



Maz Evans

SIMPLY THE QUEST

*Chicken
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For my Dilly

*Heroes come in all shapes and sizes.
Mine is dinky and blonde and would eat
chocolate for breakfast if I let her.*

I love you, my little Hercules.

Also by Maz Evans

Who Let the Gods Out?



1. Mortal Peril

The scream tore through the dawn like a razor blade through toilet paper. Elliot Hooper was the first to respond – if you can call burbling ‘whargihghplfm?’ a response.

Before he entirely knew where he was – or even who he was – another scream shattered the February morning.

Elliot sat up in bed and scratched his head. He caught his reflection in the bedroom mirror. His blond mop of hair was wayward at the best of times, but at this hour, the twelve-year-old sleepy-head thought he resembled a slightly used toilet brush. His fuzzy brain told him that it was early,



although he had only just put Mum back to bed for the umpteenth time. It had been another bad night. Nowadays, they nearly always were.

A third scream forced him into reluctant action.

It definitely wasn't Mum, he knew her screams too well. Were they under attack from Thanatos, Daemon of Death? No – Elliot had squashed him in the Underworld. With a sigh, Elliot realized that this was the third big problem in his life . . .

He rolled out of bed in his school uniform – why change into pyjamas if he was only going to wear the same clothes the next day? – and stumbled towards the bathroom.

He reached it just as his immortal Greek housemates – Zeus, Athene, Aphrodite, Hermes and Hephaestus – were hurtling (flying in Hermes's case) up the stairs. They were greeted by another soul-splitting shriek.

Elliot pressed his ear to the bathroom door.

'What in the name of thirty thermal thunderbolts . . .?' roared Zeus.

'It's nothing, it'll just be—' Elliot began, but was slammed against the wall by the two Goddesses, who formed a protective barrier around him in their full battle-armour and fluffy slippers.

‘Don’t worry – we’re here,’ said Athene, Goddess of Wisdom.

‘Are you OK, Elly?’ panted Aphrodite, Goddess of Love, drawing her crossbow.

‘I’m fine,’ said Elliot, crushed behind Athene’s enormous silver shield.

If Elliot wasn’t panicking, it was because living with a family of ancient immortals had made him no stranger to drama. From the moment Virgo, a Constellation from the Zodiac Council, had crashed into his cowshed three months ago, Elliot had:

- ⚡ accidentally freed Thanatos, Daemon of Death
- ⚡ borrowed Queen Elizabeth II’s Imperial Crown
- ⚡ nearly been expelled from Brysmore Grammar School
- ⚡ learnt how to swear in Latin, Ancient Greek and Satyr.

‘Open up!’ boomed Zeus, hammering at the bathroom door. ‘I command you!’

He was answered by another brain-melting yelp.

Zeus signalled to Hephaestus, God of the Forge.

‘All o’ you – stand back!’ yelled the blacksmith, heaving his gigantic bronze axe with surprising



strength from a hunchback the height of a nine-year-old. 'We're coming in!'

'Wait! Let's just try the—' cried Elliot as the bronze axe smashed the wood to matchsticks. 'Handle,' he said, pushing open the remains of the unlocked door.

The Gods bundled into the bathroom with a ferocious cry, weapons aloft . . .

But all they found was Virgo, rocking on the floor with a towel over her head.

'Babe? What gives?' asked Hermes, after an admiring glance at his reflection.

'Ere we go again,' grumbled Hephaestus.

'Whatever's the matter, dear girl?' said Zeus, sheathing a thunderbolt. 'I haven't heard a furore like that since I dumped Henrietta the Harpy on Valentine's Day.'

'It's . . . it's hideous,' snuffled Virgo.

'Is it a curse?' asked Athene.

'Is it a plague?' asked Aphrodite.

'Is it that fringe?' asked Hermes. 'Babe, I warned you. Totes off-trend . . .'

'No . . . It's . . . it's . . . it's . . .'

Virgo slowly lifted the towel from her head.

The Gods gasped.

Elliot just stared.

'I don't get it,' he said, disappointed that Virgo

hadn't grown a second head or an elephant's nose.
'What's wrong?'

'WHAT'S WRONG?!' Virgo shrieked, pulling her hair. 'LOOK AT IT!'

Elliot did. Still nothing.

'Boys . . .' muttered Athene as Aphrodite hugged Virgo.

Elliot shrugged at Hermes.

'E, mate!' the Messenger God whispered. 'Her hair. It's, like, totes *brown*.'

'Isn't it always?' Elliot asked.

'Mate . . .' laughed Hermes with a head-shake.

'My beautiful silver hair!' Virgo cried. 'IT'S GONE!'

'Oh, yeah!' said Elliot slowly. Now he thought about it, she did look a bit different.

'Did you dye it?' said Aphrodite, running her fingers through Virgo's long tresses.

'Babe – never dye your own hair,' said Hermes. 'I tried it once – ended up with a head like a cress plant.'

'I haven't touched it!' squealed Virgo. 'Why would I? It was perfect! I just woke up like this! What's happening to me?'

Elliot caught Aphrodite and Athene exchanging knowing glances.

'It's just your body adapting to being a mortal,'



said Athene. ‘It actually quite suits you . . .’

‘SUITS ME?!’ squealed Virgo at a pitch that could start a football match. ‘Have you forgotten about *today*? My trial?’

‘Fat chance, with you banging on about it,’ mumbled Elliot, pushing past the crowd to reach his toothbrush. He was never a morning person, and five hours sleep certainly wasn’t enough for immortal dramas.

‘You have got to stop getting in such a state,’ said Athene, giving Virgo’s shoulders a reassuring squeeze. ‘If there is any justice, today is the day you’ll get your immortality back.’

‘Listen to Boffin Butt – that kardia’s yours,’ chirped Aphrodite, helping herself to a spray of perfume. ‘Besides, it’s only a trial. The Zodiac Council like to waggle their clipboards around to feel important. Look at Christmas Day . . .’

‘We do not mention Christmas Day!’ snapped Zeus.

‘Exhacshly,’ spat Elliot through a mouthful of foam. ‘Sho schill out. Itsch not vat wig a weal.’

‘Not that big a deal?’ breathed Virgo menacingly. Everyone instinctively stepped back.

‘Uh-oh,’ whispered Hermes. ‘She’s gonna blow.’

‘NOT THAT BIG A DEAL!’ screamed Virgo. ‘For weeks I’ve had to endure mortality! I’ve

suffered hunger, tiredness, every tedious mortal emotion and some toxic reaction in my trousers whenever I eat beans! It's degrading, it's unjust and it's **TOTALLY PANTS!**

Elliot spat his toothpaste down the plughole. 'So I shouldn't mention that zit on your chin?'

'What?! Arrrrrrrrghghgh,' screamed Virgo as she wrestled free from Athene and attacked Elliot with the nearest available weapon, which happened to be a giant pink loofah.

The Gods scrambled to protect Elliot again. Aphrodite held the flailing girl back so Hermes could disarm her. Athene and Zeus grabbed Elliot's arms to drag him to safety as Virgo screamed a curse that could boil an egg.

' . . . and then you can bake it in a pie and **CHOKe ON IT!**' she screeched.

'Elly, have you watered the plants?' peeped an agitated voice behind them.

Elliot turned to see his mum, Josie, standing in the broken doorway, confused and upset. These days, she always was. He tried not to think of his bright, funny Mum who used to cartwheel home from school. She had changed so much in the past year. Everything had.

'Elly?' she asked again. 'You must water the plants. You know what Grandad's like about his



tomatoes. Have you done it?’

‘Yes, Mum,’ said Elliot, who had given up on difficult truths in favour of easy lies. Although he wasn’t sure if Mum really understood either anymore.

The last few weeks had seen a lot of changes in Josie and none of them good. Despite Elliot’s best efforts to care for her, she wasn’t getting any better. She barely remembered anything that had just happened, her moods were getting really unpredictable and she often struggled to find the right words to express herself.

Elliot ignored the dark voice inside his head.

She’s getting worse. Fast, it said.

‘Good boy,’ said Josie. ‘Grandad will be . . . What happened here?’

‘Nothing to worry about, Josie – just children being children,’ said Athene kindly, turning the frail frame of Josie Hooper discreetly from the broken door. ‘Why don’t I poach you an egg for breakfast?’

Josie wriggled free from Athene and held Elliot’s hand. ‘Elly will do it, thank you,’ she said warily.

Elliot sighed. The Gods tried to help with Josie’s care, but increasingly she’d only allow Elliot to put her back to bed, bathe her or make her

food. It was tiring, but Elliot didn't mind.

Yes, you do, his dark voice insisted.

'Well let's go downstairs and lay the table,' said Athene, shrugging an apology at Elliot.

'OK,' said Josie cautiously. 'Have you watered the plants?'

Elliot watched Athene gently guide Josie downstairs. Would today be a good day he wondered? A day when Mum remembered people and places, and stayed happy and calm? Or a bad one, when she became very confused, or angry, or obsessed over a tiny detail, or couldn't recall a conversation from five minutes ago? Elliot hoped for a good day. They hadn't had one for a while. Nor a good night.

Aphrodite smiled and pinched his cheek in a way that would really annoy him if she were anyone but a beautiful love Goddess. Elliot surveyed the carnage around him.

'Sorry, mate,' said Hermes. 'We're all just a bit stir-crazy. Y'know, being, like, totes grounded since Christmas Day ...'

'We DO NOT mention Christmas Day!' Zeus roared.

'Fine,' said Elliot. 'I'd better get started on breakfast ...'

'Breakfast!' said Virgo, instantly brightening and



bounding downstairs. ‘Excellent. I’m famished. Then I’m going to get my immortality back, reunite all my socks with their partners and finally understand long-division!’ She leapt from the bottom step. ‘It’s going to be a super-optimal day!’

Elliot rolled his eyes and headed slowly after her. Girls were so incredibly weird.