BONUS EPILOGUE
PERSEPHONE

Persephone wandered between weeping trees, their blossoms a mix of pink and white. Petals whirled in the wind, dancing in circles around her. She chose to see that as a welcome as she approached two bassinets, each skirted in white lace, at the center of the grove.

Inside each was a baby dressed in the same white lace. They were beautiful, cherub-faced, and had thick black hair.

Like Hades, she thought, and her heart stuttered in her chest as she smoothed her hand over their soft locks.

She stood between the two bassinets, feeling a connection to these babies that was beyond Divine. They were of her blood, part of her soul. She loved them more than she had ever loved anything—it was a feeling beyond anything she could have imagined, and yet it existed here.

Zagreus made a small noise and Melinoë followed.

Persephone started to hum softly, hoping to settle the twins again, but as she did, the wind picked up. It was different than before, not gentle but angry, whipping her hair and moving the lace on the bassinets.

Suddenly, there was a chill in the air and the hair on Persephone's arms stood up. She recognized the feeling—lightning was about to strike. Persephone's heart began to beat out of her chest.

"No!" she screamed, tearing from her sleep.

She sat up, breathing hard.

It took her a moment to realize she was in her own bed. She felt Hades's hand on her bare back.

"Nightmare?" he asked.

He was used to her waking like this. Her nightmares varied and included memories from her battles with Cronos and Demeter to reliving the deaths of Apollo, Hecate, and Hades.

But this one was different. This one had felt like a dream but ended like a nightmare, and in it, she was certain she had met her children—right before Zeus's magic had flooded the air

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with the intention of killing them.

She placed a hand on her stomach, feeling nauseous, but she knew that was just from the horror of her nightmare.

There was no way she could be pregnant—the Fates had unraveled that thread from her future long ago. She had known that for a while and never felt anything beyond a distant longing.

Except right now—right now, that longing made her ache.

But why now? Why at all?

She turned toward Hades and placed a hand on his chest, a silent command to lay back down. When he did, she straddled him, settling against his engorged cock.

"Do you need to chase away the dark?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered, and she took his hands, guiding them to her breasts. She would talk about it in the morning—in the light, but not right now. "Touch me. Love me. Fuck me. Do *everything* to me."

"Everything?" Hades asked. His hands slid down her stomach and over her ass; he spread her wider and jerked her harder.

"Hades," Persephone said.

"Yes, darling?"

"Don't make me repeat myself unless you're making me come," she said.

He chuckled darkly and then rolled her onto her back.

"As you wish," he said, his mouth closing over hers.

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Persephone did not dream again that night, but when she woke in the morning, the longing was still there. She rolled over, but Hades had already risen, and so instead of telling him about the dream, she was left to think of ways to communicate how she was feeling without making him feel as though he was somehow not enough.

It was one reason she felt like she should wait. Perhaps this desire to have children was fleeting, a strange hex from her nightmare.

Because that was what it had been. She could still feel the heat of Zeus's magic, something she had not sensed in a long while, and it disturbed her.

Persephone rose from bed and dressed.

She found herself heading to Hecate's cottage, with Cerberus, Typhon, and Orthrus in

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tow. The goddess was outside and had run a line between two trees close to her cottage.

"Are those…bats?" Persephone asked as she approached. There were two large ones and a small one on the line.

"Yes," Hecate said. "I found them last night."

"Hecate…we've been through this. Are they human?"

"No," she said.

Persephone raised a brow.

"No, I swear it."

"You are a terrible liar."

"I am a great liar," Hecate said. "The key is to lie like you're lying."

Persephone's brows lowered. "What?"

"Did you need something my dear?" Hecate asked, her voice light. She moved to block the bats from view.

"We're not finished with the bats, Hecate."

"I am," she said. "Now, let's have some tea."

Hecate led Persephone into her cottage, which was filled with the familiar scent of rosemary and sage. Persephone sat while Hecate turned to make the tea.

"Am I hexed, Hecate?" Persephone asked.

"Hexed?" she asked. "What a strange question. No, you are not hexed. I would know."

But as if she wanted to double check, she turned to stare at Persephone before going back to her task.

"I had a strange dream last night," Persephone said. "I cannot shake it."

"What was it about?"

"Babies," Persephone answered, just as Hecate was about to turn around.

Hecate dropped her mug of steaming tea. It crashed to the floor, splashing her feet.

"Fucking Fates," she muttered.

"Hecate, are you alright?" Persephone rose to her feet.

The goddess stuck out her hand. "No, no, dear. It's okay. Sit down, I have this."

"But I can help," Persephone said.

"I want you to tell me about the dream," she said, neglecting the broken mug and sitting down in front of Persephone. "You mentioned babies?"

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"Yes. There were two and they had this beautiful black hair, just like Hades."

Hecate made a face. "At least one needs to look like you," she said, and paused. "Or me."

"Hecate," Persephone said. "You know I cannot have children."

"You can have children," she said. "Hades, supposedly, cannot."

"Well, since I would have children with no one but Hades, why are you acting like the dream is some kind of prophecy?"

"Because you asked me like you think it is some kind of prophecy," Hecate replied.

"I asked because I don't understand why I feel like this," Persephone said.

"Like what, my dear?"

"I think I want to have children," she said. Her eyes watered. She had never said those words aloud. "I think I want children and I never have before, not until this dream, but I don't know how to tell Hades. I don't know how to…tell him he's still *enough* even though I have this…*longing* inside me."

Hecate reached for Persephone's shaking hands. "Persephone, you cannot help how you feel, just like Hades cannot help how he feels."

"That…is not…helpful," she said through her tears.

Hecate straightened a little. "Are you sure you aren't pregnant?"

"Yes," Persephone said.

The goddess did not look so certain. "I am only saying that all you can do is tell Hades how you feel, and he will…feel how he feels. You will handle everything as it comes. Truly, you have faced greater obstacles."

Persephone's flood of emotions began to ebb, but then another thing occurred to her. "What if he tries to bargain with the Fates again?"

"It is possible he would consider it, but if that were an option, you would need to make that decision together," she said. "It is something to make clear…when you tell him about this…*longing*."

Persephone glared.

"I think you should take a test," said Hecate. "What could it hurt?"

My heart, Persephone thought.

When she left Hecate's cottage, she teleported to Sybil's apartment in the upperworld.

"Persephone!" Sybil pulled her into a hug when she answered the door. "Is everything

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okay?"

"Sybil," Persephone said. "Can you do me a favor?"

* * *

When Sybil returned from the store, she did so with two large bags. "Okay, I got all the options," she announced.

Persephone sat on the couch with Harmonia. Opal had settled in Persephone's lap, knowing she needed the comfort.

"Some have a digital screen, and some have lines, and some have pluses. Harmonia and I can read you the instructions and you can take one of each."

"One of each?" Persephone asked. "Do I need that many?"

"I don't know. What if one says you're pregnant and not another?"

"Can that happen?" asked Harmonia.

Sybil shrugged.

"Why am I even doing this?" Persephone asked, covering her face. "It's so ridiculous."

"It isn't ridiculous, Persephone. You had a bad dream, and honestly, Hecate told you to do this. When the mother goddess tells you to do something, you do it."

Persephone sighed. "Fine. Give me the test."

She took it into the bathroom. Sybil shouted instructions from the other side of the door.

"It says pee on the stick for seven to ten seconds."

"Do you want me to count?" asked Harmonia.

"Are you peeing yet?" Sybil asked.

"No," Persephone said. "I think I need water."

"Hold on," said Harmonia.

After a few seconds, the door cracked open, and Harmonia's hand popped in with a cup of water. Persephone downed it and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

"Did you pee?" Sybil yelled.

Persephone opened the door. "I think I'm afraid," she said.

"To pee?" asked Harmonia.

"To know," said Persephone.

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"Persephone," Sybil said, her voice quiet. "It's going to be okay either way. You are in a good relationship with a man who worships you, literally. If it turns out that it is negative, maybe you start to explore other options…like bargaining with the Fates or adoption."

"You're right," Persephone said. "I'm just…I don't know why this is so emotional."

"Because it is," said Harmonia. "And that is okay."

Persephone nodded, and after a few quiet seconds, she pointed back to the bathroom. "I'm going to…go."

"We'll be here," said Sybil. "Oh, cap the test when you're done and sit it on the counter horizontally."

"Got it," Persephone said, closing the door. When she was done, she did as Sybil had instructed and opened the door to find Sybil waiting with two glasses, one with red wine and one with water.

"What are you doing?"

She shrugged. "I thought you needed a drink. One is for if you are pregnant, and one is for if you aren't."

Persephone took the water. "Just…for now," she said, and then cleared her throat. "How long do we wait?"

"Five minutes!" said Sybil. "I have set an alarm."

It was the longest five minutes of her life.

"Are you sure you set the alarm for five minutes?"

"Yes," she said. "See?"

Persephone closed her eyes and let out a breath. She felt so nauseous, anxiety swirling in her chest.

When the alarm finally went off, she jumped. Her heart was already racing as she turned and went into the bathroom, but it grew even worse as she approached the counter and saw what she had suspected. The test was negative.

Of course it was, because there was no way it could be *positive*.

"Persephone?" Sybil asked.

She tried to hold it together, but the tears spilled down her face. Sybil and Harmonia came into the bathroom and hugged her, one on each side.

"I don't even know why I'm crying," Persephone said. "I knew this. I knew it wouldn't

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be possible."

"Because you wanted it to be positive," said Harmonia. "There is nothing wrong with that."

Except, in a strange way, it did. It felt like betraying Hades.

* * *

Once Persephone had collected herself, she thanked Sybil and Harmonia and returned to the Underworld. She found Hades in his office. He looked up from his desk as she entered, his expression darkening.

"What's wrong?"

Until this moment, she'd thought she was going to be able to have this conversation without crying. Instead, she immediately burst into tears.

Hades rose and came to her, taking her into his arms.

"Darling," he whispered. He held her tight, and she clung to him.

He waited until she had calmed down before he led her to the couch. She expected him to sit beside her, but instead, he sat on the coffee table, his legs framing hers.

"Tell me," he said.

She wiped her eyes. "Before I say anything, you are everything to me. You are more than enough, and I love you in every way."

Hades frowned.

"I had a dream last night," said Persephone. "In it, I saw our children, and now I can't stop thinking about them. I can't stop *wanting* them."

She didn't know what to expect from him. Maybe that he would somehow be angry or upset? Or that he would remind her about the Fates as she had reminded herself all day?

Instead, he asked, "There were two?"

She nodded. "Twins," she whispered.

"Twins?" he asked. "What did they look like?"

"Like you," she said and smiled. "They looked like you."

"This is the dream that frightened you last night?" he asked, a little confused.

"The babies didn't frighten me. That was Zeus…or…his magic, at least."

Hades stiffened. "Zeus?"

She nodded. "I knew he was about to strike, and that his intention was to harm our

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children."

Hades frowned, but he did not speak.

"I can't tell what you think about…all of this?"

"What do you want me to think about it?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I just don't want you to be angry, and I don't want you to do something stupid like bargain with the Fates just so you can get me pregnant."

Hades smirked. "As much as I like the sound of getting you pregnant," he said, "I would not risk a bargain with the Fates. Given your dream, I worry they would resurrect Zeus."

Persephone felt the color drain from her face. "Is that what you think it was? A warning?"

"I don't really know what it was," he said. "Maybe it was just a dream."

A dream that had become a nightmare.

* * *

Later that night, Persephone couldn't sleep. She rose and went into the bathroom and stared at a box of pregnancy tests she had taken from Sybil's. They felt like an enemy now. It wasn't until the one she'd taken had been negative that she had truly realized how much she wanted a baby.

She swiped them off the counter and threw them in the trash, angry at them for…getting her hopes up.

And why were her hopes up? Hades had *told* her—and yet, she found herself pulling one out of the box in the trash. She took a deep breath, letting a hand rest on her lower stomach.

Maybe Sybil was right. Maybe she should take more.

Just to make sure, she thought.

She took the test. It was far less eventful than the one she'd taken at Sybil and Harmonia's.

Once it was ready, she sat it on the counter.

And waited.

And waited.

And this time, even though she knew she would regret it, she let herself think about what she would do if it was positive.

How would she tell Hades?

How would she tell Hecate?

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Finally, she rose to her feet and approached the counter, staring down at the test.

There were two lines.

Two lines meant pregnant.

Two lines meant…*pregnant*.

"What are you doing?" Hades sounded amused—until she met his gaze. His brows immediately lowered. "What's wrong?"

He strolled toward her and looked at the counter.

She did not know what to make of his silence.

"It can't be," he said. He pointed at it as if he were accusing it of a lie. "Take it again."

"Yes," Persephone said, dazed. "Yes, that's probably for the best. There can be false positives."

She took another test, and this time Hades sat beside her on the floor. They didn't speak, but she did wonder if he was thinking about what he would do if they were pregnant.

How would he tell Hermes?

Should they tell Hermes?

Then she had another thought—was she even going to be good at this? She'd had a terrible mom. She didn't know *how* to be a good one.

"It's time," she said.

Hades was on his feet first, racing to the counter where they had left the test.

"It's impossible," he said quietly. "It isn't supposed to be possible."

She took the test from him—two lines again.

"How many do I have to take before it's real?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said. "We should ask Hecate."

"Yeah, Hecate."

They met each other's gazes and then called her name at the same time.

The goddess appeared in a flourish, dressed in dark robes.

"Is that a *knife*?" Persephone asked, seeing the huge blade gleaming in her hand.

"This better be good," said Hecate. "I was just about to gut…is that what I think it is?"

"It's positive," said Hades.

"I took it twice," said Persephone.

"Two positives," said Hades.

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"How many do we need before we can believe it?" Persephone asked.

Hecate dropped her knife and the sound made Persephone flinch. The goddess brought her hands to her mouth, her eyes watering.

"Fuck, that isn't a good reaction," said Hades. He looked down at Persephone. "I say three more."

"You can take as many as you want," said Hecate. "But they will all say the same thing."

She came forward and hugged both of them, and as she pulled away, she wiped her eyes. "I am going to be an auntie," she said, and then looked at Persephone. "You're going to be a mom."

The two laughed and hugged through their tears, and when Persephone pulled away, she turned to Hades and smiled wider than she ever had in her life.

"You're going to be Dad."

He took her face into his hands and kissed her, then knelt at her feet. Before Persephone could ask what he was doing, he placed his hands on her stomach.

"Can it hear me?" he asked.

Persephone shrugged. "I don't know."

They both looked at Hecate for an answer.

"You talk to those babies, Hades," she said. "I don't care if they can hear or not!"

They looked at each other and then back at Hecate.

"*They*?" said Persephone.

She blinked. "I thought you knew," she said. "In your dream, you had twins."

"But that was a dream, not a—"

"Dreams can also be visions, Persephone," said Hecate.

"But…that cannot be," she said. "I felt Zeus's magic. He was threatening my children."

"Or it just means that one of your children was giving you nightmares," she said, and then she shrugged. "It's the downside to being pregnant with divinity."

Persephone wasn't sure how to take the news. She was relieved that it did not foreshadow Zeus's return, but she also dreaded whatever else might haunt her sleep.

"Oh, this is so exciting!" Hecate exclaimed. "I'm going to take up knitting!"

The goddess vanished.

"Hecate, take your knife!" Hades called.

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She returned. “Right,” she said, swiping the blade off the floor. “I was just so excited.”

Hades was still on his knees when Hecate vanished.

He pressed a kiss to her belly and whispered, “I love you.”

Her vision misted, and then Hades looked up at her and rose to her feet. He kissed her and lifted her into his arms.

“You are everything I have ever dreamed,” he said, and carried her to bed.

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