

The angel of desire is damned . . .

An edgy, erotic blend of fantasy and romance – from a debut author whose star is on the rise.

and Falling, Fly

Skyler White

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and Falling, Fly is a dark fable of desire between a fallen angel & a self-medicating neuroscientist in a steampunk hell

“Intriguing from page one ...

White asks hard questions about desire, damnation, love and sacrifice in a beautiful, poetic way that will keep you utterly spellbound.”

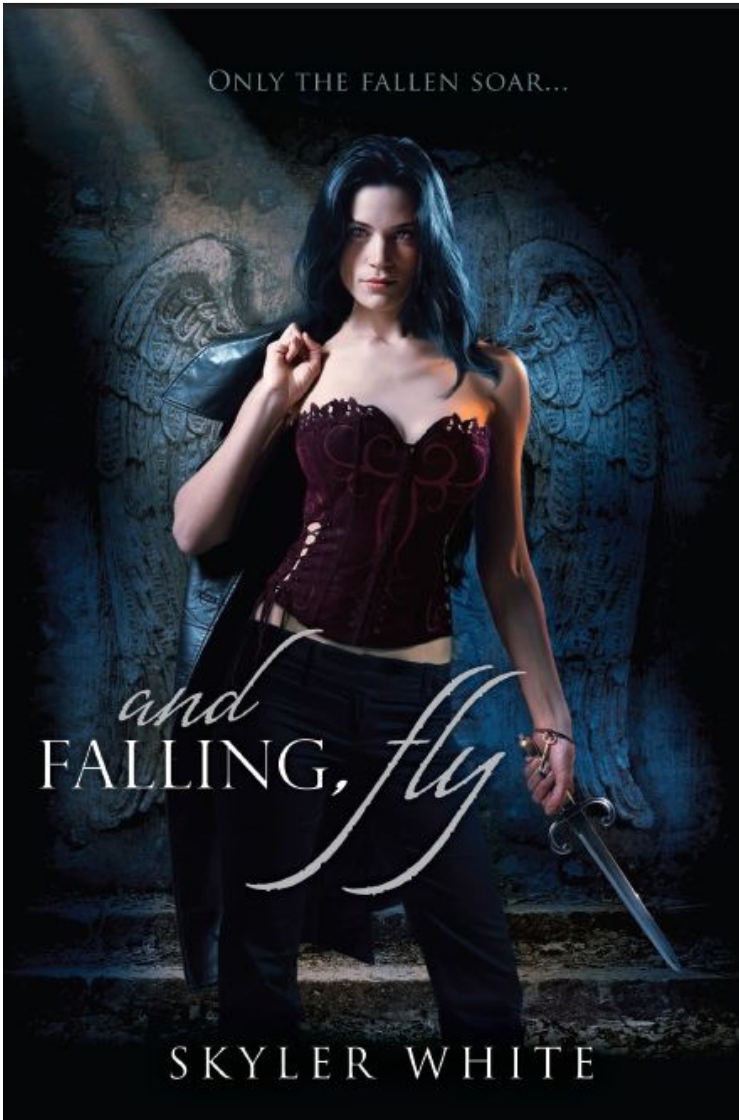
Anya Bast, author of *Wicked Enchantment*

“A unique and intelligent spin on the vampire legend ... a deeply romantic story ... An absolutely wonderful debut!”

Julie Kenner, author of *Tainted*

“An esoteric battle between myth and science told in floods of evocative prose”

Publishers Weekly



Olivia is a vampire bored with modernity. Tattooist, boyfriend, black-metal singer: everyone you don't love tastes the same. Since the fall from Eden, she has hungered for love, but fed only on desire. Dominic O'Shaughnessy is a neuroscientist plagued by impossible visions.

When his research and her despair collide in Ireland's L'Otel Mathillide – a subterranean hell of beauty, demons and dreams – rationalist and angel unite in a clash of desire and damnation that threatens to destroy them both.



Skyler White crafts challenging fiction for a changing world. Populated with angels and rock stars, scientists, demons and revolutionaries, her dark stories explore the secret places where myth and modernity collide. She lives in Austin, Texas.

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Skyler White's *and Falling, Fly*

Talking Points

- *and Falling, Fly* introduces a **new kind of vampire**: a fallen angel who feeds on others' desire. She can only feed only on people who want or fear her, and her body alters to conform to the preferences of those she hunts.

- *and Falling, Fly* is **the anti-Twilight**, in which the vampire is female and the human isn't a victim. It's feminist, pro-sex and anti-dogma. *Falling* is a very adult work and serves to re-appropriate vampires for a more mature audience.

- *and Falling, Fly* addresses itself directly to the "**damned, cursed and misbegotten**" and should have a special appeal to people who feel outside the mainstream. The first scene is set in a tattoo parlor, the vampires drink absinthe and the characters are all denizens of a secret, subterranean steampunk hell located in rural Ireland.

- Skyler White holds an MA in dramatic theory and literary criticism, teaches workshops on myth, and actively follows developments in the neuroscience community. She infused *Falling* with a deep undercurrent of literary (Dante, Milton) and classical **mythology**, as well as the bleeding edge of **neuroscience** research. She wrote *Falling* as a personal exploration in challenging the myth and dogma of desire and self-worth, and writing it changed the way she understood herself, her body and her brain.

- *and Falling, Fly* is the first book in Skyler White's *The Harrowing* series of edgy, allegorical tales set in a parallel world of mythic damnation, combining the relevance and romance of urban fantasy, the darkness of contemporary horror, and the craft and introspection of literary fiction. She is currently polishing the second book in *The Harrowing* series, *In Dreams Begin*, a **dark historical horror-romance** about Irish poet laureate W.B. Yeats, Victorian freedom-fighter Maud Gonne, and the Golden Dawn occult movement. Informed by academic research and travel, *In Dreams Begin* will be released by Berkley Books in December 2010.

- Skyler White's visual, visceral **storytelling has been praised** by author Anya Bast (*Wicked Enchantment*) as "intriguing from page one ... a challenging abrasion between rationality and myth ... asks hard questions about desire, damnation, love and sacrifice in a beautiful, poetic way that will keep you utterly spellbound" and Julie Kenner (*Tainted*) as "lyrical ... complex ... a unique and intelligent spin on the vampire legend".

- Skyler is an experienced and enthusiastic speaker with an edgy appearance who interviews well for TV, print and radio. She will be participating in **readings, signings and panel discussions** at local, regional and national fantasy/sci-fi/comic/romance conventions throughout 2010.



Skyler White Q&A

Tell us a little bit about yourself:

I grew up in a very academic home; both my parents were college professors. I was a dancer – a physical person in this heady household. So I ran away and joined the circus. Actually, I left for a performing arts high school, but they turn out to be shockingly similar. Later, I found a sort of mental-physical point-of-balance as a theater director, which was work I loved; but when I added ‘Single Mother’ to the teeter-totter, it up-ended and I went into advertising which allowed me to be creative *and* paid. Looking for a place of peace between all the things I ‘want to do’ and ‘need to be’ led me through a couple other careers until my husband and my best friend sat me down one night with a glass of whiskey and pointed out that writing was the one consistent thread through all my endeavors. This scared the shit out of me. So I had to take the bait. I wrote a novel. I buried it. I wrote another one that scared me even more. Now I’m here to promote it.

Does the world really need another vampire story?

Absolutely. The same way it needs another love story or another buddy pic. To me, the best new stories are direct confrontations with old ones, and vampires are fabulously rich symbolically. Like most powerful symbols, they can be a kind of short-hand, and writers can get lazy and let them carry too much of the narrative burden. When people say they’re tired of vampires or fairies or whatever, I think that’s what they’re reacting to. But these things are rich and lasting for a reason, and we always have something to learn from them – if we allow them to challenge us.

Why are all your books set in Ireland? Have you been there?

I’ve been twice. Once before I started writing, as sort of a personal odyssey, and once to research *Falling’s* successor, *In Dreams Begin*. And really, it’s all the books *so far* that have been set there. I have an idea for the next one I want to write, and it’s all in the states. I have another one that’s set, at least in part, in Germany. The thing I’m interested in is the mythic element of a person or monster or country. The *Hotel of the Damned* is underground in Ireland because of Ireland’s passage tombs and stories of buried kings and queens, because underground is so rich symbolically for what is unconscious, and because it’s where I’m from genetically. In Germany, the damned would have their secret home in the universities. In America, it’d down unmarked roads.

Your books aren’t really a series, but they’re linked, right?

Right. They all take place in a shared universe where things that have mythic or symbolic power also have physical reality. There are some common characters and locales, though not enough to make it a proper series, in the strictest sense. But I do think of these books, which I refer to collectively as *The Harrowing*, in a shared way.

What’s with the “damned” tattoo gallery on your website?

They’re cool freebie temporary tattoos you can get by writing and asking for one. You can then upload a photo of yourself wearing the tattoo to the gallery at www.skylerwhite.com. Within the confines of my story world, the *damned* are those who have taken their destinies out of the hands of the supernatural, culture or received wisdom, and into their own – which can be a painful, scary thing. The journey through that hell is never the same, one person to the next, and the tattoos are a playful way of illustrating that. The tattoo is the same, but it looks different on each body. I love seeing the way people interact with them, and the visceral reaction a single word can still elicit; a certain hesitation people feel in actually applying “Damned” to themselves – even if it’ll wash off.

What can we look for next from you?

My next book, *In Dreams Begin* (December 2010) is a time-travel horror-romance set around the lives of the Irish poet WB Yeats and his on-again-off-again lover the Irish radical Maud Gonne. It’s an intensely personal book about a newly-married contemporary woman who wakes up in the body of Maud and falls in love with Yeats, and has to navigate the schisms (and surprising similarities) between Victorian and modern womanhood, body image and marriage. If *Falling* is a study of wanting versus being wanted, *In Dreams Begin* is a study of freedom versus fidelity.

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and Falling, Fly: Excerpt

1. What You See

The angel of desire is damned – at least that’s what my tattoo says. Okay, if I’m honest, it just says “dam,” with “ned” still only outlined in purple stencil. But twenty-first century angel that I am, I don’t give a fig for honesty. I want speed. If Ed doesn’t hurry, no lie I can invent will explain what he’ll start to see.

He begins the “N” and glances up from the black halo of letters whose half-circle crowns my pubic mound. “So Olivia, you wanna tell me the story?”

Tattooists are the new priests for the fucked-up and the thrown away. They speak the language of symbol, and administer penance in tiny metallic lashes. They hear confession; and Ed wants mine. Or he thinks he does. And for a minute, amidst the jumbled iconography of Celtic and tribal patterns, the pick-your-own pantheon of Saints Teresa and Betty Boop, I want to tell this handsome neuvo-cleric, bent in genuflection over my crotch, everything I am.

“It’s my birthday,” I say instead.

“Yeah? Happy birthday.” He bows back over the “N,” the electric drill buzz of his pen my only indication that the needle has started again. “You just break up with some guy?”

“No, but give it a couple of hours.”

He laughs, but it’s my birthday and my boyfriend has something special and secretive planned – a dark omen. Men can never resist giving me what they want for my birthday, and so I’ve slept alone that night every year since at least the shift from the Julian calendar. Probably longer.

“Wanna tell me about it?”

“It’s not a story you want to hear,” I tell him.

“You can’t surprise me, girl. I’ve seen it all.” Crouched like a cobbler, Ed hovers inches above my low-rider briefs. I like the way this new style of underwear exposes the unblemished white of my belly for him. I like that it conceals what would freak out even this New York City pierce-and-brand style veteran of the skin artist’s trade.

“My body misrepresents me,” I say.

The whirl of the needle stops as Ed’s dark eyes take a slow tour. “I don’t see how.”

No, how could he? He smells of clove cigarettes and filth, and against the fabric of my unbuttoned jeans, my hips begin to swell. So Eddie likes his girls a little plump, eh? With a nervous clearing of his skinny throat, he returns to his work, but it’s too late. Already, my tits are filling, pushing against the fine lace of my bra, growing under my T-shirt. My hair darkens a fraction. Ed won’t notice I’ve changed. He’ll just wonder why he didn’t realize before how gorgeous this rockabilly birthday girl is. I shove my hair back from my face, inventorying the way it now falls like Bettie Page bangs. It’s okay, unless it slows him down. I can’t risk that.

“Four down, two to go,” he grins up at me. “You doing okay?”

“I’m fine.”

His conscientious, gloved fingers avoid the white cotton framed by my jeans zipper and belt, but he rests his wrist against the inside of my now-plump thigh. His sunken eyes glance up over the heightened rise of my breasts, and his habitual dabs wipe blood that no longer wells from the finished “D.” If he notices, he will worry. “Do the last two letters,” I whisper, injecting sexy into my voice to hurry him.

I can’t hate him. He is too young and can’t help the way his dominatrix fetish molds my breasts into Wonder Woman cones. I can hate them, though. Just once, on my birthday, I would like to keep my native form. Ed works steadily on my “E,” humming along to the music grinding from the tattoo parlor’s massive speakers. The word “parlor,” with its vague overtones of powdery old ladies and prostitutes, comforts me somehow. I’m grateful for it. Tonight is likely to go badly. I’m meeting my boyfriend of seven months for dinner, and trying not to hope.

To him, I am beautiful and pure, saving myself for marriage and motherhood. He sees me as a virginal holdover from a more romantic age. He has spent entire nights simply kissing me. But he’s genuine twenty-first century and only faking patience. Tonight he is likely to dispose of pretense and ruin everything with a nineteenth-century idea. I catch myself twisting the hair-fine chain around my wrist, grating the brass key against the lock it can’t reach. I still my restless fingers and swallow a growl.

“I think you’ve got a killer body.” Ed has finished the “E.”

I give him a slow, midnight smile. “You’re about half right,” I tell him.

His needle stops again. “You’re sick, aren’t you? You’ve got cancer or something, you know, down there?” It’s cute, the way compassion wars with disappointment on the poorly mown field of his face.

“No. I’m perfectly healthy,” I tell him. “In fact, I don’t think I’ll ever die.”

It’s the most truthful thing to pass my hellfire-red lips in years. “I’m just ...”

“Screwed?”

I laugh. “Not ever.” My, what an honesty streak I’m on.

“I could, you know,” Eddie shrugs, “help you out with that if you want?”

“I’m sure you could.” Better. Back to lying. “Don’t stop.”

“I didn’t.” But now he has. The electric needle hangs above the fork of my legs, immobile. His confusion peers across my newly fleshy belly, over the twin tit pyramids. I have screwed up again. I force a giggle.

“Are you high?” Ed touches the machine to me without breaking his gaze. I wince. He grins. “You’re high, aren’t you?”

The needle jabs again. Again I pretend it hurts me, and Ed’s black, Brylcreemed head bows over my pubis once more. He shares that with the ancient priests, at least – the pleasure he takes in my pain.

“You never told me why you wanted the tat.” Ed’s long, artist’s fingers rub ointment into my belly, oblivious to the lack of inflammation around his freshly-drawn lines. “Damned,” he reads aloud. His fingers dip below the elastic of my panties, spreading the slick protective gel to unmarked skin. “What did you say, your body betrayed you?”

“Something like that.”

“What, it go cheat on your boyfriend without you?” He winks, carefully taping gauze over his work. His fingers are smooth as his lines, but I don’t answer him.

“What’s his name?”

“Adam.”

“He’s a lucky guy.”

If Ed takes any longer taping my bandage, or running my credit card, or explaining my wound care instruction sheet, I run a very real risk of tearing his face off.

“And you’ve got some good anti-bacterial soap at home?”

“Yes.”

“You’ve got my phone number there. I put it on the sheet, so if you have any trouble – any questions – you call me, okay?”

I leave him at the cash register and walk, with as much poise as an impatient immortal can wrangle, to the electric blue bathroom, where I yank up my shirt and peel down the right corner of Ed’s meticulous bandage.

The letters are already fading. I sit on the toilet lid and stare at the dirty floor.

I get the same tattoo every February fourteenth. It’s my little birthday joke on myself, but today it just isn’t funny. Not with the dread of what Adam will do. Not with my breasts inflated to a size they haven’t been since the days when my brother Jack walked the London streets. In those days, a lady could stretch a courtship over a year, and be thanked for the privilege. A few months of kissing Adam, and the darling expects me to say “yes” tonight. Ten minutes of kissing Ed, and the ass would expect a different acquiescence. All I want is a tattoo – a bad girl brand on my perfect body to mark me with what I truly am. I check it again. The first “D” is gone.

“Eddie,” I call out the bathroom door, “Can you come back here a second?”

I put my alabaster hands on the stained basin of the sink and stare into the mirror above it. I wait for Ed’s reflection to show me my face in the silvered glass. He slouches in. I scowl at the pinup parody of myself and slip behind him to lock the door. I lean against the flimsy wood.

“Does it hurt?” he asks.

“Yes,” I lie. My perfect body can’t feel pleasure or pain, can’t transmit any sensation more acute than simple pressure. But my other senses are keen, and his masculine smell rises over the clove.

His hands take my waist – do they tremble just a little, tough guy? A choked prayer of desire escapes his tight throat, and I put my scarlet lips against his. I let him kiss me, lipstick messy between us for elongating seconds before I bite into his mouth.

I don’t mean to do it, but the subtle razor surfaces of my teeth and tongue erupt, grazing the insides of his mouth, making cuts too small for him to feel. It doesn’t take much to feed me, microscopic globules of blood from the tiny surface cuts my quilled teeth make in his lips and against his gums. I suck on his mouth and he shudders against me. He’s hungry too.

In his blood I taste only tedious, arcane desires, but am tempted by the whisper of the dreams that feeding full-tooth would bring. Still, I don’t strike. It’s not his fault. He worked diligently to give me what I asked for – a word for my flesh, a name for my body. But if his inky blood is all I can get of what I want, I’ll swallow what I can.

He grapples at the zipper of my jeans, and I recoil from the danger of his callused fingers finding my tattoo gone. He mutters something about hurting me and slides his innocent hands over my body, away

from the bandage, to tug on my shirt. I pull it over my head for him. I will give him anything he wants with my sandcastle tits – I can't feel them – just let me keep feasting on his stained and smoky mouth.

His delicate hands run up my back, the only ugly part of my body, and close over my breasts, grinding roughly, but my tongue laps at his gaping mouth. He would take me right here, if I let him, rough against the too-blue door. Sex is naked in the twenty-first century, naked as Ed's need, and it fucks its angels fast and hungry in the nasty bathrooms where kids who find they can't take the needle come to puke their humiliated guts out. If I could, I would let him, because "yes" is easier than "no" these days, and I'm not a cock-tease or a good girl. But I cannot, because of what I really am.

"Damned ..." Ed's fingertips graze the dressing again.

I remember to pretend it hurts me, and his cock throbs against my fat thigh. All the letters are gone, but desire still whimpers to him, and he brings his mouth down hard over mine again. I press his thin hand against the bandage. Why have I never thought of this before? Pain is easier to fake than pleasure. Could this – finally – be the loophole? Could it be suffering that frees me, instead of love?

"Look at you," he whistles.

"Behold, the damned!" I make a comic little flourish and shimmy my tits.

He groans. "You don't really believe that, do you?"

"Yeah, and I need you to, okay?"

"You're kind of messed up, you know?"

Ed, Eddie, Pontius Edward – he will ask the questions, he will drive the tiny, electric nails into my flesh, but all the time, he's washing his hands. He doesn't want to know, doesn't want to be involved. He's curious, not concerned; a voyeur not an actor, and I scent fear beneath the cloves.

He can't save me, the fucker. If I kiss him again, I will taste his hesitation. I lick my lips for lingering flecks, and he pushes his hair back with fingers that say "hate" across the knuckles. I smile into his innocent eyes and pull on my shirt. "You're blocking the door," I tell him.

"What the fuck? You think you're leaving?"

I grip his earlobe between my forefinger and thumb. He scrambles, panting mutely away from the door as I bring my quilled fingernails together.

I leave him with his new piercing bleeding softly, already cobbling the story he'll tell about the crazy chick he made out with in the bathroom on Valentine's Day after he tattooed her "damned." As his story ages, we will have had sex back there.

My breasts are already flattening by the time the tattoo parlor door slams behind me, shrinking toward the twenty-first century ideal of full and firm, but more athletic than sensual. At least I won't be hungry when I meet Adam for dinner tonight.

I have been a fool. Ed could never have been my salvation. Just another fig. Adam, however, might be. If only tonight goes differently than my birthdays always do, if only I don't have to leave Adam like I left Ed in the blue bathroom – blindly wanting me. They can't help it. They all want me. I am the angel of desire.

Desire is an angel in hell.