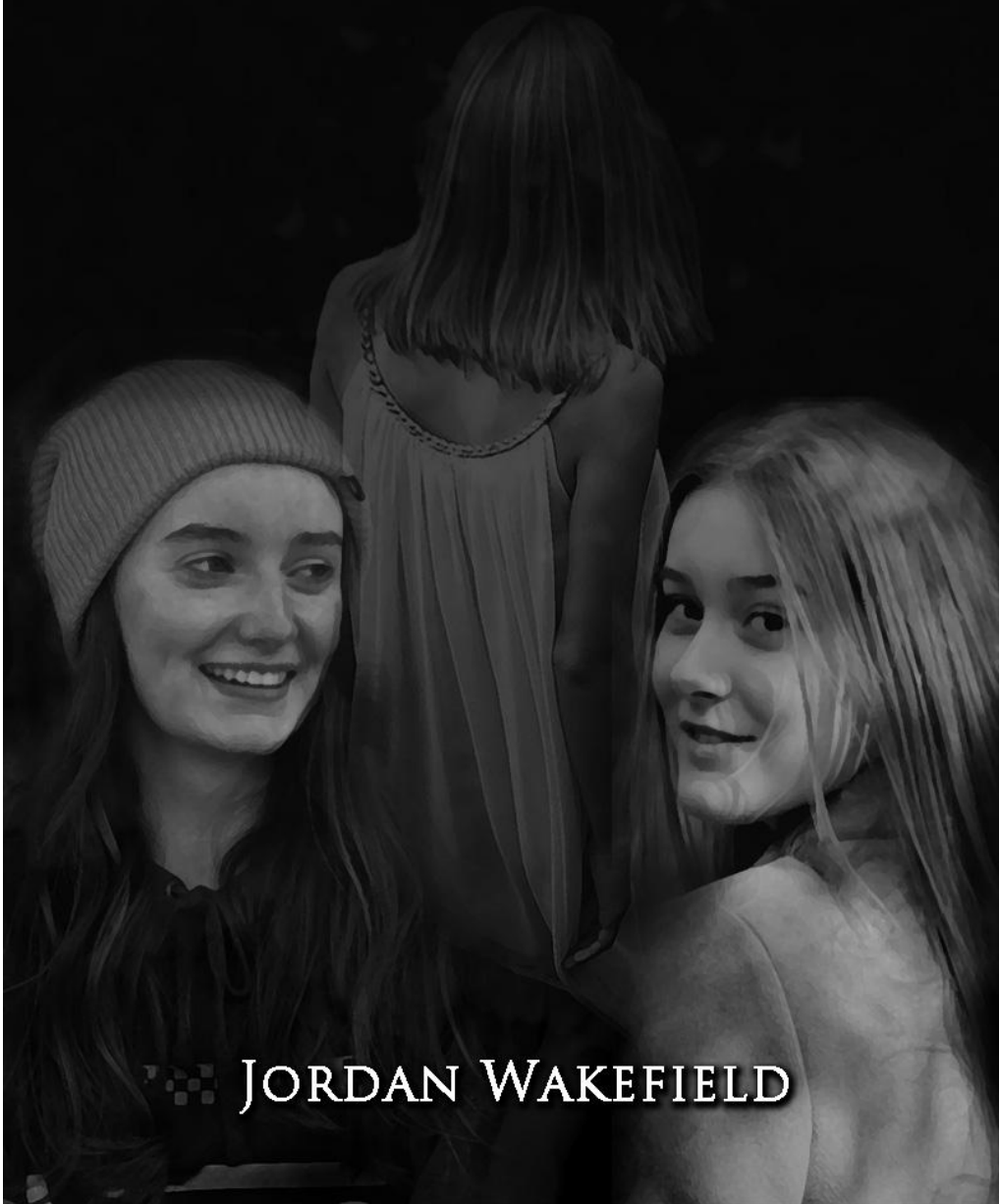


# CONFLUX: THE LOST GIRLS



JORDAN WAKEFIELD

# MOVE ALONG NOTHING TO SEE HERE

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IT'S A BAD, BAD WORLD OUT THERE - Two teenage girls who don't even know their own names. A nightmarish town that wants to eat them alive. When fate brings them together, will a murderous town full of sin and psychotic criminals pull them apart?

This book doesn't pull punches. Packed with tension and betrayal, horror and triumph, Jordan Wakefield's CONFLUX: THE LOST GIRLS follows two teenage runaways with pasts shrouded in darkness as they navigate a world ruled by drugs, violence, and dark conspiracies. With police, human traffickers and sexual deviants on their tail, they must make it out alive together. But when you don't know yourself, can you trust the person next to you?

First in the Conflux series, THE LOST GIRLS will push you off the edge of your seat and have you begging for more.

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# Conflux: The Lost Girls

by Jordan Wakefield



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**This book contains mature themes and content and is not for the faint of heart.**

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# Dedication

*To my loved ones - my family, friends, and my partner, who helped this work come alive.*

*To all humanity and those who are hurting - may you find peace, love, and happiness.*

*To my readers - may you and your friends be compelled by these pages that took ten long years to fully write.*

*Thank you.*

# 0 - Headcase



*"They're going to kill you."*

*A glass table shatters with an inhuman scream. Suddenly there's only the sound of breathing.*

*...*

*A girl alone in a cloud of dark twilight like blood. She's covered in broken glass, and aches fill her chest and fists. Her panting breaths echo in the emptiness. Warm crimson washes over and burns her eyes. Brutal agony fills her head. A ceiling lamp swings side to side slowly, creaking, casting a dim red glow over the scene in heartbeat pulses:*

*Mangled human forms litter the carpeted floor. A sweet burnt smell fills the air and iron fills her nose. Horror screams in past-minute flashes. Rent flesh and snapping bones. Eyeballs bursting in skulls. Teeth scattered in pieces.*

*An army of footsteps. The door breaks open. Eternal light blinds, filling the space.*

*A girl in a room. It's dark. Damned souls scream the halls, chaos of a thousand lives. Gnashing teeth. Clenched fists digging into palms. Siren songs of silence and great whispers.*

*Muttering. A door squeals open. Blinding light. A struggle, a pinch, silence. Darkness.*

*A girl is in the wind alone. Morning light scattered on treetops. Her hands are iron and pain. The forest takes her in. She washes in a cool, stinging brook and crimson reflections wash away in the water. She trudges through the stream in ill-fitting shoes.*

*Sun shines on a dark tower lifting through green hills, draws her closer for aching miles.*

*She brushes through dagger brambles and bone branches and emerges. A stone structure rises ahead in a dirt and gravel lot, surrounded by grasping claws of hanging wood. At the top of the steeple rests a cross of iron melted by rust, dry in the daylight.*

*Familiarity crawls up her spine. A small smile nearly streaks across her cheek as an age-old door of splintered wood appears, flaking powder-blue lead paint, surrounded by fieldstone.*

*A girl grasps the brass knob, forces it ajar. The portal opens.*



# 1 - Renaissance



I wander stone cellars and horsehair plaster chambers of an old abandoned church. The little guiding light shines in beams through the cloudy glass, pale glows scattered on dust particle seas floating in dark grey. Drove of musty books speckled with mold are piled in scattered stacks across crumbling shelves. Broken furniture lies tossed about, enclosed by torn yellowed wallpaper weeping water stains.

The dreary air speaks to me in colorless silence. *Existence*, it speaks, existence without life or death. *Many wandered these halls once*, I think. *Maybe even I have*. But now I'm alone. Only I remain to read the muttering walls' broken scriptures.

I wonder if life isn't the center of the universe if the highest things are non-living. I wonder at how small we are compared to burning suns, falling comets...

I feel nothing inside, so what hears these thoughts? Who is this *I*, this *me*, this voice in my head? What connection do I have to anything when I don't know what I am? Human... I can't remember what that means.

Visions of groveling parasites on a round blue world lost in the blackness of space, collecting to ourselves everything we can lay our hands-on. Ants in dirt mound palaces. I wonder if the non-living world is more alive than we are. I wonder if we're less alive than we think.

I reflect till the thoughts cease to disturb and become only what they are- things that come and go. The dirt-encrusted walls take on patterns of melting dilapidation, of timely death. It seems the ultimate righting of wrongs, and I start to fall into the space around me, thoughts scattered in infinite directions.



Inside, my mind grasps onto worlds above. I yearn to be a planet or a star or a cloud of cosmic dust. I yearn for the serenity of an eon as a ball of rock or plasma circling stellar spaces.

I roam. The ancient air leaves its story in my lungs. Perhaps I'll die here.

I don't fight. I only accept it. What else is left to do?

A startling noise. A book falls to the floor in a cloud of choking dust.

A girl stands in the doorway, coughing. She's short and young, staring at me with alarm from across the room, maybe mirroring my own expression.

Her hair's strawberry blonde like a sunset, cut raggedly below the top of a pink tank-top, her cheeks ruddy and shoulders pale and freckled. Her leery green eyes are immense and pained, with hints of gold and blue. They shoot deep into me.

In that moment, I feel a lifeforce fall into me from her and from outside, from the sky above, like lightning and light striking. A part of my brain awakens suddenly.

"Hey," I whisper, stepping closer. She slinks away, the doorframe hiding all but a pale hand and half a face.

My heart pumps. "I don't want to scare you away," I assure her. But is she just a figment of my imagination, haunting me before I turn to dust?

I sit on the cool floor, legs crossed, to show I'm no harm. She looks to both sides nervously, then sits across from me, holding her knees to her chest, resting her chin on top of them.

A warm glow sparks in my heart. "Who are you?" I ask.

Her attention floats between me and her surroundings, forever back to some unknowable care. Her eyes dart worriedly, searching down, around, straight ahead, then she looks hard at me again. That gaze is piercing and pervading, a veridian ocean of contradictions in the dark, with large, gold-stroked pupils in their centers. Bold black eyeliner surrounds them, with little wings from the corners of her eyes, casting spells like ancient mysteries.

"I don't have a name," she mutters.

I look her over curiously, begetting more silence. She's in light clothes for autumn. (*Autumn?* The word sounds odd. *October...?*) Short black basketball shorts, boyish grey skate shoes, loose pink tank-top, slate-colored knit hat. I like her clothes. I like her. I think I'd like her even if she hated me. I don't think she hates me, but I fear she might. *Fear...* I remember the sensation, boiling in my veins.

"What's *your* name?" she asks mously.

I hum in contemplation. "I don't have one either."

"Really?" Her colossal eyes expand.

I nod.

“So what are you doing here?” she asks, a fleck of excitement in her voice.

“I don’t know... I feel like I’ve always come here since forever, I think. But it’s been a really long time... No one comes here anymore but me. Except for you. Why’re you here?”

She winces. Her mind returns again to that unknown thing that haunts her.

“I’m just here. That’s all,” she mutters.

“Will you come here often?”

Her eyes thin. “I doubt it.”

The words cut me like ice. A void opens under my feet and all around. Cosmic gravity rips at me and fear enthrall the moment. Then the feelings and visions all stop.

“That’s a shame.” My voice is shaky. “I like that you’re here.”

She startles at that and shakes her head.

“I’m sorry. I like it here too. I just can’t do anything about it.”

“It’s alright,” I carve through the sad air with a smile. She blushes, shys away, smiles a little.

I stand slowly and extend my hand. Her forehead scrunches warily, looking up at me. She finally takes hold and rises.

“You’re tall,” she whispers, her breath close to my face. It’s warm and sweet, like wild grapes in late summer. It grows hotter and a little faster with each exhalation. “So, what’re you doing now?” Her eyes stare into mine with nervous anticipation.

“Let’s explore together. Weren’t you just doing that before?”

“I guess so...” She looks down.

“Then come on!” I take her by the hand and out of the room. Her velvet hands sweat.

“Wait!” she squeaks.

“What is it?”

“Um, nothing!... Just be quieter. Please.”

I see her caught between two worlds, in visions like mind’s eye cartoon hallucinations blinking between pure understanding and the abyss of ignorance. I feel the warmth of her soul but can’t touch her inner world to understand.

“No problem,” I wink, though where the gesture came from I don’t know. I feel a weird, good feeling now. We go off, hand-in-hand.

We travel a long hallway, up a narrow carpet staircase. She asks to walk slower, so we do.

“Look at all this!” I exclaim, taking us through an abandoned foyer into a derelict chapel. Old pews line both sides all the way to the stage, most damaged or broken, some smashed straight through as if by the fingers of God, or someone with a vendetta against Him. There’s a pulpit of wood in front.

Nonsense stories come to my mind from nowhere. “Hundreds of people used to come here. Tons of church people.”

“Oh...”

An overwhelming, mysterious nostalgia flows through me. I find myself wondering if she can see and feel what I do. Does the ruined temple speak to her too? Does its past come alive to her soul?

“It’s a nice place,” she nearly yawns. Her eyes roam as we wander down a red aisle stained with dried footprints, past wrecked wooden rows.

We step onto the stage. Up there, I’m present before an invisible audience. Ghostly forms flutter in the remains of benches. I blink once and they disappear.

She slowly opens a decrepit piano, wood creaking, and studies its dusty insides. I step to the pulpit, opening a songbook that lays on it. Swinging open the massive tome, half its weight tosses into the air in a choking cloud of dust. I stumble back and fall onto a ragged wooden chair and it cracks. She giggles.

My coughing stops and I step back to the hymnbook and flip through it, mesmerized by fanciful words and glorifying praises. I sing bits of the hymns in my head hopelessly, but no beat or tune comes for any song.

I close it with a dusty thud, then suddenly sweep it sailing off the podium with surprising ease. It smashes over the floor, smashing into pieces under its own weight. She cackles and an unstoppable smile cuts across my face. She seems to forget about not making noise for a minute, and I feel lighter for it.

Looking to the pews, I imagine the crowd of listeners again, dozens of churchgoers filling the seats, awaiting my word. Something overtakes me.

“God is alive!” I shout to the empty room jokingly, bearing a wide grin.

The piano lid slams, casting a great discordant clamor across the chapel. She slinks away from the instrument, stepping off the platform to the middle aisle.

“Is He?” she asks bitterly.

My eyes widen with disappointment and surprise. I try to hold onto my smile.

The back of my head suddenly throbs and I lurch forward in misery, gritting teeth. I feel myself dropping into the cold dark void again, but suddenly the vision disappears. She doesn't see. I shake it off before she turns around.

"I was just joking around," I clamp down a half-grin.

She hums, walking away. "I just doubt it though. About God and all."

I hop down from the platform, following her as she floats away. A wind through broken glass could blow her over.

"Why do you say that?" I ask.

"If there was a God, he'd help people," she says spitefully, spitting on a pew to the side.

"Maybe He does."

She removes her hat, balling it in a fist. "He'd help *everyone* out." Her coldness turns bitterness. "He wouldn't just leave people to suffer."

I feel what she feels. Or what I think she feels. A deep sadness. Pain for... something. Everything.

I shrug. "Maybe God helps everyone a little bit and we don't notice. Or maybe He isn't really there. I don't know."

"Yeah," she exhales.

She stops in the hallway, leaning against the wall, wringing her hat. Tears drop from her eyes, but she doesn't make a sound. Something tells me she no longer senses me. In her mind, she can't let me see her this way, let alone give a whimper.

I'm stunned and confused. I realize that whatever I feel, what she feels is something different, something only she knows. But something inside me, something that *does* understand her, forces me to reach out. I wrap her close in my arms.

Her body is rigid for a few seconds that seem like forever. Suddenly, she sobs. Hot rain droplets on my breast. A tear rolls from my eye that screams for her suffering.

Long minutes pass and I finally let go. She looks up with wet eyes and wipes them impatiently with her hat. She puts it back on snug. My hands go to wipe the rest away, but she flinches, stepping aside and holding her eyes shut.

I hesitate, afraid, then the mysterious feeling compels me to wipe away her tears. My hands are dirty and smudge the black-painted rims of her eyes. I step back and she opens them, stares at me red-eyed, examining my soul.

We walk on, exploring more, silent first, then speaking nonsense and dreamy church ghost myths again.

(...)

A half-hour later, most of the church is explored wall to wall. Not a thing you could notice is left unstoried through our giggles, though there isn't much but dust and old broken things. Hardly a word of our fantasies could be anything but just that, imagination and dreams filling the hard silence of the abandoned halls.

"Let's check out the basement!" I exclaim. We come to a fossilized wooden door. "It's one of the best rooms in the whole place. Scarier and darker than the attic, but there's lots more stuff to look at," though I can't say how I know.

Suddenly she stops. She's ghostly white, holding me back by my hand as if cuffed to a pillar of stone.

"No... no..." Her eyes are full of palpable horror that fills my gut like blood and fire.

"Okay," I whisper, laying my hand on her gently. Her skin is cold. We walk back the way we came.

In a few minutes, we're back in the room where we first met. We sit down across from each other in nearly the same spots, but places reversed, silent and distant. There's unspeakable dread in the air like a flurry of evil spirits.

"What's the matter?" I ask softly.

She wipes at her eye, trying to restrain herself. "Nothing... I can't talk about it."

My heart falls, confused at her fear and trembling. I want to face what torments her, even if it means death itself. After all, I'm just human, if that...

"I'm sorry," she whispers.

I hug her. She doesn't flinch. "It's okay... you're a good friend."

"You are too... God fucking damn it..." She laughs a little beneath tears.

"Are you sure you won't come back again?" I breathe deeply.

She drops her head, silent.

We hear footsteps that turn her white again. As the steps close in, she forces me behind an overturned table in the corner of the room. It's pecked with termite holes and emanates a foul, humid stench.

I peek through a crack in the wood, heart racing.

A man trudges into the room. Short curly hair, an unkempt black beard with dusty grey jeans and a rusty brown hoodie. A gold tooth shimmers in his mouth, gaudy gems around his neck and fingers. He lumbers like an ape, hairy arms full of brute strength.

"Hey babe, whatcha doin'?" he asks my friend.

“Just looking around. Staying inside like you said, Matty.”

“Good to hear, little girl. I’m almost done looking around, so we’re gonna leave soon. I just gotta check the attic, unokay?”

She nods, looking down and away. Her face is expressionless like she was thinking of that unknown thing again.

He kiss-kisses at her and his footsteps die off up the stairs.

I peek out from the table. She runs over. “Stay behind, don’t let him see you.”

“Who was that?”

She shushes me, peers back at the doorway.

“Matty?” I try to stir her.

She drops her head down and kneels closer. She clenches her teeth, her entire face. She smashes rose petal fists against the dusty stone floor till they bleed, till I grab them, hold them to my cold cheeks. The thin blood smears coldly across my cheeks.

“Is he your dad? Your brother? A friend?” I ask. “Your *boyfriend*?”

She sucks up a giant breath, trying to speak.

“No, he’s... he keeps me...”

“I don’t understand.” An ominous hell rises in my stomach.

“He sells me out to people...” She’s panting, struggling to breathe.

I feel the entire world collapse on me like a roof caving in. I stumble back into the table and it cracks and nearly falls over. I can’t believe... My visions of her soul become clearer. Dark and sharp razors, glimpses of her anguish come on me, more vivid than the dreams of this purgatory church.

“I...” I don’t know what to say. The words are gone from me.

She holds her face in her hands, falls silent.

I feel as if I can experience everything she feels, every pain and harm forced upon her. But I know I can’t. I can’t begin to share her pain, no matter what lingers in my forgotten past. But maybe I can help.

I stand, extending my hand. “Come with me. I’ll take you away from him.”

We hear his steps returning.

“No! no! You can’t,” she whispers, but she wants to scream. “I’m worth too much- he’ll kill you!”

"I don't care. I won't let him. I won't let this happen to you anymore!"

"No!" she yelps. "He's coming back now!"

"If I can't help you, I'm useless. I might as well already be dead!"

She shakes her head frantically as the footsteps come close. I lunge to embrace her one last time, but she pushes me behind the table and springs up to face the man. I look through the hole again, watching fixedly, sweat pouring down my brow.

Matty bursts into the room with a heavy cardboard box in his arm.

I look around for whatever object lay in the room. I want to smash his head with a lead pipe or stab him with a splinter of church wood. I want to destroy him.

"Let's go, babe," he orders. She looks at the ground silently.

He stares at her for a moment, then rushes over, grabbing her arm and dragging her out, his gorilla body carrying her away like a rag doll.

"Don't do this shit again. I'm getting sick of your fucking fits."

The wicked man cuts to my core with black diamond blades. His evil aura is so strong. I'm powerless to harm him, stunned immobile.

I stand as he charges off with her. Her teary eyes meet mine as she disappears around the corner, a hand reaching for me hopelessly.

The old cellar door slams shut down the hall. I lift a solid table leg and smash it over the old tabletop with an explosion of rotted wood splinters, wishing it was his damned skull pulverized to bits.

I whirl around the room with the makeshift club, turning all to shattered wood and glass. I rage because I'm weak, powerless, lost, but most of all because I lost her.

I pour out everything till it seems there's nothing left to give. I'm ready to give in again and die here alone, as I planned. There is nothing left. I breathe the noxious musty air in deep and beg it to choke the life from me in this last breath.

I pick up a shard of glass and aim it at my arms, where there were already many scars, large and small. I think that if I plunge it in, only dust and sand will fall out.

Suddenly on my knees, I make supplication to the Unknown, to whatever is out there, if anything. *Please, I have to save her. She's alone.*

The silence is paralyzing.

But that small feeling returns, a little fire kindling. It starts small, fills my entire body with vibrations that charge every facet of my being. My soul fills with courage and my will is revived



as if from nowhere. I can't die here. If I have nothing left, there is nothing to lose. *Nothing but her.*

There's no time to die. There is only time to keep my promise, my single purpose. Saving her is the anchor to this world that keeps the void from swallowing me up. I must find her.

I leave the old church.

Outside, the air is brisk. Night is falling. I wander into the village, time flashing by in streaming blurs. Milky white lamps light the way through the mist as I tread lonely streets. People are about in the distance, but are they truly people? They're like soulless facades, shades among shadows.

What is this strange place? Where am I going?

## 2 - To the night



A dark murder town comes into focus. Ruined grey roads and dying woods in moonlight. Sins of its crooked demon inhabitants are everywhere. Peddlers and streetwalkers on corners, hooting gangs of roaming teens, police sirens howling to the sky.

The greed, lust, hatred, cover the earth and fill the air, floating about scattered degenerate crowds like thunderclouds of blood waiting to spill rotting guts over the world.

I know the seat of evil here, an unholy temple where scum worship the lowest highs of dark pleasure. A distant memory speaks of the place. A bar and brothel where any imaginable vice is no further than the length of a few dollar bills. I feel her presence there as surely as I feel anything, a broken angel in a dungeon.

Little memories trickle as I move off the paved streets, down cobblestone roads and dirt trails, wondering what is real and what is false. Suddenly my body takes me ten feet into the brush. A withering old tree split in two by time, hunched and all but forgotten. I reach into the base of it by some instinct, a hollow between exposed roots.

Old leaves and debris give way to a damp stash wrapped in a plastic bag. Just matches and... a wad of cash. *I must be dreaming.* I count a few hundred dollars and wonder if the universe was answering my prayers, or if I had hidden it there and forgotten. *When? Why?* The faces on the bills give no answer, but only look slightly pleased, or consternated- I can't tell which.

In minutes, the questions melt away. I approach the looming bar-brothel. With every step it grows and I seem to shrink. A three-story charcoal-painted fortress the size of a small mansion, with robust, unusual architecture, like a far-eastern temple imposed on a massive cabin, with a

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