

Grand Prize Winner
Grades 7-8

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“Fallen Angel”

It was a gray, cloudy day in the ancient city of Paris, France. On such days, the entire place, Eiffel Tower and all, looked like it had reverted back to the Medieval Ages. Especially Notre Dame, home to the beautiful Rose Window and to the legendary hunchback of Notre Dame.

Notre Dame had many visitors, coming to see the relics of dead saints and maybe to light a candle or two in prayer for some soul. Today, however, there was hardly anyone about. Indeed, the candles' bright dancing on the gray stones of the dark church looked more sinister than holy. A fact that explains why even long after the Medieval Ages, people were still scared by the gothic church and by the events that took place within its stone towers.

Julé, however, found the atmosphere somehow comforting. She didn't care if other people thought Notre Dame was spooky, she loved every bit of it, gargoyles and all. Sometimes she even thought the gargoyles were her only friends. She often made trips to Notre Dame, to ask God over and over if He would please make her dad stop drinking and to please make her mom come home. Apparently, God hadn't heard her plea.

It was on this day, trudging through her sanctuary, reluctant to go home, that Julé heard an unworldly cry for help.

“Help,” someone called out just as she was about to leave Notre Dame. “Somebody please help me!” The voice grew fainter, as if every second was costing them some of his or her life's blood. Julé turned towards the sound, not sure if she should answer the call or not. One could never be too careful, as she had learned from living with her drunken father. On the other hand, it could be someone in real trouble. What if it was someone who needed her help? If she didn't respond they could die and it would be her fault. Afraid to help, but even more afraid not to, she cautiously approached towards the voice.

There, lying in a corner was a bundle of rags, a drunk no doubt, like her father. But, then a face looked up and she was quite surprised at the appearance of the person who had been crying for help. Flat on his stomach, blood streaming from a pair of wings, was what appeared to be an angel.

“Wow,” Julé whispered, “a real angel.” Quickly running over, she figured she ought to help it as soon as possible.

“Is that a mortal? Are you here to help me, child of God?” The angel spoke in almost whispers, and seemed about ready to faint.

“I suppose I am,” Julé responded, surprised that an angel could get hurt like this. “Hey,” Julé said, “how did you get injured? I thought angels never got hurt.”

“There was a great war,” the angel said, a wistful look in his eyes. “One enemy got behind me and tore my wings up, so I fell. Now, help me up so I can go on my way through the world.”

Julé began to help him up but as she did, she saw he had an extra mouth on the back of his neck, which she remembered reading somewhere, was a sign of a demon. She also suddenly recalled seeing a stained-glass window, which showed a great battle between heaven and hell

with fallen angels on the ground. She gasped and let go of him, dropping him to the ground.

“Wait a second, how do I know you’re not a demon?”

“What!?! The angel almost screamed, “How dare you blaspheme against me like that!! Why, you are the most untrusting....”

“Real angels wouldn’t yell like that,” Julé interrupted. Somehow, she was reminded of her father. So calm one minute, but make one bad move and the next thing you knew, he was raging and throwing bottles. The angel calmed down a bit and asked

“Why do you think I’m a demon? I don’t look like one, now do I?”

“Well, Julé responded, “you say you’re an angel, but you’re here on earth, so wouldn’t that mean you’re a fallen angel? Like you were kicked out of heaven or something.”

The angel looked crestfallen. “If you wish to believe I’m a demon, so be it. But if you don’t help someone who’s hurt, wouldn’t that make you evil as well? So, can you manage to give me just one cup of water?” The angel looked so sad, Julé knew she would have to. She thought of her father; when she helped him, it always seemed to make him better, to calm him down.

Running towards the baptismal font, Julé got the chalice used for masses and filled it with holy water. She was sure the angel wouldn’t mind, if he was an angel. However, she was in for a surprise. As soon as the angel—or demon—had taken a sip, he spat it out, crying,—“Mortal fool! Are you trying to poison me?!”

“Aha!” Julé cried in triumph. “That proves it! You’re a demon, because demons can’t abide holy water and neither can you!”

“Girl,” the angel said politely, “did you look to see if the water was clean or not?”

“Yeah, whatever,” Julé thought. But she also knew he was right. She remembered the gargoyles that had rain gutters coming out of their mouths and knew how filthy the rain water could be. In an old leaky church, could some have leaked into the holy water? The demon, or angel, saw her looking up and he looked up too. His face was handsome when he looked heavenward. Could a demon really look so handsome?

Were things, even in heaven and hell, not as black and white as humans made them out to be? The angel was looking to the highest tower in Notre Dame. “Take me up there, where I can be closer to home,” he said.

Julé nodded slowly. Was this angel/demon trying to trick her, or was it earnest? She knew that humans wanted everything to be either all good or all evil. The priests said her drunken father was all evil but she knew that sometimes he could be kind and gentle. Her father said she was all good but she knew sometimes she wasn’t. In any case, she would help the angel/demon up there. She knew what she had to do.

“All right then, angel, or whatever you are,” Julé said, “I’ll take you up, if it makes you feel better.” Helping the angel/demon struggle to its feet, it staggered over to the altar and the angel/demon seemed relieved to be so close to that part of the church. Passing by the baptismal font, she noticed it *was* quite dirty. But, it was holy water none-the-less and an angel would have accepted holy water dirty or clean. Wouldn’t it? Or so she thought.

The angel/demon looked terrible. Its wings were bleeding heavily, and blood was dripping all over the ancient stone floor. Its face was quite pale, and it was breathing with difficulty. Finally, after much struggling, falling down and moaning, the two finally made it up to the highest tower. The angel/demon staggered away, looked around, and turned back to Julé. “You don’t believe I’m an angel, do you?”

“Well,” Julé stammered, “I don’t really know. You sound like the stereotypical angel sometimes, but occasionally you seem like a demon.

“Hmph,” the angel/demon said, “maybe things are more complicated than you humans like to make them out to be.” Julé spun around.

“So, what are you, then?” she shouted. But the angel/demon had disappeared.