

To Olympus and Back

“What is a mortal doing here on Mount Olympus?!” He screeches. “How are we supposed to get this filthy creature back to Earth? How did this happen? I must inform Father of this immediately!” Then he took off flying! Was that even possible? I guess Olympus is different from New York. Yep. I’m a New Yorker. Or maybe I should say I was a New Yorker. Now I’m a- well, I’m not exactly sure what I am.

A couple of years ago, a group of scientists figured out how to make a vaccine that makes humans immortal. Last year, they finally released it to the public, looking for volunteers to try the vaccine, but no one volunteered. This year, our school wanted to help them. They asked parents for their permission to let their kids take the vaccine. It was completely optional and my mom was hesitant, but eventually, she allowed me to get it. The morning after getting the vaccine, I woke up lying on a floor made of a fluffy substance. I was in Olympus, I just didn’t know it yet.

Still in shock from the flying man, I turn around and run smack into a girl with black hair. She had armor and a gold helmet on. “Oh, I’m so sorry I’m-!” I immediately apologize. She cuts me off. “Are you a mortal? What’s your name?” I shrug. “Uh... well, I suppose I’m a mortal. I don’t know if the immortality vaccine worked or not. But my name is Paige.” Her eyes widen. “Immortality vaccine? That can’t be good...” Questions swirl around my head. “Is this Mount Olympus? Am I supposed to be here?” I ask. She looks at me and says, “Well, Paige, I can assure you that this is Mount Olympus. But I don’t know if you’re supposed to be here. I’m Athena.” Is this some sort of prank? Suddenly, a blond boy I recognize from my school appears, lying on the ground in pajamas. I quickly thank Athena and run over to the boy’s side, waking him up.

“Uh...what’s happening?” He asks. I quickly try to sum everything up. “Don’t think I’m crazy, but for some reason, we’re in Olympus. I think it might be the immortality vaccine. Did your parents let you take it?” He stares at me, slowly trying to take everything in. “Yeah, I took it. But how is that possible?” I shake my head. “I don’t even know.” I found out his name was William and we help wake up all the other people appearing from our school. I was the first one to wake up and Will and I had to explain everything to everyone. Tons of sleeping kids start to arrive and we meet the other gods and goddesses, who are all starting to panic. No one knew what to do or how to get us back to Earth. “We also can’t make everyone a god or goddess, there are too many people and they’re all inexperienced, anyways!” exclaims Hera, the goddess of marriage and birth.

Zeus, the god of the sky and the most powerful of them all, shouts over all of the voices. “Listen up everybody! I know this is quite a situation, but for us to take care of this, we need to be well-rested! Everyone keep calm until tomorrow!”

We fall asleep on the fluffy white floor and I start to wonder if we are immortal in the first place. I ask Athena if there's a god of fighting. She makes a face. "I don't know why you would want to know, but Ares is the god of war. He's over there." She points at a man in armor similar to hers. I walk over to him and carry out my plan. He's screaming at a girl from my school and I start to scream back at him. "Hey, you! Leave her alone! You can't yell whenever you want, so you better watch your tone!" Then I put my hands on my hips and wait for his reaction.

As I expect, he just gets angrier. He lounges at me and grabs my arm. "You're nothing compared to me!" He says. "Do you know who I am?!" I keep calm and say, "Yes, I do. You're the man with a hot temper who's screaming at someone for no particular reason." He runs out of things to say and slaps me. I don't feel pain like I would normally, but I can feel a tingling sensation that lingers on my cheek. I start to laugh. I guess I am immortal.

I realize William had been watching us the whole time and he has a look of terror and confusion on his face. Ares grips my arm tighter but then lets it go. He lets out a long breath and sits down on a rock nearby. There are rocks on Olympus? He takes off his helmet and buries his face in his hands. Will gestures to me to leave him alone, so I walk with Will back to Athena. Athena is talking to a pretty blonde in a pink dress. "What if we just threw them off of Olympus?" we hear the blonde say. If they're immortals, they would likely just arrive back here. If they aren't, they'll land splat on Earth and die."

I tap Athena's shoulder and the blonde introduces herself as Aphrodite, goddess of beauty. "I'm immortal." I say. Athena and Aphrodite look at each other. "How do you know?" Aphrodite asks. I tell them about how Ares hit me but I feel fine. The two goddesses exchange worried glances again. "Then what are we going to do?!" Aphrodite screams, frustrated. "Zeus has to do something! Where is he?"

The four of us walk around Olympus looking for Zeus and we find him in his room. "Hi, dad!" Athena says, announcing our arrival. Zeus smiles. "Hey, Athena! What a pleasant surprise. What brings you here?" Athena asks him if she could use his powers to put the students back on Earth. Zeus sighs and says, "I'm afraid that's not possible."

Zeus walks back with us. When we arrive at our original spot, Ares is screaming at people once again. He seemed angrier than before and was screaming at Poseidon and Hades, which I already learned were Zeus's brothers. Brooklyn, a new goddess, is trying to break the fight up. "Zeus, your brothers aren't letting me announce a war!" Ares says. "No wars are going to happen, Ares. Please don't start one." Zeus says, shaking his head.

I walk away and start to wander Olympus, my attempt to escape all the chaos. I had just realized that the floor was actually just clouds when I heard a voice call out from behind me. "Hey! Wait up!" I spin around and see Brooklyn. I wait for her and she runs to

catch up. She's out of breath by the time she makes it next to me and in between deep breaths, she tells me, "I...think there's a...way for you to...get back to Earth."

"What do you mean?" I ask. She explains that she found out a way to open a portal from Olympus to Earth. "Really? Is it against the rules?" I ask. She shook her head. "I promise you this is entirely allowed and real." I was still skeptical to say yes, but I did want to go back to Earth. Didn't I? "Can I take the other students with me?" Brooklyn bit her lip. "No, I'm sorry, but you can't. All of you guys disappearing at once isn't exactly allowed." Wait, what?

"I... thought that this was allowed? Who is there to hide it from?" She starts to stutter, "Well... yeah, i- it's- it is allowed, but I- Zeus... he doesn't like it when I use this method. The portal opens for five seconds and during that period, he gets a sharp pain in his chest and if there's a lot of people going through the portal, the pain is worse. If only one person goes through, then he barely feels it. I'm not supposed to know about the portal, but I accidentally found out while Zeus was trying to teach me to be a proper goddess." I would enjoy going home after so much confusion, but I don't just want to leave all of my schoolmates. "Can you open the portal multiple times?" I ask. Brooklyn shook her head again. "It's only possible to open it once every ten years, and it has to be on a specific day, too. After the day, the person that passes through the portal is the only one who can access Earth from Olympus for another ten years. Tomorrow is the day."

Even a good night's sleep couldn't prepare me. "Ready?" Brooklyn whispers, gripping Zeus's lightning bolt wand she stole from his room. I try to calm my breathing and nod at her. "As ready as I'll ever be." She throws the wand into the air and it falls as a golden-white portal opens. "Go!" She says, nudging me. I nod and jump in right as I hear a voice say, "Brooklyn?"

All I could feel was my body falling. I couldn't feel anything, either. I open my eyes and it feels like I just woke up from a deep slumber. I'm back in my bed. Was that all just a dream? I sit up and I realize my cheek is stinging. That had to be a coincidence. I hear sobbing through my bedroom door. Were my parents crying? I heard a sniffle and then my dad saying, "It's okay, Barbra." Then I heard my mom's voice. "No, it is not! Both our children are gone! First Paige, then Brianna! And the police have no leads at all!" During my time on Olympus, did I go missing on Earth? And my sister didn't take the vaccine, why did she go missing? I try to get up out of my bed, but my bed makes a loud creak. I freeze, but it's too late. My parents stop talking. I hear some rustling and then they burst through my door.

I frantically try to come up with a reasonable explanation. "Mom! Dad! I-" But they sweep me into a hug and start sobbing even louder. "Paige! We found you! We thought you were gone. What happened?" Mom asks. I have no time to come up with an explanation, and I'm itching with an important question, so I just ask the one thing I need to know. "Mom, Dad, where did Brianna go?" They started crying all over again.

Once they've stopped crying, Dad takes a folded piece of paper out of his right pocket and hands it to me. I take a deep breath to prepare myself, unfold it, and read it out loud:

"Dear Mom and Dad,

I know by the time you're reading this you're probably looking for me. You also probably have a million questions. I know it's only been a few days since Paige has gone, but those past days have been my worst. I just can't live here without Paige. I don't want to go past her empty room or be reminded of the memories all of us made as a family. I'm sorry.

Love, Brianna"

I look at Mom and Dad. I realize that I'm crying and I wipe my tears away. I hand Dad back the piece of paper. It feels surreal that Brianna is gone. I spend the next day curled in bed since it was Sunday and I don't have school. I don't have school the next day either since it was a holiday. I get up a few times to use the bathroom, eat, and grab a book, but most of the day I spend in bed. Suddenly, an idea pops up in my mind.

"I'm not sure why you would want to take this vaccine again. You already took it once and it didn't work, so I hope you know what you're doing, Paige." Mom says, driving me to the doctor. That night, I quickly scribble down on a note before going to bed. The note read I went over to my friend's. Don't expect me for a few hours. - Paige I place the note on the floor so you can see it right when you walk in. Time to go back to Olympus.

In the morning, I wake up on fluffy white clouds, like I wanted to. I stand up and Will comes running over. He springs a bunch of questions on me, but I ignore them all and just say, "Hi again, Will." He stands there and just watches as I make my way to Athena. "Hey, Athena," I said. "So, I found out that my sister ran away from home after I disappeared from Earth. How can I make her come back home?" Athena looked at me sympathetically. "Forcing her back home can be worse than letting go of her. If she doesn't go home, it's okay. You may never get over the loss of your sister. But you will learn to live with it."

I decide to take my time before traveling back to earth again. "Hey!" I hear. I see Brooklyn running towards me. "Why'd you come back to Olympus?" She asks. I don't feel like talking about my sister. "I guess I just wanted to. By the way," I say, "Have you ever heard of books? There are a lot of them on Earth." She laughs and says, "Of course I have. I'm from Earth too." "Oh, that's cool. Have you ever read A Thousand Lives?" I ask. She shakes her head. "No, but if Olympus has a library, I'll definitely try to read it."

"Okay, here we go again," Brooklyn says, throwing Zeus's wand in the air. The wand falls onto the floor, opening the portal to Earth. I said a quick thanks to Brooklyn and jump into the portal. After about twenty seconds of falling, I open my eyes. I'm in my bed, the sun shining through my window.

My mom slowly opens my bedroom door, yawning. "You up, Paige?" I sit up and stretch out my arms. "Yeah." She spots my note on the floor. "Hey, what's this?" she asks, picking it up. "Oh, I was going to go to my friend's house. But I changed my mind." I reply. She raises an eyebrow. "I thought you just woke up. When did you have time to write this note?" I sigh. There's no point in lying anymore. "Truthfully, I wasn't going to go to my friend's house," I tell her about everything from the vaccine, to Mount Olympus, to Athena. She chuckles. "I guess you're going through a hard time."

At school, I expect everyone to be talking about the kids that are missing, but no one even mentions it. I spot Will in the hallways and ask him about Mount Olympus. He winks and just walks away. I see a few other kids I recognize that got sent to Olympus too, but they act as if nothing happened.

After class, I race to my locker so I can finally walk home. I'm tired of school and I just want to lay down on my comfy bed. When I open my locker, there's a note that says, Brooklyn is Brianna. What the-? I look around the busy hallway and see Will leaving the school doors. I run over to him and show him the note. "Did you write this?" I ask. He smiles, shrugs, and walks away without a word.

At home, I drag my backpack up to my room, past Brianna's room. I peek inside, and Brianna is on her bed, reading a book, *A Thousand Lives*. I stop and stare at her. How? Why? When? She looks up and stares at me. "What do you want?" She says. I blink multiple times before asking, "Uh, where'd you get that book?" She replies, "A...friend recommended it to me. I borrowed it from a library."