

grey, like storm clouds; pretty, but intimidating, too, as if she were analysing the best way to take me down in a fight.

She glanced at the Minotaur horn in my hands, then back at me. I imagined she was going to say, *You killed a Minotaur!* or *Wow, you're so awesome!* or something like that.

Instead she said, 'You drool when you sleep.'

Then she sprinted off down the lawn, her blonde hair flying behind her.

'So,' I said, anxious to change the subject. 'You, uh, work here, Mr Brunner?'

'Not Mr Brunner,' the ex-Mr Brunner said. 'I'm afraid that was a pseudonym. You may call me Chiron.'

'Okay.' Totally confused, I looked at the director. 'And Mr D . . . does that stand for something?'

Mr D stopped shuffling the cards. He looked at me like I'd just belched loudly. 'Young man, names are powerful things. You don't just go around using them for no reason.'

'Oh. Right. Sorry.'

'I must say, Percy,' Chiron-Brunner broke in, 'I'm glad to see you alive. It's been a long time since I've made a house call to a potential camper. I'd hate to think I've wasted my time.'

'House call?'

'My year at Yancy Academy, to instruct you. We have satyrs at most schools, of course, keeping a lookout. But Grover alerted me as soon as he met you. He sensed you were something special, so I decided to come upstate. I

convinced the other Latin teacher to . . . ah, take a leave of absence.'

I tried to remember the beginning of the school year. It seemed like so long ago, but I did have a fuzzy memory of there being another Latin teacher my first week at Yancy. Then, without explanation, he had disappeared and Mr Brunner had taken the class.

'You came to Yancy just to teach me?' I asked.

Chiron nodded. 'Honestly, I wasn't sure about you at first. We contacted your mother, let her know we were keeping an eye on you in case you were ready for Camp Half-Blood. But you still had so much to learn. Nevertheless, you made it here alive, and that's always the first test.'

'Grover,' Mr D said impatiently, 'are you playing or not?'

'Yes, sir!' Grover trembled as he took the fourth chair, though I didn't know why he should be so afraid of a pudgy little man in a tiger-print Hawaiian shirt.

'You *do* know how to play pinochle?' Mr D eyed me suspiciously.

'I'm afraid not,' I said.

'I'm afraid not, *sir*,' he said.

'Sir,' I repeated. I was liking the camp director less and less.

'Well,' he told me, 'it is, along with gladiator fighting and Pac-Man, one of the greatest games ever invented by humans. I would expect all *civilized* young men to know the rules.'