

enticed



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the violet eden chapters

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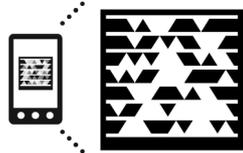


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JESSICA SHIRVINGTON



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for
mum AND DAD,
WHO HAVE ALWAYS MADE IT SO EASY TO
HAVE SOMEONE TO LOOK UP TO AND ARE
A CONSTANT INSPIRATION IN BOTH MY
LIFE AND WORK.

THANKS FOR ALWAYS BEING THERE.
I Love you.

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'I form the light and create darkness.

I make peace and create evil:

I, the Lord, do all these things.'

Isaiah 45:7



PROLOGUE

'No one takes my life away from me.

I give it up of my own free will.'

John 10:18

The angel had been ordered to make his choice. It had to be of his own free will. But what they asked of him carried a high price. He would most likely never return. Most likely be destroyed. Or worse.

And no one would ever know the truth.

'You have decided, then,' a voice said to him.

I felt each moment as he did – the obscured version of time in what had to be an otherworldly place – but could see nothing. It was surreal; no visible people – just their presence or maybe auras.

It wasn't a question, what was said. They knew the moment he'd made the decision. They probably knew before him. He could sense them all around, the mighty Seraphim. Supreme knowledge lent them a powerful presence, but it was bitter this day.

'When the first of your tasks is complete you will move on to the next. You must not reveal yourself or seek companionship with anyone, especially exiles, unless for the purposes of fulfilling your objectives.'

'I understand.'

'You will spend three years before the day on which you must act

arrives. He has his role to play. It is not possible without your actions first.'

'I understand.'

And he did – understand. He had made this decision of his own free will, despite the sacrifice, for he knew it had only been asked of him because he was the perfect choice.

He felt the universe around him, the freedom of unfettered dominion over space and realm, and wondered when he would again feel this, if ever.

'Take a name of the times when you are there. Now go.'

And so it was. He made the transition amidst images of mobs and anger. To his destiny. To death. The flash of a kiss. All things to come.

A fog cleared around me and my surroundings came into view. I was suddenly in my art studio. Standing by the window was a figure I recognised. The one I suspected was my angel maker.

'What's your name?' I asked, still amazed by the way my words seem to float through the air in these dreams, as if they had their own physical presence.

'It does not matter. But you may call me Lochmet if you require a title.'

'What does that mean?'

'Warrior.'

I swallowed, suddenly nervous. The way he said it – with such force and confidence – made him seem so powerful.

'Why did you show me that angel? I don't get it.'

'Not yet. But you will. It is but a strand of one existence, from a very long time ago.'

'No, please don't . . . Just tell me.'

He turned to face me, his shoulders squared, and I struggled with conflicting urges. One drawing me towards him, the other, to cower

away. I was sure he could see it, see right through me, which only made me more vulnerable.

'We all have the capacity to find the will to do what must be done – even when that which we must do terrifies us most. Remember this.'

'That's it? That doesn't explain anything. Who was he? I thought it was against angel law to exile to earth. How come the Seraphim asked it of that angel?'

He considered me for another delayed, vacant moment before his head tilted towards a painting beside him. The vision of a sandy beach with a midnight blue sea crashing against rocks seemed to affect him. He stretched his arm out and brushed his fingers lightly across the textured ripples of the oil-painted canvas. For just a moment, the silence between us was almost comfortable.

But when he looked back at me I knew: he wasn't going to tell me any more about the angel he had shown me.

'Be mindful. A traitor is within your fold,' he said.

'Who?'

He shook his head and turned back to the window.

'You must walk your path, leave the footprints as evidence of your journey. I cannot take it . . . or change it.'

His voice held the first hint of emotion – a small, almost undetectable, quiver.

'But you did help me,' I started. 'Two years ago, in that classroom . . . ' Even in my dream I felt the sickening memories and the lump in my throat willing me not to go on. 'It couldn't have been anyone else. You sent that teacher across the school to intervene.'

I swallowed hard, fought to hold onto my train of thought, not detour to that day, to that teacher holding me down while I struggled beneath his heavy weight.

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'You interfered,' I said, then dropped my head. 'Thank you.'

His silence was all the confirmation I needed. I looked around the room, unsure what to say next. My paintings surrounded me, but, unlike before, they now included those that I had only planned. Envisaged. Somehow, this room held the paintings of my imagination.

I shuddered.

From behind me, I heard a roar. The deepest rumble, so strong it reverberated up my legs and into my spine.

'My lion,' I whispered.

I spun around, in dreamy slow motion. There was nothing there. I turned back to the angel. He was gone. Sprinkles of rain spat in through the crack in the window.

I stood, waiting.

And then everything around me exploded in a flash of colour that settled to nothing. I was nowhere, all alone apart from the rain, startlingly cold, stinging my face with every sharp landing.

Shards of ice.



Cold enough to wake me up.



CHAPTER ONE

'In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments; there are consequences.'

Robert Green Ingersoll

I held the dagger in my right hand. The hilt heavy and intricately carved, the blade long and slim. The sharp point made an impression into the tip of my index finger – just enough to sting and stir the memories. Choices had been made and now the consequences were mine. Although I'd do it all again, although I knew now that there was something I had to do that was more important than anything else, the truth was – I mourned the life I'd left behind. I twisted the hilt slowly and watched the point pirouette on the pad of my finger.

My dagger – the dagger I killed myself with.

I put it down beside me – not wanting to touch it any longer, but unable to hide it away. I tried to snap out of it. Focus on the positives. For one – I got my period earlier in the week. Never had I been so happy for an emergency dash to the pharmacy.

Everything I had once believed in was shattered. It was still humiliating, knowing I'd been so naive under Phoenix's influence. I really *thought* I could trust him – so much so that I'd lost my virginity to him and unwittingly created some kind

of emotional bond between us. A connection he exploited to destroy my already fragile friendship with Lincoln. Throw in jumping off a cliff, nearly being killed by a bunch of over-the-top psycho exiles, discovering that Phoenix was in fact the son of the first dark exile, Lilith, and that he tricked me into becoming one of the Grigori and, well, condoms hadn't been the first thing on my mind.

Shaking myself free of the memories – and questions – was hardest when I was on my own and as I'd learned a long time ago that Dad was more comfortable at work, where he could hide from his own memories, this was a problem. Solo time made it impossible to ward off the persistent whispers of my past.

I headed into my art studio and started to lay down some fresh paint – I'd just picked up a new supply of iridescent colours and had been playing around with them since I got home from school. My phone beeped.

I'm outside – where r u?

I blew out a breath and caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I'd lost track of time. Now I was late and looked like crap. My long dark hair was twisted into a matted knot and the loose strands falling around my face were splattered with red and grey paint. I hadn't even bothered to put on make-up this morning. Although I didn't really need foundation – most were too dark or yellowy for my creamy complexion – mascara was a must for my otherwise lacklustre hazel eyes. But the only thing I had time to fix was my clothes.

Be down in 5.

I ran to my room, stripping as I went, and threw on my most reliable jeans, the only option when pressed for time, and

the first T-shirt I could find – boring black, but clean. I tried and failed to rescue my hair, finally just tying it up in a new version of the same messy knot and gave up completely on my paint-ridden hands. After a hurried attempt at applying at least a layer of mascara I grabbed my dagger and was out the door, pulling my trainers on between steps.

The mirror in the lift may as well have laughed out loud.

Shit.

By the time I reached the front doors of my apartment building, I'd completely forgotten about my appearance and unconsciously but predictably refocused on Lincoln. Sick anticipation crept through me, circulating and intensifying with every breath.

Yeah, I have it bad.

If possible, I had it worse than ever.

There was a time when I thought my love for Lincoln was unrequited, but now ... Well, it's more complicated than ever, but the vibe – the crazy wired vibe that sparks between two people who are dancing around each other while simultaneously champing at the bit, *that vibe* – was one I was walking, stumbling, hacking through a thicket of, whenever we were near each other.

'Hey. I know it's cool to be late, but could we at least keep it to a fashionable ten minutes?' Lincoln asked, a smile in his tone. I felt his eyes take me in and quickly remembered my very average appearance. I tucked my hair behind my ear and he gave a quirky grin. He knew me too well.

'You know, when you talk like that, you really show your age,' I quipped, as I slid my swipe key into my pocket.

Lincoln's eyebrows shot up.

Good job, Vi.

Less than a minute together and I'd already made things awkward. The issue of our age difference had definitely taken on more significance since I'd found out that although he only looked twenty-two at most, he was in fact twenty-six. As I was only seventeen, it increased the gap to a hefty nine years. Then again, as Grigori, neither Lincoln nor I were confined by the normal parameters of life expectancy. Unless we got ourselves killed along the way, we would likely live well into the hundreds, the ageing process slowing the older we got. So the age difference in the end meant little. It was the *other* parameters that were our problem.

'Where are we going, then?' I asked, keen to change the subject.

'Griffin just called. He got a tip-off. Exiles have been spotted a few blocks from here. If we go now, we should catch them. You up for it?'

Lincoln wanted me to be good. He wanted me to be strong and capable. That was one of the things I loved about him. He didn't want me to hide away and not be able to protect myself, but at the same time, I could hear the concern in his voice.

'Yeah, let's go,' I rallied, trying to sound as sure as I should be.

Since becoming Grigori, my life has taken a sharp change of direction. I am, for all intents and purposes, a warrior. In many ways, that suits me fine. I like being strong and having extra abilities by way of supernatural enhancement is a-okay with me. I have learned the hard way that exiled angels do not belong among humans. There is a very good reason we are divided by realms of time and space and angels were simply

not made to cope with the emotional extras that come with having a corporeal form.

Humans are born with the ability to feel, touch, smell, to experience both love and pain physically. Angels are not. Becoming human is just too much for them to process. In the end they go insane and most of them are vindictive monsters well before that.

Yet despite knowing this, there is still a part of me that struggles with the concept of killing them. Technically, that's not what we're doing, since we are only stripping exiles of physical forms when we return them to their realm for judgement. But . . .

And as if that wasn't enough, since embracing my angel half in the desert – plunging my own blade into the image of myself – I haven't been able to use my dagger, though I rarely go anywhere without it. It sits in a sheaf, carefully 'glamoured' so it cannot be seen by normal humans (weird to think I am no longer one of the *normal*), and whenever I train or head out for a hunt, like now, I have every intention of using it should the occasion call for it.

'Are you sure you're okay? I could call Griffin and he could go out with some of the others.'

'And who's going to go with him? Magda isn't back for another couple of days and everyone that can be active is already out doing something.'

Lincoln dropped his head. I nudged his shoulder as we walked on. 'I'll be okay. And anyway, practice makes perfect, right?'

He took a steady breath, stood a little taller and ran a hand through his golden-streaked brown hair. He knew there was no talking me out of it and at some point he had to get

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on board. It wouldn't help either one of us if we didn't work together.

'Right,' he said, with a finality that made me smile. With that, he segued into a tactical pep talk to which I listened intently. I was learning to be Grigori, to be a warrior, but Lincoln had already travelled well down that road. Under his nice-guy facade was a mighty champion.