

They say that lightning never strikes the same place twice...

# 1 OLYMPIA HEIGHTS

Book 1



But for Zach Jacobs, that just isn't true.

It's hard enough being seventeen-- juggling school, football, friends, and teenage romance-- but Zach's about to find out just how complicated it can get when he begins to suspect that maybe he WAS the lightning.

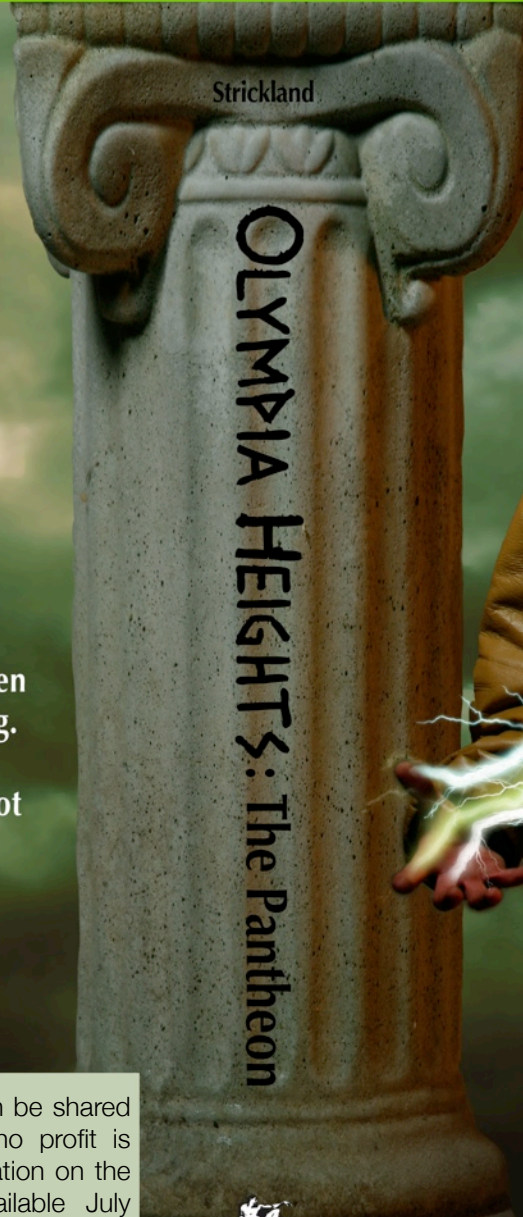
Teenage woes hardly seem significant when you've got lightning shooting from your fingertips and there are a couple of murderous Titans trying to settle an ancient score.



**Amy Leigh Strickland**

is a writer and teacher from Townsend, Massachusetts. She has a BFA from Savannah College of Art and Design. Amy currently lives outside Birmingham, Alabama with her husband, Kyle and their terrier, Apollo.

This **free** excerpt can be shared openly so long as no profit is intended. For information on the complete novel, available July 16, 2011, go to <http://olympia-heights.com>



The Pantheon

**EXCERPT**



Amy Leigh Strickland

# Olympia Heights: The Pantheon

## What is this excerpt?

The following pages contain the complete first chapter of Olympia Heights: The Pantheon. The complete book can be purchased after July 16, 2011 through Amazon and the store at [Olympia-Heights.com](http://Olympia-Heights.com) and [Matterdeeppublishing.com](http://Matterdeeppublishing.com). It will be available in formats for Kindle, Nook, and paperback purchase.

### Copyright ©™ 2011 by Amy Leigh Strickland

All rights reserved. This book is intended to be shared for the purposes of promoting the complete novel. If this excerpt is reposted for download, you must include a link to [olympia-heights.com](http://olympia-heights.com) in your posting. No part of the graphics or cover may be used for any purposes other than the promotion of the Olympia Heights series. All characters, names, and images are trademarks of Amy Leigh Strickland and Matter Deep Publishing.

**Happy reading!**



The kinds of events that once took place will by reason of human nature take place again.”  
-Thucydides

i.

*A rising fog outlined the sun's golden rays.  
In a silent forest shrill giggles echoed  
off the slender gray slanting trunks of Carobs.  
They flew through the mist.*

*The sun's spotlight pursued the lusty god's prey.  
On soft cool grass he ran a humoring pace,  
at her heels to keep the game interesting.  
Then a burst of speed.*

*He wrapped his arms around her naked white flesh  
and his soft brown beard tickled her slender neck.  
The chase was up and the prize was softly kissed  
as they tumbled down.*

“Quick decisions are unsafe decisions.”  
-Sophocles

I.

Zach Jacobs leaned on the wall in the tiled hallway of Olympia Heights Senior High. He was a tall, broad-shouldered teenager with brown hair and a smile that disarmed almost any girl who saw it. Zach Jacobs had bulked up during the summer and now, during the first official week of the football season, he was attracting a lot of attention. Not all of it was from his girlfriend.

Zach's hand was planted on the wall, high behind the head of a skinny blonde girl with too much makeup and not enough skirt. He was dressed in a pressed, collared shirt and light green tie because it was a game day. The skinny blonde pretended to be picking some lint off of the tie as she gave it a flirtatious tug.

The girl's expression changed from a careless smile to frightened and alarmed in an instant. Zach's tie was dropped and the blonde sputtered, “Oh look. June. Bye!” She ducked under his arm and headed for home room. She cleared the scene of the crime just as June's eyes caught sight of her boyfriend. The pair had barely avoided the violent storm that was the jealous fury of June Herald. The look of surprise and guilt on Zach's face was apparent for a flash before he pulled himself together and stood up. June made straight for him.

“Hey, baby,” he said, leaning down to kiss her. June made a graceful dodge, turning her cheek to him.

“Feeling better?” she asked as she started to pull a printed outline out of her binder to hand to Zach. He had given her a story about having a cold the night before to avoid working on their U.S. History presentation. He'd had other plans that involved a long-legged brunette.

“Oh, yeah,” he coughed, “Much better.”

“Good. We need you healthy and charming for our speech today. Here's the outline.”

Zach glanced briefly down at it before slipping it into his backpack. He was probably just going to wing it like he always did.

Charisma was never in short supply for Zach Jacobs and that alone was usually enough to squeak a C+.

"Now," June barreled ahead, ignoring Zach's lack of enthusiasm for their project, "I want you to explain the poster. That's simple enough, just read the key, right?" Zach could only imagine what the poster looked like. June had a three-step plan for her life. She was going to attend Harvard Law then she was going to marry Zach Jacobs and finally he was going to become a Senator. He really didn't have much choice in the matter.

"Yeah, okay. Uh, hey," Zach coughed again, dramatically. "I'm gonna go see Livingstone and get some cough drops. Okay? So I can get through the presentation."

June's shoulders sagged.

"See you in class," he said. Zach moved in so quickly that June couldn't dodge a peck on the lips before slipping into the nurse's office.

The nurse's office was three rooms. The front room was full of green and yellow vinyl loungers with curtains around them. The beds were meant to serve as private resting places for sick students. Really, they just served as a nap zone for every kid who claimed to have a headache because he really just sucked at algebra. To the right of the entry there was a tiny bathroom. Straight ahead was the nurse's office where kids were interrogated and moms were called.

Dr. Jason Livingstone was the school nurse. He was forty-three years old and had a fabulously groomed, graying beard and silvery-blue eyes that crinkled when he smiled.

Jason had been sitting at his desk, reading a medical journal when Zach slipped in. "Class hasn't even started," he said before looking up and recognizing who it was. "You go home, you can't play Miami West tonight, Mr. Jacobs."

"I uh, just need cough drops."

Jason glanced around Zach to see June's vibrant red hair vanish into a classroom. He looked back at Zach, an inquiring eyebrow raised. "Yeah. Sure."

Jason opened his drawer and pulled out a handful of honey cough drops. They were basically candy. "Here," he said, dropping them on the desk for Zach to gather. "Get to homeroom."

Zach stuffed his pockets and picked up a paper cup from the sink to get a drink. He was killing time.

"You'd better not really be sick," Jason said, closing the publication in front of him. He leaned back in his seat, resting his soft hands on the arms of the chair. "Olympia Thunder can't have a sick quarterback to start the season."

"I'll be fine," Zach said, trying not to sound too sure of that. "Our record against Miami West has been terrible the last few years. You can't even call them our rivals anymore, the way they clobber us."

Zach's shoulders tensed. "Yeah, well, we're better this year. We took Frank the Tank from them, remember? And I'm the starter now. I've got a much better arm than Tomney."

"A good arm is only half of it."

Zach scowled. He was sure Jason was just pushing his buttons. He knew that Olympia Heights had sucked in the past, but the team had turned around this fall. Their old star player, Liam Morin, had come home to coach at Olympia Heights while finishing community college. His career as a quarterback had prematurely ended due to a crippling injury, but he had found his niche in coaching. Miami West's center, Frank "The Tank" Guerrero, had left the city and moved to Olympia Heights because of a very hush-hush domestic issue. Best of all, the old coach's son, Steve Tomney, had moved away with him and Zach was now the starting quarterback. Zach's pass was quick, instinctual, and moved like a homing missile down the field. They had to be better this year. Zach didn't have the money or the grades to get into a good college otherwise.

The bell rang overhead. Jason leaned forward in his chair again and opened his journal. "Alright, Lightning, get to class."

June stood in the stands on the home side of the Olympia Heights stadium. The stadium, which was not much more than a large fenced in field, had prime seating for the home fans. The home side of the field had heavy metal bleachers and high up on the bleachers was a bright green wooden hut with an open window to the field and a desk. This was the commentator booth where Zach's best friend, Lewis Mercer, provided play by play and color

commentary for the game. The visiting team bleachers were wood and rust and tempting a personal injury suit.

The town of Olympia Heights lay on the outskirts of Miami. Like any Florida town, it had palm trees, it had shamelessly bright houses, it had pink plastic lawn flamingos, and it had football.

For the past three years since Liam Morin left Olympia Heights to play for the Gators and Coach Tomney had decided his son would make a great quarterback, the Olympia Thunder had lost all but two games. This year was different. This year Olympia Heights didn't suck. This year they were actually holding their own in their opening game against their rivals, the Miami West Titans. June Herald stood in the stands with her camcorder, trying not to let it shake as her classmates stomped on the bleachers and shouted thunderous cheers. The noise in the stands was deafening. The cheers were a form of clannish prayer-- a violent meditation focused on sending a miracle toward the home football team, dressed in green and gold. Many of the players knew that their hopes of college scholarships depended on turning things around this year. They just had to hold on a little longer.

They were up by six. Frank snapped the ball. Zach faded back, faked a pass left, and handed it off to the tailback.

The Olympia Thunder tailback skirted around a tackle, jumped over a fallen player, and ran right into a Titan tackle, who promptly and brutally, forced the tailback to eat dirt.

Everyone on the field heard the tailback's ankle snap. Coach Morin threw his clipboard, ripped off his glasses and rushed the field.

One of the Titans, dressed in crimson and black, continued the game; with a burst of laughter he snatched up the fumbled football and ran toward the end zone. He ran unopposed as all of the Thunder rushed to help their fallen teammate. Everyone except Frank Guerrero. Frank was a beast, over six and a half feet tall and built like a rhinoceros. He followed close at the Miami player's heels. The Titan spiked the ball down in the end zone and let loose a celebration that would certainly be considered excessive.

"Hell yeah!" he cheered, right before Frank Guerrero shoved the tubby sophomore into the ground like he weighed nothing at all.

"Have some respect," Frank scowled. The Titan thought he was going to wet himself. He might have if the Titan's captain, Mark Alvarez, hadn't stepped between him and Frank. Mark was good-looking with buzzed blonde hair and fierce blue eyes, but he had a bit of a baby face, even with the stubble that grew to hide it.

"You turned green fast, traitor," Mark Alvarez said to Frank, pushing uncomfortably close to his former team-mate, despite the fact that Frank towered over him. "He was just making another touchdown. What's your problem?" One of the Titans laughed. Frank growled at him. The Titan tried to cover his laughing with a cough.

"Someone got hurt." Frank said.

"Is that so?" Mark said laughing.

"You need to show some respect for..."

"It's a game, Franky. You show respect for the dead, not for your opponents on a battlefield. You were the one that taught me that after all." Mark said.

"What?" Frank said.

"Oh, speaking of the dead, how's your daddy, Franky?"

Frank had been looking for a chance to fight. The fight, if it could be called that, was over with the flash of a fist and a spray of blood. Mark toppled over onto the ground and held his nose.

"Alright! Break it up." It was Miami West's coach, Mark's older brother James, his finger pointed, his look severe.

"Mark, bench. Now." James growled. Mark scurried off the field. "I would appreciate it, Mister Guerrero, if you wouldn't break anymore of my players. Keep that temper of yours in check if you can."

"Yes sir." Frank grunted.

"Good boy."

The ref shouted a fifteen yard penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct against Olympia Heights and declared the tailback down before the ball left his hands. Mark Alvarez's turnover was invalid. The tailback was splinted and carted off to the ambulance. Miami was given the ball. The teams lined up for first down.

The crowds stomped rapidly on the bleachers. The effect was a tumult of rolling thunder. On the rubber track around the field the

Olympia Heights cheerleaders waved their pom-poms and chanted a rhyme about defense.

Jameson passed to Alvarez, Alvarez ran it up the left and into the end zone. Nobody was fast enough to catch him. The kicker came out and the ball soared through the center of the uprights for the extra point.

Olympia Heights was down by one. First down: incomplete. Second down: fumbled and recovered for a loss of three yards. Third down: another incomplete. By fourth down Zach was losing his cool. This would be the last play if they didn't gain thirteen yards here. Twenty seconds to go. The snap.

One of the more wily Titans ducked under Frank's arm and rushed Zach. The sky rumbled. They collided. The heavens roared. A bolt of lightning struck Zach and the Titan with a cataclysmic blast of electricity that flung the Titan several feet, leaving Zach sitting unharmed yet dazed on soft green grass.

"Are you sure you're OK?" June lowered her voice and inched closer to Zach. Zach had been insisting repetitively for hours that he was fine but his mother had still ordered that he go to the emergency room. She'd begrudgingly let June come along.

The emergency room was not chaotic like the ones on TV. It was boring. Zach had been sitting in the same chair for four hours and his ass was starting to hurt. On top of the boredom, there was an obese child in the chair across from Zach that had an infected thumb. It was horribly swollen and kind of purple. Zach tried to look away, but the kid wouldn't stop staring slack jawed at him. It was starting to creep him out.

June had a mini DV camcorder in hand. She hadn't let it go since the incident. She kept watching the play over and over on its tiny LCD screen. After each viewing she would look up and ask if he was OK. She seemed more confused than concerned.

Zach's Mother stood and said, "God you would think they would give priority to someone who was HIT BY LIGHTNING!" She glared at the nurse behind the counter. The nurse nervously looked around and gathered papers as people in the waiting room gasped.

"Mom, it's OK, they probably just think I'm faking it. I told you I'm fine." Zach said yawning. "Can we go home? It's two in the morning..."

The nurse stood up.

"We can see you now," she said.

"Damn right you will," snapped Zach's mom.

Zach and June were sitting together with their legs dangling off the edge of a hospital bed and staring at the screen of June's camcorder. June stepped the footage frame by frame. "The strike is only on a few frames, it's real quick, but look."

Zach leaned over her shoulder. He was distracted by the smell of her hair. It was a blend of coconut and caramel and it was far more interesting than reliving the game through June's home movie.

"Come over after this, spend the night." He didn't have his eyes on the LCD screen anymore.

She rolled her eyes. "You just got struck by lightning, Zach."

"I just want to cuddle. Seriously." He started to kiss her neck, but she pushed him off.

"Just look at this, will you?" She shook her camera in front of his face.

Zach watched the tiny screen as the Titan in crimson and black charged him. The camera had a decent optical zoom and got tight in on his body, better than the local cable channels, which broadcasted their games as a mess of generic green and yellow clad players. Each smudge of a person was indistinguishable from the next. "Nice camera," he said.

"Here," June pointed. "The lightning doesn't come down from the sky. It travels up."

"What?" Okay, now Zach was interested. "Like something underground zapped me?"

"Maybe the power for the sprinkler timer?" She looked up at him, her brow wrinkled with worry. "You should sue the school."

"But that doesn't make any sense? The only thing burnt on me was my face mask." He squinted down at the camera. "See? It

comes right up through my hands and hits the guard. I should have burns on my feet if it came from the ground.”

A male nurse in blue scrubs came in with a discharge paper. Zach’s mother was right behind him, arms folded. “Okay, these are some instructions on what to watch for in upcoming days.”

“Is that other kid okay?” Zach asked.

“Well, I can’t really discuss other patient’s details, but I can say he’ll recover.”

“Come on Zach,” June handed him his letterman jacket. “It’s like four in the morning. I’m ready to go to bed.”

“I second that,” his mother spoke through a yawn. “Let’s get you home.”

The full moon illuminated the Olympia Heights football field, revealing Zach standing on the forty-yard line. The glow from his cell phone outlined his face in neon green. It was six in the morning. Zach hadn’t been to sleep yet.

“Hey there, this is June. I can’t come to the phone right now, but if you leave your name, number, and a reason for your call, I’ll get back to you as soon as possible. Thanks!”

Zach waited for his girlfriend’s voicemail message to finish playing.

He rubbed his jaw with his palm. His facial hair grew unnaturally fast and, since shaving yesterday morning, it was already starting to get soft and curl just a little. Zach’s eyes were cast down at the field. The electric blue moon doused the world in its light. While everything seemed coated in blue, the field still seemed bright green.

The beep, finally.

“Hey Junebug, it’s me. I’m out here looking for the spot. I’ve been watching lightning strikes on Youtube since you went home and they all leave this ugly black burn mark.” He hesitated and switched the phone to his other ear. “There’s no burn mark here and I don’t think they’ve changed the turf in the last ten hours. I don’t think I was struck by lightning.”

Zach knew that the thoughts running through his mind now made no sense. He was certifiable for even thinking it. It sounded crazy, but he had to say it. “I think I was the lightning.”



<http://olympia-heights.com>