

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Days of Blood and Starlight

Written by Laini Taylor

Published by Hodder

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

DAYS *of*
BLOOD
and
STARLIGHT

LAINI TAYLOR

H
HODDER &
STOUGHTON

First published in America in 2012 by Little, Brown and Company
First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Hodder & Stoughton
An Hachette UK company

1

Copyright © Laini Taylor 2012

The right of Laini Taylor to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted
by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher,
nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published
and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons,
living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Hardback ISBN 978 1 444 72267 3
Trade paperback 978 1 444 72268 0
eBook 978 1 444 72269 7

Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Hodder & Stoughton policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products
and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes
are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Hodder & Stoughton Ltd
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.hodder.co.uk



THE GIRL ON THE BRIDGE

Prague, early May. The sky weighed gray over fairy-tale rooftops, and all the world was watching. Satellites had even been tasked to surveil the Charles Bridge, in case the . . . visitors . . . returned. Strange things had happened in this city before, but not this strange. At least, not since video existed to prove it. Or to *milk* it.

“Please tell me you have to pee.”

“What? *No*. No, I do not. Don’t even ask.”

“Oh, come on. I’d do it myself if I could, but I can’t. I’m a girl.”

“I know. Life is so unfair. I’m still not going to pee on Karou’s ex-boyfriend for you.”

“What? I wasn’t even going to ask you to.” In her most reasonable tone, Zuzana explained, “I just want you to pee in a balloon so I can drop it on him.”

“Oh.” Mik pretended to consider this for approximately one and a half seconds. “*No*.”

Zuzana exhaled heavily through her mouth. “Fine. But you know he deserves it.”

The target was standing ten feet in front of them with a full international news crew, giving an interview. It was not his first interview. It was not even his tenth. Zuzana had lost count. What made this one especially irksome was that he was conducting it on the front steps of Karou’s apartment building, which had already gotten quite enough attention from various police and security agencies without the address being splashed on the news for all and sundry.

Kaz was busily making a name for himself as the ex-boyfriend of “the Girl on the Bridge,” as Karou was being called in the wake of the extraordinary melee that had fixed the eyes of the world on Prague.

“Angels,” breathed the reporter, who was young and pretty in the usual catalog-model-meets-assassin way of TV reporters. “Did you have any idea?”

Kaz laughed. Predicting it, Zuzana fake-laughed right along with him. “What, you mean that there really are angels, or that my girlfriend is on their bad side?”

“Ex-girlfriend,” hissed Zuzana.

“Both, I guess,” laughed the reporter.

“No, neither,” admitted Kaz. “But there were always mysteries with Karou.”

“Like what?”

“Well, she was so secretive you wouldn’t believe it. I mean, I don’t even know her nationality, or her last name, if she even has one.”

“And that didn’t bother you?”

“Nah, it was cool. A beautiful, mysterious girl? She kept a knife in her boot, and she could speak all these languages, and she was always drawing monsters in her—”

Zuzana shouted, “Tell about how she threw you through the window!”

Kaz tried to ignore her, but the reporter had heard. “Is it true? Did she hurt you?”

“Well, it wasn’t my favorite thing that’s ever happened to me.” Cue charming laughter. “But I wasn’t hurt. It was my fault, I guess. I scared her. I didn’t mean to, but she’d been in some kind of fight, and she was jumpy. She was bloody all over, and barefoot in the snow.”

“How awful! Did she tell you what happened?”

Again Zuzana shouted. “No! Because she was too busy throwing him through the window!”

“It was a door, actually,” said Kaz, shooting Zuzana a look. He pointed at the glass door behind him. “That door.”

“This one, right here?” The reporter was delighted. She reached out and touched it like it meant something—like the replacement glass of a door once shattered by the flung body of a bad actor was some kind of important symbol to the world.

“Please?” Zuzana asked Mik. “He’s standing right under the balcony.” She had the keys to Karou’s flat, which had come in handy for spiriting her friend’s sketchbooks from the premises before investigators could get their hands on them. Karou had wanted her to live here, but right now, thanks to Kaz, it was too much of a circus. “Look.” Zuzana pointed up. “It’s a straight drop onto his head. And you did drink all that tea—”

“No.”

The reporter leaned in close to Kaz. Conspiratorial. “So. Where is she now?”

“Seriously?” Zuzana muttered. “As if he knows. Like he didn’t tell the last twenty-five reporters because he was saving this excellent secret knowledge just for her?”

On the steps, Kaz shrugged. “We all saw it. She flew away.” He shook his head like he couldn’t believe it, and looked right into the camera. He was so much better-looking than he deserved to be. Kaz made Zuzana wish that beauty were something that could be revoked for bad behavior. “She *flew away*,” he repeated, wide-eyed with fake wonder. He was performing these interviews like a play: the same show again and again, with only minor ad-libs depending on the questions. It was getting really old.

“And you have no idea where she might have gone?”

“No. She was always taking off, disappearing for days. She never said where she went, but she was always exhausted when she came back.”

“Do you think she’ll come back this time?”

“I hope so.” Another soulful gaze into the camera lens. “I miss her, you know?”

Zuzana groaned like she was in pain. “Ohhh, make him shut uuup.”

But Kaz didn’t shut up. Turning back to the reporter, he said, “The only good thing is that I can use it in my work. The longing, the wondering. It brings out a richer performance.” In other words: *Enough about Karou, let’s talk about me.*

The reporter went with it. “So, you’re an actor,” she cooed, and Zuzana couldn’t take it any longer.

“I’m going up,” she told Mik. “You can hoard your bladder tea. I’ll make do.”

“Zuze, what are you . . .” Mik started, but she was already striding off. He followed.

And when, three minutes later, a pink balloon plunged from above to land squarely on Kazimir’s head, he owed Mik a debt of gratitude, because it was not “bladder tea” that burst all over him. It was perfume, several bottles’ worth, mixed with baking soda to turn it into a nice clinging paste. It matted his hair and stung his eyes, and the look on his face was priceless. Zuzana knew this because, though the interview wasn’t live, the network chose to air it.

Over and over.

It was a victory, but it was hollow, because when she tried Karou’s phone—for about the 86,400th time—it went straight to voice mail, and Zuzana knew that it was dead. Her best friend had vanished, possibly to another world, and even repeat viewings of a gasping Kaz crowned in perfume-paste and shreds of pink balloon couldn’t make up for that.

Pee totally would have, though.



ASH AND ANGELS

The sky above Uzbekistan, that night.

The portal was a gash in the air. The wind bled through it in both directions, hissing like breath through teeth, and where the edges shifted, one world's sky revealed another's. Akiva watched the interplay of stars along the cut, preparing himself to cross through. From beyond, the Eretz stars glimmered visible-invisible, visible-invisible, and he did the same. There would be guards on the other side, and he didn't know whether to reveal himself.

What awaited him back in his own world?

If his brother and sister had exposed him for a traitor, the guards would seize him on sight—or try to. Akiva didn't want to believe that Hazael and Liraz could have given him up, but their last looks were sharp in his memory: Liraz's fury at his betrayal, Hazael's quiet revulsion.

He couldn't risk being taken. He was haunted by another last look, sharper and more recent than theirs.

Karou.

Two days ago she had left him behind in Morocco with one backward glance so terrible that he'd almost wished she'd killed him instead. Her grief hadn't even been the worst of it. It was her *hope*, her defiant, misplaced hope that what he'd told her could not be true, when he knew with an absolute purity of hopelessness that it was.

The chimaera were destroyed. Her family was dead.

Because of him.

Akiva's wretchedness was a gnawing thing. It was taking him in bites and he felt every one—every moment the tearing of teeth, the chewing gut misery, the impossible waking-nightmare truth of what he had done. At this moment Karou could be standing ankle deep in the ashes of her people, alone in the black ruin of Loramendi—or worse, she could be with that thing, Razgut, who had led her back to Eretz—and what would happen to her?

He should have followed them. Karou didn't understand. The world she was returning to was not the one from her memories. She would find no help or solace there—only ash and angels. Seraph patrols were thick in the former free holdings, and the only chimaera were in chains, driven north before the lashes of slavers. She would be seen—who could miss her, with her lapis hair and gliding, wingless flight? She would be killed or captured.

Akiva had to find her before someone else did.

Razgut had claimed he knew a portal, and given what he was—one of the Fallen—he probably did. Akiva had tried tracking the pair, without success, and had had no option, ultimately, but to turn and wing his way toward the portal he

himself had rediscovered: the one before him now. In the time he had wasted flying over oceans and mountains, anything might have happened.

He settled on invisibility. The tithe was easy. Magic wasn't free; its cost was *pain*, which Akiva's old injury supplied him in abundance. It was nothing to take it and trade it for the measure of magic he needed to erase himself from the air.

Then he went home.

The shift in the landscape was subtle. The mountains here looked much like the mountains there, though in the human world the lights of Samarkand had glimmered in the distance. Here there was no city, but only a watchtower on a peak, a pair of seraph guards pacing back and forth behind the parapet, and in the sky the true telltale of Eretz: two moons, one bright and the other a phantom moon, barely there.

Nitid, the bright sister, was the chimaera's goddess of nearly everything—except assassins and secret lovers, that is. Those fell to Ellai.

Ellai. Akiva tensed at the sight of her. *I know you, angel*, she might have whispered, for hadn't he lived a month in her temple, drunk from her sacred spring, and even bled into it when the White Wolf almost killed him?

The goddess of assassins has tasted my blood, he thought, and he wondered if she liked it, and wanted more.

Help me to see Karou safe, and you can have every drop.

He flew south and west, fear pulling him like a hook, faster as the sun rose and fear became panic that he would arrive too late. Too late and . . . what? Find her dead? He kept reliving the moment of Madrigal's execution: the *thud* of her head falling and the clat-

ter of her horns stopping it from rolling off the scaffold. And it wasn't Madrigal anymore but Karou in his mind's eye, the same soul in a different body and no horns now to keep her head from rolling, just the improbable blue silk of her hair. And though her eyes were black now instead of brown, they would go dull in the same way, stare again the stare of the dead, and she would be gone. Again. Again and *forever*, because there was no Brimstone now to resurrect her. From now on, death meant death.

If he didn't get there. If he didn't find her.

And finally it was before him: the waste that had been Loramendi, the fortress city of the chimaera. Toppled towers, crushed battlements, charred bones, all of it a shifting field of ash. Even the iron bars that had once overarched it were rent aside as if by the hands of gods.

Akiva felt like he was choking on his own heart. He flew above the ruins, scanning for a flash of blue in the vastness of gray and black that was his own monstrous victory, but there was nothing.

Karou wasn't there.

He searched all day and the next, Loramendi and beyond, wondering furiously where she could have gone and trying not to let the question shift to what might have happened to her. But the possibilities grew darker as the hours passed, and his fears warped in nightmare ways that drew inspiration from every terrible thing he had ever seen and done. Images assaulted him. Again and again he pressed his palms to his eyes to blot them out. Not Karou. She had to be alive.

Akiva simply couldn't face the thought of finding her any other way.