



RAINBOW ROWELL

THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *FANGIRL*

WAYWARD SON



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MACMILLAN

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Prologue

Acknowledgments

*For Rosey and Laddie—
May you know that you're loved,
even when you're lost*

EPILOGUE

Simon Snow did what he came to do.

What they all said he would do someday. He found the big baddie—he found *two*—and he finished them off.

He didn't expect to live through it. And he *hadn't*.

Baz once told him that everything was a story, and that Simon was the hero. They'd been dancing at the time. Touching. Baz was looking at Simon like anything was possible for them now, like love was inevitable.

Everything *was* a story. And Simon *was* the hero. He saved the day. That's when stories end—with everyone looking ahead to “happily ever after.”

This is what happens if you try to hang on after the end. When your time has come and passed. When you've done the thing you were meant to do.

The theatre goes dark; the pages go blank.

Everything is a story, and Simon Snow's is over.



1

BAZ

Simon Snow is lying on the sofa.

Simon Snow is pretty much always lying on the sofa these days. With his leathery red wings tucked up behind him like a pillow and a can of cheap cider hanging off his hand.

He used to hold a sword like that. Like it was attached.

It's finally summer in London. I've been studying all day—exams next week; Bunce and I are buried in books. We both pretend that Snow is studying for his exams, too. He hasn't been at uni in weeks, I'd wager. He hasn't been off the sofa unless it's to go down to the corner to buy chips and cider; he ties his tail around his waist and hides his wings under a dreadful tan mackintosh—he looks like Quasimodo. Or a flasher. He looks like three kids in a trench coat pretending to be a complete wanker.

The last time I saw Snow without wings and a tail, Bunce had just got home from a lecture. She cast a concealment spell his way without even thinking about it—and he went feral on her. *“For fuck’s sake, Penny, I’ll tell you if I want your magic!”*

Her magic.

My magic.

It wasn't very long ago that all the magic was *his*.

He was the One, wasn't he? The most. The magic-est.

Bunce and I never leave him alone now if we can help it. We go to lectures, we study. (That's what Bunce and I *do*. That's who we *are*.) But there's

always one of us around—making Snow tea he won't drink, sharing vegetables he won't eat, asking questions he won't answer . . .

I think he hates the sight of us most days.

I think he hates the sight of *me*. Maybe I should take the hint . . .

But Simon Snow has always hated the sight of me—with a few recent and bittersweet exceptions. In a way, that face he makes when I walk in the room (like he's just remembered something awful) is the only thing that still feels familiar.

I've loved him through worse. I've loved him hopelessly . . .

So what's a little less hope?

"I think I'm going to get a curry," I say. "Do you want anything?"

He doesn't turn away from the television.

I try again. "Do you want anything, Snow?"

A month ago, I would have walked to the sofa and touched his shoulder. Three months ago, I would have dropped a kiss on his cheek. Last September, when he and Bunce first moved into this flat, I would have had to pull my mouth away from his to ask the question, and he might not have let me finish.

He shakes his head.

2

SIMON

Maya Angelou said that when someone shows you who they are, you should believe them.

I heard that on an inspirational television show. It came on after *Law & Order*, and I didn't change the channel.

When someone shows you who they are, believe them.

That's what I'm going to say when I break up with Baz.

I'm doing it so that he doesn't have to.

I can tell he wants to end this. I can see it in the way he looks at me. Or in the way he *doesn't* look at me—because if he did, he'd have to face what a tosser he's saddled himself with. What an absolute loser.

Baz is at uni now. Thriving.

And he's as handsome as ever. (*More* handsome than ever. Taller, bolder, with a beard now anytime he wants one. Like adolescence isn't quite done dealing him aces.)

Everything that happened last year . . .

Everything that happened with the Mage and the Hum-drum just made Baz more of who he was meant to be. He avenged his mother. He solved the mystery that's hung over him since he was five. He proved himself as a man and a magician.

He proved himself *right*: The Mage really was evil! And I really was a fraud—"the worst Chosen One who's ever been chosen," just like Baz used to say. He was right about me all along.

When someone shows you who they are, believe them.

When someone fucks up absolutely everything—that person is an absolute fuck-up.

I don't know how to make it any more clear to him. I lie here on the sofa. And I don't have any plans. And I don't have any promise. And this is what I *am*.

Baz fell in love with what I *was*—power and potential unchecked. Nuclear bombs are nothing but potential.

Now I'm what comes after.

Now I'm the three-headed frog. The radioactive fallout.

I think Baz would have broken up with me by now if he didn't feel so sorry for me. (And if he hadn't promised to love me. Magicians get hung up on honour.)

So I'll be the one to do it. I can do it. One time, an orc-upine shot a needle into my shoulder, and I tore it out with my own teeth—I can handle pain.

I just . . .

I wanted a few more nights of this. Of him being here in the room with me, mine on the surface at least.

I'll never have someone like Baz again. There *is* no one like Baz; it's like dating someone out of a legend. He's a heroic vampire, a gifted magician. He's dead handsome. (I used to be someone out of a legend. I was Foretold, you know? I used to be part of the oral tradition.)

I wanted a few more nights of this . . .

But I hate watching Baz suffer. I hate being the reason he suffers.

"Baz," I say. I sit up and set down my can of cider. (Baz hates cider, even the smell of it.)

He's standing at the front door. "Yes?"

I swallow. "When someone shows you who they are—"

Penny bursts in then, jamming Baz's shoulder with the door.

"For Crowley's sake, Bunce!"

"I've got it!" Penny drops her backpack. She's wearing a baggy purple T-shirt, and her dark brown hair is scraped into a messy knot at the top of her

head.

“Got what?” Baz frowns.

“*We*”—she points at Baz and me both—“are going on *holiday!*”

I rub my palms into my eyes. They’re crunchy with sleep, even though I’ve been up for hours. “Not going on holiday,” I mumble.

“To America!” she persists. She pushes my feet off the sofa and sits on the arm, facing me. “To see Agatha!”

Baz barks out a laugh. “Ha! Does Agatha know we’re coming?”

“It’ll be a surprise!” Penny says.

“*Surprise!*” Baz sing-songs. “*It’s your ex-boyfriend and his boyfriend and that girl you never liked very much!*”

“Agatha likes me fine!” Penny sounds offended. “She’s just not an effusive person.”

Baz snorts. “She seemed pretty effusive about getting the fuck out of England and away from magic.”

“I’m worried about her, if you must know. She hasn’t been returning my texts.”

“Because she doesn’t *like* you, Bunce.”

I look up at Penelope. “When did you last hear from Agatha?”

“A few weeks ago. Normally she’d have texted me back by now. Even if it’s just to tell me to leave her alone. And she hasn’t been posting as many photos of Lucy”—Agatha’s little dog—“on Instagram. I think she might be lonely. Depressed.”

“Depressed,” I say.

“So, is this a holiday?” Baz asks. “Or an intervention?” He’s leaning against the door with his arms crossed and his shirtsleeves pushed up. Baz always looks like he’s in an ad for expensive watches. Even when he isn’t wearing one.

“Why can’t it be both?” Penny says. “We’ve always wanted to take a road trip across America.”

Baz tilts his head. “Have we?”

Penny looks at me and smiles. “Simon and I have.”

She's right, we have. And for a moment, I can see it: The three of us, speeding down some abandoned motorway—no, *highway*—in an old convertible. I'm driving. We're all wearing sunglasses. We're listening to the Doors, and Baz is complaining about it. But he's got his shirt unbuttoned to his navel, so I'm not complaining about anything. The sky is huge and blue and full of lens flare. *America . . .*

My wings shudder. That happens now when I'm uncomfortable. "We can't go to America."

Penny kicks me. "Why not?"

"Because I'll never make it through airport security." My tail is mostly squashed beneath me at the moment, but I flick the end up around my thigh to remind her it's there.

"I'll *coat* you with spells," she says.

"I don't want to be coated with spells."

"I've been working on a new one, Simon. It's a thing of beauty—"

"Eight hours on an aeroplane with my wings bunched up . . ."

"The new spell makes them disappear," she grins.

I look up at her, startled. "I don't want them to disappear."

That's a lie; I want them *gone*. I want to be myself again. I want to be free. But . . . I can't. Yet. I can't explain why not. (Even to myself.)

"Temporarily," Penny says. "I think it will just make them go away for a while, until the spell wears off."

"What about this?" I flick my tail again.

"We'll have to use another spell. Or you can tuck it."

America . . .

I never really thought I'd get to America—unless I had to chase the Humdrum there.

"The thing is . . ." Penny bites her bottom lip and wrinkles her nose, like she's both ashamed and excited. "I've already bought the tickets!"

"Penelope!" It's a bad idea. I have *wings*. And no money. And I don't want to get dumped by my boyfriend at the Statue of Liberty. I'd rather get dumped right here, thanks. Also I don't know how to drive. "We can't just—"

She starts singing “Don’t Stop Believing.” Which is hardly the United States’ national anthem, but it was our favourite song in third year, when we first said we were going to take this road trip, someday, when we’d won the war.

Well . . . we have won the war, haven’t we? (Never thought that would mean killing the Mage and sacrificing my own magic, but it’s still, technically, a win.)

Penny is telling me to “*hold on to that feel-layy-anng.*” Baz is watching us from the door.

“If you’ve already bought the tickets . . .” I say.

Penny jumps to her feet on the sofa. “Yes! We’re going on holiday!” She stops and looks at Baz. “Are you in?”

Baz is still looking at me. “If you think I’m letting you traipse around a foreign country by yourselves, especially in this political climate—”

Penelope is jumping again. “America!”

3

PENELOPE

All right, so, yes, things haven't been going so well. And *I* should have been the one to see it coming.

Was *Simon* supposed to see it coming? He doesn't see anything coming! He's taken aback by Tuesdays!

Was Baz supposed to see it coming? All Baz has been able to focus on for the last year is Simon; he can't see past the hearts in his own eyes.

No, it should have been me.

But I was just so happy to be *through* everything. The Humdrum vanquished, the Mage revealed, most of us still alive to talk about it . . . Simon, all in one piece! Simon with extra pieces, yes, but hale and whole, with a future!

Simon Snow, in no grave danger—my most ardent prayer answered.

I just wanted to *enjoy* it.

I wanted to get a flat and go to university, and just be a normal teenager for once, before we left our teens behind us. I didn't want to do anything radical—I didn't fuck off to California and leave my magic wand behind, for example. But I wanted to relax.

Lesson learned: Relaxation is the *most* insidious humdrum.

We all moved to London last year and started uni, as if our world hadn't just been turned upside down and shaken. As if Simon hadn't just been turned inside out.

I mean—he killed *the Mage*, the closest thing he'd ever had to a father. It was an accident, but still.

And the Mage killed Ebb, who wasn't exactly Simon's mother figure, but who was definitely like his weird aunt. Ebb *loved* Simon. She treated him like he was one of her little goats.

So, yes, I knew that Simon had suffered—but I thought winning would make up for it. I thought victory would be enough. That relief would fill in all those holes.

I think Baz believed love would do the trick . . .

It really is a miracle that the two of them ended up together in the end. (Star-cross'd lovers. "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes." The whole shebang.)

But it was a mistake thinking of that as an end. There is no end. Bad things happen, and then they stop, but they keep on wreaking havoc inside of people.

I know perfectly well that going on holiday isn't going to magickally fix everything. (If there were a way to *magickally* fix this, I swear to Stevie I'd have figured it out by now.) But we could all use a change of scenery.

Maybe it'll do Simon good to see himself in a new context. There are no bad memories waiting for him in America. No good ones either—but anything's a win that gets him off the sofa.

4

AGATHA

I never call Penelope back.

Who even *calls* people anyway? Who leaves voicemails?

Penelope Bunce. That's who.

I've told her to text me like a normal person. (I texted her to tell her.)

"But you don't reply to my texts!" she replied.

"Yes, but at least I read them, Penny. When you leave a voicemail, I just recoil in horror."

"Well, then tell me what I need to do to get a reply, Agatha."

I didn't reply to that.

Because there's nothing I could say that would satisfy her.

And because I've left that world behind! Including Penelope!

There's no way to leave the World of Mages behind and hold on to Penelope Bunce—she's the mage-iest mage of them all. She lives and breathes magic. You can't even eat toast without Penelope magickally melting the butter.

One time, I turned my phone off to get a break from her, and it *still* beeped when she sent a text.

"No more magickal texts!" I texted her.

"Agatha!" she texted back. *"Are you coming home for Christmas?"*

I didn't answer. I didn't go home.

My parents were relieved, I think.

The World of Mages slipped into chaos when Simon killed the Mage. (Or when Penelope did. Or Baz. I still don't get how it went down.)