



# ANGELS WOULD FALL

+ Geonn Cannon +

ANGELS  
WOULD  
FALL

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And who by brave assent, who by accident,  
Who in solitude, who in this mirror,  
Who by his lady's command, who by his own hand,  
Who in mortal chains, who in power,  
And who shall I say is calling?

— Leonard Cohen, *Who by Fire*

12:32 am

The music is more of a blur than sound now, a dull thumping behind the eyes. It helps keep the fog in focus, makes her able to tell when she needs a new drink. She taps the bar with two fingers and she can tell that the bartender is thinking about refusing. She slurs something, maybe promising to make it her last drink of the evening, and the bartender finally moves to fill her glass. "Good man," she thinks she says as he takes her mug and holds it under the tap.

She presses the heel of her hand against her eye, trying to drown out all the voices all around her. Why are there so many people in her dive? God, is the place so depressingly bottom-of-the-barrel that it was hip? God save them all.

The beer is magically in front of her again, and she takes another drink. Some asshole laughs across the room and she wants to throw the mug at him. The only reason she doesn't is because she knows she'll miss and she doesn't want to be thrown out for destruction of property. She touches the tip of her tongue to her top lip, tastes the foam there, and runs a hand through her hair. It's been a while since she washed it, a longer while since she had an appropriate shower. She exhales through her nostrils and decides to see about crashing at

someone's house. Maybe her partner has a shower she can use.

And then Ray Charles sticks his nose into her heartache.

*"Georgia, Georgia... the whole day through..."*

Just because some jerk feels melancholy, she isn't about to sit through the whole song. She shouts for someone to turn that shit off, but no one complies. The song continues, and she can't help but think about Gillian and her retreat. Running away, across the whole damn country. They kept up with phone calls in the beginning, tried to keep connected. They quickly realized that it was too painful trying to act like nothing had happened, so the calls started to dwindle. It was five days since their last phone call, and she was starting to feel like they would never speak again.

*"Georgia, Georgia, no peace I find. Just an old sweet song keeps Georgia on my mind."*

She spins around on her bar stool and says, "Would someone shut that damn thing off?" When the song continues to play, she pushes away from the bar and stumbles into the crowd. A few people bump into her, but she ignores them, focusing on the bright yellow and red toad squatting in the corner by the pool tables. She puts her beer down on a chair and grabs the jukebox, tries pulling it away from the wall, but it's too heavy.

"Hey, come on now," the bartender calls across the room.

"Just a second," she says. The jukebox stubbornly refuses to move, so she tries the next best thing. She picks up her beer glass and smashes it across the face of the machine. The song continues undisturbed: *"Melodies bring memories that linger in my heart, make me think of Georgia; Why did we ever part?"*

As she bends to pick up a chair, someone grabs her arm and tries to pull her away. “That’s enough. Closing time for you.”

She swings out and her fist connects with a fleshy, doughy jaw. Someone shouts at her and her other arm is pulled back by another well-meaning jerk. She bends her knee, shifting her attacker’s balance, and then throws herself back. She and the man holding her hit the jukebox, and the song finally, blessedly, stops. The light goes out, and the bar is silent except for the throbbing in her head and the angry voices in her head.

Someone grabs her by the scruff of her neck and pulls her forward. She stumbles along under the man’s strength until they reach the front door. He pushes and she stumbles, then his foot meets the middle of her ass and she goes sprawling. She throws out both hands to keep from hitting the pavement and feels the grit digging into her palms. All the violence disturbs the contents of her stomach, and she throws up in the gutter.

“I don’t care who you are,” the bartender says. She looks back and sees him silhouetted by the doorway. “No one acts like that in my bar. Get the hell out of here.”

He turns and shuts the door on her.

She pushes herself up and leans against the wall, making sure the wave of nausea is past before she tries standing. The sign next to the bar’s door shows a bat hanging upside down between the words BAT’S and BELFRY. She stares at the woodcarving for a long time until she feels comfortable standing. She puts a hand against the brick wall to keep from falling and hisses as the brick touches raw, bloody skin.

Finally, still woozy, the world refusing to stay on a single axis, Riley begins the long walk to bed.

06:32 am

Riley had barely managed to fall into a fitful slumber when the door opened. It sounded like a submarine hatch, slamming and echoing through a room much bigger than the one she was actually in. She rolled onto her side and pulled the wafer-thin pillow over her head, burrowing into the warm blanket she had gotten from a nearby locker. “God, leave me alone,” she said, her words muffled and distorted by the beddings.

“What’s that?” Lieutenant Hathaway asked. She pulled the pillow away and tossed it onto the floor. “Did you apologize for your little tirade at the Bat’s Belfry last night? Is that what you were saying?”

“Probably not,” Riley admitted. She covered her eyes with her hand and said, “Could you turn out the lights when you leave?”

Hathaway stood next to the cot. “You’re not on-call, Riley.”

“Plenty of other beds for the other detectives,” Riley said. “Or they can squeeze in next to me if they want. No funny stuff, though.”

“Riley, get up.” Riley grunted and forced herself into a sitting position. Hathaway shook her head. “God, have you looked at yourself lately? You look like shit. How many nights have you spent crawling from one bar to the next and then

coming back here to try sleeping it off?” She sat on the cot next to Riley and said, “Burning yourself at both ends like this is just going to get you burnt out. I’ve had to replace too many people lately. I’m not going to replace you, too. I need my top detective back.”

Riley sighed and leaned forward, her elbows on her knees and her hands covering her face. She wasn’t even sure exactly how long it had been since Gillian left for Georgia. Three weeks? Four? Had she lost an entire month in her pity party? She sighed and pulled her fingers down her face, tugging her eyes and lips down in a parody of melting.

“You’re right,” she said. “Sorry, boss. I’ll pull myself together.”

Hathaway nodded and touched Riley’s knee before standing up. Riley’s hand shot out without thinking, slapping the hand away. Hathaway ignored the blow, and kept her hands to herself. “That’s all I ask. We’ve all been through a bad break-up before. The trick is to just get back up and carry on.”

“Yeah,” Riley said. “Thanks.”

“You feel up to taking an assignment?” Hathaway asked. “I’ve been kind of taking it easy on you and Priest, but people are starting to notice.”

Riley nodded. “Sure.”

“The information is on your desk. Splash some water on your face before you leave, and try to find some mouthwash. You look and smell like a drunk.”

“Thanks,” Riley muttered.

Hathaway went to the door and left Riley alone in the on-call room. The act of sitting on a bed with Hathaway made her tense. Hathaway seemed to have realized the line they crossed

a few months back. Riley didn't know how she felt about their "encounter." She knew she should have reported Hathaway, probably gotten her fired. Or maybe Hathaway would have been safe and Riley would have quietly been reassigned. She didn't know why it didn't affect her any more than it did. She was sure Gillian had a lot to do with her getting through it unscathed.

She finally exhaled and pushed herself up off the cot. The adjacent locker room was dimly lit for the start of the day, several lockers standing open to announce they were available. Riley went to the locker she'd appropriated for herself and stripped out of her clothes. She took a rumpled maroon blouse from the locker, one of her last clean shirts, and put it on, tucking it into a pair of gray trousers.

At the sink, Riley turned on the hot water and finally dared to look at her reflection in the mirror. Hathaway's comment had been kind; what little sleep she managed to get was disrupted by dreams and nightmares, not to mention the fact that she passed out more than she fell asleep. Hardly restful. The on-call room was a terrible place to try and get any meaningful rest. People constantly came in and out, phones rang outside in the office all night long, and very few cops bothered to lower their voices when they came back from a late call.

She needed a real place to sleep, but her apartment was out of the question. She doubted the landlord would even allow her back in the building after a demon turned her bed into a chunk of charcoal. And Gillian's apartment... she just couldn't go back there and sleep alone. She had tried and she had failed. The on-call room was better than nothing, and she had no other options.

Although...

Riley splashed her face with water, finger-combed her hair, and left the locker room. It was a bad idea. A terrible idea. An idea that promised to cause nothing but strife and discord. But it would be better than nothing. In the bullpen, she grabbed the first cop she saw and said, "Is Hathaway in her office?"

"You just missed her. I think she's headed out." Riley thanked him and changed course for the stairs.

The main lobby of the four-ten precinct was the most impressive part of the entire building; mainly because it was the only place the majority of civilians would ever have to see. A long desk took up the east wall, manned by three or four sergeants depending on the time of day. The desk was backed by three huge arch windows, lit golden by the sunrise every morning. The floor was polished tile broken up by tall columns that were appropriated by bulletin boards and community information.

Riley reached the bottom of the stairs and saw Hathaway pushing through the large double doors onto the steps. "Lieutenant," she called, and hurried across the floor. She stepped out into the morning, the sunlight piercing her hangover like a knitting needle, and she squinted as Hathaway turned on the top step. Riley said, "Boss. Listen, I know it might be an awkward situation, but I was... wondering if I could... stay with you."

The kid in the cargo pants and red sweater was no more out of place than anyone else on the sidewalk, but Riley found her attention drawn to him in the middle of her question. A line appeared between her eyebrows as she watched him stride purposefully up the stairs toward the front doors. She was about to ask Hathaway if there was anything odd about him when he swung pulled the gun from the pocket of his pants.

Riley reached for her shoulder holster, pure instinct causing her to forget that it was still upstairs and she was unarmed. “Gun!” she shouted. She swung her left leg out and around Hathaway, twisting her body to cover as much of Hathaway’s as she could. The stairs were mostly empty except for Riley, Hathaway and the shooter, a few pedestrians on the sidewalk and one detective pulling the door open to go inside. He turned at the sound of Riley’s shout, just as the other man opened fire.

He shot six times, and the pedestrians began screaming with the first explosion. Amid the cacophony, she heard the glass front doors shatter. The sound reminded her of icicles dropping from the eaves outside of her apartment and crashing down to the dumpster in the alley, a deceptively gentle sound of destruction. As soon as the last bullet left the chamber, the kid spun on his heel and ran. Riley took half a heartbeat and turned to see if anyone was hurt.

Hathaway was already on her way down, three ugly roses blooming on the front of her white blouse. Blood spatter marred her throat and cheeks, her skin already pale as she dropped. Hathaway looked down at herself, hands shaking as she realized she had been hit. A uniformed cop suddenly appeared at Riley’s side and she said, “Pressure, on the wounds,” and focused on pursuit.

Riley launched herself toward the street, hitting hard enough to rattle her knees and throw her body forward. She hit the pavement with her hands, pain echoing the night before as her wounds were ripped open again. She didn’t let her brain acknowledge the pain as she scraped her shoes against the pavement, heart pounding as she searched for traction. Then she was up and running.

The shooter had a good half block lead on her, but she wasn't about to let him out of her sight. She felt her hangover slip to one side to make room for adrenaline. She knew she would pay for it later, but that didn't matter at the moment. She pumped her arms and legs, willing her mind to work like a machine. All she had to do was run, and run faster than some punk kid. He looked over his shoulder and Riley tried her best to memorize his features, just in case.

A pain started in her back, a dull irregular pounding that made her worry for her heart. Her face was hot, her breath coming in angry pants between clenched teeth.

The shooter reached out and hooked his fingers around the lip of a trash can, sending it tumbling over in her path. Riley launched herself over it and hit the pavement again, losing another precious second as her shins protested the rough landing. *Three more blocks and he'll be at the el station. He'll get away*, a thought immediately followed by, *The hell he will*.

He knocked over another trash can, but this one was empty. Riley bent at the waist, grabbed the can by the handle, and hurled it. She shouted with exertion as the can left her hand, hitting the sidewalk with a metallic shudder and bouncing toward her prey. She put on another burst of speed as the can slammed into the shooter's back and knocked him off balance. He hit his knees and actually bounced on them, unable to get up immediately.

The few seconds were all Riley needed. She slammed into the shooter from behind, tackling him face-forward onto the pavement. She put a hand on the back of his head, forcing his face against the rough sidewalk as she settled her weight on top of him. "You're under arrest, you prick," she said, every word a painful gasp. Her face burned and she was sweating like mad. She tugged the gun from the biggest pocket on his

calf and tucked it into the back of her belt. When she grabbed the back of her belt, she realized her handcuffs were with her gun. *Way to be prepared, Riley.*

Looking back the way she came, she saw a troop of uniformed cops closing in on her. “Handcuffs!” she called, holding out her hand. A pair of the silver bracelets appeared and she immediately wrenched the kid’s hands back to attach them. “You have the right to remain silent. If you give up that right, the cops whose boss you just shot will delight in beating a confession out of you. Get your ass up.”

She hauled him to his feet and turned him around. His cheek was torn where she’d pressed it against the pavement, beads of blood glistening on the unshaven skin. His lips curled in what was almost a sneer, almost a smile, and he said, “What makes you so sure I was aiming for her, sweetheart?” He winked and let the uniformed cop spin him around, nearly tripping on his feet as he was manhandled back toward the police station.

Riley walked behind them, trying to get her body back under control. She could barely breathe, her heart still thudding painfully against her chest. She was shocked to see the chase had barely lasted three blocks. It felt like they had crossed the entire city.

Riley said, “Around the back, guys. Take him through the back.” The cops changed direction and Riley ran to the congregation of EMTs and cops. The front steps of the station were stained with blood, and cops were already taking care of blockading the scene. Riley had to show her badge to get in, thankfully the one thing she had managed to grab before leaving the lockers, and knelt next to Hathaway. A medic had already cut open Hathaway’s blouse and was applying

pressure to the three wounds. One was in her shoulder, the other two straddling her cleavage.

“Hey, boss,” Riley said. “Looks like you got in the way.”

“Looks like,” Hathaway said.

Someone brushed through the crowd and knelt next to Hathaway’s head. Riley looked up, surprised to see that it was Priest. “What happened?”

“Shooter,” Riley said. “We got him.” She looked down at Hathaway and said, “We got him. You’ll get to toss him in jail for screwing up bathing suit season for you.”

Hathaway smiled and tried to laugh, but it came out as a ragged cough. Blood smeared her lips, and she screwed her eyes shut in pain. “God...”

Priest reached out and brushed away the medic’s hand. He didn’t seem to realize he was being dismissed. Priest spread her fingers and covered the bloody pressure pads on Hathaway’s chest. Riley watched, fascinated, as Hathaway’s expression eased and she swallowed hard. “What are you doing?”

“Buying some time,” Priest said. “Nina, I want you to look at me.”

Hathaway’s eyes opened, but it looked like doing so cost her quite a bit of energy.

“You’re going to be okay.”

“Caitlin?” Hathaway said.

“Yes, it’s me, Nina.”

“You’re beautiful.”

Riley said, “Priest, is there anything I can do?”

“Cover my hands with yours.”

Riley did as she asked and Priest closed her eyes. “Nina, I want you to take care. I want you to focus on getting better. Let the professionals do their job and protect you. Everything will be all right.”

“You have wings...” Hathaway said, her voice faraway as if in a dream.

Riley looked, but Priest’s wings were out of sight.

Priest swallowed and said, “Sometimes, yes. Are you going to fight, Nina?”

“Yeah,” Hathaway said.

Priest held tight for a moment, then withdrew her hands. The medic bent over Hathaway again, oblivious to the interruption in his care. Riley blinked and realized her hangover was no longer haunting the corners of her perception. She licked her lips and stepped back so the EMTs could load Hathaway onto a gurney. Priest said, “Riley, you’re bleeding. Were you hit?”

Riley looked down at herself and saw the blood smeared over her fingers. She turned her hands over to reveal the scrapes from the night before. “It’s nothing. I fell when I was chasing the shooter.”

“Is that all?”

Riley ignored the question and said, “Come on. Let’s go make sure the arresting officer hasn’t broken any of the kid’s bones.”

07:08 am

Riley stood in the bathroom and watched the water spiral around the sink drain. The water was pink with her blood. She washed the wounds on her hands, wincing when she felt the tiny pebbles embedded in the torn flesh. She would have to get someone to pick them out for her. She looked into the mirror and saw that her throat and cheeks were speckled with a fine mist of blood. Lieutenant Hathaway's blood.

She wet a paper towel and carefully brushed away the stains. There were still some marks on her collar, but it would fade in and get lost with the maroon material. As soon as she was back in the building, the adrenaline wore off and all she could think about was watching Hathaway fall. The blood on her blouse, the shocked look in her eyes. And so much blood. Riley looked away from the mirror as if the memory was etched into the glass instead of behind her eyes.

She took her time cleaning up, but she finally knew she had to go back out among the living. She checked to make sure none of Hathaway's blood was in her hair before she tossed the paper towels and went back out into the main room. The bullpen was full of cops, the majority of them gathered around Hathaway's office door in a symbolic show of support. They were quiet, solemn, and Riley wished they would just go on with their day. Hathaway wouldn't want everything to screech to a stop just because she had been hurt.

She saw Priest and made her way over. “She’s going to be pissed when she finds out we’re losing an entire morning because of this shit.”

“Maybe we just won’t tell her.”

Riley smirked and looked toward the stairs. “Where did they take the shooter?”

“I heard Embry saying he was still down in booking. They’re going to print him, photograph him. Hopefully they’ll find out if he has any priors.”

“Let me know when he’s safely locked away.” She clapped her hands and the chatter died down. “Listen up, everybody. I was just with Lieutenant Hathaway downstairs. She was hit bad, but we’ve all seen people get up from things much worse. Don’t start planning her funeral just yet. She’s tough. We’ve just got to have faith that she’ll pull through. Now let’s all just get back to work. Hathaway will kick our asses if we fall behind because of this.”

The crowd began to disperse, and Priest raised an eyebrow. “Nice job. That faith jab didn’t even sound sarcastic.”

Riley raised her voice, addressing the crowd but still looking at Priest. “And if anyone would like to pray, Detective Priest will be happy to lead the group.”

Priest shrugged. “I actually would, you know.”

“You’re not fun,” Riley said. “I’m going to get my hands looked at. Let me know when the shooter is through booking.”

Priest nodded.

Riley looked at the wounds on her palms as she headed downstairs. The skin of her left palm was torn, the skin of the right merely abraded. If the wounds were any worse, she

would have tried to annoy Priest with a stigmata comment. She barely remembered the initial injury, a testament to how drunk she had been, but the wounds were starting to sting. She rode the elevator down to the morgue without thinking, pushing the door open with her shoulder before she realized her mistake.

Dr. Millard Herron, Gillian's replacement, looked up from the latest corpse. He wore green scrubs, his wavy gray hair mostly tucked underneath a surgical cap. His eyes were wide and dark brown. He looked like an owl, the tufts of hair on either side of his head looking like mini-tornadoes. "Detective... Parra?" She nodded. "Good, nice to see you again. How may I help you?"

"I... uh, sorry. The other medical examiner used to... I won't bother you."

"Something wrong with your hands?"

"I hit them on the sidewalk. Scraped them up a bit."

"In pursuit of the ne'er-do-well that shot Lieutenant Hathaway. Ah, yes." He walked around the table and extended both hands to her. It was a moment before Riley shook the Frankenstein image and realized he wanted to see her injuries. She showed him her palms and he said, "Ah, nothing to fret about. I assume the other ME used to tend first aid to your wounds?"

"Yeah, something like that."

Herron shrugged. "Well, I'm not particularly accustomed to living patients, but I will do my best." He pointed to an empty table and said, "Disrobe and lie down."

Riley blinked at him.

He grinned. "A joke. Have a seat. I'll get the gauze."

Riley sat on the edge of the table and watched him walk away. The guy was a little odd, but she knew she would never accept anyone in Gillian's place. She'd never minded the morgue before. She was one of the few cops who didn't bother to smear Vaseline under her nose when she entered to view a body, and she didn't mind hanging out when Gillian was running a bit late. But now that Gillian was gone, the morgue seemed dark and foreboding. She just wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible.

Herron returned and placed the first aid kit next to Riley on the table. "This will be quick."

"I appreciate it."

"No problem, no problem." He washed out the wound, making sure all the little pebbles were gone, then sterilized the wound. Riley hissed and pressed her lips together. He wrapped her hand with gauze so that she looked like a bare-knuckle boxer. He repeated the move on the other hand and said, "A small wound for a great cause. I heard you caught the evil-doer who shot the lovely lieutenant."

"Word travels fast."

"Very good work." He gently patted her hands with his own. "You are good to go, Detective."

"Thanks." She slid off the table and started toward the door.

"Detective." Riley turned and Herron was walking toward her. He held out a CD and said, "This was left on the desk in the office. I assume if you're friends with the previous occupant, you could return it to her."

Riley took the CD and looked at the cover. Riley didn't know how she had missed it when she was packing; she was sure everything was in the box when she took it from the office.

Maybe it fell out when she picked the box up. Or maybe she had been in such a damn hurry to finish the chore, she had gotten sloppy. Whatever the reason, she now had another excuse to make contact with Gillian. She smiled and said, "Thanks, Dr. Herron. I appreciate it."

"My pleasure."

Riley went back to the elevators and looked down at the disc.

*There was shame in Gillian's eyes as she toyed with the leg of her scrubs bottoms. She wore a white T-shirt, her feet bare, and it was all Riley could do not to gather her up and hug her until she felt safe again. The apartment felt barren. Riley sat on the couch, Gillian sitting a few inches to her right. "I just need a few things from the office. Pictures, CDs, that stereo is mine. But I can't bring myself to go... back there."*

*"Ethan Winn is gone," Riley said. She touched Gillian's hand, warm and fine-boned. "He can't hurt you anymore."*

*"Maybe he can't," Gillian said. "But there will be others. That morgue is where I realized I was about to die. It's the place where I made my peace with it. Something... so much more powerful than me chose to let me live, but it could have gone the other way in a heartbeat. I know you understand what that's like, Riley. I know you do. So I hope you understand why you can't ask me to go back there. Not to pack my things, not to work."*

*"I understand. I'll pack your things tomorrow."*

*"Thank you." Gillian leaned in and kissed Riley's lips. Then she slipped off the couch and let her hand fall from Riley's grip. Riley let her hand fall, her fingers closing around the empty space where Gillian had just been.*

Riley brought her hand up and pressed the gauze against her cheeks, letting it soak up her tears as she stepped onto the elevator.

07:20 am

The shooter was transferred from booking to a holding cell. Officer Sam Cooley crossed the bullpen and scanned the crowd. Riley walked up to him and put a hand on his shoulder. "Who are you looking for?"

"You, actually. The suspect demands to speak with you."

Riley kept walking. "We'll talk when his lawyer gets here."

"He doesn't want a lawyer. At least, he hasn't asked for one yet."

Riley stopped and looked toward the holding cells. "Did he ask for the cop who arrested him, or did he ask for me by name?"

"He said 'I want to talk with Detective Parra.'"

"Great," Riley muttered. She could make three guesses what a personal request meant. The shooting might not have been as straightforward as she thought. She sighed and said, "All right. Take him to the interrogation room. The one with the camera, not the two-way mirror."

"Yes, detective."

"Officer, be careful with him. Did you see *Silence of the Lambs*?"

"I read the book."

Riley said, “Impressive. Well, just think of Hannibal in Tennessee. Don’t take your eyes off this prick for a second.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Riley went to her desk and caught Priest’s eye across the room. She motioned her partner over, and Priest weaved through the crowd. “What’s up?”

“I think the shooter works for Marchosias. He asked to see me personally.”

“That can’t be good.”

Riley shook her head. She braced her hands against the desk and closed her eyes. “Look, I would like you to have my back in there...”

“You’ve got it. Whatever you need.”

“No. I meant that’s what I want. But I think Lieutenant Hathaway needs you more. Get to the hospital. Stay with her.”

Priest hesitated. “Riley, I’m *your* guardian angel. I don’t know how much good I can do with—”

“Try, goddamn it,” Riley snapped.

Priest looked like she wanted to argue some more, but she caught the look in Riley’s eye and knew she would lose. “All right. I’ll do what I can.” She put her hand on Riley’s shoulder and said, “Promise me you will stay safe. Just because we know he works for Marchosias, that doesn’t mean we know what he’s capable of.”

“I’ll be careful. Thanks, Caitlin.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll keep you apprised of the situation.”

Riley watched Priest leave the room, then left her desk to visit the interrogation rooms. She saw Cooley and another

officer standing outside of Interrogation Room One, both standing at attention like Buckingham Palace guards. Cooley spotted her and gave a nod. She said, "Is he still cuffed and chained?"

"Yes, ma'am. Ankles chained together, wrists secured to the table."

"Good man." Riley knew she was risking the reputation of overkill, but she doubted any of the cops in the station would call her out over it. The punk shot a cop; whatever Riley wanted to do with him would probably be fair game. She said, "I'm going to let him sit for a while. Don't leave this door unattended even for a second. Get another officer to stand against this wall facing the door."

Cooley nodded and used his radio to call for another officer. Riley went down the hall and slipped into the observation room. The days of standing behind one-way glass weren't quite over, but they were on the way out. The observation room was an appropriated closet, filled with the best recording equipment the department could afford. A petite woman with owl-eye glasses sat in front of the monitors and looked up as Riley entered. She straightened when she recognized who had joined her. "Oh, Detective Parra."

"You're Barrett, right?"

The woman nodded. "Lauren Barrett." She was the technical expert for the station, usually found hunched over grainy security camera footage trying to turn a blob into a face. "They told me they were bringing someone into interrogation, so I thought I would get the cameras up and running."

"Good job," Riley said. The room was kept cool to protect the machines, and Riley always felt the chill as she crossed the

threshold. She stuck her hands under her armpits and looked at the screen.

Both monitors showed the same image; Lieutenant Hathaway's shooter, sitting in the interrogation room. He was shackled and chained, as Cooley promised, and seemed content to sit there as long as necessary. His sneakers were gone, his white socks planted far apart on the floor. His brown hair hung over his forehead to his eyebrows. He looked like a preppie high school senior brought in for drugs.

"Are you... looking for something?" Barrett asked.

"Just wanted to get a feel for him before I went in."

Barrett nodded. "Well, he hasn't moved since the officers brought him in. He just sits there and taps the table with his fingers." She sucked her bottom lip into her mouth and then whispered, "I think he's really creepy."

Riley nodded. "You and me both, kid."

The floor of the interrogation room was carpeted after a suspect tried to beat his brains out on the concrete floor, but that was the only creature comfort. The walls were plain white drywall and offered nothing to draw a suspect's attention.

Riley rolled her shoulders and focused on the kid. She knew he was working with Marchosias, she just wasn't sure of his plan. Had he intended to shoot Hathaway and disappear into the crowd? Was Riley his real target? Or had the plan been to simply cause a commotion and get the cops to bring him inside? Maybe Hathaway was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe they all were in the wrong place.

She sighed and looked at the video equipment. "If I tell you to stop recording, you stop. Got it?"

“That’s not really...” Riley turned to look at her and Barrett pressed her lips together. “Got it.”

Riley nodded and left the observation room. A third officer had appeared and stood in position as she requested. Cooley held out a manila folder and said, “Here’s all the info we managed to dig up on the shooter.”

“Good work, Officer Cooley.”

He nodded, and Riley stepped into the interrogation room.

07:34 am

“Can I get something to eat?”

Riley shut the door, focusing on the front page of the rap sheet. “Leland Stark. Twenty-four years old.” She whistled and sat down, leaving the folder open in front of her. “Wow, you’ve had a lot of attention in your short, miserable life. First arrest at the age of twelve for shoplifting. So you’ve been a criminal for half your existence. Not too shabby.”

“I do what I can,” Stark said. He leaned back in his chair and tried to look as casual as possible with his hands chained to the table in front of him. “Can we talk about you? Please? I would really like to talk about you.”

“It doesn’t work that way,” Riley said. “Sorry to disappoint. You have a lot of really petty stuff on your sheet, Mr. Stark. So where did you suddenly get the balls to go out and shoot a cop?” She held up a finger before he could answer. “No, wait. That’s not the question, is it? The question is why would someone tell *you* to shoot a cop? You’re not that high on the totem pole. I would assume you’re more of a... coffee boy. Is that it? You screwed up someone’s order, so they decided to let you come here and get yourself killed. Get you out of their hair.”

Stark suddenly lunged forward and pounded his fists on the table. He stared at her, breathing so hard that his nostrils flared. He narrowed his eyes at her, and then smiled. “Is that the right response, Detective? You question my manhood, and

I spill my guts to show you just how wrong you are? ‘Why, I’ll show her. I’ll tell her everything I know, and then she’ll believe I’m one of the big boys.’” He leaned back and said, “Sorry, Detective. No go.”

Riley flipped the file closed. “Well, if you’re not going to talk, we’re just wasting our time here. Right? Have fun in holding.” She stood up and went to the door.

“Marchosias.”

Riley stopped with her hand on the knob. She looked at the kid over her shoulder and he raised his eyebrows and spread his hands palm-out. “I’m perfectly willing to speak with you, Detective Parra. I just think it would be so much better to actually converse rather than interrogate. You’ll get information, I’ll get information. It will be so much better for both of us that way. Don’t you agree?”

“You think I give a damn what works for you?” Riley said. She walked back to the table. “You are chained up, locked in a room, in a building full of people who would love five minutes alone with you. You shot someone who wore a badge. It doesn’t matter if they knew her or not, it doesn’t matter if we *liked* her or not. Because every cop knows it could just as easily been them on the ground. Do you think you’re going to get the upper hand because you say a name and act like this is a cakewalk? You’re just going to make me and every other cop in this building pissed off. So take your time. Debate. Think about what you want to tell me. Think about Lieutenant Hathaway, and you better pray she pulls through. I’ll be back when you’re ready to talk.”

She left the room and said, “Nothing and nobody goes in. No water, no food, no anything. I don’t care if he starts picking up the table and throwing himself against the walls. No one goes in until I say so. Clear?”

“Crystal.”

Riley nodded and went into the bullpen. She searched the mess of her desk until she found her Rolodex, thumbing through until she found a number without a name written next to it. She used her cell phone to call, wandering toward the on-call room where she had spent the last dozen nights. After a handful of rings, the person on the other end of the phone picked up. “How much and where?” he said.

“Depends. How much information do you have to give me, Muse?”

“Oh, you know me. I’ve always got the goods. Whatever you need.”

Riley leaned against the wall. “Leland Stark. Young guy. Ever heard of him?”

“You sure? That shit ain’t heavy at all. You want something more powerful, I think. Something with more oomph. What you’re talkin’ about, it’s nothing. Baby powder.”

“Maybe he’s on his way up in the world.”

“Doubt it. But hey, miracles happen, I guess. You want me to see if I can find some of it for you?”

Riley said, “No. We’ve got him. He shot up the police station this morning. Hit a cop.”

“Whoa, whoa, hold up.” She heard him speak to someone else, and then she heard movement through the phone. A door closed, and Muse came back, his voice hushed. “You’re telling me Leland Stark shot a cop?”

“I was standing right next to her when it happened.”

Muse blew air through his lips. “Nuh-uh. Not the guy I know.”

“Do you remember the crime boss you told me about? March? Does Stark work with him?”

“Hell, no. Stark is total small-time. *I* don’t even work with Stark. Maybe he found some *cojones* since the last time I threw him into the street, but I doubt it. Kids like that stay kids, you know what I mean? They end up sacrificed for the greater good. Out here, it’s survival of the fittest. And he ain’t even close.”

Riley considered the information and said, “Thanks, Muse. I’ll be in touch.”

“Let me know if I need to let people know about that little white boy. He could catch a lot of people off-guard if he suddenly got big and bad, you know? Nice to have a little warning that he’s moving up in the world.”

“Nice to provide you with info for a change, Muse. Stay safe.”

“Back atcha.”

Riley hung up and sagged against the wall. There was one explanation for how Leland Stark went from a joke to a menace; he was possessed. She had seen for herself just how completely a demon could overwrite someone’s personality. When the Duchess hitched a ride on Gillian, Riley was hard pressed to see or hear anything that reminded her of the woman she loved. Maybe Marchosias put someone, or something, into the wannabe gang banger and helped him move up the ranks.

Or maybe the kid was just lying. Putting on a show to look bigger than he was.

Other cops were still wandering through the bullpen. She caught a couple sneaking glances toward Hathaway’s office as

if they expected her to come out and berate them for making a big deal out of her shooting. Riley sighed and checked her watch. She would let Stark stew for a while before she went back in to see him again.

08:24 am

Riley used the bathroom and had already started the faucet in the sink before she remembered the gauze on her hands. She settled for washing her fingers and flicked the water against the porcelain. She had spent the last half hour moping in the on-call room, berating herself for getting into a pissing contest with a demon. He was going to win. They always won. Even when she somehow managed to walk away from a confrontation with one, they were somehow the victor.

Marchosias watched her destroy an angel.

Alistair Call, Ethan Winn and the Duchess sent Gillian away.

She dreaded to think what this confrontation would cost her. She left the bathroom and crossed the bullpen to Hathaway's office. The other detectives watched her as she crossed the threshold as if she was breaking some kind of sacrament. She turned on the light and scanned the flat surfaces, trying to figure out what she was doing.

Hathaway's chair was pushed back, and Riley lowered herself carefully into it. The seat sagged briefly before it accepted her weight, but it kept her on her toes. She realized that every moment Hathaway sat behind the desk she was poised on her toes ready to run out the door. Definitely a good quality in a lieutenant. Riley glanced at the edge of the desk and had a flash of herself, on her knees, tugging Lieutenant Hathaway's trousers down over her hips.

Riley shook her head and exorcised the ghosts. Now was hardly the time to think about what had happened that day. Riley opened the desk drawer and searched for some kind of address book, anything to give her an idea of who she should call. She found a stack of memos from the desk sergeant on the edge of the desk and sorted through them.

*Mother called – will call back.*

The personal speed-dial spaces on the phone were mostly empty, but a few of them had cryptic codes. The paranoia of a cop; never let a snoop know how to contact your loved ones. She took the phone from the cradle and tucked it between her head and her shoulder. She pressed the top button and listened as the phone automatically dialed.

After a handful of rings, she got an answer. “Well, I didn’t mean you had to get back to me so soon, Nina. Im almost done with my laundry. You can talk while I sort.”

Riley was thrown for a moment. “Uh, excuse me. Miss Hathaway?”

The woman on the other end of the phone seemed to freeze. Every noise on the other end of the call stopped. Finally, she said, “To whom am I speaking?”

“Ma’am, this is Detective Riley Parra. I work with your daughter. Im afraid she’s been taken to the hospital. There was a shooting this morning.” Riley winced, knowing she was screwing it all up. She shouldn’t have tried calling anyone.

“How is she?”

“I’m not sure. She was conscious and aware of her surroundings when they loaded her into the ambulance.”

“Did you catch the motherfucker who shot her?”

Riley raised an eyebrow at the language. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Good. Which hospital?”

“St. Anthony’s is the closest,” Riley said. She heard rustling on the other end of the phone and knew she was preparing to go. “She’s most likely in the emergency room there.”

“Thank you for letting me know, Detective Paris.”

Riley didn’t bother to correct her. “It was the least I could do, ma’am. I’ll let you go so you can be with her. We’re all pulling for Lieu— for Nina.”

“I’m sure she knows, dear. Thank you again.”

They hung up, and Riley leaned back in the chair. She checked her watch again and decided she had left Mr. Stark stew long enough. She got up and left the office, leaving the light on as a symbol of Hathaway’s imminent return. The cops were still standing perfectly erect, still focused entirely on their work. Riley nodded to them as she passed, and stepped into the interrogation room once more.

08:29 am

Stark's head was down on the table, his fingers laced behind his head. When the door opened, he sat up and smiled at her. "Welcome back. Did you have a nice breakfast? I can almost smell bacon and sausage, I'm so damn hungry. Come on. Just a Pop Tart. I'll take a Pop Tart. But none of those whole grain bar things. They upset my stomach."

Riley pulled out her chair and sat down. "I don't think you realize the severity of your situation, Leland. You're not getting out of this building. I don't care who you work for. I don't care who pulls your strings. You have half a dozen witnesses who will swear up and down in court that you pulled the trigger. And every one of those witnesses wears a badge. You're fucked. Royally. I think you need to take that into consideration."

"What do you want from me?"

"I want you to tell me why."

Stark shrugged. "I does what I'm tolds."

Riley leaned forward and smirked. "I talked to a friend of mine. Apparently you're pretty small fry. Not even small fry. You're barely noticeable. See, we're starting to think that this was a suicide mission. Whoever sent you figured all us cops would just open fire on you. Cop goes down, you die a second later. Someone wanted to get rid of you in a very messy way."

“I’m on my way up. I know things now. I’m capable of things you can’t even dream of.” He looked up at the security camera and said, “May we speak frankly, Detective?”

Riley glanced up at the video camera and made a slashing motion with her hand. She gave Barrett a moment to stop taping before facing Stark again. “You want to talk, here’s your chance.”

Stark scooted to the edge of his seat and leaned over the table. “There’s something in me. Something powerful. Even if you manage to keep Leland Stark in custody and put me to death, the thing inside of me is going to continue. It’s going to get out. So you better think twice about messing with me, Detective. For I am ancient, and I have a very long memory. Your friend Muse was correct, as far as he knew. The Leland he knew was hardly worth the effort to spit on. But I’ve changed everything. And soon everyone will know my name.”

“And what name is that?”

“Morax.”

Riley laughed. “Borax? That’s a hell of a name.”

He sneered at her. “Careful, Detective Paris.”

Riley held her hands out. “Fine. I just want you to realize that this is all just a formality. As soon as I decide we’re done with you, that’s it. You’re going to disappear into the system. Your life will be in the hands of a bunch of cops. And let me tell you, there’s not one cop in this city you’d be safe with. You can tell me all the lies you want about being able to hop into a different body. If you could do it, you’d have done it when I was chasing you. Your hollow threat to ‘come after me in your new body’ won’t work.” She winked. “So why don’t you do all of us a favor and tell me who told you to shoot my boss? Marchosias?”

“I’m not one of his boys,” Stark said. “I’m one of his boys’ boys.”

“Third tier. I’m shaking.”

Stark lurched forward, his hands flat on the table. “You should be. Duchess, Call, Winn? They’re all fifth tier. At most. You don’t want to know what’s waiting for you at the top of the slide. Oh, man. You’ll put your own gun to your head and save us the trouble if you got a glimpse of that.”

Riley shrugged and made a conscious effort not to lean back. “I’ve been in Marchosias’ building, Borax. I survived.”

“Barely. Do you really believe you’ll be so lucky twice? Count your blessings and run to Georgia with your little whore.”

Riley moved so fast even Stark wasn’t prepared for it. Her hand made contact with the side of his face and knocked him to the side, her palm burning under the gauze. She pushed out of the chair, knocking it over in the process, and rounded the table. She grabbed Stark by the scruff of the neck and pressed his face into the table.

The door opened and Cooley took in the scene. “Everything okay in here, Detective?”

“Everything’s fine.”

Cooley backed out of the room and shut the door. Riley made a note of recommending him for a promotion. Riley tightened her grip and pressed Stark harder against the hard surface. “If you find it necessary to speak of Dr. Gillian Hunt, you will keep a civil tongue in your head.”

“I’d rather keep a civil tongue in her—”

Riley swung her leg up, kneeling him in the side. The air erupted from him in a deep ‘whuff!’ and she said, “Am I clear, Mr. Stark?”

He coughed and nodded as best as he could.

Riley released him and backed up a step. “Sit up.” Stark pushed himself up and brought both hands to his face. The cut on his cheek, from where she had tackled him, was open again. A trickle of blood curled down his chin like a ribbon. Riley went to the door and opened it a crack. “Get me a butterfly bandage, a towel, and some alcohol.” She closed the door while the officer got the items she requested.

“So is that how it works?” Stark said. “You don’t like what I say, you beat my ass?”

Riley sat down again. “If it gets what I want from you, why not. You saw the officer’s reaction. No one is going to shed a tear if you get a little bump on your head.”

Stark sighed and touched his cheek. He winced and said, “You’re making it very difficult for me to like you, Detective. And I do so desperately want to like you.”

The door opened and Cooley appeared with the first-aid kit. He glanced at Riley, and she nodded to let him know she would cover him. He put the kit down and opened it. He dabbed a cotton ball with alcohol and cleaned the blood from Stark’s cheek. Stark remained still as his wound was tended, his eyes locked on Riley. Cooley applied the bandage with thick, blunt fingers and closed the kit again. “Need anything else, Detective?”

“No, thank you, Officer.”

Cooley nodded and left the room.

“Why did you shoot Lieutenant Hathaway?”

“What was her first name? No one is willing to tell me.” He touched the bandage on his cheek, opening and dosing his mouth to see how it moved.

Riley shrugged. “Tit for tat. Maybe I’ll tell you if I’m feeling charitable.”

Stark rolled his eyes. “Kind of a small reward.” He laced his fingers together and rested his hands on the table. “What if I give you something huge? Some revelation you haven’t considered yet? What will you give me then? Are you prepared to give me my freedom?”

“That would have to be a pretty big something.”

“Oh, it’s huge,” Stark said.

Riley shook her head. “Nothing you give me will buy you freedom. Maybe you’ll get a nice cell with a view if you tell me who put the gun in your hand.”

Stark pressed his lips together and shook his head.

“Come on, Stark. All you have to do is name a name. You said it yourself, we can’t do anything to your bosses. What harm does it do for me to know?”

Stark laughed. “What harm? This from the woman who torched Alistair Call from the inside out with holy water. We know that you’re just a mortal. But you’re bat-shit crazy. And that scares some of us right to death. We don’t know what you’ll pull next. So we’re cautious.”

“That makes me feel good. I thought you guys just considered me a nuisance.”

“Oh, we do. You’ll never make a dent in our numbers or our strength. But you’ll take some of us out before you manage to

commit suicide. Very few of us are willing to be the martyrs who go down in the course of events.”

“Why were you willing?”

Stark made a fist and rested his chin on it. “Because I just had to meet the crazy cop bitch. I wanted to see if I could be the one to stop her for good. Worst case scenario, I get to spend time with a veritable celebrity.”

Riley gathered up the file and said, “Call me when you’re ready to give me something useful.”

She was almost to the door before Stark spoke again.

“It’s weird, isn’t it? The timing.”

Riley stopped and looked at the doorknob. She knew she should keep walking and ignore him. Instead, she said, “The timing of what?”

“Everything. This. Do you remember what happened right before Samael appeared in your apartment and this holy battle between good and evil dropped in your lap?”

*“It’s not so bad, right, Detective?” Hathaway said, her voice barely more than a whisper as she neared climax.*

“Kara died.”

“You blew her head off,” Stark said. “But that’s semantics. I meant *right* before you pulled the trigger and killed your partner. It was raining, you were fighting in the middle of the street. Something happened to you. Something violent. Think back.”

Riley kept her back to the demon and closed her eyes. *Riley sees an opening and lunges forward. Kara fires and the bullet slams into Riley’s chest, her life saved by the Kevlar vest she thought to put on. Riley wraps her arms around*

*Kara's waist and they grapple, Riley's hands wrapped around Kara's, holding the gun up and away. The rain soaks them both, rainwater running over her face like tears. Kara drops the gun and shifts her weight, throwing them back toward the car, and—*

“My head hit the side mirror.” Riley blinked and looked down at herself.

“Oh, my. How hard did you get hit?”

*The mirror clattered on the ground. Riley barely paid any attention to it, too worried about stopping Kara, who had apparently gone insane.*

God, how hard *did* she hit the mirror to knock it completely off?

Stark said, “A head injury, followed immediately by something as traumatic as Sweet Kara's death.” He tsked. “And then... well, then you started seeing angels. You started fighting demons. Wouldn't it be terrible if everything you had seen and done since then was just a... hallucination?”

“Imagine. Alistair Call, the Duchess, Ethan Winn. All three, dead. All human beings killed because of you. Because you thought they were demons. Your new partner is an angel, right? How lovely for you. How lucky.”

Riley shook her head. “Other people... have seen what I've seen. Gillian...”

“Left you. Because she couldn't take the demons any more, and she couldn't cope with your war. Think about that. Gillian left because she was scared. Maybe she was scared of *you*. Maybe she was worried about how bad your injury was getting.”

Riley said, “Shut up.”

“Detective,” Stark said, his voice totally different. “Detective, I don’t know anything about demons. Please, I— I don’t even go to Sunday school. I just want to— to talk to my lawyer. Okay? Please? Can I talk with someone else? Please?”

Riley forced herself to grab the doorknob, twisting it and slipping out of the interrogation room. She leaned against the closed door and closed her eyes, taking a moment to collect herself. She felt her heart beating — pounding — in her ears. Her mouth was dry. *What if he was telling the truth? What if everything in the past few months was just a hallucination? Oh, God, what if I’ve killed innocent people? Did Gillian leave because she was afraid of me?*

“Detective?”

She looked up and saw the three guards watching her. “Sorry,” she said. She cleared her throat and pushed away from the door. She straightened her shoulders and avoided the eyes of everyone she passed as she went to the stairwell. She let the door swing shut behind her before she dropped down onto the top step. Her stomach rolled, her face hot as she tried to steady the ground under her feet.

“This can’t be true. This can’t be true. He’s a demon. He lies. He lies...”

Her hand moved to the back of her head and sought out the spot where her head hit the mirror. Surely the impact from knocking off the side mirror of the car had left a bump. She didn’t feel anything, and she didn’t remember tending to the wound in the hours after the fight. Of course, she had a lot of other things on her mind at the moment.

If she made up the world of demons and angels, then she had to question everything else in her life. She shifted, and something in her pocket jabbed her side. She fished it out and

discovered it was the CD Gillian left behind in her office. Oh, God, she didn't sleep with Gillian until after she hit her head. If she made up the angels...

Riley straightened and looked down at the CD. Everything swam into focus. *Gillian touching my cheek, Gillian's expression when Riley told her the truth about what they were up against. Gillian's eyelids fluttering as she came, her fingers closing around Riley's wrist.* Riley opened her eyes and tightened her fingers on the CD case. Angels were real. The thing sitting upstairs in the interrogation room was either a demon or possessed by one. Marchosias, Alistair Call, there was no doubt in her mind of their nature.

Because she loved Gillian. And Gillian loved her. That was something far more unbelievable than angels fighting demons in the streets of her city. She didn't doubt that love, not for a second. Not even when a demon tried to worm his way into her brain and weaken her defenses. She closed her eyes and pictured strands of hair, turned golden brown by the morning sun streaking through the window, feathered across a lightly freckled forehead. The taste of Gillian's forehead against her lips in the morning. Waking in her lover's bed.

She stood up, hand gripping the stair rail, and took a deep breath. The demon's words faded and doubt was erased. She pushed her hair out of her face and went back into the bullpen. Even though Gillian was currently lost to her, that didn't erase the meaning behind what they had. What they still had. Love that deep couldn't be manufactured or imagined. As long as she held on to the truth of that, the demon wouldn't get its claws in her.

09:05 am

Riley needed fresh air, so she went downstairs. The front steps of the station were still marked off with yellow tape that fluttered in the wind. Riley stopped just outside the doors, moving the shattered glass aside with her feet as she looked at the spot where Hathaway fell. She could still hear the gunshots, feel the blood burning in her face as her adrenaline kicked up to superhuman levels. She put her hands in her pockets and walked down to the sidewalk.

Television reporters stood across the street, speaking into large black or gray cameras. She thought to go back inside before someone saw her and recognized her as the one who made the arrest of the shooter. She had one foot on the steps when she heard her name called. She groaned and prepared her 'no comment' statement when she recognized the voice.

Priest sped up into a jog to catch up with Riley.

"I told you to stay at the hospital with Hathaway."

Priest stopped in front of the steps and looked up at Riley. "They did everything they could, Riley. It just... it wasn't enough. The damage was too severe."

Riley frowned. "What?"

"They had to let her go, Riley."

"They..." Riley's legs suddenly went weak and she dropped down onto the steps. Priest immediately moved to catch her,

wrapping one arm around her waist and gently guiding her down onto the step.

Priest whispered, "It's okay. Just take your time, Riley. It's all right."

Riley pressed her hands against her face and her body shook with a series of violent tremors. Hathaway was gone. Everything that had happened between them suddenly solidified, suddenly became "done." She couldn't process the thought that they would never get closure. That she would never confront Hathaway about what she had done.

Priest held her, running her hand over Riley's back until the shaking stopped. "Her mother was there. She was able to say good-bye. Nina was unconscious, but... I let her know that she was heard. I was with Nina when she went. We spoke, and I helped her cross over. It was..."

"Don't say peaceful," Riley said. "That's a fucking lie. She was shot, and it took her an hour and a half to die. Do not dare to say it was peaceful."

Priest nodded.

"Are you going to be okay, Riley?"

"Yeah," Riley said. She pushed herself up and said, "Just as soon as we deal with the prick that murdered our boss."

09:22 am

Stark looked up as Riley entered the room with two of the officers who had been guarding the door. Riley said, “Stand up.” Stark pushed off the edge of the table and stood up. One of the cops took Stark’s chair and carried it from the room. The other officer unchained Stark from the table. He made sure that Stark saw the Taser on his belt. Riley said, “You’re not going to give us any trouble, are you, Mr. Stark?”

“No, ma’am.”

The two officers guided Stark out of the room, where the third guard was waiting with a baton. The bullpen was full of cops who looked ready to tear someone apart with their bare hands. Stark scanned the room and looked at Riley. “What’s going on?”

Riley closed her hand around the back of Stark’s neck and leaned in close. “Our boss just died. You’re a cop killer. We have special rules for cop killers.” She shoved him, making him stumble and trip over his chains. She hauled him back upright and shoved him forward. “Walk. Now, I’m going back to my theory. Someone wanted you out of the way, so they put a gun in your hand and told you to shoot at the police station. And you were dumb enough to do it. So here’s what I’m thinking. If someone wanted you dead, then they wouldn’t give you all the information you might need to survive.”

Stark realized he was being taken toward Hathaway’s office. The door was closed, but the lights were shining through the

closed blinds. He smirked. “Oh, come on. Are you going to try to make me see her as a person? Are you going to make me feel oh, so bad that I’ll give you whatever you want? I expected more from you, Riley.”

Riley nodded at the guards, who backed off. Riley opened the office door and said, “No psychology. Just a room. Go on in, Stark. Take a look around.”

Stark sighed and shuffled forward as best he could in the chains. As soon as he crossed the threshold, he froze. He furrowed his brow and closed his eyes. “Wait. What’s... something...”

Riley put a hand in the middle of his back and shoved. Stark fell into the room, hitting one of the chairs in front of the desk. Riley followed him in and turned to the cops. “Don’t open this door. Not for anything. Give us five minutes.” She shut the door and twisted the lock.

Stark straightened and frantically searched the room. It didn’t take him long to see Priest standing behind the door. She managed a smile, but to Riley it looked weak and sick. Priest crossed her arms over her shoulders and fixed an unwavering stare on the possessed kid. “Hello, Morax.”

“You bitch!” Stark said. He tried to straighten, but it caused him too much pain. He wrapped his arms around his stomach and dropped to one knee. “What did you do?”

“She blessed this office. It’s not hard to do. Not for an angel.”

Stark lifted his head and squinted at Priest. “Which...?”

“Zerachiel,” Priest said. “Pleased to meet you.”

Stark trembled and pushed back against the desk. “It hurts. Stop it.”

Riley crouched in front of Stark. “You see, my main problem is that I’m not sure what to do with you. You’re a demon. Even the highest security prison wouldn’t be much of a challenge for you to escape. So that left me with a predicament. But now that Nina Hathaway is dead, I’m less inclined to treat you humanely. So I’m going to give you to Priest. She’s my partner. We give each other gifts sometimes.”

“Yeah. I paid for her breakfast yesterday. She owes me.”

Riley smiled. “You ever been alone in a room with an angel before, Leland?”

His red-rimmed eyes moved up to Priest and quickly looked away. He tried to touch the floor to push himself up, but his hands jerked back as if he’d been burnt. “You bitches...”

Riley punched him in the stomach and he folded. She put her hands on his shoulders and pushed him back up, shoving him against the desk. “Language, Leland. Didn’t anyone teach you manners? You don’t talk to women that way.”

“Just get me out of here. Please, just get me out of here.”

“Who gave you the gun?”

“No one!” Stark shouted. He laced his fingers behind his head, rocking back and forth. “No one. I just wanted to see. I wanted to see what you were like because everyone is talking about you. Everyone knows about you. Everyone is scared of you and I wanted to see why.”

Riley leaned forward, her face inches away from him. “Do you know why now?”

“Yes,” Stark said. “Get me out of here. Please.”

“You’re going to become our best friend, aren’t you, Leland? You’re going to give us everything you know on Marchosias

and his operations. You're going to be a good little informant. And if I think for a second you're lying to me, or that you're starting to think you can trump me, I'll bring you back in here. I'll let Priest loose in whatever hellhole you call a home and I'll let her bless random objects. Your remote control. The food in your fridge. Your shower head. Imagine waking up to take your weekly shower, turning on the faucet, and getting sprayed with holy water."

Stark cringed and pulled his knees closer to his chest.

Priest lightly touched Riley's shoulder. Riley looked up at her, and Priest mouthed, "Enough," and nodded toward the door.

Riley stood and said, "Get up."

"It hurts..."

Riley grabbed Stark's arms and hauled him to his feet. The move left her slightly off-balance for a moment, and Stark took full advantage of it.

He rolled off the balls of his feet and tackled Riley, running her toward the wall. Riley hit hard enough to make the entire wall shake, and Stark grabbed a handful of her hair, twisting it as he hissed into her face. "You think you're in power, just because you used an angel against me? Angels aren't the only ones with power." He raised his free hand, the chains of his handcuffs dangling uselessly from his wrist, and grabbed Priest's arm as she was about to touch him. She gasped and dropped to her knees as his hand turned red, then black with power.

Stark's breath was hot in Riley's face. "Do you want the truth, Parra? I wanted to see how much fun you could be. And oh, I got my money's worth." He leaned in, his lips against the

shell of Riley's ear, and said, "You're going to be so much more fun than Christine."

The explosions were deafening in the office, and Stark's eyes widened as he realized what they were. He looked down and saw Riley's gun pressed against his stomach, the shirt around the barrel still smoking. He stumbled, his grip weakening. Riley pushed him away, and he let go of Priest's hand. Priest, suddenly free, cradled her burnt hand to her stomach and rolled away from him. She came to a stop a few feet away, perched on her haunches like a cat ready to pounce.

The door burst open and two cops appeared, guns drawn. Riley said, "Don't!"

They opened fire on Stark. He fell back against the desk, jerking with the force of their bullets. He turned his face toward Riley and smiled, then looked up toward the ceiling. Riley dropped down and grabbed Priest, helping her to her feet. "Get out! Now!" She could feel the heat building in the room. The fluorescent lights of the bullpen flickered, energy being drawn from them as Stark tried to overwhelm the barriers of Priest's blessing.

Riley slammed the door and shouted, "Take cover!"

The office erupted in a wave of heat and unnaturally smokeless flame. Riley took cover behind a desk, helping Priest move as well. The entire office seemed to shake for a moment before the power died down. Riley turned to Priest and grabbed her arm, examining the wrist Morax had grabbed. The sleeve was charred and brown, the skin underneath blistered. "Are you okay?"

"Weak, but I'll be fine. I can heal." Priest looked around the corner of the desk and said, "He overcame the blessing."

Riley looked over the edge of the desk at the flickering lights in Hathaway's office. "I think it took absolutely everything he had. He's burning out."

"He's going to take this building with him. I have to stop him."

"Yeah, but at what cost?"

Priest hesitated. "There are other angels."

Riley shook her head. "Nope." She got to her feet, ignoring Priest's attempts to stop her. She pushed Priest's hands away and said, "You've done enough already today. My turn." She returned to the office door and took a steadying breath. She threw open the door and stepped into the maelstrom.

09:37 am

Morax stood in front of Hathaway's desk, most of his clothes burnt away. The skin of the being who had once been Leland Stark was gone, replaced by a sleek red expanse of muscle. The bullet wounds in his chest were filled with thick black smoke that rose to curl around Morax's head. When he focused his eyes on her, she saw only the inhuman yellow glow of a demon. Riley felt sick, picturing Gillian with one of these... things inside of her. She pulled out her gun and Stark laughed.

"Are you going to shoot me, Detective?" He gestured at the wounds. "I doubt it will do much. But keep your talisman if it makes you feel safe."

"What did you mean?" she asked. Her eyes burned with the heat, but she refused to close them. Not when he had nothing to lose by taking her out. "About Christine? Christine Lee?"

Morax grinned and said, "You remember her well, I assume."

Riley definitely remembered Christine Lee well. Christine was the one who inspired Riley to be a cop, the one who gave her the tattoo on her left shoulder. "What do you know about her? Was she like me?"

He shifted against the desk, but made no move toward her. "No. She was far dumber than you, Detective Parra. She became infatuated with a yearling. She had protection, but she sacrificed it for an idea of love. She transferred her protection

to you, Riley. And she died for her ignorance. This city has had so many protectors. And they all fall. Every last one of them. The demons always survive. Perhaps it is time you got a lesson in just how deep of a hole you have dug for yourself.”

“Christine Lee gave me the tattoo. Did she... mark me? Is that the reason I’m in this mess?”

“One of many.”

“Thanks for the info,” Riley said. “The blessing is still intact, isn’t it? It’s tearing you apart to be in this room, but you’re still in here. Why? I think you don’t have enough power to leave. I think you’re planning to use every ounce of strength you have to take this building to hell when you go.”

He smiled. “And there’s nothing you can do to stop it. So why try? I would be running for the door at this time, Detective.”

“Maybe,” Riley said. “But this room isn’t the only thing Priest blessed.” She lifted her gun and fired at the sprinklers. The heads were fused from the heat Morax put off, but the pipes were fair game. The water erupted from the hole punched by her bullet, and the room was suddenly doused with water.

Water from a reservoir that Priest had blessed on their way upstairs.

Morax screamed as the water hit him, and the heat and smoke suddenly seemed to wrap itself around him like a cloak. He dropped to his knees, hands over his head in a vain attempt to stop the water. The only thing he managed to do was burn his hands.

Riley leaned against the door and watched the demon convulse, then his body began to smoke. It rose from him in

waves, wafting toward the ceiling in narrow wisps. Finally, he was gone, and the sprinklers were cascading down on nothing at all. Riley slumped against the wall and slid down until she was sitting. She put her elbows on her knees and put her hands on her forehead.

The door opened and Priest examined the room. "Riley."

"He's gone."

Priest knelt next to Riley. "Are you okay?"

Riley closed her eyes, inhaled through her nostrils, and finally nodded. "Yeah. I think so. I just need a minute."

Priest sat down next to Riley and looked at the spot where Morax had disappeared. "Everyone is busy trying to salvage their paperwork from the sprinklers." After a moment, Priest added, "It was a good plan, Riley."

"Yeah, but what's it taking out of you to save my ass all the time?"

"Nothing I can't get back."

Riley made a fist and held it out in front of her. Priest stared at it. Riley sighed and picked up Priest's hand. She curled the fingers into a fist, and then bumped Priest's fist with her own. She leaned back against the wall and said, "It's a thing. Don't worry about it."

Priest looked at her fist for a moment and shrugged.

"This Morax guy. He was nothing, right?"

"Pretty minor."

Riley closed her eyes. "I'm in trouble."

"Yes, you are. So what else is new?"

Riley smirked. “We’re going to have to come up with something to explain this away.”

“Leland Stark, a career criminal, opened fire on the police station in an attempt to improve his standing in his gang. He was apprehended by Detective Riley Parra, who interrogated him and learned his motives. When Lieutenant Hathaway died, Detective Parra decided to show Mr. Stark the life he had ended. In Hathaway’s office, Stark took Detective Parra’s gun and ended his own life.”

“And the fireworks?”

Priest shook her head. “People won’t remember. They can’t be explained away, so they’ll just be put aside. It happens far more often than you might think.”

Riley relaxed against the wall. The adrenaline of the morning was starting to wear off, and the hangover was making itself known. She pressed her thumb into the hollow between her eye and nose and grunted. “I think I’m going to call it a day. What time is it, anyway?”

Priest looked at the clock in the corner. “A quarter to ten.”

Riley frowned. “Already?”

“Ten in the morning.”

“Oh, that can’t be right,” Riley muttered.

Priest smiled and looked at the ceiling as the sprinklers finally stopped.

Finally, Riley said, “All right then. There’s someone I need to see.”

10:45 am

The nurse barely needed to look at the badge before she agreed. Riley wore the events of the morning like a yoke around her shoulders, leaning against the nurse's station like it was a crutch. They walked down the narrow corridor together, Riley struggling to find the strength to remain upright. The nurse stopped at a pair of double doors and said, "Right inside there. Don't take too long. They'll have my ass if they find out I let you in, badge or no badge."

"Thank you. I appreciate it."

Riley waited until the nurse was gone before she went into the morgue.

Nina Hathaway's body was on the farthest slab, covered by a white sheet. Riley approached slowly, still gathering her courage. When she reached the bed, she pulled back the sheet and forced herself to look. Hathaway's black hair was slicked back against her skull, her lips slightly parted. She was blue, which Riley hadn't expected. Someone had taken the care to wash the blood spatter from her throat and face. Riley had left the sheet at Hathaway's shoulders, but she could still see one puckered bullet wound above her collarbone.

"Hey, boss."

She sighed and pressed her lips together. She rolled her shoulders and rested her hand on Hathaway's forehead.

“You were a good boss. I’m sorry I didn’t... care for you the way you wanted. You had no right to do what you did to me. I’m sorry that this happened to you. I wish...” She closed her eyes and shook her head. “I don’t know what I wish. You deserved better than that. I guess I wish you peace.” It wasn’t closure. It wasn’t the angry shouting match she wanted, but it would have to do. She had enough emotional baggage without carrying Hathaway’s sin with her. She would find a way to live with what had happened. She took her hand from Hathaway’s forehead and resisted the urge to wipe her palm on her jeans. “Good-bye, Nina.”

She covered Hathaway’s face and left the morgue. Priest was waiting in the hallway, leaning against the wall with her hands in her pockets. “The press is having a field day with Stark’s death. They want a full investigation of police brutality.”

Riley rolled her eyes. “Of course they do. I don’t suppose you can do anything about that. Maybe wave your hands and make it go away. “These are not the droids you’re looking for.””

Priest frowned.

“God,” Riley muttered. “We have to get you a DVD player.”

Priest shrugged and pushed away from the wall. “The investigation won’t turn up anything untoward. Everything was by the book. The videotape will show that you didn’t harm Stark during the interrogation.”

“Yeah, like that’s going to be admitted any time soon.”

“There was no audio,” Priest said. “No one could hear what he was saying to you. It’s obvious he spent the entire interview period attempting to make you attack him and you resisted. That will go a long way into shutting up the reporters. It’ll just take a little time.”

Riley nodded.

“Where are you going next?”

“I don’t know. Before all of this started, Hathaway told me I had a new case on my desk. I guess I should get started on that.”

Priest nodded. “Right back on the horse?”

“Yeah,” Riley said. “Otherwise I might never get back on.”

Priest put her hand on Riley’s shoulder as they stepped onto the elevator. Riley leaned against the back wall, eyes closed, and let the motion of the car soothe her headache. She needed to stop drinking. She needed to move on with her life. The demons had already cost her too much. Sweet Kara was gone, Lieutenant Hathaway was gone... Gillian was gone, but she would be back. Riley had no doubt about that whatsoever. She might not be able to win the war, but she damn sure wasn’t going to let the war take everything away from her without a fight.

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