

“The Angel By The Tower” – Excerpt

The loose, coarse gravel grating his cheek like sandpaper when he inhaled was Gabriel’s first clue something was wrong. The scorching sun cooking his back was his second. Somehow he’d ended up flat on his face in a desert. He opened his eyes, blinking away sandy grit to discover he was naked. Again. Of course. Bollocks.

The last thing he remembered was raised voices: his own and his boss’s. A disagreement? Almost certainly since here he was, naked and alone with a mouthful of dirt. He spat it out, groaning as he rolled over on to his back, and saw a strange object waver into focus. What the—a wooly mammoth? He rubbed his eyes and realized it wasn’t just a mammoth but a ginormous five-story tall wooly mammoth. His body bolted into flight mode, limbs lurching in all directions to crab-crawl away until his fuzzy brain processed it wasn’t an actual mammoth but merely a statue of one. Why in the name of all that’s holy would anybody build a mammoth and put it... now there was a good question. Where was he?

The terrain for miles in any direction was a vast landscape of dirt and rock with sporadic dusty looking scrub bush dotting the landscape here and there. The hum of wheels speeding down blacktop and the occasional honking sounded close, but all he could see was desert and the bloody mammoth.

Gabriel staggered to his feet, teetering on shaky legs. He put his hand out to balance himself and touched the hard, glossy surface of the mammoth heated to the temperature of a sizzling hot frying pan by the sun. Snatching his hand away, he

stumbled backwards, arms windmilling to regain his balance. Once more or less upright, he bent over with his hands on his thighs to take a few deep breaths until he felt steadier. What was he supposed to do now? Whether it was sunstroke or the way he had been unceremoniously dumped in the middle of nowhere, Gabriel's memory was almost a complete blank.

He knew who he was, but where he was and why he was here was where everything got a bit fuzzy. The one thing he was certain about was he couldn't stand here looking gobsmacked all day—the harsh sun was already turning his pale skin bright pink. Jiggling around the sharp rocks that bit into his bare feet, he gingerly made his way down the hill. From this perspective he could see other statues depicting dinosaurs of all things along a path of low-growing plants of various tan, sage green and brown colors. He didn't know what they were, but their crisp, clean scent contrasted sharply with how grubby he felt. At the bottom of the hill, there were two beige stucco buildings that blended in with the desert landscape and a small car park. He turned the next bend of the winding path and met a family with three small children coming up toward him.

“Oooh, hallo,” he beamed and gave them a friendly wave. The awkward drop of their jaws in horror sharply reminded him about his lack of clothes. His hands flew to conceal his tricky bits. Shocked, the parents covered their children's eyes and herded them back toward one of the squat buildings, huffing with outrage the whole way. “Right then, must be in America. Answered that question.”