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Raziel (Fallen (Pocket Books))

By Kristina Douglas



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Kristina Douglas's sexy new series introduces a realm of fallen angels and ruthless demons, where an eternal rebellion is brewing . . . and one unsuspecting woman can change the fate of the Fallen forever.

She was just an ordinary mortal . . .

“You’re dead” is *so* not what Allie Watson wants to hear. Unfortunately, it explains a lot. Like the dark, angelically handsome man who ferried her to this strange, hidden land. The last thing she remembers is stepping off a curb in front of a crosstown bus. Now she’s surrounded by gorgeous fallen angels with an unsettling taste for blood—and they really don’t want her around. Not exactly how she pictured heaven.

. . . until death catapulted her into a seductive world she never imagined.

Raziel is unsure why he rescued Allie from hellfire against Uriel’s orders, but she stirs in him a longing he hasn’t felt in centuries. Now the Fallen are bracing for the divine wrath brought by his disobedience, and they blame Allie for the ferocious Nephilim clawing at the kingdom’s shrouded gates. Facing impossible odds at every turn, the two must work together to survive. Raziel will do anything to defend his spirited lover against the forces of darkness—because Allie may be the Fallen’s only salvation.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Debut author Douglas delivers a sexy and smart romp to launch a series about blood-drinking fallen angels, cruel heavenly administrators, angelic warfare, and true love." ---Publishers Weekly

About the Author

Kristina Douglas is the author of the *Fallen* series, including *Raziel*, *Demon*, and *Warrior*. She also writes as Anne Stuart, *New York Times* bestselling author of more than sixty novels, including *Ruthless* and *Fire and Ice*. She lives in Northern Vermont with her luscious husband, three cats, and one Springer Spaniel. And when she's not working, she's watching movies, listening to rock and roll (preferably Japanese), and spending far too much time quilting.

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CHAPTER ONE

I WAS RUNNING LATE, WHICH WAS NO surprise. I always seemed to be in a rush—there was a meeting with my editors halfway across Manhattan, I had a deposit to make before the end of the business day, my shoes were killing me, and I was so hungry I could have eaten the glass and metal desk I'd been allotted at my temp job at the Pitt Foundation.

I could handle most of those things—I was nothing if not adaptable. People were used to my tendency to show up late; the secretary over at MacSimmons Publishers was wise enough to schedule my appointments and then tell me they were half an hour earlier. It was a little game we played—unfortunately, since I now knew the rules, I'd arrive an hour late, ruining her careful arrangements.

Tant pis. They could work around me—I was reliable in all other matters. I'd never been late with a manuscript, and my work seldom needed more than minimal revision. They were lucky to have me, even if biblical murder mysteries weren't a big moneymaker, particularly when written in a smart-ass tone. *Solomon's Poisoner* had done even better than the previous books. Of course, you had to put that in perspective. Agatha Christie I was not. But if they weren't making money they wouldn't be buying me, and I wasn't going to worry about it.

I had just enough time to make it to the bank, and I could even manage a small detour to grab a hot dog from a street vendor, but there wasn't a damned thing I could do about my stupid shoes.

Vanity, my uptight mother would have said—not that she ever left the confines of her born-again Idaho fortress to see me. Hildegard Watson trusted nothing and no one, and she'd retreated to a compound filled with other fundamentalist loonies where even her own sinful daughter wasn't welcome. *Thank God*. I didn't need my mother to tell me how shallow I was. I embraced it.

The four-inch heels made my legs look fantastic, which I considered worth any amount of pain. On top of that, they raised me to a more imposing height than my measly five foot three, an advantage with obstreperous middle-aged male editors who liked to treat me like a cute little girl.

However, the damned stilettos hurt like crazy, and I hadn't been smart enough to leave a more comfortable

pair at my temp job. I'd been hobbling around all day without even a Band-Aid to protect my poor wounded feet.

I'd feel sorry for myself if I hadn't done it on purpose. I'd learned early on that the best way to accomplish anything was to grit your teeth and fight your way through it with the best grace you could muster, and wearing those damned shoes, which had cost me almost a hundred and eighty dollars, discounted, was the only way I'd ever get comfortable in them. Besides, it was Friday—I had every intention of spending the weekend with my feet up, working on my new book, *Ruth's Revenge*. By Monday the blisters would have healed enough, and if I could just tough it out for two more days, I'd be used to them. Beauty was worth the pain, no matter what my mother said.

Maybe sometime I'd be able to support myself with my writing and not have to deal with temp jobs. Snarky mysteries set on debunking the Judeo-Christian Old Testament weren't high on the public's interest meter, the occasional blockbuster Vatican thriller aside. For now, I had no choice but to supplement my meager income, making my weekends even more precious.

"Shouldn't you be heading out, Allie?" Elena, my overworked supervisor, glanced over at me. "You won't have time to get to the bank if you don't leave now."

Crap. Two months and already Elena had pegged me as someone chronically late. "I won't be back," I called out as I hobbled toward the elevator. Elena waved absently good-bye, and moments later I was alone in the elevator, starting the sixty-three-floor descent.

I could risk taking off my shoes, just for a few moments of blessed relief, but with my luck someone would immediately join me and I'd have to shove them back on again. I leaned against the wall, trying to shift my weight from one foot to the other. Great legs, I reminded myself.

Out the sixty-third-floor windows, the sun had been shining brightly. The moment I moved through the lobby's automatic door to the sidewalk, I heard a loud crash of thunder, and I looked up to see dark clouds churning overhead. The storm seemed to have come out of nowhere.

It was a cool October afternoon, with Halloween only a few days off. The sidewalks were busy as usual, and the bank was across the street. I could always walk and eat a hot dog at the same time, I thought, heading over to the luncheon cart. I'd done it often enough.

With my luck there had to be a line. I bounced nervously, shifting my weight, and the man in front of me turned around.

I'd lived in New York long enough to make it a habit not to look at people on the street. Here in mid-town, most of the women were taller, thinner, and better dressed than I was, and I didn't like feeling inadequate. I never made eye contact with anyone, not even with Harvey the hot-dog man, who'd served me daily for the last two months.

So why was I looking up, way up, into a pair of eyes that were . . . God, what color were they? A strange shade between black and gray, shot with striations of light so that they almost looked silver. I was probably making a fool of myself, but I couldn't help it. Never in my life had I seen eyes that color, though that shouldn't surprise me since I avoided looking in the first place.

But even more astonishing, those eyes were watching me thoughtfully. Beautiful eyes in a beautiful face, I

realized belatedly. I didn't like men who were too attractive, and that term was mild when it came to the man looking down at me, despite my four-inch heels.

He was almost angelically handsome, with his high cheekbones, his aquiline nose, his streaked brown and golden hair. It was precisely the tawny shade I'd tried to get my colorist to replicate, and she'd always fallen woefully short.

"Who does your hair?" I blurted out, trying to startle him out of his abstraction.

"I am as God made me," he said, and his voice was as beautiful as his face. Low-pitched and musical, the kind of voice to seduce a saint. "With a few modifications," he added, with a twist of dark humor I couldn't understand.

His gorgeous hair was too long—I hated long hair on men. On him it looked perfect, as did the dark leather jacket, the black jeans, the dark shirt.

Not proper city wear, I thought, trying to summon up disapproval and failing because he looked so damned good. "Since you don't seem in any kind of hurry and I am, do you suppose you could let me go ahead of you?"

There was another crash of thunder, echoing through the cement and steel canyons around us, and I flinched. Thunderstorms in the city made me nervous—they seemed so *there*. It always seemed like the lightning snaking down between the high buildings would find me an easier target. The man didn't even blink. He glanced across the street, as if calculating something.

"It's almost three o'clock," he said. "If you want your deposit to go in today, you'll need to skip that hot dog."

I froze. "What deposit?" I demanded, completely paranoid. God, what was I doing holding a conversation with a strange man? I should never have paid any attention to him. I could have lived without the hot dog.

"You're holding a bank deposit bag," he said mildly.

Oh. Yeah. I laughed nervously. I should have been ashamed of my paranoia, but for some reason it hadn't even begun to dissipate. I allowed myself another furtive glance up at the stranger.

To hell with the hot dog—my best bet was to get away from this too-attractive stranger, drop off the deposit, and hope to God I could find a taxi to get me across town to my meeting. I was already ten minutes late.

He was still watching me. "You're right," I said. Another crash of thunder, and the clouds opened up.

And I was wearing a red silk suit that I couldn't really afford, even on clearance from Saks. Vanity again. Without a backward glance, I stepped out into the street, which was momentarily free of traffic.

It happened in slow motion, it happened in the blink of an eye. One of my high heels snapped, my ankle twisted, and the sudden rain was turning the garbage on the street into a river of filth. I slipped, going down on one knee, and I could feel my stockings shred, my skirt rip, my carefully arranged hair plastered limp and wet around my ears.

I looked up, and there it was, a crosstown bus ready to smack into me. Another crack of thunder, the bright white sizzle of lightning, and everything went calm and still. Just for a moment.

And then it was a blur of noise and action. I could hear people screaming, and to my astonishment money was floating through the air like autumn leaves, swirling downward in the heavy rain. The bus had come to a stop, slanted across the street, and horns were honking, people were cursing, and in the distance I could hear the scream of sirens. Pretty damned fast response for New York, I thought absently.

The man was standing beside me, the beautiful one from the hot-dog stand. He was just finishing a chili dog, entirely at ease, and I remembered I was famished. If I was going to get held up by a bus accident, I might as well get a chili dog. But for some reason, I didn't want to turn around.

"What happened?" I asked him. He was tall enough to see over the crowds of people clustered around the front of the bus. "Did someone get hurt?"

"Yes," he said in that rich, luscious voice. "Someone was killed."

I started toward the crowd, curious, but he caught my arm. "You don't want to go there," he said. "There's no need to go through that."

Go through what? I thought, annoyed, staring at the crowd. I glanced back up at the stranger, and I had the odd feeling that he'd gotten taller. I suddenly realized my feet didn't hurt anymore, and I looked down. It was an odd, disorienting sensation. I was barefoot, and if I didn't know it was impossible, I would have said there was thick green grass beneath my feet.

I glanced back up at the rain-drenched accident scene in front of me, and time seemed to have moved in an odd, erratic shift. The ambulance had arrived, as well as the police, and people were being herded out of the way. I thought I caught a glimpse of the victim—just the brief sight of *my* leg, wearing *my* shoe, the heel broken off.

"No," said the man beside me, and he put a hand on my arm before I could move away.

The bright light was blinding, dazzling, and I was in a tunnel, light whizzing past me, the only sound the whoosh of space moving at a dizzying speed. *Space Mountain*, I thought, but this was no Disney ride.

It stopped as abruptly as it had begun, and I felt sick. I was disoriented and out of breath; I looked around me, trying to get my bearings.

The man still held my arm loosely, and I yanked it free, stumbling away from him. We were in the woods, in some sort of clearing at the base of a cliff, and it was already growing dark. The sick feeling in my stomach began to spread to the rest of my body.

I took a deep breath. Everything felt odd, as if this were a movie set. Things looked right, but everything seemed artificial, no smells, no sensation of touch. It was all illusion. It was wrong.

I wiggled my feet, then realized I was still barefoot. My hair hung down past my shoulders, which made no sense since I had short hair. I tugged at a strand, and saw that instead of its carefully streaked and striated color, it was brown again, the plain, ordinary brown I'd spent a fortune trying to disguise, the same plain, ordinary brown as my eyes. My clothes were different as well, and the change wasn't for the better. Baggy,

shapeless, colorless, they were as unprepossessing as a shroud.

I fought my way through the mists of confusion—my mind felt as if it were filled with cotton candy. Something was wrong. Something was very wrong.

“Don’t struggle,” the man beside me said in a remote voice. “It only makes it worse. If you’ve lived a good life, you have nothing to be afraid of.”

I looked at him in horror. Lightning split open the sky, followed by thunder that shook the earth. The solid rock face in front of us began to groan, a deep, rending sound that echoed to the heavens. It started to crack apart, and I remembered something from Christian theology about stones moving and Christ rising from the dead. The only problem was that I was Jewish, as my fundamentalist Christian mother had been for most of her life, and I was nonobservant at that. I didn’t think rising from the dead was what was going on here.

“The bus,” I said flatly. “I got hit by the bus. I’m dead, aren’t I?”

“Yes.”

I controlled my instinctive flinch. Clearly he didn’t believe in cushioning blows. “And who does that make you? Mr. Jordan?”

He looked blank, and I stared at him. “You’re an angel,” I clarified. “One who’s made a mistake. You know, like in the movie? I shouldn’t be dead.”

“There is no mistake,” he said, and took my arm again.

I sure as hell wasn’t going quietly. “Are you an angel?” I demanded. He didn’t feel like one. He felt like a man, a distinctly real man, and why the hell was I suddenly feeling alert, alive, aroused, when according to him I was dead?

His eyes were oblique, half-closed. “Among other things.”

Kicking him in the shin and running like hell seemed an excellent plan, but I was barefoot and my body wasn’t feeling cooperative. As angry and desperate as I was, I still seemed to want him to touch me, even when I knew he had nothing good in mind. Angels didn’t have sex, did they? They didn’t even have sexual organs, according to the movie *Dogma*. I found myself glancing at his crotch, then quickly pulled my gaze away. What the hell was I doing checking out an angel’s package when I was about to die?

Oh, yeah, I’d forgotten—I was already dead. And all my will seemed to have vanished. He drew me toward the crack in the wall, and I knew with sudden clarity it would close behind me like something out of a cheesy movie, leaving no trace that I’d ever lived. Once I went through, it would all be over.

“This is as far as I go,” he said, his rich, warm voice like music. And with a gentle tug on my arm, he propelled me forward, pushing me into the chasm.

Users Review

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