

Seventeen-year-old Angela escapes abuse and finds salvation through Sebastian—an angel sent to protect her. As darkness rises, love and light collide in this emotional Christian fantasy of healing, purpose, and the power of divine love.

The Fallen and the Forsaken
By Ashley Cole

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BOOK ONE OF THE OF LOVE AND RUIN TRILOGY

THE FALLEN AND THE FORSAKEN

A story of survival, sacrifice,
and the love that defied Heaven itself.



AHLEY COLE

BOOK ONE IN A
GRIPPING SUPERNATURAL ROMANCE SERIES

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Chapter 1:

Angela

People always say small towns are quiet, safe.

But they've never been to Black Cedar Falls.

They've never met Richard the Dick.

They've never been me.

My name's Angela Miller. I'm seventeen, and I live in a falling-apart house with my mom, Shannon, and her boyfriend, Richard. Or as I like to call him—Richard the Dick. It's not clever, but it's true.

My mom doesn't do much these days except drink, pass out, and pretend I don't exist. Richard? He waits until she's too far gone to care, and then he shows me exactly how much control he has.

I go to Cedar Falls High. I keep my head down, make decent grades, and wear long sleeves even when it's ninety degrees out. People think I'm shy. They have no idea.

After school, I work at Cedar Diner with my best friend, Connie. She's the only person who really sees me. Some nights, we sit by the creek behind the old church that burned down, just to escape everything for a little while. We talk, we laugh, we breathe.

I don't go home until I must.

Because home isn't safe.

Home is where the bruises come from.

Home is where the prayers go unanswered.

Or at least, they used to.

It's almost midnight when I walk through the front door. The house is dark and silent. My mom's car is gone—probably off chasing her next high.

But Richard's still here. I can feel it before I hear him.

The scrape of a kitchen chair on the floor cuts through the silence. My heart thuds in my chest. I clutch my bag strap tighter and freeze.

"You're late," he growls, stepping into the dim light. His breath smells like whiskey. His eyes are wild. Angry.

"I was working," I say, voice barely steady. "Connie drove me home."

He steps closer. "You think you can just come and go? Like you run this place?"

I shake my head. "No, I just—"

Words don't matter.

What comes next is a blur of shouting, grabbing, and pain. He throws me to the floor hard. My ribs scream, my head rings. I don't fight. Fighting only makes it worse.

Afterward, I'm left broken. Hollow. All the pieces of me scattered on the cold floor.

Later, I find myself under scalding hot water in the shower. I'm still fully clothed—my shirt soaked from the terror of the night. I didn't even think to take it off. I just needed the water to wash over me, to drown out the pain burning inside.

I curl into the corner, trembling. The water mixes with the blood running down my arms, swirling down the drain like everything else I want to forget. The cold tile presses against my skin, but I barely notice. I'm numb. Broken.

And then, between my sobs, I do something I haven't done in years.

I pray.

Not a tidy, perfect prayer. Not a hopeful one. Just desperate.

"I can't do this anymore," I whisper. "Please... anyone... help me. Get me out of here."

I don't expect an answer.

But maybe someone is listening.

Morning comes too fast. The bruises on my arms ache, and my legs feel like they're made of lead. I pull on the only clean clothes I have—long sleeves and jeans that barely hide the marks Richard left.

As I look in the mirror, I don't recognize the girl staring back. Her eyes are swollen, her face pale. But there's something else—a tiny spark of defiance. Or maybe just exhaustion.

I can't keep hiding forever.

At the Cedar Diner, the bell above the door jingles as I step inside. The smell of burnt coffee and frying bacon hits me like always—both comforting and a little sickening.

Connie's behind the counter already, tying on her apron, humming some song I don't know.

"You're late," she jokes. "Three whole minutes. Should I call the cops?"

"Go ahead. Maybe they'll arrest me, and I can get some sleep."

She rolls her eyes but doesn't ask any questions. She knows. She sees the long sleeves, the tired eyes.

Together, we set the diner for the morning rush—wiping tables, brewing coffee, flipping chairs. The regulars start trickling in old Mr. Hensley with his black coffee, a tired mom juggling three kids.

For a little while, the world feels normal.

And then the bell rings again.

I glance up.

There's a guy I've never seen before sitting alone at a booth near the window.

Dark hair. Pale skin. Eyes like he's carrying some secret weight I can't understand.

When our eyes meet, something inside me twists. I can't look away.

I wipe my hands on my apron and walk toward the booth.

"Hi," I say, forcing my voice steady. "You're new here. Can I get you something?"

He looks up slowly, eyes sharp and clear. "Coffee. Black."

I nod, fill a cup, and set it in front of him. He studies me like I'm more than just a waitress—like I'm a puzzle he wants to solve.

I try to keep my face neutral, but inside I'm a mess of nerves and curiosity.

Who is this guy? Why is he staring at me like he knows something I don't?

"I'm Angela," I say, sliding into the seat across from him before I can stop myself.

"Sebastian," he replies, calm, but with a strange weight to his voice.

There's something about him—something I can't place. Maybe it's the way he holds himself. Quiet, but like he's not just passing through.

“What brings you to Black Cedar Falls?” I ask, trying to sound casual.

He glances out the window, then back to me.

“Let’s just say I’m here to watch.”

His words send a chill down my spine. Watching? Waiting?

“Kind of a strange town to watch,” I say, trying to keep it light.
“Nothing much happens here.”

He tilts his head slightly. “Sometimes it’s the places where nothing’s supposed to happen that hold the most... noise.”

I blink. “Noise?”

“Pain. Secrets. Silence that doesn’t feel peaceful.” He pauses, eyes still on mine. “Places like that tend to call out louder than they think.”

I shift in my seat, uncertain whether to be flattered or alarmed.
“That’s... poetic.”

“It’s just true,” he says. “Some things are hard to ignore. Some people, too.”

I look away, suddenly aware of every mark hidden beneath my sleeves.
“I’m not anyone special.”

Sebastian is quiet for a moment. Then, softly: “I wouldn’t be so sure.”

The way he says it—it isn’t flirty or casual. It’s steady. Measured. Like he’s speaking a truth I haven’t figured out how to believe yet.

“Do you do this often?” I ask. “Drop into small towns and give mysterious advice to strangers?”

His lips twitch, like the ghost of a smile is trying to form. “No. This is... a first.”

Something in me settles and stirs all at once. He feels unfamiliar, but not dangerous. Mysterious, but not threatening.

“Well,” I say, pushing up from the booth, “enjoy your coffee. And the... watching.”

“Thanks,” he says. Then adds, “Angela?”

I stop.

His voice is quiet, like a whisper not meant to carry. “If something ever feels too heavy, don’t carry it alone.”

I don’t respond. I just nod and walk away, pretending I’m not shaking.

But in my chest, something strange flickers to life.

Like maybe—for the first time in a long time—someone is really watching.

And maybe they actually care.

I carry a tray back to the counter, but I don’t feel my feet touch the floor. My hands are steady, but my mind is racing.

If something ever feels too heavy, don’t carry it alone.

He said it like he knew. Like he’d seen it—that weight I try to keep hidden under layers of silence and denim.

From the corner of my eye, I glance toward the booth.

He’s still there, sipping his coffee. Still watching.

But not in the creepy way. It’s not like Richard, whose stare crawled under your skin and made you want to disappear.

Sebastian’s eyes didn’t undress me.

They saw me. And that’s somehow worse.

Because being seen means I can’t pretend anymore.

Connie breezes past me, balancing two plates of eggs and toast. She follows my gaze and smirks.

“Okay, seriously,” she mutters. “Is that guy still staring at you?”

I snap out of it. “No. I mean—he’s just... weird.”

“Uh-huh. The quiet, brooding type, huh? I bet he writes poetry in a leather journal.”

I almost laugh. “You’ve been watching too many Netflix thrillers.”

“I’m just saying. He’s hot. And you’ve got that smitten deer in the headlights look.”

“I do not.”

“You do.”

I roll my eyes and try to focus on refilling napkin dispensers, but my thoughts keep circling back to him.

Who is Sebastian, really?

Why here? Why now?

And why did his words feel like they were meant for me—like he’d been waiting for me specifically?

By the time my shift ends, the sun is higher in the sky, baking the pavement outside the diner. I untie my apron; my hands still damp from rinsing dishes.

I glance back at his booth.

It’s empty.

The cup of coffee is gone. So is he.

No trace. No check. No goodbye.

Just gone.

I step out into the heat, blinking against the brightness. The sidewalk is nearly deserted, except for a few kids biking past the corner store. I don't know what I expect—that he'd be leaning against a streetlight or standing in the shadows watching me still.

But there's nothing.

Only the echo of his words, following me like a ghost:

"If something ever feels too heavy, don't carry it alone."

I don't know what he wants. I don't know why he's here.

But a small, quiet part of me whispers something I haven't felt in a long time:

Hope.

And hope, I've learned, is a dangerous thing.

The walk home feels longer than usual.

Every step is heavy, like I'm sinking back into something I can't escape. The sun is bright, but it doesn't warm me. It just makes everything feel exposed. Real.

I pass the same overgrown yards, the same cracked sidewalks, the same mailbox with the door hanging off its hinges. It's like the town is stuck in time—fading and forgotten. Just like me.

By the time I reach my street, my stomach is in knots.

The Bennett house—Connie's house—is only a few blocks away. I think about turning that way instead. About pretending I forgot something and showing up at her door just to avoid what's waiting for me.

But I keep walking.

Because that's what I do.

I survive.

When I push open the front door, the first thing I notice is the silence.

That's never a good sign.

The house smells stale—like beer and mildew and something burned. A cigarette smolders in the ashtray on the counter. My mom's shoes are by the couch, but she's not here.

Richard's truck is parked out front.

Of course it is.

I move quietly, barely letting my footsteps make noise. I know this routine. I know how to make myself small.

The bathroom doors open. Empty.

The bedroom door is shut.

I don't touch it.

I go straight to my room, close the door behind me, and slide the lock. The sound of it clicking into place is the only thing that makes me feel even halfway safe.

I sink onto the mattress—thin, springs poking through in places—and press my hands to my face.

For a second, I let myself remember Sebastian.

The way he looked at me like I mattered.

The way his voice didn't tremble, even when mine always did.

He didn't try to fix anything. He didn't promise rescue. He just... saw me.

That shouldn't mean as much as it does.

But it does.

God help me, it really does.

Outside my window, the sky is starting to fade into gold.

Inside, everything is still the same. Still broken. Still dangerous.

But something's different.

Me.

I don't hear him until it's too late.

The door to my room creaks open, slow. Careful. The lock didn't hold—he has the key. Of course he does.

Richard steps inside without a word, his bulk filling the space like a shadow that doesn't belong in the light.

I don't move. Don't speak.

If I'm still, maybe he'll go away.

But he doesn't.

"Where were you?" he asks, voice low and rough. There's no concern in it—just control. Just that dangerous, simmering tension I know too well.

"Work," I say quietly, not looking at him. "At the diner."

He steps closer. I can smell the whiskey before I see the bottle in his hand. His boots thud against the worn carpet.

“I saw you walking home,” he mutters. “Took your sweet time.”

I clench my fists in my lap. “It was a long shift.”

“You get mouthy with me now, girl?” His voice rises—not loud, not yet, but sharp. Cold.

“No,” I whisper.

He stops in front of me. I feel the weight of his stare like a pressure behind my eyes.

“You think you can just dress how you want now?” His gaze drops to my exposed arms, the bruises visible beneath the rolled sleeves. “Trying to make me look like the bad guy?”

I bite the inside of my cheek until I taste blood. Stay quiet. Stay small.

His hand lifts—too fast—and I flinch on instinct.

But it doesn’t hit me.

Not this time.

He just chuckles, mean and quiet. “That’s right. Stay scared. That’s smart.”

He leans in close, his breath hot with liquor. “Whatever story you’re building in that pretty little head of yours, it’s not real. No one’s coming for you, Angela. No one cares.”

And for a second, I believe him.

Because that’s what abusers do best—make you believe the prison is your fault. That the bars are your own making.

But then I remember the coffee. The sunlight in the diner. The way Sebastian said my name like it wasn’t dirt.

Maybe no one’s coming.

But maybe I can still get out.

“Get out of my room,” I whisper.

Richard freezes.

“What did you say?”

“I said—get out.”

He stares at me like he’s never seen me before. Like he’s not sure whether to laugh or break me.

And then, slowly, he backs away. “Don’t test me, girl,” he growls. “You know what happens when you push.”

He slams the door behind him.

And I crumble.

But somewhere deep in my chest, where the fear lives next to a dying ember of hope, something starts to burn again.

Not anger. Not courage.

Just the smallest thought:

What if he’s wrong?

The silence that follows Richard’s exit is louder than his threats.

I sit there for a long time, staring at the wall. My body feels like it’s made of glass—cracked, splintered, one breath away from shattering. But I’m still here.

Still breathing.

The same can't be said for the girl I used to be.

I lie back on the mattress, staring at the ceiling. The paint's peeling above me. There's a spider web in the corner. Everything feels heavy. The air, my limbs, the ache in my chest.

I don't cry.

I've already used up too many tears.

But I do something else.

Something I haven't done since the last time I felt truly afraid.

I pray.

Not out loud. Not like they teach you in church. This one is silent—raw and ragged, stitched together with trembling hope.

Please...

If anyone's listening—if You're still there...

I can't take much more of this.

I thought maybe today was different. I thought maybe—

But nothing's changed. I'm still stuck here. I'm still... me.

If You're real—

If You're watching—

Please don't let me disappear.

I don't expect a voice from heaven. I don't expect rescue.

I just want to be heard.

Even if it's just once.

I close my eyes, and for the first time in days, I let my breathing slow.

There's no answer in the silence.

But there is something else.

A feeling—warm, quiet, like a hand resting just over my heart.

I don't know what it means. I don't even know if it's real.

But for a few precious seconds, I don't feel alone.

And that's enough.

Sebastian

She prayed again.

The moment her thoughts brushed the edge of belief, I felt it—like a tremor through the veil that separates this world from what lies just beyond. Not loud. Not desperate like the night before. Just quiet. Fractured. Honest.

And that's what made it dangerous.

Hope always is.

I stood on the roof of an abandoned hardware store, the night stretched wide around me. The stars above Black Cedar Falls were pale and distant, flickering behind a thin veil of clouds. This town didn't know how to shine anymore. Too many secrets soaked into the dirt.

But her light—it was flickering back to life.

Angela.

I knew her name before she ever spoke it.

I heard it when her voice cracked in the silence of a broken bathroom. When the words left her mouth not for the first time, but for the last—because she didn't expect an answer.

But I did.

Not because I was supposed to.

Because I couldn't not.

I closed my eyes and reached toward that thread of her prayer. Fragile. Fearful. But still there.

I didn't come here to change anything. That wasn't the assignment—not anymore. I came because I heard something I hadn't heard in longer than I care to admit.

A cry that felt like it belonged to someone worth saving.

She doesn't know what I am. She doesn't know what watches her in the dark or what kind of war rages in places she's never seen.

But she's not wrong to be afraid.

Because something is watching her.

Not just me.

Others.

And not all of them are merciful.

I opened my eyes again, gaze drifting toward the flickering bedroom window across town.

She was still awake. I could feel it—her mind a storm beneath the quiet surface.

The first time I saw her, I felt nothing.

The second time... it felt like falling.

But I didn't come to fall.

I came because something about her whispered more.

Because her pain wasn't just ordinary.

Because whatever broke her... left a crack wide enough for light to get in.

And for something darker to try and take hold.

She doesn't know it yet, but she's already part of something bigger.
Something ancient.

And so am I.

I stayed on the rooftop until the wind shifted.

Until the ache in my chest settled into something I hadn't felt in ages.

Conviction.

I wasn't supposed to act. Just observe. That was the boundary—the only rule that still tethered me to what I once was.

But boundaries have always been a suggestion. And some lines are drawn to be crossed.

She doesn't know it yet, but she's already on borrowed time.

Whatever moved against her before was only the beginning. Richard is nothing compared to what's waking beneath this town. He's just the first crack in the foundation.

And something is coming through.

I stepped off the rooftop, landing with barely a sound in the alley below. The street was empty, the lights flickering like they knew something was wrong.

Every town has a pulse. Black Cedar Falls? Its heartbeat is fractured. Slow. Sick.

And hers—Angela's—it's tangled in it now.

If I wait too long, something else will get to her first.

The kind of thing that feeds on pain. On fear. On the kind of hopelessness, she's been drowning in for years.

The kind of thing I used to be sent to stop.

I need to know more.

More about her.

More about what's stirring beneath the surface.

More about why this girl's prayer reached me when so many others didn't.

Because it wasn't just desperation that called me.

It was power. Buried deep. Untapped. Unaware.

She doesn't know it yet, but she matters.

And if the others find her before I do—before she understands what she is—then everything changes.

Not just for her.

For all of us.

I glance once more toward her window, then turn toward the shadows.

No more watching from the sidelines.

It's time to move.

I headed east—toward the edge of town, where the streetlights ended, and the pavement gave way to gravel. Most people didn't come out this far unless they were looking for trouble or trying to forget something they couldn't outrun.

In my case, it was both.

The old chapel sat abandoned at the edge of the woods. Burned-out roof. Shattered stained glass. The place hadn't held a sermon in years—not since the fire. The town said it was an accident. Faulty wiring. Electrical storm.

It wasn't.

I would know.

I stood at the threshold, staring up at the blackened steeple. The bell no longer rang, but I could still feel the echo in my bones. The last time I walked through these doors, I was something else entirely.

I stepped inside.

The air was thick with ash and old grief. Charred pews. Cracked stone altar. Dust floated in the moonlight like remnants of prayers too heavy to rise.

I didn't come for memories.

I came for what was buried beneath them.

In the far corner of the ruined sanctuary, behind what used to be a confessional booth, a panel in the floor gave way with a soft groan. I dropped into the dark below, landing on concrete stained with time.

The hidden chamber wasn't holy.

It was built for those like me—those sent to walk among men but never truly belong. A forgotten sanctuary. A halfway point between heaven and hell.

And I wasn't alone.

A voice scraped out from the shadows. Dry. Sharp. Familiar.

“Well, well... look what the storm dragged in.”

I turned slowly. “Hello, Eli.”

The figure emerged, cloaked in shadow. Same cold eyes. Same half-smile that never touched them.

Eli used to be like me—until he chose something darker.

“Didn’t expect to see you again, brother,” he said. “Last I heard, you were still pretending to be one of them.”

“I’m not here to reminisce.”

“Clearly,” he said, circling me like a wolf scenting weakness. “You’ve got that look. The ‘I broke a rule but want to justify it’ look.”

“I need information.”

Eli chuckled. “And what makes you think I’m still in the business of sharing it?”

“Because something’s waking in this town,” I said. “Something old. And if it’s what I think it is, even you should be worried.”

That stopped him.

He studied me for a long beat. Then:

“This about the girl?”

I didn’t answer.

“That’s what I thought,” he muttered. “You always had a soft spot for lost causes.”

“She’s not just anyone.”

“No, she wouldn’t be,” Eli said, voice lowering. “Not if it pulled you back into this world.”

I stepped forward. “What do you know?”

He hesitated—just long enough to confirm my fears.

“There are whispers,” he said finally. “In places even light doesn’t touch. That something is stirring. Something bound by blood and choice. And fate.”

“Names,” I said. “I need names.”

Eli’s smirk faded. “You don’t want names. Not if you plan to keep your hands clean.”

“I stopped caring about that a long time ago.”

A pause.

Then Eli leaned in, his voice like smoke. “They know you’re here, Sebastian. And they know she’s here too. Whatever brought her into this... it’s older than either of us. And it’s hungry.”

My jaw clenched.

“You’re already in too deep,” he added. “Might as well stop pretending you’re just watching.”

“I’m not,” I said. “Not anymore.”

As I left the ruin behind and stepped back into the moonlight, I felt it in the air—heavier now. Thicker. Like the storm wasn’t coming...

...but had already begun.

I didn’t go back to town right away.

The wind carried something sharp in it now—like it had picked up the scent of blood on the air. And I’d learned to trust that kind of wind. The kind that carried whispers from both sides of the veil.

Angela had called out, and something else had heard her too.

Not Eli.

Not me.

Something older. Something far more dangerous.

And now that it knew where she was, it wouldn't stop.

I followed the back roads toward the old cemetery.

Most people didn't know it existed—tucked deep behind the hills where the forest swallowed everything it touched. The graves were ancient, sunken, some without names. But this wasn't a place for the dead.

It was a marker.

A wound in the world.

A place where the veil between realms had thinned once—and might again.

I reached the rusted gate and stepped over it.

The silence here was different. Not peaceful.

Alert.

And then I felt it.

A pulse.

Not mine. Not hers.

The air shimmered—just faintly—as if reality had held its breath.

And there, standing among the crooked headstones, was a figure in white.

Not Eli.

Not one of the Fallen.

An angel.

But not a friend.

He didn't turn as I approached. Just stood there, hands behind his back, wings retracted, as if the very idea of needing to display power was beneath him.

"Still pretending to be human?" he said, voice cutting through the stillness like a blade.

I stopped a few paces behind him. "You knew I'd come."

He turned, and the moonlight caught his face.

Azrael.

Of course it was him.

The angel of death.

Cold, immovable, and bound to Heaven like a sword never sheathed.

"You always had a weakness for humans," he said. "But this one? She's not yours to protect. She's not even your concern."

My jaw clenched. "You think I don't know that?"

"Then act like it," Azrael snapped, stepping forward, silver eyes gleaming with restrained fury. "What she's going through has already been written. She suffers because she must. Her path is not yours to alter."

"Then whose is it?" I asked, voice steady. "Yours? The ones who write from a distance and never bleed?"

He sneered. "Careful, Sebastian. You already fell once. Keep going down this path, and there won't be anything left of you to fall from."

"I made a choice."

“No,” he growled, wings twitching, the air around him beginning to hum with energy. “You made a mistake. One that’s already rippling in places you can’t see. Your presence here—it’s opened a door that was meant to stay sealed.”

I stepped forward. “Then close it. Leave her alone.”

“You don’t get to dictate Heaven’s will,” Azrael spat. “You broke the law once. Interfere again, and you won’t just lose your grace—”

He leaned in, his voice dropping into a dangerous whisper.

“You’ll lose her.”

I didn’t flinch. “If she were dangerous, they would’ve sent someone stronger than you.”

Azrael’s lips curled into a smile, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “They will.”

A pause. Heavy. Ominous.

“She was never meant to live, Sebastian. But you—you’re the reason she still draws breath. You’ve already broken what was written.”

I clenched my fists, voice low and full of warning. “If they come for her, they’ll have to come through me.”

Azrael’s expression shifted—not with surprise, but with something heavier.

Disappointment.

“You would fall again for her?” he asked, tone curling in disgust.

I stared him down. “No.”

His eyes narrowed into slits. “Then act like it. Go back to Heaven where you belong. Seek forgiveness from our father. And stay off Earth.”

I snarled; voice sharp. “Leave the girl alone—and I will.”

Azrael's glare turned to stone, his presence suddenly suffocating.

"Let me tell you something, Sebastian," he said, voice cold as death. "If you stay—if you fall in love with her... if you choose to become human—my assignment will shift."

He paused.

"To her. And your unborn daughter."

The words landed like thunder.

"That is the future you walk toward if you stay," Azrael warned. "So back off. And go home."

He vanished in a gust of wind and light, leaving me alone in the dead silence.

I stood unmoving, his words ringing in my head.

Your unborn daughter.

Heaven knew.

They knew.

And now I had no more time.

Chapter 2:

Beneath the Bruises

The next morning, I stood in front of the mirror longer than usual. I pulled on a simple skirt and a light blouse—things I hadn't worn in months. The bruises still stretched across my arms and legs, dark and angry, but this time, I didn't try to hide them.

Not with long sleeves.

Not with jeans.

I stared at my reflection, my heart pounding with a strange mix of fear and defiance. What if people stared? What if they asked questions?

I didn't care anymore.

At school, the hallways buzzed with the usual noise—locker doors slamming, laughter, the distant ring of the bell. Connie caught my eye by the lockers, her smile bright but her gaze sharp.

“Hey,” she said softly. “You’re... different today.”

I shrugged, forcing a smile. “Just felt like changing things up.”

She hesitated, then lowered her voice. “Angela, those bruises... what’s going on? You don’t have to lie.”

My stomach twisted. I’d gotten good at hiding. But Connie wasn’t just anyone. She was the one person who might understand.

I thought about brushing it off. Telling her I tripped, or that it wasn’t a big deal. But looking into her eyes—worried, unwavering—I shook my head.

“It’s Richard,” I said quietly. “My mom’s boyfriend. He’s... not nice.”

Her face softened instantly. “Why didn’t you say something?”

“I was scared,” I whispered. “Scared of what he’d do if I told.”

She reached out, squeezed my hand. “You don’t have to be scared anymore. I’m here. We’ll figure it out together.”

For the first time in a long time, I felt a flicker of hope—small, fragile, but real.

We slipped into the back stairwell, the one nobody used since the fire alarm wires got cut last year. It was quiet there safe.

Connie turned to me; her eyes fierce. “You can’t stay there, Angela. He’ll kill you.”

I looked down at my hands, still trembling. “I know. But I don’t have anywhere else to go.”

“You have me,” she said without hesitation. “You can stay at my place for a while. My mom won’t care. You’ve practically lived there half the time anyway.”

I shook my head. “It’s not that simple. If I disappear, he’ll come looking. My mom won’t even notice until the drugs run out. But Richard... he’ll notice. And he’s worse when he’s angry.”

“Then we’ll be careful,” Connie said, already moving into planning mode. “You pack what you need. Just the important stuff. Tonight, after work, I’ll drive you to my house. You stay there for a few days—at least until we figure out how to get the cops involved.”

I hesitated. “The cops never believe girls like me.”

“Then we make them,” she said fiercely. “We take pictures of the bruises. We write everything down—every date, every injury, every threat. You keep it all in one place so there’s proof.”

Her voice shook now, but she wasn’t backing down. Connie had always been brave in the ways I hadn’t learned to be yet.

I nodded slowly. “Okay. Tonight.”

She gave me a look that made my throat tighten—half fierce, half full of love.

“You’re not alone anymore, Angie. We fight back now. Together.”

That night at the diner, I watched the clock all through my shift. Every tick felt louder than the last, like it was counting down to something more than the end of a workday. Connie worked the counter, throwing me steady, silent encouragement with every glance.

When the last customer left and we locked the doors, she grabbed my arm.

“You sure you want to do this tonight?” she asked.

“I have to,” I said. “If I don’t go now... I’ll never leave.”

She nodded. “I’ll wait by the church. Usual spot. Ten o’clock.”

I gave a shaky smile and walked out into the night.

The house was dark when I got there. My heart pounded.

Richard’s truck wasn’t in the driveway—but that didn’t mean he wasn’t home.

I slipped inside as quietly as possible, holding my breath.

My mom was passed out on the couch, a half-empty vodka bottle balanced on her chest. I stepped over her, careful not to wake her, and hurried into my room.

As soon as I shut the door, I locked it and grabbed the old gym bag from under my bed.

Clothes. Money. Toothbrush.

My hands shook so hard I could barely zip the bag. The house was too quiet—the kind of quiet that always meant danger.

I crept to the window and slid it open. Cool night air rushed in. I tossed the bag outside—it landed with a dull thud in the grass.

Then I climbed onto the windowsill, one leg out—

And a hand grabbed me.

Tight. Crushing. Yanking me back into the room.

I gasped as the air was knocked out of me. Richard's grip was iron. His breath reeked of alcohol as he dragged me away from the window.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?” His voice was low and slurred, filled with venom.

I struggled, kicking, trying to break free. He slammed me to the floor. Pain shot through my ribs as his weight pinned me down.

“You don’t get to leave,” he hissed, his hands digging into my shoulders. “You don’t ever get to leave.”

Panic exploded in my chest. I couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t move.

But I wasn’t giving up.

My eyes locked on the lamp on the nightstand.

With everything I had, I reached out, yanked the cord. The lamp crashed down, slamming into his temple.

He stumbled, dazed.

I shoved him back, heart pounding, legs shaking.

Move.

I scrambled to the window again—one leg over—when his hand caught my ankle.

“Get back here!” he roared.

He yanked me back with terrifying force. My body slammed against the frame as he dragged me inside, then slung me by the ankle across the room like I was nothing.

I hit the bookshelf hard. The wood cracked, books toppled, and I crumpled to the floor in a heap of pain and splinters.

Everything hurt.

My ribs screamed. My shoulder throbbed. I couldn’t move.

There was no escaping him now.

The room spun as I tried to breathe through the pain. My vision blurred, and I tasted blood in my mouth.

Richard stood over me, breathing hard, his fists clenched at his sides.

“You think you can run?” he growled. “You think someone like you has a way out?”

Tears stung my eyes, but I refused to let them fall. Not in front of him. Not again.

His shadow loomed over me, and I braced for the next blow.

But it didn’t come.

Not yet.

He just stood there, eyes wild, chest rising and falling like a beast deciding whether to kill or wait.

I didn’t know which was worse.

Sebastian

I sat on the rooftop of the abandoned building at the edge of town, elbows resting on my knees, trying to breathe.

Azrael's words still burned in my ears.

If you fall for her... if you choose to become human... my assignment will shift. To her. And your unborn daughter.

He didn't say it as a warning. He said it like a sentence.

And I almost believed him.

Because I hadn't planned to fall for Angela. I hadn't come to Earth for love. I came for silence. For peace. I just wanted to live out this fragment of time—drifting like smoke, anonymous among the people I was once sent to protect.

But then... she prayed.

And everything changed.

I felt it again now.

Not a prayer this time.

A scream.

Raw. Wild. Terrified.

It ripped through the stillness of night like a jagged tear in the veil—and I knew exactly who it belonged to.

Angela.

I flinched, breath catching in my throat as my whole body tensed. It was like being yanked by the ribs, every instinct inside me flaring to life.

I could feel her panic—like fire under my skin.

I tried to block it out. To listen to reason. To Azrael. To the order I had once belonged to.

But her cries were louder.

And I didn't know how to shut them out.

I pressed my fists to my temples, shaking my head. Stop. Don't get involved. It's not your place.

But it was too late for that.

It had never been about choice.

It had always been about her.

Maybe... just maybe, she was my destiny.

Maybe I wasn't meant to save the world or redeem my wings.

Maybe I was meant to fall.

And not into darkness—

But into love.

Into a life I never believed I could have. A normal life. A human life. As a seventeen-year-old boy with blood in his veins and fire in his heart.

For her.

For our baby.

I stood abruptly, heart racing.

And I ran.

The streets blurred beneath my feet as I moved faster than anyone should have been able to move. Her screams still echoed in my head. Her

fear gripped my chest like chains. And the moment I reached her house, I didn't knock.

I didn't hesitate.

I came through the bedroom window.

Glass shattered as I landed hard inside, knees bending to absorb the fall. The room was chaos—books scattered; furniture knocked over. Angela was on the floor, half-conscious, bruised and trembling.

And towering over her—was him.

Richard.

He turned just in time to see me rise from the broken glass like something not quite human.

“Who the hell are you?” he barked.

I didn't answer.

My eyes met Angela's.

And in that instant, the choice was made.

Her breath hitched when I touched her shoulder, but she didn't pull away.

“Are you okay?” I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

She nodded shakily, eyes never leaving mine. “Sebastian... why are you here? How did you know where I lived? We just met.”

I swallowed hard.

The truth burned at the back of my throat, too big to say. Too dangerous to explain.

But I gave her the piece I could.

“I heard you,” I said quietly.

She blinked. “Heard me?”

“Not your voice. Not out loud. But...” I hesitated. “When you’re afraid, when it’s too much—you call out. You don’t even know you’re doing it, but I heard it. Tonight. And I came.”

Angela stared at me; eyes wide. Not in fear.

In wonder.

Like something in her already understood, even if the rest hadn’t caught up yet.

Behind us, Richard groaned and shifted again.

I turned my head, just enough for my voice to carry.

“If you touch her again, Richard,” I said coldly, “I’ll make sure you’re the one who ends up praying.”

He stilled.

Good.

I turned back to Angela.

“We need to go.”

She nodded, wincing as she moved to sit up. I helped her gently, cradling her like something sacred.

Because she was.

I picked up her bag from the floor, slung it over my shoulder, then wrapped my arm around her protectively.

The window was still open.

I led her to it, steadying her as she climbed through. I followed after, landing lightly in the grass beside her.

The wind had shifted again.

It no longer smelled like blood.

It smelled like a warning.

And I didn't care.

Not anymore.

Because whatever consequences Azrael had promised...

I'd face them all if it meant keeping her safe.

Angela

The night air hit my face like a wave of cold truth.

I was out.

I was alive.

But I was shaking so hard I could barely keep my legs under me. If Sebastian wasn't holding me up, I don't think I'd be standing at all.

My window disappeared behind us as we moved through the tall grass. Every step away from that house made it feel less real, like something I might wake up from.

But the pain in my ribs said it was real.

The blood on my lip said it was real.

And so did the boy beside me.

Sebastian.

He had come out of nowhere—crashed through my window like something out of a dream or a nightmare—and saved me. No hesitation. No explanation.

Now I couldn't stop staring at him.

Who was he?

He didn't move like other people. He didn't fight like them either. One moment, Richard had me. The next, Sebastian had him pinned like it was nothing. Like it didn't take effort.

And his eyes—when he looked at Richard, they weren't just angry. They were ancient.

That was the only word I could think of.

Ancient.

But when he looked at me...

I didn't feel scared.

I felt seen.

Held.

Like I mattered in a way I hadn't mattered to anyone in a very long time.

We stopped just beyond the tree line near the old church, the one Connie and I always used as a meeting place. The stained-glass windows were broken, and the roof had half-collapsed, but it had always felt like sanctuary.

Tonight, it felt like salvation.

Sebastian sat me down gently on the steps, then crouched in front of me. His hands hovered at my sides, unsure of where I hurt, unsure if I'd let him touch me again.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, voice low.

I nodded slowly. "Some bruises. Maybe worse. I don't know yet."

He winced like it hurt him too.

I studied his face. He looked so calm. So quiet. But something behind his eyes burned. Like he was fighting something I couldn't see.

"You said you heard me," I whispered. "How?"

Sebastian was silent for a long moment. Then: "Sometimes... I just can. I don't know how to explain it."

That wasn't true.

I knew it. He knew it.

But I didn't press him.

Not yet.

Because something inside me already knew—deep down, beneath all the fear and noise—that he wasn't like anyone else.

And maybe I wasn't crazy for hoping he came for me.

Maybe... he was meant to.

The silence wrapped around us like a blanket—thin, fragile, but real.

I sat on the steps of the old church, hugging my arms around myself as if I could still feel the echo of Richard's grip. The bruises burned. My ribs ached. My ankle throbbed. But the sharpest thing in me wasn't pain.

It was the question.

Why had Sebastian come?

Why really?

He sat next to me, quiet and still. He hadn't said much since pulling me out of that house. Like maybe he was afraid of what would happen if he did. Or maybe... he didn't know what to say.

I turned to him, voice barely a whisper.

"Sebastian?"

His golden eyes met mine in the dark, calm but unreadable.

“Yeah?”

“Why did you come back for me?”

He didn’t answer at first. His gaze dropped to his hands; fingers curled loosely together like he was holding something invisible.

“I mean,” I went on, forcing myself to speak through the tremble in my chest, “we don’t know each other. Not really. You could’ve walked away. You should’ve. So why didn’t you?”

He exhaled, slow and careful, like he was choosing his words one heartbeat at a time.

“Because” he said finally, “something about you wouldn’t let me.”

I stared at him, trying to make sense of what he meant.

He looked up at the broken stained glass above us, the pale shards catching moonlight like tiny, fractured stars.

“The first time I saw you,” he said softly, “you looked like someone drowning in plain sight. And I—I guess I’ve seen too many people pretend they’re fine when they’re breaking inside.”

He turned to me again.

“And when I heard you—really heard you—I couldn’t ignore it. I didn’t want to.”

My throat tightened. I didn’t know what to say. I wasn’t used to someone choosing me for any reason that wasn’t cruel or selfish.

I lowered my gaze. “You don’t owe me anything, you know.”

“I’m not here because I owe you,” he said. “I’m here because I couldn’t stay away.”

The wind stirred between us. I felt it in my bones—that pull again. That strange gravity between us I didn’t understand but didn’t want to run from either.

Maybe it wasn’t just safety I felt around him.

Maybe it was something else.

Something that could grow into something bigger than both of us.

I reached out, just a little, letting my hand brush his.

And for the first time in what felt like forever...

I didn’t feel alone.

We sat in silence for a while longer, letting the night settle around us.

The stars above looked like they were holding their breath.

I didn’t know what tomorrow would bring, or the day after that. But for the first time in months, I didn’t feel like I was about to break.

Then I heard it—the familiar rumble of Connie’s beat-up car crunching along the gravel path behind the church.

Headlights swept through the trees, and a moment later her door slammed.

She came around the corner, breathless, wide-eyed, flashlight in one hand and phone in the other.

“Angela!” she called out, panic breaking through her voice. “Angela, are you—”

“I’m here,” I said, standing slowly. My voice was hoarse. “I’m okay.”

The flashlight beam landed on me, then on Sebastian, who rose beside me like a shadow peeling from the steps.

Connie rushed forward and wrapped her arms around me so tightly I could hardly breathe—but it didn't hurt. It felt like home.

"Oh my God," she whispered. "You're bleeding. Jesus, Angie, are you okay? What happened?"

"It's okay," I breathed. "I got out. I made it."

She pulled back, eyes wild with worry. "I thought—I thought if you didn't show up—" She looked past me suddenly, to Sebastian. Her body stiffened.

"And who the hell is that?"

Sebastian stayed quiet, giving her space. But his presence was impossible to ignore. He didn't move like other people did. He didn't feel like them either.

"This is Sebastian," I said, voice low. "He's... the one who got me out."

Connie's eyes narrowed as she scanned him, then me. "The guy from the diner?"

I nodded.

She crossed her arms, jaw clenched. "Okay, I don't know what kind of superhero move just went down, but I want to be very clear—if you hurt her, I will ruin you."

"Understood," Sebastian said quietly, and for the first time I saw him smile. Just a little.

Something passed between them. Not friendship. Not yet.

But respect.

"Okay," Connie said, exhaling. "Okay. I parked on the back side so no one sees us. Let's go."

She wrapped her arm around me again, and together we walked through the trees toward the car. Sebastian followed a few paces behind, silent, watchful.

When we reached the car, Connie opened the door and helped me into the backseat.

“Home?” Sebastian asked gently.

I shook my head.

“Not home. Not yet. Just... somewhere safe.”

Connie nodded. “My place. Mom’s out of town till Tuesday. You can crash in my room.”

Sebastian lingered at the edge of the trees.

He didn’t ask to come with us.

But as Connie started the car and pulled onto the road, I glanced back through the rear window.

He was still there.

Watching.

Waiting.

And for the first time in my life, I wanted someone to be watching.

Chapter 3:

Predator

The bottle slipped from Richard's fingers and shattered against the linoleum, a sharp crack cutting through the silence of the darkened kitchen. He didn't even flinch. Just stared at the broken glass pooling in liquor, his chest rising and falling in uneven bursts.

Angela was gone.

She'd run. Left without a trace.

And that meant one thing: someone was helping her.

He pressed his hands flat against the counter, knuckles whitening. The room stank of stale beer and old sweat. The flickering light above the stove cast long shadows that danced like ghosts across the peeling wallpaper.

He didn't remember falling asleep. He rarely did anymore. The drinking blurred things—time, pain, memory—but when he woke, the rage always returned sharper than ever.

"You think you can get away from me?" he muttered; voice slurred but venomous. "You think someone's gonna protect you?"

His bloodshot eyes flicked to the crumpled photograph pinned to the fridge. Angela, maybe ten years old, her smile stiff, her mother's arm draped around her shoulders like a noose. He tore it down and crushed it in his fist.

"She's mine."

The words stuck in the air like poison.

He knew where she might've gone. That little friend—Connie. Always hanging around, whispering behind closed doors, planting ideas. Angela

never had the guts to do something like this on her own. No, Connie had pushed her.

But then Richard paused, frowning.

That guy. The one who'd come out of nowhere.

He remembered now. How he'd been slammed across the room. How the air seemed to go still, how the boy's eyes had looked at him like he wasn't even human.

Who the hell was that?

Some punk? Some new boyfriend?

Was Angela sleeping with someone?

The thought curdled in his stomach.

He needed answers.

And just as the anger surged in his gut, something shifted in the room. The shadows deepened. The air turned cold.

Behind him, a voice broke the silence—smooth, cold, and inhuman.

“Quite the mess you’ve made, Richard Carter.”

Richard spun, eyes wide, breath catching in his throat.

A man stood in the corner of the room, tall and pale, with silver eyes that didn't blink and an aura that made the hair on Richard's neck stand up. He wasn't there a second ago. No sound, no warning. Just... there.

“Who the hell are you?” Richard barked, though his voice lacked bite.

“I’m someone who knows things,” the figure replied, stepping closer. “Like the fact that Angela didn’t run alone. That boy—Sebastian—isn’t just anyone. He’s... special.”

Richard's jaw clenched.

“What are you talking about?”

The stranger tilted his head slightly. “He’s been close to her. Too close. You didn’t see it, but I did. He touched her like she belonged to him. She cried for him.”

“That’s a lie,” Richard snarled. “She wouldn’t—she’s mine.”

Azrael smiled thinly.

“Not anymore.”

Richard’s hands curled into fists. Rage boiled in his veins.

“He’s the reason she’s gone,” Azrael continued. “He got into her head. Told her lies. Whispered things to make her leave you.”

Richard’s breathing turned ragged. “Why would you care?”

“I don’t,” Azrael said simply. “But I know what happens next. And so do you.”

A long pause.

Then Azrael stepped even closer, his eyes glowing faintly now.

“Go to her. Remind her what happens when people forget who they belong to.”

And just like that, he vanished—gone in a blink, as if swallowed by the shadows themselves.

Richard stood frozen for a long moment, fists clenched, blood roaring in his ears.

Sebastian.

He was going to make that bastard pay.

He lit a cigarette with shaking hands and took a long drag, exhaling smoke like a dragon nursing a grudge.

The cops wouldn't help her. Not once he told them how she lied. How she liked the attention. How she always came back.

He knew how to play the victim.

He knew how to wait.

And he wasn't done with Angela.

Not yet.

The engine of Richard's truck coughed to life, sputtering smoke into the cold night air. He didn't care how loud it was—the whole neighborhood could hear it screaming and he still wouldn't flinch. Let them look. Let them wonder. None of them would say a damn thing to his face.

The cab reeked of cigarettes and spilled beer. The glove compartment was jammed with old papers and unpaid bills. He reached across the seat, flipped it open, and pulled out a folded scrap of paper—an address scribbled in faded ink.

Connie Bennett
172 Maple Drive

He remembered it from months ago. He'd followed Angela once, after a fight. Watched her run off with that girl, too shaken to look back. He'd kept the address.

Tonight, he'd use it.

He drove slow. Deliberate. Eyes on the street signs, mind running dark scenarios like film reels in his head.

Would Angela open the door herself? Would she be scared when she saw him?

Good.

Fear made people easier to control.

But as the miles ticked by and silence grew thicker, something colder began to settle in his bones.

Not guilt. He'd drowned that years ago.

Not regret.

But something close to unease.

Because this time, she hadn't come back.

No tearful text. No apologetic call.

She'd vanished.

And that meant someone had given her the courage to disappear.

That someone needed to be taken out of the picture.

He rolled to a stop a block away from Maple Drive, killing the headlights. The neighborhood was quiet. Too quiet. The kind of place where porch lights were left on, and people trusted their neighbors.

He reached behind the seat and pulled out a crowbar.

No knocking tonight.

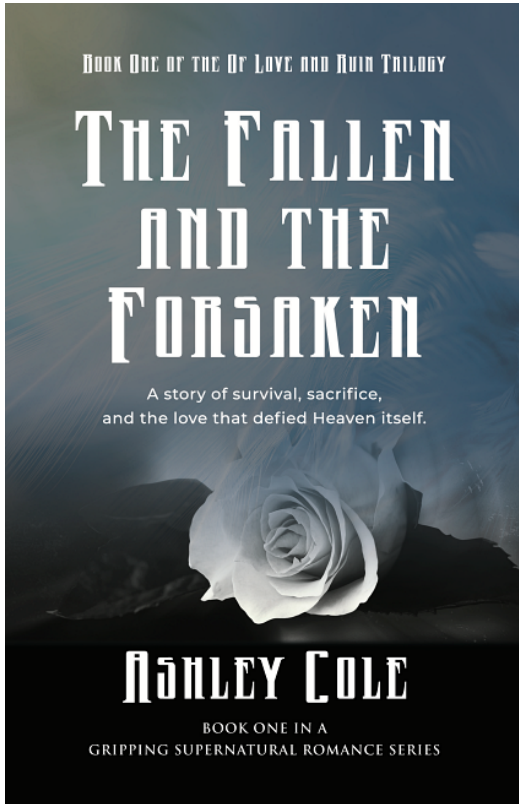
No talking.

Just answers.

And maybe a little reminder.

He stepped out of the truck.

And the night swallowed him whole.



Seventeen-year-old Angela escapes abuse and finds salvation through Sebastian—an angel sent to protect her. As darkness rises, love and light collide in this emotional Christian fantasy of healing, purpose, and the power of divine love.

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