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## Poseidon

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# Poseidon

**Author Bio**

Rachel is a junior majoring in Music and English with a Writing Concentration. She plays the French horn in the Wind Symphony and Symphony Orchestra on campus and currently serves as the secretary for the Newman Association. She particularly enjoys worship and community service, and is a member of the Fishkill United Methodist Church in her hometown, Fishkill, New York.

# Poseidon

Rachel Barber

My voice ripped through the air, bellowing with the depth of a timpani, “I am Poseidon! King of the—”

Mud puddles. With a wave of my hand a sheet of muddy water leapt up from the curb, splashing across those filthy-spirited college boys, griming up their gelled hair and seeping into the solid white polos wrapped around their chests. My puddle sprayed their tight, athletic figures with the incense of wet dog, a more rugged cologne than I’m sure either boy was accustomed to. I could have raised my arms high in triumph (in fact, I think I did) and let loose a mighty roar ringing out with the weight of thunder in the heavens (now *that* I’m pretty sure I didn’t do—not this time, anyway). My sea-green eyes gleamed with the victory of vengeance as I cried out within: That’s what happens when you don’t give Poseidon spare change!

I let down my hands slowly, savoring the moment of divinity, before scratching at a glorious itch in my long, white, jungle beard. I scratched with sullied hands, stained by brown streaks from the chocolate pudding cup I’d discovered in the dumpster that morning—and it was only half-way eaten when I got there! I scoffed at the memory, a thick, shady wheeze smoking from my lungs. How had it taken the gods so many centuries to perfect pudding?

Well, whatever our pudding troubles, we still know how to jostle the mortals. I could see my pair of frat boys thrashing and cursing across the street, dispirited by bad “luck,” the modern era’s name for the remaining gods’ vast powers. “Ha!” I laughed, ignoring the stares of mortal passersby, who were wrinkling their noses—perhaps in envy of my indescribable authority, but probably at the stench of tuna fish (I had picked up a bit of a smell that morning, along with my pudding). I paid them no mind. They were only men, so far inferior in thought that they probably imagined my vengeance against the youths to be nothing more than an accident. They would watch the whole affair and recognize only an unfortunate, muddy spray kicked up by a minivan. They wouldn’t care that the van just happened to turn the corner at the same time I waved my hand, striking the puddle I had called upon to strike the boys. Mortals: they never see anything straight anymore.

I turned away from the scene of my revenge, the thick trench coat swirling about my legs like one of the old mists I once conjured on the seas, back when Philoetius, the fisherman, was scanning the waters for my pre-

cious seahorses to exterminate and I had to lose him in the...well, perhaps that's a tale for another time.

Oh, how far the mighty have fallen! From mists and seas to mud and sewage, I had dropped in the mortal vision, and in (practically) seconds. Mortals are firmly fickle; just a couple thousand years pass and suddenly nobody cares about you anymore. How are you supposed to rule such faithless, fruitless filth when they won't acknowledge the obvious power before their eyes? I tell you, it's not easy being god of the sea on a ship consumed by the storm of "luck."

My dark brown coat swung a little loose on my shoulders—as wide and imposing on me as a king's royal robe—as I paraded down the streets of Delaware, Ohio, a red carpet of dried, withered leaves unfurling before me upon the concrete. My crown, the black knitted ski-cap, stood firm on my head. It was given to me by the last of my loyal worshippers some years before, the story of its reception transforming the dull hat into a symbol of steadfast majesty. Yes, I remembered well the days of Shirley of New York, the kind old woman standing outside St. John the Divine's Cathedral who listened and believed as I recounted my name and rank among the heavenly beings, who, with kind eyes, took the hat she had knitted for her grandson out of its bag as an offering to the god of the sea, who...well, perhaps the whole story's for another time. In any event, with my crown I was, as always, a regal sight—if only the passersby had eyes to see it.

Crossing from the side of the street, bordering the luxuriant green grass of Ohio Wesleyan's university campus, I looked both ways first. I had long ago recognized that mortals no longer dropped to their knees at the mere inkling of my presence; they would run me down if I got in their way (although surely their cars, not I, would be in for some refurbishing). Patting my snarling beer belly as I strolled across the road, my eyes scanned the doors of the neat shops and businesses for a hopeful mortal to ask for change. Not that I really needed it, of course, but I still held fast to the hope that someday my servants might acknowledge me once again, offering up the same life to me that I gave them through the sea and the sewage. A quarter for the god of the oceans hardly seems too much to ask.

"Well, if it isn't Poseidon."

I twirled, the royal robe tossing about my shoulders but the crown clinging solidly to my hair. Behind me stood a man much younger than myself, leaning against the sidewalk's tall, black lamppost, its blaze extinguished at the moment, unnecessary during the light of day. The young man, dressed in a pretentious navy blue suit with golden cuff links, gazed back at me with a smug, superior smile. His self-assured eyes were tempered only by the sleek darkness of his sunglasses, or else they might have burned the air with their vanity. He stood with his arms crossed, leaning

against the dreary, dead lamppost so fully that the two might have been one.

He looked most unpleasant, but how could I deny an old, once beloved friend? “Why, if it isn’t the Prince of the Air! Hermes, where have you been?”

A scoff escaped his lips, foul to my ears, but vaguely expected—how far the mighty have fallen. “New York. I observed you heading off a little while back and I thought I’d pay you a visit.” He turned his head, examining the pale street where I lived through his deep, empty shades. The university side was rather nice, with well-trimmed lawns and regally kept trees, but the side I had crossed to, where both Hermes and I now stood, had its fair share of trash on the ground and smudges on the occasional shop window. Still, I could see the life thriving along the street with the bustle of traffic—blues and reds and silvers flashed by, the metallic sheen of each car glinting with light. The mortals who whirled around us, from the whining baby in the pink stroller to the grieving man ambling by on a thick, wooden cane, surely had their own treasures of experience and stories to brighten up the dull concrete and dismal grime.

I’m not sure Hermes saw the life in it, though, because his smirk cut a little deeper into the sides of a once lovely, even heavenly face. “How far the mighty have fallen, hmm? Why ever did you come here?”

I shrugged, the weight of the great robe still bearing down on my shoulders. “They didn’t believe I was Poseidon at the shoreline. So I thought I’d try inland.”

“Ha!” A sour laughter broke free from the smirk and his eyes, whether I could see them or not, were locked unequivocally on me, soaking me up, so to speak, the muddy trench coat, stringy beard, puddinged fingers, and all. His shady gaze looked me up and down, from the warm, dark crown atop my head to the stained yellow tint of my once white sneakers. He lingered on my sneakers, I observed, and I noticed the pristine gleam of his jet-black, slip-on dress shoes. The god’s face fell for just a moment, cracks forming in the conceited shell of his smile, which dug into the bottom of his lips pitifully. But it was gone in an instant, the shady arrogance restored as he aimed a question at me: “And what happened to you?”

I let my fuzzy mouth grin, undaunted by the strike—for it was a strike. Another shrug shook my mighty shoulders. “You know how it is, Hermes. The people don’t worship me like they used to, don’t even believe I exist, no matter what I say or do.” I glanced down at the lump of beer belly hanging lightly over my pants. “And I suppose, when nobody cares for your care, you let a few things slide.” More than a few, actually. I didn’t patrol the seas like I used to, didn’t make or break ships as I once had. I let the waters turn on their own for a while. Certainly, I held on a little bit, just enough

to keep the world afloat, but I had given the seas over more and more to chaos. I suppose, somewhere in the back of my mind, I hoped they might notice my absence.

“Hmm.” The sharply dressed god smirked. “Well, you have to face facts, Poseidon. The mortals don’t worship anything for too long. In the end, they abandon the old fancies for the new. You just have to take what you can get.” With a subtle sweep of his hand, Hermes removed the shades from his eyes, revealing at last to me the strong but, as I well knew, dying glow of his gaze. Whatever the original color of his irises, Hermes now owned golden eyes, a stunning, shining circle of gold ringing the empty blackness of either pupil. I could feel my heart falling, sinking like a downed boat, some poor ship probably wounded irreparably in an ill-conceived war. Oh yes, I could remember the sensation of a boat, a warship to the humans, but less than driftwood to me, plunging into my depths, pulled and torn first by enemies and then by the rock of my waves—really splashes, though, nothing but splashes to a god. Yet, how important to the individual! That ancient King Odysseus lost his own ship in quite the storm of mine, his life dragged out from under him with the splintering of his mighty ship, shattered by...but perhaps even that’s a story for another time.

Relishing the concern climbing up from the depths of my heart and ignoring, or accepting, the pain that came with it, I shook my grizzled head at the would-be god before me. I knew what the golden eyes meant, their shine little more than dying embers. I had seen it enough times before in my brothers and sisters to understand Hermes’s ill condition. “Oh Hermes, no...”

The self-satisfied burn of his smirk dimmed as he expounded, still superior, “Yes, Poseidon, I’m mortal. I traded in my immortality for dollars. What good is it anyway to live forever if you forever live in the dumps?” The golden eyes took me in again, self-assured at first, but finally resting on my stained white shoes, perhaps remembering the wings he had traded for wealth. Of course, he might have simply been going blind, but I doubt it considering how young he looked. He had years before death would finally swing its trap, although he’d be trudging toward it now with every step, and the golden eyes—like a plaque on a body commemorating how an immortal used to live there, a symbol of dying divinity I had seen in Zeus himself only decades before—still burned with too much fire to have achieved their dying blindness. Oh yes, his eyes would eventually darken to black, just as Zeus’s and Aphrodite’s and Hera’s and Apollo’s and all of the others’ had, but he had a fistful of healthy years before him, although it passed for nothing in the lifespan of an immortal.

Hermes shrugged off the sympathy he must have noted in my yet godly countenance. “You really should try it too, Poseidon. The mortals

worship the bill, and if you trade in your seas for treasure you're certain to live your last years with followers abounding. You can be worshipped once again, my old friend, just as I am." He spoke with firm and confident tones, but I saw the dismay escape his gaze before he slid the glasses back over his eyes. It's hard, after all, for a being who lives forever to recognize he is going to die.

I sighed, a wheeze rustling my lungs like the wind rattling tattered sails. "How tempting, Hermes! I do miss the worship they owe, the attention or love you'd think I'd earned after years of tending the wild seas. But I'm not the god of gold—I am Poseidon, King of the Sea!" I lifted the arms of my old, worn coat, marking the extraordinary power within such a lowly form. "I could look as ostentatious as I want, but really, to what purpose? If I give up who I am just to catch some fickle attention, what kind of god would I be?" Clearly not one at all. But I left that last part out; this man was still one of my own...the last of my own.

"Then you'll live alone," he sputtered harshly, but, I believe, more from personal fear than true meanness. The high-priced shades met my gaze. "We've all given in, you know, all of us. There isn't a divinity left alive but you and me. And soon enough I'll be..." His voice never quite failed him, that slick, would-be immortal, but he had to clear his throat unceremoniously before continuing, "You'll be alone. The only one left of your kind. And you'll find no comfort among man, who has forgotten you already. At least I'm going out with followers yet. I won't spend eternity alone. I'll live my final years with admiring mortals about me, surrounding me with their warm attention and worship. You, Poseidon," the rich mortal muttered, leaning against the post nonchalantly, but his terror reeking like a stench from his fighting words, "you'll be all alone."

I was the god who moved waters, churned oceans, and swept up whole beaches by the sound of my voice, but all I could do for Hermes was shrug, saddened for the both of us. "Then so be it. But you know, I'm not so confident that the mortals won't return. They are fickle, all right, but full of potential, I think. They'll see me someday as they once saw before. If I stand here long enough, they won't ignore me; they can't ignore me forever."

Hermes scoffed, straightening up and smoothing out his overpriced jacket, "That's a fisherman's tale, Poseidon." The god, the last of my equals, although not so equal anymore, turned, waving dimly at me as he set off down the street. "If you're ever in New York you must look me up, but do it in the next fifty years or so." For one brief moment, he turned his head my way, a dim glow of gold piercing even the shades of his glasses.

"I'm running on a rather tight schedule."

And he strutted off.

“Good-bye, Hermes,” I called after him, watching his form dwindle and disappear into the small crowds roaming the streets of Delaware. Missing him already, I turned in the opposite direction only to be assaulted by a middle-aged woman wearing surprisingly high heels and barking orders into her cell phone. She rammed straight into me, her focus absorbed in her intense conversation with somebody neither of us could see. We both were knocked to the ground, the god of millennia carelessly pushed over by some forty-five-year-old corporate executive wedded to her cell phone. For my part, I climbed to my feet and brushed myself off, willing to let the mortal go unpunished (although these newest generations really must learn to control their cell phone use. We never had such problems at Marathon).

But some forty-five-year-old women are too important to be inconvenienced by anyone, least of all themselves. She spun on me as she rose to her feet, snapping rather like a sea turtle, “Watch where you’re going!”

Now this, however patient I might be, demanded a rebuke, and I proclaimed, “You crashed into me, madam, so don’t tell me to watch where I’m going. And moreover,” I puffed myself up, the trench coat robe and ski-hat crown still my predominant tokens of majesty, “I myself, whom you have spoken to so harshly, am Poseidon! King of the oceans, seas, puddles, sewage—”

“Poseidon?” The woman bayed, throwing back her head with a derisive laugh, “All right, God of Thunder, do your worst.” She didn’t wait for a demonstration, though (I suspect she didn’t actually expect one), or even for a correction (I am not the god of thunder). She just pushed on past me, still growling at her phone.

I watched her saunter off and all at once my hands were above my head, the untapped power of millennia suddenly stirring within me, collecting like dark clouds in the sky and simmering with the unrest of lightning strikes thrust through my chest. I was the god of the ocean depths, which covered most of the precious world she lived in, and she wanted me to prove myself? I could show her my power all right. I could send up a single wave to crash across the continent and a storm to billow clear through the state of Ohio until Delaware met the worst of it—brought low, bulldozed. I could call on the waves to do their worst, the seas to converge on Delaware, Ohio, to smother the far edges of the city in an overpowering flood. In an instant I could drown Delaware in the tears of an abandoned, discarded god, washing the very life from the woman’s face.

Or worse—the thought struck me, hard and cold like a stone or a slap in the face—I could let go of the rein I yet held on the waters. The very idea danced before me, twirling on a scale in my head. I could retreat entirely, not just from the coast, but from this world, just like they wanted.

I could see the future clearly: out the waters would spin, unbounded, swallowing the surface of the earth of their own accord. They would dump over the land, swirling and sloshing, crashing into every “civilization” the mortals had built. Not a man-made nor even heaven-designed structure would stand—no bird, tree, or flower would survive the blast. I could let the waters go, released from their stalwart prison. Let them do their worst.

I could do it—my hands were raised with justice and anger and power enough to accomplish the task.

Before me, suddenly, the vision flashed: I could see, somewhere in my mind’s eye, boys and girls and men and women swept up painfully in the would-be torrent, plunged into freezing water and held under by the unrestrained fist of the oceans. I could hear screams and cries of agony as Hong Kong, Calcutta, Brasília, Nairobi, New York—everything, including Delaware—disintegrated under the grip of the waves, bashed against the rocks of this world until mere dust remained, crushed and ground into nothing. Nothing, not a soul living on, but the righteous god—and I am righteous—who allowed the devastation. The woman deserved it, even wanted it in her own way, and perhaps they all did. But I wasn’t the god to do it, any more than I would trade in my immortality for a few years of cheap praise.

I could tell that the good people of Delaware who ventured down the sidewalk that day thought I was nuts, casting odd glances at the arms that still hung above my head. Still, I paid no mind to their stares, bringing my fists down slowly and still watching that woman retreat from me in the distance. I could have taken her down then and there, or let her drown in a world of her own creation. I could have shown my true might to her and all the other mortals who insisted I wasn’t there. I could allow the destruction of the entire human race with a single release of my fist.

I didn’t, though; instead, I just turned my own way, my capped head still held high, and tromped regally down the trash-littered sidewalk.