown by Silena and Luke at camp, but since his mom had said he could invite a few friends for cake and Disney-movies, Percy had eagerly invited Rachel and the others.

"Tanti auguri di buon compleanno, mio amore", smiled Nico gently as he kissed Percy.

"Ew, gross. Get off my big brother!", complained Laura while giggling, pushing Nico away.

The little girl sat on her brother's lap, now giggling and squirming as Nico took revenge by tickling her. Sally observed them fondly, relieved at how well Percy and Laura got along and how Laura seemed to like her big brother's boyfriend (even though what she liked most about him was teasing him; mostly about stopping being gross with her brother). Percy laughed where he was being squished between his baby sister and his boyfriend, at least until Tyson threatened to eat all the pie on his own if they didn't pay attention soon. Percy gasped scandalized.

"That's my cake", whined Percy with a pout, leaning against Nico while hugging Laura.

Leo grinned at him and handed him a piece of the cake. The Latino was so much more at ease now that the secret about Romans and Hazel was out in the open. Percy was happy, genuinely relieved, to see his baby brother so carefree again. Not to mention, having Hazel around also made Nico happy – and a happy Nico made Percy happy. He leaned more against his boyfriend and opened his mouth demandingly, giving Nico the best kicked-kitten eyes possible. The Italian snorted before he started feeding Percy cake. Percy grinned broadly, happy to get away with this stuff on his birthday. Nico was caressing his hair softly. Percy loved Nico-cuddles. And he loved having his friends close. Laura in his lap was animatedly chatting away about how excited she was about the new school year already while stealing from Percy's cake. Calypso was talking to Sally, while Nico and Annabeth were arguing again, the way they always were. Paul seemed interested in the whole Roman-thing – he had barely gotten used to the Greek-thing, after all – so he was engaged in a conversation with Jason and Hazel. Percy liked this. It was nice. Homey. The calm before the storm. Sure, that was supposed to be metaphorical, but Percy could nearly smell it in the air – the oncoming storm of the war. He sighed and decided to milk the peaceful time before for what it's worth. After cake, they all squeezed in together on the couches to watch the promised Disney-movies. It was really more like a puppy-pile, but Percy liked it. He had already gotten his presents before cake. A silver kitten- pendant with sapphire eyes hung around his neck – he had gotten it from his Nico, because he was Nico's kitten. It was so sweet, but Percy was glad they had agreed to cut back on the presents and not try to trump each other every time. Just simple things. Like this.

"And you're going to the underworld tonight?", asked Rachel curiously during the credits of *The Little Mermaid*. "How... I mean, how is the underworld...?"

"It's home", replied Percy with a simple smile. "You'd probably think it's scary or intimidating. But to me, it's... home. An endless adventure, you know."
Sally's smile dropped only a little at hearing her boy call another place home. But she knew how much she owed Hades and Persephone and the warmth she felt in her heart for how wonderful Percy had turned out thanks to their parenting outweighed the pang.

"I'm glad you could make it", stated Sally as she smoothed down Percy's messy hair.

"I'll always make time for you, mom", huffed Percy with a broad grin. "You're my family too. You're my mom. I'm just sorry I didn't have much time to visit this summer..."

"It's okay", dismissed Laura confidently. "As long as you come to my ballet-performance in October! I'll be the Pumpkin Queen, you have to come! You can even bring your Nico."

"That's so generous of you, princess", chuckled Nico and rolled his eyes.

"Queen", corrected Laura miffed and stuck her nose up.

Percy grinned pleased as Nico and Laura started sticking their tongues out at each other.

Home was suffocating. Percy laughed as he was being hugged to death by Poseidon, Persephone, Makaria and Melinoe. His dad, mamma and sisters were trying to smother him with love while Hades and Nico just watched in amusement. They had dropped everyone off at their respective camps before Nico had declared that tonight, he'd be staying in the underworld too. More cake was being consumed. Percy honestly felt ready to burst, but if grandma Demeter baked him a cake, he'd eat the cake. Percy looked exceptionally happy when he sat between his dad and his papà at the dining table. But if he was being honest, those birthdays were exhausting. Everyone wanted Percy-cuddles and his attention and he was positively ready to just drop by the time him and Poseidon went outside for a walk. He yawned and leaned against his dad, who had a supporting arm around Percy's shoulders. They walked along the river-bank of Styx.

"How are you holding up, Percy?", asked Poseidon gently.

"I'm good, I guess. I wish I could worry about normal teenage drama, like... homework and school and that one of my siblings ate the last chocolate cookie, or dates with my fiance. But... well, our dates mainly considered of training and then simply dropping dead on our feed and thus cuddling", sighed Percy with a slight pout. "But now we're not even training together anymore, which actually does work better. I train with Hazel, he trains with Jason, or for regular fights we take on Reyna and Annabeth, but... We haven't exactly seen a lot of each other in the past few weeks and that's not going to improve now that I'm back home and I don't really know if we'll manage to pull through this war and still stay... together. We just... we didn't have much time to focus on us, as a couple."

"You love him, don't you?", asked Poseidon casually.

"Very much", admitted Percy with red cheeks. "When... When I fall asleep in his arms, I feel safe and like... we can win the war, as long as we're together. And when we fight side by side, I feel so powerful like I alone could take over the world, as long as I have him."

"Then, I believe, there's absolutely nothing to worry about", smiled Poseidon reassuringly. "But maybe you should talk about those feelings with him? It's fine to feel insecure every now and again, but it's important to talk about it with each other."

"Yeah... Yeah, I guess you're right", nodded Percy before he hugged Poseidon. "Thanks, dad."

"No problem, my boy", smiled Poseidon as he returned the hug.
Getting late wasn't exactly a good excuse when one could shadow-travel in split-seconds, but for now it worked. After all, Hades wanted both his boys happy so he was more than willing to welcome Nico at the palace for the night, even though Nico made it very clear he planned on leaving the next day. What also didn't quite work with a shadow-traveler was putting him into a separate room than his fiance. Traveling through the darkness, Nico exited in Percy's bedroom. Percy was already deep asleep, curled together on his bed, surrounded by various blue stuffed-toys. Nico grinned fondly as he approached the bed and carefully lifted the covers to crawl in behind Percy. He was wearing his cute dolphin pajamas, which looked just too adorable on him.

"Good", hummed Percy pleased as he snuggled up to him.

"...You're awake?", asked Nico surprised, nose buried in Percy's neck.

"Couldn't sleep. I... sleep better when I have you", admitted Percy and took Nico's arm to lay it over his waist and pull him closer. "I love you, Nick. I really, really love you."

"I love you too, Percy", whispered Nico back, kissing Percy's neck. "You know that."

"I do. I know it, but... it starts to feel like something we just... say, like hello and good bye and stuff", mumbled Percy, face hidden in his pillow. "And I don't want that. I don't want it to just become some kind of routine because we don't have time for each other..."

"It's not", assured Nico with a frown, kissing along Percy's neck and shoulders. "I assure you, it's not. But... is that why you've been so easily irritated with me? Why you snapped so easily because of the whole me taking it easy on you thing...? Because you think we're in a routine?"

"Kinda", shrugged Percy with a blush. "I'm just. I don't know. It's just that... I don't have a lot of experience with romance. Not just because you're my first boyfriend, but because I grew up in the underworld and what I saw were mainly movies that end when they said 'I love you' and kissed in the moonlight and that kind of thing. I don't... know how it continues. And these days, between negotiations with the Romans, training, even more training, recruiting help from overseas, it..."

"I know", sighed Nico, pulling Percy even closer until they were pressed flush against each other. "When the war ends. When the war ends, I'm going to steal you away."

"Yeah?", asked Percy skeptically, turning a little to look at Nico.

"Yeah", confirmed Nico seriously. "Between two camps, the underworld, your parents in New York and the underwater palace, it's... really hard for us to spend time together and it's... sadly, it's not exactly the top priority. But after we won the war, I will steal you away from everyone. Just you and me, traveling... somewhere. Anywhere. I don't care. Visiting new places, going on dates. Being together. No one to distract either of us from each other. How does that sound?"

Percy blushed with a pleased look on his face. "That... sounds perfect. And it makes me feel silly for worrying before. I can't... I can't wait for peace, Nick..."

"Neither can I, amore", agreed Nico. "But... we need to get stronger for that. Promise me to get stronger until we see each other again, okay? And then kick my ass in training."

There was a teasing to Nico's voice, earning him an elbow to the ribs. "I can kick your ass right now, if you want, Mister Ghost King. Now shut up and let me sleep."

Nico laughed, both arms wound around Percy's waist. He held his fiance until Percy was deep
asleep and even after, until Nico too drifted off. Both of them dreaming of peace.

When Percy woke up in the morning, Nico was already gone. There was just a note on the pillow next to him – *Until we see each other again, I love you.* Percy smiled and tugged the note away into his nightstand before he got up and headed to the kitchen. Tyson had left with Poseidon, wishing to help his *other* brothers in the forges. Leo had returned to Camp Jupiter, for now. He was going to travel between the two camps, just like Nico most likely. Percy had left Mrs. O'Leary behind at camp – she would be happier being around Plutonius anyway – and the two hellhounds were currently the fast line connection between the two camps. It was going to be a lonely autumn, that much was for sure, but it'd give Percy time to focus on training, he supposed.

"Buongiorno, papà", greeted Percy with a smile as he entered the kitchen.

He walked over to Hades and stood on his tiptoes to kiss Hades' cheek. "Good morning, my boy."

Percy grinned pleased as he saw that Hades was making pancakes, so Percy went to set the table for four – Hades, Percy, Makaria and Melinoe. Persephone had to return to Olympus; it was not yet officially the end of summer. A little while longer. Percy couldn't wait to have his underworld-family complete again. By the time the pancakes were done, his sisters walked in.

"Just because you are goddesses of the dead, you don't need to look like zombies", said Percy.

Melinoe leveled a glare at Percy as she shoved pancakes into her mouth. "Shut it, brat. Not everyone can look as cute and perky as you in the morning."

"Language, Melinoe", chided Hades pointedly as he also sat down. "Now, what are your plans for the day, children? Does anyone have time for your old man today?"

"Thanatos and Olethros roped us into helping them properly secure Tartarus again", groaned Makaria. "Just to make sure no more Titans will escape..."

"I'm sorry, papà, I have plans too", chimed Percy in high spirits. "But we could watch a movie tonight, when Mak and Melly get back from the Doors of Death?"

"That sounds like a great plan", groaned Makaria pleased. "Edward Scissorhands?"

As everyone agreed, they continued breakfast in peace and mainly in silence, because Percy's sisters were still dead-tired (pun so very much intended, thought Percy with a proud grin). This was so different to either camps, or to staying at his mom's. Percy frowned. Nico was definitely right. Percy had too many places he belonged to, too many people he cared about and wanted to spend time with. Not that he wished to have less of either; but he did wish to be stolen away. The frown eased into a soft smile at the thought of being with Nico, without the worries of war.

"Aw, someone's thinking about his boyfriend", chimed Makaria teasingly.

Percy blushed deep-red at that, glaring at his older sister. Melinoe snickered at him and Hades smiled a bit amused. Embarrassing Percy was entirely too easy and too entertaining.

"He sneaked into your room last night", stated Hades rather firmly.

"I—I... You know?", asked Percy, making himself small and looking like a kicked-kitten.

"He came out of your room this morning when he wanted to say goodbye", replied Hades casually. "It got a bit more awkward due to the fact that I walked past your room when he exited."
Percy's blush flared up again and he ducked his head. "We just... talked. About the future."

Hades eyed him critically, but he knew his boy wasn't a liar. "The future, mh? What about it?"

"What we'll do when the war is over", shrugged Percy with a small smile.

"Aw", cooed Makaria mockingly. "What's it gonna be? A white wedding? Riding into the sunset?"

Percy rolled his eyes and stuck his tongue out at his sister. "We don't know yet, but Nico promised we'd go... somewhere. See something of the world. Be... together."

Hades' eyes softened as he watched his boy. That was all he wanted for the both of them, really. He wanted Percy and Nico to experience peace and happiness. He sighed deeply. When had he been turned into such a sap? He blamed the brightly smiling boy in front of him.

"I'm done! I'll go and see if any of my aunts has time for me!", declared Percy.

Before anyone could protest, he bolted out of the kitchen and out of the palace. Humming happily, he skipped along the river-bank, knowing sooner or later he'd find auntie Styx if he just followed her flow. And true to his assumption, he found Styx sitting at one of Persephone's gardens. She was having a brunch with Hecate and Nemesis, by the looks of it. Eggs and bacon, salmon, croissants, cold cuts. Well, he had just had pancakes, but there was always room for bacon.

"Good morning!", greeted Percy in a chipper voice.

"If it isn't the little prince", hummed Nemesis curiously. "What brings you here?"

"I wanted to ask if any of you would want to train with me, but maybe after breakfast?"

Hecate pulled one of the empty chairs back to invite him to sit. Percy obliged happily. He hadn't just missed his mamma and papà, he had missed his whole underworld family. He listened eagerly as they discussed current underworld-themes. He didn't miss the calculating looks Styx gave him, but he dismissed them for now. She had that intensity to herself. After breakfast, Nemesis gave him a long look before she got up and nodded at him. Grinning, Percy got Riptide out of his pocket.

"I hope you haven't forgotten any of the lessons I taught you", drawled Nemesis out.

"Nope. Not at all. Stay focused. Stay balanced, to tip the scales in your favor", stated Percy firmly.

He took stance and Nemesis summoned her own sword. There was no harsher opponent than the goddess of revenge. Training at camp was nothing compared to that. Styx watched them closely, watched how they danced with violence and force. He watched the flicker of Percy's aura.

"You found something you truly hate", observed Styx curiously. "What is it?"

"Death", whispered Percy as he dodged Nemesis. "Unnecessary death. People... dying, for the cause of others. Dying, unable to truly change things. Dying and... and leaving others behind."

There was a powerful irony to the prince of the underworld hating death, even if it was just part of death. Styx nodded in understanding. His hatred was what she had feared the most. The hatred of a kind person was a powerful weapon, if used right. And Percy knew how to focus his hatred.
It was winter in Vermont when the huntresses returned to the US. Piper's hair was longer by now, braided with feathers of all the birds of prey they had encountered in Europe. Bianca had done most of the braiding, but Phoebe had occasionally helped. Her father hadn't been there for Thanksgiving, but he would be for Christmas. And so would she. Sure, she was lying to him – he still thought she went to boarding school in New York, even though she had been taking out monsters in Europe and recruiting demigods and helpful creatures there – but she loved him, didn't want to endanger him.

"While you visit your father, we are going to stay at Camp Jupiter", stated Thalia as she sat down next to Piper on the couch of their hotel room. "Apparently, Luke is over visiting his... boyfriend. I have teasing to do. Jay promised me to help with the teasing. And Nico agreed to come over to the Romans too, what with Hazel living there and all... Annabeth and Reyna got roped into tagging along. Honestly, at this point, I'm pretty sure Annabeth is planning a full-blown Christmas party in New Rome, for all demigods to attend. Sounds... like a good plan though."

"Mh. Cheers and party sound like a good idea", agreed Piper and took a bandage as she turned toward Thalia to change the bloodied one on her arm for her. "There was a lot of fighting."

"There is a lot of fighting", argued Bianca as she stepped into the room.

Both Piper and Thalia hummed in acknowledgment while Piper carefully cleaned Thalia's wound from a manticore attack in Bulgaria. The scent of war was heavy in the air. Thick and unpleasant like copper. Like blood. Bianca sighed as she sat down next to them. Maybe a party was a good idea after all, to take their minds off of things, for at least a single day, remind them what they fought for.
Chapter 31: The Battle of Manhattan

They had decided when to strike. The first time the Graeco-Roman front would attack the Titans first. Not defend themselves against an attack of the Titans, but harm the enemy forces themselves. The date was easily set. The prophecy had set it for them. January 28th 2009. Nico di Angelo's sixteenth birthday. As the oldest child of one of the Big Three, his birthday was looming over them. Together, the senate of Camp Jupiter and the cabin-heads of Camp Half-Blood decided they would not allow the Titans to get the first punch in. A mission was put together. Nico, Leo and Percy. Honestly, Percy had been a bit surprised the Romans would cave like that and allow an all-Greek team to go. Then again, they had enough missions going on that Romans too were busy.

Their team was chosen wisely; the plan was to set the Princess Andromeda aflame, destroy all weapons, plans and preferably monsters that were stored on the main ship. The fire-controlling son of Hephaestus to do the job, the shadow-traveling son of Hades to bring them back and forth without being noticed and the water-bending son of Poseidon, just in case something went wrong.

"Let the record show that this is not how I had planned to spend my boyfriend's sixteenth birthday with him", whispered Percy as the trio landed on the large ship.

Nico smiled amused, grabbing Percy by the neck and pulling him into a deep, passionate kiss while Leo prepared the explosives he was about to hand out to everyone. When he was done, he elbowed the two boys until they were finally giving in and parting. Nico glared viciously at the Latino while Percy blushed just a little bit. Greek fire explosives, courtesy of Hephaestus Cabin with some help from the Hecate kids. It was supposed to at the very least slow the Titan Army down, cause some disarray and give their forces the chance gain the upper hand, which would be a good start.

"We'll meet back here once we're all done, okay?", growled Nico, looking at both others sternly.

That was the plan. That was what should have happened. Of course, it wasn't what actually had happened. What actually happened was that Percy managed to get caught and was brought forth to meet Kronos and Rhea – in their new human forms as Bryce Lawrence and Drew Tanaka. Not quite the kind of company Percy liked having, but thanks to the explosions going off, he managed to sneak away. If one can call being shipwrecked and drowning 'sneak away'. But he was glad; the trio had beforehand agreed to pull through with the plan regardless of what might happen. Percy not showing up at the meeting point at the agreed time didn't mean the others should look for him; it meant they needed to pull through with it regardless. He was relieved, because the injury he got from an angry Kronos was one thing, but the image of his boyfriend and his brother being caught in an attempt to save him – no. All there was for him as he drifted to the bottom of the ocean was the hope that Nico and Leo would somehow manage to escape in one piece.

"You are a ridiculous creature, Perseus."

What a way to be woken up. Blinking blearily, Percy stared up into the glaring face of his big brother Triton. The merman had his arms crossed over his chest as he glared Percy down. Percy blinked slowly and tried to sit up, just to gasp and go down again, fingers clawed at his back.
"Easy there, brat", huffed Triton pointedly, pushing Percy back down onto the bed.

They were underwater. In the palace? What was he doing here? How had he gotten here...? In the back of his mind was a hazy dream, a dream of laying in Nico's arms, cuddling with his fiance and being told that he was safe and that he would be okay, but that he'd have to... wake up. Oh. Right. Not a dream then, not fully at least. Nico must have dreamwalked into Percy's dream to wake him.

"H—How long... was I... out?", asked Percy, still clutching his chest.

Poseidon swam past Triton and nudged his older son aside so he could hug Percy, making the demigod wince. Poseidon carefully let go of him and pried his hand off to inspect Percy's lower back. Percy stared down at it in utter horror. A nasty scar was running down his chest. That was when things came back to him. Kronos. Capturing him. Slicing him open with the scythe, starting at his mortal spot, the explosion barely saving his life, him drifting around in the sea unconsciously...

"Roughly a month", stated Poseidon, voice wavering. "You've been unconscious for nearly a month, Percy. This is a titan's weapon, it's a miracle you're still alive... We send word to Camp Half-Blood."

Percy nodded numbly and took in the appearance of his biological father and brother. Both looked worn out, pale, with stubble on their chins, hair a mess, dark bags beneath their eyes.

"What's... happening... with you?", asked Percy concerned.

It made both chuckle fondly before Poseidon answered. "Even on death's bed, you would still worry about others, Percy. We're... exhausted. We've been leading our forces against Oceanus. He's been riling up the sea monsters, attacking our cities and borders... It's been dragged out. They had been riling up for years now, but it's getting worse and worse... But don't worry about us, Percy."

"That's kinda hard", frowned Percy as he hugged Triton and Poseidon tightly.

It was the beginning of March that Luke was pacing nervously. One small battle after the other, but all slowly growing more heated. There was a hole. A Percy-shaped hole. It worried Luke. Octavian, who was sitting at a table with Rachel and Chiron, heaved a sigh and stood to grab Luke and pull him down with him. Luke grunted displeased as he snuggled up against his lover.

"The sea brat will be fine. Di Angelo said so", grunted Octavian pointedly.

The council was slowly gathering to discuss further action. The war was brewing. Next steps needed to be decided. For the next two hours, the council was debating and disagreeing, with varying degrees of attention being paid. After all, with both the cabin-heads and the Roman senate crowded together and debating together, it was ridiculously hard to ever come to a decision. The problem was that Nico was not in a good mood and he was literally giving off dark vibes. Shadows were pulsing around him, licking up at him comfortingly. Annabeth sat next to him, her back against his as the two long-time friends curled together. Percy had wormed his way into her heart too, after all. And that he had been out of commission for a month and hadn't been seen in just as long was weighting morals down. Or at least until the door opened, two hours into the meeting, and a slightly wobbly Percy basically gravitated toward Nico until he crashed in Nico's lap.

"P—Percy", whispered Nico stunned, staring down at the son of Poseidon.
"Dad said I should have waited a couple days longer. Didn't want to. Should have. Everything hurts", groaned Percy and buried his face in Nico's neck.

"Percy", whispered Nico more firmly, tightening his grip on Percy and hugging him.

"Very well", stated Chiron loudly. "Let's end this meeting and get Percy to the infirmary."

Nico nodded sharply and gathered Percy up in his arms, kissing the top of his head before shadow-traveling him over to the infirmary where a startled Will Solace nearly fell off his chair before he hurried to treat Percy. The scar would remain, but he could get Percy up and moving again.

Another month later during May, after many smaller missions, did they finally march out. Out of necessity more so than out of free will, really. The titans were on the move and the demigods had to take care of it. They were divided into groups, attacking various problems at once.

Jason and Thalia teamed up with small group of huntresses, Romans and storm-spirits to take down Typhon. One of the strongest titans and as he came into play, they knew they had to send some of their strongest players too. The children of Zeus/Jupiter, controllers of storms.

The strongest demigods of each side were send to New York to defend the Empire State Building and defeat Kronos once and for all. The bigger part of the demigods – albeit the weaker ones – were send to take care of the titans at their very own headquarters, in the backyard of New Rome. Kinzie the Amazon Queen had been convinced to help out in San Francisco too.

Morpheus, Hypnos and their children helped out by putting the mortals to sleep. The least anyone wanted was to have human casualties, or have them used as shields and blackmail by the titans.

All of New York was asleep, but still Kronos had some tricks up his sleeves. He was using his own powers and the help of Rhea to manipulate time itself. He was trying to slow it down, to draw out this attack and take over in peace. Hecate and her children Liam, Lou and Alabaster, as well as Hazel who had gotten quite good with her magic abilities, were working hard to break the spell. Only that time was fighting itself and they could see time passing – faster than intended.

Spring changed to summer and summer reached its peak while the demigods marched to war. Months passed in the span of days as titans and demigods battled each other.

Clearly annoyed by the demigods' interventions, Prometheus tried to negotiate with the demigods. He met up with Luke and offered him Pandora's Box-that-was-a-Jar. If he'd release Hope, the titans would accept their defeat. Annoyed by this mockery and dulled by the many wounded, Luke found himself curled together in the hotel that had become their commando base.

"Are you alright?", asked Calypso concerned as she knelt down next to him. "Are you hurt? You haven't moved at all since you returned. Shall I go and get Octavian?"

"No", replied Luke firmly, glaring up at Calypso before sighing softly. "Tav is busy enough trying to decipher the rest of the prophecy with Rachel... I don't need to distract him."

"Then... would you like to share your thoughts with me? A second set of ears might help", offered Calypso gently as she sat down next to the son of Hermes. "What's bothering you?"

"Your... uncle gave me this", stated Luke, lifting up the jar. "He told me they would accept our surrender if we were to... give up Hope. On the one hand, I feel insulted by this, because we are fighting hard to keep going, but... on the other hand, I see all the wounded, the... dead and..."
"And you are tempted", offered Calypso with a concerned frown. "But surrender is... not an option. We can not let the world fall. Is... it okay for me to make a suggestion then?"

"Be my guest. Can't be worse than the things I came up with so far", grunted Luke irritated.

"I became a priestess of Vesta and... I think that is where Hope belongs too. With the hearth and the warmth of family and home. May I take the jar and give it to Lady Vesta?", suggested Calypso.

Luke looked surprised for a moment before he nodded. It was better than to have it tempt him. Really, he just wanted this war to be over, he wanted to know his family safe and he wanted to curl together on Octavian's lap for at least one week straight without councils or fights.

Nico was laying on the couch in their hotel room, Percy on top of him and deep asleep. The bed was occupied by Bianca, Hazel. Grover and Tyson were on the floor. Leo and Annabeth had refused to go to bed because his mind was buzzing with plans. Nico was running his fingers down Percy's back, eyes wide open as he stared down where Percy's shirt was riling up. The tip of the scar was pointing out. He didn't even know what had happened – neither did Percy, not fully. It was all fuzzy, or so Percy had said. He had been captured, taunted and then cut open by Kronos, right before the explosion. That is, the scythe coming close was the last thing Percy remembered before the explosion. The mere fact that Kronos had dared to hurt Nico's Percy fueled the Ghost King enough to try his luck and strangle the titan king on his own. Alas, he had a lot of good friends keeping him from doing something that insane and stupid. Still, Kronos was going to pay for what he had done.

"Stop thinking so loudly", groaned Percy, swatting at Nico's face.

"I'm thinking loudly?", snorted Nico amused. "How so, gattino?"

"Your aura is acting up when you're angry", muttered Percy irritated. "Please, Nick. Sleep. We're going to battle a titan tomorrow, I really need my sleep. And so do you."

Nico heaved a sigh and closed his eyes, pulling Percy just a little closer. Tomorrow.

"It's you!", exclaimed Annabeth as she stumbled into the room, startling everyone awake.

"It's... who? What's going on?", groaned Hazel tired, throwing a pillow at Annabeth.

"I—it's Percy. I just... Leo and I, we came up with a plan. Plan 23. There are automatons all over New York, if we activate them, we might just stand a chance, but the point is when I researched them on Daedalus' laptop, I noticed the date! This whole time-mess thanks to Kronos and Hecate... It's 1:12 AM on August the 18th. Today is your sixteenth birthday, Percy", stated Annabeth panicked.

"...Well. I didn't get to buy you a present seeing as three days ago, it was still May", drawled Bianca jokingly, both eyebrows raised as she looked at Percy. "Happy birthday, I suppose."

Happy was a bit of a stretch considering his birthday was most likely marking the end of the war. Either they'd win today, or the world would end. Didn't quite qualify for a happy birthday and it only made Percy dread the morning even more, leaving him wide-awake this time around.
Tomorrow came and tomorrow brought disaster with it. They split up and headed out to their respective fights. The Clazmonian Sow had been seen and Bianca and her huntresses went after it. Percy and Nico led the main attack, though until they actually came face to face with Hyperion, they hadn't known what to expect. Hyperion, the titan of light.

"I love you", whispered Percy, giving Nico's hand one last squeeze before they charged.

Nico was the perfect distraction for the titan of light – because he was the darkness. Shadows. Nico held his own against the arrogant titan as good as he could, giving Percy the time to concentrate on summoning a hurricane. One alone could never beat such an overwhelming enemy as a titan. But the combination of darkness and the sea was too strong even for Hyperion. It cost both Percy and Nico a ton of energy and they were ready to pass out, but they couldn't. Still so much work.

Leo, Beckendorf, Jake, Nyssa and Shane were leading the most important teams for today – the ones searching for New York's automatons; the last line of defense. Annabeth was with Leo, the two of them leading the operation. Maybe with the metallic backup, they might just stand a chance.

Frank and Clarisse were currently preoccupied with a drakon attack, thanks to the enemy.

In the end, in the very end, it came down to Percy and Nico though. Titans and monsters emerged everywhere and those not on important missions of their own were easily distracted by them.

"Listen, you need to lead this fight", stated Percy very firmly, eyes locked with Luke.

"Kiddo, I've been leading since you were still in diapers", grunted Luke, flipping Percy's forehead.

"I know", huffed Percy, rubbing his forehead. "But I mean... you... don't have powers."

Luke flipped his forehead again. "I have my sword, I have my wit and I have our army. Go."

"Just... hold down the fort until the gods arrive", grunted Nico with a slightly irritated glare.

Percy had contacted Hades and the gods of the underworld had been fighting with them for two days now, but they weren't enough. Persephone had gone to convince her father with the aid of her mother and they were expecting the Olympians to join them soon, hopefully. That, or they might just get to witness the apocalypse. Before Nico and Percy left, Luke pulled them both into a hug and kissed their foreheads though, much to Nico's embarrassment. Then, the son of Hades shadow-traveled himself and Percy to Mount Olympus. It came down to them.

Well, technically, it came down to Percy, as Annabeth had informed them yesterday. When she discovered how far time had been flashed forward, they knew it would be today. Percy had to go to Mount Olympus today and try his best. Nico refused to let Percy go alone. Nothing would stop him from being at his fiance's side. Nowhere in the prophecy did it say that the hero had to be alone.

"Hiding behind the lover-boy, are we?", drawled Kronos unimpressed, golden eyes flashing.

"I don't need to hide behind my boyfriend, because we can stand side by side and kick your butt together", huffed Percy, Riptide weighting heavy in his hand.

They knew where to hit. Thanks to Nico's dreamwalking, he had been spying on Bryce Lawrence even before. It was how they knew the other demigod had taken a dip in the River Styx himself and it was how Nico knew where his Achilles heel was. His Achilles armpit. The only problem
was to somehow pierce it with their swords, because Kronos? He was a good swordsman, he was strong and he had backup. Thankfully enough, Reyna came with reinforcements to take care of the monsters so Nico and Percy could take out Kronos. Which was easier said than done. Nico was currently dueling Kronos, taunting him and distracting him rather effectively. Percy managed to sneak up behind Kronos, outside of the king’s vision.

"Do it now", called Nico out loudly.

Percy closed his eyes tightly as he drove his sword in through Kronos' ribcage via his armpit. He easily pierced the titan's heart, but the problem was that Nico was holding Kronos in place, arms hooked with the titan lord, pressed up against Kronos. The blade went through without a hitch. Kronos gasped strangled, blood pouring from his mouth as he collapsed on the ground, Riptide going through his chest once. But all Percy could do was stare in horror at Nico, bleeding wound in his chest. The center of his chest. His mortal spot. Percy hadn't noticed his chest-plate slipping!

"No. No, no, no", chanted Percy as he stumbled over Kronos' body to grab Nico.

Nico collapsed on the ground, right into Percy's awaiting arms, smiling strained up at Percy. "It's... alright., love... T—this way, he at least... went d—down with me..." He reached a shaky hand out to caress Percy's cheek. "It's alright. The hero's soul, cursed blade shall... r... eap. Better my soul t —than yours, kitten... I... love you, Perce..."

Percy felt as though he was being strangled as he stared down at Nico, watching the light fade from his eyes. He could dimly hear Reyna screaming at someone to go and get Will Solace before the Latina collapsed next to them, clinging onto Nico's hand desperately.

"You can't die. You can't. We won. You can't. I can't explain to Bianca and Hazel that you managed to get yourself killed while under my protection, don't be selfish, di Angelo", screamed Reyna.

Percy watched in utter horror how Nico's aura started flickering out. He could see it. He had never seen it before. How a soul left the body. And in that moment, as the beautiful silvery shimmer of Nico's soul slowly tried to slip out of Nico's lips, something inside of Percy snapped.

Styx had always feared him for the potential his rage and hatred had, the power bubbling underneath. He was a son of Poseidon, he controlled the sea. But he was so much more thanks to years and years of training. Taking a deep breath, Percy leaned down and kissed Nico, trapping the escaping soul between their lips as he started to focus every last ounce of strength he had on something he had never done before – controlling the blood inside a body. The human body was 80% water – blood, cells, everything – and Percy could control water. Sure, it took everything of Percy to force Nico's blood to stay inside his body and to manually, only with the force of his mind, keep it running. With his pure power did he force the water in Nico's heart-muscles to keep moving. Right now, all that was keeping Nico alive was Percy – keeping the blood in, keeping it running, forcing his soul to stay. Though now that the blood was running again, the soul easily slipped back into the body it belonged to. Colorful dots were dancing in his vision before they slowly turned to black and everything got blurry. The fights had already been draining, but this? This took everything from Percy and he could feel his own conscience slipping away, but he was not going to allow Nico to die. Not after what they had just accomplished. Not even if it cost Percy's own life was the las thing Percy thought as he felt his own life-force flickering in and out.

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter will deal with the aftermath of the war! Luke gets to curl together on Octavian's lap for a week and Hazel and Leo will get themselves a handsome Canadian ;) Also, of course, you will learn what happened to Percy and Nico!
Chapter 32: Granted Godhood

When Percy woke up, it was to familiar but unexpected surroundings. His room. He was at home. He blinked confused, groaning softly. Someone pressed against his chest, holding him down. Blinking, he turned his head just a little to look into Leo's upset face.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid brother", hissed Leo before he practically collapsed on Percy, hugging him. "You nearly died. And not even during the fight! You spent nearly all of your life-force on keeping Nico alive! By the time Apollo appeared, you were nearly dead!"

"N—Nico...", whispered Percy with an edge of desperation and fear.

"Turn your head to the right", drawled Bianca's amused voice from somewhere.

Percy obeyed the voice to see Nico's sleeping face next to him on the bed. Smiling, Percy reached out to link their hands, clinging onto Nico's hand. He took a couple deep breaths before properly looking around his bedroom. Tyson stood behind Leo, looking very upset and very worried. On his couch in the corner were Thalia, Luke and Annabeth curled together, Reyna just in the middle of draping a blanket over the trio. Bianca, Frank and Hazel sat next to Nico on the bed.

"I... couldn't let him die. I nearly killed him", whispered Percy, letting go of Nico's hand and turning away from his fiance as tears gathered in his eyes. "I should have seen he was in the way, I—I..."

"You shut up", stated Bianca very firmly and very coldly. "You saved the world. And you saved him. You didn't let him die, so stop acting like you did. You did what you had to do, don't take a guilt-trip now, Perseus. If Nico was awake, he'd tell you the same thing."

Percy gulped hard and nodded slowly. "What... happened? After, I mean...?"

"Well, the gods finally arrived. Helped clean up the rest of the titans. Hades rounded them up with the help of Thanatos and Olethros. The gods held some meetings while you were out of it", sighed Annabeth as she woke up, yawning and stretching out. "We all got varying degrees of thanks. You two? You got granted the promised godhood that Hades had been playing at for sixteen years now."

"I'm sorry", muttered Percy with an upset frown.

"Sorry?", snorted Luke ridiculed, one eyebrow raised. "You didn't expect the gods to hand out presents to everyone who fought in the war? You and Nico, you two took out Kronos. Besides, I got my personal reward sitting in New Rome, complaining about all the rebuilding he has to do."

Percy frowned concerned, slowly sitting up. "Is there much to do...?"

"Oh no, you don't", huffed Reyna pointedly, pinning Percy to the bed with a firm hand. "You are still out of commission. You will stay right here in this bed until you're perfectly healed again. Besides, look at us. We're here, instead of helping, too. Because everyone took some time to first of all heal. Broken buildings can wait, broken bones matter more. Not Annabeth, of course. She's been planning new districts for New Rome, to allow housing for Greeks too."
"We fought a war together, we can live together", muttered Annabeth stubbornly.

Percy smiled softly, relieved as he laid down on the bed properly again. He had been worrying about that; about leaving camp to its own devices once he became a god. Wait.

"I don't feel godly", stated Percy with a confused frown.

"Well, they didn't bestow godhood upon you right away", snorted Thalia amused. "You know my father; he wants to make a show of things. You and Nico will become gods once you're healed up."

Percy nodded slowly, feeling a little numb and very tired. "Can I... sleep some more, please...?"

"Of course, kiddo", sighed Luke, brushing Percy's hair out of his face. "You did good. Get well soon, okay? And when you're well again, come visit us in New Rome, yeah?"

Percy smiled up at his friends before he closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Leo looked around curiously. New Rome wasn't new to him. In fact, he knew it better than Camp Half-Blood, but something about looking at it now felt different. Before they all had headed to the underworld to wait for Nico and Percy to wake up, there had been a very tiring council meeting where the fusion of Romans and Greeks was finally declared official. Demigods were to live in New Rome, new senate elections would take place so equal parts of Greeks and Romans could make up the senate. Camp Jupiter would become their training facility during the year and Camp Half-Blood would be what it ought to be; a summer camp, but for all of them.

"Are you sure you want to move here, little lion?", asked Hazel gently, standing next to him.

Leo's eyes were on Thalia, Luke, Octavian and Rachel as the four walked the streets, bickering while Luke and Octavian held hands (the augur amusingly flustered by the silly action). Construction teams were at work everywhere, Beckendorf was close by with a group of Romans, rebuilding one of the temples that had fallen. Annabeth was constantly walking around from one construction side to the next, bossing everyone around and holding all the plans.

"Yeah. Tyson got promoted to be general of the cyclopes. He left for the sea. Percy is going to be a god. I don't... feel like I have a place in the underworld anymore. I know I do, I know they'd still want me there, but... being the only non-god? I... think my place is here. With you", said Leo softly.

Hazel smiled gently and slipped her hand into his, tugging on it to make him follow her. They passed Vesta's temple, where Calypso was personally doing most of the work, the titaness waving at them in greeting before she spotted Jason around the corner. Hazel stopped at the Fields of Mars, where Reyna, Clarisse and Frank were in a three-way-training-session. Leo frowned confused.

"You have feelings for him", stated Hazel softly, no judgment. "For a long time, I was... wondering why you acted so weird. So guilty. Then I met Frank and saw the way he smiled at you and trailed after you like a lost puppy. He loves you. And you like him too. And after having known him for a year now, I have to admit... I understand that. He's very... amazing. Strong yet gentle and kind. Also very cute. And he adores you, completely."

"I don't... understand?", admitted Leo confused, not sure where Hazel was going with this.
"I like him too", stated Hazel simply, tilting her head. "We've been through so many funerals in the past week. We still find bodies. Still miss some people. I just think, if you like him and he loves you and I like him and I love you, maybe... it's worth a try? To ask him out?"

"On... a date? With both of us?", asked Leo even more confused, staring at his girlfriend.

"The worst that can happen is that he says no and then we at least tried", shrugged Hazel, caressing the back of Leo's hand with his thumb. "If you want to and only then, Leo."

He was still staring at her dumbly before he bolted forward and kissed her fiercely. She laughed softly into the kiss, laying one arm gently around Leo's waist to pull him closer. They kissed until they were interrupted by an annoyed Clarisse telling them to get a room and Reyna chuckling.

"We're heading to the showers. See you later, Frank. Good work", stated Clarisse grumpily.

Frank nodded and smiled at the two girls before he turned to Hazel and Leo, blushing brightly as he saw how flushed they were from kissing. "Uhm. Hey. I should... shower too. Just wanted to say hello, I guess. I'll see you for Annabeth's project later on too, right?"

"Yes, of course", smiled Hazel brightly. "And maybe afterward for dinner?"

"Uh, sure? I mean, we all eat together, right?", asked Frank confused.

"No. Just... you and Hazel and me", clarified Leo, ears catching a little bit of fire. "Like... a date."

Frank's eyes were wide and if he had fire-powers, his ears would be as on fire as Leo's. Hazel rolled her eyes fondly – she seemed to have a thing for the awkward, cute ones, apparently – as she patted Leo's ears gently to extinguish the fire. Then, she leaned up to kiss Frank's cheek.

"Not 'like' a date, but an actual date. If you want", smiled Hazel kindly. "Do you want?"

"Yes", blurted Frank out hastily, eyes even wider. "Yes, please. I'd really like that."

Hazel laughed amused. Things were going to be interesting from here on out, she knew.

"I have been awake for a couple of days, but he hadn't left the bed yet. He also didn't plan to, not any time soon. Not until those sea-green eyes would flutter open and look at him. Oh, Percy had woken up once, two days ago, but Nico had of course missed it by being asleep for like an hour. For hours, Nico had stayed awake, staring at Percy, willing him to wake up, and the moment he decided to rest some more – after Bianca, Annabeth and Hazel had threatened him to knock him out if he didn't close his eyes soon – that was the moment Percy chose to wake up. Nico was laying on his side, looking at Percy intensely, one arm resting on Percy's waist, fingers absentmindedly tracing the scar on Percy's lower back – on Percy's mortal spot. Percy arched into the touch a little.

"Mh...", grunted Percy, eyes very slowly fluttering open. "My Nico... Hello."

There was a soft smile on Percy's lips as he reached out to caress Nico's cheek. Nico returned the smile a little pained, leaning into the warm touch before pulling Percy up against his chest, hugging him tightly. Percy hummed and snuggled up against Nico, nose buried in Nico's neck.

"You will never ever do such a thing again", growled Nico, grip tightening even more. "You nearly died to save my life. Don't... Don't do that. I... Do you have any idea how I'd feel if you had died to save my life, Percy? Amore, you... The others told me what happened. You spent
nearly all of your life-force on keeping me alive, Percy. You were... so strong and brave, but... I can't lose you..."

Percy hid his head beneath Nico's chin. "I'm sorry. I mean, for scaring you. Not for saving your life, because... I... I wouldn't have been able to endure losing you, Nico. I had to save you, my love."

Nico heaved a sigh. He wanted to argue, but he couldn't. He would throw his life away to save Percy too, so he couldn't really scold Percy for doing the same. Still. The thought that he had nearly lost Percy? It broke Nico's heart and hurt more than the sword to the heart had.

"What do you want to do now?", asked Nico lowly, kissing Percy's temple and neck.

"...Just lay here for like... two more days?", suggested Percy hopefully. "And then go and see my mom, Paul and Laura? And help the others with the rebuilding! They're all really busy already and-
"

"Slow down, love", sighed Nico, tilting his head down to capture Percy's lips. "Laying here for two more days sounds like a perfect plan. And once you feel better, we can visit your mother."

Percy sighed and snuggled up to Nico some more. "We won, Nico. It's... over."

"Yeah", nodded Nico with a small smile. "We won. Together."

He caressed Percy's hair and down his spine, Percy arching into the touch. The son of Poseidon moaned softly as Nico's hand traced the scar on Percy's lower back. Their mortal spots were hyper sensitive and both of them knew that. Nico's – in the center of his chest, where he had thought it would be easily protected by armor – was Percy's favorite spot to leave hickeys. Nico all the while had developed a special kind of preference to caressing Percy's back. After the incident on the _Princess Andromeda_, the scar on Percy's lower back was even more sensitive than the rest of it. Over the past year, the two of them had thoroughly explored each other's bodies with hands and tongues. They may not have had sex yet, but groping and making-out had definitely become two of their favorite pastimes for stress-relief between all the fighting. Nico latched onto Percy's neck with his mouth, sucking and kissing while his fingers danced over Percy's lower back, sending jolts of pleasure through the Sea Prince and making him arch into the touch.

"Ew. Ew. Brothers making out. Ew!"

Percy and Nico dove apart and turned to stare wide-eyed at the disgusted looking underworld goddesses Melinoe and Makaria. Makaria was giggling while Melinoe was covering her eyes. Both boys blushed furiously and Percy threw a couple pillows at their sisters, both dodging them easily.

"Ah. You're both awake, so that's what all the commotion is about."

Percy paused and looked over at his papà and his mamma. Hades looked exhausted and worn-out as he stepped up to the bed without another word and then pulled both Percy and Nico into a tight hug. Nico stiffened in surprise, while Percy eagerly wrapped his arms around Hades. Persephone sobbed just a little as she joined the hug, kissing Percy's cheeks over and over again.

"Sweetie, you can not do that to me! Just because I'm immortal doesn't mean I can't get a heart-attack from worrying about you! And Sally and I agree on that!", declared Persephone firmly.

Percy nodded slowly, a bit horrified that both his mothers were apparently now teaming up on him. There was more hugging and more kissing and even more chiding, but once Persephone was content she let go of Percy, patting his cheek tenderly.
"I'm glad you're alright, boys", stated Hades, resting one hand on Percy's head and one on Nico's.

"Yes. And now come – father is already waiting for you", declared Persephone.

Before either boy could ask what she was talking about, the goddess was already grasping their arms and teleporting them to Mount Olympus. Zeus looked annoyed, Hera mildly bored and Poseidon jumped right off his throne to steal Percy for a hug of his own. Hephaestus, Ares and Athena regarded them with neutral, slightly uninterested looks, while Aphrodite, Hermes, Apollo and Demeter smiled at them. Artemis had one eyebrow raised as she watched her lieutenant's younger brother step up in front of the council. Percy carefully freed himself from Poseidon's grasp, cheeks flushed embarrassed. He watched surprised how Hades walked up to a throne of his own. Thirteen thrones in the throne room of Olympus. Persephone smiled brightly as she sat down on the arm-rest of Hades' throne, on their other side being Demeter's throne.

"Papà?", asked Percy softly, looking confused at Hades.

"For the great aid that Hades and his underworld council supplied during these trying times, Hades has earned his throne on Olympus and place among the Olympians to represent the underworld", rattled Zeus off, sounding majorly annoying and glaring at his oldest brother.

Hades smirked smugly and Percy smiled brightly. That was true. The gods that had helped during the war? Not the Olympians. Hypnos and Morpheus had put the mortals out of danger, Hecate had worked her magic to protect them, Hades, Olethros and Thanatos had led the armies of zombies and ghouls during the fight on Mount Olympus. Hades' daughter Bianca led the huntresses during the war. Hades' son Nico and his prodigy Percy had in the end won the war. All while most Olympians were off pouting, or whatever. Percy was proud of his papà, glad he had finally gotten what he had always wanted. To finally be one of them, to finally be recognized and respected.

"Kneel", grunted Zeus grumpily and sat up straight, waiting until the two demigods obeyed. "For your great services to the gods, I will grand you the greatest gift the gods can give – immortality."

"Thank you, Lord Zeus", chorused Percy and Nico, heads bowed deep and fingers linked.

"I hereby declare you... Lord Nico, god of heroic deaths, and Lord Perseus, god of souls."

Percy looked up surprised. He had figured he'd become like some kind of minor river god or whatever, considering that was a pretty popular thing. But then again, he supposed it made sense. There was not really a god of the soul – granted, in a way the gods over death were also responsible for souls but souls had no one to be responsible solemnly for them. He gasped strangled as the power coursed through him. He felt strong, all the exhaustion caused by the actions of the war fell off of his shoulders, leaving him with a feeling of relief and strength. He blinked a couple of times before turning to Nico. His boyfriend smirked at him, eyes shining silver for a moment. They were both underworld gods now. They would be able to stay together forever.

"I love you", whispered Percy as he pulled Nico into a kiss.

"Yes, yes, do that somewhere else", grunted Zeus irritated. "Get out of my throne-room."

Percy grinned against Nico's lips and tried his luck with the teleporting, landing them both on Percy's bed again, where their hellhounds whined in surprise as their masters fell on top of them. Percy laughed nearly hysterically, feeling high from the sudden burst of power and the sensation of teleporting. He caressed Mrs. O'Leary's head while Plutonius growled and licked Nico's cheek.
"We're gods", whispered Percy breathlessly. "I can't... believe papà's plan worked... I can't believe we actually lived through everything... I can't... we're gods. I can't believe it."

Nico laughed and laid an arm around around Percy's neck to pull him into a kiss. "Neither can I. Now, what was that about the napping and then visiting your mother? Helping the others and then, then we get to enjoy godhood, yes, love? You, me and the world, right?"

Percy hummed contently and rested his head on Nico's shoulder, sighing softly. "Sounds perfect."

Octavian blinked very slowly and put his book aside to look down at the weight no his lap. He blinked a couple more times as he saw Luke Castellan curling together on his lap, sighing contently. Frowning, Octavian closed the book and laid it on a table to focus on the half-asleep blonde. Luke had put a lot of work into the rebuilding of New Rome and the camps. It had become a regularity that Luke would just collapse on the couch, or Octavian's bed, and fall asleep in the evening. But he had never curled together on Octavian like that before. Ever since the war had ended, Luke had been staying with Octavian – because what apartments hadn't been destroyed were either already inhabited by demigods or were now booked by Greeks. Other Romans had taken in Greeks too – Silena and Beckendorf were staying with Gwen and Nathan, Katie and Malcolm with Dakota and Leila, Frank and Leo of course with Hazel and Jason. Octavian had the questionable honor to take in not just Luke but also Rachel, who had simply decided she would be staying with him.

"Aw, he's really in love with you. You two are so cute", cooed said annoying redhead.

Octavian turned to glare at Rachel. The girl had just entered the living room, grinning like a maniac as she carried a box of pizza in that she must have ordered without Octavian noticing. Then again, with all the work they all were doing, he too was quite exhausted at the end of the day and all his focus had gone into his relaxing book and cup of tea. Frowning, Octavian turned back to the boy in his lap and started to carefully pat Luke's head, caressing his messy golden-blonde hair. Luke hummed contently and snuggled into the touch, stretching a bit.

"Yeah, that's the stuff", groaned Luke pleased, rubbing his cheek against Octavian's thigh. "Keep doing what you're doing, Tav, this feels great. Also, if you eat that pizza on your own, you are in big trouble, RED. Come over here and give me something too. Annabeth stole half my lunch and Thals stole the other half. Why they couldn't just order something for themselves is beyond me..."

Rachel chuckled as she sat down next to Octavian and handed Luke a slice of her pizza before taking a piece for herself. Octavian made a face at the two uncivilized barbarians, eating with their hands and without using plates. Rachel and Luke exchanged amused looks at that. The two were working hard on softening Octavian up and making him socialize with others. Make friends and such. It was a lot of fun to try and accomplish that and both had bonded a lot over it.

"I'm so glad you're safe and alright", sobbed Sally against Percy's neck, hugging him so close he felt like he would suffocate soon, while Laura was clinging onto his legs. "Lady Persephone came and told us what had happened and that you were in the underworld and would be alright, but oh, we were so worried for you, sweetheart. I'm so happy to see you, sweetie."

"No more dangerous stuff, big brother", declared Laura firmly and with a pout.

"No more dangerous stuff", promised Percy with a gentle smile as he hugged his mortal family.
Paul was part of the hug, but not of the chiding. He was relieved Percy was alright too, but he also knew why Percy had to do what he had to do. He was just glad it hadn't led to heartbreak for Sally.

Chapter End Notes

So I failed at ending this story, because after the next was supposed to be the epilogue. The epilogue kinda... grew outta hand. So, next chapter is the final chapter of Nico's and Percy's adventures - them exploring the world and, ah, exploring each other's bodies. And then two more chapters plus epilogue! And I also moved this story to the Wednesday-update-spot because... it's been going on over two years and with the new expand I wouldn't be done until like May next year. So, you will get a weekly update of this story and I will thus wrap the story up within 2016! ;)}
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 33: I Can Show You the World, It Belongs to the Prince

The remains of Kronos and Rhea were secured back in Tartarus, all other titans were put back in their jail cells and Olethros and Thanatos were taking good care of them. Rebuilds has wrapped up about a week ago – the Amazons had left for South America and the Huntresses had left for Europe, though both girl-groups had agreed to meet up for a friendly competition at some point. Greeks had moved to the remodeled and renamed New Olympus, Chiron was on vacation in Europe to visit his wife Chariclo and Dionysus was throwing the probably year-long celebratory party on Olympus, as they had once again defeated the titans (not that the Olympians had done a lot), but now that Camp Half-Blood was a summer-gig only, the two camp leaders finally got some off-time too.

Percy and Nico were very flustered when they were told about Annabeth's latest project; a temple, dedicated to them. Considering they were now gods too and what they had done for them, to teach following generations about what greatness a hero could achieve. Granted, the temple was mainly dedicated to Percy and Nico, but on the inside, statues of other great heroes – the first Perseus, the first Jason, Orpheus, Theseus, Herakles, Atalanta, Achilles, Odysseus – lined the way to the altar and the (slightly larger than the rest) statues of Lord Niccolò and Lord Perseus. Between their statues hung a black marble board, engraved with the names of all demigods who had lost their lives during the second Titan War, honoring those who had not become gods like Percy and Nico. It was flattering and Percy was very pleased by the honors going to those who had given far more than either Percy or Nico had. And in the end, it wasn't just a shallow temple for Nico and Percy, it was a temple to honor all heroes who had fought for the gods, to show future heroes what they could be.

The fact aside that building the temple gave Annabeth something to do; and keeping her occupied was always a good thing. Tyson was busy under the sea as the new general and head of the forges of Poseidon. Leo and Hazel were currently in the middle of adjusting to their new three-way relationship with Frank. Bianca was, as mentioned, off to Europe right now. As in; no one immediately needed Nico and Percy, which meant the two of them finally got to see the world.

Literally.

They left a note in the underworld palace after having spent the last evening with Hades, Persephone and the other gods of the underworld. Percy also left a note for his mother, promising her to send her postcards from wherever he was. And then Nico and Percy took Plutonius, Mrs. O'Leary and Ascalaphus and just left. Ace, the ever-faithful carrier owl, was responsible for bringing said postcards to the Blofises and also to New Olympus. Sure, Percy and Nico could now teleport, but they still decided to rather ride on their hellhounds – as much as that worked; when hopping from continent to continent, they still teleported. But other than that, their hellhounds really enjoyed getting so much exercise and the boys enjoyed racing each other.

They had started small with Canada and then moved on to Europe. Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England – they spent roughly a month in each country, taking in the sights and exploring the cities. It was exhilarating to just travel and go on an adventure like that, no high stakes, no pending war.

"I love this", whispered Percy as he dangled his feet from the Big Ben.
Nico made a grumbling noise from where he sat behind Percy, one arm around Percy. "London is beautiful, but couldn't we have overlooked it from the London Eye, love?"

"Afraid of height, my big bad Ghost King?", asked Percy teasingly, leaning against Nico.

Nico grumbled softly, tightening his grip on Percy. "Don't get cheeky, Soul King."

Percy grinned broadly at that. "We're still going to do the London tour tonight, right?"

"Hng. Sure. Who else can say they got a city tour from Charles Dickens?", smirked Nico.

The plus side of being gods of ghosts and souls? They had their own personal tour guides for essentially every bigger city there was. Percy smiled gently as he stared down at the mortals walking the streets, the tourists taking pictures of Big Ben, not aware of the two gods sitting on its roof. He had to admit, he was having a lot of fun being a god so far. Sure, sure, there were duties awaiting them – but hey, the other gods had gotten up to a lot of mischief and silliness too, so why shouldn't they? They were gods now and they were only sixteen. They had dedicated their entire lives so far into saving the world; they deserved to also see and enjoy it.

"We should get going. You made the dinner reservation for us, right?", whispered Nico gently.

Nodding, Percy waved his hand and teleported them both to their hotel room – luxurious, many star hotel with its own spa and pool, naturally. The upside of being both not just gods but also the sons of the god of wealth. Percy grinned and pecked Nico's lips before he got up.

"I'll go and take a shower", declared Percy with a sway to his steps.

"You are now, are you?", hummed Nico, eyes fixed on Percy's ass.

"Care to join me, Lord Nico?", grinned Percy mischievously, looking over his shoulder.

That was something they had been doing a lot since moving into the underworld palace together half a year ago when they had become gods. The making-out also got a bit more intense. One could say that after they started giving each other hand-jobs, Nico had grown decidedly more desperate to do more with his love, but he didn't plan on pushing anything. The problem was just that Percy was a tease. As proven by Percy's mischievous grin while he shed his clothes very slowly. Nico grumbled and got naked too, eyes glued to Percy's beautiful body. Since becoming a god, his skin really had a certain glow to it, literally so. Nico could just stare at him for hours, really. But when Percy climbed into the spacious shower, Nico knew he could have a bit more than just looking. He joined his lover, hands finding Percy's shoulders and running down his back. Percy shuddered while he turned on the hot water and grabbed a sponge to hand it to his lover.

"Do my back, Nick?", asked Percy innocently, batting his eyelashes.

Nico refrained from commenting, instead he grabbed the soap and the sponge and started tenderly rubbing circles on Percy's back, from the top down to the scar at his lower back. Percy gasped and braced himself against the wall as Nico intentionally put more pressure on Percy's sensitive mortal spot. Well, former mortal spot. Becoming gods had washed Styx' effect away, considering that a god's 'mortality' worked quite different than a demigod's. Which was nice, because Nico got to leave hickeys on his lover again. Percy squeaked adorably as Nico teasingly ran the sponge along the crack of Percy's far too tempting ass. Percy was a tease; but whenever the groping and touching actually went to ass or crotch, the son of Poseidon was actually quite easily flustered.

"I love you so much", whispered Nico, lost in his own mind and just marveling at how overwhelming his feelings for the boy in front of him were. "I love you more than I thought
humanly possible. I always thought... these kind of feelings were something Disney made up to sell movies. Which would prove Clarisse right that you're a Disney princess."

Percy huffed and hooked his foot around Nico's ankle, easily making the Ghost King loose his footing. But before Nico could actually hit the ground, Percy grabbed him by the upper arm and pulled him up, then proceeding to pin him against the wall with a glare.

"I'm not a princess", growled Percy, eyes dark and grip on Nico strong.

The Ghost King blushed as he felt himself hardening. He thoroughly enjoyed that intimidating, strong side of his lover; it was why Nico liked to watch Percy train and thoroughly destroy any of his opponents. Nico gave Percy the most convincing puppy-eyes possible and leaned in – as much as Percy's grip on him allowed – until Percy caved and sealed his lips.

"I know that", whispered Nico against Percy's lips. "You're my king, after all." 

Percy grinned against Nico's lips, slowly trailing kisses down Nico's jaw and to his pulse. Then, all of a sudden, Percy let go of Nico and instead grabbed the shampoo to start with his hair. Nico stared at his damn tease of a lover before glowering and soaping himself up.

"We're meeting the girls for dinner", informed Percy in a chipper voice as he washed off.

"...The girls?", echoed Nico with a confused look.

"Yeah. Bianca and the others. Well, Phoebe is taking most of them out shopping and watching shows, but Bianca, Thalia, Hylla and Piper are going to join us", said Percy.

"How come I didn't know that?", asked Nico surprised. "Bianca didn't mention they're here. I thought they were like... in China, or something?"

Percy grinned mischievously at him. "I was talking with Rachel, who told me Piper said she'd be in London and Rachel told her we are too, so Piper and I planned to meet up. Bianca doesn't know you and me are here though. I figured it'd be nice if you could be the one surprising her for a change."

Percy yelped surprised as he was whirled around and kissed passionately. "You are brilliant."

"Yeah, I know", grinned Percy and winked. "Now come on, let's get dressed."

After getting dressed, the two made their way to the restaurant, where Bianca, Thalia, Hylla and Piper were already sitting – Bianca and Thalia with their backs to the boys. Nico smirked as he sneaked up to his sister and tried covering her eyes to surprise her. She grabbed his wrist and twisted his arm. She gasped surprised when she saw who it was and let go immediately before hugging him tightly and apologizing. Nico waved her off (with the other arm though).

"It's fine", chuckled Nico, wrapping one arm around Bianca's waist. "I missed you."

"I missed you too. It's been months", sighed Bianca before sitting down.

Nico took the seat at the small end, between Bianca and Hylla, while Percy sat down opposite him. He received a nudge from Thalia and a half-hug from a very excited Piper, who immediately started telling Percy all about where they last had been and what monsters they had slayed.

"I thought you were still in Dublin", admitted Bianca a bit sheepishly. "I was planning on going there to visit and surprise you in a few days..."
"Well, it seems I was faster this time", smirked Nico pleased.

"I have the nagging suspicion your better half has had his fingers in on that one", stated Bianca.


Both di Angelos chuckled at that and rolled their eyes. During dinner, the huntresses told them about how they would be going back to the US come next week and that they planned on visiting New Olympus – Hylla, Thalia and Bianca were dying to see their younger siblings and Piper wanted to take a detour to go and see her father. Percy and Nico in return told them what their next travel-plans were. Bianca enjoyed seeing this wide-eyed, happy look on her brother as he talked about his plans with Percy. It always pleased her to see how happy her baby brother was.

"I mean, we have to get back to New York next month, because it's Laura's birthday and I already bought like a dozen presents for her from wherever we went", stated Percy with a sheepish grin.

"She'll be thrilled", chuckled Bianca amused and fondly.

After dinner, the little group had gone to see Wicked, because no one appreciated a good misunderstood villain story quite as much as the children of Hades. They had a fun time and all of them were still singing Defying Gravity by the time they left the theater.

"Elphaba is my new role-model. Also, I have to convince Rachel, Annabeth and Reyna to go and see this in New York with me", declared Piper with sparkling eyes.

Percy grinned amused as he hugged her goodbye. After everyone was hugged and Bianca properly kissed Percy's and Nico's foreheads while also warning them to watch out for themselves, Nico and Percy returned to their hotel. Nico felt pretty beat, but in a positive way. Spending a day with one of his sisters was always very exciting but also draining. He yawned and stretched before collapsing forward into the bed. He grunted a bit as a weight settled on his lower back and sneaky fingers pushed his shirt up. Nico stretched his arms out and allowed Percy to pull the shirt off completely. He groaned pleased as Percy's cunning fingers started massaging him.

"What did I do to earn this?", groaned Nico blissfully.

"Being adorable", stated Percy cheerfully. "I love seeing you with Bia. You two are such dorks."

Part of Nico wanted to object to being called adorable, but the bigger part was way too until getting a massage from Percy to disagree with anything the son of Poseidon said. While Percy's clever hands were working the knots beneath Nico's shoulder-blades, his very cunning mouth was trailing along Nico's shoulders, kissing and nibbling. Nico groaned, erection pressing into the mattress. Percy was just far too good with his hands, really. Suddenly, Nico, rolled them over and pinned Percy beneath him on the bed. Percy gasped and stared doe-eyed up at Nico, face flushed and pupils blown, betraying the doe-eyed innocent look he was trying to show.

"What now, Soul King?", asked Nico challengingly, hovering close, lips nearly upon Percy's.

"I vote for you losing the rest of your clothes", hummed Percy mischievously.

"Only if you do too", smirked Nico, slowly opening his own pants.

Percy snapped his fingers and all of a sudden there was a naked, delicious young god beneath Nico. Snorting amused, Nico shrugged off his pants and threw them on the floor before returning his attention to Percy. His lips found Percy's pulse, sucking and biting and leaving a beautiful
mark before continuing on along his collarbone and toward his perky, pink nipples. He licked with the flat of his tongue over Percy's right nipple and then over his left, wrapping his lips around one and twirling the other now wet nipple between his fingers, pinching it teasingly until Percy arched his back in that delicious way of his. Nico smirked pleased as he scratched Percy's jugular with his teeth, making Percy gasp and moan softly. Nico twisted Percy's left nipple in that way that made Percy whimper right at the edge of pain but completely enthralled in pleasure. Over the past months, Nico had perfected the art of making Percy do all the most amazing sounds. His free hand wandered down to Percy's cock, wrapping his hand around it and gently coaxing it into full hardness. He rubbed the head teasingly with his thumb, smearing the pre-cum over it while Percy whimpered softly, his hands clinging onto Nico's shoulders, nails digging in. Nico hissed and Percy just dragged his nails very slowly up, pulling Nico down so he could bite the Ghost King's neck.

"Want me to get you off?", asked Nico roughly, jerking Percy slowly. "Hand... or mouth?"

And that had been something they had started in Scotland, about a month ago. Blowjobs. Nico wasn't the biggest fan of doing it, but Percy's mouth? Percy's mouth was heaven. Still, Nico was more than willing to because he loved the sounds Percy made and he didn't actually mind; there were just a couple things he enjoyed more than sucking someone off.

"No", groaned Percy, hands wandering down to Nico's dick, teasingly caressing it.

"Oh. You want to get me off? Well, I don't mind that", grinned Nico smugly. "Can I have your mouth then? I mean, I'm totally fine if you want to jerk me off, but... I love your mouth."

"No", hummed Percy and tilted his head, eyes hooded and dark.

"Okay, fine. Handjob it is", chuckled Nico smugly, amused by the thoughtful look on Percy's face.

"No", whispered Percy and rolled them over to straddle Nico's waist.

Nico grunted as Percy very slowly and sensually rubbed his ass against Nico's cock. "A—Are you... sure...? Or are you just teasing again? Because I gotta give you a hard no to this kind of teasing."

Percy grinned down at him before he stole a kiss from Nico. "No teasing. I think we've been waiting long enough. I... uh... I mean, I've been thinking that for like over half a year now, but... Now's as good a time as any to tell you that I want more. If you want more too." Nico must have blanked out for a while, because Percy was suddenly kissing his cheek gently. "Hey? You with me? We don't have to if you don't want, Nick. But... tell me, okay?"

"What? No. I mean, no I'm not saying no, I mean...", Nico paused to think this through. "Yes, I want to have sex with you. Gods, do I want to have sex with you. I've been waiting for this for so long, Perce. Gods, do I want you, mi amore..."

Percy grinned pleased and rolled his wrist once, having a bottle of lube appear in his hand at that. Nico's eyes darkened immensely at that. Percy yelped and giggled a little as he was being rolled over once more and pinned to the bed. He gasped as Nico took the bottle from him and kissed him roughly, nearly bruising. Percy was more than willing, arching into his lover. Only barely did he notice how Nico lubed his fingers up. Percy gasped strangled as Nico's fingers found his entrance.

"I need you to relax. This will feel weird at first", whispered Nico soothingly.

"...Nico, I love you, but I know what it feels like to have a finger up my ass", snorted Percy.

"You what now?", asked Nico with a frown, blinking very slowly.
Percy grinned mischievously as he leaned up to slowly lick the shell of Nico's ear. "I've been masturbating too, Nick. And... I... did get curious. I've fingered myself before, Ghost King."

"Fuck, that is the hottest thing I've ever heard", cursed Nico softly, throwing the bottle on the bed.

"I want you to finger me and then I want to feel your dick inside me", whispered Percy.

"I take it back, that was the hottest thing I've ever heard", groaned Nico, hitting his head against Percy's shoulder, eyes screwed shut. "What happened to my innocent, blushing little boyfriend?"

"Your innocent, blushing little boyfriend has been dating you for over two years now", hummed Percy casually. "And he's sixteen now. Also, he spent a lot of time on the internet with the dubious company of the Stolls, so yeah, not so innocent anymore."

"Who in their right mind left you alone with the Stolls and the internet?", grunted Nico horrified.

Percy laughed softly and hit Nico's shoulder. "Are you going to have sex with me now or not?"

Nico looked at him as though it was the single most stupid question ever. He teasingly circled Percy's hole a couple times before carefully slipping one finger in. Percy's breath hitched and he wrapped his legs around Nico's waist, rocking his hips to get more of Nico's finger in. Nico's eyes were practically entirely black at that, teeth finding Percy's neck once more while he crooked his finger. He wiggled it around and nudged until he found what he was looking for – and made Percy howl out, nails piercing Nico's arms as he clung onto his lover so hard. Nico hissed in pain, but endured as he added a second finger and started scissoring Percy. Now it was Percy's turn to hiss, nosing at Nico's neck and in the end biting down to keep from making sound. Huffing, Nico added a third finger and properly spread his lover open until he felt Percy was ready – and Percy had moved on to whining a little. The whining got louder as Nico pulled his fingers out and instead grasped Percy's thighs to spread them. Percy groaned at that, pulling Nico closer. Chuckling, the Ghost King carefully pushed into the tight muscle-ring, breaching his lover's virgin hole. Nico's eyes were closed shut as he concentrated fully on enjoying that amazing feeling. Percy was so beautifully tight and warm, embracing Nico like this was his place to be. Nico groaned as more and more of his dick entered the tight hole. Once he was fully seated inside his lover, he opened his eyes to check if Percy was alright, considering that the son of Poseidon was oddly silent. Percy's mouth stood open in a little 'o', while his eyes were rolled back, cheeks flushed beautifully. Nico growled pleased, leaning in to capture Percy's lips as he slowly rocked back and forth, thrusting shallowly. Percy mewed cutely, the sounds caught by Nico's lips. After a little while of slow thrusting, Nico let go of one of Percy's thighs so he could start jerking off his Soul King. Percy moaned full-blown, hands grasping Nico's neck to pull him into a deep, passionate kiss, legs hooked very tightly around Nico's waist to make sure his lover would definitely not pull out and abandon him. Not that Nico would even consider such a ludicrous idea. They kissed nearly the entire time they fucked, too enthralled in each other to really let go. Percy was the first one to come, painting both their stomachs white, too overwhelmed by the sensation of Nico's thick, warm cock moving inside of him and repeatedly hitting his prostate. Nico continued fucking him all through his orgasm and by the time Percy slowly came down from it, he got assaulted by the intense feeling of Nico coming inside of him. They were both panting hard as they curled together on the bed and fell asleep in each other's arms.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have a time-skip and show how the next generation of this world
would be and what kind of happy families there are :)

Chapter 34: Children of the Gods

I don't want for my children to meet your children.

Never before had one sentence hurt that much. It had been the single hardest decision Percy had ever made in his entire life. When Percy had first fallen pregnant, five years after the Titan War had ended, he had been ecstatic. Happy. Euphoric. Painting the nursery and picking baby names with his mom. It had been a totally planned pregnancy; with all the duties of the underworld, Percy had fallen into a tiring routine – he needed more. Needed some life and joy in it. So him and Nico had planned their first child. Bianca Maria di Angelo was a beautiful, precious princess. Bianca was very flustered and honored to be her niece's namesake, though they normally referred to their daughter as Bianca Maria. She had been the second child born to their generation.

During Percy's pregnancy, Reyna and Annabeth had found their own bundle of joy – literally found, because thanks to Annabeth's Athena-powers, their daughter had just appeared in their bed as the two girls contemplated having children. Theobella Anna Chase – Reyna, who had never been fond of her long name, had embraced her wife's last name after their wedding. Thea was as precious a princess as Percy's daughter and Percy loved fawning over the little girl.

He had already been planning how Bianca Maria and Thea would grow up to become best friends, but then Calypso had fallen pregnant. It was a trigger of sorts for Percy. It made him realize something. When Calypso found out she was pregnant, she gave up her immortality. Because Calypso would never want to stay immortal and watch her own child grow old and die, watch her husband grow old and die while she would remain young. Calypso had given up her titanhood for Jason and for their son Hercules, because she would rather have one mortal life with them than spend an eternity mourning them once they'd inevitably pass away.

And that was just it. They were mortal. Part of Percy had always been aware of this; that him and Nico were now gods and that their friends were still mortal. That they would die. A very large part of Percy dreaded that moment, but another part of him knew that for the heroics they had performed during the Titan War, they would get to live in Elysium and Percy would still get to spend eternity with them. Percy had mentally prepared himself for that since he learned about his papà's plans.

But it was something Percy couldn't do to his children. He didn't want to. He didn't want his godly children to grow attached to mortals, to make all their friends among the demigods, just to suffer loss after loss when they died. Sometimes Percy thought that was cruel, but other times he saw it for what it was – they were living in the underworld, their children made friends in the underworld. They made plenty of friends under the sea among the immortal merpeople. They even had a couple friends on Olympus. They were happy, they had friends. Who even knew whether or not they would have gotten along with the children of Percy's and Nico's friends...? How was it much different than say choosing a pre-school for the kid; one school would mean an entirely different set of friends than the other, and again with elementary school. Parents very often chose the environment in which their children would have an opportunity to make friends.

Sometimes, it hurt Percy to think about what ifs. What if Nico and Percy hadn't chosen immortality and would be living among their friends? What if their children would grow up with the children of their friends? But then he looked at Theseus Paul, ranting animatedly about how
much he loved Camp Hydros and how much fun he had during his summer there. And as long as his children were happy, his decision couldn't have been wrong, right? Who was to say what was better? Camp Half-Blood or Camp Hydros, or neither of the two? As long as his children were happy, they were exactly where they ought to be. And, to be honest, Percy loved Camp Hydros too. Now that he was a god, he could freely shapeshift and become a merman himself, he got to enjoy the sea – the element that had been so foreign to him for years even though he was born into it.

His children however, they were allowed to live in the element they were born into. The underworld, the sea – both of them belonged to Nico's and Percy's off-springs. They never had to feel torn out of what should be their home; they always, right from the start, knew where they belonged and they always had the guidance of their mother and father. Something Percy insisted on. Yes, many might take the 'easy' route of thinking man equals father, woman equals mother. When in fact, it was a bit more complex than that. The father was the party involved with the insemination, the sperm-donor as some liked to say. The mother however was the one who had the privilege of carrying their child beneath their heart for nine months, creating a bond that any mother would tell you was one only a mother could feel – so how, in any way, could Percy possibly be their father, if he had been the one to carry their children beneath his heart, protect and nourish them for nine months before giving birth to them. That was what made him a mother, because it felt so much more important than to say he had a penis and thus he must be a father.

Percy was a mother, a god and a husband. Now that that was established; he would like to focus a little more on that last one. Their oldest was seventeen now and their youngest was five. For the last seventeen years, Percy had prioritized being a mother, just like Nico had prioritized being a father. After all, they had eight children – Bianca Maria, Hades Poseidon, the older twins Sally Persephone and Theseus Paul, Orion Grover, the younger twins James Charles and Laura Silena, as well as their youngest Jackson Tyson. Eight children were a lot to manage. But now they were various ages of being responsible. One had always been too young, making Percy feel too guilty not to spend all his attention on their children. But adding their duties as gods on top of parenthood, both Nico and Percy didn't get to spend a lot of quality time with each other. And with the supervision of Hades and the entire underworld council – who all fawned over the adorable little ones and were basically tripping over each other at a chance to babysit (well, most of them. Olethros preferred to stay as far away from them as possible and Styx kept her distance too) – Percy was confident their kids would be taken care of while Percy and Nico went on a little romantic vacation.

"Jackie, do the thing."

Twelve years old Orion Grover stood with his arms crossed and a pouting glare directed at Percy in the doorway to their parents’ bedroom, his youngest sibling in front of him. Orion was brunette like Percy's mother and with an unexplainable dash of freckles that Bianca had declared were something Nico used to have too. He was also the most stubborn of Percy's children. Jackson Tyson stood in front of his big brother, lower lip pushed out as much as possible, quivering as his eyes seemed to grow larger and larger. The thing was; little Jack was essentially a carbon-copy of Percy, really. Which was why, out of all their kids, Jack was the one they had named after Percy, in a sense, by giving him Percy's bachelor name 'Jackson' as his first name.

"Why don't you and papà love us anymore?", asked Jack with a small sob.

"Really?", asked Percy with a deadpan. "That's 'the thing'? Guilt-trip me into staying?"

"Well, is it working?", asked Orion, both eyebrows raised high in a judgmental way.

Percy huffed and smiled, motioning for his sons to come to him. Both essentially crashed into Percy, him wrapping his arms around them and hugging them tightly. Orion was stubborn, but he
was also clingy. He disliked the idea of Percy and Nico leaving for a week.

"It's not working, sweeties", whispered Percy, caressing their hair. "Mamma and papà need some
time alone. Besides, you have no problem with not seeing us for weeks when you're at camp."

"...That's different", muttered Orion stubbornly, frowning. "Then I'm the one gone and I know
you and papà are home and I can find you here if I need you."

"You can still IM us if you really need us, but you got your big siblings and nonno Hades to take
care of you", pointed Percy out, smiling a little. "You'll be just fine, my little darlings."

"I demand Percy's undivided attention", declared Orion very firmly. "That is non-negotiable."

"...Where do you even learn those words?", muttered Percy amused.

The Percy Orion was referring to was Sally Persephone – commonly called Percy Junior, or just
Percy by her siblings and Junior by her parents. She was Orion's favorite big sibling, even though
she was only two years older than him, but he adored her. Not that he was quite willing to
admit it. No, he rather demanded for her to babysit him than asking if his sister would spend time with
him.

"Percy, love, please free yourself from the bambini so we can get going!", called Nico out before
rounding the corner. "Ah. Knew it. You can't go an hour without one of them attached to you."

"It's not my fault I'm such an amazing, beloved mom", huffed Percy and puffed his chest out.

Nico smiled gently as he leaned down to pick Orion up, stealing a kiss from his husband while
doing so. Orion whined displeased, though he still buried himself in his father's neck. Percy all the
while hoisted Jack up and followed Nico out of the bedroom and to where Hades was waiting
with their oldest son – Sally Persephone and Theseus Paul had their sword-fight lessons with
Nemesis right now, while James Charles and Laura Silena were in the kitchen with Hestia, baking
cookies. Their oldest daughter had joined the hunt a year ago, which hadn't surprised either of her
parents too much; Bianca Maria looked up to her aunt as a role-model and she had always enjoyed
spending time with the hunt. Percy and Nico had already said their goodbyes to them all an hour
ago, but Percy just had a hard time leaving. Now however, they really had to go, or else they'd
never leave.

"Ah, there you are, you two rascals. No more playing hide and seek if you run off", warned
Hades.

Nico and Percy dumped their sons on Hades' lap – one on each of the god's thighs. Hades
laughed, ruffling the boys' hair. Hades adored his grandchildren. Not that Poseidon, Paul and
Sally didn't, but there just was something about seeing the gruff lord of the underworld light up
like the sun when he got one of his grandchildren smiling up at him. This was what mamma had
told him about, what Percy had never understood before. That Percy had changed Hades. Now
that Percy got to see it from a different perspective, he understood it. Smiling, Percy took Nico's
hand.

"You're in charge now, bambino", stated Nico very firmly, looking at their oldest son.

Hades Poseidon II, or Donny for short because who wanted to parade around with two thirds of
the Big Three's names, really. Donny was strong, the strongest of their children when it came to
powers. The others either had a tendency toward the underworld or the sea, but Donny was the
only one with a very strong connection to both. He was also a very responsible leader to his
siblings, because that was what Bianca Maria had charged him with when she had joined the hunt.
Donny had pouted for a week straight and then he had shrugged it off; using his teleportation-powers to just follow the hunt around like a lost puppy for about a month before he got bored and was being scolded by aunt Bianca just one too many times, so he returned home and took over as the oldest sibling at home.

"Of course, papà", chimed Donny obediently, looking just a bit too innocent.

"Not just your siblings; make sure your grandpa doesn't get into trouble either", added Percy.

"Oi!", called Hades out, glaring at his boys. "You're not too old to be grounded, you know?"

Percy laughed softly before he pulled Donny into a hug and kissed his forehead. "Be good."

"Always", promised Donny as he hugged his mom tightly. "You too. Don't make another sibling for me just yet; Jack is a handful enough for two already."

"Oi!", huffed Nico red-cheeked, glaring at his boy. "You're not too old to be grounded either!"

Donny laughed at that and also moved on to hug his dad. "It was a joke. A joke I totally meant, but still a joke. But... please watch out for yourselves, okay?"

"We're gods, we can handle ourselves", grinned Percy and ruffled Donny's hair. "Just... you watch out for yourself and your siblings too, okay? If one of you as much as has a scratch on your knees, I will never leave your sides again, am I understood, Donny?"

Donny chuckled amused, eyes sparkling as he watched his mom and dad teleport away. He could hear Orion Grover complaining in the background until grandpa Hades suggested to go to the kitchen and see if their siblings and Hestia had finished the cookies. That did lift Orion's spirits a bit and within moments, Donny found himself all alone in the great hall. He grinned mischievously to himself as he looked around. Mom and dad were awesome, they somehow always managed to watch out for all of their children. But with mom and dad away? Grandpa Hades was easily overwhelmed by the mass of grandchildren, especially since it was spring and grandma Persephone was on Olympus. Which meant that finally, Donny would have some time for himself to explore and go on an adventure. Sure, he loved the underworld a lot, but he already knew every nook and cranny in the underworld. He already had explored it all with his siblings and with aunt Makaria and aunt Melinoe. He wanted more. He wanted more adventure.

"Ah, the young prince", commented Atropos as Donny entered the cave of the Moirai.

Why the Fates were living in a cave was beyond him; they had a perfectly fine palace where even with Donny and his siblings there still was more than enough room to take in Atropos, Klotho and Lakhesis. But if they insisted on living creepy, then that was totally their decision, he guessed.

"I didn't think you'd come for classes on your first day of freedom", mocked Lakhesis.

Donny laughed a little as he went to sit down. Sure, the Fates were a little creepy sometimes but they were awesome. He knew they had taught his mom everything – how to read auras, how to read fate and most importantly how to save Nico di Angelo from certain death at the end of the Titan War. Donny knew about that. After all, he took history lessons from the Fates too and they did teach him everything. He looked up to his mom, he adored Lord Perseus, the great god of souls and the celebrated hero of the mortal world. Not that most of the mortal world even knew he existed. But Donny knew his mom and dad had saved the world – with the help of their friends.

And said friends were what Donny was curious about. He knew so many merpeople, had so many friends at Camp Hydros, was really good friends with the muses and with the four daughters of Hephaestus, his best friends were Harmonia, Aura and his cousin Pallas, the daughter of Triton
and Thanatos. He had so many good friends, he had so much fun, but he also had so much safety. All the adventures he had with his friends were completely safe. When he was little and they used to explore the underworld, it felt like adventure, but in the end Hades and everyone else had made sure it was perfectly safe for the kids. Donny was tired of safety nets. Obviously, he didn't want total, constant life-threatening danger, but he wanted real adventures.

"You are up to no good", accused Klotho amused.

"What? No! Really, I'm totally well-behaved", disagreed Donny hastily, looking innocent.

All three Fates snorted and laughed at that, making Donny frown confused until Atropos took Donny's hand into her own bony ones. "Sweetie, you are your parents' child. You do not have it in your genes to be well-behaved. Those two boys, they have always gotten themselves in trouble..."

Donny huffed and blushed as he ducked his head a little. "So... you think they wouldn't be too mad at me if I took a little... trip? Because I really don't want to upset them..."

"They would not even be upset with you if you freed the titans", snorted Klotho.

"If I may make a suggestion", hummed Lakhesis, blinking their all-seeing eye at him. "I think you would find quite the adventure in New Olympus, young god."

"I'm so happy you came over for dinner before you'll head out to your vacation!"

Frank was grinning like a total idiot as he nearly crushed Nico in a hug. Nico smiled amused, happy to be a god so he could survive that hug. He had never forgotten Frank in the twenty-three years since he had become a god. And he never would. Frank was his best friend – who happened to be married to both Nico's sister and Percy's brother-by-anything-but-blood. So, really, out of all the demigods they visited in New Olympus, the threesome of Frank, Hazel and Leo was the most frequently visited one. Nico smiled as he watched from the corner of his eyes how Percy whirled Leo around and smothered the little fire-bender.

"Of course, man", grunted Nico, mock-offended. "How are you? And the kids?"

"Are they here yet? Are they? Oh! Uncle Nico!"

And approximately half a second later, Nico had a teenaged Latina attached to himself in a hug that was very similar to Frank's. He smiled amused as he patted his niece's hair. Esperanza Nicole Zhang was a whirlwind. They had thought she'd grow out of it as a teen, but she really didn't. She was a fire-bending tinkerer who had an affinity to get into trouble – very much Leo's daughter. Which she was; the daughter of Leo and Frank. It had been a blessing of Lord Poseidon, a thanks to Leo for being there for Percy. Leo had hugged Poseidon so tightly and actually kissed the god in thanks, the embarrassment written all over Poseidon's face had been very entertaining.

"Hey there, Sparky. I hope you aren't driving your parents too insane with your inventions", smiled Nico amused, patting the girl's long, soft curls. "You and Thea still up to no good, huh?"

Esperanza grinned broadly and nodded wildly, before shaking her head. "I mean, no. We're totally not doing anything dangerous or crazy and we're certainly not building a giant robot."

Nico snorted and rolled his eyes. He rolled them again when he heard his husband's excited squeak. Leaving Percy to Leo and Esperanza to talk about giant robots, Nico headed to the kitchen where he found his little sister. She had grown into a beautiful woman, wearing her hair
shorter and tied back. Smiling at Nico she turned around to pull him into a one-armed-hug.

"I haven't seen you in weeks, Nico", chided Hazel sternly.

"You know how exhausting being a god is, or raising eight mini Percys...", muttered Nico.

Hazel laughed softly and shook her head a little. "You didn't come say hi when you were over for dinner at Ethan's and Alabaster's. I'm taking personal offense to that."

"Do you know how exhausting Alabaster and his witch-brood are?", asked Nico wide-eyed. "I barely managed to teleport back home and collapse on the bed!"

"Of course I do; I'm helping Lou and Alabaster with teaching their kids magic", chuckled Hazel.

Nico muttered something beneath his breath as he started setting the table. "I mean, Lance is easy to handle. He's calm and collected and all, but Marble? She's the devil. The actual devil."

"I think she's a cutie-pie", argued Hazel with a frown.

Nico huffed, but he opted to change the topic. "We're going to check up on the hunt while we're in Europe. See how our Biancas are doing. Sometimes, I'm a bit afraid of what kind of influence our sister is on my daughter. It's horrifying, like having two Biancas. I mean, you know what I mean."

Of course did Hazel know what he meant; both were named Bianca, but he was talking about his daughter's character and behavior. After all, the original Bianca was taking great pride in being an aunt and role-model. Nico and Hazel both smiled at that thought. Bianca was still going strong as the lieutenant of the huntresses. The huntresses regularly visited New Olympus, but most of the year they were gone, all around the world, fighting monsters.

"Why are you really leaving?", asked Hazel in a slightly serious tone after checking just how occupied Percy had Leo and Frank in the other room. "You two haven't gone on one-on-one vacation since Bianca Maria's birth. Something is going on, brother."

Nico heaved a sigh. Of course he couldn't hide from Hazel. He stood and walked over to lean against the counter next to Hazel, shoulders bumping with hers. She looked concerned at that.

"Something is coming. Percy isn't sure what, but... he and the Fates, they... saw an entanglement? I'm not sure. You know I still don't have as good a grasp on fate as Perce does", whispered Nico softly. "But it... looks serious. As in; there's a reason the augury and the prophecies have been acting up lately. We're just... before things get too serious or dangerous, I want to be with Percy. Just with Percy, just being happy and doing some... romantic things, you know?"

"You want to see the world before it ends", summed Hazel up gravely.

Nico didn't confirm, but he also didn't deny it. Every time a camper asked Rachel for a quest, the only thing she could do was recite the second Great Prophecy lately. It had to mean something.

Chapter End Notes

This was supposed to be a short epilogue to show their happily ever afters, but then I really got into this alternate next gen, so I decided to write two and a half chapters (aka the epilogue) on it. It might be interesting for those who are familiar with my
Chasing-verse, I guess. Like Orion Grover - the child Percy lost when he miscarried. As a god, with his changed circumstances, Percy did not miscarry and instead had a grumpy, pouty, stubborn and clingy little boy. Next chapter, you're going to meet my next gen children of Beckendorf and Silena, as well as Ethan and Alabaster's, see Luke and Octavian with their adopted daughter Danny! ;)
Chapter 35: Life in New Olympus

Chrysander Rodriguez, commonly known as Sander, was the middle-child of Chris and Clarisse and was currently, on behalf of his mother, in a beauty salon. Certainly not because Clarisse had somehow, in the past twenty-two years, learned to appreciate prettying up. No; Sander was running an errant. He had been sent to pick up aunt Silena's cherry pie. Sure, as the captain of the school's football team he'd prefer to be at practice, as one of the bigger heroes of his generation, he would have preferred training too, and as a seventeen-years-old teenager, he would have loved to just hang out with his friends. But as a good son, he went and did what his mom wanted. That aside, he also really loved aunt Silena's cherry pie. He hummed as he reached the counter.

"Sandy! You look so cute in your Letterman jacket!", cooed his cousin.

Sander made a face as the dark-skinned young woman rounded the corner to engulf him in a hug. He did not appreciate being called 'so cute', but just like her mother, Aglaia Beckendorf did not take no for an answer when it came to those things. Her startling bright eyes sparkled as she smiled at him. Sure, she wasn't his real cousin and aunt Silena wasn't his real aunt, but with the way their family tree worked, those things were more on an emotional level than an actual biological level. Clarisse was far closer to Silena than to many of her actual half-siblings.

"Mom sent me to pick up the pie?", asked Sander embarrassed, wiggling his nose.

"Oh. Sure. Just go to the backroom, Becks is currently fixing a broken pipe, he can give you the pie. I can't leave; paying customers waiting", smiled Aglaia brightly, kissing Sander's cheek. "But could you do me a favor, sweetie pie? Danny used the kitten-eyes on me and asked if she can have a pie too, but as just mentioned; I'm pretty swamped. Would you bring one to them, please?"

He blushed brightly and nodded. She was three years older than him and apparently, that was enough for her to see him as some adorable little puppy of sorts. Granted, when he had been small, he used to trail after Aglaia and her twin-brother Pyrrhus – who due to that name preferred to be called Becks – like a lost puppy, because they were older and cool and nice.

"Hey, Becks", greeted Sander with a sheepish grin as he entered the staff room in the back.

Becks was laying on the ground, head disappearing under the sink. He was pretty much the mirror-image of his father Charles Beckendorf. Tall, broad and muscular, but still kind and gentle on the inside. Becks peeked out from beneath the sink to grin at Sander and wave briefly.

"Did Laia send you to get the pies?", asked Becks, waiting for the affirmative nod. "They're on the window-sill. But watch out for the traps – yes, we had to booty-trap them because two very sneaky little sons of Hermes kept trying to steal them..."

Sander grinned broadly, knowing exactly which sneaky little sons of Hermes Becks was talking about. The two charges of Connor and Travis Stoll, mischievous little orphans they had taken in a couple years ago. Their names were Hunter and Hayden and Sander loved how much they looked up to him, considering that Sander was the head of Hermes Cabin. Still grinning, Sander opened the window and, by avoiding the traps, took the two delicious-smelling cherry pies.

"Thanks for the treat", chimed Sander with a bright smile. "Thank your mom from me?"
"Sure thing", grunted Becks before he disappeared under the sink again. "Tell your mom I'll come over tomorrow to look at that microwave she's been complaining about, okay?"

"She'll be thrilled. She's that short of asking uncle Leo for help and you know how much she hates letting him anywhere near anything electronic in our house", grinned Sander happily. "See you."

With that and a chipper note to his steps did Sander leave the salon to head over to Danny's. Danny and Aglaia were basically inseparable – after all, from their generation, the Beckendorf-twins and Danny were the oldest so they had somewhat grown up together, even though Danny still had a couple years on Becks and Aglaia. Honestly, Sander didn't mind bringing her the pie, because it meant he'd get to visit his most favorite uncle – and considering how loosely he used that term on his parents' generation and their friends, that was really saying something, because he had a lot of honorary uncles and aunts. The generation of the second Titan War was a close-knitted bunch, but Sander could only guess that much. After all, something as exciting – or dangerous – as the Titan War hadn't happened during his life-time just yet. No, the most exciting things they got were small retrieval quests and such. Well, not that Sander was complaining, really. He knew the war stories from his mom and dad; he was glad he had gotten to live out his childhood in peace and not with a war looming over his head. Well, technically, there was a war looming, but no one really knew when it'd happen. After the Titan War, Rachel Dare, the Oracle of Delphi, had recited the second Great Prophecy, but so far everyone was just sitting and waiting for it to happen. Deep down, every little demigod and legacy hoped to be one of those seven half-bloods of the prophecy, because everyone wanted to have a statue in the temple of Lord Niccolò and Lord Perseus, the Temple of Heroes. Everyone wanted to be a hero worthy of having their names even remotely associated with the big heroes of old days. Sander grinned slightly as he passed said temple.

"Sander! Delivering pie, I see? That smells divine. Let me guess; Silena's doing?"

Sander blinked a little and turned toward the temple of Lady Hestia-Vesta just one temple over. "Hello, aunt Calypso! Yeah, Silena made cherry pie. I'm supposed to bring one to Danny."

Calypso hummed and nodded, smiling at Sander. "Hercules has already been complaining about you missing your practice session today. But you're just too good a son, aren't you?"

Sander blushed and ducked his head. "Herc's a good son too. He does everything you ask of him."

Hercules Grace was one of Sander's very best friends and what Sander said was true; Herc was great. He often helped his mom Calypso out at the temple of Lady Vesta-Hestia, or helped his dad Jason out with training-plans or anything. Calypso laughed gently and patted Sander's shoulder. "You're right", smiled Calypso amused. "And you're a good friend. He can be glad to have you."

Ducking his head once more, Sander ruffled his hair. "Well, I better get going so Danny can enjoy the pie before dinner time, right? I'll see you around, aunt Calypso."

She waved him off as he continued on his way. Finally did he reach his destination, broad smile on his face as he rung the bell eagerly. Within seconds did the door open and his very favorite uncle stood in front of him. There were some lines of laughter around his mischievous eyes and his mouth, a scar marring his face, but other than that he had really kept young and handsome.

"Sander, my most favorite little nephew!", exclaimed Luke Castellan before hugging him. "And you bring pie, that makes me love you even more. Come, get inside."
"Aglaia said I was supposed to bring the pie over for Danny", said Sander dutifully.

Luke laughed and led the way into the kitchen where he instantly got four plates out while motioning for Sander to start cutting the pie. "Yeah, Tav has been hard on her all week... She really does deserve a treat. You're a sweetheart for bringing it over."

Danny was the adopted daughter of Luke and Octavian, a daughter of Apollo with the gift of augury. Octavian had been training her to become his successor for years now and she was already very good, but apparently, lately her augury had been acting up some. Sander grinned in a dopey way as Luke brought the plates over and ruffled Sander's hair. Luke had always treated him like an equal, even when he was a little kid, Luke spent time with him and made sure to explain stuff to him in a way Sander understood – not in that patronizing way some adults did, but more like he just wanted Sander to understand stuff. Besides, Luke knew the most awesome stories and pranks.

"Will Danny be alright?", asked Sander with a slightly worried frown. "I mean, if the augury doesn't work, that's... bad, right? We need it to know of dangers."

"Ah, my little princess will be alright", dismissed Luke lightly. "She's a tough cookie."

Now that there was pie on the plates, Luke took two and motioned for Sander to bring the other two. Sander trailed after the adult into the living room, where the two other blondes were. Octavian looked grumpy and a bit constipated. Unlike his husband, he was spotting some gray near his temples already. He also somehow always looked kinda tired – not in a haven't slept in a while way, but more in a tired of this world and its crap kinda way. Danny on the other hand looked pretty as always. The Turkish girl with the dark olive skin and exotic features smiled kindly and gratefully at Sander as she took one of the plates off of him. Danny was nice, she had been one of Sander's first babysitters. She had been born during the Titan War and was already twenty-three, which sounded so old to Sander, because he was still enjoying school while she was already all busy with college and adult-stuff. Not to mention the augur duties she fulfilled for their city.

"You are an angel, Sander", sighed Danny blissfully as she took a bite of the pie.

Octavian grunted neutrally as he pulled Luke down to sit on his lap. Luke chuckled and leaned against his husband, stealing the piece of pie that Octavian had intended for himself – but then again, Luke and Danny were the only people on this planet that Octavian could never deny.

"Uhm, can I ask... what the problem is with your augury?", asked Sander carefully.

"It's stuck", sighed Danny with a slight pout.

"...Stuck?", echoed Sander confused.

"Sedanur", said Octavian in his warning voice, using Danny's actual first name in chiding. "We agreed it would be best not to discuss these matters with anyone."

Sander frowned very confused. "What does stuck mean and shouldn't more people know...?"

"Not until Rachel and I got a chance to... verify with Lord Apollo", stated Octavian coldly.

And thus, Sander shut up, just to be sure, because Octavian could be scary.

Luke's eyes were dark as he watched his husband and daughter lean over yet another failed
augury. He worried. To the point that there was a knot in his stomach. They were stuck, the Oracle and the augury. The only prophecy coming through was an endless loop of the second Great Prophecy. There really was only one explanation for it – but Octavian disliked it just as much as Luke and was as adamant at refusing to acknowledge it as Luke. When Rachel had first recited the second Great Prophecy, they had thought it would not be fulfilled within their life-times – after all, the first Great Prophecy took centuries too. But that augury and Oracle could only refer to this one prophecy could really only mean that its time had come. Luke's jaw set.

"I'll be out for a bit, darlings. Be good and please, take a break, yes?", informed Luke.

"Sure, see you later, dad!", hummed Danny with a smile.

"Could you bring dinner, Lucas?", requested Octavian absentmindedly. "And be safe, love."

Luke smiled amused as he left the house. He needed a change of scenery and fast. Something else aside from this awful prophecy that sent flashbacks of the war into his mind. Within minutes did he reach his destination and rang the doorbell in a slightly frantic way. It didn't take too long for a young Japanese man to open the door. Emerald eyes, at first uninterested, lit up with a smile when he recognized Luke. It was fascinating how much Balance Nakamura-Torrington looked like Ethan. Then again, Ethan and Alabaster had used magic to create their two children, so perhaps not as much a surprise. When Luke saw Balance, he saw Ethan before the war. Not worn-out.

"Uncle Luke! You got awesome timing, you know? Marble just made gumbo!"

"...Marble... cooked? Well, was nice seeing you, I gotta go", chuckled Luke teasingly.

"I heard that, uncle Luke, and I take offense to that!", screeched a female voice from inside. "Cooking is basically like potions-brewing just that it tastes better!"

Luke smiled amused and allowed Balance to lead him inside. "What are you even doing here, Lance? Weren't you oh-so relieved when you got to move out for college...?"

"Well, Becks is spending the evening with his family since he's on a... repair-tour. So I figured I should do the same. Besides, without Becks, I got no one to game with me", sighed Lance.

Luke grinned amused as they reached the kitchen. In front of the stove stood a short brunette girl, her hair reaching all the way to her hips and her face covered in a gracious dash of freckles. The fifteen-years old little fireball glared very fiercely at Luke, waving a wooden spoon in his direction.

"How dare you insult my cooking, uncle Luke!", complained Marble with a pout.

With a soft chuckle did Luke reach out to ruffle the brunette girl's hair. "It was just... a cautious assessment based on your father's cooking skills. But I'm more than willing to try yours."

Marble looked pacified and nodded pleased. "Dads are in the backyard gardening. Dinner will be ready in ten, so when you go say hello, tell them to clean up and come in, okay?"

Luke nodded amused before he left the two Nakamura-Torrington off-springs on their own to check on his friends. He grinned amused as he saw his friends; Alabaster kneeling next to his herbal garden while Ethan was tending to the roses which were his pride and joy. Thirty years ago, a teenaged Luke would have laughed his ass off if someone had told him he'd find Ethan and Alabaster calmly gardening in their free time. Well, things had changed since then.

"So, is your daughter gonna poison us all, or can she actually cook?", chimed Luke.
Alabaster looked up with a fierce glare. "Of course she can cook! I taught her everything!"

"She's actually pretty good", added Ethan amused, knowing how 'well' his husband could cook. "Are you running away from your brooding husband again, Luke?"

Luke gave a half-shrug, which really was all the answer needed. Getting off the ground, Ethan dusted off his pants and walked over to Luke, motioning for Alabaster to come and follow them.

"You look like you could really use a vacation", stated Alabaster curiously, eying Luke skeptically.

"I could. I'd love a vacation. From work, New Olympus, even my oh-so beloved husband. He's driving me crazy with that augury of his", leaved Luke, rubbing his forehead.

"You know who's currently taking a vacation?", asked Alabaster with a teasing smirk. "Our... lords and saviors. Heh. Nico was over for dinner the other day and he said he has plans to abduct his godly consort to get some alone time. Get away from their duties and kids. Maybe you and Octavian should do that too; Danny is already in college, she doesn't mind."

"You just want Tav to put off analyzing his augury", muttered Luke beneath his breath.

And truthfully, all of them wanted for Octavian to just drop it, for Rachel to drop it, for it to not be what they all feared it was. But the idea of a romantic vacation with Octavian? That sounded good. Maybe Nico and Percy were onto something there. He smiled strained. It had been a couple of months since he had last seen them. They couldn't make too much time; between godly duties and their own children in the underworld, it sometimes amazed Luke how often they could make time.

"Why is he such a taskmaster?", whined Sander, panting and gasping.

"Because you missed training for the sake of pie", panted his best friend Hercules Grace.

"Less babbling, more running, girls!", barked their so-called taskmaster.

Trend Austin, son of Athena and one of the strongest fighters New Olympus had. They normally always trained together either mornings or evenings – depending on their schedule. Trend was running a couple meters ahead of them, looking and sounding not the least bit exhausted or pleased.

"I think it's also because Sara and Marshall are on a quest in Canada", added Thea Chase.

As a legacy of both Athena and Bellona, the girl was one of the fiercest females New Olympus had. She was by far not as out of breath as Hercules and Sander were. The Latina smirked at the boys as she sped up some to run side by side with Trend, leaving Hercules and Sander in her dust.

"She's so gorgeous when she kicks my ass", sighed Hercules dreamily.

Sander snorted and rolled his eyes. "Dude, she already is your girlfriend. No need to swoon like that. You don't need to convince her to date you, she already is dating you. Dunno why, but she is."

"Doesn't change how much I adore her", grunted Hercules and elbowed him. "Maybe you will understand it too if you ever meet someone who can actually hold your attention, dumbass. Speaking of... where is the one that can distract Trend enough so he won't kill us with training?"
Sander frowned as he looked around curiously. "Trend! Why did Sam get out of training?"

Trend paused and turned around to face the two boys with a scowl attached to his face. Well, that looked like an additional couple of lapses for them all for the sake of Trend's irritation. Thea also stopped, though she started stretching as she was now out of motion.

"He... already had plans with... Derek", grunted Trend, looking a little constipated.

Sander suppressed the snort. The rivalry between Trend and Derek for Sam's attention was ridiculous. The only thing more ridiculous was probably that Sam still hadn't caught on with it. Then again, Sander was the last one who should say something. He had never felt the way about anyone that Trend did about Sam. For a little while, Sander had kind of felt that way about Sam, but not as intensely as Trend, which was probably why Sander hadn't tried his luck. He wanted something real and intense, not some crush that might blossom into more. He wanted that fairy tale kind of love that hit you like a brick-wall at first sight.

"Guys", called a cheerful voice out as a brunette shorty jogged up to them.


Marble Torrington grinned as she bounced on the balls of her feet. "Uncle Luke was over for dinner today and I went home with him to pick up some books for tou-san. And Danny and Octavian were still on the prophecy and I sneaked a look and I had a great idea."

"...I don't like where this is going", muttered Hercules with a frown.

"Seven Half-Bloods Shall Answer the Call", recited Marble dutifully. "The first line of the Great Prophecy. Maybe... Maybe it's stuck because no half-bloods have answered the call yet. So I was thinking, I mean, Esperanza has been building this awesome flying ship out of boredom, right? Because she found the plans in uncle Leo's walking desk. So, I figured, I mean, Hercules is like the closest we got to a child of one of the Big Three. Thea and Trend are our best strategists. And Sander and Sam are our biggest heroes – uh, wait, where's Sam? Anyway, then Esperanza as the ship's captain and obviously me. That would like totally make seven, right?"

"You... want us to go and take on the Great Prophecy?", asked Thea surprised, blinking wide-eyed.

"Sure", shrugged Marble casually, mischievous grin on her fifteen-years-old face.

She was the youngest of them. She was also a little adventure-seeker. And she was probably the most powerful witch of their generation – even including the actual children of Hecate themselves. Sander frowned curiously. He was used to quests; him and Sam were a team and they had taken on more quests than anyone else from their generation, really. Usually with someone else tagging along – most of the time either Trend, Marshall or Sara, though with the daughter of Mars and the son of Enyo on their own quest, that only left Trend. Trend was strong. There was a reason he was the one leading their training sessions. But he wasn't too into quests. Thea was also strong and clever. Esperanza had been building a flying ship in the backyard as a fun project with Leo, Jake, Beckendorf and Becks. It was supposed to be just a hobby, but that did sound pretty practical considering the last line of the prophecy was about the Doors of Death – and no one knew where to even look for those. So with a flying ship, they could literally get everywhere.

Against his own consent, Sander grew giddy. He went on many successful quests, but he wouldn't call himself a hero. He had never actually been involved in anything major. Not major enough to put him in one line with the real great heroes. And that was what Sander and Sam had wanted since they were little boys; to one day have their own statues lined up with Lord Perseus.
and Lord Niccoló. Grinning just a little bit, Sander looked around to check with his friends. There were calculating and thoughtful looks, but neither looked like they would object to it.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, the final chapter. Next is the epilogue - because I'm an asshole and I'll just hint at the second Great Prophecy being taken on by the next gen. But you are definitely going to get the meeting of Donny and Sander ;3 *wiggles eyebrow*

(But that aside; this is what I had kind of expected at the end of PJatO. Next Great Prophecy, Riordan writing a next gen book about taking on the Great Prophecy because that the second one takes place literally four months after the first one was just... total and utter bullshit of the "Teens will only read it if it is about teenagers so I haaaave to make it take place while Percy and the others are still teens"-kind of twisted thinking. Not that I'd EVER want to read about Percabeth next gen kids, but... it would have at least given the whole thing a bit of a more realistic twist...)
Epilogue: The Dark Sea and the Golden Boy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Epilogue: The Dark Sea and the Golden Boy

"I can't believe you roped me into a quest while I wasn't even there!"

Sander grinned and ducked his head as he followed his best friend, obediently and silently listening to Sam's chiding. Sam probably had a point there, but then again, Sander hadn't been the only one agreeing that Sam should be part of this. Marble had suggested it and Trend had insisted on it. Yet here Sander was, once again taking the brute force. That was just what he got for being too kind.

"Sorry about that. But don't act like you don't want to be part of the Great Prophecy", argued Sander. "Everyone who's been born in the last twenty years dreams of being part of the Great Prophecy and make our veterans proud. Would you really have said no, Sam?"

Sam frowned at him, forest-green eyes sparkling in irritation. He heaved a sigh and ran a hand through his mohawk as he shook his head. His very nice arms flexed at the motion and even Sander couldn't help but look. Sam was a looker, that one was totally out of the question. With his bronze-skin, the always a little too tight red sleeveless shirt, the pants that hugged his very nice ass very nicely and his eyes. Sander understood why Sam had a whole line of fangirls and fanboys, really.

"Obviously not. I'm not crazy. But... I mean...", drawled Sam doubtfully. "Can really we decide when it's time for a prophecy...? I mean, okay, so the prophecy does kinda imply we have to answer some call for stuff to start, but... Derek's not a fan. Just to warn you; he might try to claw your eyes out the next time he sees you for putting me in danger. The dork."

"Where are we going anyway?", asked Sander, lightly dismissing Derek's bad mood.

"The temple. If we're actually going to take this quest, I want to send some last prayers before packing it up", replied Sam with a casual shrug. "Can't hurt to ask some adult for blessing, right?"

The son of Ares had both eyebrows raised high as he looked at Sander expectantly. They reached the Temple of Heroes and went in. Both bowed their heads respectfully in front of the statues of the old heroes and walked the way to the statues of Lord Perseus and Lord Niccoló. Between their statues was a large fireplace where people could burn offerings and prayers. Sam unwrapped a piece of blue cake. Sander blinked slowly, both eyebrows raised. Sure, everyone knew from their history books that Lord Perseus used to love blue food as a mortal. Sam threw the cake in the fire and folded his hands in prayer as he closed his eyes. The temple darkened and Sander wrapped his arms around himself. Considering that both Lord Perseus and Lord Niccoló were gods of the underworld, the temple always gave Sander the creeps. The shadows seemed to come alive, curling like smoke or like ink in water. They thickened and Sander was absolutely sure that this was so not normal.

"Sam... uh... Sam, something's... not right", stated Sander a little high-pitched.

"Sh. Praying", growled Sam irritated, stepping onto Sander's foot with one of his own.

Sander winced and marveled at how well Sam's aim was, even with his eyes closed. The shadows opened up and two hellhounds stepped out of them, floating above Sam and Sander in the giant...
temple. Plutonius and Mrs. O'Leary – the carriers of the chariot of Lord Perseus and Lord Niccoló! Sander's heart skipped a beat. Normally, gods didn't exactly make an appearance when prayed to.


Sam cracked his eyes open, but mainly so to glare pointedly at Sander. At least until he noticed the two hellhounds pulling a chariot. Sam's eyes widened comically as he stared up. Sander mirrored the expression. The hellhounds carried the chariot down – it was a beautiful chariot, Stygian iron, silver and decorated with sapphires and shells. It touched the ground and Sander's throat tightened.

"L—Lord... uh... Perseus?", tried Sander doubtfully.

He wasn't really sure. Sander knew pictures of both the gods, from his history books and from the private photo books of his mom. But this god kind of looked like... both of them? Sander was confused. Also, confusingly flustered – because wow, this god was a real god, like how one would picture a Greek god. Absolutely gorgeous. With sparkling sea-green eyes, bright and intense and as though the green and blue were actually moving like waves in those eyes. His skin was olive-colored, a mess of dark curls on his head that looked soft and fluffy. He sure wasn't tall, more like short and cute. Not the least bit intimidating like a god should be – well, his intense gaze aside.

"Nope. Sorry, neither Lord Perseus nor Lord Niccoló can take your calls right now because they're on a well-deserved second honeymoon", chimed the pretty god with a mischievous smile.

"And... who... are you?", asked Sam skeptically, eyebrows knitted.

"I'm Donny, Ambassador of Percy and Nico in their absence", chimed the chipper god.

"Uh... Lord... Donny?", tried Sander carefully, drawing a blank on that.

Donny rolled his very beautiful eyes, an amused grin on his lips. "Lord Hades Poseidon the Second. But considering there are two other very popular gods using those names, I really prefer to go by Donny. Also, 'lord' sounds so... old. Old gods like my parents would do that."

"Uhm, your... parents...", drawled Sander out awkwardly, still staring at the pretty god.

"Percy and Nico. Sorry, Lord Perseus and Lord Niccoló. Which, ironically, they really don't like", hummed Donny and tilted his head, watching Sander. "Like I said, second honeymoon for them, so as their oldest son, I figured I could take a call for them. Now, what's up?"

Sam blinked doe-eyed before exchanging a look with Sander. "Uhm, well, we... We and our friends decided to take on the Great Prophecy and I had hoped for a little advise from the heroes of the last Great Prophecy, to be honest... I mean, we are so totally gonna do this and all, but... We've never done a quest that size, you see. I thought, maybe they'd have some... input."

Donny looked at them for a moment and Sander started feeling fidgety under his intense eyes. "Well, mamma would probably say 'just do what feels good and always have each other's backs'. And papà would agree with him. But if you want some help, I'm currently not too busy."

Sander felt like something was dropping in his stomach. Did a god seriously just offer them his help? A very, very pretty god at that? But now Sander was a little confused. The prophecy said seven. Well, the prophecy said seven half-bloods, so maybe gods didn't count...? Or... was this the call? So far it was just a crazy little idea that seven demigods had spun up, but absolutely nothing was set in stone just yet. It was just a suggestion from a crazy little witch. But if a god supported the idea, that made it semi-official, didn't it? Sander blinked wide-eyed.
"Okay", said Sander without wasting another second to think about it.

Donny was grinning delighted as he sat on the figurehead of the Happy Dragon – a truly magnificent flying ship. As was expected from his cousin. Not that Donny even knew his cousin. He knew aunt Hazel, uncle Leo and uncle Frank, but mom and dad were way too protective, worrying about how mortals died and how meeting the legacies would inevitably break the hearts of Donny and his siblings. The thing was that Donny was very much like his mom; if someone told him not to do something, he just wanted it even more. Besides, the two heroes he had met at the temple yesterday? They were interesting. The pretty one was amusing – strong Ares blood in him, but an even stronger heart that would make Aphrodite proud – but the handsome one? Oh boy. Donny’s cheeks heated up. His aura read as Hermes and Ares blood mixed, definitely strong too. And good looking and cute. The seven had gone to get their stuff and say goodbye to their families. They had agreed to come here and meet up at twelve. Sam and Sander were the first ones to come, apparently right in the middle of talking about something.

"So, you had problems telling your parents?", asked Sam casually as they climbed onto the ship.

"Yeah. I mean, you know my mom, she's all for glory and fighting. She thinks it's due time I make my mark. I had a way easier time convincing her than like most of the others. Calypso is totally worried about Hercules, while Jason thinks it's a great opportunity and that they shouldn't stop him from being a hero. Reyna and Annabeth are 'reluctantly supportive' of Thea taking the quest. Ethan and Alabaster... have less arguments against Marble going than Marble's big brother does, actually. And I think Esperanza has the hardest time. You know how easily Leo worries."

Donny smiled faintly; that did sound like uncle Leo. "Hey, guys. So we're going to leave soon?"

It was amusing to watch the two heroes jump about half a meter into the air. Sander turned to look at him like a startled puppy – he had pretty nougat-brown eyes. Donny really liked those eyes. Plutonius and Mrs. O'Leary at Donny's feet lazily lifted their heads to watch the startled heroes.

"Y—Yeah. As soon as the others arrive", nodded Sander awkwardly. "But where do we even go?"

"We are going to figure that out as soon as we get in the air", declared a fierce female.

Donny turned to watch the other crew members climb up. A pretty Latina with a bow strapped to her back, followed by another Latina with a blue baseball cap tugged into her jeans, two blonde boys, one with glasses and one with what looked like a copy of the Aegis shield in, a freckled brunette girl that seemed to be the youngest of the bunch and lastly a pissed-off brunette boy.

"That's our crew", declared Sander, chest puffed out in a cutely proud way. "Our captain/navigator Esperanza Zhang, our strategists Thea Chase and Trend Austin, our legacy of Jupiter, Hercules Grace. Our local witch Marble Torrington and a very stubborn son of Demeter – Derek Rhys. Guys, this is... Donny. The ambassador and son of Lord Perseus and Lord Niccoló. He offered to help us."

Donny took them in slowly, placing their last names with the names of his parents' friends. It was so exciting to finally meet them. To finally go on a real adventure. Oh, his parents were going to be furious for sure, but hey – he could work the sad kitten-eyes pretty well.

"But, uh, you do know you're eight half-bloods now?", stated Donny skeptically.

"Oh, I am not part of this quest", declared Derek with an irritated glare aimed at both Sander and
Trend. "I'm just here to make sure my Sammy comes back in one piece."

Sam flushed a little at that and rolled his eyes while Trend huffed in a very agitated way. Huh, this crew looked like it was going to be fun. He turned to look at Sander. A lot of fun.

"Well then, I know where to start. I know where the Doors of Death are", chimed Donny.

"...You... do?", asked Thea surprised, staring at him startled. "How? I've been wrecking my brain and all resources I had to find something out about them! Not even Daedalus' laptop could help."

"Well, I'm a god of the underworld", stated Donny mischievously, tilting his head.

"Oh, this is gonna be good", declared Esperanza eagerly, a fire in her eyes. "Let's get this ship off the ground then. Everyone, take positions! Where are we going, little lord?"

Donny huffed at that nickname, grinning just a little bit. "Epirus. In Greece. There's a temple for my grandpa there and that's where the Doors of Death are located in the mortal world."

"Greece? Wicked", hummed Marble with a mischievous look on her freckled face.

Donny grinned pleased as he surveyed the crew. He was so looking forward to getting to know them all better and going on this adventure with them. His eyes flittered to Sander. He was going to be especially interesting, or so Donny thought. He seemed very pure, in lack of a better word. Loyal, humble, sweet and also totally adorable, but still strong and brave. Or that was how his aura read, at least. Donny couldn't wait to see all of what he had read in the aura put to action.

"So, you prefer to go by Donny, no fancy lord and all?", asked Marble curiously, popping her gum.

"Yup. For this, I'm just... one of you guys", confirmed Donny with a grin. "I mean, you got any idea how annoying it is to be the grandson of Poseidon and Hades? All the doting and stuff. Meh. I want something... real. A real adventure, a real... normal teenage-experience. Just once."

"Whole package deal includes stupid crushes, unnecessary tantrums and disobeying the parents."

Donny's eyes wandered back to Sander, who was laughing with Sam. He wouldn't mind a little crush. And the parents-thing was also covered. Their biggest adventure was just awaiting them.

~*~ The End ~*~

/omake/

"...You lost one of my children? We were only gone for two weeks and you managed to lose one of my children."

It was a slightly amusing sight to see the great king of the underworld ducking his head like a guilty school boy and perhaps Nico would have laughed at the picture his father painted. Perhaps, if he wouldn't be wholeheartedly agreeing with his consort and love. Percy was glaring fiercely at Hades.

"You have eight of them. It's hard to keep count", tried Hades. "And managing to somehow keep them all contained while also ruling the underworld isn't exactly easy either, bambino."

"Oh, please. Nick and I manage too", huffed Percy and crossed his arms over his chest. "I will tell mamma about this and let's see how much you'll manage to defend yourself about losing one of"
Fascinatingly enough, Hades managed to shrink some more at the threat of his wife learning about this. Nico heaved a sigh and ran his fingers through his hair. When him and Percy had returned from their second honeymoon, six of their children had happily greeted them. That Bianca Maria was with the hunt was obvious, but Donny should have been there. Alas, he wasn't. There was a distinctive lack of Donny - and Percy did not take that too well.

"The Fates said he took a quest. In New Olympus", tried Nico to soothe his raging sea.

It didn't help. If anything, Percy's aura flared up with more anger at that. He shook Nico off to point an accusing finger at Hades, eyes dark as the sea during a storm.

"My baby took on a quest. I leave them alone with you one time and my son ends up on a quest? H-How... That's it. I am done. Honestly, how did Makaria, Melinoe, Leo, Tyson and I even survive with that kind of supervision is beyond me!", exclaimed Percy, waving his arms around wildly.

That being said, Percy stomped out of the room, muttering something about talking to Apollo about this mess. Hades carefully stared after his boy before turning to Nico. Nico too looked irritated, but by far milder than his consort.

"You think he'll be mad for long...?", asked Hades slowly, rubbing his temples.

"Depends on how that quest goes for our son", pointed Nico out, both eyebrows raised. "But if I were you, I'd go and seek shelter in a safe distance to Percy. And Persephone. And Poseidon. And Paul and Sally."

Hades winced slightly. Maybe it was time for a little vacation of his own. After two weeks of being tortured by his six too energetic grandchildren, he sure deserved it. Somewhere far, far away from the underworld...

Chapter End Notes

Aaand that is it. Wow. Can't believe it took me so long to finish this story. Started writing this story in October 2014. More than two years ago now. Thanks for reading this and even more so for reviewing; reviews are after all what keeps me posting ;)

This story is a total of 200 pages long. And I love it. I mean, to be honest writing kiddo!Percy being raised by the underworld was the most fun and I do consider it one of the cutest things I've ever written; it was also a fascinating character study on Percy. I enjoyed writing this different dynamic to Nico and Percy. And I love to see how my next gen would have unfolded in this different universe (there would be A LOT of blushing Sander, because god!Donny is far more confident and comfortable with himself than demigod!Donny, so he'd be quite the tease and very forward in what he wants).

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