



THE CITY OF  
FANTOME

THE  
DAGGER



AND THE  
FLAME

THE NUMBER ONE BESTSELLING AUTHOR

CATHERINE  
DOYLE

# 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*

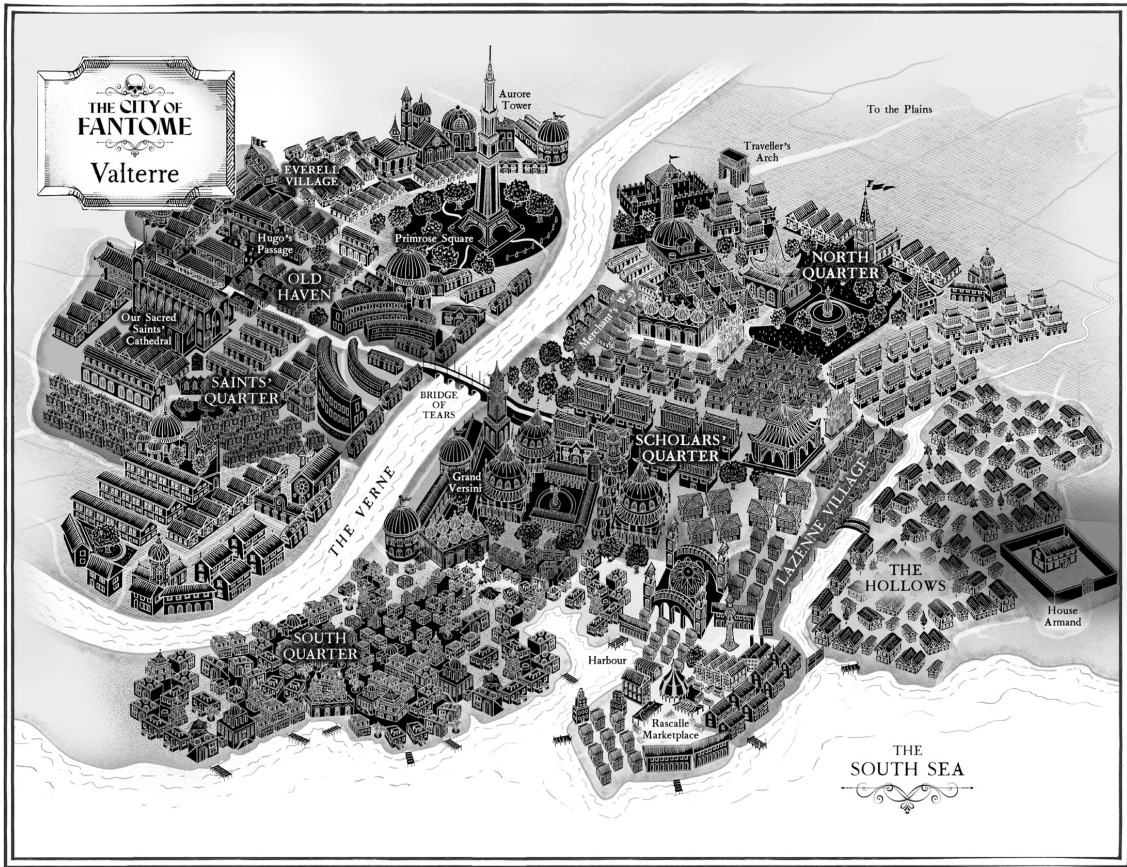
‘Stunning, thrilling, and devastatingly romantic. *The Dagger and the Flame* is guaranteed to be your new obsession.’ – Katherine Webber, co-author of *Twin Crowns*



**THE  
DAGGER  
AND THE  
FLAME**

**CATHERINE  
DOYLE**

SIMON & SCHUSTER



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

## LIST OF PLAYERS



### **ORDER OF THE DAGGERS**

Hugo Ralphe 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

Out 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.

**One year later**



# Chapter 1

## Seraphine

It was midnight in the city of Fantome, and Seraphine Marchant was running for her life. Pippin was doing his best to keep up. They were following the Verne, the pebble-grey river that wound through the heart of Fantome like an artery. From the arched stone entrance on the outskirts of the city, it led them through the north quarter and onto Merchant's Way, where the taverns were lit and bustling, echoing with the caterwauls of drunk sailors.

Seraphine barely noticed them. It was the beginning of autumn, and a light rain was falling. It kissed her cheeks, mingling with her tears. Her chest burned, as though a fist was closing around her heart, but she didn't dare slow down. She could still smell the smoke that had driven them from their farmhouse only hours ago. It coiled in her hair and sat heavy in her lungs.

*Keep moving, she told herself. Don't look back.*

Every time a memory of the fire reared up, Seraphine shook it off violently, but the flashbacks were becoming harder to ignore. The shock was fading. Beneath it waited a rising swell of grief and anger. Questions tumbled over one another, demanding to be answered.

*Don't stop. Don't think.*

Beside her on the street, Pippin was splashing in and out of puddles, trying to cool his singed tail. Soon, his shaggy grey face was sopping. Seraphine tried to pick him up, but he wriggled free.

'Little gremlin.' She sniffed. 'Have it your way.'

*Saints*, her legs ached, and her body was so tired all her bones felt like lead. She wished she was riding Scout, the dappled mare's strides sure and quick beneath her, but the fire



had sent Seraphine's beloved horse fleeing through the fields and there hadn't been time to look for her. It was too late to turn back now. Seraphine herself should have been dead by now. But Saint Oriel of Destiny clearly had other plans for her.

Though Seraphine hadn't grown up in the bustle of Valterre's capital city, she had visited Fantome so many times that she knew the street layout like her favourite constellations, and knew how dangerous they became when the sun went down.

When she was a little girl, Mama used to bring her into the city every Sunday. They would set out from their farmhouse in the plains at first light, taking a wagon to arrive in the city by late morning. At the harbour market, Mama would buy a pocketful of jam-and-custard pastries and they would wander along the Verne, giggling as they licked the sugar from their fingers.

Afterwards, they would browse for hours at Babette's House of Books, Seraphine selecting a well-thumbed fairy tale, while Mama – always clever, and forever straining beyond the reaches of her imagination – pored over yellowed encyclopaedias about alchemy and invention, with text so small Seraphine had to squint to read it.

When the street lanterns flickered to life and the air chilled, they would head home, Mama's hand tight around Seraphine's as they left the darkening city behind them. For it was in the falling shadows of Fantome that the Cloaks and Daggers roamed. The rival guilds, one of thieves and the other of assassins, were both powered by Shade – the only magic the once-blessed Kingdom of Valterre had left at its fingertips. Shade was a substance, controlled by those brave enough to step, or foolish enough to fall, into the underworld. The fine black powder was a mundane substance, unworthy of the divine majesty of Valterre's long-dead saints, those twelve magic-borne figures who had founded the city over a thousand years ago, filled it with life and beauty, made it glitter like a sea of stars.

Shade was the dust that lost golden age had left behind. A volatile substance that bent shadows to the will of man. For those skilled in the art of dark magic and trained by the Orders, Shade could be used to steal. To spy. To kill. To avenge. To survive.

The Daggers consumed Shade in small doses, temporarily turning their bodies into deadly weapons where one touch alone could kill. The Cloaks never consumed Shade. Rather, they wore it, allowing them to blend in with the night and take from it whatever

they wished. They might have considered themselves nobler than their rivals, but to dance with Shade at all was to tempt fate.

Mama's job as a smuggler meant that Seraphine had lived in close proximity to Shade her whole life. Both as the boneshade plant, raw and trailing roots when it arrived from the far hills of Valterre, and as the fine black powder it became once Mama had painstakingly baked and ground the plant into dust.

Seraphine had filled more vials with Shade than she could count, but she had never dared experiment with it herself. Even the touch of the glass felt like ice against her fingers. A cold breath of warning. Then there was Mama's guiding voice, always close to her ear as they worked side by side at their workbench, reminding Seraphine that while Shade was what they did, it was not who they were.

*We are merely the go-betweens, little firefly. Nothing more, nothing less.*

But that wasn't really true. There was no in between with Shade. Playing with magic was like playing with fire, and in the end someone always got burned.

The Age of Saints was long over.

At night, the Cloaks and Daggers owned the city. Mama always knew to keep well away from them and having grown up in her shadow, never far from the cold slick of Shade, Seraphine did too.

As she got older, their trips to the city became fewer and less frequent, as though Mama feared they might be snatched off the street, even in daylight. Better not to be there at all, if they could help it. Better to be nestled in a faraway farmhouse than darting through murky, shadow-swept streets, where anyone – even one of the king's nightguards – could find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mama had spent most of her life looking over her shoulder, and yet, in spite of all her caution, she had run afoul of the guilds at last.

*But why now?* The question nipped at Seraphine's heels.

*Stop,* she hissed to herself. *Don't look back.*

The night had fallen silent, and her thoughts were too loud. Memories crowded in on her, catching her by the throat. She slowed down when she reached the Scholars' Quarter, fighting the rising urge to retch. Towering, opulent buildings peered down at her, their beautiful stained-glass windows like wide, prying eyes.

*What are you running from, Seraphine Marchant?* she imagined them whispering.

She hated hearing the thunder of her own heartbeat, the chatter of fear in her teeth. In the main square, she slumped onto a bench under a pear tree, clutching the armrest with whitened knuckles. The fire was still crackling in her head, and there, between the violent whips of red and gold... lay Mama.

The memory rose like a tidal wave, and in the sudden stillness, Seraphine could do nothing but yield to it.

*The setting sun gilded the cornfields as Seraphine and Pippin trudged home without a single measly rabbit to show for their hunt. Not that they hadn't enjoyed themselves, racing each other through the hills. Seraphine had stopped to tumble down the highest of them just to see if she could roll faster than Pip, and find out how much grass she could collect in her teeth. A lot, as it turned out. In her fist now, she clutched a bouquet of bluebells, a gift for Mama, to thank her for giving her the afternoon off. A bribe, perhaps, for tomorrow's freedom.*

*They turned at a familiar bend in the road, and at the sight of smoke pluming in the distance, Pip set off into a run. Seraphine laughed at the mutt's sudden sprightliness, sure she had run him ragged in the fields. But the sound died in her throat as she ventured closer, into the thickening haze. The cloud was too dark for chimney smoke, too high and black and choking and—Seraphine dropped the flowers.*

*She bolted for home, lungs aching, heart pounding. As she cleared the last of the low hills, she saw the flames that brewed the smoke. They made a violent ring around her house, like a dragon come to devour it. There was such a roaring in Seraphine's head, she forgot to breathe.*

*The flames parted as though she had willed them with the strength of her horror. And there, beyond the open doorway of the farmhouse lay her mother. Already dead. Already burning.*

*It was no dragon that Seraphine saw standing over her, but the figure of a man. A shape she did not recognize. Tall and broad-shouldered with a sweep of wavy hair. His face was wreathed in smoke, except for a pair of violent, quicksilver eyes.*

*The roaring gathered in Seraphine's throat, choking her. Or perhaps that was the smoke. She didn't care as she stumbled towards the doorway, towards her mother's killer. He was already turning away from Mama's body, slipping his hands into his pockets as though he*

*might take a stroll in the back garden. As though he did this kind of thing every day of his life.*

*And she knew, saints, she knew, exactly what he was.*

*An assassin, brewed in the dark heart of Fantome and sent here by Gaspard Dufort, the infamous leader of the Order of Daggers.*

*Mama had been marked.*

*If it wasn't for Pippin whining and tugging at the hem of her trousers, Seraphine would have flung herself into the fire just to claw the Dagger back. But the dog at her ankle was enough to stop her, to kindle in her some vital instinct to run.*

*To run and run and never stop.*

Now, in the stark silence of the square, Seraphine let the memory wash over her, knowing it would return again to ravage the shores of her soul. That question, like a shark in its belly.

*Oh, Mama. What did you do?*

She dropped her head and tried to breathe, but she couldn't get enough air. Her head was too heavy, and her heart had been sliced right down the middle. If she stood up now, it would fall apart inside her chest.

Pippin yipped at her feet. She ignored him. He darted under the bench, and spun around so that she could see his tired little face peering up at her. She squeezed her eyes shut. 'No, Pip. I'm too tired.'

Pippin nudged her ankle, then yipped again, as if to say, *Get moving!*

Relentless little gremlin. Seraphine groaned. If she gave up now, simply collapsed on the bench and waited for the same evil that had taken Mama to come for her too, then what would become of Pippin? She was all he had left. She raised her head and raked her hands through her hair. The city blurred into focus – the soft green of the pear tree, the cool touch of the wrought-iron bench.

She gripped the golden teardrop that hung from her neck, and reached for a different memory of her mother. Not as she had been that evening but on the morning of Saints' Day a month before. Mama had stayed up all night to craft the necklace, pressing it into Seraphine's hands like a talisman just after sunrise.

*Happy Saintsmas, my little firefly.* Mama's brown eyes were tired, but her smile was bright.