

# THE FALLEN

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## **PART ONE**

### **The Fall**

## Chapter 1

The young man stared into the eyes of his aggressor, wondering why it was that he was always picked on. They never got anything out of it, Gau had nothing they were interested in and he never reacted to the taunting and pushing.

Today though he could see they were going to push him too far. He could see the bitterness in his assailant's eyes, the anger that had always before been hidden today was on the surface.

He prepared himself.

His aggressor pushed him again, the spectators suddenly seeing what Gau already knew was coming, seeing that the aggressor would swing next. One of them stepped forward, intent on catching the swinging fist.

He managed to stop the aggressor just before the fist would have connected. Gau smiled, still staring into his aggressor's eyes.

"Leave him man, it's not worth it." The spectator whispered loud enough for Gau to hear. The aggressor shook free and swung again. Gau swayed backwards, just out of reach then elbowed his assailant in the sternum as he swayed forward again.

The man dropped breathlessly to his hands and knees, the spectator stepping back in surprise.

"Good day." Gau said quietly as he walked around the man and continued on to his destination. He hoped he'd never have to deal with that again.

Alexa folded in her wings, ruffling the feathers to get them to sit neatly. What this creature was saying made some sense, there was no way anything evil could get into Eden. Nothing evil had set foot here since the time of Adam and Eve.

And yet still she felt like she should not trust this creature, this monitor on two legs. She did not recognise it as a creature of the garden and the fact that it seemed to be vocalising rather than communicating in any way recognisable for the lizard it seemed to be based on.

"Where did you come from?" She enquired inquisitively. The monitor seemed to shrug, its scales making a soft rustling sound. She noticed that the ones that changed their position seemed to change colour in the light.

"I woke up here, I don't remember before." It seemed to say. Its mouth did not move, nor did any other part of it suggest that it had spoken however Alexa was still sure she

was hearing it rather than interpreting as was usual with the creatures of Eden. She considered her options for a moment, knowing that with her suspicions she should probably go to the Arch-Angel.

If this creature was an alien to the Eden though, she shouldn't let it out of her sight.

"Come with me." She commanded, turning and leading the creature towards the Arch-Angel. It was the only way.

The beautiful Archangel Sariel stared at the creature, as curious as Alexa was about him. He had watched Eden for long enough to know that this creature was not of the land. As with Alexa though, he knew that it was not possible for those without divine power to enter the realm.

He stepped close to the creature, between it and Alexa, then started to circle it, watching as the scales reflected the light differently, constantly changing colour.

Alexa felt a frisson of terror sweep over it but suppressed it. She was in the company of one of the most powerful beings in existence, nothing could go wrong.

The monitor allowed the inspection, standing still for the most part. It was only as the Archangel turned away that Alexa saw the shiver pass through its scales. In that moment of rapid movement she thought she saw its form change but dismissed it as being a product of her fear.

"Although I do not doubt that you are here for a reason, I can not believe that you are a part of the realm." Sariel intoned, his voice rich and deep. The monitor shivered again and this time Alexa was sure of what she saw. She took a step forward but it was too late.

The lizard form shivered one more time then grew instantly to twice its size, the scales disappearing and revealing a more leathery skin, crimson in hue.

It moved quicker than she thought possible, its still toothless maw snapping closed around the neck of the Arch-Angel. With a snap of his wings, Sariel pushed the creature away and turned towards it, a sword of light appearing in his hand.

He moved with deft speed, slashing at the creature's throat while moving forward, his wings providing a forward thrust as he moved. The creature dodged under the blade and snapped its mouth around the Archangel's left hand.

Sariel pulled the creature forward and slashed down onto its tail, severing it completely with a hiss. The creature released his hand, roaring in pain, then darting around the Archangel and snapping at his left shoulder.

The Archangel followed its movement easily and slashed at it as it snapped, the blade of the sword cutting cleanly through the crimson skin on either side of the maw.

The creature did not pause, instead slashing at Sariel with vicious intensity with its claws. They sank deep into the Archangel's chest leaving four gashes running diagonally across it.

Sariel gritted his teeth and attacked with renewed vigour, sending forth a blurred series of slashes at the creature. As each slash landed a hiss accompanied it and Alexa

saw dark welts forming wherever the blade touched.

The creature staggered backwards, its arms going limp. As it took one more step away from the Archangel, Sariel slashed once more across the creature's throat, severing the head.

Sariel and Alexa stared at the creature as it fell to the floor. Within moments it began to disintegrate, becoming a fine mist that floated away on a non-existent breeze.

The Archangel was breathing deeply and Alexa could hear that he was having difficulty with each breath.

"Shall I go and fetch Raphael?" she enquired quietly, almost trying not to be heard. She felt powerless and worse, she felt responsible for the terrible injuries she was currently staring at. Sariel turned to her and seemed to be trying to recognise her.

He opened his mouth as if to speak but then closed it again, his brow furrowing in puzzlement. Alexa stood staring at the Archangel, not able to move, unable to comprehend the symptoms that he appeared to be displaying. The Archangels had always seemed perfect, powerful, infallible.

And yet here stood Sariel, unable to recognise her, unable to speak. She shivered as dread crept up her spine.

Sariel's mouth curled into a snarl a moment before he dropped his blade, his hand going to the gashes in his chest and trying to clutch at them. The snarl turned to a grimace as he dropped to his knees and bowed his head, obviously in pain.

Alexa saw the bite on the back of the Archangel's neck, red and practically glowing with heat. Infection did not exist in the realm of the divines but Alexa had spent time around humans once and she recognised the signs.

She ran for help.

By the time Alexa had gotten back to Sariel with Raphael and Raguel Sariel was already lying prone on his back, his right hand still on his chest, the left swollen and red as the back of his neck had been, his throat red and inflamed now as well.

His breaths came slow and shallow and Alexa knew in that moment that it was too late. Nothing Raphael could do could save Sariel. Raguel turned to her and gestured for her to follow him.

She obeyed without hesitation, knowing what was coming. She had had no choice, but she had still failed and so punishment was something that was inevitable. Alexa followed the Archangel a little way into Eden before he turned to her.

"I imagine you're shaken up by this?" he asked of her. She nodded, not trusting herself to speak without giving away her expectations. Raguel looked back towards the glow that told them Raphael was attempting to heal his comrade.

"If Sariel dies..." he trailed off, apparently troubled by the continuation of the thought. Turning back to her he continued, "Banishment to the realm of humans shall be your punishment. You will not be sent as you are but split. The side of you that could have saved Sariel will be one, allowed to learn to be stronger. The side that led to this

mess shall be the other, allowed to learn to trust her instincts.”

Alexa stared at the Archangel, not fully understanding what he meant. He put a hand on her shoulder, comforting despite the judgement he had just passed down.

“I am truly sorry.” He said as pain ripped through her.

Samantha screamed out in pain as she woke up, feeling a deep burning sensation between her shoulder blades and her spine. She looked around at the room that she had woken up in, her breathing heavy. Her eyes took a long time to adjust to the darkened atmosphere.

She could smell something foul in the room with her but could not identify it immediately. It was only after a moment that memory began to come back to her about the dream she had been having. A dream of Eden and Archangels and a demon.

The foul smell resolved itself and she identified it as alcohol and cigarette smoke. The combination meant trouble since the cigarettes were likely not pure, and the fact that she could smell it meant that he was in the room somewhere.

Slowly she climbed out of the bed, glad that she had slept in her clothes, and moved towards the door, careful of the lumps on the floor, any of which could be him.

She made it out without accidentally tripping over him. She had had enough, it was time to leave this place, to leave the pain that he constantly inflicted on her. She made her way to the front door.

Samantha put her hand around the door knob and slowly turned it, only pulling on the door when she heard the latch clear the strike plate.

“Where are you going, slut?” his voice whispered right behind her. She became aware of the smell again too late.

As he grabbed her arm so tightly it hurt she screamed.

Victoria woke with her arm throbbing as if she had been grabbed. She could feel the pain of her other heart but could do nothing about it, her blackened wings too conspicuous. She had tried to venture into the city twice but both times her wings had been identified as more than a coat.

She had flown away both times, hoping that somehow the people watching would be dismissed as crazy or otherwise dismiss what they had seen.

So far she had been lucky. She cursed her lack helplessness, not just for herself, but also for her twin Samantha. She moved to the front of the cave in the cliff overlooking the city, the morning lights still on as the sun rose above it. Such a beautiful view, marred by the knowledge of what was right at this moment happening somewhere in it.

She had considered flying down during the night and removing the man from existence but she had not lost all sense of what was right and what was wrong.

Unfortunately killing without provocation like that wasn't even grey enough for her to motivate herself to do it. She sat down, holding her arm and shutting her eyes, trying to take some of the pain from her twin, feeling the blows landing on her shoulders and back as she curled into a ball.

“Please, someone save her.” She pleaded as the tears began.

Gau heard the scream and its sudden end. His blood ran cold even as he started to run towards where he was sure the sound had come from. The abandoned house on the corner had long fascinated him with the dingy residents that he had often seen moving in and out of it.

Now it no longer seemed like a curiosity but rather it looked dark and foreboding. He hesitated a moment at the foot gate, listening, wondering whether he had imagined the cry that had drawn him here.

Another one sounded, a loud sob that confirmed what he had heard initially. He grabbed the top of the gate, stepped up onto the middle crossbar and launched himself over and into the unkempt garden, feeling the strong smell of weeds hitting him as he crushed them.

The narcotic flora was not his concern though as he sprinted towards the door, his backpack tight to his back as always. He could see that the door was slightly ajar. The breeze should have pushed it open all the way but instead he could see it almost shivering.

As he got closer he heard the soft thuds of someone being beaten and his blood boiled. The scream had been female.

He stopped at the door, felt his jaw clench as he forced himself to resist the urge to kick the door open, figuring that the person being beaten was likely behind it.

Instead he knocked and waited as he heard the beating stop. There was a whimper of pain, then the door opened. A man stood there, unshaven and unkempt, the smell of alcohol strong enough for Gau to feel it burning his nostrils.

“What do you want?” the man demanded roughly. Gau considered his options for a moment, then stepped forward and put his hand on the door. The man reacted as he had expected, by reaching forward to push him back out.

Gau grabbed the man’s hand, pulling it forward and down. With his right hand he grabbed behind the man’s neck and quickly dropped to his left knee.

The man’s intoxication showed as he rolled over forward and landed heavily.

Gau stood quickly and moved into the kitchen beyond the door. A girl lay on the floor, her nose bloody, an eye swollen, her bottom lip split. Gau couldn’t help the snarl of anger that escaped him as he looked back to the man who was just now standing up.

Gau stepped towards the man, his fists clenched in anger for the first time in a very long time. It was only the girl’s voice that stopped him.

“Don’t.” She whispered quietly, the word clear despite the clear damage to her face. The man stood and turned towards him.

“Get out and leave here.” He growled. Gau could see his right hand clenched and knew once again what was about to come.

“I’m not leaving without her.” Gau said as an ultimatum, watching the man’s body language. He could see the possessiveness, the violence, the jealousy, the anger and

bitterness, all of this he could see in this man's eyes.

"One more chance." The man warned.

"If he attacks me, may I defend myself?" Gau enquired of the girl. A muted sob was her only reply. "My statement stands." He replied to the man. With anger fuelled violence the man charged, feinting with a punch but then sending a kick towards Gau's knee.

Gau dodged sideways, stopping himself from kicking back, instead moving his foot to overextend the man's already extended leg. The man slid into a split beyond what he was capable of and howled in pain. Only then did Gau kick out, catching the man in the chest.

He watched as the man fell backwards, hitting his head on the strike plate on the door frame. The man crumpled into unconsciousness.

He turned to the girl and extended his hand.

"Come with me, I'll keep you safe." He promised, keeping his voice low. With the slightest of hesitation she took his offered and he helped her to her feet.

They left the house behind.

## Chapter 2

Victoria had felt the moment Samantha had stopped being afraid. It had taken her a week after she had left her abuser before she allowed the protector to come near her.

Even in his moments of tenderness she had felt her twin's fear, the belief that at any moment the kindness would turn to torture once again.

In those moments Victoria had tried to think reassuring thoughts, tried to will her calm across to her sister. It had started to work and now almost a month later she could feel her sister relaxing, could feel the warmth of the moments that the protector created.

Sitting against the back of her cave she revelled in the shared warmth that her twin was feeling, the connection strong thanks to Samantha's beginning to understand that there was someone else out here connected to her. No longer did it feel like the connection was an intrusion into her sister's life, now it was as safe as the protector's arms.

A tear rolled down Victoria's cheek as she remembered Sariel's moments of protection, those times where she herself had been afraid so far back in her memory that she hoped it was truly that and that fabrications that she needed in order to feel like she wasn't being left out.

The thought brought more tears.

Gau was holding her while she cried, not knowing why and not asking either, just keeping his arms around her, his head over hers, enveloping her in as close an embrace as he could manage.

He didn't know if what he was doing was right, and he knew that there was no way that he would ever know the right thing to do with Samantha. She was different in a way that he could not quite identify. He had told herself in the beginning that it was merely the fact that she had been so abused, that it had caused her to be this meek and so kind.

But then he had asked her about before she had met her abuser.

The question had confused her and let her into a breakdown when she realised that she could not remember anything from before waking up in that house. She hadn't let him near her again for hours after that and he wondered whether he had destroyed the little trust that he had managed to build in her.

The sobs were beginning to slow, Samantha's body slowly calming. She nuzzled closer into him and he felt her hands unclench against his chest. He smiled at that small

movement, knowing that it meant she would be smiling again soon.

Her smile was enough to make his heart soar. Every time he saw it he felt like everything was right in the world.

Samantha sighed softly, feeling the girl on the other end of her connection slowly calming down. The pain had been intense, the emotion as strong as anything she had felt for herself. She wondered where the person on the other end was, and what had caused her pain.

She wished that somehow she could find her and show her the same kindness she was being shown in this moment. Slowly she relaxed, pushing her arms around her protector, embracing him and keeping him close to her, feeling him tense at the unusual reaction.

She still could not understand him, could not understand why it was that he had come for her, why he had saved her, why he had allowed her to stay, why he never asked for anything.

Somehow, despite her worthlessness, he always treated her like there was nothing more important to him in the world, like in that moment nothing else even existed in the world. She looked up into his face, focusing on his eyes, staring deep into them and smiling at their complexity and kindness.

She saw the skin around them crease into a smile, knowing that his lips didn't show nearly as much as his eyes ever did. She put her head on his shoulder and closed her eyes, her smile still on her face. He would need to move soon, she knew that, he never was able to keep the affection going after she had calmed down, not as long as she'd like at least.

She could feel the restlessness growing in his legs and chest, the random twitches that said that his body had already been fighting him for ages. Slowly she pulled away, pulling back a little and crossing her legs facing him.

He sighed and she could see the relief in his features that told always told her how much he wished he could hold her forever without his 'limitation' getting in the way.

Gau looked at her as he stretched his arms and legs, trying to get the tingles to quiet. He wondered again what exactly caused them, wondering whether knowing would allow him to fight them.

"Are you okay?" he enquired quietly, his voice little more than a whisper. He had found that it helped to speak as softly as he could with her, but that whispering caused his words to be lost in the space between them.

She nodded once, looking toward the door then back at him.

"You need to go again." She said matter-of-factly. He nodded, his smile fading as it always did. She returned his nod, confirming the sequence of events in her mind. She reach for his hand and he met hers halfway. The moment lasted longer than he expected and his smile returned before he squeezed softly.

He let her hand fall slowly away, then stood and stretched once again, focusing on his legs this time.

“I’ll try not to be too long.” He promised. At the door he turned back to her and smiled once more, watching as his smile was reflected with the radiance that he always hoped for.

As he closed the door behind him he closed his eyes, allowing the sight of her to linger longer before he turned and continued with his day.

Gau’s day progressed smoothly, his work challenging but not too much so. He buried himself in it with as much zeal as he always did and before he knew it it was done, his day was over.

Heading home he thought of Sam, wondering why it was that he still didn’t call her that even though he thought of her with that name.

He drove home as he always did, fast but not so fast that he endangered himself or others, knowing that he now had someone to live for again.

Today though he noticed that the dark flashes and figures that he had always seen were more plentiful and worse, they were far better defined than he had ever noticed before.

A cold shiver ran through him as he began to try and look more directly at them. A couple of minutes later the shiver was a feeling of pure anxiety. Something bad was coming, and whatever it was, it was worse than anything he’d faced before.

He got home soon after that, the figures everywhere now and for the first time in his life they were visible even when he was not driving. He rushed to the door, unlocking it quickly and heading inside.

Silence greeted him, safety seeming to shower over him as he stepped inside like an air curtain. He turned and looked outside, surprised to see that some of the figures had resolved into humanoids rather than just being tall blobs of darkness.

Gau shut the door quickly and rushed to Sam’s room, knocking on the door despite her insistence that he didn’t need to.

“Come in.” She called out to him. He opened the door slowly, cautiously, not knowing why he always felt like he should be ready to run whenever he came into her room.

She was sitting on the bed, cross-legged again, smiling at him until she saw the look on his face. Slowly the smile disappeared.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, worried. He looked back behind him, feeling something happening, then looked back at her.

She was no longer looking at him, instead she was staring out of the window, her eyes far away.

“It’s begun.” She whispered quietly and although he had no idea what she was talking about he knew that it was true.

Victoria crouched at the entrance to her cave, staring out at the city and the red shimmers that were popping up everywhere. She knew what it was, knew that this was

her fault.

One of the shimmers on the far end of the town solidified and turned crimson a moment before demons began to pour out of it in their thousands. The winged ones took to the air, filling it like a swarm of bats, darting back and forth scouting for those below. They began to focus their movements on the gates that had not yet opened and soon more began to solidify.

Victoria put her hand back behind her, spreading her wings and feeling their weight change, ready for flight. She closed her hand slowly, feeling the moment when her sword formed and feeling the relief spread over her that that had not been taken away as well.

She could fight if she needed to and she intended to do so.

As she raised her wings, ready to push off into the air she paused, apprehension overtaking her.

It froze her from action and more, her intuition told her that she should listen to her instinct this time.

Gau looked out the window as saw the demons circling in the sky. Their patterns seemed to have randomised now where before they seemed to have been centred. Somehow he knew that they were searching for something.

“Gau?” Samantha asked quietly. He turned to her, his expression harder than he intended but it was impossible to change it. She didn’t recoil as she normally would have.

“What’s happening?” He asked, hoping that she would know after her statement that it had started.

“I don’t know. I’m scared Gau.” She whispered, coming to the window and looking out with him. He turned back to the sky and saw the patterns beginning to resolve once again.

With horror he realised that they were beginning to centre on them.

“We need to go.” He said, grabbing her wrist and pulling, keeping his grip as light as he could while still making sure that she would follow.

He led her out into the street and looked up. The demons were definitely centred around them.

“Where are we going?” Samantha asked, a tremble creeping into her voice. He couldn’t answer. Instead he pulled her down the street, heading toward the mountains, for the industrial area. There were warehouses there that had long since been abandoned but that still hadn’t been gutted in the hopes that one day they would be used again.

Victoria could feel Samantha’s fear as the two of them ran closer to her. She could see where the demons were focusing and was thankful that there were no gates between her and Samantha.

The protector was keeping them moving at an amazing rate, keeping them going fast enough that Victoria dared to hope that the demons would not be able to keep up yet. This soon after their breach there would not be enough fear in the world to strengthen

them.

It was only a matter of time though.

Victoria's grip on her sword tightened a little and a flicker of light made her turn away from the chase.

The sword had engulfed itself in fire, something that even as an angel it had never done before. It meant that the weapon had fully focused itself. And it meant that it was now truly a divine weapon.

Victoria looked beyond it, remembering that the fires grew when a demon got closer. Right now they were flickering as if a demon was in the cave with her. Slowly she moved into the cave, holding her blade in front of her for light and defence.

An unholy screech accompanied the sight of her enemy, a lesser demon with the same leathery skin as the one that had killed Sariel.

Bloodlust overcame her and she lashed out.

She did not know how long she fought or even how she had, instead all she knew was that the demon now lay dead in front of her, burning scars covering its body in a way that told her she had not stopped when it died.

She turned away from the corpse and looked back toward the city.

Her heart sank as she saw that the swarm above her sister had begun to descend. Without hesitation she launched herself high into the air, her huge black wings extending fully for a moment before she beat at the wind once more and propelled herself higher.

She gained altitude quickly, the wind ripping at her hair as she flew, her blade at her side.

She paused for a moment, then tucked her wings in, angling herself down at the swarm, bringing her blade across her body and diving.

They were almost there, the warehouses visible a couple more blocks down. Gau continued to run as hard as Samantha could go while still they held each other.

The demons above them were beginning to descend and he could hear the terror beginning to spread as people became more aware of what they were facing.

He glanced over his shoulder and could see that there were now demons in the street, some chasing him and Samantha, others breaking into houses, screams hailing their arrival.

He turned forward again, starting to feel his legs burning from the distance they had covered. A shadow crossed in front of him and he looked up in time to see a huge pair of wings extend then push at the air.

He did not follow the object, focusing instead of trying to get off the street before whatever it was got involved.

A demon descended in front of them, its skin crimson and scaly, its arms ending in wicked claws, its wings folding as it dropped to the floor.

Gau did not slow, letting go of Samantha's hand and getting ready for a fight, knowing in his mind how futile it would probably be.

Just before he reached the snarling demon a blur whipped past, a flash of light accompanying it. The demon glared at him a moment longer before it fell into two pieces.

He hurdled the body, then turned for a moment to make sure that Samantha cleared it as well.

The blur shot past again and once again a demon split in two. Gau focused on leading Samantha again, pushing a little further before choosing an old abandoned mill that had once been part of the original town.

He bashed through the door with his shoulder then shut it immediately after Samantha had made it in.

Somehow they had made it and for whatever reason Gau felt safe once again.

## Chapter 3

The morning after their escape saw them wake stiff and sore, the hard ground having provided no comfort to their sleeping bodies.

Gau's shoulder was visibly bruised from where he had slept on it and the bruising made it difficult for him to move it. As a small blessing it was his left rather than his right which meant that, in his mind at least, he would not be completely useless if something were to happen.

He set about exploring the mill further, something they had neglected to do before out of fear and exhaustion. Samantha followed him around, helping search the rooms and showing a different side to her than the meek innocence that Gau had assumed was all there was to her.

She seemed to know where best to find what was hidden but when he asked her how she had figured the places out she could not tell him.

It made him wonder about her past.

Before the morning had passed they had already found a small stash of old canned food with no signs of rust or swelling, a tap that still worked, a filtration system that although a little dusty still looked like it had been new before it was abandoned and finally a few odds and ends that would come in handy in surviving whatever this was.

Something that they didn't find however was any sort of weaponry. There were no knives or even letter openers left behind and so, so far as offensive tools were concerned, they were left unarmed.

Victoria watched as the demons circled over the mill, diving now and again, probing for a weakness in the barrier that had formed.

Once again she wondered whose work it had been. It was bigger than anything she could have created, and with Samantha's obliviousness to who she was and what she could accomplish Victoria doubted it was her doing.

Which left three possibilities.

Either someone else in the area was skilled with anti-demonic magic and had a vested interest in keeping Samantha alive, or it was magic that had been placed over her to protect her in exactly this event, or finally it could be the man with her tapping into something latent.

None of the options comforted her in the least. The former meant that there was

another player in this event, someone beyond the forces that were already clashing somewhere out there.

The latter meant that Samantha could be around someone who, although he seemed to be looking out for her, might be something other than what even he thought he was.

The middle option was the least worrying for her although it meant that someone had a plan for Samantha, someone from the kingdom who didn't have the same plan for her.

That thought sent shivers down her spine.

Gau was sitting in the middle of the mill, breathing deeply and slowly, trying to take stock of what exactly had happened since the day before and extending it into the near future.

That there were demons ruling the outside world he could not deny. What it meant was that nowhere was likely to be truly safe which meant that simple things from getting food to finding others would be extremely dangerous.

It also meant that he should probably find a way to barricade windows and doors that they were not going to use.

Which meant that they'd have to find tools and wood.

Which meant they needed weapons.

He sighed quietly, looking around at what had been left behind. The only thing even vaguely viable as a weapon was an old broom that had been abandoned in a corner.

He slowly stood, stretching as he rose, before heading across to the broom. Samantha was somewhere else in the building, still looking through what was around with the intention of creating sleeping quarters for the two of them that weren't hard, cold floor and easily attackable.

He picked up the stick and kicked off the head of the broom, the metal fasteners rusted to the point where they broke off easily. The stick was heavy, obviously not made with the usual stuff that one found everywhere. He imagined that with the mill being as dusty as it could get someone got tired of always having to replace the broomsticks.

He swung the stick around a few times, testing its weight before heading off to find Samantha.

"Samantha?" he called as he approached the door to where she had started to set up. She came to the door and smiled at him.

"Please call me Sam instead." She admonished him. He returned her smile and nodded before continuing with the reason he'd sought her.

"I need to head out and see what's out there. Whether there are survivors, where the closest store is... I imagine it would be a good idea to gather some sort of supplies. Can you think of anything we could need?" he inquired.

"It will be far easier if I come with you. Then we can find what we need and bring back more at once." She said, picking up on his suggestion that she stay behind. He smiled lopsidedly then shrugged.

"I guess that's true... I just don't really want to have to worry about looking after you

while we're out there. I have no idea what I'm up against and I'm afraid that whatever it is will be too much for me." He explained honestly, knowing that it probably wouldn't change her mind one way or another.

"When are we heading out?" she confirmed his suspicions. He sighed quietly and looked around at the room she was creating.

"We'll go as soon as you're ready." He allowed, turning and heading back onto the mill floor.

They left half an hour later, the broom handle clutch in both his hands, anxiety running the length of his spine. He could see the demons still circling far above, every now and again trying to dive toward them but somehow always stopping as if they were rebounding off something.

He wondered what it was that they were coming up against but put that out of his mind, focusing on the road ahead, on their destination.

There was a small mall only a couple of kilometres away and Gau figured that was probably the closest place to gather supplies without looting the houses in the area. Somehow he still felt like that would be wrong, despite the likelihood of them being abandoned.

Samantha stayed close behind him, watching the shadows, expecting something to jump out at any time. She was glad she had chosen to come with him, knowing that she would have been paralysed by fear while he was away if she'd stayed behind. Something about all of this felt so familiar, and she felt a horrible guilt for it that she could not understand.

It was only when they crossed over into the more residential area that the ground based demons started to appear again. They seemed to be going about whatever it was their business was without even noticing the two of them.

Samantha could see that Gau was nervous, his knuckles white around the broom handle, his head moving rapidly from side to side, trying to keep track of every movement around them.

They managed to make it all the way to the mall without incident, the broom handle still tightly clutched in Gau's hands.

They quickly made their way from shop to shop, gathering sheets and pillows and other items they needed to make themselves a little more comfortable in their new living quarters.

In addition they grabbed various supplies for barricading the warehouse further, two first aid kits and other medical items which they thought would come in useful as well as a couple of knives.

One of these Gau attached to the top of his broom handle to create a crude spear. He tested it on a mannequin, feeling the weight and the range of the weapon before nodding with a slight sense of satisfaction.

In order to make the supplies easier to carry they stretched a sheet between two poles

and made a stretcher in which they placed what they had gathered.

Still, even after their shopping trip it seemed like the demons weren't interested in them.

It was only halfway back that they were ambushed.

Gau spotted the quiet spot before they got to it, an area that seemed devoid of movement where there were signs of it before and after.

They slowed slightly and he whispered to Samantha that if he hopped out from under the stretcher's poles that she should try and work them together and keep everything from falling out.

Once she responded he resumed the pace they had been keeping before, relaxing his shoulders a little, realising how tightly he was holding onto the spear and trying to relax his grip as well. It would after all end up slowing him down if he was not relaxed enough.

They crossed over the threshold of the still area and Gau slowly scanned the houses around them. He could feel the eyes on him and yet, even above them, there were no demons in sight.

He was just starting to believe he was being paranoid when a screeching cry issued forth from a house to the right.

A small group of demons rushed out, two of them taking to the air as the others charged them on foot. Gau lunged forward out from under the stretcher, bringing his spear to bare and facing the oncoming demons.

As the first one got within striking distance of the spear Samantha called out to look up. Gau hopped backwards and brought his spear up in front of him, one of the flying demons impaling itself on the knife on the end of it as it tried to take a swipe at him.

Gau quickly tilted the shaft and thrust forward quickly before pulling back, dislodging the dying demon with relative ease and turning towards the runners. He stepped forward, swinging at the closest demon and catching it on the temple with the shaft of the spear before jumping forward and embedding the knife into the next one.

It groaned in an almost human voice as he pulled the knife out and changed his grip. He used the butt of the spear to hit what would have been a temple on a human on the next demon.

Gau smiled as he felt the rhythm of the fight, stabbing into the first demon as he turned again. It was at that moment that the knife ripped itself free of the shaft.

Victoria felt the fear suddenly erupt in Samantha where before there had been an odd sense of exhilaration. She sprinted to the edge of the cave mouth and launched herself into the air, her wings unfurling as she fell, catching the air and with one powerful beat propelling herself forward.

She pushed herself for spear feeling the fear give way to anxiety and uncertain hope. She wondered what could be happening that was causing these feelings but only for a moment as she tried to pick up on her twin's location.

She climbed quickly when she realised that they'd gone further than she expected and finally spotted them, a single winged demon flying above a group of others who were fighting the man.

She could see that he'd managed to at least incapacitate a couple of the creatures but now they were moving in on him, his defence desperate and yet still it showed sign of being competent.

She angled herself towards the scene then dove, tucking her wings in enough to reduce their drag but still keeping her angle right. She put her hand to the hilt of her sword as she felt the air rushing past her, waiting to draw it at the last moment.

The flames left a demon behind the man with a neat cut down the middle. He didn't slow in his dance, the staff he was using lashing out this way and that, trying to keep them off him.

Victoria wished she could help more directly but for one reason or another did not want her twin to be able to see her more closely. She circled round as quickly as she thought safe then dove again, this time severing the head of the flying demon.

Gau spun around, letting the stick slide through his hands until it was almost fully extended. He felt the impact of the strikes and the jarring that accompanied its force. Finally he brought the stick back in and dropped to his knee having managed to inch his way to the knife.

He picked it up in his left hand, lashing out once more with the stick before letting it go and swapping the knife across to his right.

He heard another whoosh as the winged figure swept through the group of demons again but he focused on what was an immediate threat.

He lunged forward and buried the knife to the hilt in one of the remaining demons, twisting it as he turned away and pulled it out, ready to attack the next one.

It was then that he realised there were only two left. He smiled as he took two quick steps forward and slashed at the creature in front of him. It dodged backwards as if he were moving in slow motion, a caricature of a grin spreading across its face as it pulled an arm lazily back, ready to take a swipe at him.

Its arm below the elbow disappeared in another whoosh and in that moment Gau lunged forward again and slashed open its throat.

The final demon stepped in around its dying kin and took a swipe at Gau.

He felt a deep burning sensation suddenly explode through his upper left arm as he was flung off his feet. He landed with a roll and pushed himself up immediately, turning to face the demon who had knocked him aside.

It was already charging at him, hand trailing behind it but not above its head suggesting that it knew what had happened to its compatriot.

Gau watched it coming, waiting until the last moment before dropping to a knee and pushing himself forward, the knife ahead of him, his left arm limp beside him.

The knife punctured the creature's chest and he watched as the life drained from its eyes.

Pain shot through his arm again as he stood over the corpse and he looked down at the four large gashes in his arm. They weren't too deep since most of the force of the blow seemed to have transferred into his impromptu flight but they were deep enough to be bleeding.

Victoria watched from the sky as Samantha ran over the Gau carrying a red first aid kit. She was panting from the exertion of attaining speed quickly and then redirecting it at the last moment.

Samantha pulled out gauze and a bandage, quickly wrapping the man's arm tightly enough to stop the bleeding. Victoria smiled as they rushed back to the stretcher, knowing that they had thought the same as she had.

It was better to get back to the mill and deal with his wound there than to try and dress it properly here.

She flew slowly above them, looking out for any further ambushes or potential problems. It was only once she was sure there were none that she headed back to her own home, hoping that the particular demon who had landed a blow on the man had not had anything lethal coating its claws.