



FALLEN
IN
LOVE

A *FALLEN* NOVEL IN STORIES

BY THE #1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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CHAPTER SAMPLER

The life so brief, the art so long in the learning, the attempt so hard, the conquest so sharp, the fearful joy that ever slips away so quickly—by all this I mean love, which so sorely astounds my feeling with its wondrous operation, that when I think upon it I scarce know whether I wake or sleep.



—GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *The Parliament of Fowls*

Translated by Gerard NeCastro

ONE



TWO FOR THE ROAD

Shelby and Miles were laughing when they stepped out of the Announcer. Its dark tendrils clung to the brim of Miles's blue Dodgers baseball cap and Shelby's tangled ponytail as the two of them emerged.

Even though Shelby's body felt as weary as if she'd done four back-to-back sessions of Vinyasa yoga, at least she and Miles were back on solid—present tense—ground. Home. *Finally.*

The air was cold, the sky gray but bright. Miles's shoulders towered in front of her, shielding her body

from the brisk wind that sent ripples across the white T-shirt he'd been wearing since they'd left Luce's parents' backyard on Thanksgiving.

Eons ago.

"I'm serious!" Shelby was saying. "Why is it so hard for you to believe that my first priority is lip balm?" She ran a finger across her lip and recoiled exaggeratedly. "They're like sandpaper!"

"You're crazy." Miles snorted, but his eyes followed Shelby's finger as she gingerly traced her lower lip. "*Lip balm* is what you missed inside the Announcers?"

"And my podcasts," Shelby said, crunching over a pile of dead gray leaves. "And my sun salutations on the beach—"

They had been leapfrogging through the Announcers for so long: from the cell in the Bastille where they'd met a wraithlike prisoner who wouldn't give his name; into and right back out of a bloody Chinese battlefield where they didn't recognize a soul; and, most recently, from Jerusalem, where they'd found Daniel at last, looking for Luce. Only Daniel wasn't entirely himself. He was joined—literally—with some ghostly past version of himself. And he hadn't been able to set himself free.

Shelby couldn't stop thinking about Miles and Daniel fencing with the starshots, about the way Daniel's two bodies—past and present—had been wrenched apart after Miles drew the arrow down the angel's chest.

Creepy things happened inside Announcers; Shelby

was glad to be done with them. Now if they could just not get lost in these woods on their way back to their dorm. Shelby looked toward what she hoped was west and started to lead Miles through the dreary unfamiliar section of the forest. “Shoreline should be this way.”

The return home was bittersweet.

She and Miles had entered the Announcer with a mission; they’d jumped through in Luce’s parents’ backyard after Luce herself had disappeared. They’d gone after her to bring her home—as Miles said, Announcers weren’t to be pranced into lightly—but also just to make sure she was all right. Whatever Luce was to the angels and demons fighting over her, Shelby and Miles didn’t care. To them, she was a friend.

But on their hunt, they kept just missing her. It had driven Shelby nuts. They’d gone from one bizarre stop to the next and still had seen no sign of Luce.

She and Miles had bickered several times over which way to go and how to get there—and Shelby hated fighting with Miles. It was like arguing with a puppy. The truth was, neither of them really knew what they were doing.

But in Jerusalem, there had been one good thing: The three of them—Shelby, Miles, and Daniel—had actually, for once, gotten along. Now, with Daniel’s blessing (some might call it a command), Shelby and Miles were finally headed back home. Part of Shelby worried

about abandoning Luce, but another part—the part that trusted Daniel—was eager to get back to where she was supposed to be. Her proper era and place.

It felt like they had been traveling for a very long time, but who knew how time worked inside the Announcers? Would they come back and find they'd been gone just seconds, Shelby had wondered, a bit nervously, or would *years* have passed?

“As soon as we get back to Shoreline,” Miles said, “I’m running straight into a long, hot shower.”

“Yeah, good call.” Shelby grabbed a chunk of her thick blond ponytail and sniffed. “Wash this Announcer funk out of my hair. If that’s even possible.”

“You know what?” Miles leaned in, lowering his voice, even though there was no one else around. Weird that the Announcer had planted them so far off the grounds of the school. “Maybe tonight we should sneak into the mess hall and snag some of those flaky biscuits—”

“The buttery ones? From the tube?” Shelby’s eyes widened. Another genius idea from Miles. The guy was good to have around. “Man, I’ve missed Shoreline. It’s good to be—”

They crossed beyond the line of trees. A meadow opened up before them. And then it hit Shelby: She wasn’t seeing any of the familiar Shoreline buildings, because they weren’t there.

She and Miles were . . . somewhere else.

She paused and glanced at the hillside surrounding them. Snow sat on the boughs of trees that Shelby suddenly realized were definitely *not* California redwoods. And the slushy mud road ahead of them was no Pacific Coast Highway. It wound downward over the hillside for several miles toward a stunningly old-looking city protected by a massive black stone wall.

It reminded her of one of those faded old tapestries where unicorns frolicked in front of medieval towns, which some ex-boyfriend of her mom had once dragged her to see at the Getty.

“I thought we were home!” Shelby cried, her voice landing somewhere between a bark and a whine. Where *were* they?

She stopped just short of the crude road and looked around at the muddy desolation before her. There was *no one* around. Scary.

“I thought we were, too.” Miles scratched his cap glumly. “I guess we’re not quite back at Shoreline.”

“*Not quite?* Look at this excuse for a road. Look at that fortress thing down there.” She gasped. “And are those little moving dots *knights*? Unless we’re in some kind of theme-park, we’re stuck in the freaking Middle Ages!” She covered her mouth. “We’d better not get the plague. Whose Announcer did you open up in Jerusalem, anyway?”

“I don’t know, I just—”

“We’re never going to get home!”

“Yes, we are, Shel. I read about this . . . I think. We got backwards in time by leapfrogging through other angels’ Announcers, so maybe we have to get home that way, too.”

“Well, what are you waiting for? Open another one!”

“It’s not like that.” Miles jerked his baseball cap lower over his eyes. Shelby could barely see his face. “I think we have to find one of the angels, and just sort of borrow another shadow—”

“You make it sound like borrowing a sleeping bag for a camping trip.”

“Listen: If we find a shadow that casts across the century where we actually exist, we can make it home.”

“How do we do *that*?”

Miles shook his head. “I thought I’d done it when we were with Daniel in Jerusalem.”

“I’m scared.” Shelby crossed her arms over her chest and shivered in the wind. “Just do *something*!”

“I can’t just—especially not with you screaming at me—”

“Miles!” Shelby’s body seized up. What was that rumbling sound behind them? Something was coming up the road.

“*What*?”

A horse-drawn cart creaked toward them. The clomp of horses’ hooves was growing louder. In a second,

whoever was driving that cart would crest the hill and see them.

“Hide!” Shelby screamed.

The silhouette of a stout man holding the reins of two brown-and-white-spotted horses rose into view on the sloping road. Shelby grabbed Miles by his collar. He’d been fussing nervously with his hat, and as she yanked him behind the wide trunk of an oak tree, the bright blue cap flew off his head.

Shelby watched the cap—the cap that had been part of Miles’s daily wardrobe for years—sail through the air like a blue jay. Then it plummeted downward, into a wide pale-brown puddle of mud in the road.

“My hat,” Miles whispered.

They were huddled very close together, their backs against the rough bark of the oak. Shelby glanced over at him and was amazed to see his face in its entirety. His eyes seemed magnified. His hair messy. He looked . . . handsome, like a guy she’d never met before. Miles tugged on his hat-hair, self-conscious.

Shelby cleared her throat and her thoughts. “We’ll get it as soon as the cart goes by. Just stay out of sight until this dude is out of the way.”

She could feel Miles’s warm breath on her neck and the jut of his hipbone pushing against her side. How was Miles so skinny? The guy ate like a horse, but he was all meat and no potatoes. At least, that was what Shelby’s

mother would say if she ever met him—which she never would if Miles couldn't find an Announcer that would take them back to the present.

Miles fidgeted, straining to see his cap.

“Stay still,” Shelby said. “This guy could be some sort of barbarian.”

Miles held up a finger and tilted his head. “Listen. He’s *singing*.”

A patch of snow crunched under Shelby’s feet as she craned her neck around the tree to watch the cart approach. The driver was a ruddy-cheeked man with a dirty shirt collar, daggy trousers that were obviously handmade, and a colossal fur vest he wore cinched at the waist with a leather belt. His small blue felt cap looked like a ridiculous little polka dot in the center of his broad, bald forehead.

His song had the jolly, raucous ring of a pub tune—and boy, was he belting it out. The clopping of his horses’ hooves sounded almost like a drumming accompaniment to his loud, brassy voice:

“Riding to town t’ fetch a maid, a busty maid, a lusty maid. Riding to town to take a bride, in eventide, a Valentine!”

“Classy.” Shelby rolled her eyes. But at least she recognized the man’s accent, a clue. “So, I guess we’re in jolly old England.”

“And I guess it’s Valentine’s Day,” Miles said.

“Thrilling. Twenty-four hours of feeling especially single and pathetic . . . *medieval style*.”

She'd done jazz hands on that last bit for effect, but Miles was too busy watching the crude board cart drive by to notice.

The horses were tacked in unmatched blue and white bridles and harnesses. Their ribs were showing. The man rode alone, sitting atop a rotting wooden bench at the head of the cart, which was about the size of a truck bed and covered with a sturdy white tarp. Shelby couldn't see what the man was hauling to town, but whatever it was, it was heavy. The horses were sweating despite the frigid weather, and the planks of wood at the cart's base strained and shuddered as it drove toward the walled city.

“We should follow him,” Miles said.

“What for?” Shelby's mouth twitched. “Want to fetch yourself a busty, lusty maid?”

“I'd like to ‘fetch’ someone we know, whose Announcer we can use to get us home. Remember? Your lip balm?” He parted her lips with his thumb. His touch left Shelby momentarily speechless. “We'll have a better shot coming across one of the angels in town.”

The cart's wheels groaned in and out of ruts in the muddy road, rocking the driver from side to side. Soon he was close enough that Shelby could see the coarseness of his beard, which was as thick and black as his bearskin

vest. His pitch faltered on the extended last syllable of *Valentine*, and he took a great gulp of air before beginning again. Then his song broke off abruptly.

“What’s this?” he grunted.

Shelby could see that his hands were chapped and red from the cold as they tugged roughly on the horses’ reins to slow them. The rail-thin animals neighed, coming to a stop just short of Miles’s bright blue baseball cap.

“No, no, no,” Shelby muttered under her breath. Miles’s face had gone pale.

The man shimmied fatly off the bench, his boots landing in the thick mud. He walked toward Miles’s hat, bent down with another grunt, and swooped it up in the blink of an eye.

Shelby heard Miles swallow hard.

A quick swipe against the man’s already filthy trousers and the cap was halfway clean. Without a word, he turned and mounted the cart’s bench again, tucking the hat inside the tarp behind him.

Shelby looked down at herself and her green hoodie. She tried to imagine this man’s reaction if she were to pop out from behind a tree wearing weird clothes from the future and try to take back his prize. It was not a calming idea.

In the time it had taken Shelby to chicken out, the man had tugged on the reins; the cart started rolling to town again, and his song entered its twelfth off-key

round.

Another thing Shelby had screwed up. “Oh, Miles. I’m sorry.”

“Now we definitely have to follow him,” Miles said, a little desperate.

“Really?” Shelby asked. “It’s just a hat.”

But then she looked at Miles. She still wasn’t used to seeing his face. The cheeks Shelby used to think of as babyish seemed stronger, more angular, and his irises were speckled with a new intensity. She could tell by his crestfallen expression that it definitely wasn’t “just a hat” to him. Whether it held special memories or was simply a good-luck talisman, she didn’t know. But she would do anything to get that look off his face.

“Okay,” she blurted out. “Let’s go get it.”

Before Shelby knew what was happening, Miles had slipped his hand through hers. It felt strong and assured and a little impulsive—and then he tugged her toward the road. “Come on!” She resisted for an instant, but then her eyes accidentally locked with Miles’s, and they were super-crazy blue, and Shelby felt a wave of exhilaration kick in.

Then they were running down a snow-dotted medieval road, moving past crop fields that were dead for the winter, covered in a sleek sheet of white that draped the trees and spotted the dirt road. They were heading toward a walled city with towering black spires and a

narrow, moated entry. Hand in hand, pink-cheeked, chapped-lipped, laughing for no reason Shelby could ever have put into words—laughing so hard she nearly forgot what they were about to do. But then, when Miles called out, “Jump!”—something snapped into place and she did.

For a moment, it almost felt like she was flying.

A knotty log formed the back ledge of the cart, barely wide enough to balance on. Their feet skimmed it, landing there by sheer, graceless luck—

For a moment. Then the cart hit a rut and rattled fiercely, and Miles’s foot slipped and Shelby lost her grip on the canvas tarp. Her fingers slipped and her body flailed and she and Miles were flung backward, sailing downward, into the mud.

Splash.

Shelby grunted. Her rib cage throbbed. She wiped the cold mud from her eyes and spat out a mouthful of the dingy stuff. She looked up at the cart growing smaller in the distance. Miles’s hat was gone.

“Are you okay?” she asked him.

He wiped his face with the hem of his T-shirt. “Yeah. You?” When she nodded, he grinned. “Do Francesca’s face if she found out where we were right now.” Miles’s command sounded cheerful, but Shelby knew that inside he was gutted.

Still, she would play along. Shelby loved to

impersonate their stately Shoreline teacher. She rolled out of the puddle, propped herself on her elbows, stuck out her chest, and pinched up her nose. “And I suppose you’re going to deny that you were purposely attempting to disgrace Shoreline’s legacy? I’m absolutely loath to imagine what the faaancypants board of directors will say. And have I mentioned that I broke a nail on an Announcer’s edge trying to track you two down—”

“Now, now, Frankie.” Miles helped Shelby up from the mud as he deepened his voice to do his best impersonation of Steven, Francesca’s slightly more relaxed demon husband. “Let’s not be too hard on the Nephilim. A single semester of scrubbing toilets really should teach them their lesson. After all, their mistake began with noble intentions.”

Noble intentions. Finding Luce.

Shelby swallowed, feeling a somberness settle over her. They’d been a team, the three of them. Teams stuck together.

“We *didn’t* give up on her,” Miles said softly. “You heard what Daniel said. He is the only one who can find her.”

“You think he’s found her yet?”

“I hope so. He said he would. But—”

“But what?” Shelby asked.

Miles paused. “Luce was pretty mad when she left everyone in the backyard. I hope that whenever Daniel

finds her, she forgives him.”

Shelby stared at mud-slicked Miles, knowing how much he had—at one point—truly cared about Luce. Admittedly, Shelby hadn’t ever felt *that* way about anyone. In fact, she was legendary for choosing the absolute worst guys to date. *Phil?* Come on! If she hadn’t fallen for him, the Outcasts wouldn’t have tracked Luce down and she wouldn’t have had to jump through the Announcer, and Miles and Shelby wouldn’t be stuck here right now. Covered in mud.

But that wasn’t the point. The point was: Shelby was amazed that Miles wasn’t more bitter about seeing Luce in mega-love with someone else. But he wasn’t. That was Miles.

“She’ll forgive him,” Shelby finally said. “If someone loved me enough to dive through multiple millennia just to find me, I’d get over myself.”

“Oh, that’s all it would take?” Miles elbowed her.

On impulse, she swatted his stomach with the back of her hand. It was the way she and her mom teased each other, like best friends or something. But Shelby was usually a lot more reserved with people outside her nuclear family. Weird.

“Hey.” Miles interrupted her thoughts. “Right now you and I need to focus on getting to town, finding an angel who can help us, and making our way home.”

And getting that hat in the meantime, Shelby added

inside her head as she and Miles broke into a jog, following the cart toward the city.



The tavern stood about a mile outside the city walls, the lone establishment in a large field. It was a small wooden structure with a swinging sign of weathered wood, and big barrels of ale lined up against its walls.

Shelby and Miles had jogged past hundreds of trees stripped of their leaves by the cold, and melting patches of muddy snow on the pocked, winding road to the city. There really wasn't all that much to see. In fact, they had even lost sight of the cart after Shelby got a stitch in her side and had to slow down, but now, serendipitously, they spotted it parked outside the tavern.

"That's our guy," Shelby said under her breath. "He probably stopped in for a drink. Sucker. We'll just snatch the hat back and be on our way."

Miles nodded, but as they slipped around the back of the cart, Shelby spotted the man in the fur vest inside the doorway, and her heart sank. She couldn't hear what he was saying, but he held Miles's hat in his hands and was showing it off to the innkeeper as proudly as if it were a rare gem.

"Oh," Miles said, disappointed. Then he straightened his shoulders. "You know what, I'll get another one. You

can buy them everywhere in California.”

“Mmmm, right.” Shelby swatted the canvas tarp of the man’s wagon in frustration. The force of her blow sent a corner billowing up. For just a second, she caught a glimpse of a heap of boxes inside.

“Hmm.” She snaked her head under the tarp.

Underneath, it was cold and a little fetid, crammed with odds and ends. There were wooden cages filled with sleeping speckled hens, heavy sacks of feed, a burlap bag of mismatched iron tools, and loads of wooden boxes. She tried the lid of one of the boxes, but it wouldn’t budge.

“What are you doing?” Miles asked.

Shelby gave a crooked smile. “Having an idea.” Reaching for something that looked like a small crowbar in the sack of tools, she pried open the lid of the closest box. “That’s a bingo.”

“Shelby?”

“If we’re going into town, these clothes might make the wrong statement.” She flicked the pocket of her green hoodie for effect. “Don’t you think?”

Back under the tarp she found some simple garments, which looked faded and worn, probably outgrown by the driver’s family back home. She tossed little gems out at Miles, who scrambled to catch everything.

Soon, he held a long, pale-green linen gown with bell sleeves and an embroidered golden strip running down

its center, a pair of lemon-yellow stockings, and a bonnet that looked sort of like a nun's wimple, made of taupe linen.

“But what are *you* going to wear?” Miles joked.

Shelby had to rummage through a half dozen more boxes full of rags, bent nails, and smooth stones before she found anything that would work for Miles. Finally, she pulled out a simple blue robe made of stiff, coarse wool. It would keep him warm against this buffeting wind; it was long enough to cover his Nikes; and for some reason it occurred to Shelby that the color was perfect for his eyes.

Shelby unzipped her green hoodie and slung it over the back of the cart. Goose bumps rose on her bare arms as she tugged the billowing dress over her jeans and tank top.

Miles still looked reluctant. “I feel weird stealing stuff that guy was probably taking into town to sell,” he whispered.

“Karma, Miles. He stole your hat.”

“No, he *found* my hat. What if he's got a family to support?”

Shelby whistled under her breath. “You'd never make it a day on skid row, kid”—she shrugged—“unless you had me there to look after you. Look, compromise, we'll repay something else to the cosmos. My sweater . . .” She chucked the green hoodie into the box. “Who knows?”

Maybe hoodies will be all the rage next season in the anatomy theaters, or whatever they do for fun around here.”

Miles held the taupe bonnet above Shelby’s head. But it wouldn’t fit over her ponytail, so he tugged on the elastic band. Her blond hair tumbled down her shoulders. Now *she* felt self-conscious. Her hair was a complete beast. She *never* wore it down. But Miles’s eyes lit up as he placed the bonnet on her head.

“M’lady.” He gallantly held out his hand. “Might I have the pleasure of accompanying you into this fair city?”

If Luce had been here, back when all three of them were still just good friends and things were a little less complicated, Shelby would have known just how to joke back. Luce would have put on her sweet, demure damsel-in-distress voice and called Miles her knight in shining armor or some crap like that, to which Shelby could have added something sarcastic, and then everyone would have burst out laughing, and the weird tension Shelby felt across her shoulders, the tightness in her chest—it would have gone away. Everything would have felt *normal*, whole.

But it was just Shelby and Miles.

Together. Alone.

They turned to face the black stone walls around the city, which surrounded a high central keep. Marigold-

colored flags hung from iron poles in the tall stone tower. The air smelled like coal and moldy hay. Music came from inside the walls—a lyre maybe, some soft-skinned drums. And somewhere in there, Shelby hoped, was an angel whose Announcer could take the two of them back to the present, where they belonged.

Miles was still holding out his hand, gazing at her like he had no idea how deep blue his eyes were. She took a deep breath and slipped her palm inside his. He gave her hand a little squeeze and the two of them strolled into town.

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

ISBN 978-0-385-74261-0 (trade)

ISBN 978-0-375-99067-0 (lib. bdg.)

ISBN 978-0-307-97629-1 (ebook)

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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