

The Color of Angels

by Terri Windling

"Angel Wall" © 1995 by Jacqueline Warren

Glass shattered against the wall to the left of Larry's head. "All right, I'm out of here," he said, departing as suddenly as he'd appeared on Tat's doorstep earlier that evening.

She listened to his footsteps in the hall, and the grind of the lift as it descended to the street. Then she crossed the loft to mop up fragments of glass and the oily turpentine spill. The jar she had thrown had held soaking paintbrushes, which now dribbled turp and paint on the floor. She let out her breath, a long sigh of air that was half disgust, half embarrassment. Only Larry drove her to tantrums like this. And then refused to believe she was patient and reasonable with everyone else.

The phone rang and she reached for it, knowing exactly who it would be. "Now listen, Tat," Larry said from the phone box on the corner, a safe distance from flying art implements, "I've booked us a table at our Italian place. Half past seven. I'll meet you there."

"Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you," Tat said. "I mean it. I never want to see you again."

"Yeah I know. But you'll feel differently in an hour, thank god. Half-seven. The Italian place. Okay?"

"No, it's not," she snarled. She hung up on him, but she knew he was right. She couldn't stay mad, not at anyone and especially not at Larry Bone. A forgiving nature was a failing, she thought. Those self-absorbed, vain, demanding kind of women--like the actress whose bed he had slept in last night--were better at getting whatever they wanted; while Tat had realized long ago that she'd never have what she wanted most. Not that having Larry in her own bed again was what she wanted *most*, Tat told herself firmly, dropping turp-soaked rags and shards of glass into the rubbish bin.

Tat looked at the clock. She had an hour left to work. She crossed to the studio portion of the loft, where the tables (and the floor, and everything she touched) were covered with spattered inks and paints. Moon lay sprawled beneath the sink where he'd retreated when voices were raised. The dog's great head rested on long paws as he watched her through soft, ink-black eyes. He was huge (part wolfhound she'd always thought, with fur the silver of a winter moon) and mute; he'd never spoken once since she'd rescued him from the pound.

Large industrial windows let in the last of the fading dusty light. The rooftops beyond the glass looked sooty, a drawing rendered in charcoal. The ceaseless traffic of London was a sound so familiar it seemed like silence to her. She snapped on an overhead light, re-tied her carpenter's apron around her waist, then frowned down at the piece she'd been working on until Larry arrived. The painting was a wet expanse of printer's inks in subtle tones: the greys of the November sky, a watery blue from her dreams last night, golds and creams breaking through like a weak autumn sun through a cover of cloud. She'd brushed, rolled and splattered the inks onto the surface of a plexiglass plate; the plate in turn would be run through a press, transferring the image to paper. She finished loading the plate with thick ink, and then she began to pare it away, rubbing with rags, with fingertips, scratching with knives, razors and pins, stripping the imagery down until shapes emerged, abstract, half-tangible, suggestive of archways and thresholds, of faded frescoes on crumbling walls.

Tat glanced up at the clock again. Just enough time to print the plate; she'd only be a little late, and Larry, of course, would expect that she'd be. Late, breathless, paint on her hands: that's the way she always came to him; while he would arrive precisely on time, order a bottle of good red wine, and flirt with all of the waitresses until Tat finally arrived.

She placed the plate on the bed of her hand press, covered with wet Fabriano paper. She set the weights, and then began to pull the wheel that turned the press, pushing ink and paper together. The wheel was stiff. She fought the rise of panic when it would not move, betraying the weakness in her body, the inexorable deterioration. She took a deep breath and hauled on the wheel. The

