

PROLOGUE

Up until a few minutes ago, here's what I thought I knew about my life.

Eleven days ago I was living in Pandanus Beach with my best friend, Maggie, holding down a job at the library, grieving for my twin brother Jude. I thought I was a backpacker; I thought I'd watched Jude die in a crumpled mess of metal and petrol and dust. I thought I was learning to get on with my life, despite weird and gruesome dreams that featured hell-beasts and mutilations.

Then Rafa came to town. Violence followed—and some mind-bending news. I wasn't nineteen: I was a hundred and thirty-nine. I wasn't a high school drop-out estranged from my parents: I was part of the Rephaim—a society of half-angel half humans. My father was one of the Fallen, a band of disgraced archangels banished from heaven and

sent to hell thousands of years ago for seducing human women. A hundred and forty years ago, led by Semyaza, they broke out and did the same thing all over again. And then they disappeared without a trace. The only one of the Fallen who abstained was Nathaniel. He's the one who gathered together the Fallen's bastard babies and made us into a society. Raised us into an army and created a base for us at the Sanctuary. Called us the Rephaim. He murdered our mothers to do it—not that anyone but Jude and I knew about it until a few moments ago.

Nathaniel claims our destiny is to find our Fallen fathers and turn them in: hand them over to the Angelic Garrison. But we're not the only ones hunting them. Hell's Gatekeeper demons are also tracking them, and are itching to destroy the Rephaim along the way.

My role in all this is complicated.

About a decade ago, there was a major split among the Rephaim over what should happen if we actually found our fathers. Jude and twenty-three others including Rafa rebelled. They left the Sanctuary and became Outcasts. I should have walked out with them, but I didn't.

Then, a year ago, Jude and I made up. Jason—our cousin, who'd been hiding from Nathaniel all these years—reached out to us. He told us about a young girl in his family who had visions. She'd seen something important involving me and Jude, so we went to see her. At that point, as far as anyone knew, we disappeared. Both factions of the

Rephaim assumed we'd betrayed them; that we'd found the Fallen—and it got us killed.

But we were both alive. With no memory of being Rephaim or what we'd done, both thinking the other was dead. Me living in Pandanus Beach with my grief. Then Rafa found me and told me who I was. Helped me find Jude. Reunited me with my brother, who seemed to take the truth better than I did. Who fitted back into his Rephaite skin so much quicker than me.

A few days ago, we discovered there's a family in Iowa that hates us; has done for generations. They claim to receive divine guidance about how to protect the world from us, including building an iron-lined room capable of trapping Rephaim despite our supernatural abilities. A family who lost a woman and teenager, horribly killed when demons overran that farm and took control of the iron room.

And then the demons took Rafa and Taya.

We rescued them. Got them back and destroyed the iron room. Along the way, we found out that Mya—de facto leader of the Outcasts—is actually a member of the family in Iowa. She gave herself away when she saved Rafa and me yesterday, then she went to ground.

And now the Gatekeepers are headed for Pan Beach to draw the Rephaim into a fight that could end us—or jumpstart a prophesied war between heaven and hell.

A few minutes ago, Rafa, Jude and I rallied a crew of

Outcasts and Sanctuary Rephaim to head to Pan Beach to try to stop the Gatekeepers tearing apart the town I love.

But on the way here, everything changed.

A few minutes ago, I didn't know my own story. Why I stayed at the Sanctuary when Jude and the others left to become Outcasts. What secrets Rafa was keeping from me. A few minutes ago, I didn't know what Jude and I were doing when we had our memories taken from us.

The difference between now and a few minutes ago?

Now I remember it all.

NOW

AWAKENINGS

Jude and I are looking at each other. Watching. Sunlight streams through the window, warms my back. I can hear the surf pounding the beach a block away. A magpie somewhere outside. My room smells of stale coffee and the half-melted vanilla-bean candle in a mason jar by my bed. My chest is a storm of emotion, thunderous and insistent.

‘What do you remember?’ Jude keeps his voice low, doesn’t move closer.

I bite my lip. Memory after memory rises up like a wave, crashes down, replaced by another. They just keep coming.

‘Gaby, we need to talk.’

‘I know. Just...’

I close my eyes. I’m unhinged, spinning. There’s a tornado under my ribs, surging and tearing at me. Voices in the kitchen, louder now. Mick Butler. Zak. Micah. Daisy.

Footsteps in the hallway. I force my eyes open, let the world back in.

‘Gabe.’ Ez steps into the doorway. ‘What do you want us to do with the Butlers and their crew?’ Daisy appears between Ez and Jude, still rattled about having chosen to defy the Sanctuary and come with us.

I cast around for some thought to anchor me to the moment. *Demons are coming to tear Pan Beach apart.*

That’ll do.

I remember where I am. *Who* I am. ‘They’re human. They need to go home and sleep. We’ll catch up later at the Imperial.’ My voice is steadier than I expect. ‘Tell Mick to stay off the mountain.’

Ez frowns. ‘Are you okay?’ She looks at Jude and then back at me. ‘What’s happened?’

I shake my head. Swallow. My heart is racing. Ez and Daisy are going to hear my pulse if I don’t get out of here. ‘Just relieved to be home.’

Home.

‘When are you going to Rafa’s?’ Ez asks.

My stomach does a neat somersault. ‘Soon,’ I say. ‘I need a run.’ Because if I don’t burn energy soon, the chaos in my gut is going to rip me open.

‘A run?’ Daisy says. ‘Like, *now*?’

‘Yep.’ My mouth is dry.

‘What about everyone else? Shouldn’t we be—’

‘You can all chill for half an hour. We’ll work out a

plan when I'm back.' I'm talking too fast. I look around for my running gear, spy three-quarter tights in the pile of clean washing on my desk. 'I need to change.' I force myself to make eye contact with Daisy. 'I won't be long.'

'I'll come with you.'

'No.' It comes out too loud. Daisy stares at me, her straight red hair tucked behind her ears. Freckled cheeks flushed. 'I need...space.'

Ez's forehead is still creased. 'But you'll call into Rafa's?'

I nod, noncommittal, and kick off my boots.

The voices in the kitchen are louder. Micah's arguing with Rusty. Ez gives a meaningful glance in their direction. 'I need to sort out these clowns. Daisy—a hand?' Ez disappears back down the hallway. Daisy catches my eye for a second, shakes her head in frustration, and follows.

Jude stays. 'Can we talk?'

Anger stirs—or the memory of it. I can't tell what's real and what's an echo right now. 'Let me get my head straight.'

'Gaby—'

I grab a t-shirt and my running shoes and shift next door to Maggie's room without looking at him. I stand for a moment, my breathing quick and ragged, thoughts tumbling.

Maggie's bed is neatly made but her work table is a jumble of cloth bolts and patterns. Her sketchbook is closed, half-covered by a crimson shawl she started

knitting last week. Chanel No. 5 still lingers. It brings another flood of memories—more recent—of cooking with Maggie in our kitchen, walking down the hill to work together, sharing the bathroom mirror. Drinking beer in our regular seats at Rick’s, overlooking the esplanade.

My throat tightens. I need to run. *Now.*

I shift with the shoes in my hand. It’s easy now, like walking. I pinpoint my arrival to a spot behind a hulking fig tree on the rainforest track. The path is empty under the leafy canopy. I stomp my foot on the trunk to jam my heel into the runner. I don’t realise how much I’m shaking until the third time I fumble the laces.

Quick hamstring and calf stretches. I fix my eyes on the track, anticipating the cool air against my skin, the burn in my muscles. I need the release. I need the escape.

But I already know I can’t outrun the thing I’m trying to avoid.

The truth.

11 YEARS AGO

ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE

I don't want to be here.

I'm still wound tight from yesterday. It's hard not to be. I wish my katana was closer but it's hidden a few metres away, out of sight. I haven't even got a knife in my boot: we're not in a boot-wearing kind of place.

'Drink up.' Rafa gestures to the fishbowl glass in front of me. Frothy pink bubbles fizz at the edges. I pick out the umbrella and take a sip through a fat plastic straw. The assault is instant: strawberry, coconut, Grand Marnier. Sickly sweet with the consistency of wet cement. I unstick my tongue from the roof of my mouth.

'Yep. Disgusting.'

We're at yet another bar. We've been to hundreds over the years, maybe thousands—I've lost count. Usually it's all dull lighting, nicotine haze and stained carpet. Not tonight. Tonight we're outdoors under a

thatched roof, breathing in sea air laced with exotic flowers and kerosene from torches lining the beach. Waves break beyond the guttering flames with gentle monotony. Couples with unnaturally vivid drinks stand chatting, skin scorched from the day's sun. Candles in jam jars are scattered around on crates. A guy with tribal tattoos and a wide, happy face strums an acoustic guitar in the corner.

Behind the bar, Jude tosses cocktail bottles like a seasoned pro and flirts with two blondes in sarongs. Daisy is next to him, slicing fruit, barely watching what she's doing with the knife. It's like yesterday never happened. Not the undersea earthquake a few hundred metres offshore here; not the shit-storm back home.

Yesterday the island shuddered. A few kilometres inland, an old church cracked and slumped and the road split in two. The locals rode out the aftershocks and waited for the repercussions from the sea. Jittery tourists held their breath.

Not all that different from what was going on at the Sanctuary. Jude and Nathaniel arguing. Again. The rest of us keeping our heads down, waiting for the aftermath. The ground shifting under our feet.

But now, with the sea again calm and the sky a crisp blanket of stars, it's hard to believe the world was almost upside down yesterday—here or there. Ez and Zak are at a table behind me. Half-watching the shadows beyond the torches, mostly watching each other. Whispering, frowning. It's not the earthquake

they're worried about, or even the promise of Gatekeepers sniffing around; It's what's going on between Jude and Nathaniel.

I straighten and stretch my neck side to side. 'I *really* need to hit something.'

Rafa's mouth quirks. 'I know what you need.'

'In your dreams.' I know where this is going: it's been the same banter for about five decades now. Usually he saves it for an audience.

'In *my* dreams, Gabe, you end up slick with sweat and moaning.'

'I have food poisoning?'

He laughs, a beer halfway to his lips. Condensation drips from the bottle. He's completely at ease here: three-quarter cargoes, frayed t-shirt, bare feet. 'I'm just saying that if you need distracting, I'm your man.'

'If I wanted to go places everyone else has been, Rafa, I'd take a trip to Disneyland.'

He leans in closer. 'Yeah, but don't you want to know why everyone loves Space Mountain?'

Jude walks down the bar and pushes a fresh beer in front of Rafa. 'Dude, what have I told you about talking that shit to my sister? At least where I can hear you.' He glances at my glass, still full. 'You're not even trying.'

'I'm not in the mood.'

'That's not the point. You're insulting my bar skills.'

This game of ours started forty years ago in Mongolia when he dared me to drink banana liqueur in yak's milk.

'So? You planning to make this a full-time career?'

Jude shrugs but it's too quick, too jerky. 'Depends on what happens when we get home.'

'It's not going to come to that.'

'It might.'

We share a long look. This secret we've been carrying for over a century has grown heavy on both of us. The weight of it makes every other frustration cut deeper, sting longer. It's the reason Jude keeps pushing Nathaniel. Well, that and calculated agitation from Mya.

She's around somewhere. She's the reason I'd rather be anywhere but here right now.

Rafa rests his forearms either side of his glass. 'You two are such drama queens. It'll sort itself out.'

I ignore him and nod down the bar at the cluster of bare chests, boardshorts and bikinis. 'What's the story here?'

Jude follows my gaze. 'None of them can surf for shit.'

'And...?'

'The pit scum haven't been here.'

'There's still a chance the fault line is a lead,' I say.

'Come on, sending us here was an excuse to keep us distracted. Nothing more.'

'Maybe. But Malachi and Taya saw Gatekeepers two islands over yesterday.'

Jude grabs a dishcloth and wipes up a beer spill with a deft flick of his wrist. 'Zrael and his horde are as bored as us. If there was even half a chance the Fallen disappeared from here, the place would be

crawling with demons and hellions. And Nathaniel would be here by now.'

A brunette with bronzed skin in a soft cotton dress lifts an empty glass in Jude's direction. He smiles at her. It takes a second for it to reach his eyes. 'Well look, someone here actually likes my cocktails.' He slides a glass from the rack above his head, tosses and catches it. He moves away from us. 'Same again?'

Rafa taps his thumb on the bar. 'When this is done, I'm taking him to San Fran.'

'Who's in San Fran?' Because with these two, it's always a 'who'.

'Two European history majors who go weak at the knees when we speak French to them. Your brother needs to blow off steam. Given how twitchy you are, you should come with us.'

'Yeah, 'cause there's nothing I enjoy more than watching you two hook up.'

'So find your own entertainment. Seriously, how long's it been?'

I fiddle with the straw in my drink. It's been almost a year, but I'm not telling Rafa that. I happen to be fussy about who I blow off steam with.

'Anyone else going?'

'Jones and Daisy.'

'And?'

'Me.'

I don't bother twisting around to see who it is.

'Got a problem with that?'

Mya leans on the bar, not too close. She's smart

enough not to crowd me. She's wearing a turquoise bikini and a see-through white sarong tied low on her hips. Blonde hair frames her face. Her lips are glossy, her eyes shaded with kohl.

I ignore her and she drums short black fingernails on the bar. 'Jude,' she calls out. 'Make me something special.'

Daisy bangs her knife on the chopping board, halving a watermelon with enough force to split a skull.

'I thought we'd see action today,' Mya says. 'Maybe we should've made our presence more obvious.'

I pick at my straw, push it around in my drink. 'We're here to investigate the fault line, not provoke a brawl with demons.'

'Yeah, but who follows orders?'

'We do.'

Rafa scoffs. I ignore him.

'That's the problem with you lot,' Mya says. 'Not enough independent thought.'

I finally face her. 'No,' I say carefully, 'the problem is people who confuse arrogance with independent thought.'

She holds my gaze. 'Yeah, I can imagine that'd be a bitch.' A taunting smile, and she saunters down the other end of the bar to watch Jude pour the electric blue cocktail he's made for her.

'When are you going to cut her some slack?' Rafa says, amused as always by how much Mya aggravates me. 'She's good value.'

‘For what, trouble?’

‘Says you, who can’t go a day without goading her. Honestly, Gabe, I don’t get it. It’s been a year—’

‘Exactly: one year. And she struts around the Sanctuary like she owns the place.’ I push my drink away. ‘She’s next to useless in a fight, has already made an arse out of Malachi by screwing him and dumping him, and she’s—’

My phone rings. I answer without seeing who it is.

‘Hello.’ It comes out clipped.

‘Gabe?’

I look right at Rafa. ‘Daniel.’

Rafa rolls his eyes and takes a long drink of beer.

‘How’s the weather there?’ Daniel asks.

Small talk. Perfect. We never used to do this, but in the last few months we’ve been having a lot of awkward conversations. And I’m not having one in front of Rafa. I’ve already copped enough ribbing from him and Jude about Daniel’s changing interest in me.

‘Humid,’ I say, ‘and no sign of Gatekeepers.’

‘What’s the status?’

That’s what I like about Daniel—he’s easily distracted by duty.

‘Jude felt nothing when he arrived this morning and he and Daisy aren’t getting vibes from the locals about anything weird since the quake. If the Gatekeepers haven’t been here by now, they’re not coming.’

‘Are Jude and Daisy working or drinking?’

‘Working. They’re doing a shift for free—their contribution to “quake relief”.’

'And the rest of you?'

'Working *and* drinking.'

'Gabe...'

I turn my back on Rafa, focus on the flickering torches in the sand. 'It's been a shitty week, Daniel, give me a break.'

'It's not you I'm worried about. You know your limits. But your brother and Rafa—'

'Everyone's doing their job, Daniel.'

A pause. 'We need to talk when you get back about what's going on between Jude and Nathaniel.'

I close my eyes. 'It'll have to wait until tomorrow. We're taking a breather before we come home.'

'Who's we?'

'The usual crew.'

'For how long?'

'A few hours.'

Another pause, longer this time. 'Stay in contact.'

I disconnect and take my time turning back to Rafa. He's waiting, smug. 'So you're coming with us?'

I can see it now: Daisy watching Jude flirt, pretending it doesn't bother her; Jones trying to distract her and failing; Rafa throwing back shots, talking crap in French; Mya prowling the bar, finding her own brand of entertainment.

'No chance.'

'What then?'

'I'll hang here for a while. See if I like it more when Mya's not around.'

Jude is back down our end. He uncorks a white

wine, pours two glasses. Pushes them across to Rafa and nods towards Ez and Zak.

‘I look like a waiter to you?’ Rafa says.

‘As if I’d let you deliver drinks to real customers.’

Rafa grins. ‘Fuck you.’ But he picks up the drinks and heads in Ez and Zak’s direction.

I wait for Jude to have a go at me for dissing Mya, but he’s distant, distracted.

‘You okay?’ I ask.

He stacks glasses in the dishwasher, not meeting my eyes. ‘I think we have to go.’

He means leave the Sanctuary. Him and me. We’ve talked about it for years—done nothing about it for just as long—but things have never been this tense.

‘I’ve found this great little beach town in Australia.’

My eyes track to Rafa, Ez and Zak—caught up in quiet conversation—and then to Daisy. Her red hair is tied back, her eyes frequently sliding to Jude and me. Worried.

‘You want to walk away from everyone?’

I try to imagine life without the rest of the Rephaim. Without the people I’ve known my entire life. People I’ve laughed with, argued with, fought beside. I can’t.

‘It wouldn’t be forever,’ Jude says, but I hear the doubt in his voice. Once we leave, how would we ever return?

Rafa is coming back our way, shoulders relaxed because he has no clue what Jude and I have got hidden behind our backs. Ticking away.

'He'll never forgive us if we go without him,' I say.
Jude's face folds a little. 'I know. But he'll be so
pissed off at us for lying to him all these years it'll
take a while for him to notice.'