

A Redemption of Wings by Emily Michel

Deleted Chapter

Originally, Kheone and Shax spent much more time in Purgatory. I had to give them something to do. They really struggled with translating the spell, but that ended up being boring. I move things around, had Hinndal show up right away, and a lot less sex in the early chapters. But this is still a fun look at how they work together, and an interesting backstory as to how Shax became a cat shapeshifter.

Her writing kept disappearing as soon as she stopped thinking about the page.

“Dammit!” Kheone tossed the pad of paper across the room.

Shax raised an eyebrow, his lips twitching in amusement. “Something on your mind, Blue?”

She fought the urge to stick her tongue out. “Didn’t you already translate this?”

“Some of it. History and ingredients. Never got to the spell itself.”

“Well?”

“Priests got fed up with Lucifer’s demons and came up with a spell to lock them in Hell. The only two ingredients I can remember are angel’s blood and soil from the Garden of Eden.”

“You’re not much help,” Kheone muttered without vitriol.

“We’re just going to have to do this the really old-fashioned way.”

Ugh, memorization. And even when they had the ingredients and spell memorized, they needed to come up with a counterspell. Neither of them were versed in the magical arts. They’d have to guess or enlist the help of someone who was.

Shax scrolled through the photos until he was back on the second page. “Here are the ingredients. Translate it, say it out loud, I’ll repeat. And we’ll keep going until we have the important bits memorized.”

Kheone ground her teeth together but nodded. It was the only option, and she was a fool for not thinking of it sooner.

They worked until the list of ingredients was firmly lodged in their memories and a nugget of a headache formed behind her eyes. Then she took Shax back to bed.

Staring up at the ceiling, her body warm and satiated, Kheone let her thoughts drift. What were they doing? Although she and Serel had been the gathering’s best translators, Michael had access to all the angels on Earth. Surely, someone would quickly translate this for him, if he wanted it.

“How long do you think we have until Michael catches up to us?” she asked.

Shax rolled over on his side, his amber eyes meeting hers. He reached out a finger and, when she didn’t flinch away, he stroked her cheek.

“Wish I knew, Blue. Even if we did, time here doesn’t flow. It could be months back on Earth, and we’d have no idea. They’re probably going mad trying to find us. We still don’t know how you did it. Why do you ask?”

“Do you think Michael will have a translator working on this? Or Aeshma?”

“I doubt it. Michael killed Serel to keep this information from coming into the light. He damn near killed you, too. And demons aren’t exactly known for their scholarship.

Michael probably chucked the notes and the book into a fire at the earliest possible moment.”

His words soothed away her anxiety. Worry wasn't going to solve anything for them. Getting this mess translated and trying to open a rift back to Earth were the only things that would save them. She needed to concentrate on what she could do, not what she couldn't.

They developed a rhythm that worked for them. Kheone would translate until she couldn't see straight, and Shax would summarize it back to her while she stretched. They would exercise, running up and down the stairs and swimming in the pool.

Every time she looked out a window, though, more souls gathered. At first, a few seemed to wander aimlessly around the building. They were so far below, Kheone couldn't tell if they were the same souls or if they changed out. Not only were they pale, wispy effigies of their human selves, but the melancholy light of Purgatory also stripped them of what little life left to them.

The crowd grew as time passed, but none entered the building. The streets soon teemed with these ghosts. A fog of them drifted up and down the artificial canyons of downtown Kansas City, still too far away to affect her the way they had the first time.

She and Shax chose to ignore them. What else could they do? Kheone didn't know how long she'd been working on the translation. Three cycles, at least, of reading, translating, and exercise. Sometimes they dozed, and they made love.

God, what a poor phrase for what they shared. It was sex, that was certain. But every time left her wanting more. More of him, truly. She wanted his body always, but he always seemed to withhold some part of himself, perhaps the trauma of being a demon. She wanted that, too, but had no right to it, no right to ask for it. In the end, she was an angel and Shax was a demon. When they solved the problem of the Gates, she would go back to Heaven and he would take his place in Hell. For now, she would try to fuck the horror of his previous existence away.

She rested on her side, watching Shax breathe. His chest moved slowly, in and out, as though he slept this time. He seemed a little lighter of soul with every passing moment.

“Shax,” she whispered.

Nothing but deep, even breaths answered her. Considering she had spent thousands of years thinking of him as the enemy, Kheone's recent comfort around this demon left her more confused than ever about him. Shax was the only being she could trust in the entire universe. She felt it deep in her bones. He was also capable of great evil. He'd confessed it to her days ago. Yet, that version of Shax was gone.

Kheone tried again. “Machka.”

He cracked open an eye. “Meow.”

She stroked his cheek. “You never told me. Why a small cat?”

Shax nuzzled her hand, planting a kiss in her palm. Usually when she brought up his past, his entire body tensed, and he fought for words. This time, his gaze met hers with a spark of amusement.

“I used to think it was one of Lucifer's petty punishments—sending a black cat into a witch-crazed Europe.”

She bit her lip. “It wasn't?”

“Oh, it was probably that, too. But with hindsight, I think perhaps someone else was playing the joke.” He looked toward the ceiling, and the spark of amusement flared into a full smile.

“*God* made you a cat?”

“You angels always say they work in mysterious ways.” Shax chuckled.

Kheone thwacked him with a pillow, which only made him laugh harder.

“I’m going for swim,” she said, unable to keep an answering chuckle out of her voice.

Before she could leave, Shax tucked an errant strand of her hair behind her ear.

“You sure?”

She nodded and rose from the bed. He turned over and closed his eyes, perhaps thinking this was all a pleasant dream. Kheone didn’t blame him. Surely, hiding in Purgatory and having fantastic sex was a huge step up from the torments of Hell. Even if the sun never shone, the breeze never blew, and they never knew when someone who wanted to kill them would turn up.

Kheone ran up the stairs to the pool and stripped down to her underwear. Though it was always cool, like a spring evening, and there was never any wind, clothes dried mere moments after being soaked, returning to their own equilibrium. Clothing spent far more time dry than wet.