

# **Before The Fall**

Beck Robertson

Prequel to The Fallen Trilogy

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I stand at the window of the Turretus, the castle where most of the training of my initiates takes place as I watch them all playing outside, rolling and laughing in the tufts of Catchmite grass and Dollen that grow in profuse clumps around the palace grounds. I take a deep breath and begin to count their heads, one by one; Sisan, Michelo, Ire, I know each of their names intimately, committing each one to memory.

I am their Guardian, the one tasked with training and tutoring them, the one who must keep them all safe until the time comes for their Severance, until they must take his mark. I shudder for they do not know what that truly means, how could they? I stand there, still observing them as they shriek and scream with joy, pushing and pulling one another with the spirited energy so commonly found in young children.

But these are just not any young children. They are Angelus, angels, and it is my duty as their Guardian to ensure when it is time they do their duty. Even if that duty is his will. I look up at the sky, the golden light filtering through the panes of the Turretus's window and sigh heavily. *It will not be easy, when the time comes.*

I turn my attention back to the children playing, continuing to count them all, remembering the special gift each one brings, noting the vital part each of them has to play in our future, in all of our futures. I watch as they tumble and run around, watch as Tobias, Ramo, and Drane play a game of tag among the long fronds of Ellerus, stand there as the light from the bright orange sun blazes down upon the grass.

The sunlight is always here now, always blazing, burning so bright that to look at it hurts my eyes. I remember a time when the sun rose and set, when night fell, when there was not always the permanent, relentless searing blaze of the sun. *When the true light still remained.* It has been prophesized that should the three ever return the natural pattern of sun rising and falling will return too. I do not know now if that will ever happen. *There is only one we can count on now.*

And then I see him, the blonde boy, emerging from between the broad leaves of the Olliope; his expression enquiring as he tugs playfully on the feathered braid of his equally blonde haired friend Janna.

Bailey. The one with the special gift. The one who may save us all. *God knows we will need it soon.* I eye the distant spires of the Culectus, rising so tall up through cloudless blue of the sky and shiver, turning away from the window.

It was not always like this. At one time it could have been so very different. Before the great divide. *Before there was only one.*

I close my eyes remembering.

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“Ganor! There you are.” I hear her voice, high and melodious, laughing as she glides into my study, her long inky braids almost touching the floor. I have to force myself to stop staring at her, for she is truly a vision, there cannot be a woman celestial or otherwise who is a match for her beauty or her spirit.

*Chrysler.* The one who stands between. The neutral, the balance.

“Yes, attending to my books, as usual,” I say, gesturing to the quill I hold in my ink stained hands. She makes a face at me and shakes her head, her large blue eyes deep as one hundred bottomless oceans.

“Ugh, you must come away from all that and walk with me in the gardens, have some fun a while.” She skips lightly over to my desk and hoists herself up on it with an easy, feline grace. I watch spellbound as she extends a delicate foot out in front of her, inspecting it casually. Her blue silk slipper is beaded with Calash and the tiny stones shimmer and sparkle in the sunlight streaming through the study’s only window.

I marvel at her face in the sunlight, the way her thick lashes cast feathered shadows on her high cheekbones, she is a sight to behold indeed. No wonder Lucian is half mad for her. We all are lost in her spell and she knows it but she accepts with a casual grace, not with arrogance or pride. But the look in Lucian’s eyes when he gazes at her makes me afraid sometimes, though for what exactly I do not know.

Chrysler smiles at me, her lovely heart shaped face lighting up as she grabs my hand, jumping down from the desk.

“Walk with me a while outside Ganor?” She tips her face invitingly to me and I feel my heart skip a beat. *How could I refuse her? How could anyone?*

I smile, holding out my arm to her and she takes it as we walk out of the study. We walk through the long hallway with its bright scarlet slash of carpet, walk past the throne room where the three bright golden thrones sit atop the raised dais, walk until we emerge through the white marble cherubim and seraphim decorated archway that leads to the flower gardens.

“So,” I say, turning to her with a smile as we walk through the neatly manicured flowerbeds, sprung with exotic blooms that sprout in a riot of color, “to what do I owe this pleasure?”

Her lovely face is serious now as she looks at me, the bright smile she wore now gone. I look at her confused as she looks around to make sure no one is watching.

“Ganor, I am worried. You are the only one I can confide in but it is getting worse between the two of them,” she says, concern creasing her flawless features.

I sigh, shaking my head. *When will they learn?* I do not know who is worse, Thorus, who should know better, or Lucian and his prideful arrogance.

“It will be fine,” I say, trying to be reassuring. “It is always fine is it not?”

She shakes her head at me, and I see the worry flash in her dark blue eyes as they meet my own in desperation.

“No. It is different this time. Lucian has become mad with envy; he will not stop until he bests him now.”

For as long as I can remember those two have been battling over her, the three of them residing over the Kingdom in a kind of unsteady truce, the light, the balance and the night, a perfectly blended symphony.

“You my dear are the key as always,” I say, “you must find a way to quiet them down as you always do.”

“Ganor,” she says, beckoning me closer, “there is something else you should know.”

I lean in to her and find my senses overwhelmed by her scent, sweet as the night blooming Caviert that opens its thick white lush petals only to the light of the silvery moon. As she presses her lips to my ear, I find the mere touch of her sends a pleasurable shiver through me, and if I didn't before, now I understand why the two of them would drag a Kingdom into chaos over her.

“He wants me to choose him,” she says, “I cannot hold him off anymore; I cannot play the part of peacemaker.” She looks at me, her blue eyes so heavy with sorrow that my heart actually hurts for her.

“How can I help you,” I say, laying my hand on her arm. I would do anything for her, anything to help her, to make her happy.

“I hope it is not too late, he is overtaken by jealousy even though I tell him repeatedly he need not envy him. But he will not list –

She stops as a tall shadow crosses our path at the end of the flower strewn aisle we walk and we both look up with a start to see Lucian standing there, a smirk on his impossibly handsome face.

“Ah I see the busy bees hum among the flowers,” he says, looking at Chrysler then me. I gulp, Lucian has always been intense but now the expression on his face is as dark as the shadows of night itself.

“We were just walking Lucian,” Chrysler says, smiling brightly as she drops my arm and walks up to him. He smiles indulgently down at her as she slips her arm through his, looks at her as if she is a possession, a morsel to be devoured and I shudder to myself. I fear Chrysler is right, Lucian will not stop until he has her completely, not even if the whole Kingdom is dragged into ruin.

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The next day I am in my study when there is a loud knock at the door. I lift my head up from the records of student prowess I am tasked to keep so painstakingly, and call out in greeting to whoever would intrude at this late hour.

“Come in,” I say, frowning impatiently.

The heavy wooden door creaks open and Thorus strides in, his strong features furrowed in a frown as he turns his intense brown eyes to me.

“My Lord,” I say, closing the record book I am writing in carefully and placing my quill back in the ink pot. “What troubles you?”

“I must speak with you Ganor. I fear there is trouble coming to our Kingdom and I wish to make sure you are well informed in case anything should happen to me,” he says.

I swallow. *So it is true, he fears it too?*

“Nothing will happen to you my Lord,” I say, as if the very idea is ludicrous. “You are almost as a God, what can possibly happen to you?”

He walks up to the desk, the golden sword sheath he wears clanking against the metal of his belt loop, as he crosses the room quickly.

“Ganor,” he says, taking me by the shoulder, “it is Lucian. He is plotting something. I don’t know what he is up to but I fear he will hurt her. You must help me.”

“What would you have me do my Lord,” I say, looking at him. “You know I would do anything to ensure you both are safe.” I mean what I say, he is my liege, I would protect him to the death. As for Chrysler, I would jump into the abyss itself for her if I could. I hope it will not require that of course, but if the time comes, I am prepared to defend them both to my last, any way I can. An oath once sworn should be sacred. I can only hope Lucian feels the same way.

“Do not concern yourself with me,” he says, “but promise me something.”

“Anything,” I say, looking at him. He is so earnest, I have never seen him this way, usually he is so calm, so in control but now he acts quite unlike himself, his eyes wild, desperate.

“You must promise me Chrysler will be safe,” he says, shaking me. “I do not know what he will do but I know her. She loves him but she will not choose between the two of us, she will never bow to him, no matter what he does. And I fear in his pride –

“You really think he would hurt her?” I look at him incredulously, shaking my head. Lucian is unpredictable certainly but I know one thing for sure. He is obsessed with Chrysler mad for her; surely he would not hurt her?

“I do not know,” he says, “but promise me you will protect her if it should come to that.”

I nod, meeting his gaze with solemnity.

“I give you my word my Lord. I will lay down my life to ensure she is safe,” I say. I think of Chrysler’s face, it is an easy promise for me to make. Still I am sure it is a promise that will never be tested, I cannot imagine Lucian will do anything to endanger her, Thorus frets for nothing.

“You must take this,” he says, reaching into the red velvet purse that swings from his thick brown leather belt and thrusting something into my hand.

“What’s this?” I look down at the item nestled in my palm, and as I see what it is I gasp aloud. The golden seal of the sun, the circular disk engraved with the sacred trifecta, so cool and smooth against my skin. I can feel the energy that emanates from it spreading through my fingers, an energy so powerful it makes my whole body vibrate with a steady hum.

“You cannot take this off? You must know you will not be protected if you do,” I say, looking at him in horror.

He nods solemnly at me. “I know. But she may need it more than I. Promise me you’ll give it to her?”

I am dumbstruck, I don’t know what to say. The three seals of the heavens must be worn by the Arch Angelus at all times if the power of peace is to remain undisturbed. Now Thorus removes his and asks me to redistribute the balance. *Has the world run mad? Has he?*

“I, I,” I flounder, not wanting to give my assent.

He steps closer to me, taking my hand in his.

“You must,” he says, his gaze insistent, “I cannot leave until you swear you will.”

I look at him and I know he is serious, he will have me swear. Reluctantly I nod, closing my palm around the seal.

“Thank you Ganor. Of everyone I know I can rely on you,” he says, patting me on the shoulder and turning to leave my room.

“Wait,” I say, calling after him. He stops, turning around to face me, his handsome features now a little more relaxed now he has my word I will protect her, though I can tell the worry is still there, lurking beneath the surface.

“Yes?”

“What happens now? What should we do?”

He shrugs, his broad shoulders heaving. “I wish I knew. I have sent my men to the Fields of the Nephilum to consult the Oricus, perhaps she will be able to tell me what Lucian is planning. Until then we must all wait and pray for peace.”

I nod, a small trickle of fear spreading slowly down the back of my neck.

“For peace,” I murmur as he smiles at me thinly, the gesture not quite meeting his worried eyes. I stand there still watching as he turns away from me, watching his leather greatcoat swoosh in a semi-circle around his broad frame as he strides from my room. I stand there as the door shuts behind him, attempting to quiet my worst fears, trying to quell the nagging sense of dread that bubbles up in the pit of my stomach and threatens to overwhelm me.

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I am walking past Chrysler’s chambers on my way to give her the seal when I hear raised voices coming from inside. I recognize them for how could I not know them, they are as familiar to me as my own?

“I will not do what you are asking Lucian, you cannot make me do this.” I hear Chrysler’s voice through the bedroom door and move closer to press my head against it. Her tone concerns me, she sounds unusually distressed, of the three of them typically she is the calmest, normally so perfectly in control.

“You do not love me then?” Lucian, sounding as petulant as he always when he does not get his way, when his pride has been scorned.

“You know I love you deeply. You know the times we have shared. But I will *not* do this to him,” she says and I hear the determination in her voice, underneath the fear.

“You are loyal to him still? Even though he would defend the Kingdom before he would defend your honour?” I can picture the sneer that must be decorating Lucian’s handsome face in my mind, even though I cannot see his face.

“Thorus is a noble man,” Chrysler says, insistent. “I will not betray him.”

“I have worshipped you for centuries. I will worship you for centuries more. Is my love not enough for you?” He sounds bitter. He is bitter. The thing about Lucian is underneath it all he’s a hopeless romantic.

“I love you Lucian. I do. But I do not want to usurp him, it is not right. Can we not share power peacefully as we have done for centuries?”

*Yes can we not?* I hold my breath.

“I do not want to share power anymore. I do not want to share anything anymore. And I am sick of the moony eyes you make at him every time he returns from battle. Anyone would think he was a hero or something.”

“He is a hero. He defends our kingdom, he keeps us all safe.” *Uh oh.* I hear a crash as something heavy hits the wall, followed by a shattering sound as whatever it was splinters into many pieces. It’s safe to assume whatever Lucian was holding he isn’t holding it anymore.

“Lucian please, calm down,” she says, and I hear her move, as if she is trying to placate him.

“Keeps us safe? What am I then, bloody decoration?” He’s enraged, I can hear it in his voice, it’s never good when Lucian’s angry. Rash, unpredictable, prideful Lucian, his love for Chrysler is as big as the Kingdom and just as liable to become spoiled.

“No, but your strength is not in your protection my love. You are our magician, our wise clever ambassador, our vengeful Lord when there are wrongs to right,” she says soothingly. My clever little Chrysler, if anyone can soothe Lucian’s fragile ego it will be her. Nobody knows how to get under his skin quite like she does.

“I can protect you. You don’t need him,” Lucian says, and I can tell by his tone he’s not quite mollified.

“We work so much better the three of us. It was always supposed to be this way. You have no reason to be jealous of him,” she says, her voice firm, steadier now. I brace myself; I know what’s coming next even if she doesn’t. Chrysler might be the woman that haunts his every waking thought but you never tell a vengeful angel who’s stuffed so full of pride it seeps from his every pore that he’s jealous of another man. *Especially not another man who’s been his rival for millennia in everything from love to war.*

“Jealous. Why would I be jealous? I can command Kingdoms. I do not need him. You are either with me or not, you whisper pretty words in my ear when you’re in my bed Chrysler but whose do you pine for afterward?”

I wince at the accusation. There is probably some truth in it though it is not quite as Lucian’s twisted mind imagines. Chrysler would never betray Lucian but then, on some level, he probably knows that. In fact that’s possibly what enrages him so, the fact that he can possess her carnally, consume her even but yet there is a part of her heart that will always belong to Thorus. She loves them both. She’s never been able to choose. *That’s her weakness.*

“Lucian I am faithful to you. You know I am. I have *always* been faithful to you.” She’s pleading now, her voice conciliatory rather than stern.

“Then support me. It is time, I tire of this Kingdom the way it is. The same old battles, the same tiresome squabbles and still nothing ever really gets done. Things need to change and *I’m* going to change them,” he says.

“But why do you need to overthrow him? Can’t you just work together? Can’t we all work together? Thorus only desires peace,” she says. Ouch. Another mis-step.

“Peace? He is weak then for I will make this Kingdom great again, I will change the universe. Is that something you can admire Chrysler? Or would you prefer we all sit around and make Calamus flower chains in peace,” he says, emphasizing the last word sarcastically.

I hear him cross the room and instinctively I step back from the door but he does not open it. I should leave but I want to hear the end of the conversation. I need to know what Lucian is planning if I am to tell Thorus, if I am to defend the Kingdom, if I am to protect her.

“Sooner or later you will have to choose,” I hear him say. “You will have to choose if the man you allow into your bed every night is the man you will back on the battle field. And if I were you,” he says, “I’d stake my chances on the man who aims for greatness over mere peace.”

I hear him turn the knob and don’t hang around, turning quickly on my heel and fleeing up the empty passageway to the safety of my chambers instead.

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They come for me in the early hours of the dawn, knock on my door when I am sleeping, rousing me and dragging me from the comfort of my bed. They strip me of my blue Robe of Office and throw me in a cell, a bare sparse room with hardly any light and only a pile of rough straw to sleep on. They find the seal among my possessions when they rifle through my drawers and I curse myself for not having had the presence of mind to secure a better hiding place for it, that I did not have the courage to find a way to carry out my Master’s wish.

When I try to protest, to ask them why they must secure me, they just laugh at me, cuffing me around the head and telling me I must be silent. *Lucian’s men*. This is all Lucian’s doing of course, who else would have orchestrated this? He is run mad with power, bitter in his lust for Chrysler, for lust is surely what it is. He cannot love her, though he thinks he does or how could he do this? How could he drag her and everyone she cares for to the edge of hell itself?

I crouch on the floor, a rough, scratchy blanket thrown to me by one of the guards my only warmth, and huddle there, icy cold fingers of dread snaking down my spine. I have failed Thorus and I have failed her too. There is nothing I can do now. Now I must wait, wait and hope that whatever love Lucian has for her will keep her safe, that he will not ruin us all.

As the first fingers of the day creep through the bars of my cell they come for me again, hauling me roughly to my feet.

“Your presence is required in the Palladia,” one of the guards, a surly looking dark haired man with hard, glittering light blue eyes tells me, “we must ready you.”

“Where are you taking me?” I twist in his grip, clutching his arm in panic. He chuckles, the sound a hollow brittle laugh, and I feel the fingers of dread creep up my back again.

“Don’t you know? There is to be a glorious battle today and soon everything will change,” he answers, draping a heavy cloth around my shoulders. I look down at the material, it is golden and well spun, brighter than anything I have ever seen before, but it weighs upon my shoulders like the weight of a thousand souls.

“These are Lucian’s orders? He wishes to wage war?”

“Who else would we serve but our Master, the one true King,” the guard says, smirking and ushering me through the open door of the cell. As I step outside into the corridor I sense the anticipation everywhere, see the fear visible in the eyes of those who have long dreaded this

day. Lucian has never been known for his even temper but none of us imagined it would come to this.

“I must talk with Lucian,” I say, looking at the Guards who stand gathered around outside my cell in a semi-circle, waiting to escort me. “Let me talk with him. He must not do this.”

“He will see no one.” I turn to see a young looking man with cool grey eyes and hair the color of burnished flame addressing me.

“He cannot wage war,” I say, “you must listen to me, you must let me stop him before the peace of the whole Kingdom is threatened.”

The guards erupt in laughter, openly sneering at my desperation as they regard me.

“Poor fool,” another of them, a squat, brown skinned man with curly hair says, “he still wishes to serve the other one. To save him from certain defeat.”

I feel panic clutch at my chest, *Thorus, they mean Thorus.*

“Where is Thorus?”

“Readying himself for battle. Soon it will be done.” The blonde one speaks again.

“Thorus agrees to this?” I look at them incredulously. How can he agree to go into certain exile? *Or worse?* He must know he cannot win without the seal.

I look from guard to guard helplessly but I see no mercy in their faces, only the cruel hardness of men who have already decided how things shall be.

“Now you see who you truly serve. Your noble Thorus has agreed to endanger your position. Perhaps you have been foolish to pledge your loyalty to him. Perhaps if you beg him on your knees, Lucian will forgive you,” the brown skinned man says, shoving me hard in the gut. I wince, winded, but it is not the pain that bothers me. *Why would Thorus agree to this?*

“I do not believe it. Thorus would never give his word,” I say, protesting.

“He does not have a choice,” the blonde with the cool eyes says, his voice calm, “your great noble Thorus would not give up his Kingdom and so he places you all in danger. You see?”

“Thorus seeks only peace,” I say, “there must be another way.” But even as I speak the words, they ring false in my ears. I know what these men say is true, Thorus is many things, noble, courageous, even pragmatic but he would never willingly desert his people, he would never agree to give up his throne. *Even if it meant endangering her.*

“Chrysler, where have you taken her,” I say, an awful thought coming to me. They snicker again, all of them as they stand around watching me, laugh openly at my distress.

“Oh he enquires as to the Lady,” the dark skinned man, raises an eyebrow as she looks around to the others. The blonde man grins as he steps forward to address me again.

“Do not fret, for as long as she obeys she will come to no harm. She will watch the battle from the Palladia with you and then when it is over, he will claim her for his own. Then she will be his consort and he will reign over all of us,” the blonde man says, his voice calm, steady, secure in the knowledge of one who knows he is on the winning side.

“Can’t we find peace,” I say, aware of the rising panic in my voice, “is it really too late?”

“We do not want peace. Lucian does not seek peace. He seeks only glory and we will ensure glory is his. And then we shall all receive our glory too.”

I shake my head in disbelief, is that how he has won them? Promised them what they want, riches, power, are men’s loyalties as easily turned as this? I think of my noble Thorus then and shiver. *He does not know what he is up against.*

“How many of you serve him,” I say, “how many in his army?”

“There are 100,000 of us in his service armed and ready to fight. And 600,000 more from all the realms should he need replacements,” the dark skinned man says, smirking, as if he dares me to challenge his words .

*So it is done then. Thorus cannot compete, he does not have 700,000 celestial warriors to fight in his service, he barely has 70,000. How has Lucian done it? What has he promised them?*

The dark skinned man moves closer, an expression of disapproval on his face as he looks at me.

“If you’re smart, you’ll keep your mouth shut because before the sun sets you’ll serve a new Master.”

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I sit in the great palladia, on a silver throne, positioned on a high raised dais overlooking the battlefield as 100,000 of Lucian’s warriors sharpen their swords, adjust their armour and generally prepare for battle. Chrysler sits beside me as she has been ordered too, a frightened look on her flawless face. Neither of us want what is sure to happen soon, neither of us want to speak about the inevitable outcome.

I lift a hand to shield my eyes from the blazing light of the sun and squint across the battlefield. I can see Thorus striding around as he addresses his troops, his noble bearing making him easily identifiable anywhere. I feel fear clutch my heart when I see there cannot be more than 30,000 men in his service.

“Why does Thorus not have more men,” I say, turning to Chrysler and looking at her, trying not to let my voice betray my fear.

She fixes me with a matter of fact stare.

“It is easier it seems to promise men great reward and immortality if they will only abandon their principles and fight for one man’s vanity than it is to convince them to die for a noble cause.” Her tone is flat as she speaks, her voice heavy with the resignation of one who has reconciled themselves to some awful certainty of fate.

I look at the two sides of the battlefield again and shudder. It *is* inevitable, the battle must be already decided before it has even begun. Even with the seal protecting him, Thorus would have his work cut out. He is a master warrior, brave and strong, and no one can best him with a sword, nor compare with his courage but Thorus is just one man, albeit a divine one. Even he cannot hold off 700,000 of Lucian’s men.

“Is nobility really such a lost cause for them to fight for, M’Lady?”

“I think we would be unwise to discount the greed that lies within men’s hearts. Lucian certainly has not,” she says, pursing her lips.

“You cannot love him still,” I say, shaking my head, “not after this.

She sighs, and for a moment, she looks every inch of her 1000 years.

“Even after all this I will always have a place in my heart for Lucian. How can I not, he has loved me for centuries? But I will never forgive him for this day, I will not forgive him for bringing us to this.”

I nod, turning my attention back to the battlefield, my stomach sick with misery. From the left, Lucian’s side, I see a herald atop a white horse canter into the centre of the battlefield. He carries a golden horn, which he raises to his lips and as he does so I see he is joined by another herald, this one riding in from the right hand side, clasping a bronze trumpet and sitting astride a great chestnut steed.

“It begins then,” I say, turning to Chrysler, keeping an eye on the heralds as they sound the horns, a great trumpeting blare that signifies the commencement of the battle.

She nods, saying nothing in reply, though I notice her hands clasped tightly together, the white of her knuckles and the tight set of her jaw the only things revealing the tension she must be feeling in this moment.

20,000 of Lucian’s riders come charging down the field with an almighty roar, swinging swords freshly sharpened at Thorus’s men, their horse’s hooves thunderous. I watch, my heart in my throat as they are met bravely by Thorus’s expert swordsmen, some of Lucian’s army cut down almost immediately, others ploughing through the front line that met them head on.

“Thorus has trained his men expertly,” I say, clutching at a vein of hope however small, “perhaps it will be alright after all. Look how many are still standing.”

It is true, after the initial impact it is clear more of Thorus’s army are still on their horses than Lucian’s are.

“It does not matter. In fact it makes it worse, since Lucian will take pleasure in drawing his victory out slowly,” she says, her eyes never leaving the battlefield as she speaks.

“But don’t you think there could be a possibility? Thorus has spent his entire life as a warrior, he is far more skilled with a sword than Lucian is,” I say, allowing the prospect to imbue my speech with hope, if only for a moment.

Chrysler just shakes her head, with the sagacity of one who knows better.

“Lucian has an endless supply of soldiers, it would take a miracle to withstand all of his men,” she says, her tone making the hair on the back of my neck stand up. She is right, of course she is right, it is not possible. Even if Thorus’s men were to withstand, 50,000, 60,000, even 100,000 of Lucian’s men, they cannot withstand 700,000 of them. I do not know what will be left of them by the end of this battle, I cannot bear to contemplate it but something tells me unless there is a miracle I shall be forced to witness it all the same.

There is no miracle. What there is, is a long slow painful drawn out battle where Thorus’s men are systematically hacked through, cut down and butchered until only a few brave warriors remain. Chrysler sits beside me through the whole thing, still as a statue, uttering not a word and I wonder how she can keep so composed, knowing the inevitable must occur.

“Perhaps if Thorus begs for Lucian’s forgiveness he will spare him,” I say, feeling a responsibility to give some comfort to her, even though I know the words I speak are a lie. We both know Thorus is far too proud a man to beg forgiveness for a cause he would defend with his dying breath. Not that he will die; he is immortal. He will suffer a fate worse than that.

“He will not Ganor. All is lost,” she says, her tone hopeless, even though she still sits upon the dais as stiffly and as regally as a Queen. Anyone watching would never know she is breaking inside. She reaches over and pats my thigh, the action stirring my emotions and I find the tears welling up in my eyes.

“Take heart,” I say, “I am here. And Lucian would never hurt you.”

She looks at me then, and I shrink back from her, her rage visible beneath the perfect mask.

“You must prepare yourself Ganor,” she says, “for I will not forgive him this. And I do not know what he may do when he learns of it.”

“I will keep you safe,” I say to her, “I promised Thorus I would keep you safe and I will see to it no harm comes to you.”

She does not reply, merely slips her little hand in mine and I close my fingers protectively around her. Chrysler is a Queen, a noble Goddess but in this moment she is as vulnerable as a little girl. Not that I blame her. The world as we know it has come to an end, everything must change now.

“Concede.” We look down at the battlefield to see one of Lucian’s men, astride a white hunter, booming the order out of a silver horn across to the remaining line of Thorus’s depleted army.

I look to Thorus men, perhaps if they put down their weapons now, even now, then somehow it can stop here, without any more blood being shed. But even as I watch Thorus’s warriors brace themselves for the end, even as I see by the proud set of their profiles that the last thing they intend to do is concede, I know that cannot happen.

Lucian would be a fool if he allowed Thorus to go free now, for how could he sleep at night? He has overthrown the peace of the Kingdom, invoked the sacred rule of balance, and he cannot stop now for what else could Thorus do but try and avenge him? Yet, he cannot kill him either, only the Unseen themselves have that power. There is only one way he can rid himself of Thorus; a fate far more terrible than death, at least for a celestial being.

20,000 of Lucian’s men ride hard towards the last lone survivors on the opposite side of the battlefield, their steed’s hooves bringing up the dust and mud of the ground as they gallop full force into the ragged looking line.

I wince at the deafening clash of swords, the whinnying of horses and the cries of men ringing around the Palladia as I watch in awe at the last of Thorus’s men fighting back. Even now they do not lose their courage even though less than 1,000 of them remain. *It will not be long now. It cannot be long now.*

It is not long, though Thorus’s men stand firm till the last, each one of them cut down in their prime, each one of them slashed to ribbons by Lucian’s relentless swordsmen. And then there is only Thorus, left, a lone figure astride his horse, still with the proud bearing of one conscious he is carrying the flag of righteousness even to the bitter end. His punishment will be harsh, there is no chance Lucian will spare him now. I look at Chrysler, her usually sunkissed complexion abnormally ashen and I feel myself pale, frozen with fear as we watch two of Lucian’s riders advance towards Thorus.

“Will he go quietly you think?” I look at her, praying she will nod and say yes but she just shakes her head slowly, and my heart sinks.

“He will never stop fighting for what he believes is right,” she says, her voice sounding oddly calm, as if she is in a trance, as if she cannot believe what is happening. I do not blame her; I cannot quite believe what is happening myself.

We watch, horrified as Lucian’s men reach Thorus and stop before him. One of them says something to him and he shakes his head, raising his sword. The two riders look at one another and then over their shoulders at the line of men at their back. There is only Thorus now, it will be over very soon.

They swing at him but Thorus is too quick, his sword flashing and slicing through the air. He must catch one of them hard as Lucian’s fighter topples from his horse, clutching at his side in agony, his great black stallion rearing up in surprise. The other of Lucian’s men lunges for

Thorus but misses too and for a moment, for a brief second I feel a tiny flash of hope surge through me again. Then I hear them, hundreds of hooves cantering down the field apace, as they ride towards him and I know that truly, all is lost.

They pull Thorus from his horse and take him by the arms, dragging him through the scattered bodies, though the blood the mud and dirt. Still his head is held high, still he is not broken. The crowd gathered here today, forced to endure this spectacle may have seen a Kingdom fall but they have learned one thing at least, nothing can break this man, nothing ever will.

I clutch Chrysler's arm, steadying her but she is as still as the mountains of Calcius stone that surround the Palladia, their craggy peaks soaring into the never ending azure of the sky above us.

Then we see him, Lucian, riding through the ranks of his men, his jet black hair streaming out behind him as he gallops forward atop his white charger. He is clad entirely in cloth of gold, from his finely made tunic to his gleaming spurs, his glorious golden wings streaming out behind him and he cuts a striking figure indeed, his beauty otherworldly and blinding even from where I sit.

Lucian the Lightbringer. *The most magnificent of all. The most deadly.*

In his hand Lucian carries a golden trumpet and he lifts it to his mouth, smiling as his horse rears to a halt in front of the men who hold Thorus. Lucian looks down at his captive, with the slow easy smile of one who has secured a sure victory writ large all over his handsome face.

"Do you concede now noble warrior? Do you admit defeat, in front of all these people?" Lucian gestures widely around at the assembled Palladia as he speaks through the horn's mouthpiece. He is basking in his glory, in what he imagines to be Thorus's humiliation but as I look at the gathered faces I see only two emotions.

Fear, for they are frightened of course, Lucian and his army have the ability to instil obedience in them, but I see something else too, respect, not for Lucian as he would like to imagine but for Thorus. They see what I see, that even now Thorus will not bow his head, that they will have to force him to his knees, for he would rather die a thousand deaths than concede defeat.

But he will not die, he cannot die. He is an Arch Angelus, he has been entrusted as a Guardian of the ancient gateways. The Unseen made him with drops of their own blood and so only Unseen can destroy him. Yet they will not interfere in this or they would have made their presence known would they not? They will let this battle for dominance play out, they will let Lucian grab the power and disturb the balance and they will let us all be terrorized into obeying him.

*No he cannot kill Thorus. But when Lucian is finished with him he will wish they could.*

“Do you think they will exile him?” Chrysler turns to me, her face still a perfect mask of composure but I can see the concern in her eyes as she tries to assess the situation.

“I do not see how they can just exile him,” I say, “Lucian must know if they do that, he will come back, stage a rebellion, amass loyal men, perhaps this time even win.”

We hold our breath as we watch them, two long rivals facing each other off, one now on his knees, held there by Lucian’s guards and the other victorious, atop his horse. Thorus shakes his head, the gesture defiant, obvious and I see Lucian’s lip curl. He does not like to be disobeyed like this, not in front of so many people.

“You refuse to admit the truth proud warrior? That you are no longer needed to rule this Kingdom?” Lucian’s hand goes to his sword hilt and he unsheaths it, withdrawing his shining blade, the hilt studded with thousands upon thousands of priceless Calash stones, the finest stones, gleaned by hand and applied to the weapon’s handle painstakingly by the best master craftsmen in the Kingdom.

“No – I hear Chrysler call out beside me, her cry piercing the stadium, as she leaps forward, leaning over the balustrade that overlooks the battlefield. I turn to her, utter panic welling in me, as I frantically pull her back by her skirts.

“You must not speak against him M’Lady, it is bad enough already,” I say, urging her to sit down. But my efforts to silence her are too late for Lucian looks up at us and sees the source of the noise, sees the horror written plain all over her face. A terrible expression passes in the green of his eyes then, it is rage and jealousy and anger all mixed into one but then all at once the expression is gone and he smiles. It is a chilling smile, a measured smile, a smile that makes my blood run cold and my bones shiver.

“You see,” he says, speaking through the horn he carries again so we may all hear his voice, rich and resonant as it resounds around the Palladia.

“The hearts of women are weak for Chrysler sees your weakness and she would spare you even now.” Lucian emits a throaty chuckle, looking to his men, who all begin to chuckle too and the laughter slowly spreads throughout the nervous crowd gathered around me, the sound becoming deafening.

I allow myself to breath, perhaps as long as Lucian feels he has presented himself to the crowd as the victor things will not be so bad. Perhaps the punishment will not be as terrible as I initially feared.

“Silence,” Lucian says, holding up a hand, his voice booming above the laughter. Immediately the crowd fall silent, it is eerie how much power he can wield but all through fear, it is that which forges their allegiance.

“Take him to the Shadowlands,” he says, turning to the men who hold Thorus by the arms, “cast him into the great abyss and let the endless void sap him of his strength.”

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