Cold. God, I’m so cold.

I’m wrapped in two blankets, knees tucked under my chin, waiting. Waiting for my sliding thoughts to find traction. Waiting for the crushing panic to pass. Waiting for Rafa to appear in the middle of this ancient chapterhouse, bloodied, injured, pissed off. Alive.

But Rafa’s not coming.

My breath shortens; my head swims with jasmine, incense and musty wool. I blink, try to focus. My eyes skate over white marble columns, towering arches, heavy glass panes; angels tearing demons apart in a thickly textured oil painting.

The winged figures blur. All I see is the demon blade thrusting out of Rafa’s stomach, wet with his blood, his eyes searching for mine in the darkness. Black spots stain
my vision. I bite the inside of my cheek, taste copper.

‘Gaby, stop.’ Jude’s fingers press into my shoulderblade. ‘You’re doing it again.’

I take a long, shaky breath. The spots recede. Jude is still with me. Rafa is at the mercy of demons in Iowa and I’m in a monastery in Italy with the Rephaim, but I have my brother back.

It’s something. A big something.

I wipe my face. The tips of my fingers are numb from the cold.

Rafa was taken no more than twenty minutes ago. The longest twenty minutes of my life. My eyes travel to the domed ceiling high above us. The point where the arches meet is shrouded in shadow and cobwebs.

I do not want to be here; I don’t want to have to deal with Nathaniel and his Council of Five. Anger, flaring under my ribs, burns off the fear, just for a moment.

Screw Nathaniel.

Screw the fallen angel and his Rephaim for snaring me in this shitty blood-soaked mess of angels and demons. Screw them for dragging me into their world and then ripping mine apart. Everything they touch leads to violence, and somehow that’s cost me the memories I should have of a whole other life, the one with the Rephaim: it’s cost me a year without Jude and gifted me a year of gnawing grief and emptiness. And now it’s going to cost me Rafa.

My fingernails dig into the worn timber pew.
‘Gaby.’

Jude is still watching me. I force myself to focus on him. His brown eyes—so much like mine—are searching, worried. He smells like campfire and the sea.

‘Are you sure this is where you want to be?’

‘There is nowhere else,’ I say and I hate the truth in those words.

‘That’s assuming Nathaniel’s not lying through his teeth. But if you change your mind—if you want out of here—we’re gone.’ He holds my gaze. ‘It won’t take too much to convince these guys to leave.’ He nods at Ez and Zak, standing with their heads together a few metres away. Mya paces the chapterhouse behind them, cheeks still flushed from arguing with Nathaniel. Her shirt and jeans are covered in gore and grass, her hair loose, wild.

Ez sees us looking and comes over. ‘Are you ready?’ Her lips are pale, the scars on her cheek and neck stark against her caramel skin.

I sit up. ‘Yeah.’ It’s the first time I’ve lied to Ez. She pretends not to notice.

‘You can’t let the Five see weakness,’ she says. ‘Remember: the last time you were here you killed a hell-beast.’

I push away the memory of the blood-stained sawdust and chain-link wire. Try to focus.

‘The Gabe you were in the cage, that’s who they need to see here today.’ Ez checks I understand what she’s saying. I do. I need to be the fighter they’ve known for more than a
century. It doesn’t matter that I don’t remember ever being that person: it’s the only version of me they’ll respect. I’ve already let Nathaniel see me lose it in the last ten minutes. This conversation has to go differently.

Zak gives me a quick once-over. ‘You can do this.’ Solid as always—but even he looks smaller in this cavernous place. His blue eyes are paler than usual, his ebony skin dull, as if just being here somehow diminishes him.

Mya comes to a standstill in the middle of the chapterhouse. ‘It’s a waste of time.’ She’s talking to Jude but she’s angry with everyone. Me for choosing to stay here and ask for help; Ez and Zak for agreeing to it. ‘Nathaniel will find an excuse not to attack the farmhouse.’

‘Maybe,’ Jude says. ‘But we need to try.’

Mounting a rescue for Rafa and Taya shouldn’t even be a discussion. And it shouldn’t be me arguing for it. It should be Daniel. Of those of us who were ambushed on the mountain twenty minutes ago, he’s the only one on the Council of Five.

I close my eyes and I’m back there. The chorus of cicadas, the tang of eucalypt and damp soil, diesel and campfire smoke. Warm night air. Rafa and Daniel arguing because we’d told the Butler brothers and their crew about demons and hellions. Taya and Rafa arguing about my trip with the Outcasts to Los Angeles.

I saw the blade slice through Rafa, then I saw flaming eyes in the dark. And then chaos. Blood. Terror.
‘This place stinks.’ Mya is pacing again. The monks have mostly cleaned up the mess of our arrival but the air is still pungent with charred flesh and vomit. ‘We need to open a window.’

Zak shakes his head. His long black curls are still plastered against his scalp and barely move. ‘It’s freezing out there.’ He holds out his katana, checks it in the faint light straining through windows high above us. It’s sticky with demon blood. He picks up an unused bandage and wipes the blade clean. I look around, find my sword propped beside Jude’s at the end of the pew. Somebody must have grabbed it because I don’t remember having it when we left the mountain.

Mya finally comes over.

‘When is Jones getting here?’ Zak asks.

‘Soon.’ She hands him her katana. He wipes it down, hands it back. ‘He’s waiting for the rest of the crew. Strength in numbers.’

I sit against the pew. Nathaniel will be back with the Council of Five any time now. It’s about to get crowded in here.

Jude is watching the door. ‘Everyone who walks through there is going to know us, aren’t they?’

‘Yeah,’ I say. ‘But they won’t all come through the door. The Outcasts will shift in.’

He blows out his breath. The Rephaite ability to be anywhere in the blink of an eye is still new for him. ‘We
really used to be able do that? On our own?’

I nod, and have a sharp memory of dark trees in Melbourne. Cool air against my skin. Insects chirping. Rafa trying to teach me to shift. The terrifying sensation of being sucked into a vortex—and then slamming into the concrete path about a metre from where I started.

‘Then we can do it again,’ he says. ‘I’d feel a lot better being here if we could come and go as easily as everyone else.’

Mya sits on his other side, ignores me. ‘So what’s the plan?’

‘We listen to what Nathaniel has to say. If there’s a chance he’ll help, it’s worth sticking around for a bit longer. If not, we’ll get the rest of your crew—’

‘Our crew,’ Mya corrects.

Jude pauses. ‘Our crew together, and work out our own plan. Deal?’

‘Deal.’ Mya, Ez and Zak say it together. As if it’s the most natural thing in the world for him to be taking charge.

There’s a heavy scraping over the stone floor. The big timber doors opening. I sit up straighter, try to steady my pulse.

Time’s up.
Daniel walks in first. His dark hair is sticking up in all directions and there’s still a streak of dried blood on his neck. The sight of him looking so dishevelled crushes any hope this is anything other than a full-blown crisis.

Next is a redhead with cropped hair and seventies sideburns, followed by two women I don’t recognise and a monk with wispy white hair. And then Nathaniel. Too late, I realise my sword is out of reach. I’d feel better if I was armed, but going for it now would look like a provocation.

They cross the room and we stand up. All of them stare at Jude except Daniel, who’s staring at me. They stop a few metres away, Nathaniel in the middle, taller even than Zak. His irises flicker with those unnatural blue flames.

‘I’m guessing this is the Council of Five,’ I say to Jude.
I’m thrown by the presence of the elderly monk, though. ‘That one’s Uriel—Uri.’ I point to the redhead. ‘I don’t know the others.’

‘This is Magdalena,’ Daniel says, gesturing, ‘and Calista.’

I look from one to the other, try to remember what Rafa said about the Five...*Nathaniel likes to have all three Rephaite disciplines covered: military, religious, academic...* He was sitting at the bench in my kitchen, reading the paper and winding up Jason about his beautifully tied scarves. I shut the memory down quickly, before the panic starts to rise.

Everything about Calista says soldier: broad shoulders, cropped hair, scarred arms. Her coal-dark eyes graze over us, wary; some of the hardness softening as those eyes meet mine. She wants me to remember her.

Magdalena—Magda, Rafa called her—stands back. She grips her elbows, her hands pale, her nails short and manicured. A strand of dark hair hangs loose around her face. She’s fiddling with a string of prayer beads; they clack against each other in a strange rhythm.

‘Where’s the other one?’ I ask.

‘Zebediah is in the scriptorium. Brother Stephen will brief him.’ Daniel’s voice is thin. ‘What have you decided?’

I glance at Mya. She won’t meet my eyes. ‘We’re staying. For now.’

‘And the others?’

‘Here soon.’
Jude is still scrutinising the four council members. Measuring them. Like the rest of the Rephaim, they look about twenty, not a hundred and thirty-nine. They don’t look like the governing body of a society of half-angel bastards.

‘Jude.’ It’s Uri who speaks. ‘Did you come here for a fight?’

My brother shrugs. He seems relaxed; I know he’s not. The muscles in his neck are taut, his eyes wary. ‘That depends on what happens next.’

Mya spins her sword, threatening. Nathaniel and the Five are unarmed and I realise this could go off the rails before the others even get here. My heart gives a hard rap on my ribs. I have to keep this on track.

‘When are we attacking the farmhouse?’

All eyes shift to me. A gust of wind rattles a pane somewhere above us. Magda’s beads clack once, then again, and fall silent.

‘Gabriella.’ My name echoes back from the buttressed ceiling. ‘I have called everyone here to keep them safe. These walls—’

‘I know, I know, they’re warded against demons. What about Rafa and Taya?’

‘In a moment. We cannot overlook the significance of what has befallen you and your brother.’

‘Are you shitting me?’ I glare at Daniel. ‘Tell me again you didn’t orchestrate that attack simply to get us all here.’
His jaw tightens. ‘What sort of monsters do you think we are?’

‘The sort that thought it was a good idea to put me in a cage with a hellion.’

‘One hellion—and you killed it. I didn’t set a horde of Gatekeepers on you while you had your back turned.’

‘This is what you wanted though, isn’t it? Jude and me, here?’

‘Not like this. Never like this.’

‘Please,’ Nathaniel says. ‘Zachariah, Esther, Mya. We need a moment with Judah and Gabriella before the others arrive.’

‘I said no.’ I let my blankets drop to the cold floor. Ez, Zak and Mya move closer. It’s more in defiance than solidarity, but I’ll take what I can get.

Nathaniel’s eyes don’t leave mine. ‘Why will you not talk to us alone?’

‘Because I don’t trust you.’ I let my eyes narrow. ‘And since we can’t shift...’

He has the gall to look offended. Beside him, Calista squares her shoulders. As if she’s heard enough to know I’m not the Gabe she remembers.

Nathaniel shifts his attention to Jude. ‘You say you do not remember your past. Will you allow me to search your mind?’

Jude flicks me a glance.

‘He can read our thoughts, but we have to let him,’
I say. ‘Unless we’re drugged or beaten unconscious.’

He snorts. ‘No fucking way.’

‘Show some respect.’ Calista’s face is pinched, flushed.

‘That’s one thing he certainly hasn’t learned,’ Daniel says. Uri steps up beside him, flexes his fingers. The cool air fizzes with anger.

Which is when Jones and the rest of the Outcasts materialise in the middle of the chapterhouse.

Armed.