

For as long as I shall live, I will testify to love, I'll be a witness in the silences when words are not enough.

'Testify to Love' by Avalon

Chapter 1

"Alimon! Calliel!"

The Voice boomed out of the shadows, causing the two angels' wings to agitate in alarm before they flattened in submission. They did not look up, did not seek the face that belonged to the Voice. No one did. No one dared.

"Yes, Lord?" they replied in unison.

"Where is Emmanuel?"

"I... we..." Alimon stuttered.

"We haven't seen him in weeks, Lord. He never returned from his last assignment," Calliel interrupted.

"I know," the Voice replied. "He is hiding his face from Me, and I want you to find out why. You have been his best friends for millennia. He needs your help."

"If You are sure, we will find him," Alimon promised.

Calliel elbowed Alimon. "You heard what the Voice said. Come on. Let's find Emmanuel."

The two angels stretched their wings and their senses, searching their domain for signs of their friend. They glided swiftly between heaven and earth, seeking all Emmanuel's favorite haunts, but he was not perched on the towers of Notre Dame in Paris, nor atop the spires of the Canterbury

Cathedral. The Sistine Chapel bore no sign of his presence, nor did St. Peter's in New York. He was not hiding in the Dome of the Rock, nor in the Jama Masjid in Delhi. Far and wide, they searched, among the grandest churches and temples, mosques and shrines, in the world, all the hallowed ground where angels sought rest, but they found no sign of their missing friend.

"What was his last assignment?" Alimon asked when they grew tired.

"That painter in Montana," Calliel replied. "The one who had forgotten to look at the beauty around him."

"The one who had forgotten how to love," Alimon added. "I remember now. Do you suppose we should try there? Maybe we can pick up his trail."

"We can try," Calliel agreed, "although that has never been my forte."

"Do you have a better suggestion?"

"No. Let's go."

And off they flew, searching for a painter in Kalispell, Montana whose life needed the grace of an angel.

They knew what it felt like when a soul rediscovered grace, for there was much rejoicing in heaven when that happened, but they felt no such joy as they hovered on the outskirts of town. Alimon frowned. "Why did Emmanuel leave?" he asked. "He obviously did not complete his assignment."

"I don't know," Calliel replied, equally surprised, "but I think we had better find out. Let's find that painter."

They flitted through the streets, invisible to mortal eyes in their angelic form, searching for any sign to guide them. They were about ready to

give up when Calliel saw a rough placard above a run-down door. Anderson Painting, it read.

“Let’s try in there,” he suggested.

They floated to the ground and folded their wings, folding them gracefully against the line of their coats so that anyone looking at them, visible now, would see only two ordinary men. Calliel knocked at the door, frowning at the peeling paint. It was not much of an advertisement. When there was no answer, he tried the knob, and finding the door unlocked, pushed it open.

“Hello?” he called. “Is anyone here?”

Silence greeted him first, then an icy chill he recognized all too well, having fought it off before.

“No!” he shouted, springing forward, his wings coming unfurled as he prepared to fight one of his own kind. “You won’t take him.”

Alimon was at his side, a second behind, eyes searching for the cause. His gaze landed on a prone figure, huddled limply on the floor. Leaving Calliel to struggle with the Adversary, Alimon went to the man whose hand clutched a small gun. “Put it down,” Alimon said softly. “I don’t know why you think this is the answer, but it’s not. I promise you, there is a solution.” He used every ounce of persuasion at his disposal to convince the man to talk to him, to surrender the gun.

The blue eyes opened slowly, focusing through the tears that flooded them and stained the stubble-covered cheeks. “He’s gone,” the red-headed man said in a dull voice. “He forced me to live again, to come out of the misery of my existence. For a few short weeks, he showed me I could be happy again. He made me believe it, and then he left, and it all went with him. I can’t go back to that. I won’t. Without him here, there’s nothing left to live for.”

Testament to Love by Ariel Tachna

“There’s always something to live for,” Alimon answered softly, reaching slowly for the gun. It could not hurt him, even in mortal guise, but he did not want it to go off and injure the man. When he had pried it from the man’s grip, he looked at the pathetic figure in front of him. He could hear the shrieking of the Adversary in the background as he lost the battle, at least for the moment, though he knew the sounds would not transfer onto the mortal plane. Alimon had no illusions. Calliel might have won this battle, but if they did not act quickly, the Adversary would still win in the long run.

“Who left you?” he asked. “Maybe we can find him again, convince him to come back. Will you tell me his name?”

“Emmanuel.”

Alimon lost his balance, the shock of the man’s revelation sending him reeling, mentally and physically. It went against everything they were taught to let a mortal depend on them to that extreme, yet it appeared as if that was exactly what had happened.

‘Don’t jump to conclusions,’ Calliel’s voice admonished him, his voice sounding only in Alimon’s head. ‘Keep him talking. You don’t know the whole story yet.’

Alimon guffawed inwardly, sending his disbelief back at his friend. Emmanuel had been sent to help a painter. A painter was on the verge of suicide because someone named Emmanuel had left him. It was too much to be a coincidence.

“Tell me about Emmanuel,” Alimon said. “Where is he from and where does he live? We can search for him, try to find out why he left,” Alimon asked, following Calliel’s advice.

“I don’t know,” the man replied. “He showed up here a few weeks ago, looking for a job. I can barely support myself. I can’t afford an employee, but he looked so down and out. I offered to let him stay for a day or two.”

'I'm getting a sense of his trail,' Calliel's voice interrupted. 'Stay here and learn what you can. I'm going after Emmanuel.'

"I'm Alimon," the angel said, introducing himself. "What's your name?"

"Cameron," the red-headed man replied. "Do you really think we can find him?"

"We're certainly going to try," Alimon promised, inwardly grim. They would try, but he feared the outcome if they succeeded. The situation had gotten unexpectedly complicated. He rose and offered Cameron a hand. "Come on. Let's get you cleaned up so we can look for your friend."

Cameron accepted the extended hand, letting Alimon pull him to his feet. "I live upstairs," he said, pointing redundantly toward the stairs. Alimon followed Cameron, unwilling to leave the man alone, in case thoughts of suicide returned.

"So you're a painter," Alimon began, trying to keep Cameron talking.

A cynical laugh greeted his comment. "I used to be," the man replied. "Now I'm just a slave."

"What do you mean?" Alimon asked, sure that part of Cameron's problem lay in that comment.

"Look around you," Cameron said as they reached the top of the stairs. Alimon did as he was instructed, amazed at the murals that covered every inch of the walls.

"It's beautiful. Did you do this?"

Cameron nodded. "I used to paint like this all the time. I even sold a few canvases. I wasn't getting rich, but I was getting by."

"What happened?" Alimon asked.

"My ex-wife decided I wasn't providing for our daughters well enough. She demanded more and more money, so I had to find another source of income. I paint houses all day. Roller and brush, up and down, no creativity, no passion. Just make the homeowner or resort owner happy, get my paycheck and send it all to her."

"You could still paint for yourself in the evenings," Alimon suggested.

"No inspiration," Cameron said dully. "What's there to paint when there's no joy in my life?"

"Paint the darkness."

"There isn't even that," Cameron replied. "There's just nothingness."

Alimon approached the walls. "These look fresh. You must have found something to give you inspiration."

"I did," Cameron agreed. "For a few short weeks, I did. My routine didn't change, when Emmanuel showed up. I still went to paint other people's houses all day, but he went with me. I couldn't pay him, but he said it didn't matter. It was his way of repaying me for a place to stay and some food. And at the end of a few days, I found I wanted to paint for myself again. So he sat there, on that couch, and watched. And then a few days ago, he disappeared. No note, no goodbye, just gone. I looked everywhere, but no one remembered seeing him. Ever. They think I've gone mad, that I've created him out of my imagination to fill up the emptiness in my life, but I know I haven't. I know he was real."

"How do you know?" Alimon asked, curious. They were trained to leave nothing behind, to let those they helped go on without them, until they were a faded memory, only the lesson learned staying fresh.

Cameron reached into his pocket and pulled out a little box that could be used to hold brushes. There were no brushes inside, though, only a few dark brown hairs. "These were on the couch where he slept," Cameron

explained. “No one ever comes up here except me, and I don’t have brown hair. They’re his.”

Alimon’s eyes flickered over the tatty red couch that was the centerpiece of Cameron’s living room. He was getting more and more confused. It sounded like Emmanuel had made progress, had even succeeded for the most part in helping Cameron rediscover himself. So why had Emmanuel left before he was sure Cameron was stable?

“Did something happen before he left?” Alimon asked. “Something that might, well, have scared him?”

“I... I don’t know,” Cameron said slowly.

“Why don’t you tell me what happened the night before he disappeared. Maybe we can figure it out,” Alimon suggested, using all his power of persuasion to keep Cameron talking. He was quite sure the painter was not usually so forthcoming with a stranger, but he had no time to win Cameron’s trust the conventional way. Something was terribly wrong, if his gut feeling could be trusted. He only hoped Calliel found Emmanuel quickly.

“We’d been working at one of the resorts up near Glacier National Park. We finished it, and I offered to take Emmanuel out to dinner to thank him for his help...”

The memory was crystal clear to Cameron. They were both covered in paint splatters, but the euphoria of finishing a job was as evident on Emmanuel’s face as it was in Cameron’s heart. Not only had they finished the resort lodge, Cameron had finished the mural in the living room at home, inspired to paint for himself again for the first time since his divorce, five years before. He had tried once or twice to thank Emmanuel, to give him credit for the transformation in his life, but Emmanuel had always demurred, insisting that it was all there within Cameron, and that Emmanuel had nothing to do with it.

That was what Emmanuel thought, but Cameron knew the truth. Emmanuel had opened his heart again, had made him see the beauty that surrounded him every day, and in the process, Cameron had fallen in love with the young man. It had happened so simply, so effortlessly, that Cameron had not even been aware of it. When he looked into Emmanuel's laughing brown eyes as they left the lodge they had been working on all week, though, Cameron understood that he had everything he needed to make himself happy right there. He could deal with the drudgery of painting houses if he could have Emmanuel at his side. He could accept having no money because his wife took it all if Emmanuel was there to laugh with him and remind him that money wasn't important; happiness was. It was time to start his campaign to convince Emmanuel to stay forever.

"Let me take you to dinner," Cameron suggested as they left the house.

"Like this?" Emmanuel asked, laughing. "No decent restaurant would seat us."

"I meant after we've cleaned up," Cameron explained.

"Well, why didn't you say so?" Emmanuel teased.

"You didn't answer my question," Cameron pointed out. "Will you let me take you to dinner?" His voice was earnest, his heart on his sleeve. He hoped Emmanuel would not be turned off.

"I'd love to have dinner with you," Emmanuel replied.

They went home and cleaned up as quickly as they could. Cameron knew Emmanuel did not have much in the way of clothes so he did not pull out his suit, settling instead on a comfortable shirt and slacks.

They had gone out to a simple restaurant that served simple food, but it was not the locale Cameron was interested in anyway. He was only interested in the company. He made a point of opening the car door for Emmanuel and then the door to the restaurant. He could see his

companion looking at him strangely, since he had not bothered with those niceties before that evening, but that did not deter him. Cameron was determined to show Emmanuel how wonderful it could be if only he would agree to stay. Cameron would indulge his every whim, treat him like he was the center of the universe, because in those short weeks they had been together, Emmanuel had become the center of Cameron's universe.

At the restaurant, Cameron encouraged Emmanuel to order whatever took his fancy. "We're celebrating," Cameron insisted.

"But the bill... your wife..."

"Ex-wife," Cameron corrected, "and tonight I don't want to think about her. I only want to think about us."

"Us?" Emmanuel asked slowly.

"Yes, us," Cameron replied. "We've worked so well together that I was wondering if you would consider staying on."

"I thought you couldn't afford an employee," Emmanuel reminded him.

"I can't," Cameron admitted, "if I have to pay minimum wage, but I can afford to have you stay with me. I can afford to feed us both. If you're willing to keep helping me, at work and at living, I know we can do it."

"I don't know," Emmanuel hesitated. "I hadn't planned to stay very long."

"Do you have someplace you have to be?" Cameron asked. "You've never mentioned any family."

"I don't have any specific plans," Emmanuel admitted.

"Then stay," Cameron urged.

"I suppose I could, at least for a while longer," Emmanuel answered after a considerable pause.

“Wonderful!” Cameron exclaimed. The longer he could keep Emmanuel here, the harder it would be for the young man to leave. He would get used to being with Cameron, to working together, and to all the little signs of love that Cameron would shower on him. Cameron would win him over, day by day.

Alimon frowned silently when Cameron recounted this part of the story. Emmanuel should have realized what was going on. He should have diverted Cameron’s attention, found a way to focus his excitement inward rather than on Emmanuel. Something was terribly wrong.

Cameron recounted how the rest of the meal passed in easy conversation as they discussed their next project and what he was going to paint next. He talked about doing the walls in another room. Emmanuel suggested that he do a canvas instead. “That way, you can take it with you if you ever move.”

“Is my place too small for you?” Cameron asked, half teasing, half apprehensive. He could not afford anything larger, but he would do his best to find a way if Emmanuel insisted.

“Not at all,” Emmanuel replied smoothly. “Your couch is more than enough for me. People move sometimes, is all.” As he spoke, Cameron smiled at the thought of the worn velvet that welcomed Emmanuel’s weight each night. He wanted desperately to change places with the couch.

Looking across the table into the coffee-colored eyes, Cameron knew that on his couch was not where he wanted Emmanuel. He wanted the young man in his bed, as his lover, his partner, his mate. That would take time, though. Emmanuel had given no indication that he was interested in Cameron on that level. Even if that interest was never reciprocated, Cameron would be happy, simply having Emmanuel there. It did not mean, though, that he would not try.

When they were done with dinner, Cameron had escorted Emmanuel back to the car, letting his hand settle on the other man's lower back, guiding him, subtly caressing him. When Emmanuel did not pull away, Cameron was incredibly heartened. If Emmanuel accepted that caress, he might be willing to accept more. They had driven home and settled on the couch as had become their habit. They had talked a little longer before Emmanuel had started yawning. Cameron had teased him about it, a little, before rising to give Emmanuel room to sleep. He lingered as Emmanuel settled himself on the couch, blankets hiding Emmanuel's slim form and the ornate carvings on the legs of the couch.

Right before he went to his room, Cameron leaned over Emmanuel's reclining form and kissed him, a gentle brushing of lips. A soft moan greeted his ears at the almost innocent touch, and Cameron could not stop himself from bending his head again. Emmanuel's lips moved pliantly under his, encouraging Cameron to deepen the kiss. He lapped softly at the seam of Emmanuel's mouth, urging the other man to let him inside. It had taken a moment, but Emmanuel's lips had parted finally, letting Cameron's tongue through, letting his mouth be taken. The kiss stayed gentle, even as it grew more passionate. Finally, knowing that he was losing control, Cameron had raised his head and smiled down at his soon-to-be lover. "Sleep well," he whispered before going to his own room for the night.

"And when I came out in the morning, he was gone. I kissed him. That's all. There's no harm in that, is there?" Cameron asked with a pleading look on his face.

Alimon did not know how to answer that question. If Emmanuel had been simply a young man, like Cameron believed, there would have been no harm, since it certainly sounded like Emmanuel had been willing. The problem arose because Emmanuel was not what he appeared, and he had broken the cardinal rule in allowing Cameron to fall in love with him. Alimon wondered briefly if the emotions were reciprocal. That could explain Emmanuel's disappearance.

“Is there?” Cameron repeated.

“I don’t know,” Alimon answered finally. “I guess that depends on Emmanuel.”

Chapter 2

The trail Emmanuel had left was not fresh, but the panic was clear enough that Calliel could follow it easily. He found Emmanuel in almost the same position that they had found Cameron, hiding in a corner of a rundown shed, deep in the Bitterroot Mountains, curled up in a ball, crying as if his world had ended. The only differences Calliel could see were the absence of the gun Cameron had held and the presence of the soft, feathery wings that hid Emmanuel's face from his friend.

"Emmanuel?" Calliel said softly.

"Leave me alone." Emmanuel's voice drifted up softly, the pain muffled but not obscured by his wings, but he did not raise his head.

"I can't do that. Alimon and I were sent to find you. I left Alimon with your painter and followed you here."

"Cameron," Emmanuel whispered brokenly. "His name is Cameron."

"He's in bad shape, Emmanuel. He was trying to kill himself," Calliel told him gently.

Emmanuel's head flew up, wings opening aggressively. "What? I've got to..."

Calliel caught Emmanuel's shoulders, stopping him from springing into the air in his haste to get to Cameron. "Calm down. Alimon got the gun away from him, and I ran off the Adversary. Alimon's still with him. He won't let anything happen. You want to tell me what happened?"

"Not really," Emmanuel said, sinking back into his huddled position, his wings sagging in defeat, a cushion between his back and the splintered wood of the little cabin. "There isn't anything to say."

"I think there is," Calliel disagreed, "and I think you'd better start by telling me what happened. Maybe we can still fix things."

"I don't know if I can go back," Emmanuel admitted.

"Why?" Calliel was confused. What could possibly keep Emmanuel from finishing the job?

"I'm afraid that if I go back, I won't ever leave," Emmanuel said in a soft voice.

Calliel's confusion gave way to shock. He had gathered from Alimon that Cameron fancied himself in love with Emmanuel, but it had never occurred to him that the feeling might be mutual.

"Emmanuel! That's forbidden!"

"I know," Emmanuel replied bitterly. "Why do you think I'm here instead of with Cameron? I can't go back to him because I'm not allowed to offer him what he needs, but I can't go home either because I don't know how to stop these feelings."

"Tell me what happened," Calliel said, "and start at the beginning."

Emmanuel sighed, trying to decide where to begin. "I did a little research before I left for this assignment, and I found out that Cameron fed every stray in town, so I thought I'd present as one of his strays. I showed up with just a backpack, asking for a job, telling him all I had was what was in my bag, and that I hadn't eaten in two days because I wouldn't scavenge in people's trash or beg on a corner. He looked so distressed when he told me he couldn't afford an employee, but he offered to let me stay for a day or two. I acted like I didn't want charity, so he said he'd let me help him out in exchange for meals and a place to stay. That gave me a way to spend more time with him."

Calliel studied Emmanuel's face as he talked, catching glimpses of his normally enthusiastic friend in the now-dull voice.

"I could feel his despair, Calliel, as soon as he opened the door. There is such grace in him, but he stopped seeing it long ago, and I could feel his

soul dying little by little as we stood there. I had to stop it, any way I could.” Emmanuel’s voice was pleading, desperate for Calliel to accept, to understand.

“Even at the expense of your own soul?” Calliel queried softly. No one ever spoke of the exact punishment for letting a mortal become too dependent. No one needed to. What angel would want anything to separate him from the Most High? It was unthinkable. And yet that appeared to be what Emmanuel was thinking.

“Even that,” Emmanuel agreed. “He took me in. I was prepared to ‘persuade’ him, but it wasn’t necessary. What kind of man takes in a complete stranger in this day and age? Either a crazy one or a reckless one, but Cameron is neither. He is generous to his core, even when he hides it under layers of bitterness and regret.”

“You’ve convinced me,” Calliel assured him placatingly. “What happened?”

“We worked together,” Emmanuel said, “and a few days turned into a few weeks. He never gave any indication that he wanted me to leave, and after a few days, he started painting again, for himself instead of only for others.” Emmanuel’s eyes lit up as he remembered the evenings spent in Cameron’s company and the amazing transformation that took place before his very eyes. “He painted the most extraordinary murals on the walls of his living room.”

Emmanuel’s eyes drifted shut as he remembered sitting on the ratty couch in Cameron’s house, watching as the painter gave way to the artist, as the first tentative brush strokes became more and more confident, as dabs gave way to streaks of color, as dour colors gave way to joyous ones. Emmanuel did not dare to move when Cameron was painting like that, for fear of jarring the man out of his creative flow. He had even offered, at one point, to leave Cameron alone to paint, but Cameron had rejected that idea immediately, insisting that Emmanuel remain on the faded couch to keep him company.

“You’re the one who inspired me to paint again. Why in the world would I want you to leave?” Cameron asked incredulously.

Emmanuel knew what his answer should have been. He knew he should have pointed out that the inspiration was inside Cameron all along and that all Emmanuel had done was help him see it again. That was what he was supposed to say, but the words never came out. Emmanuel simply could not make himself deny the feelings he felt growing between Cameron and himself. He knew it was forbidden. He knew he would pay a price if he let it go any further, but he did not have the heart to stop it.

“He finished the mural one night and we finished a big project the next day,” Emmanuel continued. “He wanted to take me out to dinner. I tried to keep it light. I knew that he was getting too dependent on me, and I know how dangerous that can be. I had already decided that I needed to talk about moving on, so that Cameron would have time to get used to the idea and to realize that he did not need me, that he had all the grace he needed inside him, both for his art and for living his life.”

He took a deep breath, trying to prepare himself to explain what happened next. “Then at dinner, he started talking about us. That word shouldn’t have applied, but it did. It did, Calliel,” Emmanuel repeated, his voice breaking and tears shimmering in his eyes. “Somehow, over the three weeks I was there, he and I had become us. He talked about us becoming partners, about us working together, us living together. Us. Being together. Us.” The sigh that escaped him was so heavy, so poignant that Calliel felt tears welling in his eyes. “And I wanted what he was describing. I know I shouldn’t have, but I agreed to stay. We talked all through dinner, mostly about work, but something changed when we left the restaurant.”

As they were leaving, Cameron’s hand settled low on Emmanuel’s back. Emmanuel stopped the reflexive flinch at having a mortal’s hand so near his wings, but he could not stop the shiver that went through him at the gentle pressure. Or at the thought of Cameron’s hand moving just a little higher so it touched his wings. His eyes closed at the thought of

Cameron's roughened palms moving across his feathered appendages. He had to remind himself that it would never happen, that he could not allow Cameron to learn of his true nature. The internal reminder did nothing to stifle his desire, though.

It had been a long day, and soon after they got home, Emmanuel's fatigue caught up with him, even though he wished he could stay in that moment forever. He tried unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn. Since the couch doubled as his bed, Cameron had to retire himself in order for Emmanuel to get any sleep. Ever considerate, Cameron had immediately risen to let Emmanuel settle in for the night.

Emmanuel made himself comfortable, stretching out on the couch in preparation for going to sleep. He turned his head to say good night to Cameron only to find the man leaning over him. Before Emmanuel could speak, Cameron's lips were brushing his, not demanding anything, merely touching. They demanded nothing, but they offered Emmanuel his heart's desire. He could not stop the moan that escaped from his throat.

Almost immediately, Cameron's mouth was back, his tongue flicking tenderly across Emmanuel's lips, catching Emmanuel completely unprepared. He hesitated for a moment, but the wet caresses felt so wonderful that he parted his lips slowly, allowing Cameron inside. Emmanuel trembled beneath the onslaught of unfamiliar feelings as the kiss grew more passionate. And then Cameron raised his head and smiled lovingly. "Sleep well," he whispered, leaving Emmanuel alone to struggle with the newly awakened emotions.

"We angels touch so rarely," Emmanuel told Calliel unnecessarily. "I had never considered the amazing joy to be found in the simple touch of a hand, much less in a kiss. I could have sat there all night and exchanged kisses with him, but he left me alone to sleep."

Emmanuel lay on the couch, listening to the sounds of Cameron getting ready for bed. He could hear the water running, the toilet flushing, the sound of Cameron's shoes hitting the floor, followed by the closet door

opening and then closing again. All Emmanuel had to do was close his eyes, and he could imagine the scene in the next room, could imagine the layers of clothes coming off, one by one, until Cameron was down to his underwear, or perhaps even naked. The heat that spread through Emmanuel's body at the thought scared him. He was an angel. He was pure, above such base desires. Telling himself that had no effect on the emotion welling up in his heart because what he was feeling did not seem base to him at all. Yes, he could imagine, with disturbing clarity, what Cameron would look like without his clothes, but Emmanuel wanted so much more than that. He wanted to stay by Cameron's side and paint with him. He wanted to sit in Cameron's living room and inspire him to paint. He wanted to share every aspect of Cameron's life.

He had fallen in love.

And that was not allowed.

In a panic, hoping only Cameron's passion had been engaged, not his heart, Emmanuel grabbed his bag and fled. He had no idea where he was going, but he could not stay there and he could not go home. He had failed in his mission and would be chastised at the least, if not outright banished. He would be run out of any sanctuary, any holy site for having fallen as he had. He settled finally on the nearby mountains. They were not holy ground, so he did not have to worry about being rejected, but their beauty and majesty would still ease his soul. He only hoped Cameron would be all right.

"But he's not, is he?" Emmanuel finished.

"No, he's not all right," Calliel agreed. "Apparently, he is as lost without you as you seem to be without him. You have to go back."

"And say what?" Emmanuel asked, beginning to get angry. "Sorry about this, but I'm an angel, and I'm not allowed to love you? I just wanted you to know that before I disappear forever? I won't do that to him. I've

already hurt him so much by leaving once. It would be too cruel to go back only to leave him again. I can't do that. I won't."

Calliel remained silent for a long time. What he wanted to suggest went against everything they believed. Their role in the lives of mortals was to remind them of the grace of God, to help them find their way home. And then to leave. But there could be no leaving this time if Emmanuel went back. Calliel did not need Emmanuel's words to tell him that. He could see the anguish etched into the other angel's face, could feel the despair pouring off of him.

If Emmanuel went back, he would stay, and nothing but the Hand of God would be able to make him leave. He would be disinherited, removed from the ranks of angels, for no angel could hide his nature forever among mortals. Looking at Emmanuel's stricken face, Calliel wondered if that even mattered to Emmanuel any more. Taking a deep breath, he made a decision. He had been sent to help Emmanuel, he and Alimon. They had been chosen for a reason, because the Lord did not do anything by chance. He had to follow his heart and believe that it would not lead him astray.

"What if you went back and didn't leave?" he said softly. Even saying the words scared him, but the pain he could feel emanating from Emmanuel scared him even more.

"I..." Emmanuel began, "I couldn't do that... Could I?"

"I don't know," Calliel replied. "No one ever has, but what else can you do? If you go home the way things are now, you'll be reprimanded for sure, for not finishing your assignment, and that doesn't even take into consideration what will happen because you fell in love with a mortal. At the very least, you owe Cameron an explanation. You can't just leave him to try to commit suicide again as soon as Alimon is gone."

"I won't be able to lie to him," Emmanuel admitted. "If I go back, I'll tell him the truth, all of it. It might be better if you and Alimon left as soon as

I get there. That way, what I do won't affect you. I'll risk my soul for him willingly, but I can't ask you to risk yours."

Calliel smiled. "We already are, Emmanuel m'lad, but I'm beginning to think it's worth it."

Chapter 3

Emmanuel stared at the peeling door, hand poised to knock. For three weeks, he had not needed to knock. He had walked in and out freely as if it were his right to do so. Cameron had given him the right to do so, but Emmanuel had lost that right when he disappeared in the middle of the night without saying thank you or good-bye. He had no idea what his reception would be now, but he knew he had to see Cameron one more time. Even if the man rejected him, he would know that he had faced him and been honest with him. He glanced back at Calliel who stood on the other side of the street.

‘Alimon knows you’re here,’ Calliel told him silently. ‘He’ll leave as soon as you knock so that you and Cameron can talk in private.’

‘Don’t wait for me,’ Emmanuel pleaded. ‘Don’t put yourselves in jeopardy for me.’

‘We’ll be here when you’re done,’ Calliel continued as if Emmanuel had not spoken.

Emmanuel sighed. He hated that his friends were about to be at risk for his decision, but Calliel would not be swayed. Perhaps Alimon could talk some sense into the other angel. He tried to imagine what he would say to Cameron, how the painter would react to the revelation that Emmanuel was an angel, wanting an answer to Cameron’s possible objections so that he could convince the man to take him back. Realizing that he was stalling, Emmanuel took a deep breath and rapped on the door. He could hear footsteps inside the house as Cameron came down the stairs to answer the door.

The door swung open. Cameron stood there for a moment, looking haggard, far worse than when Emmanuel had first met him. “I’m sorry,” Emmanuel whispered before Cameron had a chance to speak.

Cameron's fists opened and closed restlessly at his sides as he debated whether he should reach for the other man. What he wanted to do was pull Emmanuel into an embrace and never let him go. He was afraid, though, that doing so would scare Emmanuel off before they had a chance to talk. "Would you like to come in?" Cameron said finally.

Emmanuel nodded, his heart in his throat as he walked inside.

"You left without saying good-bye," Cameron said plaintively when the door closed behind Emmanuel.

"I know." Emmanuel's head bowed with guilt at the state he found Cameron in. There were dark circles under the man's eyes that had not been there before and Emmanuel could see the traces of tears still on his face. "I'm so sorry. I... I got scared."

"Why?" Cameron asked. "What did I do wrong?"

The anguish in his voice was too much for Emmanuel. Abandoning his hesitations, he crossed to where Cameron stood, leaning in to kiss him. It was supposed to be a kiss of simple reassurance, but Emmanuel underestimated the effect that the touch of Cameron's lips against his own would have on him. At that first contact, his whole body yearned for more. Unable to stop himself, he stepped closer, letting their bodies touch softly.

"You didn't do anything wrong," Emmanuel assured him, their foreheads still touching even after he separated their mouths. "I have some things I need to tell you. Let's go upstairs and talk. Then, if you still want me, I'll stay. If not, I'll understand."

Cameron could not imagine what Emmanuel could tell him that would make Cameron not want him, but he agreed to listen. If nothing else, it would get everything out in the open and avoid something like this happening again.

~~~~~

Cameron stared at Emmanuel, dumbfounded. An angel... The young man he had fallen in love with claimed to be an angel.

"You don't believe me, do you?" Emmanuel asked sadly, seeing the look on Cameron's face. "I don't blame you, really. I doubt I would believe me if I didn't know it was true." It saddened him, in a way. A part of him wished Cameron would believe him without having it proven, but that seemed to be asking more of the artist than he could give.

"It's not that," Cameron protested, though it was exactly that. "It's just a lot to take in all at once."

Emmanuel nodded. He did not know what he had expected, but he should not have been surprised, really. He would simply have to show Cameron so he would understand. "Have you ever wondered why I never took my shirt off, even on the hottest days, when we were working outside?" he asked, rising from the couch where they had been sitting and lifting his hands to the top button of his shirt.

"I figured you were shy," Cameron replied.

"I suppose I am," Emmanuel agreed, "but there's a reason for that." He opened the top button and then the second.

"What are you doing?" Cameron exclaimed, jumping to his feet, not quite sure why Emmanuel was suddenly getting undressed.

Emmanuel did not reply, merely undoing two more buttons. Alarmed by Emmanuel's odd behavior, Cameron grabbed the other man's hands, stopping their downward descent. "You don't have to do this," Cameron told him.

"Yes, I do," Emmanuel replied. "You'll understand when you see." He undid the last two buttons. "Take my shirt off," he requested.

Still confused, but feeling the first stirrings of desire, Cameron did as Emmanuel requested, pushing the fabric away from his shoulders and

down his arms. When the shirt dropped to the floor by the couch, Emmanuel turned around slowly so that Cameron could see the wings furled tightly against his back. They arched up from where Emmanuel's shoulder blades should have been, covering his back and hips in the ivory shadow, parting just above his bottom to taper to their tips.

Cameron gasped, faced with the suddenly undeniable truth of Emmanuel's earlier statements. The part of him that wanted to cling to logic searched for a harness, anything that could explain the wings, but he knew, despite his mind's final grasping attempts at rationality, that Emmanuel was indeed the angel he claimed to be. Without conscious thought, his hand reached out to touch, stopping when it hovered a hair's breadth from the feathery edge.

Emmanuel looked over his shoulder at Cameron's stunned expression. "You can touch," he said softly, wondering if he was really ready to take that step and yet eager to finally know what it would feel like. He had been imagining this moment since Cameron touched his back on the way out of the restaurant.

Emmanuel's permission broke the spell that bound Cameron. He let his hand settle gently on the feathered contour of Emmanuel's wing. It was soft and warm beneath his touch, and through it, he could feel the minute tremors that were wracking Emmanuel's body. "Is this all right?" he asked in the same soft tone he had once used to gentle horses.

Emmanuel's nostrils flared as he tried to control his breathing, but he nodded in response to Cameron's question. Every muscle in his body had tensed in anticipation of the novel contact and even that simple tentative touch was enough to have him vibrating all over as he waited for more, unsure if he could handle more sensation. His fantasies had not even begun to prepare him for the reality of Cameron's hand on his wings. Then Cameron's hand moved, fingers sliding between the feathers, and Emmanuel had his answer. His back arched at the intimate touch, a current of desire sizzling down his spine and into his groin. He could not stop the whimper that escaped him.



Cameron snatched his hand back as if burned. "I'm sorry," he apologized, feeling like he had committed some terrible sin. Then Emmanuel turned to face him, and Cameron read the raw desire etched into the angel's features. "Emmanuel?"

"If you don't want me," Emmanuel whispered hoarsely, "tell me to leave now because if I stay much longer, I'll never be able to go."

"Don't go," Cameron whispered in the same hoarse tone. "I want you. You have no idea how much I want you."

"Show me," Emmanuel pleaded.

"Are you sure?" Cameron asked, apprehension assailing him at the thought of besmirching a celestial being.

In response, Emmanuel stepped back into Cameron's embrace, placed one of Cameron's hands back on his wings, down near his hip this time, and brought his mouth to the man's, kissing him with all the passion that the earlier caresses had inspired.

Cameron dove into the kiss like a parched man at an oasis. He had believed Emmanuel lost to him, and even his return had not eased those fears with Emmanuel's talk of angels. There was no denying Emmanuel's willingness, his eagerness, not with the angel burrowing deeper into his embrace, each heartbeat seeming to draw them closer. He wanted to run his hands over every inch of Emmanuel's body, every inch of his wings. He wanted to ravish him, feast upon him.

Worship him.

He could taste the passion in Emmanuel's kiss, but he also sensed the inexperience, and so he set out to teach Emmanuel how to make love with his mouth. Gently, he took control of the kiss, moving his lips over Emmanuel's, brushing, teasing, enticing.

Emmanuel ceded control to Cameron immediately. He knew his own ignorance. He only hoped Cameron would not mind enlightening him. Cameron's lips brushing across his own certainly suggested he did not. Emmanuel stood passively at first, quivering with desire but held in check by his inexperience and his fear of doing something wrong, something that would drive Cameron away. Quickly, though, he caught the rhythm of Cameron's kisses and began to anticipate them, turning his head, pursing his lips to meet the man halfway. This was what he had dreamed of, lying on Cameron's sofa after their first kiss: an exchange of kisses that stretched and stretched, gentle, soul-stirring touches of mouth to mouth that kindled a heat in Emmanuel's blood and a fire in his heart like nothing he had ever known before.

Cameron's tongue teased across Emmanuel's lips, reminding the angel that there was more to kissing than merely lips. His parted eagerly, ready for more of the delicious sensations Cameron was inspiring.

The man buried one hand in Emmanuel's sable curls, tipping the angel's head to get better access to his mouth. The other hand remained motionless on Emmanuel's wings. He wanted to run his hand over the elegant contours, to discover if their entire length was as sensitive as the one place he had already touched, but he thought it best to let matters develop slowly between them. He did not want Emmanuel to feel overwhelmed or to get scared because he moved too quickly. Instead, he let his tongue play along the inside of Emmanuel's parted lips, tantalizing him with the prospect of ever more intimate contact.

The enticement worked. After a few moments, Emmanuel's tongue slipped out to meet Cameron's, barely touching, flicking out for a tentative taste. Cameron retreated, hoping Emmanuel would have the courage to reciprocate the caress. The angel was nothing if not courageous. Having relished the sensations that Cameron's mouth inspired in him, he wanted nothing more than to return the favor and evoke those same sensations in Cameron. He did not know if he could, but he was determined to try. He thought about all the ways Cameron had kissed him since the first time and which way he liked best. That was

how he wanted to kiss Cameron, what he wanted to always give Cameron: the very best. Coming to a decision, he let his tongue mimic the caresses that Cameron had most recently bestowed upon him, tracing the seam of the man's mouth and then, daringly, darting inside to find Cameron's tongue.

Cameron closed his lips around the invading tongue, sucking the probing flesh. Emmanuel gasped into the man's mouth at the sensual shock, but the surprise passed quickly, leaving only a desire for more. He moved with the rhythm of Cameron's mouth, his tongue surging and retreating as the pressure ebbed and flowed. At first, only his tongue moved in time, but before long, his entire body rocked against Cameron's in response to each pull. It made him wonder if he could influence Cameron the same way. He withdrew his tongue slowly, parting his lips in invitation, ready to clamp down and capture Cameron's invading muscle when or if it came.

As tempted as he was to abandon the kiss for other pleasures, Cameron was not so lost yet in passion that he forgot who he was making love with. He sensed that Emmanuel needed the time to explore, to gain in this arena the confidence he showed elsewhere, and while Cameron certainly wanted more, eventually, than mere kisses, he was quickly rediscovering the joys to be found in a leisurely exploration of another's mouth. He accepted Emmanuel's invitation and slid his tongue between the parted lips, there to be ensnared by the gentle pressure of Emmanuel's mouth. He moaned as Emmanuel sucked his tongue in an almost innocent caress that evoked in Cameron's mind much less innocent ones to come. He shivered, rocking into Emmanuel as the angel had rocked into him, only with a little more deliberation, so that he rubbed his hips intentionally against Emmanuel's groin.

Cameron could feel the tremors that wracked Emmanuel's body in the trembling of the wing under his hand. He smoothed his hand down the arched contour, trying to soothe the angel in his arms. It had the opposite effect. The shivering increased. Once again, Cameron snatched

his hand back as if burned. “Emmanuel?” he asked, looking at the closed eyes and set features of his angel.

Emmanuel’s lids lifted, revealing eyes so dark with desire that they were almost black. He licked his lips, trying to moisten them enough to speak. “Yes, Cameron?” he said finally, his voice deeper, huskier, than Cameron had ever heard it.

“I... Your wings...” Cameron stuttered, unsure of what he wanted to say now that he had the chance

Emmanuel smiled a little. “They’re very sensitive,” he explained. “That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t touch them, but you can’t expect me not to react when you do.”

Cameron returned the smile and then glanced around his living room. “Do you want me to touch them?” he asked. That was the important question.

Emmanuel’s smile broadened. “Oh, yes,” he breathed. “Please.”

“Then let’s go where we can both be more comfortable. Will you come to the bedroom with me?”

Cameron expected a moment of hesitation, perhaps even more. Kissing in the living room was one thing. Going with him into the bedroom was a much bigger step, but Emmanuel did not hesitate. His smile grew ever more radiant as he nodded his assent and held out his hand to Cameron, leading the way to the other room.

Cameron followed Emmanuel into the bedroom, wondering what other mysteries Emmanuel’s body had in store for him. His thoughts were derailed, though, when Emmanuel reached up and began to undo the buttons on Cameron’s shirt. “I would watch you,” Emmanuel said softly as he freed each button from its niche, “as we were painting. I would watch the way your muscles flexed as you worked. I told myself I was simply appreciating beauty wherever I found it, as any good angel would

do, but it was so much more than that. I wanted to reach out and touch you, to see if your skin was as soft as it looked, to see what the hair on your chest felt like, if it was wiry or soft, to test the strength of your muscles, not against mine, but simply so I would know.”

“Why didn’t you?” Cameron asked softly, mesmerized by Emmanuel’s tribute, afraid to break the mood surrounding them.

Emmanuel’s smile dimmed for a moment as the thought of all he was leaving behind crossed his mind. “Because that’s not why I was sent,” he replied. Resolutely, he pushed his sad thoughts aside. That was not what he wanted to be focused on. “None of that matters now. All that matters is that I’m here and can touch you. Can I touch you?”

Cameron’s breath caught in his throat. He tried to answer the question, but no words came out. He nodded instead.

Emmanuel’s hands parted the halves of Cameron’s shirt and settled tentatively on his skin, exploring as he had longed to do since the first time he had seen Cameron bare-chested, tracing the lines of his muscles, stroking the smooth skin and then tangling his fingers in the light pelt. Cameron schooled himself to stillness, his whole body quivering like a horse in heat. His eyes closed as the exquisitely delicate caresses set him alight.

Emmanuel took his time learning Cameron’s body. He knew what he wanted – to stay with Cameron as long as the man would have him – but he did not know if that would be allowed and so he intended to experience everything the first time. In case there was no second time. He knew from the work he had done with Cameron that painting for hours on end, day after day, required a fair amount of strength in the arms, so he lingered there as he slid the shirt off Cameron’s shoulders, testing the solidness of the muscle under his fingers. After a time, touching was not enough, so he bent his head to let his cheek settle against Cameron’s upper arm, his head rubbing back and forth. Cameron’s other hand rose to fiddle lightly with his curls, making

Emmanuel smile and turn his head to press a kiss to Cameron's skin. The sudden indrawn breath made Emmanuel raise his head. "You like that?" he asked.

"Very much," Cameron replied honestly.

Emmanuel considered that new information. His inventive imagination supplied all sorts of uses for this newly-discovered sensitivity. Curiously, he let his lips move higher over Cameron's shoulder to the stubble-pocked skin of his neck. "You haven't shaved," Emmanuel observed.

"I didn't feel like doing much of anything while you were gone," Cameron admitted.

"That's all right," Emmanuel replied, running his fingers over the whisker-roughened skin. "I like it."

Cameron leaned into the touch, eager for that and more. He turned his head and pressed a kiss to the palm of Emmanuel's hand. "Maybe you'd like to feel it elsewhere," he teased, rubbing his cheek against Emmanuel's and then lower to brush against the smooth skin of the angel's chest.

Emmanuel froze under the lash of new sensation. Cameron's stubble rasped most agreeably over his skin, sending frissons of desire through him again. Feeling incredibly bold, Emmanuel leaned into Cameron's caress and turned slowly so that Cameron was face to face with the arched edge of Emmanuel's wing. Moving his pinion gently, Emmanuel rubbed it against Cameron's cheek, letting the stubble scrape sensuously against his feathers. A raw moan escaped his throat, echoed by one from Cameron. Emmanuel's wings fluttered in what Cameron thought was invitation. "Tell me if it becomes too much," Cameron whispered, burying his face in Emmanuel's wings. "I'll stop if you tell me to."

Emmanuel was pretty sure it was already too much, but he was not about to tell Cameron to stop, not when he had never felt anything so wonderful. Cameron's hands moved up and down the feathery wings,

tracing them, learning their shape and texture as Emmanuel trembled under the lash of sensation, moans and whimpers escaping his lips in a symphony of sound that resonated in Cameron's soul. His fingers burrowed into the feathers, seeking the flesh and muscle beneath. He kneaded the sinews when he found them, careful not to crush the feathers.

The tingling in his flesh spread outward from Emmanuel's wings, lighting up every nerve in his body, sending blood rushing to his groin in an indescribable sense of joy. He could feel his cock swelling, pulsing in time with each touch of Cameron's hands, each pass of his lips. Emmanuel pressed his lower body back against Cameron's, feeling an answering swelling in the man's pants. A part of him knew he should touch Cameron, should reciprocate the caresses in some way, but he was frozen in place, mesmerized by what he was discovering at Cameron's hands. The dizzying sensations built, layer upon layer, as Cameron lavished more and more attention on the angel's wings. Finally, Emmanuel could contain it no more. His body trembled in ecstasy and he slumped back into Cameron's arms.

"Wha... what was that?" he asked softly.

Cameron chuckled. "That is the ultimate pleasure to be found in the arms of someone special," he explained, not wanting to sully the beauty of what they were sharing with any more vulgar description.

"That pleasure seems to have a very physical consequence," Emmanuel commented, feeling the semen cooling and drying on his skin inside his clothes.

"A most enjoyable physical consequence," Cameron agreed. "Let's see if we can't make you more comfortable." He nudged Emmanuel toward the bed, his hands moving down to unfasten the angel's pants. "Take these off," Cameron urged when they arrived at their destination.

Emmanuel did as Cameron bade him, sliding the sticky cloth off his hips and down his legs so that he stood before the man in all his naked glory. He could not help the smile that crossed his face at the open admiration he could read in Cameron's eyes. Deciding that Cameron was overdressed, Emmanuel reached for the man's belt, drawing him closer so that Emmanuel could divest him of his clothes as well.

Cameron chuckled again. "Eager, are you?" he teased.

"You gave me the ultimate pleasure. I want to return it," Emmanuel explained.

"There's no rush," Cameron said, even as Emmanuel pushed his jeans down, revealing his rampant erection.

Emmanuel reached out and stroked Cameron's flesh inquisitively. When he heard Cameron's gasp, he looked up and smiled. "Are you sure? It seems rather urgent to me."

Cameron grabbed Emmanuel's hands and raised them to his lips, kissing them gently. "Do you trust me?" he asked.

"With all that I am," Emmanuel replied, his wings rustling softly as if to remind Cameron of how much Emmanuel had already trusted him with.

"I want..." Cameron hesitated. How was he supposed to explain to this ethereal angel what he wanted? I want to fuck you was too vulgar. Penetrate was too clinical. There had to be a way to describe what he wanted without bringing it down to only matters of the flesh.

"I am yours," Emmanuel promised. "Tell me what you want, and I will give it to you if I can."

Emmanuel's words did not help. If anything, they pushed Cameron closer to the limits of his fraying control. He sat down on the bed and reached for Emmanuel. "Lie down here beside me," he requested.



Emmanuel furled his wings, stretching out to lie along Cameron's side, his eyes watching Cameron's curiously. "Kiss me again," Cameron asked.

Emmanuel obliged immediately, bringing his mouth to Cameron's and diving in to as deep a kiss as any they had shared. Slowly at first, Cameron ran his hand down Emmanuel's arm and side, caressing the skin, waiting to see if Emmanuel would protest. When none came, his questing hand grew bolder, sliding around to grasp Emmanuel's smooth flesh and pull them closer together. They both moaned when their movement brought their cocks into alignment. Emmanuel's hips bucked reflexively, driving their shafts into greater contact.

Cameron rolled to his back and reached into the drawer of the bedside table for the lube he had put there before Emmanuel's disappearance in the hopes of needing it sometime soon.

Not knowing what was going on, Emmanuel whimpered when Cameron pulled away, but the man was back almost immediately, lips and hands soothing the angel, assuring him silently that he had done nothing wrong.

Cameron coated his fingers with the lube and then paused, nervous again. "Can I... can I show you all the ways two people can love each other?" he asked finally.

Emmanuel's response was more moan than word, but Cameron understood the plea. He slipped one hand between them, encircling Emmanuel's cock and stroking gently. The other hand, the slippery one, moved to Emmanuel's back and down to the crevice that hid Cameron's ultimate target.

Emmanuel was so lost in the pleasure of Cameron's touch that he would not have protested anything the man did. All he wanted was more of the marvelous feelings that Cameron's talented hands were evoking. The fingers around his erection kept time with the movement of his hips, stroking him lightly, stoking the fires burning within him without pushing him beyond his limits. The other fingers, the ones slowly making their

way inside him, were a different story. They kept striking a spot inside him that made the flames dance higher and higher until Emmanuel felt like he would explode at any minute. Some innate instinct told him that was not right, that the explosion should be mutual, but he did not know how to make that happen. He could not even think clearly enough to reciprocate the caresses that Cameron was lavishing on him.

“Turn over the other way,” Cameron whispered, his fingers slipping out of Emmanuel’s body and away from his cock. The angel was surprised, but he did as the man requested, turning so his back, and his wings, were against Cameron’s chest.

Cameron buried his face in Emmanuel’s wings, earning another trembling moan from Emmanuel’s mouth, and pressed his aching cock against Emmanuel’s buttocks. “Tell me if you want me to stop,” he whispered as he aligned his erection with the pulsing opening.

Emmanuel nodded, too caught up in the feeling of the kisses that Cameron was bestowing on his wings to be truly cognizant of what Cameron was saying. He felt the head of Cameron’s cock pulsing against his entrance, and he knew it was important, but Cameron’s chest kept moving against his wings, distracting him.

“Relax,” Cameron whispered in his ear. Emmanuel tried to do as Cameron asked, but he had no attention for anything but the brush of Cameron’s body against his wings.

Until Cameron’s cock slid against that spot inside him. He could not contain the hoarse shout that burst from his lips, his back arching, pushing his wings tighter against Cameron’s chest. He could feel the moment of complete ecstasy nearing again. Cameron’s hands were on his hips now, guiding his movements to match the man’s, but that was not where Emmanuel wanted them.

“Touch my wings,” he pleaded.

Cameron trembled, moving his hands up from Emmanuel's hips to the place where the wings joined the smooth skin of his back. His thumbs slid against the top sides of each base while his fingers caressed the undersides. His fingers could not meet around the pinions, but Cameron stretched them as if to try, kneading at the sensitive flesh as his erection slid in and out of Emmanuel's velvety hot passage. The immediate stiffening of Emmanuel's body and the change in tone of his moans let Cameron know just how much pleasure he was bestowing, but the position made it more difficult for him to find leverage to thrust. And he very much wanted to thrust more deeply into the tight sheath that seemed made for him.

He pulled out, grinning slightly at Emmanuel's cry of protest. "Roll over onto your knees," he instructed, helping Emmanuel into the position he desired. He took a moment to look down at the vision spread out before him. Emmanuel's back arched as he leaned on his elbows, his wings spreading out wide, his knees set apart, his head hanging down between his arms as he panted with desire.

Cameron's hands trembled as he repositioned himself to slide back into Emmanuel's body. There had to be something wrong about this. It was too beautiful, too perfect to be allowed. He could not stop himself, though, and it was obvious that Emmanuel did not want him to stop. The angel pushed back against his inward thrust, bringing their bodies into sudden, sharp contact. Cameron gasped, his hands gripping hard at Emmanuel's waist.

"Wings!" the angel said again, reminding Cameron of why they had changed position in the first place. He let his hands drift back to their previous place around the base of Emmanuel's wings and then bent over the curve of the angel's spine as he drove deeper into Emmanuel's pulsing passage.

Emmanuel decided he had found heaven on earth. Nothing could possibly feel better than Cameron's hands on his wings, kneading the sensitive sinews, Cameron's shaft in his sheath, prodding repeatedly at

the place within him that brought such pleasure, Cameron's breath on his back, rustling his feathers.

The rhythm of Cameron's hips faltered as he felt his release nearing. He started to reach for Emmanuel's cock, to bring the angel along with him, but the sound of protest when his hand left Emmanuel's wing was so needy that Cameron changed his mind. Emmanuel had climaxed once before, from just stimulation to his wings. Cameron would simply have to make sure it happened a second time. He leaned further over Emmanuel's back, bringing his lips to the upper curve of the arched wings. Tightening his pulsing grip on the base of the wings as he increased the speed of his thrusts, he bit down gently on the delicate camber.

The pressure of Cameron's teeth on his wings was enough to trigger Emmanuel's orgasm. He bucked and trembled beneath Cameron, his motions forcing Cameron's cock even deeper inside him, which only served to make him tremble harder, leaving him vibrating in helpless desire. He tried to support himself, to ride out Cameron's continuing thrusts, but his climax had left him spent. Then Cameron's arms were around his waist, balancing him as the man's climax overtook him. Emmanuel could feel the hot liquid spool out inside him, filling him. When he felt Cameron start to withdraw, he pushed back against him, unwilling to let the moment of communion pass so quickly.

Obligingly, Cameron rolled them to their sides, leaving their bodies joined for the time being. He nuzzled Emmanuel's wings tenderly before placing a kiss on the nape of his neck.

He did not want to ask, but he could feel reality impinging on their cozy little world. "What happens now?" he asked Emmanuel softly.

"That depends on you," Emmanuel replied honestly. "Do you love me?"

"Yes," Cameron answered without hesitation.

“Enough to have me here, mostly dependent on you, for the rest of our lives?” Emmanuel asked.

“Yes,” Cameron answered again. “Why are you asking?”

“Because I have to go home soon and answer for what we’ve done,” Emmanuel explained.

“What?!” Cameron asked, sitting up. “What do you mean?”

Emmanuel sat up beside him and ran a loving hand over Cameron’s cheek. “This,” he said, gesturing to the bed, “is not in my job description. I wasn’t supposed to fall in love with you or let you fall in love with me. I don’t know what will happen when I go home, but they will not be happy with me. When I come back to you, I will probably be as mortal as you.”

Cameron was stunned. He had no idea Emmanuel had put himself in such a precarious position. If he understood what Emmanuel was saying... “You’re giving up your place in heaven for me,” he murmured, amazed and humbled.

“I’ve found my heaven here on earth with you,” Emmanuel assured him. “As long as you love me, as long as you’re with me, they won’t have taken anything I haven’t willingly given.”

He heard Calliel’s voice in his head, calling him. He had felt the other angel disengage when he first entered Cameron’s house, but the connection was back now “I have to go, but I promise, I will come back to you,” he swore, bending to kiss Cameron’s lips one last time for strength and courage. “Promise me you’ll be here when I get back,” he pleaded. “Even if it isn’t right away, promise me you’ll wait for me.”

“I promise,” Cameron said. The words were barely out of his mouth when Emmanuel disappeared, leaving him alone in an empty bed that smelled of sex and love and longing. Ignoring the discomfort of the damp splotches, Cameron snuggled down under the sheets, wrapping himself in the comfort they provided.

## Chapter 4

When Emmanuel left the mortal plane for the celestial one, he was clothed again in white, all evidence of his recent activities gone from his body. He regretted the loss, but it did not matter in the end. Nothing could erase the evidence from his heart.

Calliel and Alimon flanked him as they made their way slowly back to heaven.

“Are you happy?” Calliel asked softly.

Emmanuel’s smile was radiant. “Happier than I can ever remember being.”

The other two angels nodded. They did not understand, not really, but they could see, could feel, the contentment and joy radiating from Emmanuel. They had no idea what would happen next, but they rejoiced in the serenity of that moment.

Then they reached the Gates of Heaven, only to find them closed.

“They’ve never been closed to us before!” Alimon exclaimed.

“And they wouldn’t be closed to you now if I weren’t here,” Emmanuel replied. “I’m sorry that this has happened to you. I will make it very clear that this was my decision and that you should not suffer for it.”

“Do you think you’ll get that chance?” Calliel asked.

“Oh yes,” Emmanuel replied. “I have transgressed, and I am sure the Adversary will take great pleasure in informing everyone of it.”

“When did you get so cynical?” Alimon inquired.

“When the laws that govern us made me choose between the man I love and the God I serve.”

“Sacrilege!” The voice was cold and accusing.

Emmanuel turned to face his accuser. The Adversary stood there, finger pointed accusingly. “You heard him,” he said to the gathering host behind him. “Sacrilege! He is mine now.”

The word sent the multitude into a frenzy, lifting Emmanuel, Alimon, and Calliel, and bringing them to the Seat of Judgment.

“And why is it that an angel has been brought before me?” the Judge asked, not unkindly.

Before Emmanuel could reply, the host had taken up the cry, led by the Adversary. “Sacrilege!”

“Be silent,” Calliel shouted, coming to stand beside Emmanuel, aware that Alimon had moved to his other side. “We fought you for the soul of the painter and won. How much harder do you think we would fight for the soul of our friend?”

Emmanuel bowed his head, not in shame, for nothing could make him ashamed of his love for Cameron, but in sadness that it had come to this.

“See!” the Adversary shouted. “He cannot even face his accusers.”

Emmanuel’s head snapped up, and he stepped forward. “What am I accused of and who accuses me? You? Tell them what you know, or think you know.” He turned to the Judge. “I will submit to Your will, but I do not need the likes of him to accuse me. If loving Cameron is a sin, then yes, I have sinned. If finding joy in his arms is a trespass, then yes, I have trespassed. If seeing beauty and grace and goodness in his heart is a transgression, then yes, I have transgressed. I freely admit it, but I will not stand to have that beauty and grace sullied by that one’s accusations. Judge me for what I have done, not for what he thinks I did.”

“And what have you done?” the Judge asked.

“Saved a soul,” Alimon replied before Emmanuel could speak. “I saw the painter, Cameron, saw what misery he was in alone. That one would have taken him in his despair. I touched his heart again before we left to come back. Even if Emmanuel never returns, he will wait and hope. He may never love again, but he will wait and he will live, hoping to be worthy of Emmanuel when he does return.”

“And why should he hope to be worthy of Emmanuel?” the Adversary sneered. “Should he not hope to be worthy of the Lord instead?”

“No act of kindness, of goodness, is forgotten,” the Judge reminded him, “no matter the reason behind it. If he lives well to be worthy of anyone’s love, he is worthy of Mine as well.”

“There is more to it than that, though, isn’t there?” the Judge asked Emmanuel.

“There is,” Emmanuel agreed. “For I love him as he loves me. I promised to return to him, to stay with him, and it is a promise I intend to keep.”

“You know you cannot live as an angel among mortals,” the Judge pointed out.

“I know,” Emmanuel replied. “It is a small enough price to pay. Let me go back to him.”

“You do not have to leave. You could stay here and watch over him, guide his steps, be his guardian angel.”

“And never know the joy of his smile directed at me, the beauty of his laugh, the grace of his touch? Yes, I could stay, and while he would wait and hope, I would wither and die a little more every day, knowing that he was waiting and hoping for a day that would never come. I will not do that, to him or to me. Let me go back.”

“That is truly your choice?” the Judge asked, one last time.



“It is. But this was my choice. Alimon and Calliel had nothing to do with it. All they did was save Cameron from the Adversary until I came to my senses. They do not deserve to share my fate, for this was not their choice.”

“Alimon and Calliel do not and will not stand accused before me. As for your choice, so be it,” the Judge decreed. “You are cast out of the host of angels, to live as a mortal for the days allotted to you.”

The pain in his back was searing, a terrible ripping sensation, then he was falling, falling, plummeting toward the earth. Darkness took him, and he did not feel the hands that caught him, that lay him gently on the doorstep of the run-down building with the sign, Anderson Painting. He did not see those hands knock at the door or the two forms that hovered over him until the door opened and Cameron let out a sharp cry at finding Emmanuel there. When his eyes opened, he saw the deep blue ones looking at him, searching his depths for answers, but he did not see the fluttering wings of the two angels who left him to the life he had chosen. That sight, the one that let him see beyond the mortal world, was blinded, but he did not care. All he needed to see, to know, was that the man was holding him. “I told you I’d come back,” he said weakly.

Cameron scooped Emmanuel into his arms, carrying him inside. “Are you all right? What happened?”

“I am human now,” Emmanuel said, “with all the strengths and weaknesses of any man. I will live out my days at your side, if you will have me still.”

“Now and forever,” Cameron vowed.

“Forever is not promised to any of us, but I will treasure the days we have. I love you, Cameron.”

“And I love you, angel.”

Emmanuel winced. “Don’t call me that. I am an angel no more.”

“You will always be my angel. You saved me.”

“I think maybe we saved each other,” Emmanuel replied. “We are together. That’s what matters. Kiss me, please, now.”

Cameron hastened to do as Emmanuel requested, pulling the angel – the man – nearer to him and bringing their lips together to seal the promises they had made. Emmanuel plunged into the kiss ravenously, needing the immediacy of the contact to remind himself why he had made his choice. It was all he remembered, all he craved, all he needed to be happy. His hands moved frantically to cup Cameron’s head, holding it still so he could probe the other man’s mouth passionately.

Cameron broke the kiss, gasping for breath. “Easy, Emmanuel. Calm down. There’s no rush.”

“Yes, there is,” Emmanuel disagreed, urgency in every line of his body, every sound he made. “I need you. I need us to be joined as we were before. I need to feel that communion again.”

“That’s where we’re going, baby, but I don’t want it like this. I want to make love to you, slow and gentle. I want to show you everything we bypassed last time.”

Cameron’s voice washed over Emmanuel like soothing rain, calming his frenetic energy. “Just promise we’ll get there,” he pleaded.

“I promise,” Cameron answered. “I wouldn’t have it any other way. Come to bed now?”

Emmanuel nodded and they walked side by side into the bedroom. Emmanuel reached immediately for the buttons on his shirt, but Cameron caught his hands. “Let me,” he urged.

Emmanuel could feel his impatience returning. He understood what Cameron wanted, but he needed more. He needed now. He stepped

closer to Cameron and latched onto the older man's mouth again, pushing him toward the bed, trying to convey his desperation.

Realizing that Emmanuel was not going to be calmed, Cameron lay back under the onslaught and let his lover take what he needed. Then, he would show the other man the joy to be found in leisurely lovemaking.

Heartened by Cameron's acquiescence, Emmanuel let his hands race over Cameron's body, undoing buttons, pushing fabric aside in his quest for contact with skin. Cameron moved only as necessary to facilitate his disrobing, but found that Emmanuel's urgency was contagious. When Emmanuel's fingers closed around his throbbing erection, Cameron let the passion those caresses evoked take him. He bucked his hips up into Emmanuel's hand, enjoying the tentative caresses that quickly became more assured. There would be time to teach Emmanuel finesse, but for the moment, Cameron simply luxuriated in the other man's touch, his smell, in his very presence. That he was there at all was a miracle that Cameron would never take for granted.

Despite the lack of finesse, Emmanuel's touch soon had Cameron teetering on the edge of orgasm. A part of him still protested the rush, but he gave in. His body gave him little choice. He thrust up into Emmanuel's fist one more time, his seed shooting out to coat his stomach and Emmanuel's hand, his face contorted with the intense pleasure.

The sight of Cameron, his head thrown back, his eyes clamped shut, his face a mask of ecstasy, was all Emmanuel's control could handle, and completely untouched, he felt his own release burst out of him. He collapsed forward onto the bed beside Cameron.

Cameron pulled Emmanuel into his arms even before his panting eased and his heartbeat slowed. He needed his lover in his arms. His hands moved leisurely over Emmanuel's arms and up his back, coming to a sudden halt when they reached the place where Emmanuel's wings had been.

"They're gone, aren't they?" he asked sorrowfully.

"Yes," Emmanuel replied. "I can't very well live as a human with wings on my back, can I?" He tried to make it a light-hearted quip, but his voice was flat.

"Don't make jokes," Cameron scolded. "You paid a terrible price for what we have."

"No, it wasn't like that," Emmanuel hastened to correct him. "This isn't my punishment. This is my choice. I could have stayed and remained an angel, but I made a promise to you, and I wanted to keep it. I chose to come back to you, to be mortal and live with you. They didn't take anything from me. I gave it up willingly, gladly even, for it let me return to your side. I love you, Cameron. That's what matters."

Cameron felt tears pricking his eyes at Emmanuel's words. "I love you, too," he replied softly.

For a moment more, he cradled Emmanuel against him. Then, slowly, he rolled the other man onto his back and began working the buttons on his shirt, studying the revealed skin as he did. "I'll have to find your other sensitive spots then," Cameron said, his lips against Emmanuel's neck, "since I can't lavish attention on your wings any more. I guess I'll have to stroke and kiss you all over until I find where you're the most susceptible."

Emmanuel shivered at the sound of Cameron's silk and sandpaper voice and at the images he conjured. "I think I'd like that," he whispered, eager to begin this new phase of his life.

That was all the permission Cameron needed to begin his exploration, to start to learn all that there was to know about the creature in his arms. Emmanuel was mortal, human, now – he understood that – but he was also so much more, and Cameron looked forward to discovering Emmanuel's secrets. He parted Emmanuel's shirt, helping his young lover sit up so he could remove the hindering garment. As he lowered

Emmanuel back to the bed, his hands encountered the raised, rough scar on Emmanuel's back. He fingered it slowly.

"It is not a rebuke," Emmanuel reminded him firmly. "It is a testament to our love."

Cameron nodded, reminding himself to always cherish Emmanuel the way he deserved, but his fingers lingered, caressing, discovering this new place on his lover's body. It took Emmanuel a minute to understand Cameron's actions, but he relaxed finally, realizing that Cameron's attentions to the scar were not objectionable, were even pleasant because of the devotion he felt in the touch.

Cameron rose up over Emmanuel's prone form, letting his weight press lightly against his lover. He propped himself on one elbow, leaving the other hand free to ghost across Emmanuel's chest, studying his face for every hint of reaction. Emmanuel's face was as expressive as Cameron could have wanted, flickers of desire racing across his features when Cameron stroked his neck, the sensitive spot beneath his ear, his Adam's apple, his nipples, his stomach.

His initial survey complete, Cameron went back to linger, to shower Emmanuel with love and tender devotion. His lips settled against Emmanuel's skin, drifting over his cheekbones, the bridge of his nose, to kiss away the lines of worry or pain that lingered there, despite all of Emmanuel's brave words. "I can't begin to imagine how you must feel right now, leaving behind all you've known, all you were," Cameron whispered, smoothing his fingers across Emmanuel's forehead, "but I am glad you're here with me." The word did not even begin to describe his feelings: overwhelmed, honored, flabbergasted, thrilled, but those words did not come out. The emotions were still too new. He did not know how to express them yet.

"There is no place I'd rather be," Emmanuel replied equally softly, but with a firm determination in his voice that made Cameron flush with pleasure. "Never forget; I chose this."

Cameron made his way slowly down to the strong jaw and the long, supple neck. He licked at the olive-hued skin, urging Emmanuel to tip his head back so Cameron could explore more fully. Already drifting in a sensual daze, Emmanuel was putty in Cameron's hands, moving willingly at his lover's will. His head fell back as the smooth lips teased his skin. It took him a moment to realize what was different from before. He raised a hand to Cameron's cheek. "You shaved."

Cameron smiled, pressing another kiss to Emmanuel's neck before raising his head. "I had something to look forward to while you were gone. I wanted to be ready for your return."

Emmanuel savored the smooth skin a moment longer before his hand dropped back to the bed and his head tilted back again in blatant invitation. "I like it," he murmured as he waited for Cameron to resume his explorations.

Cameron obliged immediately, his lips moving back to the silk on steel skin. His lover's corporeal form left nothing to be desired. As his lips moved lower, he said a silent prayer of thanksgiving for the gift in his arms and swore to do everything he could to be worthy of such grace. Then he returned his focus to Emmanuel, licking and nibbling at his collarbone.

Emmanuel moaned softly as Cameron's teeth and tongue teased his skin. The electric contact eased a fear he did not even know he had. At his insistence, their first round of lovemaking had focused almost completely on his wings, every other touch but Cameron's cock inside him paling in comparison. Feeling himself react now to Cameron's other caresses eased his mind on that last count. He could make love to Cameron as a mortal. Even without wings, his body reacted to Cameron's touch. He threaded his fingers through the soft red hair, encouraging the continued exploration.

Teasingly, Cameron circled Emmanuel's nipple with his lips, playing across his lover's chest. When he sensed that Emmanuel's impatience was about

to get the best of him, he took the tightly furled bud in his mouth, holding it between his lips as he laved it with his tongue. Emmanuel whimpered, arching his back into the novel caress. He could feel arousal surging through him again as Cameron worked his sensitive flesh.

Hearing the sounds of pleasure falling from Emmanuel's lips, Cameron intensified his attentions deliberately, redoubling his efforts to heighten Emmanuel's awareness, his sensitivity, his desire. He wanted to wrap Emmanuel in his love. His hands drifted lower as he switched to the other nipple, sucking and licking, nipping at it as he had its twin. He could feel Emmanuel trembling beneath his touch and it rocked him to the core of his being. It seemed that everything in his life had led up to this moment, with this man, molding him into the man Emmanuel could love, and he was determined to be that man. Slowly, he inched his way down Emmanuel's torso to the accompaniment of the other man's moans, savoring each fresh sound, each new patch of skin.

Emmanuel was caught in a sensual web, heart pounding, loins throbbing as he waited for what came next. He knew, or thought he knew, where they were going, but he did not know, could not anticipate, the path they would take to get there, and so he lay back under Cameron's caress, responsive but waiting, letting Cameron take the lead and teach him the joys of his changed body. Sensation upon sensation rushed through him, leaving him shaking with wanton desire. He shifted restlessly, feeling again the building pressure, the tingling that he was learning was a desire for release. "Please," he whispered.

"Soon," Cameron promised in a voice that stroked the other man's ear like velvet, his lips memorizing every curve and cut of Emmanuel's stomach as he began to undo his lover's pants, sliding them off Emmanuel's hips, leaving him finally naked. His fingers followed the light dusting of hair down from Emmanuel's navel, sliding into the curls at his groin but studiously avoiding the eager erection.

His lips drifted out, over Emmanuel's hip and down his thigh before working his way around to the sensitive inner face. Emmanuel parted his legs eagerly, longing for Cameron's touch.

Suddenly hungry himself, Cameron moved up and buried his nose in the thatch of hair, inhaling Emmanuel's unique scent. His lover's cries were tempting him beyond control, driving him wild with desire. He pressed his lips to the base of Emmanuel's cock in a gentle kiss before sliding his mouth toward the tip. When he reached the rosy head, he let his tongue explore, loving the salty flavor that assailed his senses.

Emmanuel froze when he felt Cameron's mouth on his erection, but the knowledge that this was Cameron, his love, who was touching him so intimately, helped him overcome his instinctive inhibitions. "Can..." he began, feeling the need to touch Cameron, to return some measure of the joy that he was feeling. Cameron lifted his head to meet Emmanuel's eyes. "Can I touch you? That way?"

Cameron shifted so that he was lying beside Emmanuel, giving his lover access to his body even as he lowered his head to resume his ministrations. Tentatively, Emmanuel copied Cameron's actions, trying to give his lover the same pleasure he was receiving. He could not take Cameron as deeply as Cameron took him, but the sounds he could hear and feel emanating from Cameron's throat were intoxicating, making Emmanuel feel incredibly powerful.

"No more," Cameron said finally, raising his head and pulling away from Emmanuel's clinging mouth.

"Why?" Emmanuel protested.

"Because I want to be inside you again," Cameron replied hoarsely. Emmanuel groaned in delight at the words and the tone of Cameron's voice.

"Yes. I want that, too." Emmanuel's voice rubbed against Cameron's ear like an affectionate kitten.



Cameron shuddered as he fought to stay in control. He had to take this slowly. Emmanuel was still practically untouched, and after all he had sacrificed, willingly or not, the last thing he deserved was a rough, painful experience. Cameron sat up long enough to retrieve the lube from the bedside table and reposition himself on the bed. Emmanuel turned away immediately, lying on his side, offering himself to Cameron. The painter's heart leapt in his throat as he truly understood how much Emmanuel wanted this. It eased his concerns of rushing his lover, but it made him all the more determined to give Emmanuel the most fulfilling experience possible.

"Not this time," Cameron whispered, rolling Emmanuel onto his back. "This time, I want to see your beautiful face."

Emmanuel accepted Cameron's declaration, willing to do anything if it would bring the moment of their joining closer. He recognized the feeling of the lube-slicked fingers as they slid over his skin and toward his entrance. Anticipation built inside him as he braced his feet and lifted his hips into the touch.

Cameron ran his other hand soothingly down Emmanuel's flank. "Easy," he crooned. "We'll get there. There isn't any rush."

"Yes, there is," Emmanuel panted. "I need you."

Cameron wanted to draw out the preparation, to tease and tantalize until Emmanuel was begging, until he was open and pleading, but his own need was too strong. It was time to satisfy both their appetites. He probed Emmanuel's rosette gently, waiting for it to relax, to let him inside. Almost immediately, Emmanuel pushed against the questing fingertip, trying to bring that much of Cameron inside him at the very least. Cameron obliged, working his finger slowly into Emmanuel's body.

Emmanuel whimpered, protesting the drawn-out pace. "I'm not fragile," he whispered.

"But you are precious," Cameron replied. "I don't want to hurt you."

“I’ll tell you if it hurts,” Emmanuel promised, “but I need you now. Give us what we both want.”

Cameron added a second finger, stretching Emmanuel’s entrance, but more quickly, hurrying now toward their goal. He reached for the lube and smeared it over himself. “Tell me if you need me to stop,” Cameron reminded Emmanuel as he lined up his cock with the clenching portal.

“Don’t stop,” Emmanuel pleaded, arching against Cameron’s body.

Cameron slid inside Emmanuel, the sense of homecoming so strong that he nearly wept for the joy of it. He tried to pause, to give Emmanuel a chance to adjust, but the other man was moving restlessly beneath him, stirring Cameron’s cock in his sheath despite Cameron’s immobility. That lasted only long enough for Cameron to realize that Emmanuel truly did not need the time, that he wanted this as badly and as immediately as Cameron himself did. He began to thrust, matching his rhythm to the movements beneath him, guiding Emmanuel’s hips gently at first until he learned the pattern of this new position.

Emmanuel moaned at the feeling of Cameron sheathed inside him. He could feel the spiritual connection that was echoed by their physical joining. His hands moved to Cameron’s broad shoulders, clutching at them frantically as they moved together in unison, pulling Cameron’s face to his for a kiss. The configuration of their bodies trapped Emmanuel’s cock between them so that with every thrust, Cameron’s belly provided more stimulation to the throbbing flesh. Their mouths met in hungry desperation as they strove for completion, tongues entwining, mimicking the motions of their hips.

Cameron could feel the tightening in his groin that signaled his imminent release. He shifted enough that he could slide one hand between their bodies, providing the final push that Emmanuel needed.

His climax began, deep inside him, spreading outward in great, pulsing waves. He convulsed beneath Cameron, his channel clamping down on Cameron's cock, massaging the entire length.

Cameron whispered Emmanuel's name in hushed awe as his own orgasm overtook him, shaking him in its grasp like a rag doll. He continued to thrust slowly as he came down from the sensual high. "I think I've died and gone to heaven," he said softly.

Emmanuel smiled. "No, you just found a little piece of heaven on earth, our little piece of heaven." He knew what heaven felt like, but this was different. Heaven was open to any who chose it. Cameron's arms were open only to him. He smiled more broadly and shared those observations with his lover.

Cameron chuckled and kissed Emmanuel tenderly. "My angel," he whispered.

\*\*\*\*\*

Looking down at them from their place in heaven, Alimon sighed. "It doesn't seem right, what happened to him," he told Calliel.

"That's not for us to say," Calliel disagreed.

"No, it is not for you to say," the Voice agreed, "but you were there. You heard Emmanuel make his choice. Close your eyes. Do you not hear it, the song of love? It swells each time they touch, each time they kiss. Emmanuel was not punished. He has chosen a different path to Me, a different way to testify to all that I am. He will live out his days with his love, honoring Me as love does in all its forms. Their road will not be easy, in the world that is still blind to My ways, that does not understand that I am love and that all love comes from Me. Death will someday part them, it is true, but if their hearts remain faithful, it will be only a temporary separation. And when Emmanuel's days are done, there will be much rejoicing in heaven, for we will have not one but two to add to our numbers. Emmanuel was right. He would have withered here,

without Cameron, his soul growing dimmer and dimmer each day. And what would that have wrought? No joy, for sure. No, as unfair as it seems, Emmanuel made the right choice. Rejoice for your friend. He has found happiness and love. What more could any of us possibly want?"

Check out these other titles by Ariel Tachna...

