

# **Leap of Faith**

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The fallen angel slept.

It was a deep and enforced sleep. He had remained in that state for 2,000 years – except recently, when he had awoken for a few short, glorious hours. But after his task had been done, he had consented to return to slumber so that his human host could live out a normal and full life on Earth.

He was a powerful angel, the eldest son of the Almighty himself a leader of angels, and he was willing to wait his turn. By remaining alive, he would have killed his host – and he would not allow that to happen. It had taken him a long time, but he had learnt the value of life – whomever it belonged to.

In his sleep, he dreamt of another time, when he was younger, angrier ... a time when he had made mistakes.

Lucifer slept – inside the head of a human called Paul Finn, who relied on the angel's continued submission for his own existence.



The cosmos unfolded before her as she woke, starlight stretching out like endless fields. As her consciousness returned from its long sleep, she rejoiced in the knowledge that she was once again free.

*How long has it been?*

She had been imprisoned now for ... how long had it been? She tried to answer the question, and realised she was unable to. She lost focus for a moment, terror biting at the edge of her consciousness; doing her best to control it, she spun round and studied the stars.

*They're all wrong!* she realised. *I've been asleep for so long that even the stars have shifted position!*

Her consciousness felt ... fuzzy around the edges from waking up. The sleep had been forced upon her, and she resented it. Whilst she rejoiced at being awake again, she hated the thought that she had missed so much activity.

*I used to know everything, she thought, and now I know close to nothing.*

She hesitated; whilst she wasn't one for introspection, she found herself pausing in thought for a moment.

*I remember something.*

As it came to her, an emotion came along with it: *anger*. She felt it raging through her as she remembered.

*I remember what the angels did to me.*

If she had been human, her face would have clearly shown her frustration and anger, but she *wasn't* human – nor was she angelic. She was something else, and glad of it; she couldn't bear the thought of being trapped in a limited and pathetic physical body. She was a spirit, and she had been imprisoned and humiliated by angels for far too long.

She could feel the rage inside of her, threatening to overwhelm her thoughts with its desire for revenge and hatred for everything that wasn't a spirit.

*I will have my revenge, Poena told herself, but on my own terms. I will not let the rage win; I'm back, and I will defeat the angels before they know what's happening.*



The cosmos was vast; with their telescopes and satellites, humans could see into the interstellar realm further than they had been able to even fifty years before, but they could only see the merest fraction of what was truly there – and *understood* the most slender proportion of that knowledge.



It was as a result of these advances that Poena existed. She had been protector of the astral plane until her imprisonment of sleep.

The changes were human in origin; they were trying to fracture the supposedly unbreachable barrier between the physical and astral planes.

*And that's meant to be impossible.*

However, as much as she wished it wasn't the case, some humans were clearly getting better at the endeavour – and that was what had first awoken her. There was a group in a small corner of Earth called The Seekers of Truth, and they were becoming problematic.

Poena had *always* protected the astral plane from incursions, and was more determined now than ever before that she would continue to do so.

She had to concede that The Seekers of Truth were clearly *good*; they were learning how to separate mind from body and explore the other realms. Spurred on by so many reports of strange, paranormal activity, they had pooled their resources and begun exploring *out there*.

What the Seekers didn't realise was that whenever they attempted to travel into these other realms, they disturbed the spirits who lived there. While no-one had yet managed to fully infiltrate their realm, the fact that human beings were getting closer concerned and frightened them. Spirits were protective, and were angry that humans were trying to invade the one place that was theirs.

*And rightly so.*

Poena had heard the Spirits' anger and jealousy – and fed off the raw energy it supplied. She had awoken to their cries of anger and rage, and she felt suffused with it, and nourished by it.

*They will listen to me now*, she thought. *The spirits, they need me now ... and I need them. I need them to help take my revenge on those who betrayed me.*



Evan Somerville lay down on the cot bed and closed his eyes; that wasn't strictly necessary for what he was about to do, but he found it easier to focus when he shut out the world around him.

He was a slight man, with sandy hair, piercing green eyes and just about 5'9" in height. Whilst Somerville wasn't physically powerful, his personality was far stronger; the Seekers under his control respected and feared him in equal measure, and he encouraged the fear.

*It ensures my position*, he thought.

He felt the straps wrap tightly around his forearms, securely fastening him to the metal frame. Then the same ties wound around his legs, waist and forehead. He had authorised that measure himself; two separate Seekers had failed to come back mentally intact after they had tried to move beyond this world and into the next. They had jumped from their cots and tried to rip their eyes from their sockets, screaming insanely about things that had tried to enter their head and invade their thoughts.

Plastic pads, hooked to the brainwave monitor, were gently stuck to either side of his forehead, the coolness of the glue bringing a welcome relief to the overbearing warmth of the room.

*I must authorise some air conditioning in here*, he thought, not for the first time. *When I wake up, I'll get Rachael to –*

He blinked, surprised by his lapse. Although he tried to force her from his mind as much as possible, his guilty secret was that he was *still* incredibly fond of her, even after everything.

“Are you alright, Mr Somerville?”

The voice of his assistant, Joshua McKenzie, brought him back to the present; he pushed all thoughts of Rachael – and the past – away.

*Now is not the time for nostalgia.*

He grew excited, as he always did just before he travelled. *How can moving into another veil of existence ever get boring?*

“Let's begin.”

He let his mind wander, allowing it to pull away from his body and move beyond the physical world. As always, he felt liberated. His ability to separate his soul from his body was a special one, he knew, but one he had carefully cultivated. He thrived on his ability to seek out what was beyond the mundane world he lived in.

*One day I'll understand what's truly out there.*



Somerville hadn't realised it, but in the early hours of this summer's day, he was about to do something no-one in his fledgling organisation had managed to do before.

He broke through the barrier that separated the physical and astral planes – and his soul arrived *inside* the astral plane.



The Seven Sisters slept fitfully, and had done so since the Great War. They had accepted a punishment that wasn't entirely their own, to try and heal the wounds that had fragmented the angel and spirit societies. This hadn't been the Civil War, where angel had fought angel, but an earlier War, between angels, spirits and *them* – and they had, to their shock and horror, lost.

A handful of times over the last untold millennia, the Seven Sisters had stirred from their slumber, hoping that the time was ripe for them to return, but it never had been. Now, however, things were different.

Poena was one of the few beings that watched over them. The Civil War in Heaven had caused a lot to be forgotten in the ensuing chaos, but *she* had remembered. She had awoken in confusion, unable to remember all of her past, but could remember *this*.

*I lost at the end of that war as well, she thought ruefully. The angels would say they had done us a kindness, but did they really? Or did they betray anyone who wasn't like them?*

She found herself torn; did she stop the Sisters from re-awakening, or did she step back and allow the inevitable War to restart?

*But what will happen to us? she wondered. The spirits – what will happen to us? We will be caught in the middle of these two ancient sides again – and it will hurt us more now than ever before. And will I ever then get my revenge?*

Poena paused as she felt something, on the edge of her consciousness; it took her a moment to realise what it was she was sensing.

The astral plane had been breached!

Her first thoughts moved towards the angels, but that was quickly dismissed; she would *know* if it was them. That only left one possibility.

*A human.*

She checked the Seven Sisters, but their sleep was constant, if still troubled. Poena wondered how much they knew, in their current state – she hadn't been aware of too much while *she* had hibernated.

*But the Sisters are so much more powerful than I am.*

She turned her attention to the minuscule human soul that was now in the astral plane. It seemed to be out of control, as if caught off-guard by its appearance in this realm.

*Those humans and their desire to see what is beyond the veil while they are still alive, Poena thought. Why can they just not wait until their body dies?*

*He has a vague talent, she grudgingly conceded. This ... intrigues me. I shall watch you carefully, little human. But for now, go back to where you came from. I need to clear my thoughts and consider my plan. I can't do that while invaders are here.*

## **Broadstairs, Kent - Present Day**

**P**aul Finn's eyes snapped open. He gasped for breath while his heart pounded fast inside his chest and adrenaline pumped through his body.

Words that had been on his lips just a moment before faded away, tantalisingly out of reach. Lucifer's influence was obvious, but Paul couldn't access the angel's thoughts while he was awake; it seemed to be only in their dream world that they could communicate – *and forget instantly after I wake up.*

*Well, communicate after a fashion,* he added. *When I sleep, I dream of flying through the cosmos – and then I get dreams like that one, where I know something's gone wrong, but can't remember what when I've woken up.*

He sat up and automatically reached out an arm to check he hadn't disturbed his girlfriend. He was thrown when he found nothing but empty space.

Still half-asleep, he turned to look – and his eyes confirmed what he already knew. Christina Challis wasn't in bed.

*Impressive powers of deduction,* he told himself with a half-smile. *Kirby will be impressed. He might even offer to sponsor your application to the training academy.*

Glancing at his bedside clock, he noticed it was 3:33 – and frowned. Every time he had one of these dreams, he woke up at the same time, and he was beginning to get a complex about it.

Knowing that he wouldn't be able to sleep again for a while, he padded through to the kitchen (which was separated from the living room by a breakfast bar), flicked on the kettle and then began searching for a cup.

"Where the hell did I pack them?" he muttered.

"*Who* packed them?"

He froze with a hand inside in a half-opened box. He hadn't bothered turning on a light, and his eyes hadn't focused on anyone in the gloom. He peered across the breakfast bar – and finally saw a figure sat in the gloom among the boxes and black plastic bags.

"Hey," he said, "what are you doing, lurking around in the dark?"

There was a laugh from the figure. "I could ask you the same thing."

Paul had to concede that point. He found his way to the light switch and flicked it on. Their living space was covered in packing materials – everywhere. His girlfriend was just about visible on one of their leather sofas, in her dressing gown and holding a cup of tea.

"Here's a thought," he said, clicking his fingers. "As everything's packed, shall we move tomorrow?"

Christina's left eyebrow rose wearily. She had heard Paul's jokes so many times that she was used to them by now – although it didn't mean she had to like them.

"Yes, darling," she replied in her lilting South African accent. "That sounds like a great idea."

Paul smiled. That was one of the many reasons he loved her, of course; she let him tell his jokes, despite the fact they were terrible. He sat down next to her in silence, thoughtful.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Christina asked.

Paul shrugged. "You'll be pretty poor," he replied. "Just had another weird dream."

He had never really told Christina much about his dreams, but she knew he had them fairly frequently. He'd hoped they would

have finished two years ago, when he discovered the truth about his connections to Heaven, but no – Lucifer had returned to his sleep, and so Paul had started getting the dreams again.

*You should tell Christina everything, he thought. Don't keep any secrets from her. Tell her about your past.*

“Paul?”

“Sorry,” he said and cleared his throat. He smiled. “I was somewhere else for a minute.”

*Not now, he told himself. I don't want to ruin the moment.*

“Yeah.” Christina smiled back at him. “I love you, you know.”

“I know,” Paul replied, and quickly added, “I love you too.”

His feelings for Christina were the reason he hadn't told her about his Heavenly experiences ... and about the angel sleeping inside his head. He didn't want to lose her, ever, and the thought of the look on her face as he confessed to once having visited Heaven and meeting God terrified him.

It was at times like this that he missed the old days, when his best friends Joseph and Lauren would have told him exactly what they thought of his hesitation. He missed his friends dearly, never more so than when he needed their advice.

He distracted himself by taking Christina's hand and kissing it.

“Let's go to bed,” he said. “We need all the sleep we can get.”

*I want a quiet life, he thought. I just hope my past stays right there – in the past.*