

THE WORLD WILL BURN

a
TOUCH
of
CHAOS

USA TODAY AND INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SCARLETT ST. CLAIR

HADES X PERSEPHONE

also by
SCARLETT ST. CLAIR

When Stars Come Out

HADES X PERSEPHONE

A Touch of Darkness

A Game of Fate

A Touch of Ruin

A Game of Retribution

A Touch of Malice

A Game of Gods

A Touch of Chaos

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King of Battle and Blood

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FAIRY TALE RETELLING

Mountains Made of Glass

a
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of
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All good things come to an end.

Content Warning

This book contains scenes that reference suicide and scenes that contain sexual violence including dubious consent and sexual assault.

Specific references to suicide in this novel are in [chapters XXXII](#) (Theseus) and [XXXVII](#) (Theseus).

Specific references to sexual assault are in [chapters XXXII](#) (Theseus) and [XXXVII](#) (Theseus).

The specific scene with dubious consent is in [chapter XI](#) (Theseus).

The scenes are not detailed and fade to black but please read with caution or skip these scenes to protect your mental health.

If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or go online to suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Are you a survivor? Need assistance or support? National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) hotline.rainn.org/

Part I

“There will be killing till the score is paid.”

—HOMER, *THE ODYSSEY*



CHAPTER I

PERSEPHONE

Persephone's ears rang, and the Underworld trembled violently beneath her feet.

She was reeling from Hecate's words.

That is the sound of Theseus releasing the Titans.

Theseus, a son of Poseidon, a man she had met in passing only once, had managed to tear her life apart in a matter of hours. It had begun with the abduction of Sybil and Harmonia and spiraled from there. Now Zofie and Demeter were dead, the Helm of Darkness was gone, and Hades was missing.

She wasn't even sure that was the right word, but the fact was that she had not seen him since she'd left him in her office at Alexandria Tower, bridled by her magic. The look on his face as he'd watched her leave still haunted her, but there had been no other option. He wouldn't have let her go, and she wasn't going to let Hades face an eternity of punishment for not granting a favor.

But something was wrong, because Hades had not come for her, and he was not here now as their realm was being torn apart.

Another tremor rocked the Underworld, and Persephone looked at Hecate, who stood opposite her, eyes dark and face drawn.

"We have to go," Hecate said.

"Go?" Persephone echoed.

"We have to stop the Titans," Hecate said. "As much as we are able."

Persephone just stared. The Goddess of Witchcraft was a Titan herself. She might be able to fight the elder gods, but Persephone had only just managed to go up against her Olympian mother.

"Hecate, I can't—" she began, shaking her head, but Hecate took her face between her hands.

"You can," she said, her eyes peering straight to her soul. "You must."

You have no choice.

Persephone heard what Hecate did not say, though she knew the goddess was right. This went beyond protecting her realm.

It was about protecting the world.

She pushed aside her doubt, growing fierce in her determination to prove she was worthy of the crown and title she had been given.

"Oh, my dear," Hecate said, dropping her hands from her face and twining her fingers with Persephone's. "It isn't a question of worth."

It was all she said before her magic flared in a powerful burst and teleported them to the Asphodel Fields. Despite the destruction Persephone had witnessed when she had faced the Olympians outside Thebes, she'd still not managed to imagine what the Titans could do to her realm, but the reality was devastating.

The mountains of Tartarus had once risen and fallen steeply like the waves of an angry sea. Despite their use and the horror they contained, they had been beautiful—a dark and jagged shadow set against the muted horizon.

Now they were nearly leveled, as if crushed beneath the feet of a giant, and the sky was split, an angry wound open to the world above.

Something had already escaped the Underworld.

The ground shook, and a massive hand shot out from the depths of Tartarus, sending an explosion of rocks flying across the land. The head of a Titan emerged from the prison, and he gave a roaring cry.

The sound was deafening and just as destructive, shattering nearby peaks as if they were nothing but glass.

Persephone recalled what Hades had said about the Titans. Since they were not dead, only imprisoned, they retained all their powers.

"Iapetus," Hecate said, her voice almost a hiss. "He is Cronos's brother and God of Immortality." Hecate met her gaze. "I'll take him. You must seal the sky."

Persephone nodded, though her mind scrambled to understand exactly what that meant. She had yet to use the magic she had been granted upon marrying Hades.

Hecate teleported first and appeared in the air over Iapetus's head. Suddenly, there were three of her, all surrounding the God of Immortality, and from her hands sprang black flames that she funneled in a burning stream toward the Titan. Iapetus's roar of anger vibrated the air as her magic struck.

With him distracted, Persephone called to the darkness within her, reaching for the feelings that had fueled her destruction of the Underworld when she had stumbled upon Hades and Leuce in the Forest of Despair. Recalling that time made her feel stretched and raw. Though what she had witnessed had not been real, the emotions still shuddered through her. From that anguish, her power bloomed, a force that called to the roots of the Upperworld above her. They broke through the darkened sky like serpents twining together, sealing the open chasm.

A sense of relief flooded her, and her attention turned to Hecate, who was still engaged with Iapetus. Now Persephone could focus on trapping the Titan within his mountainous prison, but something hard struck her, and she flew through the air. When she landed, she

rolled to the very edge of Asphodel where the field dropped into a valley.

Persephone drew in a deep and haggard breath, though her lungs felt frozen in her chest, and rose onto her hands and knees, coming face-to-face with a monster—a creature with three heads, those of a lion, a goat, and a snake.

The lion roared in her face, lips peeling back from sharp teeth. The goat opened its mouth and breathed a noxious fire that singed the air. The snake shot forward rapidly but was not close enough to strike with its venomous fangs.

The creature was a chimera, a haphazard mix of animals, all dangerous to some degree, and it had escaped from Tartarus.

"Fuck."

The monster pounced, and Persephone scrambled back, forgetting how close she was to the edge of the valley. She fell, tumbling over the side, hitting the unyielding, grassy earth.

She teleported and managed to land on her ass at the bottom of the meadow. She glared up at the chimera, which roared at her from above, and was surprised when another roar came from behind her. Persephone turned to find another chimera looming. Two others approached, flanking the monster.

She stumbled back as a shadow passed over her head. The first chimera had jumped from the cliff and joined the fray, slowly encroaching on what little space she had left.

"Why are there so many of you?" she muttered, frustrated as her eyes slid from creature to creature, assessing.

Suddenly a large pomegranate struck the goat head protruding from the back of one of the chimeras. It whipped its head to the side, breathing fire on an angry bellow, and set the creature beside it aflame. A horrible screech escaped its mouth, and it crashed to the

ground, rolling in the thick grass, but the flames only seemed to spread.

More pomegranates followed the first one, raining down on the monsters. As they turned to face their new attackers, Persephone saw that the souls had gathered in a huge crowd. The first row were women and elders with baskets of fruit. Yuri was among them, and while Persephone's heart rose at the sight of her people, her delight quickly turned to horror as the chimera stalked toward them.

She had no idea what would happen to the dead when faced with a threat in their realm, but she did not wish to find out.

As she watched, however, the second row of souls came forward—armed men and women. Ian was in the lead, and he called out orders as the chimera approached.

"Go for their necks!" he said. "Their throats are made of fire and will melt your weapons and choke them to death."

While three of the chimeras charged toward the gathered souls, one turned toward Persephone. The lion bared its teeth while the goat's eyes reddened with fire. The snake reared, readying to strike. She backed away as the creature took one predatory step after another toward her, and just as it was about to attack, the wide jaws of its three heads unhinging, she teleported. She had every intention of summoning her magic, of trapping the creature in a bramble of thorns, but as soon as she appeared behind the chimera, a massive creature barreled into it. It took Persephone a moment to realize what had attacked—a three-headed dog.

Not just any three-headed dog—Cerberus, Typhon, and Orthrus.

She had never seen them in their singular form, but Hades had spoken of it. "*Cerberus is a monster,*" he'd said. "*Not an animal.*"

Sometimes Cerberus existed as one, sometimes he existed as three, and he seemed to have tripled in size, towering over her as

he tossed the chimera into the air. It landed some distance away and did not move again. Cerberus turned toward Persephone, his large body wiggling at the sight of her.

"Cerberus—"

Her words were cut short when a sharp crack drew her attention to the mountainous horizon where Hecate was still battling Iapetus. The Titan's massive hands had managed to slip between the mighty roots Persephone had summoned to seal off the sky, and with one quick jerk, they tore free. A few terrified screams erupted from the souls gathered in the meadow as splintered wood rained down across the Underworld.

More of the mountains gave way beneath the impact of the falling roots. A keen and angry wail followed as seven snakelike heads emerged from the crumbling depths of Tartarus. Persephone's blood ran cold, recognizing the bulbous frame of the Hydra.

"Fuck!"

She'd only had a modicum of control over this situation before, and now she had none.

"Looks like you're in a pickle, Sephy."

She looked to her left where Hermes had manifested in all his golden glory, still dressed in armor from their encounter with the Olympians. She had lost track of him on the battlefield, but he had been one of the first to stand with her and against Zeus—he and Apollo.

The familiar scent of earthy laurel drew Persephone's attention, and she turned to see the God of Music on her right. He looked stoic and calm and offered a small smile.

"Hey, Seph," he said.

She smiled back. "Hey, Apollo."

"Rude," said Hermes. "I didn't get a greeting."

"Hi, Hermes," she said, looking back at him.

He scoffed. "It doesn't mean anything if I have to point it out."

She grinned and burst into tears at the same time, overwhelmed with gratitude by their presence.

"Don't cry, Sephy," said Hermes. "It was just a joke."

"She isn't crying over your stupid joke," Apollo snapped.

"Oh? And you know her so well?"

"He isn't wrong, Hermes," Persephone said, wiping at her eyes quickly. "I'm just...really glad you are both here."

Hermes's expression softened, but their attention was soon drawn to Tartarus again when the Hydra roared and launched itself from the peak upon which it was poised, landing in the Forest of Despair. Trees snapped beneath its massive body as if they were nothing but twigs. The monster's heads whipped about, slinging its poisonous venom. It landed across the Underworld like a deadly rain, burning and blackening whatever it touched, including a chimera whose horrid wail filled the air as the poison burned the creature to death.

At the same time, Iapetus had managed to free himself further, and now his entire head was exposed, down to his wide shoulders. His face was thin and his eyes sunken and angry, gleaming as if filled with fire. He looked wicked and unkind, and while Persephone had expected nothing different from the Titan who had been locked away for centuries, it was another thing to be faced with the sharp force of his fury.

Persephone could feel Hecate's ancient magic rush over her, as if she were drawing energy from everything within the Underworld. It raised the hair on her arms and the back of her neck, stole the moisture from her tongue. Then Hecate released her power in a

great burst. Iapetus folded beneath its weight, his head striking the mountains, but Persephone knew it was not enough.

"We have to get them back into Tartarus," Persephone said.

"We'll work on that," said Hermes. "You worry about that massive hole in the sky."

They must have sensed her doubt because Apollo added, "You've got this, Seph. You are Queen of the Underworld."

"The one and only," said Hermes. "That we know of."

Persephone and Apollo glared.

"It's just a *joke*," Hermes whined.

Apollo sighed and took a few steps forward. His bow materialized in his hand, his quiver on his back. "Let's go, Hermes."

The God of Mischief took a step and then twisted to face Persephone. "If it helps at all," he said, "there is no one else."

She knew what he meant. No one else could trap the Titans or contain the monsters in Tartarus. No one else could mend the broken sky.

That was power granted to the King and Queen of the Underworld.

It was either Hades or it was her, and Hades was not here.

His absence made her chest ache, though she knew it was not time to agonize over what had befallen him since she'd last seen him. She had to deal with what was before her first, and the sooner she was able to contain this threat, the sooner she could find her husband.

Hermes's wings unfurled behind him, and he launched himself into the air before bolting across the realm to the Hydra with Apollo in tow.

Persephone teleported to the edge of the Asphodel Fields. Alone, she took a moment to observe the chaos.

She had often been aware of her faults but never so much as she was at this very moment. The mountains of Tartarus were nothing more than piles of rubble, the beauty of Hades's magic was marred by patches of scorched and smoking earth from the Hydra's venom, the air smelled like burning flesh, and amid all this, the souls still fought the chimeras. Hermes wielded his golden sword against the Hydra while Apollo sent rays of blinding light to cauterize the wounds and prevent the heads from regenerating. Iapetus continued to rock the Underworld, fighting beneath Hecate's magic.

Persephone took a breath and closed her eyes. As she did, she felt the world around her go quiet. Nothing seeped into her space save her anger, her pain, her worry. Her ears rang with it, her heart pumped with it, and she used it to draw on the darker part of her magic. It was the part of her that ached, the part of her that raged, the part of her that no longer believed the world was wholly good.

"You are my wife and my queen."

Hades's voice echoed in her mind. It sent chills down her spine and cradled her heart. The sound brought tears to her eyes and made her chest feel tight, stealing the air from her lungs.

"You are everything that makes me good," he said. *"And I am everything that makes you terrible."*

She swallowed the thickness that had gathered in her throat. Before, she would have balked at those words, but now she understood the power in being feared.

And she wanted to be dreaded.

"Where are you?" she asked, desperate for him to manifest at her side where he belonged, but the longer she remained alone, the darker her energy became.

"Waiting to carry you through the dark if you will bring me to the light."

Her heart felt so heavy, a weight in her chest.

"I need you," she whispered.

"You have me," he said. *"There is no part where you end or I begin. Use me, darling, as you have for your pleasure. There is power in this pain."*

And there was *pain*.

It radiated through her, a bone-deep sorrow that had become so much a part of her that it almost seemed normal. She could not remember who she was before the hollow ache of grief had carved a spot in her heart.

"You are more now that I am gone," said Lexa.

Persephone squeezed her eyes shut against her best friend's cruel words, though she knew they were true. Strange that life granted power in the face of loss, stranger yet that the person who would be most proud was not here to witness it.

"I know your truth," Lexa said. *"I do not need to witness it."*

Something cut through Persephone then, a pain so deep she could not contain it, and when her eyes opened, her vision was sharpened from the glow of her eyes. Her power waited, obedient to her will, a flame wreathing her body. For a moment, everything stilled, and she felt Hades's presence as if he had come up behind her and wrapped a possessive arm around her waist.

"Feed it," he commanded, and with his warm breath on her ear, she screamed.

Her anguish became a real and living thing as her power gathered around her. It flooded the Underworld, darkening the sky. Shadows flew from the palms of her hands, turning into solid spears, impaling the chimeras and the Hydra. A cacophony of shrill screams and pained roars filled the air, and it fueled her, made her dig deeper until the earth began to tremble and the ground beneath the Hydra

and the mountains of Tartarus turned dark and liquid. Thick tendrils shot out from the pool, latching onto the Hydra's large, clawed feet and what remained of its heads, dragging the monster down into its depths until its screams were suddenly silenced.

Her magic rose in dark waves over Iapetus too, aided by Hecate, whose power drove the Titan farther into his cell in the mountains, though he fought against it, arms stretched out, reaching for the still-open sky. Her darkness continued to climb, matting his hair and blinding his eyes, spilling into his open mouth. He wailed in anger until his throat was full and he could no longer speak, and when he was covered, the magic hardened, and the mountains of Tartarus shone like glistening obsidian against the dark horizon.

From the tallest peak, which was the tip of Iapetus's hand, now frozen in hard stone, her magic continued to build, mending the broken sky, and when it was finished, she dropped her hands, and her magic reeled back, ricocheting through her. She trembled but remained on her feet. She felt something wet on her face, and when she reached to touch her mouth, she found blood.

She frowned.

"Sephy, you were amazing!" Hermes said as he appeared before her. He swept her into a tight hug. Despite the way his armor dug into her body, she welcomed his embrace.

When he set her on her feet, it was before Apollo, Hecate, and Cerberus, who was still fused into a large three-headed monster. He ambled forward and nuzzled her hand gently, all three sets of jowls dripping with saliva and blood.

She didn't care and stroked each of the heads anyway.

"Good boys," she said. "Very good boys."

In the meadow below, the souls cheered. Their enthusiasm would normally lift her heart, but instead, she felt dread.

Would her magic hold? Could she keep them safe?

Her gaze shifted to the horizon and the strange tower that now connected the mountains of Tartarus to the sky. She had no idea how she'd created it, but she knew what had fed her magic. She could still feel those emotions echoing inside her.

"I like it," said Hermes. "It's art. We'll call it...*Iapetus's reckoning*."

Persephone thought it looked more like a scar, a blight on Hades's kingdom, but perhaps he would fix it when he came home.

Something thick gathered in the back of her throat, and she couldn't swallow. She turned to look at everyone, searching each face as if one of them might hold the answer to her greatest question.

"Where is Hades?" she asked.