**Deadly Grace**

**Avenging Angel Series Book 3**

**by Eden Crowne**

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# **CHAPTER ONE****: Evie**

The afterlife has rules and Evie had broken most of them over the past few months. If she was still a cop – and alive – she'd arrest herself.

The rebel Daemon were free from their angelic prison, the Watchers snatched into Faerie, her lover kidnapped, her earthly mentor in intensive care, a young wizard cruelly murdered, her heavenly Grace taken away, and it was all Evie's fault. All of it.

*'Evangeline Grace*,' she said to herself. '*You suck at being an angel.*'

Tonight she was hoping to make amends for a few of those mistakes.

To find a bad guy, you need someone worse. Or so Evie's mentor Capt. Phil Morgan of the Atlanta Police Department told her once-upon-time before she was murdered. Crouching on the cold, hard ground outside the old Chinese cemetery, Evie hoped he was right. Because tonight, she was after a very bad guy to catch someone far worse.

Roman Barracuda, voodoo king and bail bondsman, stood next to her. He peered around the stone gates, his massive form cloaked in shadows of his own making. The darkness swam over and around him; strange shapes that Evie did not want to look at too closely.

“Anything?” she asked.

He shook his head. “Close, Miss Grace, I can feel him.” He had on a pair of brass knuckles that fastened over his hands like fingerless gloves and he kept bunching the fingers of first one hand and then the other into a fist.

They were here to grab a Chinese Ku sorcerer. Evie had never heard of Ku sorcerers until Barracuda called her a few hours before from Barracuda Bail Bonds on the wrong side of the 91 Freeway. He declared he'd discovered a way to track the Baron, the architect of their current supernatural crisis and the Fallen Angel behind Evie's broken heart.

Last week had been a complicated one in a supernatural, emotional, and physical way. In fact, in any way you could think of. The Red Queen had come out of Faerie to orchestrate the release of a group of rebel Daemon from their prison with a Portal Key known as the Imp's Bottle. She did not do this because she cared about the unfortunate beings, second only to Angels in their power and majesty. The Red Queen was many things – half angel, half Fae and the woman who murdered Evie one terrible night in Atlanta – but compassionate was not one of them. The Red Queen's kingdom teetered on the edge of war. A hostage prince had been poisoned with a holy relic from the human world. Her father, the Baron, refused to use his angelic powers to heal the prince and save the kingdom from imminent destruction.

The Red Queen’s only hope lay with the healing abilities of the Watchers, a legendary group of angels who left heaven to live on earth. It was the Watchers who imprisoned these Daemon long ago and understood an escape would put them, and human civilization, in peril. Combining her own desperate need with some sweet revenge, the Queen made it appear her father, the Baron, was planning to free the rebels to force a bargain with the Watchers.

That bargain was to free the Baron's wife was currently languishing in a Celestial prison. A powerful witch of the Thirteen Families, she had been the key to imprisoning the Daemon in the first place. The Heavenly Host took no chances and locked her up for safe keeping in case her services were ever needed again.

The Red Queen's magical plotting revolved around finding one integral element to opening the Portal: an Elemental Wizard. Someone capable of summoning and controlling all four elements at the same time. One of the rarest of all powers. Neither Trick nor Evie realized until too late, their young friend Adam Lee was exactly what the queen needed.

Plots within plots within plots.

In the end, the prince was healed, the Watchers yanked through a Portal to Fae, Trick kidnapped by the Baron, and despite Evie's best efforts, the Portal opened releasing the Daemon. Once the spell was complete, the Fae murdered Adam and the Red Queen was then killed by her own half-sister, a Nephilim named Autumn they all thought was someone else entirely. With her dying breath, the Red Queen gave Evie one of her wings. Now with one black wing and one white, Evie could again take to the skies.

Complicated wasn't a strong enough word. It had been a heinously vile week.

Evie flew to meet Barracuda a little before sunset on a street not far from the cemetery. As they sat in his vintage 1972 chocolate brown Cadillac drinking gas station coffee, Barracuda explained Ku sorcerers practiced black magic using elemental energies. Ku power was specifically directed at hurting people. Something like the flip side of Adam Lee's powers as a Feng Shui Luck Wizard. Adam did only good. Well, until the Red Queen forced him to create that impossibly huge elemental energy spell releasing the Daemon from their exile. But that wasn't his fault.

This particular sorcerer, Master Wu, was a bone reader of tremendous skill, according to Roman. That was no small accolade from as someone as powerful as him. Roman used bone reading in his own scrying magic.

Evie didn't truly understand the dynamics of that magical art. “So what does he do? Throw the animal bones in the air and see how they fall? Is that really going to help find the Baron?” She couldn't quite keep the skepticism out of her voice.

“Not animal bones.” He gave her a significant look.

*Click, click, whirr* went the gears in her head. Then she understood. “Oh. Human bones.”

“Not only human. Whatever is linked to the person or creature you are hunting.”

“Again, how is that helping? The Baron is a Fallen Celestial. He was never human. There aren't a lot of angel bones just floating around on internet auction sites. Wait,” she looked at him over the rim of the take-out cup, “are there?”

He chuckled. “Certainly not. I do have something.”

“That links to the Baron?” She was openly curious. “What? What could you possibly have of his?”

He stopped making eye contact and turned to look out the windshield. “I'm not sure you want to know, Miss Grace. Why don't you just leave that part of the job to me?”

“Tell me,” she insisted. The Baron had taken her wing and her lover, she wanted to know anything that involved him. Her tone of voice changed as she exerted some of her power, infusing the inside of the car with white light. Roman needed to be reminded she was far more than the attractive, brown-haired human woman she appeared to be.

He gave her an uneasy glance.

“Mr. Barracuda.”

“As you wish.” Reaching across her and into the glove compartment, Barracuda removed a hinged wooden box about six inches across. Gripping it tightly, he whispered a few words that gave Evie goosebumps.

The lid of the box released with a *click*. He pulled out a plastic zip bag. Just like the ones for sliced carrots or celery. This one, Evie saw, held fingers. Three long, slender fingers.

Her eyes flashed to Barracuda's.

He met her stare. “They are the Red Queen's.”

Evie had not expected that. “You cut off her fingers?”

“She was gone, Miss Grace,” his voice was firm and unapologetic. “Her spirit had fled. Her body an empty vessel. And I knew her flesh was linked to the Baron's. We needed an advantage and I took it. They have everything on their side. The Daemon and the Baron. More magic than you or I can ever summon. We don't know what they're planning, either by themselves or together. We have to think ahead.”

Voodoo walked a very narrow line along the spiritual divide. Evie knew Barracuda was on their side, still, his magic had layers that were hard for her to think about. But he was right. This was not the time for squeamishness. Or hesitation.

She put her hand on his wrist. “Good thinking.”

The big man gave a small sigh of relief. “I'm glad you understand.” He shut the box with a whispered word and buttoned it in the inside pocket of his Burberry trench. Roman was a very stylish sorcerer. That style was firmly placed in the nineteen-seventies, his favorite decade of the several centuries he'd lived through.

“We're going to get Wu to toss the bones; read for us. Read for the Baron. He can at least point us in the right direction.”

“We have to kidnap him to do this?” Evie said, rolling down the window and dumping the last of her coffee onto the road.

“Not kidnap,” he smiled. “Negotiate with extreme prejudice.”

Evie smiled with him. She had plenty of experience with that back in her days on the Vice Squad. Bad men, camera-less rooms. She'd crossed a few gray lines 'negotiating' herself.

“Why can't we just approach him directly?”

He shifted in the car seat and for the second time this evening looked uncomfortable. “Well, you see, Master Wu is...” he cleared his throat, “well, kind of insane.”

“Insane?” Evie repeated.

“Bat shit crazy if you want the medical term.”

Nothing comes for free in the magical world. Whoever casts a spell must give the spirits something in return. In Roman's case, that was usually blood. Roman explained Ku spells draw on the integral spirit of the practitioner. Eventually, the magic not only drives them mad but steals their human form.

“Depends on the sort of demon he's summoned over all these years to what kind of creature he evolves into,” Roman said. “Master Wu's transformation is just about complete. This is not going to be pretty.”

The two of them took up their positions by the cemetery gate around ten o'clock. As their vigil wore on, Evie wondered just exactly what to expect from a crazy, black magic bone reader who was being transformed into a demon. Her afterlife, she couldn't help reflecting, had swerved into some very tight turns along the 'Highway of the Bizarre' since she met Trick and lost her Grace.

Nathan 'Trick' McKitrick, Reaper and ex-cowboy, former servant to a high demon and the man who stole Evie's heart. He'd walked into a West Hollywood bar all languid grace and muscles, dark brown hair falling over one eye, high cheekbones, strong forehead and jaw. Casually, he ran one hand through his hair and looked her way with his sea green eyes and that was it. Her mission had been to kill him and avenge the death of three innocents. Instead, she broke every law of the afterlife and fell in love. She'd lost a wing and her angelic Grace for love. She couldn't lose Trick as well. The Baron had kidnapped the Reaper on the night of the battle with the Red Queen’s forces. Why, she didn't know. Despite her best efforts, she hadn't been able to find him. It was very important to locate the Baron because wherever he was, Trick must be, too. Evie was prepared to do anything to accomplish that goal.

A little before midnight, Roman flicked his hand to signal her. She couldn't see what alerted him. Nevertheless, the game was afoot. Evie rose silently and flexed her wings just a little. The irony that she could fly again thanks to the dying gift of the Nephilim who murdered her in the first place was not lost on Evie.

The gates were only about ten or twelve feet high. Evie easily jumped them, landing silently on the other side. Amazingly, Barracuda followed her just as effortlessly and just as quietly. For such a large man, he was very light on his feet.

The cemetery had no CCTV cameras or guards. She let Barracuda lead, following as he worked his way to the opposite end of the grounds. Some of the graves were scrubbed and weeded, the stone memorials well cared for. Others were just as dusty and dirty as you would expect in such an old graveyard. Families long dead. Their ghosts forgotten.

Barracuda came to an abrupt stop by a trio of gray stones leaning against one another in a nest of weeds. Peering around his shoulder, Evie saw a cloaked figure. Moving fast and in a strangely serpentine manner, his body stretched out low to the ground. Was he *crawling?* The creep-out factor rose exponentially.

The figure made for a grave standing just in front of a chipped and broken section of the concrete wall. This was a very particular grave, Roman told her earlier in the night. Fresh flowers filled two steel vases on either side of a new, black rectangular headstone. Thirty days after this unfortunate man's cremation, Wu was coming to harvest the ashes and bones from one of his victims. Those ashes were their ace in the hole.

“Your shadow *glamour* won't blind him,” Roman whispered. “Fast and hard.”

The dark shapes surged up behind Barracuda, creating a curtain of darkness.

She gave a curt nod. “Fast and hard it is.”

# **CHAPTER TWO****: Evie**

Taking her sword, she spread her wings and launched into a jump that carried her directly to the cloaked man.

She grabbed him with one hand. For the briefest moment, she felt something hard beneath her fingers. A fountain of dirt erupted into the air and then all she had was his woolen cloak. Wu was burrowing underground. *That,* she had not expected.

Overturning headstones, Wu cut a swath right through the center of the graveyard. Evie vaporated ahead of him, thrusting her sword deep in the ground to block his way. He swerved to the right and she did the same thing, this time cutting it closer. The third time she let the sword strike. He burst up out of the dirt, howling.

Barracuda was right. Master Wu was undergoing quite a transformation. The thing bobbing and swaying in front of her was long and reptilian, no longer even remotely human. His jaw and nose had flattened and lengthened into a snout. The thick, fleshy whiskers protruding from either side wriggled like tentacles. His backbone and ribcage were stretched out, making him was almost seven feet tall. He was naked and Evie clearly saw jagged scales running up and down his chest and legs. Two long, scaled appendages curled up from his thighs around his chest and onto his shoulders. She couldn't even begin to guess what those were.

Wu leaped straight at her, talons spread to rip and tear. She pushed off with her wings, over his head, swinging at him hard with the flat of her sword. Her angelic blade could slice through virtually anything. Their aim was to disable, not dismember him. At least, not yet.

The sword shaved off a few scales, but he was already prone on all fours, digging his way furiously back into the ground. Not quite fast enough. Roman stepped out of his cloak of shadows, reaching out to grab Wu by one leg. He yanked Wu up and out of the dirt. Still holding him by the leg, Roman flipped him through the air over his head, smashing him from side to side in the dirt.

The fleshy objects wound around Wu's body came to life. Quite literally. Eyes flicked open to glow ruby red with LED intensity. A sigh, a hiss, and a whisper of movement made the hair on the back of Evie's neck stand up. They wriggled off Wu's torso, long bodies passing over and under one another, scales rasping. They were smaller versions of what he was turning into. Wriggling up onto scaly hind legs, they coiled their snake-like bodies.

Wu threw a fiery red sigil at Barracuda. The mark picked the big man up and tossed him. Barracuda smashed into one of the granite headstones, cracking it in half. Wu tried to wriggle away but Roman held tight.

One of the little dragons sprang with astonishing speed to wind itself in a sinuous embrace around Evie's lower body like a constrictor. Mouth gaping, fangs ready. The creature's long front claws tore at her clothing, shredding her skin as though it was paper.

The dragon squeezed her chest and Evie felt a stabbing pain as a rib snapped. Spinning, her black wing extended, she knocked the other dragon away as it jumped. She flipped her sword around with one hand, holding the dragon's head with the other, and sliced right through the flesh and bone. The thing's muscles flexed convulsively. Evie shoved her blade vertically between the coils of the beast and her body as it loosened its hold, pushing outward. The edge sliced the creature into three separate pieces. It fell to the ground still thrashing. Evie swung around to press its twin into a grave marker with the shoulder bone of her black wing. She ran her blade down the bony ribcage eviscerating it and slicing the gravestone in half as well.

Wu was screaming hysterically. Holding onto Wu with his left hand, Barracuda was putting his sharp-tipped brass knuckles to good use. The thud of metal on the thick scales echoed over the graveyard grounds. Wu swung his hindquarters and wrapped his lower body around Barracuda's barrel chest, the long tail reaching all the way to Roman's throat.

The pieces of the dismembered dragons began to shudder and shake. They melted into a cloudy gray liquid that swiftly oozed back into dragon shapes. Evie pounced, chopping them into smaller bits.

Barracuda shouted a string of words that lit the graveyard like a flare. The shadows behind him split apart and took shape and form. Human and animal, blacker than the night, their eyes glowing. The shadows swarmed over Wu, prying him off the voodoo king.

As Evie moved to attack, Roman motioned for her to stay back.

The shadows began to glow, lit from within by orange flame. The flame grew brighter and brighter until it burst forth, scattering the dark forms. Wu jumped up, flinging his arms wide in triumph.

“Pansy, Rose, now!” yelled Roman.

Barracuda's two formidable assistants, Pansy and Rose La Rue, jumped up and over a row of standing stones to throw a fine mesh net around the Chinese sorcerer. Wu thrashed and tore at the metal. Pansy and Rose, quite as large and muscular as their boss, danced around him, maneuvering the flexible material until he was completely entangled. With her sister's help, Rose gave a mighty heave on a chain running the length of the net. Roman and Evie jumped in to help pull it tighter. At a word from Roman, animal-shaped symbols flared brightly around the border of the net.

In seconds, Wu was entrapped within a drawstring bag of magic.

Screaming in Chinese, he tried to tear and bite apart the wire mesh.

“Get him in!” Roman shouted at the two women as he pulled Evie back.

With a mighty heave, Pansy and Rose picked up the bag by the chain. Spinning like twin Olympian hurlers, they threw the bag up and over into a circle of what looked like black ash. Wu landed in a heap squarely in the middle. Roman sped to the circle, flicking two flat flints together to make a spark. The spark ignited a flame that sped through the ash. A wall of dull purple fire rose from the ground just as the sorcerer struggled free of the net.

The oozing gray liquid cylinders that had been the skinny dragons wriggled over trying to push through the circle.

Evie looked at Roman in alarm, moving to intercept.

He waved her off. “They can't reform with him behind the barriers. They're just piles of magical goo. Watch, his animation spell is already losing energy.”

Barracuda knew what he was talking about. As Evie watched, the gray matter flattened and spread until the dragons were only nasty, formless puddles.

On his feet, Master Li was chanting as he threw himself again and again at the purple barrier. His words took form, black symbols that turned to smoke, filling the chamber until the only thing they could see were his glowing eyes.

Roman stood with his hands on his hips, the La Rue sisters ranged on either side in the same pose. They were dressed in their usual skin-tight black leather tracksuits, their red hair piled wedding-cake high. Barracuda Bail Bonds dealt in a lot more than 'get out of jail' money for the average felon. The little house saw a frightening parade of supernaturals and humans looking, most often desperately, for protection charms and personal wards. Barracuda's was the place to go when a body needed to fly under the paranormal radar. As Barracuda's resident enforcers, the sight of the sisters alone was a very effective deterrent to clients thinking of skipping town on a payment. Nobody with an ounce of sense wanted the La Rue sisters on their trail.

“He can't dig himself out, can he?” Evie wasn't sure about the exact specifics of magic circles and Wu had shown he could dig like nobody's business.

“We took care of that. Gonna' choke himself to death though if he doesn't stop. *Wu!*” he shouted. “Cut that out! We want to talk. Got a proposition for you.”

Wu stopped shouting. The smoke slowly lifted and Evie could see the sorcerer on all fours, racing around the edges of the spell so fast he was only a fleshy blur. He stopped abruptly, threw himself on his back and began to cry, kicking his legs in the air.

Roman seemed undisturbed, gazing calmly back. Wu did look more like a dragon than a man, Evie thought. A Chinese dragon, not a Western one. Long and lean and whiskery.

After a minute or two of dramatic sobbing, the sorcerer flipped over on his stomach, spewing words non-stop. Some in English and some Evie could not guess what language they were from. None of it made any sense to her.

She looked at Roman.

“I know you speak English,” he said to the sorcerer. “You used to be a professor at U.C. Berkley back in the twenties and thirties. I attended some of your lectures on Chinese antiquities. Very eloquent. Look at you now.” He shook his head and *tut-tutted*.

Wu pulled himself up on his haunches, weaving back and forth like a cobra, his long, misshapen claw fingers clenching and unclenching. “What, what, *what,* you want dead-man-walking?” he hissed. “I'm busy, busy, busy! Spells chasing the moon. We got to dance, moon and me. Dance and be going, gone. You got my magic? I kill, kill, *kill* *you!*”

Barracuda crossed his arms across his barrel chest and smiled. “How you gonna' *kill, kill, kill me* from there, Wu?” he mimicked.

Wu screamed and smashed his clawed fists against the invisible barrier, sending ripples of purple magic around the circle.

“You need those special ashes from that poor young man you murdered to complete your alchemy; stave off this transformation and bring back your human form. You can have them. Just read the bones for us and we will release you.”

Hunkering down, sitting almost like a dog, the man gave them a sly look. “*Ho, ho, ho*, now I see. Now the truth comes out.” His voice became deeper, “Do me a favor, Wu. Help me, Wu. Stop touching me!” he shouted over his shoulder. “I'm talking now!” Wu looked back at them, rolling his enormous eyes and pointing behind him.

Evie looked carefully into the circle. She couldn't see anything in there with him and he wasn't talking to the smaller dragons. They remained puddles of gray goo outside the barrier.

“You're here for the ashes and bones of Charlie Mah. There's only an hour of moonlight left on the thirtieth day after his death.”

“Mine, mine, mine!” he screamed pounding the ground.

“And you can have them,” Barracuda said calmly.

Wu stopped. “*Shh*,” he said to his invisible friend, “I want to listen.”

“If you...”

“Shut up!” Wu screamed. He twisted his long body in agitated circles. “I can't hear!”

Apparently, he wasn't talking to Barracuda, as the voodoo king waited until Wu stood still again before continuing. “Read these bones, tell us where to find the blood link between them and we will give you what you need.”

Rose moved a few steps closer and shrugged off a small backpack. Pulling open the top, she showed the contents to Wu.

“I see it!” he snarled. “Let me do the talking.”

“You have your relics with you to cast.” Roman pointed at the amulet bags around the sorcerer's long scaly neck.

“How do you know that!” He turned accusingly, pointing at the air. “You've been going behind my back, haven't you? Telling my secrets. When I am whole again, I will *murder* you!”

Evie stared harder into the magic circle wondering if maybe someone really was there in a magical sense. Maybe hiding in a *glamour*. With her enhanced vision, she could usually pick out the slight ripple across the surface of whatever was veiled. Nothing that she could see. Roman said Master Wu was crazy. Watching him, that seemed like a fair call. Crazy, however, did not cancel out lethal.

“Master Wu, you have only an hour to finish your spell. Do the reading and we will release you.”

“How do I know you will not break it? *What?*” he roared, turning again. He paused, listening. “You do? How can you be sure?” He waved his claws impatiently. “All right, all right. He says you can be trusted to keep your word.”

Roman nodded. “I can.”

Evie shifted her stance and clenched her fists tightly as Barracuda gave his promise to release the sorcerer after the reading was complete. Her sword burned hot in the scabbard across her back and her wings fidgeted back and forth in sharp twitches, especially the black one. It got very agitated in battle. Urging her on. Wu had the death of many innocents hovering around him. She could taste them in the back of her throat, acrid and bitter. She hadn't felt this strong of a reaction since she confronted Trick's demon master on the shores of the isolated beach in Palos Verdes.

There are a great many bad entities that do not necessarily involve themselves in the lives of innocents. The evil that kills other evil was not an Avenging Angel's provenance. In fact, more power to them. Evie's powers were primed to sense the difference and alert her. Her alarm bells had been going off non-stop since the Ku sorcerer appeared. His magic needed the lives of innocents to fuel it. Letting him go did not feel like justice to her.

“Give me your bones, dead-man-walking. Give them to me now,” Wu demanded.

Roman took the bag with the three finger bones out of his pocket, removed them and laid the fingers on the ground. Motioning for Evie to follow, Roman moved a few steps away to another ring of ash he prepared earlier. This one was not yet closed. Evie and the La Rue sisters entered it with the bag of Charlie Mah's ashes. Roman stepped over to break the magic circle holding the Ku sorcerer. With uncanny speed, Roman leaped back into their circle, closing it with a hurried word. The shadows he had summoned remained outside, roiling around the edges, reinforcing the barrier.

Wu stepped out snarling. The gray goo transformed into the toothy dragons and entwined themselves around his body. He threw himself at their circle and was blasted ten feet in the air, landing sprawled across several stone grave markers. Picking himself up, he crawled back to the finger bones, hissing and muttering to his imaginary pal.

Roman waggled the rucksack full of Charlie Mah's ashes in the air.

Wu hissed louder. He wanted those ashes very badly.

Evie watched as the Ku Master removed different objects from the amulet bags around his neck and more tied in a sash wound several times around his bony waist.

After he arranged everything in precise order, he lit a small fire that glowed white hot. He dropped the fingers one at a time into the flames. There was a blurring in the air around him, particularly above the fire. Evie, of course, couldn't see what he was seeing.

“Did Adam need this kind of stuff for his ceremonies?” she whispered.

Roman gave a hearty laugh. Wu looked up scowling and Roman tried to smother it with his hand. “Oh, lord no. Can you see that boy in a graveyard stealing old bones?” He laughed again. Despite being a Feng Shui wizard, their friend Adam was frightened of everything that went bump in the night. He had been a Political Science major at Pepperdine when the legacy of his family's power claimed him*.* He hated magic and at the same time was far stronger than any of them realized – until it was too late.

“That boy would have run into the bathroom and thrown up if he even saw such a thing as corpse powder, let alone have to touch it. His Feng Shui was all about keeping bad things out. Poor Adam."

"Poor Adam," she echoed.

Wu's eyes became opaque and he rocked back and forth, his arms wide. “Not far, the blood of her blood. Planting seeds at the five corners. He will grow a bridge to the stars from the waters of the city and embrace it with the bones of sweet death.”

The opacity drained away, leaving his eyes dark and bright once again. He dropped his arms. “The bones have spoken.” He started gathering his amulets and placing them back in their pouches.

Roman and Evie looked at each other.

“I thought he was supposed to tell us where to find the Baron, not just babble gibberish.” Evie was disappointed and didn't bother to hide it.

“This is more important. Clues to the spell to come. This is what is on the Baron's mind. Wu has just given us a peek inside.”

“A peek into crazy town more like,” Evie snorted.

“No. Wu is seeing clearly, he's only crazy when he's not in a trance. The blood of her blood,” Roman said thoughtfully. “That's the Baron. Planting seeds at five corners.”

Evie shook her head. “Four elements, four directions, probably. I get that. But five?”

“Bones of death has to be Santa Muerte.”

“Agreed,” nodded Evie.

“And the Celestial Bridge, we know he's planning that to get to his wife's prison. The rest, well, that's going to take some pondering.”

Wu stood. “Where is my cloak? Bring it to me!” One of the dragons slithered down his body and crawled off among the headstones. Returning swiftly, it dragged the cloak through the dirt with its teeth.

The sorcerer held the cloak up. There was a long tear in the middle from Evie's sword. “Look what you did! Stupid, stupid! Give me my bones,” he hissed. “Give them to me.”

“He's bad, isn't he?” Evie said, never taking her eyes off the sorcerer.

“Very,” agreed Roman.

“So we should kill him.”

Roman shook his head. “Miss Grace, he is almost already gone. That spell he's counting on, it ain't gonna' do much good. Soon he will be all beast, pulled wholly into the demon realm. A much more fitting punishment.”

Evie looked doubtful. She felt the deaths on him. Innocent ones. Her sword flamed higher and her black wing arched up and out of its own volition. A shadowy figure rose from the bag of ash Roman held. Young Charlie Mah, who else could it be? She saw him clearly. She did not need the Death Mark from the Celestials to tell her he was an innocent, dead before his time. He was in pain, even in the spirit world. The hold this dark sorcerer had placed on him chained his spirit to earth.

“Distasteful as it is,” Roman continued. “We need to walk away. People, the sort of people we need, will not talk to us if we kill our sources. And I gave my word.”

With a resigned shrug, Roman opened the circle and began walking to the sorcerer with the ashes, the La Rue sisters flanking him.

Since losing Trick, Evangeline Grace's patience for wrongdoing had worn very thin. She'd also learned a thing or two from the duplicitous dealings of the Fae queen.

“I didn't give mine,” Evie said grimly.

She leaped, her wings beating hard. She looked directly into the sorcerer's mad eyes as she came down, letting him see his death mirrored in her own. Evie thrust her blade all the way through his chest and out the other side. The light of vengeance flowed through her hands and consumed him in flames as he screamed.

She stared at Roman and the La Rue sisters who moved closer, their faces full of shock and surprise. “I'm an Avenging Angel, not a Guardian Angel. People better start remembering the difference."