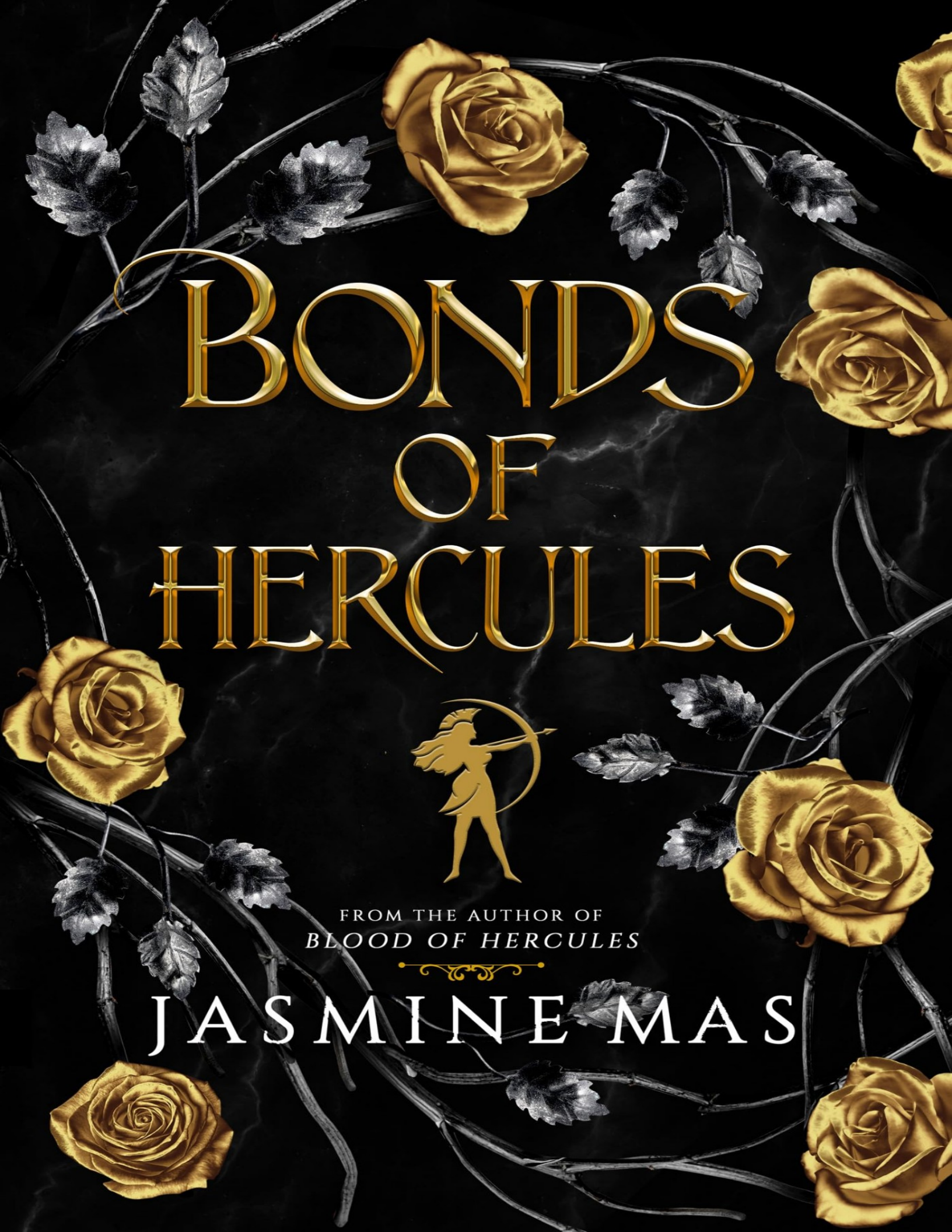




BONDS OF HERCULES



FROM THE AUTHOR OF
BLOOD OF HERCULES

JASMINE MAS

BONDS OF HERCULES



JASMINE MAS



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the people who spend their nights reading fan fiction about relationships that make them wonder “Am I okay?”

This one’s for you.

CONTENT WARNING

This book contains excessive violence, language, and a brief allusion to sexual violence. Please take care of yourself while reading.

THE 12 HOUSES OF SPARTA

OLYMPIAN HOUSES

THE HOUSE OF ZEUS.

THE HOUSE OF HERA.

THE HOUSE OF ATHENA.

THE HOUSE OF HERMES.

THE HOUSE OF POSEIDON.

THE HOUSE OF DEMETER.

THE HOUSE OF APOLLO.

THE HOUSE OF DIONYSUS.

CHTHONIC HOUSES

THE HOUSE OF ARES.

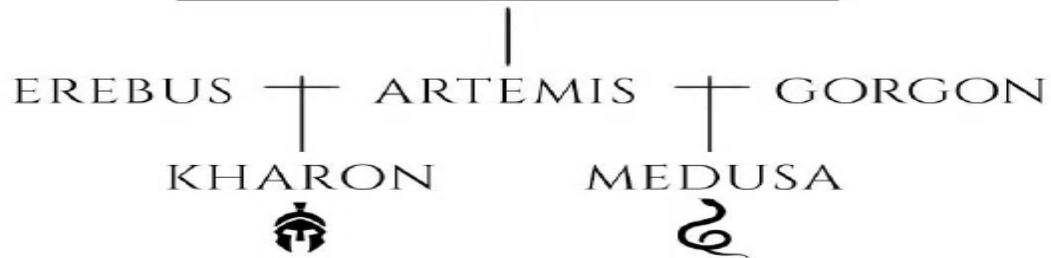
THE HOUSE OF HADES.

THE HOUSE OF ARTEMIS.

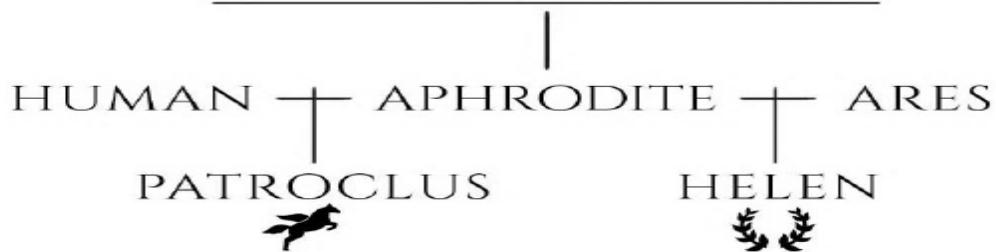
THE HOUSE OF APHRODITE.

CHTHONIC HOUSE LINEAGES

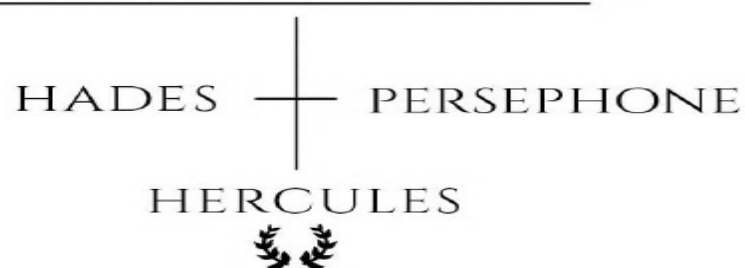
HOUSE OF ARTEMIS



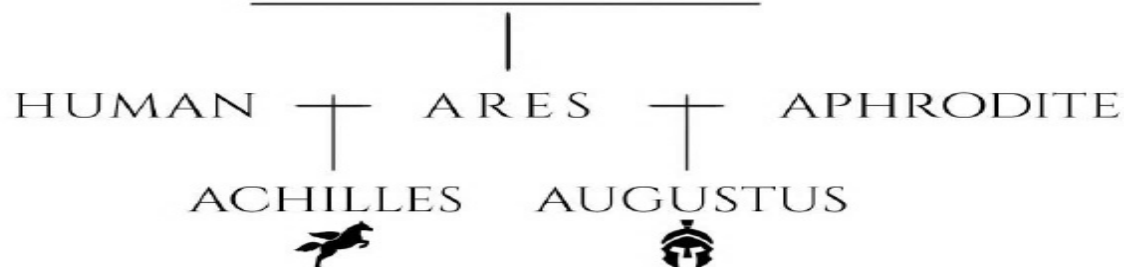
HOUSE OF APHRODITE



HOUSE OF HADES



HOUSE OF ARES



HOUSE HEIR



HOUSE HEIRESS



MALE MUTT



ESCAPED

CHTHONIC MALES: STATS

AUGUSTUS



NAME: Augustus, heir to the House of Ares.

NICKNAMES: The eldest Chthonic heir. Heir to the House of War. The Diplomat.

LINEAGE: Father—Ares, leader of the House of Ares. Mother—Aphrodite, leader of the House of Aphrodite.

SPARTAN HOUSE AFFILIATION: Chthonic.

HEIGHT: 6 feet, 6 inches.

WEIGHT: 255 pounds.

BIRTHDAY: August 1, 2067.

POWER: Mental compulsion, breaks minds.

ANIMAL PROTECTOR: Raccoon (rabid).

POWER RANKING: 85 out of 100.

OCCUPATIONS: Assembly of Death member. Founded WSDL weapons manufacturing with Patro, Achilles, and Kharon. Majority shareholder of

WSDL weapons manufacturing.

NET WORTH: \$6 billion.

KHARON



NAME: Kharon, heir to the House of Artemis.

NICKNAMES: The Hunter. Killer. Sociopath. Hades's favorite soldier. The ferryman.

LINEAGE: Father—Erebus, ancient dark creature. Mother—Artemis, leader of the House of Artemis.

SPARTAN HOUSE AFFILIATION: Chthonic.

HEIGHT: 6 feet, 5 inches.

WEIGHT: 265 pounds.

BIRTHDAY: February 1, 2073.

POWER: Touch, emotional manipulation.

ANIMAL PROTECTOR: Hellhounds.

POWER RANKING: 70 out of 100.

OCCUPATIONS: Assembly of Death member. Founded WSDL weapons manufacturing with Patro, Augustus, and Achilles.

NET WORTH: \$4 billion.

PATRO



NAME: Patroclus.

NICKNAMES: Patro. The Son of Sex. The Leader of the Crimson Duo. The Ideal Man. Achilles's Handler.

LINEAGE: Mother—Aphrodite, leader of the House of Aphrodite. Father—human.

SPARTAN HOUSE AFFILIATION: Chthonic.

HEIGHT: 6 feet, 4 inches.

WEIGHT: 240 pounds.

BIRTHDAY: August 23, 2078.

POWER: Touch, detects lies.

POWER RANKING: 70 out of 100.

ANIMAL PROTECTOR: Nemean jaguar.

OCCUPATIONS: Assembly of Death member. Founded WSDL weapons manufacturing with Achilles, Augustus, and Kharon.

NET WORTH: \$3.5 billion.

ACHILLES



NAME: Achilles.

NICKNAMES: The Son of War. The Killer. The Beast of the Crimson Duo.

LINEAGE: Father—Ares, leader of the House of Ares. Mother—human.

SPARTAN HOUSE AFFILIATION: Chthonic.

HEIGHT: 6 feet, 7 inches.

WEIGHT: 290 pounds.

BIRTHDAY: March 23, 2077.

POWER: Voice torture ability, details unknown.

ANIMAL PROTECTOR: Wolf.

POWER RANKING: 95 out of 100.

OCCUPATIONS: Assembly of Death member. Founded WSDL weapons manufacturing with Patro, Augustus, and Kharon.

NET WORTH: \$3 billion.

Epigraph

Agathokakological (adj., Greek origin)

Composed of both good and evil

According to Greek mythology, humans were originally created with four arms, four legs, and a head with two faces. Fearing their power, Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning them to spend their lives in search of their other halves.

—Plato, *The Symposium*

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Content Warning](#)

[The 12 Houses of Sparta](#)

[Chthonic House Lineages](#)

[Chthonic Males: Stats](#)

[Augustus](#)

[Kharon](#)

[Patro](#)

[Achilles](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Fate's Partial Unseen Prophecy](#)

[Chapter 1: The Survivor](#)

[Chapter 2: The Hunter](#)

[Chapter 3: The Hunted](#)

[Chapter 4: The Eldest Heir](#)

[Chapter 5: Prisoners of War](#)

[Chapter 6: Guns and Other Foreplay](#)

[Chapter 7: The Lover](#)

[Chapter 8: Men Who Kneel](#)

[Chapter 9: Poisoned Tongues](#)

[Chapter 10: Sign Language](#)

[Chapter 11: The Dragon](#)

[Chapter 12: Fighting to the Death, and Other Womanly Pursuits](#)

[Chapter 13: The Hunter](#)

[Chapter 14: The Eldest Heir](#)

[Chapter 15: Satan's Touch](#)

[Chapter 16: Your Pain is Mine](#)
[Chapter 17: The Hunter](#)
[Chapter 18: The Price of Power](#)
[Chapter 19: Demons in the Dark](#)
[Chapter 20: The Eldest Heir](#)
[Chapter 21: Omens and Warnings](#)
[Chapter 22: Enemies Who Crawl for You](#)
[Chapter 23: The Hunter](#)
[Chapter 24: The Eldest Heir](#)
[Chapter 25: A Massacre of Power](#)
[Chapter 26: Changing Beasts](#)
[Chapter 27: Sexual Tension & Other Drugs](#)
[Chapter 28: Softly it Begins](#)
[Chapter 29: Opening Ceremonies & Gore](#)
[Chapter 30: The Eldest Heir](#)
[Chapter 31: The Games Begin](#)
[Chapter 32: Electric Energy](#)
[Chapter 33: A Siren's Promise](#)
[Chapter 34: The Battles We Wage](#)
[Chapter 35: The Real Games Begin](#)
[Chapter 36: Sleeping Arrangements](#)
[Chapter 37: Demons in the Flesh of Men](#)
[Chapter 38: Seductive Propositions](#)
[Chapter 39: The Patron Saints of Sin](#)
[Chapter 40: The Hunter](#)
[Chapter 41: The Eldest Heir](#)
[Chapter 42: The Hunter](#)
[Chapter 43: The 12 Labors of Hercules](#)
[Chapter 44: The 12 Labors of Hercules Continues](#)
[Chapter 45: Who Did This To You?](#)
[Chapter 46: Interrogations](#)
[Chapter 47: The Impersonator is Revealed](#)
[Chapter 48: Medusa](#)
[Chapter 49: Federation Meeting](#)
[Chapter 50: Corruption](#)
[Chapter 51: The Sins of the Father](#)
[Chapter 52: The Lover](#)

[Chapter 53: The Dragon](#)

[Fate's Full Unseen Prophecy.](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Also by Jasmine Mas](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

FATE'S PARTIAL UNSEEN PROPHECY

FATE: ONE DAY IN THE FUTURE

I tipped my head back, sucking on the smoking pipe as I inhaled the herbs deep into my ancient lungs.

Symbols, numbers, and letters swirled in nonsensical patterns—each a drop of water in a churning ocean.

Eyes rolling back, I engaged my powers fully.

I focused on the current.

Individual glistening droplets rose up, out above the stormy sea, separating themselves, speaking their words to me:

*“The lost one shall change what is before
Chained to death’s soldiers, becoming evermore
Her lgingihlthae shall—the—four
—,—, hrakno, and the Serpent of Lore*

*The chained one shall reveal the evil underscore
Derguda by mneonsircm men,—afore
Their—shall—the tides of war*

*The monstrous one shall mend and restore
For the otls eon hears his—roar.”*

My eyes widened.

Water splattered across my face as the sky opened up with rain.

For the first time in years, the cryptic words revealed to me were *still* tangled and obscured. The incompleteness of the path was abrasive in its wrongness, deeply unsettling.

The pipe fell from my parted lips as I gripped my toga.

It could mean only one thing—someone else could also read the words of premonition.

There was another Spartan alive, not just with the power of Fate, but with the rare ability to *wield* it.

A once-in-a-millennium event had occurred, *again*.

This changed everything.

1

THE SURVIVOR



ALEXIS: MAY, CRETE. 2100

“**W**ere the human casualties avoidable?” Persephone asked softly as Hades stepped through the front door, his boots drenched in crimson blood.

Hades laughed and kissed her forehead. “The mission was a success.”

Weeks later, their interaction still haunted me.

Titan blood was black.

He’d never answered her question.

Now I slowly backed away from the sprawling House of Hades palace.

The ancient marble structure was perched atop a hill on the island of Crete, and the Aegean Sea spread out in every direction. On the western horizon, the sun set with burnt-orange rays.

Insects droned.

“Please, sweetheart, you *don’t* have to do this,” Persephone whispered. Charlie stood solemnly beside her. Hydra, the dragon protector perched on her shoulder, let out a mournful cry mixed with fire.

The flames were bright in the dusk.

Persephone’s frown deepened.

A sharp ringing sound echoed, and I tilted my head to see her better.

Only Charlie knew my secret—my left eye was blind, and my left ear was permanently damaged. A violent childhood had bestowed its marks on me.

It forged me into this.

A symphony of dying voices screamed inside my head—I'd slain them all.

Alexis, you're not an evil person.

My real name was Hercules.

Yes, you are.

I gritted my teeth.

It wasn't real.

Yes, it is.

It had only taken twenty years for me to lose my mind.

Persephone's fingers whitened where she clung to Charlie's arm, their togas whipping in the spring sea breeze.

Shadowy waves crept along the shoreline as the sun disappeared.

Night had arrived.

I pushed back the sleeve of my cloak. Lips pulling up in a false smile, I gently pressed my fingers to the "C+A" tattooed messily across my forearm. Persephone's recent gift to me, two dainty golden cuffs, covered my scarred wrists. My wedding bracelet clinked against one of them.

Charlie nodded at me solemnly from his lanky height, his yellow eyes soft as he mimicked the gesture.

Nyx shifted beneath the loose folds of my exercise toga, her grip tighter than usual around my torso. Fluffy Jr. let out a low whine as he crouched at my feet, our protector bond trembling.

Trepidation prickled the back of my neck.

Every instinct screamed at me to wrap myself around Charlie. In a perfect world I'd never leave his side. In a perfect world I'd be human.

I wasn't.

This was Sparta.

God, please save my soul.

The flame from the torches lining the palace entrance cast warped shadows across our faces: mother, daughter, and newly adopted son.

It was *far* too late for my salvation.

"I know exactly what you're feeling." Persephone's voice echoed, her bare toes curling into the short grasses that competed with rocks to decorate

the landscape. “Your fear and rage leave a bitter residue in the earth. I can taste your ... *impulses*.”

She was being kind. Holding back from airing the depth of my shame in front of Charlie. But I saw it in the panicked expression on her face.

She could taste my delirium. She knew my murderous blood was boiling me alive and my thoughts were slowly melting with it.

In my mind, Father John was throwing holy water at my face. “You’re possessed,” he whispered, eyes wide with terror. “You’re one of *them*. An abomination.”

I nodded solemnly in agreement.

“Alexis, snap out of it.” Persephone’s voice vibrated with power.

I startled back into reality.

Father John was somewhere in Montana.

I was hyperventilating on Crete.

The blessed and the cursed, existing beneath the same stars.

“Alexis, *please*,” Persephone urged, blond curls rising beneath her gold laurel crown as she used her powers to commune with the land.

Her mother was Demeter, but her father was Iasion, a terrifying dark creature who was rumored to have power over plants—she took after him.

Persephone was gentle and caring, but her powers were *petrifying*.

Case in point: I was losing my mind, and she could literally feel it happening.

In the last few months living on Crete—avoiding Satan and Evil Incarnate (my husbands) and trying to find a single smidgen of mental health (still searching)—I’d learned that it was a common misconception that the House of Hades owned the island.

Hades didn’t own Crete.

Persephone did.

Their marriage bond had twisted her creature powers into something insidious.

She’d sunk them deep into the rocky soil and claimed the land. She could literally *feel* every person, animal, and plant that roamed across it. The longer anyone stayed, the more attuned she was to them.

You could never deceive her.

It was why, except for my parents, the island was abandoned.

No one from Sparta visited. *Ever*.

“You’re so troubled with ugly emotions, daughter ... Please don’t let them guide you,” Persephone said slowly, carefully choosing her words. “You can live here safely—your time fighting can be over.”

Her curls rose higher, defying gravity.

“The federation *cannot* force you to participate in the Assembly of Death,” she said, as Hydra let out another roar of orange flame. “They can’t take you from this land.”

Dragon fire illuminated the love in her eyes.

“Live in safety—be *better* than those who hurt you.”

All I’d ever wanted was a quiet, simple life for Charlie and me. Food, bed, and a roof above our heads. The freedom to spend my days learning and studying.

What she offered was heaven.

But after twenty agonizing years in this world, I’d finally accepted the truth. I wasn’t made for a life of ease—I was destined to make those who hurt me suffer.

Sparta would learn.

I would wield my powers, or I’d die trying. *Most likely the latter.*

Penance and revenge were separated by a razor-sharp edge, and I was already inching across it.

Persephone’s voice echoed with power. “If you walk this path, Alexis, it will not be easy. The cost to your soul will be great—but I *believe* in you. You can pay it. You just won’t emerge the same. Remember ... our world is not a kind one.”

I pulled the hood of my new cloak over my spiked ruby crown. “Neither was mine.”

I’d already lost everything: my freedom, morality, and *humanity*.

Suffocating on existential dread, I turned away from Persephone and Charlie, hurrying down the hill before I lost my courage. Fluffy Jr. ran beside me, a blur of misshapen fur.

At the edge of the lawn, Hades was waiting for me. Cerberus sat beside him and all three heads turned to me, tongues flopping, tails wagging with excitement.

Fluffy Jr. jumped on him and they rolled together in the grass, both about the same size.

Hades shook his head at their antics.

Inky fog wrapped around his pale skin and long black toga in insidious coils; new voices from his power joined the chorus.

"She doesn't understand what it's like," Hades said softly, breaking the silence. "Her power isn't ... *restless* like ours. We were born for battle."

He reached for me—I stumbled away. He'd never hurt me, but lessons from years of abuse were hard to unlearn. When someone moved quickly toward you, you ducked. *Always*.

Hades dropped his hand, dark eyes lighting with fury—fog thickened around us and the world plunged into coldness—screams intensified.

He breathed out and his shrieking fog retreated.

Water lapped against rocks as the island sounds returned.

Hades's lips thinned. "Remember what I've taught you these past months—survival in Sparta is all about power and fear. You must learn to embrace and harness your more ... complicated feelings. No one fears the sane."

I nodded, but my head felt like it belonged on someone else's shoulders.

"There are only two paths forward in life for Spartans like us," Hades continued softly. "Either we run from what we really are, or we hone it and become ... legends."

His black eyes burned with intensity.

"*We* are the ones who shape Sparta," he said. "Your power is poison—you will excel in the Gladiator Competition."

I wanted to cry.

Hades spoke vehemently. "You have nothing to fear from the Assembly of Death. You are *my* daughter. They will come to fear you."

Hades smiled wistfully. "Both our blood runs in your veins." He looked back up the hill fondly to where Persephone stood. "You're our miracle child."

I tried to smile, but my lips wouldn't comply.

I don't want to do this.

Hades straightened the long robe of his toga. "Do you have all your weapons?"

With shaking fingers, I patted the new leather holster that rested on my hips and nodded.

"And do you remember everything I told you about the Assembly of Death's hunt?" he asked. "It's just hazing."

"I think s-so."