

Even Angels Die

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A couple of angels, Zarek and Astrid, are in love... but something terrible happens to Astrid, and Zarek must find her again! But when he finds her, she won't be herself, for she has been reborn.

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Chapter 1 - Death and Life

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1 - Death and Life

Prologue:

In this land, there are two distinct peoples, the Cherubim and the humans. They are similar, except for a few things. A cherub has eyes where the irises are of two colors, swirling constantly. Also, every cherub is born with birthmarks. Two distinct wings on their backs, and, depending on the shape of the tattoo looking mark, the wings that emerge. The cherubim are also known for their unparalleled beauty, both genders of the race. The cherubim are either considered a sign of great luck to come... or an omen to be feared. Nobody has ever proven this, but it's still reason enough for him or her to be hunted by ruthless brigands.

The story:

Deep in the middle of the Great Forest on the western side of the continent, two Cherubim, known to the humans as "Angels" were goofing off.

"Sometimes I wonder if you really are crazy. Did you know that?" Astrid said to Zarek.

"Really, why is that?" asked a young man with locks of black hair hanging in his face, as he hung upside down from a tree-branch 20 feet off of the ground. He curiously regarded her with his swirling red and black eyes, his head cocked to one side like a bird's.

"Because, you do all this dangerous stuff, without any thought. Don't you know you could fall and get killed?" She replied, tossing her long blue-black hair from her face, and then glared at him through her swirling evergreen and silver eyes. "And then where would I be? Hmm? I'd be alone, thank you very much. I would be all alone, without anyone to protect me. And, who's fault would that be? Yours."

"Well, for one thing, unless they drug you, you don't need anybody's protection. You'd have them dead in no time. Plus, you didn't even give me time to answer your question. You just answered it."

"I knew the answer. I didn't need you to say it." She told him calmly.

"But, why would you ask me a question, if you already knew the answer?" He asked her, confused.

"Men" Was all she said before she walked away.

"Hey, what did you mean by that?" Zarek twisted on the branch, to check where she was. He couldn't see her. He then heard a started cry, then some laughter. He carefully dropped from the branch and went to look for Astrid.

"Hey, Astrid!" He could hear horses galloping away and shouts of alarm. "Where are you? This isn't funny! Come on this isn't-" was all he got out, before he walked into a clearing and saw Astrid hunched over on the ground, bleeding from a wound in her stomach. In her hand was a bloodied arrow. It looked as if she had pulled it from the wound.

"Zarek." She coughed up some blood onto the ground. "I'm sorry, I wasn't able to stop the arrow. My telekinesis, I didn't react fast enough." She winced." Ouch, this hurts." She coughs again, and blood streams down her chin. Zarek runs to her side and kneels beside her.

"You're going to be ok, I'll bring you to your brother, and he'll heal you, just like that." He chokes on a sob. "It'll all be ok, just don't leave me." He hugs her close, careful of her injury, and great big, black leather wings burst through the fabric of the back of his shirt. They shoot into the sky.

Zarek lands in front of a cabin by a lake in the middle of the woods "Zarek." Astrid whispers.

"Don't speak, save your energy." He tells her gently.

"Zarek, listen to me, the ones who shot me, they were wearing furs and chain mail. They were just brigands. They shot me for sport. I was so mad, but I'm not mad anymore. I just feel calm, and cold." She coughs more blood trails from the corner of her mouth down her chin. "If I don't make it, I swear, I'll come back. When the God of the Sun and the Goddess of the Moon embrace, I will be reborn. I've been faithful to the Goddess, she will grant me this wish. We're immortal remember? Time cannot harm us much. Please, look for me when I come back."

"Don't, Astrid, please don't go! Please, I know you will live! You have to, you promised you'd marry me!" He could hardly keep himself from breaking down.

"What's going on here?! Zarek?! What happened to Astrid?!" A tall man with short black hair runs up to the couple, his swirling light blue and silver eyes wide in shock. "What has happened to my sister?" He whispers, stifling a cry.

"Brigands. They shot her for the fun of it, just because she was there. And because she's a Cherub I'm guessing." He holds down a sob. "Can you do anything for her? Adonis, I'm so sorry, she walked off, and I followed right behind. I brought her here as soon as I found her." Astrid suddenly starts to shiver violently, then, just as swiftly, stops moving completely.

"No." Zarek whispers in disbelief. "Adonis, check her pulse!" Adonis puts his fingers to his sister's

jugular, and pulls them away numbly, silently. He solemnly closes her eyes.

"I'm sorry. She's gone." Adonis says bleakly. His face contorts in anguish, and a great cry of anger rises from his lips. He screams defiance at the Heavens for allowing this to happen to his baby sister.

A single tear slowly finds its way down his face, to fall off his chin and land on his sister's cheek. After he calms and quiets down he brushes it from her face tenderly. He then takes off his light brown wool shirt, exposing the black, feathered wing birthmarks on his back, and places it over her face "Come, we should get her ready to be sent off to the Good God and Goddess. She wouldn't have wanted to wait. Impatient little girl." He smiles sadly at her still face. He would have sworn she had a look of determination about her.

After they set up the pyre, they waited till the moon rose. They gently lower her seemingly fragile, limp body onto it. They lit it, and stayed there till the fire was nothing but ashes and faintly glowing embers. When even the embers died down a great wind came and blew the ashes away. Scattering them far and wide. She was burned with all of her clothes she had been wearing.

Zarek took her ring. Made of silver, it was a crowned heart being held between two hands. She had been wearing it on her left hand, heart pointing inwards. It meant that her heart wasn't out searching. He tenderly places the ring on a finger on his own left hand, heart facing outwards. His heart would now be searching for hers forever more.

She and him had been friends since they were able to walk. She had worn it ever since her 16th birthday, when her father had given it to her as a present. He died only a week later, ambushed by brigands.

When she was 19, and he 20, he told her how he felt about her, and asked her to marry him. He was so scared that she would laugh at him. He was especially frightened when her mouth quirked at one side in a mischievous grin. Then, to his utter surprise, she said, "Do you have any idea how long I've been waiting to hear you say that?" And with that, she took her ring from her right hand, and faced the heart inward on her left hand. "I accept."

They then embraced. She may not have said it, but he knew her. That single action of switching her ring around meant that she had feelings for him too. And he later found out that she didn't just have mere feeling for him, but that she loved him, heart and soul alike.

50 years later, Zarek doesn't look aged much at all. That is how it is with his people. Time barely touches them, like it does humans, who die within a century.

The loss of a loved one, no matter how much time passes, is a very painful thing. Even after half a century, Zarek could remember Astrid's death as if it had happened yesterday. The anguish was still alive and well in him.

He couldn't take it anymore, he decided one night. He'd kill himself. He walked over to the river, about to throw himself in, when a mighty wind pushed him back from it, forcing him away from the water.

"Why?" He screamed raggedly at the sky, at the Heavens. "What do you want from me? Haven't I suffered enough?" He throws a rock at the wind. It threw it back into his face, bruising and cutting his cheek. He rubs at it sullenly. "Okay, I'm listening."

Then he hears a whisper, soft and gentle. Then he felt a soft caress brush across his injured cheek, and it no longer hurt. "Astrid" he whispers in wide-eyed wonder. Then, after a few minutes of staring unseeing into the sky, everything started to darken. He looked carefully through his fingers at the sun, and, sure enough, it was starting to darken.

"When the God of the Sun and the Goddess of the Moon embrace, I will be reborn." He remembered Astrid saying this. "She's back. She's back!" He exclaimed, jumping for joy. But, he had a problem. He had no idea where to find her.

For nearly 19 years he tried to find her the old fashion way. Looking.

He finally got frustrated and went to find one of the traveling fortunetellers. In the city, they very rarely gave any real predictions, since it took so much energy. But for one of Zarek's race, they were more than willing to help. After all, they considered it good luck.

He found a little old lady among a traveling caravan of entertainers, and asked her. She led him into her wagon, and told him to sit on one of the horribly, bright colored cushions while she looked into her seeing stone.

"Where wind and water meet. Towards the place the sun wakes up each morning. That is where you will find her. But be warned, she is a different person. She has a new, and different life." She told him.

He listened to her warning. He paid her handsomely in gold he had gathered over the years, and departed. First going to where the sun awoke each morning. East.

Zarek flew as far as he could go. That's where he saw the ocean. He was searching along the coast, up until he found himself in a small fishing village.

It was starting to get dark, so he set out to find a tavern. The tavern he chose was *The Flying Salmon*, the sign had a salmon with wings, jumping out of some water. "Where wind and water meet, huh?" He pulls his hood up over his head, hiding his red/black Cherubim eyes, and then enters through the quaint tavern's double oak doors.

As he entered, all conversation seemed to stop. He noticed that everyone was staring at him, and he waved. Still keeping an eye on him, the other customers resumed what conversations that his entrance had interrupted, mostly fishermen.

The place had a welcome, homelike feeling to it. He went up to the slightly plump, female bartender. "I'd like a room and a meal. How much would that cost?" He then paid for a room, a small meat pie, and a mug of the house special, which had a taste of fruits and spices. It also had a nice, lingering after taste. He sat down in the darkest corner he could find, he pulled his hood over his face, and began enjoying the drink and pie. The drink was, amazingly, non-alcoholic. Not typical in taverns.

Then a girl in her late teens with long red hair walked in through the front doors and straight to the bartender.

"Hey, mom." She kisses the older woman on the cheek. "Owen and I caught some fish, he's bringing them into the kitchen through the back, ok?"

"Okay. Thank you." She said with a smile "I'll thank him later, also. Now, can you go around and serve the customers if they need it, I'm going to go prepare one of the fish for a nice treat for you, Owen and me. Is that ok?"

"Sure mom." She leans over and embraces the older woman, then lets her go. Then she starts walking around, asking people if they needed anything. Some of the older men calling out friendly words to her that made her laugh along with them. By the time she got around to Zarek, he had finished his pie and drink.

"Would you like anything, sir?" She asked in a friendly manner. When he looked up into her eyes, about to answer, he gasped in surprise. Her irises were evergreen and glowing silver, swirling together around her pupils. Her eyes widened a bit. She took a step back and lowered her gaze "I'm sorry. I'll get somebody else to wait on you." As she started to walk away, Zarek gently grabbed her arm.

"Wait, why?" He was confused by her reaction. She turned cautiously back toward him.

"You mean, you're not offended?" She asked hopefully.

"No, why would I be?" He said as he pulled his hood from his forehead, revealing his own swirling black and red eyes. "I'm sorry, but what is your name?"

"My name is Skye." She replied, in awe of this visitor. "You're a Cherub too?" She asked him, still numb with shock.

"Yes, I am." He replied with a soft smile. Then looking over her face he realized she had the same eyes as Astrid. He touched his fingers to her cheekbone, in a sort of daze. Then he realized what he did when

Skye took a quick step away from him. "I'm sorry he said." And he meant it. All she did was give him a suspicious look, turned around and walked swiftly away. He watched her walk behind the serving counter, and serve up the food orders. He did notice, no matter how much she tried to hide it, that she was blushing.

Since it was getting dark, and there was nothing else to do, he retired to the room he paid for. It was in the second floor of the building, and he had to walk by Skye in order to get to the stairs. As he was walking by her, their eyes met for an instant, before she instantly averted her eyes. He found the stairs, climbed them, found his room, went in and closed the door behind himself. When he entered his room, he just laid down on the bed, his body motionless, but his mind moving through his memories of when Astrid died. Tears rolled silently down his face, into his neck length hair, soaking it.

When he awoke the next morning, he was surprised to discover that the sun wasn't even up yet. It may have been too early to rise for him, but he couldn't go back to sleep, so he just went downstairs. He brought with him a small piece of apple wood, he had found it a few weeks ago in an orchard, and his penknife.

When he got down stairs, he sat at the only table where the light from the kitchen shined. He carefully set to work carving the piece of wood.

He was startled when a shadow was cast over his work just after he finished the last detail. He looked up, startled into awareness. Skye was standing over him.

"What are you doing?" She asked him, curiosity obvious on her face.

"I'm carving a little statuette of a hawk. See?" He held it up for her inspection. Her eyes went wide in wonder. She held her hands out to it.

"Is it ok if I hold it?" She asked, reminding him of a child. He smiled kindly and handed it to her. "It's beautiful."

"Would you like to keep it?" Asked her, out of the blue. She was stunned.

"This?" She asked unbelieving. Looking at it from all angles "But it's so pretty."

"Exactly." Was all he said. And reached over and carefully closed her fingers around the little treasure.

"Why, though?" She asked. "It took time to make this, why would you want to waste it on me?"

"You remind me of somebody I once knew." He said as he stood and walked toward the door.

"Wait!" She called out to him. He turned to look at her, regarding her curiously. "Where are you going?" She asked him tensely. "It's only a couple hours past sun-up." She shifted her feet nervously.

"I'm going for a walk in the woods. Would you like to join me? I could teach you how to use your Cherubim Gifts, or powers, as humans call them."

He held her gaze for a few moments before she replied. "I'll go ask my mom if it's ok." She ran into the kitchen. When she came back out moments later, she was holding a basket.

"Alright, let's go." She said to him with a little grin. They walked side by side until they reached the edge of the woods.

"Do you know of any good clearings? With a fair amount of open space to do some work?" He asked her. She did, after all, live in the area.

She nodded and led the way to a little clearing, with grassy turf all along the inside. She knelt, then, and opened the basket. Out of it, she took a wool blanket, and spread it on the grass. On it she placed some plates of nice treats, like apples and little pastries, probably made for the customers of the tavern for their breakfast.

He took off his hooded cloak, and dumped it into a pile at the foot of a tree. When he looked back at Skye, she was string curiously at him.

"Why did you trust me?" He asked her seriously, holding her swirling evergreen/silver eyed gaze with his red/black one.

"What do you mean?" She asked him back, confused by his question.

"You came out here alone with me, far from anybody who could help you if I decided I wanted to hurt you. And I could, you know. Hurt you, that is." He continued to hold her gaze.

"I'm not sure." She replied, getting a speculative look on her face. "When I saw you, it was like déjà vu. I felt as if I've met you before, and that, if anything, you'd protect me, not hurt me." She smiled at him. "Actually, I wasn't really sure you were real. I've had these dreams, you see, and you're in them." She smiled sheepishly at him. "They're just dreams though, right?" When he didn't say anything, she went on. "Okay, so, are you going to teach me anything? My parents can't teach me this stuff, you know." She gives him a nice smile, filled with laughter, and was it sorrow?

"Wait a second. Are both of your parents human?" He asked her.

"Well, they aren't my REAL parents. You see, when I was younger, they found me crawling around in the woods, with nobody around for miles. So, they took me home, and sent messages around to the surrounding villages, kind of like a lost dog. Well, it goes without saying that nobody answered. So, my "parents" adopted, and raised me alongside their own son, Owen." She smiled sadly.

"I'm so sorry." He said to her, meaning it. He gave her a sympathetic smile. "I know what it's like to lose somebody very important to you."

"Really? Who?" She asked cautiously, not wanting to bring up any subject that would hurt his feelings.

“Well, many years ago, I was engaged. As you know, our people don't age very fast past the age of 20.” The expression on her face made him stop. “You did know that, right?”

“No.” She replied. “I didn't.” Her face was full of awe. “So, how old are you?” She asked him, curious as a little kid.

He thought about that for a bit. “Last I checked, about less than a year ago, I was about I think roughly 80 years old. I can't be sure, I don't really keep track of it.” The look of shock on her face sent him into peels of laughter. “Yes, when you reach 20 or so, you'll not age very much either.” He said with a smile.

“Okay, back to the subject, who was it who died?” She reminded him.

His mood instantly sobered. “My fiancé, Astrid. She had eyes like yours.” He stopped talking when her face flushed, and her face went blank. “Are you ok Skye?” He asked her worriedly.

“Astrid.” She said. “That's my name in my dreams.” She gave him a blank stare. “It was a dream, right?” She yelled at him, grabbing two handfuls of his shirt and looking him in the eyes.

“Wait, what do you mean?” He asked her, baffled. “Tell me, what are your dreams about?” He asked her in a calm voice, even though he wasn't feeling calm a single bit.

“Well, you're in it. It's mostly the same thing, though. I'm telling you that you're crazy, and I walk away from you, into the woods. I walk into a little open area, and an arrow hits me in the stomach. I cry out a little, I think. I'm not sure. Then they laugh at me, pointing, calling me dirty names. Then I hear your voice, calling out to me. I pull the arrow out, cause I can't stand the sight of it in my skin. It hurt so much, I've woken up screaming before. The rest is kind of fuzzy. It does really make sense to me.” She stopped talking. Then she raises her face toward Zarek, and looks defiantly at him. “Tell me. Did that really happen? Or do I have an over-active imagination, like my mom says.” She's stunned when she sees a tear roll down Zarek's cheek.

“Astrid. Are you really she?” He asked her desperately.

“How could I be?” She asked, suspiciously. She wanted answers, and she wanted them as soon as she could get them, to make real sense of all of this.

“It happened just like you said. Except, she told me that she would be reborn. I've been looking for over 60 years now. Can you really be her?” He asked her desperately.

Then she got an idea. “Hey, why don't we ask the old gypsy lady? I've heard she can show you your past lives, if you have any. Owen was a blacksmith, she said. I went with him that day, but I was too scared to ask her. We could give it a try.”

He nodded agreement, smiling into her face. “I hope you are her.” He bent down and kissed her on her forehead. “Here, flying is faster. You do know how to make your wings grow at least, right?” He asked her.

“Of course.” She replied tartly. Then the back of her shirt burst apart, and two great white-feathered wings protruded from the wholes they had made in her shirt. “See?” She said, smiling like a little child.

“Yes.” He said, smiling also. “I can clearly see. Now, can you use those wings?” He asked with a raised eyebrow. That was when she shot herself into the sky like an arrow. He, then, grew his wings, and quickly caught up to her. “Well, that answers my question.” He told her with a wolfish grin.

It only took a couple of minutes for them to travel what had earlier taken them about 20 minutes. “Oops, we forgot the blanket and food.” Skye said, looking worried.

“Don't worry, we can come back later.” He comforted her.

Skye led the way to the old woman's hut. It was more like a gypsy wagon, with the wheel taken off, and put on stumps instead.

Skye landed then walked up to the door, with Zarek landing right behind her. She knocked a few times on the frame where a door would have gone. An old aged face popped out from behind the rug covering the doorway. Her eyes lit up at the sight of them.

“Ah, two Cherubim. This is my lucky day.” She paused, regarding Skye for a second, before recognition dawned on her old wrinkly features. “Skye? I didn't know you were one. Oh, well, it doesn't matter, come in, come in.” She waved toward the inside, indicating them to come in, as if her word weren't enough. They followed her in, and they all sat on some grotesquely bright colored cushions, after they made their wings grow back into the birthmarks on their backs.

“So,” The old woman spoke “what is it that you ask of me?” She asked calmly, with a bit of cheer in her voice.

“Well, we have some speculation that I knew this man in my past life. We're here to see if it's true.” Skye replied.

“Come, sit in front of me, child. I will do only a simple spell, like I did to Owen. You remember, yes?” She continued at Skye's nod. “Well, if you have has a past life, that is how you will act. Like nothing ever happened, you'll just remember a little, nothing of this life. That `s, until I break the spell. Now, are you ready, Skye?” She asked, her voice full of concern.

“Yes.” Skye told her stubbornly. Determination was written all over her face.

“Okay then.” The old woman then out her hands together, and begins a soft little chant, then extends her hand towards Skye's face, and softly touches her forehead. Skye's eyes widen, and then close. “Well,” said the wizened gypsy “let's see if she was once another person, shall we?” She looked across at Zarek, who nodded his agreement. It was enough for her. She turned back to Skye and, chanting again, traced a circled on Skye's forehead, and then pressed her index finger to the center of it, and Skye opened her eyes with a gasp.

“Where am I?” Was the first thing she spoke, panicky. She slowly looked around, and her gaze fell on Zarek. With a cry, she launched herself into his arms, holding him so tight, he could barely breathe. “Oh,

Zarek! I missed you so much!" When she looked into his face, she saw his shock. Then she turned where she was on the floor, looking around the little wagon. When she found a mirror, she leaped to her feet and ran to it. It was the height of the wall, and a couple of feet wide. She examined herself in the mirror with curious eyes.

"So, I'm a red-head now? Interesting." She continued to look.

"Um, Astrid?" Zarek asked cautiously. Skye's body turned around to regard him curiously.

"Yes?" she replied with a sweet smile.

"She really is you!" He exclaimed, and jumped to his feet, going up to her, and embracing her. They continued to hug, and then he bent his head down, and planted a kiss on her lips.

The gypsy woman, having a sense of humor, broke the spell as he kissed her. Skye's eye closed without Zarek even noticing, and then they snapped open in surprise.

She tapped him on the shoulder, and then he let her go.

"What are you doing?" She asked him, with a little bit of an attitude, her arms crossed.

Zarek hugged her, and whispered in her ear "You ARE her. You are Astrid."

"Really?" She asked him back.

"Oh, go on you two. Live happily ever after, or whatever the happy ending is." She grinned at them. "I wish you both happiness." She said this last part with a real heart-felt smile, not a mischievous grin.