

# Angel

A romantic illustration of a man and a woman about to kiss. The man has dark hair and is wearing a brown shirt. The woman has blonde hair and is wearing a light blue top. They are both looking at each other with soft expressions. The background is a warm, reddish-brown color with vertical lines, suggesting a wooden wall or door.

Eleanor Darby Wright

A small, stylized illustration of a purple and blue flower or floral arrangement, located in the bottom right corner of the cover.



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# ANGEL

by Eleanor Darby Wright

## *I. Not what I seemed*

My mother named me her 'perfect, little, angel', which my aunt called me all the time, until I had the courage to leave her drunken home. I actually thought that 'perfect' was my first name for the first few years of my life. I learned what sarcasm was, living with my aunt and the string of drunken 'uncles'.

Unlike my Caucasian aunt, I was small, brown-haired and brown-eyed. My father had been a migrant Mexican farmworker, I gathered, whom I took after. That's why my mother had named me, Angel, I guess. My aunt told me my last name was Perez. She didn't want me using hers, Smith, 'A good old-fashioned, white man's name,' in her words. She often taunted me that, since my mother and father weren't married, I was a 'bastard'. I should use that as my last name.

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One nice, old uncle, how he ever got with my Aunt Sandra I'll never know, had called me a 'love child'. I liked that term for myself. When I met Carlotta and she asked me about myself, that's what I told her I was.

"Angel Lovechild," said Carlotta mockingly. "What's a Latino guy like you doing with a name like that?"

My looks betrayed me. I had big, brown eyes and dark lashes. I had black, gleaming hair, a little long, as all we guys wore it. My name? Angel Perez. I was a fighter. I hit anybody, even those bigger than me if they told me what a sweet, little girl I was. I spoke not a word of Spanish. I'd never been to Mexico.

Carlotta had been born across the border, had blonde hair, hazel eyes, and looked like a cheerleader. She chattered to me in Spanish and thought I was putting her on when I explained I didn't understand a word she'd said.

"I'm a Latina who looks like a gringa," Carlotta laughed at me. "And you're a gringo who looks like a Latina! We're meant for each other!"

I didn't realize Carlotta had referred to me in the feminine until much later, when she gave me a few impromptu lessons in 'Mexican', as she called the Spanish she, and others she knew, spoke. It took very little persuading to get me to leave my aunt's and move in with Carlotta. She convinced me to keep on moving with her to California, where her cousins, she promised, would find jobs for us.

The cousins, of course, were long gone when we got to LA. No-one, at the address Carlotta had, knew where they'd gone. We were told not to stay in the house by an older woman, two babies on her hips. "The Immigration's here all the time," she said to us in accented English. "You kids better have your IDs or you'll be in detention center by morning and in Tijuana by nightfall."

"But I'm American," I said. "I have my drivers' license!"



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"Anyone can fake that," sneered the woman. "You need your green card."

Carlotta was worried. It would take me time to get my Social Security Number, as I did, but she couldn't get any kind of ID as she was, she confessed, an illegal immigrant.

"There's only one thing to do," Carlotta said to me. "I have to marry a gringo, pronto!"

Carlotta looked at me expectantly. I was gallant. "Carlotta, my one and only true love," I said to her with a grin. "Will you make me the happiest man in the world and marry me?"

"I sure will," Carlotta said, throwing her arms about me and giving me a passionate kiss.

It took a bit of finagling but we did it. We went to Reno, in Nevada, working in the kitchens of some grungy restaurant until we satisfied the residency requirements. In a tacky marriage chapel, with pastor, organist and bookkeeper as witnesses - we paid them all first - we were married.

The barrio was the only place we could find a room cheap enough for the little money we had. We shared a bed, fumbled our way through sex and love - and grew up fast.

I staggered home late one night. Carlotta was with another guy in our bed. "It's not what you think," she said, joining me in the all-night pizza parlor where I'd beaten a hasty retreat.

"You were having it off with another man," I said to her in a huff.

"Anyone would think you're my husband," said Carlotta, sitting across the table from me. We were the only English speakers in the place. There was even Mexican pop music blaring from a nearby jukebox. At least, we weren't overheard.

"It's not like you're really my husband," said Carlotta. "You and I know that. You're still my boy friend, Angel Lovechild." Her smile was the same as it had always been. It drew me to her as it always did. "But look." She reached over and put two, crisp hun-

dred dollar bills in the top pocket of my denim jacket. "That's what I got from Diego's friend for sleeping with him."

I noticed that the thin, gold band I'd spent two weeks' wages, to buy for her, was missing from her finger. "Oh, Jeez, Carlotta," I said, a knife twisting in my stomach. "You can't do this, sleep with guys for money! You know what that makes you!"

"It makes me an escort!" Carlotta said, her eyes flashing. "This isn't any different from sleeping with you, is it? If I hadn't married you, to get the green card, d'you think I'd really have married you? You're good-looking, Angel. Everyone says you're a pretty boy but I need more than you can ever give me. You know that. You haven't bought me a new dress or given me money to get my hair done since we've been married. You're never going to be anything but a bottle washer, are you?"

I listened to her, an icy feeling spreading through me.

Carlotta looked at me uncertainly. "I need you, Angel, for a while, anyway," she said. I looked at her, the fantasy world, in my mind, of the two of us being man and wife, disintegrating. I'd dreamed of finding a decent job, getting out of the ghetto, into a proper house, with baby and car, living like people on TV.

"I need security," said Carlotta seriously. "Diego's lining me up for dates at the hotel where he works. I'll make a thousand a week, more if I get really lucky. So, buy yourself a suit, shirt and tie, new shoes as well, Angel, and practise looking mean. Get yourself a knife you can flash, or something. Anyone tries to rob or not pay me, you rescue me. I'll pay you well."

"I might fight a lot but I'm no pimp," I said vehemently, "and you're not a puta!"

I'd heard guys calling girls that, girls walking by them with their noses in the air, treating them like dirt. I knew the word meant prostitute or whore. I was pleased to see Carlotta pale as I said it.

"I'm not," she said angrily. "If you want to stay married, Angel, you be at the Sombrito tonight, where Diego works. Watch out for me. Or you can blow LA. I like you, Angel, as my boy friend. But a girl has to look out for herself here. I'm moving up and out as soon as I get a few thousand together. I'll take you with me, Angel, but don't try to stop me. You're not man enough, anyway!"

No amount of talk changed Carlotta's mind. She had fantasies too, it seemed. She saw herself in a 'real' apartment, out of the barrio. She seemed to think money compensated for what she was getting into. My talk of STDs and drugs she told me not to repeat. She didn't want to know. But I could go over to the all-night pharmacy on Lux and buy her a selection of condoms.

\*\*\*\*\*II. *And your boy friend too*\*\*\*\*\*

Carlotta was gorgeous in little dresses or micro-skirts and silvery tops she wore. My heart ached as I followed her to the hotels she visited. I waited for her call or the code that she needed me right away.

For a month or so, everything went the way Carlotta had planned. Then, one night, at the Rio Verde Inn, I was coded by her, two rings cut off and then a single repeat ring. I rushed for the elevator. She needed me, stat.

She was supposed to be partying on the eighth floor. Carlotta was standing in a doorway, looking most unhappy as I raced to her. "What's wrong?" I asked. She pouted at me.

"He doesn't want me," Carlotta said. "He wants you."

I couldn't figure what she was saying, at first; then, it dawned on me what she meant. I was grossed out. "Let's get out of here," I snarled. A tall, really good-lucking, macho guy came from the room Carlotta was in front of.



"Wow," the tall guy said, studying me. "Your friend's beautiful, too, Carlotta baby. Okay, a grand for the threeway, but it's all night, and you know how I want your friend here to look."

"Carlotta!" I gasped at her. "Let's get out of here!"

Carlotta turned and smiled at the trick, which is what we called guys she slept with. "I need a word with my friend," she said, looking so pretty as she urged the tall guy back into his room. "I'll explain everything to her! You'll get what you want, Dan. You really will."

I should have stormed off and left Carlotta to her fate. But she was my wife, even if she didn't think she was. I had to get her out of there.

"It's a thousand dollars!" Carlotta hissed at me. "For cuddling and kissing and a blow job now and then. We can't leave that laying on the table! Besides, I have to pay Diego and his cronies here."

"You said he wanted me!" I said shrilly as Carlotta tried to calm me down.

"He's bi," Carlotta said. "He wants a boy and a girl working on his staff to get off. Look, I've done threesomes with Mimi a few times. It's not bad. It's just kissing and handling a man's penis. I do it for you all the time, don't I?"

"You can't expect ...!" I spluttered.

Carlotta kissed me, her arms about my neck. In high heels, she was definitely taller than me. "It's about time you saw where the money I'm showering on you," she said with her lovely smile as she hugged me, "is coming from. No, you're not gay, Angel, for doing this. We'll split this one down the middle, five hundred apiece; and we don't tell Diego what we got, understand?"

I understood I wasn't going to do it, no way.

"Oh, he wants you to wear a dress," said Carlotta, hugging me tighter. "I'll put my nightie on. You can wear this dress and a little makeup. What's the matter, Angel? I know a hundred guys who'd jump at the chance to earn five hundred for one night. Boys get

ten, twenty if they're lucky, for a blow job. Queens on the street are the same. You don't know how lucky you are to get this chance!"

I absolutely couldn't do it. It wasn't what I'd agreed, with Carlotta, I'd ever do. She tugged my very unwilling hand, catapulting me towards the door into a really luxurious hotel room. The tall guy flicked on the lights in the bathroom. Carlotta pulled me towards it as the guy slammed the outer door behind us.

"Gonna work a little magic on your friend?" asked the smiling man.

"You've got me all wrong!" I said, furious with Carlotta for promising the big guy what she and I would do for him.

"You want me to hold him for you?" the big guy asked Carlotta with a smile. "I like forced feminization as well. I've got a she-male video you guys should see. It could be the three of us here and now, he objecting before his wife and I tame him. You," he said to Carlotta, "you pretend to be his wife. What shall we call him?"

Carlotta squeezed my arm viciously as I loudly objected to what this guy proposed. "Angelina," giggled Carlotta. "With those lips, could she be called anything else?"

Carlotta and the room's male occupant began to laugh as I fumed, partly in embarrassment. My lips were things I was always teased about. I did have big, 'female' lips, like Angelina Jolie's. I'd been teased about them, unmercifully, in school. I was called 'Angelina' by stupid people, boys and girls, wanting to get a rise out of me.

Really, I looked nothing like Angelina Jolie. Even my lips weren't like hers. They were just unlike most boys' lips. I was asked if I'd had collagen implants or injections. Of course, I hadn't. Most times I just grimaced. If I said anything, I turned the hurtful words back on my tormentors.

"Oh, yeah, right," I'd sneer. "You want the name of my doctor? So you can be a pretty Angelina as well.

Give me a kiss and I'll tell you where to go. On second thoughts, forget the kiss and go to Hell, you pervert!"

Yes, I had a few scraps because of my lips. But, at least, others knew I'd fight if pushed too far. So, I got grudging respect. I hadn't heard anyone say anything about my lips since I got to LA. Still, I usually had my wife, Carlotta Perez, on my arm, ready to defend me, I think. I didn't know what others were saying about me in Spanish, anyway.

Now the Angelina taunt was back, front and center. I was really angry with Carlotta as she pushed me back into the bathroom, closing the door, separating us from the leering 'client', as Carlotta called him.

"I'm not ...!" I began as Carlotta shoved me against the bathtub.

"Yes, you are!" she said. "You are, you are, you are!"

Carlotta frantically pulled at my clothes as I resisted. Her pretty dress came off swiftly. She rummaged in her nightbag that she took everywhere. She undressed to her black panties and bra, pulling off my socks and shoes.

"I'm not playing perverted games!" I told the girl, legally married to me. "You can't expect me to!"

"Don't you remember that time in Reno," asked Carlotta with a laugh, "when you had my lipstick all over your mouth and I said, lick your lips?"

I did. At lunch with her, I couldn't understand why the waiter kept calling me 'Miss'. Then, I caught a look at myself in the mirror. I'd never been so embarrassed. Carlotta had brushed my hair, back-combed it, I suppose. With my lips full and red, my hair curling about my face, I'd looked decidedly effeminate, if not feminine. I'd hidden my face in a napkin until I got to the washroom, washed my face, re-combed and flattened my hair.

"That was your joke," I said heatedly. Carlotta ignored me. She wanted me to do that again, and more. She actually wanted me to put on her spare panties, pantyhose and her dress!