

The Forsaken

The Apocalypse Trilogy
Book Two

G. Wells Taylor

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For my sisters
Alphabetically
Kelley, Kerry and Wendy

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1 – Assassin

An Angel was going to die. The idea caused the man on the road to smile—a rare smile cruelly cut into hard, pitiless features. The Angel would die quickly. It was a pity that it had to be so fast. But surprise was necessary. It was essential. He knew he was lucky to have that much of an edge and speed was the only way to maintain it. Their supernatural abilities allowed no margin for error. But the idea of killing one slowly appealed to him—to kill an Angel and take his time doing it. He smiled again thinking about what it would be like to get a knife and take one apart. See what all the fuss was about.

Miles to the west, his car was parked permanently on the soft shoulder. The Pontiac's twenty-year-old engine had cracked in two. He had taken one look under the hood and grabbed his packs to start the long walk to the City. There was nothing he could do about it. He was not that kind of mechanic.

But an Angel was going to die. That was something. Two hours had passed, and the idea had kept him focused on the march. *Fuck the car.* It was common for people to drive them into the ground only to purchase another rebuilt junker when it was necessary. He'd done it more times than he could remember. Automotive parts designed to last in the old counting could not keep up to people who did not age in a time of endless rain and decay.

Money wasn't a problem. He carried enough in pocket to buy a new vehicle right off the lot. By why bother? They all fell apart eventually. It

didn't matter how much money you spent. Time got them in the end, like it got everything.

But he wouldn't buy another vehicle just yet. There were too many variables to justify the expense. He had only trusted his abandoned car because it drew little attention. But this was now and the future was then. He was close enough to the City of Light to walk, so he'd walk. And once there, who knew? Cars were more common than strangers buying them. Until he completed his contract anonymity was his greatest ally.

Don't let them see you coming. That was the first rule of the business he was in. The second was to have a backup plan and backup plans cost money. Beneath his Kevlar vest was a nylon money belt containing forty thousand in cash and about the same in gems for special purchases. Printed money wouldn't always buy you what you wanted in the circles he traveled. And it seemed that people with apparently ageless bodies identified with the permanence of diamonds and gems—*he* did.

The belt held enough for bribes, transport and emergencies. He had plenty more, but with the chaos that yawned around what was left of humanity, the traveler knew that a place you left might not be there when you returned. The remains of civilization were on the verge of riot and dissolution. Occasionally fear would manifest and burn one of the dying cities or towns that remained. The man on the road didn't care about the social costs; he just understood that his many money stashes could be consumed by the madness; so carrying a small fortune had become a habit. And he was the safest bank he knew.

He snarled up at the rumbling overcast as he marched along the road—then stumbled. The broken pavement beneath his boots had heaved in places torn by cycles of frost, and undercut by incessant rain. Scowling, he dropped back into his steady, rhythmic pace. The black canvas bags were heavy hanging across his muscular shoulders, but they did not impede him. The mild annoyance of the gun barrels and ammunition thudding against his kidneys did more to reassure than irritate.

The City was not far off. He'd get there by sundown. The last hill he crested had given him a bleak view of its monolithic skyline and the Eastern Sea beyond. The distance did not concern him, since he welcomed any sort of physical challenge. In his Spartan philosophy he could never be hard or strong enough. Besides, if he grew bored with the walk, he could flag down a passing motorist and either hitch a ride or buy the vehicle outright with a bullet—there were still travelers despite the rigors of the road. In fact, the latter mode of transportation would allow him to enter the slow tempest of the City without making a ripple. And he wouldn't have to make conversation.

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But the walk would do for now. It allowed him to step outside his life for a time and do something simple—it was the closest he ever got to carefree, and he could never be carefree. There was no rush. Again the distant thunder made him look up at the clouds. He shrugged knowing he'd packed an overcoat in the smaller of the two bags.

Rattle! His boots scuffed against the pavement, almost muffled the sound. And then: *Click!*

The traveler threw his bags and dropped to a knee. A .9 mm automatic jumped lightly in his sinewy hand; its muzzle scanned the dark brush at the side of the road. Dim light from the overcast showed ugly gray weeds—the brittle shafts quivering, rattling sporadically as the gun ran over their varied surfaces searching a target.

Then the traveler hissed with disgust, turned the pistol up and slipped it away. A woman's hand twitched and convulsed its way out of the dead brush. The skin was torn off it from the severed wrist all the way up the broken thumb—worms or beetles crawled in the swollen red meat on its palm. The knuckles clicked hollowly as it moved.

The man walked to his bags, hefted them, and resumed his trek without another glance at the hideous thing that scuttled farther onto the road behind him. The traveler let his mind move onto more prosaic concerns. He could reach the City inside two hours—if he didn't buy a car first.

And an Angel would die soon after.

2 – Dawn at Night

The forever child had a hard time following orders though the reckless bravado that started her current adventure had long ago departed. Swagger was fine to get things going but tended to dissolve the farther she got from safety. That left behind was a small and trembling child of over a hundred years, but a child at heart with a child's store of emotion and anxiety and imagination. She looked to be five years of age, no more—pixie-like, cute with curly brown hair and big round chestnut eyes that peeked over soft and downy cheeks. Dawn was terrified and she was in deep shit.

Her grownup friend Mr. Jay wanted her to stay in the hideout while he was away on business. But she took his concern as a command, and rebelled against it. The first few minutes of her escape were thrilling—she usually had to go about disguised or hidden—but it was dark, and the neighborhood was shadowy and quiet enough for her to take the chance.

Almost all forever children like her had been rounded up in the first fifty years following the Change. Authority insisted it was for their own protection but rumors spoke a grimmer tale of science experiments and worse. Other kids that escaped the government were caught by evil men who made them do evil and grownup things—still others in the cities lived a life in hiding: always running in a world that was after them. So sprinting through the shadowed puddles in a mist of rain—droplets spattering her bare calves—was exhilarating in its first few innocent moments. Before the truth hit home.

She moved quickly through the trash-strewn alley re-tracing her steps,

fully aware of the danger. Her child's body held too few defenses to justify wandering the streets of the City of Light at night—especially on its lowest level, Zero. A quick scan of the familiar damp walls told her that she was close to safety but Dawn was too frightened to breathe a sigh of relief just yet.

A scream rang along the alley and the forever girl froze in her tracks. Her loose fitting jumper hung close and damp about her shoulders. The night was wet as they all were. She cast her head left and right. Preternaturally youthful ears scanned along the rain soaked bricks seeking the source of the noise.

“Dawn,” she whispered in a voice that far exceeded her youthful looks. “Now you’re fucked!”

Another scream echoed through the night. Her perceptions focused on a dark alley that cut across the one she traveled.

“None of your business, this...” Her voice’s tone was deep with experience. “Get back to the hideout—NOW!”

But she ignored the warning and ran in the direction of the sound. Her small form wriggled inside her jumper alternately stooping at the shoulders, hands clasping worriedly over her round belly. Quietly she cautioned repetitively breathing, “No.” Head lowered she dropped into the mouth of the alley as a scream echoed again. “Mr. Jay...” Her voice changed momentarily now—had become dewy, nascent. “You’re going to kill me.” She ran breathlessly—all forty pounds of her flitted through the shadows like a dream.

Dawn made no noise as she skidded to a stop in the puddles. Her approach and abrupt halt made no impact on the three people silhouetted ahead of her. In the dim light of a dying streetlight she saw they struggled with a fourth person.

“Come on, bitch!” A gruff voice crossed the distance. “It’s over quick! Well, first times are...” There was the sound of a slap. “At least with them bastards. Me, I’m hard to satisfy. I’m a real lover!” All three men laughed.

A woman screamed again. The fuzzy hairs on Dawn’s limbs stood on end. The men were Rapers for sure. And Mr. Jay had always told her that the worst in the world were Rapers because they killed without killing. She couldn’t quite understand how they did that, but she trusted Mr. Jay. With her friend firmly in mind, she crouched behind a pile of rubbish, working her fingers into the conglomerate muck and stone. The woman’s shriek was followed by a harsh impact like she’d been hit.

Dawn studied the men. All three looked the way she thought Rapers would but these ones also were sick and worse. The biggest had yellowish skin on his round fat belly that was blotchy with purple marks. His

companions were thin and wasted enough to be dead men. Their hollow-featured heads looked like skulls. Quickly she guessed she could outrun all of them. Her youthful eyes looked for the woman now—hidden in shadow and covered by the body of a thin man. There was another scream. Rapers are the worst. She'd seen pictures and books. But her retarded sexuality did not understand the true horror that they represented. Dawn was sure that getting stuck in the body with a knife or a spear or a bullet would be much worse. *Rapers kill without killing.*

She clawed a hard jumble of stone from the refuse, stood and flung the missile at the biggest man, Yellowskin, who stood thirty feet from her.

A muffled thump. "Augh! What the fuck!" Yellowskin's voice was loud and angry. Dawn crouched low in the shadow of a crumpled garbage can.

"What happen, Jimmy?" A different man's voice—hollow and wheezing.

"Something fucking hit me!" Dawn heard feet scuff the wet ground. "Over there." More scuffling. "No you hold the bitch. Maybe she got a friend over there."

Dawn's heart was pounding. She clasped a hand over it to quell the sound; with the other she lifted a stone.

"Forget it! Fucking city's crumbling. Came from up there..." The other skinny man growled from the darkness. "Hurry or I poke the bitch first."

"Yeah, hold on," snarled Yellowskin. "I do her first." More scuffling feet and the woman screamed again.

Dawn rose quickly, arm cocked to let the missile fly but one of the thin men had crept close during the talk, stood a yard away, leering.

"There you are!" he hissed then ducked, and yelped as the rock bounced off his shoulder blade. Dawn leapt over a tumble of refuse, but slipped on something soft. Hard, rough hands were on her. One clamped around her arm, the other pinched high up her leg.

"I got it, Jimmy!" Dawn was lifted kicking and snarling. "Look!" Every muscle in her body flashed and struck. "Fucking monkey!"

"Oh, shit! Harry, hold that bitch. Knock her down for Christ sake," Yellowskin barked at the man who held the woman. Dawn bit at the hand that gripped her arm, but it twisted away from her teeth. She felt the fingers slip from her leg and wrap around her other arm. Her captor pulled her wrists back until she screamed.

"What this?" Yellowskin squatted in front of Dawn. His penis was out and its mottled purple head almost touched the ground. "She look like a midget, but she no midget!"

"Know what I think?" her captor speculated. "Don't laugh or nothing, but I think she one of them forever kids. They say there's no more, but

look at the skin!”

“Well she’s no fucking elf.” Yellowskin wiped a grimy hand across his forehead. It came away bloody. “Look what you done now, you bad itty bitchy. Hit old Jimmy with rock. And he only out to grill up a fun piece of pussy over there.” He laughed as Dawn struggled. “Now, you been bad, itty bitch. We got to teach you lesson...”

“Maybe she worth money. Think Authority want her? Maybe Prime?” The thin man squeezed her arms. “If she one of them kiddies then she rare as gold. Feel the skin!”

“I figure she be worth money if we careful how we *teach* her.” Yellowskin laughed sickly then slid a big calloused hand over Dawn’s ribs. “And she well fed too... plump and firm.” He looked back down the alley to where the other thin man struggled with the woman. “Hold that bitch, Harry!” Dawn heard a muffled affirmative. Then Yellowskin turned back to her, both of his hands came together between his legs with fingers wriggling. “Maybe we double the fun...”

“That’s enough!” The order rolled up the alleyway. Yellowskin turned quickly rising.

“Shit!” he bellowed. “This fucking alley is busy!” He took a step or two forward. Dawn tried to see past him. “What you want?”

“Let her go!”

Dawn recognized the voice.

“Mr. Jay!” she screamed. A dirty hand slapped over her mouth. Dawn bit down on the thumb. Heavy fluid sprayed into her mouth. The thin man shrieked, released his grip. Her feet hit the ground flashing. Yellowskin threw two big arms out to catch her, but youthful nerves and muscle easily dodged them. In seconds she was wrapped around Mr. Jay’s denim-covered leg. She looked up at him, tears in her eyes; but his gaze stayed steady on Yellowskin. Then her friend turned to the shadow where the third man struggled with the woman on the ground.

“You too.” Mr. Jay’s voice was even and calm. “Let her go.”

“Fuck off!” the prostrate form grunted.

Mr. Jay slipped a finger under Dawn’s chin. His green eyes stared intensely into her face. The brim of his top hat framed his head like a halo. “Go now!” Seeing her inner hesitation, Mr. Jay shook his head. His eyes burned toward Dawn’s attackers before he repeated. “The way you came, Dawn. *Now!*”

Dawn started backing away. She could see Yellowskin approaching from the darkness of the alley. His large hands were folded into heavy fists; his round blotchy belly was thrust out like a battering ram. “So that your little piece of pie? Take her and fuck off. We understand. We all need some

from time to time fur or no.” Dawn turned. After ten steps she heard Mr. Jay speak—his tone was even and calm.

“I’m sick of people like you...”

The forever child ran back toward the hideout. As darkness closed around her something like lightning banged against the bricks.