



THE
GATEKEEPER'S
PROMISE

Gatekeeper's Saga, Book Six

Eva Pohler

**THE GATEKEEPER'S PROMISE:
GATEKEEPER'S SAGA, BOOK SIX**

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Chapter One: A Short Honeymoon

The shifting hues of the Aurora Borealis danced above Therese as she lay with Than on a blanket on the frosty summit of Mount Thor—home of the world’s greatest vertical drop. For their honeymoon, Than had brought her to Baffin Island in Northern Canada near the North Pole. The light show lasted several minutes until Helios appeared, bright and early at two in the morning. His golden cup would remain visible for a good twenty hours, which was precisely the reason Than had brought Therese to this spot.

She kissed the side of his face. “Spectacular,” she whispered.

“I thought you’d like it.” He pulled her more closely into him as the rays from Helios enveloped them in the sunrise. “It’s the brightest place on Earth, next to Mount Olympus.”

And the opposite of the Underworld in every way. Why did he still think she didn’t love the house of Hades? Not wanting to hurt his feelings, she thanked him again and snuggled closer to him.

He yawned lazily. She rarely saw him so peaceful-looking.

They’d ridden polar bears, sang with narwhals, swam with baby penguins, and sunbathed with walruses. Than had thought of everything she’d enjoy. Therese felt like the luckiest person in the world.

Now it was cuddle time beneath the fantastic northern lights, which were fading in Helios’s beams.

A movement near her ribs made her flinch. The babies were waking up.

“He’s up high today,” she said of the boy twin inside her.

“How do you know it’s Hermes and not Hestia?”

“I sense them.” She lifted his hand toward her swollen belly. “Maybe you can sense them, too.”

He laid his large hand, with its thick, long fingers, up against her skin and waited. His eyes suddenly widened with surprise.

“Hestia! I can’t explain how I know it’s her!” His face beamed.

And he’d never looked sexier.

“Pretty amazing, huh?” She winked.

“She put her tiny baby hand up to mine,” he said, astounded.

“They aren’t like regular mortal babies, are they,” she said without inflection.

“They’re so advanced.”

“They *are* demigods.”

“I can’t wait to hold them in my arms.”

He frowned.

“I’m sorry.” She clapped her hand to her forehead. “I’m so stupid.” She kept forgetting how he must feel, knowing he would endanger the lives of their children if he was in their presence once they were born.

“We should have a plan.” The muscle near his jaw flexed.

She sat up and leaned over him. “We’ll ask Hip to switch with you, just until the twins become adults—eighteen years tops. That’s nothing to him, right?”

“It’s a lot to ask.”

“You could offer to give him breaks every day.”

Than gave her a half smile. “But I’d still never see the twins awake.”

“You could hold them in your arms as they slept.”

“Maybe he’d do it—switch with me.”

“I think he would. He loves you so much. So stop worrying, okay?” She leaned down and kissed him.

She could sense in the way he kissed her back that he was worried. Hermes and Hestia may never have the chance to get to know their father.

“A-hem,” came an unexpected voice nearby.

The newlyweds turned their heads to find Dionysus, in nothing but a loin cloth, standing over them.

“Sorry to interrupt,” he said. “But the Maenads are waiting.”

Than was surprised to find that Dionysus had led them to Crete, near the palace ruins of Knossos.

“What’s going on?” Therese asked.

“The Maenads have grown fond of the Minotaur and his labyrinth,” Dionysus said.

Ariadne appeared with a scowl. “How many times must I ask you to call him by his Greek name? Is that so difficult?”

Dionysus turned to see his estranged wife glaring at him. “My apologies. Old habits.”

“Make new ones,” Ariadne said. Then she took Therese by the hands and

asked, "How are you holding up?"

Than knew Therese was trying to be brave for him, as always. This was harder on her than it was on him.

Asterion emerged from the labyrinth followed by three Maenads and two Curetes.

"What, Curetes, too?" Than asked of the dancing men and their crashing cymbals.

"They heard the Maenads and came down from the mountain," Dionysus explained.

"They were just leaving," Asterion added. "Go on, men. Now's not a good time."

The Curetes skipped away in a rush of clangs and hops.

"I don't like this," Ariadne said to Dionysus. "I told you I didn't want this here."

"Asterion's never been happier," the god of the vine objected. "You said so yourself."

"The company has been good for him, but my nerves can't handle what the Maenads are about to do."

Dionysus wrapped his arms around her waist. "If we're to be together..."

"It doesn't matter," Than interrupted. "Let's just get it over with. The sooner the better."

Jen stopped outside the master bedroom door, her heart aching at the sound of her mother's sobs. She couldn't take the sorrow anymore. Jen had to tell her.

She tapped on the door and went in. "Mom?"

Her mother lay on her bed, hugging her pillow. Her whole body shook, but she stopped as soon as she heard Jen come in.

"Oh, hi there, sweet baby girl. Don't mind me." She wiped her swollen eyes with the bed sheet. "I'm such a mess."

"That's alright, Mom." Jen sat on the edge of the bed with one leg curled underneath her. "Maybe if you just got out more. It's too bad Mr. Stern hasn't come around in a while."

More tears poured from Mrs. Holt's eyes. "I just haven't been in any kind of shape for company lately."

“You haven’t come out to help with the horses for three days.”

“I’m not feeling well, baby doll.”

“Remember when Dumbo died?”

“Course I do.” She wiped her face with the sheet. “Why do you ask?”

“You made Therese come help with the horses the very next day.”

“I wouldn’t say I *made* her.”

Jen picked at the bed covers. “You pressured her enough.”

“Now, listen here, baby girl.” Her mother’s face turned red. “You can’t compare the loss of Dumbo to your brother. And I *was* out there the very next day. We all were. I’m just not well right now.”

“Mom, I’m just saying...” What *was* she trying to say? Everything seemed to be coming out all wrong. “Never mind. There’s something I want to tell you. Now don’t freak out.”

Her mother sat up on the bed, alarmed. “Oh, no. What?”

“It’s not bad. It’s good. Just promise not to freak out.”

“How can I promise that if I don’t know what it is?”

“You know how Pete used to say Daddy’s ghost talked to him?”

“Pete was sick. He couldn’t help it.”

“We saw Daddy’s ghost that one time, too. The night he died. Remember when we were all in your tub ’cause you thought a tornado was coming? Therese convinced us it was a dream.”

“Now wait a minute...” Her mother pulled the covers back and moved to the edge of the bed.

“Just listen. This is gonna sound crazy.” Jen was scared to death she was doing the wrong thing. Her mother would probably think Jen was sick, like Pete. But Jen couldn’t take another day of her mother’s pain. “I’ve been to the other side. Don’t freak out.”

Her mother looked exasperated. “What are you talking about, baby doll?”

“It wasn’t a dream, either.” Jen stood up and walked around to the side of the bed to get closer to her mom. “I went to the other side, and I saw Pete.”

Hip made his way down the deepest path of the Underworld, determined to ask Pete’s advice. The seer was already condemned, so what harm could come from using his gifts? Hip’s heart was hurting, and maybe Pete could tell him what to do.

Wouldn't it be just Hip's luck that the moment he knew he was one hundred percent in love, it would be with a mortal, and it would be just at the moment the lord of the gods decreed there would be no more apotheosis? If humans couldn't become gods, how would he and Jen get their happily ever after?

Before he reached the iron gate of Tartarus, he sensed Pete and Tizzie down in the seers' pit, among the asphodel where the Phlegethon did not flow. Tizzie's wolf lay at her feet. Hip was still several yards from them, and Tizzie and Pete did not seem aware of Hip's presence.

"How can I not warn them?" Pete asked in a strained, almost tortured voice.

"The visions of seers aren't guaranteed," Tizzie replied.

"You don't believe in me."

"That's not it, love. Come here."

Tizzie's dark, slender arms wrapped around Pete's transparent neck, but fell through. She struggled with the illusion of embracing him. Her long, dark, serpentine curls lay limp without their usual animation.

Tizzie sensed him then and said in an annoyed tone, "Can we help you, Hip?"

"Let's ask him what to do," Pete said.

Hip opened the gate, scratching the iron against the rock, and then closed it behind him. He made his way past the flames of the Phlegethon, turned the dark corner, and went down, down into the deep pit of the seers.

"Hey, sis," Hip said in the most nonchalant voice he could muster. "What's up?"

"Everything," she said without humor. "This *is* the Underworld."

"Double entendre?" Hip asked playfully. "I mean, everything *is* up above us, and the Underworld *is* a hopping place, am I right?"

"If you're a frog," Pete replied.

"Ha, ha, ha. Good one." Hip snapped both thumbs in the direction of the seer.

"So tell us why you're here," Tizzie demanded, and her wolf gave one sharp bark.

"Well, I was hoping for some advice, but it sounds like *you* want the same thing from *me*."

Pete said yes at the same time Tizzie said no. The two lovers glared at one another.

"Whoa," Hip said. "I didn't mean to start a war."

"It's about the twins," Pete said. "There's twins."

“What about them?” Therese asked from around the corner as she escorted Than into Tartarus.

Therese had obviously taken Than’s duties as the god of death. Than didn’t look so hot. It was August, which meant the Maenads.

“You okay, bro’?” Hip put a hand on Than’s transparent shoulder.

“Huh?” Than gave him a blank look.

“Give him a minute,” Therese said. She put her arms around her husband. “Than, Baby? Do you know who you are?”

“Speaking of babies,” Pete said. “There’s something...”

Tizzie cupped Pete’s face in her hands, and blood dripped from her eyes. Her serpentine curls lifted up in a hiss before falling limp again. “Don’t.”

“What’s this about?” Hip asked. “I get that it’s about the twins, but what about them?”

“Do you mean *our* twins?” Than snapped to attention.

“They can’t live here,” Pete blurted out. “Hades neglected to tell you *that* part of the prophecy.”

Therese’s brows bent together and her mouth fell open. “What are you saying?”

“The twins have to grow up among mortals if they’re to fulfill their destiny,” Pete replied.

As Therese and Than sought one another’s eyes, Hip wondered what this would mean. Would Therese leave his brother behind and return to the Upperworld to raise their children?

Chapter Two: Confrontations

Thanatos was not one for sitting idle. It wasn't in his nature. Rarely, since the moment he had come of age and the duties of death had been bestowed upon him by his father, had he had a moment's rest. Even as he had been honeymooning with his bride, he had been working.

Now he wasn't sure which was worse, enduring the horrific pain of having his limbs ripped from him, or sitting in Tartarus waiting for his body to heal. Although Therese visited him each day, she had her duties and responsibilities, along with his, and couldn't stay with him for more than a few hours at a time. Unlike him, she wasn't adept at disintegration and found it hard to relax while doing a million other things. That left Than bored out of his mind and burdened with thoughts of his family's future.

Therese and the babies would have to leave him. It was the only way.

If he'd been in his body as he imagined his life without them, he would have cried.

So, as the days wore on in Tartarus at their unusually slow pace, Than distracted himself as much as he could. At the top of his list was a confrontation with Melinoe. He'd been putting it off, but now he had no more excuses not to speak with her.

He floated past the area of punishment, where Alecto was busy purging some evil soul of its wrongdoing, his screams as loud as they would have been using his human body. Unused to this part of the Underworld, Than shuddered and moved on, down into another part of the pit where the souls who never leave dwell.

Unlike the seers' pit, the deepest parts of Hades were alight with the flowing Phlegethon spiraling down in an almost vertical drop. The souls of the damned clung to the cavern walls. Most of them were silent in their misery, but others moaned or sobbed—usually the newly condemned who had not yet accepted their lot. At the very bottom of this pit were the Titans who'd been imprisoned by the Olympians after the great rebellion.

No one went down that deep anymore.

At last Than found the Malevolent sitting idly on a rock tossing pebbles into the river of fire.

She narrowed her transparent eyes—one black and the other white—when he

approached. “What do you want?”

“Peace,” he said, as he took a seat across from her.

“Peace is boring.” She tossed another pebble into the fire.

“And this isn’t?”

She floated up so that she could look down her finger at him. “Look, you have a purpose. You don’t know what it’s like.”

“You could have one, too.”

“I *had* one.” She folded her arms and turned her back to him.

“Stealing souls and tormenting mortals?” he asked, but not without kindness. If he wanted her to cooperate, he didn’t want to make her angrier than she already was.

She whipped around to face him again. “Your other sisters torment mortals.”

That was the first time in centuries she’d acknowledged they were related. He looked at her for a moment, taking it in.

“What?” she said impatiently.

“Do you realize you’ve never called yourself my sister?”

She turned away from him again. “Quit changing the subject.”

“Well, you must see the difference between tormenting evildoers to purge them of sin and scaring the hell out of innocent people.”

She laughed and faced him. “One’s a hell of a lot more fun.”

He didn’t have to ask which one she meant. “If it didn’t mean robbing those souls of eternal peace...”

“Like what you’re doing with these people down here?”

“These people made their choices.”

“Well, which is it, Thanatos? First, you say I should have the opportunity for redemption because my father turned me into the monster I’ve become.” She moved closer. “And now, you’re saying that people are responsible for their choices.”

He looked at her misshapen face—half white and half black. “You’re different.”

“Are you so sure? Look around you. Most of the souls down here never had a chance.”

Than didn’t know what to say. He stood up. “Therese swore an oath to spend eternity down here with you if any god in the Alliance treated you unjustly.”

Melinoe flew back to her seat and sat down. “I should have known that was the only reason you came. Get away from me.”

“Melinoe...”

“Get away from me!!!”

He planted his transparent feet firmly on the path and said, “I don’t have all the answers, but if Therese has taught me one thing, it’s that change *is* possible. But you have to want it too, sister.”

Reluctantly he turned and flew back to the upper part of Tartarus.

He spent the next couple of days spying on Hip, who, he noticed, was not acting like himself. Hip’s usual charm and quick wit had been replaced with dullness and despondency. Maybe Hip had become depressed over some news about Than’s twins.

So Than beckoned to Hip one day.

“Come see me in Tartarus,” Than prayed. “I’d like a word.”

Hip appeared instantly. “You called, bro?”

“Yeah. Sit down.”

Hip sat cross-legged on a nearby boulder. “If this is about the fate of your twins, I know nothing more than you.”

Than sighed. “You swear, on the River Styx?”

“I swear.”

Than slumped on a rock across from Hip. “Then what’s on your mind. You’ve been moping around like a teenage girl who’s just got her period.”

Hip arched a brow. “That’s a rather pleasant comparison.”

“And apt. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Hip shrugged. “Life sucks for me now, bro’. I used to have it good, see? I used to play all day and night without a care.”

“What’s changed?”

“You know the answer to that.” Hip lifted his palms in the air. “Sometimes I wish we never would have met Therese. Things were better before.”

“Maybe for you.”

“I’m glad you got your girl, but it kills me that I’ll never have mine.”

“Why can’t you? At least for the rest of *her* life?”

Hip cocked his head to one side. “Would you be able to live happily if Therese died a mortal?”

“No, but I’d take that over no life with her at all.”

Hip stood up and turned his back to Than, facing the dancing flames of the Phlegethon. “Maybe. The only time we have together is when she sleeps. It’s hard not to have her here with me.”

Than stood and clapped a hand on his brother's shoulder. "I know what you mean. Therese and I are in the same boat."

Hip spun around to face his twin. "What are you saying?"

"You heard Pete. She'll have to go back to Colorado. Maybe she'll live with her aunt and uncle and visit me at night, I guess. I don't see any other answer, do you?" Than looked into his brother's eyes, hoping for an idea.

But Hip slowly shook his head. "Sorry, man."

As Hip was about to leave Tartarus, Hermes appeared.

"Lord Zeus requests your presence, cousin," Hermes said.

Than and Hip exchanged looks.

"It's Hip this time," Hermes said. "You holding up okay, Thanatos?"

"As well as can be expected." Than gave the messenger god a smile. "It's good to see you back in business. I can't thank you enough for what you did."

"Oh, stop," Hermes insisted. "I'd say naming your son for me is thanks enough and more than I deserve."

"You promised to come play night Frisbee over on Crete," Than added.

"And I will. Call me next time."

"Sorry to interrupt this sweet family reunion," Hip said. "But what could Lord Zeus possibly want with me?"

"Well, now. That's for Zeus to know and for you to find out." Hermes winked and turned again to Than. "Don't be a stranger." Hermes disappeared.

"Catch you later, bro," Hip said just before he followed Hermes to Mount Olympus.

As soon as Hip entered the court where the sun always shined, his mother crossed the room and embraced him.

"I'm so bored up here, and my mother is suffocating me," she whispered in his ear.

At that moment, Hip wanted to say, "I know how you feel," but he resisted the urge as he peeled his mother's arms from his neck.

From over his mother's shoulder, he met Aphrodite's smile. The goddess of love waved at him. Hip smiled back.

The Graces, sitting near Aphrodite, batted their eyes at him—all but Pasithea, whose face turned red as she looked away.

“Please tell me you’ve come to visit me,” Persephone said. “And you’re not here on business.”

Hip squeezed his mother’s hands. “I should visit, shouldn’t I? I’m sorry I haven’t. Shame on me.”

Hephaestus waved from the door of his forge. Hip gave the older god a friendly nod.

Persephone smiled. “Well, you’re here now.”

Hip lowered his head and then met his mother’s hopeful face. “Zeus called for me.”

Persephone’s smile faded.

“But I’ll come by and chat right after I see him.”

“Good.”

Hip left his mother and crossed the room to the double throne at the back, where Zeus and Hera sat conversing with one another. He always admired the golden ruby-eyed eagle and three golden finches that adorned their throne. The two gods leaned close together, their noses almost touching. Hera’s long red hair was loosed from its usual knot. Hip thought she looked more beautiful, less severe, with her hair down.

Ares, the twins, Athena, and Poseidon were not at court. Hip remembered Athena and her mother, Metis, had gone on a trip around the world together—making up for lost time, he supposed. Hestia was discussing something with Hecate and Demeter, who had thrown her arm around her daughter’s shoulders the moment she had returned from Hip’s side. Hermes played a light tune on his pipe while Cybele—or Rhea, as they had come to call her again—clapped her manly hands to the rhythm beside him. Despite the presence of this handful of gods, Mount Olympus felt abandoned.

The god of sleep waited patiently to be acknowledged.

“Aha,” Zeus said. “Good to see you, Hypnos.”

“Likewise,” Hip replied. “You asked for me?”

“No one likes a dull boy,” Zeus said. “The mortals are suffering. What pains you?”

Hip hadn’t expected this direct question from the lord of the gods. His mouth dropped open, and he stared dumbly back at Zeus.

“It’s the mortal girl, isn’t it?” Hera asked.

“Of course it is,” Rhea said.

“I knew it,” Zeus said before Hip could reply. “Hermes, bring Cupid to me.”

Hip glanced at his cousin, who looked up with surprise from his pipe. “Cupid? Of course, Father.”

Hermes left the room.

Aphrodite flew over to Hip. “Father, what has my son to do with Hip’s situation, if you don’t mind the question?”

Rhea moved closer to Hera and crossed her manly arms.

Zeus got to his feet. “Sleep is very important to peace on earth, my dear—not that I ever expect to have such a thing, especially with Ares running around, making his mischief. As of late, mortals have been suffering from lack of good sleep. They are restless because Hypnos is restless.”

“Lord Zeus,” Hip began, feeling suddenly light and happy. Might Zeus make an exception of his rule against apotheosis for the sake of world peace? “Is this what I think it is?”

“And what is that, my boy?” Zeus asked.

“Do you mean to make Jen Holt like us?”

Zeus burst out in laughter. Hera even chuckled beside him, but Rhea frowned.

Hip’s cheeks burned red, first with embarrassment and then with anger.

Zeus’s face also turned to anger. “Make Jen Holt a god? You can’t be serious, Hypnos! Don’t you recall the stalemate that took place, right here in this room, just a few weeks ago? I had your brother with my lightning bolt at his throat. Poseidon directed his trident at Ares. Your father threatened to unhand me as he hid beneath his helm! In response to the demands of the Alliance, I gave equal footing to my sisters and mother in exchange for my own demand! Don’t you recall what it was?”

“No more gods,” Hip said glumly.

“Precisely!” Zeus bellowed. “So why should I change my mind so soon on the heels of that agreement? Nay, *oath!* We all swore an *oath!*” His face looked like an angry red bull about to charge.

Hermes and Cupid appeared beside Zeus.

But Zeus continued. “It was my one and only demand in a stand-off with my brethren! And you think I would dismiss it so easily? So soon? Because you are *sad?*”

“My apologies, Lord Zeus,” Hip managed to mutter, his hopes dashed and his ego humiliated. “I will try to do better for the sakes of the mortals. Am I excused?”

“Not quite,” Zeus replied, the red draining from his face. “Not quite, my boy. Aphrodite, bring me Pasithea.”

Aphrodite turned on her heels and returned holding the hand of Pasithea, who looked nervous standing before the lord of the gods.

“What is this about, Father?” Aphrodite asked.

Hip held his breath as sweat broke out on his brow.

“Be careful, Zeus,” Rhea warned. “Think this through.”

“Hypnos, gaze upon your old fiancé,” Zeus commanded, ignoring his mother. “Cupid, shoot him with your arrow.”

Hip fell to his knees as the room began to spin. The thought of losing his love for Jen sickened him. He wanted to vomit. “Do not do this, Zeus. I beg of you. I will go back to my merry ways. You have my word.”

He sensed Pasithea break into tears. He hadn’t meant to hurt her. Surely she could understand. He turned back to see her face, and at that moment, the arrow struck him fully in the heart.

Therese was overjoyed when she re-integrated—a sure sign Than’s soul had returned from Tartarus, rejoined his body, and resumed his godly status. She stood up from her favorite spot in the bat cave and smiled down at Clifford, as well as Cubie and Galin, who had been allowed to remain in the Underworld to keep Clifford company while their mistress was away on Mount Olympus.

Therese lifted her chin. “Than?”

He immediately appeared before her. The glow of his body brought more light to the cave.

She threw her arms around his neck. “I’ve missed you.”

He laughed. “You’ve spoken to me every day in Tartarus.”

She kissed his face, his lips, his ear. “I’ve missed your skin.”

“Mmm.” He returned her kisses. “So have I.”

“We’ll see you two lovebirds later,” Cubie said.

“Why?’ Clifford barked.

“They need their privacy,” Galin explained. “And they’re making me a little sick.”

Clifford reluctantly followed the black Doberman pinscher and fluffy polecat out of the bat cave.

“We’ll catch up with you in a minute,” Therese called after them.

Thanatos put his hands on Therese’s abdomen. “Wow. The twins have grown a

lot in one week.”

“They’ve missed your touch.”

He kissed her gently on the lips and then knelt on the ground, even though it was damp and dirty, and kissed her swollen belly.

Together they walked through the winding tunnel along the Phelgethon back toward their rooms.

Than seemed distracted, so Therese asked, “Are you feeling okay?”

He squeezed her hand. “I should ask the same of you.”

“Fine but...”

“What?” Than’s frown made her stomach lurch.

“It’s time,” Therese said before they had reached their part of the palace.

Than looked down at her. His mouth dropped open. “So soon?”

She laughed and said, “Not the twins, silly. It’s time to confront your father about Pete and Melinoe.”

Than let out his breath. “I still don’t think there’s anything Hades can do without Melinoe’s cooperation.”

“There has to be,” she insisted. “Please?”

He sighed. “Lead the way.”

At the door to Hades’s chamber, Therese and Than heard shouting.

“McAdams has moved on to the Elysian Fields,” Tizzie snapped.

Therese shuddered. The man who had killed her parents had moved on, already?

“And your point?” Hades snapped back.

“If someone like that killer can be purged of wrong-doing and have a chance at redemption,” Tizzie said, “then why can’t Pete?”

“You know the rules!”

“But Pete was only using his gifts for good. He should be allowed a chance!”

“That’s not what you want, and you know it!”

“I do too, Father! I want him to be happy, even at the expense of my own happiness!”

“There’s nothing I can do,” Hades replied. “Now leave me be!”

Tizzie rushed from the door, her snake hair hissing.

Therese swallowed hard and turned to Than. “Maybe this isn’t the right time.”

“For what?” Hades demanded from inside. “Enter!”

Jen froze on the bottom step when she heard the voice of Mr. Stern at the front door. She'd been napping after a late night of babysitting Lynn for Carol and Richard. Peering around the corner, she saw her mother leaning against the open door with a cigarette in a shaky hand. Her gray hair had recently been cut in its usual bowl shape for the funeral, but it was stringy and in need of a wash.

"I'm sorry, John," Jen's mother said. "I just can't do this right now."

"Don't shut me out."

"I need time."

"Believe me, Steph. I know how you feel," Mr. Stern said.

"Will you please stop saying that?" Jen's mom said in a raised voice. "Please quit saying you know how I feel! You *don't* know how I feel! Now please go!"

Jen jumped at the slam of the door. Then she softly crept back upstairs to her room and fell on her bed and cried.

Her poor mother! She would never be the same.

Jen wiped her eyes and reached for her dream globe. More than ever she needed Hip. Things had been strained between them lately, for reasons she didn't quite understand, but he had visited her a few nights ago and had admitted he loved her.

At first she had thought he was a figment, but when she had said the words Therese had taught her to say ("Figment, I command you to show yourself!), he hadn't turned into one of the giggling eel-like creatures that had often left her feeling disappointed. The person who had said he loved her had been the real Hypnos.

If it hadn't been for her sadness over losing Pete and her concern for her mother, Jen would be on cloud nine. Hip made her feel so happy to be alive, in spite of all the tragedy that surrounded her family recently. There was something about his playful charm and easy grace—not to mention his magnificent good looks—that lifted her up no matter how often she fell down in the dumps. Maybe he could lift her up again.

She closed her eyes and asked to see him. He appeared immediately, but he wasn't alone. Standing beside him looking smitten was his old fiancé. And they were holding hands.

"Hip?" Jen asked. "What's going on?"

Hip's eyes widened as he looked directly at her through the globe. "Jen?"

Jen stared at the globe with disbelief. Her throat tightened, her mouth went dry, and everything around her went still, as though time had stopped. Was this really

happening? She tried to speak.

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out.

“Jen, I...”

“F-figment! I command you to show yourself!” she finally said through her tight throat.

“Jen...”

“Figment! Figment!”

“I’m no figment.”

Jen climbed from her bed with the globe cradled like a football in one arm. Then she flung her window open and tossed the globe from her second-floor bedroom as far as she could. She watched it hit the ground and shatter into pieces, just like her heart. Iridescent light flickered from it like a dying flame and then disappeared. She closed the window and returned to her bed, trying not to cry as she hugged her pillow, but the tears came hard.

I’m such an idiot, she thought. How had she ever believed a god could love her?

“Therese!” Jen prayed. “Please come as soon as you can. If you’re still my friend, I need you!”

Chapter Three: Unexpected Visits

As Than followed Therese into his father's chambers, Therese turned to him with a look of concern.

Jen is calling to me, she prayed. It sounds like an emergency.

Go. I'll handle my father.

Than walked across the room and explained why Therese had vanished.

"What brings you here?" Hades asked. "I doubt you've come to keep me company, knowing how miserable I am with your mother away."

"I should have come for that." A wave of guilt washed over Than. "I've only just returned from Tartarus, and I have a lot on my mind."

"Take a seat and tell me about it." Hades motioned to a chair, not far from his. "It doesn't seem that long ago when your mother and I were expecting our twins, and here you are, expecting yours."

Than sat but didn't reply. He didn't think his situation was similar to his father's in the least. Hades had always been a part of Than and Hip's lives. Thanatos wouldn't get that with his children.

"You're worried about them, of course," Hades said. "All parents worry. And you think because your children are mortal you have more to fear than those of us with godly children. But you couldn't be more wrong."

Than lifted his brows but said nothing, sensing his father had plenty to say.

"Your children are destined to live lives of greatness. They will shine like a bright flame, and then they will spend eternity in the Elysian Fields. Once they are there, your worries are over." Hades tugged at his beard. "My worries over my children haunt me for all of eternity. I can never escape them. Just before you came here, your sister Tisiphone asked me for something I had no power to grant. Do you know what that does to a father? It's maddening."

"What does she want?" Than asked.

"To free the new seer from Tartarus. I think what she really wants is to grant him the status of a god."

"Impossible?"

Hades frowned. "Not impossible. Deals can be made. But the Fates require a trade, like they did with old Admetus centuries ago. Remember? Which of us would trade places with the seer and spend eternity in Tartarus? I know none, do you?"