

# FALLEN ANGEL: PURGATORY

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*For Sarah, and all those who said I could do it.  
Also, for everyone who thought I couldn't.*





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I woke up in Hell. Again. As I've done every morning for far too long, I stretched, yawned, rolled out of bed and stumbled to the mirror. Yep, there I was, staring right back at me. I continued my routine.

Bloodshot eyes. Check. Two days' stubble. Check. Memory of last night. Missing. Hmm. Nothing surprising there. All seemed well, or at least as well as it ever got, so I stumbled off to the bathroom in search of pain relief. I have to tell you here that, despite the way it sounds, I don't actually have a drinking problem. I know, I know. You've heard it a hundred times, "I'm not an addict. I can quit whenever I want." Thing is, in my case, it's true. I can quit. I've done it before, and gone years without a drink. Then things get on top of me again, and I find temporary solace in the bottle.

I suppose I should mention here that I'm immortal. When I say "years", it can mean one, ten, or a couple of hundred. Hmm. Maybe I should have prepared you for that a little better. Tell you what. Forget I said anything. I'm just some scruffy looking thirty-something guy who may or may not have a drinking problem.

Oh, I should probably introduce myself. Cassiel's the name. Cassiel Malcolm. Was Malachim, but it's a bit of a mouthful, frankly, so I changed it. Also, it led to a few too many questions. I wish it were that easy to change other things... Anyway, I suppose I should get on with my story.

So. There I was, rummaging through the medicine cabinet in my tiny little two-roomed 'apartment' when I heard a knock on my door. It was a quiet little knock, like the person on the other side was hoping whoever was home wouldn't hear, and they could get on with their life while honestly saying "I tried". Well, I heard it, and it worried me. I should point out here that I don't have what you might call a social circle. Not even a social dot, really. I have no family, few friends, no job, and according to Government records, I don't exist. I do have all the necessary documents, of course, just in case I ever need them, but generally speaking the Government doesn't bother me and I don't bother them.

My building technically doesn't exist either. The other tenants were homeless people who enjoyed having a roof over their heads and no hassles from law enforcement. No hookers or dealers though. I made myself quite clear on that one. Anyone caught flouting the rules was politely asked to leave. I never had to ask twice. You might say I've gone to great lengths to ensure a peaceful existence and to avoid being noticed. You'd be right. My point being, almost no-one knew where I was, so why was someone *knocking on my door?*

I unlatched the bolt quietly, squinting through the peephole. There was definitely someone there. Looked like

a male, about 180 cm tall, late forties, heavily built. Hmm. Curious. A slow, deep breath later I yanked the door open.

“What?”

The ‘6-foot tall 40-something solid guy’ turned out to be a five-foot-eight woman who most certainly was not heavily built, and looked a good fifteen years shy of forty. She had long, wavy brown hair that hung past her shoulders, vivid blue eyes, and a figure that made me wish I’d at least put clothes on before I answered the door. I made a mental note to clean the peephole.

“Umm, Cassiel?” She asked the question in such a way as to make it obvious she hoped I’d say no. I had to disappoint.

“Yes.” Suave, aren’t I.

I noticed that her eyes seemed not to focus on me, but rather at some distant point over my shoulder. Actually, they seemed to flick from right to left and back again. I was glad in a way, as Little Cassiel had woken up and appeared to be taking an interest in the conversation, or at least in our visitor.

“I’m Angela. Angela Edgecombe. Um, may I come in?”

This was one of those ‘adult movie’ moments – you know, the kind where an impossibly endowed housewife doesn’t have the money to pay for the pizza, so she offers to pay the also-impossibly-endowed delivery guy in ‘other ways’. I had never before had a woman ask if she could come to my place, especially not a woman as attractive as this one. Little Cassiel was busily sending his opinion to my

brain, but unlike the majority of males on this planet, his vote did not override my common sense.

“Ah, now’s not the best time,” I replied. “If I had a maid, it would be her day off.”

“Please,” she said. Were those tears in her eyes? “It’s important.”

I shrugged. “I’m sorry, but I don’t know you from Adam, and I have no idea what an attractive woman such as yourself would find important enough to cause her to wander into the house of a total stranger.” And I had no intention of finding out.

“Okay.” She spoke so quietly that I almost didn’t hear her. She sniffed a little, then began to turn away. Just then, my cell-phone rang. I know, I don’t have many friends, so why do I need a phone? We live in the digital age, remember? Everyone has a cell. Also, how else am I supposed to order pizza?

I hesitated, unable to decide what to do next. The phone trilled again – the not-so-dulcet strains of ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’ as butchered by a blind, tone-deaf, one-handed keyboardist. “Come in,” I said. I didn’t wait to see what Angela would do; I bolted back inside and tried frantically to locate the phone before whoever it was hung up, while simultaneously trying to throw some clothes on. I was lucky – the phone happened to be buried under my clothes, so I was able to accomplish both things at once.

I slid the phone up. “Speak.”

The voice on the other end sounded like a prank-calling pre-teen. I knew who it was immediately.

“Hey. It’s me.”

“Yeah.”

‘Me’ was Demid E’mon. Six feet six of ebony-skinned, muscle bound body, and a less-than-forgiving nature. He was the kind of man you prayed you never met in a darkened alley at night. Until he spoke. Then you just prayed he didn’t hear you laughing. I wasn’t kidding about his nature. He once beat seven bikers to within an inch of their lives when one of them made a disparaging comment about his voice. His name kind of gives it away, if you think about it. It’s funny, most of us keep some kind of link with our history, almost as if we’re afraid to strike out and forge new identities for ourselves.

“Is she there yet?” Demid asked.

“Who?”

“Angela.”

I turned around. Angela had indeed come in, and was trying to sit on my sole chair by resting the absolute minimum of her body on it. Her eyes were flicking around the room, taking in the lack of personal items and the abundance of chaos.

“Yes.”

“Good. You need to listen to her. Call me when you’ve heard what she has to say.”

“Will do.”

I hung up, strode over to the door and closed it, then turned back to my guest.

“That was Demid,” I said. “He said you have something to tell me?”

Angela straightened up and looked me in the eyes. I swear I felt a jolt of electricity when she did, something I haven't known since Marta.

"My father's missing." She said. "He went out to the store ten days ago, and never came back."

I shrugged. "So? That's the kind of thing the police should be involved in, not me."

"They can't help." She slumped then, her strength seeming to leave her in one quick rush. "He was... he... he was like you."

"Like me? What do you mean?" Despite myself, I was interested. It wasn't like Demid to send random women to my place, or to do anything nice for someone he wasn't intimately familiar with. For him to do so must have meant that whatever Angela's story was, it was big.

She pointed one long, delicately tapered finger at me. I noticed that her nail-polish was slightly chipped, and the nail itself was raggedy, as if it had been chewed. The others bore the same scars.

"He had a tattoo the same as yours."

That was a shock. My 'tattoo', a pair of full-sized swan-like wings on my back, wasn't something that I made public. I suppose it could be called a mistake I made in my youth, although that's not really doing the story justice. It's also not really a tattoo; it was the mark given to me long ago when I Fell. Demid has a similar one – a pair of black bat-wings. He Fell too, but not from the same place as me. For Angela's father to have the same mark as me meant that we had a similar history. Not enough to usually convince me to assist a stranger, but something about

Angela made me think twice about telling her I wouldn't help.

“What was his name?”

Angela told me. When she did, I was glad I hadn't asked her to leave. I also wished that I owned more than one chair. I needed to sit down, to do something to take the edge off the news. I settled for grabbing the nearest bottle of JD, which was conveniently positioned on the floor near the bed, where I'd dumped it the night before. I unscrewed the cap and took a long pull before speaking again. Angela just waited, hands bunched together in her lap, fingers entwined.

“Jeepers. Your dad was Michael?”

She nodded. Michael. One of my oldest friends, and I hadn't even known he was here, let alone that he had a family. I suppose it's not actually too surprising, given that most of us like to keep to ourselves, but still. That was a piece of news I never thought I'd hear.

I sat on the edge of the bed, wincing at the squeaks of the ancient springs. In a voice I hardly recognized as mine, I asked her to tell me everything. She did, but it wasn't really much more than she'd already said. She lived with her dad in a suburb not dissimilar to mine, in a once-prosperous neighborhood on the other side of town. Mom had died a few years ago. Michael made a living doing handy work for people in the neighborhood, and Angela worked at a homeless shelter. It was a peaceful, fulfilling life for both of them, apparently. Then, ten days ago, Michael had gone out to pick up some groceries, and had simply vanished.

Angela hadn't been able to go to the police because her dad, like me, didn't officially exist, and she was bright enough to realize that the cops would ask her more questions than she'd be able to answer. She'd waited for a week, trying to act normally, then broken into Michael's private office. Inside, she'd found Demid's phone number, written on the back of an old family photograph. It took three more days of not having any other idea of what to do before she'd called him, and he'd passed her on to me.

I needed another drink. I unscrewed the lid again, raised it to my lips, then remembered there was a lady present.

"Want some?" I asked.

Angela shook her head. Her hair, which had looked so lustrous earlier, now revealed itself to be greasy and tangled. She'd obviously forgotten how to take care of herself. I finished my drink, and the bottle, and just sat for a moment, enjoying the warming glow of the alcohol sliding down my gullet.

"Jeepers."

"You said that already. What I want to know now is, can you help me? And what's your connection to my dad?"

I thought for a moment before replying. Not easy, really, with the alcohol and endorphins rushing around my body like roaches on crack.

"I can help you," I said. "Whatever happened, we'll get to the bottom of it. As for my connection to your dad, well, he was one of my oldest friends."

This didn't placate her.

“That’s not an answer. I mean, if you and he were so close, how come he never mentioned you my whole life? When did you meet – you’re not that much older than me? None of this makes any sense.”

I could see that she was close to losing it, so I did what felt right. I leaned closer, rested a hand on hers and looking her in the eye. Zap! There was that lightning again.

“It doesn’t matter right now,” I told her. “I promise I’ll tell you everything later, but right now we need to find Michael.”

She shuddered slightly, then sighed.

“Okay.”

And that was that. I took a few minutes to shower and dress, and when I emerged from the bathroom, it was to an apartment that looked as if a team of maids had just spent five hours giving the place the works. I could actually see the floor again, and my Leaning Tower of Pizza Boxes had been compacted, tied together, and placed at the door. She’d even tidied my bookshelf.

“Wow.” It was all I could think of to say. Angela shrugged, and actually blushed a little too. The moment dragged on, and before it got too awkward I gestured to the door.

“Let’s go.”

As we left the apartment, I made sure I locked the door behind me. Can’t be too careful in a neighborhood like this. We descended the stairs, and I called Demid.

“Don’t go anywhere.” I said when he answered. “We’ll be there soon.”