

# Rumisiel's Lament, Chapter 1

A Misfile fanfiction by ShadowDragon8685

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*What have I done?*

Sitting atop a small, lonesome tombstone in a large, windswept field of the dead, a young man in a torn jean-vest and jean trousers trembled, tears spilling down his cheeks as he held his head in one hand, a bottle of some brew or another—he had long since lost track of what it was—in his other hand.

*How could I have done... this? What kind of an Angel am I?*

With an anguished sob, he tilted over the tombstone, tears spilling onto the dark, simple granite marker in the ground, as another strong burst of wind wracked the field, sending another wave of chills through him.

*I killed them... I destroyed everything... I'm... a monster.*

With a self-pitying snuffle, he closed his eyes, raised the bottle, and drank—but not even the vile, terrifyingly powerful brew in the dark brown bottle could block the memories, which came flooding back as the contents of his stomach came up. With his last ounce of strength he turned away so as not to vomit on the grave marker, before blackness overcame him.

## 72 Hours Earlier

January, 2008. It seemed like such a good time to check back—and of course, it had taken him a solid year of near-tireless, model behavior to earn some vacation time. He hadn't told anyone—not even his brother. He had also timed his visit to be absolutely certain that Cassiel was not in possession of any vacation time—the last thing he needed was for her to show up and see things as they were, and then blow the lid on his past fuck-up—he'd probably get canned if she did, if not banished.

At least he had cleaned up his act. He hated to admit it, but those two years had had quite an effect on him—if not entirely willingly on his part. Enforced sobriety was a pure pain in the ass, but after all that time of not touching a single mood-altering substance—and even later, time in the filing depository, working his ass off to get the vacation time he'd need to see how things had gone—he hadn't had time. Even his father had commented on how good his time on Earth had been for him—and his father almost never spoke to him!

"I oughta come here more often," he chortled to himself, pacing down the side of the long road. He let out a smile as he saw the sign, in large letters graven in stone, 'Welcome to Tempest'.

In a way, it felt like coming home. Surely, it wasn't his home, but that didn't stop it from feeling that way. You don't live on a friend's couch for two years, roof your friend's father's house and dig a leech field, or any of the other crazy and oftentimes arduous escapades those years had been, without developing an affinity for a place.

Only another... three miles to walk. He thought about bitching about it, but figured that and a sack was worth the sack—he also thought about just bypassing the trip entirely, but that would be lazy—and laziness is how he started the mess in the first place. Besides, taking a walk through the bad side of town would be an opportunity to score some more 'good deed' points—he always could use those.

Rumisiel laughed, scratching at his scruffily shaved cheek. If only Ash could see him now! Oh wait, he will. The treading angel laughed again, merrily on his way, into the worst part of Tempest—the run-

down hodgepodge of old tenements and poverty. They hadn't changed much—there were still drug dealers and old winos, but he turned down the offers. After all, that was how he got screwed up in the first place—and then compounded it by spending the night freebasing. The memories were foggy, for which he was glad, but he knew better than to be *too* glad—lest the urge to go back to the bottle return.

A flicker in the alleyway caught his eye, and he turned. He raised his hand just in time to block the brick from hitting his head, and the other hand caught the hobo's other arm, which had a bottle. The scruffy man, uncleaned and unkempt, was ranting incoherently, so Rumisiel pushed him back against the wall. "Hey, hey! What's wrong with you, man?!"

His words started to chug through the alkie's head, and the scruffy hobo peered at him. "Youzz got change for me?"

*"He's totally off it. I better placate this guy."* Thinking quickly, Rumisiel remembered that he had had the foresight to acquire some currency before coming down. "Yeah, I got some cash for you, pal. Just put the brick down, okay?" The hobo's arm relaxed, and Rumisiel let him lower it—the brick fell to the ground, and Rumi took out a bill—a crisp, clean ten. "This is for you, okay?" The hobo's eyes lit up, and he snatched the bill. "And hey, pal... how about I buy this off you?" He pointed to the bottle, which the Hobo snatched away, fiercely guarding it.

"Izz valuable," he growled.

Rumisiel nodded to him. "I know it is. Um, what is that? Mad Dog 20/20?" A quick peek at the label confirmed it, and the wandering Angel smiled. "Good stuff. How about I give you... fifty for it?"

The hobo's eyes lit up like saucers, and Rumisiel took out five ten dollar bills. "Go get something to eat, man. You look like you really need it." The hobo nodded vigorously, and bottle—full, and still sealed—and bills changed hands. A smile crossed both faces, and the old alkie ran off with a "Yahoo!" while Rumisiel strolled back to the street, pocketing the bottle and continuing on his way. One down.

He whistled a catchy tune to himself as he walked up the streets, until he turned onto a street he knew all-too-well. A little pride, and maybe some trepidation, crept up his back—would Ash remember? How would things be? Would Ash still even be here? Ash would be 20 or 21, he reminded himself. The Angel grinned softly, imagining a fantasy elsewhere, the red-headed Ash and blue-haired Emily married, or at least co-habituating, in a small house with a ridiculously large garage, filled with racing trophies. Then again, maybe they'd stayed with Doctor Upton. Either way, the good Doctor was the best place to start his search. He kind of hoped that Doc Upton would recognize him, though it was unlikely. Still, the files could do strange stuff.

His heart quickened as he walked to the door, pressing the bell. He was shaking—anticipation. He grinned as he realized now he knew what Ash was feeling for that second race with Kate. He waited—glanced at the driveway. The garage was closed, but Doctor Upton's Audi was on the pad. Then he heard a step inside. His gut clenched.

Doctor Edward Upton opened the door on a young man who looked to be a biker. He peered warily at him. "Can I help you?"

*"He doesn't remember me... crap. But that's not so bad, I guess. I did piss him off a lot."* Rumisiel smiled. "Hello, Doctor Upton. Um, I'm Rumisiel—I was a friend of... (*Crap. Do I say daughter or son? Better not use a gender identifier until I know exactly what happened.*) Ash's a few years back. I'm from Canada," he explained, slipping back into an old and familiar role.

Doctor Upton peered at him, again, and he continued, "We fell out of contact, but I decided to go traveling, and I was passing through Tempest—I don't know what happened to Ash, but maybe you could point me in the right direction?"

The eyes—they bored into him. His gut felt like it was squirming—Doctor Upton was a canny character, whether or not he remembered Rumisiel. Then a sort of weary specter passed over his face, and he nodded. "My son still lives here. It's not often he gets visitors, so I suppose I'll let you see him." The doctor stepped back out of the doorway. "He's upstairs in his room. Please be quiet, but talk to his right ear—his left doesn't work so well."

Rumisiel blinked, as he entered the house, walking. A cold, nameless fear gripped his guts. “*Why doesn’t Ash’s ear work?*” He hurried—displaying a familiarity with the house’s lay-out that made Doctor Upton pause and ponder. He arrived at Ash’s door seconds before Doctor Upton, who knocked on it for him.

“Ash? You’ve got a visitor, from Canada? Says he was your Internet friend a few years ago.”

“*Internet friend—good cover. Gotta remember that.*” There was no answer from inside, so Doctor Upton unlocked the door, opening it.

The sight within was not quite what Rumisiel had expected; he had to work hard to maintain composure. It was so familiar, and so alien. The young man on the bed turned his head—bloodshot eyes, so familiar yet so terrifyingly alien, peered over Rumisiel, and then to Doctor Upton. “Dad? D’ya mind if I get another bottle?”

His father shook his head. “You’ve had enough, Ash. Maybe at dinner. Go on in, Rumisiel.”

The doctor turned and walked away, leaving Rumisiel unsteadily walking into the room, closing the door behind him. The smell—well, he recognized it all right. It was the smell of the domicile of someone who’d been on a long, long bender. Empty bottles were tossed into a laundry basket in a corner of the bedroom, the cans into a different basket. There were quite a few which had missed the baskets, and three open on the desk next to Ash. Ash was wearing what Rumisiel supposed would be his racing-meditation gear: a short-sleeved Tee and boxers.

But what was so startling was the state of him. His left side, or what Rumisiel could see of it, was a network of scarred, slightly-charred flesh. The left side of his head in particular was burnt. His arm was deformed with the damage, most of the outer bicep gone. His fingers still worked, through some miracle, which was how he was sitting upright in bed, working the controller of a video game—a racing game. He was driving some fast car with reckless abandon, only half-paying attention, and clearly drunk at that. The fact that he hadn’t managed to completely wipe out was telling of Ash’s innate skill.

“Good Lord, Ash... What happened to you, man?” It took the orange-haired boy a long moment to find the pause button and swivel his head. That head... so familiar, yet so not. The face, the shape—it was *eerie*, he thought, seeing Ash as a man—then he realized he’d never really conceived of that before. Even when he knew that he’d personally refiled Ash in the male cabinet, he still held in his mind’s eye the image of the young woman he had left behind. His guts churned and clenched as he sat on the chair at the desk, looking at Ash, fighting not to show the trembling in his body.

“Don’ wanna talk about it,” the drunken Ash replied. “I know you? Y’look familiar...” A spark of hope—maybe he could jog Ash’s memory.

“I’m Rumisiel,” he replied. “Your friend from, ah, ‘up north’?” He hoped the euphemism would place him, but Ash shook his head.

“Don’t... I don’t remember you. I mean... I kinda... do, but I don’t know you.” He looked down. “Maybe you’ve got the wrong place?”

“*(Like hell I do.)* Um, maybe. But you look like you’ve been through some rough times. Maybe I could cheer you up?”

He was unprepared for the violent, bitter glance Ash threw in his direction, before looking down. “Nobody can... ’less you happen to have a bottle of the stuff Dad won’ let me have.”

“*(Ugh... looks like I’ve got to.)* Yeah, actually I have.” He looked around, conspiratorially. “If you’ll tell me what I want to know.” He brought out the bottle of Mad Dog, and Ash’s eyes locked onto it like an owl finding a mouse at night.

“All right.” He reached for the bottle with his left arm—it was feeble, more or less unable to move except slowly, so Rumisiel put it on his lap. Ash struggled to open it, but snarled when Rumisiel moved to do it for him, so Rumi let him do it himself. Ash took a long, long swig, and asked, “What do you want to know?”

Several hours and half a bottle of Mad Dog later, Rumisiel slowly walked out of Ash's room. He felt like throwing up. Doctor Upton was downstairs ordering take-out when he stumbled down the stairs.

"You look white as a sheet... Rumisiel?"

Rumi nodded at the correct pronunciation of his name. "Er... Yeah."

"You want to stay for dinner? My treat. You did keep my son company, after all."

Rumi shook his head. "Er, no... no, thank you anyway... I, um..."

"Not what you expected? That damn crash. It changed him. I think it killed a part of him, deep inside. That could be why he stopped talking to you."

Rumisiel nodded glumly. "Yeah... I think so. Look, I, uh... I gotta go, um... I... just gotta go."

"As you wish. And thank you."

Rumisiel beat a hasty retreat, but that was nothing compared to the cold uncertainty in his guts that spurred him into a dead run as soon as his feet hit concrete. Ash's life seemed like it had been an unending series of mishaps and malice after the Misfile Day, but that was almost nothing compared to one terrifying, horrifying fact: Ash had not recognized the name of Emily McArthur—at least, no moreso than he had recognized Rumisiel's name, or Vashiel's, or Cassiel's.

He pounded pavement at a dead run. At least, maybe, *maybe* Emily was okay, just... not recognizing Ash. He pelted up the driveway, looking for Emily's car. Nothing in the driveway, but the garage was shut. He raised his hand, knocking. And waited. And waited. And he knocked again, then rang the bell.

Finally a woman answered the door, looking somewhat haggard. "What do you want?" she snapped at him. Rumisiel started into his speech, but no sooner had he uttered the words 'old friend of Emily's' than the woman in the door shouted, "Go away from here! Don't ring the bell again or I'll call the police!"

She slammed the door, literally on his nose, and he stumbled backwards, reeling—his whole world felt like it was falling apart. What did that mean? The response, the hostility? He searched for some meaning, but short of the unthinkable—and he was *not* going to think it—he simply needed more information. But it was getting dark; he couldn't very well go check the library yet.

Blindly, he stumbled to the cheapest hotel in Tempest. He vaguely remembered getting showered, laundering his clothes, and fighting off the temptation to drink himself to sleep.

#### 48 Hours Earlier

Rumisiel needed to make sense of what had happened. He had part of the story, but Ash was drunk, rambling, and angry at the world. As near as he could tell, things first started to go truly batshit after Kamikaze Kate had come for him. When Ash was a girl, Kate had told him to get his act together—as a boy, she had forced him off the old road, into the cliff to the left side of the downhill track. The XR4Ti had wiped out, and came to a rest almost off the cliff. So, he'd start with Kate.

"*Am I going to have to exorcise Angelica again?*" He didn't know, but he knew he could do it—he remembered that first time so well. It was his own first real moment of badassery, after all. Steadfastly he closed his mind to any mention of Emily, and walked long and long, to Aries, the last place he remembered having heard of Kate. What he found was... unexpected. The garage was boarded up, the 's' in the sign had fallen off and nobody had bothered to clean it up. He tried to find his way inside, and eventually flapped over the building and prised a sheet of plywood. The inside was dusty and deserted, run-down and ramshackle. He found a piece of paper taped to the inside of the window, and pried it off. Taking it outside, he read it:

To all my loyal customers,  
It's a sad, sad day that I have to say that I've got to go. While I've loved working with you all, and it's been good times, I've got to go. My mum back in Wales is dying, and I have to go to her.  
When I left home to come to America, my mom made me promise her that I'd find a wife and settle down before she passed on, or else I'd take over the family business, as I'm the last surviving heir of my family.  
Sorry, lads and lassies—see you on the other side of the pond.  
Harry Walsh, December 6, 2006.

Rumisiel let the paper drop out of his hand. That explained where Ash's favorite mechanic had gone—but not where Kate was. She was supposed to have married Harry—that would've provided the family, wouldn't it?

He had to find Kate. Maybe there would be answers there. If nothing else, he could ask her why. Why had she run Ash off the road? But where was she?

Rumisiel walked back into town, slowly. His mind was going in circles—he knew he was avoiding facing the Emily question, but he didn't care. It took a long time to walk, as he wasn't really interested in getting there expediently—slowly he trudged up to the Library. It was open, so he walked in. The librarian was happy to help him find old newspaper records on microfiche, from the year 2004.

It wasn't hard to find what he was looking for: they were front-page headline articles. Ash Upton's XR4Ti had been run off the road in an illegal street race on the old Mountain. He had refused to speak about who had done it, only to say that the other racer had pushed him into the rock face. There was no damage to the right side of his vehicle, so authorities at first were skeptical, but the headline a few weeks later said that Kate had turned herself in, giving a full confession and waiving her rights to trial by jury and to an attorney. She had officially confessed to attempted vehicular homicide, but given her remorseful and full confession to that and other acts of vehicular aggression, the presiding Judge had sentenced her to no less than ten and no more than twenty year's imprisonment. She was currently serving time in Framingham Correctional Institution.

He checked the date—she had confessed on the day *after* the day when he had originally talked Angie into leaving. He suspected he already knew what the answers would be—that Kate had run Ash off the road in a fit of fury at the poor performance Ash put up the first time. When the day of Rumisiel's exorcism of her sister had come, she would have been freed from the hate and the fury—but what would it have left? Bitter guilt over what she had done to Ash—ruined his life? That would explain the confession. But he had to know for himself.

Fortunately, the library had a copy of Google Earth installed. He quickly discovered the direction he wanted to take, and ran out of town, to the deserted stretch of highway leading to the old mountain where he could take wing, flying through the night to Framingham. He arrived around two, found a hotel to shack up in, took a shower, and indulged in a single bottle as a soporific before sleeping hard and troubled.

#### 24 Hours Earlier

In the morning, he made his way to the prison, and managed to convince the authorities that yes, he was a visitor. They took him to a small room, subdivided into two sides with clear Lexan, a table in each half of the room, a grille to speak through, and chairs. He sat, and waited. He knew he was just confirming what he already knew, but he had to do it.

"*Four years of prison,*" he thought, as she walked in wearing an orange jumpsuit, "*have not been kind to her.*" Kate's trademark long blond lock of hair had been shorn to a buzz-cut. She peered curiously at Rumi, as she sat down, uncomfortably. "*She must not have any visitors,*" he thought.

She confirmed it, quietly saying, "I don't get visitors... So I have to know, who are you?"

"My name is Rumisiel. (*Crap. Gotta... think of something.*) I am a friend of Ash Upton." He saw a tremble in her eyes at the name.

"Why are you here," she asked him in reply.

"I have come to ask you..."

"Why I did it? Why I destroyed him?" She looked down, at the floor. "I... can't say," she said—Rumi didn't bother to interrupt. He suddenly got the impression that he was playing Confessor. "I was so angry... so very, very angry, at him. I had only met him once before, but I was so angry... he called himself 'King' of that mountain, and I... I just could not tolerate that. I had to beat him, to crush him... for... for Angie."

The woman in the orange jumpsuit slumped forward, onto the table, laying her head on her forearms. "But, when we raced... he was so weak, so *pathetic*... it just made me so much more angry, it wasn't worth the doing. I was so... so full of hate. I don't know why I did it. I stopped on the side of the road, in the shadow of a peak, let him drive by, and I came out. I... I thought I was trying to scare him into really racing, but I wasn't. I wanted to... to *hurt* him. To make him suffer, I was so... I could only see hatred, and rage. I wanted to make him pay for insulting me with that joke of a race."

"*Man... Ash said something about her being really pissed off—maybe it was the fact that Ash was a girl the first time they met that prevented Kate from going crazy?*"

"I pushed him. Startled him into thinking I was going to ram him from the right—he turned his wheel, just as the road narrowed..." She closed her eyes, and pantomimed the maneuver with her hands—and then the crashing of Ash's car into the wall, using her hand against the Lexan barrier.

"So... what did you do then," Rumisiel prompted.

Kate didn't look up as she talked on. "I went home... I didn't do anything, even though I'd seen the flash of yellow behind me. I didn't care... I felt so cold, so empty, so full of hate. I read the newspapers, I knew they didn't believe Ash's story about another racer. I didn't leave any rubber that night, at least, none they could link to Ash's crash. I knew I could just... wait it out. Let them discredit Ash, get away... I even started making plans to do what I'd done to other racers. I knew I could get them the way I got Ash—get them alone, don't leave any rubber. But then..."

She looked up, at Rumisiel's face. "It was like waking up from a nightmare, but waking up in another one. I could *feel* again. Love, joy, humor. They all came back one night, while I was doing nothing. Then they went away. I remembered what I'd done. I felt so sick.

"I destroyed him. For no reason at all, I destroyed him. He didn't know me, he didn't even want to race me. His car was as old as he was. I had no reason to really race him, except that I was so... so bitter that I didn't want to see any man calling himself the best racer, anywhere..."

She closed her eyes, putting her hand on the thick Lexan barrier. Rumisiel put his hand on the other side. Figuring it couldn't hurt, not now, he let his wings unfurl from behind him. "It's okay, Kate. You did the... the right thing, in confessing. Angelica would have been proud."

The former Demon of Greylock opened her eyes, stared at the sight on the other side of the barrier. "Things aren't supposed to be this way, Kate. But you still did the right thing. Please take some comfort in that." Rumisiel stood up. "I have to go do the right thing, too. We'll see what happens."

He turned to leave, but the trembled, "W-wait," behind him made him turn, looking back.

"Yes?"

Kate's eyes were streaming lightly. "Tell... t-tell Ash that I'm sorry... please..."

Rumi nodded. "I will, when I see him again." His wings vanished as he exited the visitation room, and he heard the guards taking Kate away behind him. His own exit from the prison was a haze, his mind working, racing hard. He **had** to fix things. But he was a fuck-up, he knew that. When he tried to

fix things, they only got worse—he had undone the Misfile, and things got worse. Then it had taken him more than a year to even come back to see.

*“I’m gonna need to tell Vashiel. There’s no helping it now—even if I get fired, maybe he can help me put things right. But first...”*

Rumisiel disguised his presence with his angelic powers, winging back over the state, and landed at Tempest, on the street outside Ash’s home. He looked up at the upstairs window—the flickering of the television screen could barely be seen. He would tell Ash, but he had some more business to take care of. Even as he thought of how he was going to break the news to his brother, he trudged towards the cemetery. While he let himself hold out a glimmer of hope that Emily had simply gone on to Harvard, and had disowned her mother, he knew better.

He was just delaying for delay’s sake, and he knew it. His reverie was interrupted when his foot crunched on a glass bottle—he looked down. This was that hobo’s alley, the hobo he had given sixty dollars to the first day. But something was wrong—he smelled blood. Warily he crept into the alleyway, and then he went pale. The old hobo was laying in a pool of blood and other bodily fluids, two empty bottles next to him. His head had been bludgeoned by some form of blunt instrument—most likely the bloodied pipe discarded next to him.

*“God... God, help me... he’s...”* Rumisiel leaned down. The old man was dead, there was no doubting that. *“He spent all the money on... on liquor. And then someone killed him for it.”* Rumisiel closed his eyes, tears streaming down his face. *“I fucked up again... I...”* He stumbled out of the alleyway, trembling. Stumbled to a liquor store, bought a bottle of Jack and a bottle of Everclear, and used the pay phone. Called the police department, and told them about the body—he hung up when they started asking questions, and made a beeline for the outskirts of town.

Things got fuzzy after that. He knew he’d lost the bottle of Everclear before he got to the graveyard—presumably, he’d ‘lost’ it down his throat. Stumbling through the graveyard, he read every marker, starting with the big ones, and then working his way to the smaller ones, until he got to the ones that were tiny, on the ground, small plaques of granite rather than any large memorial. He stumbled through them, until he found the one he’d dreaded.

It simply read ‘Emily McArthur. Beloved Daughter, Brilliant Mind. 1986–2004.’ He’d collapsed to his knees, then sunk to sitting over the grave marker, crying heavily, as his mind, fogged as it was, muddled through things. That was a difference of 18 years—she must not have lasted very long after the Misfile’s correction. Then it hit him—the news of the car accident that her old best friend, Molly, had gotten into.

*“I’m... a monster...”*

Rumisiel sniffled as he realized that his fuck-up had compounded a thousand times. *“I killed her.”* He drank deep of the bottle of Jack, remembering Emily, remembering their times together. Even though they fought, and she’d always rightly blamed him, he’d come to think of Emily as his friend, and he’d killed her. And crippled Ash, deprived Harry of a wife, and sent Kate upstate. God alone knew what further repercussions his actions had wrought on others whose lives he had touched and witnessed—for one, Ash’s mother never knew Ash as her son, which was sad, especially as this was exactly when she would have been most helpful in Ash’s life.

The images, the faces, the places, they spun around him, ghosts in the graveyard, and next to him Emily’s ghost, staring at him, mute accusatory eyes on her intangible face. The whole world spun, and Rumisiel fell over, forcing himself away as he realized it was all about to come up. Yes, there it went—all the contents of his stomach, over the grass. At least it didn’t wind up on her grave; he couldn’t have taken that.

Then he simply blacked out.





## Rumisiel's Lament, Chapter 2

A Misfile fanfiction by ShadowDragon8685

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Elsewhere, 2:17 AM

The midnight silence was broken only by the purring sound of the engine that moved up the street, the distinctive sound of a manual transmission shifting, and then the soft screech of well-maintained brakes. This was followed by the sound of a car door opening and closing, and a pair of shod feet slapping up the drive. The door opened...

Ash looked up from holding the wet compress on the feverish forehead, as the figure in the door started, "It's two in the morning. What's so... important?" The blue-haired girl paused, spying the unusual sight—her red-haired friend sitting on a chair next to a couch, looking rather helpless and holding a wet compress against the forehead of the pointy-eared Angel, unconscious on the couch and wearing Ash's father's shirt.

"It's Rumisiel," Ash started. "He's..."

"Sick?" Emily prompted.

"Yeah, I guess, I mean, I didn't know Angels *got* sick, but..." Her orange hair shook, as Emily walked closer, closing the door behind her and dropping her jacket on the chair next to the door.

"Okay. This is significant, but why did I have to sneak out in the middle of the night?"

Then Rumisiel started thrashing and murmuring softly, "Killed... killed them... *nnnngh! Emily... E-Emily McArthur... 'm a monster... two thousand four... two thousand... nnngh...*"

The angel slumped back into his troubled dream, while Emily blinked. "*That* was weird."

"No kidding. It gets worse. He's been like this all night. He's said pretty much every name we know. He's also said the words 'misfile' and 'angel' more than a few times, and said something about me being a boy."

*That* got Emily's attention. "Oh gods. Tell me Missi's not here."

Ash cocked her head, replying, "Why would Missi be here? It's two in the morning."

A nameless sense of relief washed through Emily. Of course, she was just happy that the cat wasn't yet out of the bag... right? "And Vashiel is out of town searching for the missing Archon. Your dad?"

"We lucked out. He got out of here to catch a red-eye about four hours ago. Something about a lecture."

The blue-haired teenager's shoulders sagged in relief, as she pulled up a chair. "He really is a mess, isn't he?"

"Yeah. I already removed one bucket of vomit; that happened a few minutes ago." Ash made a face of considerable distaste, and Emily blinked.

"Was he drinking?"

"That's just it—he's stone-cold sober. He hasn't had any alcohol at all, but he was muttering something about a whole bottle of Everclear about twenty minutes ago."

"So, he dreams about going on a bender, and it makes him puke?"

"Yeah. As near as I can tell."

A groan from the couch interrupted them again, and both girls turned their heads to watch Rumisiel, as he tensed, groaning again. "Wrecked... everything... prison... England... crippled..." He let out a sob in his sleep, and Ash sighed.

"It's so strange. He's incoherent, but his incoherency has a coherence, if that makes any sense. He's talking about... well, about *things*. Things we know are real. I heard him mumbling about Framingham, isn't that a town?"

Emily blinked. “Not just a town. He said ‘prison’, right? Framingham is the site of the state’s prison for women.”

Ash furrowed her brow, and then it clicked. “He was muttering about Kate, and prison, and Framingham? Maybe he thought she was imprisoned?”

A shrug from Emily, then a nod, made her think she might be on to something. “He was muttering something about Harry, and England, and the year two thousand six, shortly before that. Do you think it’s some kind of... I dunno, vision?”

“I wouldn’t actually discount that, but either way, we can’t let anyone hear him. Even if he is clearly sick, if Vashiel hears about this...”

“It could be bad if he started muttering something inopportune, like ‘misfile’...”

Emily opened her mouth to reply, but Rumisiel groaned another word, “Vashiel... brother...”

They stared at him, and Ash said, “That’s new. He hasn’t really been talking about Vash.”

### 16 Hours Later

“I *don’t* believe you!” stormed Vashiel, literally pulling his younger brother from the drunk tank he had found him in. “Three *days* back on Earth, and I have to come find you in a police station?! What is *wrong with you?!*”

“Ugh. Bro, bro... please, let’s talk about this outside...” Rumisiel’s eyes shifted to the ceilings and the walls, and his brother seemed to get the message, for he turned and stormed back up the stairs, his alcohol-reeking brother behind him.

“At least it’ll air off the smell.”

Having already convinced the police that he was in fact Rumisiel’s brother—largely thanks to the fact that they both looked highly similar—Vashiel nigh-dragged his brother out of the station. They didn’t talk as the older Angel of Vengeance simply dragged Rumisiel to the outskirts of town. But not even he could be prepared for what was to happen next.

Rumisiel simply collapsed in front of him, grabbing his coat and crying, murmuring something that was nearly incoherent. Vashiel probably should have just kicked him away in disgust, but the genuine nature of the incoherently rambled confession made him kneel down and listen closer.

“Killed them... I killed them, bro... I did. Didn’t mean to, but they’re dead, and Ash is all... and Kate’s in prison, and Harry’s alone in England, and... and...”

“*Slow* down. Start over, Rumi.” A gentle slap accompanied the admonishment, and his brother’s eyes focused on his.

“It started four years ago, bro. When I got Banished.”

“Go on.”

Rumi took a deep breath. “Look, my bosses stormed in while I had two files pulled for review... Ash’s and Emily’s.”

Vashiel had only a cursory working knowledge of the Filing system, but he nodded.

“I’d had them pulled for like, eight hours, they were on the bottom of my stack, and I’d left them out when I lit up the joint. So when my bosses busted in, I panicked. I grabbed them and shoved them back in the cabinets, but I’d accidentally left two pages out of Emily’s file, all right? And I accidentally put Ash’s file in the girls cabinet.”

Vashiel blinked, contemplating the magnitude of what his brother was saying. “Ash...”

“Was born a boy, bro. Originally, anyway.” Vashiel blushed softly as he considered the secret, deep-felt crush he had long held for Ash. “But... see, when I got back, I fixed things. I found those two pages from Emily’s file and filed them where they were supposed to go, and I put Ash’s file back in the right cabinet, right?”

Vashiel nodded, slowly. “Go on.”

“Only, everything is crazy. Absolutely bonkers, we’re talking way beyond FUBAR here.”

“Specifics. What happened?”

“Well... well...” Rumisiel had to take a deep breath. “Ash is like, a boy again. Only, he’s not the Ash we knew at all. He’s crippled. The whole left side of her body is fucked up beyond all recognition, she... Damn, I still can’t think of Ash as a boy. *His* left arm is all fucked up, like, can’t even open a bottle without five minutes of work.” Rumisiel looked down. “He just sits on his bed more or less all day, drinkin’ more than I ever did and playing racing games.”

Vashiel took a deep breath. That revelation alone made him feel dizzy. Ash Upton, one of the brightest stars he had ever had the privilege and the pleasure of meeting and living with, a drunken cripple with no direction or life? That was almost unthinkable.

“And, well... then I went to look up Emily, but her mom just slammed the door in my face. It scared me, so I went to look up some other people we knew. I went to Harry’s shop, but it’s all boarded up.”

“But why there? You hardly knew Harry.”

“I know, but I figured Harry might know what had gone on. Ash didn’t want to tell me much, just that the Kamikaze had done it to him. But Harry was gone, in England, and Kate... well, I was able to track her down.”

“I don’t like where this is going, brother. Keep going.”

“She like... you know when Ash faced her the first time, and she went kinda psycho and hugged her, saying she wanted Ash to be her sister? Well, this time it didn’t happen that way. Ash was King of the Mountain, and she destroyed him, bro.”

“Destroyed him?”

“Yeah. I went and tracked her down in the state pen. She ran Ash into the cliff wall, didn’t leave any evidence behind. Then she went and confessed.”

“Confessed?”

“Yeah. On the day after that night I originally exorcised her sister. I think it means stuff *we* did remains, just not anything else. I checked her out in prison. Angie wasn’t there.”

“Okay... go on,” Vashiel said, softly.

His brother took a deep breath, “Well... I think I killed a hobo.”

A confused Vashiel tilted his head, and his brother elaborated.

“When I got here, I walked in from the highway, through the bad part of town. This hobo with a brick attacked me; boy was he drunk. But I talked him down, I gave him ten bucks, and then I saw he had a full bottle of Mad Dog. I didn’t think it’d be good for him, so I paid him fifty bucks to give me the bottle. I told him to go get a shower and a hot meal, but I guess he went and bought more booze with it. When I found him last night, somebody’d cracked his head in with a pipe and stolen his booze... You don’t have to say it. I fucked up. Again. That’s all I ever do, isn’t it bro?”

Vashiel paused. On the one hand, Rumisiel was right: he did fuck up. On the other, he was still his brother, and more he’d been *trying* to do the right thing. “Didn’t you see that on TV?”

“Yeah. I remembered this Law & Order episode that Doc Upton made me turn the TV to once, where the guy bought a brick off this crazy dude who was threatening to heave it at him with cash...”

Vashiel sighed, and reached up, putting his hand on his brother’s head. “You tried, Rumisiel. You may have screwed it up, but at least you’re trying. Keep going. You’re hiding something, and I know that means it’s bad.”

Rumisiel shook his head. “No, I...” He broke into tears again. “Graveyard... I...”

“Emily,” Vashiel said suddenly. “She’s dead, isn’t she? That’s what you’re hiding, isn’t it?” His brother broke down completely, whining that it was the case, holding his head against his brother’s jacket and crying on it. Vashiel could only sigh, and hold his brother’s head, canny mind whirling to accept the complete topsy-turning of the most recent and full years of their lives.

Elsewhere, 2:40 AM

“Okay, that last tirade of his was disturbingly coherent,” said Emily, as Rumisiel slumped back down, and Ash looked up at her.

“How can you tell? It seems to be random.”

“He seems to be going over old ground and muttering different parts of it.” Emily was sitting in another chair, with a notebook in her lap and a pen in her hand—she’d been writing down words that he uttered over and over, and there was a pattern. “I think he’s thinking he’s confessing to his brother about the Misfile.”

“I got that much. What did you get out of it?”

“Okay. I’ve been basically tracking what he’s muttering, and if you cross-reference the last three times he’s gone into a muttering state, it’s... well, disturbing. Like this: Kate. Ash. Crippled. Race. Ran off road.” Emily shook her head. “It’s weird; it sounds like he’s discussing a ‘what might have happened’. It sounds like he’s saying that you were crippled after the first race with Kate. And that she then confessed to it, and was thrown in prison.”

Ash gulped softly. “She’s never... I mean, she’s run people into things, but I don’t think she’s ever wrecked anybody...”

“But that race... it was different from the others. It was a turning point, Ash...” She leaned over, brushing Ash’s hair back from her ear. “When you were a girl, she hugged you, right? She said she wanted to find her sister in you, right?”

“Yeah... I guess maybe she was hoping I was like, the reincarnation of Angelica or something, right?”

“But you delivered an atrociously poor performance, because you were so scared stiff of her, that she just gave it up in the middle and told you that you had better do better next time... right?”

“Yeah. But she seemed so fixated on me being a... girl...”

Emily nodded, as it started to click into place in Ash’s head. “If you were a boy, she might have been so angry she didn’t give you a second chance. She might have just... you know, made one of those ‘turning points’. Turned into a killer.”

“But Rumisiel exorcised her sister Angelica when we faced the next time, and she turned into a nice person.”

“He mentioned that, too. He said he tracked Kate down in prison. He said something about the exorcism happening when it should have happened, and that’s when Kate turned herself in. Maybe without Angie’s hate, she got scared and guilty about crippling you?”

Ash blanched. “Yeah...” He pictured the Kamikaze in his head, Kate plus her sister’s ghost. “Yeah. I could see her killing. She was... on the edge.”

Emily nodded. “Yes, and then... he said he killed a hobo... and that I was... dead?” She went a little white about that. “Do you think he was talking about the car crash?”

“I don’t know, Em. He did say 1986–2004...”

“I was born in 1986. The first time, that is. I looked at my records post-Misfile, it’s the right date, just, in eighty-eight. I *would* have been eighteen.”

“Yeah, but... it’s just a fevered dream, right?”

Emily’s eyes were strangely vacant. “I never told him about the car crash, or about any of the details, or that I thought I might have been...” She cast her eyes down, and then closed them, as she felt an all-too-wonderfully-familiar arm wrap around her shoulders.

“Nnnnnngh!” Rumisiel’s groan brought her eyes up, even as blue hair leaned into orange. “Won’t... recognize... bro. Not Ash... we know...”

Emily’s head turned, her eyes looking into Ash’s. “That was disturbingly coherent. Is he talking to Vashiel about seeing you?”

“Sounds like. And he said I wouldn’t... recognize them?” Ash was somewhat pale about that. “I mean, I don’t like anything that’s happened, but... I don’t want to not remember it, or them, or...”

Ash looked down, and Emily murmured in reply, “You don’t want to forget me. I don’t want to be forgotten, Ash. I don’t want to be a corpse.”

Ash’s eyes looked up, quickly, meeting Emily’s. “Don’t talk like that! This is just some weird celestial fever talking! You can’t know that the Files would kill you like that. Besides, it doesn’t seem likely. The first time it happened, it adjusted everything possible to keep us as close to what we were as it could. It’ll do the same thing again.”

Emily met her gaze, and Ash trembled slightly, viewing a very unfamiliar and unpleasant emotion in her best friend’s eyes—fear. “You don’t believe that, do you, Ash? You’re afraid of the same thing I am, aren’t you?”

The orange-haired Misfile looked down, as Rumisiel groaned softly again.

### 20 Hours Later

“We’re here, bro... but you’re not going to like it.” The Brothers Angelic stood at the foot of the drive leading to the Upton Residence.

“I... have to see, Rumisiel.”

“Yeah, I figured you would. I’ve more or less resurrected our old alias—brothers from Canada. Just keep your trap shut, say you’re an old friend of Ash’s if pressed, and if asked for details, just use ‘up north’. It’s a euphemism for Heaven, so you should be able to do that much, right?” Vash looked uncomfortable. “No, of course not. Just let me do the talking. And thanks for letting me find a hotel and take a shower.”

“No problem, Rumi.”

The pair approached the door. Rumi rang.

A minute later, Doctor Edward Upton answered the door, to find not one but two strange young men on his doorstep. He glared at Rumisiel. “What are you doing back here?”

The hostile reception put Rumi on the defensive. “Uh, I wanted to see Ash again. My brother’s also an old friend of his, and we wanted, you know, to wish him well while we were still in town?”

Doctor Upton pierced Rumisiel with a gaze that could melt stone. “You gave my son an entire bottle of Mad Dog 20/20. Why?”

Rumisiel sighed softly. “He was hurting, Doctor. And... he wouldn’t talk to me otherwise.”

The steely gaze the Doctor gave him pierced Rumisiel’s eyes and made his guts feel like jelly again. “Very well, I suppose it didn’t hurt him too much, and it’s about the only thing that makes him feel better these days. Just don’t do it again.”

Rumi nodded vigorously. “Yes sir. I mean, I won’t, sir. I mean... ugh.”

Doctor Upton shook his head. “Just go on ahead. He’s still upstairs. And I mean it—nothing that I haven’t said he can have. That said, go ahead and take him a bottle of lager.”

Doctor Upton went back to his office as Rumi and Vash shared a shrug. Retrieving the bottle was old hat; they knew where Doctor Upton kept his liquor, after all. Then they went to Ash’s room. Rumisiel knocked on the door again.

“Dad?”

The voice from inside was so feeble, even Rumi hated to hear it. The look on his brother’s face was visibly shaken, and Rumisiel took a moment to gulp for air, licking his lips.

“No, Ash. It’s me again, Rumi. I brought you some more good stuff.” A snap of the fingers turned the contents of the bottle from regular lager into the Best Damn Lager Rumisiel could imagine: smooth as cream soda, strong as 151. It couldn’t hurt, he reasoned. Not now.

“Rumisiel?” The voice from the other side of the door came. “Okay. Come in.”

Rumi opened the door, and he stepped in, followed by his older brother. They closed the door behind them, and Rumi heard a gasp from behind him. He knew it was going to be hard on Vash.

“Ash?” Wash began, incredulous. The young man on the bed bore such a strong resemblance to the girl he had secretly (and not-so-secretly) pined after for so long, and yet... It was alien, but all the more alien for the intense resemblance to the Ash Upton he had known. Ash still had the same freckled face, the same orange-as-a-fruit hair, even the same general features, despite being a fair amount broader-shouldered and, obviously, less female. But the strangest difference was not the difference, not even the hideous damage that Ash’s body had sustained, the awful scarring, the excising of most of his left arm, the burning.

It was seeing his friend, the devil-may-care racer who (it had turned out) had not only had the strength to stand up to a demon-possessed racer with many more years’ experience and a car many times faster and more expensive than hers, the absolutely fearless, indomitable Ash Upton, reduced to a quivering, alcoholic wreck. It struck him speechless—which was, altogether, a good thing in Rumisiel’s mind, as he started the conversation.

“This is my brother, Ash. His name is Vashiel. You don’t remember him either, do you?”

The orange-haired, terrified wreck put down the controller and shook his head. “M sorry, I don’t... don’t recognize you.” He peered hard, very hard, even as Rumi sat in the chair and handed him the bottle. This time he opened it before he handed it over. Ash took it, and drank a deep swig. “Goo’ stuff...” he bleared. “I feel like I should know you... like, dee-jah voo...”

“Yeah... you should know us, Ash.” Rumisiel sighed, as he watched his brother sink to the floor, looking down at the floor.

“I’m sorry, Ash,” Vashiel began. “I... I failed. I-If I had known... I might have been able to fix things.”

Ash blinked at that. “What are you talkin’ about?”

Rumisiel cut off the response, “He’s not talking about anything, Ash. He’s just feeling a lot of misplaced guilt that’s rightfully mine. He’s my big brother. I fucked up, he feels responsible.”

It was more or less the truth, so Vashiel accepted it.

“Ash... I thought you ought to know. I went to Framingham the other day. Talked to Kate. She made me swear I’d tell you she’s sorry.”

Ash’s eyes were bitter, but not cold. “Sorry? Hah... sorry. Sorry and a wrecked car are worth the parts’ value.”

Rumisiel could only let out a soft, sad snort of macabre amusement. “That’s Ash, all right. She is, Ash. She turned herself in, I don’t know if you knew it. But she did. She waived her rights to a trial by jury, to an attorney. Went up in front of a lone judge and told it all. She could’ve been sentenced to life, but she got ten to twenty. She didn’t have to. She could’ve gotten off free.”

The orange-haired wreck on the bed tugged a blanket around himself, set the bottle down on the desk next to him, and closed his eyes. “That’s... not much help to me, is it? My arm’s shot, I’ll never drive again, not even a piece of shit automatic. I can’t even get behind the wheel without panicking.” He shivered. “I can barely type on the computer, I can’t hold my arm up for more than a few minutes at a time, and I can hardly stand on my left leg. I can’t feel anything but pain in my left side, and the doctor said I suffered irreversible nerve damage. I can’t even feel my own penis, and the doctors said I was very, very lucky to not be permanently hooked up to a colostomy bag.

“And she’s sorry?”

Ash snorted, and then curled his head down, dragging a pillow in front of him with his right hand, while all Vashiel and Rumisiel could do was watch.

“Well, I guess it’s what I’m going to get, isn’t it? You’re supposta forgive, right? I don’t know if I can... but I can’t even work up a good hate anymore.”

With a worried realization, Rumisiel noticed that tears were actually streaming down Ash’s face. “I feel so cold...” No sooner had he said it than Rumisiel and Vashiel were piling blankets around him. “Like nothing in the world matters. Like I don’t matter to anybody. And the only people who can think

enough of me are a crazy pair of Canucks that I don't know who think I know them and who feel maddeningly familiar yet unfamiliar, and the Kamikaze who did this to me..."

Ash appeared about to sink into another depressive fit, but he suddenly sighed softly and slumped forward, cuddling the pillow tightly, as Vashiel leaned over.

"Brother, look Beyond. Carefully," he whispered in Rumi's ear. Rumisiel gulped, and let his vision expand. Nothing could have prepared him for what he saw.

"About time you looked at me, Rumisiel."

On the bed was a translucent figure, nearing transparent, but the vivid blue hair formed into a widow's peak gave it away. And the wreck of a boy on the bed had vanished, replaced with the apparently unconscious form of another Ash Upton, the one they knew all-too-well, being held tightly by Emily's ghost.

"I know you can't speak to me without upsetting Ash. Meet me over my... tombstone... after he's fallen asleep. He usually passes out around two in the morning."

The dumbfounded angel simply stared, dumbstruck.

"Don't look so surprised, Rumisiel. Did you really think I could pass on like this?" Her ghostly hand stroked Ash's spiritual orange hair. "I have to protect her. It's all I can do. I think he's going to fall asleep, but with the two of you providing stimulus, it's not going to happen. I'd be very grateful if you could shut off the power on your way out. Snap a line or something. Without the game, all he'll have is your enhanced brew over there, and he'll pass out sooner."

Rumisiel nodded. With a flash of sight, the 'real' world returned. Ash did indeed look close to a passing out. "Well... we may be back, Ash. Enjoy the brew. I brought you the good stuff."

It was perhaps the hardest thing to maintain composure while walking out, down the stairs, and being confronted by Doctor Upton about how they had known where he kept his liquor. Fortunately, Vashiel's answer that, "Ash told us," was true, and the elder Upton accepted it. On the way out, Rumisiel flicked his fingers, causing a short in the breaker, as the pair marched quietly, stoically to the graveyard...

Elsewhere, 3:30 AM

"I... I think Rumisiel might be having some sort of ethical crisis, Ash. An angelic nervous breakdown, if you will."

Rumisiel stirred on the couch, again, and Ash looked up into Emily's eyes. "How do you figure?"

"Well, it seems to me that his unconscious mind is interacting with his conscious. His subconscious mind is 'running' the world for his consciousness, instead of seeing the real world. It's generating his ethical problems and ethical support in the form of people he knows and places that are real enough to be plausible."

"Makes sense. So when he's muttering about Vashiel..."

"His unconsciousness is using Vash as his moral compass, his responsibility, his role model."

"An Angel's shoulder Angel?"

"Yes, only bigger."

"And us?"

"It sounds like he's actually talking about two forms of 'us'. There's the 'consequences us', where I'm dead and you're a crippled wreck, and the 'real us', where I'm a ghost and you're a 'what should be'. Er, sorry. It's his dementia, not mine."

"Don't apologize, Em." Ash looked down. "This is all he's known us as. Maybe that's why when he imagines me as a boy, he has to imagine something so alien, because it's the only way he can?"

Emily shrugged, and leaned harder into Ash's side, her eyes closed. "Possibly."

"So, if Vashiel is his sense of responsibility, what's my father?"

Emily shrugged again, and offered a weak smile. “Sometimes, Ash, a gynecologist is just a gynecologist.”

Ash snickered softly, and curled her arm tighter around Emily, as the Angel on the couch groaned again. They stared at him, but Rumisiel failed this time to make any significant sounds, so they continued to wait.

Although their minds burned with worry for Rumisiel’s condition blowing the lid off the Misfile—as well as some measure of worry for Rumisiel himself—there wasn’t a lot either could do about the situation directly. Rumisiel had failed to awaken even when subjected to pinching and shouting-in-the-ears, so all they could do was hold one another while maintaining a bedside vigil over their ‘friend’.

Emily’s eyes closed. *“I love this feeling. Ash is holding me, and she’s probably not even aware she’s doing it... It’s such a soft, simple but comforting thing.”*

Ash was smiling as well, one arm around Emily’s shoulders, the other holding her notebook for her. *“This is so friggin’ girly, but I don’t care. She feels so nice...”*

“The last time we were this close for this long was...” Ash murmured softly, unaware she had spoken, but Emily’s murmur finished the thought:

“Cape Cod.” The two words conjured the heady atmosphere of the wonderful summer they had spent together. Surely it wasn’t without its annoyances, or its troubles and tribulations but Ash strove hard to remember a time in his previous life that had equaled those months, or even came close.

“I’m sorry.” They both said it at once. Then Emily half-turned to look into Ash’s eyes. The pair smiled softly at the amusing nature of both of them having said the same thing at the same time, and Emily wrapped her arms around Ash’s shoulders, pressing against her, laying her head over Ash’s shoulder.

“You have nothing to be sorry for, Ash. Y-You haven’t done anything wrong.”

“Neither have you, Em.”

Ash squeezed Emily’s back tightly, causing the blue-hair to arch into her, but Emily disagreed.

“Yes, I have...”

Emily was cut off by Rumisiel’s groaning...





# Rumisiel's Lament, Chapter 3

A Misfile fanfiction by ShadowDragon8685

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24 Hours Later

“Graveyards are spooky places, bro.”

“No kidding.”

Walking through a graveyard while looking Beyond the Physical was indeed a very spooky thing to do. There wasn't much to see—no plethora of the dead walking about—but the entire area's aura was eerie, creepy, and warped. The pair picked their way to the back of the expansive green lot, into the section where those who didn't have the money for a good headstone were buried, and found what they were looking for: a blue-haired ghost, her long hair blowing in the wind. She appeared lost in thought, staring up at the moon, but as the brothers Angelic approached, she spoke without turning around.

“Four years, Rumisiel. Four years...”

Rumisiel was mute, looking down at the ground, so she continued.

“You're probably wondering what I'm still doing here, Rumi. When you 'fixed' the Misfile, it created a massive sense of... discontinuity, if you will. It was like being sheared from life, watching time unwind itself, and I was dropped here.” She looked down, and then crouched over the tombstone.

“Emily McArthur. Beloved Daughter, Brilliant Mind. 1986–2004.” She stood up, turning to confront the pair. “Four *damn* years I've been waiting for you to show yourself. But I can't even yell at you. That's the worst part, Rumi.”

The ghost sighed and sank down to the ground. “You did what we thought we wanted you to do. You worked hard, straightened your act up, and you fixed the Misfile. And now here I am.” She sobbed, softly. “A ghost who remembers living longer than she did. I can't 'move on', even if I wanted to. I'm still a Misfile, only now it's my soul that's lost in the system. Ash is here, too,” she sighed. “I don't... honestly know how, but it's *our* Ash, the Ash we know. When I woke up... here... she was with me, but unconscious, if a spirit can be said to be conscious. I looked and looked, but I couldn't find her grave. That's when it hit me—Ash wasn't dead. But only just.

“The soul of that miserable boy we saw withered away a long time ago. Can you imagine Ash without racing, without cars? Without being able to lift an arm? I kept him going by putting her inside him. That's why you saw our Ash when you looked Beyond. I don't know if it's helping or not, I just have the feeling that if I let that Ash die, my Ash would, too, and then I'd follow suit.”

Vashiel was the first to speak, after licking his lips. “Emily... maybe staying here isn't the... right thing for you? Maybe you should go on...”

She scowled at him. “I've tried, Vash. I've really tried. I gave up about two years ago, and I just wanted to leave. But I *can't* leave. I'm stuck here. The only thing really binding me to anything at all were the times after the Misfile. But this universe doesn't recognize those times, and so I'm here... stuck in limbo.”

Rumisiel sighed, heavily. “Man. I fucked up again...”

“Yes, you did. But you couldn't have known. You did what we were so hell-bent-for-leather on doing—reversing the Misfile. I just... want this to *end*. I want to go back to those times we had together. I want... I want to forget this.”

Rumisiel nodded, and fell to his knees, sobbing. “I will, Em. I'll fix this. I don't know how, but...” He sniffled, and looked to his side. His brother had taken his sword out. It hit him: he was vowing to bypass the system and deliberately Misfile them. Wasn't that a punishable offense?

But then Vashiel sunk to his own knees as well, point of the sword in the ground. “And I swear, on my honor as an instrument of Heavenly Vengeance, I will not rest until my brother has repaired this gross injustice of fate, Emily.”

The ghost blinked softly, and actually cracked a weak smile. “I want my Ash back, Rumi. I want my life back. But I think you’re going to need to use our leftovers to fix the mess.”

“How?”

“I don’t know. I’m not the filing system expert, you are.”

Rumisiel nodded, and straightened up, followed by his brother. “I don’t know how we’re going to do it, Emily. But we *will* get it done.”

“Good. Oh?” She perked up, looking back. “Ash is waking up. I need to hold her together. Good luck. Please have good luck.” She made a motion as if to start running towards Tempest, then streaked away in a blinding blur, out of sight in a split second.

Elsewhere, 3:51 AM

“Nnngh... wow... she’s fast.”

Ash and Emily registered the groan from the couch, though both of them were drowsy from their long vigil. They were sitting across two chairs pulled up to the side of the couch, leaning on it so that one of them could change Rumisiel’s compress every half hour, with Emily leaning back into Ash. The orange-haired tuner’s arms were around her best friend’s stomach, and one of Emily’s hands was atop them. It was a decidedly eerie thing, pondering the events Rumisiel’s nightmare was bringing up.

“Do you think it could happen that way, Ash? The way he’s saying it?” Ash didn’t answer, so Emily pried the fingers of one of her hands away from the other, squeezing Ash’s hand tightly. “Ash?”

“I don’t... want to think about it, Em.” Ash squeezed back, her eyes closed. “I don’t want to think about you in the graveyard... I...”

“I don’t want to think about you as a crippled drunk. We have too much to do.”

“I still have to teach you how to race.”

“And I need to get that turbo put in my car.”

They each squeezed the other’s hands, and Emily closed her eyes, laying her head back on Ash’s shoulder.

“Ash,” she murmured softly, and Ash’s head turned to listen. “Thank you... for everything you’ve ever done for me. And I’m sorry for all the mean things I’ve done to you.”

“Em, you haven’t done anything mean to me.”

“Yes, I have. Shh...” Her hands clenched tightly, squeezing Ash’s, and Ash closed her eyes, savoring the contact.

“Ash? Do you really... want to go back? Don’t answer, just think about it. I was stewing in a pressure-cooker of a house, and getting away to Harvard probably wouldn’t have made much difference. You didn’t really have any friends, or anybody you really could be close to. Now you’ve got your mother, and your dad’s a lot closer to you.”

“And I have you,” Ash finished the thought, squeezing Emily tightly.

“Rumi said that once fixed, we wouldn’t remember any of this. Will we still know each other, Ash? Would we still be friends? We wouldn’t have met if not for the Misfile. And I’d probably be dead.”

“You can’t...”

“Know that. We’ve been over this. It just gives me a really... creepy feeling when I think about it.”

“Em...” Ash began, but Rumisiel’s groans interrupted her again.

### 36 Hours Later

“Okay, so... you know we’re gonna get banished for this, right?” Rumisiel commented, as he and his brother walked along the Old Road, discussing their options.

“We may,” Vashiel began. “But we took our oaths. We have to live with them.”

“Yeah. Think Ash’ll let me live on her couch again?”

“Maybe. Hope I get the basement again; it’s warm down there.”

“Heh... heheh... you liked it too, didn’t you? Living with Ash an’ rockin’ Doctor Upton?”

Vashiel took a long, deep breath. “Yes. I did...”

“Right. Now, see, here’s the rub. The files are unpredictable, within certain guidelines. I’m just trying to figure out how we can one: restore Ash and Emily and the world to the way we know it; and two: prevent my bosses from fucking it up again when and if they find out.”

“Is there any way to override the files?”

“It’s possible, but short of Himself, I don’t know what is capable of doing it. Maybe... maybe if we destroyed the files themselves—but that would just leave them the way they are now, which is *not* what we’re looking for...” Rumisiel sighed. “This would be *so* much easier with time travel. We could just go back to when I got un-banished and kick my ass and prevent me from changing the files.”

It at least elicited a chuckle from his brother. “As amusing as that would be, it’s not possible. Let’s go over this again. You put Emily’s missing two years into her file, at the end, right? And you just picked Ash’s file up from the girl cabinet and put it back in the boys, right?”

“Yeah. I guess it recalculated everything...”

“So, in theory, if we re-Misfile Ash’s folder to the female cabinet, and remove Emily’s two years...”

“It might work that way, it might not. See, the ‘history’ pages are always being written to.”

“So, remove the last four years of Ash’s life?”

“Might work. It might leave her even more fucked-up...” Rumisiel sighed. “What we need is, well, a back-up copy.”

“Back-up?”

“Yeah. You saw Ash using her computer, right? Well, you save a second copy of something, and don’t use it. Keep writing to the first file. If something fucks up the first file, you can go back to the file that you saved separately and load it again.”

“Can we find such a thing?”

“We can... but you ain’t going to like it. That’s Fourth’s job. They archive all the back-up copies.”

“Cassiel. It figures.”

“It gets worse. I don’t know if they archive Misfiled files.”

“Mmm. That would be a pickle. Wait.” Vashiel blinked. “The files are just code for a soul and its interactions on Earth, right? We have two ‘intact’ souls of them. Their ghosts.”

“Might work... actually, that might work well. Turn them from ghosts into files and remove the last four pages. But how do we turn a spirit into a file?”

“Um... I don’t know. And judging from the look on your face, neither do you.”

“I dunno. Maybe if we just take them back with us, they’ll turn into files?”

“It might work that way, but if it doesn’t, they’ll be very, very visible, and we’ll have to explain why we have a couple of ghosts of people who don’t exist.”

“Yeah... Why’d you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Take an oath like that to Emily.”

“It’s... it’s hard to explain, brother. I feel like we owe them. And more than that, like...” Vashiel sighed. “Like I feel towards you. Responsible for you, even if you are constantly making mistakes.”

“Whatever the reason, thanks.”

Vashiel nodded, and offered his hand. “We’re in ‘till the end, then, brother.”

Rumisiel took the hand, and squeezed it, shaking. “Right. So...” he sighed heavily. “We need to figure out what we’re going to do.”

“I have an idea. What if we get the archive file from four years ago? The day you Misfiled Ash and Emily, and re-create their original misfile?”

“It might work, but I’ve got my doubts. It’ll pull them four years into the future. What we need is a way to make ‘fake’ years, so that the system still puts them at the correct years and all, but...” Rumisiel sighed. “Urgh. This would be so much easier with time travel.”

“Maybe. But since that’s not possible, we’re going to have to make do with what we can do. And short of His intervention...”

“Maybe we just... need to try something. Take a chance.”

“Or we could do some research. The Library?”

“What? But they don’t have any books on celestial filing depots.”

“Not the *Tempest* library, brother. The Final Library.”

Rumisiel’s eyes opened wide, and he nodded. “Why didn’t I think to hit the books until now?”

“Probably because neither of us ever have. It’s more Emily’s sort of thing than ours.”

That elicited a chuckle from Rumisiel, and he grinned. “It might work at that, bro. It might work...”

Elsewhere, 4:26 AM

Emily wasn’t entirely sure how they had moved from the chairs next to the couch to Ash’s bed. She was too tired, too *warm*, and too *content* to care. Ash’s smooth, bare legs ran across hers, and she smiled; the both of them were just wearing pairs of Ash’s shorts and one (each) of her T-shirts, close up under the blankets. Flat on her back, she cradled Ash atop her, lying across her body, with Ash’s head on her shoulder, her cheek to Emily’s. With a hand in Ash’s orange hair, and one of Ash’s arms under her, they each held the other’s hand. It was...

It was a *perfect* moment, one of contentment, of happiness. Warmth suffused her body without being unbearable or rampantly lustful, a wonderful, close feeling of intimacy.

She tilted her head and Ash’s head turned to match. Their lips met openly—not slowly, not chastely, but not with wild, ravenous hunger—with soft, unhurried need. *This* was what Ash needed, not that little tramp who couldn’t understand her. Emily shifted and Ash shifted in response, moving their legs and feet together, against one another. Emily’s eyes closed. This was bliss, holding her tuner-girl who used to be a boy, squeezing Ash’s hand tight. Ash squeezed back tighter. And tighter.

“Emily?” The word was soft, spoken in her ear from behind.

Emily’s eyes opened, her face burningly hot. She was staring at the ceiling (living room, not bedroom). Rumisiel’s fevered murmurs came to her from the right, Ash’s voice from behind and to the left. Ash was holding her left hand, squeezing it, as she whispered in Emily’s ear.

“*Oh gods... another dream? I fell asleep?*” She *knew* she was blushing, and hard. In the darkness, maybe Ash wouldn’t notice—never minding the fact that Ash could probably feel the heat coming off her cheeks.

“Emily? You fell asleep. You okay?”

Emily groaned softly. “Yes... I had a dream...”

“What kind?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she replied, then gasped softly as Ash turned her head.

“Good. I don’t feel like talking.” Ash squeezed her and rolled, toppling them to the floor. She was over Emily in a flash, but Emily didn’t fight; she was tearing back at Ash’s clothes, arching up into her. Emily’s eyes fell upon the VCR clock, its green numbers flowing, incomprehensible symbols. Ash slid her hand into Emily’s panties, and...

Emily awoke with another gasp, looking around.

Ash's hand was tightly upon Emily's, and Ash was whispering Emily's name, while pinching her other palm. "Em? You okay?"

Emily looked around for the clock. It read 4:26. She looked away, and looked back. It read 4:26 again. "Y-Yeah," she murmured, remembering what she had read about false awakenings. She fumbled in her pocket, pulling out a key chain with a flashlight, and shined it into her eyes. Ash let out a noise of protest, unprepared for the quick flash of light. "*Okay. I'm awake, now.*" She was still breathing hard, and she shifted her weight, sitting more upright, looking back at Ash. "Did I... fall asleep?"

"Yeah, you did. You, um, okay?"

Emily nodded, quickly—*too* quickly. Her heart was racing. "Yeah," she said, out of breath. "I, um... I think I need to get some water. She stood up, making for the kitchen in a hurry, then paused in the doorway. "I'm, uh, hungry, too. You want me to microwave you something, too?"

Ash nodded, quietly, peering quizzically at Emily. "Um... sure. You know where the Hot Pockets are, right?"

Emily retreated into the kitchen. She dug through the freezer, taking out the box of microwave sandwiches and tearing it open. She was simply on autopilot as she put them on a plate, inside the sleeve, and set the microwave, then walked over to the sink, splashing water on her face. The whole time, her head was on repeat, saying, "*I did not just have a sex dream of my best friend!*" over and over. Finally, the microwave's alarm brought her out of her reverie.

"*I can't be having sex dreams of Ash. I just... I can't.*" The word 'denial' was itself strictly denied, but she shivered. "*Yeah. The first dream... I mean, that was just cuddling, right? Just... just cuddling.*" She shook her head. "I'm a mess..." Emily retrieved the plate, discarding the cooking sleeves and walking back to the living room. She settled back onto the chair, her legs curled up and sitting between Ash's feet, holding the plate on her lap.

"What kind are they?"

"I... I didn't look," she truthfully answered, as Ash picked hers up and took a bite.

"Mmmm. Four-cheese and chicken quesadilla." She grinned at Emily, who let out a soft sigh of relief that Ash wasn't talking about the dream, and bit into hers.

"You were mumbling pretty hard, there. You okay?"

Emily's face burnt again. "Um, yeah. It was just a... a nightmare." She smiled, entirely unconvincingly. "*Oh crap. She knows, she knows.*"

Ash took another bite, her face blissfully serene, as Rumisiel snored. "A nightmare like that one I had at Cape Cod?"

"Gah! No!" Emily blushed violently. As soon as the words left her mouth, she knew the jig was up.

"You did?" Ash blushed herself, and she blinked. "Huh... so..."

Emily shook her head, vigorously. "I *don't* want to talk about it, Ash."

"Okay."

It was the last answer Emily expected. Prying, probing, teasing, 'giving her a hard time', sure. Maybe some fumbled attempt to try and make Emily feel better about it. But 'okay'? It was so simple, so... dismissive. "*Oh great. As if I don't have enough to worry about, now I'm worried that she doesn't care enough to pry into the sex life of my dreams.*"

And she did worry. A cold, gnawing worry, for which images of the little sparkplug tramp-tagged tuner-girl with the absolutely no breasts whatsoever flashed unbidden into Emily's mind. Why did that make her so *angry*? So *jealous*?

Fortunately, Rumisiel's convenient, fevered groaning allowed her and Ash to focus on something else entirely.

## 48 Hours Later

“Now see, bro, *this* is why I didn’t hit the books or become a librarian. I suck at it.”

In truth, Vashiel did, too. Their family was never very strong on academic pursuits.

“We don’t have a lot of choice, brother.”

The pair were sitting at a large table in the Final Library: a vast, seemingly endless Library that contained the sum of all works, both Mortal and Celestial. If they could sift through it all to find the relevant books, and sift through those, they might find the information they’d need to restore Emily and Ash, and Harry and Kate, and anyone else whose lives had been messed up by the re-filing of the pair of Misfiles.

“Man, there’s all this stuff on souls, so much of it is pure B.S. And I can’t believe someone actually writes a *webcomic*, of all things, about Misfiles. They’re serious stuff.”

“As I understand it, it’s like the way the Men in Black operate. By letting small doses of fact out, but in a format that seems to be complete fiction, you help to discredit the idea.”

“The Men in Black are real? Dude, we *have* to go to New York now!”

“No, they’re not real. It’s the fictitious explanation of how they can operate. It’s really confusing. A fiction about a fact which pretends to be fiction.”

“Now I’m all confused.”

“Good. Stop worrying about the Men in Black and start reading up on Misfiled Souls.”

They had been at the effort tirelessly since they returned to Heaven, but even Vashiel had to be impressed by his brother’s effort. Perhaps seeing the effects of his screw-up firsthand—having them affect people he cared about—had changed him.

“I’d kill for a joint about now,” Rumisiel complained, as he set one book aside and reached for the next. “Or at least a nice, good lager.”

Maybe not that much. But then, he was still buckling down and getting it done. That was *something*.

“I’ve got it!” Rumisiel explained triumphantly. “On the disposition of Misfiled Souls. This is exactly what we need.” He flipped to the chapter. “Let’s see... let’s see... Okay, it says that in the event of an emergency discontinuity too strong for the system to resolve on its own, *or* in the event of a situation where the filing system produces a completely unacceptable outcome doing its own resolution, such that it leaves a soul or souls out of place and unable to move on, reality may be revised by... uniting the soul with its own file, which... will allow the soul’s own internal mechanism of what should and should not be to take over, rewriting the entire contents of the Misfiled folder.”

Rumisiel looked up. “Shit.”

“What’s wrong? That’s what we need, isn’t it?”

The younger angel sighed, laying his head on top of the book. “It says here that the number of times it’s been done is precisely zero. And it means we’ll have to *sneak* them into the Fifth Depot Repository.”

“Oh... *oh*... Drat.”

“Yeah. Drat is right. And if someone asks us what we’re doing and you blab...”

“We’ll just have to not be asked, then.”

“You’re seriously going to do it?”

Rumisiel peered into Vashiel’s eyes, and his brother nodded. “I absolutely am going to do it. I swore and oath to a very lonely, very hurt young girl who deserves to live the life we saw her live.”

Rumisiel held out his hand. Vashiel clasped it, and they squeezed. “Then, let’s go collect them.”

They exited the library, taking a long, slow walk towards their favorite send-off point: a promontory mountain of cloud beside the depot, a place they had long enjoyed watching from. Both of them stared back, the unspoken agreement being to enjoy what may well be their last peaceable visit to their home. They then fluttered their wings out, and the pair dove from the cloudy mountainside, screaming towards Earth below. They had no trouble finding the (currently shrouded in nighttime) North American continent, or finding the United States of America within it. It was a simple arc towards the

distinctive shape of the state of Massachusetts on the coast, and from that height they could angle in, refining their flight to the county level, then to the city of Tempest, then to the poorer section, then to the graveyard, and from that height they could see Emily's ghost standing over her tombstone, staring up at the sky.

They landed at the kind of speed only an angel or a space capsule could land at—although, unlike a spaceship, they did not hurtle through the atmosphere in a blazing fire, like a trebuchet-launched gasoline soaked cat.

Rumisiel stood up first, then Vashiel. “We have it, Emily.”

“What must be done?”

“Yeah, see, that's the rub.”

“We have to sneak you and Ash into the filing depository, then unite the two of you with your Files. That will make the world return to the way you hold it to be truest.”

“Wait... won't that make Ash a man?”

“It might. We don't know. But...”

“It's our only shot, Emily,” Rumisiel finished.

The blue-haired specter nodded. “Wait here. I'll collect her.” She did her light-speed-zoom trick again, and returned with Ash's spectral form hanging limply in her arms. It took all of a minute, perhaps.

“I'm ready.” The ghost of Emily trembled. “I feel... excitement?” She smiled. “At least... it'll be over, one way or another.”

“We're gonna put you back right, Emily. Let's go,” said Rumisiel.

The brothers stood on either side of her, and placed their hands on her shoulder. Then they snapped their fingers.

“Wow... this?”

“Yeah. Not what you were expecting is it?”

Emily's ghost shook her head. She was solid again, she could see that much. And her and Ash's outfits had returned to them. They still looked out of place, with Ash still unconscious, and the fact that their clothes were very different from the clothes the angels were wearing. Still, it was better than being naked and, fortunately, none of the angels walking or flying around paid them much attention.

It was eerie. Frankly, Rumisiel half-expected to be ambushed by his father, his bosses, Cassiel, anyone else who'd ever taken umbrage with his lackadaisical attitude, and the Lord Almighty from the moment they returned. But they weren't. They actually made good time. Until he walked around a corner, into the very *last* Angel he wanted to see. Or hear. Or collide with at a brisk walk.

“Watch where you're going, you big... Rumisiel!” The annoyance in Cassiel's voice as she stood up from the pavement turned to true venom as she spied who had collided with her. “Humph! Shouldn't you be heading to the Depot? You're already late. Ho? What's this?” She looked over at Ash and Emily, who gulped. “Brought your dyke girlfriend and her girlfriend back for a visit? Naughty, you know that's against the Rules. Wait...”

The look of outrage on Emily's face could probably only be matched by the look of horror on Rumisiel and Vashiel's. “Why is she unconscious? What are you doing?”

“*Ah, fuck me,*” Rumisiel thought as Vashiel opened his mouth, instinctively.

“She is unconscious because her soul is lost. We are taking her to the Depot to perform an emergency re-filing as outlined in the procedures manual for dealing with Misfiles.”

“Damn it, bro!” The looks on Cassiel's face swept through a number of shades of ‘mystified’ and ‘confused’ to ‘terrifying glee’. Rumisiel knocked her down, shouting, “Run for it!”

Though the trio (and unconscious cargo) pelted out of the intersection, Cassiel's laugh haunted them from behind. After all, Cassiel was an expert at translocating herself. The fast strides that could only be born by the true urgency of panic ate up the pavement. Still, it was at least a block, and the blocks were long in the Eternal City. When they arrived, Cassiel was standing outside with Rumisiel's bosses



Terrael and Fillaniel, a pair of thoroughly bureaucratic types. One looked middle-aged and paunchy, the other was thin as a reed and nerdy, even wearing a pair of nerd-glasses. All three were bearing crossed arms, and Cassiel's look of pure, malicious glee would probably have made even the officious bureaucrats question her motives in informing them, had they seen it.

“**Rumisiel!**” Terrael began, “What the **HELL** are you doing?!”

“Standing up for myself and doing what a good Angel should do, boss.”

The suggestion that he was doing what he should be doing almost made a vein pop from the paunchy bureaucrat's forehead. “Cassiel tells me you Misfiled a couple of souls, and now you have the gall to invoke the emergency reintegration clause?!”

“That is exactly what we are doing. We are fulfilling an oath we took to repair a pair of lives our intervention inadvertently shattered.”

The nerd-glasses wearing boss looked Vashiel up and down. “You are Vashiel, son of Gabrielle, are you not?”

“I am Vashiel, of the second order of holy swords, divine punishment division. We have stated our intent quite clearly. Will you not permit us to complete our work?”

“What? **No!** The emergency reintegration clause has *never been invoked!* It is unnecessary, completely so! The filing system is perfection incarnate!”

The last person Rumisiel expected to reply to that replied. “No. It isn't. It completely tore our lives apart when Rumisiel Misfiled us. But that was nothing compared to the damage it did when your ‘perfect’ system was corrected by putting us back where we were.” All five Angels stared at Emily. “The Misfile brought us nothing but an unending stream of complications. But the times after Rumisiel upset our lives were also the happiest, fullest times we ever lived through. Then he returned, and placed our files back where they belonged. I wound up *dead, trapped* over a grave that did not belong to me. My friend here wound up a crippled lonely drunk with no life left and no friends. One of our other friends is also alone, and another is imprisoned. Your system's idea of ‘perfection’ has ruined at least four lives.”

“*Wow... Emily pulled that off like a total badass. Does she have no fear?*”

Impressive as her speech was, Terrael and Fillaniel had no initial comment. Cassiel, on the other hand, snorted dismissively. “I don't know what your big problem is. You never had it so good.”

Emily bared her teeth in a snarl at Cassiel, while Rumisiel addressed his boss again. “She's had a chance to see it both ways, boss. Given the choice, she'd prefer to be Misfiled. And Ash is completely miserable with the life she has a boy. It's not even worth living.”

“As a *boy?*!” Cassiel goggled, but Terrael shook his head.

“It's too dangerous, Rumisiel. And this whole mess is of your doing anyway.”

Rumisiel's anger flared, his wings flashing out from his back. “Yes! Yes, it is! But that doesn't mean Ash and Emily and Kate and Harry and God knows who else should be forced to suffer because *you* are too proud to let us correct a mistake! Banish me if you want, but they shouldn't have to suffer for it!”

The paunchy bureaucrat shook his head. “I can't do that. I won't be seen as the manager who let a couple of mortals Misfile themselves, or let a laze like you march on in here and screw everything up with your disgusting habits.”

“Then do it for them.” Vashiel stared into Terrael's eyes. “Do it for Ash and Emily, and Kate and Harry, and God-knows who else, that's had their life torn apart by this. Putting these two back, as they should be, will correct their lives.”

“They *are* as they should be, Vashiel.” Cassiel stuck her tongue out. “The little lesbian turned out to be a crippled boy, and the snotty bitch got dead. Sounds like you don't like that, and want it changed.”

“You're right, Cassiel. We *don't* like it. And I fully intend to change that. Step. Aside.” Rumisiel clenched his fist. “I took an oath to return her world to the way it should be. To the way they were happy. I *will* see it through!”

Then Vashiel's wings unfurled, too. "As did I. I must demand that you step aside. I do not wish to employ force to gain entry to this filing depot." He waited a beat, and let his sword coalesce out of thin air. "But I will if I am left with no choice. My oath as an instrument of Heaven's Vengeance *demands* no less of me."

"Good God, he's *whacked! Run!*" Terrael shouted. The two bureaucrats took wing and bolted for the sky; Cassiel simply translocated away.

As the barring Angels sped away, Rumisiel, Vashiel, and Emily made a beeline into the depository. The clerk on the desk was quite, *quite* startled to see the lot of them burst in, especially at the sight of Vashiel's sword. "Which way, brother?"

"This way." Rumisiel ran to the door, and tried it. "Why won't it open?"

The desk clerk squeaked, "Terrael says you're not allowed in, Rumisiel!"

"Yeah, well... let's just add *breaking* and entering to the list of reasons we're getting banished. On three, bro. *Three!*"

The door was strong. Pretty much everything in Heaven was. Even so, it wasn't actually designed to hold in the face of an ordinary Angel who was, for some strange reason, hell-bent on forcing his way in. Rumisiel's half of the door snapped open under the impact of his boot. Vashiel's simply flew off the hinge. The desk clerk squealed and dove under the desk.

"Have both of my sons **lost their minds?!**"

"*Gulp! Uh-oh. Dad.*" Rumisiel turned around, as did Vashiel and Emily—bonking Ash's head on the door frame in the process, which made the unconscious soul stir.

"Dad!" Rumisiel gulped. "This isn't... okay, it's probably exactly what it looks like, but I *assure* you, we have a *good* reason!"

Their father, the Archangel Gabriel, was in full form in the lobby, having crashed through the glass dome (and showered the—by now—witless clerk with glass), holding his sword. "I should *very much* like to hear it! Imagine my surprise when Cassiel translocated to me, telling me that my sons were brandishing swords and kicking open the doors to the Depot."

"Cassiel... Dad, she's Bad News, you know that!"

"Aye, but it's even worse when I come and find she is telling the truth! What is going on? Explain yourselves! What are these mortal souls doing here?"

Vashiel cut Rumisiel off. "This is Emily. The one she's holding is Ash. Rumisiel made a colossal mistake and Misfiled them four years ago, and we spent most of the time we were away living with them trying to correct that mistake. When Rumisiel returned, he corrected the original Misfile, but it tore their lives apart. Emily wound up dead, a stranded soul unable to find anywhere to go, and Ash became a crippled boy. We returned and found their world shattered. And then we swore to restore them."

"Restore them? It sounds as if they were restored. Are you saying they would choose a Misfiled life instead?"

"Yes. I would, in a heartbeat. And I *know* that Ash would, except I haven't been able to talk to her. This is the only incarnation of her I could find, and she's trapped between lives. But this is how she sees *herself*. She would want this."

"I... listen, sons, there is no need for this violence! We can hold an inquiry, go through the proper channels..."

"I cannot permit that, Father. That would bring too great a risk of a rejection, and even now Cassiel is without a doubt spinning her web of half-truths and arraying support against us. This *must* happen and now. I beg you, do not stop us. This will take mere minutes."

"I cannot simply step aside, Vashiel. You know that." Father's gaze met son's.

"I know, Father, I know. Rumisiel, Emily—*Run!*" Vashiel made the first move, his sword igniting in a blaze, leaping towards his own father with a look of tragic determination on his face.

The swords collided behind the pair of runners like a bomb going off, while Rumisiel and Emily dashed into the depot. They burst into Rumisiel's room, and he started yanking open drawers, starting with the 'Boys' cabinet. "Let's see... Abbernathy, Balen, Claude..." The clashes from behind them came more and more frequently, as did the voices, the argument, the begging for both sides to stand down. "Ugene, Upton! Upton, Edward—one too far—Upton, Ash!"

He yanked the file out as Ash groaned, the proximity to the file waking her.

"Em... Rumi? Where?"

"No time, Ash." Emily silenced her with a touch of lips, as Rumisiel pushed the file into Ash's hands. Ash let out a gasp, then her body became translucent, then transparent, before the file fell to the floor, alone, but glowing a bright orange. Emily yanked open the girl's cabinet. "Do they have to be in order?"

"No, just shove her back in there and it'll file her in order." Emily dropped Ash's file in, as Rumisiel filtered through the McArthurs. "Emily McArthur. There's like, a dozen. Which one?"

"No time," Emily muttered, simply shoving her hand into the cabinet, on top of the many files. A particular one began to glow as she lurched forward, reality itself streaming before her eyes. She lasted just long enough to see Vashiel's form, bloody and somewhat battered, but by no means dead, flung through the door backwards, landing on the table.

Rumisiel looked at the door...

Upton Residence, 6:02 AM, September 2004

Rumisiel awoke with a heavy gasp, looking around. "*Where am I? What... when am I?*" No immediate answers were forthcoming. The compress fell into his lap, and he looked down, then at the DVD player. "*Ash's house,*" he thought, and he slowly stood up. "*It was... a dream?*" He blinked, looking around, terrified heartbeat calming down, and he spied Ash and Emily asleep in the chairs next to the couch. He smiled.

"*It was a dream. All just a nightmare.*" With a smile, he held his hand out, levitating the pair, very careful not to disturb them, and took them to Ash's room. He carefully put the sleeping girls to bed, using his levitation to strip them (without looking or even peering out) to their underwear, and then pulled the covers up.

Grinning like a loon he ran outside, looking around at the dawn light filtering through the gray sky. With a laugh, he sprouted wings and took flight, soaring above the landscape to the outskirts of town. He landed in the graveyard in the poorer section, but was quite pleased to see that the plot he had dreamt he had vomited next to was quite, quite empty.

His next leap of wing took him to the garage on the outskirts of the other side of town, specifically to the house nearest it. He checked the mailbox. It said Walsh, so he knew he was in the right place. The very distinctive black Jaguar parked in the driveway filled his heart with glee. Flitting around to the back and flapping up into the air next to the house, he peered in. Tucked under the covers was the bearded Welshman, curled up next to the long, blond-haired racer, her arm up over the covers, that giant ring glittering in the pale dawn's light.

Rumi fell back to the ground. Everything... was *okay*. Ash was sober, healthy, vital, and female (well, three out of four ain't bad). Emily was alive. Kate was un-imprisoned, and Harry was quite happily hitched (or engaged to be hitched).

With a shout of "Ya-hoooooo!" Rumisiel invisibly winged to the sky, more active than he'd felt in months, soaring above the town.

Upton Residence, 6:06 AM, September 2004

Emily had awakened with Rumisiel's gasp, but had kept her head quiet. When she felt the levitation, she had remained perfectly still, though inwardly she had smiled. It had taken some nerve to *not* raise an objection when Rumisiel had stripped her clothes (very, very carefully). When he was gone, she smiled openly and opened her eyes.

Ash was quite asleep. She grinned softly to herself—it was the perfect crime. When Ash woke up, she could say Rumisiel put them this way. Until then, she slid her leg over Ash's legs, linked the fingers of her hand with Ash's, and laid her head on her orange-haired friend's shoulder.

It was petty. She kept on even saying it wasn't true, telling herself she didn't care. But until the rest of the world caught up, she could indulge her silly, tormented emotions. "*My Ash,*" she thought, all thoughts of Missi banished from her head, as she closed her eyes, sighed softly, and drifted back towards sleep.

Thanks to:

Chris Hazleton (aka Peacefire), for being a good sport about letting me play in his playground.

The City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, for their rendition of the song "Roll Tide", the theme song to the movie *Crimson Tide*, the primary theme of this story.

Griffon8, for editing help.

You, for reading this story.