

Jason doesn't speak when he sees her on an autumn day, when the leaves are fading from red to grey and the skies above are pearly. She sees him too, maybe, but he's the one who approaches her as she sits, alone and somehow not, on the cement pavement just several steps from him. Her eyes are big, and her blond hair creates a sort of halo around her head. (*Which he finds kind of ironic because the girl he sees, Isa—*)

He tries to speak but it catches in his throat, just one big lump of sorrow and saltiness he can't quite fathom. Awkwardly his hands fly to the pockets of his frayed tan jacket; he looks up at the bland atmosphere around him and questions silently the sheer vividness she is creating around her.

Her eyes meet his unblinkingly, and when she stands up, Jason thinks he would not be surprised to see her in full flight, laughing at the world below her and leaving to join distant lands. But the thought is soon dispelled as she shoots him a look—of what, he cannot quite say—and cocks her head.

"I know you." she says, and annoyance flashes through Jason before he realizes that she's smirking in that queer fashion only she can pull off as she says it. "Long time no see, Jace."

That's all he hears from her before she turns and leaves, each step full of casual grace and freedom he never knew she possessed. But he runs after her and catches her by her bare arm—scrawls on it with a sharpie his number and address. He notices that she doesn't look displeased, not at all.

"5 o'clock good with you?" she says, and Jason nods.

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This time he speaks, maybe a bit too much. He takes her coat, like a gentleman, and admires the way her shirt is the *teensiest* bit low-cut, unlike a gentleman. They don't make small talk; instead he clears his throat and talks about the first thing he notices.

"You didn't erase my number off your arm."

"I didn't want to, Jace." she replies bluntly (*she's never been a romantic*) and proceeds to seat herself on the chipped kitchen table. She runs her fingers over the wooden surface and Jason sits down next to her, marvelling again at the glow that seems to fill the small apartment just at her arrival.

"Why did you leave, Isa?" he blurts, and *oh, aren't we good at making blunt conversation without thinking about the scars?*

Isa takes a while, thinking of a response, and he looks at her, devours her, finally accepts the fact he's missed her terribly since the day she refused to say goodbye and left Chicago with thirty-five dollars in her pocket and a battered suitcase slung over her back. Now that he has her sitting three feet from him with a pondering look in her eyes, he begins to savour the feeling of having her near him, the radiance surrounding her.

"I left because I was scared." She says finally, and the air is suddenly heavy. "I-I ran, Jason, I ran away, and don't ask why I did because you'll know soon enough." Her voice becomes sharp towards the end, and Jason of course knows better than to go any further with Isa's cryptic response but instead rejoices in the sheer fire of it. She smiles when he doesn't answer, and just for a second he swears he hears something vaguely like the notes of a harp playing delicately in the background.

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It turns out she's brought over two twelve-packs of Blue and they end up hysterically, irrevocably, extremely drunk on his garage-sale sofa, but not before he learns of her life in the last twelve years—working the streets for three, then sobering up to actually get off her ass and getting her undergraduate to become a "culinary assistant" for the rest.

"—which basically means I get a bunch of free shit." She finishes, sitting haphazardly on the couch, long limbs everywhere. This strikes Jason as extremely funny, and he howls with uncontrollable laughter until tears stream down his cheeks. The salty taste on his mouth jolts him back to drunken reality, and he can almost feel the sexual tension in the room go up ten notches as a strange golden fire is evoked in Isa's eyes and her fingers dance on his skin.

Then her mouth is on his, and they're kissing with a passion as strong as hatred as her hands roam freely underneath his shirt. Her hands are warm—strange considering the fact she's been clutching at an ice-cold beer seconds ago—and Jason, fuelled by some strange animalistic desire, rips her tantalising top off and is about to unhook her bra when suddenly he feels them.

Wings.

Two large, white-feathered, glowing wings are sprouting from her slender back and they flap as though happy to be finally freed, creating a gentle breeze around her bare torso. Her blond hair is shining and cascades down her shoulders in rippling waves of gold, and a soft light surrounds her form as she smiles on at Jason. The smile holds a challenge; it dares him to recoil, to be disgusted with her, to fear her.

Jason, shaken out of drunkenness, thinks she's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen.

“You’re an angel, Isa.” He whispers, his own soft voice seeming too loud in the eerie silence, and her lips grin crookedly. He knows he’s safe, and her smile is bringing back the music he can almost hear, so beckoning and soft, surrounding him like a hug.

“What gave it away? Was it the two big wings?” she answers sarcastically, and her wings flap languidly as though laughing at Jason’s stupidity. Jason forces himself out of his reverie, looks her clear in her star-dazzled eye.

“Funny though.” He says, the irony of the situation getting to him now, “I’d always thought you were more of a demon.” For a split second he’s afraid he’s gone too far, but then she laughs, the tinkling sound more magical to him than the faraway harps.

“I thought so too.” She says, eyes bright. “But one day I woke up and I just *knew*. That’s why I ran, Jace, for a really stupid, selfless reason. You’re my Saviour, and I’d only hurt you in the end.”

Jason looks at her, unable to register the words that echo in his brain. Saviour. It sounds like she expects him to be some sort of superman, and he says to himself, *well, no pressure!*

“I mean,” She explains, thinking out each word carefully, “you keep me earthbound. We have to free each other in order to fly, and in order to free each other, one of us has to die.” A silvery shine is coming from her now, and Jason gasps when he feels the light dance on his skin. He forces himself to ask the next question, even though there are so many things to ask and so little time, he suspects, to ask them.

“What do you mean, free each other?” he asks, half-afraid to know. Isa’s face twists unpleasantly as she grabs for her shirt and slides it over her golden head. She gets to her feet, all tipsiness gone, and Jason stands as well. Something tells him they won’t be coming back anytime soon.

“I think,” she says, snatching up her purse, “it’s time to go see a friend of mine.”

He follows her wordlessly into the violet dusk.

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Jason’s first impression of Shay is that she’s a hardened, rough-talking sort of street thug with little regard for other people. But the hard shell ebbs away and he can see that she used to be sweet and vulnerable; he can see this by the way she treats Isa, carefully and gently, almost as though they were lovers. He guesses, by the delicate way Isa responds to this treatment, that they probably once were.

“Hey, handsome.” She greets them as they approach, Jason shielding himself behind Isa, half-afraid to see anything more. “You’re Jace, huh? Isa’s new buddy, am I right?”

Isa glares at him in a way that says *don't respond to that*.

Shay is beautiful too, but in a way much different from the radiant angel beside him. Her black hair falls straight down her thin shoulders, her skin is moon-pale, and something in her dark eyes tell him that she's seen sorrow. But they're angry eyes now, and when he sees the fire within them he knows that she's an angel too. There's no golden light or music, but she carries herself the same elegant way and he's sure he sees lumps in the back of her frayed drop-box shirt. He notices also the harshness of her voice, and that gets to him the most.

The two angels talk for a while and Jason watches the early stars, noticing how bright they seem tonight as they pin-prick the darkened sky. He catches words from their conversation, words like *freedom* and *flight*, *music* and of course, *Saviours*.

"Guess who's mine?" Shay asks bitterly, cigarette muffling her words. "Brian Estevez, the bastard."

Isa looks genuinely sorry, and Jason wonders who this Brian is.

"No way, hun! They know he's a pompous jerk, how the hell can he be a Saviour? I mean, a Daemon I'd understand, but a *Saviour*?"

"Franklin's going senile." Shay says moodily, flicking the cigarette to the ground where it burns bright and extinguishes. "He thinks we'll be good for each other, and that our souls are *supposed to meet*. How do they let a guy as trusting as him become the Chief anyway? He'd let *Voldemort* be a Saviour if he said two nice things."

"That's not too far a stretch. You know how he always says serial killers are just looking for a friend." Isa responds drily, and the two laugh, Isa's laughter illuminating and golden, Shay's echoingly sad.

It's getting colder now, and Jason envies how the two angels seem to be immune to the chilly air. Isa, seeing him shiver, intertwines her slender fingers through his. Her touch sends heat rushing through his body and he grips her hand a little tighter. Shay looks venomous seeing this, so Jason quickly asks the question he's supposed to.

"So, what does it mean, to free an angel?"

Shay studies him reproachfully. "Why do you ask, handsome? You a Saviour now?" She laughs a little too hard at her own joke and begins to cough uncontrollably. Isa takes this time to look at Jason in the fast-fading light.

"She'll kill you, you know." she murmurs, and Jason can tell she's not kidding. "Hope you know what you got yourself into. Shay might not look like much now, but she used to be one of the

strongest angels. Well, until...” and then she lets a sad sort of smile that looks entirely out of place on her fiery face grace her lips.

Shay’s finished choking up her lungs, and she spits a wad of phlegm onto the pavement. She looks up, let her black eyes meet his. “Answer me, pretty boy. You a Saviour now, or what?” her voice is dangerously dark, and as her palms clench into fists, Jason can almost see what looks like black fire building in her tight hands. Recklessness seizes him, maybe because Isa looks amused by the whole business and maybe because he can see that emotionally, Shay is very much *screwed*.

“Oh, I just happen to be Isa’s.” He says offhandedly, though he has the vague feeling he’s not too far from committing suicide. “We’re connected, you know, like *soul mates*! Isn’t that great?” he plasters a stupid smile onto his face and waits for the bomb.

It never comes. Instead Isa cries out like she’s been shot and when he turns to look, Shay is gone. All that’s left is a single black feather, drifting onto the sidewalk like black snow and dissolving instantly. As he bends to stem Isa’s blood, Jason thinks he hears whispering words that fade away with the wind.

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“Isa,” Jason asks later that night as he sees the blood stain her pure wings like rose petals, “Why did you take me to see Shay? She never even told me what it meant—the whole Saviour thing.”

Isa swivels around to send Jason an exasperated look, even as he trails broken kisses down her side and runs his fingers through her bloodstained wings. “Jace, you know what it means. You knew all along.”

Jason shrugs, and presses himself even closer to the fire that is Isa. “Maybe I do. Is it that we hate each other?” He knows it’s not, but the game is so addicting.

Isa laughs softly even as the blood runs heavier, cascading down her tanned back and onto the sheets below. “Jace, hate doesn’t look like this. I should know. We love each other; get used to it. But then again, love and hate are pretty damn close.” She says the last bit like she has endless experience with passion.

“I’ve always loved you,” Jason whispers into Isa, who shivers inexplicably. “You know that. But you didn’t answer me yet. Why did we see her, anyways? All she did was hurt you, you knew she would.”

Isa shrugs heavily, her blue-grey eyes unfathomable. “I hurt her first.” She says, and Jason knows instinctively that Isa is the reason for Shay’s diminish, the reason she is more of a

moonbeam than a sunbeam. “I was *her* Saviour before I knew you, Jason, and what happened? I killed her Spirit.”

He wants to ask what that means, but then he sees the gash in her wings are beginning to heal, mend themselves easily and flawlessly. Isa groans and intertwines her legs with his.

“We should sleep.” She says, kissing the nape of his neck. “We’ve got lots to do tomorrow.” Moonlight filters through the window and illuminates her already bright form, and *oh* she is so very beautiful, defines the word beauty itself. He attacks her lips hungrily, and no, they don’t get much sleep.

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They are wakened the next day by a fevered knocking on the front door, and Jason thinks groggily that the neighbours won’t be too happy with the noise. So he reluctantly gets up and pads to the door in only his boxers, groaning when he sees the scars in the bathroom mirror. Isa is already up and she looks as though she’s bathed in liquid sunlight. She’s dressed in a robe, and a look of repulsed horror is on her face.

“Morning.” He yawns, but she doesn’t reply. Instead she points to the vibrating door.

“It’s Estevez.” She spits, looking horrified. “What the hell is that little jerk doing here?”

“Open up!” a smooth, albeit angry, voice is saying from the other side. “Open up, Isa, if you know what’s good for you!”

Jason looks to Isa who wrenches open the handle to reveal a slim young man in an elaborate suit and three-figure shoes. He looks very flustered, and he rushes into the apartment without being invited. He waves his arms wildly, and Jason is reminded of some sort of octopus as he approaches Isa, who recoils instantly.

“What the hell are you—” she begins roughly, but Estevez interrupts her.

“She’s dead!” he shouts, eyes crazed, and Jason wonders if any of the neighbours have called 911 yet. “The Daemons got to her last night; I’ve been told to alert the other angels. The blood is still on my hands.” He holds up his red palms with a disgusted look, but Isa merely looks stunned.

“What?” she snarls, seizing Estevez by the shoulders. “Who’s dead? It- it’s not- can’t be—”

“Shay, that’s who!” Estevez cries, looking ruffled. “Tragic, it was, what with the *horrible laughing* and the soul simply leaking onto the floor, and her laughing even as they tore her to shreds...”

There's real sorrow in the man's eyes and he collapses into a chair with his bloody hands to his face. Isa looks shell-shocked still, pacing the living room with her usual light step.

"No—no—angels can't die—" Isa says, as though reasoning with fate, and Estevez looks suddenly sympathetic, as though just remembering the relationship the two angels shared.

"They can if their Sprit already has." He says in a deadpanned voice, examining his crocodile-skin shoes. Jason appreciates the fact he doesn't say who exactly killed Shay, but the room dims suddenly and he sees that Isa looks fainter, paler; like a day-old memory.

"I should free her." She says faintly, and Estevez's eyes bulge, all pity gone.

"I was her Saviour, Isa! I *already* freed Shay!" he shrieks, doing his bizarre octopus impression again, limbs flying. Isa fixes him with a fire-filled glare that quenches him instantly.

"I was her real Saviour." she says, with a voice so honest even Estevez doesn't respond but instead raises an eyebrow in confusion as Jason follows her wordlessly out the door and into the golden morning. Isa steps back to tell Brian Estevez one last thing.

"Don't bother trying to get rid of the blood." She says with a twisted smile. "Won't ever come off."

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What Isa does to free Shay is simple. They take a smelly bus to a small, run-down graveyard about an hour away, Isa looking hollow and lost all the while and Jason knowing better than to make meaningless conversation. Instead he stares out the grimy window and wonders how exactly she broke her. He suspects he'll never really know, because Isa is just like that; refusing to reveal more than she needs to, covering up the wounds with a quick word and flick of her head. He thinks these thoughts until they've arrived, Isa touching his arm lightly and sending warm fire running through his veins.

"We're here." She smiles, and he smiles back, swaying slightly.

"You ready?" he asks her, shoving roughened hands into pockets and stepping off the bus. The shrieking of children still echo, and Isa bites her lip. Her soulful eyes gaze into the weathered graveyard, engravings and faded flowers sticking out awkwardly from different angles like crooked teeth, early morning fog swirling around the tombstones.

"No." She answers, and sliding open the creaky gate, she walks inside, dew sticking to her worn converse. Jason, as he often does, follows her shimmering form into the cemetery which looks gloomier than ever by contrast.

They walk amongst the maze of endless gravestones, some, though not many, looking tended for; the rest simply forgotten along with their inhabitants. Weaving between the sombre stones, Jason wonders what exactly Isa will do to free Shay. No one has ever evoked such curiosity from Jason —Isa is like a golden fire, wonderful to watch and admire but to be feared if blazing out of control.

Finally she stops at a patch of rough ground. “This is it,” she says, no doubt in her voice. “Hold my jacket, will you?” She rips off the blue windbreaker and tosses it at Jason, who watches in reverie as her wings flap free, looking so very out-of-place in its very beauty in the dead burial ground.

What Isa does to free Shay is simple. She merely plucks a golden-white feather from one of her wings and presses it to her lips. Then she gently sets it onto the barren ground. It flashes black and promptly dissolves into a golden mist.

“Shay,” Isa says, voice dark and deep yet somehow melodious, “I free you.”

She turns then, locks her fingers with Jason’s, and they walk slowly out of the graveyard, neither one looking back.

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What Jason will remember about the year to follow is the way Isa looks in the early morning, wings bathed in the light of dawn and eyes reflecting late stars. He will remember also the nights they spend together, hands and lips locked together beneath the night sky, the sadness only really showing then. The light strengthens him, brightens him, deepens him, until one day he feels them too. Wings.

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*I know this is really cliché and all of me to do, just before we get our happy ending, but I gotta tell you.*

*I’m leaving you, Jace. I know you’re ready now and so am I, and this is predestined anyways, one of us leaving. My spirit has already broken once; I don’t think it can happen again.*

*You’ll always be my Saviour, you know.*

*Isa*

Jason burns the note, thankful that his tears won’t extinguish the flames but instead add to them.

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Oh, well. At least the stars still shine.

*fin*

