

CHAPTER ONE

MY RESCUE OPERATION GOES VERY WRONG

1 The Friday before winter break, my mom packed me an overnight bag and a few deadly weapons and took me to a new boarding school. We picked up my friends Annabeth and Thalia on the way.

It was an eight-hour drive from New York to Bar Harbor, Maine. Sleet and snow pounded the highway. Annabeth, Thalia, and I hadn't seen each other in months, but between the blizzard and the thought of what we were about to do, we were too nervous to talk much. Except for my mom. She talks *more* when she's nervous. By the time we finally got to Westover Hall, it was getting dark, and she'd told Annabeth and Thalia every embarrassing baby story there was to tell about me.

Thalia wiped the fog off the car window and peered outside. "Oh, yeah. This'll be fun."

Westover Hall looked like an evil knight's castle. It was all black stone, with towers and slit windows and a big set of wooden double doors. It stood on a snowy cliff overlooking this big frosty forest on one side and the gray churning ocean on the other.

"Are you sure you don't want me to wait?" my mother asked.

"No, thanks, Mom," I said. "I don't know how long it will take. We'll be okay."

"But how will you get back? I'm worried, Percy."

I hoped I wasn't blushing. It was bad enough I had to depend on my mom to drive me to my battles.

"It's okay, Ms. Jackson," Annabeth smiled reassuringly. Her blond hair was tucked into a ski cap and her gray eyes were the same color as the ocean. "We'll keep him out of trouble."

My mom seemed to relax a little. She thinks Annabeth is the most levelheaded demigod ever to hit eighth grade. She's sure Annabeth often keeps me from getting killed. She's right, but that doesn't mean I have to like it.

"All right, dears," my mom said. "Do you have everything you need?"

"Yes, Ms. Jackson," Thalia said. "Thanks for the ride."

"Extra sweaters? You have my cell phone number?"

"Mom—"

"Your ambrosia and nectar, Percy? And a golden drachma in case you need to contact camp?"

"Mom, seriously! We'll be fine. Come on, guys."

She looked a little hurt, and I was sorry about that, but I was ready to be out of that car. If my mom told one more story about how cute I looked in the bathtub when I was three years old, I was going to burrow into the snow and freeze myself to death.

Annabeth and Thalia followed me outside. The wind blew straight through my coat like ice daggers.

Once my mother's car was out of sight, Thalia said, "Your mom is so cool, Percy."

"She's pretty okay," I admitted. "What about you? You ever get in touch with your mom?"

As soon as I said it, I wished I hadn't. Thalia was great at giving evil looks, what with the punk clothes she always wears—the ripped-up army jacket, black leather pants and chain jewelry, the black eyeliner and those intense blue eyes. But the look she gave me now was a perfect evil "ten."

"If that was any of your business, Percy—"

"We'd better get inside," Annabeth interrupted. "Grover will be waiting."

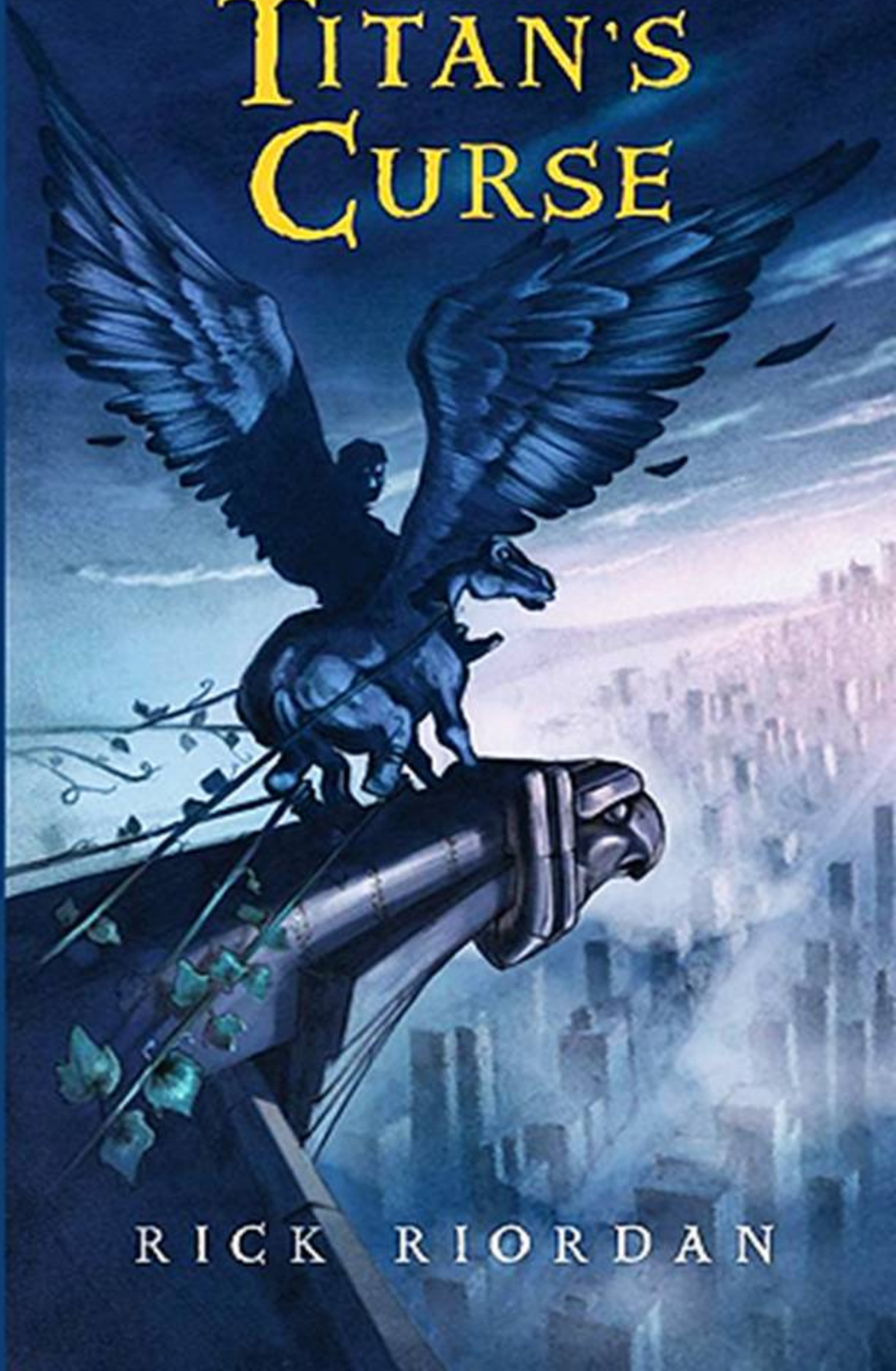
Thalia looked at the castle and shivered. "You're right. I wonder what he found here that made him send the distress call."

I stared up at the dark towers of Westover Hall. "Nothing good," I guessed.

The oak doors groaned open, and the three of us stepped into the entry hall in a swirl of snow.

PERCY JACKSON & THE OLYMPIANS BOOK THREE

THE TITAN'S CURSE



RICK RIORDAN