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SPARKS OF HOPE

VOL. 1

READING
SAMPLE

OF ANGELS, BOMBS
AND BATHROOMS



Being an angel was a lot more boring than it sounded.

Frustrated with the world, Alyssa pulled the hoodie over her head. The bus she was sitting in was reasonably full of people. None of them were looking at her. Everyone was either blankly staring out of the windows, or hooked on their smartphones. Very few of them seemed happy in the slightest.

This used to be so much easier. During the millennia she had spent among humans, Alyssa had seen many changes in society. Settlements, roads, nations, communication... it was inspiring to see how far humanity had come. All the while, she had been there to provide guidance. Always in subtle ways. A sip of water, a helping hand, an encouraging smile.

Unlike the humans she had encountered, Alyssa had always remained a nomad. There was no way she could stay in a village for more than a few decades, before someone discovered that she didn't age. It was a lonely existence. At first, she had taken pleasure in human company. She had been a wife, a mother, a grandmother... but every time, her joy had inevitably turned to ashes. None of her descendants had inherited her longevity. Over time, the pain had become too much to bear. Solitude was the lesser evil.

For the people around her, unfortunately, it seemed to have returned with a vengeance. Not by their choice. Even though the pandemic had come and gone, a sickness had remained in society. One that had been there be-

fore, but was now so exacerbated, it was impossible to avoid. Loneliness.

Alyssa could have brightened the mood, of course. Revealed herself as an angel. Summoned a celestial suit of armor, along with a beautiful golden longsword. Spread her wings. Assuming the driver didn't crash the bus, there would instantly be something to talk about. People would be all over her, taking pictures and videos with their smartphones, asking for autographs, or a wing feather. Sadly, that was the reason why she couldn't do it. Society was so connected nowadays, there was no way she could stay anonymous after that. She couldn't risk anyone following her home, especially someone who would spread her face and address over the Internet. Not that anyone could physically

harm her – the armor, while medieval in design, was bulletproof. It would, however, force her to be a public figure, whether she wanted to or not.

Even flying, something she had loved to do for many years, was no longer an option. The last time she had done so, half a century ago, a passenger plane had almost collided with her. Even though she had seen it coming, the wings hadn't flapped fast enough to move out of the way. The jet engine's force had been so strong, it had almost pulled her in and torn her to shreds.

Her own health, with or without armor, wasn't at stake. Alyssa had survived many fatal injuries over the years, including multiple witch burnings. Her concern was that the damage to the plane might have killed the passengers.

Nowadays, with satellites and radar systems being everywhere, things were even worse. The last thing she needed was to get shot down by a fighter jet for violating a no-fly zone, whether by accident or otherwise.

Over the years, Alyssa had found a variety of ways to get with the times. In fact, in many regards, time was on her side. Her reflection in the bus window was a reminder. At five and a half feet, she had towered over most people during ancient times. Now, her size was mediocre and inconspicuous. Not that she minded – life was far easier when one wasn't the center of attention. In fact, in order to appear a bit more down-to-earth, she had added some pink strands to her blonde hair, and gone for a shorter, shoulder-length hair-

style. One that could easily fit under her hoodie.

What also helped keep a low profile was the general health of the people around her. Even outside of the plagues and other epidemics Alyssa had lived through, incurable injuries and diseases had always been omnipresent. Someone like her, who never tired or sickened, who was unmarked by illness or injury, had stood out like a sore thumb. Nowadays, even a global pandemic could be beaten back. Instead of a generational apocalypse that had killed a third of the population, it had been little more than a speed bump for society as a whole. Life, for better or worse, was allowed to continue.

Now, if only I could get these people to understand it.

The men and women on the bus were, on average, a sad bunch. The way Alyssa saw it, they were stuck in a paradox. Even though each of them had the entire world at their fingertips, just one press of a button away, none of the apps on their devices allowed them to make any meaningful connection. Each and every one of these programs had an ulterior motive, more or less subtle, to the point where she felt the urge to jab her hands through the screen and banish them from the Internet. Unfortunately, that was one aspect that her angelic powers didn't cover. Unless she travelled to whatever heartless corporation had designed them and rearranged the creators' insides. Which was not only a rather extreme solution, but also one that wouldn't solve

anything. After all, it would only take so long for another app with a similar function to pop up and fill the niche.

As she took a few glances at the smartphones around her, at the apps the people were passing the time with, Alyssa fumed silently.

The games? Most of them were nothing but gambling machines. Designed not to entertain, but to hook people, to the point where they burnt their money on worthless gems, just to get a shower of shiny sparkles on their screens.

The social media platforms? Built to bring people together in the most superficial way possible. Whether they shared photos of their lunch or plotted to kill each other's families, the only currency that mattered to the suits in charge was engagement. The

more users clicked, the more money flowed.

The dating sites? A mockery of intimacy. Nothing but a funnel to drain money from the lonely and desperate, for the slim chance of meeting someone – anyone – regardless of how horrible a match they were.

The common thread that rotted it all was advertisement. The constant shouting of how drab and hopeless life was. How much better it would be, if one only bought that one miraculous product that would solve all problems. Preying on people's fears and insecurities, promising a quick and easy solution, only to give them useless garbage in return. [...]

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In a time when the world seems to have gone insane, when things look hopeless and everything feels like it's heading downhill, it's more important than ever to look on the bright side. To know that, no matter how dark things may appear, there is hope for a better tomorrow.

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