

## The Shattered Angel

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House of Angels had seen countless clients through its gates over the years. Madame D. Poupeé, the hostess and owner of the venue, regarded quality over quantity, hence seven was her population cap. Her flair at grooming and dolling her girls up distinguished her establishment. Poupeé's Angels came from different backgrounds and fit proudly into their exotic ethnicities. A typical costume always defined their identity. An Italian opera singer, an American movie star, a Japanese geisha, an Arabian belly dancer, an Argentine Tanguera, a Swiss milkmaid, and a Russian ballerina. Their mission was to entice customers with fantasies. Their evangelizing weapon was their allure. They drew their targets like insects enthralled by the brightest glow in the darkest night. The majority were wealthy, lonely individuals beyond a certain age who yearned to fill their hollow existence with some youthful beauty. For the right price, they were allowed to seize an angel. The girls' eyes looked sad, almost expressionless, but they never complained at the chance of escorting a patron. They kept upright and poised as ever. They had been made for that moment.

Robert Devour was fixated on the Russian ballerina, Aglaea. Such a powerful name had no need for any adorning last or middle names. Buoyant like a star, her magnetism attracted Robert like an orbiting planet. Fantasies of her knocked on the back of his skull at every idle moment, as if there were someone else residing in his body, a loosely tethered beast. The beast craved to play with her. And the beast knew no limits, responded to no authority. One evening, when he was pacing by the gates of the House of Angels, he noted Madame Poupeé's absence. This was the golden chance he had been dreaming of. He snuck through the side window, grasped Aglaea by the waist, and without paying her price, escaped the venue with his prisoner, unnoticed. The Russian ballerina offered no resistance. She was minute in the grip of her predator.

He took her back to his lair and threw her on his bed. Her perfume was just like his mother's, which tingled his deepest senses. He had been hankering to lick her crimson cheeks like a lollipop. His tongue glided out of his mouth and felt the cold taste of her porcelain skin. The apex was looming near. The only obstacle between him and his wildest dreams was Aglaea's tutu, which he considered imprisoning. He violently stripped it off her, leaving her naked figure exposed. But disappointment overtook him. Disappointment so revulsive that he flung her off the bed with a single motion. With a hard crash, her frail body shattered against the concrete wall and fell on the hardwood floor. A cold chill shot up his spine like a rocket. He immediately felt that remorse of doing what cannot be undone. The bridge he had crossed now burned behind him. She lay there on the floor, her lifeless eyes staring at him, wide open like saucers.

Desperate like a cornered animal, he rushed to his backyard and began digging a tomb for Aglaea with his spade. He covered it as best as he could and hastily took

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refuge in his room. He could see her grave from his window. That night, the memory of her shattered face haunted him like a million spectres.

After a long, fruitless search, humans had almost given up any hope of finding her. But it is always the dogs who have an unquenchable thirst for justice. Angelique Devour Poupeé, who ran the finest doll shop in town, retrieved the dirt-covered porcelain ballerina from Toby's drooling jaws. She gave the family dog a pat in reward and, after a long sigh, followed by a deep breath, she turned around and shouted out with all her might: "Bobby! How many times have I told you that you can't be messing with my angels! This time you've gone too far young man!" Little Bobby Devour got the flogging of a lifetime that day.