

...the sidewalk. Pink and yellow stucco buildings lined the street, their windows boarded up. A block away, past a line of hibiscus bushes, the ocean churned. Florida, I thought. Though I wasn't sure how I knew that. I'd never been to Florida. Then I heard hooves clattering against the pavement. I turned and saw my friend Grover running for his life. Yeah, I said hooves. Grover is a satyr. From the waist up, he looks like a typical gangly teenager with a peach-fuzz goatee and a bad case of acne. He walks with a strange limp, but unless you happen to catch him without his pants on (which I don't recommend), you'd never know there was anything unhuman about him. Baggy jeans and fake feet hide the fact that he's got furry hindquarters and hooves. Grover had been my best friend in sixth grade. He'd gone on this adventure with me and a girl named Annabeth to save the world, but I hadn't seen him since last July, when he set off alone on a dangerous quest—a quest no satyr had ever returned from. Anyway, in my dream, Grover was hauling goat tail, holding his human shoes in his hands the way he does when he needs to move fast. He clopped past the little tourist shops and surfboard rental places. The wind bent the palm trees almost to the ground. Grover was terrified of something behind him. He must've just come from the beach. Wet sand was caked in his fur. He'd escaped from somewhere. He was trying to get away from...something. A bone-rattling growl cut through the storm. Behind Grover, at the far end of the block, a shadowy figure loomed. It swatted aside a street lamp, which burst in a shower of sparks. Grover stumbled, whimpering in fear. He muttered to himself, Have to get away. Have to warn them! I couldn't see what was chasing him, but I could hear it muttering and cursing. The ground shook as it got closer. Grover dashed around a street corner and faltered. He'd run into a dead-end courtyard full of shops. No time to be slack up. The nearest door had been blown open by the storm. The sign above the darkened display window read: ST. AUGUSTINE BRIDAL BOUTIQUE. Grover dashed inside. He dove behind a rack of wedding dresses. The monster's shadow passed in front of the shop. I could smell the thing—a sickening combination of wet sheep wool and rotten meat and that weird sour body odor only monsters have, like a skunk that's been living off Mexican food. Grover trembled behind the wedding dresses. The monster's shadow passed on. Silence except for the rain. G grover took a deep breath. Maybe the thing was gone. Then lightning flashed. The entire front of the store exploded, and a monstrous voice bellowed: "MIIIIINE!" I sat bolt upright, shivering in my bed. There was no storm. No monster. Morning sunlight filtered through my bedroom window. I thought I saw a shadow flicker across the glass—a humanlike shape. But then there was a knock on my bedroom door—my mom called: "Percy, you're going to be late"—and the shadow at the window disappeared. It must've been my imagination. A fifth-story window with a rickety old fire escape...there couldn't have been anyone out there. "Come on, dear," my mother called again. "Last day of school. You should be excited! You've almost made it!" "Coming." I managed. I felt under my pillow. My fingers closed reassuringly around the ballpoint pen I always slept with. I brought it out, studied the Ancient Greek writing engraved on the side: Anaklusmos. Riptide. I thought about uncapping it, but something held me back. I hadn't used Riptide for so long.... Besides, my mom had made me promise not to use deadly weapons in the apartment after I'd swung a javelin the wrong way and taken out her china cabinet. I put Anaklusmos on my nightstand and dragged myself out of bed. I got dressed as quickly as I could. I tried not to think about my nightmare or monsters or the shadow at my window. Have to get ancient gesture Grover had once taught me for warding off evil. The dream couldn't have been real. Last day of school. M getting expelled. No weird accidents. No fights in the classroom. No teachers turning into monsters and trying to ood. Only one more day to go. Surely even I couldn't mess that up. As usual, I didn't have a clue how wrong I was saying anything is possible. Percy can pass seventh grade. Waffles can be blue. Little miracles like re to sell candy at Sweet on America. Her long brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail. The waffle hen something was bothering me. She dried her hands and sat down across from me. "School out the other part of my life. We tried to live as normally as possible, but my mom knew all sed as she said the word camp. 'What is it?' I asked. 'Nothing,' she said. 'I'll tell you struggling with money. Between my mom's night classes and my private school tuition ight.'" She twisted her dishrag. "Ah, dear, about that...I got a message from Chiron. 'Po not be safe for you to come to camp just yet. We might have to postpone.' " "Po ery, very sorry. I was hoping to talk to you about it this afternoon. I can't expel ock chimed the half-hour. My mom looked almost relieved. "Seven-thirty, warning, like if I pushed her too hard she'd start to cry. Besides, she'y Mom, this problem at camp. Does it...could it have anything to do with I didn't know it at the time, but my mom and I would never get to be ing sunlight—a human silhouette against the brick wall, a shadow e' school in downtown Manhattan, which means we sit on beanb loads, so I'd never done that great in regular schools even before e my first class today: English. The whole middle school had e yard to spend an hour with no adult supervision to see what ame. The school bully, Matt Sloan, led most of those activiti ut sloppy clothes, like he wanted everybody to see how litt n into a PLEASE SLOW DOWN FOR CHILDREN sign. Any d at Meriwether College Prep. As near as my mom and he t-three and built like the Abominable Snowman, but he ing. I couldn't tell you what color his eyes were, becau I guess because he'd never gone to school before co New York City alleyway, because that's where he liv students could feel good about themselves. Unfortun I good by picking on him. I was pretty much his onl nothing ever seemed to happen. The social worker ow. Anyway, Matt Sloan snuck up behind him and go back to your cardboard box!" Tyson started s ght have friends if you weren't always sticking up o busy laughing. I wondered if it were my imagin "Just wait till PE, Jackson," Sloan called. "You a d we should never, never grow up to be violent me. No." I promised, gritting my teeth. "Matt S ice project." I wondered if the headmaster had e like him that anything would be fine? Our next tiny vials we were supposed to use. He accident she praised Tyson and me for being natural c ldn't stand the idea that something might be w ps, I opened my notebook and stared at the ph n a bandanna. She was standing in front of the o she's always visiting famous monuments an ust been my imagination. I wished Annabeth w Matt Sloan reached over and ripped the photo o anded the photo to his ugly buddies, who snick office. They must've had a weird sense of hum t year," Sloan bragged, like that was supposed er, Jackson. Good thing I'm gonna put you out mortals, no matter how obnoxious they were. I y!" I looked around the locker area, but nobody of kids rushed for the gym, carrying Tyson and horts and tie-dyed T-shirts. Fortunately, we did use I didn't want to deal with Sloan. I was abou nd aggravated about it. "Yeah, sure, man." Tyson etely hairy and he's got weird scars on his bac oors off lockers. When we got into the gym, Co ded me of the Oracle at Camp Half-Blood—whi n I be captain?" "Eh?" Coach Nunley looked u because all the jocks and the popular kids mo ways got harassed by Sloan and his gang. Nor six of them. Matt Sloan spilled a cage full of yson pointed at Sloan's new friends. "Smell ur meat and beat them with sticks. Sloan blew th ler tried to crawl behind the wall mat and joke. . My eyesight was fuzzy. I felt like I'd just gotte I mat, and Corey Baker yelled: "Hey!" I yelled us Jackson! I hope so!" The way he said my na owing in size. They were no longer kids. They it! Who... "The other kids on his team started s t shut like magic. Raj and some of the other kid y morsels? No, Son of the Sea God. We Laistry e of cannon balls, perforated like wiffle balls w geball game, he didn't let on. That's the proble hth graders pounding the younger kids like us with genuine man-eating bloodthirsty monsters creamed. Tyson pulled him out from behind the nd, that door also slammed shut. "No one leav always kept in my pocket, but then I realized I king toward me. Tyson pushed me out of the w , two hungry giants were glaring down at me. "It was too late. Both balls slammed into him...alls speeding toward him at a zillion miles an h win columns of flame—a sure sign they were m bal walled. He flexed his muscles and his Bab over Coach Nunley's head and landed in the b imself stood petrified in the middle of the court kept his eyes on his magazine. Surely the whol to tell him he was taking the dodgeball game w to be seriously burned from blocking the first v e balls back toward their owners and blasted th emolished the locker room door. Now, I figured blew apart. Locker doors, socks, athletic suppoe Bob, had wisely held on to his own ball, wait e back wall, which cracked and partially crumbl son tried to pick it up, but he fell back, stunned ll and aimed it at Tyson. "Stop!" I yelled. "It's s in a smoking heap of clothes right by the gi elf to die. Suddenly the giant's body went rigid. ne, not a horn—the glowing tip of a blade. The een flame, which I figured was going to make B ap tucked in her pocket, a bronze knife in her h me to his senses. He blinked at Annabeth, as if nd." The gym was in flames. Kids were still run ock, a crowd of teachers piling up behind him. ver alone. "The shadow I saw this morning—t t to—" "There!" a woman screamed. The doors f distaste that I didn't quite understand. "You'd the middle of the burning gymnasium when th up from the pile of cinder blocks." Head hurts. Coach Nunley had been dutifully reading his m elieve me, even if I could tell them the truth. I gr L TORMENT Annabeth was waiting for its use in "she demanded, pointing at Tyson. Now, und me was Athena and didn't get along with my dad here or four times, and all Annabeth could do e can hear you, you know. Why don't you ask h couldn't believe she was being so rude. I exami ed, with dirty fingernails the size of potato chip ered. "I'm surprised the Laistrygonians had the is hand away. "Annabeth," I said, "what are yo rth. Odysseus ran into them once, but I've nev t it for a moment. "Canadians," she decided. "he dreams?" "The dreams...about Grover?" oked stormy, like her mind was racing a million ow exactly. Something's wrong. We have to get acks?" I shook my head. "None all year...until I till in class. "Canadians in the gym called Perc erved the truth after almost getting killed. "Big those gods are still alive. They kind of follow W mortals. Kids called half-bloods." "Yes," Tyson s-in-training. And whenever monsters pick up rprised or confused by what I was telling him, ah," I admitted. "My dad is Poseidon." Tyson fr e time for this?" Annabeth said. "We'll talk in t about Tyson?" I imagined escorting my giant d he act at a training camp for demigods? On t in trouble, too." "Yeah." Annabeth looked grim on were a big disease we needed to get to the side streets of downtown while a huge colum topped up on the corner of Thomas and Trimlb worse than I'd realized at first. Her chin was cut. in the open. The slashes on the hems of her jea ubt Matt Sloan had given them a statement by no son and I were the bloodthirsty cannibals. "Found o at I recognized as a drachma, the currency of Mount Oly

As usual, the moment she spoke in the language of Olympus, I so

phew under Zeus's thumb. She said: Stop, Chariot of Damnation! That didn't exactly make me feel real excited about whatever her plan was. She threw her coin into the street, but instead of clattering on the asphalt, the drachma sank right through and disappeared. For a moment, nothing happened. Then, just where the coin had fallen, the asphalt darkened. It melted into a rectangular pool about the size of a parking space—bubbling red liquid like blood. Then a car erupted from the ooze. It was a taxi, all right, but unlike every other taxi in New York, it wasn't yellow. It was smoky gray. I mean it looked like it was woven out of smoke, like you could walk right through it. There were words printed on the door—something like GYAR SSIREB—but my dyslexia made it hard for me to decipher what it said. The passenger window rolled down, and a old woman stuck her head out. She had a mop of grizzled hair covering her eyes, and she spoke in a weird mumbling way, like she'd just had a shot of Novocain. "Passage? Passage?" "Three to Camp Half-Blood," Annabeth said. She opened the cab's back door and waved at me to get in, like this was all completely normal. "Ach!" the old woman screeched. "We don't take his kind!" She pointed a bony finger at Tyson. What was it? Pick-on-Big-and-Ugly-Kids Day? "Extra pay," Annabeth promised. "Three more drachma on arrival." "Done!" the woman screamed. Reluctantly I got in the cab. Tyson squeezed in the middle. Annabeth crawled in last. The interior was also smoky gray, but it felt solid enough. The seat was cracked and lumpy—no different than most taxis. There was no Plexiglas screen separating us from the old lady driving the cab. Wait a minute. There wasn't just one old lady; there were three, all crammed in the front seat, each with stringy hair covering her eyes, bony hands, and a charcoal-colored sackcloth dress. The one driving said, "Long Island! Out-of-metro fare bonus! Ha!" She floored the accelerator, and my head slammed against the backrest. A prerecorded voice came on over the speaker: Hi, this is Ganymede, cup-bearer to Zeus, and when I'm out buying wine for the Lord of the Skies, I always buckle up! I looked down and found a large black chain instead of a seat belt. I decided I wasn't that desperate...yet. The cab sped around the corner of West Broadway, and the gray lady sitting in the middle screeched, "Look out! Go left!" "Well, if you'd give me the eye, Tempest, I could see that!" the driver complained. Wait a minute. Give her the eye? I did it. I didn't have time to ask questions because the driver swerved to avoid an oncoming delivery truck, ran over the curb with a jaw-rattling thump, and flew into the next block. "Wasp!" the third lady said to the driver. "Give me the girl's coin! I want to bite it." "You bit it last time, Anger!" I said. "Is that the driver, whose name must've been Wasp. 'My turn!' "Is not!" yelled the one called Anger. The middle one, Tempest, screamed, "Red light!" "Brake!" yelled Anger. Instead, Wasp floored the accelerator and rode up on the curb, screeching around another corner, and knocking me and Tyson out of our seats. "That's the least of our problems," she said. "Have you been having hat were you dreaming about?" Her eyes loo e thing! But what kind of trouble?" "I don't kna, trying to stop me. Have you had a lot of teaan, oh?" Tyson raised his hand like he was s w how I could explain, but I figured Tyson desdon, Athena—" "Yes," Tyson said. "Well... U.S. And sometimes they have kids with alf-bloods." I said. "We're like...hereo I stared at him. He didn't seem su re...Son of the Sea God?" "Ye st our ally." "We don't hav t me." I hesitated. "Wha lar bullies, how woul decided. "He'll be said that, as if Ty saked through, as if Ty eeked even veral nights