

SNEAK PEEK



TORMENT



A *FALLEN* NOVEL

BY THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LAUREN KATE

TORMENT

The second novel in the
addictive **FALLEN** series . . . where
LOVE NEVER DIES.

Hell on earth.

That's what it's like for Luce to be apart from her fallen angel boyfriend, Daniel. It took them an eternity to find one another, yet now he tells her he must go away. Just long enough to hunt down the Outcasts—immortals who want to kill Luce. He hides her at Shoreline, a school on the rocky California coast with unusually gifted students: Nephilim, the offspring of fallen angels and humans. At Shoreline, Luce learns what the Shadows are, and how she can use them as windows on her previous lives. Yet the more Luce learns, the more she realizes that Daniel hasn't told her everything. He's hiding something—something dangerous.

What if Daniel's version of the past isn't actually true?

What if Luce is really meant to be with someone else?



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PROLOGUE



NEUTRAL WATERS

Daniel stared out at the bay. His eyes were as gray as the thick fog enveloping the Sausalito shoreline, as the choppy water lapping the pebble beach beneath his feet. There was no violet to them at all; he could feel it. She was too far away.

He braced himself against the biting gale off the water. But even as he tugged his thick black pea coat closer,

he knew it was no use. Hunting always left him cold.

Only one thing could warm him today, and she was out of reach. He missed the way the crown of her head made the perfect ledge for his lips. He imagined filling the circle of his arms with her body, leaning down to kiss her neck. But it was a good thing Luce couldn't be here now. What she'd see would horrify her.

Behind him, the bleat of sea lions flopping in heaps along the south shore of Angel Island sounded the way he felt: jaggedly lonely, with no one around to hear.

No one except Cam.

He was crouched in front of Daniel, tying a rusty anchor around the bulging wet figure at their feet. Even engaged in something so sinister, Cam looked good. His green eyes had a sparkle and his black hair was cut short. It was the truce; it always brought a brighter glow to the angels' cheeks, a shinier sheen to their hair, an even sharper cut to their flawless muscled bodies. Truce days were to angels what a beach vacation was to humans.

So even though Daniel ached inside each time he

was forced to end a human life, to anyone else, he looked like a guy coming back from a week in Hawaii: relaxed, rested, tan.

Tightening one of his intricate knots, Cam said, “Typical Daniel. Always stepping aside and leaving me to do the dirty work.”

“What are you talking about? I’m the one who finished him.” Daniel looked down at the dead man, at the wiry gray hair matted to his pasty forehead, his gnarled hands and cheap rubber galoshes, at the dark red tear across his chest. It made him feel cold all over again. If the killing weren’t necessary to insure Luce’s safety, to save her, Daniel would never raise another weapon. Never fight another fight.

And something about killing this man did not feel quite right. In fact, Daniel had a vague, troubling sense that something was profoundly wrong.

“Finishing them is the fun part.” Cam looped the rope around the man’s chest and tightened it under his arms. “The dirty work is seeing them off to sea.”

Daniel still gripped the tree branch in his hand. Cam had snickered at the choice, but it never mattered to Daniel what weapon he used. Tree branch, dagger, automatic rifle—it may as well have been a feather duster; Daniel could kill with anything.

“Hurry up,” he growled, sickened by the obvious pleasure Cam took in human bloodshed. “You’re wasting time. The tide’s going out now anyway.”

“And unless we do this my way, high tide tomorrow will wash Slayer here right back ashore. You’re too impulsive, Daniel, always were. Do you ever think more than one step ahead?”

Daniel crossed his arms and looked back out at the white crests of the waves. A tourist catamaran from the San Francisco pier was gliding toward them. Once, the vision of that boat might have brought back a flood of memories. A thousand happy trips he’d taken with Luce across a thousand lifetimes’ seas. But now—now that she could die and not come back, in this lifetime when everything was different and there would be no more reincarnations—Daniel

was always too aware of how blank *her* memory was. This was the last shot. For both of them. For everyone, really. So it was Luce's memory, not Daniel's, that mattered, and so many shocking truths would have to be gently brought to the surface if she was going to survive. The thought of what she had to learn made his whole body tense up.

If Cam thought Daniel wasn't thinking of the next step, he was wrong.

"You know there's only one reason I'm still here," Daniel said. "We need to talk about her."

Cam laughed. "I *was* talking about Luce." With a grunt, he hoisted the sopping corpse up over his shoulder. The dead man's navy work-suit bunched up around the lines of rope Cam had tied. The heavy anchor rested on his bloody chest.

"This one's a little gristly, isn't he?" Cam asked. "I'm almost insulted that the Elders didn't send a younger, more challenging hit man."

Then—as if he were an Olympic shot put thrower—Cam bent his knees, spun around three times to wind up,

and launched the dead man out across the water, a hundred feet clear into the air.

For a few long seconds, the corpse sailed over the bay. Then the weight of the anchor dragged it down ... down ... down. It splashed grandly into the deep aquamarine water. And instantly sank out of sight.

Cam wiped his hands. “I think I’ve just set a record.”

“How you take human death so lightly,” Daniel said, “it’s a mystery to me.”

“This guy deserved it,” Cam said. “You really don’t see the sport in all of this?”

That was when Daniel got in his face and spat, “She is not a game to me.”

“And that is exactly why you will lose.”

Daniel grabbed Cam by the collar of his steel gray trench coat and considered tossing him into the water the same way he’d just tossed the predator. A cloud drifted past the sun, its shadow darkening their faces.

“Easy,” Cam said, prying Daniel’s hands away.

“You have plenty of enemies, Daniel, but right now I’m not one of them. Remember the truce.”

“Some truce,” Daniel said. “Eighteen days of others trying to kill her.”

“Eighteen days of you and I picking them off,” Cam corrected.

It was a longstanding celestial tradition for a truce to last eighteen days. In Heaven, eighteen was the luckiest, most light-affirming number, the number by which all groups and categories were broken down. In some mortal languages, eighteen had come to mean life itself—though in this case, for Luce, it could just as easily mean death.

Cam was right. As the news of her mortality trickled down the celestial tiers, the ranks of her enemies would double and redouble each day. Miss Sophia and her cohorts, the Twenty Four Elders of Zhsmaelin, were still after Luce. Daniel had glimpsed the Elders in the shadows cast by the Announcers just that morning. He had glimpsed something else, too—another darkness, a deeper cunning, one he hadn’t recognized at first.

A shaft of sunlight punctured the clouds, and something gleamed in the corner of Daniel's vision. He turned and knelt down to find a single silver arrow planted in the wet sand. It was slimmer than a normal arrow, a dull silver color, laced with swirling etched designs. It was warm to the touch.

Daniel's breath caught in his throat. It had been eons since he'd seen a starshot. His fingers quaked as he gently drew it from the sand, careful to avoid its deadly blunt end.

Now Daniel knew where that other darkness had come from in this morning's Announcers. The news was even darker than he'd feared. He turned to Cam, the feather-light arrow balanced in his hands. "That predator wasn't acting alone."

Cam stiffened at the sight of the arrow. He moved towards it almost reverently, reaching out to touch it the same way Daniel had. They both knew it was incredibly rare. "Such a valuable weapon to leave behind. The Outcast must have been in a great hurry to get away."

The Outcasts: A sect of spineless, waffling angels, shunned by both Heaven and Hell. Their one great strength was the reclusive angel Azazel, one of the few remaining starsmiths, who still knew how to produce starshots. When loosed from its silver bow, a starshot could do little more than bruise a mortal. But to angels and demons, it was the deadliest weapon of all.

Everyone wanted them, but none were willing to associate with Outcasts, so bartering for starshots was always done clandestinely, via messenger. Which meant the guy Daniel had killed was no hit man sent by the Elders. He was merely a barterer. The Outcast, the real enemy, had spirited away—probably at the first sight of Daniel and Cam. Daniel shivered. This was not good news.

“We killed the wrong guy.”

“What ‘wrong?’” Cam brushed him off. “Isn’t the world better off with one less predator? Isn’t Luce?” He stared at Daniel, then the sea. “The only problem is—”

“The Outcasts.”

Cam nodded. “So now they want her, too.”

Daniel could feel the tips of his wings bristling under his cashmere sweater and heavy black coat, a burning itch that made him flinch. He stood still, with his eyes closed and his arms at his sides, straining to subdue himself before his wings burst forth like the violently unfurling sails of a ship, and carried him up and off this island and over the bay and away. Straight towards her.

He closed his eyes and tried to picture Luce. He'd had to tear himself away from that cabin, from her peaceful sleep on the tiny island east of Tybee. It would be evening there by now. Would she be awake? Would she be hungry?

The battle at Sword and Cross, the revelations, and the death of her friend—it had taken quite a toll on Luce. The angels expected her to sleep all day and through the night. But by tomorrow morning, they would need a plan in place.

This was the first time Daniel had ever proposed a truce. To set the boundaries, make the rules, and draw up a system of consequences if either side transgressed—it was a huge responsibility to shoulder with Cam. Of course he

would do it, he would do anything for her ... he just wanted to make sure he did it *right*.

“We have to hide her somewhere safe,” he said.

“There’s a school up north, near Fort Bragg—”

“The Shoreline School.” Cam nodded. “My side has looked into it as well. She’ll be happy there. And educated in a way that won’t endanger her. And, most importantly, she’ll be shielded.”

Gabbe had already explained to Daniel the type of camouflage Shoreline could provide. Soon enough, word would spread that Luce was hidden away there, but for a time at least, within the school’s perimeter, she would be nearly invisible. Inside, Francesca, the angel closest to Gabbe, would look after Luce. Outside, Daniel and Cam would hunt down and kill anyone who dared draw near the school’s boundaries.

Who would have told Cam about Shoreline? Daniel didn’t like the idea of their side knowing more than his. He was already cursing himself for not visiting the school before they made this choice, but it had been hard enough to

leave Luce when he did.

“She can start as early as tomorrow.... Assuming” —Cam’s eyes ran over Daniel’s face—“assuming you say yes.”

He pressed a hand to the breast pocket of his shirt where he held a recent photograph. Luce on the lake at Sword and Cross. Wet hair shining. A rare grin on her face. Usually, by the time he had a chance to get a picture of her in one lifetime, he had lost her again. This time, she was still here. It was he who wasn’t with her.

“Come on, Daniel,” Cam was saying. “We both know what she needs. We enroll her—and then let her be. We can do nothing to hasten this part but leave her alone.”

“I can’t leave her alone that long.” He’d tossed out the words too quickly. He looked down at the arrow in his hands, feeling ill. He wanted to fling it into the ocean but he couldn’t.

“So.” Cam squinted. “You haven’t told her.”

Daniel froze. “I can’t tell her anything. We could lose her.”

“*You* could lose her,” Cam sneered.

“You know what I mean.” Daniel stiffened. “It’s too risky to assume she could take it all in without...”

He closed his eyes to banish the image of the agonizing red-hot blaze. But it was always burning at the back of his mind, threatening to spread like wildfire. If he told her the truth and killed her, this time she would *really* be gone. And it would be all his fault. Daniel couldn’t do anything—he could not exist—without her. His wings burned at the thought. Better to shelter her just a little longer.

“How convenient for you,” Cam muttered. “I just hope she isn’t disappointed.”

Daniel ignored him. “Do you really believe she’ll be able to learn at this school without distraction?”

“I do,” Cam answered slowly. “Assuming we agree she’ll have no ... external distractions. That means no Daniel, and no Cam. That has to be the cardinal rule.”

Not see her for eighteen days? Daniel couldn’t fathom it. More than that, he couldn’t fathom Luce ever agreeing to it. They had only just found each other in this

lifetime and finally had a chance at being together. And, as usual, explaining the details could kill her. She couldn't hear about her past lives from the mouths of angels. Luce didn't know it yet, but very soon, she would be on her own to figure out ... everything.

The buried truth, specifically what Luce would think of it, terrified Daniel. But Luce uncovering it by herself was the only way out of this horrible cycle. This was why her experience at Shoreline was so crucial. For eighteen days, Daniel could wreck as many Outcasts who came his way. But when the truce was over, everything would be in Luce's hands again. Luce's hands alone.

The sun was setting over Mount Tamalpais and the evening fog was rolling in.

"Let me take her to Shoreline," Daniel said. It would be his last chance to see her.

Cam looked at him strangely, wondering whether to concede. A second time, Daniel had to physically force his aching wings back into his skin.

"Fine," Cam said at last. "In exchange for the

starshot.”

Daniel handed over the weapon, which Cam slipped inside his coat.

“Take her as far as the school and then find me. Don’t screw up; I’ll be watching.”

“And then?”

“You and I have hunting to do.”

Daniel nodded and unfurled his wings, feeling the deep pleasure of their release all through his body. He stood for a moment, gathering energy, sensing the wind’s rough resistance against his armor. Time to flee this cursed, ugly scene with Cam, to let his wings carry him back to a place where he could be his true self.

Back to Luce.

And back the lie he would have to live a little while longer.

“The truce begins at midnight tomorrow,” Daniel called, kicking back a great spray of sand on the beach as he bent his knees, lifted off, and soared across the sky.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN: 978-0-385-73914-6 (trade)
ISBN: 978-0-385-90773-6 (lib. bdg.)
ISBN: 978-0-375-89717-7 (e-book)

The text of this book is set in 12-point Classical Garamond BT.

Book design by Angela Carlino

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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