

The Lightning Thief

... Mrs. Dodds turned on me. There was a triumphant fire in her eyes, as if I'd done something she'd been waiting for all semester. 'Now, honey –'

'I know,' I grumbled. 'A month erasing textbooks.'

That wasn't the right thing to say.

'Come with me,' Mrs. Dodds said.

'Wait!' Grover yelled. 'It was me. I pushed her.'

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

She glared at him so hard his whiskery chin trembled.

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

'But –'

'You – will – stay – here.'

Grover looked at me desperately.

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

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

Nancy Bobofit smirked.

I gave her my deluxe I'll-kill-you-later stare. I didn't mind being in trouble for pushing her. I just wished I could remember doing it. I turned to face Mrs. Dodds, but she wasn't there. She was standing at the museum entrance, way at the top of the steps, gesturing impatiently at me to come on.

How'd she get there so fast?

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

I wasn't so sure.

I went after Mrs. Dodds.

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

I looked back up. Mrs. Dodds had disappeared again. She was now inside the building, at the end of the entrance hall, waving at me to hurry.

Okay, I thought. She's going to make me buy a new shirt for Nancy at the gift shop.

But apparently that wasn't the plan.

I followed her deeper into the museum. When I finally caught her, we were back in the Greek and Roman section. Except for us, the gallery was empty.

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

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

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

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

She tugged on the cuffs of her leather jacket. 'Did you really think you would get away with it?'

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

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

I said, 'I'll – I'll try harder, ma'am.'

Thunder shook the building.

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

I didn't know what she was talking about.

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

'Well?' she demanded.

‘Ma’am, I don’t . . .’

‘Your time is up,’ she hissed, her eyes glowing like barbecue coals. Her fingers stretched, turning into talons. Her jacket melted into large, leathery wings.

She wasn’t human. She was a shriveled hag with bat wings and claws and a mouth full of yellow fangs, and she was about to slice me to ribbons.

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

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

Mrs. Dodds lunged at me.

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

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

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

She snarled, ‘Die, honey!’

And she flew straight at me.

Absolute terror ran through my body. I did the only thing that came naturally: I swung the sword.

The metal blade hit her shoulder and passed clean through her body like she was made of water. Hiss!

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

I was alone.

There was a ballpoint pen in my hand.

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