

Last Christmas

A short story by Colleen Keehne

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The snow seemed to swirl down faster with each step I took. The

walkway that edged the bridge was only wide enough for one person. Cars whizzed by just inches from me on one side and a 40-foot drop into the freezing waters of the rushing river below was on the other side. Being here, in this place and time wasn't a choice I had willingly made. "Damn car!" I muttered head down as I plowed slowly forward. The words seemed to hang in the frozen air in front of me, it was that cold. Ten minutes ago I had been toasty warm... well OK, "*toasty*" might not be the right word for it. More like semi warm. At least I had been out of the blowing wind that dropped the temperature

to just above freezing. *Damn car... damn car...damn car*, I chanted over and over in my mind in time with each step I took. I heaved a huge sigh. *No... can't really blame the car. I knew there was something wrong with it. No way was it the car's fault that it had broken down half way across the bridge. I should have had it looked at months ago! But then, just like now, I was broke. No job. No home. No money. No future. No someone to love me. Throw in the time of year it was, a week before Christmas, and my life sucked big time.*

Shaking my head, I trudged on

toward the faintly twinkling colored lights in the distance. I didn't know what I could do once I got there. Being alone, I really had no one I could call for help. At least I'd be warm. It had been that way my whole life. Always alone, even when surround by others. Growing up in the foster care system would do that to person. Reaching up, I pulled the bright red watch cap back down over my cold ears. It was the only festive looking thing about me. You really can't call my old faded green pea coat festive, I groused to myself. It may have seen better days, but hey... it kept this old girl warm.

A semi-truck roared by me, the wind from his passing knocking me against the low railing of the bridge. That railing was the only thing between me and the water below. I teetered there, trying to regain my footing on the icy walkway. Clutching the railing, I managed to steady myself, only to find I was looking down into the snow dotted abyss. "It would be so easy," I whispered, feeling the pull of the darkness and the water below. With one small step, I could be over the railing. "Oh, so tempting." All I had to do was swing one leg over the low barrier. I could see myself floating gently among the

snowflakes, doing graceful pirouettes in the air until I reached the river. I saw myself pierce the surface, the water embracing me as it carried me down, almost cradling me as I drifted into a better place.

A low rumble of laughter from next to me broke the spell that held me enthralled. “Com’ on, sweetheart, you really think that’s how it goes down?” The voice was low and husky. The timbre of that voice warming my insides. I looked to my left, where the voice came from. There, lounging against the rail next to me was a Greek God of a man. Turning slightly, I

let my eyes drift from his thick honey-colored hair to his incredible green eyes, framed with long lashes. His nose was perfect for a man, aquiline and straight. I looked at his lips... *oh my God...* his lips were full, kissable even with a slight smirk on them. I was totally mesmerized by those lips. Licking my lips, I was so close to reaching out and tracing his lips with my fingers. He leaned toward me... *holy shit... was he going to kiss me?*

"Sweetheart? You still with me?" he asked. *Crap... I'm old enough to be his mother.* Blinking a few times, I stalled for time. "Umm... sure. Still

here." *Oh, just brilliant you dip!* I scream at myself. *This guy could be the proverbial ax murderer from all those urban legends. And yet here I am, eyeing him like he's one huge piece of dark Godiva chocolate.* My eyes dropped to his muscular chest, encased in a tight black t-shirt emblazoned with the words Angel of Death and a skull framed by angel wings in white. I'd gone this far so I figured why stop with his chest? I eyed his trim waist, where his shirt tucked into jeans so tight they looked painted on. And damn...they didn't hide anything from his meaty thighs to his... package. And what an

outstanding package it was!

Completing his bad boy look was an open leather jacket; His legs crossed at his ankles, he leaned on the railing next to me.

I snapped my eyes back up to his. Looking into their green depths, I felt something stir to life deep inside my core. Something that I hadn't felt for at least 30 years. I caught my breath; *old ladies don't get those kinds of "something's". Maybe a stray hot flash?* He chuckled "You're never too old, Livie."

All the air rushed out of my lungs. Livie...he called me Livie. "Why

did you call me that?" I demanded when I could breathe again. No one had called me Livie since I'd been 13 and I hit the last in a long string of foster homes. When I turned 14, I'd dropped Livie in favor of Olivia. Livie was what the asshole in that last foster home had called me when he had tried to creep into my bed one night. I was gone by the next morning and he was nursing some sore family jewels. I took a step to my right, away from this strange man.

"It's your name, sweetheart." I saw him raise his arm as if to touch me. I jumped, avoiding his hand only

to realize how close to the low bridge railing I was. There was no place to go but over. With a gasp of terror, I felt myself over balance and tilt out over that dark space, as I started to fall.

Nooo... Not knowing if I had screamed out loud or just in my mind. I closed my eyes ,as if having them closed would somehow stop what was going to happen next. I may have felt the pull to take that step over the railing, but in reality I wanted to live!

Before I went totally over the side, warm hands grabbed both of my forearms, firmly anchoring me to the walkway. I looked up at the now

standing man who'd stopped my fall.

Whoa... the dude is TALL! I thought. I looked up into those green eyes. What I saw there took my breath away. They swirled a bit as he drew in a deep breath, drawing me closer to his body. I licked my lips nervously, and those laser green eyes fixated on that small action.

"Do... do I know you?" I gasped, not sounding as sure of myself as I wanted to. Something about this man called to me. I'd never had this reaction to a total stranger before and take my word for it I had known a LOT of strangers in my past. But this man...

it was like I'd been waiting for him all my life.

"Not yet." He answered me as my body settled into his arms. He looked past me, over the railing. "Were you going to do it?"

"Do it?"

"Jump. Off yourself. End it all." He nodded to the river below.

"You're kidding right?" I asked looking up at him.

"Not kidding. It's why I'm here."

"You're here to...?" I let it hang out there, asking what he meant.

"Collect souls."

Now I tried to take a step back from him. "Collect souls? My soul? Who the hell are you?" He let me take that step, but didn't entirely let go of me.

He grinned, "Just what the shirt says, sweetheart."

"Angel of Death?" I wiggled, trying to take another step back.

"You're part of Angel of Death? The rock band?"

His laughter rang out in the silence that surrounded us. Wait... silence? Looking around I was amazed

to see that the once busy bridge was deserted. No cars or trucks in sight. The howl of the wind had disappeared; the stinging, driving snow now drifted down in big, fat fluffy flakes.

His laughter stopped, tugging on my arms, trying to draw me back to that warm, hard chest.

“Hold on a second.” I put one hand on said chest, bracing myself, keeping some space between us.

“Again... Who are you?”

“The Angel of Death.” He stated.
“But you can call me Caleb. And yes...

Angel of Death is my band.”

OK... yeah he looked the part of a rock god.

“And rock gods collect souls?” I asked still stiff arming him.

“Nope, sweetheart.” He shook his head and tugged a bit harder on me. “The band is what I do in my spare time.”

“And what do you do in your not so spare time?” I really, really wanted to just give in and cuddle up to that nice tight chest. *Holy crap! Where did THAT come from?* I asked myself even as I relaxed my arms, one

hand on his chest starting to stroke it absent-mindedly.

He paused as if gathering his thoughts.

“I told you... I collect souls.” He smiled again, “I am the Angel of Death.”

OK maybe this guy isn't an ax murderer (although I've seen no real proof that he isn't yet.). But he's really got some issues if he thinks he's the Angel of death.

“Umm... really?” I was once again trying to push away from him. “And whose souls are you here to

collect?”

“Relax, sweetheart,” he said easily, “Not yours... yet.”

Yet was all I really heard. “Yet?” I choked out. I looked around again, hoping to see a car, truck; shit... anything coming that would mean I could scream for help and have someone hear it.

“Not your time yet, Livie.” He whispered as he yanked me against him. Tilting my head back, I looked up at him, watching in fascination as his lips slowly descended to mine. “But now is the time for this, sweetheart.”

And he kissed me.

Softly at first, as if trying to not scare me, but when I let my lips open to his, that changed. With a muffled groan his kiss hardened, deepened. And so help me...I kissed him back just as hard and deep. Our tongues dueled. I plastered my 60-year-old body to him, feeling his erection throbbing through our clothes.

He broke the kiss off, resting his forehead on mine.

“I need you.” He mouthed against my forehead. Wrapped in the cocoon of his arms, flushed from the

kiss and contact we'd just shared, nothing mattered to me now except him.

Not the strange circumstances that I found myself in.

Not that I was a lonely 60-year-old spinster.

Not the fact I was homeless.

And certainly not that I now believed him when he said he was the Angel of Death.

“What’s happening here, Caleb?” I asked, noting my voice was thick with passion.

“Even Angels need to find love, Livie.” He said softly. “And I’ve found mine.”

I pondered that statement a minute. “Me?”

Raising his head, he looked right into my eyes. “You.”

“Why me?” I asked still not understanding. “Why here and now, if my soul isn’t the one you have to collect tonight?”

“Ahh, Livie.” He planted a kiss on my forehead. “I wanted to make sure you knew it wasn’t your time. Look into yourself sweetheart, all the

answers are there.”

I tilted my head while I looked inside myself. Being in his arms was right. I could feel that all the way to my bones. My heart filled with warmth. Then my head had to go and ruin it all.

“But how do we do this Caleb?” I asked, “I mean you’re the Angel of Death and I’m just a lonely old woman.”

Pulling me into a tighter to his body, he reassured me. “It’ll work out. Right now, tonight, is just a start for us, Livie.”

He let me go, stepping back and looking over my head, into the distance

“When the time is right, I’ll come for you.” He smiled off into the distance, “You’ll be ready for me then. We’ll have an eternity together.”

“What happens when you come back? I die?” I asked the thought of dying not so scary now.

“Yes.” At least he wasn’t sugar coating it for me. “I have to go, sweetheart, there’s souls that need collecting.” Looking down, he dropped his head for one last soul-stealing kiss.

He stepped back and as he did the wind picked up, the snow once again swirling around us. The roar of traffic just a few feet away from us was almost deafening.

He turned to walk away, his jacket flapping in the wind.

“CALEB!” I called out to him, worried he wouldn’t hear me over all the noise. He stopped and looked back at me.

“I love you!” I couldn’t let him go with telling him that. I saw him smile at me.

“I know, Livie... I know.” He

winked and then he turned and faded from view. I was left standing alone on the busy bridge, snow melting in my hair, shivering now. Partly from the cold, but mostly of the heat of loving the Angel of Death.

I don't know how long I stood there, watching the space he'd disappeared into. My mind was all fuzzy, trying to process the encounter. Still shivering, this time from the cold, I pulled my old jacket tightly around myself and started walking forward again. The twinkling Christmas lights

at the end of the bridge seemed brighter now.

Huh... maybe this Christmas wouldn't that bad, I thought. Or maybe I DID make that jump into the river below and this was my own personal Hell. Trapped on this bridge making out with the hot Angel of Death. My steps slowed, something was pulling me back to my poor car. I stopped completely, torn. Should I go toward the lights? Or follow the tugging back the way I had come?

“Really? Go toward the lights?” I was talking to myself again, one of my least annoying traits. “What a dumb

ass cliché!” Turning, I started back to my car. “You’re crazy Olivia. Your car won’t start, and it’s starting to freeze out here. Just what are you planning on doing once you get back to it?” I didn’t expect an answer back so I kept walking.

It seemed much farther back to my car then I remembered. I had my head down, watching where I put each foot. *I do NOT want to slip and fall now.* Pausing to look up and get my bearings I saw flashing lights up ahead, next to the dark lump that was my car.

“Crap... Crap... Crap!” I chanted

over and over as I picked up my pace. *A freaking tow truck?* When I got to my car, I saw it was, indeed, a tow truck. But instead of hooking up my broken down and illegally parked car, the driver was sitting in the cab of the truck, waiting. He looked up from whatever he was looking at in his lap... *EWWW don't go there, Olivia!* Seeing me, he waved, and then hopped out of the truck.

“You Livie Shields?” He grunted. He glanced down at the clipboard in his hand, reading off my name.

“Olivia Shields.” I corrected him. No one calls me Livie... except a

certain Angel of Death.

“Got a call you needed a tow. Guy said to take to you wherever you need to go, drop the car off at my repair shop and fix it.” He looked at me with a question on his face.

“Huh?” I stared at him, speechless, which doesn’t often happen with me.

“Ma’am?” The driver was waiting for me to tell him what to do.

“Umm... OK. How much is this going to cost me?” Knowing full well I had zero money. I asked. He’d give me a figure; I’d sigh, and then send him

on his merry way without me.

“All paid for Ma’am.” He consulted his clipboard again. “By one Caleb Aod?”

“Caleb Aod?” I mulled this for like 30 seconds before a light went on in my head. *Aod!! Angel of Death! Caleb had sent this guy to me. He WAS real! That whole encounter was real?! I must have had a smile a mile wide, because the driver smiled back at me before he turned and started hooking my car up. It wasn't long before we were on our way back toward the twinkling Christmas lights at the far end of the bridge.*

An hour later, my car had been dropped off at the guy's shop. After putting me into a taxi, (again all paid for by Mr. Aod), I was standing in front of the local homeless shelter. The taxi driver had wanted to drop me at some hotel downtown. But I already had a voucher for this place. This was where I was heading when my car bit it. *Man, look at all of those freakin' Christmas lights!* The place was lit up from the stairs to the third story rooftop. Laughter and singing came from inside the building. The cold made me shiver, as I stood there

on the dark sidewalk. *Move feet,* I thought as I climbed the stairs and pulled open the door, the warmth from inside enveloping me.

I stayed there for the week between meeting Caleb and Christmas Eve, enjoying people coming and going, helping out in the kitchen when I could. I even enjoyed Christmas Day when it dawned bright and snowy at the end of the week. The Christmas tree in the public room was tall and glowed with hundreds of small colored lights. Trimmed with glass balls, tinsel, garlands, and silver bells it was beautiful. Looking at it made

me feel... happy. And I hadn't felt that in a long time. I just wasn't sure where that happiness was coming from. Never far from my mind was Caleb and all that had happened on the bridge that night a week ago. I had told this incredible and young man I loved him. After spending only... a few minutes, a few hours... time was a bit fuzzy from that night with him. The funny thing about it was that I can still say I love him.

Christmas night everyone, young and old, gathered in the public room to watch "It's A Wonderful Life". My breath caught as the storyline

unfolded. A bridge spanning a dark rushing river. An angel coming to the rescue. It all was so familiar. All but the happy ending, the one where George Bailey comes home a new man. Clarence the Angel got his wings. Sadly, there wasn't a happy ending in my future. At least not one I could see. As the credits rolled at the end, I thought I heard the tinkle of bells from the tree. Looking around, no one else seemed to have heard it but me.

You're hearing things, my inner voice snorted. Get some sleep. Rubbing my tired eyes, I ambled off to the small room I shared with two

other women and two small kids. But it was a dry, warm place to stay. Maybe not 100% safe, but what shelter is? Besides I could protect myself if I had too. And with the weather turning nasty with sub-freezing temperatures and a blizzard on its way, I felt lucky to have this place. I'd even scored the last weekly voucher for the coming week. That meant I had a bed until after New Year's. After that? Who knew where I'd end up, I certainly didn't.

I woke up the next morning feeling the chill in the room. *Someone needs to replace that damn boiler! I*

groused to myself. It took a while in the mornings for the old boiler in the basement to get up to speed and warm all the floors of the aged building. I rolled out of bed; it takes a while for this old body to get up to speed these days. I saw my roommates were all up and about, making me the last one to get up. That meant a chilly, if not downright cold, shower in the communal Women's locker room at the end of the hall. But a cold one was better than none at all, so off I went, towel and clothes in hand, blanket wrapped around my old body.

Twenty minutes later I scurried back into the room. My hair was wet and my body damp. I hung the threadbare towel on one of the hooks next to the bed that was mine for now, and next to the towel, my pajamas. Finger combing my hair and jamming my red hat on, I headed downstairs and out the front door. With a semi cheery wave to the young woman manning the front desk, I went right to my car. It had come back from the repair shop a few days after being towed. I'd run some errands for the shelter, kind of a way to pay them back for the room. But I was running low on gas and so far, no help on

getting more was forthcoming. Small puffs of air fogged the air when I breathed out and the air was frigid. Looking with longing at the car, the last real thing I owned, I turned to my left and started walking. I had decided to find some work ... legal work... that I could do. In the past, I'd worked in bars, small diners, and the odd office temp job here and there. I was after all, a rather good Jill of most trades.

It was near dark when I trudged back into the shelter. My employment dreams dashed on the rocks of the

crushing economy. The only place that I found hiring was a sketchy bar in a part of town even the cops didn't venture into alone. Not a productive day at all. The wicked cold had seeped into every bone. Walking into the lobby of the shelter, a wall of warm air hit me. It felt like needle pricks where ever it came into contact with my exposed skin. Caleb had been on my mind all day too. I wasn't sure why, but he was.

A soft sob caught my attention. A young pregnant girl was standing at the lobby desk. Dressed more for a cool fall day rather than the arctic

days we were having now. She looked frozen in place and way too thin. She stood with her arms wrapped protectively around her rounded belly. Tears were slowly making a path down both of her cheeks. That sob had been the only sound I'd heard her make. The girl from this morning was gone, replaced by an older man at the front desk. He looked exasperated.

"What's up?" I asked walking to stand next to the girl. The old man looked up from the log book on the desktop.

"This young woman here" he nodded at the girl, "needs a place to

bunk down." He shook his head "We're full for the week and every other shelter is too. It's the cold you know. I'm trying to find her someplace to stay, at least for tonight."

I tilted my head thinking, "Can she bed down in the public room? Just for tonight?"

Without looking back up, the man's head shook. "It's against the law, everyone has to have a bed assigned to them." I stuck my hands in my coat pocket. There, in one, was my voucher for the coming week. I had a bed. This girl didn't. The door opened behind me, letting in a blast of frigid

air as a group of kids hustled through it. I shivered as the cold air rushed past me, the door slowly swinging closed. I knew what I had to do. I walked up to the desk and stepping in front of the girl, I slid my voucher across the counter.

"She can have my spot." The old man looked at me, a puzzled frown on his face.

"You giving up your bed for the night?" he asked.

I shook my head "No... for the week."

Another sob came from behind

me. The old man looked past me, then back at me. With a shrug, he reached out for my voucher. "You'll have to remove your things from the room."

My head bobbed up and down. I didn't have a lot to pack up. Turning I locked my gaze with the girl's. Her eyes were a rich chocolate color, shimmering with tears. A feeling of peace filled me. I knew deep down this was the right thing to do. She reached out and took both of my hands into hers.

"Please... can we share?" she begged in a soft voice, "It's so cold, I

can't just take your bed."

Share? Yeah... we could share.

Even as that thought went through my mind, the old man behind me killed that idea.

"Sorry. Not allowed to share. One bed per person."

The girl looked past me, still clutching my hands. She opened her mouth to speak, but I forestalled her.

"No... you take the bed." I pulled free of her, "I'll be fine. I can sleep in my car tonight and find a new place tomorrow." I turned back to the old man "Give her the voucher. I'll just go

up and grab my things."

I didn't give either of them a chance to say anything, I just walked away, climbing the stairs to the second floor. I packed my few belongings and walked out of the room without looking back, backpack slung over one shoulder. Each step I took, I could feel excitement building in my belly. At the bottom of the stairs, the girl waited for me. In her hand was a tiny silver bell. It looked a lot like one of the bells on the shelter's Christmas tree.

"Please... your name?" She asked, holding the bell out to me. I

took it from her and tucked it into my coat pocket.

"Thank you." I said smiling at her. Walking to the shelter's door, I stopped and turned back looked back at her.

"Olivia... my name is Olivia."
Turning, I walked out the door.

God... it's frickin' cold! I shifted in the back seat of the car, trying to find a more comfortable position to sleep in. It wasn't easy. There's not a lot of room in the back seat of a 1997 Chevy

Cavalier when it also serves as your living room and kitchen. I was wearing every piece of clothing I owned. I'd added a ragged comforter to my old sleeping bag for warmth. And an even older looking packing blanket over all that.

"And I'm still freezing!" I muttered. I'd been living in my car for two days now. Since I wasn't staying at the shelter anymore, they told me I had to move my car. So here I was, parked in a Wal-Mart parking lot at the edge of town, freezing my butt off. So cold my bones ached, I couldn't stop shivering. Sleep eluded me.

Thoughts of Caleb, though, were ever present.

But the cold is worth it, I told myself. She had needed that bed more than I did. She and the baby she carried. I shoved aside the blankets and sleeping bag, wiggling between the bucket seats, twisting the car's keys. There was just enough gas in the tank to give me some heat tonight. The engine made grinding sounds. Frowning, I turned it again. The engine coughed and caught.

"Thank You God." I breathed. I set the heater on medium and sighed when a puff of warm air hit me in the

face. Settling back into my "nest" in the backseat, I thought about the last few days. Before my encounter with Caleb on the bridge, I would have bitched about my current circumstances.

Before the Angel of Death popped into my life and kissed me, I mused, I don't think I'd given up that bed at the shelter. But here I was, shivering from the cold and deep in thought, my eyes growing heavy in the back seat of my car. I let myself smile, a feeling that something was waiting for me. No, that wasn't right. *Someone* was waiting for me. Giggling filled the

car. *Was that me?* I couldn't keep my eyes open now, yawning, I let them drift closed. I wiggled deeper into the seat, noticing I wasn't shivering anymore. Warmth flooded through me and I sighed. *It feels so good to be warm!* So good I ignored a faint warning bell going off in my head. Blackness engulfed me.

Too hot! Was my first thought on waking up. My second one was that I really need to snuggle deeper into the hard body I was laying on. *Hard body?* Putting both hands flat on

that hard chest, I pushed. And went nowhere. A low laugh rumbled under me. I stopped pushing... I knew that laugh.

"Caleb?" I asked with a hint of wonder in my voice. The arms that had held tightly to his body eased. Lifting my head, I looked into his brilliant green eyes. "Caleb?"

"Livie." he said with a grin. One hand moved to the back of my head as he gently pulled me down, his lips meeting mine in a soft kiss... that turned deep and hard in an instant. I moaned, letting his tongue slide into my mouth. His other hand moved to

my ass, massaging it, pressing me down into the hard bulge in his jeans.

When we came up for air, I looked into his eyes. I saw passion, love, and lust there.

"Am I dead?"

"Yes, Livie"

"Are you here to collect my soul?"

"No, sweetheart." He stroked my graying hair.

"No?" I frowned.

"No, Livie." He said again. "I'm here for *you*. All of you, body and

soul."

Caleb pushed me up, holding me as he stood with me in his arms. He let me slide down his body to set me on my feet.

"Turn around sweetheart."

Caleb said.

I turned in his arms, seeing for the first time I was no longer in my car. Fog ebbed and flowed around us as if being blown around by a silent breeze. I looked over my shoulder at Caleb and him staring over my head. Looking back, I now saw a mirror in front of us. *Where had that come*

from? I thought, puzzled.

Figures began to fade into view in on the mirror. As the image cleared, I saw they were us. My eyes caught Caleb's in the mirror. He smiled at me as I felt a slight tremor go through him. He nodded back to the mirror.

As I watched, wings sprang from Caleb's back. Rich, glittering black wings, spanning at least twelve feet.

"Holy Shi... Cow!" I gasped. Caleb folded those glorious wings around me, blocking my view of the mirror. Closing my eyes within the cocoon of soft feathers, I could feel

them caress every part of my body.

Way too soon for my liking, Caleb folded his wings back. I sighed at the loss.

"What happens now, Caleb?" I asked. "I'm dead. How does this work for us?"

Caleb laid a finger against my lips to quiet me, and then he began stroking them.

"It works this way, Livie," he said. "When I collect someone's soul, I deliver that soul to one of two places. The living call these places Heaven or Hell." He paused, "I've been the Angel

of Death for eons. At some point in time, I'll be replaced by someone else. It's been a lonely life. I'm only allowed to find my life mate, my one true love, once."

"And I'm that one?" I asked in wonder.

"Yes, sweetheart. You are that one." There was no doubt in his voice.

"So. How does this work" I needed an answer.

"Look in the mirror sweetheart." Caleb tilted his head toward the mirror.

"I am, but all I see is..." My eyes

widened as the figure that was me started to change. The years seemed to drop off. Winkles smoothed out, my breasts firmed up under the t-shirt I wore, my hair grew longer, the gray changing to a rich Auburn. For a moment I was speechless.

"What's happening to me?" I whispered.

"Olivia, you made the greatest sacrifice anyone could make. Because of you, a young woman lives. And the baby she carries will do great things for humanity." Caleb's tone of voice had gone serious. "For that, you'll be rewarded." With those words he

stepped away from me.

I felt a tingle in the middle of my back. "Caleb?" Pain ripped down my spine but before I could react, sparkling white wings sprouted from my back. *Ohmygod... ohmygod!* The scream rolled through my mind. Slowly, they unfurled as if they had a life of their own. My eyes were like saucers as I watched them stretch out behind me a good 6 feet. Caleb stepped behind me, his black wings unfurled, making a striking contrast.

"Livie, sweetheart" his wings swept around us, mine folding back to let him cocoon us again. "Will you be

my mate, my true love? My Angel of Light for eternity?"

I felt a heat start to build deep inside of me. *This is what I've waited my entire life for*, I thought to myself. *I have waited for him to come for me.*

"Yes." I closed my eyes, feeling his body pressing into mine, his wings warping us together. "For all of eternity, my love. My Angel of Death." His lips met mine in a heated kiss and the world faded out around us.

Epilogue

The TV in the public room was tuned to the local News. The lead story tonight was all about the deadly cold that held the city in its grip. No one really paid attention to what was being reported. The young woman curled up in the corner of the sofa paused as she rubbed her belly. She listened as the blond newscaster reported on an older woman found dead in the back seat of a 1997 Chevy Cavalier in the parking lot of a local Wal-Mart. While identification was pending, the police did say she had

frozen to death. Suddenly the young woman felt a movement under the hand that rested on her belly. Before she could absorb this, the first fluttering of her baby, she heard the clear tinkling of bells from the Christmas tree still standing in the room. A smile crossed her lips, as she started rubbing her belly again. She knew what the sound of the bells meant.

Somewhere an Angel had just gotten her wings.