

IS LOVE LOST FOREVER?

SNEAK PEEK INSIDE

UNFORGIVEN



RAPTURE

A FALLEN NOVEL

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LAUREN KATE

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Praise for the FALLEN Series
Extract from UNFORGIVEN
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About the Book

The sky is dark with wings . . .

And time is running out for Luce and Daniel.

In order to stop Lucifer from erasing the past, they must find the place where the Fall began. Only Luce can break the curse, and it is her choice alone that will decide all of their fates.

But as Dark Forces gather, great sacrifices will have to be made in this final, epic struggle . . .

In the fight for Luce, and for Love, who will win?

RAPTURE



A FALLEN NOVEL

LAUREN KATE

RHCP DIGITAL

FOR JASON—
WITHOUT YOUR LOVE, NOTHING IS POSSIBLE.



PROLOGUE



FALLING

FIRST THERE WAS silence—

In the space between Heaven and the Fall, deep in the unknowable distance, there was a moment when the glorious hum of Heaven disappeared and was replaced by a silence so profound that Daniel's soul strained to make out any noise.

Then came the feeling of falling—a drop even his wings couldn't prevent, as if the Throne had attached moons to them. They hardly beat, and when they did, it made no impact on his fall.

Where was he going? There was nothing before him and nothing behind. Nothing up and nothing down. Only thick darkness, and the blurry outline of what was left of Daniel's soul.

In the absence of sound, his imagination took over. It filled his head with something beyond sound, something inescapable: the haunting words of Lucinda's curse.

She will die . . . She will never pass out of adolescence—will die again and again and again at precisely the moment when she remembers your choice.

You will never truly be together.

It was Lucifer's foul imprecation, his embittered addendum to the Throne's sentence passed in the Heavenly

Meadow. Now death was coming for his love. Could Daniel stop it? Would he even recognize it?

For what did an angel know of death? Daniel had witnessed it come peacefully to some of the new mortal breed called human, but death did not concern angels.

Death and adolescence: the two absolutes in Lucifer's Curse. Neither meant a thing to Daniel. All he knew was that being separated from Lucinda was not a punishment he could endure. They had to be together.

"Lucinda!" he shouted.

His soul should have warmed at the very thought of her, but there was only aching absence, an abundance of what was not.

He should have been able to sense his brethren around him—all those who'd chosen wrongly or too late; who'd made no choice at all and been cast out for their indecision. He knew that he wasn't *truly* alone; so many of them had plummeted when the cloudsoil beneath them opened up onto the void.

But he could neither see nor sense anyone else.

Before this moment, he had never been alone. Now he felt like the last angel in all the worlds.

Don't think like that. You'll lose yourself.

He tried to hold on . . . Lucinda, the Roll Call, Lucinda, the *choice* . . . but as he fell, it grew harder to remember. What, for instance, were the last words he'd heard spoken by the Throne—

The Gates of Heaven . . .

The Gates of Heaven are . . .

He could not remember what came next, could only dimly recall how the great light had flickered, and the harshest cold had swept over the Meadow, and the trees in the Orchard had tumbled into one another, causing waves of furious disturbance that were felt throughout the cosmos, tsunamis of cloudsoil that blinded the angels and crushed their glory. There had been something else,

something just before the obliteration of the Meadow, something like a—

Twinning.

A bold bright angel had soared up during the Roll Call—said he was Daniel come back from the future. There was a sadness in his eyes that had looked so . . . *old*. Had this angel—this version of Daniel’s soul—suffered deeply?

Had Lucinda?

A vast rage rose in Daniel. He would find Lucifer, the angel who lived at the dead end of all ideas. Daniel did not fear the traitor who had been the Morning Star. Wherever, whenever they reached the end of this oblivion, Daniel would take his revenge. But first he would find Lucinda, for without her, nothing mattered. Without her love, nothing was possible.

Theirs was a love that made it inconceivable to choose Lucifer or the Throne. The only side he could ever choose was hers. So now Daniel would pay for that choice, but he did not yet understand the shape his punishment would take. Only that she was gone from the place she belonged: at his side.

The pain of separation from his soul mate coursed through Daniel suddenly, sharp and brutal. He moaned wordlessly, his mind clouded over, and suddenly, frighteningly, he couldn’t remember *why*.

He tumbled onward, down through denser blackness.

He could no longer see or feel or recall how he had ended up here, nowhere, hurtling through nothingness—toward where? For how long?

His memory sputtered and faded. It was harder and harder to recall those words spoken by the angel in the white meadow who had looked so much like . . .

Who had the angel resembled? And what had he said that was so important?

Daniel did not know, did not know anything anymore.

Only that he was tumbling through an endless void.

He was filled with an urge to find something . . .
someone.

An urge to feel whole again . . .

But there was only darkness inside darkness—

Silence drowning out his thoughts—

A nothing that was everything.

Daniel fell.

*All other things to their destruction draw, Only our
love hath no decay. . . .*



—JOHN DONNE, "*The Anniversary*"

ONE



THE BOOK OF THE WATCHERS

“GOOD MORNING.”

A warm hand brushed Luce’s face and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

Rolling onto her side, she yawned and opened her eyes. She had been sleeping deeply, dreaming about Daniel.

“Oh,” she gasped, feeling her cheek. There he was.

Daniel was sitting next to her. He wore a black sweater and the same red scarf that had been knotted around his neck the first time she’d seen him at Sword & Cross. He looked better than a dream.

His weight made the edge of the cot sag a little and Luce drew up her legs to snuggle closer to him.

“You’re not a dream,” she said.

Daniel’s eyes were blearier than she was used to, but they still glowed the brightest violet as they gazed at her face, studying her features as if seeing her anew. He leaned down and pressed his lips to hers.

Luce folded into him, wrapping her arms around the back of his neck, happy to kiss him back. She didn’t care about her unbrushed teeth, about her bed head. She didn’t care about anything other than his kiss. They were together now and neither of them could stop grinning.

Then it all came rushing back:

Razor claws and dull red eyes. Choking stench of death and rot. Darkness everywhere, so complete in its doom it made light and love and everything good in the world feel tired and broken and dead.

That Lucifer had once been something else to her—Bill, the ornery stone gargoyle she'd mistaken for a friend, was actually Lucifer himself—seemed impossible. She'd let him get too close, and now, because she had not done as he wished—killed her soul in ancient Egypt—he had decided to wipe the slate clean.

To bend time and erase everything since the Fall.

Every life, every love, every moment that every mortal and angelic soul had ever experienced would be balled up and discarded at Lucifer's reckless whim, like the universe was a board game and he was a whining child giving up when he began to lose. But what he wanted to win, Luce had no idea.

Her skin felt hot as she remembered his wrath. He'd *wanted* her to see it, to tremble in his hand when he took her back to the time of the Fall. He'd wanted to show her it was personal for him.

Then he'd thrown her aside, casting an Announcer like a net to capture all the angels who'd fallen from Heaven.

Just as Daniel caught her in that starry noplacE, Lucifer blinked out of existence and incited the Fall to begin again. He was there now with the falling angels, including the past version of himself. Like the rest of them, Lucifer would fall in powerless isolation—with his brethren but apart, together but alone. Millennia ago, it had taken the angels nine mortal days to fall from Heaven down to Earth. Since Lucifer's second Fall would follow the same trajectory, Luce, Daniel, and the others had just nine days to stop him.

If they didn't, once Lucifer and his Announcer full of angels fell to Earth, there would be a hiccup in time that would reverberate backward all the way to the original Fall, and everything would start anew. As though the seven

thousand years between then and now had never happened.

As though Luce hadn't at last begun to understand the curse, to understand where she fit into all this, to learn who she was and what she could be.

The history and the future of the world were in jeopardy—unless Luce, seven angels, and two Nephilim could stop Lucifer. They had nine days and no idea where to start.

Luce had been so tired the night before that she didn't remember lying down on this cot, drawing this thin blue blanket around her shoulders. There were cobwebs in the rafters of the small cabin, a folding table strewn with half-drunk mugs of hot chocolate that Gabbe had made for everyone the previous night. But it all seemed like a dream to Luce. Her flight down from the Announcer to this tiny island off Tybee, this safe zone for the angels, had been obscured by blinding fatigue.

She'd fallen asleep while the others had still been talking, letting Daniel's voice lull her into a dream. Now the cabin was quiet, and in the window behind Daniel's silhouette, the sky was the gray of almost sunrise.

She reached up to touch his cheek. He turned his head and kissed the inside of her palm. Luce squeezed her eyes to stop from crying. Why, after all they'd been through, did Luce and Daniel have to beat the devil before they were free to love?

"Daniel." Roland's voice came from the doorway of the cabin. His hands were tucked inside his peacoat pockets, and a gray wool ski cap crowned his dreads. He gave Luce a weary smile. "It's time."

"Time for what?" Luce propped herself up on her elbows. "We're leaving? Already? I wanted to say goodbye to my parents. They're probably panicked."

"I thought I'd take you by their house now," Daniel said, "to say goodbye."

“But how am I going to explain disappearing after Thanksgiving dinner?”

She remembered Daniel’s words from the night before: Though it felt like they’d been inside the Announcers for an eternity, in real time only a few hours had passed.

Still, to Harry and Doreen Price, a few hours of a missing daughter *was* eternity.

Daniel and Roland shared a glance. “We took care of it,” Roland said, handing Daniel a set of car keys.

“You took care of it how?” Luce asked. “My dad once called the police when I was a half an hour late from school —”

“Don’t worry, kid,” Roland said. “We’ve got you covered. You just need to make a quick costume change.” He pointed toward a backpack on the rocking chair by the door. “Gabbe brought over your things.”

“Um, thanks,” she said, confused. Where was Gabbe? Where were the rest of them? The cabin had been packed the night before, positively cozy with the glow of angel wings and the smell of hot chocolate and cinnamon. The memory of that coziness, coupled with the promise of saying goodbye to her parents without knowing where she was going, made this morning feel empty.

The wood floor was rough against her bare feet. Looking down, she realized she was still wearing the narrow white shift dress she’d had on in Egypt, in the last life she had visited through the Announcers. Bill had made her wear it.

No, not Bill. *Lucifer*. He’d leered approvingly as she tucked the starshot into her waistband, contemplating the advice he’d given her on how to kill her soul.

Never, never, never. Luce had too much to live for.

Inside the old green backpack she used to take to summer camp, Luce found her favorite pair of pajamas—the red-and-white-striped flannel set—neatly folded, with the matching white slippers underneath. “But it’s morning,” Luce said. “What do I need pajamas for?”

Again Daniel and Roland shared a glance, and this time, they were trying not to laugh.

“Just trust us,” Roland said.

After she was dressed, Luce followed Daniel out of the cabin, letting his broad shoulders buffet the wind as they walked down the pebbly shore to the water.

The tiny island off of Tybee was about a mile from the Savannah coastline. Across that stretch of sea, Roland had promised that a car was waiting.

Daniel’s wings were concealed, but he must have sensed her eyeing the place where they unfurled from his shoulders. “When everything is in order, we’ll fly wherever we have to go to stop Lucifer. Until then it’s better to stay low to the ground.”

“Okay,” Luce said.

“Race you to the other side?”

Her breath frosted the air. “You know I’d beat you.”

“True.” He slipped an arm around her waist, warming her. “Maybe we’d better take the boat, then. Protect my famous pride.”

She watched him unmoor a small metal rowboat from a boat slip. The soft light on the water made her think back to the day they’d raced across the secret lake at Sword & Cross. His skin had glistened as they had pulled themselves up to the flat rock in the center to catch their breath, then had lain on the sun-warmed stone, letting the day’s heat dry their bodies. She’d barely known Daniel then—she hadn’t known he was an angel—and already she’d been dangerously in love with him.

“We used to swim together in my lifetime in Tahiti, didn’t we?” she asked, surprised to remember another time she’d seen Daniel’s hair glisten with water.

Daniel stared at her and she knew how much it meant to him finally to be able to share some of his memories of their past. He looked so moved that Luce thought he might cry.

Instead he kissed her forehead tenderly and said, “You beat me all those times, too, Lulu.”

They didn’t talk much as Daniel rowed. It was enough for Luce just to watch the way his muscles strained and flexed each time he dragged back, hearing the oars dip into and out of the cold water, breathing in the brine of the ocean. The sun was rising over her shoulders, warming the back of her neck, but as they approached the mainland, she saw something that sent a shiver down her spine.

She recognized the white 1993 Taurus immediately.

“What’s wrong?” Daniel noticed Luce’s posture stiffen as the rowboat touched the shore. “Oh. That.” He sounded unconcerned as he hopped out of the boat and held out a hand to Luce. The ground was mulchy and rich-smelling. It reminded Luce of her childhood, running through Georgia forests in the fall, luxuriating in the anticipation of mischief and adventure.

“It’s not what you think,” Daniel said. “When Sophia fled Sword & Cross, after”—Luce waited, wincing, hoping Daniel wouldn’t say *after she murdered Penn*—“after we found out who she really was, the angels confiscated her car.” His face hardened. “She owes us that much, and more.”

Luce thought of Penn’s white face, the life draining from it. “Where is Sophia now?”

Daniel shook his head. “I don’t know. Unfortunately, we’ll probably soon find out. I have a feeling she’ll worm her way into our plans.” He drew the keys from his pocket, inserted one into the passenger door. “But that’s not what you should be worried about right now.”

Luce looked at him as she sank onto the gray cloth seat. “So what should I be worried about right now?”

Daniel turned the key, and the car shuddered slowly to life. The last time she’d sat in this seat, she’d been worried about being alone with him. It was the first night they’d ever kissed—as far as she’d known then, anyway. Luce was

stabbing the seat belt into its buckle when she felt Daniel's fingers over hers. "Remember," he said softly, reaching over to buckle her seat belt, letting his hands linger over hers. "There's a trick."

He kissed her cheek, then put the car in reverse and peeled out of the wet woods onto a narrow two-lane blacktop. They were the only ones on the road.

"Daniel?" Luce asked again. "What else should I be worried about?"

He glanced at Luce's pajamas. "How good are you at playing sick?"



The white Taurus idled in the alley behind her parents' house as Luce crept past the three azalea trees beside her bedroom window. In the summer, there would be tomato vines creeping out of the black soil, but in winter, the side yard looked barren and dreary and not very much like home. She couldn't remember the last time she'd stood out here. She'd sneaked out of three different boarding schools before, but never out of her own parents' house. Now she was sneaking *in* and she didn't know how her window worked. Luce looked around at her sleepy neighborhood, at the morning paper sitting in its dewy plastic bag at the edge of her parents' lawn, at the old, netless basketball hoop in the Johnsons' driveway across the street. Nothing had changed since she'd been gone. Nothing had changed except Luce. If Bill succeeded, would this neighborhood vanish, too?

She gave one last wave to Daniel in the car, took a deep breath, and used her thumbs to pry the lower panel from the cracking blue paint of the sill.

It slid right up. Someone inside had already popped out the screen. Luce paused, stunned as the white muslin

curtains parted and the half-blond, half-black head of her onetime enemy Molly Zane filled the open space.

“Sup, Meatloaf.”

Luce bristled at the nickname she’d earned on her first day at Sword & Cross. *This* was what Daniel and Roland had meant when they said they’d taken care of things at home?

“What are you doing here, Molly?”

“Come on. I won’t bite.” Molly extended a hand. Her nails were chipped emerald green.

She sank her hand into Molly’s, ducked, and sidled, one leg at a time, through the window.

Her bedroom looked small and outdated, like a time capsule of some long-ago Luce. There was the framed poster of the Eiffel Tower on the back of her door. There was her bulletin board of swim team ribbons from Thunderbolt Elementary. And there, under the green-and-yellow Hawaiian-print duvet, was her best friend, Callie.

Callie scrambled from under the covers, dashed around the bed, and flung herself into Luce’s arms. “They kept telling me you were going to be okay, but in that lying, we’re-also-completely-terrified-we’re-just-not-going-to-explain-a-word-to-you kind of way. Do you even realize how thoroughly spooky that was? It was like you physically dropped off the face of the Earth—”

Luce hugged her back tightly. As far as Callie knew, Luce had been gone only since the night before.

“Okay, you two,” Molly growled, pulling Luce away from Callie, “you can *OMG* your faces off later. I didn’t lie in your bed in that cheap polyester wig all night enacting Luce-with-stomach-flu so you guys could blow our cover now.” She rolled her eyes. “Amateurs.”

“Hold on. You did what?” Luce asked.

“After you . . . disappeared,” Callie said breathlessly, “we knew we could never explain it to your parents. I mean, *I* could barely fathom it after seeing it with my own

eyes. When Gabbe fixed up the backyard, I told your parents you felt sick and had gone to bed, and Molly pretended to be you and—”

“Lucky I found this in your closet.” Molly twirled a short wavy black wig around one finger. “Halloween remnant?”

“Wonder Woman.” Luce winced, regretting her middle school Halloween costume, and not for the first time.

“Well, it worked.”

It was strange to see Molly—who’d once sided with Lucifer—helping her. But even Molly, like Cam and Roland, didn’t want to fall again. So here they were, a team, strange bedfellows.

“You covered for me? I don’t know what to say. Thank you.”

“Whatever.” Molly jerked her head at Callie, anything to deflect Luce’s gratitude. “She was the real silver-tongued devil. Thank her.” She stuck one leg out the open window and turned to call back, “Think you guys can handle it from here? I have a Waffle House summit meeting to attend.”

Luce gave Molly the thumbs-up and flopped down on her bed.

“Oh, Luce,” Callie whispered. “When you left, your whole backyard was covered in this gray *dust*. And that blond girl, Gabbe, swept her hand once and made it *disappear*. Then we said you were sick, that everyone else had gone home, and we just started doing the dishes with your parents. And at first I thought that Molly girl was a little bit terrible, but she’s actually kind of cool.” Her eyes narrowed. “But where *did* you go? What happened to you? You really scared me, Luce.”

“I don’t even know where to start,” Luce said.

There was a knock, followed by the familiar creak of her bedroom door opening.

Luce’s mother stood in the hallway, her sleep-wild hair tamed by a yellow banana clip, her face bare of makeup and pretty. She was holding a wicker tray with two glasses

of orange juice, two plates of buttered toast, and a box of Alka-Seltzer. "Looks like someone's feeling better."

Luce waited for her mom to put the tray down on the nightstand; then she wrapped her arms around her mother's waist and buried her face in her pink terry cloth bathrobe. Tears stung her eyes. She sniffed.

"My little girl," her mom said, feeling Luce's forehead and cheeks to check for fever. Even though she hadn't used that soft sweet voice on Luce in ages, it felt so good to hear it.

"I love you, Mom."

"Don't tell me she's too sick for Black Friday." Luce's father appeared in the doorway, holding a green plastic watering can. He was smiling, but behind his rimless glasses, Mr. Price's eyes looked concerned.

"I am feeling better," Luce said. "But—"

"Oh, Harry," Luce's mom said. "You know we only had her for the day. She has to be back at school." She turned to Luce. "Daniel called a little while ago, honey. He said he can pick you up and take you back to Sword & Cross. I said that of course your father and I would be happy to, but—"

"No," Luce said quickly, remembering the plan Daniel had detailed in the car. "Even if I can't go, you guys should still do your Black Friday shopping. It's a Price family tradition."

They agreed that Luce would ride with Daniel and her parents would take Callie to the airport. While the girls ate, Luce's parents sat on the edge of the bed and talked about Thanksgiving ("Gabbe polished all the china—what an angel"). By the time they moved on to the Black Friday deals they were on the hunt for ("All your father ever wants is tools"), Luce realized that she hadn't said anything except for inane conversation fillers like "Uh-huh" and "Oh really?"

When her parents finally stood up to take their plates into the kitchen and Callie started to pack, Luce went into

the bathroom and shut the door.

She was alone for the first time in what seemed like a million ages. She sat down on the vanity stool and looked in the mirror.

She was herself, but different. Sure, Lucinda Price looked back at her. But also . . .

There was Layla in the fullness of her lips, Lulu in the thick waves of her hair, Lu Xin in the intensity of her hazel eyes, Lucia in their twinkle. She was not alone. Maybe she never would be alone again. There, in the mirror, was every incarnation of Lucinda staring back at her and wondering, *What is to become of us? What about our history, and our love?*

She took a shower and put on clean jeans, her black riding boots, and a long white sweater. She sat down on Callie's suitcase while her friend struggled to zip it up. The silence between them was brutal.

"You're my best friend, Callie," Luce finally said. "I'm going through something I don't understand. But that thing isn't you. I'm sorry I don't know how to be more specific, but I've missed you. So much."

Callie's shoulders tensed. "You used to tell me everything." But the look that passed between them suggested that both girls knew that wasn't possible anymore.

A car door slammed out front.

Through the open blinds Luce watched Daniel make his way up her parents' path. And even though it had been less than an hour since he had dropped her off, Luce felt her heart pick up and her cheeks flush at the sight of him. He walked slowly, as if he were floating, his red scarf trailing behind him in the wind. Even Callie stared.

Luce's parents gathered in the foyer with them. She hugged each one of them for a long time—Dad first, then Mom, then Callie, who squeezed her hard and whispered

quickly, “What I saw last night—you, stepping into that . . . that *shadow*—was beautiful. I just want you to know that.”

Luce felt her eyes burn again. She squeezed Callie back and whispered, “Thank you.”

Then she walked down the path and into Daniel’s arms and whatever came along with them.



“There you are, you lovebirds, you, doin’ that thing that lovebirds do,” Arriane sang, bobbing her head out from behind a long bookcase. She was sitting cross-legged on a wooden library chair, juggling a few Hacky Sacks. She wore overalls, combat boots, and her dark hair plaited into tiny pigtails.

Luce was not overjoyed to be back at the Sword & Cross Library. It had been renovated since the fire that had destroyed it, but it still smelled like something big and ugly had burned there. The faculty had explained away the fire as a freak accident, but someone had been killed—Todd, a quiet student whom Luce had barely known until the night he died—and Luce knew there was something darker lurking beneath the surface of the story. She blamed herself. It reminded her too much of Trevor, a boy she’d once had a crush on, who had died in another inexplicable fire.

Now, as she and Daniel rounded the corner of a bookshelf to the library’s study area, Luce saw that Arriane was not alone. All of them were there: Gabbe, Roland, Cam, Molly, Annabelle—the leggy angel with the hot-pink hair—even Miles and Shelby, who waved excitedly and looked decidedly different from the other angels, but also different from mortal teens.

Miles and Shelby were—were they holding *hands*? But when she looked again, their hands had disappeared under the table they were all sitting at. Miles tugged his baseball

cap lower. Shelby cleared her throat and hunched over a book.

“Your book,” Luce said to Daniel as soon as she spotted the thick spine with the brown crumbling glue near the bottom. The faded cover read *The Watchers: Myth in Medieval Europe* by Daniel Grigori.

Her hand reached automatically for the pale gray cover. She closed her eyes, because it reminded her of Penn, who’d found the book on Luce’s last night as a student at Sword & Cross, and because the photograph pasted inside the front cover of the book was the first thing that had convinced her that what Daniel told her about their history might be possible.

It was a photograph taken from another life, one in Helston, England. And even though it shouldn’t have been possible, there was no doubt about it: The young woman in the photograph was her.

“Where did you find it?” Luce asked.

Her voice must have given something away, because Shelby said, “What is so major about this dusty old thing, anyway?”

“It’s precious. Our only key now,” Gabbe said. “Sophia tried to burn it once.”

“Sophia?” Luce’s hand shot to her heart. “Miss Sophia tried—the fire in the library? That was her?” The others nodded. “She killed Todd,” Luce said numbly.

So it *hadn’t* been Luce’s fault. Another life to lay at Sophia’s feet. It didn’t make Luce feel any better.

“And she almost died of shock the night you showed it to her,” Roland said. “We were all shocked, especially when you lived to talk about it.”

“We talked about Daniel kissing me,” Luce remembered, blushing. “And the fact that I survived it. Was that what surprised Miss Sophia?”

“Part of it,” Roland said. “But there’s plenty more in that book that Sophia wouldn’t have wanted you to know

about.”

“Not much of an educator, was she?” Cam said, giving Luce a smirk that said, *Long time, no see*.

“What wouldn’t she have wanted me to know?”

All the angels turned to look at Daniel.

“Last night we told you that none of the angels remember where we landed when we fell,” Daniel said.

“Yeah, about that . . . How’s it possible?” Shelby said. “You’d think that kind of thing would leave an impression on the old memorizer.”

Cam’s face reddened. “You try falling for nine days through multiple dimensions and trillions of miles, landing on your face, breaking your wings, rolling around concussed for who knows how long, wandering the desert for decades looking for any clue as to who or what or where you are—and then talk to me about the old memorizer.”

“Okay, you’ve got acknowledgment issues,” Shelby said, putting on her shrink voice. “If *I* were going to diagnose you—”

“Well, at least you remember there was a desert involved,” Miles said diplomatically, making Shelby laugh.

Daniel turned to Luce. “I wrote this book after I lost you in Tibet . . . but before I’d met you in Prussia. I know you visited that life in Tibet because I followed you there, so maybe you can see how losing you the way I did made me turn to years of research and study to find a way out of this curse.”

Luce looked away. Her death in Tibet had made Daniel run straight off a cliff. She feared its happening again.

“Cam is right,” Daniel said. “None of us recall where we landed. We wandered the desert until it was no longer desert; we wandered the plains and the valleys and the seas until they turned to desert again. It wasn’t until we slowly found one another and began to piece together the

story that we remembered we'd once ever been angels at all.

"But there were relics created after our Fall, physical records of our history that mankind found and kept as treasures, gifts—they think—from a god they don't understand. For a long time three of the relics were buried in a temple in Jerusalem, but during the Crusades, they were stolen, spirited away to various places. None of us knew where.

"When I did my research several hundred years ago, I focused on the medieval era, turning to as many resources as I could in a kind of theological scavenger hunt for the relics," Daniel continued. "The gist of it is that if these three artifacts can be collected and gathered together at Mount Sinai—"

"Why Mount Sinai?" Shelby asked.

"The channels between the Throne and the Earth are closest there," Gabbe explained with a flip of her hair. "That's where Moses received the Ten Commandments; that's where the angels enter when they're delivering messages from the Throne."

"Think of it as God's local dive," Arriane added, sending a Hacky Sack too high into the air and into an overhead lamp.

"But before you ask," Cam said, making it a point to single out Shelby with his eyes, "Mount Sinai is not the original site of the Fall."

"That would be way too easy," Annabelle said.

"If the relics are all gathered at Mount Sinai," Daniel went on, "then, in theory, we'll be able to decipher the location of the Fall."

"In theory." Cam sneered. "Must I be the one to say there is some question regarding the validity of Daniel's research—"

Daniel clenched his jaw. "You have a better idea?"

“Don’t you think”—Cam raised his voice—“that your theory puts rather a lot of weight on the idea that these relics are anything more than rumor? Who knows if they can do what they’re supposed to do?”

Luce studied the group of angels and demons—her only allies on this quest to save her and Daniel . . . and the world. “So that unknown location is where we have to be nine days from now.”

“*Fewer* than nine days from now,” Daniel said. “Nine days from now will be too late. Lucifer—and the host of angels cast out of Heaven—will have arrived.”

“But if we can beat Lucifer to the site of the Fall,” Luce said, “then what?”

Daniel shook his head. “We don’t really know. I never told anyone about this book because, Cam’s right, I didn’t know what it would add up to. I didn’t even know Gabbe had it published until years later, and by then, I’d lost interest in the research. You had died another time, and without you being there to play your part—”

“*My* part?” Luce asked.

“Which we don’t really yet understand—”

Gabbe elbowed Daniel, cutting him off. “What he means is all will be revealed in the fullness of time.”

Molly smacked her forehead. “Really? ‘All will be revealed’? Is that all you guys know? Is that what you’re going on?”

“That and *your* importance,” Cam said, turning to Luce. “You’re the chess piece that the forces of good and evil and everything in between are fighting over here.”

“What?” Luce whispered.

“Shut up.” Daniel fixed his attention on Luce. “Don’t listen to him.”

Cam snorted, but no one acknowledged it. It just sat in the room like an uninvited guest. The angels and demons were silent. No one was going to leak anything else about Luce’s role in stopping the Fall.

“So all of this information, this scavenger hunt,” she said, “it’s in that book?”

“More or less,” Daniel said. “I just have to spend some time with the text and refresh my memory. Hopefully then I’ll know where we need to begin.”

The others moved away to give Daniel space at the table. Luce felt Miles’s hand brush the back of her arm. They’d barely spoken since she’d come back through the Announcer.

“Can I talk to you?” Miles asked very quietly. “Luce?”

The look on his face—it was strained about something—made Luce think of those last few moments in her parents’ backyard when Miles had thrown her reflection.

They’d never really talked about the kiss they’d shared on the roof outside her Shoreline dorm room. Surely Miles knew it had been a mistake—but why did Luce feel like she was leading him on every time she was nice to him?

“Luce.” It was Gabbe, appearing at Miles’s side. “I thought I’d mention”—she glanced at Miles—“if you wanted to go visit Penn for a moment, now would be the time.”

“Good idea.” Luce nodded. “Thanks.” She glanced apologetically at Miles but he just tugged his baseball cap over his eyes and turned to whisper something to Shelby.

“Ahem.” Shelby coughed indignantly. She was standing behind Daniel, trying to read the book over his shoulder. “What about me and Miles?”

“You’re going back to Shoreline,” Gabbe said, sounding more like Luce’s teachers at Shoreline than Luce had ever noticed before. “We need you to alert Steven and Francesca. We may need their help—and your help, too. Tell them”—she took a deep breath—“tell them it’s happening. That an endgame has been initiated, though not as we’d expected. Tell them everything. They will know what to do.”

“Fine,” Shelby said, scowling. “You’re the boss.”

“Yodelayhee-hooooo.” Arriane cupped her palms around her mouth. “If, uh, Luce wants to get out, someone’s gonna have to help her down from the window.” She drummed her fingers on the table, looking sheepish. “I made a library book barricade near the entrance in case any of the Sword & Cross-eyed felt inclined to disrupt us.”

“Dibs.” Cam already had his arm slipped through the crook of Luce’s elbow. She started to argue, but none of the other angels seemed to think it was a bad idea. Daniel didn’t even notice.

Near the back exit, Shelby and Miles both mouthed *Be careful* to Luce with varying degrees of fierceness.

Cam walked her to the window, radiating warmth with his smile. He slid the glass pane up and together they looked out at the campus where they’d met, where they’d grown close, where he’d tricked her into kissing him. They weren’t all bad memories. . . .

He hopped through the window first, landing smoothly on the ledge, and he held out a hand for hers.

“Milady.”

His grip was strong and it made her feel tiny and weightless as Cam drifted down from the ledge, two stories in two seconds. His wings were concealed, but he still moved as gracefully as if he were flying. They landed softly on the dewy grass.

“I take it you don’t want my company,” he said. “At the cemetery—not, you know, in general.”

“Right. No, thanks.”

He looked away and reached into his pocket, pulled out a tiny silver bell. It looked ancient, with Hebrew writing on it. He handed it to her. “Just ring when you want a lift back up.”

“Cam,” Luce said. “What is my role in all of this?”

Cam reached out to touch her cheek, then seemed to think better of it. His hand hovered in the air. “Daniel’s right. It isn’t our place to tell you.”

He didn't wait for her response—just bent his knees and soared off the ground. He didn't even look back.

Luce stared at the campus for a moment, letting the familiar Sword & Cross humidity stick to her skin. She couldn't tell whether the dismal school with its huge, harsh neo-Gothic buildings and sad, defeated landscaping looked different or the same.

She strolled through the campus, through the flat still grass of the commons, past the depressing dormitory, to the wrought iron gate of the cemetery. There she paused, feeling goose bumps rise on her arms.

The cemetery still looked and smelled like a sinkhole in the middle of the campus. The dust from the angels' battle had cleared. It was still early enough that most of the students were asleep, and anyway, none of them were likely to be prowling the cemetery, unless they were serving detention. She let herself in through the gate and ambled downward through the leaning headstones and the muddy graves.

In the far east corner lay Penn's final resting place. Luce sat down at the foot of her friend's plot. She didn't have flowers and she didn't know any prayers, so she lay her hands on the cold, wet grass, closed her eyes, and sent her own kind of message to Penn, worrying that it might never reach her.



Luce got back to the library window feeling irritable. She didn't need Cam or his exotic bell. She could get up the ledge by herself.

It was easy enough to scale the lowest portion of the sloped roof, and from there she could climb up a few levels until she was close to the long narrow ledge beneath the library windows. It was about two feet wide. As she crept along it, Cam's and Daniel's bickering voices wafted to her.