

BOOK ONE OF THE HEAVENLY BODIES SERIES

‘A scorching romance.’

Olivia Rose Darling, author of *Fear the Flames*

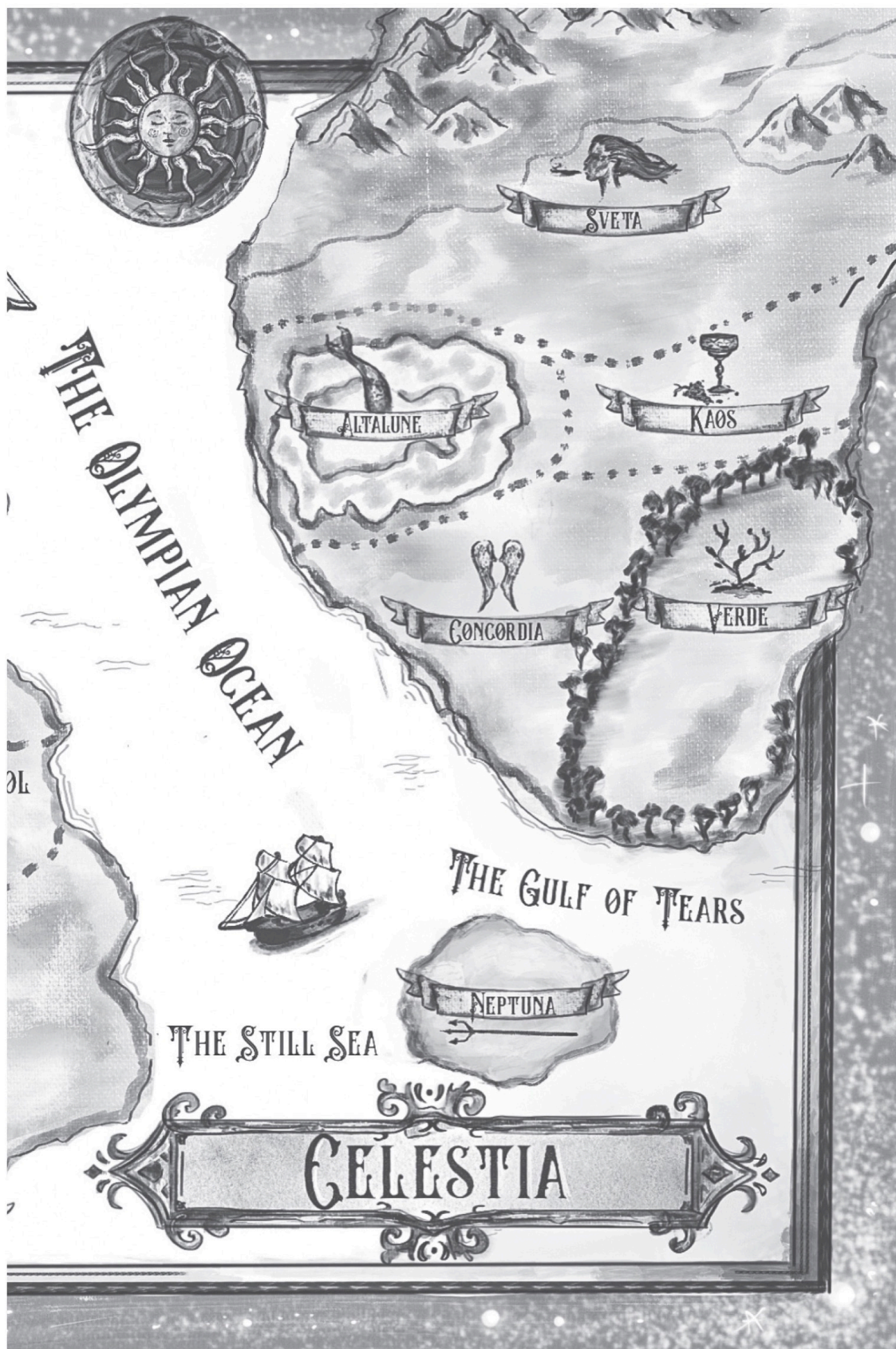
HEAVENLY BODIES

Can
love
overcome
fate?

IMANI ERRIU







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Random House Canada

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About the Author

To Marco, without whom none of this would be possible



THE STARS

Ariete (Ah-ree-ett)—Patron Star of **Perses**.

The King of Stars. God of wrath, war and blood.

Also known as '*the Tyrant*'.

Torra (Tor-a)—Patron Star of **Aphrodea**.

Goddess of lust and pleasure.

Also known as '*the Seductress*'.

Gem and Eli (Jem and Ee-lie)—Patron Stars of **Castor**.

Goddess of spite and trickery; god of riddles, cunning and knowledge.

Also known as '*the Trickster*' and '*the Silvertongue*'.

Cancia (Can-see-a)—Patron Star of **Altalune**.

Goddess of pain, sadness, rivers and lakes.

Also known as '*the Weeping Goddess*'.

Leyon (Ley-on)—Patron Star of **Helios**.

God of pride, arts, prophecy and the Light.

Also known as '*the revered Lord Light*'.

Verra (Veh-ra)—Patron Star of **Verde**.

Goddess of earth and decay.

Also known as '*the Virgin*'.

Lias (Lie-as)—Patron Star of **Concordia**.

God of love, justice and lies.

Also known as '*the Beautiful Liar*'.

Scorpius (Scorp-ee-us)—Patron Star of **Neptuna**.

God of envy, oceans and poisons.

Also known as '*the Merciless One*'.

Sagitton (*Saj-i-ton*)—Patron Star of **Kaos**.

God of wine, madness and ecstasy.

Also known as '*the Reveller*'.

Capri (*Cap-ree*)—Patron Star of **The Sinner's Sands**.

God of greed, money and success.

Also known as '*the Merchant*'.

Aquaria (*Ah-quer-ee-a*)—Patron Star of **Sveta**.

Goddess of misfortune, air and ice.

Also known as '*our Unblessed Lady*'.

Piscea (*Pie-see-a*)—Patron Star of **Asteria**.

Goddess of fate, fear and the Dark.

Also known as '*the Slumbering Goddess*'.

CHAPTER ONE

Elara Bellereve had been able to walk through dreams for as long as she could remember. Some were Stygian black and jagged nightmares; others were sherbet-painted and cloud-filled, the daydreams of the innocent. Then came the brown, flat dreams of the day-to-day and the incense-perfumed prophetic dreams, those that the seers throughout Celestia dreamed.

She had fallen into the dreamscape of a Helion. She knew that much. Yet, as she crept around the red sand dunes of his dreams, something struck her as familiar about them. Had she walked here before? The colours were vivid and bright, the air dry and hot, so unlike the cool and dark dreams she was familiar with. She saw the back of a male figure, strong and lithe as he wielded a golden sword, battling against something. But as she crept closer, she saw shadows surrounding him, attacking him, the figure gasping for help as they slowly began to suffocate him.

She woke with a start, her surroundings filtering through the remnants of her dreams. A panicked blink showed her only darkness. A coarse fabric itched her cheek—a sack by the feel of it.

She had been running down the cobbles of the Dreamer's Quarter, dress damp with blood, and then—

She racked her brain. There'd been the scent of dread-poppies pressed to her nose, arms around her waist and...nothing.

She swallowed, raising her rope-tied wrists to try and remove the sack, but a sharp yank on them stopped her. She hissed, lowering them and forced herself to sit up as much as she could. She was moving, the *clop-clop* of hooves and hard wooden slats digging into her back suggesting she was in a wagon. 'If it's money you want, I can give you money,' she said, blinking away the fog.

There was a faint laugh, and a man with a slightly lilting accent spoke. ‘We have enough of that.’

‘Then what?’ Elara asked, forcing her voice steady. ‘Are you in league with the Star?’

Silence.

She slumped back, her last memories before the darkness flittering around the edges of her mind.

One moment she had been dancing with Lukas at her birthday ball and the next...

Red starlight, blood—so much blood—seeping over marble, and a scream to run.

Her breath began to race away from her and she forced herself to drink it back in—once, twice, as she squeezed her eyes shut.

Into the box, into the box, into the box.

She chanted it until her emotions had been rammed down inside of her, a veneer of calm replacing them.

She took stock of her position. It seemed she’d been kidnapped. Fucking kidnapped. Aquaria, the Star of misfortune, must have been laughing over her shoulder.

Elara blinked, forcing herself to remain present, to gauge as much as she could of her surroundings. The memories of the last few hours rattled, desperate to be let out, but she gritted her teeth as she ignored them. She couldn’t stay with those memories right now, couldn’t think of home—or she might unravel entirely.

Think.

How could she escape these people? She checked in with her well of magick. It was awake all right, writhing in the pit of her stomach, ready to be siphoned into her Three.

She didn’t even bother to try and summon the shadows she was born with. If they hadn’t appeared in eighteen years, then they wouldn’t now.

And her dreamwalking was useless in this instance, which left her last gift. One she could actually use.

‘Where are you taking me?’ Elara demanded, in a tone as bold as she could muster. She looked down—light was visible through a tiny sliver at the bottom of the sack covering her head. Shifting herself carefully, slightly increasing the size of the sliver, she could make out her shoes, and a pair of heavy boots to her right, all drenched in Asterian light.

‘You’ll see soon enough.’

She kept her eye fixed on the soft violet light—the only indication that she was still in Asteria—as she tried to form a plan. All she had to do was wait for the cart to stop, which it inevitably would have to. And as these brigands—whoever they were—attempted to haul her to whichever terrible fate awaited her, she would make her break for freedom. She could do it. She had to. The cart rumbled on, as Elara bided her time, turning over her plan of escape as she softened her body, feigning sleep.

Hours must have passed from the way the light began to turn indigo, when a voice broke the silence.

‘I’m hungry.’

Elara tensed at the different voice, this one with a similar lilting accent.

The first voice, the one that had spoken hours ago, replied in a low tone: ‘You can eat when we cross the border. Though if you spent as much time worrying about your king’s orders as you do what you’re going to shove down your gullet, you’d have been promoted by now. It’s your own fault you’re not in the King’s Guard.’

There was a muttered response as Elara picked through the conversation. King? Border?

Dread crept up her spine. They were taking her to Helios.

It took every ounce of control within Elara’s body not to struggle then and there, as she realized she was being led into enemy territory. Not just by some bored Asterian thugs, but by Helions. Soldiers, by the sounds of it.

The force who had plagued her kingdom with raids and blockades for years. Who had encouraged the rest of the world to shun her people. All thanks to the man at the helm of it all, the one who had waged the War on Darkness against her father, two decades ago. King Idris D’Oro.

‘You know, for one of the King’s Guard, you’re not the most adept at espionage,’ she said. ‘Shouldn’t you be, I don’t know...guarding your king?’

There was a beat, before the first voice—the leader, she assumed—replied, ‘What makes you think we’re the King’s Guard?’

‘You don’t exactly use inside voices,’ she replied.

There were muttered curses, enough so that Elara counted between five or six other people within the cart, before the leader spoke again with a note of finality. ‘No more questions.’

‘You may as well save us the journey, and drag me outside to kill me now,’ she said. It would be death, or a fate far worse if she set foot in the Palace of Light, so if there was any chance of escape near the border, she’d take it.

‘We’re not going to hurt you,’ he replied.

Elara tried subtly to work her wrists against their binding again. As she shifted, she felt her dagger press into her thigh. It was relief that washed over her first—the soldiers hadn’t discovered it. Shortly followed by a string of mental curses as she realized how far it was away from her incapacitated hands.

Finally, the cart ground to a stop followed by a sharp rap to her left.

‘State your business,’ came a voice heavy with the accent of the Asterian Borderlands.

Elara took a deep breath, ready to scream, but a solid hand clamped down on her lips, gifting her a mouthful of sack. She coughed against it, but the hand held firm, another pushing down upon her shoulder when she tried to struggle.

There was an inaudible murmur from the driver up front, and the sound of coins clinking.

There was another rap on the cart, and it trundled on, until finally the hand released her. She spluttered and spat the burlap out of her mouth, as she blinked down once more at the slice of light. To her horror, it had shifted from her familiar lilac-blue to fierce orange. She was across the border.

The sack was yanked off her head, and Elara winced at the horrid burnished glare of Helion light that flooded her sight. It was so much more garish than the comforting tones of home, casting the cart in a bright gold. When she blinked it away, a man was looking at her, a very handsome man, a slight frown on his face. His eyes were warm brown, skin brown too, and he had the closely shorn haircut of the militia, though with an intricate pattern shaved more closely on one side of his head, which stretched into straight lines of the Light's rays. Oh, he was Helion all right.

'Who are you?' she demanded, before taking quick account of the rest of the group, draped in golden armour.

'Leonardo Acardi,' said the brown-eyed man.

Her stomach plummeted. 'You're the general of the Helion army. The King's Thunderbolt.'

He shrugged, something like a twinkle in his eye. 'Is that what they call me?'

She forced her gaze off him, if only to look desperately back to her home as they rolled further into Helios, the border growing further and further away. She caught sight of the Temple of Piscea, Asteria's patron Star, which signified the entrance into Asteria. A familiar resentment clung to her chest as she glanced at the glossy black obsidian pillars—perfect and out of place within the soft twilight hues of her kingdom. Piscea's prayer stood out in glittering silverstone, a fairly new one that had only been coined a few decades before.

So worship her. So fear her.

Apt, for the goddess of terror, of fate and darkness. Though she slumbered now, thank the Stars. Elara raised her eyes to the sky, and the split torn through it, the patch of gold and orange growing larger as her sapphire sky diminished.

'The palace horses are waiting on the outskirts of Sol,' Leonardo said. 'We'll leave this cart there,' he said to a comrade.

Elara reached back to her geography lessons. It was just as she'd thought—she was being taken to the capital of Helios, where the Palace of Light waited. She remained silent as she settled back, and waited, spiralling

into her magick. As she moved, the dampness of blood on her dress pinched at her, and nausea roiled through her, along with unwanted memories.

The blood.

The starlight.

'Run!'

She squeezed her eyes shut again until the images had disappeared once more. When she looked out from the cart, she saw dusty streets rather than the lush, dark vegetation that lined every road in Asteria. Though the sounds were muffled through the wood it sounded louder than her home too, and gods, it was sweltering. Her thick woollen dress felt cloistering, her corset beneath digging into her chest and waist uncomfortably as sweat began to gather at the base of her spine. But she cared not, when she didn't plan on staying in the Stars-forsaken city for a minute longer than she had to.

When the wagon stopped, and the doors were flung open, Elara was ready.

As she was pulled up by Leonardo, and led off the cart, she struck.

Her magick danced out of her, threads rapidly weaving a cocoon of sweet invisibility around her. Leonardo cursed, as the other soldiers shouted, but Elara had already slipped from his grasp.

She pelted away from the cart and into the streets of Sol.