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Hush, Hush (Hush, Hush #1) SACRED OATH A FALLEN ANGEL A FORBIDDEN LOVE Romance was not part of Nora Gray's plan. She has never been particularly attracted to boys at her school, no matter how hard her best friend, V, pushes them on her. Not until Patch comes. With his slight smile and eyes that seem to see inside her, Patch turns Nora against him against her better judgment. But after a series of terrible encounters, Nora does not know who to trust. Patch seems to be everywhere she seems to know more about her than her closest friends. She can't decide whether she should fall into his arms or run and hide. And when she tries to find answers to some questions, she finds herself next to the truth, which is much more disturbing than anything Patch makes her feel. For she is right in the middle of an ancient battle between the immortal and those who have fallen - and when it comes to choosing sides, the wrong choice will cost Nora her life. Read/ Download now on copy and paste a link to your web browser Hush, Hush (Hush, Hush, #1) is one of the best books released in 2009, containing 391 pages, this book written by Becca Fitzpatrick who is known as the author and has written many interesting books with a great story. Hush, Hush (Hush, #1) was published by Simon Schuster BFYR on October 13, 2009. This book was very surprised because of its rating of 4.00 and received about 711,090 user reviews. Hush, Hush (Hush, Hush, #1) book tell us the story of : SACRED OATH A FALLEN ANGEL A FORBIDDEN LOVE Romance was not part of Nora Gray's plan. She has never been particularly attracted to boys at her school, no matter how hard her best friend, V, pushes them on her. Not until Patch comes. With his slight smile and eyes that seem to see inside her, Patch turns Nora against him against her better judgment. But after a series of terrible encounters, Nora does not know who to trust. 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Read more about this book : Title : Hush, Hush (Hush, Hush, #1) Original title : Hush, Hush ISBN : 9781416989417 Author : Becca Fitzpatrick Rating : 4.00 Number of pages : 391 pages You can download Hush, Hush (Hush, Hush, #1) via this secure link with форматами, перечисленными ниже : Kindle PDF ePub Mobi Read Online / Download Hush(Hush, hush, #1) #1) ☞ copy and paste a link to your hope web browser this review can be useful to readers. Happy reading! Downloading Hush, Hush (Hush, Hush #1) SACRED OATH A FALLEN ANGEL A FORBIDDEN LOVE Romance was not part of Nora Gray's plan. She has never been particularly attracted to boys at her school, no matter how hard her best friend, V, pushes them on her. Not until Patch comes. With his slight smile and eyes that seem to see inside her, Patch turns Nora against him against her better judgment. But after a series of terrible encounters, Nora does not know who to trust. Patch seems to be everywhere she seems to know more about her than her closest friends. She can't decide whether she should fall into his arms or run and hide. And when she tries to find answers to some questions, she finds herself next to the truth, which is much more disturbing than anything Patch makes her feel. For she is right in the middle of an ancient battle between the immortal and those who have fallen - and when it comes to choosing sides, the wrong choice will cost her her life. READ BOOK ONLINE FREE Chapters Best Reviews The Latest Reviews Nora finds forbidden love with her fallen angel, in the new New York Times bestseller Hush, The Hush Saga. For Nora Gray, romance wasn't part of the plan. She has never been particularly attracted to boys at her school, no matter how much her best friend, V, pushes them on her. Not until Patch showed up. With his slight smile and eyes that seem to see inside her, Nora turns to him against her better judgment. But after a series of terrifying encounters, Nora doesn't know who to trust. Patch seems to be everywhere she is, and know more about her than her closest friends. She can't decide whether she should fall into his arms or run and hide. And when she tries to find answers to some questions, she finds herself next to the truth, which is much more disturbing than anything Patch makes her feel. For Nora is right in the middle of an ancient battle between the immortal and those who have fallen - and when it comes to choosing sides, the wrong choice will cost her her life. These questions -- I waved my hand where he hid them -- were jokes. Wee wrote them, I added in the blink of an eye of inspiration. It's all her fault. I know your handwriting, Nora. Well, good, good, I began, hunting for a clever answer, but I've lost my chance too long. No restraining orders, he said. No crime. I tilted my chin up. Girl? I told myself I didn't care how he answered. Either way it was good with me. It's none of your business. You tried to kiss me, I reminded him. You made it my business. The ghost of a pirate smile was hidden in his mouth. I had the impression that he remembered all the details of that close kiss, including my sighs. Exgirlfriend, he said a minute later. My stomach fell as a sudden thought popped into my head. What if the girl from Delphi Victoria's Secret was the former Patch? What if she saw me talking. Talking. Patch in the arcade and - by mistake - assumed there was a lot more to our relationship? If she still attracts Patch, it made sense that she might be jealous enough to follow me around. A few pieces of the puzzle seemed to crash into their places..... And then Patch said, But she's not around. What do you mean she's not around? She's gone. She'll never come back. You mean ... She's dead? I asked. Patch did not deny it. My stomach suddenly felt heavy and twisted. I didn't expect that. Patch had a girlfriend, and now she's dead. The door to the ladies' room was rattling when someone tried to enter. I forgot I locked him up. Which made me wonder how Patch got in. Either he had the key or he had another explanation. An explanation I probably didn't want to think of, such as sliding under a door like air. Like smoke. I need to get back to work, Patch said. He gave me once that lingered a little below the hips. Killer skirt. Deadly feet. Before I

enemies. Some of these enemies may be capable of brutality, but Patch was not one of them. The senseless beating was not his style. No, I said. All dressed up Saturday night in? Something like this, I said in the coldest tone I dared. Detective Holistic pulled a small notebook out of his coat pocket, flipped it over and pressed the handle. We're going to need his name and number. Ten minutes after the detectives left, the black jeep commander rolled to the side of the road. The patch ran through the rain on the porch, wearing dark jeans, boots, and a thermal gray T-shirt. A new car? I asked after I opened the door. He gave me a mysterious smile. I won it a couple of nights ago from a pool game. Did someone put their car in? He wasn't happy about it. I'm trying to stay away from dark alleys for the next some time. Have you heard of Marcy Millar? I left him there, hoping that the question would take him by surprise. No, no, no, no, no, no, what happened? His answer came easily, and I decided that it probably meant that he was telling the truth. Unfortunately, when it came to lies, Patch didn't believe me as an amateur. Someone beat her up. Shame. Any idea who might have done it? If Patch heard the anxiety in my voice, he didn't say it. He leaned against the railings of the porch and thoughtfully rubbed his hand on his jaw. No. I asked myself if I thought he was hiding something. But reading a lie wasn't my strong point. Have a lot of experience. Usually I wandered around people I trusted... Usually. Patch parked the jeep behind The Bo Arcade. When we got to the front line, the cashier laid eyes first on Patch and then on me. Back and forth they were going, trying to make a connection. What happened? Patch said, and put three dozen on the counter. The cashier was training his watchful gaze on me. He noticed that I couldn't stop looking at the moulty tattoos covering every available inch of skin on my forearms. Did he move a pack of gum? Tobacco? on the other side of the lower lip and said: Are you looking at something? I like your tooth, I started. I don't think he likes me, I whispered I patched up when we were at a safe distance. Bo doesn't love anyone. Is that Beau from Beau's Arcade? This is Beau Jr. of Beau Arcade. Beau Sr. died a few years ago. As? I asked. Bar fights. Below. I felt an irresistible urge to run back to the jeep and clear the party. Are we safe? I asked. The patch has a sloping look to the side. Angel. Just asking. Downstairs, the pool hall looked exactly like it was the first night I came. Cinderella's walls are painted black. The red felt pool tables in the center of the room. Poker tables are scattered all over the fringe. Low lighting path curved through the ceiling. The overloaded smell of cigar smoke clogs the air. The patch chose a table far from the stairs. He took two 7UPs out of the bar and popped their caps on the edge of the counter. I've never played pool before, I confessed. Choose a signal. He pointed to a rack of billiard sticks mounted on the wall. I lifted one down and carried it back to the pool table. The patch wiped his hand down his mouth to wipe the smile. A what? I said. I can't get home to run in the pool. I nodded. No home works. Got it. His smile was stretched. You hold your signal like a bat. I looked at my hands. He was right. I held him like a bat. It feels comfortable that way. He moved behind me, put his hands on my hips, and set me in front of the table. He hugged me and took up the pool stick. Like this, he said, repositioning my right hand by a few inches. And ... he continued, taking his left hand and forming a circle with his thumb and forson. He then put my left hand on the pool table like a tripod. He pushed the tip of the pool stick through the circle and over the fist of my middle finger. Bend at the waist. I leaned over to the pool table, with the breath Patch warms my neck. He retreated to the pool stick, and she glided in a circle. What ball do you want to hit? He asked, referring to the triangle of balls located at the far end of the table. yellow ahead is a good choice. Red is my favorite color. Red is. Patch drew the stick back and forth in a circle aimed at the cue ball, practicing my kick. I mowed on the cue ball and then on the triangle balls further down the table. You will I felt him smiling. How much do you want to bet? Five dollars. I could feel him shaking his head gently. Your jacket. Want my jacket? I want it off. My hand twitched forward, and the pool stick shot at my fingers, ramming cue. In turn, cue shot forward, hit a solid red, and smashed the triangle, balls ricocheted in all directions. Ok, I said, shucking off my denim jacket, maybe I'm a little impressed. Page 6 Patch reviewed my silkscarfslashhalter. His eyes were as black as the midnight ocean, his expression contemplative. Ok, he said. He then moves around the table, carefully inguaring the location of the balls. Five dollars says you can't sink a blue striped one, I said, choosing it intentionally; It was protected from a white cue ball with a mass of colorful balls. I don't want your money, Patch said. Our eyes are locked, and the tiniest dimple has surfaced in his cheek. My internal temperature went up another degree. What do you want? I asked. The patch lowered the billiard stick to the table, made one practical blow and drilled the cue ball. The momentum cued over the solid green, then by eight balls, and punched a striped blue into his pocket. I gave a nervous laugh and tried to hide it by cracking my knuckles, a bad habit I never succumbed to. Okay, maybe I'm more than a little impressed. The patch still leaned over the table, and he looked at me. The look warmed my skin. We never agreed on a bet, I said, resisting the urge to change my weight. The pool stick felt a little slick in my hands and I discreetly wiped my hand on my hip. As if I was no longer sweating enough, Patch said: You owe me. Someday I'll come and collect. I laughed, but it wasn't quite on the field. Do you want. Steps barrel down the stairs across your room. A tall, stringy guy with a hawkish nose and shaggy blue hair appeared at the bottom. First he looked at Patch, and then he turned his eyes to me. A slow smile appeared and he strode over and tipped back my 7UP, which I left on the edge of the pool table. You didn't tell me she was so soft on your eyes, he told Patch, wiping his mouth with his back hand. He spoke with a heavy Irish accent. I didn't tell her how hard you were at them either, Patch came back, mouthing at a relaxed stage just before smiling. The guy stepped away from the pool table next to me and stuck his hand to the side. Rickson's name, love, he told me. I reluctantly slid my hand into it. Nora. Am I interrupting something here? Rixon said, sharing the questionable view between me and Patch. No, I said at the same time, yes. Suddenly, Rixon playfully rushed to Patch, and they fell to the floor, rolling and throwing punches. There was the sound of hoarse laughter, fists laying in the flesh, and the cloth tearing, and Patch's bare back came into view. Two thick wounds ran the length. They next to his kidneys and ended on the shoulder blades, expanding to form an inverted V. Wounds were so grotesque that I almost gasped with horror. Yes, get away from me! Rixon yelled. The patch swung from the door, and as he rose to his feet, his torn shirt fluttered open. He sloughed it and threw it in the bin in the corner. Give me your shirt, he told Rixon. Rixon sent an angry wult to me. What do you think, Nora? Should we give him a shirt? Patch made a playful lunge forward, and Rixon's hands flew up to his shoulders. Easy now, he said, back up. He took off his hoodie and threw it on the patch, revealing a fitted white tee underneath it. As the patch rolled the hoodie down the abs hard enough to put a flutter in his stomach, Rixon turned to me. He told you how he got his nickname, didn't he? Excuse me? Before our good friend Patch here got tangled up in the pool, the guy favors Irish bareknuckle boxing. Wasn't very good at it. Rixon waged his head. Truth to say, he was utterly pathetic. I spent most of the night patching it, and soon after everyone started calling it Patch. Told him to give up boxing, but he won't listen. The patch caught my eye and handed me a goldmedal barfight smile. The smile itself was scary enough, but under the rough exterior, he held a note of desire. More than a note, actually. A whole symphony of desire. Patch tilted his head on the stairs and held his hand to me. Let's get out of here, he said. Where are we going? I asked if my stomach was falling to my knees. You'll see. As we climbed the stairs, Rixon shouted to me: Good luck with that, love! CHAPTER 18 ON THE DRIVE BACK, PATCH TOOK THE TOPSHAM EXIT and parked next to the historic Topsham paper factory sitting on the banks of the Androskoggin River. At one point, the mill was used to turn the pulp of trees into paper. Now a big sign across the side of the building read SEA DOG BREWING CO. The river was wide and changeable, with mature trees shooting from both sides. It was still heavy rain, and the night settled around us. I had to hit my mom home. I didn't tell her what I was going to do because... Well, the honest truth is, Patch wasn't the guy his mother was smiling at. He was the kind of guy the locks were changed for. Can we get a takeaway? I asked. The patch opened the driver's door. Any requests? A turkey sandwich. But no pickles. Oh, and no mayonnaise. I could tell that I earned one of his smiles that never quite made it to the surface. I seemed to earn a lot of them. This time I couldn't understand what I was saying. I'll see what I can do, he said, slipping out. The patch left the keys in the ignition lock and the heater pump. For the first few minutes, I replayed our evening so far in my head. And then it dawned on me that I was alone in Patch's jeep. His personal space. If I were a Patch, and I would hide something very secretive, I didn't hide it in my room, my school locker, or even my backpack, all of which might be or searched without warning. I'd hide it in my shiny black jeep with a sophisticated alarm. I unbuttoned my seat belt and rummaged through a stack of textbooks at my feet, feeling a mysterious smile creeping into my mouth at the thought of revealing one of the secrets of the patch. I didn't expect to find anything special; I'd stop at the combination with his locker or his cell phone number. Toeing around old-school assignments cluttering floor mats, I found a faded pinescented air freshener, an AC/DC highway to hell CD, pencil stubs, and a receipt from 7 Eleven from Wednesday at 10:18 p.m. Nothing particularly surprising or revealing. I popped open the glove compartment and sifted through the manual and other official documents. There was a glitter of chrome, and my fingertips brushed metal. I pulled out a steel flashlight and turned it on, but nothing happened. I unscrewed the bottom, thinking that the flashlight felt a little light, and of course there were no batteries. I wondered why Patch was holding a broken flashlight stored in his glove compartment. It was the last thought I had before my eyes at home on a rusty liquid that dried up at one end of the flashlight. Blood. Very carefully, I put the flashlight back in the glove compartment and closed it out of sight. I told myself there were a lot of things that would leave blood on the flashlight. How to hold it with an injured hand, using it to push a dead animal to the side of the road... swinging it with force against the body repeatedly until he broke his skin. With my heart rattling, I jumped on the first conclusion that presented myself. Patch lied. He attacked Marcy. He dropped me off on Wednesday night, exchanged his motorcycle for a jeep and went out looking for her. Or maybe their paths crossed by accident, and he acted impulsively. Anyway, Marcy was injured, the police got involved, and Patch was guilty. Rationally, I knew it was a quick draw and a big leap, but emotionally, the stakes were too high to take a step back and think. The patch had a frightening past and many, many secrets. If brutal and senseless violence was one of them, I wasn't safe riding around alone with him. A flash of distant lightning illuminated the horizon. Patch left the restaurant and ran through the parking lot, holding a brown bag in one hand and two fizzy drinks in the other. He went towards the driver and dived inside the jeep. He lifted his cap with the ball and cleaned the rain from his hair. Dark waves have turned over everywhere. He handed me a brown bag. One turkey sandwich, keep the mayo and pickles, and wash something it. Did you attack Marcy Millar? I asked quietly. I want the truth now. Patch lowered his 7UP out of his mouth. His eyes are cut on mine. A what? A flashlight in the glove compartment. Explain it. Have you been through my glove compartment? He didn't sound annoyed, but he didn't sound pleased, either. The flashlight died the blood This is. The police came to my house earlier. They think I'm involved. Marcy was attacked on Wednesday night, right after I told you how much I can't stand her. The patch gave a cutesy of laughter, minus the humor. You think I used a flashlight to beat Marcy. He reached out behind his seat and pulled out a large gun. I screamed. He bent down and sealed my mouth with his hand. Paintball gun, he said. His tone cooled down. I divided the views between the gun and the patch, feeling a lot of white swirling around my eyes. I played paintball earlier this week, he said. I thought we went for it. That doesn't explain the blood on the flashlight. Not blood, he said, paint. We played Capture the Flag. My eyes shifted back to the glove compartment, where the flashlight is stored. The flashlight was ... Flag. A mixture of relief, idiocy and guilt in accusing Patch floated through me. Oh, I said loudly. But it seemed too late for pity. The patch stared straight forward through the windshield, his breath deep. I wondered if he was using silence to let go of a little steam. I just accused him of assault, after all. I felt terrible about it, but my mind was too rattled to come up with the right apology. From your description of Marcy, it sounds like she's probably tormented by a few enemies,' he said. I'm sure Wee and I are top of the list, I said, trying to lighten the mood, but not quite joking, either. The patch pulled up to the farm and killed the engine. His ball cover was low over his eyes, but now his mouth held the offer of a smile. His lips looked soft and smooth, and I found it difficult to prevent my eyes. Most of all I was grateful that he seemed to forgive me. We're going to have to work on your pool game, Angel, Patch said. Speaking of swimming pool. I cleared my throat. I would like to know when and how you are going to collect on this... what I owe you. Not today. His eyes followed my eyes closely, judging by my answer. I was caught between weakening my mind and disappointing. But mostly disappointing. I have something for you, Patch said. He reached under his seat and pulled out a white paper bag with red chili printed across it. Bag of that from the border. He put it between us. What is this thing for? I asked, looking inside the bag, having absolutely no idea what might be inside. Open it up. I pulled a brown cardboard box out of the Facebook bag and lifted the lid. Inside was a snow globe with a miniature Delphic Seaport Amusement Park captured inside. Brass wires were bent roughly in a circle for the Ferris wheel and winding loops for roller coasters; flat sheets of stained metal formed the magic carpet ride. It's beautiful, I said, a little surprised what Patch thought of me, let alone gone into trouble with buying me a gift. Thank you. I mean it. I love it. He touched the curved glass. There is an Archangel before he was Behind the Ferris wheel is a thin wire flare tape hills and valleys of Arkhangelsk. An angel with broken wings stood at the highest point, bowing his head, looking down without eyes. What really happened the night we drove together? I asked. You don't want to know. If you tell me you're going to have to kill me? I was half joking. We're not alone, Patch said, looking through the windshield. I looked up and caught my mom standing in the open doorway. To my horror, she went out and went to the jeep. Let me do all the talking, I said, stuffing the snow globe back into the box. Don't say a word, not a word! The patch popped out and came outside my door. We met my mom halfway through. Page 7 I didn't know you were going to get away with it,' she told me, smiling, but not in a calm manner. It was a smile that said we'll talk later. It was kind of a last-minute, I explained. The rest was implied. Lucky for me, you're not so lucky. I was counting on her to go out on a smoothie with her friends after class. Nine times out of ten, she did. She turned her attention to Patch. It's nice to finally meet you. Apparently my daughter is a big fan. I opened my mouth to give a very brief introduction and send a patch on my way, but Mom beat me to it. I'm Nora's mom. Blythe Gray. It's a patch, I said, breaking my brains for trying to say that would bring pleasanties to a sudden halt. But the only thing I could think of was screaming Fire! or a fake seizure. Somehow, both seemed more humiliating than the bravura conversation between Patch and my mom. Nora told me you were a swimmer, mom said. I felt the patch tremble with laughter beside me. Swimmer? Are you on the school swimming team, or is it a city league? Learn more... recreational, said Patch, passing me questioning the look. Well recreational is also good, said Mom. Where do you swim? River Center? I'm more of an open-minded guy. Rivers and lakes. Isn't it cold? My mother asked. On my side, Patch twitched. I wondered what I missed. Nothing about the conversation seemed out of the ordinary. And I had to sideline with my mom on this. Maine was not a warm, tropical place. Swimming outdoors was cold, even in the summer. If Patch did swim outdoors, he was either crazy or he had a high pain threshold. Ok! I said, taking advantage of the lull. The patch has to go. Go! I kicked him in the mouth. It's a very good jeep, Mom said. Did your parents buy it for you? I got it myself. You have to have quite a job. I have bus tables at the border. Patch spoke as little as possible, keeping himself carefully shaded in secret. I was wondering what his life was like when he wasn't around me. On the way back I couldn't stop thinking about his frightening past. So far I've fantasized about discovering his deep, dark secrets because I wanted to prove to myself and Patch that I was able to figure it out. But now would like to know his secrets because that were part of it. And even though I regularly tried to deny it, I felt something for him. The more time I spent with him, the more I knew that the feelings didn't go away. Mom frowned. I hope that the work will not put on the way to study. Personally, I do not believe that high school students should work during the school year. You have enough on your plates already. Patch smiled. It wasn't a problem. Mind, if I ask you GPA? Mom said. Is that too rude? God, it's too late, I began loudly, consulting with the watch I didn't wear. I couldn't believe my mom was so uncool about it. That was a bad sign. It could only mean that her first impression of Patch was worse than I feared. It wasn't an introduction. It was an interview. Twopointtwo, patch said. My mom was looking at him. He's joking, I said quickly. Patch has something to do. Places to go. Pool to play - I put my hand over my mouth. Play? My mom said sound confused. Nora is referring to Bo Arcade, Patch explained. But that's not where I was headed. I have a few errands to run. I've never been to Beau,' she said. That's not all that interesting, I said. Wait, said her mother, very much like the red flag that had just appeared in her memory. Is it on the coast? Next to the Delphic seaport? Wasn't there a shootout in Beau a few years ago? It's tamer than it used to be, Patch said. I narrowed my eyes on him. He beat me to the beat. I was planning to openly lie about Beau having some history of violence. Want to come for ice cream? Mom asked, sounding excited, caught up between doing polite things and acting on the impulse to drag me inside and bolt the door. We only have vanilla,' she added of the sour deal. That's a few weeks ago. Patch shook his head. I must go. Maybe next time. It was nice to meet you, Blythe. I took a break from the conversation as my signal and pulled my mom to the front door, relieved that the conversation wasn't as bad as it could have been. Suddenly my mother turned back. What are you and Nora doing tonight? She asked Patch. The patch looked at me and raised my eyebrows all so little. We grabbed dinner at Topsham, I answered quickly. Sandwiches and fizzy drinks. It's a harmless night. The trouble is, my feelings for Patch weren't harmless. Chapter 19 I LEFT SNOW GLOBE IN ITS BOX and tucked it in my closet for a stack of argyll sweaters I was poaching from my father. When I opened the present before the patch, Delphic looked shimmering and beautiful, light swirling rainbows from the wires. But one in my bedroom, the amusement park looked haunted. The camp is perfect for disembodied spirits. And I wasn't completely sure there was no hidden camera inside. After changing into elastic camisole and floral pj pants, I called Vee. Well? She said. How was it? Obviously, he didn't kill. So it's a good start. Were Pool. You hate the pool. He gave me a few pointers. Now that I know what I'm doing, it's not too bad. I bet it can give you pointers in a few other areas of your life. Hmm. Normally, her comment may have incited at least a fluff of me, but my mood was too serious. I worked hard, I thought. I know I've said this before, but the patch doesn't inspire a deep sense of comfort in me, Wee said. I still have nightmares about a guy wearing a ski mask. In one of my nightmares, he ripped off his mask and guessed who was hiding under it? Patch. Personally, I think you should treat it like a loaded gun. Something about it is not normal. That was exactly what I wanted to talk about. What can lead to someone having a Vshaped scar on their back? I asked her. There was a minute's silence. Chum, Wee choked. Did you see him naked? Where did this happen? His jeep? His house? Your bedroom? I didn't see him naked! It was kind of an accident. Uhhuh, I've heard that excuse before, said Wee. He had a huge, inverted Vshaped scar on his back. Isn't that a little weird? Of course it's weird. But that's the Patch we're talking about. He has a few screws loose. I'm going to take wild guesses and say... gang fight? Prison scars? Discount marks from hitandrun? One half of my brain tracked my conversation with V, but the other, more subconscious half got lost. My memory came back to the night Patch dared me to ride the Archangel. I hit off the creepy and strange pictures on the side of the car. I remembered the horned beasts, tearing the wings off the angel. I remembered the black upturned V where the wings of an angel used to be. I almost dropped my phone. Sorry, what? I asked V when I realized she had held the conversation further and waited for my answer. A what. Happened. Next? She repeated, making every word. The Land of Nore. I need the details. I'm dying here. He got into a fight, and his shirt ripped. End of story. There's no whathappenedeither. Wee is sucked in the breath. That's what I'm saying. You two together ... And he's into a fight? What's his problem? It's like he's more of an animal than a human being. In my opinion, I switches between a picture of angel scars and Patch scars. Both scars healed to the color of black licorice, both ran from shoulder blades to kidneys, and both curved as they traveled along the length of the back. I told myself that there was a good chance that it was just a very eerie coincidence that the paintings on Arkhangelsk depicted Patch's scars perfectly. I told myself that a lot can lead to scars like Patch's. Fighting gangs, prison scars, skidding marks. As Wee said. Unfortunately, all the excuses were like lies. It was as if the truth was looking me in the face, but I wasn't brave enough to look back. Was he an angel? Wee asked. I snapped myself. A what? Was he an angel, or was he living up to his badboy image? Because, honestly? I'm not this whole version of the story he didn't/trying/anything. V? I must go. My voice was strewn with cobwebs. I see it like this. You are going to hang up before I get the details of the big shebang. Nothing has happened to date, and nothing has happened since. My mom met us on the road. Shut up! I don't think she likes the patch. You don't talk! Wee said. Who would have guessed? I'll call you tomorrow, okay? Sweet dreams, baby. A fat chance, I thought. The room was small, with a pitched roof, more substantiate than a room. One greasy window with faded orange curtains from the 1970s looked out into the side yard. I could be fully up in about 30 percent of the room. At the other 70 percent, the top of my hair brushed exposed to bunches of rafters. There was one naked light bulb. Ten minutes later the computer provided an internet connection and I typed angel wing scars into the Google search bar. I hovered my finger over entering the key, fearing that if I went through it, I must admit I was actually considering the possibility that the patch was-well, not... Person. I hit the enter and mouselicked on the first link before I could dissuade myself from it. FALLEN ANGELS: A FRIGHTENING TRUTH When creating the Garden of Eden, heavenly angels were sent to Earth to look after Adam and Eve. Soon, however, some angels set their sights on the world behind the walls of the garden. They considered themselves future rulers over the population of the Earth, crave power, money and even human women. Together they seduced and persuaded Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, opening the gate guarding Eden. As punishment for this grave sin and for desertion from his duties, God deprived the angels of wings and forever banished them to earth. I skimmed down a few items, my heart beats erratically. Fallen angels are the same evil spirits (or demons) described in the Bible as having taken possession of human bodies. Fallen angels roam the Earth in search of human bodies to chase and control. They tempt people to do evil by communicating thoughts and images directly into their minds. if a fallen angel succeeds in turning a person to evil, he can enter the human body and influence his or her personality and actions. However, it is only during the Jewish month of Cheswhan that the human body of the fallen angel can be taken hold. Czechwan, known as the Bitter Month, is the only month without any Jewish holidays or fasts, making it a wicked month. Between the new and full moons during Ceswan fallen angels in droves invade human bodies. My mind lingered on the computer monitor a few minutes after I finished reading. I had no thoughts. None. Just the complexity of emotions, confusing inside me. Cold, panicky amazement and foreboding among them. Involuntary shuddering woke me up to my I remembered several times when I I some patch broke normal methods of communication and whispered directly to my mind, just as the article claimed, fallen angels could. Comparing this information with the scars of the patch, whether it was possible ... Can the patch be a fallen angel? Did he want to take over my body? I scanned quickly through the rest of the article, slowing down when I read something even more bizarre. Page 8 Of fallen angels who have sexual relations with a man produce a superhuman offspring called Nephilim. The nephilim race is evil and unnatural race and should never have inhabited the Earth. Although many believe that the Great Flood in Noah's time was intended to cleanse the Earth of the nephilim, we cannot know whether this hybrid race has died out and whether fallen angels have continued to reproduce with humans ever since. It seems logical that they will, meaning that the nephilim race is probably on Earth today. I pushed away from the table. I shoved everything I read into the psychic folder and filed it away. And stamp SCARY on the outside of the folder. I didn't want to think about it right now. I'd sort this out later. Can. My cell phone was buzzing in my pocket and I jumped. We decided, avocado green or yellow? Wee asked. I've already filled all my green fruit slots today, but if you tell me avocado yellow, I'm in business. Do you believe in superheroes? After watching Tobey Maguire in SpiderMan, yes. And then there's Christian Bale. Older, but the killer is hot. I'd let him save me from ninja swords. I mean it. Just like me. I asked. I heard it burst into a gum bubble. Sunday. Do you think the Bible is accurate? I mean, do you think it's real? I think Pastor Calvin is hot. In 300things. This pretty much sums up my religious belief. After I hung up, I went to my room and slid under the blanket. I threw on an extra blanket to prevent a sudden cold. Whether the room was cold or the icy feeling arose inside me, I wasn't sure. Ghosts words such as the fallen angel, human possession and Nephilim danced me to sleep. CHAPTER 20 I THREW ALL NIGHT. WIND GUSTED THROUGH OPEN farm rim fields, spraying debris against windows. I woke up several times after hearing the shingles pulled from the roof and tumbling over the edge. Every little noise from the rattle of the window panes to my own creaking beds had me jumping out of my sleep. About six I gave up, pulled myself out of bed, and soft down the corridor for a hot shower. Then I cleaned my room - my closet looked thin, and of course I filled the basket with three loads of laundry. I was climbing the stairs with a fresh load when a knock sounded at the front door. I opened it to find Elliot standing on the doorstep. He was wearing jeans, a vintage plaid shirt, elbow-rolled, sunglasses and a Red Sox cap. From the outside, he looked all-American. But I knew better, and the jolt of nervous confirmed it. Nora Gray, Elliot said in a patronizing voice. He bent down and smiled, and I caught a sour smack of alcohol on his breath. You've been causing me a lot of trouble lately. What are you doing here? He followed me into the house. What does it look like, how do I do it? I want to talk. Can't I come? My mom's asleep. I don't want to wake her up. I've never met your mom. Something about how he said it made the hair on the back of my neck stand tall. Excuse me, do you need something? His smile was half sloppy, half derisive. You don't love me, do you, Nora Gray? In response, I put my hands on my chest. He staggered back a step with his hand pressed to his heart. Oh. I'm here, Nora, as the last attempt to convince you that I'm the average guy, and you can trust me. Don't push me. Look, Elliot, I've got a few things I need, he drilled his fist into the house, smacking his knuckles against siding hard enough to shake loose chipped paint. I'm not done yet! He's a slurredly hot voice. Suddenly he tilted his head back and laughed softly. He bent down and put a bleeding hand on their knees and moaned. Ten dollars says I'll regret it later. Elliot's presence made my skin crawl. I remembered a few days when I really thought he was goodlooking and charming. I wondered why I was such an idiot. I was thinking of closing the door and locking it up when Elliot took off his sunglasses, showing blood-soaked eyes. He cleared his throat, his voice coming out straight. I came here because I wanted to tell you, Jules is under a lot of stress at school. Exams, student government, scholarship applications, yadda, yadda, yadda. He's not acting like himself. He needs to get away from it all for a few days. The four of us -- Jules, me, you, V -- should go camping on spring break. Leave tomorrow at Powder Horn and return on Tuesday afternoon. This will give Jules a chance to unpack. Every word that came out of his mouth sounded intimidating and rehearsed carefully. Sorry, I already have plans. Let me change my mind. I'm planning the whole trip. I'll get tents, food. I'll show you what a great guy I am. I'll show you a good time. I think you should leave. Elliot tilted his hand on the doorknob, leaning towards me. Wrong answer. For a fleeting moment, a glass stupor in his eyes disappeared, something twisted and ominous eclipse him. I unwittingly retreated. I was pretty sure Elliot was going to kill him. I was pretty sure Kirsten's death was in his hands. Go away, or I call a taxi, I said. He grabbed me in front of my robe and yanked me outside. Then he pushed me back to the siding and pressed me there with his body. You go camping whenever you want to or not. Get out of me! I said, twisting away from him. Or what? What are you Do? He's Him. me by the shoulders now, and he knocked me back into the house again, banging his teeth. I'll call the police. I had no idea how I said it so boldly. My breath was quick and shallow, my hands sticky. Are you going to shout for them? They can't hear you. The only way I'm going to let you go is if you're going to go camping for Nora? Elliot and I both turned to the front door where my mom's voice carried. Elliot kept his hands on me a minute longer and then made a disgusting noise and pushed me away. Halfway down the porch steps, he looked over his shoulder. That's not all. I hurried inside and locked the door. My eyes started to burn. I dragged my back down the length of the door and sat down at the entrance carpet, struggling with the urge to sob. My mom appeared at the top of the stairs, cinching her robe at the waist. Nora? What's wrong? Who was at the door? I blinked my eyes dry in a hurry. The kid from school. I couldn't keep the wobble out of my voice. He -- I've already been in enough trouble for my date with the patch. I knew my mom was planning to attend a wedding and reception tonight for a friend's daughter from work, but if I told her Elliot rudely me, there was no way she'd go. And that was the last thing I wanted, because I had to go to Portland and explore Elliot. Even a sliver of evidence can be enough to put him behind bars, and until that happens, I won't feel safe. I felt violence going on inside it, and I didn't want to see what would happen if it got out of hand. He wanted my Hamlet notes, I said flatly. Last week he cheated on my quiz, and apparently he's trying to make a habit of it. Oh, darling. She came down next to me, stroking my wet hair, which cooled down after my shower. I can see why you're upset. I can call his parents if I want. I shook my head. Then I'll make breakfast, my mother said. Go finish getting dressed. I'll have everything ready by the time you come down. I was standing in front of the closet when my cell phone rang. Did you hear it? The four of us are going on a hike for spring break, said Wee, sounding strangely hilarious. Wee, I said, trembling in his voice, Elliot is planning something. Something terrible. The only reason he wants to go camping is because he can take us alone. We're not going to. What do you mean we're not going to? It's a joke, isn't it? I mean, we can finally do something exciting during spring break, and you're saying no? You know my mom will never let me go alone. I'll do whatever I want. Seriously. I'll do your homework in a week. Come on, Nora. One little word. Say it. It starts with the letter Y.... The hand holding my camera was shaking and I raised my other hand to stabilize it. Elliot showed up at my house fifteen minutes ago, drunk. He physically threatened me. It was a quiet moment. What do you mean by being physically threatened? He me out of the front door and pushed me to the house. But he was drunk, wasn't he? Is it? Does it matter? I cut it off. Well, he's got a lot going on. I mean, he was wrongly accused of getting tangled up in some girl's suicide, and he had to change schools. If he hurts you and I don't condone what he did, by the way, maybe he just needs... counseling, you know? If he hurts me? It was wasted. Maybe he didn't know what he was doing. Tomorrow it will feel terrible. I opened my mouth, closed it. I couldn't believe V was on Elliot's side. I have to go, I said briefly. Can I be completely honest, baby? I know you're worried about this guy wearing a ski mask. I don't hate me, but I think the only reason you're trying so hard to blame this on Elliot is because you don't want it to be Patch. You're rationalizing everything and it scares me. I was speechless. Rationalization? The patch didn't come out at my door this morning and slam me against my house. You know what? I shouldn't have talked about it. Let's just drop him, okay? Okay, I said harshly. What are you doing today? I stuck my head out the door listening to my mom. The sound of a wheek scraping off the side of the bowl is carried out of the kitchen. Part of me doesn't see the point in sharing anything else with V, but the other part of me felt resentful and confrontational. Did she want to know my plans? Good with me. It's not my problem if she doesn't like them. I'm going to Portland as soon as my mom goes to a wedding in Old Orchard Beach. The wedding started at 4pm, and with the reception after, my mom won't be back home until 9pm anytime soon. Which gave me enough time to spend the evening in Portland, and beat her home. In fact, I was wondering if maybe I could borrow neon. I won't put my mom to see the miles I put on my car. Oh, boy. You're going to spy on Elliot, aren't you? You're going to spy around Kinghorn. I'm going to do a little shopping and grab dinner,' I said, sliding the hangers down the rack in my closet. I pulled out a long sleeved fabric tee, jeans, and pinkandwhitestriped beanie I reserved for badhair days and weekends. And will the grabbing dinner include a stop at a certain diner located a few blocks from Kinghorn Prep? The diner where Kirsten what'shername is used to work? It's not a bad idea, I said. Are you going to actually eat, or just interrogate the workers? I could ask a few questions. Will I get neon or not? Of course you do, she said. What are your best friends for? I'll even go with you on that doomed little dummy. But first you have to promise that you will go camping. No problem. I'm on the bus. We'll talk about spring break later! Wee rang the phone before I was able to disconnect. I've been to Portland a few times, but I didn't know the city well. I got off the bus armed with my camera, a map and my own Compass. The buildings were redbrick, tall and slender, blocking the setting sun, which erupted from under the thick thick storm clouds, inhabiting the streets under a canopy of shadows. The shops all had verandas and fancy signs stretching over the doors. The streets were lit by black witches. After a few blocks, the congested streets opened in a wooded area and I saw a sign for Kinghorn Prep. The cathedral, spire and clock tower looked over the treetops. Page 9 I stayed on the sidewalk and rounded the corner on 32nd Street. The harbour was only a few blocks away and I caught glimpses of boats passing behind the shops as they came to the dock. Halfway down 32nd Street, I saw a sign for Blind Joe's Diner. I pulled out my interview questions and read them one last time. The plan wasn't to look like I was holding an official interview. I was hoping that if I accidentally touched on the topic of Kjrjsten with the staff, I could tease something to a handful of reporters before I somehow missed. Hoping that the questions were kept to mind, I had a behind-the-scenes list in the nearest trash can. The door was s forced in when I walked in. The floor was yellow-and-white tiles, and the cabins were abode in nautical blue. Photos of the harbor hung on the walls. I sat in the booth next to the door and shrugged my shoulders out of my coat. A waitress in a painted white apron appeared next to me. The name is Whitney, she told me in a sour voice. Welcome to Blind Joe. A special sandwich with tuna today is. Soup of lobster chowder of the day. Her pen was ready to accept my order. Blind Joe? I frowned and tapped my chin. Why does that name sound so familiar? Aren't you reading the paper? We were in the news for a week right last month. Fifteen minutes, and all that. About! I said with sudden clarity. Now I remember. It was murder, wasn't it? Doesn't a girl work here? It would be Kirsten Halverson. She pressed the handle impatiently. Want me to bring out a bowl of that chowder to start? I didn't want lobster chowder. In fact, I wasn't remotely hungry. It must be hard. Were you two friends? Hell, no. Are you going to order or what? I'll give you a little secret. I don't work, I don't get paid, I don't rent. Suddenly I wish the waiter through the room did not accept my order. He had a short, bald back to his ears, and his body type imitated the toothpicks in the dispenser at the end of the table. His eyes never reached above three feet from the ground. As pathetic as I would have felt after having one friendly smile from me may have been enough to have it shed the whole story of Kirsten's life. Sorry, I told Whitney. I just can't stop thinking about murder. Of course, this is probably old news for you. You must have been reporters here all the time asking questions. She gave me a pointed look. Need a few more minutes to look at the menu? Personally, I find reporters annoyed. She bent down, sn down her hand on the countertop. I find customers who take their own sweet time annoying. I blew my silence and flipped open the menu. What do you recommend? It's all good. Ask my boyfriend. She smiled sardonily. He's a cook. Speaking of guys ... made Kjrjsten have one? Good segue, I said to myself. Spill, Whitney demanded. Are you a cop? Lawyer? Reporter? Just a concerned citizen. It sounded like a question. Yes right. Tell you what. Order a milkshake. French fries, Angus burger, a bowl of chowder, and give me a twenty-five percent tip, and I'll tell you what I said to everyone else. I weighed my options: my allowance or answers. It's done. Kirsten met this child, Elliot Saunders. The one in the papers. He was here the whole time. Walked her back to his apartment at the end of his shift. Have you ever spoken to Elliot? Don't you think Kirsten committed suicide? How would I know? I read in the paper that a suicide note was found in Dursen's apartment, but that there was evidence of a rupture. And? You won't find that little... Weird? If you're asking if I think Elliot could put a note in his apartment, of course I do. A rich guy like that can get away with anything. Probably hired someone to plant a note. Here's how it works when you get the money. I don't think Elliot has much money. I always had the impression that Jules was rich. Wee never stopped raving about his house. I think he went to Kinghorn Prep on a scholarship. Scholarship? She repeated it on the digging. What were you drinking in the water? If Elliot didn't get a lot of money, how did he buy Kirsten her apartment? Tell me that. I struggled to keep my surprise in check. Did he buy her apartment? Kirsten will never shut up about it. Oh drove me crazy. Why would he buy her an apartment? Whitney was looking at me, her hands on her hips. Tell me you're not really that dumb. Privacy. Proximity. Have. I said, do you know why Elliot was transferred from Kinghorn? I didn't know what he did. I juggled her answers with questions I still wanted to ask, trying to summon them from memory. Has he ever met friends here? Anyone other than Kjrjsten? How should I remember that? She gave a hard roll of her eyes. Do I look like I got one of these photographic memories? How about a really tall guy? Very tall. Long blond hair, beautiful, tailored clothing. She tore off the tattered tonactu with her front teeth and dropped it in her apron pocket. Yes, I remember that guy. It's hard not to. All capricious and quiet. He came once or twice. Not so long ago. Maybe around the time Kirsten died. I remember because we were serving salted sandwiches on St. Patrick's Day and I couldn't get him to order one. Just looked at me like he would have reached across the table and slit my throat if I stuck around reading the daily special more. But I think I remember something. It's not like I love it, but I have ears. Sometimes I can't help but hear things. Last time high and Elliot came in, they were at the table, talking about the test. A test at school? How would I know? It sounded like the tall guy failed the test, and Elliot wasn't too happy about it. He shoved his chair back and burst in. I didn't even eat my whole sandwich. Do they mention Kjrjsten? The tall guy came first, asked if Kjrjsten was working. I told him no, she wasn't and he got on his cell phone. Ten minutes later, Elliot walks. Kirsten always handled Elliot's desk, but like I said, it didn't work, so I got it. If they were talking about Kjrjten, I didn't hear. But it seemed to me that the tall guy did not want Kjrjsten around . Do you remember anything else? Depends. Are you going to order dessert? I think I'll have a piece of cake. Pie? I'm giving you five minutes of my precious time, and all you order is a pie? I look like I have nothing better to do than chatter with you? I looked around the diner. He was dead. Besides the man hunched over the paper on the counter, I was the only customer. Ok... I went through the menu. You want raspberry lemonade to wash this cake down. She wrote it on her set. And after a coffee. More scribbling. I'll be looking forward to an extra twenty percent review with this. She pressed me with a smug smile and then hid her pad in an apron and sashayed back into the kitchen. CHAPTER 21 OUTSIDE, WEATHER HAS SHIFTED TO COLD AND drizzle rain. The lampposts burned an eerie, yellow color that did little against the thick fog brewing through the streets. I hurried out of Blind Joe, grateful I had looked at the weather forecast earlier and brought my umbrella. As I walked past the windows, I saw crowds gathering in bars. I was a few blocks from the bus stop when the now familiar icy feeling kissed the back of the head. I felt it that night when I was sure someone had looked through my bedroom window, in Delphi, and again right before Vee came out of Victoria's Secret wearing my jacket. I bent down, pretended to tie my shoelace, and cast a secret glance around. Sidewalks on both sides of the street were empty. The light of the pedestrian crossing changed and I came off the side of the road. Moving faster. I hid my handbag under my arm and hoped the bus was on time. I cut through the alley behind the bar, slipped past a bunch of smokers, and went out to the next street. Running up a block, I veered down another lane and circled back around the block. Every few seconds I checked behind me. I heard the rumble of the bus, and a minute later it rounded the corner, materializing from the fog. It slowed against the curb, and I boarded, heading home. I was the only passenger. Sitting a few rows behind the driver, I slouched to hold on to the sight. He yanked the lever to close the doors, and the bus roared down the street. I was on the verge of offering a sigh of relief when I received a text message from Vee. WHERE IS U AT? PORTLAND, I WROTE BACK. You? ME 2. AT A PARTY WITH JULES AND ELLIOT. Meet. WHY WHY PORTLAND? I did not wait for her answer; I dialed it directly. It was quicker to speak. And it was urgent. Well? What can I tell you? Wee asked. Are you in the mood for a party? Does your mom know you're at a party in Portland with two guys? You're starting to sound neurotic, baby. I can't believe you came to Portland with Elliot! I had a sinking thought. Does he know you're on the phone with me? So he can come to kill you? No, I'm sorry. He and Jules ran to Kinghorn to pick something up, and I'm cooling solo. I wouldn't use a winged woman. Hey! Wee screamed in the background. Hands off, okay? O.F. Nora? I'm not really in the biggest area. Time has to be essentially. Where are you? Hang on ... Okay, the building across the street says oneeventwoseven. Highsmith Street, I'm sure. I'll be there as soon as I can. But I'm not staying. I'm going home, and you're coming with me. Stop the bus! I called the driver. He applied the brakes, and I was thrown on the seat in front of me. Can you tell me which way Highsmith is? I asked him as soon as I made it to the top of the aisle. He pointed to the windows pouring out on the right side of the bus. Do you plan to walk? He was looking at me up and down. Because I have to warn you,

it's a rough neighborhood. Well done. I had to walk just a few blocks before I knew the bus driver was right to warn me. The scenery has changed dramatically. The bizarre display cases have been replaced by buildings sprayed with bandit graffiti. The windows were dark, riddled with iron. Sidewalks were deserted paths stretching in the fog. A slow, crawling noise drifted through the mist, and the woman pushes a basket of trash bags wheeled into view. Her eyes were raisins, beads and dark, and they twitched their way over me in an almost predatory assessment. What did we get here? She said through gaping missing teeth. I drew a discreet step back and grabbed my handbag against me. It looks like coats, mittens, and a pretty woolen hat,' she said. Always wanted me to have a beautiful wool hat. She uttered the word pritee. Hello, I said, clearing my throat and trying to sound friendly. Can you tell me how far further Highsmith Street is? She screamed. The bus driver pointed me in that direction, I said with less certainty. Did he tell you Highsmith like that? She said the sound was annoying. I know the way to Highsmith, and it's not. I waited, but she didn't specify. Do you think you could give me directions? I asked. I have instructions. She tapped her head with her finger, which strongly resembled a twisted, knotted twig. Keep everything here, I do. Which way is Highsmith? I'm inspiring. But I can't tell you for free,' she said in a chiding tone. It's going to cost you. A girl has to make a living. No one has ever told you anything in life for free? I don't have any money. Not much, anyway. Just enough for the bus home. You have a nice warm coat. Page 10 I looked at the My the cold wind ruffled my hair, and the thought of peeling my coat sent a flush of goosebumps. I just got this coat for Christmas. I'm freezing my derriere here, she snapped. Do you want directions or not? I couldn't believe I was standing here. I couldn't believe I was bartering my coat with a homeless woman. Wee was so far indebted to me that she might never come out. I shucked off my coat and watched her zip into it. My breath came out like smoke. I hugged myself and stomped my feet, keeping my body warm. Can you tell me the way to Highsmith now? Do you want a long way, or a shortcut? Shshort, I said. The shortcut got an extra charge attached. Like I said, always wanted me to have a pretty wool hat. I pulled the pink and white beanie off my head. Highsmith? I asked, trying to keep the friendly tone as I conveyed it. See what alley? She said, pointing after me. I turned around. The alley was half a block back. You take it, you go out to Highsmith on the other side. That's it? I said incredulously. Is one block over? The good news is that you got within walking distance. The bad news is, you shouldn't walk in this weather. Of course I am nice and warm now I have got me a coat and a beautiful hat. Give me these mittens and I'll walk you there myself. I looked at the mittens. At least my hands were warm. I'm a hee. She shrugged and wheeled her cart to the next corner, where she took the post against the bricks. The alley was dark and cluttered with trash cans, water cardboard boxes and an unrecognizable hump that may have been thrown away by a water heater. Again, it just as easily could have been a carpet with the body rolled inside. A high chain fence swept the alley halfway down. I could barely climb the four-foot fence on a good day, let alone a ten-foot. Brick buildings surrounded me on both sides. All windows were smeared and banned. Stepping over boxes and garbage bags, I chose my way down the alley. Broken glass crunched under my shoes. A flash of white rushed between my legs, stealing my breath. Cat. Just a cat disappearing in the dark in front. I reached for my pocket to tell her that I was close and follow me when I remembered that I had left my cell phone in my coat pocket. It's nice to go, I thought. Exactly - thin to no one. I decided it was worth a try, and as I turned around, the sleek black sedan sped past the opening in the lane. With a sudden glow of red, the brake lights caught fire. For reasons I couldn't explain for my intuition, I drew into the shadows. The car door opened, and shots rang out. Two shots. The car door slammed shut, and the black sedan squealed away. I could hear my heart pounding my chest, and it was mixed with the sound of my legs running. A minute later I realized that these were my and I ran into the mouth of the alley. I am I corner and came up short. The lady's body bag was in a pile on the sidewalk. I rushed and fell to my knees beside her. Are you okay? I said desperately, turning it over. Her mouth was agape, her eyes raisin hollow hollow. The dark liquid blossomed through the quilted coat I was wearing three minutes ago. I felt the urge to bounce back, but forced myself to reach inside the coat pockets. I had to call for help, but my cell phone wasn't there. There was a phone booth on the corner across the street. I ran up to him and dialed 911. While I was waiting for the cameraman to pick up, I looked back at the lady's body bag, and that's when I felt the cold adrenaline shoot through me. The body's gone. With a wobbly hand, I hung up. The sound of approaching footsteps tapped in my ears, but whether they were near or far away, I could not say. Clip, clip, clip. He's here, I thought. A man in a ski mask. I put a few coins in my phone and grabbed the receiver with both hands. I was trying to remember Patt's cell phone number. Squeezing his eyes closed, I visualized seven numbers, which he wrote in red ink on my hand on the first day we met. Before I could secondguess my memory, I typed the numbers. What happened? Patch said. I almost sobbed at the sound of his voice. I heard crack billiard balls colliding on the pool table in the background, and knew he was in The Arcade Bo. He could be here in fifteen, maybe twenty minutes. It's me. Nora? I'm at PPortland. On the corner of Hampshire and Nantucket. Can you have me? It's urgent.' I huddled at the bottom of the phone booth, counting silently to a hundred, trying to stay calm when a black jeep commander slid to the side of the road. The patch slid the door into the phone booth open and crouched down in the porch. He took off the top layer - a deep black T-shirt, leaving it in a black shirt. It fits a neck out-t T-shirt over my head and a minute later my hands are pushed through the sleeves. The shirt eclipsed me, the sleeves dangling far beyond my fingertips. He mixed the smells of smoke, salt water and mint soap. Something about it filled the hollow space inside me with confidence. Let's get you in the car, Patch said. He picked me up, and I put my arms around his neck and buried his face in him. I think I'll be sick, I said. I need my iron pills. Shh, he said, holding me against him. It's going to be fine. I'm here now. I managed to nod a little. Let's get out of here. Another nod. We have to get Vee,' I said. While Patch was riding a jeep around the corner, I listened as my chattering teeth echoed around inside my head. I've never been so scared in my life. Seeing a dead homeless woman conjured up my father's thoughts. My vision with the red, and hard as I tried, I couldn't get rid of the image of blood. Were you in the middle of a pool game? asked, recalling the sound of billiard balls colliding in the background during our brief phone call. I was winning an apartment. Condo? One of those posh on the lake. I'd take this place. It's Highsmith. Do you have an address? I can't remember him,' I said, sitting above to better look out the windows. All the buildings looked abandoned. There was no sign of the party. There was no sign of life, period. Do you have a camera? I asked Patch. He slipped the blackberry out of his pocket. The battery is low. I don't know if it will make the call. I wrote V. Where are you? CHANGE OF PLANS, she wrote in response. GUESS J AND E COULDN'T FIND WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR 4. We're going home. The screen merges into black. He's dead, I told Patch. Do you have a charger? Not on me. Wee returns to Coldwater. Do you think you could drop me off at her house? Minutes later we were on the coastal highway, driving right along the cliff just above the ocean. I've been this way before, and when the sun was, the water was slate blue with patches of dark green where water reflected evergreen plants. It was night and the ocean was a smooth black poison. Are you going to tell me what happened? Patch asked. The jury still didn't know if I should tell Patch anything. I could tell him that after the bag lady snatched me out of her coat, she was shot. I could tell him that I thought the bullet was meant for me. Then I could try to explain how the lady's body bags magically disappeared in the air. I remembered Detective Basso's mad look at me when I told him that someone had injected into my bedroom. I wasn't in the mood to get eyeballed and laughed again. Not Patchem. Not now. I got lost and the lady bag cornered me, I said. I wiped my nose in the back of my arm and sniffed. She got my hat, too. What did you do all the way here? Patch asked. Meeting V at a party. We were halfway between Portland and Coldwater, on a stretch of lush and unpopulated highway, when steam suddenly erupted from the bonnet of a jeep. The patch braked, weakening the jeep to the side of the road. Hold on, he said, swaying. Having lifted the hood of the jeep, he disappeared out of sight. A minute later, he dropped the hood into place. Brushing his hands on his pants, he came to my window, gesticulating to let me down. Bad news, he said. It's an engine. I tried to look informed and smart, but I had the feeling that my expression just looked blank. The patch raised an eyebrow and said: Let him rest in peace. He's not going to move? Not if we don't press it. Of all the cars, he had to win a lemon. Where's your camera? Patch asked. I lost him. He smiled. Let me guess. In his coat pocket. The lady's bag is really cashed out, isn't it? He's scouted the horizon. Two options. We can tag down the ride, or we can go to the next exit and find the phone. I went out, closing the door with behind me. I kicked the right front tire of the jeep. I knew I was using anger to mask my fear of what I went through today. As soon as I was all alone, I broke down crying. I think there's a motel on the next exit. I'll go cccall the taxi, I said, my teeth chatter harder. You're waiting here with the jeep. He cracked a slight smile, but it didn't look funny. I'm not going to let you out of sight. You look a little insane, Angel. We're going to go together. Crossing my arms, I stood in front of him. In tennis shoes, my eyes came level with his shoulders. I had to tilt my neck back to meet his eyes. I'm not going anywhere near the motel with you. It's best to sound firm, so I was less likely to change my mind. Do you think the two of us and the slum motel make for a dangerous combination? Yes, actually. The patch leaned back on the jeep. We can sit here and argue about it. He squinted in the exuberant sky. But this storm is about to catch its second breath. As if Mother Nature wanted her to say in the verdict, the sky opened and a thick mixture of rain and sleet collapsed. I sent a patch of my cold look and then blew an angry sigh. As usual, he was right. Chapter 21 TWENTY MINUTES LATER PATCH AND I WASHED UP at the entrance to a low-budget motel. I didn't say a word to him as we ran through the wet rain, and now I was not only soaked, but thoroughly ... Unnerving. The rain is cascading down and I don't think we'll be back in the jeep any time soon. What left me, Patch, and the motel in the same equation for an indefinite amount of time. The door chimed on our way in, and the desk clerk stood abruptly, dusting Cheetos crumbs from his knees. What's it going to be? He said, sucking his fingers clean from the orange slime. Take the two of you tonight? We nnneed to borrow the phone, I chatted, hoping that he could understand my request. No one can do. Lines down. Blame the storm. What do you mean llines are down? Do you have a camera? The clerk looked at Patch. She wants a non-smoking room, Patch said. I turned my face to the patch. Have you lost your mind? I got my mouth shut. The clerk tapped a few keys on his computer. Looks like we have ... Wait... Bingo! A non-smoking king. We'll take him, Patch said. He looked at me sideways, and the edges of my mouth tipped over. I narrowed my eyes. It was then that the lights above his head blinked, plunging the lobby into darkness. We all stood silent for a moment before the clerk fumbled around and pressed the industrial flashlight. I was a Boy Scout, he said. Back in the day. Be prepared. Then you mmmust have a mobile phone? I said. Yes I did. So far I couldn't pay the bill anymore. He pulled his shoulders. What can I say, my mom is cheap. Page 11 His Mom? He was supposed to be forty. Not that it was my business. I was much more concerned about what my mom would do when she came home from the front desk and found me gone. How do you want to pay? The front desk staff member asked. Cash, Patch said. Secretary of the Table bouncing his head up and down. It's a popular form of payment here. He leaned close and spoke in confidential tones. We get a lot of people who don't want their extracurricular activities traced, if you know what I mean. The logical half of my brain told me that I couldn't actually consider spending the night at the motel with Patch. It's crazy,' I said of the patch in the shade. I'm crazy. He was again on the verge of smiling. It's about you. How much for a flashlight? He asked the clerk. The clerk reached below the table. I have something even better: survivalsize candles, he said, putting two in front of us. When he struck the match, he lit it. They're on the house, no extra charge. Put one in the bathroom and one in the sleeping area and you will never know the difference. I'll even throw it in the matchbook. If nothing else, it will make a good souvenir. Thank you, said Patch, taking his elbow and walking down the hallway. In room 106, Patch bolted the door behind us. He put a candle on the nightstand and then used it to light the spare. Raising a baseball cap, he shook the ends of his hair like a wet dog. You need a hot shower, he said. Taking a few steps back, he dived his head into the bathroom. Looks like bar soap and two towels. I tilted my chin to a fraction. You can't assure me to stay here. I only agreed to go this far because I didn't want to stand out in the downpour, for example, and I had high hopes of finding a phone for two. It sounded more like an issue than a statement, Patch said. Then ansswer him. His rogue smile crept out. It's hard to focus on the answers with you, looking like this. I glanced at Patch's black shirt, wet and clinging to my body. I brushed past it and closed the bathroom door between us. Turning the water to full hot, I got off Patch's shirt and my clothes. One long black hair was plastered against the shower wall and I trapped it in a square of toilet paper before washing it off. Then I stepped behind the shower curtain, watching my skin glow warm. Massaging soap in the muscles along the neck and down over my shoulders, I told myself that I could handle sleeping in the same room as the patch. It wasn't the smartest and safest arrangement, but I personally wish nothing had happened. Also, what choice I had ... Right? The spontaneous, reckless half of my brain laughed at me. I knew what he was thinking. Early on I felt drawn to patch a mysterious force field. Now I felt that I was attracted to him quite another. Something with a lot of heat involved. Communication today was inevitable. On a scale of one to ten, which scared me about eight. And excited me about the nine. I turned off the water, went out, and patted my skin dry. One look at my soaked clothes was all I needed to know, I had no desire to put them back on. Maybe there was a cooperated dryer nearby... one that doesn't require electricity. I sighed and on my camisole and panties, panties, endured the worst rain. Patch? I whispered through the door. It's done? Blow out the candle. Done, he whispered back through the door. His laughter, too, sounded so soft that he could be whispered. After sniffing a candle in the bathroom, I went out, meeting full blackness. I heard Patch breathing right in front of me. I didn't want to think about what he was or wasn't wearing, and I shook my head to fragment the picture of the formation in my head. My clothes are soaked. I have nothing to wear. I heard the sound of wet tissue slipping like a squeegee over his skin. I'm lucky. His shirt landed in a wet pile at our feet. It's really embarrassing,' I told him. I could feel him smiling. He was too close. You have to take a shower, I said. Do I feel bad? Actually, it smelled so good. There was no smoke, mint is stronger. The patch disappeared in the bathroom. He lit a candle and left the door ajar, a sliver of light stretching across the floor and up one wall. I slid my back down the wall until I sat on the floor and then tilted my head against the wall. Honestly, I couldn't stay here tonight. I had to go home. It was wrong to be here alone with Patch, a vow of prudence or not. I had to report the body of the lady's bag, or me? How was I supposed to report the disappearance of the body? Talk about the insane, which was the dreaded direction my thoughts started to go anyway. Not wanting to dwell on the idea of madness, I focused on my original argument. I couldn't stay here knowing that V was with Elliot, in danger when I was safe. After reviewing the moment I decided that I needed to paraphrase this thought. Safe was a relative term. While Patch was around, I wasn't safe, but that doesn't mean I thought he was going to act like my guardian angel. Immediately, I would like to return the guardian angel of thought. Calling on my powers of persuasion, I banished all thoughts of guardian angels, fallen or other, from my head. I told myself I was probably going crazy. All I knew was I was hallucinating, seeing a bag lady die. And I was hallucinating seeing Patz's scars. The water stopped, and a minute later Patch strolled around wearing only his wet jeans hanging low at his waist. He came out of the bathroom candle lit and the door wide. The soft color was shining around the room. One quick look and I could say a patch clocked a few hours a week running and lifting weights. The body that identified did not come without sweat and work. Suddenly I felt a little shy. Not to mention soft. Which side of the bed do you want? He asked ... Fox smile. Nervous? No, I said, as confident as possible in the circumstances. And the circumstances were that I was lying through my teeth. You're a bad liar, he said, still smiling. Worst of all I've seen. I put my hands on my hips and reported silence Excuse me? Come here, he said, pulling me to my feet. I felt that my previous promise Melts. Another ten seconds standing so close to patch and my defense will be blown up to smithereens. The mirror was hanging on the wall behind him, and over my shoulder I saw the inverted V scars shining black on his skin. My whole body was tough. I tried to blink the scars away, but they were there forever. Without thinking, I slid my hands up my chest and around to my back. The tip of his finger cleaned the right scar. The patch strained under my touch. I froze, the tip of my finger trembled on his scar. It took me a while to realize that it wasn't really my finger moving, but me. All of me. I was sucked into a soft, dark chute, and everything turned black. Chapter 23 I was STANDING IN LOWER LEVEL BO'S ARCADE with my back to the wall before a few pool games. The windows were on board and I couldn't tell if it was day or night. Stevie Nix walked through the speakers; song about a white-winged pigeon and being on the edge of seventeen. No one was surprised by my sudden appearance from the air. And then I remembered that I was wearing only kyami and panties. I'm not all that vain, but standing in a crowd consisting solely of the opposite sex, my essentials barely covered, and no one even looked at me? Something was ... Off. I pinched myself. Absolutely alive, as far as I can tell. Waving my hand to clear the misty cloud of cigar smoke, I saw Patch all over the room. He sat at the poker table, kicking back, holding his hand cards close to his chest. I'm stuffing barefoot all over the room, crossing my arms on my chest, making sure to keep myself covered. Can we talk? I went into his ear. It was unnerved quality to my voice. Understandably, since I had no idea how I came to find myself in Beau. At one point I was at the motel, and the next I was here. The patch pushed a short stack of poker chips into a pile in the center of the table. How, maybe, now? I said. It's kind of urgent..... I trailed off when the calendar on the wall caught my eye. It was eight months behind, showing last August. Right before I started sophomore year. A few months before I met Patch. I told myself it was a mistake that whoever was responsible for stalling the old months had fallen behind, but at the same time I briefly and reluctantly considered the possibility that the calendar was where it was supposed to be. And I wasn't. I pulled the chair out of the next table and stopped next to the patch. He holds five rush, nine rush, ace hearts ... I stopped when I realized that no one was paying attention. No, that wasn't the point. No one saw me. The steps lumbering down the stairs across the room, and the same cashier who threatened to throw me out the first time I came to the arcade appeared at the bottom of the stairwell. Someone upstairs wants to talk to you, he told Patch. The patch raised eyebrows, passing a silent question. She didn't give her name, the cashier said. I am A couple of times. I told her you were in a private game, but she wouldn't leave. I can throw it away if you want to. No, no, no, no, no, no, Send it down. The patch played his hand, collected the chips and pushed it out of the chair. I'm going out. He walked up to the pool table closest to the stairs, rested against him, and slid his hands in his pockets. I'll follow him all over the room. I cut off my fingers in front of his face. I kicked his boots. I hit him on the chest. He didn't flinch, he didn't. Light steps sounded on the stairs, getting closer, and when Miss Green emerged from the darkened stairwell, I experienced a moment of confusion. Her blonde hair was up to her waist and toothpick straight. She was wearing dyed jeans and a pink tank top and she was barefoot. Dressed this way, she looked even closer to my age. She sucked a lollipop. Patch's face is always a mask, and at any moment I have no idea what he thinks. But as soon as he locked his eyes at Miss Green, I realized that he was surprised. He recovered quickly, all emotions funneled away as his eyes appeared guarded and cautious. Dabria My heart struck faster than the cadence. I tried to wrestle with my thoughts together, but all I could think was if I was really eight months in the past, how did Miss Green and Patch know each other? She hasn't had a job at school yet. And why did he call her by her first name? How were you? Miss Green-Dabria - asked with a closing smile, tossing a lollipop in the trash. What are you doing here? Patch's eyes were even more alert, as if he didn't think that what you see is what you get applied to Dabria. I slipped away. Her smile is twisted on one side. I should have seen you again. I've been trying for a long time, but security, you know. It's not exactly weak. Your look and my appearance, we don't have to mix. But you know that. Coming here was a bad idea. I know it was time, but I was hoping for a slightly more friendly reaction,' she said, pushing her lips into a pout. Patch did not respond. I couldn't stop thinking about you. Dabria dimmed her voice to a low, sexy step and took a step closer to Patch. It wasn't easy to get here. Luciana makes excuses for why I'm not here. I risk her future as I do with my own. Don't you want to at least hear what I have to say? Talk. Patch's words did not trust a single drop. I didn't give up on you. All the while -- She interrupted and blinked back a sudden display of tears. When she spoke again, her voice was more composed, but still held a hesitant note. I know how you can get your wings back. She smiled at Patch, but he didn't return the smile. Once you get your wings back, you can go home,' she said, speaking more confidently. Everything will be as it was before. Nothing has changed. Not really. What's the catch? Page 12 There is no catch. You have to save a human life. Very reasonable, given the crime that drove you here in the first place. A what Will!? All the confidence was in Dabria's eyes, and I feel like he asked one question she hoped to avoid. I just told you how to get your wings back,' she said, sounding a touch of condescending. I think I deserve gratitude- Answer the question. But his gloomy smile told me he already knew. Or it was a very good guess. Whatever Dabria's response, he didn't like it. Ok. You're going to be a guardian, okay? Patch tilted his head back and laughed softly. What's wrong with being a guardian? Dabria demanded. Why isn't that good enough? I have something better in my work. Listen to me, Patch. There's nothing better. Are you joking. Any other fallen angel will jump at the chance to get their wings back and become a guardian. Why can't you? Her voice was smothered by bewilderment, irritation, rejection. The patch pushed up from the pool table. It was good to see you again, Dabria. Have a good trip back. Without warning, she curled her fists into her shirt, yanked it close, and crushed a kiss in her mouth. Very slowly The Body Patch turned to her, his position softening. His hands came up and skimmed his hands. I swallowed hard, trying to ignore the blow of jealousy and confusion in my heart. Part of me wanted to turn away and cry, some of me wanted to come over and start screaming. Not that that would be good. I was invisible. Obviously Miss position ... Dabria ... Whoever she is ... and Patch had a romantic past together. Were they still together now- in the future? Had she applied for a job at Coldwater High to be closer to Patch? That's why she was so determined to scare me away from him? I have to go, Dabria said, pulling out. I've been too long. I promised Luciana I would hurry . She lowered her head to her chest. I miss you, she whispered. Save one human life and you will have your wings again. Come back to me, she pleaded. Go home. She suddenly broke away. I must go. None of the others will know I was here. I love you. When Dabria turned away, the alarm disappeared from her face. The expression of hour-long confidence replaced it. It was the face of a man who was bluffing through the rough hand of cards. Without warning, Patch caught her by the wrist. Now tell me why you're actually here,' he said. I was trembling from the dark underwater current in Patch's tone. To an outsider, he looked perfectly calm. But for everyone who had known him for a while, it was obvious. He was giving Dabria a look that said she had crossed the line and it was in her best interest to jump back over it-now. The patch directed her to the bar. He put her on a bar stool and slid on one beside him. I took one next to Patch, leaning to hear it above the music. What do you mean I'm here? Dabria stuttered. I told you, You're lying. Her mouth fell. I can't believe you think. Tell me the truth, now, Patch said. Dabria hesitated before replying. She gave him a fierce fierce fierce then said: Okay. I know what you plan to do. Patch laughed. It was a laugh that said I had a lot of plans. Which one do you mean? I know you've heard rumors about the Book of Enoch. I also know you think you can do the same, but you can't. The patch folded his hands on the bar. The sent you here to convince me to choose a different course, didn't they? The smile showed in his eyes. If I'm a threat, the rumors must be true. No, it's not. If it happened once, it could happen again. It never happened. Did you even bother to read the Book of Enoch before you fell? Do you know exactly what he says, a word for the holy word? Maybe you could give me your copy. It's blasphemous! You're not allowed to read that, she exclaimed. You betrayed every angel in heaven when you fell. How many of them know what I'm after? He asked. How big is the threat I am? She threw her head from side to side. I can't tell you that. I've already told you more than I should have. Are they going to try to stop me? The angels will take revenge. He looked at her with meaning. Unless they think you're telling me to do it. Don't look at me like that. She sounded like she was putting all her courage into sounding firm. I'm not going to lie to protect you. What you're trying to do is wrong. It's not natural. Dabria. Patch called her name a soft threat. He might as well have her arm twisting behind his back. I can't help you, she said with a calm conviction. Not really. Get it out of your head. Become a guardian angel. Focus on that and forget the Book of Enoch. The patch planted his elbows on the bar, radiating thoughts. After a while he said: Tell them what we said and I showed interest in becoming a guardian. Interest? She said, a little incredulous. Interest, he repeated. Tell them I asked for a name. If I'm going to save a life, I need to know who's at the top of your list. I know that you are implicated in this information as an angel of death. This information is sacred and both private and predictable. Events in this world vary from moment to moment depending on the human choice - One name, Dabria. Promise me you'll forget the Book of Enoch first. Give me your word. Would you trust my word? No, she said, I wouldn't. The patch laughed in cold blood and, grasping the toothpick from the dispenser, went to the stairs. Patch, wait, she began. She jumped off the bar stool. Patch, please wait! He looked over his shoulder. Nora Gray, she said, and then immediately squeezed her hands behind her mouth. There was a faint crack in the expression of Patch-frown disbelief mixed with irritation. Which hasn't made sense since, if the calendar on the wall was correct, we haven't met yet. My name shouldn't have made me know. How will she die? He asked. Someone wants to kill her. Who? I don't know, she said, covering her ears and shaking her head. There's so much noise and noise here. images blur together, they come too fast, I can't see clearly. I have to go home. I need peace and tranquility. The patch hid a strand of Dabria's hair behind her ear and looked at her convincingly. She shuddered warmly at his touch, then nodded and closed her eyes. I don't see ... I don't see anything... It's useless. Who wants to kill Nora Gray? Patch called. Wait, I see her, Dabria said. Her voice became anxious. There's a shadow behind her. It's him. He's watching her. She can't see him... But it's right there. Why can't she see him? Why isn't she running? I can't see his face, it's in the shadows... Dabria's eyes opened. It's sucked into a quick, sharp breath. Who? Patch said. Dabria curled her hands to her mouth. She trembled as she looked up at Patch. You, she whispered. My finger moved away from Patch's scar, and the connection broke. It took me a while to refocus myself, so I wasn't ready for Patch, who fought me to bed in an instant. He pressed my wrists over my head. You shouldn't have done that. There was controlled anger in his face, dark and boiling. What did you see? I raised my knee and stabbed his ribs. Get out- I am! He slid on my hips, saddled them, eliminating the use of my feet. With my hands still stretched over my head, I couldn't do more than squirm under his weight. Get out-!-or-!-screaming! You're already screaming. And it will not cause a stir in this place. It's more of a slut than a motel. He gave a heavy smile that was all lethality around the edges. Last chance, Nora. What did you see? I fought back tears. My whole body was humming with emotion, so I couldn't even call it foreign. You're nauseous! I said. Who are you? Who are you really? His mouth became even more gloomy. We're getting closer. You want to kill me! Patch's face gave nothing, but his eyes cooled. Jeep didn't actually die tonight, did he? I said. You lied. You brought me here to kill. That's what Dabria said you wanted to do. Well, what are you waiting for? I had no idea where I was going with this, and I didn't care. I spat with words in an attempt to keep my horror at bay. You've been trying to kill me all this time. From the beginning. Are you going to kill me now? I watched him, hard and unblinking, trying to keep the tears from the spill as I remembered the fateful day he entered my life. It's tempting. I twisted under it. I tried to roll to the right, then to the left. I finally realized that I was wasting a lot of energy and stopped. The patch will settle his eyes on me. They were blacker than I'd ever seen them. I bet you like it, I said. I felt my heart pounding clear down my feet. Just do it, I said in a complex voice. Kill you? I nodded. But first I want to know why. Of all the billions of people out there, why me? Bad genes. That's it? Is that the only explanation I get? At the moment, what should it mean? My voice rose again. I get the rest of the story when you finally break down and kill me? I don't have to break down to kill you. If I wanted you to die five minutes ago, you would have died five minutes ago. I swallowed a less lethal thought. He brushed his thumb over my birthmark. His touch was deceptively soft, which made him even more painful to endure. What about Dabria? I said, I'm still breathing hard. She's just like you, isn't she? You are both angels My voice cracked at the word. The patch turned a little from my hips, but kept my hands on my wrists. If I get weaker, will you hear me? If it weakens, I'll bolt to the door. What do you care if I run? You just drag me here. Yes, but it's going to cause a scene. Is Dabria your friend? I felt every ragged rise and fall of my chest. I wasn't sure I wanted to hear his answer. Not that it mattered. Now that I knew Patch wanted to kill me, it was funny that I even cared. Was it a long time ago before I fell to the dark side. He gave a heavy smile, trying to humor. It was also a mistake. He swayed in his heels, slowly letting me out, checking to see if I could fight back. I was lying on the mattress, breathing heavily, my elbows propping up me. Three bills passed, and I rushed at him with all the force that I had. I pushed him on the chest, but apart from swaying back a bit, he didn't move. I got out from under him and took my fists to him. I hammered his chest until the bottoms of my fists started to pulsate. It's done? He asked. No! I put my elbow in his thigh. What happened to you? Don't you feel anything? I got to my feet, found my balance on the mattress, and hit him as hard as I could in my stomach. You have one more minute, he said. Get your anger out of your system. Then I take over. I didn't know what he meant by taking over, and I didn't want to find out. I made a bouncing escape from the bed, with the door in sight. The patch hooked me in the air and supported me against the wall. His legs were flush with mine, front down the length of our hips. Page 13 I want the truth, I said, struggling not to cry. Did you come to school to kill me? Was that your goal from the start? Patch's jaw muscle jumped. Yes. I stole a tear that dared to escape. Are you gloating inside? That's the thing, isn't it? Getting me to trust you so you can blow it in my face! I knew I was going to get irrationally torn. I must have been terrified and furious. I had to do everything in my power to escape. The most irrational part of it all was that I still didn't want to believe that he would kill me, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't stifle that illogical speck of trust. I understand you're angry, Patch said. I'm torn apart! I screamed. His hands glided around my neck, searingly hot. Gently pressing my thumbs to my throat, he knocked my head back. I am his lips come against mine so hard that he stopped regardless of the name I was about to call him off coming out. His hands fell on my shoulders, skimmed down my arms, and came to rest on my small back. A little shiver of panic and pleasure shot through me. He tried to pull me against him, and I bit him on the lip. He licked his lip with the tip of his tongue. Did you just bite me? Is everything a joke for you? I asked. He dabbed his tongue to his lips again. Not all of them. How and what? You will. All night long! I felt unbalanced. It was hard to have a showdown with someone as indifferent as the patch. No, it doesn't matter. Perfectly controlled. To the last camera in his body. I heard a voice in my head. Relax. Trust me. Umigosh, I said with a burst of clarity. You do it again, don't you? Messing with my mind. I remembered an article I stopped when I Googled fallen angels. You can put more than words in my head, right? You can put images-very real images-there. He didn't deny it. Archangel, I said, finally realizing. You tried to kill me that night, didn't you? But something went wrong. Then you made me think my cell phone was dead, so I couldn't call V. Did you want to kill me to go home? I want to know how you make me see what you want! His face was thoroughly inexpressive. I put words and images there, but it's up to you if you believe them. The images overlap reality and you have to figure out what is real. Is this the special power of an angel? He shook his head. The fallen angel of power. Any other kind of angel will not invade your privacy, even if they can. Because the other angels were good. And Patch wasn't. The patch pinned his hands against the wall behind me, one on either side of my head. I put the thought in the coach's mind to repaint the seating chair because I need to get close to you. I made you think you fell off Arkhangels because I wanted to kill you, but I couldn't get through it. I almost did, but I stopped. Instead, I stopped at scaring you. Then I made you think your camera was dead because I wanted to give you a ride home. When I walked into your house, I took a knife. Then I was going to kill you. His voice softened. You changed your mind. I sucked in a deep breath. I don't get it. When I told you my father was murdered, you really regretted it. When you met my mom, you were nice. Okay, Patch repeated. Let's keep that between you and me. My head was spinning faster and I could feel my pulse beating in my temples. I've felt this heartbeating panic before. I needed iron pills. Either that or Patch makes me think I did. I tilted my chin and narrowed my eyes. Get crazy. Right now! I'm not in your mind, Nora. I leaned forward, fastening my arms on my knees, sucking the air. Yes, you. I can feel you. So that's how you do it? To strangle me? Soft flapping sounds echo in my ears, and the blurry black framing of my vision. I tried, my lungs, but it was like the air had disappeared. The world bent over, and Patch slipped sideways in my vision. I flattened my hand against the wall to stabilize my balance. The deeper I tried to breathe, the stiffer my throat was. The patch moved towards me, but I'll throw out my hand. Beat it! He leaned his shoulder against the wall and collided with me, his mouth set with concern. Get out of me, I gushed. I can't breathe! I was suffocating, clinging to the wall with one hand, squeezing the throat of the other. Suddenly Patch scooped me up and narrated me to a chair across the room. Put your head between your knees, he said, pointing my head down. I had my head down, breathing fast, trying to force air into my lungs. Very slowly I felt oxygen creep back into my body. Better? Patch asked in a minute. One day I nodded. Do you have iron pills with you? I shook my head. Keep your head down and take long, deep breaths. I followed his instructions, feeling the clip loosen around my chest. Thank you, I said softly. If you want me to trust you, let me touch your scars again. Patch studied me silently for a long time. That's not a good idea. Why not? I can't control what you see. That's the point. He waited a few points before answering. His voice was low, emotion could not be traced. You know, I'm hiding things. A question was attached to it. I knew Patch lived a private life and had secrets. I wasn't presumptuous enough to think that even half of them revolved around me. Patch lived a different life beyond what he shared with me. I've talked more than once about what his other life might be like. I've always had the feeling that the less I know about it, the better. My lip was wobbly. Give me a reason to trust you. The patch sat on the corner of the bed, the mattress was sinking under its weight. He leaned forward, putting his forearms on his knees. His scars were in plain sight, candles dancing eerie shadows all over their surface. The muscles of the back escalated and then relaxed. Go ahead, he said softly. Keep in mind that people change, but the past doesn't. Suddenly I wasn't so sure I wanted it. On almost every level, Patch scared me. But deep down, I didn't think he was going to kill me. If that was what he wanted, he'd already done it. I looked at his terrible scars. Trusting a patch fell a lot more comfortable than slipping into my past again and having no idea what I could find. But if I had backed down now, Patch would have known I was afraid of him. He opened one of the closed doors just for me, and only because I asked for it. I couldn't make the request so heavy and then change my mind. I won't fall into the trap there forever, will I? I asked. The patch gave a short laugh. No. Calling for courage, I sat on the bed next to him. For the second time today, my finger brushed the peak of his ridge Misty gray overflowed my vision by working from the edge of the Inch Lights Lights Of. Chapter 24 I was on my BACK, my CAMI SPONGING UP MOISTURE under me, blades of grass poking bare skin on my hands. The moon overhead was nothing more than a sliver, a smile tipped on its side. Apart from the rumble of distant thunder, everything was quiet. I blinked several times in a row, helping my eyes hurry and adapt to scant light. As I rolled my head to the side, the symmetrical arrangement of curved twigs poking out of the grass would hardly be in my vision. Very slowly I pulled myself up. I couldn't take my eyes off the two black balls staring at me just above the curved branches. My mind worked to accommodate a familiar image. And then, with a terrible outburst of confession, I knew. I was lying next to a human skeleton. I crawled backwards until I came across an iron fence. I pushed through a confusing moment and recaptured my last memory. I touched Patch's scars. Wherever I was, it was somewhere in his memory. The voice, masculine and vaguely familiar, carried through the darkness, singing a low melody. Turning to him, I saw a maze of tombstones stretching like dominoes in the mist. The patch crouched on one. He wore only Levi's and a navy T-shirt, though the night was not warm. Moonlight with the dead? It's called a familiar voice. It was rough, rich and Irish. Rixon. He slouched against the tombstone in front of the patch, watching him. He stroked his thumb on his lower lip. Let me guess. Do you have in your head to own the dead? I don't know, he said, wagging his head. Maggots wriggling in your eye holes... and your other holes may be holding things too far. That's why I'm keeping you around, Rixon. Always see things from the bright side. The Czechs start tonight, Rixon said. What do you do arsing around in the cemetery? Thinking. Thinking? The process by which I use my brain to make a rational decision. The corners of Rixon's mouth were pulled off. I'm starting to worry about you. Come on. It's time to go. Chancey Lange and Barnabas are waiting. The moon turns at midnight. I confess I got my eye on Betty in town. He gave the cat a purr. I know you love them red, but I love them fair, and once I get into the body, I intend to take care of unfinished business with the blonde who makes an eye on me before. When Patch didn't move, Rixon said, Are you stupid? We have to go. The Pledge of Allegiance to Chancey. Don't ring the bell! How about that. You're a fallen angel. You don't feel anything. Until tonight, that is. The next two weeks are Chancey's gift to you. Given the reluctant, mind-numbing, he added on the conspirator's syms. The patch gave Rixon a side-look. What do you know about the Book of Enoch? About as much as any fallen angel: thin to no one. I was told there was a story in the Book of Enoch. About a fallen angel who becomes a man. Rixon doubled down with a laugh. Are you crazy, mate? He welded the outer edges of his palms together, making an open book with his hands. In the Enoch is a bedtime story. And good, still. Sent you straight to Dreamland. I want a human body. You'd better be happy with two weeks and Nephil's body. Half a man is better than nothing. Chancey can't undo what's been done. He swore, and he must live up to it. Just like last year. And the year before that, two weeks isn't enough. I want to be human. Constantly. Patch's eyes slammed into Rixon, laughing at him again. Rixon raked his hands through his hair. Enoch's book is a fairy tale. We are fallen angels, not people. We were never human, and we never will. End of story. Now, throw arsing around and help me figure out which is the way to Portland. He stretched his neck back and watched the wobbly sky. The patch swung down from the tombstone. I'm going to be human. Of course, mate, of course you can. Enoch's book says I must kill my nephil vassal. I have to kill Chancey. No, no, Rixon said with a note of impatience. You have to possess it. Not to overshadow things, but you can't kill Chancey. Nephilim can't die. And have you thought about it? If you could kill him, you might not possess it. If I kill him, I'll become a man, and I won't need to possess it. If we could kill Nephilim, we'd have found a way. I'm sorry to tell you, man, but if I don't get into this blond Betty's soon, my brains are going to go. And a few other parts of mine -- Two choices, Patch said. Eh? Save human life and become a guardian angel, or kill your vassal Nephil and become a human being. Take your pick. Is this more Enoch's book of garbage? Dabria to visit me. Rixon's eyes widened, and he snorted with laughter. Your psychotic ex? What's she doing here? Did she fall? Lost her wings, didn't she? Page 14 She came down to tell me that I could get my wings back if I saved a human life. Rixon's eyes are more like. If you trust her, I say go for it. There's nothing wrong with being a guardian. Spending your days to keep mortals from danger... Can be fun, depending on the mortal you are assigned. But if you had a choice? Patch asked. Yes, my answer depends on one very important distinction. I'm roaring drunk ... or am I completely crazy? When Patch didn't laugh, Rixon soberly said, There's no choice. And here's why. I don't believe in the Book of Enoch. On his website. I'd be targeting custody. I'm halfway through the deal. It's a pity I don't know people on the brink of death. There was a moment of silence, then the patch seemed to get rid of his thoughts. He said: How much money can we earn before midnight? Playing cards or boxing? Cards. Rixon's eyes sparkled. What do we have here? A beautiful boy? Come here and let me give you a proper knock. He hooked the patch on pressing it his The crook had an elbow, but Patch got him around the waist and dragged Rixon to the grass, where they took turns throwing clobering punches. All right all right! Rixon cried, throwing his hands in surrender. Just because I don't feel the lip doesn't mean I want to spend the rest of the night walking with one. He winked. Won't increase my chances with the ladies. And the black eye will be? Rixon raised his fingers to his eyes, probing. You didn't! He said, waving his fist at the patch. I tore my finger off Patch's scars. The skin at the back of my neck is spiky, and my heart is pumped too fast. The patch looked at me, a shadow of uncertainty in his eyes. I had to admit that maybe now is not the time to rely on the logical half of my brain. Maybe it was one of those times when I had to go beyond. Stop playing by the rules. Accept the impossible. Then you're definitely not a human being, I said. Bad guy. It squeezed a smile out of Patch. Do you think I'm a bad guy? You

possess other people ... Bodies. He accepted the statement with a nod. Do you want to have my body? I want to do a lot of things for your body, but this is not one of them. What happened to the body you have? My body is very much like glass. Real, but external, reflecting the world around me. You see and hear me, and I see and hear you. When you touch me, you feel it. I don't feel you the same way. I can't feel you. I feel everything through a sheet of glass, and the only way I can cut through this sheet is by possessing a human body, Or part of the man. The mouth of the patch is tightened in the corners. When you touched my scars, did you see Chauncey? He figured it out. I heard you talking to Rixon. He said you own Chauncey's body for two weeks every year during Ceswan. He said Chauncey wasn't human either. He's Nephilim. The word rolled down my tongue in a whisper. Chauncey is a cross between a fallen angel and a man. He is immortal as an angel, but has all mortal feelings. A fallen angel who wants to feel human sensations can do it in Nephil's body. If you can't feel why you kissed me? The patch traced his finger along the collarbone and then headed south, stopping in my heart. I felt it pounding on my skin. Because I feel it here in my heart, he said quietly. I haven't lost my ability to feel emotions. He was following me closely. Let me do it this way. Our emotional connection is lacking. Don't panic, I thought. You mean you can feel happy or sad or -Desire. Barely smile. Keep moving forward, I told myself. Don't give your emotions time to catch up. Deal with them later, after you have the answers. Why did you fall? Patch's eyes held my on a couple of points. Lust. I swallowed it. Money to be lost? The patch stroked his jaw. He only did it when he had to hide what he thought giveaway his thoughts be his his He struggled with a smile. And other species. I thought if I got a good one, I'd be human. The angels who seduced Eve were banished to Earth, and there were rumors that they had lost their wings and become human beings. When they left paradise, it wasn't such a big ceremony that we were all invited to. It was personal. I didn't know that their wings had been ripped out, or that they were cursed to roam the Earth with hunger to possess human bodies. Back then, no one had even heard of fallen angels. So, in my opinion, it made sense that if I die, I'd lose my wings and become human. At the time I was crazy about a human girl, and seemed worth the risk. Dabria said you could get your wings back to save a human life. She said you'd be a guardian angel. You don't want that? I was confused as to why he was so anti-themed against him. It's not for me. I want to be human. I want it more than I ever wanted anything. What about Dabria? If you two aren't together anymore, why is she still here? I thought she was just an angel. Does she want to be human too? The patch went deadly still, all the muscles up the arm will be stiff. Is Dabria still on Earth? She got a job at school. She's the new school psychologist, Miss Green. I met her a couple of times. My stomach gave a hard turn. After what I saw in your memory, I thought she took the job to be closer to you. What exactly did she tell you when you met her? To stay away from you. She hinted at your dark and dangerous past. I paused. Something about that's off, isn't it? I asked, feeling the ominous thorn make its way down my back. I have to take you home. Then I go to school to see her files and see if I can find anything useful. I'll feel better when I know what she's planning. Patch section the bed naked. Wrap yourself in them, he said, handing me a packet of dry sheets. My mind worked hard to understand the fragments of information. Suddenly my mouth went a little dry and sticky. She still has feelings for you. Maybe she wants me out of the picture. Our eyes are locked. It's going to cross my head,' Patch said. An icy, unsettling thud pounded in my head the last few minutes, trying to get my attention. He was practically yelling at me now, telling me Dabria might be the guy in the ski mask. All the while I thought the man I hit with neon was a man, just like Wee thought her attacker was a man. At this point, I wouldn't put him past Dabria to fool us both. After a quick trip to the bathroom, Patch appeared to wear his wet tee. I'm going to get the jeep, he said. I'll pull around to the back exit at twenty. Stay in the motel until then. CHAPTER 25 AFTER THE PATCH LEFT, I PUT THE CHAIN ON THE DOOR. I dragged a chair around the room and rammed it under the doorknob. I checked to make sure the window locks were in place. I don't know if the locks work against Dabria- I don't even know if it was after me, but I thought it best to play it safe. After walking around number for a few minutes, I tried the phone on the nightstand. There's still no signal. My mom was going to kill me. I snuck behind her and went to Portland. And how was I supposed to explain the whole situation I checked in at a motel with Patch? I'd be lucky if she didn't ground me before the end of the year. No. I'd be lucky if she didn't quit her job and apply for a replacement to teach until she found a full-time job at the local level. We're going to have to sell the farm, and I'm going to lose the only connection I have with my father. About fifteen minutes later, I looked into the peephole. Nothing but blackness. I unbarred the door, and just as I was about to tug it open, the lights flickered on behind me. I was circling around, half expecting to see Dabria. The room was still empty but the electricity came back. The door opened with a loud click, and I entered the hall. The carpet was bloodied, worn down the center of the hallway and stained with unidentified dark marks. The walls were painted neutral, but the paint work was sloppy and chipped. Above me, a neon green sign wrote the way to the exit. I followed the arrow down the hall and around the corner. The Jeep flipped over at a stop on the other side of the back door and I rushed in and hopped in on the passenger side. When Patch pulled up to the farm, the lights didn't light up. I experienced a guilty squeeze in my stomach and wondered if my mom was driving around looking for me. The rain died, and the mist clung to the siding and hung on the bushes like Christmasinsel. Trees dotted with driveways were constantly twisted and deformed by the constant northerly winds. All the houses look unattractive with the lights off after dark, but the farmhouse with its small slits for windows, bowed roof, caved-in porch, and wild blackberries looked haunted. I'm going to pass, Patch said, swinging. Do you think Dabria is inside? He shook his head. But it doesn't hurt to check. I was waiting in the jeep, and a few minutes later Patch came out of the front door. It's clear, he told me. I'll take her to school and come back here as soon as I wash her office. Maybe she left something useful behind. He didn't say he was counting on it. I unbuckled my seat belt and ordered my feet to carry me quickly before the walk. When I turned the doorknob, I heard Patch back down the road. The boards on the porch were creaking under my feet, and suddenly I felt very lonely. Keeping the lights off, I crept through the room of the house on the room, starting from the first floor, and then running my way upstairs. The patch has already cleared the house, but I don't think the extra pair of eyes will hurt. After I was sure that no one was hiding under the furniture, behind the shower curtains, or in the cupboards, I pulled on Levi and the black Vneck sweater. I found an emergency cell phone that my mom kept in a medicine cabinet under the bathroom sink, and dialed her camera. She went up to the first ring. Hello? Nora? Is it you? Where are you? worried the sick! I took a deep breath, praying that the right words would come to me and help me get out of it. That's what this is about, I began in a heartfelt and apologetic voice. Cascade Road flooded and they closed it. I had to turn back and get a room at Milliken Mills- that's where I am now. I tried to call home, but apparently the lines aren't working. I tried your camera, but you did not pick up. Please wait. Have you been to Milliken Mills the whole time? Where do you think I've been? I gave an inaudible sigh of relief and sank to the edge of the bath. I didn't know, I said. Where do you call? Mom asked. I don't recognize that number. Emergency cell. Where's your phone? I lost him. A what? Where is? I came to the stony conclusion that lying inaction was the only way. I didn't want to scare her. I also don't want to be based on an endless term. It's more like I misplaced it. I'm sure it will pop up somewhere. On the body of a dead woman. I'll call you as soon as they open the roads,' she said. Then I called V's cell. After five rings I was sent to voicemail. Where are you? I said. Call me on this number as soon as possible. I cut off the phone shut and hid it in my pocket, trying to convince myself. Wee was fine. But I knew it was a lie. The invisible thread that binds us together warned me for hours that she was in danger. Anyway, the feeling is amplified by the minute. In the kitchen I saw my bottle of iron pills on the counter, and I immediately followed them, pushing out my hat and swallowing two with a glass of chocolate milk. I stood still for a moment, letting the iron work in my system, feeling my breath deepen and slowly. I was walking the milk box back into the fridge when I saw her standing in the doorway between the kitchen and the laundry room. Page 15 is a cold, damp substance that merged at my feet, and I realized I had dropped the milk. Dabria I said. She tilted her head to one side, showing a mild surprise. Do you know my name? She stopped. Patch. I retreated to the sink, putting more distance between us. Dabria didn't look like Miss Green did at school. Today her hair was tangled, not smooth, and her lips were brighter, a certain hunger reflected there. Her eyes were sharper, a slick of black ringing of them. What do you want? I asked. She laughed, and it sounded like ice cubes ringing in a glass. I want Patch. There's no patch here. She nodded. I know. I waited for him on the street until he left before I got in. But that's not what I meant when I said I want a patch. Blood pounding through my legs circled back into my heart with giddy effect. I put one hand on the counter to stabilize myself. I know you spied on me during the consultations. Is that all you know about me? She asked, her eyes looking for mine. I remembered the night when I was sure that someone had peered into my Window. You spied on me here, too, I said. She dragged her finger along the edge of the kitchen island and sat on a chair. It's a good place. Let me refresh your memory, I said, hoping that I sounded bold. You looked out my bedroom window while I was sleeping. Her smile is curved high. No, but I followed you shopping. I attacked your friend and gave her little hints, making her think Patch hurt her. It wasn't far off the stretch. It's not harmless from the start. It was in my best interest to have you as frightened of it as possible. So I'd stay away from it. But you didn't. You're still standing in our way. On your way, what? Come on, Nora. If you know who I am, then you know how it works. I want him to get his wings back. He has no place on Earth. It belongs to me. He made a mistake and I'm going to fix it. There was absolutely no compromise in her voice. She got up from her chair and walked across the island to me. I retreated along the edge of the outer counter, keeping the space between us. Breaking my head, I tried to figure out a way to distract her. Or run away. I lived in the house for sixteen years. I knew the floor plan. I knew every secret slit and the best hideouts. I ordered my brain to come up with a plan: something spur-of-the-moment and brilliant. My back met the buffet. While you're around, Patch won't come back with me, Dabria said. I think you overestimate his feelings for me. It seemed like a good idea to downplay our relationship. Dabria's possess seemed to be the main force that made her act. An incredulous smile dawned on her face. Do you think he has those feelings for you? All the while you were thinking: She interrupted, laughing. He won't stay because he loves you. He wants to kill you. I shook my head. He's not going to kill me. Dabria's smile hardened around the edges. If that's what you think, you're just another girl he's seduced to get what he wants. He has the talent for that,' she added shrewdly. He seduced your name right out of me, after all. One soft touch from the patch was all it took. I fell under his spell and told him that death would come for you. I knew what she was talking about. I witnessed the exact moment she meant Patch's memory. And now he's doing the same thing to you,' she said. Betrayal hurts, doesn't it? I shook my head slowly. No, he's planning to use you as a victim! It flared up. See what sign? She put her finger in my wrist. That means you're a descendant of a nephil. And not just any Nephil, but Chauncey Lange, vassal patch. I glanced at my scar, and at one point heartstopping, I actually believed her. But I knew better than to trust her. There is a sacred book, the Book of Enoch, she said. In it, a fallen angel kills his vassal Nephil, sacrificing one of Nephil's descendants. You don't think Patch wants to. You? What does he want most? As soon as he donates to you, he'll be human. He'll have whatever he wants. And he's not coming home with me. She unsheathed a large knife from a wooden block on the counter. And that's why I have to get rid of you. It seems that somehow, my premonitions were right. Death is coming for you. Patch is coming back, I said, my insides are sickening. Don't you want to talk about it with him? I'll do it quickly,' she continued. I'm an angel of death. I carry souls into the afterlife. As soon as I'm done, I'll carry your soul through the veil. You have nothing to be afraid of. I wanted to scream, but my voice was trapped in the back of my throat. I went around the buffet, putting the kitchen table between us. If you're an angel, where are your wings? No more questions. Her voice became impatient, and she began to close the distance between us seriously. How long has it been since you left paradise? I asked, stalled. You've been here for months, haven't you? Don't you think other angels have noticed that you're missing? Not a step, she cut off, holding up the knife, scattering the light from the blade. You're going to get a lot of trouble for the patch, I said, my voice isn't as devoid of panic as I wanted. I'm surprised that you don't resent him for using you when it fits his goal. I'm surprised you want him to get his wings back. After what he's done to you, aren't you happy he's banished here? He left me for a useless human girl. She spat, her eyes fiery blue. He didn't leave you. Not really. He fell. He fell because he wanted to be a man like her! He's me - he's me! She laughed, but that doesn't mask anger or sadness. At first I was wounded and angry, and I did everything in my power to forget about him. I told myself I wasn't going to fall in love with him over and over again, but what good did he do? Dabria, I began quietly. You are all selfish and sleazy! Your bodies are wild and undisciplined. At one point you are at the peak of joy, the next time you are on the verge of despair. It's unfortunate! No angel will strive for this! She threw her hand into a wild arc across her face, wiping away tears. Look at me! I can barely control myself! I've been here too long, immersed in human filth! I turned and ran from the kitchen, tipping over the chair and leaving it behind me in the path of Dabria. I ran down the hall knowing that I was trapping myself. There were two exits in the house: the front door, which Dabria could reach for me by cutting through the living room, and the back door from the dining room, which she had blocked. I was pushed hard from behind, and I came forward. I skidded down the hall, coming to a stop on my stomach. I rolled over. Dabria hovered a few feet away. me -- in the air -- her skin and hair blazed in dazzling white, the knife pointed at me. I didn't think so. I threw my leg out with all my might. I arched in a punch, invigorating with my non-boiling leg, and aiming at her lower arm. The knife was knocked out of her hand. When I got my feet under me, Dabria pointed to the lamp on a small porch table, and with a sharp toe, sent it flying at me. I rolled back, feeling shards of glass slide beneath me like a lamp shattered on the floor. Movement! Dabria commanded, and the entrance bench slid to barricade the front door, blocking my exit. Scrambling forward, I took the ladder two at a time, using a railing to propel me faster. I heard Dabria laughing behind me, and the next moment the railings broke free, crashing into the hall below. I threw my weight back so as not to fall on the unguarded edge. When I caught my balance, I ran up the last stairs. At the top I rushed into my mom's bedroom and slammed the French doors closed. Racing on one of the windows of the flank fireplace, I looked down two stories to the ground. There were three bushes in the rock bed right underneath, all their foliage gone from the fall. I didn't know if I'd survive the jump. Open! Dabria commanded the other side of the French doors. The crack split the tree when the door strained from the castle. I didn't have time. I ran to the fireplace and dived under the fireplace. I had just pulled my legs up, attaching them to the inside of the chimney when the doors swung open, slamming back against the wall. I heard Dabria step towards the window. Nora! She called her subtle, chilling voice. I know you're close! I can feel you. You can't run and you can't hide- I'll burn this house around the room if that's what it takes to find you! And then I'll burn my way through the fields behind me. I'm not giving you away! The glow of bright golden light hissed at life outside the fireplace, along with the roar of whistling fire igniting. The flames sent shadows dancing into the pit below. I heard the snap and crackle of fire eating food, most likely furniture or wooden floors. I stayed cramped in the chimney. My heart was beating, sweat was flowing out of my skin. I took a few breaths, slowly exhaling to manage the burn in my tightly contracted leg muscles. Patch said he was going to school. How long until he gets back? Not knowing if Dabria is still in the room, but fearing that if I don't leave now, the fire will trap me, I put one foot in the pit, then the other. I came out from under the mantelpiece. Dabria was nowhere to be seen, but the flames licked the walls, smoke choking all the air out of the room. I hurried down the hall, not daring to go down, thinking that Dabria would expect me to try to escape through one of the doors. In my bedroom, I opened a window. The tree outside was close enough and strong enough to climb. Maybe I could lose Dabria in the fog behind the house. The nearest neighbors were a little less mile, and running hard, I should be there in seven minutes. I was going to wave my foot out the window when the creaking sounded down the hall. Silently closing in the closet, I dialed 911. In my house, someone is trying to kill me, I whispered to the cameraman. I just gave my address when the door to my room was weakened. I kept quite calm. Through the slats in the closet door, I watched the dark figures enter the room. The lighting was low, my angle was off and I couldn't see any distinctive details. The figure parted with the window blinds, peeping out. He had his toes socks and underwear in my open drawer. He took a silver comb at my office, examined it, and then returned it. When the figure turned to the side of the closet, I knew I was in trouble. With my hand shifted on the floor, I felt everything I could use in my defense. My elbow came across a stack of shoe boxes, beating them. I cursed the curse. The steps came closer. The cupboard doors opened, and I threw away the shoe. I grabbed the other one and left him. The patch swore in shade, pulled the third shoe out of my hands, and threw it behind him. Struggling with me from the closet, he put me on his feet. Before I could register relief when detecting him rather than Dabria in front of me, he pulled me against him and wrapped his arms around me. Are you okay? He muttered in my ear. Dabria is here, I said, my eyes full of tears. My knees were shaking, and holding Patch was the only thing that kept me going. She's burning down the house. The patch handed me a set of keys and curled my fingers around them. My jeep is parked outside. Come in, close the doors, come up to Delphi and wait for me. He tilted my chin face to face with him. He brushed the kiss through my lips and sent a flash of heat through me. What are you going to do? I asked. Take care of Dabria. As? He hid me to see what said: Do you really want the details? The sound of sirens wailed in the distance. The patch looked out the window. Did you call the police? I thought you were Dabria. He was about to walk out the door. I'm going after Dabria. Take a jeep to Delphisk and wait for me. Page 16 What about the fire? The police can handle it. I've tightened my key control. Part of my brain was divided, and running in opposite directions. I wanted to get out of the house and away from Dabria, and meet Patch later, but there was one nagging thought I couldn't shake for free. Dabria said Patch had to sacrifice me to become a human being. She didn't say it lightly, or get under my skin. Or even harden me against him. Her words came out cold and serious. Seriously enough, she tried to kill me to keep Patch from reaching me first. I found a jeep parked on the street, as Patch said. I put the keys in the ignition and floored the jeep down Hawthorne. Finding out it was pointless to try V's cell phone again, I dialed her home phone instead. Hi, Mrs. Heaven, I said, trying to sound nothing was out of the ordinary. Is there a V in there? Hello, Nora! She left a few hours ago. Something about a party in Portland. I thought she was with you. We broke up, I lied. She was thinking about watching a movie. And she's not answering her camera, so I guess she turned it off for the show. All is well? I didn't want to scare her, but at the same time I wasn't going to say it was all right. Not a bit it felt good to me. Last time I heard from V, she was with Elliot. And now she didn't answer questions. I don't think so, I said. I'll start at the cinema. Will you look for an embankment? Chapter 26 It was SUNDAY NIGHT before the spring break kick-off, and the cinema was packed. I got into the ticket line, constantly looking back at the signs that were being followed. Nothing alarming so far, and press makers have offered a good cover.ed. I told myself that Patch would take care of Dabria, and that I had nothing to worry about, but it didn't hurt to be vigilant. Of course, deep inside, I knew that Dabria was not my biggest anxiety. Sooner or later, Patch was going to find out that I wasn't in Delphi. Based on past experience, I had no illusions about being able to hide the long term from it. He would have found me. And then I'll be forced before him by the question I feared. Or rather, I was afraid of his answer. Because there was a shadow of doubt in my head, whispering that Dabria was telling the truth about what it would take for Patch to get the human body. I went to the cash register. The nine-way movies are just beginning. For one sacrifice, I said without thinking. Immediately I found the name terribly ironic. Not wanting to think about it any more, I fished in my pockets and pushed a pack of small bills and coins under the window, praying that it would be enough. God, said Teller, looking at the coins spilled under the window. I recognized her from school. She was the eldest, and I was sure her name was Kayleigh or Kylie. Thank you very much, she said. It's not like there's a line or anything. Everything behind me muttered collective expletive. I've cleaned my piggy bank, I said, trying to sarcasm. I'm not joking. Is this all here? She asked, outting a sigh as she pushed the coins into groups of quarters, pennies, pennies, and pennies. Of course. Whatever it is. I don't get paid enough for that. She flooded the money into the cash drawer and shoved my ticket under the window. There are things called credit cards.... I grabbed the ticket. Have you accidentally seen Vee Sky come tonight? Bee who? Wee Skye. She's a sophomore. She was with Elliot Saunders. Kayleigh or Kylie were listening. Does it look like a slow night? Does it look like I just sat here remembering every face that passes by? Never-before-hard, I was breathing, heading towards the door leading The Coldwater cinema has two screens behind doors on either side of the concession counter. As soon as the ticket guy tore my ticket in half, I pulled the door to theater number two and dived inside into the darkness. The film has begun. The theatre was almost full, except for a few isolated places. I was walking down the aisle looking for V. At the bottom of the aisle I turned and walked through the front of the theater. It was hard to distinguish faces in the dark, but I was sure that V was not here. I walked out of the theater and went up to the show next door. It wasn't that crowded. I did another step-by-step guide, but then again, I didn't see V. Sitting next to the back, I tried to calm down. All night long I felt like a dark fairy tale, which I wandered into and could not get out. A tale of fallen angels, human hybrids and sacrificial murders. I rubbed my thumb over my birthmark. I especially didn't want to think about the possibility that I was a descendant of one of the Nephilims. I took out the ambulance and checked for missed calls. None. I put the phone in my pocket when a box of popcorn materialized next to me. Hungry? Asked a voice from a little over his shoulder. The voice was quiet and not particularly happy. I tried to keep my breath calm. Get up and get out of the theater, Patch said. I'll be right behind you. I don't move. Come out, he repeated. We need to talk. How do you have to sacrifice me to get the human body? I asked my tone of light, my insides feeling lead. It might be cute if you thought it was true. I think it's true! Sort of. But the same thought kept coming back, if Patch wanted to kill me, why didn't he come back? Shh! said the guy next to me. Patch said, Go away, or I'll kill you out. I rolled over. Excuse me? Shh! the guy next to me rinsed again. Blame him, I told the guy, pointing to Patch. The guy pulled his neck back. Listen, he said, facing me again. If you don't calm down, I'll get security. Okay, go get security. Tell them to take him, I said, signaling to Patch again. Tell them he wants to kill me. I want to kill you, the boy's girlfriend slyded, leaning around him to address me. Who wants to kill you? The guy asked. He was still looking over his shoulder, but his expression was puzzled. There's no one there, a friend told me. You make them think they can't see you, do you? I told Patch, awed by his power, even when I despised his use of it. Patch smiled, but he was pinched in the corners. Oh Lord! A friend said, throwing her hands in the air. She furiously rolled her eyes at her boyfriend and said, Do something! I need you to stop talking, the guy told me. He gestured on the screen. Watch the show. Here's my soda. I swung into the aisle. I felt the patch move behind me, anxiously close, not quite touching. He stayed that way until we left the theater. On the other hand door, Patch hooked my hand and directed me across the lobby to the ladies' room. What's wrong with you and the girls' bathrooms? I said. He pointed me through the door, locked her, and leaned against her. His eyes were on me. And they showed all the signs of wanting to intimidate me to death. I was backed up to the counter, my palms digging in the edge. You're angry because I didn't go to Delphi. I lifted one wobbly shoulder. Why Delphic, patch? Sunday night. Delphic will be closing soon. Any particular reason you would want me to drive to a dark, soon-to-be deserted amusement park? He walked towards me until he stood close enough so I could see his black eyes under the ball cap. Dabria told me that you should sacrifice me to get the human body, I said. And do you think I'd go through this? I swallowed it. Then is it true? Our eyes are locked. It has to be a deliberate sacrifice. Just Kill You Won't Do It. Are you the only person who can do this to me? No, but I'm probably the only person who knows the end result, and the only person who will try it. That's the reason I came to school. I had to get close to you. I needed you. That's the reason I came into your life. Dabria told me you were in love with a girl. I hated myself for experiencing the irrational torments of jealousy. It wasn't supposed to be because of me. It was supposed to be an interrogation. What happened? I desperately wanted Patch to give away some clues to his thoughts, but his eyes were cool black, emotions lurking out of sight. She died. It must be hard for you, I snapped. He waited a few points before answering. His tone was so low that I trembled. You want me to come clean, I will. I'll tell you everything. Who I am and what I did. Every detail. I'll dig it all up, but you have to ask. You have to want it. You can see who I am, or you can see who I am now. I'm not very good, he said, piercing me with his eyes, which absorbed the whole light but didn't reflect any, but I was worse. I ignored the roll in my stomach and said: Tell me. The first time I saw her, I was still an angel. It was instant, possessive lust. It made me crazy. I didn't know anything about her except that I'd do everything I could to get close to her. I watched it for a while, and then I got it in my head that if I came down to Earth and possessed a human body, I would be banished from heaven and become human. The thing is, I didn't know about Ceswan. I went down at night in August, but I couldn't possess the body. On the way back to heaven, many revenge angels stopped me and tore out my wings. They threw me out of the sky. I knew right away that something was wrong. When I looked at people, all I felt was an insatiable thirst to be inside their bodies. All my strength was deprived, and I was such a weak, pathetic thing. I wasn't I fell. I realized that I gave it all up, just like that. All this time I hated myself for being I thought I gave it up for nothing. His eyes were singularly focused on me, leaving me transparent. But if I hadn't fallen, I wouldn't have met you. My conflicting emotions weighed so heavily in my chest, I thought they might suffocate me. After biting away the tears, I forged forward. Dabria said my birthmark meant I was related to Chauncey. It's true? Do you want me to answer that question? I didn't know what I wanted. My whole world felt like a joke and I was the last one who got hit by the line. I wasn't Nora Gray, the average girl. I was a descendant of a man who wasn't even human. And my heart is broken into pieces over another non-human. Dark angel. Which side of my family? I finally said. Your father. Where's Chauncey now? Even though we were related, I liked the idea that it was far away. Very far away. Far enough, the connection between us can't feel real. His boots were flush with the feet of my tennis shoes. I'm not going to kill you, Nora. I don't kill people that matter to me. And you're top of the list. My heart made a nervous flip. My hands were pressed against his stomach, which was so strong, even his skin did not give. I kept a pointless defense between us, since even a towering electric fence didn't make me feel safe from it. You're encroaching on my personal space, I said, pulling back. The patch gave a barely-it-30 smile. Is it unsightly? It's not the SAT. Nora. I hid a few stray hairs behind my ears and took one significant step to the side, rounded the sink. You're boring me. I need a room. I needed boundaries. I needed willpower. I needed to be in the cage, because once again I proved that I could not trust in the presence of Patch. I had to bolt for the door, and yet.... I wasn't. I tried to convince myself that I stayed because I needed answers, but that was only part of it. That was the other part I didn't want to think about. The emotional part. The part that was the pointless struggle. Do you keep anything else from me? I wanted to know. I keep a lot of things from you. Page 17 My Insides took a steep dive. As? Like the way I feel about being locked up here with you. The patch prepared one hand to the mirror behind me, its weight tipping over to me. You have no idea what you're doing to me. I shook my head. I don't think so. That's not a good idea. That's not right. There's all kinds of right, he muttered. On the spectrum, we're still in a safe zone. I was sure that the self-confident half of my brain was screaming, run for your life! Unfortunately, the blood roared in my ears and I didn't hear straight. Obviously, I didn't think straight either. Definitely right. Usually the right thing to do, Patch continued. Mostly right. Maybe right. Maybe not now. I sucked some air. From the corner of my eye, I noticed a fire alarm drilled into the wall. It was ten, maybe fifteen feet away. I wish I was quick, I could cross the room and pull it out before Patch stopped me. Me. will run. I'd be safe. And that's what I wanted.... Don't you? Not a good idea, Patch said with a soft trembling head. I bolted to the fire alarm anyway. My fingers closed on the lever, and I went down to sound the alarm. Only the lever didn't budge. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get him to move. And then I found out patch's familiar presence in my head, and I knew it was a mind game. I turned to him face to face. Get out of my head. I burst back and pushed him hard in the chest. The patch took a step back, stabilizing itself. What was that all about? He asked. All night. For making me crazy about it when I realized it was wrong. He was the worst. He was so wrong that he felt good and it made me feel completely out of control. I might have been tempted to hit his square in the jaw if he hadn't taken me by the shoulders and pressed me against the wall. There is almost no space between us, only a thin air boundary, but Patch managed to eliminate it. Let's be honest, Nora. You have it bad for me. His eyes held a lot of depth. And I don't have that bad for you. He leaned over to me and put his mouth on mine. A lot of them were on me, actually. We touched the base in several strategic locations down our bodies and it took all my willpower to come off. I backed off. I'm not done yet. What happened to Dabria? Everyone took care of it. What exactly does that mean? She wasn't going to keep her wings after plotting to kill you. The moment she tried to return to heaven, revenge on the angels would be to deprive them. Sooner or later she did it. I just sped things up. So you just ripped them off? They were deteriorating; feathers were broken and thin. If she stayed on Earth much longer, it was a signal to all the other fallen angels who saw her fall. If I hadn't, one of them would. I dodged another of his accomplishments. Is she going to make another unwanted appearance in my life? You never can tell. Lightning fast, Patch caught the hem of my sweater. He got me into it. His knuckles brushed the skin of my navel. The heat and ice shot through me at the same time. You can have it. Angel, he said. I've seen you both in action, and my bet is on you. You don't need me for that. What do I need you for? He laughed. Not sharply, but with a certain low desire. His eyes lost their advantage and were focused entirely on me. His smile was all fox ... But softer. Something right behind my belly button danced and then spiraled below. The door is locked, he said. And we have unfinished business. My body seemed to be swept aside by the logical part of my brain. I strangled him, actually. I slid my arms up his chest and looped his arms around his neck. The patch lifted me to my hips, and I wrapped my legs around his waist. My pulse was pounding, but I didn't mind anything. I crushed my mouth to him, soaking up the ecstasy of his mouth at the mine, his hands on me, myself on the verge of breaking out of my skin- skin- the cell phone in his pocket rang to life. I broke away from Patch, was breathing heavily, and the phone rang a second time. Voicemail, Patch said. Deep in the recesses of my consciousness, I knew answering my phone was important. I couldn't remember why; Patch's kisses made all the last harboring worry evaporate. I untangled myself from him, turning away so he wouldn't see how working up to ten seconds kissing him made me. Internally I was screaming for joy. Hello? I responded by resisting the urge to wipe my mouth for greased lip gloss. Baby! Wee said. We had a bad connection, crackling static cutting over her voice. Where are you? Where are you? Are you still with Elliot and Jules? I flattened my hand against my free ear to hear better. I'm at school. We broke in, she said in a voice that was naughty to perfection. We want to play hide-and-seek but not enough people for two teams. So... Do you know the fourth person who could come to play with us? A rambling voice muttered in the background. Elliot wants me to tell you that if you don't come to be his partner-hang-on-what? Wee said in the background. Elliot's voice appeared. Nora? Go play with us. Otherwise, there is a tree in the common area with the name Wee on it. Pure ice was flowing through me. Hello? I said hoarsely. Elliot? Vee? Are you there? But the connection was dead. CHAPTER 27 WHO WAS IT? PATCH ASKED. My whole body rang. It took me a while to respond. Wee broke into school with Elliot and Jules. They want me to meet them. I think Elliot is going to hurt V if I don't go. I looked at Patch. I think he's going to hurt her if I do. He folded his arms, frowning. Elliot? Last week in the library I found an article that said that he was questioned in a murder investigation at his old school, Kinghorn Prep. He walked into a computer class and saw me reading it. Ever since I got a bad atmosphere from him. Very bad atmosphere. I think he even broke into my bedroom to steal the article back. Is there anything else I need to know? The girl who was murdered was Elliot's friend. She was hung from a tree. Just on the phone he said: If you don't come, there's a tree in the common area with the name Wee on it. He seems cocky and a little aggressive, but he doesn't seem like a killer to me. He dipped into my front pocket and took out the keys to the jeep. I'll drive up and check things out. I won't be long. I think we should call the police. He shook his head. You'll send V to the U.S. to destroy property and B and E. And more. Jules. Who's this guy? Elliot's friend. He was in the arcade the night we saw you. His wrong deepened. If there was another guy, I'd remember. He opened the door, and I followed him. The janitor wearing black trousers and a workissue maroon shirt had sweeping bits of popcorn in the lobby. He did a double take at the sight of Patch exiting the ladies' room. I recognized him. School. Brandt Christensen. We had English together. Last semester. I helped him write a newspaper. Elliot is waiting for me, not you, I told Patch. If I don't see it, who knows what's going to happen to V? It's a risk I'm not going to take. If I let you go, will you listen to my instructions and follow them carefully? Yes. If I tell you to jump? I'm going to jump. If I tell you to stay in the car? I'll stay in the car. Mostly it was true. In the parking lot of the theater, Patch pointed his keychain at the jeep, and the headlights blinked. Suddenly he stopped and swore under his nose. What happened? I said. Tires. I dropped my eyes and of course both the tires on the driver's side were flat. I can't believe it! I said. Did I ride two nails? The patch crouched on the front bus, running with his hand around the circle. Screwdriver. It was a deliberate attack. For a moment I thought maybe it was another trick of the mind. Maybe Patch had a reason he didn't want me to go to school. His feelings for Wee were no secret, after all. But something was missing. I didn't feel Patch in my head. If he had changed my mind, he would have found a new way to do it, because as far as I could tell, what I saw was real. Who would do that? He rose to full height. The list is long. Are you trying to tell me you have a lot of enemies? I've upset a few people. A lot of people are betting that they can't win. Then they accuse me of leaving with my car, or more. The patch went up to one space to the compartment, opened the driver's side door and got behind the wheel. Reaching beneath him, his hand disappeared. What are you doing? I asked, standing in the open doorway. It was a waste of breath as I was well aware of what he was doing. Looking for a spare key. Patch's hand reappeared, holding two blue wires. With some skill, he took off the ends of the wires and knocked them along. The engine flipped over, and Patch looked at me. The seat belt. I'm not driving a car. He shrugged. We need it now. They don't. It's theft. That's not right.' The patch didn't look restless in anything. In fact, he looked too relaxed in the driver's seat. It's not the first time he's done this, I thought. Try not to stay at the crime scene longer than necessary. Wait one minute, I said, holding my finger. I was running back to the theater. On my way inside, the glass doors reflect the parking lot behind me, and I saw a patch swing out of the compartment. Hi, Brandt, I said to the boy, still flashing popcorn in a long dusty pan. Brandt looked at me, but his attention was quickly drawn over his shoulder. I heard the doors of the theater open, and I felt Patch moving behind me. His approach is not all that different from the sun's eclipse sound, subtly darkening the landscape, hinting at a storm. How does this happen? Brandt said insecurely. I am car problem, I said, biting my lip and trying on a sympathetic face. I know I'm putting you in an awkward position, but since I helped you with this Shakespearean paper last semester... You want to borrow my car. In fact... Yes, yes. It's a piece of junk. It's not the jeep's commander. He looked directly at Patch, as if apologizing. Does it work? I asked. If when you run you mean doing a wheel roll, yes, it works. But it's not for credit. Patch opened his wallet and handed over what looked like three crunchy hundred-dollar bills. Reining in my surprise, I decided that the best way to play. I changed my mind, Brandt said, his eyes wide, pocketing the money. He was fishing in his pockets and had a back-to-back patch of a couple of keys. What to do and color? Patch asked, catching the keys. You never can tell. Part of Volkswagen, part of Shvetev. It used to be blue. That was before he rusted up to orange. Will you fill the tank before you return it? Brandt said, sounding like he had his fingers crossed behind his back, pushing his luck. The patch will clean up another twenty. In case we forget, he said, thrusting him into the front pocket of Brandt's uniform. Outside, I said to Patch, I could talk him into giving me the keys. I just needed a little more time. And by the way, why do you bus tables at the border if you're loaded? I don't. I got money from playing pool a couple of nights ago. He pushed Brandt's key into the lock and opened the passenger door for me. The bank is officially closed. Patch drove through the city through the dark, quiet streets. It didn't take long to arrive at school. He drove Brandt's car to a stop on the east side of the building and killed the engine. The campus was wooded, the branches twisted and gloomy and holding nothing but a damp mist. Behind them loomed Coldwater High. Page 18 The original part of the building was built in the late nineteenth century, and after sunset it is very similar to the cathedral. Grey and foreboding. It's very dark. Very abandoned. I just got a really bad feeling,' I said, looking at the school black voids for the windows. Stay in the car and stay out of your eyes, Patch told me as he walked through the keys. If someone leaves the building, take off. He's out. He was wearing a fitted black crewneck tee, dark Levi's, and boots. With his black hair and dark skin, it was hard to distinguish it from the background. He crossed the street and, in a matter of minutes, completely mingled into the night. CHAPTER 28 FIVE MINUTES CAME AND WENT. TEN MINUTES stretched to twenty. I struggled to ignore the hairy feeling that I was under surveillance. I looked in the shadows, calling the school. Why did the patch take so long? I shuffled through several theories, feeling more uneasy at the moment. What if Patch doesn't find V? What happens when Patch found Elliot? I didn't think Elliot could beat Patch, but there was always a chance if Elliott had an element of surprise. The phone in my rang, and I jumped out of my skin. I see you, Elliot said, responding. Sitting there in the car. Where are you? Looking at you from the second story window. We're playing inside. I don't want to play. He finished the call. With my heart in my throat, I got out of the car. I looked at the dark windows of the school. I didn't think Elliot knew patch was inside. His voice came across impatient, not angry or irritated. My only hope was that Patch had a plan and would make sure nothing happened to me or V. The moon was clouded, and in fear I went to the east door. I went into the half-back. My eyes took a few seconds to make something of a shaft of street light falling through the window enclosed in the top half of the door. The floor tile reflected the waxy sheen. The lockers lined up on both sides of the corridor like sleeping robot soldiers. Instead of a calm, quiet sense, the halls radiated a hidden threat. External lights lit up the first few feet in the hallway, but after that, I didn't see anything. Right inside the door was a switch panel, and I flipped them over. Nothing happened. As the electricity was running outside, I knew the electricity inside was manually cut off. I'd like to know if that's part of Elliot's plan. I couldn't see him, and I couldn't see V. I also couldn't see Patch. I had to feel my way through every room in the school, playing a slow elimination game until I found it. Together we'll find V. Using the wall as a guide, I walked forward. On any weekday I walked through this section of the hall several times, but in the dark it suddenly seemed foreign. And longer. Much longer. At the first intersection I mentally appreciated my surroundings. A left turn will result in a band and orchestra halls and cafeteria. Turning right will lead to administrative facilities as well as a double staircase. I went straight, heading deeper into the school, to the classrooms. My foot caught on to something, and before I could react, I went sprawling on the floor. A misty gray light filtered through a hatch directly above my head as the moon broke between the clouds, illuminating the features of the body I tripped over. Jules was on his back, his expression fixed in a blank stare. His long blond hair tangled on his face, his hands slack on his sides. I pushed back to my knees and closed my mouth, gasping for air. My legs were shaking with adrenaline. Very slowly, I put my hand on Jules' chest. He wasn't breathing. He was dead. I jumped to my feet and choked with a scream. I wanted to call Patch, but it's going to give my location to Elliot if he didn't know it yet. I realized from the beginning that he could stand his feet away, watching me as his twisted game unfolded. The overhead light disappeared and I did a frantic view of the hall. A more endless corridor stretched ahead. The library was up the short staircase to my left. started on the right. By decision for a moment, I chose a library groping blackened halls to get away from Jules' body. My nose was dripping, and I realized that I was crying silently. Why did Jules die? Who killed him? If Jules was dead, was Wee dead, too? The library doors were unlocked and I fumbled my way inside. Past the bookshelves, at the far end of the library, there were three small study rooms. They were soundproof; if Elliot wanted to isolate V, the rooms were the perfect place to put her. I was just about to start to them when a male moaned through the library. I stopped. The light in the hall feeds on life, illuminating the darkness of the library. Elliot's body lay a few feet away, his mouth parted, his skin ash. His eyes rolled my way, and he reached out to me. A shrill cry ran away from me. Spinning around, I ran to the library doors, pushing and kicking chairs out of my way. Run! I ordered it for myself. Get to the exit! I staggered out of the door,

and that's when the lights in the hall died, plunging all again into black. Patch! I tried to scream. But my voice caught, and I choked on his name. Jules was dead. Elliot was almost dead. Who killed them? Who's left? I tried to figure out what was going on, but the whole reason left me. A push to my back threw me out of balance. Another push sent me flying sideways. My head crashed against the locker, naked me. A narrow beam of light swept through my vision, and a pair of dark eyes behind a ski mask swirled into the spotlight. The light came from the miner's headlight, fixed over the mask. I pushed up and tried to run. One of his hands fired, cutting off my escape. He raised his other hand, snupcing me to the locker. Did you think I was dead? I heard a gloating, an icy smile in his voice. I couldn't steal one last chance to play with you. You're going to have to change my head. Who do you think the bad guy was? Elliot? Or don't you think your best friend can do it? I'm warming up, aren't I? That's the thing, that fear. It brings out the worst in us. It's you. My voice thundered. Jules ripped off her headlight and ski mask. In the flesh. How did you do that? I asked, my voice is still trembling. I saw you. You weren't breathing. You were dead. You're giving me too much credit. It's all you, Nora. If your mind wasn't so weak, I wouldn't have done anything. Am I making you feel bad? Is it discouraging to know that of all the minds I've invaded, your top of the list as simple? And the fun part. I licked my lips. My mouth tasted a strange combination of dry and sticky. I could smell the fear in my breath. Where's Wee? He hit me on the cheek. Don't change the subject. You really have to learn to control your fear. Fear undermines logic and opens up all sorts of opportunities for people like me. It was Jules' side I'd never seen. He was always so quiet, so sullen, radiating a complete lack of interest in everyone around him. He in the background, attracting little attention, little suspicion. Very clever of him, I thought. I claved at him and twisted away, and he drove his fist into his stomach. I tripped backwards, gasping for air that didn't come. My shoulder dragged down the locker while I sat crumpled on the floor. The air tape slipped in my throat, and I suffocated on it. Jules touched the tracks my nails cut out in my forearm. It's going to cost you. Why did you bring me here? What do you want? I couldn't keep the hysteria from my voice. He yanked my hand and dragged me down the hall. Hitting the door open, he shoved me inside, and I went down, my palms faced a difficult floor. The door slammed behind me. The only light came from the headlight that Jules held. The air kept the familiar smells of chalk dust and stale chemicals. The walls were decorated with posters of the human body and the interbreeding of human cells. A long black granite counter with a sink stood at the front of the room. It collided with rows of appropriate granite laboratory tables. We were in Coach McCounaughy's biological room. A flash of metal caught my eye. The scalpel was lying on the floor, tucked against a trash can. He must have been overlooked by both the coach and the cleaner. I shoved it in the waistband of my jeans just as Jules hauled me to my feet. I had to cut off the electricity, he said, placing a headlight on the nearest table. You can't play hideandseek in the light. Scraping two chairs across the floor, he positioned them facing each other. Take a sly. It didn't sound like an invitation. My eyes rushed to the panel of windows covering a distant wall. I wondered if I could crank one open and run before Jules caught me. Among thousands of other self-defense thoughts, I told myself not to seem frightened. Somewhere in the back of my mind I remembered that advice from the self-defense class I took with my mom after my father died. Make eye contact ... Look confident ... Use common sense ... everything is easier said than done. Jules pushed me over my shoulders, forcing me into a chair. Cold metal seeped through my jeans. Give me your cell phone, he said, his hand. I left it in the car. He was breathing with laughter. Do you really want to play games with me? Your best friend is locked in a building somewhere. If you play games with me, she'll feel a hug. I'll have to come up with an extra-special game to make it up to it. I dug up the phone and handed it over. With superhuman force, he bent it in half. Now it's just the two of us. He sank into a chair in front of mine and stretched his legs out sumptuously. One hand was hanging from the back seat. Let's talk, Nora. I ran off my chair. Jules hooked me by the waist before I took four steps and pushed me back into the chair. I used to have horses, he said. Once upon a time in France, I had a stable of beautiful horses. Spanish horses my favorite. They were caught and brought straight to me. Within a few weeks I had conquered them. But there was always a rare horse that refused to be broken. Do you know what I did to a horse that refused to be broken? I shuddered at the answer. Collaborate and you have nothing to fear, he said. I didn't believe him for a minute. The gleam in his eyes was not sincere, I saw Elliot in the library. I was surprised to waver in my voice. I don't like or trust Elliot, but he didn't deserve to die slowly and sick. Did you hurt him? He got closer, as if to tell the secret. If you're going to commit a crime, never leave evidence. Elliot was an integral part of everything. He knows too much. Is that why I'm here? Because of an article I found about Kiersten Halverson? Jules smiled. Elliot didn't mention what you know about Kijrsten. Did Elliot kill her... Or you? I asked about the cold snap of inspiration. I had to test Elliot's loyalty. I took what was most important. Elliot was in Kinghorn on a scholarship, and no one let him forget about it. It's up to me. I was his benefactor. After all, everything is up to the choice of me or Kiersten. More succinctly, choosing money or love. Apparently, there is no pleasure in being poor among princes. I bought it and then I knew I could rely on it when it was time to deal with you. Why me? Haven't you figured it out yet? The light emphasized the ruthlessness in his face and created the illusion that his eyes turned the color of molten silver. I played with you. Wash you with a rope. Using you as a confidant because the person I really want to hurt can't get hurt. Do you know who this person is? All the nodes in my body seemed to have been undone. My eyes were out of focus. Jules' face was like an impressionistic picture, blurred around the edges, devoid of detail. Blood was flowing from my head and I felt like I was starting to slide off my chair. I felt this way enough times before knowing that I needed iron. Coming soon. He hit me on the cheek again. Focus. I don't know who I'm talking about. I couldn't push my voice above the whisper. Do you know why he can't get hurt? Because he doesn't have a human body. His body lacks physical sensations. If I locked him up and tortured him, it wouldn't be good. He doesn't feel it. Not a drop of pain. Surely you already have an assumption? You spend a lot of time with this man. Why is it so quiet, Nora? Can't understand that? Page 19 Of the Pot of Sweat crawled across my back. Every year at the beginning of the Jewish month of Ceswan, he takes control of my body. Two whole weeks. That's how long I've been losing control. No freedom, no choice. I can't afford the luxury of running away for those two weeks, borrowing my body and then coming back when it's all over. Then I can convince myself that it's not really happening. No. I'm still there, imprisoned inside my own body, every moment of it, he said in a grinding tone. Do you know what it is? And you? he he I kept my mouth shut, knowing that it would be dangerous to speak. Jules laughed, a rush of air through his teeth. It sounded ominous than anything I've ever heard. He said: I took an oath allowing him to take over my body during Ceswan. I was sixteen. He shrugged, but it was a hard movement. He swore at me by torturing me. Afterwards, he told me I wasn't human. Can you believe it? Not a man. He told me that my mother, a man, had slept with a fallen angel. He chuckled odiously, sweat spraying his forehead. Did I mention I inherited a few traits from my father? Like him, I'm a liar. I make you see a lie. I make you hear voices. Just like that. Can you hear me, Nora? Are you scared? He patted me on the forehead. What's going on, Nora? Terribly quiet. Jules was Chauncey. He was Nephilim. I remembered my birthmark, and what Dabria told me. Jules and I had the same blood. There was monster blood in my veins. I closed my eyes, and the tear slipped out. Remember the night we first met? I jumped in front of the car you were driving. It was dark and it was foggy. You were already on the verge, which made it much easier to fool you. I liked to scare you. That first night gave me a taste for it. I'd notice it's you. I whispered. You're not listening. I can make you see whatever I want. Do you really think I'm losing sight of a detail as judgmental as my height? You saw what I wanted you to see. You saw a nondescript man in a black ski mask. I sat there, feeling a tiny crack in my horror. I wasn't crazy. Jules was behind all this. He was crazy. He could create mind games because his father was a fallen angel, and he inherited power. You didn't really loot my bedroom, I said. That's why he was still ok when the police arrived. He applauded slowly and intentionally. Do you want to know the best part? You could block me. I couldn't touch your mind without your permission. I reached out, and you never resisted. You were weak. You were easy. It all made sense, and instead of feeling a brief moment of relief, I realized how receptive I was. I've been smoothed. There was nothing stopping Jules from sucking me in his mind game if I didn't learn to block him. Imagine yourself in my shoes, Jules said. Your body is disturbed year after year. Imagine hatred so strongly, nothing but revenge will cure it. Imagine expending large amounts of energy and resources to keep a close eye on the object of your revenge, patiently waiting for the moment when fate presented you with the opportunity to not only gain even but tip the scales in your favor. His eyes are locked on mine. You have that opportunity. If I hurt you, I hurt Patch. You overestimate my value for the patch, I said, sweat erupts along my hair line. I've kept a close eye on the patch for centuries. The Last Last he made his first trip to your house, even though you didn't notice. He's been following you up a few times. From time to time, he made a special journey out of his way to find you. Then he went to your school. I couldn't help but ask myself, what's so special about you? I made an effort to find out. I've been watching you for a while now. Nothing but fear gripped me. It was then that I knew it was never the presence of my father I felt after me as a ghost guardian. It was Jules. I felt the same icy, unearthly presence now, only amplified a hundred times. I didn't want to attract Patch's suspicion and backed off,' he continued. That's when Elliot came forward, and it didn't take him long to tell me that I had guessed. Patch is in love with you. It all clicked into place. Jules wasn't sick the night he disappeared into the men's room in Delphi. And he wasn't sick the night we went to the border. All this time it was a simple fact that it had to remain invisible to the patch. The moment Patch saw him, it would have been over. Patch would have known, Jules-Chauncey - was up to something. Elliot had Jules' eyes and ears, feeding the information back to him. The plan was to kill you on the campaign trail, but Elliot couldn't convince you to come, Jules said. Earlier today, I followed you out of blind Joe and shot you. What was my surprise when I discovered that I had killed a lady in a bag wearing your coat. But it worked out. His tone relaxed. Here we are. I shifted to my seat, and the scalpel slid deeper into my jeans. If I wasn't careful, it would have slipped out of reach. If Jules pushes me to get up, she can slide all the way down my trouser legs. And that's the end of it. Let me guess what you think, said Jules, rising to his feet and strolling in front of the room. You start to wish you had never met Patch. You want him to never fall in love with you. Go on. Laugh at the position he put you in. Laugh at your bad choices. Hearing Jules talk about Patt's love, I was filled with irrational hope. I fumbled the scalpel out of my jeans and jumped out of my seat. Don't come near me! I'm going to stab you. I swear I will! Jules made a gutted sound and threw his hand across the counter in front of the room. Glass glasses are broken on the board, the papers flutter down. He came up to me. In a panic, I brought a scalpel as hard as I could. He met his palm, slicing his skin. Jules washed and retreated. Without waiting, I loaded the scalpel into his thigh. Jules gaped on the metal protruding from his leg. He yanked it, using both hands, his face curvature in pain. He opened his hands, and the scalpel fell crashing. He took an intermittent step towards me. I screamed and dodged away, but my hip clipped the edge of the table: I lost my support and fell down. The scalpel lay a few feet away. Jules flipped me over my stomach and Me in the back. He pressed my face to the floor, crushing my nose and and my screams. A valiant attempt, he gushed. But it's not going to kill me. I'm Nephilim. I'm immortal. I grabbed the scalpel, dig my eyes into the floor to stretch those last, vital inches. My fingers were fumbling over him. I was so close, and then Jules dragged me back. I brought my heel hard between my legs; he moaned and went limp to one side. I scrambled to my feet, but Jules rolled to the door, kneeling between me and her. His hair hung in his eyes. Sweat beads leaked down his face. His mouth was lopsided, one half curled up in pain. Every muscle of my body was spiral, ready for spring action. Good luck trying to escape, he said with a cynical smile that seemed to require a lot of effort. You'll see what I mean. Then he sank to the ground. CHAPTER 29 I HAD NO IDEA WHERE V WAS. OBVIOUS THOUGHT came to me to think like Jules - where would I keep V hostage if I were him? He wants to make it hard to run and hard to find, I reasoned. I raised the mental plan of the building, narrowing my attention to the upper levels. Chances are, Wee was on the third floor, the tallest in the school, except for a small fourth floor that had more attic than anything else. It was led by a narrow staircase, accessible only from the third floor. There were two bungalow-style classes at the top: AP Spanish and Ezin Laboratory. Wee was in the ezing lab. Just like that, I knew it. Moving as fast as I could, through the darkness, I felt that I had climbed two flights of stairs. After some trial and error, I found a narrow staircase leading to the ezine lab. At the top, I pushed the door. V? I called quietly. She let out a small groan. That's me, I said, taking every step with care as I maneuvered up to the aisle tables, not wanting to tip over the chair and warn Jules to my location. Are you hurt? We need to get out of here. I found her huddled in front of the room, hugging her knees to her chest. Jules hit me in the head, she said, raising her voice. I think I passed out. Now I don't see. I don't see anything! Listen to me. Jules cut off the power and painted shades. It's just darkness. Hold my hand. We have to go down right now. I think he hurt something. My head is throbbing. I really think I'm blind! You're not blind, I whispered, giving her a small cocktail. I don't see either. We have to feel our way down. We're going to go out through the exit at the athletics office. He's got chains on all the doors. A minute of silence fell between us. I remembered Jules wishing me luck, and now I knew why. A noticeable chill ripples from my heart through the rest of my body. Not the door I entered, I said at last. The door of the Far East is unlocked. It should only be one. I was with him when he chained the others. He said that so no one would be tempted to go out while we were playing hideandseek. He that the outside was outofbounds. If the eastern door is the only one Left unlocked, he will try to block it. He'll wait for us to come to him. But we're not going to. We come out of the window, I said, working out a plan from the top of my head. At the opposite end of the building is the end. Do you have a cell phone? Jules took it. When we go outside, we have to split up. If Jules is chasing us, he'll have to choose one of us to follow us. The other will get help. I already knew who he was going to choose. Jules wasn't rude for V, except to lure me here tonight. Run as hard as you can and get to the phone. Call the police. Tell them Elliot's in the library. Live? Wee asked, her voice trembling. I do not know. Wee stood huddled together, and I felt her pull up her shirt and wipe her eyes. It's all my fault. It's Jules' fault. I'm afraid. We'd be fine, I said, trying to sound optimistic. I hit Jules in the leg with a scalpel. He's bleeding heavily. Maybe he'll give up chasing us and go get medical attention. Wee ran to sobbing. We both knew I was lying. Jules's desire for revenge will outweigh his wound. It's going to outweigh everything. We and We crawled down the stairs, holding tightly on the walls until we got back to the first floor. That's it, I whispered in her ear, holding her hand as we walked quickly down the hall, heading further west. We were not going very far when the gutted sound, not quite laughter, rolled out of the tunnel of darkness ahead. Well, what do we have here? Jules said. There was no face attached to his voice. Run, I said Toe, squeezing my hand. He wants me. Call the police. Run! Wee lowered his hand and ran. Her steps disappeared depressingly quickly. I wondered briefly if the patch was still in the building, but it was more of a side of thought. Most of my concentration went into not fainting. Because I'm all alone with Jules again. It took the police at least twenty minutes to respond, Jules told me, the faucet of his shoes was approaching. I don't need twenty minutes. I turned and ran. Jules broke into a run behind me. With my hands over the walls, I turned right at the first intersection and ran down the perpendicular hall. Forced to rely on walls to guide me, my hands hit the sharp edges of lockers and door clocks, nicking my skin. I did another right, running as fast as I could for double gymnasium doors. The only thought of knocking in my head was that if I could get to my gym locker in time, I could lock myself inside it. The girls' locker room was walkiwall and floortoceling with oversized lockers. It will take Jules time to break into each of them individually. If I was lucky, the police would have come before he found me. Page 20 I rushed to the gym and ran over the attached girls locker room. As soon as I pushed on the door handle, I felt a burst of cold terror. The door was locked. I rattled the pen again, but he didn't. around, I was looking desperately for another way out, but I was trapped in in I fell back to the door, squeezed my eyes closed to prevent fainting, and listened to my breath hitch up. When I opened my eyes again, Jules was walking into a haze of moonlight, seeping through the windows. He's tying his shirt around his thigh; blood stain seeped through the tissue. He was left in a white shirt and chinios. The gun was tucked into his pants belt. Please let me go, I whispered. You are afraid of heights. He looked up at the rafters high above the gym. A smile cracked his face. The stagnant air was filled with smells of sweat and wood varnish. The heat was off for spring break and the temperature was icy. Shadows stretched back and forth across the polished floor as moonlight broke through the clouds. Jules stood with his back to the stands, and I saw Patch move behind him. Did you attack Marcy Millar? I asked Jules, ordering myself not to react and give up Patch. Elliot told me there's bad blood between the two of you. I don't like the idea of someone else having the pleasure of torturing my girlfriend. And my bedroom window? Did you spy on me while I was sleeping? It's nothing personal. Jules froze. He came forward suddenly and twitched on my wrist, rotating me in front of him. I felt like I was afraid there was a gun tap on the back of my neck. Soymi had, Jules Patch said. I want to see the expression on your face when I kill her. You're helpless to save her. As helpless as I had to do anything about the oath I swore to you. The patch took a few steps closer. He moved easily, but I felt it tightly curbed caution. The gun went deeper, and I went in. Take another step, and it will be her last gasp, Jules warned. The patch looked at the distance between us, calculating how quickly it could cover it. Jules saw that, too. Don't try, he said. You're not going to shoot her, Chauncey. No? Jules pulled the trigger. The gun clicked and I opened my mouth to scream, but all that came out was a tremulous sob. A revolver, Jules explained. The other five cameras are loaded. Ready to use these boxing moves you always brag about? Patch told me to mind. My pulse was all over the place, my legs barely held me. Wwhat? I stuttered. Without warning, the tide of power is the course in me. Foreign power expanded to fill me. My body was completely vulnerable to Patch, all my strength and freedom lost as he took hold of me. Before I had time to realize just how much this loss of control terrified me, the crushing pain spiked through my arm, and I realized Patch was using my fist to hit Jules. The gun was shot down; it skidded across the gym floor out of reach. Patch ordered me to slap Jules back against the stands. Jules tripped, falling into them. The next thing I knew my hands were closing on Jules' throat, throwing his head back against the grandstand with Crack! I held him there, pressing my fingers to his neck. His eyes widened and then bulged. He tried to speak, slurring his lips, but Patch did not give up. I can't stay in you much longer, Patch talked to my thoughts. It's not Ceswan, and I can't. As soon as I'm made, run. Do you understand? Run as fast as you can. Chauncey will be too weak and stunned to get into your head. Run and don't stop. A high buzzing sound whined through me and I felt my body peeling off the patch. The vessels around Jules' neck jumped out, and his head sank to one side. Yes on, I heard a patch called it. On the sidelines ... Aside ... But it was too late. The patch disappeared from within me. He was so suddenly gone that I was dizzy. My hands were in my control again and they bounced off Jules' neck on impulse. He gushed from the air and blinked at me. The patch was on the floor a few feet away, motionless. I remembered what Patch said and sprinted through the gym. I rushed to the door, waiting to sail into the hall. Instead, it was like hitting a wall. I pushed the bar knowing the door was unlocked. Five minutes ago, I went through this. I threw all my weight at the door. It didn't open. I turned around, the adrenaline frustrating causing my knees to shake. Get crazy! I was yelling at Jules. Pulling himself to sit on the lowest climb of the podium, Jules massages his throat. No, he said. I tried the door again. I raised my leg and kicked the barbell. I hit my palms on the door slit of the window. Help! Does anyone hear me? Help! Looking over his shoulder, I found Jules limping towards me, his injured leg buckle under each step. I squeezed my eyes closed, trying to focus my mind. The door would open as soon as I found his voice and swept him. I searched every corner of my mind, but I couldn't find it. He was somewhere deep, hiding from me. I opened my eyes. Jules was much closer. I had to find another way down. Drilled into the wall above the stands was an iron staircase. He reached the grid rafters at the top of the gym. At the far end of the rafters, on the opposite wall, almost directly above where I was standing, was an air shaft. If I could get to it, I could climb up and find another way down. I burst into a dead sprint past Jules and into the stands. My shoes were clapping on wood, echoing through empty space, making it impossible to hear if Jules was following me. I got my footing on the first ladder rang and lifted myself up. I went up for one run, then another. From the corner of my eye, I saw a drinking fountain much lower. It was small, which meant I was under high profile. Very high. Don't look down, I ordered myself. Focus on what's above. I've previously gone for another run. The stairs rattled, not welded properly to the wall. Jules' laughter came up to me, and my concentration slipped. Images of the fall flashed in my head. It was logical that I knew he was Then my brain bent over and I couldn't remember which way it was up or down. I couldn't decipher which thoughts were mine and which belonged to Jules. My fear was so thick that it blurred my eyesight. I didn't know where I was standing on the stairs. Were my legs in the middle? Was I close to slipping? Squeezing the hole with both hands, I pressed my forehead to the knuckles. Breathe, I told myself. Breathe! And then I heard it. The slow, excruciating sound of a metal squeak. I closed my eyes to suppress dizziness. Metal braces providing the top of the stairs to the wall popped free. The metal groan changed to a high whine as the next set of braces down tore off the wall. I watched with a scream trapped in my throat as the entire top half of the stairs broke free. Locking my arms and legs around the stairs, I prepared for the fall back. The ladder oscillated a moment in the air, patiently succumbing to gravity. And then it all happened quickly. The rafters and lanterns disappeared into a dizzying blur. I was flying down until, suddenly, the ladder slammed to a halt. He bounced up and down, perpendicular to the wall, thirty feet above the ground. The impact yanked my feet loose, my hands my only attachment to the stairs. Help! I screamed, my legs cycling through the air. The ladder rushed, dropping a few more feet. One of my shoes slid on my leg and then fell. Too long later, he hit the gym floor. I bit down on my tongue as the pain in my hands deepened. They were breaking out of the sockets. And then, through fear and panic, I heard Patch's voice. By blocking it. Keep climbing. The stairs are intact. I can't. I sobbed. By blocking it. Close your eyes. Listen to my voice. After swallowing, I closed my eyes. I clung to Patch's voice and felt a strong surface forming beneath me. My legs were no longer in the air. I felt one of the steps of the stairs digging through the balls of my feet. Concentrating with determination on Patch's voice, I waited until the world crept into place. The patch was right. I was on the stairs. It was upright, fixed to the wall. I regained the measure of determination and continued the ascent. At the top I loosened myself erratically on the nearest rafters. I hugged him and then swung my right foot up and over again. I was facing the wall, with my back to the air shaft, but there was nothing I could do now. Very carefully I knelt down. Using all my concentration, I start inching back through the expanses of the gym. But it was too late. Jules rose quickly, and was now less than fifteen feet away from me. He climbed the rafters. Give me your hand, he dragged himself to me. The dark slash on the inside of his wrist caught my attention. He crossed his veins at ninety-19 corners and was almost black. To anyone else, it might look like a scar. It meant a lot more to me. The family connection was obvious. We are the same blood, and it showed in our identical identical We were both cross-border rafters, sitting face to face, ten feet apart. Any last words? Jules said. I looked down though it made me dizzy. The patch was much lower on the gym floor, still like death. Then I wanted to go back in time and relive every moment with him. Another secret smile, another common laugh. Another electric kiss. Finding him was like finding someone I didn't know I was looking for. He came into my life too late, and now he's leaving too soon. I remembered him telling me he'd give everything for me. He's been there before. He gave up his own human body so I could live. I hesitated by accident, and instinctively fell lower to balance myself. Jules' laughter is carried out like a cold whisper. It doesn't matter to me if I shoot you or if you fall to death. It matters, I said, my voice is small but self-confident. You and I share the same blood. I raised my hand precariously, showing him my birthmark. I'm your descendant. If I donate my blood, Patch will become human and you will die. It's written in Enoch's Book. Jules' eyes were devoid of light. They were trained on me, absorbing every word I spoke. I could say from his expression that he weighed my words. The flush came up in his face, and I knew he believed me. You, he sprayed. He slid towards me at breakneck speed, simultaneously reaching into my waistband to draw a gun. Tears stung my eyes. More than once I'll deal with the time, I've thrown myself off the rafters. CHAPTER 30 DOOR IS OPEN AND CLOSED. I WAITED TO HEAR steps approach, but the only sound came from the ticking clock: a rhythmic, steady pounding through the silence. The sound began to fade, swerving. I wondered if I would hear this stop completely. I was suddenly afraid of this moment, not knowing what was after. A much brighter sound overshadowed the clock. It was an encouraging, ethereal sound, a melodic dance on the air. Wings, I thought. I held my breath, waited, waited, waited. And then the clock started going backwards. Instead of slowing down, the rhythm became more confident. Inside me formed a spiral liquid that is rolling deeper and deeper. I felt caught up in the current. I glided down through myself, into a dark, warm place. My eyes flickered open for familiar oak panels on the sloping ceiling above me. My bedroom. A feeling of confidence flooded me, and then I remembered where I was. At the gym with Jules. The tremor slipped on my skin. Patch? I said, my voice hoarse from the unqueptive. I tried to sit down and then gave a muffled scream. There's something wrong with my body. Every muscle, bone, cell ached. I felt like one giant bruise. There was movement near the doorway. The patch leaned against the door pit. His mouth was pressed tightly and lacked his usual brilliance of humor. His eyes held more depth than I had ever seen before. They were protective edge. It was a good fight back in the gym, he said. But I think you could of a few boxing lessons. On the wave, everything came back to me. Tears roll from the depths of me. What happened? Where's Jules? How do I get here? My voice cracked with panic. I rushed off the rafters. It took a lot of courage. Patch's voice became hoarse, and he stepped all the way into my bedroom. He closed the door behind him, and I knew it was his way of locking up all the bad things. He shared me and everything that happened. Page 21 He came up and sat down on the bed next to me. What else do you remember? I tried to put my memories together, working backwards. I remembered beating the wings I heard shortly after I rushed with the rafter. No doubt I knew I was dead. I knew an angel had come to carry away my soul. I'm dead, aren't I? I said quietly, reeling with fear. Am I a ghost? When you jumped, the victim killed Jules. Technically, when you came back, he had to, too. But since he had no soul, he had nothing to revive his body. I am back? I said, hoping I wouldn't fill myself with false hope. I didn't accept your sacrifice. I said no. I felt small about the shape in my mouth, but it never made it past my lips. Are you saying that you gave up getting a human body for me? He raised my bandaged hand. Under all the gauze, my knuckles were throbbing from Jules' impact. Patch kissed every finger at the wrong time, keeping his eyes glued to mine. What's good about the body if I can't have you? Heavy tears rolled down my cheeks, and Patch pulled me to him, wrapping his head to his chest. Very slowly the panic ran away, and I knew it was over. I was going to be fine. All of a sudden, I'm out. If Patch gave up the victim, then: You saved my life. Turn around. I solemnly ordered. I rested my T-shirt up to his shoulders. His back was smooth, a certain muscle. The scars are gone. You can't see my wings, he said. They are made of spiritual matter. You're a guardian angel now. I was still too much in awe to wrap my mind around it, but at the same time I felt amazement, curiosity ... Happiness. I'm your guardian angel, he said. Am I getting my own guardian angel? What is your actual job description? Protect your body. His smile bent higher. I'm serious about my job, which means I'm going to have to get to know the subject on a personal level. My stomach went all fluttering. Does that mean you can feel it now? Patch stared at me in silence for a moment. No, but that means I'm not on the blacklist. Downstairs, I heard the quiet rumble of the garage door sliding open. My mother! I was a breathed. I found a watch on my nightstand. It was just after 2 a.m. They must have opened the bridge. How does this whole guardian angel business work? Am I the only one who can see you? I mean, are you invisible to everyone else? The patch looked at me as he hoped I wasn't you're not invisible? I was squeaking. You have to get out of here! I made a move to push the patch out of bed, but was interrupted by a searing blow to my ribs. She'll kill me if she finds you here. Can you climb trees? Tell me you can climb a tree! Patch smiled. I can fly. A. To the right. Well good. Police and the fire department have been here before, Patch said. The master bedroom should be gutted, but they stopped the fire from spreading. The police will be back. They'll have a few questions. If I had to guess, they were already trying to contact you by calling you on 911 on . Jules took it. He nodded. I got it. I don't care what you say to the police, but I'd appreciate it if you left me out of it. He slid my bedroom window open. The last thing. Wee got to the police in time. Paramedics rescued Elliott. He's in the hospital, but he'll be fine. Down the hall, at the bottom of the stairs, I heard the door of the house closed. My mom was inside. Nora? She called. She threw her purse and keys on the front desk. Her high heels snapped on wooden floors, almost at a running pace. Norat There's a police tape on the front door! What is going on? I looked out the window. The patch disappeared, but one black feather was pressed against the outer glass that was kept in place in the rain last night. Or angelic magic. Downstairs, my mom clicked on the light of the hall, a faint beam of it stretching all the way under the crack at the bottom of my door. I held my breath and counted the seconds, suggesting that I had about two more before she screamed. Nora! What happened to the railings! It's a good thing she hasn't seen her bedroom yet. The sky was perfect, washed blue. The sun is just beginning to swell over the horizon. It was Monday, a whole new day, the horrors of the last twenty-four hours far behind. I had five hours of sleep under my belt, and apart from all the body pain that came from being sucked into death and then spat back on, I felt remarkably refreshed. I didn't want to hang a black cloud at the moment, reminding myself that the police had to arrive at any moment to take my statement about the nightly events. I still haven't made the decision what I'm going to tell them. I'm soft on the bathroom in my nightgown-mentally blocking the question of how I changed into it since I was supposedly wearing clothes when the patch brought me home and sped through my morning routine. I splashed cold water on my face, cleared my teeth, and tamed my hair back into the gum. In my bedroom, I pulled on a clean shirt, clean jeans. I called V. How are you doing? I asked. Ok. How are you? Ok. Silence. Well, Wee said in a hurry, I'm still totally scared. You? Fully. Patch called me in the middle of the night. He said Jules roughed you up very badly, but that you were fine. Really? Did the patch call you? He called from the jeep. He said you were sleeping in the back seat and taking you home. He that just ended up behind the wheel high school, when he heard a scream. He said he found you in the gym, but you fainted in pain. The next thing he knew, he looked up and saw Jules jump off the rafter. He said Jules must have snapped, a side effect of all the onerous guilt he felt for terrorizing you. I didn't know I was holding my breath until I let him go. Apparently, Patch manipulated several details. You know, I don't buy it. Wee went on. You know, I think the patch killed Jules. In V's position, I would probably think in a similar way. I said, what does the police think? Turn on the TV. It's live, Channel 5. They say Jules broke into the school and jumped. They consider it a tragic teenage suicide. They ask people with information to call the hotline listed at the bottom of the screen. What did you tell the police when you first called? I was scared. I didn't want to be arrested for B and E. So I called anonymously with either 88. Well, - I finally said - if the police consider it a suicide, I think that's what happened. After all, it's modern America. We have the advantage of forensics. You're keeping something from me, V said. What really happened after I left? That's where it got sticky. Wee was my best friend and we lived under the motto No Secrets. But some things are simply impossible to explain. The fact that Patch was a fallen angel topped the list. Directly beneath it was the fact that I jumped off the rafters and died, but was still alive today. I remember Jules cornering me in the gym, I said. After that, the details will be hazy. Is it too late to apologize? Wee said the sound was more sincere than she was in all our friendship. You were right about Jules and Elliot. Apologies accepted. We have to go to the mall,' she said. I feel this overwhelming need to buy shoes. Many of them. What we need is some good old shoehopping therapy. The doorbell rang, and I glanced at the clock. I have to give the police my statement about what happened last night, but I'll call you after that. Last night? Ton Wee shot with panic. Do they know you were at school? You didn't give them my name, did you? In fact, something happened at the beginning of the night. Something named Dabria. I'll call you soon, I said, hanging up before I had to lie through another explanation. As I walked down the hall, I reached the top of the stairs when I saw who my mother had invited inside. Detectives Basso and Holstic. She led them into the living room, and although Detective Holstic collapsed on the sofa, Detective Basso remained standing. He turned his back on me, but the step creaked halfway through my descent, and he turned around. Nora Gray, he said in a stern voice to the policeman. We'll meet again. My mom blinked. Have you met before? Your daughter has life. Looks like we're here every week. My Mom Mom questioning the look on me, and I shrugged my shoulders, clueless, how to guess the police humor? Why don't you sit down, Nora, and tell us what happened, said Detective Holstjic. I sank into one of the plush chairs opposite the sofa. Just before nine last night I was in the kitchen drinking a glass of chocolate milk when Miss Green, my school psychologist, showed up. Did she just walk into your house? Detective Basso asked. She told me I had something she wanted, and that's when I ran upstairs and locked myself in the master bedroom. Back, Detective Basso said. What was that thing she wanted? She didn't say. But she mentioned that she's not a real psychologist. She said she was using the job to spy on students. I shared the look between everyone. She's crazy, isn't she? Detectives shared a look. I'll run her name, see what I can find, Detective Holstjic said, pulling myself back to her feet. Let me get this straight, Detective Basso told me. She accused you of stealing something that belonged to her, but she never said what? Another sticky question. She was hysterical. I only understood half of what she was saying. I ran and locked myself in the master bedroom, but she broke down the door. I was hiding inside the fireplace, and she said she'd burn the house around the room to find me. Then she started a fire. Right there in the middle of the room. How did she start the fire? My mom asked. I couldn't see. I was in the chimney. It's crazy, Detective Basso said, shaking his head. I've never seen anything like it. Is she going to come back? My mom asked the detectives, coming to stand behind me and putting her hands protectively on my shoulders. Is Nora safe? Maybe want to see about getting the security system installed. Detective Basso opened his wallet and slipped a card over his mom. I vouch for these guys. Tell them I sent you and they will give you a discount. A few hours after the detectives left, the doorbell rang again. It must be the company alarm, my mother said, meeting me in the audience. I called, and they said they'd send the guy today. I'm not going to make the idea of sleeping here without some protection until they find Miss Green and close her. Didn't the school even bother to check her links? She opened the door, and Patch stood on the porch. He wore a faded Levi and a cozy white T-shirt, and he held a box of tools in his left hand. Good afternoon, Mrs. Gray. Patch. I couldn't beat my mother's tone. Surprise mixed with discolored. Are you here to see Nora? Patch smiled. I'm here to spec your home for a new alarm system. I thought you had a different job, Mom said. I thought you bussed tables on the border. I got a new job. The patch looked my eyes with me and I headed up in many places. In fact, I was dangerously close to feverish. Outside? He asked me. I followed him up to his motorcycle. We still have a lot to talk about, he said. He shook his head, his eyes full of desire. Kiss, he whispered my thoughts. Page 22 Was not a question, but a warning. He smiled when I did not protest, and lowered his mouth to mine. The first touch was just that touch. Teasing, tempting softness. I licked my lips and Patch's smile deepened. More? He asked. I curled my hands into his hair, pulling him closer. More. More. hush hush series book 1 read online

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