

MISSUS MOONEY'S HALFPENNY DREADFULS PRESENTS



*The Curse
of
Persephone Templar*

A PENNY DREADFUL BY PATRICIA MISKIMINS

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The Curse Of Persephone Templar

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This is the story of Persephone Templar, great niece to Eudora Templar matriarch of the Templar family.

Percey as she preferred to be called had lived with her father at the Templar manor house-for the first six years of her life. By the age of seven she and her father moved to a dwelling above a book store her father owned on Wych St, in London. The store was a wondrous place filled with books of antiquity, religious writings and pagan rituals, but Percey had innately been drawn to her father's private collection of the paranormal, spells and the strange and alluring stories of Greek gods.

Simeon Templar, a book trader and seller for the elite society of Britain often travelled for days on end leaving Percey to her own thoughts and fantasies as she scoured the books from his private collection.

Simeon Templar loved his only child deeply even though her birth brought about the demise of his beloved wife Leah. Their love was very much frowned upon by his Aunt Eudora who raised him after the early death of his own mother. Simeon had never gotten to know his mother and was still perplexed even after many years as to the strange and unresolved malady that the doctor could never explain. Simeon had often wished Percey had been born a boy. Not because he didn't wish to have a dear daughter such as her but because from the time of Percey's birth, he knew he would have to give her up to the purpose for which she was born. He had always known she carried in her blood the Templar curse from which he had in some way tried to shield her from until now.

A fortnight before her birthday, Percey received an invitation that was not to be refused. An invitation to celebrate her twenty first birthday and, as the message read, 'her coming of age'. She did not wish to accept the invitation however her father had made her agree she would attend before he left on one of his travels for trading. The next morning as Percey prepared for her trip to Templar Manor, there was a nagging feeling of foreboding that stirred within her.

As the carriage was packed by the coachman Percey settled in for the long journey from London to the edge of the Surrey hills. The rocking motion of the carriage lulled Percey into a restless sleep. As the carriage came to a halt Persephone was jolted from her restless sleep wrought with strange figures and symbols. She was relieved to be awake as the dreams had been very disturbing and unnerving adding to her earlier uneasiness.

The hurried voice of the coachman shook Percey from her thoughts. The door opened, a hand was extended to her and with a deep breath that shook her insides; she took the offering and stepped out of the carriage.

"Good afternoon Miss Persephone, my name is Victor, I am Miss Eudora's butler, please follow me into the Manor where your great aunt is waiting.

Templar Manor was a dark and ominous building perched on a hill in the Surrey countryside, emerging through the overgrown bushes and trees, unsightly and grey. Once again Percey tried to brush aside the all too familiar unhealthy stirring in her belly. As dreadful as it seemed she somehow felt she was home. Walking across the rugged stone walkway, two ravens flew low and landed on either side of Percey and though they startled her, she was only curious of their closeness to her.

As they approached the heavy wooden front door, it slowly opened to reveal a tall boney woman in a voluminous black taffeta dress giving form to the otherwise frail body; a lace veil partially covering her face added mystery to her appearance. In the instant of looking upon the face of her great aunt, Percey had flashes of her early childhood spent living in the manor house, and the strange things she felt and heard as a small child before her father took her to live in London so that he could pursue his interest in trading and selling his beloved books.

“Hello Persephone my dear, I have waited such a long time to see you again, please, come in” said her aunt as she stepped aside allowing Percey to enter. Her long dress rustled in the movement and small black shoes peaked out from under the skirt.

“That will be all Victor,” said Eudora Templar, “please ask Phoebe to bring us tea in the parlour”.

“Yes Miss Eudora, straight away ma’am” said Victor as he disappeared down a hall to the kitchen where his wife Phoebe, the cook and housemaid, was busy preparing a platter of cold sliced mutton, cheese and fresh baked bread. As she reached for the tray to place the food on, she implored Victor to tell her about Miss Persephone. Phoebe had heard much talk lately between Victor and Miss Eudora about this young woman and was quite eager to have conversation with her, to find if what she has heard could possibly be true.

Miss Eudora settled Percey into a chair in the dimly lit parlour, silence fell on them like the heavy London fog and Percey longed for her father to be with her. She drifted back into her thoughts, wishing to be in their London flat, comfortable and alone with her books. The silence was suddenly broken with the entrance of Phoebe carrying a heavy tea tray and Aunt Eudora announcing, "That will be all Phoebe, you and Victor may retire for the evening."

"Thank you ma'am, have a good evening. And to you too Miss Persephone, goodnight." Phoebe was eager to leave as she did not like to be in the manor house after dark. Any conversation she hoped to have with Miss Persephone would have to wait for the morrow.

The evening seemed to linger on for an eternity and the conversation was strained as Eudora spoke to Percey vaguely of the plans she had made in regards to the twenty first birthday celebration. Once again the foreboding rose in Percy. She feared the unknown and instinctively knew the baneful feelings she carried in her soul her entire life were about to intensify.

Her aunt's preparations for Persephone to continue the cycle, one Eudora Templar herself had carried were moving forward and in light of her own diminishing powers due to age, and the fact Eudora had not given birth to a daughter Persephone was the next female heir and the ritual of succession was upon her.

As the evening ended, Eudora guided Percey to the second floor bedroom where Percey's carpet bag had been unpacked and her few belongings neatly placed in the tallboy.

“Sleep well, Persephone. I have business to attend to most days; however, I will be with you for evening tea.” Eudora turned and silently closed the door as she left.

Percey sat on the large four poster bed, feeling unsettled and tired, hoping sleep would not elude her. The room, despite being papered in pink Victorian roses felt gloomy and carried a slight musty odour. The dark green draperies tightly closed kept out the sound of the brisk wind blowing in from the far off sea. Percey slept fitfully waking often from dreams of darkness and fear. This feeling never seemed to leave her, she carried things that she just instinctively knew and now here in her great aunts home, she could not put aside what her instinct was telling her. The morning dawned with a shrouded sun and Percey forced herself to prepare for the day ahead. She took her breakfast of eggs and bread in the kitchen while Phoebe chattered almost endlessly about her life and of servitude to Miss Eudora.

“I do beg pardon Miss Persephone, I have had a good natter with you but now I must get to the chores at hand”, and with that Phoebe picked up her feather duster and disappeared into the parlour.

Percey took a stroll out to the overgrown gardens in hopes of clearing her head in the cool, fresh morning air. Aimlessly following a small path, to her great surprise, she came into direct contact with a handsome young man. Stumbling over her own feet and falling forward, she is caught in his strong, tanned arms.

“Oh, I do beg your pardon sir, I am very sorry.” exclaimed Percey to the young man. “Very clumsy of me to fall over my own feet” she said with a nervous giggle.

“Not to worry, Miss Templar, I fear I may have startled you completely!”

“How do you know my name?” asked Percey.

“I am the grounds keeper for Miss Eudora, I was told of your arrival. I have worked here for a short time and I am doing battle with these overgrown tangles of bushes.”

“I’m sorry Miss Templar, excuse my lack of manners, my name is Elijah Morgan, and I’m pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Percey in embarrassment and interest responded with “likewise” and after what seemed a very long time of eyes fixed on one another excused herself and carried on with her walk along the path. Unbeknownst to her, prying eyes were watching the interaction from behind the lace curtains of a second floor window and slowly the thin lips of Eudora Templar formed a smile of quiet anticipation. It had begun!

Percey made her way to the edge of the property and sat resting under a great old oak tree and surveyed her surroundings with interest. There appeared to be a circle of worn grass and a large stone shaped much like a table in the middle.

“Such a curious thing” thought Percey but soon, thoughts of Elijah crowded her mind as she reflected on his captivating eyes, pools of bottomless darkness, reaching into her very soul, and reading her mind. As if he could see her completely stripped, knowing all her secrets and desires. It was unnerving to Percey but a shiver of excitement rushed her unexpectedly.

The following days were filled with discoveries of childhood hiding places in the large gardens, late night secret meetings with Elijah by the old oak tree on the edge of Templar estates and sleep filled with more unnerving, strange dreams.

Elijah, a strong handsome man of infinite knowledge and mysterious ways, longed to love Percey completely and it was near impossible to resist Percey’s tender kisses and imploring embraces, but he knew it was not time for such happenings. He must not tarnish this beautiful, alluring virgin woman yet he longed to continue their nightly meetings.

With her birthday nearing, Percey wrote a letter to her father who had finally returned to their London flat. In the letter she implored him to please come and be with her. She missed her father and dearly wished to tell him of the man who had stolen her heart away. Days passed but never was there a reply to her letter. One evening laying on the grass under a moonlit sky, in the arms of the man she had come to love so deeply she pondered the subject of their romance, “where is this taking us Elijah?” she asked. Elijah pulled Percey close to him and answered her with a fiery kiss.

“Soon my darling, I will take you away. We will be together until....” He did not finish the sentence, instead he held her close and in her innocence, Percey felt she would be with Elijah for ever.

The morning of Percey's birthday dawned warm but the darkened clouds threatened a looming storm and several ravens circled about the gardens, their cawing appeared to herald the arrival of something dark and obscure. Eudora Templar's plan had been unfolding as expected. Percey would not be sharing morning laughter with Phoebe in the kitchen as had become her habit, today she would breakfast with Eudora. Percey, sitting at the great dining table, felt tension rising in her chest as she waited for Eudora to speak.

"This evening we will be having company to celebrate your birthday Persephone", she said. "We will be conducting a ceremony in celebration of your coming of age". "I have taken the liberty of choosing a gown for you to wear". Percey's heart dropped; she felt burdened with the plans her great aunt had for her.

As the evening skies darkened Percey slowly dressed in the white gossamer gown set out for her. The softness of the fine fabric fell gently, offering glimpses of the beauty of Percey's delicate body, her facial features framed in loose curls of golden red hair. She was the embodiment of youth, perfection incarnate. Percey made her way to the door where upon opening it, Victor was standing waiting. "I shall escort you Miss Persephone, Miss Templar is waiting for you in the parlour," the time had come.

Eudora sat somberly as she waited, recounting to herself the time of her rite of passage all those years ago and how despite trying to fight off her feelings she eventually gave in to the secret love of her handsome groundskeeper on the family estate.

Now that her time was over the ritual was to begin again. The long black robe she wore featured a large hood which overwhelmed her small stature and the metal amulet crusted in black and red stones hanging on a chain from her neck gave way to a very ominous appearance.

Victor guided Percey into the parlour and with a quick bow, silently left the room.

“My dear Persephone, you look so beautiful” remarked Eudora.

Percey closed her eyes momentarily to the sight of her aunt in front of her but opened them with boldness and implored her aunt not to go through with this; whatever “this” was to be.

Eudora dismissed her words; she had always known this day would come when Persephone would take her place. So it was written, so it shall be, and with a taking of Percey’s hand she lead her out the front door and down the path to the strange flat rock by the ancient oak tree.

The scene was surreal with hundreds of candles flickering in a circle around the flattened grasses, men in hooded robes chanting in a low droning tone.

At this very moment Persephone instinctively knew what was happening. This was her initiation, the completion one more time of the Templar curse that she had always felt and known in her heart. This was her life’s reason unto which she was born, her path to follow and with a short struggle she gave in to acceptance and allowed herself to be taken to the stone alter like a sacrificial lamb.

Facing the robed men Percey recognized Victor and then her eyes lay upon the grieved face of her father. "Father" she cried out. "Please, break the wicked circle and save me from this destiny, I beg of you!"

Simeon Templar's eyes grew large as he made a motion to step forward, but was held back by those standing beside him.

"Percey" he cried out in anguish, "I am sorry!" and as he dropped to his knees sobbing.

Eudora Templar raised her arms and spoke words completely unknown to Percey. The chanting began again and the candles burned brighter than before. The sound of thunder was heard in the distance.

Persephone's heart raced, her mind swirling in terror, her breath shallow and uncontrolled. She was terrified and weeping in fear when suddenly in front of her appeared her secret lover. She called out his name and Elijah took her into his arms. He kissed her with a passion Percey had never felt before and she melted into his embrace allowing him to left her and gently lay her on the stone alter. He caressed her body, his black eyes burning into her soul. Suddenly her terror gave way to a passion intensifying deep within as she opened herself to him and allowed him to sweep her into the depth of his love.

Everything and everyone around her swirled into a dizzying blur as she felt an explosion of pain and an intense sense of joy in that moment. She moaned Elijah's name and in her desire, opened her eyes to gaze upon his lovely face only to find a winged, hoofed unknown on top of her.

She screamed in terror at the sight then instantly closed her eyes and mind to the horror of what was happening. Once again she could feel the caresses and passion of Elijah and melted into his embrace pushing aside the horrid hallucination she had seen. Slowly Persephone opened her eyes to find Elijah beside her. Had all this been a dream?

As Elijah and Persephone rose from the alter Persephone could not help but be drawn to her aunt Eudora, holding in her hands a stone that appeared to be glowing red.

Her aunt raised her arms and with the words "hail to the new Queen" threw the stone to the ground where it burst into a cloud of red hot dust. At that same moment Eudora Templar crumbled into ashes as did Victor Roswell, Simeon Templar and all the other robed men.

Persephone gasped in horror her eyes as large as saucers she stared in shock as Elijah picked up Eudora's amulet lying in the ashes. He gently waved it in the air to cool it down before motioning to Persephone that he wished to place it around her neck. She stepped toward Elijah and he placed the chained amulet over her head. Suddenly they were both surrounded by a thick hot mist and as the ravens cawed they completely disappeared into the underworld.

ONE YEAR LATER.....

In the second floor nursery of Templar Manor Persephone gently rocks the cradle of her three month old daughter Melanie Eudora Templar. Humming a tune of sunshine and meadows, Persephone realizes it is the same tune her Aunt Eudora hummed to her as a child. A gentle knock sounds on the door of the nursery and the ever faithful Phoebe brings a tea tray to Persephone.

“Here is your tea Missus, and some fresh baked bread with strawberry preserves.” Percey smiles as Phoebe sets the tray on a small table.

“How lovely you look this morning ma’am, I trust you slept well, and look at this wee girl, she is a real beauty!” Percey smiles again and agrees, as Phoebe excuses herself closing the door to the nursery quietly behind her.

Melanie coos at her mother, her large, dark, mysterious eyes reaching deep into Percey’s soul. Percey knows her daughter will continue the bloodline of her mother, the defender and patron of the Templar curse.

This may be a story with no ending....

Persephone's Sonnet

Hail Hades, your Queen is on the rise.

I am gone, but not in peaceful sleep,

My human memories I cannot keep.

I abide in worlds far below,

Dank and dark, black like coal.

Clopping hooves sound out on stone,

Hissing, squealing, I am not alone.

A growl rises from further deep,

I wait and listen, no breath to keep.

Gnarled fingers reach out, unaware

Of cold and heat collecting there,

Swift is the clutch of death's embrace,

I the Queen of the Underworld now take my place.