

tellulah
darling

**MY EX
FROM
HELL**

Book One in



The
Blooming
Goddess
Trilogy

When the going gets desperate, the desperate send email

To: ????

From: bloominggoddess@gmail.com

Subject: Seriously?

Dear Your Royal Imperialness Demeter, Goddess of Grain and Fertility, Preserver of Marriage, and Bringer of Seasons,

Or can I just call you Mom?

Bet you never thought you'd be hearing from me. Sorry for not having written sooner, but until about twelve hours ago, I didn't know you existed. Nothing personal.

See, yesterday, I was plain old Sophie Bloom. My life sucked in your typical 16-year-old ways. I was stuck here at Hope Park Progressive School on probation *again* ("mouthy behavior"), dealing with cliquish poseurs, rampant hormones, blah blah blah.

Then I met a guy. I know that's the worst cliché ever. But sadly, it's true. And of course, me being me, he couldn't be just any bad boy. No. He had to be Kai, son of Hades, Lord of the Underworld. Anyway, he was really hot and there was this bone-melting kiss and ... whatever. The point is, before he showed up, I thought I was human. Afterward, well, let's just say everything changed. Who knew when I was cramming Greek mythology for my English final, I was studying the family tree?

They say when you die, your whole life supposedly

flashes before your eyes. When Kai and I kissed, here's what flashed before mine—Mount Olympus, Zeus, the Underworld, Hades, and you. But that wasn't my life. Or was it?

Here's the Wiki version. (Do you have Wi-Fi on Mt. Olympus?) Turns out I'm Persephone. Me, Goddess of Spring and Embodiment of Earth's Fertility? Ew! Which makes me your kid, Hades' target, and totally screwed. In the myth version, I'm the innocent maiden, you're the grieving mother, and we're reunited with great joy. Guess that's why they call it a myth.

I know I sound like a nut bar. And maybe I'll wake up in a padded room restrained for my own safety. But in that moment with Kai, it felt *real*. Like I knew who I was. Or used to be. Those were *my* memories flashing before my eyes—not some fantasy or hallucination. Part of me remembered those moments. But where do I go from here? And is there an online tutorial I can take?

I don't exactly have your email. But if you're a goddess, maybe you'll know I'm writing. That I really need my mom right now. And if not—well, I guess I'll save this for my obituary. Which I'll probably need pretty soon because of the gods-wanting-me-dead thing.

Take care.
Sophie

a.k.a. Persephone
a.k.a. Goddess of Spring
a.k.a. Your Daughter

1

All's fair in high school and war

α'

Let me state, on the record, that despite that super melodramatic email, I am totally sane. Well, as sane as I can be for a sixteen-year-old. I've just had the day from Hell. Literally.

I should back up. Hi. I'm Sophie Amalia Bloom. Longtime human, first time goddess. How would I describe myself? Hmmm. If my life was going to be a movie—do you ever do that? Rescript your personal history with a great soundtrack and better extras? My dream version would be courtesy of Tim Burton but I think the sad truth is that the movie of my life would be a lame after-school special.

You know, something like “poor little rich girl, her life littered with hopes and dreams.” I love “littered with;” such over-the-top drunk divorcée lingo, uttered right before the aging cougar smashes her cocktail into the fireplace. Just how my adoptive, socialite mother Felicia ended every New Year's Eve. But we have plenty of time to get into moms and their respective failings.

My life in a nutshell on Saturday, October 31, when my universe turned upside down, involved me being a

totally human junior at Hope Park; a “progressive” day and boarding school whose forward-thinking curriculum was offset by the students’ petty jealousies, social climbing, and the ongoing dramas of hook-ups and break-ups.

The only bright spot was that it was Halloween. Sure, it meant a dance with far too many dumb boys in drag (acting out some of their not-so-latent sexual issues), but it also meant chocolate.

And dressing up.

And revenge.

Cue horror music and the entrance of the dreaded yoga girls. The leader of that “namaste” bowing bitch-fest was one Bethany Russo-Hill. For all her practice of enlightenment through bendiness, she ran her ~~cult~~ yoga sessions like a drill sergeant. Girls had been known to come out sobbing because their sun salutation wasn’t worshipful enough.

To say I hated that red-haired, black-souled cow would be an understatement. My greatest fantasy was to poison Bethany slowly, then let her get better before administering a really nasty dose that left her dead and rigor mortised in a humiliating position. Emphasis on the humiliation. The dead would be a happy bonus.

Since she had been at Hope Park as long as I had, Bethany and I had a nice long run together. It wasn’t any one big torment, just a continual series of small cruelties. But as Bethany was Miss School Spirit, managing to fool the Powers That Be with her big blue eyes and Googled new age crap, I was the one currently on probation due to my attitude problem.

But thanks to some laxatives, a wig, and one unforgettable kiss, the balance of power was about to shift.

See, for the past twenty-four hours, Bethany had been going on and on about some town boy she'd met on a field trip. Apparently he was so hot, she'd set up a drunken midnight rendezvous with him.

I caught this dirt as I was coming out of the principal's office having been lectured once again on the importance of cooperation and getting along with one's classmates. Oh, and I had earned that probation status I mentioned, due to an earlier encounter with Bethany that was just now screwing me over.

Bethany had seen me chewing on the end of my pencil and spread the rumor that I liked to "suck wood." Charming. So I went up to her and told her that she might like some tips since the only way she'd ever get ahead in this world was on the basis of her oral dexterity. Guess which one of us was overheard.

All this to say, I'd had enough of her Bindi-wearing rule of tyranny. As Bethany seemed so excited about her little tryst, I could think of no better plan (well, not on such short notice anyway) than to wreck it for her.

Laxatives ground into the bottle of vodka she planned to get hammered on before the dance: ten dollars. Bribe money for Stan the janitor to go out and buy me a wig in town that exactly matched Bethany's dark red hair: twenty dollars. The joy of impersonating Bethany and making her out to be a giant twat? Priceless.

The plan was to sabotage her hook up with a poo party. Not only would she miss the midnight meeting,

but if I was lucky, she'd experience loud, gaseous humiliation. Meanwhile, dressed in my Bethany yoga costume (which would irritate the hell out of her), *I* would go find the guy at the meeting spot by the back fence and make such a fool of my Bethany persona that he'd never want to see *her* again. Brilliant, right?

The first up in the naysayer parade was my best friend, Hannah Nygard. If Hollywood ever drove a money truck up to my door and begged to make the aforementioned movie of my life, Hannah wouldn't even need beefed up stunt casting, thanks to her genetically superior Swedish good looks. Yes, of the tall, blonde, leggy, chesty variety. She even has perfect posture.

'Course, when I met Hannah, we were both six and she was covered in dirt and letting black ants run over her arms. She's a big science geek. Had I known that she'd become this bright, glorious sun and I'd be the space junk trailing in her wake, I might have had second thoughts about sharing my Creamsicle with her on that first day. But maybe not.

Me, on the other hand? I'd need an A-list actress to replace my low-rent, cable-show-passable normalcy. Average height, average brown hair, below average chest. As for my wardrobe: I went for funky comfort over flaunt my booty. Honestly, what would be the point? I'd still be more "kinder" than "whore." Leggings stuffed into flat boots with short skirts and layered shirts suited me fine.

Apparently, though, there was still hope for me. I had this on good authority from my adoptive mother Felicia, who turned to me last summer and pronounced: "I've

seen a lot of uggos, kid. And you're not going to be one of them. There's a pretty good chance you'll grow into your looks." Textbook positive parenting. I would have run to Daddy for an ego boost, but since that position had been filled by a revolving door of stepfathers, it was kind of a no go.

Felicia would never have said that about Hannah. The two of us were as different as best friends could be. Fabugeek and the average kid. And fabugeek was currently oozing anxiety. To a casual observer, it would just look like Hannah was scarfing M&Ms. But I knew her. And her scarfing was done with an attitude of extreme worry.

I studiously ignored her as I placed a couple of bowel blowout tablets between two pieces of paper towel on my worn, wooden desk.

"I'm not sure this is a good idea ..." she began, sprawled across her bed on her side of the room, dressed in her standard jeans and geeky science T-shirt. Today's read "Darwin is my homie-nid."

Breezily, I cut her off. "Sure, it is. With any luck, by this time tomorrow, Bethany will be gone."

Hannah gasped. "Sophie!"

I rolled my eyes. "Not dead, dummy." Although a girl could dream. "Just gone. Expelled for drunk and disod-orly."

Hannah didn't even snicker at my pun. "I don't know. What if something goes wrong with the dosage? What if she dehydrates?" Hannah was the biggest softy ever. Unlike me and my running character assassination monologue, she found the good in everyone. Usually

worried about them, too. Unless there was the off chance of somebody being mauled by a shark, dismembered by lions, or ravaged by fire ants. Then it was all food chains and nature's balance. Girlfriend's love of wildlife wandered into extreme bloodlust territory.

I turned puppy dog eyes on her and put on my most pathetic voice. "Don't you want her bullying to stop?"

She folded her arms crossly, opened her mouth to speak and—

"You know that only makes your boobs look bigger, right?"

Hannah hurriedly uncrossed her arms. She curled into a dejected little ball, even crinkling her candy packaging in a pathetic way.

I felt awful. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Hannah rose with a grin, sticking her tongue out at me. "Ha! You're so gullible."

I really was. Muttering something about "with friends like these," I raised the boot in my hand to bring down upon the unsuspecting pills.

"No!"

"Seriously?"

Hannah shook her head at me in exasperation. "Not 'no, don't.' No, don't use your boot. You'll just grind the pill dust into the treads. Use my Exacto knife."

I obediently retrieved the knife, which was easy to find due to its place on Hannah's side of the room. It was pretty obvious who slept on which side. Hannah's half was meticulous, with reference books, telescope, microscope, and field hockey equipment all in its place. My

side wasn't so much messy as haphazard. It was filled with random stuff I'd deemed cool or important over the years; a Tamagotchi (long dead due to excessive beatings and candy feedings), the bouquet Hannah and Theo had given me for my sixteenth birthday, now dried, the Dr. Seuss book "Fox In Socks," of which I had a dim but happy memory of being read to by Felicia. Stuff like that.

The entire room was raspberry, since once you hit high school, students were allowed to choose their own paint colors for their walls. A girly delight. Or a dark berry nightmare, depending on the light. Over the years, both Hannah and I had threatened to paint the entire thing white but laziness won out. Raspberry it was.

Hannah continued with her directions as I hesitated over the pills with the knife. "Don't smash down. Chop. In fine motions. Also, did you calculate for milligrams versus liquid, taking body weight in as a factor?"

"Huh?" I was lost.

"Did you figure out exactly how many pills need to go into the amount of booze Bethany will be drinking, taking her weight into account so you just give her the runs. Instead of, say, death by defecation?"

"Uh, yes?"

She held out her hand imperiously. "Give me the pills."

I handed them over. "Size of bottle?" she asked.

"Mickey," I replied without hesitation. "About twelve ounces."

"How are you so sure?"

“I bribed Stan an extra ten to tell me what he’d gone into town to get her.”

“Okay. She’s about a hundred twenty so …” She did a few mental calculations. “Two more please.”

I tossed them over to her. “I so love you for your brains.”

She sighed wearily. “That’s what they all say. But in the end, it’s my beauty they clamor for.” She handed me back the pills. I placed them on top of one sheet of paper towel and took up the knife.

“Trust me,” I said, “unless I start playing for a very different team, I’ll never clamor for you.”

“You could, you know.”

I paused my chopping to throw her a weird look. She glowered at me. “Not me, obviously, because that would feel like incest—“

“Wow. Just keep sticking that foot in deeper.”

Hannah rolled her eyes in exasperation. “What I mean is that it would be okay if you liked girls.”

I put down the knife and checked the pills. Perfectly ground. “Mom, are you trying to say you’d love me even if I was Lebanese?”

“I wouldn’t love you because you annoy the crap out of me, but I would be very happy for you. As long as she’s a good person and treats you right.”

“Hannah, you’re seriously freaking me out now. Did I miss some episode of ‘A very roommate moment?’”

“It’s just that you never seem to get crushes on guys.”

“I don’t get crushes on girls, either.”

“I know. I was kinda hoping you did and just didn’t want to tell me about it.”

“One, I wouldn’t be ashamed if I did. And B, why were you hoping?”

Hannah impatiently pushed her hair off her forehead. “Because you’re sixteen and you should like someone. It’s not normal.”

That kind of rocked me. I mean, I knew most of the school thought I was weird. If they thought of me at all. But Hannah? “You think I’m a freak?” I asked carefully.

“Only sexually. Maybe physically. Definitely mentally.”

I snatched her candy away. “Bite me. Besides, who do you like? Other than possibly gay, pretty boy actors, whose pictures you like to rub up against when you think I’m asleep?”

“I so do not.”

“You rustle.”

“You’re confusing that with the sound of your waterproof sheets. For your bedwetting problem.” She threw me her best “don’t mess with my superior intellect” expression. “Besides, a gay crush means never making a fashion faux pas. Also, getting great home decorating advice for free.”

“Basically, you want an eye candy cliché,” I said.

“An eye candy cliché who I’ll have a crush on. Which, as I was saying, is normal.”

I snorted my laughter. “I bow before your logic.” I tossed some candy into my mouth and relented at Hannah’s pout to throw a few over to her. “Have you ever

considered that being stuck at Hope Park just doesn't give me many chances to meet someone who isn't a total knob? Maybe once I get out of here, I'll meet some guy and it'll be fireworks. He'll be my soulmate. The one I can't live without."

Hannah rolled over onto her stomach. "Jeez, Soph. Drama queen much? I'm just talking about liking some guy. No fireworks. Just chemistry and mutual interests and compatibility."

"You should totally write Valentine's Day cards. 'To my chemically compatible partner. Hope we enjoy a mutual interest together on this fine day.'"

She pulled her pillow, decorated with pictures of sharks, from under her belly. "Then on the back I could include the email for dad's divorce firm. Get a commission for each referral."

"Now you're thinking. I'm off to find vodka." I left the room to her protest of "leave the candy." Which I didn't. But hey. There's friendship and then there's peanuty bites of cocoa delight.

There I was, sugar blissing down the hallway and absolutely not thinking that my words about my fated soulmate were going to come back and bite me in the ass in about seven hours.

To be fair, it wasn't a long bliss out either, since the dorms at Hope Park were set in the short part of the school's L-shaped structure. Our gender-segregated bedrooms and bathrooms were separated by connecting doors on each floor that were supposed to be locked.

Hope Park may have billed itself as forward-thinking but when it came to co-habitation, it was strictly Victorian.

The school itself was a rambling three-story, red brick building nestled in Vancouver Island's Cowichan Valley, off the west coast of British Columbia. The long part of the main building greeted visitors as they came up the winding driveway. It housed the office, classrooms, gym, and cafeteria. The building was pretty airy, lots of windows—all the better to see students practically wipe out on their butts on the totally-worn-and-slippery-but-we-call-them-charming wood floors.

Felicia dumped me in this slice of rural heaven back in grade one. Most definitely as a boarder. So while I was on a first name basis with some of the cows that roamed outside school property, I couldn't always say the same about her husbands. Which was probably for the best. Why bother getting to know expendable Number Six when he was only going to be dumped for being too sporty, not sporty enough, or whatever reason Uncle Oliver cited in the divorce papers? Oliver being Felicia's lawyer and Hannah's dad.

I checked my watch. Bethany and her crew would still be at yoga, downward dogging away, so I knew I had some time to carry out my evil plan. Carefully I slid her door open.

No one bothered to lock up their rooms. For one thing, cell phones were banned (the easiest item with possible dirt on a person) and for another, most of us had the same kinds of stuff. Most of us also had roommates and really, it was very hard to keep a secret in this place.

One way or another, someone was always going to bust you. The closet kleptos were out of luck.

Bethany's room, a rare single occupancy, was a boudoir explosion. One of the wealthiest students at Hope Park, she could afford pricey lingerie and a plethora of cosmetics and designer yoga wear. It was shocking how much companies could charge for clothes made from panda food. Bethany's desire to lord this over anyone who gave a rat's ass extended to the state of her room. I was convinced she never put anything away just so unsuspecting visitors would be forced into up close and personal encounters with all of her privilege. Personally, I found it obnoxious.

Once inside, I stepped over some scarlet Victoria's Secret push-up number and went directly to the giant teddy bear propped up in the corner. I lifted it up, turning the fugly thing over to reveal the jury-rigged bungle hole that Bethany had created to stash her booze. It was all very bootlegger. With a shiver of distaste, I shoved my hand into the wrinkly fold.

Success. I pulled the bottle out of its butt. This felt so wrong on so many levels. I unscrewed the mickey of vodka, carefully opened my packet of laxative powder and—

"Sophie Amalia Bloom, you are in so much trouble!" a voice boomed. I jumped a mile, spilling some of my precious stash in the process, and turned with dread to find Theo leaning against the doorframe, busting a gut laughing.

Theo Rockman was the lone male who rounded out

Hannah's and my band of misfits. He didn't enter the picture until grade two so he was a late addition to the pack and, therefore, the most expendable. A fact we liked to remind him of when he got too mouthy.

Theo had spiky black hair to match his thick-framed black glasses and was the kind of guy who wore his wallet on a chain attached to his belt loops. He was the ruffled poster child for charming "nerd-chic." Or a living anime character. He was a little touchy about that comparison though, so I only used it for maximum annoyance.

Theo's parents had died. At least, I think they had. It was never discussed. Except this one time when he was drunk. I assumed (and yes, insert "ass", "u", "me" here) that his mom was some hippy chick because he kept calling her an earth goddess. All I pictured were hairy legs, sensible footwear, and baking bread. I wouldn't have talked about her either.

"You rat bastard ..." I began, desperately trying to scoop up all the spilled powder. "Do something useful and hold this." I shoved the mickey at him.

He glanced at the bottle in surprise as he pushed his glasses back up his nose. "Vodka? Thought she'd be more of a peach cooler girl." He launched into his "commercial voice." "Parents, do your daughters come home smelling like an orchard? Is their giggle quotient higher than usual? They may be in thrall to the dangerous wine cooler. Gateway drug of the terminally insecure, its usage results in excessive clumsiness and the condition 'trophy wife-itis.' The lethality of which only manifests after age thirty-five and ends in gutter living and suicide."

By this point, I was trying not to pee, I was laughing so hard. “Shut up,” I hissed.

He shot me an innocent smile. I added the remainder of the laxative powder to the alcohol. Theo screwed the cap back on and I motioned for him to give it a good shake.

“Neither sleet, nor snow, nor fear of expulsion can keep our heroine from carrying out her incredibly stupid plan,” he said.

“Well, you’re aiding and abetting now, Einstein. So just stuff good time Charley there back up Teddy and Operation Screw Bethany will be in full swing.”

We put everything back in its place and exited the room without being caught. “You really think this is a bad idea?” I asked.

“No. Gastric blowout goes great with probation. Unless you want to stay under the radar and not get kicked out.”

“Yeah. Too late for limboing under Big Brother. The pills are dissolving as we speak.” I wrinkled my nose. “Nothing is going to go wrong.”

“Except the part that has ‘complete mess’ written all over it.”

“Which part?”

“Pick one.” Theo flinched as I punched his shoulder. “You figure out how to jimmy the bathroom lock yet, Sophie Magoo?” he asked, using his nickname for me.

“I could use a bit more tutoring.”

“Come on, then. If you’re determined to do this, better get you in and out as fast as possible.”

I linked arms with him. “Thanks, Theo. I appreciate you sharing your criminal skills.”

“Don’t say I never did anything for you.”

Off we went. I felt great. I had a plan and it seemed as if this time, Dame Fortune was going to smile upon me.

Substitute “laugh” for smile, and you’d have been closer.