

Royal Grace

Avenging Angel Series 4

By Eden Crowne

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CHAPTER ONE

“Shall I kill him?” the Angel’s fingers hovered over the hilt of the sword glowing hot and bright in the leather scabbard around his hips.

Eyeing the Fae courtier resplendent in dark blue velvet, Evie was seriously considering it. She’d had it up to *here* with Fae.

“Your Highness,” the Fae courtier said with a sigh, “I require an answer for my Prince.”

The courtier and three attendants had stepped out of a Portal in the Seven-Eleven parking lot. Without so much as a ‘hello’ or ‘how do you do’ he’d shoved a crown in her face and declared Evie the rightful Queen of the Red Kingdom.

Evie had responded to this announcement with a string of expletives that had impressed even Gaius, the Earthbound warrior angel at her side. She did not want a kingdom. She wanted a six-pack of beer and a burrito and maybe a slice of pizza. Preferably pepperoni. Hence the visit to Seven-Eleven.

“I think I would like to kill him,” Gaius said, inching closer.

The Fae seemed unimpressed. In fact, he looked bored. Like he’d drawn the short straw for this job and just wanted to get it over with.

“Your highness,” the Fae said, motioning the courtier holding the poofy red cushion and delicate gold crown to come closer. “Your Prince, your Court, and your child await you in the Red Kingdom.”

Evie’s wing’s flared, “I do not have a child! Or a Prince. Or a Kingdom,” she snapped.

Any Kingdom. Having been given the Heavenly pink slip after sacrificing one of her wings to save a group of innocent — and one not so innocent — lives. Seems the Celestials frown on making deals with Fallen Angels.

Maybe their actions were justified since that act had triggered a tsunami of cataclysmic events leading to a possible war between heaven and earth.

The Courtier didn’t quite roll his eyes but almost. “Now that you have adopted the mantle

of the old Queen, your Highness, Fae recognizes you as the rightful heir to the Red Kingdom. At least until such times as the princess is old enough to rule.”

“What does he mean by mantle?” asked Gaius fingering gripping the sword hilt and taking a firmer stance.

Evie stretched out her black wing. “*This*. The red Queen gave it to me as she lay dying. I thought she was asking for vengeance after being murdered by her half-sister. Since that same half-sister had just freed the rebel Daemon who want to take over Southern California and possibly the world, I was happy to accept. Turns out the Queen was recruiting me to the Fae.”

She didn’t have to tell Gaius about the change the wing had wrought in her angelic DNA. The entire Heavenly Host knew the whole sordid story. He’d cheerfully called her an ‘abomination’ the first time they met.

Evie yanked Gaius out of the way as a black double-cab pick-up rumbled into the parking lot. They were hidden behind a *glamour* the Fae had crafted, shielding them prying eyes and CCTV. Though since this was Southern California, it probably wasn’t necessary. L.A. County residents were used to weird in strip mall parking lots.

Though the sight of four exquisite silver-haired men and women dressed in embroidered velvet trousers, jackets, and robes crowding around one ex-Avenging Angel and one earthbound angel wearing roman armor might give even jaded South Bay residents pause.

“Take your crown and go away. In case you haven’t been paying attention, we’re a little busy with a Daemon infestation,” she said bluntly. “I haven’t got time for Fae nonsense and I am not a queen.”

Unless it was Queen Bitch these days because honestly, her world was sucking big time right now.

The Courtier snapped his fingers and one of the attendants held out the small portrait of a chubby-cheeked little girl with raven curls. “Your child...” he started to say.

Evie had her sword out before he could finish the sentence.

“She is not my child,” she hissed, holding the point under the man’s chin.

He stood his ground. “You are blood of her blood now. Your high...”

He stopped as Evie narrowed her eyes.

“Madam,” he corrected himself as he waved the courtier back. “These events are under neither my control nor yours. If I may make a suggestion?”

What that suggestion was would have to wait.

A pair of winged Daemon vaporated into their midst and tried to brain Gaius and Evie with maces. Maces!

“Shit!” shouted Evie blocking the blow and slicing right through the weapon’s handle with her glowing sword.

“*Excrementum!*” echoed Gaius in Latin, mirroring her move.

With one mighty down sweep, the two of them were airborne and winging it toward the ocean with the Daemon in hot pursuit waving their wooden handles.

The Fae wisely stayed where they were.

The sea was only a few blocks from the Convenience Store. Good thing she’d ignored Gaius’ demands for Buffalo Wild Wings (there was one not far from St. Jude’s where the two of them had been spying) and waited to get back to Hermosa Beach.

She and Gaius lead the daemon away from the houses and commercial beachfront around the beach towns crowded together. She knew the coastline well thanks to Trick. He loved the sea and had shown her the secret coves where mermaids and Selkies still came to play.

The Daemon pursued but did not seem particularly intent on catching them. What they thought they could do without their weapons, Evie wasn’t sure.

“Something is shadowing us,” Gaius shouted. “In the sea.”

He pointed and Evie saw a V-shaped wave was indeed paralleling them, running against the current.

Damn. She had been focused on the Daemon and looking for a place to land while they had summoned reinforcements.

She signaled to Gaius and they landed on a narrow sandy beach at the base of a sheer cliff on the Palos Verde headland. Ironically it was very near where she and Trick had battled his demon master and the Baron had taken Evie’s wing. Hopefully, tonight would have a more positive outcome.

The v-shaped wave turned in the same direction thought the Daemon hung back, beating their bat-like wings and hovering over the sea.

The wave rolled in with the breakers. It crested high, revealing an impressively large black and white dorsal fin. Its skin shone in the bright moonlight.

“Is that an Orca?” Evie asked.

It certainly looked like one. Shiny smooth skin. Piebald coloring.

The creature rode the crest sliding smoothly up onto the beach and it stood up.

Stood up.

On legs.

“*Ammázza!*” exclaimed Gaius. “*Quid est?*”

“If you’re saying ‘what the hell is that?’ I am with you. Because, what the *hell* is that?”

“Those,” corrected Gaius pointing.

Another wave smashed into the beach washing up three more. They slid in on their broad, smooth bellies and jumped to their feet brandishing tridents. Because not only did they have legs, they had arms too.

The one in the lead released a high-pitched screech through the blowhole on its head and they charged. Their legs were set forward on their bodies giving them a hunched appearance but damn, they were fast.

Evie and Gaius spread their wings to take to the air when dozens of tentacles shot out of the sand. They knotted around Evie’s calves and in a heartbeat had pulled her up to her hips in the sand.

Evie swept her sword out and down, slicing through the tentacles as easily as fresh sushi. More and more shot up. A dozen wrapped around her sword arm, pulling it away from her body. They tried to grab her wings but pulled back as if stung. Both wings – black and white -- generated their own energy field. It was not wise to touch them without permission.

Flailing wildly, the tentacles fastened around her waist and hips as the first of the Orcamen barreled into her. Screeching through his blowhole, he angled the short, thick trident to stab.

What happened next was more by accident than design. Fighting against the pull of the tentacles, Evie used the sting of the black wing to partially free her sword arm. With one hard pull, she tugged her arm free. As she did, her sword fell forward and before she could shift it, the Orca-man impaled himself on the blade. The beast’s own weight and the force of its charge drove the blade right up to the hilt until they were face to face.

The thing was an unsettling mash-up of human and orca features: eyes closer to the center of its face than a normal killer whale, the wide mouth framed with pink lips.

A gust of air sighed from the blowhole and the beast collapsed.

On top of Evie.

She fell, the air whooshing out of her own lungs as his full weight pressed her into the sand. Technically, maybe as an angel, she didn't *have to* breathe but she did and for a panic-filled few moments she couldn't. Its weight was crushingly heavy and around her, more tentacles erupted from the sand.

Evie channeled the panic into anger, letting the energy of that anger burn through her. This angry energy was a new and not necessarily welcome change since she took the black wing. But it could serve a purpose. Her new Fae half liked anger. It liked it very much.

Power surged through her black wing, giving her the strength to push up and out. Evie twisted, forcing herself into a half roll until the Orca-man slid to one side. Pushing against the sand with her white wing, she propelled herself to her feet, spinning her sword as she straightened, slicing the tentacles reaching for a new hold.

How many tentacles did this thing have? She'd cut literally a hundred by now.

As if in answer to her question, something erupted out of the sand and she was staring in the enormous eyes of a pasty-white bullet-shaped creature the size of a Buick. It reared back exposing a beak-like mouth and roared. Hot, fishy breath washed over Evie stinging her eyes with sand and salt. Except for the eyes and mouth, tentacles sprouted from every inch of its body. Thousands of them.

The creature's unexpected emergence derailed the charge of one of the Orca-men, tumbling him backward head over heels.

He was on feet in a heartbeat, agile as a gymnast despite his unlikely shape. Orca-man screeched through his blowhole and the tentacle thing twisted to look at the beast before wriggling to the side, the tentacles looking like an army of wacky inflatable tube men as they flailed in the air.

The Orca-man stabbed at her with his trident. Evie slid the point of her blade through the points and twisted. Instead of letting go, the Orca-man held on, rolling over and over with the motion of the blade before pulling the trident free.

Evie lunged and he used the space between the points of his trident to catch her blade and force it down. Evie kicked him hard in what she thought might be his stomach, spread her wings, and flashed them forward. The momentum pulled her back, freeing the blade.

At that point the Sand Squid, as Evie decided to call it, lurched over and aimed dozens of

tentacles at her. She wrapped herself in her wings and the tentacles drew back at their touch. The enormous beast shuddered and groaned.

She opened her wings to find the Orca waiting. He stabbed with his trident, but Evie turned to shove the black wing between them. Her wings were not just feathery fluff. They were also shields, impenetrable to all but another heavenly blade.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the sand squid furiously digging its way back under the sand, probably so it could come up beneath her.

Ora-man threw his trident aside, blew a furious scream through his blowhole, and charged her like a linebacker. He was hoping to knock her over and either use those sharp white teeth on her throat or hold her down for the Sand Squid to capture.

Evie rose into the air with one down sweep of her wings and swung her sword in a hard arc. Her blade sliced through the Orca-man's neck, beheading him in one stroke. The squid stopped digging and stretched out its tentacles trying to grab her. Evie pushed up then flipped back into a loop and came down just behind the eyes and beaked mouth. She drove her sword to the hilt into its skull and hoped she hit the brain.

The creature thrashed wildly, throwing Evie off. She tumbled painfully into the rocks by the cliff face, scrambling to her feet as the creature thrashed wildly on the narrow beach. She vaporated higher onto the rocks but it was over. Her sword had indeed served a killing blow. The tentacles flailed a few more times and fell limp.

She could see Gaius from her perch. He had killed another of the Sand Squids and one of the Orca-men. The last remaining warrior had a trident in either hand and was trading blows with Gaius.

Evie took a deep breath and allowed her senses to speak to her. Both her angelic and Fae wing were sensitive to a demonic presence. Typically, they sent little sparks of warning energy skipping along her nervous system. Neither wing was reacting that way. Her sword was angry but that's because Evie was under attack. The weapon sensed the danger the Orca-men represented to her mistress and reacted instinctively.

Despite the contaminating presence of Fae blood, Evie did not enjoy killing for no good reason. If these Orca men and their squid pals weren't demons, perhaps they could be reasoned with. If she could get the last one to stop trying to impale Gaius

"Gaius don't kill him," she shouted, taking to the air and swooping low to hover behind

him.

“You jest!” he shouted back, trading blows with the beast.

A tentacle shot out of the sand to wrap around Evie’s foot, it jerked her through the air and began to try to hammer her back and forth. Momentum and gravity were working against her, so she let herself go limp. Hanging by her knees, she sliced the tentacle in half.

This time a much smaller sand squid wriggled out of the sand.

The Orca let out a piercing series of whistles and hoots and the creature scuttled backward into the sea.

Evie let it go.

The Orca-man had a single trident left but continued to press his attack, staying close and not giving Gaius a chance to get any leverage with his sword. Gaius flipped his sword back and smacked the Orca-man between the eyes with the hilt. The creature staggered.

Evie swooped behind it and pressed her sword into the Orca-man’s back.

“Stop,” she said. “We don’t want to kill you. Talk to us.”

She knew it would understand her. Angels could speak all languages.

She pressed the point a little harder.

It blew a stream of wet air from its blowhole and twisted back to front. Jaws wide, he lunged for her throat.

Gaius drove his sword through the top of the creature’s skull in the same move Evie had used on the Sand Squid. He jerked it free. The Orca-man stopped, eyes wide, mouth still open to bite before it dropped to his knees and fell face forward in the sand.

Gaius took a deep breath before speaking. “He left me no choice,” he said. Thrusting his sword in the sand to clean the blood and ochre off, he added, “They are not demons. You guessed this, yes?”

Evie nodded.

A shout of “Hey!” made them turn.

Trick trance umped down from the cliff waving an arm.

Evie waved back, and her heart gave a little leap of joy at seeing him. Then it sank to the souls of her feet. Trick McKitrick. Her lover. A reluctant Reaper she had willingly sacrificed so much for. Now, she couldn’t touch Trick without causing him excruciating pain. Seems Reapers and Fae/Angel hybrids can’t mix. She loved him still. How could she not? They’d been through

so much. Her arms wanted to reach out to hold him. Instead, she took a firm grip on her sword handle.

In seconds, he stood with them.

“Hell and damnation, this is new!” he exclaimed running a hand through his hair as he stared at the corpses of the Orcamen.

“The Daemon are gone?” Gaius asked, scanning the sky.

Trick nodded, “Yep, they took off when they spotted me. Flying toward the PCH and probably back to Torrance and St. Jude’s.”

Evie kept her eyes on the Orca-man, feeling her cheeks flush as they always did when he was near.

“How did you find us?” she asked. He hadn’t been with them as they spied on St. Jude’s.

He pulled out his phone and waggled it. “Leo put a tracker on your cell phone like the acolytes did at St. Jude’s.”

Leo was one of the few worker bees from St. Jude’s who had seen the writing on the wall when the Daemon took over and hightailed it out. He was a Russian, only recently transferred over from the St. Petersburg office. Poor guy. Probably wished he’d just stayed in the Motherland.

“We must remove the bodies,” Gaius said in a practical tone of voice. “Shall we burn them?”

Evie was not surprised to see another of the Orca-men walk out of the wave as it washed onto the shore. The smaller Sand Squid scooted after him.

He approached his fallen comrades.

Evie, Trick, and Gaius took up defensive positions.

The creature held out its hands in the universal sign for peace and pointed at the bodies.

“They left us no choice,” Evie said. “I asked this one,” she indicated the creature Gaius had killed last, “but he pressed the attack.”

He or Evie guessed it *could* be a she, Orca kept everything on the inside, so it was hard to tell, looked at her and frowned.

Evie shivered. The creature’s face crossed the Uncanny Valley of almost human, but not. The utter wrongness of it triggered an instinctive fight or flight response.

“We are not your enemy,” she persisted.

“All land creatures are our enemy,” he answered, speaking through his mouth instead of his blowhole. His voice was deep and resonant. Definitely male, Evie decided.

“What did he say?” asked Trick.

Reapers did not have the angelic gift of understanding all languages.

“He said all land creatures are our enemy.”

Trick barked a laugh, “Oh come on, don’t pull an Aquaman on us. *All land creatures are our enemy*,” he snorted. “Give me a break. I’m guessing you’re not even from this world.”

Evie repeated what he’d said to the Orca-man.

The Orca-man frowned. Their mouths were quite expressive. Creepy but expressive.

“The Daemon are our enemies,” she said, sheathing her sword. “If they are threatening you, perhaps we can help?”

“We must bury our dead.” He turned away.

“Think about it,” Evie said.

The small Sand Squid prodded at the large one Evie had killed. It looked from the Orca-man to the dead thing and back. The Orca-man patted it on its head.

It made sad squeaking sounds and Evie felt ill.

Damn the Daemon.

They left Palos Verde and did not look back.

Trick and Gaius headed for home. Home being one of the Baron’s houses in Hermosa Beach. The irony was not lost on Evie that they were now allies with the Fallen Angel who had brought most of this down on their heads. But beggars can’t be choosers, as her mother used to say. None of them had a place to live anymore. Or a salary.

Evie went back to the Seven-Eleven on the PCH. It was almost midnight, but they were open twenty-four hours. She was hungry, tired, and heartsick. Beer and food would help with the first two problems. Nothing on earth could solve the last.

Shedding the *glamour* and tucking her wings back in their magical pockets she saw the Fae lounging against one side of the building. All of them had oversized Slurpee’s in one hand and what looked like burritos in the other.

At the sight of her, all four froze in mid-slurp with identical deer-in-the-headlight looks. The lead courtier tried to speak but inhaled a bite of food and began to choke.

“Highness.”

“Highness.”

“Highness.”

The other three whispered looking for a place to set their food and drink and probably bow.

“Idiots,” she said almost laughing. “Take it easy. I’m not the queen now. Finish your food.”

The lead courtier’s eyes were watering, and Evie patted him on the back, holding his Slurpee as he wheezed and coughed.

“Your highness, forgive us,” he gasped. “We meant no disrespect.”

She waved his comment away. “Relax...uh, what’s your name?”

“Lehric,” he said bowing his head, adding, “Your servant, your Highness.”

“Okay, Lehric. I don’t need a servant right now. I need a beer. Several, probably. I’m going to go inside, get food, and then I’m going home. It’s late. I’m tired. We can continue this discussion another time, okay?”

She handed him back his Slurpee.

“Yes, your Majesty. Very gracious of you, your Majesty.”

“I am not *your* majesty and you are a pain in my ass,” she said over her shoulder as the doors whooshed open. “You know that, right?”

“Yes, your Majesty,” said the Courtier politely.

Evie sighed to herself, ‘Honestly. Why is being dead so much more difficult than being alive?’

To be continued...

CHAPTER TWO

They probably live in Faerie. the Daemon seem adept at traversing the portal between our worlds. Opened a portal up in Alaska and they. Swam down here.

the Daemon brought them down from the arctic waters. The current along California flows from Alaska which is why the water is always so damn cold.

“What is that smell?” Trick said taking a step back.

“That would be her,” Gaius said pointing at Evie with his sword tip from a distance.

“And why are you green?” Trick asked.

“I hate you both.”

It took most of a bottle of shampoo to get the green goo out of her hair and skin. Her wings only needed a quick rinse. She stuffed the clothes and shoes in a trash bag and left it out by the kitchen door. There was no way that smell was ever coming out.

She suspected Inuit mythology.

Oh, for Melinda and the busy worker bees at St. Jude's. Before the Daemon took it over. She'd have texted a photo and gotten an answer in no time.

Tupilaq Inuit monster made from animal parts and human corpses. Set to seek out a specific enemy

They have your scent but they can't exactly walk around.

Also Kigatilik demon that kills shamans

The Daemon had no problem partnering with demons and foul beasts who could further their ends. Whatever the hell those ends were.

She had disguised herself as xx they'd lost many people who had blindly followed the faux leader.

They had learned she was had killed and taken over the form of xxx currently running for mayor of Los Angeles.

They had an agenda. What that agenda was was a complete mystery. Evie had her dreams and those dreams did not bode well for the future of their ventures.

They had a bug courtesy of Trick. It was a nasty looking little thing. They'd placed it a few days previously and had learned of the substitution.

Guess they found the bug.

The Fae must know where she lived. They kept popping up. With their stupid objects.

Evie was spitting sand when Damn if the Fae didn't just walk over from the Strand.

Madam will you please listen.

You are now Queen, your consort is a Prince and your child cries for you nightly

take out their handler take out the worms,
much like zombies and the zombie wrangler.

"I need a damn drink," said Evie stalking off.

It had taken a lot of explaining and some Elemental Magic courtesy of Adam to keep Gaius from hurling himself into battle with the Baron.

their story was not black and white.

Evie had travelled to several gates of Heaven for the Baron to free his wife from a Celestial prison. She had been a key player in the war to imprison the Daemon as they attempted to alter human development in line with their ideas and against Heavens policy of non-interference.

they 'put her on ice' to keep in case the daemon every escapades.

Which of course they did. even though it took around ten thousand years. Of course, to an immortal that's not very long.

The Baron had not been a Fallen way back when. after his comrades' betrayal, he turned against Heaven starting his own private war. Inthe end his wing was taken and he was cast out.

Fate or whatever you want to call it had brought Evie, the Red Queen, the Baron and many other players together to engineer the sequence of events leading to the Daemons release and the Baron's success.

He and his wife were reunited.

Evie could fly but was becoming an earthbound angel/Fae hybrid.

Trick was freed from his Reaper contract to the Baron. But she couldn't touch him. Literally could not touch him. Probably forever.

Their young friend and Elemental Wizard Adam Lee had been murdered by the Red Queen then taken by the Chinese God of Ghosts and transformed into a warrior from *their* heavenly pantheon. He was currently on loan from Princess. So at least they were together again. Sort of. Evie was never going to get over the guilt of his death.

St. Jude was protected by sentinels. Earthbound angels stood guard. Hiding behind a glamour but glowing like beacons to Evie and Gaius.

Gaius had been ready for a frontal assault.

He'd gone in Rambo style by himself ready to slay? and he'd come back.

Let's get a sniper. Even. A headshot won't take her out. She'll recover. And more Daemon are joining her.

Besides killing her doesn't mean this will stop.

The Justice party is gathering supporters. And enemies. It's leading to more division not less.

Hate is growing.

They are going to play the heaven card and soon. I'm sure. An Angel will appear at one of the killings.

Prophetic. Exactly what happened.

A hate group was wiped out in a rooftop party at a downtown hotel. A winged angel announced and was filmed declaring God does not love everyone. everyone except people like this. Reckoning.

The Reckoning pushing an acceptance platform. It's not ELysia this is grass roots. Got

their share of crazies no doubt. Also sincere intelligent people. Elysian running a mainstream platform.

The Reckoning party.

Evie had said they were not killing other angels. Okay. Not killing because they would eventually come back. Angel against angel now that was an abomination.

Besides she wasn't sure about Gaius ability. He had weapons Evie had never heard of. The gun that had turned the fallen Daemon at their first meeting to dust for one thing. She had no doubt the Celestials were capable of sending Earthbound to the True Death. She did not want to be responsible for that.

BRING IN THE GUARDIAN ANGEL FROM BOOK ONE AND HIS CHARGE.

She can see through the Daemon's Glamour and manipulate energy. She joins their team.

She has to make money. Doing jobs for Belencourt? She was living in one of the Baron's houses only a few blocks away on the Strand promenade. A five-bedroom *cottage* as he called it worth about six million dollars on the current market.

Leo and Adam were there along with Gaius. Leo had fled the BCB when Elysia had taken over, joining their merry band of conspirators. Leo was their tech guy.

Evie had no identity in the real world. Leo's Russian connections crafted a California Driver's License and fake birth certificate. Without the BCB's protection she couldn't always guarantee she was off the grid.

Leo had been freelancing even with the BCB and finessed those contacts to get a string of projects. He'd had the foresight to bring all his equipment with him when he cleared out his apartment and hightailed it to help Evie out.

Aside from giving them the run of the house and the wifi password, the baron had been

noticeably absent. Trick told them he was with his wife who was regaining her strength after thousands of years in a h eagerly prison. It was a brave new world for the woman and must take some getting used to.

Oh, well Evie couldn't be sorry, even after all the heartache that followed.

She had the skies back after the death of the Red Queen. Which was ironic since the Queen was the one who murdered Evie triggering this mad afterlife of angels and demons.

The Queen was stabbed with a cursed blade by *surprise*, her own half-sister — both of them Nephilim and — wait for it — fathered by the Fallen who had taken Evie's wing. As the Queen lay dying, she gave Evie one of her wings, begging for vengeance. Unfortunately the gift was not quite the boon Evie thought. Sure, she could fly again but the Queen's wing was slowly infusing Evie with Fae blood. Not only was it altering her Celestial status (and not for the better). She could not touch her lover, Trick, without hurting him since it appears Fae and Reaper cannot.... cohabitate.

Her afterlife was becoming as complicated as a Spanish soap opera. Just when you thought it couldn't get any more dramatic...BANG... today happens.

It was three in the morning and the Fae had wisely crafted a *glamour* spell around the entire group to shield them from prying eyes and CCTV. Though since this was Southern California, it probably wasn't necessary. South L.A. County residents were used to weird. It was part of living by the beach.

She turned to go and Gaius, still facing the Fae, cautiously backed away with her.

Damn if the Fae, all four of them, didn't trot right after them, cushion tassels swinging.

"Your Highness," the leader called. "*Your Highness!*" He said louder until Evie felt she had to stop.

According to this Fae courtier, by taking the Red Queen's wing, Evie had also agreed to share both her crown and her husband.

Mazel Tov! You're married.