

Wings

I walked the streets, late at night, as I always did. *For a big city, these streets are surprisingly empty at this hour. Only the pimps, hookers, and druggies out at this hour, excepting, of course, the cops and other people unlucky enough to work at this hour.* I looked around. *It's beautiful in an odd way, though, and most will never know that.* The skies cried gently and persistently, if not heavily. *Drizzle may be the most annoying of all rains,* I thought absently, not really meaning it.

I'd been following a specific person for days. I'd seen her on the street about a week ago, lost and alone. Even with her beauty, people ignored her as if she weren't even there. I remember my thoughts when I saw her, having recognized her immediately. *Satan curse me! I know her! What's she doing here, and lost at that? She should know this place like the back of her hand.*

When I realized that she seemed completely unaware of herself, I chose to follow her, to see if it was an act, although that would be somewhat uncharacteristic of her; unless, of course, she was on a mission for higher up.

During the week, I had found myself considering something. *I've always loved her. Now I have a chance to possibly win her, rather than either loathing or pity. Knowing her old self, probably pity. I think it's the pity that hurts so much. All I have to do is leave her as she is, and she might be able to love me for me.*

All I have to do is leave her crippled.

I stopped, stunned by my own thoughts. *All I have to do is leave her crippled. That says it all, doesn't it?* I chuckled humorlessly. *What's become of me? I could have done this without a hitch a few years ago. So what if someone got hurt?* I shook my head. *As if showing a little compassion is the road to redemption for the likes of me.*

I searched her out again. When I found her, she was in a large plaza, still looking terribly lost. I approached her carefully. "Excuse me, miss? May I offer you some help?"

She started as I spoke, but great gratitude replaced the surprise. "I hope so, sir," she said in a pleasant voice. "I'm completely lost, and I think I've

had a major accident, because..." She stopped and tears began to form in her eyes. "I don't know who I am, and all I've got is this coat."

"They took your purse as well?" I prompted.

"Worse." She opened the coat, and I was reminded that it had been longer than I could remember since I had seen alabaster skin, especially in a city that can be as dark, dirty, polluted, and dank as this one. She closed it quickly, but not before I could verify that the only thing under that coat was what the Creator had granted her upon her creation. *Man has not been so lucky as to glance at such*, I thought rather poetically.

I looked to my own ruddy skin, as if embarrassed, and discovered, oddly enough, that I was. *Well, I guess I'm not as jaded as I thought*, I chuckled to myself. "You might want to be careful, miss. That can be a dangerous thing to do here in the city, especially with what you're wearing, or not wearing, as the case may be."

She began to cry. "They stole my clothes, and I don't even have a description to give the police to find them," she sobbed.

"Well, I believe that I can help you, miss."

"Really? Do you know who did this?" The raw hope in her magnificent blue eyes brought a lump to my throat.

"Yes, I do," I finally said after swallowing the lump. "You may not be happy with the answer, though. Also, you may not believe me, but I can eventually prove it to you."

"Just tell me!" she cried out. "Who did this to me?!"

After a moment, steeling myself for her reaction, I answered simply, "You did. You did it to yourself."

"Don't tell me that! I took my own memories and clothes away? How ridiculous!" She turned to storm away.

"What were you wearing yesterday, other than the coat?" I asked her emotionlessly.

She spun as if to slap me, but what I had said obviously percolated through, and she lowered her hand. After several moments, she finally said, "I don't know. I really can't remember. Why is that? Am I sick?" She lunged forward as if to grab me, but I stepped out of reach. "I am, aren't I? Is it contagious? Do you know how long I have to live?"

"Given what I know about you, that's a tough question to answer."

She interrupted me. "Just answer the question!"

I locked eyes with her. "What I am about to tell you is serious, and if you'll let me, I can prove it to you. The questions answered in order: you made yourself forget; no, you're not sick; again, no, you're not sick; it's not contagious; the question is meaningless."

"Which one was meaningless?" she asked in puzzlement.

"How long you have to live. You were never alive, so you can't really die."

"What, I'm a vampire?" she snorted. She grinned a toothy grin. "I can show you that I've got no fangs."

"Being a vampire assumes humanity."

She opened the coat again, this time holding it open. "Does this look non-human to you?" she asked angrily.

I closed my eyes. "Miss, while you have your coat open, reach behind you, inside the coat. What do you feel?"

She did as I asked, and I'll admit to sneaking a peek while she did so. With extreme puzzlement in her voice she said, "What in heavens name? Feathers?" She grunted as she pulled one out and brought it forward. "That...hurt. Why?"

"Simply put, miss - you're an angel."

She gave me the look that can easily be classified as the 'yeah, right' stare. "Explain to me, then, how come it hurt when you pulled out that feather. It's connected to you." Her now almost permanent puzzled expression returned. "Look to the skies."

"I have been for days. I'm drawn to it, but it just makes me more puzzled."

"Close your eyes, and look with your heart." She gave me a strange sidelong glance, first, but then did as I asked. She closed her eyes and raised her head skyward. Slowly, a smile spread across her face, and she raised her arms skyward. I stepped closer, drawn to the transformation. Suddenly, her coat burst, her wings unfurled, and I closed my eyes at the

painful glory unleashed. I heard the beat of her wings, and they quickly faded away.

I left my eyes closed. I knew she'd left; there was no way I could not feel it, once she'd come back into her own. After several moments, I finally opened them; looking down upon the coat she'd discarded, as well as the feather she'd pulled. I knelt to the spot she'd stood on moments before and touched it reverently, then picked up the coat and feather. *I wish I'd just kissed her once while she was here*, I thought as a tear escaped from my eye and fell to where she'd been. *But dark, gleaming demon's wings just don't cut it with angels*. I sighed heavily. *Such is my lot for siding with the wrong angels*.

I carefully placed the feather in my inside pocket, and gently rolled up the trench coat she'd worn, and began walking again. *Love and compassion can be bitter, cruel things. But after all, I had to, and I'd do it again for her*. With a sense of wonder I thought, *After all, under her coat, she had wings*.

The End

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I felt a tap on my shoulder when I reached my flat. I spun to find her there, in all her glory. "Oh, I suppose you're here for this," I said, reaching into my coat and pulling out the feather.

She cocked her head sideways at me. "No, I'm here to thank you. You didn't have to do that, but I know that you know that. Why did you remind me?"

For the first time in millennia, I actually blushed. "Because...; well, because the thought of you not knowing your full glory was painful. Because it was wrong. And despite my being a demon, that was just *too* wrong. So I fixed the problem."

"I'd imagine the view under my coat was a plus," she said mischievously. Trust me, when an angel's eyes twinkle, it's not just an expression.

"I won't lie to you. And in its own way, that makes it the more painful, knowing that I'll have that memory until You-Know-Who forces me to my final destination permanently. Actually, that's when the memory will be worst. At least here on Earth, I have the chance to see you again. After the End, I'll be permanently separated from you for the rest of Eternity. These humans just don't get just how long that time is."

She looked at me in wonder. "How long have you been in love with me?"

"Does it matter? It can't be. Why torture myself more?"

She leaned forward and grabbed my face in her hands, and pulled me close, kissing me soundly. I could feel her body against me, and I tried to ignore it. When she let go, she was smiling. "Now, what should have happened there? An angel touching a demon like that?"

Now it was my turn to have wonder in my eyes. "I should be smoldering. The unholy can't bear the touch of the holy." Suddenly, it hit me, and I fell to my knees, pounding the pavement. "No, damn it! It's not fair!"

"What's not?" she asked, bemused.

"If you could bear touching me, then you must have been corrupted! Damn it to hell!"

"There's no other possibility?" she asked, openly grinning.

"No!" My eyes were jammed shut, trying to hold back the tears, and failing at the job quite miserably.

She reached out and tore off my trench coat, then grabbed one of my wings. "Look at it."

I looked. And then I looked again. And then I noticed my skin color. "But...how? I chose to leave the Presence, and paid for it. How..."

"Love and compassion may be bitter, cruel things, but sometimes they are repaid. Your pain at the thought of me, crippled, was the start of your redemption. Your granting me my Self back completed it. You made the ultimate sacrifice from love. You know He understands that." She smiled at me again. "Shall we go home, love?"

We took to the air, and the morning sun made a beautiful rainbow in the sky.

The Real End

Based on the song *Wings*, lyrics and melody Copyright 1997 Catherine Faber

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