For my readers,

who have shown me so many kinds of love



FALLEN IN LOVE

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

Love Where You Least Expect It



The Valentine of Shelby and Miles

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 clop 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."