



Battle Angel: An Immortal City Novel

By Scott Speer

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Will Jacks find the strength and forgiveness to enter the fray and fight the demons as a stronger-than-ever Battle Angel? Or has the damage been so great that the Guardians will set off for the next place, abandoning Angel City in its darkest hour?

It all comes down to love-wrecked half-Angel Maddy and the strength of her bond with Jackson in this game-changing, thrice-as-sultry series finale that blends beautiful themes of redemption and renewal with heart-pounding action scenes and jaw-dropping twists.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Immortal City*:

"Speer blends romance and mystery to deliver a fresh take on the 'angel novel' . . . [with] strong writing, well-rounded characters, and an enticing hook."—*Publishers Weekly*

"An atmospheric TV show of a book."—*Booklist*

About the Author

Scott Speer is a movie and music video director and a graduate of the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts. He has worked with Will.I.Am, Ashley Tisdale, Paris Hilton, Jordin Sparks, and other Hollywood personalities, and most recently directed *Step Up Revolution*. He is also the author of *Immortal City* and *Natural Born Angel*. Scott lives in Los Angeles, California.

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CHAPTER ONE

There was everything to say, and there was nothing. But the silence that filled the moment was strangely peaceful, Maddy thought. The push and pull of the water against the pier pilings. Flagpoles making that familiar rope-on-metal clanging sound in the breeze. It could have been an altogether pleasant moment, if only she didn't have to say anything. But this moment couldn't last. Finally, Maddy knew it was time to speak. And what she was about to say would change everything.

She looked between the pairs of expectant eyes that looked back at her, the two stares that waited for her answer. The piercing blue eyes belonged to Jackson Godspeed, whose gaze was familiar yet still so thrilling to her. Though she had known Jacks for two years now, she really had never gotten used to the way that glance could pierce straight through her and see the real, vulnerable girl inside her. Jacks's gaze was perfect, too perfect, all blue fire and insufferable beauty. It was divine, something more than human. It was the gaze of a Guardian Angel. His eyes made her feel breathless, made her pulse go wild, and had always made her feel—in some way she couldn't quite understand—not quite good enough.

She turned to meet the other expectant gaze. These eyes were green, watchful, and kind. They were newer to her, and yet, strangely, she felt somehow more at ease with them. This was Tom Cooper, who had come into her life at a time when she thought she was utterly alone in this world. Tom's gaze felt like patience and soft vanilla, like sinking into a warm bath at the end of a long day. It would never spark with the blue electricity of Jacks's, but maybe that was all right. Tom's eyes were human eyes, and being held in his gaze was the closest thing Maddy had ever felt to home.

She thought if there was some way to bottle this moment and live in it forever, she would jump at the chance. To live in a constant state of about-to-answer, where neither Tom nor Jacks would know the truth, both hoping for the answer they heard in their heads, the answer each expected. In this moment, Maddy didn't have to break someone's heart. In this moment, there seemed to be a strange sense of balance. But it was a balance that could not last.

Maddy shook off her reverie and took in the two figures in front of her. The aircraft carrier holding the fighter jets floated behind them as both Jacks and Tom turned to face one another with jaws clenched, fists at

the ready, as if looking to each other for Maddy's answer. Between them, Maddy formed the tip of a triangle, and she was the only thing that was keeping them from crashing into each other in anger and fury.

Time stretched out like a blade. There was Tom in his olive flight suit. A hero. A human hero. He looked handsome. Perfect, even. What more could she ask for? Then she looked at Jacks in his black battle armor, mechanical wings flexed and ready, gleaming in the sunshine. Jacks was no longer perfect. His journey with her—because of her—had altered him. Studying those sleek, man-made wings, Maddy knew the Jacks she had met at the diner was gone forever.

But couldn't the same be said about Maddy? Was it really just a coat she was wearing? A coat that she could take off in the end and still be the same girl underneath? Or had the training and the embrace of this new Angel's life changed her? Had she allowed herself to be altered, in the way that couldn't be undone? The answer dawned on her bitterly, just like when she thought about those mechanical wings. The answer was yes. Just like Jacks, Maddy Montgomery, waitress and high school student, was gone, too. They had both been affected, irreparably wounded, and now they bore the scars of their journeys. Some journeys change us forever, and the idea filled Maddy with a sudden, welling sadness. There was no going back. There was only going forward now. It was time to choose, not just between mortal and Immortal, but also between two worlds.

She couldn't keep stalling. It was time to speak. The moment of about-to-answer had slipped away and was gone. Life was like that. A series of fleeting moments. Maddy faced the two guys who would do anything to protect her, who would fight for her. Maybe even die for her. She'd made her decision. It was the only decision she could make. With a sick feeling, she parted her lips and let a word fall out.

"Jacks." She said his name but couldn't look at him. "I can't go with you."

Her voice sounded very far away.

"I choose Tom."

CHAPTER TWO

Had she really just said that? Whatever just happened, it was too late to take it back. Life can pivot on a single choice, a pinpoint of time, causing ripples of consequences to circle out endlessly. Now she watched the ripples of her decision engulf and transform everything they touched.

They reached Jacks's face first, warping it out of shape, twisting his Immortal features into an ugliness Maddy didn't want to look at, but couldn't bear not to. Jacks took an almost imperceptible step back, as if the decision were a physical weight that he had to strain against as it pushed him backward. Before the anger came and clouded over his face, Maddy caught the glimpse of another emotion as it flashed across his features. She saw it around the corners of his eyes, and it was impossible to miss. Helplessness. A glimmer of the Jacks whom she had left standing on the platform at Union Station, the Angel who had been on top of the library tower with the demon. It was the Jacks who had watched her go at the viewpoint. Betrayal is worst for the betrayer, Maddy thought.

The ripple wave struck Tom next. In Tom's eyes, Maddy saw someone plunging into the waters of baptism, as if a new life force surged around him. He looked reborn. If the ripple had knocked Jacks back, it seemed to buoy Tom, making him stronger, making him stand taller. Maddy looked away.

Why was it that she felt compelled to wallow in Jacks's gaze of helplessness, rather than soak in Tom's triumph? Why couldn't she focus on the elation in Tom's eyes? What was wrong with her? Was she afraid of

what she would feel? Was she afraid she wouldn't be able to mirror his unbridled happiness? Maybe it was that meeting Tom's gaze would confirm something even worse: that she was happy. That she was just as happy as he was.

"Maddy, you're not one of them," Jacks said in that hoarse, bargaining tone, the one that she had heard him use on the train platform. "Listen to me. I have somewhere you can go. Where you'll be safe. With us."

Before she could answer, Tom did it for her.

"She made her choice. Have the decency to respect it." His voice rang with the confidence that comes with victory. "Not that I expect decency from an Angel."

Maddy saw muscles twitch inside Jacks's armor, but the Angel stayed put.

"You don't understand," Jacks said slowly, carefully, enunciating every syllable. "This is an army that cannot be defeated. At least, not like this." He pointed at the massive carrier. Up on the deck, the soldiers had their rifles trained on him, itchy fingers ready at the triggers.

"We're pretty good in a fight," Tom said, his jaw set.

"This isn't a just a 'fight.' This is an extermination. An enslavement."

"No one's making a slave out of me," Tom growled.

"They will. Before this is over, you will beg for your own death. Or, if you're a coward, which I have a feeling you are, you'll beg for mercy and happily become a slave." Jacks's eyes narrowed.

In a flash Tom was on him, grabbing at Jacks's armor, thrusting his forearms against Jacks's chest. Jacks had his hands around Tom's throat before Maddy even saw them move. She heard a wet gurgle as the air was forced out of the pilot's throat.

"Get back! Get back!" shouted a soldier from the carrier deck.

Maddy screamed. "Jacks, no!" Yet even as the words came out of her mouth, she knew Tom wasn't in danger. Jacks could have killed Tom in the time it took the soldiers on the carrier to react. Even in his rage, he was choosing to restrain himself. For me, Maddy thought. Because he cares about me.

The soldier shouted again. "Get back or you will be fired upon!" Maddy watched Jackson eye the carrier, then slowly release his grip, leaving Tom gasping on his knees. Maddy took a step toward Tom, but he waved her back, almost violently.

"I'm fine," he sputtered, and stood.

Hate and anger radiated off Jackson. And something else as well, Maddy thought. Fear. Fear for her?

"The humans can't win," Jacks said, his expression hard. "Make the smart choice, Maddy."

"What about Uncle Kevin? What about Gwen?" Maddy's voice came out almost as a wail.

"Why don't you ask your president-elect?" Jacks shot back, then caught himself and softened. "Linden made their choice for them already, Maddy. It's too late for them to be helped. But it's not too late for you."

“Everyone can be helped.”

“No! There is no hope!” Jacks’s voice was raw, naked.

“There is always hope,” Maddy cried. “And even when there’s not, we still stand with each other, because that’s what people do.” Maddy looked to Tom, who had quietly lifted a hand to tell the soldiers to stand down. He returned her gaze. Resolute. Determined.

“Explain that logic to me,” Jacks grumbled.

“It’s not logical,” Maddy said. “It’s human.”

“You are not human!” Jacks roared. “You are a Guardian Angel! You belong with us!”

“My place is by my uncle’s side. By Kevin’s side. By Tom’s side. My place is beside anyone who isn’t strong enough to protect themselves. My place is beside anyone I can help.” Maddy was gasping for air. “That is the true purpose of the Angels.”

Jacks shook his head. “Your human side . . .,” he muttered to himself. Then he looked to Tom. “They turned their backs on us, Maddy,” Jacks said. “We don’t owe them that. You don’t owe them that. We don’t owe them anything.”

“Spoken like a true Immortal. You’ve got quite a sense of duty, Guardian,” Tom quipped.

Jacks ignored him and instead did something Maddy didn’t expect. The anger in his face flickered away, leaving only that raw helplessness Maddy had glimpsed before. Jacks let the helplessness wash over him and fill out his features completely.

“Please, Maddy,” Jacks said quietly. “Why don’t you get it?”

He was whispering now.

“I can’t lose you.”

Even Tom’s confidence seemed to waver for a moment. There the Battle Angel stood, guard down and emotionally naked. Jacks looked at Maddy, and Maddy felt herself being pulled into one of their moments, where the outside world just slipped away, leaving only the two of them. She could not let it happen. She set her feet, moved her shoulders back, and pushed the words out in breathy, raw bursts as a new tidal wave of emotion broke over her.

“I will always cherish what we had, Jackson, but I don’t feel that way about you anymore. Too much has changed. You have changed. And my place is here with Tom.” She stood firm as a sudden sea gust blew her hair forward and whipped it around her face. “I love him,” she whispered.

Jacks flinched and spoke through his teeth. “I will not come for you. Neither will any of the others. The demons will make sure you’re torn apart. Limb by limb. Your wings will be ripped out of your back—”

“That’s enough, Godspeed!” Tom barked. Maddy felt Jacks’s words prickling her skin all over. Torn. Ripped.

Jacks yelled. “You are choosing death, Maddy!”

“Then I choose it!” Maddy choked, and the tears finally spilled over. She didn’t bother to stop them. “This is my decision.” She reached out to him and let her fingers rest on the armor covering his arm.

Jacks pulled his arm away as if she had burned him. Shocked, Maddy watched as something changed behind his eyes. An uncoupling. Just then, an image jumped into Maddy’s head, of a train that uncouples from a car and leaves it behind on the track. Before, whenever Jacks was angry with her or felt betrayed by her, his eyes had always burned with a kind of frustrated loyalty, a refusal to give up on her. But Maddy saw now that those fires had been snuffed out. She watched, helpless, as Jacks unlinked her from his life, and from his heart. It only took an instant, and it gutted her completely. Jacks’s eyes were cold now and held nothing for her. She knew it just as sure as she knew anything.

She had done it. She had lost him.

“It’s time for you to go now,” Tom said, his tone even, or as even as it could be after Jacks’s vise-like grip around his throat.

“Don’t worry, I’m going,” Jacks said. Maddy lifted her gaze to meet his, and for the first time, it wasn’t waiting for her. “There’s nothing for me here.”

And without saying anything more, Jacks rocketed into the sky, robotic wings hissing through the air, and was gone.

Maddy felt a gentle warmth as Tom took her hands in his.

“Maddy? Will you look at me, please?” Maddy realized her face was still turned up to where Jacks had disappeared into the sky. She turned and met the green eyes that were waiting for her.

“Are you okay?” Tom asked. Maddy was done being strong. The fearless Guardian Godright was all used up, and only the vulnerable Maddy Montgomery was left.

“I’m so afraid, Tom,” she said, her voice small. “If something happens to you—”

“I’ll be fine.” Tom smiled. “I’ve got you. That’s all I need.”

Maddy’s smile was tight, and her throat was closing in. Her cheeks were hot and wet. The truth, Maddy thought. What was the truth, anyway? The truth was that no one knew what to expect. Not even Jacks. Not even the Angels. So why did she know he was right? They couldn’t win. What had Jacks called it? Not a fight, an extermination. An enslavement.

Just then, Maddy became aware that they were no longer alone. The dock had filled with sudden life as the carrier and the soldiers prepared to leave port. Families were saying goodbye to their loved ones, wishing farewell to fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters. Children. She wanted to know what was going through their heads. Did they feel hopeful? Were they scared? She wondered what Tom was thinking, too. In her mind, there was only the ringing of Jacks’s words. An extermination.

Maddy put on her bravest face.

“Take care of yourself,” she managed.

“I better.” Tom grinned. “I have to get back to you.”

He kissed her, and Maddy kissed him back, but it felt strange on her lips. Not like a kiss of love. A kiss of

goodbye.

And before she could process the feeling, he was gone. She stood alone as Tom walked toward the gangplank, eventually disappearing into a small sea of officers and sailors. It was all Maddy could do to fight the awful feeling that she would never see him again. She closed her eyes and tried to push the thought away. She listened to the wind. To the clanging rope-on-metal sound of the flagpole. To the flap of the flag. She opened her eyes to find it was the American flag that was flying, the Stars and Stripes. She hadn't noticed until just then, but there it was, fluttering overhead on this near-perfect day. This, she realized, might be one of the last. Very soon, there might not be any more nice days for Angel City. Only time would tell what they were in for.

At least she had done it. She had to focus on that. She could hold on to that, couldn't she? She had come here today to tell Jacks it was all over, that it was Tom who had stolen her heart, whom she had fallen in love with. She had told Jacks she didn't love him anymore. She had done it.

So what if it wasn't true?

CHAPTER THREE

In the car, the tears came again. She still hated the feeling of the hot liquid spilling over her cheeks, the quiet dap dap as the tears found her jeans. Crying made her feel weak. But she couldn't do anything to stop it. Holding on to the wheel with one hand, she pulled her sleeve over her palm and wiped her face with the other. This, she thought, was a very human moment: driving and crying at the same time. She wondered how many trips people had taken in tears, having to balance those two things, steering with one hand and wiping with the other. It should be called crying, Maddy thought. She should trademark it. She gave a crooked half-smile through her tears.

Maddy turned onto an on-ramp to send her gleaming Audi racing down to the freeway. But she was stopped at the entrance by a National Guard roadblock.

Two soldiers holding machine guns and wearing Kevlar helmets stood there in front of a Humvee.

"I'm sorry, miss, but by order of the governor we have closed off all freeways to all nonemergency vehicles. Any citizens who are still in the area are advised to seek shelter and await further instructions."

Maddy pulled her sunglasses off and tried to smile at the soldier. It was funny; she had always thought using the Do you know who I am? move to get something you want was a terrible abuse of Angel celebrity, but she needed to get back to Kevin.

And it worked; another soldier off to the side lit up in recognition.

"It's Maddy Montgomery!" the soldier said.

"I just got here," Maddy said. "I need to get back to Angel City. How could I know you'd be blocking the freeways?"

The first soldier looked unsure, but the second one, who was obviously an Angel fan, approached and intervened.

"Let her through, Ernesto," the second soldier said. Maddy tried to maintain the smile, even though on the inside she was crumbling with sadness and fear.

“I don’t know . . . ,” the first soldier, Ernesto, said. But the second soldier was already moving the barricade.

Maddy shot him a thank you wave and stepped on the gas pedal before the soldier could change his mind. As she zipped down the on-ramp, she peered out the windshield at a sight she had never seen before. The Angel City Freeway was completely empty. It was eerie. And just another reminder that this was not a normal day. Because normal days were over. The massive five-lane freeway looked naked with no traffic, no honking drivers, no cars changing lanes without signaling first. Deserted, Maddy thought, just like the humans. And empty, just like she felt. There was a strange silence to driving down this empty open stretch, with only the hum of her car and the whistle of the wind to remind her she was alive. If she closed her eyes, she would be able to convince herself she wasn’t driving at all. She could be running. Nowhere in particular, just running away.

She switched on the radio and heard nothing but a long, monotonous tone for several seconds before a voice broke in.

“This is not a test,” an electronic female voice announced. “This is the Emergency Broadcast System. A state of emergency has been declared. All residents of Angel City and immediate areas are ordered to stay indoors at this time. A citywide curfew has been put in place—”

Maddy switched the station. The message continued. “I repeat, this is not a test. Emergency shelters are located at—”

Maddy switched the station again. Same thing. Every station was broadcasting it. When the message ended, it simply started over again. Something about that message made this whole situation even more real. Made it worse. She listened to the robotic voice play again and again. This is not a test. This is not a test. She glanced up at the sky, which was beginning to darken. The sunny day was growing dim as a gray blanket of clouds stretched over the city. Wind gusts shot past the Audi now, almost shrieking. What was going to happen? What kind of hell were they in for? Gradually Maddy began to recognize her all-too-familiar surroundings. She was headed toward the heart of Angel City—home. She pulled her fingers through her hair and wiped her puffy eyes. The exit for Angel Boulevard approached, and she pulled onto the off-ramp.

Angel City, Maddy thought darkly. It was both the place she had always dreamed of leaving and the place that seemed destined to keep her. Every time she had tried to escape it, something about it only drew her back in. She felt caught in its web of crisscrossing streets, the allure of its bright downtown lights. It was capital city to the Immortals, and the unrivaled symbol of Angels and their power around the world. More than a city, it was an idea. It was synonymous with wealth, celebrity, and power—the perfect icon to represent the lavish Angel lifestyle that most of the world envied and craved. Maddy swung down Highland, passing under glowing billboards showing famous Angels selling handbags, cars, and perfume. On one of the billboards was her own face, smiling seductively and holding a bottle of Chanel perfume. Maddy felt her stomach turn. On any other day, she wouldn’t have been able to bear looking at it, but now she couldn’t look away. Someone had spray-painted TRAITOR over her face in an angry red scrawl.

She drove down the world-famous Angel Boulevard, past the tourist shops and the Walk of Angels. Angel Stars blurred by on the pavement. How many millions of people had come from all over the world to pose next to those stars and take pictures with them? She used to weave around those tourists on her way to school, wondering how anyone could care so much about a sidewalk. Now she had an Angel Star of her own; now her name was etched in gleaming gold in the ground. It still felt strange. She was a famous Guardian Angel. The most famous Guardian Angel. She shook her head, thinking of how much she had wanted to just leave two years ago. Would she ever get out of this city? Maybe the bigger question was, would she ever get Angel City out of her? She used to think so, but now she wasn’t so sure. Just as the ground had been etched

with her name, she felt the city had been etched on her, too. As permanently as a tattoo. The tourist shops were all closed up now. No plastic wings for sale. No T-shirts with slogans like SAVE ME! or PROTECTION. The metal doors were all rolled shut.

Maddy squinted as she looked down the street through her windshield. There was life up ahead, a crowd gathered around the Temple of Angels. The last thing Maddy wanted right now was to be recognized. She sank down in her seat as she approached, but she couldn't help but ease up on the gas and look as she passed. In spite of the danger that was close at hand, a grab bag of fans, thrill seekers, and stranded tourists had gathered outside the temple in a bizarre, circus-like display. Several people stood in a huddle, holding a candlelight vigil. Others danced. Still others fought. There were young Angel-crazy girls, Angel experts, and families. There was even a man wearing nothing but a white loincloth, Rollerblades, and neon sunglasses. He had taped styrofoam wings to his back and rolled around the crowd while others tried not to stare at his loincloth. It seemed the die-hard Angel fans had already managed to splinter themselves into even smaller categories. One group appeared to be anti-Maddy, calling her a traitor to the Angels, while another equally sized group held up signs that glorified Maddy and praised her for being a "true" Angel. Maddy groaned. It was worse than she'd thought. She cut the wheel and swung up a side street to avoid the rest of it.

As she turned off Angel Boulevard, a familiar sign came into view. Although it was off, she could still make out the neon lettering against the fading paint. Kevin's. Her uncle's diner, where she had worked all through high school. And the place where she had met Jacks. It was dark inside now. No one sat in the booths; no food was being served. How could it have been just two years ago that she was a waitress there? It felt like another lifetime. She pulled past the diner and into the driveway of her uncle's house just past the restaurant. She looked up at the small, two-story bungalow where she grew up. The simple, aging house stood bravely in the gusts of the oncoming weather. With all that had changed in her life, there had always been this dependable house. A companion. A friend. An island of consistency in the ever-changing sea of time. She cut the Audi's engine and stepped out.

There was Kevin, standing in the doorway, his face creased with concern. He wore old jeans and a worn, flannel shirt—his uniform.

"You're back," he said, and Maddy could tell he was trying not to appear like he had worried too much. He searched Maddy's face with his intelligent gray eyes. "And . . . Tom?"

"He's gone," Maddy said, trying to keep her voice steady. "The fleet is going to fight."

Kevin's face darkened. After a moment, he nodded.

"Jacks was there, too," Maddy added.

"What?" Kevin's tone took on a harshness. "What did he want?" Kevin's opinion of Jacks had been like a roller-coaster ride over the past two years. Of course, he didn't care for Angels on principle, and had downright hated them after what happened to his sister. He had done his best to give Jacks a chance when it became clear that he was in Maddy's life, like it or not. But now he had hardened his heart toward Immortals once again. Kevin was pro-Maddy until the bitter end. He would do his best to support her in whatever she wanted, despite his own reservations or opinions. It was the reason why Maddy loved Kevin so much.

"He offered me a choice," Maddy said quietly. "To go with him and the other Angels."

"I see. . . . Well, what did you say?"

Maddy bit her lip. How would Kevin feel about her decision? She might be the most famous Guardian Angel

in the world, but she would always care about what Uncle Kevin thought of her and her actions. She just couldn't help it. Just like when she was a little girl, part of her always wanted his approval.

"I'm here, aren't I?" she said at last. Then she quickly added, "Tom asked me to wait for him."

Kevin paused, as if searching for the right thing to say. But when his response finally came, it was simple. And just what Maddy needed to hear.

"It's going to be okay," he said. "Tom is going to be okay. We all are."

"Do you really believe that?" Maddy asked softly.

"I have to, Mads." Kevin gave his most reassuring smile. "And so should you." Then he grinned even wider, the corners of his mouth wrinkling up in the way she knew so well. "Want some ginger tea?"

"Okay." Maddy smiled. She wasn't going to argue with ginger tea. Kevin always made ginger tea for her when she was sick, or just feeling under the weather, with lemon and loads of honey.

• • •

Kevin headed into the kitchen, and Maddy walked into the little living room, with its secondhand furniture and the pictures of her as a kid. There were some new photos, too: pictures of Maddy from Angels Weekly and the newspaper, which Kevin had cut out and clumsily fit into frames. Maddy heard from the kitchen the familiar sounds of the gas stove snapping on, the whoosh of the flame, and the kettle being placed on the burner. As she listened to the heating water begin to murmur, she let herself lie back and sink into the couch. For this one small moment, there was suddenly nothing for her to do. After everything that had happened, she now found herself in a little pocket of calm. She sat quietly, just listening to her uncle make the tea. Her gaze settled on the new flat-screen TV, the only piece of furniture or technology in the house that had been manufactured after 1998. She grabbed the remote and turned it on.

"And the question on everyone's mind is," said a stoic-looking woman in a blue suit, "where are the Angels? Guardian Angels in the Immortal City have disappeared overnight, leaving everyone to wonder where they have gone, and whether they will be coming back." A graphic of an Immortal Ring appeared next to the woman's head, cueing Maddy to play with her own. "The Angels have disappeared from the glittering Immortal City, and fans willing to brave security checkpoints and the possibility of being caught in a war zone have come to the Walk of Angels to participate in a candlelight vigil in hopes that the beautiful Immortals will return."

Maddy changed the channel to NBC News, where she was shocked to see Tara Reeves, the usually bubbly host of A!'s morning gossip show, standing in front of the camera. Tara had finally made the switch from entertainment reporter to news journalist, covering the Angel crisis and the mysterious sinkhole threatening to swallow Angel City. It must have been more than shocking for her normal A! audience to see her now, though: Tara had switched her look from glamorous red-carpet reporter to something more like an international war correspondent. She wore smartly cut khakis and a sensible button-up shirt, and had her hair drawn back in a ponytail. Of course, her makeup was still impeccable, her high-waisted trousers were Gucci, and she totally couldn't resist accessorizing with a Louis Vuitton field bag.

"I'm Tara Reeves, reporting live from Angel City for NBC News," she began in a breathless, urgent tone. "The question on everyone's lips as Angel City faces a possible threat is, where are they? All those beautiful mansions in the Hills empty. All those glamorous cars sitting in garages instead of cruising down the freeways. Security isn't letting anyone up near the houses, but authorities are confirming that no one is

home. Where are the Angels of the Immortal City?" Tara walked her cameraman to a large crowd gathered at the Temple of Angels.

"Despite the Angels' disappearance," she announced with signature drama, "their true fans, as they call themselves, remain undaunted. They are determined to support their Angels, no matter what they do." The camera panned over the crowd Maddy had seen on her drive home. Some of the fans had SAVE ME T-shirts on, while others held up signs displaying Ted Linden's face crossed out with big red X's. They were chanting something, but it was hard to make out what.

"Their message?" Tara quipped as the camera scanned the scene. "Bring back our Angels. They stand in front of the Temple of Angels, the very same temple where the glamorous Commissioning takes place. The building stands silent now, no Immortals to be seen." The report switched to interviews with several of the fans in the crowd. The first was a teenage girl with her mother. The girl was wearing an oversize shirt bearing a name that made Maddy's stomach twist: Emily Brightchurch.

Emily was written in seductive pink cursive, right above a picture of her face. "There's no way the Angels won't come," the T-shirt girl was chirping. "They're just trying to teach us a lesson because humans were being mean to them. If you're out there watching, Jacks or Emily, or Chloe, or even Archangel Godspeed, please come back! We need you! OMG, we love you!" She shrieked until she was practically swooning.

The next interview was with a middle-aged man holding a sign depicting both an Angel and a UFO, with a big green question mark painted between the two. A conspiracy theorist, Maddy figured. "Where are the demons?" he asked. "Have we actually seen them besides on specially staged television broadcasts?" He was getting more and more worked up. "This whole 'war' is just a diversion to distract us from what's really going on in the government with Senator Linden. It's a cover-up. A conspiracy to turn America against the Angels, and people are swallowing it hook, line, and sinker. Just like the supposed 'moon landing,' as if anyone believes that. Save the Angels!" Behind him, the group of Angel conspiracy theorists howled and cheered.

The image cut and Tara was back, spinning toward the camera with a dramatic flourish. "Also out of the spotlight is Maddy Montgomery." Maddy bolted upright on the couch. "Since her public announcement in support of the Immortals Bill, we have heard nothing from Angel City's newest Guardian. What are her thoughts on the impending demon attack? Has Jackson abandoned her to be with the Immortals, wherever they are? Will we ever see those famous Maddy Montgomery wings flying over Angel City again?" Footage of Maddy in flight, her luminous purple wings outstretched, hair cutting across her face, filled the screen, and she flipped the station.

On the Angel News Network, a grave-looking anchor was in the middle of a story. "There are even some global experts who say that despite so-called demon sightings, the sinkhole off the coast of Angel City will not develop further." The shot cut across the news desk to a bespectacled man in a sharp suit.

"The Angels are playing a game of chicken. A very, very sophisticated game of chicken. It's all about who blinks first. They'll come to our aid, but they want to teach the entire world a lesson first. It's not as if they would simply abandon us, would they?" He chuckled nervously, and Maddy felt bad for him.

She flipped and flipped again, only to land on more of the same. Every channel was reporting either on the attack or on the growing crowd in front of the Temple of Angels. A!seemed to be the only network that had given up running anything about the demon attack. In fact, it had switched to a rerun of Chloe's reality show, Seventeen and Immortal, to be followed by a marathon of old Angel Commissioning ceremonies.

"It's just more of the same," Kevin said as he entered the room and handed Maddy a mug.

“Thanks,” Maddy said, and smiled at her uncle through the steam. “This is great.” And it was. The warmth of the tea radiated through her chest as she drank. Kevin just shrugged, but Maddy could see the intensity in his face, and she could tell he wanted to say something to her. He looked down at his tea.

“We’re all in this together, Mads,” he said, finally looking up at her. “Even if the Angels really have left us, I’m still here. And so is Tom. And President Linden. He’ll know what to do.” Maddy smiled a little and wrapped her arm around him, pressing the side of her face against his chest. She could feel his heartbeat against her cheek. She felt Kevin’s hands fumble for a hug, which was a bit awkward, but warm all the same. Suddenly Maddy felt herself being pulled back into thoughts of the pier, but she stopped herself before she could get started. There were more important things at hand, she told herself.

“I know there are a lot of people who don’t think this is real,” Maddy said. “But, Kevin, we need to assume the demons are coming.” Maddy looked at her uncle.

“I know what you’re trying to tell me,” Kevin said. “And I’m not leaving. They’ve already closed down the freeways for emergency vehicles only. All the chaos earlier today blocked everything. No one’s getting out now.”

“I could make a call—” Maddy started to suggest. Kevin stopped her by putting a hand on her shoulder.

“When your mom and dad left you with me, I made them a promise. I promised that I would protect you, no matter what,” Kevin said. “Nothing about that has changed.” He looked at Maddy. “I know you, Maddy, and I know what kind of young woman, and Angel, you are. I know you aren’t leaving like the rest of them. You’ll stay here and fight. And I’m not going anywhere, either. We’re going to get through this together, just like we always have. Even a Guardian needs someone to look after her.”

Tears started to form in Maddy’s eyes, and they hugged again. Kevin’s eyes welled up a bit as well, but he quickly wiped them dry. He looked out the living room window. “Besides, who’s going to be here to reopen the diner after everything’s over if I’m out in Kansas somewhere with a bunch of refugees? No. I’m staying right here.”

• • •

Maddy took a long, hot shower, willing the steaming water to wash away the day’s events. When she was finished, she wrapped herself in a towel and walked into her old room, the one she grew up in. Kevin had more or less kept it the same way Maddy had it while in high school, but it looked much different now compared with her new glass condo. By contrast, this room was old and worn, yet somehow that was comforting. Maddy sat on her bed, which, as Kevin had promised, was neatly made. She couldn’t help thinking it was a different person who used to live in this room. A different young girl, with different dreams, who was going to live a different life. Maddy felt like an impostor.

On the bedside table sat Tom’s flight wings. She picked them up and felt the weight of them in her hands. Their heaviness always surprised her, considering how small they were. As she held the wings and sat in the quiet of her old room, the thoughts began to flood her mind. Thoughts she had tried to push away since leaving the dock, and there was no stopping them now. She replayed a string of decisions in her mind, as if going over them again would convince her that they were, in fact, the right ones.

Why had she chosen Tom? Because he needed something to fight for. He was going up against an enemy he could not possibly beat, and the least she could do was give him a reason to survive. Fear welled inside her as she pictured Tom aloft in a fiery sky, fighting for his life against supernatural creatures that couldn’t be killed by bullets or bombs. In a moment like that, Maddy thought, death might feel like a welcome escape. If

the future he saw for them together could keep him alive, then so be it. Her love was the best weapon she could give him to use against the demon army. And so she had done what needed to be done, just like she always tried to do. It was her job as an Angel. Sacrifice. Tom was her Protection now.

But—what about Jacks? She let herself fall back in the bed and listened to it creak like it used to with her weight. Her eyes traced the familiar edges of the room. Did she love Jacks? Of course she did. She always would. But she would have to forget about Jacks. Not just for herself, but also for Tom. She had made a promise to Tom, and she intended to keep it. The only question was, could she?

Could she forget two years in which she and Jacks had been inseparable, in which Jacks had been a part of her? She knew exactly how they fit together, and could so vividly recall the way she would reach for his hand and lace her fingers with his, like it was the most natural thing in the world. She thought of the way he would bend his head and kiss her slowly, and could practically feel the pressure of his lips on hers. They had each other memorized. How could she just erase it all? An aching chill started in her throat and radiated through her body, and suddenly she was freezing. Shivering against her wet hair, she realized it wasn't the temperature in the room making her cold. It was the dawning of the idea that, from the very beginning, she knew this could never work out. She'd been a fool. She had known from their very first date, when Jacks had taken her flying over Angel City, and yet she had let herself be pulled into this whole misadventure, this emotional black hole. She willingly let herself be lulled into a dream because she so badly wanted it to be real.

It was this same blind desire that had driven her to train as a Guardian Angel, and to believe that she and Jacks could actually have a life together and be happy. She didn't want to see that she and Jacks were too different, that they came from different worlds and had different values. Just like she didn't want to see that Jacks's injuries were as severe as they were after his fight with the demon, or that he would withdraw from her as her own star rose. Just like she didn't want to see herself becoming swept up in the glamorous lifestyle of a Guardian—the money, the fame, the adoration—so she just closed her eyes to the world while it all washed over her, while she let herself be sucked into everything she used to hate about the Angels. Maddy thought back to the moment she received her rich, entitled Protections, the same moment she realized she had lost herself and become just another Angel. The memory turned her stomach. That wasn't who she was, but it was who Jacks was. She had wanted the dream of the two of them together so badly that she couldn't see that was all it was ever going to be: a dream, a fantasy. They were just too different to ever work. How often, Maddy wondered bitterly, do people really see things for what they are? How often do we instead just see a version of things—the version we want them to be? Here she was, two years later, and things were exactly the same as they'd been on that first night. And now she really had to face it: Maddy Montgomery and Jackson Godspeed just weren't meant to be.

She turned over and looked at the flight wings in her hand. If she somehow survived the demon attack, if she could help Tom and Kevin and everyone she loved to survive, then it didn't matter what happened to her afterward. If she and Tom could have a life together, wouldn't that be enough? Maddy's smile was slight, bittersweet. There's a strange sense of freedom and calm in letting go of your own desires and giving in to the path that fate has placed before you. She pictured her life up until this point as standing waist-deep in a swiftly moving river, straining and fighting against a relentless current but getting nowhere. Now she was finally letting go and was ready to let the current take her. There was something beautiful about it. Maybe the current would take her to the place she was always meant to go. Maybe everything was going to be okay. She felt a weight lift off her chest, one that she hadn't even realized was there until now.

Yet, deep inside her, the flame that still flickered for Jacks had to be snuffed out. She conjured up an image of Kevin in the claws of one of the demons, crying out for help—crying out for her—and white-hot anger raced through her veins. Even if she was the last thing standing between Kevin and an entire army of

monsters, she would never abandon him. Jacks knew the kind of danger her uncle was in, the danger everyone was in, and yet he was content doing nothing. He was actually going to stand by and leave those weaker than him to their fate. Tom, on the other hand, was out there right now, preparing to go up against impossible odds without a second thought for himself. The anger came to a boil inside Maddy, replacing her blood with bitter water and filling her. Consuming her. She erased those pictures of the Jacks she loved, of the impeccable Angel she had memorized, and replaced them with the new Jacks. This was the Jacks in battle armor, worn to attack humans. That armor and those robotic wings were all that was left of him now. She let herself think through her next realization very slowly. If the Angels wouldn't help the humans against their enemy, then the Angels were the enemy, too.

She sat up and looked out her window to the Angel City sign that stood on the hill, still gleaming and white, like a beacon. How she hated that sign and everything it stood for. How she hated the city and everything it had done to her.

In a low voice, Maddy said aloud, "Nonaction is complicity." She thought of the Emergency Broadcast on the radio. That broadcast was like her life now. This was not a test. This was really happening. The Angels were the enemy. The logic was irrefutable. And that could only mean one thing.

Jackson Godspeed was now her enemy, too.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nestled in between the trees in the Angel City Hills, the ostentatious glass cube building was perfectly under the radar. In Pittsburgh, Plymouth, or Podunkville, USA, it would have stuck out like a sore thumb. But here up off Mulholland it was just another display of Angel taste, wealth, exclusiveness, and prestige. The front entrance was the site of what would likely be the last public Angel televised appearance for some time. Archangel William Holyoake had stepped out with Jackson and other Guardians at his side to state that the Guardians would not be taking part in the demon war. And all just before the first demon scouts had been sent into the Immortal City.

As Jackson dropped down from the sky, he entered the glass doorway and retracted his glowing wings, all in one smooth motion. The security guards positioned inside the cube saluted him, but Jacks didn't pay any attention to them as he walked—stomped, really—to the large elevator, which was housed in a marble column in the rear center of the cube. The gleaming doors opened smoothly, and Jackson stepped into the plush car. Soothing music played from sleek speakers, and an enormous TV embedded in the back wall displayed footage of underwater tropical fish swimming calmly along a coral reef.

He didn't have to push a button. There was only one way the elevator could go. And that was down.

It took some time for the elevator to reach its destination. Not too long ago, Jacks had idly wondered how deep down the sanctuary actually was. Now he couldn't have cared less, and he didn't even notice the ride. After what Maddy had done to him on the pier, his mind—his whole body—had become a tempest of rage, sadness, and confusion.

The elevator dinged, the doors opened to reveal another world, and Jackson began walking, his footsteps echoing along the Italian marble floor. The secure Angel complex had been prepared as a haven for just the kind of emergency the demon attack posed. It had been dreamed up during the Cold War, when the threat of nuclear annihilation was a real concern, but this was no bare-bones underground bunker. Far from it. In true Angel fashion, no creature comfort was left uncared for.

Long, elegant passageways extended underground, illuminated by soft light coming from frosted windows

along the way, which simulated sunlight filtering through to the lush plants. Jackson's footsteps echoed as they stepped along the marble floors. The Immortals' living quarters were furnished with huge flat-screen TVs, enormous claw-foot bathtubs, king-sized beds with feather pillows, and balconies that looked out over artificial lakes. All the interior windows were outfitted with electric bulbs timed to simulate natural light from dawn through sunset, and the air was pure and fresh from outside. They had everything they needed for quite some time. Everything had been planned out immaculately.

It was called the sanctuary.

The complex was known only to a handful of non-Angels who had been forced to sign threatening-looking, ironclad agreements promising they would never say anything about it. Any slip of a word and an army of Angel lawyers would be suing the pants off them. Back when the sanctuary was being built, a construction worker blabbed his story, and the National Enquirer ran a story with the headline, "HOLE-Y COW! SECRET ANGEL UNDERGROUND LAIR!" The construction worker was sued into the next century, and the next week the tabloid took the very unorthodox step of totally taking back every part of the story, saying: "How sad we are to admit we had been fooled so easily." And so the legend of the sanctuary died.

But the legend was real. The sanctuary was quietly refurbished every few years so it remained up-to-date for the finicky Angels. There were the living quarters, which were lavish and suitable for those Angels who were only accustomed to the finer things in life. Along the passageways were rows of boutiques displaying the latest trends, fine jewelry shops, a half-dozen organic gourmet restaurants, and a couple of fancy cafés. Everything the Immortal City had to offer, all kept safe and tucked away in the sanctuary. It was all perfectly planned and was the ideal place to ride out the demon attacks while still ensuring that the Angels kept their foothold in Angel City, no matter what happened upstairs.

The Angels had only been down there for a day, but they were already settling in nicely. The sanctuary was always prepped for their arrival and ongoing comfort, and now the time had finally come. As soon as the demons struck with the sinkhole, the Angels had simply disappeared from human sight, stealing away from their homes in the Angel City Hills and descending to their paradise below.

But the sanctuary wasn't only used for hiding. Somewhere along the way, the maze of passages led to the Council chambers. Once a year, the Angels convened in the sanctuary ballroom for an ultrasecret gala where they honored the Council of Twelve, who had brought them into the Light. And sometimes the Archangels would have their most secretive meetings—or, depending on whom you asked, secret parties, complete with wild debauchery—down here. There were also darker rumors about darker things that had taken place in the sanctuary during the Troubles, but they were never substantiated.

• • •

"Godspeed," said Mitch, Jackson's closest friend, calling out to him as he passed.

Jackson kept walking.

"Godspeed!" Mitch caught up to him and put his hand on his best friend's shoulder.

Jackson stopped on a dime and spun around to Mitch.

"What?" Jacks growled.

"Whoa, bro, relax," Mitch said. "Your stepfather was looking for you."

“He can keep looking.”

Mitch looked at Jackson. It didn't take a psych major to see something wasn't quite right. “What's going on?”

“Nothing,” Jacks said. He continued down the hall again, and Mitch followed alongside him.

“Sorry, I should have known you'd be upset. You know, we're all worried. From a certain angle, it's pretty harsh that we're leaving the humans out in the cold like this.”

Jacks looked at Mitch in disbelief.

“I mean, I understand why you're a little upset, bro. We've been protecting the humans for how many thousands of years?” Mitch said. “That's a long time. And now, just to turn away from them with the demons coming? Even if the humans were trying to ban Angel activities, we could've worked through that, at some point. But to leave them alone like this, and they don't even know what they're up against?”

Jacks gave him an incredulous glance. “Are you an Immortal or a human, Mitch? Think about it. Would they have supported us? No. They would have been glad to see us wiped out.”

Mitch's expression betrayed his confusion. “What are you talking about? I thought you were mad because we're not helping the humans. You've always been pretty liberal in comparison with the National Angel Services, or NAS. We've talked about this for years.”

Jacks snorted.

Mitch put his hand on Jacks's shoulder and stopped him again. “What happened? This isn't like you, Jacks,” Mitch said. “I knew you were gone for a while today. A bunch of Angels saw you leave. No one said anything to Mark or anything, though.” Mitch paused. “Did you go see her?”

Jackson ignored the question. “Don't you remember the Immortals Bill, Mitch? They were going to imprison us. Remember whose side you belong to. Don't be a human sympathizer.” Jacks paused and steeled himself. “They deserve whatever they're going to get.”

“You don't know what you're saying, man. You can't believe that. Whatever's happened between you two, you still have to think about Maddy!”

The name was like a billowing red sheet waving in front of a speared bull. He shoved Mitch out of the way and stormed down the gilded passageway.

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Jackson hadn't gotten far before a beautiful female assistant of the Council's dressed in a luminous modern robe stopped him.

“Jackson,” she said calmly.

“What?” Jacks spun around angrily on the woman.

“You're wanted in the solarium.”

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