

Daniel breathes out a tired, near-frantic puff of air. His bicycle whizzes past people out walking for whatever reasons. His legs ache, and his arms are shaking. The sun is still shining after school, not that it matters. Before you know it the winds could pick up and lightning could strike. He stares at the sun wearily with brown eyes more tired than any fifteen-year-old might have.

He stops at a light. This gives him time to gaze and grimace at the trash-strewn road ahead.

Where there's pavement and a secure bike lane in the intercity, the road to his grandfather's is older and more dilapidated, where the sidewalk crumbles but the grass is a brighter green.

There's still trash everywhere. It's inconsiderate to dump your stuff everywhere like you own the place. That's how people are usually.

Daniel's jaw tightens. His grandfather's place is probably a mess too. Not because he's inconsiderate. Daniel's Grandfather Lewis is more... well he calls himself eccentric. Hopefully, that eccentricity doesn't mean Daniel will have a lot of cleaning to do.

He manages to be so focused on his thoughts and what lies ahead that he nearly topples over while still seated. He used to put on a helmet. Now he runs his hand through his short dyed blue hair and hopes it doesn't rain.

There's a flash of green around him, near blinding. It isn't the traffic light. A voice in his mind tells him he doesn't care. What could possibly be going on in this world that's of any interest?

There's a girl standing on the roadside. Not just any girl. The girl. The one that's been showing up in his dreams ever since his grandfather's accident.

Daniel knows better than to think it's anything fantastical, magical, or otherwise. That stuff only happens in books. He likes reading them of course. If he's going to have a dream about a random girl he'd rather dream of boys instead.

The girl has dark brown hair spilling down off her shoulders as she skewers a piece of trash off the road. Despite seeing her frequently she doesn't look any different. This whole thing can't be grounded far out of reality if she's ignoring him just like everyone else.

Daniel puts his foot on the pedal and pushes the second the light turns green. He keeps going, his chest pounding and the final rays of sunlight disappearing as he comes to the old foreboding hill. He closes his eyes to avoid the sight. Dark clouds practically spiral around his Grandfather's house where lightning could strike at any time. Luckily, as he peddles up, he starts to sweat and his vision starts to fade enough that it turns everything fuzzy.

He parks his bike by propping it up against a tree then wobbles over to the door. His grandfather is probably sleeping. So he decides to quietly dig for the house's spare key that his parents didn't think to take.

The door swings open and Daniel barely dodges out of the way of a wooden cane with an unfortunate metal tip.

"G-grandpa?" Daniel yells. "Shouldn't you be in bed?" Daniel tries to scold, out of breath and about to pass out in the shrubs. He doesn't care for nature much but he could find comfort in it now.

"Shouldn't *you* be at home, boy?" Lewis questions with a cackle. He walks with a limp and is seemingly slouched perpetually, not unlike a cartoonish depiction of a thunderbolt. If a thunderbolt had graying brown hair, wrinkles, freckles, and a constant crooked smile.

Daniel's younger brothers are sure he's stuck like that but they don't experience Lewis's cane strikes from a scarred hand struck by lightning.

"I had club stuff," Daniel mutters.

He looks at the ground like it will give him answers. Answers that aren't lies or truths he doesn't want to face.

"Mmm, so why are you not at your club?"

"I wanted to read here. Because I knew you wouldn't be at the clinic. "Why aren't you at the clinic anyway?"

"Because I was struck by lightning, not some deadly disease. What are they gonna do for me besides telling me to stay in bed? You can do that just as well."

"You won't listen to me either."

Lewis continues to laugh as he moves back so Daniel can come inside.

Daniel insists on making tea when his grandfather asks if he wants some. He stares at the worn ceramic coffee cup because he doesn't like lying to Lewis's face.

"Everyone left..." The club, in general. They aren't coming back. "For the day. I'd rather read here than in school." Or at home.

"Hah, I don't know what sort of grandson I have that'd rather spend his time in his grandfather's old cruddy shack than with his friends at his book club but sure."

Daniel stares at him.

"Don't pout," Lewis says. "I'm just joking."

"I'm not pouting." Daniel sighs. "Obviously I like it here, Gramps."

"But?"

"Does there always have to be a but?"

Lewis takes a mournful breath. "You know, really young Daniel would have laughed and said butts under his breath.

Daniel smiles. "Really younger Daniel was kind of lame."

"I liked him a lot but that's understandable."

Daniel sits forward in his chair. "I'm just worried about you staying here for now so soon."

Daniel only needs to look up, watching how the marks from the lighting strike zig-zag in an angry line toward where Lewis's couch used to be. No matter where moves, lighting always finds him anyway.

Lewis nods, almost seriously enough that Daniel doesn't doubt him at all. "Daniel, I may not be running around trying to fight monsters or going on any sort of quest but the gods themselves couldn't stop me from living here."

"Not even the God of death?" Daniel says and instantly regrets it because even he doesn't want to think about his Grandfather dying.

"No," Lewis grins. "I'd come back and haunt the place as a ghost. If Zeus wants to strike me down a third time he's welcome to try." He laughs, shouting and raising his hand up towards the ceiling.

Daniel frowns. Involuntarily slouching down. It's not like him to be afraid for himself but... he doesn't know if Lewis could survive that. He knows all about the gods. How vengeful they can all be. Hypothetically. Whether they exist in the real world or not is another story but nature and weather exist no matter what. No matter how it comes about, electricity is still dangerous.

Daniel knows he won't get anywhere trying to get Lewis to leave. So he may as well start helping to clean.

"You know," Lewis whispers. Not so much because he's afraid of overheating but for dramatic effect.

"Even if I did move somewhere, that light is always finding me." Lewis sounds almost wistful.

"I know Grandpa."

"Good, good."

Daniel gets up to find where Lewis has stashed the cleaning supplies. "Oh, I thought you were going to read?"

"I'll read later," Daniel says. Hoping that isn't a total lie. Eventually, he'll get that desire back to do stuff. Probably. Doing stuff for his Grandfather puts him in a good mood anyway.

"What about your tea?" Lewis motions.

Daniel moves forward, pouti- not pouting as he does. The tea is hot but Daniel chugs it down. He grimaces, making a displeased noise as the hot water goes down his throat. Lewis laughs.

Unperturbed by Daniel's plight or rather he knows Daniel would be more annoyed if he fussed over him. Everyone else in their family fussed over him... just in the most wrong of ways.

—

Daniel cleans his Grandfather's overly large drafty, somehow always dusty house and is sent on his way with even more mythological books.

"Let me know how you like 'em," Lewis says cheerfully with a wave at the door.

The bike ride home feels heavier for more than one reason. When Daniel zooms down the hill sometimes it feels like he's flying anyway. When the wind whips in his face he smiles. He's not trying to get back home. He'd rather kill time, as much of a waste as it is. Only he hopes and wishes that somehow the girl from before would be there.

He doesn't know why he cares about some weird girl that's always on the side of the road picking up trash. It's probably for school community service. He has to be desperate if he's trying to avoid school to hang out with girls. His parents would probably love him hanging out with girls... as long as it was part of their whole wanting him to be a girl again. Not again. There was never a time at all.

When he eventually gets home, Daniel doesn't try to talk. If there's one somewhat good thing about them it's that his parents know he's going to visit his Grandfather but it's not like they'll stop him.

---

There's a red piece of paper on the door to the room Daniel has been using as the mythological club room. The frantic hard penned scrawl is not from any teacher so he rips it down and puts his backpack on the chair inside.

He decides that it's better not to lie to his Grandpa and he should try to not just read them... but to enjoy them. Only the second he turns the page, reading about some hero on a quest for some troubled God, there's pounding on the door.

"We know you're in there, Danny," shouts Greg, the resident bully that gets on Daniel's nerves. *Danny.* Daniel supposes it's better than some of the other things they've called him. He yanks a



bookmark out of his pocket and just barely manages not to slam the book closed or crumple part of it.

"Wow," Daniel replies mockingly. "With the way you're shouting, I know it's you guys. Well, I don't hear all of you but I'm sure you had to bring other people along so you don't get lost."

Greg sputters as some of his minor bully entourage hold back laughter.

"Y-you wouldn't be saying that if you weren't behind that door."

"*You* wouldn't be talking if you could get a teacher to stop me."

"We will."

"I'm sure you'll try."

He is relieved, even if it's temporary, to hear their angry stomping away.

He's definitely going to get his butt kicked at some point anyway. The only reason they haven't gone to kick him out to a teacher instead of just bullying him is that they like to try to intimidate Daniel. Unfortunately for them, he doesn't care anymore.

Daniel would have given them the stupid room if they weren't rude. He can read anywhere, preferably at his grandfather's house. Only he used to enjoy school. He never felt at peace anywhere else besides his rapidly dissolving club but at least the headache of bullies, rude teachers, and annoying classes seemed almost mundane when he went home to his parents and siblings.

Daniel looks down at his book. Sometimes he wishes things were more simple. A lot of times. It's an understatement to act like these heroes and gods don't have their hands full with world-shattering problems, even if they are just fiction. But when Daniel feels like he can't even go to the bathroom in peace let alone study, read, or do anything he wants well, those are the biggest problems in his life.

He glances at the door. Some of the bullies are on the football team, cliché as they are, they could probably knock down the door, pull Daniel out of the room and shove him into a toilet no problem. Of course, they don't want to incur the wrath of the teachers by defacing school property. Daniel knows more than he and his one friend Jude like mythology.

They just don't Daniel him and they'd rather his friend focus solely on baseball. No one wants Daniel on any team, especially Daniel himself who'd rather sit around and read or do anything besides running around with a bunch of jocks who don't like him. He could probably round up or bribe some kids who are indifferent about books to join. The stubborn petty part of himself says not to do that. He remembers a time when liking what he liked was just a simple part of who he was and not some weird dramatic political nonsense.

Everyone should enjoy mythology. That's what his grandfather believes. The old stories should be passed down to everyone. There are enough gods, goddesses, and morals for everyone to find something that they enjoy. Daniel can practically hear him in his head. He can also hear his Grandfather say that he wants to know how Daniel feels about this latest book in a more impatient, almost childish inquiry as to why he hasn't read it. Whatever is going to happen to Daniel isn't going to occur for at least the end of clubs so he leans back in his chair and opens his book back up.

*This wouldn't be happening if you had more friends. Even the friend you have doesn't want to hang out with you.* Daniel winces as the voice echoing in his mind sounds very much like what his bullies shout at him.

"Forget about friends," he mutters. "I just need someone else for this stupid clubroom."

Daniel doesn't feel like lugging all the books to the school's broom closet or wherever else he'd be exiled to sooner or later. If the bullies want to be here so badly they should haul the books down themselves, not that Daniel trusts them with his books or anyone else's. He sighs and for now, lets himself be engrossed by his stories.

A rough wind hits the windows. Daniel knows the watery smell of rain, its pitter-patter, and the prelude to thunder. He hates even the thought of it. At least he knows his parents definitely won't bother to pick him up in this weather. He didn't bring an umbrella and his bike will rust and

likely lead to himself getting electrocuted both from a scientific angle and the working theory that at least his grandfather is cursed by mythological standards.

Daniel continues to read. Maybe he'll spend the night here. He may as well get his time's worth out of his club. Ominous rain pouring against the window and empty classrooms is nothing compared to the annoying atmosphere of his home. He doesn't want to impose on his grandfather for long periods of time. When Daniel starts reading again, it isn't five minutes later when he hears another loud noise. He doesn't want to look up but something feels wrong in the room all of a sudden. Not so much as wrong but... right? The air feels cleaner, not unlike a pleasant thunderless rain in the summer and he can smell what must be some nice super realistic floral air freshener.

A small yellow flower with some of the brightest green leaves he's ever seen falls on his head then off and into his book. Another and another fall. Until his book is full of little flowers.

Daniel looks up, sure he must be dreaming.

The girl from the side of the road smiles at him.

"Finally got your attention, hmm? Well, I suppose I was not actively trying to get your attention before."

He sets his book down as carefully as one can when seeing a girl who he's been seeing off and on for years.

"You're-" Daniel starts. A dream? No, he still wouldn't dream about a flower conjuring girl or any other.

A nightmare? Can't be that either. Daniel has never had a nightmare that smelled that good. Even if the flowers do remind him a bit of lighting appearance-wise. A hallucination perhaps? That's the most possible theory.

He could at least ask,

"How did you get in here?"

"That's what you want to ask?"

"Yes."

The possible hallucination girl sighs and steps forward into the light of Daniel's lamp. Her hair is still brown and her eyes are still green. The same green as the flowers, Daniel thinks and he doesn't even care about what color anyone's eyes are or their glossy tree bark chocolate-colored hair. Up close he can see that the girl has dark circles under her eyes and a little mole on her chin.

"I do not know why I bother." She sighs. Daniel doesn't know what she's talking about but he can relate to that feeling.

She reaches behind her back and slowly pulls out the same stick she was using to spear trash.

"You aren't going to use that to spear me are you?"

"You are a very strange boy that asks strange questions." She responds. "No, I have no need to spear humans who are simply curious or brave in their own ways."

Daniel is about to argue that she, whoever she is, is a very strange girl.

When the girl holds her staff up high, it glows with that same green light. The metal of the trash picking-up stick twists into a wood branch and curves around into a more circular shape. Leaves pop out, twisting and continuing to grow then wrapping around the other side forming a bow.

Daniel knows who she is.

"I am Artemis, goddess of the hunt."

"Who are you hunting?"

Artemis stares at him with her bright green eyes and her bow now still in hand.

"You are not surprised in the slightest?"

She doesn't sound all that bothered by his knowing.

"Girls don't materialize in my club room or anywhere else. You're carrying a bow and you dropped flowers on my book."

"You, I must admit, are somewhat adept for a boy."

Daniel is trying to figure out if he should be offended by the way she keeps saying the word boy or happy that he's getting recognized at all when Artemis asks,

"Would you like to talk?"

"Would you? I didn't know you liked to talk very much."

"Hmph," Artemis huffs, standing over him like she means to attack.

"You should not believe everything you hear in stories."

"You're right," he says in case she is real. I have to finish reading this.

"That story isn't much fun."

"You shouldn't spoil it for people."

"I am not spoiling it." Artemis squints and she looks less regal and like a normal kid. "There are hardly any animals and it takes place almost exclusively at sea. My uncle would likely enjoy it."

*She's easy to talk to...* Daniel can't help but think. Almost too easy. Why would he dream about her? It isn't like Artemis is his favorite goddess. Nothing against her but if she's all about girls then we'll that's far out of Daniel's interests.

"You take things in stride and have a good nature to you like your grandfather."

"Huh? You know my Grandfather?" He glares at her. "Wait."

Artemis only continues to stare at him.

"You're Zeus's daughter." Daniel feels so angry that he jumps up, forgetting what's rational and reasonable because- "Are you the reason my Grandfather is getting struck by lightning?"

"No, in fact, *he* is the reason."

Before Daniel can ask which he she's talking about, Zeus or Lewis, there's a banging at the door.



Artemis looks panicked.

"What's wrong?" Daniel asks. If anything he should be the one panicking.

"I do not like talking to people. Bullies either. Or boys honestly, I don't-" She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes and flowers grow under her feet.

"You're talking to me," Daniel says wearily.

"Yes." For a moment Daniel thinks she's going to say that's because she doesn't consider him to be a boy. But... goddesses and gods can't worry about petty stuff like that, can they?

"You, you're like well- not family. However, your grandfather and his stories are quite popular and I can tell you know a lot about my family and you are not ill-tempered."

"Thank you?"

"It was not a compliment. Listen- I only came here for one purpose. You need more club members and despite the inaccuracies, I have no ill will toward the thought of a mythology club. If possible, instead of owing you more favors I would like to also solve the... tension between your grandparent and my father."

"What are you talking about?"

Artemis looks towards the door and takes another breath. Does she need to breathe? She spreads her legs into a wide stance and her hair flutters in a non-existent breeze.

The book Daniel was reading and the others in his backpack all flew up to the ceiling. Daniel blinks in alarm. Still partially convinced this is a dream. If Artemis truly is a Goddess then, making books fly wouldn't be difficult.

"Paper is still made from wood, no matter how the connection to the earth may be severed."

Artemis sounds louder now, more confident. She smiles and her hair has grown down, covering her eyes.

"That's great? Maybe don't do that in school though." Daniel doesn't know why he cares. He doesn't even like school let the goddesses rip apart his classrooms actually.

The classroom door flies open.

"That's wood too?"

"Yes!"

Well at least when Daniel gets suspended it will be next to a girl who's actually having fun. At least someone is.

Only when he looks over at the table his eyes widen and even he smiles a little.

Vines like the ones from Artemis's bow twist around the long-abandoned chairs.

The books settle and bloom into flowers and vines, and tree bark. They melt together in an amalgamation of light and plants. It is then that four plant-created students sit at the table.

Greg, some of his cronies, and one tired teacher pile inside.

"See," Greg says, "we could be using that building ourselves, Mr. Howard."

One of Greg's bully friends elbows him in the side urgently.

"Who are all you kids?" Mr. Howard asks the plant students, incredulously.

The plant people look as lively as real people, with their own seemingly individual movements and even conversations. Each talking about mythology, or Artemis's interests, bows, plants, and the like.

"I-" Artemis says in an almost shy voice. "We are Daniel's friends."

Artemis speaks so quietly that Daniel barely hears her. He knows that no one else did. "Now would you please be on your way?"

Daniel has gone back and forth as to if he's dreaming. No things are too fantastical and mundane both to be a dream.

If it were his dream, his teacher and all the stupid bullies would be on their knees apologizing. The sight of Mr. Howard passing out membership applications to the students is far too ordinary. Artemis presses her application up to the wall and writes in a fast, sloppy way. He sees at the top she's written Diana then hesitated for a while then wrote May for her last name.

The teacher sighs as the papers are given back to him. He says goodbye to Daniel and Artemis, then his angry footsteps are drowned out by the sound of Greg and the other bullies chasing after him trying to explain themselves and apologize.

The second they're out of sight and earshot, the door slams shut.

The books fly back into Daniel's bag, completely back to normal. Artemis sits down. She's shorter than Danial and smaller too but she radiates power.

"Thank you... You said my Grandfather wrote these?"

Artemis chuckles. "Finally he sounds interested. "Yes, I did. Now hush, I would like to read some of them for myself before I pass my judgment."

Daniel smiles. "If you do really want to read then I guess you can be part of the club for real. Then you have some explaining to do."

Artemis smiles faintly. "I never should have said I didn't mind talking to you."

