

“The Angel At The Gate” - Excerpt

For weeks now, an overwhelming sense of doom had taken a firm hold of Gabriel St. John and refused to let go. He blearily studied the distant desert landscape from the roof of the Mission Inn. The barren land thick with brush seemed to creep closer, threatening to devour the medium-sized town of Riverside, California, like a malevolent being.

“Now you’ve gone completely daft,” he muttered, shaking his head.

Sleep had become impossible of late. Nightmares of swords and screams haunted him the moment his eyes closed. The Inn’s rooftop garden was his nightly escape, his refuge. Once again he was lost in a hundred bleak thoughts but tonight the loud *meows* of the sleek tuxedo cat interrupted them.

He squatted to scratch the wee cat under the chin, earning him a rumble of purrs. The cat drifted in and out of Gabriel’s life over the last three months, almost from the day he ran up the steps of the historic hotel barefoot, wearing borrowed clothes, panicked that something terrible was about to happen to Abigail Campbell. And it almost had.

“We’re going to have to name you, eventually.”

The cat appeared unbothered either way.

Since the feline made himself a guardian of sorts to Gabriel, some strong, angelic name would be appropriate. Which should have been easy since Gabriel was once a guardian angel himself. The names of his coworkers should have offered lots of choices. But Gabriel’s memory of his life before he found himself unceremoniously dumped in the desert remained fuzzy and full of gaping holes. The only thing he could clearly recall was how he’d watched over Abby Campbell her entire life. She’d been in danger, but

also turned out to be the key to saving the world from a fierce, plague-spreading wyvern set loose by a desperate man hell-bent on rebooting the human race. They'd saved humanity and yet Gabriel was still here, abandoned and alone.

*Why hasn't my Father taken me home?* Deep down, he feared he already knew.

“Because you, Gabriel St. John”—he let his Scottish brogue roll thickly—“are no longer an angel or a human. You've become something else.” Worries about exactly what left his stomach churning.

When sorting out how to save the world nearly cost him his life, Evie, his friend, ex-lover and powerful demon, infused him with some of her energy to save him. The maneuver worked, but changed him somehow. Now his human form possessed some of his angelic powers—or some of her demonic powers? Or both? He'd give anything to ask Evie about it, but for the crime of helping them save the world, his younger brother, Lucifer, had summoned her back to Hell. He hadn't seen or heard from her since.

The cat gave a short sneeze as if allergic to Gabriel's moodiness and trotted away. He rose with a grimace and leaned against the rough-hewn stonewall running the length of the historic, beautiful, but eclectic, Inn. Between all the brooding and pining, he supposed he hadn't been much fun to be around lately. Abby continued to try, but everyone else at the Inn had learned to steer clear of him. To be fair, the twin scars from the dragon's claws raking down the left side of his face from eyebrow to below his prominent cheekbone kept strangers away. Before she'd gone, Evie remarked the scars improved his boyish face, but apparently she was alone in her opinion. Whereas, many people found this human form pleasing prior to the battle, now most glanced at his face and quickly averted their gaze. Or it could be, as Abby gently chided, because a scowl

had become his constant expression. *Plus, these bloody things don't help.* He glowered at the intricately detailed feathered tattoos covering his arms and, of course, the ones on his back covered by his shirt. Their dark colors stood out against his pale skin and drew unwanted attention.