



Stolen Soul:
Acedia

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First Edition

Chapter 7

He interrupted their reunion as he appeared in the corner of the loft.

Startled by the stranger's sudden appearance, Christos asked, "Where did you come from?"

He paused still taking in the presence of the figure who, unbeknownst to Christos, truly was the Devil. A look of amazement at how much they looked alike grew over Christos' face.

"Why are you here?" Acedia asked annoyed.

"Acedia, you need to tell Christos about us. The babe is mine." The Devil lied.

"What? No! It is not yours! I was already pregnant when I laid with you." She turned. The look on Christos' face was heartbreaking. In remorse, she explained, "I was lonely and it didn't mean anything. I love you." She began to move towards him.

Christos held up his hand. "Wait. Stop."

For a time he looked from her with her pleading eyes glistening and clear with remorse, to the innocent tender child swaddled and back again trying to grasp her words.

The stranger piped up, "You, good sir, have every right to be angry. I don't blame you. However, we both know she could never be faithful."

Christos turned his gaze to the stranger who stood, glib, smug and strangely triumphant. Christos' eyebrows knit as if he was trying to see how to untangle the threads of truth and lies. After a moment, his response came, side to side his head began to shake ever so slowly.

"I'm sorry, Christos. I can't undo what I did but I do love you."

The Devil interrupted, "Acedia, it's time for you to pay. You will be with me anyway. Remember your sister." The Devil

inspected his fingernails, "So, your time with me can start now or you can kill for me now."

In a fury, Christos barreled towards the Devil but he vanished. The momentum of Christos could not be stopped, he ran headlong into the loft's supporting post. He crumpled to the floor. The Devil returned, this time levitating in mid-air, near the pulley and rope.

"Choose, Acedia. Be quick as I have no more time for you to decide. I need a soul." The Devil smiled.

She could not believe her eyes. *Is this a dream? For if it is, then it is truly a nightmare!* Acedia felt unsure what to do now. Her heart thumping, her blood pulsed in her ears so loud that she could hardly think. The man with whom she had caroused months ago was not a man at all but something supernatural, something beyond words, something with which she had to comply.

Just as the Devil had instructed, she made a choice. She grabbed the knife.

Acedia thought she could attack. She hurled the knife at him but strangely it stopped in midair just before it reached him. It rotated then angled towards the direction of Christos. The Devil blew at the knife. The dirk flew across the loft to where Christos was still huddled on the floor. The blade plunged into his back as the handle vibrated from the impact.

"No! No! No!" Acedia screamed.

She ran towards Christos.

There was the scrape of wood upon wood.

The Devil forced the stool to slide across the loft floor just in front of Acedia causing her to lose her footing.

It was too late to regain her balance. Acedia landed on top of Christos plunging the knife even further into his back. Acedia scrambled off him. She gasped as she clenched at the knife as she struggled to pull it. When she did, the wound surged the deep dark wine color. Within minutes, his life bled out on the floor.

Acedia was wide-eyed. Her hands bloody, she dropped the dirk. In horror, she realized what she had done, no, what the Devil

had done to her beloved. She crouched over Christos' body and screamed, "No!" Acedia collapsed onto her love's body.

The Devil's voice came, "You must give the child to me."

"What?" Acedia was shocked. "No! You just killed Christos and have the soul of him. You cannot have her too!"

The Devil let out an exasperated sigh, "Technically, I only wounded him. You actually killed him." The Devil smoothed an eyebrow. "In any case, I see now his soul was not meant for me. His love is old and tied to my Father in heaven. I knew that I would never be able to turn him." He snickered. "Oh, Did I forget to mention that?"

"No, you cannot have my child. Spare her. Please!" Acedia cried, realizing her daughter was now his target.

The Devil raised his hand to his chin as if he were considering this situation, although he had already anticipated this exchange.

"You do remember what happened with your sister, don't you? You will be going to hell but it's a shame to leave this child without any parents so, you can kill her and we'll be done with it."

"No, no, please, leave her be."

"As an adulterer and murderer, you have proven yourself worthy of me. What's one more murder?"

"I can't. I won't."

"Ah, but you must." The Devil grabbed a fistful of her hair and dragged her to the child.

Acedia screamed, "No please, I'll do anything. Leave her be." She began pulling on his arm and barely jostled him. She was no match for his unhuman strength.

With his free hand, he delicately approached the child and attempted to touch her forehead. He recoiled. The child's soul emanated through her body; she was too pure for him to touch.

"Damn it!" He let out an exasperated sigh although Acedia was still struggling to pull him away. "I was counting on three but one will have to do." Devil said as if speaking to himself. Then to Acedia, "The babe will be allowed to live as a mortal. As for you,

you and I have much in common. We both have been thrown out by our fathers. I will make a deal with you. I will give you all worldly things, ever-lasting beauty and riches but, you must do what I need in return.”

Acedia asked, “So no harm will come to my daughter?”

“Of course.” he smirked.

She looked at Christos’ body. A flurry of thoughts raced through her mind. She envisioned prison, possibly a dungeon, living penniless, she could see no way to get away from this. Acedia knew that she had been tricked and trapped and there was nothing she could do about it. Then she looked at her child. “All the riches I need?” She asked.

He nodded.

She did the same.

He grabbed her wrist, and with his razor sharp nail slit her finger then unfurled a scroll and laid it on the table.

“I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking it’s not right but my dear, you’re penniless. You’ve no one to care for you. If you have enough gold, then, you can raise the child in our ways. And clothe yourself in the finest silks. Don’t be stupid.” The Devil cocked his head. “It’s the chance of a lifetime.”

Acedia considered her situation.

The Devil looked at Acedia hovering over the scroll.

“So, let’s make this deal final. Make your mark,” he ordered.

With the red of the cut, Acedia began to write the six letters of her name that her father had taught her. She wrote the A.

But coming from just below the candle, Acedia heard something.

“It’s not right. Don’t, Acedia! It’s not right!” said the tiny, young, almost unperceivable voice.

Acedia withdrew her hand and began to rethink things.

Despite the hesitation, the Devil swooped in and snatched the scroll.

“Your mark seals the deal with me.”

“But I . . .” her voice trailed off.

It was too late. It was in that instant she was transformed. Her hair, dress, and teeth turned lustrous. A perfectly fitted gown spun from fine purple silk appeared on her body. Acedia savored the fabric with her fingers. She lifted the dress to see her feet, her sandals were replaced with silk slippers. Upon her hip, there was a bump and when she slithered her hand in, she found the inner pocket. It held more gold than she had ever seen. Then, a hollow cold crept into her innards.

The babe, as she had all along, slumbered on through this exchange too. Acedia caressed the child's plump cheeks and the babe's tender lips curved into a smile. *All will go well for her.* Acedia was intent upon that.

Acedia looked over at Christos' body slumped in the corner, again tears came, "We had a wonderful life."

"No, no, my dear, he had a wonderful life. You on the other hand, remind me of Narcissus. You love no one but yourself."

Acedia's bottom lip began to quiver.

"However, do not misunderstand me; that is something I take pride in. For now, farewell, my love." He smiled and melted out of sight.