

*An Angel twice born within the realm of man  
The Father's creation stands guard over Divine Hand  
A Human blessed with the Mother's gift  
The catalyst for the healing of the rift  
Together will bring forth the next stage  
Summoning the start of the New Age  
Return what was lost when the stars were formed  
The family united that once was torn  
Sacrifices made cannot be undone  
End the war and three realms become one*

## Chapter One

Something was coming—something that would change everything.

I had been watching the hills since nightfall. As the stars turned above me in the darkness, a stirring excitement grew in my stomach. I wondered what the approaching dawn would bring. Anticipation pulled at me, an incessant tug drawing me towards whatever was calling out.

My back rested against the old Serra Cross of Ventura, California. The dampness of the morning mist crept over me from the concrete platform I sat upon. I ignored the sharp chill from the ocean that penetrated my layers of clothing and kept my gaze dutifully trained on the horizon. I listened to the heart of the city stir and hoped whatever change those distant hills held would hurry up and arrive.

It was dark under the cross, mostly because the city had removed the lights that once illuminated the religious symbol. I liked the darkness, though. Because of it, the cross had one of the best views in the city and glaring spotlights would have lessened its appeal.

A cement pathway surrounded by manicured lawns of lush grass connected the platform to the parking lot. At the bottom of the landscaped hill, downtown Ventura awoke to the rhythm of the waves against the not-so-distant shore. Lights, which had kept their vigil through the long winter night, winked at the coming sun.

“What are you doing here?” a familiar voice asked as it came towards me. “You should be out doing whatever it is kids your age do.” It was Uncle Azra, my father’s best friend. I’d been entrusted to his care when my father died

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centuries ago.

I glanced over as he settled himself next to me. "I don't think there are any kids my age."

The smile he gave me showed his pearly white teeth. He didn't look much older than twenty-five, all bronzed and blonde from surfing. Only a couple of things gave away the fact that he wasn't human: the gold flecks in his impossibly blue eyes and the slight shimmer that accented the air around him, which most mortals couldn't discern. Well, that and his outfit; he wore only a pair of board shorts and flip-flops in the middle of January.

"Uncle Az," I sighed, "put some clothes on. It's only twenty degrees out here. The humans will notice."

He laughed. It was a booming sound that always seemed to cheer me up. "There's no one around to see us, Orion. It's just you and me." He spoke his words with a conglomeration of accents. The syllables brought to mind all the world's languages and, at the same time, a language unheard of on Earth. He didn't bother to mask his speech either. He preferred to let people wonder about it.

"Don't call me Orion," I grumbled. "I told you, I'm going by Ryan now."

"Fine, Rye-anne." He said the name with a jeering emphasis to illustrate how ridiculous it sounded. "Why don't you tell me what's got you all bothered? You're too mopey lately. Don't glare at me like that. I can tell when you're upset."

When I didn't say anything he settled back on his elbows and tilted his head back to gaze up at the stars, confident that I would break eventually. We sat in companionable silence for a while. I with my eyes set firmly on the horizon and his on the heavens.

Unexpectedly, a horrible noise erupted from my uncle. After a second or two an equally noxious smell wafted around us.

"Ugh!" I covered my nose and mouth against the fumes. "Dude! What the hell did you eat?"

Azra burst into a fit of giggles. "Sorry, kiddo. Had

some angel food cake earlier.”

Though I fought it, I couldn't help but laugh. Uncle Azra had that effect on people.

With the mood lightened, we resumed our observations of the sky and Azra asked me, “You know what they used to say about the stars? They said stars were the campfires of the angel army.”

“When did they say that?” I'd heard this story countless times before and knew my cues well. Sometimes I wasn't in the mood to listen. This morning was one of those times. With the nagging sensation in my stomach and the persistent tugging of my awareness towards the horizon, I only listened halfway.

“Back in the good old days—when the Sumerians came to power—there wasn't any of this non-belief idiocy. Mankind had more realistic views about the Creator. There wasn't any of this ‘my god can beat up your god’ crap. Well, there was, but it wasn't as intense. It was more of a, ‘you sacrifice to that god and I'll sacrifice to this god and we can have wars over the real estate.’ They knew what it meant when—”

I stopped listening and allowed my mind to wander.

We'd been living in Ventura, California for almost two months now and, until this morning, there hadn't been anything to indicate that we were in the right place. We had come from Toronto, and before that a village in Cambodia, and before that . . . well, I lose track. Azra loved living in California, but I think that was more for the surfing rather than being where we were supposed to be. While there hadn't been any sign of others of our kind skulking nearby or our cover being blown, I'd been more than ready to move on out of sheer boredom. Unless. . . The nagging feeling in my stomach twitched.

Unless something happened.

It wasn't the first time that night I wondered if the strange calling I felt was real or if I was just hoping for some sort of change. I could do with some action, even if it meant having to uproot for the umpteenth time.

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Almost as if in response to my thoughts, the faintest sound of footsteps and hissing came from the left. I sprang to my feet, disrupting Azra's tale. He was right behind me, crouched and ready to launch himself at whatever was approaching us, the story already forgotten. This kind of reaction was typical when you have been hunted for most of your life.

By the shadows that danced around the approaching figure, I recognized the outline of a man and knew it to be a Fallen One; an angel turned demon when the Angelic War had first started in Heaven. I could hear his sinister chuckling as he stepped into view.

The Fallen One mused loud enough for us to hear him, "Two Watchers. Who would have thought I would find those of the exiled choir. Your kind are rare these days. Tell me, do you still believe the Creator loves you?"

My uncle, ever quick with his wit asked in return, "Tell me, does the devil know you are out here? I can't believe the all-powerful Hell Bat would allow something as stupid as you out of the Great Easy Bake Oven willingly. After all, he's got a reputation to uphold."

A condescending grin spread across his narrow, pale features as he addressed my uncle. "Still fighting the good fight, I see. You're still trying to rid the world of our influence so you can gain the favor of Heaven. What a fool you are." In the darkness, the red gleam in the Fallen One's black eyes was the only color he had. Behind that gleam, though, were millennia of torments. He hid it well as he sauntered closer and as his gaze flicked between Azra and me. His eyes met mine long enough for me to feel the sorrow and hate of the damned echo across my mind. Sleepiness washed over me, making my limbs feel heavy.

I blinked and tensed, ready to fight. My anger bubbled, dispelling the drowsiness of the Fallen One's attempt of taking me over. I would show Uncle Azra that I could beat him on my own.

"I got this," I assured my uncle.

"You think so?" Azra asked, the ghost of amusement

lacing his words.

The Fallen One considered us, ignoring our whispers and calculating the opportunity for attack. "I wonder. . . Will you die like a human or like our holier-than-thou brethren? I've never killed a Grigori before."

Faster than thought, he darted forward. There wasn't time to dodge out of the way, so I braced for the assault. At the very last second, Azra's hand clamped onto my shoulder and he shoved me towards the edge of the hill and away from the coming attack. The propulsion my dear uncle gave me was a little more forceful than I could handle, and I bounced over the edge of the plateau.

The coarse plumes of grass and scrubby underbrush made my fall both perilous and itchy. I grabbed desperately at whatever plant life I could, trying to stop my bumpy descent. It was to no avail; I landed with a painful thud on the access road that wound up the hill, roughly half a mile away from where I started.

Furious, I got to my feet and brushed the dirt from my clothes. The fight was in full swing above me; the clash of energies reverberated off the surrounding hills. I heard Uncle Azra taunting his opponent as well as the low pitched growl of the Fallen One. It was a good thing most of the humans in the area, even if they could hear the fight, would refuse to understand what was happening. The majority of humans only saw and heard what they could easily explain, all else was ignored to the point of obstinacy. It was both a blessing and an annoyance.

I ran back to the cross, angry that the battle was taking place without me. He hadn't needed to push me out of the way. I could have handled it.

The jeering taunts my uncle issued were getting louder with every step I took. "Sing like a Choir Boy! Oh, wait, you can't can you? That's why you were kicked out of Heaven, wasn't it? They couldn't stand your screeching!"

The Fallen One hissed, so enraged that he couldn't even formulate a response.

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"Oh!" Azra went on louder than before. "You're one of *those* Fallen Ones. It's okay. I hear Jesus loves everyone so you aren't completely screwed. By the way, your mother was a stinky pirate! No, wait—that would make you kinda cool . . ."

I groaned, but kept running. Just as I crested the hill, the sun emerged, cutting through the clouds. The Fallen One stopped his enraged charge at Azra as the brightness of the dawn threatened to dispel the shadows in which he surrounded himself.

Taking advantage of the momentary distraction, Uncle Azra lunged and stabbed the Fallen One with a knife that he had taken out of a hidden pocket in his shorts. I recognized the celestial blade (this one was a small dagger that was a miniature of his real sword) by its otherworldly glow. With a growl and a furious curse in the old tongue, the Fallen One dissolved into what appeared to be a sticky puddle of tar that absorbed into the ground. Every Fallen One's physical form that I'd seen dispatched vanished the same way— in a sticky goeey mess. Why that was I couldn't say. Whatever the reason, it saved on cleanup and awkward questions with the mortals.

Azra wiped the slime from the Fallen One off of his blade and onto the grass. He beamed at me as I came closer. "Man! That was fun! You should have stuck around, kiddo! You missed one hell of a fight!"

I glared at him as I went to retrieve my backpack from the base of the cross. "Why did you push me away? I could have taken him on my own."

"Why are you so anxious to get yourself killed?" Azra asked as he watched me pull out my headphones from one of the front pockets of the dark blue bag. "I made a promise to protect you, you know?"

I rolled my eyes at him and flipped on my iPod. Irritation crossed Azra's face and he shouted to be heard over my music. "Your father would have done the same thing! He wouldn't have wanted you taken down by some sleazy—"

The mention of my father was the last straw. Cutting him off, I yelled, "My father would've taught me how to defend myself by now! He would have given me the chance to stand up for myself, to see what I could do! He wouldn't have pushed me down a hill to keep me from fighting a stupid Fallen One."

This startled him into a stunned silence, something that rarely happened. While we had argued this point many times before, my aggravation was magnified by the insult of being literally shoved out of the way of the fight. Usually, I tried to respect Uncle Azra as my elder. After all, there was a reason why my father had left me in his care, even if he was erratic at the whole parenting shtick.

I looked at Uncle Azra's stricken face and sighed. He looked so pathetic standing there all crestfallen.

"You're right," I conceded, softening my tone. "My father wouldn't want me taken out by some worthless, every day Fallen One, but he wouldn't want me cowering in fear every time one crossed my path, either."

As he opened his mouth to argue, I turned my back and headed for the road.

"Do you at least have your beads?" he hollered.

In response, I lifted my left wrist, showing off the wooden prayer beads. The sigils burned into the spheres were a charm meant to disguise my psychic presence and make me appear nothing more than a Watcher or, to those not paying close attention, a human. They were also a constant reminder to keep my anger in check.

The volume of my iPod increased, drowning out whatever else Azra yelled at me as I walked away.

Punk music formed the soundtrack of my trek back to the studio apartment I called home. The building wasn't in the best repair; however, it was close to the ocean and had an amazing view. The location, of course, made rent insanely high. That didn't matter too much to me, though. When you have been around for most of human civilization, you just sort of accumulate stuff that appreciates in value over a few hundred years.

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As I trudged up the stairs, the sounds of my neighbors waking up came through the thin walls. I envied them. Humans had the option to believe in the illusion they were safe. To not know what I knew, to not be as trapped as I felt by the sheer weight of what I was; well, it seemed like a great life.

I thought about the fight at the cross. The majority of the Fallen Ones we found, or who managed to find us, were stupid and easily tricked. There were a lot of them on Earth and it seemed no matter how many were destroyed, more would crop up. Running into one like that was almost an everyday occurrence. Given that fact, it still confused me why Uncle Azra refused to train me to defend myself against them and the Heavenly Host. Both were a threat and only being able to hide and evade them wouldn't win me any fights if they cornered me.

I sang the chorus of the song blasting through my headphones under my breath when I reached my door and pulled out my keys.

The early morning light shone weakly through the windows in my apartment. I tossed my keys onto the table tucked into the corner and slung my bag onto the ground. Despite Azra's attempts to keep the small, cramped space clean, it was cluttered and disorganized. Empty plates and cups lounged among the bits of crumpled paper littering the floor. Patches of beige carpet showed through the piles of stuff. The walls, or at least the parts not covered by artwork (both my own and others) were in need of new paint.

My furniture was an odd mix of the very antique and the very secondhand. This was also my choice. Azra had wanted to decorate and buy new things, but I preferred the pieces I already had. Still, he bought several items in an attempt to class up the place, ranging from a Tiffany lamp to a bearskin rug. I had disposed of them after he left. Overall, the apartment was rundown and cramped, but it was home.

With the day already underway, I didn't have much

time to get changed for school. I set my iPod next to my keys and turned to the armoire on the other side of the room. I had to move one of Uncle Az's abandoned surfboards to get it open and, once it was, I cursed the emptiness of it.

I forgot to do laundry. Again.

I kicked at the clothes littering the floor to find the least dirty pair of jeans and the least wrinkled hoodie, all the while grumbling to myself. When I told Uncle Azra this apartment was what I wanted, he pitched a fit. He said it was too low-class—this from someone who preferred camping on the beach instead of his own high-end apartment a block over. I stuck to my decision, though, and eventually he let me lease it.

It turned out to be an unfair deal because half the time he stayed at the apartment anyway. He stayed and criticized. I think it's his second favorite pastime, next to surfing. Uncle Azra's main contention was that he didn't agree with the state of disarray my apartment was in.

I could hear his voice ringing admonishments in my head: 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness, Orion' and 'Lysol kills 99.9% of germs'. I swear, he memorized the cleaning commercials just to torture me. Not only that, but I also kept finding various cleaning products in random places. Like a bottle of bleach placed benignly on the TV, hinting at the promise of gleaming white shower tiles without mold or mildew.

Unearthing a decent pair of jeans and a minimally wrinkled hoodie, I headed into the bathroom.

There was a note written in lipstick and taped to the mirror above the sink. "Beware of Norman."

"Thanks, Uncle Az." Scowling, I ripped it off the mirror, allowing my image to frown back at me for the briefest moment before I looked away. I knew what I looked like and I hated it. My brown hair was streaked with natural highlights, proof of my time in the sun. Laziness on my part meant that it was long enough to be considered shaggy. If it were cut any shorter, the angular

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structure of my face would look more awkward than it already did.

What I loathed the most about my appearance, though, were my eyes; my father's eyes. I hated their color, the strange mix of grey and deep blue that oftentimes took on a purplish hue. The silver flecks that accented the irises didn't help. My eyes marked me as different in a world of brown, blue, and hazel.

As the hot water from the shower sluiced over me, I thought about the pull I had felt up at the cross, the nagging feeling that something was coming. I allowed myself the briefest flickering of hope. Maybe it was the one I was supposed to find.

There is a certain prophecy among the angelic community which promises that an angel born on Earth would, with the help of a human, end the Angelic War. Some believe this to mean that all of the Creator's creatures, more specifically the Grigori, would return to Heaven. According to Azra, I was the foretold angel in the prophecy. This human we were looking for would know what to do to fulfill our destiny to end the war.

I had my doubts about this. The prophecy wasn't very specific, but then, I didn't think it was their nature to be clear and concise. My father and Uncle Azra used to tell me about it when I was younger. I believed them back then. With both sides of the angelic divide gunning for me it made a certain amount of sense to think I was a threat to them somehow. Uncle Azra explained that most beings feared the unknown and I was nothing if not an unknown entity. That's why they wanted me dead: to stop me from ending the war and, possibly, their lives.

As I grew up, I realized it wasn't necessarily the prophecy that had everyone up in arms; it was my parentage. You see, my parents, like Uncle Azra, were part of a choir of angels called Grigori or Watchers. I'm the child of two angels and the only of my kind.

When my existence became known, the news exploded across both sides of the angelic community. The

only thing the councils of both Heaven and Hell could agree on was that I should not exist. I was a dangerous anomaly.

I turned the shower off, stepped out of the tub and dried myself with a towel. I ran my hands through the wet strands of my hair, smoothing it out of my face.

After pulling on my clothes, I hunted for a pair of socks. There was one last pair rolled up and stashed in the back of my sock drawer. Though old and mismatched, they were better than nothing.

“Orion!” Uncle Azra burst through the front door, his anger radiated off him in waves. “We need to talk.”

I tied my shoes, unimpressed with his blustering authority figure act. “I’m going to be late,” I told him in a bored voice.

“I don’t care. We can’t have this fight every time a Fallen One shows up. They’re like roaches. You’re too important to risk your life on them!”

I didn’t want to go through the lecture. So instead, I jumped up and grabbed my backpack and skateboard on my way to the door as Uncle Azra shouted, “Orion, stop and listen to me!”

“Late for school.” I waved him off and shut the door behind me. With my headphones in place, I set off down the stairs.