



**THE
DAGGER
AND THE
FLAME**





PRAISE FOR THE DAGGER AND THE FLAME

‘Sizzling romance, stunning world-building, spectacular writing.’ – Lauren Roberts, author of *Powerless*

‘Packed full of Doyle's trademark lush description and snarky banter, *The Dagger and the Flame* is a sprawling adventure through the treacherous streets of Fantome. Enemies to lovers, sworn-to-kill-each-other-but-let's-kiss, swoony romance, perilous mystery, cute animal sidekicks – it ticks every romantasy box and will delight fans everywhere.’
– Melinda Salisbury, author of *The Sin Eater's Daughter*

‘Fast paced, and exciting and clever, and because it’s Catherine Doyle, it’s beautifully written, too.
Oh, and did I mention it’s really, really hot?’
– Louise O’Neill author of *The Surface Breaks*

‘Gorgeous and ruthless: stand back everyone,
the true rivals to lovers has arrived.’
– Sarah Rees Brennan, author of *Long Live Evil*

‘Stunning, thrilling, and devastatingly romantic. *The Dagger and the Flame* is guaranteed to be your new obsession.’
– Katherine Webber, co-author of *Twin Crowns*





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AND THE
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**CATHERINE
DOYLE**

SIMON & SCHUSTER

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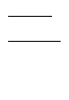
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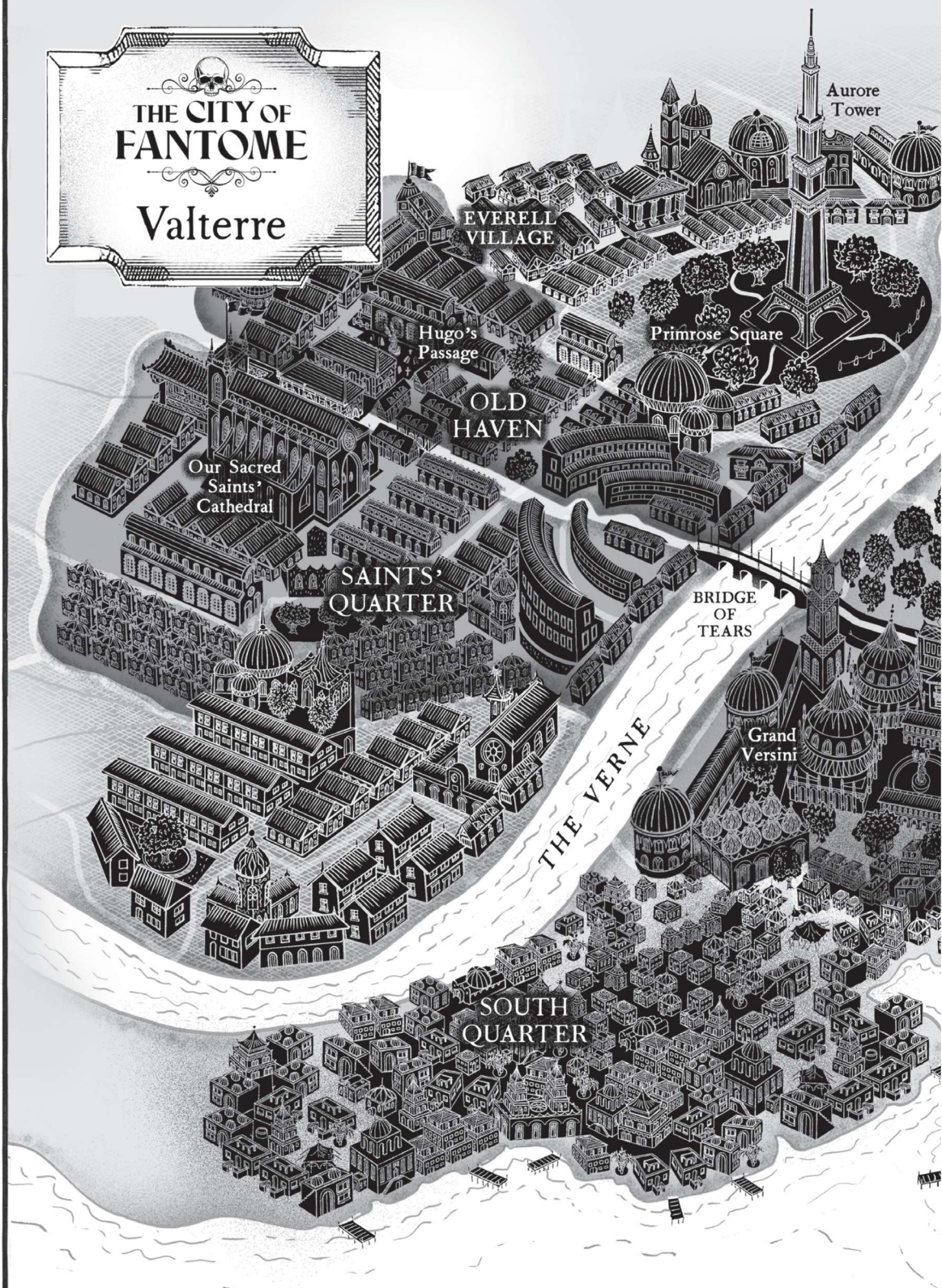


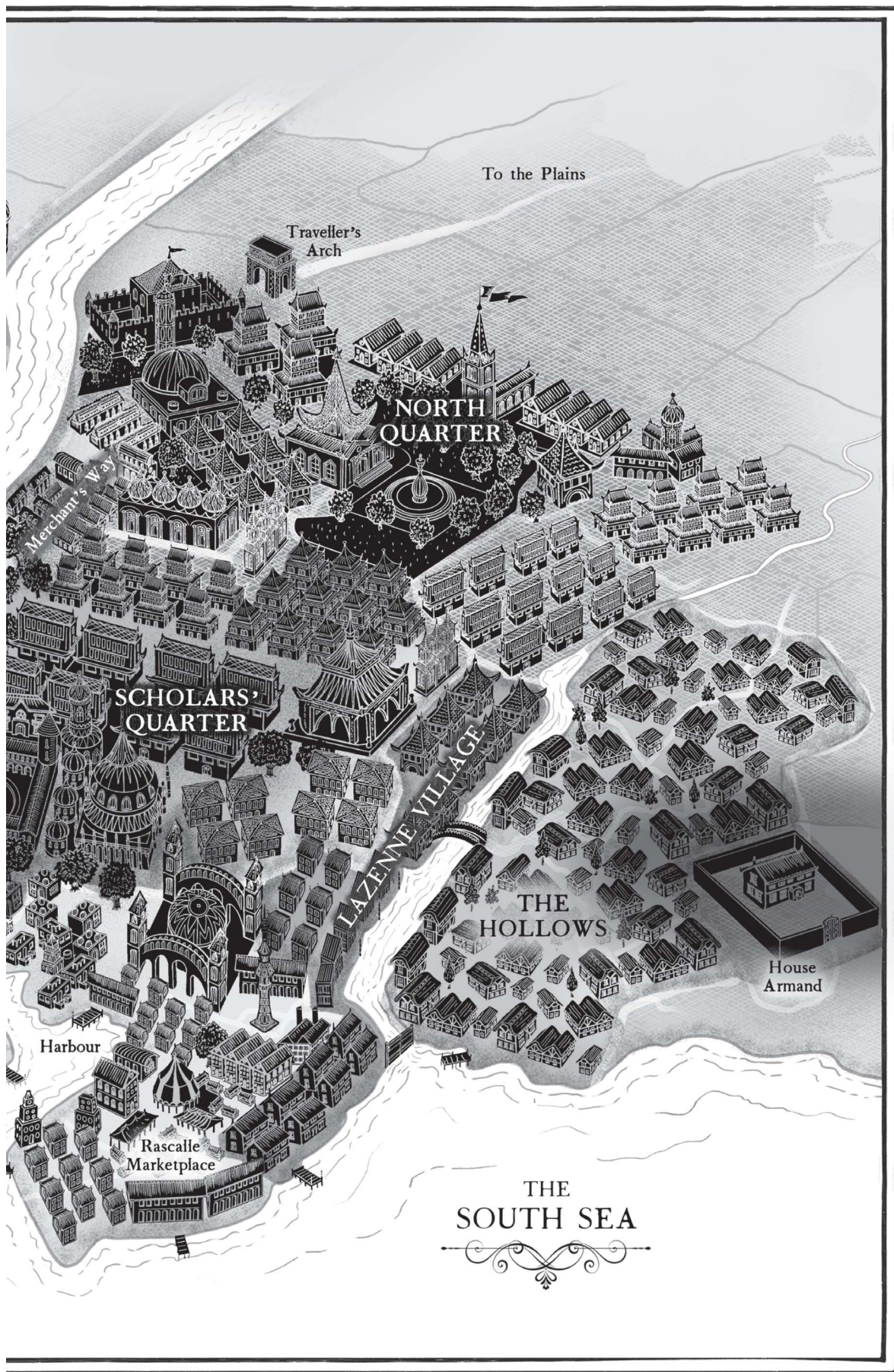


*For Rachel Denwood, who turned the
spark of this story into a flame*

THE CITY OF
FANTOME

Valterre





LIST OF PLAYERS



ORDER OF THE DAGGERS

Hugo Ralph Versini, *Founder of the Order of the Daggers*

Gaspard Dufort, *Head of the Order of the Daggers*

Ransom Hale, *Dagger*

Lark Delano, *Dagger*

Nadia Raine, *Dagger*



ORDER OF THE CLOAKS

Armand Versini, *Founder of the Order of the Cloaks*

Madame Cordelia Mercure, *Head of the Order of the Cloaks*

Madame Josephine Fontaine, *Former Head of the
Order of the Cloaks*

Valerie, *Cloak*

Sabine Fraser, *Cloak*

Theodore Branch, *Shadowsmith*



Sylvie Marchant, *Shade smuggler*

Seraphine Marchant, *her daughter*



HOUSE OF RAYERE, THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES

Bertrand IV, King of Valterre

Odette I, Queen of Valterre



SAINTS OF VALTERRE

1. Calvin, Saint of Death
2. Celiana, Saint of Song and Poetry
3. Frederic, Saint of Farmers and Hunters
4. Maud, Saint of Lost Hope
5. Maurius, Saint of Travellers and Seafarers
6. Oriel, Saint of Destiny
7. Serene, Saint of Animals
8. Alisa, Saint of the Sick
9. Cadel, Saint of Warriors
10. Calliope, Saint of Beauty and Youth
11. Placido, Saint of Peace
12. Jasper, Saint of Artisans
13. Lucille Versini, Saint of Scholars



Part I



‘Take only what your cloak can carry,
and your conscience can bear.’

Armand Versini,
FOUNDER OF THE ORDER OF CLOAKS

‘Those who refuse to wield the dagger are
doomed to die by its blade.’

Hugo Versini,
FOUNDER OF THE ORDER OF DAGGERS



Before

ut beyond the glittering city of Fantome in the wild heart of the plains, the midnight moon hung like a lantern in the sky, bathing the farmhouse that belonged to Seraphine Marchant's mother in a soft silver glow. The light crept in through Seraphine's window and danced along the pages of her book, and for a moment, she imagined the curious moon was reading over her shoulder. She turned a page, the words blurring as her eyelids grew heavy. She should be asleep but she couldn't rest at such a crucial point in the story. Even if she had read it eight times already. Even if, at seventeen years old, she was too old for fairy tales.

Pippin slumbered at her feet, warming her toes. As a dog of considerable age and with only three legs to carry him, he had no interest in the inky whispers of imagined adventures. He cared chiefly for naps, river sprats and, on occasion, Farmer Perrin's chickens.

At the sudden sound of swearing, Seraphine turned her face to the window. Out in the garden, Mama was on her hands

and knees hissing at the lavender, whorls of her thick black hair veiling her face. Unusual behaviour, even for Sylvie Marchant. Seraphine frowned, closing her book. Down below, a cat darted from the bushes. Mama pounced, snatching up the startled tabby. It was Fig, so named because Seraphine often found the stray napping in the fig tree behind their house. Not that Mama had ever taken the slightest interest in him until now.

Seraphine watched as her mother pulled a familiar glass vial from the pocket of her cardigan before removing the stopper with her teeth. The cat yowled as Mama tipped the contents into his mouth. Pippin raised his head, a growl rumbling in his throat. Unease rumbled through Seraphine, too.

Mama set the cat down. Fig scampered a couple of steps, then jerked. Another step, and a howl burst from him. It was not a sound Seraphine had ever heard before, and the agony of it raked claws down her spine. Pippin's hackles rose.

She pressed her nose to the window, watching in silent horror as Fig's little body thrashed. In a matter of seconds, he grew to twice his size, then larger still. Soon, Fig didn't look like himself at all. Not a cat, but a beast. His fur was so black it seemed to join with the darkness. Strange shadows poured from his barrel chest like tentacles, some sweeping through the low bushes, others lashing out, high and fast. Mama jumped backwards to avoid one, a laugh springing from her as though it was a jump rope.

Seraphine's blood ran cold.

The moon dipped behind a cloud and in the sudden dark, Fig disappeared entirely.

'Pss pss pss,' hissed Mama.

A deafening roar cut through the night. As the cloud passed and the moonlight returned, Fig lunged from the bushes, with saliva dripping from his fangs. He cornered Mama.

Seraphine leaped to her feet, the book tumbling from her lap as she bolted for the bedroom door. Behind her, she felt, rather than saw, a snap of bright golden light, and then heard Mama's shout rising in the dark. Seraphine took the rickety stairs two at a time, grabbing the kitchen broom at the bottom. With Pippin barking at her heels, she burst out into the night.

And ran head-first into her mother. She stumbled backwards, broom raised, eyes wild. The beast was nowhere to be seen, but Seraphine kept her guard up. 'Get behind me, Mama!'

Mama's bronze eyes were wild, too. 'What are you doing out here, little firefly?' she demanded breathlessly. 'You should be asleep.'

Seraphine blinked, then stared hard at her mother. Sylvie Marchant was uninjured, grinning with two neat rows of pearly teeth. But there was an edge to that smile. A faint smell of burning lingered in the air, and beneath it, Seraphine scented a strange citrus tang, like lemon blossoms. She craned her neck, searching the darkness. Pippin was already tramping through it, inspecting the bushes.

'Where is Fig?'

Mama cocked her head. 'Fig?'

'The cat,' said Seraphine, her heart beating so loudly she could scarcely think. 'He changed. He charged at you. I saw him.' She was still brandishing the broom. 'I thought you were hurt. I came to rescue you . . .' she trailed off. She felt unsteady on her feet. Unsteady in her mind.

Seraphine knew Shade magic. She had grown up with it, watching Mama grind and bottle it long before Seraphine started helping with the task. She had washed the dust of it from her fingers more times than she could count, but what she had seen just now . . . *that* was something else. Something bigger. A dent in the rules they had followed so very carefully, for so very long. *Touch, but don't use. Never taste.* The thought etched a scowl on her face. 'What are you up to, Mama?'

Mama gently flicked her on the nose. 'Watch that frown before the wind sets it. Or we'll have to start using you to frighten off the crows.'

Seraphine tossed the broom aside. 'You know we're not supposed to mess around with—'

'I know the rules,' said Mama, swishing the words away. Refusing to be interrogated. Or scolded. 'I think you've been reading too many stories, darling girl. I only crept out to look for my ring. I thought I dropped it in the bushes when I was gardening this afternoon.'

The lie was so effortless, so comforting, that Seraphine felt herself leaning into it, like a slant of sunlight in winter.

'Come,' said Mama, nudging her back towards the house. 'Let's put some colour back into those cheeks. It's nothing a little sugar won't fix.'

As Seraphine watched her mother bolt the back door behind them, she tried to unpick the strange smile on her face, the spring in her step as she went to the kitchen cupboard and retrieved the remaining half of yesterday's sugar loaf. A rummage in the drawer produced a candle and then the cake was between them, the lone candle alight.

She stared at Mama through the flame. ‘Do you have a secret birthday I don’t know about?’

‘It’s after midnight,’ said Mama, gesturing to the clock on the wall. ‘Which means it’s the birthday of Saint Lucille.’ Mama’s favourite saint. She didn’t give a rat’s ass about the other twelve – the ancient original ones, who once stalked the length and breadth of the Kingdom of Valterre with true magic in their veins. Lucille, the last of them, was young and clever and almost recent enough to touch. She was the Saint of Scholars, and Mama saw herself as a scholar, too.

For her part, Seraphine preferred the allure of stories over the mercurial nature of philosophy. She rarely prayed, and only ever to Saint Oriel of Destiny. Seraphine was a dreamer, not a scholar. But that was not the fault of Saint Lucille. Or the cake. ‘Make a wish, Seraphine.’

Seraphine frowned again, but this night was so utterly baffling already, she didn’t see the harm in making a wish. So, she closed her eyes and made the same one she always did. For a grander destiny, for the freedom to go far beyond their little farmhouse in the plains, to hurl herself headlong into the kind of adventures she read about in her books. A life that made her heart gallop, that made her feel like she was truly *living*.

She blew out the candle and she and her mother perched on the countertop, setting the strange incident in the garden aside and devouring the remains of the sugar loaf. But when Seraphine went to wash her plate in the sink, she saw Mama’s ring sitting in the soap dish.

She held it up, suspicion nagging at her once more, but Mama only laughed as she snatched it from her. ‘There it is! It

looks like *my* wish came true.’ She slipped it onto her finger. ‘Now, to bed with you before we push our luck.’

Seraphine was too tired to press the matter. If she was honest with herself, a part of her was too frightened to prod at the lie until it fell apart. There had always been a darkness in Mama, and Seraphine feared that if she looked directly at it, it might become a part of her too. It might destroy their careful little life.

‘Goodnight, Mama.’ As Seraphine pressed a kiss to her cheek, she swore she saw a spark in her mother’s burnished brown eyes. The sign of a different, secret wish that had yet to come true.

‘Sweet dreams, my little firefly.’

That night, Seraphine sat on her windowsill, waiting for the tabby cat to return, but as the full moon gave way to the blushing dawn, she nodded off, dreaming of terrible beasts with sharp fangs leaping at her from the shadows.