

AN ANGEL'S CHOICE

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CHAPTER ONE

“Micah, please report to loft room B.”

Anticipation made his shoulders twitch when the summons echoed through the air. His next assignment was *the one!* His wings. He floated a few inches above a sunbeam with happiness, quickly bringing himself back down before one of the Mentor Angels caught him. Looking around guiltily, he noted he was alone. It was hard to hide his joy at the chance. One more assignment and he qualified; one more soul and he would have the wings, his mark of benevolence. He wanted to throw a fist in the air and cheer. Instead he made his collected, if hurried, way to the lofts.

He’d worked hard over the centuries to earn his wings. Angels had very demanding jobs, though few realized it.

A gilt and ivory door appeared within the fluff of one of the concealings as he approached. Those were known as clouds on Earth. At that moment though, he didn’t care if they were called raspberry jam.

The concealing thinned as he neared, and when he lifted a hand as if in greeting to the glowing door, it opened.

After taking a final second to push back his wavy hair and straighten his pristine white robe—it didn’t hurt to look put together when meeting with his mentor—he entered the bright space.

The loft didn’t really resemble a room, which was why they were called lofts. Instead, they were large, open spaces flooded with sunlight or moonlight depending on when you were called, encased as they were in the cool, swirling masses of clouds. Each loft formed around the Mentor and the Book of Souls they guarded endlessly, assigning guardian angels to their duties with diligence and compassion. Every angel in service anticipated being called to the lofts, to serve not only their mentor, but the spirit of God himself. Every visit offered redemption, and a successful assignment brought them closer to their wings.

The golden tome of angel assignments hung in the air as Aria inscribed his mission on the gilded pages. The feather quill flew across them. As it continued to write, leaping and twirling while it filled first one page, then another, and two more beneath her intent gaze – and Aria remained silent – Micah began to get nervous.

Finally, the feather stilled and sank to the side of the tome. With her hands shrouded within the folds of her starlight white robes at her back, Aria looked up.

She was a beautiful woman, one of His Mentoring Angels, and Micah had complete faith in and respect for her. He'd come a long way since he'd been given the opportunity to atone. More than once, he'd challenged her, but she'd merely made him work his way through his misconceptions. It was because of her that Micah wasn't working in Hell. He owed more than a second chance to her judgment, but his own sense of right and wrong. The path had been molded, and now he offered his help willingly to pay back her patience and understanding in him. He hid the smirk, knowing from their long working relationship, he'd been far from an easy student.

It was difficult for him to remain patient though standing before her now, beside himself with this last opportunity. One more and he had his wings! He'd had a lot of debts to pay back. After so many angel-aided miracles, he was ready for this last one.

"Come closer, Micah."

She startled him with her soft-spoken voice. It wasn't her usual greeting. He came forward though without hesitation.

She kept her hands behind her back as she regarded him. Her golden hair hung in a thick sheet between beautiful wings, the mark of her mentoring status. She was beautiful, but angels didn't see physical beauty. Just as he was no longer the man he had been since the last moment he breathed a mortal breath, she was pure, the inspirational beauty that painters craved to emulate with their talents, and that religions used as icons. She glowed with compassion and patience. "You are aware of your reward if you succeed on this assignment?"

Micah wanted to shout his answer to the heavens, to everyone, but he nodded with a controlled smile instead. Her eyes glinted in amusement at his restraint. Ah, she knew him well.

“This is going to be a very difficult assignment.”

Micah shrugged, feeling confident in his ability.

Aria’s gaze cooled a little. “Don’t be overly assured of success on this one, Micah. It is the Christmas season on Earth. The hardest time of the year for us, for those who lose faith.”

There was a moment’s concern, brought on more by Aria’s caution than his one misgiving about the time of the year. Earth hadn’t changed in millennia. People were the same regardless of creed, sex, or religion. He reacted with humans as they saw him, as their beliefs allowed. Sometimes he stayed invisible, sometimes not. He’d become very good at reading the necessity and nudging the proper outcome for the individual. At one time, his commanders would have called him cocky. Now, he was simply confident.

Humans all desired. They all loved, and hated. Many lost their way, and some simply quit. Those souls didn’t make it to the gates, if they chose that path. It was a sad occurrence, but he’d realized some time ago that he couldn’t help them all. Those souls didn’t become angels, but it was his honor to aid the others as best as he could. So far, he had a near perfect track record. Even young angels make mistakes.

He wasn’t young anymore, which was why he anticipated this assignment with eagerness.

When he was granted his wings, he’d be the mentor, he’d write in the tome, and call on his fellow angels to help those who needed it most. It wasn’t power, as he once had craved. It was time to pass on what he had learned.

“I do not fear Christmas,” he said. “It is the best time of the year.”

Aria tilted her chin in a thoughtful silence. “I hope in this case, your assessment helps the lady in question.”

Lovely! He almost cheered. Women's wishes were by far easier to aid as they rarely fell into materialistic wants. Some did, of course, but women were emotional creatures. They wanted warmth, caring, tenderness. His time traveling back and forth over the centuries gave him quite an advantage.

"Are you ready?" she asked. There wasn't any need to instruct him, as she once had. He was an experienced angel of mercy. Aria had been a patient and thorough teacher.

"I await my assignment with an open heart."

She lifted a hand over the hovering tome, and it slowly spun until Micah could also read it.

Silence stretched as he read.

"If you do not think you can help this one..." Aria said, disturbing Micah's second read through. There was no anger or disappointment. Not every angel could help every case.

"No, no. Why would you think that?" he quickly asked, hiding the swell of doubt he felt, for the first time. This one was not going to be easy.

Her gentle tones floated on the sunbeams around them. "I ask because you were frowning."

He glanced up and caught her stare. Simply patient. A single 'oh' was all he could give her in answer. Aria did not lie.

Micah squared his shoulders. "I accept." He pushed away the niggles of doubt that sat on his shoulders. He had been asked to help for a reason. He could not fail this one.

For the first time since he'd been serving the heavens, he questioned how humanity continued with such wounded souls walking the Earth. And how those who harmed so deeply could still walk free. Aria's expression was blank, merely accepting his decision, then she nodded and offered a small smile of warmth, blessing him for his choice. It was not out of arrogance that he'd chosen to help this wounded soul, but

because he knew he had been asked for a reason. He would help her, heal her, prepared for the coming moments or days as much as he could be. Standing straight, he waited.

In a flash of light, Aria and the tome disappeared, and Micah was swept down to Earth to give his aid to this lady who had, indeed, suffered.

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