

# Alistair Cross – Prose

Excerpt from *The Angel Alejandro*

Stepping down the sloped roof, Madison's shoes lost traction and her feet shot out from under her. The caulking gun flew as she windmilled for balance. The gravelly asphalt raked her elbows as she came down hard on her tailbone. A sickening *thunk!* resounded and a flash of white blinded her as the back of her head smacked the brick chimney. Pain bit her, crippled her, and she rolled down the slope, a tattered rag doll. Though barely conscious, she felt the roof disappear beneath her. Then she was freefalling.

*Help me!* she thought, unable to scream, to speak.

In the dream-like instant of her descent, the sky flashed - not lightning, but a shooting star streaking toward earth.

She plummeted into the koi pond below.

Icicle-cold, the water stole her breath. She panicked, tried fighting, but body and mind had parted company. She sank, paralyzed as blurred ribbons of blood rose and eddied around her. Like a failing bulb, her vision flickered and went out.

She was not aware of any time having passed. As if waking suddenly from a nightmare, she shot from the water, gurgling and choking, her lungs starved of oxygen. Splashing, writhing, her nails bit into bare shoulders and with the sound of rusty brakes, she sucked in a deep lungful of air. The black world resolved, and she glimpsed the face of a man, a stranger - no, not a stranger, not exactly. *I know you, don't I?*

She gagged, clawed for purchase. Water gushed from her nose and mouth in explosive bursts as her lungs purged themselves. She locked onto the stranger, her fingers like anchors in his bare arms. Seconds later, she was on the sodden earth, on her back. She coughed, vomiting water. Hands clutched her head, turned it to the side, and water spilled from her mouth and nose like unspooling ribbons. More gurgling, more body-wracking gasps. Her vision came, dissolved, settled midway between blindness and sight.

A mouth covered hers, blew, and Madison's lungs expanded with borrowed breath. As if the man were blowing on dying coals, warmth glowed inside her, spreading and swelling through her solar plexus, expanding, reaching her limbs, bringing heat to her skin and clarity to her mind. She could breathe, she could see, and what she saw was the stranger's face.

Handsome. Full lips, strong cheekbones, eyes she couldn't yet fathom. Close-cropped, golden hair backlit by a near-blinding halo of light. Yes, she knew him from somewhere - but where?

The warm buzz swam through her. Her fingers and toes tingled. She was losing consciousness again, but she didn't care; the panic was gone. As the world pulsed in and out, the man leaned over and blinked black-lashed silver eyes at her. Not gray, but silver. Bright and shining, like disks of polished steel. The light behind him swelled and brightened just before the world relapsed into black and nothingness wrapped itself warm around her.

Excerpt from *The Angel Alejandro*, by Alistair Cross  
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