



MAX HARDY

HER MOONS  
DENOUEMENT

Even Fallen Angels Have Wings

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Ah, her succinct instinct haemorrhages denial  
elementally raw, she, Carpathian hewn  
pale beauty shaded scarlet in alacritous  
humorous allegory of her wanton moon

Ah, her bridled burden a sullen mood constrained  
midst the tacit verve, she, in sated succour strewn  
ignominy the riddle of illicit names  
naked edged the carrion of her hollow tune

Ah, her frozen glow carves tears upon virgin lips  
an echo bereft, she, breathless of amour's swoon  
soul scarred and sewn, beating with their eternity  
no warmth of life tonight to light her aching womb



## Chapter 1

The rusting, squeaky rubber wheels bounced erratically over the uneven shoe-shined cobbles on the narrow, steeply inclined side street leading up towards the Royal Mile in Edinburgh. The wheels supported a twelve-foot high distressed mahogany cabinet that was agitatedly shaking and rocking while being pushed up the incline. A hunched back man, dressed in Jester's motley, dull and threadbare, all vivacity faded from the colours, was pushing from behind it. Tarnished silver bells jingled on the end of the Fools Hat framing his ruddy, sweating face, which was grimacing under the strain of his labour.

Up ahead, streams of people passed the entrance to the alleyway and the vociferous hubbub of the main street in the middle of a Fringe Festival began to pervade the alley, drowning out the jangling bells as with one last huge effort, the Jester rolled the cabinet off the cobbles and onto the flag stoned pavement of the Royal Mile.

The din was infectious, swirling through the open air under a cloudless midday sun streamed blue sky, intoxicating the milling throngs who were devouring the street entertainment. A slow meandering wave of people navigated their way around crowds surrounding the jugglers, magicians, living statues, fire-eaters and sword swallows, bobbing heads trying to catch sight of the wares. Up and down the pavements, sandwich boards and posters proclaimed the evening gigs, touts

standing next to them shouting out the same message and forcing flyers into the hands of every person that passed by.

The Jester slowly negotiated the cabinet along the pavement, patiently going with the flow, until he came to a small square by St Giles Cathedral, where there was a relatively open space in front of the imposing building. He manoeuvred the cabinet into place in front of steps to the entrance of the Cathedral, the front doors of it facing out onto the street. He opened a drawer in the bottom of the cabinet and proceeded to remove half a dozen buckets filled with stones from within and placed them in a semi-circle about five metres in front of it.

A few passers-by stopped to watch as the Jester skipped back to the cabinet and started to unfasten the doors. Swinging one of the doors open, he turned to the small crowd, smiling broadly.

'Good morrow to you kind Lords and Ladies. Today, I have for you revelations of the like you will have never encountered. They will truly blow your mind. Please, please, avail yourselves of a stone or two from the buckets in front of you while I finish setting up the show.' he encouraged animatedly, his hunched body prancing to open the other door, revealing a large white sheet, fully ten foot tall by ten foot wide covering something within the cabinet. At the top of the cabinet three metal rods with clasps on the end held the sheet in place. Emblazoned on the sheet in blood red letters, each a foot tall were the words 'Even Fallen Angels Have Wings'. Words that were also written on the inside of the open doors.

The jester turned back towards the growing, inquisitive crowd with a broad, almost manic grin on his face and skipped towards the throng building behind the buckets. He had picked up what looked like a metal tube with a bladder on the end from the bottom of the cabinet, which he proceeded to tap off the heads of the crowd as he jauntily skipped the line.

'Fear and Faith. Faith and Fear. Fear and Faith.' he started to sing while bopping the bladder off people, who smiled in nervous expectancy. He suddenly stopped in front of a young, tall skinny man in the middle of the line and stared into his eyes intently.

'In whose faith is your fear founded?' the Jester started to sing, rattling the bladder and shaking the tarnished bells on his hat in rhythmic accompaniment. 'Which God's atonement do you seek?' he continued, turning to the young woman who was with the man and tapping the bladder off her forehead, chest and shoulders in the sign of a crucifix. 'Whose penance keeps your soul grounded, when spirits avarice is preached?' he finished, stooping down and grabbing a few stones from the bucket in front of him. He skipped back a few steps and took in his ever-growing audience.

'Ladies and Lords. Would you help me uncover the truth? Would you help me tear down the veil of deception? I am not without sin, but I am prepared to cast the first stone.' the Jester preached, raising one of the stones above his head in his free hand. He smiled broadly as he watched the crowd look down at the stones they held, then turned and threw his towards the clasps holding the sheet in place, tapping from foot to foot as he took a second stone and threw that. He turned back to the crowd, grinning and skipping. 'Help me derail the veil, help me expose the truth.' he encouraged, throwing another stone which pinged off one of the clasps, slightly dislodging the sheet.

A stone shot out from the crowd and smacked into the sheet well below the clasps with a dull thud, causing the blood red words to billow and dance. More followed, from the hands of people whose faces were still perplexed, but also enlivened with the temptation of the revelation, joining in the crowd reflex. Stones pinged of the woodwork, splatted into the sheet, the odd few making contact with the clasps, shaking them and loosening the cover.

Suddenly, the sheet came away from the clasp on the right side of the cabinet and fell down, partly revealing what lay behind. There were panicked gasps and screams from the crowd and as one, the group shuffled back, dropping whatever stones they still had in their hands to the ground. A few started to push their way out and away from the scene. Many more, the majority, stood transfixed in morbid curiosity, staring intently at an outstretched, blood-stained arm, the hand of which being nailed through the palm to a wooden plank.

The Jester stopped skipping and walked slowly over to the cabinet, his stride imperceptibly lengthening, his shoulders widening as his gait started to un-hunch, even though the lump was still on his back. He grabbed the flapping corner of the sheet and yanked it forcefully off the remaining two clasps to further screams and gasps of astonishment.

In the cabinet was a crucifix, ten foot tall. Nailed to it palm and foot was a scrawny silver haired man, naked apart from a dirt stained loincloth. He was unconscious, head lolling to one side, blood meandering down his brow: from the barbed wire crown that was gouging into it. Behind the crucifix, on the back of the cabinet there were pictures. Smiling faces. Smiling faces of young, vibrant women, their carefree snapshots resonating with the beautiful bright day, but at odds with the macabre scene in front of them.

'Is your fear founded in his faith!' shouted the Jester, turning back to the remaining crowd and pointing his bladder towards the man on the crucifix. 'Do you want to know the truth of his faith! What he does in the name of his faith!' His voice was rising in volume, simmering with vitriol as he stood up fully from his feigned stoop and pointed the bladder towards one of the pictures.

'Demi Simpson, twenty three, a prostitute, went missing in 2008.' he pointed to the next picture. 'Josie Richards, nineteen, a lap dancer, went missing in 2010.' And the next. 'Shelley Crabtree, seventeen,

seven-fuckin-teen,' he spat, 'still in sixth form, went missing three weeks ago.'

The crowd were in stunned silence, but through the Jesters rant could be heard the raised tones of someone pushing through them, the bobbing peaked cap of a police officer visible above their heads.

'Come on people, let me through, what's all the screaming about.' PC Simpson started just as he got to the front of the crowd and saw the vista in front of him. 'Bloody hell mate, what's going on here!' he said as he walked into the open area in front of the cabinet, his incredulous gaze moving between the crucifix and the Jester.

Instantly, the Jester pulled the bladder from the end of the tube he was holding and pointed it towards the PC. The tube was the barrel of a gun. 'Please stop there PC?' he asked calmly, holding the gun steadily at the police officer's chest.

Pandemonium broke out behind them as those in the front of the crowd saw that it was a gun the Jester was holding, panic pulsing in waves as people turned to flee, screaming, while some stood fast in their curiosity and still more on the periphery sought to see.

'Simpson. Bill Simpson. Now I don't know what your beef is Sir, but could I ask you to just keep calm and put the gun down please.' Simpson asked as he stopped suddenly, putting both hands out in front of him in placation.

'You have nothing to fear from me Bill. Quite the contrary. Today I am here to help you. Today I am here to expose the crimes of this man to the world.' the Jester answered, smiling radiantly, the gun not wavering at all.

'What do you think this man has done?' asked Simpson, his eyes darting from the crucifix, to the Jester, to the frantic crowd and the other peaked caps he saw pushing through it.

'It's not what we think Bill, it's what we can prove. In the bottom drawer of the cabinet are folders, each one of which contains conclusive evidence of that man's, no, that *monsters* involvement in the murder of those seven poor women.'

'Okay Sir, so perhaps you could put down the gun and we can talk about that. Talk about who this man is and what he has done.' Simpson suggested, seeing other police officers emerging from the pulsing crowd and gesturing for them to hold back.

'His name is Liam O'Driscoll. Archbishop Liam O'Driscoll.' he shouted, so that the curious still in the crowd behind the ever expanding line of police officers could hear. 'The highest authority of the Catholic Church in Scotland. You may have unburdened your sins to him in confessional. He may have asked you to do three Hail Mary's. That wasn't enough of a penance for these women. No. Their penance was to be bound face down on the altar in the Cathedral behind you as he sodomised them while strangling them to death. All in the name of his God.'

'Jesus.' stuttered Simpson, losing his composure for a moment at the revelation. 'Please don't think about shooting him. If you have evidence that can prove he has done those things...'' he continued before the Jester interrupted, laughing.

'Bill, Bill, I'm not going to kill him. I am giving him to you so that justice can be exacted, so that the lies and deceit that are spread in the name of his God can be exposed. For far too long his seed have committed debauchery under the fear of his faith and we say NO MORE!' he finished the sentence shouting, flexing his shoulders, his eyes alive with fervour.

'We will no longer sit in the shadows of your Gods and let their impotence prevail. Even Fallen Angels Have Wings!' he sang, stretching his arms out as he did, still keeping the gun levelled at

Simpson. There was a rip of Velcro from the hump on his back and out of the Jesters Motley, two giant feathered wings sprouted, fully the length of his arms, shimmering and fluttering in the brilliant sunlight. Simpson stepped back in surprise, an astonished shriek escaping his gaping mouth, in tandem with gasps from the rest of the crowd.

'We want justice. Justice for Demi, justice for Josie, justice for Shelley. We want justice for every Angel that has died. Justice for every Angel left to bleed in the fear founded by the disease of their seed. We want the world to see the truth.'

The Jester quickly turned the gun in his outstretched hand from pointing at Simpson and forced it into the temple of his own head.

'We are the Fallen Angels!' he shouted, smiling wildly at the crowd, and pulled the trigger.



## Chapter 2

I am in a padded cell, my hands and feet nailed to a chair in the middle of it, naked. My mind is swirling, trying to comprehend where I am, what is happening. The walls are pulsing, the stained and ripped individual pads ululating as the material starts to morph, starts to coalesce into faces. Faces of Sarah, my wife. Faces of Jacob, my son. Hundreds of faces staring at me imploringly, their lips screaming in silence. I cannot hear the words, but they echo in my mind, condemnatory.

'Why John, why did you choose her?'

'Why Daddy, why did you forsake me?'

An explosion flashes, startling my gaze from the walls to a point in front of me where the very air itself is torn apart. In the rip I can see a building engulfed by an inferno and I can feel the searing heat emanating from the explosion blistering my naked skin. Behind the aberration, the faces of Sarah and Jacob still silently scream at me.

Then through the flames a shadow appears: the dark, charred, stuttering outline of a person, the nauseous stench of their still burning flesh invading my nostrils on the breath of the searing heat. The outline moves closer, away from the burning house, towards the

rip in the air in front of me. Pieces of darkness start to fall away from the shadow, evaporating into nothingness, revealing the pristine suited form of a man beneath, Dr Ennis. He sneers toward me as he walks closer to the rip in the air, taking a glove out of his pocket, a Vampire glove, impressed with sharp metal pins. As he pulls it onto his hand, he speaks in silence, but the words echo around my mind, along with the other words in there.

'In my world Saul, this type of pain is a precursor to pleasure.'

'Why John, why did you choose her?'

'Why Daddy, why did you forsake me?'

The words swirl around in my head, biting, scratching, clawing and gouging at my understanding, awakening my pain. And I suddenly remember what he does next. What that malicious gloved hand does to my penis and I start shaking furiously in my bindings, strapped to the seat, screaming 'No!' silently at the top of my voice, catching the maniacal image of him climbing through the rip in the air as I try and turn my head away. I can't. It is strapped tight to the chair around my forehead. I try to close my eyes, but they won't close. I am forced to watch him approach, forced to watch that hand get closer and closer to me, forced to watch his rictus grin salivate over what he is about to do.

I see his face. I see Sarah's faces. I see Jacob's faces. I see the gloved hand getting closer, and I start to understand my hell.

Then I see the glove start to disintegrate, breaking up into pieces that float away into nothingness. His clothes, his skin, his hair, his face all do the same. Slowly revealing the naked form of a woman, her body emaciated, hair ripped from her head, her skin pock marked, scarred and ravaged. It is Rebecca. Her gaunt, sunken ghostly countenance smiles beseechingly at me, revealing the withered stump of a tongue

as she pleads with me silently, words bursting into my mind, joining the crescendo.

'You have to believe me John, I am not Madame Evangeline.'

'In my world Saul, this type of pain is a precursor to pleasure.'

'Why John, why did you choose her?'

'Why Daddy, why did you forsake me?'

Her hand, which is still reaching out as she stops in front of me, hovers over the nail rammed through my right hand into the chair. She gently strokes her fingers over it. I wince with the pain, eyes angled down to watch what she does. Skin starts to peel from her fingers as she strokes the head of the nail, then from her hand and from her arm. I watch as the battlefield of harm seems to evaporate from the left side of her body, leaving smooth, lithe skin. Long red hair sprouts from the riven scalp, framing the left side of a face starting to flush with colour, forming the familiar countenance of my lover, Jessica. Her eye is a deep emerald, as is the eye on the right, on Rebecca's side of the face. They both implore me, half wizened, half voluptuous lips silently pleading, screaming in my mind.

'I am not Madame Evangeline. I thought you believed that, I really thought you believed that.'

'You have to believe me John, I am not Madame Evangeline.'

'In my world Saul, this type of pain is a precursor to pleasure.'

'Why John, why did you choose her?'

'Why Daddy, why did you forsake me?'

The walls breathe, the faces seethe in front of me, while inside my mind their voices scream a tornado to my ignominy. My eyes fall from their faces in shame; to the last vestiges of ravaged flesh flaking away

from Jessica's half of their stomach. To the forked tongue of the snake tattoo inveigling its way from their vagina.

To the forked tongue that flicks.

To the snake head that pulses, then bloats and becomes real.

Its head turns to me, beady eyes entrancing me in a stare as it starts to meander up the stomach, over Jessica's arm and onto the chair where my right hand is nailed, more and more of its body coming out of their vagina. I hear a sibilant hiss in my head, followed by words augmenting my torment.

'You had a choice John. It was all down to you. Jacob or Jessica. Only you knew the truth. Only you had the facts.'

'I am not Madame Evangeline. I thought you believed that, I really thought you believed that.'

'You have to believe me John, I am not Madame Evangeline.'

'In my world Saul, this type of pain is a precursor to pleasure.'

'Why John, why did you choose her?'

'Why Daddy, why did you forsake me?'

The snake crawls up my arm and its body circles my neck, coiling around it, the head slowly angling in front of me again as the coils start to constrict. It hisses silently, eyes piercing me, as do the eyes of Rebecca/Jessica, as do the hundreds of eyes of Sarah and Jacob. Screaming words start to change in my mind as all of the lips in front of me start to sync.

'You had a choice John. It was all down to you...'

The coils start to constrict further, tightening around my throat, crushing my windpipe, slowly choking me. All of their lips now whisper sibilantly, accusing me.

'Only you knew the truth, only you had the facts...'

I try to scream, but my throat is too constricted, my tongue fattening and filling my mouth, my eyes bulging in my skull as I am starved of oxygen. I begin to palpitate and shake in my bindings, unable to move, unable to stop the descent into my hell as with the last whisper of breath in me, gutturally I plead 'Forgive me!'

My eyes start to roll in my head, the room around me swirling, the images spiralling into a vortex of faces blurring into each other, all mouthing the same damning incantations. Consciousness starts to leave, everything turning dark, sinking into the distance, my body slumping as the last vestige of my human being escapes. The voices fade. Darkness. Silence. The emptiness of forever.

Then, crystal clear, a voice, coming through the darkness, through the silence, through the emptiness of forever.

'John, think on one thing: Even Fallen Angels Have Wings.'

I wake with a start, sitting bolt upright in the leather chair I fell asleep in. The nightmare is still resonating through my mind so the very first thing I do is raise my hands, just to make sure they aren't nailed to the chair, just to make sure I am not back in that cell. The bandages are weeping slightly and are soaked in sweat, as is the rest of my body, and as I lift my left hand, I see the Nagant M1895 revolver still tightly clasped in its palm.

Statistically, you would think the odds of blowing your brains out with a Nagant playing Russian Roulette would be seven to one. After all, there are seven chambers in the cylinder and only one bullet, right?

Wrong. What people don't generally take into account is gravity. When you spin the cylinder, the chamber with the bullet in is heavier than the ones that are empty, so nearly every time, that chamber will end up near the bottom. So statistically, the odds of blowing your brains out are very long. That's how magicians get away with it.

Slivers of light are seeping in through tiny gaps in the closed blinds, suggesting daylight outside. They are strobing talons through the semi-darkness, revealing the contents of my studio, revealing the collage of evidence I have pinned to every spare surface in the room. I put the revolver down on the writing desk in front of me, stand up gingerly, slouch my way to the far wall through the discarded takeaway containers, empty vodka bottles, ripped up notes and photos festooning the floor. It still hurts to walk. I take in glimpses of the evidence, of images, of loved ones gone on the wall in front of me.

Two weeks ago, my wife and son were killed in an explosion at a country house called Fetherstone Hall. My son had been kidnapped, incarcerated inside a crate in the Hall and was being used as bait. Bait to try and ensure that I investigated the murder of a dead body, Michael Angus, which was also in the Hall. A murder where his mother, Rebecca Angus, had already been committed to a mental institute for the crime. An 'Unknown Caller' set a challenge. He wanted me to find the real killer of Michael and return to the Hall with that killer, within twenty four hours, before midnight, or the crate would explode. All the evidence pointed to a woman called Jessica Seymour, my lover, being the real killer of the dead body. But I knew she couldn't be. I knew that at the time Michael was killed she was with me.

I thought the 'Unknown Caller' was a man called Gordon Ennis. He ran a mental facility called the Fielding Institute, where Rebecca Angus was committed. I had investigated him in the past for suspicious deaths caused by 'Face Down Restraint' and thought that he was out to exact some kind of warped revenge against me. He wasn't directly involved,

but he was a killer and during the course of the investigation, he nailed me to a chair, sexually molested me and would have ripped my heart out if the real 'Unknown Caller' hadn't intervened and saved my life.

I say real 'Unknown Caller', but I still don't know who he was. He was a trinity. Father, Son and Holy Ghost. One in the same. An older man called 'Ben Hanlon' who had spirited Rebecca Angus away from under the nose of Gordon Ennis. A young paediatric physician called 'Rob Adams' who was looking after my son, Jacob. A nebulous voice of the 'Unknown Caller' who no one ever saw. They were all the same person and he wanted me to choose.

He wanted me to choose between Jessica and Jacob. He wanted me to believe that Jessica had an alter ego. An alter ego called Madame Evangeline who had seduced Rebecca Angus and somehow been involved in Michael's murder. But I knew Jessica could not have been Madame Evangeline. Even though Jessica was in Edinburgh when Michael was killed. Even though Rebecca and Michael had been seen in a Limousine owned by Jessica. Even though Jessica owned Featherstone Hall, where Michael was killed. Even though Jessica had the exact same Snake tattoo on her abdomen, I knew she couldn't have been Madame Evangeline.

So I chose Jessica: and Sarah and Jacob died at midnight on that fateful evening when the Hall exploded. Shortly after that, while I was being taken to hospital to have my injuries seen to, Jessica died too, in a car crash. In the space of an hour, everyone I had ever loved was gone.

And I still don't have a clue why. There was a serpent, there was temptation, there was forbidden fruit and someone wanted me to make a choice. I chose wrong. All I do know is that it wasn't chance.

But I will find out. If chance lets me, today I will go and see Allie, Sarah's friend and see if she knows which Private Investigator Sarah

used to have Jess and I followed. I chose wrong, which means Jessica could have been Madame Evangeline. Nothing in the evidence I have can corroborate that. This Investigator may have seen something while following us, which could help.

If chance lets me.

I turn from the wall of frustrated hope and stagger to the other side of the room, picking up the revolver from the desk as I pass. There is a six foot tall blank canvas leaning against the wall, my signature, John Saul, in the bottom right corner. It will be called 'My Last Lament' when it is finished. I'm not sure exactly when that will be. It could be in the next few seconds, it could be in a day, or a week. Only chance knows that.

While statistically there is very little chance of blowing your brains out during Russian Roulette if you let the barrel come to a natural stop, that's not true if you stop the barrel mid spin. I flick the barrel on the revolver out, slip the single bullet into my palm and then quickly slide it back into a different chamber. When you stop it mid spin, the odds are seven to one. When you have tried it seven times, statistically, the odds are even. Every time you try it after that, statistically, you will blow your brains out.

I turn, standing with my back to the canvas and spin the barrel of the revolver, stop it mid spin, put it to my forehead, and for the fifteenth time, pull the trigger.

**'Her Moons Denouement' will be released on**

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