

The Isis Phenomenon

The Isis Phenomenon: when a woman has lost her lover to a violent death, she may wander her world, searching for memories of their life together; desiring only to piece them together to recreate what has been taken from her in the same manner that the Egyptian goddess Isis renewed the life of her husband, Osiris, granting him his immortality.

-an excerpt from Rachel Wariner's 'Angelic Impact'

It starts with the ringing of the phone, a jangle determined to roust even the most stubborn of dreamers from their wanderings. I roll over, ignoring its rude interruption; it's Saturday after all and neither Raoul nor I work on Saturdays. Weekends are our time, the big house to ourselves. We sleep in on weekends, curled against each other in our lover's nest, the morning's glow spreading slowly over the ground from beneath the curtains, flooding our bedroom with invasive radiance that sets everything in a surreal fiery light. Usually these revelations come with the pleasures of a slow love making, the kind that leaves you shivering with the touches of gliding fingers over flesh for hours afterwards. You come into it with a wonder, eyes closing at the moment of pleasure as it sweeps you away, a second coming of Dream. You catch yourself dozing off again in your lover's embrace. It's a poem in writing, a morning like that, and every stanza is composed only for you and him; no one else will read these words. After the first glory of morning there's a late breakfast, out on the verandah if it's bright, in the dining room if it's not. Breakfast is followed tentatively by amusements, a dip in the pool in summer, a walk in the park, occasionally a visit to an exhibition at one of Raoul's galleries, or just a stay-at-home-day filled with reading and paint; Raoul never looks more beautiful to me than when he's covered in paint.

It's what our lives are, and what we love in them. This morning was going to be perfect.

But it starts with the ringing of that phone. It doesn't stop. I'm surprised that Raoul hasn't woken up and reached over me to yank the damned thing out of the wall the way he does when one of us has forgotten to switch off the alarm. Sleepy-eyed, I roll back, stretching aimlessly into the hazy distance with a blind touch. The phone is in a familiar location and I pick it up, forcing myself into a half-raised position off the bed so I can at least try to sound like I'm aware of what's going on.

"Hello? Cassandra Thames here."

"Good morning, Cass," the voice over the receiver is gruff, younger, and I can picture the man sitting behind some desk even on the weekend, "it's James." I blink, trying to register the words, why was James calling me on the weekend? And at this hour? I can hear the engine of his car.

"Hi, James, what's up? How's Rachel?"

"Cass, I'm on my way to pick you up." I try to understand what he's saying. All I want to do is roll over and press my face against my husband's back, sleep again.

"Why? What's going on?" A hesitation. The phone moves, I can hear a murmured voice.

"Cassie, sugar, it's Rachel. You need to come down to the station." I sigh and stretch, sulky at being called out of my bed by my closest friends.

"Alright, let me get dressed and wake Rao-" I frown. The place beside me is empty, the bed sheets untouched. I panic, the phone shaking in my hand as I reach over and touch the bed. Jerking, I trip, landing on the floor with a painful crash, the phone tumbling from numbed fingers.

“Cassie?” Rachel asks, speaking loudly enough that I can hear her over the beating of my heart. I fumble with the phone up and lift it to my ear.

“It’s...no. Rach, Raoul’s not here. He hasn’t come home.” The words are familiar, as though I’ve said them before. I look at the bedside table, there’s a half empty glass of water, a box of tablets. My sleeping tablets. My hand flies to my mouth.

“R-Rach...did I call you last night?” A pained silence, I can almost see her flinch at the question, I can certainly feel it; we’ve known each other a long time, James, Rachel and I.

“Yes, sugar, you called me last night. Don’t you remember?” I can hear my breath catch in my own throat; it’s very much like looking at someone in a play, a play where the dramatic irony reigns, but not for the poor creature it concerns. The audience holds their heart in their mouths as the creature stumbles into the scene, awakening to the reality of what has happened.

“You’ve...found him?” A pause over the receiver, carefully measured and held, weighing me by the sound of my breathing perhaps; Rachel says something to her husband and I hear the phone passed again, “It was Angelico, wasn’t it? That bastard’s killed my husband...” I whisper, my mind running over the case files and the phone calls I had had to make because there was a psycho loose in our city. I wander back over the last few weeks; phone calls exactly like this – “*Ma’am, I’m sorry to tell you that...*”. I can feel something burning out inside me, like a candle guttering in the calm of the storm, walls coming down around me.

“Yes, Cass,” James says quietly, and then the formula kicks in. I don’t bother to listen to the rest of the words, I know them too well.

“...thank you, James,” I reply numbly. The doorbell sounds from below and James hangs up the phone. I swallow and try to sort through the fog that has fallen over my

mind, dulling my capacity to think. It is strange, after all I have faced – sobbing parents, screaming husbands, wailing children – *this* is what frightens me most. There is no cool, velvet darkness for my escape; it's all in front of me, breaking down.

Stepping out into the hallway I press the security release button, letting whoever it is at the door in; for all I know they are a bunch of salesmen or Jehovah witnesses, but right now, I couldn't care if it was Angelico himself come to deliver one of Raoul's masterpieces, vandalized and ripped apart like so many other paintings and sketches had been over the last five years. Back into my bedroom, where Raoul's side of the bed is still neatly made. The sheets on the bed are a soft lilac color, a shade that Raoul himself uses so often in his work. It hurts to look at that bed, to think that Raoul might never curl up the way he does when he's in it. There are footsteps on the stairs, and soon a light knock on the bedroom door.

"Cass?" A woman's voice, soft and gentle through the white wood of the door.

"In here, Rach," I reply quietly. She smiles and looks over her shoulder as she enters.

"I'll bring her down in a moment," she calls, her voice rising through the hallways and descending the stairs. There are no words after that, she merely comes to my side and takes my arm, and as we leave the house I look back. From the rumpled sheets of the bed, Raoul's memory smiles at me.

I've never liked anniversaries. Christmas, Easter, birthdays... if it wasn't for the enjoyment of others at their celebration and the gatherings of loved ones, I'd have done with them completely. And today...

Today is one I never thought I'd reach. And it's the only one I can't leave behind.

As I sit writing this, it's so hard to believe that I'm experiencing the anniversary of a day I never conceived of seeing. My mind still shies away from framing it in words, as though by refusing to articulate my loss I can somehow reverse it. And yet, I can see it all around me – in the child sleeping near my desk, the new buds on the bonsai that occupies the pot on the windowsill, the absence of sound from the rest of the house. It's a Sunday morning in spring, the early morning sun burning off the dew, crossing my page in pale golden streams.

A year ago today, he died.

For some time she simply sat, staring at the page in front of her. The second page in the beautiful notebook she'd bought Jeff, the one he'd never used. It was her handwriting which now engaged the slightly rough surface of the handmade paper. It was a small comfort, knowing that it had once been his, this book in which she was now acknowledging his death. A day for firsts.

Stretching, she pushed back her chair and stood. She walked to the bassinet and looked down at her daughter, the child Jeff had never seen. Smiling, she reached down to stroke the soft, dark hair, so like his and so unlike her own. Emma had been an almost unbearable reminder; the only real piece of Jeff she had left. The sun, now higher in the sky, gleamed off the ring she still wore on her hand. She'd kept Jeff's wedding ring, wore it most days on a chain around her neck. *I wonder if I'll ever be able to stop wearing them?* The thought was unwelcome; she hated the feeling of moving away from him in time, when every day she still expected

to wake up beside him. It frustrated her that no-one seemed to understand her need to remember; the expectation that, now, after a year, she should somehow be able to move on, to shut down her memories and longing and recreate her life was so common that she had simply stopped answering questions about how she was doing, meeting them with mundane answers that completely avoided the true state of things. There were a few who understood: she'd found a friend in an older colleague, who'd lost his wife to cancer several years ago, and remained unwilling to fill the hole her loss had left in his life; and Rachel, who'd been a friend now for 17 years. They'd been close since their university days, despite the different paths their lives had taken. She seemed to understand that to close the phase of life that she'd spent with Jeff would be too much, and so had never suggested that she should.

Knowing that Emma probably wouldn't wake for a couple of hours yet, she went to the kitchen to make breakfast, and clear up the detritus from last night's meal. Finished, she decided she felt like baking – there was no noise from the other room yet, and she felt the need for easy occupation. Besides, Rachel would probably be over in a few hours, something to nibble on would probably come in handy.

It was two weeks before she wrote in the notebook again.

The police station falls silent as I step in. Beside me Rachel shares a long look with her husband's subordinates and the place comes to life once more, murmurs starting up in my wake as I am drawn through the rows of desks. I feel as though I am walking through a school room, and my mind, fickle and worn, takes me back to a distant high school exam room. We had arranged ourselves carefully, my friends and I, so that we

could draw on each other for potentially necessary whispered answers. I can still hear Rachel's giggle as she slides the calculator with the answer back to me, giving the supervisor the widest and most innocent look ever to grace the face of this earth. The memory fades as James brings us to a stop outside the elevator.

"Cass-" he begins but I do not give him time.

"I need to see him, Jim." A touch of a hand on my shoulder, and looking up I see Rachel.

"I don't know if Lang is ready for you, sugar," she says softly.

"I don't care, I have to see him." I break free from her grasp before and burst past the others; I know my way. Forgetting the elevator, the stairwell leading down to the morgue is cold, the lighting dim, but my feet fall surely on the steps, taking me down the flight with my friends and colleagues in pursuit. My heart pounds in time my feet, driving me onwards as though in some desperate dash to a hidden finish line. I ignore Rachel's voice calling for me to wait for her. *Raoul*, my mind cries, and then I stand in the morgue, the familiar and shocked face of Dr. Lang staring at me with bright blue eyes over the top of that mask, scalpel in hand, deftly held between two fingers.

"Cassandra, you should have waited," he says chidingly, his other hand moving forwards to twitch the sheet over the corpse on his autopsy table.

Cold. Like ice. It steals your breath away, leaving you completely numb and without hope, but somehow you can feel the kick someone has delivered straight to your stomach, just below your ribcage, making your legs crumple, melting your bones into a pulp, burning your eyes out of your skull, and making your voice go ragged with a single word. It is not something you will ever forget, what you see before you; the Grief of Isis destroys you in an instant, levelling fertile fields and blasting the Nile

into drought through its iridescent heat. Some fight off the clinging darkness, but you fall into it, and what you cannot forget you obliterate from memory and mind.

I found one of his drawings today. I know it's from two weeks before he died. I wasn't expecting to; it fell from the pages of a book, I remember the day; it was a grey, blustery winter day, a weekend. The last gasp of winter before spring broke through. We were both at home: I was curled up in front of the fire, 8-months-pregnant, leaning against one of the armchairs as I sat on the floor. I was so sleepy, I didn't even know he was drawing me. My head is propped on one hand, the other resting on my swollen stomach, my legs tucked beneath me as I stare into the flames. The sketch is in soft pencil, and even on the poor quality photocopy paper, it catches something about me that I've never been able to see.

It still makes me laugh to think of it, sitting on the floor in front of the fire with the weather beating against the windows, sharing pancakes. Me spilling maple syrup on the floorboards because my belly was so big I couldn't fit the plate on my lap. Making love in front of the fire and spooning afterwards, lying on the rug with the warmth playing over our skin. 12 days later I identified his body, the body that in life I knew so well, so different in death. Only his face was the same. It had the same kind of peace it used to wear in sleep, the grace that showed when he pressed his hands against my stomach, feeling our child move. It was in the viewing room at the mortuary, James standing close behind me as I nodded. When I asked for a lock of his hair, it took 20 minutes to find a pair of scissors. They gave it to me in a clear ziplock bag.

Afterwards, I drove to his parents' house to tell them what had happened. We were supposed to go there for dinner that night. Instead, Veronica and I spent the afternoon drinking interminable cups of tea while Mark drove to the mortuary, insisting that the police must have made a mistake, that I must have made a mistake, that somewhere, there must have been some kind of mistake. And Jim and Rachel drove him home, unable to speak. Such a sight, no parent should have to see. It frightens me now, the idea of that experience. I knew that it would; thought I was prepared to understand the idea of being held hostage to another's fate. Thought that I did understand it, when Jeff was killed;

know now that the terror it inspires will never leave me, and cannot be explained. That this life that I have nurtured could be taken, whether in violence or sickness, by chance or design... I fear that would be the end of me.

Raoul looks away from the window, watching me as I continue my attempts at knitting; it's been a hopeless case for the most part, a tangle of wool and uncoordinated fingers, but somehow it seems that I should be doing something for the baby. The Doctor says it's a boy, so I've decided on green; Raoul's colour is blue, mine's red, but I can't dress a baby in purple, so green will have to do. Raoul smiles that knowing little smile as I run a hand over my stomach, barely showing. I look down at the sketch pad, filled again with Raoul's work, drawing, concepts, and ideas for his next great work.

"Do you miss the studio?" I ask him.

"Only for the lighting," he replies, "the Doctor says you can go home once the baby's here." I nod absently, starting a new row with the needles.

"It's getting dark outside," he murmurs after a while, turning back to look outside.

"It's nearly dinner time," I point out, "Sally will be here soon and I'll ask if she can bring that other drawing book down from the room." Raoul nods calmly and gestures at the world outside.

"Jeff would've loved this," he says softly, and I smile sympathetically, "I wonder how his wife and little Emma are doing. Angelico destroys so much." A chill runs through me and I grip the knitting needles so hard my hands begin to ache.

"I'm sure they're fine. Rachel said she was looking after them, remember?" I force myself to speak, pushing away the feeling of anxiety.

“Yes, I know. I just wondered.” The chasm looms at my feet, dark and unknowable and I stare into it, unable to move or even to blink. It terrifies me, burning deep into my bones with such fear that I could not bring myself to decipher it. It shrouds everything I see in a haze of menace. Stepping away, I turn back to the common room of the St. Agatha Hospital’s Psych Ward, and settle again.

“We’ll be fine, Raoul,” I say, “Rachel will be here on Sunday again and we can ask her.” His dark eyes search my face for a long moment and at last he nods, turning back to the window, just as Nurse Sally sweeps in.

She closed the book with a snap, looking around guiltily. She was at work, the Friday of her first week back. She'd been only one week into her fortnight's 'bereavement leave' when Emma had been born, and although she'd taken her full year's entitlement of maternity leave, she'd needed to start working again. And yet, here she was reminiscing. The police grief counsellor, not Cassandra Thames or Rachel as she had half-hoped, had told her that she would 'work through it in your own time,' and that 'no one predicts the way the grieving process goes,' and then proceeded to inform her of the best ways to 'achieve closure.' Shaking her head, she marvelled at how right even the condescending can be: writing had been up there on the silly woman's list of 'managing the grieving process.' And here she was, doing just that.

She started as the phone rang, interrupting her train of thought. Just as well... it's not like it was going anywhere productive. The pulsing tone indicated a direct outside call, and she anticipated the call for a quote she'd been waiting for. Instead, in a welcome addition to her day, Rachel's warm tones greeted her. Rachel had babysat Emma, somehow finding time, while she'd found her feet; she was reluctant to place

her in a stranger's care just yet. Somehow, her being with Rachel seemed less like letting her go.

“Kitten, I've decided to cook dinner for you. When do you think you'll be home?”

She smiled at the old nickname. It had been the first one she'd ever had; people had never tended to have pet names for her. Then, at 19, Rachel Wariner had come into her life, and it had never been quite the same again.

“Actually, I'm thinking of leaving in the next half hour or so. There's not much on here, and I've a feeling I won't accomplish anything today anyway. Somehow I doubt they'll mind me leaving early, so I'll see you in about an hour – say, 3 o'clock?”

“Perfect. I'll just swing by Cassandra at the Hospital and then chez yours. You keep *l'enfant terrible* here from under my feet, and I'll make a mess of your wonderful kitchen. And once we've bribed her into bed with delicacies, I'll feed you red wine and chocolate in front of the telly until you fall asleep.”

“Thanks, love. What would I do without you?”

“Flounder.” Rachel rang off, leaving behind a sense of... belonging. Knowing that her house would feel like a home when she walked in the door, her child and oldest friend waiting, banished the sense of disquiet that had haunted her day, an interminable counterpoint in the music of her life.

“Sit still, doll, I can't get the shading right if you keep twitching like that.” His words are gentle, almost teasing as he smiles at me over the rim of his drawing pad. I stick my tongue out at him and giggle.

“*Oui, monsieur*,” I reply cheekily and do as I'm told. The clock ticks in time with the scratching of his pencil on the rough paper, and I stare, motionless, out at the late afternoon sky. It passes so slowly, clouds drifting by, the world seeming to go at a

slower rate than usual, the golden glow bringing on a sense of colloquial beauty, the kind that you might find in a child's drawing.

"*Viola!*" Raoul announces, breaking me out of the imprisonment of silence. He moves towards me, his work beautifully perfected and held out for me to see.

"It's beautiful, love," I whisper as my fingers curl around the pad's sturdy frame, I look up at him just as he leans down to kiss my forehead. I let myself dwell there, comforted by his proximity, by his scent, so familiar and reassuring. Suddenly a wave of complete loss and dread floods over me and for that single moment Raoul is gone, everything is gone, and I am alone in the common room, hands clutching the drawing with shaking fingers. Someone has taken away the light, and the abyss crumbles away at my feet again, down, down into the blackness.

"Doll?" Blinking I look up, my eyes blinded by the sunlight streaming in through the window from the crack in the soft-blue curtains.

"Why're you crying, Cass?" Raoul asks, sinking down onto the sofa beside me. I reach out and press a hand against his leg, leaning into him so that I can hear his heartbeat. The rhythm seems faint at first, and then clearer, growing solid and *real*.

"I had this terrible minute where..." I bite back the words.

"Where what, lover?" Raoul murmurs, stroking my hair softly.

"Where I thought you were *gone*." He touches my cheek gently.

"I'm right here with you, Cass, like I've always been, 'n like I always will be." I listen to his beating heart.

"I know." Yet, I can't seem to shake the feeling that I could lose him in a second, as though a single wrong step will cost me everything. I look down at the drawing he has made, us on the small yacht.

“I miss that yacht,” I murmur running my finger over the line depicting the sail. Raoul makes a dismissive sound, meaning for me to stop fretting. He rises and moves to the window, looking out over the falling evening. The clock strikes in the hall.

“Cass, how are you?” I turn my head slightly as Sally comes in to check on my unborn child.

“I’m find, thanks, except that I think we’ve used up all the paper again. Would you mind terribly bringing Raoul another one after dinner?” Sally clucks her tongue and pats my shoulder reassuringly.

“Don’t you worry, m’dear, we’ll have you drawing again shortly. I showed my daughter that picture you drew for me, she –”

“Not me, Raoul,” I correct firmly and receive another kindly pat.

“Of course, dear. I showed her the picture *Raoul* drew for me. She loved it and said I really ought to get it framed and everythin’.”

“Lots of Raoul’s work gets framed, it’s up in the galleries,” I reply coolly, “I don’t think he’ll mind if you don’t frame it.” Raoul smiled.

“The frame isn’t important,” he murmurs.

“What’s that you said, Cassandra?” Sally asks, checking my pulse. I glance at her, a little confused.

“It would be nice...to get a memory framed.” She clucks her tongue again.

“I know, m’dear, I know. I should go check on Madeleine now.”

“But you won’t forget –?”

“Never, darling, you’ll have the pad after dinner.”

“Thank you.”

“So, what do you think of him?”

“Rachel...” she couldn't keep the note of reproach from her voice, even knowing that her friend only wanted her to think about it. They were sitting on the lawn, the remains of Emma's 3rd birthday picnic spread around them. The birthday girl sat a little way away, dividing her attention between some of her presents and an earthworm that last night's rain had brought to the surface. The parents of various other toddlers had taken their offspring home, and she felt, as she always did on occasions such as these, that somehow she was failing to engage in the world of absorption that characterised the other parents' preoccupation with their children. Sitting next to Rachel, she wondered if her friend was aware of just how... palpable her train of thought was. Probably not, she decided. For all that Rachel was sensitive to her need not to discuss 'moving on', she could tell that her friend was becoming impatient with the way that she was merely marking time. Truthfully, she was beginning to feel smothered by her own stillness, feeling the need to somehow turn the page that would help her understand how to start again. For three years the pages she'd turned have been blank, behind as well as ahead; stuck with a book of blank pages, which hold no wisdom for her, and a past rich enough to lose herself in. Allowing her thoughts to wander as she sat next to Rachel in the spring sun, she wondered if she would have lost herself in the memories, recreating the world she'd shared with Jeff, had Emma not forced her to be present and responsible. Heaven knew it would've been easy enough... even now, the vividness of memory outstripped the sepia of everyday experiences. In her mind, she could picture the pages she'd written in her journal, after 2 years still the one she'd written that heart-piercing line in: *A year ago today, he died.* It was a different 'he' that occupied recent pages, a development she found unsettling.

I met Rachel for lunch today. As usual, I circumvent my propensity for Mondayitis by not working - I find it works wonders. So, after a lazy morning at home, I dropped Emma off at crèche and wandered to our usual Monday meeting place, the cafe in Criterion Street, below the second hand bookshop. I could see her choosing a table in the sun, waving to Alain as he called out to her from inside. I smiled as I walked down the hill; somehow these Mondays make me feel normal again, without the guilt. And then, this Monday changed. There was a guy walking down the hill, a little way in front of me. From behind, I couldn't tell that he was watching Rachel, but as it turned out, he'd spotted her around the same time I had. I was surprised to see him turn into the cafe ahead of me; for some reason, we usually have it to ourselves on Mondays. The real surprise, though, came when he called out to her: in 16 years, his voice hadn't changed a bit. The voice which called out to Rachel that sunny Monday was the voice I remembered, coldly telling me I wasn't worth the effort. It had been a supreme effort of will to sit through lunch, knowing Rachel was unaware of what had passed between us so many years ago.

It's a strange feeling for her, to reminisce about someone other than my husband; it'd been a long time since she'd been caught up in a reverie about anyone but him. Rachel's voice brought her back to herself, propped on her elbows on a picnic rug. Emma had given up on the worm, and turned her attention to a snail, chattering animatedly to herself (or it) about her recent haul of shiny things. It was a moment before she realised that she and Rachel had been caught up in similar thoughts, and that she expected and deserved an answer to her question.

“Well? What do you think of him?” Sighing, she lay back and closed her eyes, letting the sun warm her face; it saved her from having to over-school my expression, but she would rather have poked her eyes out with a spoon than look at Rachel's; it was bad enough knowing what was in them.

“He hasn't changed much.” She knew Rachel wouldn't be satisfied with so insubstantial an answer. Both expectation and prediction are beside the point: neither pointed to the somewhat unwelcome reappearance of someone from their youth.

Looking at Jeff's daughter, she wondered if she was going to have to revise her opinion of anniversaries.

“Dark,” Raoul says softly from by the window and I smile at the sound of his voice.

“It *is* nighttime,” I point out in amusement. A nurse comes up beside me, her smile carefully indulgent.

“Are you alright there, Mrs. Thames?”

“She’s new,” I explain apologetically to my husband.

“I know, doll,” he replies, deciding to ignore the woman if she was going to ignore him.

“Mrs. Thames?”

“Cass, please,” I say out of habit.

“Cass,” the girl says dutifully, “is there something I can get for you?” I study her for a moment, wondering when I started considering younger women as ‘girls’.

“Do you suppose you could get a new sketch pad from my room?”

“Didn’t Sally get you a new one this morning?”

“Raoul used it all already, never stop him at his work,” I tell her wearily, wondering how many new interns I was going to have to explain this to. ‘Karlee’, that’s what her name tag says. She doesn’t strike me as a Karlee, though, a Sharlene perhaps, or a Marie.

“Um...Mrs. Thames...” Sally comes in with her bright smile and happy manner just in time to forestall one of my lectures.

“Hello there, Cassie, how’re you?”

“I’m doing alright, the pad’s full though.”

“That’s alright, Karlee here will run out and get a new one. We can’t have Raoul working on empty, now can we.” Karlee gives her supervisor an alarmed looked.

“Ma’am, we’re not suppose to—”

“She’s expecting a baby, Karlee, don’t be rude,” Sally states bluntly and turns back to me with her smile, “how are you feeling, dear?” Coming towards me, she touches the stethoscope to my belly.

“Restless,” I reply honestly. Sally clucks her tongue in that maternal fashion before glancing at Raoul by the window.

“And how are you, Mr. Thames?”

Dear Jeff,

I’ve only now realized what writing in this journal has meant to me since your death. It’s a year since my last entry, and two since the one before – Emma is 5 now, and she looks more like you than ever. Her hair is lighter than yours, but she’ll have your build. She has your eyes, too. I can see you in the way she responds to the world, the delighted curiosity of her reactions. She reminds me so much of you, the way she sees the beauty around her. Watching her experience the world, I’m reminded of how you were able to appreciate life without losing your ability to observe.

I still find it hard to understand the violence of your death. When you gave up journalism, I thought you’d be safe – you know I’ve never been a worrier, but when you were in war-zones for weeks at a time, I discovered anxiety. When you were murdered, I discovered loss. The idea that I could lose Emma, my daughter and my last living piece of you, overshadows my days. Without you, she has become my salvation, my amazing grace. If it were not for her, I think the gap you left in my life would have swallowed me whole. I would almost have welcomed that, if not for her.

In the past five years, others have been killed. They call him Angelico, the man who kills them, killed you...I always hear of it, no matter how much I would like to avoid it. For me, it brings back the memory of seeing you laid out, injuries carefully concealed. Every time I hear of another victim, I imagine another wife experiencing my pain, another fatherless child bewildered by the supremacy of death. I know that to some, I

appear relatively unscathed by my experience. My life has continued, as outwardly normal as any other, but I can still sense the gulf of your absence, am still tempted to live in a world constructed of my memories of you, the life we had together... the life we could have had with Emma. I do miss you.

I don't know if there is part of you which survived your death. Sometimes I like to think that you watch over us, and I suppose it's in that spirit that I'm writing this to you. Despite my lack of faith, I'd like to believe that somewhere, you have heard me. No one else will ever be what you were to me, and I have to believe that's worth something. Somewhere, I think you're proud of us.

The next day, she scattered the ashes of what had once been Jeff's journal in their favourite place, a stand of ash trees overlooking a bend in the coast path near their home.

"Kitten, why do you always wander off when you're supposed to be doing something with me?" Rachel's voice asked from behind her, a tone of mock exasperation evident.

"Afraid it's put up or shut up with me, love, you know that. I guess we'd best collect Emma and get going."

Raoul heard them before Cassandra did and got to his feet, he knew what was coming now, he was the only part of Cassandra who expected it. Rachel swept in first, a bush of brilliantly colored flowers in one hand and jangling car-keys in the other.

"Hello," Cassandra greets her, half-surprised as she looks up from her two-day-old son.

"He's gorgeous, sugar!" Rachel exclaims as she plonks herself down in the seat Raoul had conveniently vacated. He watched the women dote on his son for a couple of minutes and then braced himself as Rachel started to talk once again.

“Cassie, I’ve brought some friends today,” she said quietly and Cassandra looks at her in query, Rachel smiled and patted her hand before raising her voice, “Emma darling, why don’t you bring your mother in now?” The door opened again, and a five-year-old girl toddled into the room, clutching at her mother’s skirt.

“Cass, sugar, do you remember Isobel?”

By the window, looking out into the sunlight, Raoul Thames smiles.

*‘And to the sky she cried rage and despair,
Fury unknown in the angelic lair,
Thus from depths of heart’s vain sire,
To relive Isisian truth but held by reason’s ire.’*
-an excerpt from Rachel Wariner’s ‘Angelic Impact’
