Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Blood of Olympus

Written by

Rick Riordan

Published by

Puffin Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 707 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3008, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, Block D, Rosebank Office Park,
181 Jan Smuts Avenue, Parktown North, Gauteng 2193, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

puffinbooks.com

First published in the USA by Disney•Hyperion, an imprint of Disney Book Group, 2014
Published simultaneously in Great Britain by Puffin Books 2014
001

Text copyright © Rick Riordan, 2014
All rights reserved
The moral right of the author has been asserted

Set in 13.08/18.5 pt Adobe Caslon
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN: 978–0–141–33922–1
Trade paperback ISBN: 978–0–141–33925–2

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



Penguin Books is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council™ certified paper.

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

I

JASON

Jason hated being old.

His joints hurt. His legs shook. As he tried to climb the hill, his lungs rattled like a box of rocks.

He couldn't see his face, thank goodness, but his fingers were gnarled and bony. Bulging blue veins webbed the backs of his hands.

He even had that old-man smell – mothballs and chicken soup. How was that possible? He'd gone from sixteen to seventy-five in a matter of seconds, but the old-man smell happened instantly, like *Boom. Congratulations! You stink!*

'Almost there.' Piper smiled at him. 'You're doing great.'

Easy for her to say. Piper and Annabeth were disguised as lovely Greek serving maidens. Even in their white sleeveless gowns and laced sandals, they had no trouble navigating the rocky path.

Piper's mahogany hair was pinned up in a braided spiral. Silver bracelets adorned her arms. She resembled an ancient

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

statue of her mom, Aphrodite, which Jason found a little intimidating.

Dating a beautiful girl was nerve-racking enough. Dating a girl whose mom was the goddess of love . . . well, Jason was always afraid he'd do something unromantic and Piper's mom would frown down from Mount Olympus and change him into a feral hog.

Jason glanced uphill. The summit was still a hundred yards above.

'Worst idea ever.' He leaned against a cedar tree and wiped his forehead. 'Hazel's magic is too good. If I have to fight, I'll be useless.'

'It won't come to that,' Annabeth promised. She looked uncomfortable in her serving-maiden outfit. She kept hunching her shoulders to keep the dress from slipping. Her pinned-up blonde bun had come undone in the back and her hair dangled like long spider legs. Knowing her hatred of spiders, Jason decided not to mention that.

'We infiltrate the palace,' she said. 'We get the information we need, and we get out.'

Piper set down her amphora, the tall ceramic wine jar in which her sword was hidden. 'We can rest for a second. Catch your breath, Jason.'

From her waist cord hung her cornucopia – the magic horn of plenty. Tucked somewhere in the folds of her dress was her knife, Katoptris. Piper didn't look dangerous, but if the need arose she could dual-wield Celestial bronze blades or shoot her enemies in the face with ripe mangoes.

Annabeth slung her own amphora off her shoulder.

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

She, too, had a concealed sword, but even without a visible weapon she looked deadly. Her stormy grey eyes scanned the surroundings, alert for any threat. If any dude asked Annabeth for a drink, Jason figured she was more likely to kick the guy in the *bifurcum*.

He tried to steady his breathing.

Below them, Afales Bay glittered, the water so blue it might've been dyed with food colouring. A few hundred yards offshore, the *Argo II* rested at anchor. Its white sails looked no bigger than postage stamps, its ninety oars like toothpicks. Jason imagined his friends on deck following his progress, taking turns with Leo's spyglass, trying not to laugh as they watched Grandpa Jason hobble uphill.

'Stupid Ithaca,' he muttered.

He supposed the island was pretty enough. A spine of forested hills twisted down its centre. Chalky white slopes plunged into the sea. Inlets formed rocky beaches and harbours where red-roofed houses and white stucco churches nestled against the shoreline.

The hills were dotted with poppies, crocuses and wild cherry trees. The breeze smelled of blooming myrtle. All very nice – except the temperature was about a hundred and five degrees. The air was as steamy as a Roman bathhouse.

It would've been easy for Jason to control the winds and fly to the top of the hill, but *nooo*. For the sake of stealth, he had to struggle along as an old dude with bad knees and chicken-soup stink.

He thought about his last climb, two weeks ago, when Hazel and he had faced the bandit Sciron on the cliffs of

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

Croatia. At least then Jason had been at full strength. What they were about to face would be much worse than a bandit.

'You sure this is the right hill?' he asked. 'Seems kind of – I don't know – *quiet*.'

Piper studied the ridgeline. Braided in her hair was a bright blue harpy feather – a souvenir from last night's attack. The feather didn't exactly go with her disguise, but Piper had earned it, defeating an entire flock of demon chicken ladies by herself while she was on duty. She downplayed the accomplishment, but Jason could tell she felt good about it. The feather was a reminder that she wasn't the same girl she'd been last winter, when they'd first arrived at Camp Half-Blood.

'The ruins are up there,' she promised. 'I saw them in Katoptris's blade. And you heard what Hazel said. "The biggest –"'

'"The biggest gathering of evil spirits I've ever sensed,"' Jason recalled. 'Yeah, sounds awesome.'

After battling through the underground temple of Hades, the last thing Jason wanted was to deal with more evil spirits. But the fate of the quest was at stake. The crew of the *Argo II* had a big decision to make. If they chose wrong, they would fail, and the entire world would be destroyed.

Piper's blade, Hazel's magical senses and Annabeth's instincts all agreed – the answer lay here in Ithaca, at the ancient palace of Odysseus, where a horde of evil spirits had gathered to await Gaia's orders. The plan was to sneak among them, learn what was going on and decide the best course of action. Then get out, preferably alive.

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

Annabeth re-adjusted her golden belt. 'I hope our disguises hold up. The suitors were nasty customers when they were alive. If they find out we're demigods –'

'Hazel's magic will work,' Piper said.

Jason tried to believe that.

The suitors: a hundred of the greediest, evilest cut-throats who'd ever lived. When Odysseus, the Greek king of Ithaca, went missing after the Trojan War, this mob of B-list princes had invaded his palace and refused to leave, each one hoping to marry Queen Penelope and take over the kingdom. Odysseus managed to return in secret and slaughter them all – your basic happy homecoming. But, if Piper's visions were right, the suitors were now back, haunting the place where they'd died.

Jason couldn't believe he was about to visit the actual palace of Odysseus – one of the most famous Greek heroes of all time. Then again, this whole quest had been one mind-blowing event after another. Annabeth herself had just come back from the eternal abyss of Tartarus. Given that, Jason decided maybe he shouldn't complain about being an old man.

'Well . . .' He steadied himself with his walking stick. 'If I *look* as old as I feel, my disguise must be perfect. Let's get going.'

As they climbed, sweat trickled down his neck. His calves ached. Despite the heat, he began to shiver. And, try as he might, he couldn't stop thinking about his recent dreams.

Ever since the House of Hades, they'd become more vivid.

Sometimes Jason stood in the underground temple of

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

Epirus, the giant Clytius looming over him, speaking in a chorus of disembodied voices: *It took all of you together to defeat me. What will you do when the Earth Mother opens her eyes?*

Other times Jason found himself at the crest of Half-Blood Hill. Gaia the Earth Mother rose from the ground – a swirling figure of soil, leaves and stones.

Poor child. Her voice resonated across the landscape, shaking the bedrock under Jason's feet. *Your father is first among the gods, yet you are always second best – to your Roman comrades, to your Greek friends, even to your family. How will you prove yourself?*

His worst dream started in the courtyard of the Sonoma Wolf House. Before him stood the goddess Juno, glowing with the radiance of molten silver.

Your life belongs to me, her voice thundered. *An appeasement from Zeus.*

Jason knew he shouldn't look, but he couldn't close his eyes as Juno went supernova, revealing her true godly form. Pain seared Jason's mind. His body burned away in layers like an onion.

Then the scene changed. Jason was still at the Wolf House, but now he was a little boy – no more than two years old. A woman knelt before him, her lemony scent so familiar. Her features were watery and indistinct, but he knew her voice: bright and brittle, like the thinnest layer of ice over a fast stream.

I will be back for you, dearest, she said. *I will see you soon.*

Every time Jason woke up from that nightmare, his face was beaded with sweat. His eyes stung with tears.

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

Nico di Angelo had warned them: the House of Hades would stir their worst memories, make them see things and hear things from the past. Their ghosts would become restless.

Jason had hoped that *particular* ghost would stay away, but every night the dream got worse. Now he was climbing to the ruins of a palace where an army of ghosts had gathered.

That doesn't mean she'll *be there*, Jason told himself.

But his hands wouldn't stop trembling. Every step seemed harder than the last.

'Almost there,' Annabeth said. 'Let's –'

BOOM! The hillside rumbled. Somewhere over the ridge, a crowd roared in approval, like spectators in a coliseum. The sound made Jason's skin crawl. Not so long ago, he'd fought for his life in the Roman Colosseum before a cheering ghostly audience. He wasn't anxious to repeat the experience.

'What was that explosion?' he wondered.

'Don't know,' Piper said. 'But it sounds like they're having fun. Let's go make some dead friends.'

Text copyright (c) Rick Riordan. Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd