

# Paper Angels



Christy Frazier

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Untamed Dreams- The Twin Stars  
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**By Christy Frazier**

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To all those who believe in Christmas magic,  
angels, and love, this story is for you.

## Acknowledgements

The saying, “It takes a village to raise a child” holds true when writing a novel too. As I wrote this story I thought about the many experiences I had while working for Mervyn’s department store. I worked with some wonderful people and we had many interesting customers. Both characters, Lola and Ethel were ladies I worked with. Lola became one of my dearest friends. She has since passed on.

My grandma, Mimi lived the last seven years of her life in an assisted living facility for the elderly. While she was there, I met some wonderful people who were very good to her. Therefore, my character, Ari, works at an assisted living facility. A patient in the story, Leona, was my sweet and beautiful adopted aunt.

As a child, my parents would take me, and my brother and sister to Christmas Village in Ogden, Utah. It was always a special magical place for the little girl in me, so why not take my characters there too.

Trevor, the angel, is a part of everything good in the many people I have ever known. But he also needed to be real and not too “perfect”.

So, as I said before, it takes a village to write a novel. Thank you everyone.

# 1

*“The Master created  
the angels.”*

“Run away, that is what I should do, just run away,” Ari grumbled to herself.

“I’m sorry miss, what did you say?” asked a small elderly man on the other side of the customer service counter. He was thin and had a gentle smile.

“Oh, nothing,” Ari said, quickly clearing her throat. “Here is your bag and thank you for shopping at Garland’s.” She handed the medium-sized package over to the waiting hands of the older man.

He smiled. “You have a Merry Christmas.” Turning he walked away.

The next customer in the long line approached the customer service counter. The scowl on the thirty-something woman was a clear warning, she wasn’t going to be pleasant.

“Welcome to Garland’s, may I help you?” Ari greeted. It was the greeting all sales associates were to use when customers or “guests” as they were to refer them as, approached her.

“I’ll have you know, I have been waiting in line for at least fifteen minutes,” the disgruntled woman informed her.



“The lines on Black Friday traditionally tend to be long. We are sorry for the inconvenience.” Ari was hoping this would pacify the woman.

“Well, if I wanted a lecture, I would have asked for one,” the woman sneered. “Now, I want to pay cash for these three shirts, which are all on sale.” She set them down onto the counter. “Then use this credit card for all of the towels, which are also all on sale.” She placed the large stack onto the counter along with her credit card. “The rest of these items, which are also on sale, I want to put on my store credit card.”

Ari rung up the shirts and towels as instructed. The remaining items were scanned, but the store credit card was declined by the register’s internal computer. Ari dreaded having to tell the woman that her card had been declined.

“I’m sorry ma’am, your card is being declined,” she quickly said, then waited for the woman’s expected wrath. Her six months of experience in working a retail job had already taught her what the signs of a disgruntled customer looked like. It prepared her to put her invisible combat uniform on.

“What do you mean declined?! I know for a fact I haven’t reached my credit limit, so try again. I am sure *you* made an error.”

Ari swiped the card and once again, it was declined. She looked at the angry customer. “I’m sorry—”

“This is why I hate shopping here,” the woman sneered. “You people aren’t any help.”

She began to dig through her purse, and then pulled out another credit card. “Try this one.”

Ari swiped the new card and it too was declined. The woman gave her another one to try, but as the two previous cards, it was also declined. With a reddened face, the woman pulled several twenty dollar bills out of her wallet and threw them at Ari.

“Just use these, I’m sure they won’t be *declined*,” she sneered. She stared at Ari like a lioness who was about to pounce upon an unsuspecting antelope.

Ari picked up the scattered bills and promptly finished the sale. She learned quickly that the sooner you got rid of an unpleasant customer, the better things would be. She handed the customer her change. “Thank you for shopping at Garland’s.” She handed the woman her packages.

“I don’t suppose you could gift wrap these?”

“No ma’am, but I could give you some boxes if you would like and they are free?”

The woman huffed loudly. “That would mean *I* would have to wrap them. I don’t think so.” She snatched the bags out of Ari’s hands and stormed off.

Ari groaned inwardly. “Like I said, I should just run away.”

“You look like you could use a lunch break?” asked Elise, one of her coworkers as she approached Ari.

“You have no idea.”

Elise, who was in her twenties smiled. “Go to the break room and put your feet up and try to close your eyes for a while if you can. We still have four more hours to go.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me,” groaned Ari as she logged off the register. With her head down, and avoiding any eye contact with the people around her, she hastily made her way to the employee lounge hoping she wouldn’t be stopped by a customer. The door to the lounge swung open as she pushed on it and she slipped inside. Taking a deep breath of relief, she stopped short as she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror that was hanging on the wall by the door. Her brown hair was pulled back tight into a ponytail, but a few strands had escaped. Her blue eyes, which normally sparkled with life, looked tired and red.

“Ari, if I didn’t already know you were only nineteen, I would think you were somewhere in your seventies,” she said critiquing herself. “Then again, you are nineteen and working two jobs, to save enough money for college in the spring.”

Her dad had been one of the many victims of the poor economy and lost his job eight months ago. Since then he had been working odd jobs to help support her mom and their four kids while searching for a better job. Ari was the oldest. Her mom worked as a dental assistant, but it wasn’t enough money to pay all of the bills. Instead of immediately going to college like her friends, Ari decided to put it off until the following spring. She was working two jobs to help pay some of the bills and saving some of the money for college.

She went straight to her locker and pulled out her sack lunch, then sat down at one of the tables. She propped her aching feet up onto one of the empty chairs and closed her eyes for a moment.

“Ew-wee, girlfriend you look tired.”

Ari opened her eyes and looked over to the couch. Ethel, with her flawless ebony skin was slumped back into the cushions. “Yeah, I guess you could say I am tired. What is it with people? I have had some very nice customers today, but there have been several who really deserve to burn in—”

Ethel burst out laughing. “I know what you mean. I firmly believe that there is a very hot place for nasty customers. One day I plan on visiting them with a tall, cool glass of lemonade, and I don’t plan on sharing it.”

Ari laughed. “I hope you’re right.”

“Oh, I am sure I am. In fact, I think I already have several relatives there too. It will be a glorious day when I can slowly drink that nice cool lemonade in front of them.”

Lola, a tall thin woman with graying long hair, walked into the room and joined them. She had a smug look on her face.

“Oh girlfriend, you have been up to something devious, do share,” coaxed Ethel.

Lola looked around making sure there wasn’t a manager in the room. “Well,” she confided. “I just dealt with a very unpleasant customer and I found a way to get back at them without getting myself into trouble.”

She now had the attention of Ari and Ethel.

“I crammed all of her things into the smallest bag I could find. You should have seen her trying to hold the bag, her purse and the other bags she had as she walked away.”

All three looked at each other, then burst out laughing.

“I will have to remember that one,” said Ari. “I could have already used it today.”

“Me too,” agreed Ethel.

Lola sat down next to Ari. “How are you holding up with working two jobs? I just don’t know how you’re doing it.”

“I guess when you have to, you make it work,” offered Ari. She took a bite of her peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Ethel looked her up and down. “You are as thin as a rail. If you aren’t careful, you are going to blow away with the next breeze. Just why are you working so hard?”

Ari took a deep breath. “I want to be a geriatric nurse. School is expensive and scholarships right now are far and few between. I need the money.”

“So, you’re working full-time at an assisted living facility and part-time here,” stated Lola.

“Yes.”

“If you don’t mind my asking, when was the last time you had a day off?”

Ari sat back for moment thinking. “I’m not sure, I think it was three weeks ago tomorrow, maybe four. It doesn’t really matter anyway.”

“Heaven to Betsy Ross, girl, that’s not living, that’s putting yourself into an early grave,”

Ethel pointed out. She sat up. “You need to find a better way to make more money or find some better jobs.”

“That’s easier said than done,” defended Ari. “In order to qualify for any grants or decent student loans, my dad has to be out of work for at least a year, because and let me quote, ‘he used to make too much money’. That’s what the school’s financial-aid lady told me when I met with her.”

Lola shook her head. “It was so much easier twenty years ago when I was in college.”

Ethel chimed in. “I have to agree. All these businesses keep pushing college degrees’ on people, but I don’t think they fully get how hard it is to pay for college anymore. The tuition these days is outrageous, then add to that the price of the text books.” She rolled her eyes. “The price they charge for those books is a scam all on its own. I won’t tell you what it has cost my son to go to college his first year. It will just give you all a bad case of indigestion.”

“I can’t argue with that,” said Ari as she took the last bite of her sandwich.” My friend Rose said her books cost over \$500.00’s last semester.” She looked at her watch. She only had five more minutes left of her lunch break. She quickly drank the rest of her water and put her lunch bag into her locker.

“Well, ladies, it’s back to the old grind mill.” She smiled at her coworkers. “Only three and a half hours to go. I won’t forget your small bag revenge Lola.” she said as she slowly walked out of the break room.

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“I don’t know how she does it,” said Lola shaking her head. “After she leaves here, she will be going to her other job, to fill in for someone who wanted the day after Thanksgiving off. I guess holiday pay is making it worth her while.”

“That girl needs more than holiday pay, she needs a miracle,” stated Ethel.

# 2

“Their destiny is to help  
all living souls.”



“Trevor,” called Jace. He walked into the pristine garage, never had he seen a garage that was so perfectly kept and lit. The floor was spotless and all of the tools were hanging on a pegboard and organized into categories, then sized largest to smallest. The tools too were polished and spotless. “Where are you?” He looked around the large room, then at the three vintage cars that were perfectly lined up. The first was a red 1969 Chevrolet Camaro RS Z28, next to it sat a pale yellow 1958 Corvette Convertible and on the other end was a blue 1967 Mustang.

Jace could hear movement so he bent down onto his hands and knees and looked underneath the cars. Trevor was lying on his back on a creeper under the Mustang working on it. “Hey, didn’t you hear me? I have been calling you,” asked Jace.

“Yeah, I heard you, I just wanted to get this nut tightened before I answered,” responded Trevor. He pushed the ground with his foot and the creeper rolled out from under the Mustang. Sitting up he looked at his friend.

“I don’t know why you take the time to do that manually when there are *easier* ways.”

“I like working with my hands, you know that. Unlike you, who likes to take the easy way out in doing things.”

Jace rolled his eyes at his friend.

“What do you need?” asked Trevor.

“You are wanted upstairs,” said Jace.

“Another assignment?” Trevor asked raking his fingers through his shoulder length blond hair.

“Yes, it’s Christmas, so the rush is on. You know how it is during the holidays.”

“I sure do,” Trevor smiled showing his white teeth. He stood up and brushed his hands over his jeans and straightened his black t-shirt. “How do I look?”

Jace rolled his eyes. “Like it matters.”

Both laughed.

The two walked out of the garage closing the door behind them. Both were as opposite in looks as you could get. Jace had dark tan skin, dark hair and hazel eyes. Trevor on the other hand, had blond hair and bright blue eyes. The only thing they had in common was their height of six feet two inches.

“So, Ely wants to see me?” Trevor asked as they walked up the large granite staircase to a two story, red brick, colonial house that had four large white pillars out front. They opened the ornate white door and entered.

“He said he has a tough case, and thinks you can do the job,” answered Jace.

Inside, the interior was elaborately decorated with large paintings of various landscapes on the walls. Several leather couches

with matching chairs were arranged in groups, while various cherry wood desks were placed around the large open room. Jace and Trevor walked over and sat down at the largest desk that sat alongside the back wall. Next to it was a fireplace with a small fire burning in it.

“Maybe Ely doesn’t have a job for you, maybe you are in trouble,” Jace teased as he playfully punched him in the arm. Jace and Trevor had been friends for a very long time and enjoyed joking around with each other.

“Or maybe the job is to straighten you out, that would be the toughest case I could ever have,” Trevor shot back jabbing him in the ribs.

“If you two *gentlemen* are finished, we have some business to discuss.” Ely always liked to make a surprise entrance. He was dressed in a black tuxedo, with a starched white shirt, and a black bowtie. His white hair was pulled back into a ponytail that hung down his back.

“I have a tough case,” he informed Trevor. “Alistair and Franklin were unable to complete the job. Both said she is stubborn and determined to do things her way. Let me show you.” He pressed a small button inside of the desk drawer and a large glass screen emerged on the top of desk, then a hologram began to appear. A young girl with brown hair was sitting with an elderly woman reading to her. The scene was very serene.

“This doesn’t seem too bad,” commented Trevor as he watched the young woman.

Ely looked at him with one eyebrow raised. Trevor sat back in his chair and didn’t say another word. One thing he learned after working

with Ely for many decades was to let him finish what he had to say before commenting.

The image flashed forward and the same brown-haired girl was working at a department store. Her hair was still pulled back with a barrette, but different strands of it were falling out of it. She was very busy helping customers with their purchases. Another image flashed forward of same girl, this time she was lying in her bed where she had fallen asleep in her work clothes.

Ely looked at Trevor and Jace. “Do you see what I see?”

The two younger men looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. “No, she just looks like she had a tough day and fell asleep on her bed.”

Ely smiled at them knowingly. “I thought you would say that.” He pressed another button. Again, more images of the girl appeared, showing her working at the department store, then helping various older people. A few of the images showed her cooking dinner, cleaning house and taking care of some younger children. “Tell me what you see Trevor?”

“I see a young very young mother who has a lot of responsibility.” He was still confused as to what Ely wanted him to see.

“This young woman is not the mother of the children you see. She is their sister and she is only nineteen,” replied Ely.

“She’s only nineteen?” He could have sworn she was much older.

“Yes. Are you starting to see what I am trying to tell you?”

“I think so. She needs a break or something. Her shoulders are heavy with a lot of responsibility.”

“You are getting much closer.”

“Could I have a hint?” asked Trevor.

Jace intervened. “I think Ely is trying to tell you that the young girl is working too hard—”

“That’s obvious,” interrupted Trevor.

“What I don’t understand is what I’m supposed to do. A lot of the Earthbounds are overworked during this time of the year. Many work hard during the holidays to earn extra money to buy gifts for others. This has been going on for a very long time, but it only lasts about a month or two.”

Ely and Jace looked at each other.

“Trevor,” Ely began to explain. “She has been working like this for the last six months, without a break. She thinks because she only worked one of her jobs on one day a few weeks ago, that she had a break.”

“Ouch, that long huh?”

“Did you see her smile or laugh in any of the images?”

“No, actually I didn’t,” Trevor admitted. He looked back at the screen and gained a whole new perspective of the young woman.

“Well, that is your job.”

Trevor’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “To make her laugh and smile? Really? That should be easy.”

Ely looked at him, his face was somber. “Not when you have forgotten how to live your life. I don’t mean just getting out of bed, eating,

working, and sleeping, but *enjoy* living your life. There is a difference.”

Trevor sat back in the chair, his hand curled under his chin. “I didn’t think of that,” he stated as he analyzed the images again.

“Forgetting to enjoy living her life, she is much to young not to be doing this.”

“I agree. Before leave for this assignment, I would advise that you talk with Alistair and Franklin first. Ask them what they have learned and what they have tried.” Ely stood up, both hands on the desk. “Just don’t forget the rules about physical contact and becoming personally involved with your assignment. You are to remain undercover and unnoticed.”

“I have been doing this for nearly a century; I haven’t become personally involved with any of my assignments and will continue to do so. I know where to draw the line.” He winked at Ely.

Ely stared at him. “Just remember the rules.”

# 3

“The angels observe  
and care for the souls  
in their charge.”

Ari walked through the doors of Lake View Assisted Living where she had been working for the past seven months. She enjoyed working with elderly people. It was this decision that inspired her to choose the area of geriatrics in her nursing career. She did various jobs around the facility, from minor cleaning to helping the elderly with projects, games and personal things like writing letters for them. Her favorite part of her job was visiting with the many residents who lived there. Some were living at the facility because they could no longer take care of themselves at home. Other residents chose to live there because of the help they received and they liked the company and activities Lake View provided for them. This job was her “peaceful” job.

She walked into the employee room to check the schedule to see what assignments she had for the day. “Hmmm, not too bad,” she whispered. She had some cleaning to do, but afterwards she was to help with some of the activities.

Walking down the hallway she noticed one of the apartment doors was open. She carefully stuck her head in. “Anyone here?”

A light cheerful voice with a southern accent called out to her. “Yes, please come in.”



Ari stepped into the studio apartment. The room had been beautifully decorated with greens, browns and light yellows. Several pictures hung on the wall and the single bed had a few stuffed animals resting on it. Sitting in a small reclining chair was an older woman. She was petite; her grey hair was cut into a bob and she was beautifully dressed.

“Hi, I’m Ari, it is nice to meet you,” she greeted the new resident with her hand held out.

“I’m Vivian, but my family calls me Mimi, so you may as well too.” She reached up and took Ari’s hand and gently squeezed it.

“Well Mimi, it’s nice to meet you. I’m here to help you with anything you need,” stated Ari.

“Thank you doll, I might take you up on that sometime.”

“We hope you enjoy living here. Many of our residents have been with us for several years and they all have good things to say about living here. There are many fun and different activities to do every day. In fact, I believe we have a concert in the dining room this Friday night. A local family is going to come and play their instruments for us. They’re very talented with their violins, flutes and obo’s.” Ari handed her a schedule for the month. “This is a calendar of all of the activities we have for December.”

Mimi took the paper from Ari’s hand. “My husband, Charles, would have loved listening to the concert. He always enjoyed music.”

Ari noticed the portrait of a young man on the wall behind Mimi's recliner. "Is this a portrait of your husband?"

Smiling Mimi looked at the portrait, "Yes, he was a handsome devil. He is about seventeen in that portrait. That was a few years before I met him."

Ari decided she had some spare time, so she sat down in the chair next to Mimi. "How did you meet him, if you don't mind me asking?"

"I never mind talking about Charles. Telling people about him keeps his memories warm in my heart." She relaxed back into her chair. "It was during World War II, I met him at a USO dance. He approached me and asked me if I would like to dance with him. Well, I saw how the other girls were looking at him, and I wasn't about to allow them a chance to dance with him, he was the best-looking guy there. I took his hand and as he led me out onto the dance floor, I warned him that I couldn't dance." She rolled her eyes and smiled at the memory. "He was very gracious as he guided me around the dance floor. I kept stepping on his feet and missing the steps he was trying to help me with, but he kept smiling at me. After the song was over, he escorted me back to my seat. Then that rascal leaned down and whispered into my ear, 'You're right, you can't dance', but I would love to teach you."

Ari gasped. "He didn't! How embarrassing that must have been."

"Yes, he did, and yes it was embarrassing," she laughed. "But it didn't matter; we fell in love with each other that night."

Ari was thinking how romantic Mimi's story was, love at first sight. She had heard stories like this, but figured falling in love with someone the first time you meet them was very rare. "How long were the two of you married before he passed on?" She had learned that most of the widowed residents liked talking about their spouses and that certain questions were okay to ask.

"Sixty-seven years, three months, two weeks and four days. They were the happiest times of my life."

"I'm sure he is watching over you from Heaven."

"Oh, I know he is." She smiled.

"Do you have children?"

"Oh yes, two, a boy and a girl. They are twins. Both of them have three children each. How I do love my grandchildren."

"I bet they love you just as much."

"Having grandchildren is such a joy. I get to spoil them, then send them right back home." She had a wicked little smile on her face.

Ari laughed. Her own grandparents did the same thing with her and her brothers and sister. She looked at her watch. "Well, I have a list of things I still need to do, but I would love to come and visit with you again sometime if you would like?"

"I'll be here and my door will always be open to you Ari."

"Thanks Mimi." She got up and patted the smaller woman on the shoulder. Stopping at the door she turned and waved to her. She smiled as she walked down the hall. There was something

special about Mimi and she couldn't quite put her finger on it...

Several hours later, Ari finished with the cleaning assignments on her list. The cleaning wasn't too bad, but she enjoyed helping the residents with their activities more. She spent an hour helping with the daily afternoon Bingo game. Many of the residents looked forward to playing Bingo. Some were very competitive when playing and others used the time to socialize with their friends. When she was finished with the Bingo games, she made her way down another hall and through some bigger doors, into the critical care section of the assisted living facility. The patients here required twenty-four-hour care. Most were bed ridden from different illnesses and many suffered from Alzheimer's disease. It pained her to see the patients and their small frail bodies, that weren't able to do much for themselves, if anything at all.

One particular patient was an eighty year old woman named Leona. She suffered from Alzheimer's disease which set on early in her life. When Ari began working at Lake View, Leona was still coherent and they would have some wonderful talks. But the last two months she had declined quickly and was bed ridden. She never had children of her own and her husband passed on when she was only fifty-five. She never remarried. The only family she had was a grand-nephew who lived in New York City. He flew in to South Ogden, Utah where Lake View Assisted Living was located several times a month, but Ari had never met him. He also saw that she was sent

a fresh bouquet of flowers twice a week. Every bouquet was different and there was always a letter from him attached to the vase.

Ari quietly walked into Leona's room and sat down on a chair that was next to the sleeping elderly woman. "Okay Leona, where did we leave off last time?" She took a large book off of the night table next to the bed and opened it. "If I remember right, Scarlet had just made herself a dress out of the curtains that had hung in the window and was going to pay Rhett Butler a visit."

When Leona talked, she had mentioned how much she liked the book *Gone With The Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell. It saddened Ari when she learned that Leona would be spending the remainder of her days in bed. She decided that she would take time during each of her shifts to read a chapter or two of the book to Leona. She had heard once that Alzheimer's patients may not seem coherent, but could still hear what was going on around them. The room was quiet as Ari leaned back into the chair and read to Leona.

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Trevor quietly sat back and listened to Ari while she read the story to the elderly woman. He had a small notebook on his lap and wrote while he listened. "Caring, patient and generous," he said as he wrote down the words.

\*\*\*

After working at Lake View in the earlier half of the day, Ari went straight to Garland's department store. She only had a four hour shift tonight, which as bad as she needed the money, she was grateful for. Her feet and back were aching tonight. She put her purse into her locker and then pulled her sweater on. She had been chilled for most of the day, so the warmth of the sweater was welcomed. On her way out of the employee break room she reached into her pocket for a tissue. Instead of a tissue, she pulled out a piece of paper, but it wasn't a typical piece of paper. This one had been folded into a three-inch angel.

With her lips pressed tight she looked at the angel curiously wondering how it got into her pocket. She turned it over and on the back was the word, *Caring*. She looked around the empty room then back at her locker. Her eyebrows drawn together she tucked the angel back into her pocket and walked out onto the sales floor.

# 4

“They see our efforts  
And know our hearts.”

Ten o'clock at night the public bus was almost empty as Ari stepped out of it and the doors closed behind her. The cool night air whipped around her face, so she pulled her jacket up around her neck. It had snowed earlier that day, so with each step she took the snow crunched under her feet. She was grateful the bus stop was only three blocks from her house as she made her way down the snow-covered sidewalk. Turning the corner, she saw her house. The porch light was on and the inflatable Santa Clause in the front yard was full and lit up. Other houses on her street had colorful lights framing their roofs, windows, and shrubs which colorfully lit the street.

She stepped up onto the porch and stomped the snow off of her shoes and walked into the house. Inside everything was quiet and only a few lights were on. No doubt her brothers and sister were already in bed since it was a school night. She hung her coat up in the closet as her mom walked into the family room. Her mom was already dressed for bed and had her lavender bathrobe wrapped around her. She was a small woman with shoulder length brown hair and light blue eyes.

“Oh good you're home,” said her mom, Alice, as she walked up and gave her a hug. “You



left so early this morning; I didn't have a chance to talk to you."

Ari hugged her back. "Yeah, I had to be to Lake View by eight, so I left at seven. You were in the shower. Did you get my note?"

"Yes, thank you." Alice followed her into the kitchen. "I have some leftover lasagna in the fridge. All you have to do is heat it in the microwave."

She smiled. "That sounds really good right now, I'm starving." Ari pulled the plate out of the refrigerator and put it into the microwave. She filled a glass with some water and set it on the counter. The microwave beeped and she pulled the dish out and set it on the counter as well, then sat down. Her mom sat next to her.

"Ari, I don't know how you're doing it, working two jobs. I'm worried about you, you look so tired." She brushed a stray strand of hair away from her daughter's face.

"It's not forever mom, I'll be fine." She filled her mouth with a bite of lasagna. She hadn't eaten anything since lunch so it tasted like heaven.

"You're too young to be working so hard. You need to take some time and do something fun." Ari started to interrupt her but her mom put her hand up. "No, I mean it. Yes, our money is tight, but we aren't desperate. Your dad and I appreciate all that you're doing to help, but you need to live a little too."

"I will mom, but it's just going to take time. Besides, I almost have enough money saved to pay for at least two semesters," she quickly intervened.

Alice shook her head. “You have always been so stubborn. Just promise me, that you will take a day off and do something fun with your friends, and allow yourself to relax. You deserve to have some fun and need it too.”

Ari breathed out a long sigh. “I’ll try mom, but with it being the holidays, I can get more hours at Garland’s. After December, everything will slow way down and my hours will go down too. This is a chance for me to make more money for school—”

“You’re a stubborn young lady,” Alice murmured. “Life isn’t just about money, it’s about living it.”

“I know, just give me some time. Okay?” She leaned towards her mom. “After the holidays, I will take some time off, I promise.”

Alice shook her head, knowing that Ari was going to do things her way, as she always did. She decided to change the subject. “Hey, before I forget, dad has another interview with the financial company tomorrow, so cross your fingers that they will offer him the job.”

“Mom, I don’t think they have been uncrossed since he got the first interview,” she laughed.

Alice smiled. “Same here.” She held up her hands showing her crossed fingers.

The two of them laughed.

Ari finished her dinner and put her plate into the dishwasher then went upstairs to her room. She slowly removed her sweater and set it on her bed. Stopping, she picked it back up and reached into the pocket and felt the paper angel.

## Paper Angels

Pulling it out she turned it around and studied it. The detail in the folds amazed her. The message on the back confused her. She wondered who put the angel in her pocket and why. She set it down onto her night table next to her clock radio and finished getting ready for bed.

Once her pajamas were on, she removed the barrette from her hair and let it fall over her shoulders, then massaged her scalp. It felt good to let her hair hang down after having it pulled back all day. She pulled her comforter and blankets back on her bed and slid under them. Reaching up she went to turn the light off, when the angel caught her eye. Picking it up, she looked at it one more time.

“Caring, why would anyone write caring on the back of a paper angel,” she said aloud. It seemed so odd. Setting it back down, she turned her light off and quickly fell asleep.

# 5

“They help us find  
ourselves and  
often through our  
dreams.”

Trevor sat in the Mustang Convertible reading the notes he had written in his notebook, when Jace sauntered into the garage. “How is your assignment going?”

“Ely was right, this one is stubborn,” he said exasperated. “I have tried sending her free movie tickets, had others offer their help to her and even compelled another saleslady to take an extra shift at the department store so that she would have to do something else besides work.”

“But it didn’t work I take it,” said Jace. He opened the car door and sat down on the seat next to Trevor.

“No, in fact it only made things worse. Another employee asked her if she would work their shift the same night as the one I stopped her from working, and it’s a longer shift. I didn’t see it coming until it was too late, so I couldn’t intervene.”

“Ely tried to tell you it wasn’t going to be easy,” Jace added, even though he already knew that Trevor was aware of this.

“I know,” he sighed. He had been helping people for nearly a century and thought this particular case was going to be easy, since he had dealt with tough cases before. He sat quietly tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, then his

expression changed and he began to smile. “I know what I need to do.”

“What?” Jace asked. Trevor went from looking as if one of his cars had fallen to the earth, to one of complete joy.

“I’ll let you know later.” He jumped out of the car, then disappeared.

“I hope for your sake, it works,” he called after Trevor.

\*\*\*

Ari sat quietly in Leona’s room. She just finished reading her another chapter from *Gone With The Wind*. Setting the book down onto the night table she reached over and smoothed Leona’s silver bangs down onto her forehead. Leona began to stir and Ari quickly pulled her hand away.

“Is that you Ari?” Leona quietly asked.

Ari was shocked. Leona hadn’t said much and moved very little in the last several weeks.

The older woman blinked her eyes several times trying to focus them. “I do enjoy your readings. I want you to know that,” she yawned. Her pale brown eyes looked almost grey in the dim light of the room. She looked around and began to frown, her forehead creased even more as she tried to focus on one particular area. “Who did you bring with you?”

Ari turned around. There wasn’t anyone else in the room but herself. “Leona, I’m the only one here.”

“No, there is a young man standing next to you. He has the bluest eyes I have ever seen and his hair is blond. He is looking right at you. He seems so familiar to me. Have I met him before?”

Goose bumps erupted on Ari’s arms. She had been told that when a person is close to death, some will talk about seeing loved ones who had passed on. “Honest Leona, there isn’t anyone else in the room but you and I.”

“No dear, he is shaking his head and smiling at you.” She yawned again. “Oh, I know who he is...” she started to doze off and quit talking.

Ari gently shook her arm. “Who do you think it is?” she urged.

Leona lay still in her bed, breathing quietly. Ari was about to give up when Leona began to whisper. “He’s your guardian angel. I think he’s trying to tell you something.”

“I don’t hear anybody—”

“No child... try to listen with your heart and not your ears...” She closed her eyes and fell back to sleep.

As Ari stood in the quiet room her eyes were wide as she cautiously looked around. A guardian angel, is there really such a thing?

Trevor quietly stood next to Ari. He was just a surprised as she was that the older woman could see him. He had helped others pass when their spirit separated from their body. Many had seen him before the separation took place, but it was rare for others to see him if he wasn’t helping them. He curiously looked at the fragile body lying in the bed. She was so still and calm. Next to

her stood another figure, a woman, she looked at him and smiled. Her golden hair spilled in curls around her shoulders.

“Hi Beverly, it has been a long time,” Greeted Trevor.

Beverly preferred to wear lacy white dresses that hung to her ankles, unlike Trevor, Jace and many others who preferred to wear jeans and t-shirts. Beverly was one of the oldest angels he had ever met. Someone once told him that she was over a thousand-years old.

“Yes, Trevor it has. Who is the young woman?” she asked in a soft voice.

“Her name is Ari, she’s my current assignment,” he answered.

“She isn’t going to pass is she?”

“No, I have to help her learn to find herself and be happy while she is living her life here on Earth.”

“Oh, a tough case, I had one of those once. It took me nearly five earth years to accomplish the task.”

Trevor put his hands into his pants pocket and looked back at Ari. “I don’t have that long to work with this one. Ely wants me to help her before Christmas.”

“Why? I find that odd.” Beverly too was looking at the young girl before her, studying her.

“I don’t know why– and I have learned to not question him.”

She smiled at him knowingly. “May I make a suggestion?”

“Yes, I would appreciate any suggestions you could give me.”



“Some Earthbounds need to find themselves inside before the outside can be worked on.”

“I’m not sure I understand what you mean?” He looked at her, both of his eyebrows were drawn together.

“Dreams, Trevor, help her in her dreams. I do this when Earthbounds have lost a loved one. They can’t let go because they miss them so deeply. I allow their loved one to visit them in their dreams. It’s very comforting for them and helps them to move forward.”

“I never thought about that,” he said quietly. “Thank you, Beverly.”

She smiled.

He looked back at Leona’s frail body. “How much longer before you can help her pass over?”

“Not long, she still has a few more things to do before she can leave her earthly bonds.”

“I understand, but it’s still hard to watch them go through this.”

“Why Trevor, are you feeling emotions? I didn’t think it was possible for us to do this.”

Trevor recovered himself. “No,” he said quickly. “I just sometimes try to imagine what they are going through. It helps me to do my job better.”

“Oh, I understand. Maybe I will try to do this too.” Beverly moved over by Leona and looked down at her and gently moved her hand about two inches over Leona’s arm in a patting motion. Leona immediately began to relax and breathe easier.

“You always did have a special way with your Earthbounds. Maybe one day you could teach me how you do this...”

She nodded.

Ari’s pager began to quietly beep in her pocket. She leaned down to Leona and quietly whispered, “Sleep well Leona, it was wonderful talking with you today.” She straightened the blankets over Leona’s small frail body, then quietly left the room.

Beverly watched the young woman with interest. “She does have a good heart, doesn’t she?”

“I’m beginning to see much about her that wasn’t in her profile, and her compassion for others is one of them.” He nodded to Beverly and followed Ari out the door.

Ari strode quickly to the front desk. Behind it sat an older woman with short curly hair that had been dyed an unnatural shade of black. She looked up at Ari, her lips pressed together. She was tapping a pen on the desk in front of her. “I have a problem, and I’m not sure what to do about it.”

“What it is, maybe I could help you?” Ari offered. She was a bit apprehensive about talking to Pat. Sometimes Pat could be snippy and you never knew what would set her temper off.

Pat looked at her. “I had arranged for a young man to come and play Christmas music on the piano during lunch today, but he just called and said he has the flu. I know he can’t help it, but it doesn’t help me either.” She started flipping through a notebook in front of her. “I just don’t

know anybody I could call and have them here in less than an hour.”

Ari bit her lip and was quiet for just a moment. “You said it was just during lunch today?”

“Yes. Why, do you know of someone you could call?” Pat’s face lit up with hope.

“I can play the piano. I’m not the best, but if you are desperate, I would be willing to help.”

Pat swiftly ran around the desk and hugged Ari tightly. “You are the sweetest young lady I know. Thank you so much!”

Ari was taken aback by this reaction. This was a side to Pat she didn’t know existed. The smile on Pat’s face made Ari feel good about her decision. It wasn’t very often that she or anyone else could make Pat smile. She had heard once from one of the nurses that Pat had had a hard life and that her husband died at an early age. If playing the piano at lunch would help Pat with her dilemma, then it would be worth every minute.

“I have a few more things on my list to finish first, then I will make my way down to the dining room.”

“Don’t worry about the rest of your list. I will see if Ann will finish it for you. It’s the least I could do since you will be helping me out of a pinch.” Pat stopped suddenly and looked Ari up and down. “Hmmm, we need to fix you up a bit though. Let’s start by removing your work smock.”

She reached up and helped Ari pull her arms out of the sleeves. Underneath, she was wearing a dark green long-sleeved t-shirt and

jeans. “Well that’s a bit better. Now your hair—” Without asking she reached behind her and pulled the barrette out of Ari’s hair, then spread strands of it down and around her shoulders with her fingers. “It’s not the best, but it will do.”

Ari stood there feeling humiliated at what Pat had just done. She knew that her hair needed more effort than she gave it, but to have her pull it out of its barrette like that felt very awkward. Her face was burning with embarrassment. “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll be in the cafeteria in about thirty minutes.” She quickly walked away from the desk then down the hall and turned the corner. She leaned up against the wall and shook her head in disbelief.

“Hi Ari,” said a sweet little southern voice.

Ari jumped and her heart began to beat harder. She thought she was alone in the hallway. “Oh, hi Mimi,” she said awkwardly. Now she wasn’t sure if she was more embarrassed about Pat’s quick make-over or Mimi catching her in the middle of her humiliation.

Slowly walking towards her with her fancy purple walker was Mimi. “I just saw what Pat did. She meant well I’m sure, but sometimes that woman has no class if you ask me.” Mimi stopped in front of her and gently pulled Ari’s chin up so she could look at her.

Ari broke out into a little smile. “You aren’t kidding about that,” she smirked. “I really do try to give her the benefit of the doubt but sometimes she makes it very difficult.”

“I want you to come with me to my room, I have something for you.” Mimi began to walk to

## Paper Angels

her door then stopped and looked back. “Well, hurry, we don’t have all day.”

Shrugging her shoulders, she followed Mimi into her room.

# 6

“Their efforts are  
pure and fill our  
souls with music.”

Mimi made her way to her closet and pulled out a beautiful red sweater. It had a scooped neckline then gathered under the bust with a ribbon and tied in the middle. The sleeves were form fitting until they reached the wrists where they slightly fanned out. “I want you to have this.” She put it up to Ari’s shoulders. “I bet it will fit you perfectly.”

Ari shook her head. “Mimi, I can’t accept this, it’s much too nice.”

“Nonsense, I won’t wear it; it’s too small and trendy for me. The style is for a much younger woman like you. Besides, if you don’t, it will continue to sit in my closet, when it should be worn and shown off. Now,” she directed. “Go into my bathroom and try it on.”

Once again Ari began to protest but Mimi gently pushed her towards the bathroom. A few minutes later, Ari shyly opened the door and stepped out. “What do you think?” she asked as she turned around.

“I think it was made just for you.” Mimi smiled. She then thoughtfully looked at Ari. “Something is missing though—”

“What?” asked Ari. She began to scan the floor for whatever it may be.

“Well, would you be willing to humor an old lady?”

The pleading look on Mimi's face made her immediately say, "Yes."

"Back in my day, I owned and operated my own beauty salon. I had quite the clientele too, I even had a few movie stars for clients," she said proudly. "Would you let me have the honor of styling your hair? I have truly missed doing this."

Ari looked at her watch. "I have to be in the dining room in twenty-five minutes..."

"It won't take long, not when I already have a beautiful model to begin with."

Ari snorted slightly at Mimi calling her a beautiful model. She never was the striking beauty that caught the boys attention in high school.

Mimi had her sit in one of her chairs while she plugged in her curling iron. While the iron heated, she applied a small amount of makeup onto Ari's eyes and brushed on a bit of blush to pinken her cheeks a bit. "Even in my younger days, I never could have gotten away with as little makeup as I have put on you and looked so nice. You are a natural beauty, never forget that."

Ari sat quietly while Mimi brushed and styled her hair. She wasn't allowed to look in the mirror until she was finished. Mimi curled small strands of her hair then backcombed parts of it on the crown of her head. The

"Okay now, slightly open your mouth." Mimi slid some lipstick over her lips. "Now purse them together and slightly rub them back and forth. Perfect. Now, you may look in the mirror."

Ari stood up and apprehensively turned around to look in the mirror. What she saw surprised her. She recognized herself, but she



didn't in a way either. Her hair had been slightly styled into long big curls that rested on her shoulders. Mimi had also taken her long bangs and loosely pulled them back and pinned them into place with her barrette. What surprised her most was how blue her eyes looked with just a little bit of eye shadow and mascara accenting them.

"Wow," she whispered in awe. "Mimi, you are a miracle worker."

Mimi laughed at being called a miracle worker. "No, I just enhanced what was already there. Now, we need to get you down to the dining room." Mimi began to walk towards the door when Ari realized that she didn't have her walker.

"Mimi, don't you need your walker?"

"Oh, heavens yes." She slowed down and walked at a snail's pace back over to the purple walker. "It's a good thing you reminded me, I wouldn't want to lose my balance and fall."

Ari thought it was odd, Mimi was walking just fine a second ago, then all of a sudden, her pace slowed down dramatically. "Why don't I walk down with you?" she offered.

"No, I need to powder my nose first, so I will meet you there. Now hurry, you don't want to be late." Mimi shooed her hand towards the door with a small flick of her wrist.

Smiling, Ari quickly strode over to Mimi and hugged her. "Thank you. I love my hair and the new sweater."

"My pleasure darlin, now get going or you'll be late."

\*\*\*

Ari sat down at the piano as the residents slowly filtered into the dining room and sat at their tables. She was nervous; it had been a long time since she had played the piano for an audience. Her parents had put her in piano lessons when she was seven, because she showed an interest in the piano they had in their living room. For the next six years Ari took lessons and played for various guests her parents would have in their home and sometimes at church. The last few months she hadn't played the piano at all. She just didn't have enough time. Nervously, she took several breathes and moved her fingers up and down to warm them up. She would be playing all of the songs from memory.

The last resident was seated and she began to play *In The Bleak Midwinter*. The cafeteria quickly quieted down as the music filled the air. Next, she played *Silent Night*, then *Jingle Bells*, which had many of the residents singing along with her. She played *What Child Is This* and *Mary's Lullaby*, then ended with her favorite Christmas song of all, *Oh Holy Night*. When she finished pressing the last key, the room was so quiet; she thought that maybe everyone had left while she was playing. Shyly she turned to look at her audience and they erupted into a loud applause. She smiled and stood up bowing slightly in thanks for their appreciation.

The large room turned into a low murmur of voices and movement as everyone began to exit the cafeteria. Pat quickly rushed up to her. "Ari, I had no idea how talented you are!" she cooed.

“Maybe I could talk you into playing for us some other time?”

Smiling Ari looked at her. “Pat, I would love too. Thanks.”

“Come and talk to me later and we’ll see what the schedule is like.” Pat began to walk away then stopped. She looked at Ari and smiled.

“Thank you for helping me today, I really appreciate it.” A long moment of silence followed then Pat cleared her voice. “Oh look, Mr. Black is stuck.” She rushed over to help an elderly man get his walker around one of the dining room chairs, then led him down the hallway.

Ari sat back down onto the bench and looked at the keys on the piano and brushed her fingers over them. She felt, well... happy inside. She waved to several of the residents as they exited the room. When was the last time she had felt this way she wondered? The room quieted down and she was alone.

Was it the Christmas music or playing it on the piano that made her feel so peaceful she wondered? Turning, her hand knocked something off the bench. Reaching down she picked up a small piece of paper that was folded into an angel. Looking at it she turned it over. This one had *Beautiful* written on its back.

Curiously she looked around the large room, hoping that maybe she would see who left it there. Then the thought came to her, when would someone have set it next to her? Surely she would have seen them...”

\*\*\*

Trevor was taken aback as he listened to Ari play the piano. Her profile had listed “plays the piano” under “Hobbies” of all things, but in his opinion it had been a gross error. Playing the piano should have been listed under “Talents”. What else had been mismarked in her profile he wondered?

He watched her as she examined the paper angel and the way she looked around the room in wonder looking for the person responsible for putting it there. Her eyes looked especially beautiful today and it was no wonder he thought, she was happy inside for the first time, in a long time. She needed more of this, he smiled thoughtfully.

He began to write more notes in his book. Closing it he watched Ari as she sat quietly brushing her fingers on the piano keys. She quietly hummed a small tune, and then began to play it softly on the piano. He was mesmerized by her hand movements as they bounced up and down over the black and white keys. He stayed and listened to her until she finished. Pulling the cover over the piano keys, she stood up and looked around, then she left the dining room. He liked how her hair swung back and forth as she walked away...

7

“Our good qualities  
they record.”

Ari put on her coat and scarf as she prepared to leave Lake View. She was heading for the mall to work a shorter shift at Garland's tonight. She was grateful for the shorter shift, but all she really wanted to do was go home and snuggle up and watch something dumb on the television or read a good book. She laughed at the latter, since she knew she didn't have the time to get involved in a good book right now. At least she had the excuse of reading one to Leona.

Sighing, she briskly walked out to her car. Her mom had let her borrow her car today since she would be home taking care of Kaiya, her little sister. Kaiya had been up all night with the stomach flu, which meant her mom had been up all night too. She called the dental office she worked for and told them she wouldn't be able to come in. This made the car available for Ari to use that day, which was a nice break from riding the bus.

She opened the car door and slid in onto the seat, then quickly closed the door behind her to keep more of the cold air from entering. She began to set her purse down onto the passenger side seat when she noticed something sitting on it. Lined up next to each other were three paper angels. Curiously she picked them up. One had

## Paper Angels

*Outstanding* written on it. The second angel had *Happy* written on its back. She set the two down before she looked at the third one. Shaking her head in disbelief she turned the third one over and it had *Important* written on its back. Shaking her head, she knew it wouldn't do her any good to look around the parking lot to see if she could find the person responsible for leaving the angels. Whoever was leaving them, didn't want her to know their identity. Smiling she gently set the angels back down onto the car seat.

She put the key into the ignition and turned it and the car immediately began to idle. The late afternoon sun caught her in the eye, so she quickly reached up and pulled the sun visor down. Something fell down from it and landed on her lap. She wasn't at all surprised when she saw another paper angel. Hesitantly she picked it up then turned it over. This one was different from all the others, instead of a single word on it, this one had a message, *Take the time*.

Her eyebrows drew together. "*Take the time*, what is that supposed to mean?" She picked up all four of the angels and looked at each of them again, but it didn't help with the confusing message, nor did it provide any information as to who was sending them to her. She now had six angels; the first one was left for her at Garland's and the other five left at Lake View. Trying to narrow down who was leaving the angels was like finding a needle in a haystack, since many people knew she worked at one or the other places.

Sighing, she gently set them back down onto the seat and backed out of the parking stall, then

drove out onto the main road. She hadn't driven too far when the car began to bounce up and down on the right front side. Slowly she pulled over into a vacant parking lot and got out of the car. She walked around the car and looked at the tires first to see if one of them was the problem. As she approached the front of the car, she noticed that the passenger side was lower than the rest of the car. Crouching down she examined the flat right front tire.

“Great, just what I need right now, a flat tire. Now I'm going to be late for work,” she grumbled discouragingly. She felt like getting back into the car and crying. As if there wasn't already enough going on right now, she felt this was going to be the one thing that was going to bring her down. She could feel the tears welling up in her eyes and her bottom lip began to quiver. “I just can't take any more,” she sniffed as she bent down to get a good look at the flat tire.

“Excuse me, you look like you could use some help?”

Startled, Ari jumped. Her eyes darted up to see who was talking to her. A man in his early twenties was standing close to her and looking at the tire. He was wearing jeans and snow boots, but surprisingly he was only wearing a beige sweater on a cold winter day. His blond hair touched his shoulders, but it was his piercing blue eyes that caused her to suck in her breath. “I aaa... well... I have a flat tire,” the words stumbled out of her mouth.

He smiled at her. “Here stand up and let me take a look.” He stood to the side so she could



move, and then traded her places. “It’s definitely flat. Do you have a spare tire?”

At first Ari didn’t hear what he said, she was still staring at him.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

Quickly coming out of her embarrassing stupor, she blurted out, “Yes, in the back of the car, I mean in the trunk.” Her cheeks reddened even more. Inwardly she was dying from embarrassment over the giddy way he was making her feel. She reached into the car and fumbled for her keys in the ignition and turned off the car. She pushed a small black button on the lower dashboard and the lid to the trunk popped open.

He smiled knowingly at her and walked over and lifted the trunks lid. Removing a blanket and a set of jumper cables, he pulled the carpet back and found the spare tire underneath. On top of it was a jack. He lifted both out as if they weighed as much as a feather and set them down next to the car. Ari watched as he changed the flat tire. He did it with ease, and quickly, as if this was something he did professionally for maybe a race track. Within minutes he was placing the flat tire into the trunk and closing the lid.

Dusting his hands off, he looked at her. “Well, that should do it.”

She reached into the car and grabbed her purse. “Let me pay you. I’m not sure—”

He put his hands up and shook his head. “No, I didn’t stop so you could pay me for helping you. That’s not how I work.”

She smiled. “Are you sure? I really don’t mind, you did me a huge favor.”

“Yes, I’m sure. Just promise me that you will get the tire fixed within the next few days. These spare tires aren’t made for every day wear and tear, especially on snowy and icy roads.”

“I promise I will, thanks.” She looked at her watch. “Oh no, I’m going to be late for work. I need to hurry and get going. I really am grateful, thank you again.” She opened the door to the car and slid onto the driver’s seat and started the car.

“You won’t be late, so take your time.”

“I’m going to the mall, and will be fighting that traffic along with commuter traffic. Both are a bad combination.”

“Trust me, you won’t be late,” he stated.

“You seem very positive about that.”

“Maybe so, but I can guarantee you, that you won’t be late if you’re careful.” He stepped back and closed the door for her. “Have a Merry Christmas.” He waved to her and walked away.

She waved back then carefully pulled out onto the street. She quickly peered in her rearview mirror to get one more look at him, but he was already gone. This puzzled her, since she didn’t see any other cars in the parking lot and the sidewalks were empty. “I wonder where he went?” she whispered.

\*\*\*

“What are you doing?” Jace asked astonished.

Trevor stood on the sidewalk and watched as Ari drove away. “What I was assigned to do, helping Arianna Nance get a better life.”

Jace looked at him skeptically with his arms folded across his chest. “You are getting dangerously close to breaking the rules and you know it.”

“Yeah,” Trevor grinned. “But haven’t I always done things my way? I like pushing the limits and you know it. Besides, I always know when to back off.” He began to walk down the sidewalk then disappeared into a cloud of mist with Jace on his heels.

“You aren’t supposed to let them see you and not only did you let your Earthbound see you, you helped her physically,” Jace snapped at him.

They were now standing outside of the garage. Trevor held his hand out and motioned for the door to open. The door gently swung inward and the two walked inside.

“I never made any physical contact with her.”

Jace began to argue with him, but Trevor held his hand up to stop him. “Jace, don’t you get tired of always following the rules *exactly*, haven’t you ever been tempted to bend them just slightly?” He had stopped and leaned against the Corvette. Jace joined him and leaned against the car too.

“No, I believe that the rules have been set for a reason. If we break them or,” he looked hard at his friend. “Bend them as you put it, things will go wrong. There is a reason why Ely has given them to us.”

Trevor was quiet for a moment, as he scratched his head. “Yeah, but sometimes, not very often, I have felt strongly that the rules need to be bent. Remember Samson?”

“The old man with the sick dog?”

“Yes. I tried to do things the way we are supposed to, and followed every rule exactly, but it wasn’t working. The old man was becoming more depressed and wouldn’t see or listen to the promptings I kept giving him.”

“The dog almost died if I remember right.”

“Yes, and he wasn’t supposed to die. The dog was part of Samson’s future, but his inability to recognize the help he was being given was changing the course of things. The dog was getting worse and worse with each day. During this time, I kept getting the feeling I was supposed to go beyond the rules, so I did by knocking the phonebook onto the floor. The page opened up to a veterinarian that could help the dog. Samson saw the page and immediately called the vet and got the dog the help it needed, and the dog lived. Samson is now back on track and living his life as he was supposed to.”

Jace didn’t say anything; he stood quietly and stared straight ahead. Sighing he asked, “What are you going to do now? Is she responding to anything you have done so far?”

A smile spread across Trevor’s face as he remembered listening to Ari play the piano. “Yes, today, she played the piano for the first time in a long time. Did you know that her profile has her piano playing listed as a hobby?” He still couldn’t believe the listing. “She played beautifully. It should be listed under talents instead. Not to mention, I saw her smile and heard her laugh for the first time since she was assigned to me.”

Jace turned and looked at Trevor his head was tilted to one side. “Are you falling in love with her?”

Trevor’s mouth fell open and he sharply turned his head toward his friend. “No, of course not, we aren’t capable of such emotions and you know it,” he said defensively.

Jace backed away from him with his hands up. “Hey, I just thought I would ask.”

Trevor relaxed. “I know, sorry. You just caught me off guard.”

“So, what are you going to do next?”

“I’m not sure. I need to check and see if the mini piano concert worked for her in a long-term perspective. You know, see if it had staying power or not. Ely gave me such a short time frame for this one, and I have had to step up the game a bit. My time is growing shorter.”

“Well, just be careful.”

“Aren’t I always?” he grinned wickedly.

Jace rolled his eyes and left the garage.

“No!” he hollered before he shut the door behind him.

# 8

“They rescue us  
and help transform  
our souls.”

Ari was in a good mood the next morning. Nothing had changed in her circumstances, but playing the piano for the residences at Lake View had given her something to smile about. Ethel watched as the usually sad and frowning young woman before her dusted and straightened the display racks and the clothes that were hanging on them. She was smiling and humming a Christmas tune as she walked by Ethel with a feather duster and two blouses in her hands.

“Hello Ethel,” Ari sweetly chirped as she walked by.

Ethel’s eyes were large and round at this display and her arms were folded over her chest. “Okay girlfriend, we need to talk.”

“Sure, what would you like to talk about,” Ari asked straightening the snowman pin on Ethel’s sweater.

Ethel gently slapped her hand away and grabbed Ari by the wrist then led her over to the back-stock door. “I need to know if you are on something?” she hissed. You always knew where you stood with Ethel; she didn’t have any problems in telling you exactly how she was feeling.

Ari pulled her arm away. “What is wrong with you today? Why would you ask me such a thing?” She was very insulted by Ethel’s accusation.

“Me? *You* are asking *me* if there is something wrong with *me*?” she said exasperated.

Putting her hands on her hips Ari looked at her. “Yes I am.” Her head was tilted to the side and her mouth was a straight line, daring Ethel to insult her again.

“Two days ago, you came to work looking like the world was going to end. In fact, that is how you always look, doom and gloom. You always look like the weight of the world is all on your shoulders and about to end. Then today, you show up to work all cheery and... and... now,” Ethel stepped back and looked at Ari from head to toe. “Did you get one of those make-overs or something? I really like your hair and your sweater, but that’s not the point. It’s like you have had one of those Christmas ghosts visit you in the night and show you what your life will be like if you don’t change. It just isn’t natural to change so fast.”

Ari smiled. When she woke up, she decided to take the time to curl her hair and apply a small amount of make-up on her eyes and cheeks, like Mimi did for her the day before. She also decided to wear the red sweater again, it made her feel pretty. “No ghosts visited me, how ridiculous is that? Yesterday we had a pianist scheduled to come and play Christmas music for the residents but he called in sick. They needed someone to fill in last minute, so I helped by



playing the piano for them. One of the residents at Lake View gave me a quick make-over and this sweater.” She held her arms out and turned to the left then the right. “Ethel, it felt wonderful to play the piano.” Ari folded her arms across her chest and almost did a full twirl but stopped midway when she realized what she was about to do.

Ethel broke out into a loud laugh. “I get it now, you aren’t drunk—” She stopped when a customer walked by and gave her a shocked look. “I mean,” she whispered as she leaned in closer to Ari. “You aren’t drunk with alcohol, you are drunk with happiness! It’s like you are a... *happiness lightweight* or something.”

Ari gasped. “What do you mean, drunk with happiness? There isn’t such a thing. I think that maybe you are the one who has been hitting the bottle, not me,” she said defensively. “A happiness lightweight, I’m always happy.” Her chin shot up as she looked away from Ethel.

Laughing, Ethel put her arm around her shoulders. “Girl, you haven’t been happy for a long time, and now, you have finally realized you can be, even with your workload.”

“What do you mean I finally realized I could be happy? I have been happy all along—”

Ethel snorted. “Okay if you say so.” She walked towards the customer service desk to help a waiting customer. “Go and *really* look at yourself in the mirror. Then think about how you have been feeling and acting for the past several months. There is something different about you today. I like it.”

Ari stood by the back-stock door with a dejected look on her face. Had she really looked like doom and gloom all these months? She walked over to the mirror by the dressing room. She did have more color to her face, but that was because of the make-up. She pulled some of her hair around her face and scrunched it a bit to give it more fullness. She liked what she saw.

She began to walk over to the customer service desk to help Ethel with the growing line of customers when something fell onto her head then tumbled to the floor. She looked down at her feet and saw a white piece of paper. She knew immediately what it was, another paper angel. Bending down she retrieved the angel and turned it over. On the back was written, *Beautiful Smile*. She quickly looked around, but knew she wouldn't see who was responsible for it. At first, she was happy to see the angel, and then she became discouraged. She wished she knew who was making the angels for her. She should at least be given the right to tell them thank you. She gently flattened the angel and slid it into her pants pocket and went to help Ethel.

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Trevor stood back and watched Ari. He liked seeing her smiling and enjoying herself. He was hopeful that this state of happiness Ari was experiencing was going to last. Then he would be able to report to Ely and let him know that he was able to *fix* the tough case that two other angels weren't able to do, and before the due date. His

smile quickly left as a small frown replaced it, for a quick moment, he felt a pang of sorrow. He was going to miss Ari when he finished with her case. It had been a long time since he enjoyed helping an earthbound as much as he did Ari. All of his cases were important to him, but this particular case was bringing him joy– Quickly he shrugged the latter thought away, he wasn't capable of feeling such emotions and wasn't quite sure why the thought of not seeing her anymore bothered him. After this case was finished, he was going to have to ask Ely for some time off. Working hard and nonstop for nearly a hundred years was beginning to take its toll on him. Yup a vacation was what he needed.

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The afternoon went by quickly, since Garland's was very busy with holiday shoppers. As Christmas day drew closer, more and more shoppers began to come to the store to buy gifts. This was good and bad. Good for business and what Ari referred to as "Job Security" and bad too, because the store was always messy and cranky customers began to appear more and more due to the stress of running out of time.

The lines at the customer service counters had been long all day due to the storewide sale. Ari was counting down the last two hours she had before her shift ended. Her feet were beginning to ache from standing on them all day. Looking up she smiled at her next customer.

"Hi, may I help you?" she asked.

“I certainly hope so,” grumbled the older man in front of her. He pulled a gold bracelet out of a small bag and held it up. “I bought this charm bracelet a month ago for my daughter and the charm has already broken off. I want to know what you intend to do about it.”

Ari reached out for the charm. “May I look at it?”

“Yes,” he huffed loudly as he rolled his eyes and handed it to her.

Ari looked at the charm. It had a small stress fracture on it. “If you would like, we could send the charm out to our jeweler and have it repaired at no cost to you,” she offered.

“Is that my only choice?”

“If you have your receipt, we would be happy to give you a full refund.” She could feel the tension in the customer building and was hoping that by giving him his money back, he would feel better. “Or,” she quickly interjected, seeing the look of anger building on his face. “We could replace it with another charm of the same or lesser value.”

He slammed his hand down onto the counter. “No, I don’t have my receipt and no I don’t want another charm. I want this one, did you not understand me the first time?” he snapped at her.

“Then let me get an envelope and we will send it to our jeweler—”

“And how long will that take?” he sternly interrupted.

“About a week...” Ari cringed.

His face was reddening as he leaned towards her. “You just want to make things difficult for me because I’m older,” he fumed. “I’m going to report you to your store manager and let him know how rude and difficult you are. With any luck, they will fire you for the bad employee you are.”

Tears started to well up in Ari’s eyes as she tried her best to stay in control and help the angry man.

“Oh, what now? Are you going to cry?” He sneered as he threw his arms up into the air then slammed them down hard against his sides in disgust. “This is why women should stay home...”

Trevor watched as the customer’s unfair treatment of Ari began to unfold. He clenched his teeth tight and his jaw began to have a ticking motion to it. “Enough,” he said. “Enough!” Sliding in between two other customers whose mouths were hanging open as they witnessed the angry man, he appeared. No one noticed him as he did since they were too busy watching the older man verbally abuse Ari.

“Excuse me sir,” Trevor said to the man. “Your treatment of the lady is uncalled for and out of line.”

The older man swung around to face Trevor. He didn’t expect the younger man before him to be at least three inches taller than he was. “This is none of your business young man, so butt out.”

Trevor smiled down at him. “Sir, you made it all of our business when your nasty attitude spilled out of your mouth, as you attacked

an innocent young woman who is just trying to do her job. She has given you several options of what you can do with your bracelet, but it is obvious that no matter what she offers, you just want to be nasty. In fact, sir, I have seen many others like you who take your ill tempers out on people who can't truly defend themselves because it could cost them their jobs. You are a bully."

"Why I'll have you know," the man began, but Trevor wasn't about to let him say anymore.

Putting his hand up, he stopped the older man from saying any more. "I'll have *you* know, that *you* owe this young woman an apology and your mother too since I'm sure she didn't raise you to be a rude and overbearing bully."

The older man began to stammer looking for words to say. Then all of a sudden, he began to calm down, as Trevor stared directly into his eyes. "Now tell the young lady you are sorry."

As if in a trance, the older man turned around towards Ari and repeated, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" Trevor coached.

"For being a rude out of control, insensitive jerk."

"And..."

"And it isn't your fault the charm is broken. I shouldn't have taken it out on you like I did. In fact, my daughter needs to take better care of her things. She can be a spoiled brat and hard to live with..."

Ari looked at the older man as if he had lost his mind. The apology was one thing, but spilling his life story was another.

Trevor cleared his throat and looked at the older man. "That will do."

The man stopped talking and calmly stood there with his head down, like a child who had just been scolded by his mother.

"I think he would like to have the charm repaired." He turned towards the older man. "Is that right sir?"

"Yes, I would like to have the charm repaired."

"And..." Trevor again coaxed.

"And I promise when I pick it up, I will be nice."

Another woman in the line began to giggle.

Ari stared in disbelief at the man as she handed him the identification slip and had him fill it out. She then placed the charm into a small pouch and put it into the jeweler's bag that was in the drawer. She then handed him his claim ticket. "It will be ready in a week."

"Thank you miss, and again, I'm sorry for my behavior. I need to go and call my mother now," he murmured as he turned and walked away.

Ari stood and watched him leave. She looked like a balloon that had had its air let out.

"Ari? Ari, why don't you go and take a ten-minute break," said Lola as she gently tapped her arm. "I'll take over for you."

"Okay," she said quietly. Shaking her head, she began to slowly walk to the employee lounge, not paying attention to her surroundings.

"You know, we need to stop meeting like this?"

“What?” she said offhandedly. “I mean, can I help you?”

She swung around to see who was talking to her and stopped short. “It’s you? How...where...I mean.” She didn’t know what she meant. Standing in front of her was the same man who helped change her flat tire the day before.

Trevor smiled at her. “Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah, I’m getting used to how people treat retail workers. Some customers like that man, can be just downright mean and over things that aren’t even my fault. Sometimes I think people treat those who work in retail poorly because it makes them feel superior. But I always imagine the Karma bus coming straight at them.”

Trevor laughed. “The Karma bus, what is that?”

“You know, you get back what you put out, an eye for an eye?” She shook her head and shrugged her shoulders.

“I never really thought about that.” His eyebrows came together in thought. “It makes sense though. I have seen a lot of that over the years; I just never had a name for it... until now.”

She stopped and looked at him. “Is there something I can do for you?”

Trevor didn’t quite think about what he was going to do after he decided to appear. “Well, since I’m here, could I ask you out?” Now that was too much even for him he thought. Angels don’t “go out on dates”.

“Well, I don’t know, I’m very busy...” she began.



Oh, no you don't, he thought to himself. You aren't going to crawl back into the dooms day pit again. "Come on; let me take you out tonight. I have wanted to walk through the Christmas Village this holiday season and haven't done so yet. It would be fun if you came with me."

She began to hesitate. "I don't know, I have so much to do..."

Ethel walked behind Trevor and looked at her. She was mouthing "Go, just go!" to her as she nodded her head up and down.

"Well... okay, yeah sure, that would be nice." She couldn't believe she just accepted to go on a date with this guy. Then to make matters worse, it dawned on her that she didn't even know his name.

"Aaa, this is very awkward, but what is your name? If I'm going to go out with you, I should at least know your name."

He laughed. "It's Trevor."

She looked at him curiously. "Don't you want to know mine?"

"I already know it. It's Ari."

She looked at him suspiciously. "How did you know my name? I don't recall telling you."

"It's on your name badge."

"Oh." Her face reddened as she looked down at her name tag, in big bold white letters on a blue background was her name.

"Look, why don't you tell me your phone number and address and I'll pick you up around seven o'clock?"

"Seven would be fine. Don't you want me to write them down?"

“No, I have a photographic memory. I only need to hear it once.”

Scratching her head, she looked at him. He was quite the package she thought. Not only was he good looking, but smart, and funny too.

His smile widened as he watched her.

If I didn't know any better, she thought, I would swear he just read my mind. But that was impossible.

“Not always,” he quietly said.

“What was that?”

“Oh, nothing, I was just thinking about what a nice day this was becoming.”

# 9

“At times, we  
surprise them.”

The drive home seemed to take forever as Ari wove in and out of traffic. She grumbled when she was stopped by several red lights, feeling like they were all working together and deliberately stopping her. Finally, she made it to her house and realized she only had an hour to get ready before Trevor came to pick her up. She quickly pulled the car into the garage and put it into park, turned it off then jumped out and rushed to the back door. She opened the door so hard that it crashed against the wall. She quickly looked at the wall for damage and ran her hand over it. When she didn't see anything that hadn't already been there, she speedily ran to her room.

“Mom!” she called out. “Do you know if my dark colored jeans are clean?”

“They should be hanging in your closet.” Her mom called back. “Why?”

“I have been asked out by a really nice guy and he will be here in less than an hour to pick me up.” She shuffled through her closet until she found her jeans. “One of these days, I need to take the time to organize this mess,” she grumbled while sorting through her sweaters.

“What do you mean you're going out?” Her mom was now standing in her doorway with her hands on her hips.

“This really nice guy, the one I told you about who changed the flat tire on the car yesterday?” she looked at her mom hoping she would remember her telling her about how him. “Well, he was in Garland’s today shopping. Trevor, that’s his name, straightened out this old guy who was really ripping me up about his broken bracelet. He even made the guy apologize to me for being so rude. Well, anyway, he asked me to go look at the lights and displays at Christmas Village tonight.”

Alice stood at the door and watched as her daughter kept throwing sweater after sweater out of her closet. She tried on a few of the sweaters then threw them onto her bed. Ari was so busy; she didn’t notice her mother leaving the room.

“Great, just great,” Ari said exasperated. “None of these will work.” She flopped down onto her bed in resignation; she had nothing to wear tonight.

Her mom walked back into her room holding a package. “Here, I think this may help.” Ari looked at her mom in question as she handed her one of the presents that had been under the Christmas tree for a week. “Isn’t that one of my Christmas presents?”

“Yes, but I think you should open it now,” Alice smiled. “What’s the difference between opening it now or later when it will do more good tonight.”

“Wow Mom that’s very nice of you.” She began to tear the paper off the box.

“Hey, if Ari gets to open a present now, then so should I,” stated her ten-year old sister,

Kaiya. Her bottom lip was down in a pout and her arms were folded across her chest. Kaiya looked just like Ari, but her hair was longer and hanging in a lopsided pony tail.

“Nope, just Ari gets to open one of her gifts early,” Alice told her younger daughter.

“That’s not fair, why should she get to open one early and not me?” Kaiya whined.

“No, it’s not fair, but it’s my decision. Besides, one day when you are going out on a date and need something to wear, I may do the same for you.”

“Ari is going out, on a date? Oh boy!” Kaiya left the room and went running down the hall shouting, “Alex, Nick, Mom let Ari open one of her presents early because she’s going out on a date!”

Ari rolled her eyes. “Mom, now they won’t leave me alone when Trevor comes to get me.”

“I have already thought of that. I will order a pizza and tell Nick to go and pick it up and to take Alex and Kaiya with him,” she said smugly.

“You’re good Mom,” Ari grinned. Neither of her siblings could resist a chance to ride with Nick since he just got his driver’s license, and was officially past the waiting period for taking passengers with him.

Ari opened the box and peeled the tissue paper away. Inside was a dark pink sweater. Ari pulled it out and unfolded it. The neckline was gathered with a large piece of yarn that was woven through the wool threads which made it ruffle slightly. The two loose ends that hung outside of the neckline had small pompoms hanging from

them. The sweater buttoned down the front and hugged the waist slightly, then gradually fanned out over the top of the hips.

“Mom, this sweater is beautiful, I love it.” She jumped up and hugged her mom tightly. “Thank you for letting me have this early.”

“I thought you could wear your dangling silver earrings with it.”

“That would be perfect,” Ari said as she hugged the sweater to her.

Alice looked at her watch. “You better hurry; you only have about thirty minutes until your date arrives.”

Ari was back into panic mode. “I still need to fix my make-up and curl my hair.” She ran out the door and into the bathroom to plug in her curling iron.

Alice smiled and shook her head as she walked down the hallway to go and order a pizza.

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“What do you think you’re doing?” Jace asked bewildered while he followed Trevor around the garage. “You can’t go out with her.”

“Jace, did it ever occur to you that this is all part of the plan to help her?”

Jace looked at him skeptically. “I’m sure you’re going to try and convince me, how going on a date with one of your Earthbounds will help you complete your assignment. So, please do try...”

Trevor looked harshly at him. He was polishing the hood of the Mustang. “Everything

was going to plan. She was happy inside and out. It showed in her walk, the way she spoke and even deep inside her mind, she was actually letting herself be happy.”

“Go on.”

Trevor huffed. “You weren’t there, so let me finish. I went to check on her and this old guy was yelling at her and threatening to have her fired.”

“That’s nothing new. We see that kind of stuff all the time, especially during the holidays.”

“Maybe so, but this was different. She was getting upset, and starting to close down again, deep inside. I couldn’t let that happen, so I—”

“So, you broke the rules and appeared right out in the middle of a large crowd of Earthbounds,” Jace scolded. They were allowed to appear to their assignments, but only when it was absolutely necessary. Even then, they were to be very discrete when doing it. Trevor had always been one who pushed the rules to the brink, but he always knew when to stop. Today he had gone too far, and deliberately broke one of the biggest rules and didn’t seem to care how serious the violation was.

“Don’t you think I didn’t take any precautions? Everyone’s eyes were fixed on the old man. The way he was yelling at her, had me staring at him too. He was very mean and nasty. In fact, maybe Jonah should put him on his list of “souls going in the wrong direction and need help fast”. In any case, I knew I would be okay to appear right then. Not one person noticed me until I spoke up to defend Ari.”



“I hope you’re right,” Jace said unconvinced.

“I know I am.” I have done this for a long time, and have never been careless.”

“There is always a first time.”

“Not with me.”

Jace decided to change the subject. “How much more time do you think you’ll need before you will be done?”

“If all goes like I plan, tonight should be it. I feel confident that my plan will work. Then I can move on to my next assignment.” He finished polishing the head light and stood back to view his work. He was very pleased at how shiny the chrome and paint were on the car.

Jace shook his head. He didn’t believe that Trevor would be able to walk away from this assignment as easily as he had the other assignments. He wasn’t attached to others as he was with this Earthbound.

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Ari was in a panic. She had her parka and hat ready to go but she couldn’t find her gloves. She was kneeling and looking under her bed when she heard the doorbell ring. “Oh no!” she gasped. “He’s here.” She hastily began to drag stuff out from under her bed looking for her gloves. “How could I put so much junk under here!” she fumed.

Outside, Trevor waited as he held a fruit basket in one arm and two bouquets of flowers in the other. He heard footsteps then a hand on the doorknob as it turned and the door swung open. A

tall man wearing jeans and a sweat shirt in his late forties stood in front of him.

“Hello sir, my name is Trevor and I’m here to take Ari out for the evening.” Why this made him nervous he wasn’t sure.

The man stood and stared at him for a moment. “Please come in.” He stepped back as Trevor entered the house. “I’m Ari’s dad, Mark.” He extended his hand out to shake Trevor’s.

“Glad to meet you sir.” Instead of shaking Mark’s hand, Trevor put the fruit basket into his arms. “I thought you might like this,” he offered.

Mark was surprised by the gesture. But as he looked at the basket and its contents of oranges, bananas, apples and a small fruitcake he smiled. The young man was trying to make a good impression... and it was working.

“Come in and have a seat.” Mark motioned for him to sit on the couch in the living room. Trevor sat down and waited for the barrage of questions he knew would be coming. Years of experience had prepared him for this moment. “So, tell me Trevor, what do you do?”

“I work with the public,” he offered. Whew that was easy he thought.

“Doing exactly what?” Mark pushed. “Is it in a health-related field or business?”

“Sometimes it covers both, but mostly in the health field I would say.” He was about to elaborate more when Ari entered the room, her mom was behind her. He immediately stood up. Her hair was curlier than before and the pink sweater accented her face.

“Here, these are for you.” He handed the larger bouquet of flowers to Ari.

“They’re beautiful, thanks.” She put them to her nose and smelled the different flowers. “Mmm, they smell good.”

Her mom walked up to him. “Hi I am Alice, Ari’s mom.” She extended her hand out to shake Trevor’s. He handed her the smaller bouquet of flowers. “Oh my, are these for me?” She blushed a bit. “Thank you.”

“Mom, if you wouldn’t mind, would you put the flowers in some water for me?” she looked shyly at Trevor. “Do you want to get going?”

“Sure.” He turned to Mark and asked. “When should I have her home?”

Mark looked at Ari. “She’s nineteen; I think it’s up to her. Just not too late,” he quickly added.

“Not too late it is.” He looked at Ari then walked over and held the front door open for her. She walked through and outside as he shut the door behind them. Parked in the driveway was a vintage Mustang.

“What year is your car, about 1968?” she asked.

Trevor was surprised that she knew what year the car was. “Yes. Do you like older cars?” He watched with interest as she looked at the details of the Mustang.

“I find them very interesting. Some of them have some cool things about them, like their steering columns and hood ornaments. I like to go to car shows with my dad, it’s fun to look at the different body styles and paint jobs.”

He smiled at her, then broke out into a grin. He never would have thought she would like old cars as much as he did. This was going to be a good evening. He opened the passenger side door and waited for her to get in then closed it. Walking around to the other side of the car, he got in and turned the key in the ignition. The motor purred like a content kitten sitting on its owner's lap.

“You have taken good care of this car. The engine is running very smoothly,” Ari offered offhandedly. “Did you restore it?”

Trevor looked at her for a moment in surprise. He had never met anyone who wanted to talk about his cars, not even Jace showed much interest and Ari did. “Yes, I did.” Smiling he backed out of the driveway, then put the car into gear and drove off down the street.

# 10

“They are marveled  
by our actions.”

The winter night sky was crystal clear and the stars were brightly illuminated against the dark background. Trevor drove down the street stopping at several street lights. Many of the houses and businesses were decorated with various types of lights. Some blinked on and off while others twinkled with a soft glow. Ari sat in the car thinking about what she should say or ask. She didn't know anything about Trevor, other than he could change flat tires, made mean people be nice and restore vintage cars.

“So, what do you want to be when you grow up?” He teasingly asked. He already knew, but wanted to hear it from her.

“I want to be a Geriatric Nurse. I like working with older people.” First question down she thought. That was easy enough. “What about you?” she asked.

“I'm already done with school and am working in my field.” Before she could ask what it was, he answered her. “I work in communications. I help people.”

“Like a psychiatrist?” She looked at him strangely; he looked much too young to already be finished with school and working as psychiatrist.

He laughed. “No, not necessarily in the medical field per say. Sometimes people are like

businesses. They can't figure out why they are always in the red emotionally and not profiting with positive things in their lives. I help them figure out where they are underestimating themselves and help them fix it."

"Hmmm, that's interesting. I guess I didn't realize that there were jobs like that out there." She looked over at him. His parka was pulled up high but his blond hair spilled over the collar. "Do you live around here? I mean like what high school did you go to?"

He could feel her looking at him. "I didn't go to school around here, but I have been living in this area for quite a while." He looked at her and she blushed at being caught staring at him. "Is Ari your full name, or is it short for something else?"

"My full name is actually Arianna, but over the years my parents and family just started calling me Ari."

"I like your full name; do you mind if I call you Arianna?"

She felt tingly all over when he asked her that, which confused her. Why would Trevor calling her by her full name have that effect on her? "No, I don't mind, you can call me Arianna."

There was a moment of awkward silence so Ari quickly asked, "How old are you?"

Trevor looked at her. "How old do you think I am?"

She studied him for a moment. "I would say that you are around twenty-two years old."

He smiled. "You're right." He was *around* twenty-two along with a few centuries added to it.

Before she could ask any more questions, Trevor rounded a corner and pulled into the parking lot behind the Ogden City Municipicle building. Off in the distance were many lights and a lot of children and adults walking around.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

“Yes.” She buttoned up the collar of her parka, pulled her hat over her head and slipped her gloves on. “Ready.” She smiled.

He watched her as she put her things on so she would stay warm. Earthbounds were peculiar to him at times. When it was cold they covered as much of their bodies as they could. Sometimes the layers were so thick, they had a hard time moving. He never got cold, so he didn’t quite understand the need for many layers of clothing. Ari turned and looked at him. It was his turn to get caught staring at h

He cleared his throat. “I guess we should get going then...”

“Yeah, we should,” she said quietly as she shyly looked away.

Blinking his eyes a few times, he took a deep breath and got out of the car and walked around to open the passenger side door. Ari stepped out of the car, and together they followed several people as they walked towards the lights and music. They entered the small village and began the trek around the park. The village was set up with various light displays and small cottages that were designed to look like Santa’s village at the North Pole. Large display windows in each cottage were lit up so you could see the displays inside. Some of the cottages were small with a



single window while others were larger with several windows. Inside, each cottage had its own unique theme. One displayed a family sitting around a Christmas tree opening presents. Ari laughed at the mechanical dog whose head was moving back and forth with a piece of wrapping paper in its mouth.

“Do you see the dog?” She was pointing at it through the window. “This display has been here since I was a little girl. I always loved this one.”

Trevor smiled at her. He enjoyed watching Ari’s excitement over the displays more than everything else that was going on around him. This feeling was new to him, and he liked it.

Ari ran ahead of him. “Trevor, you have to see this one, it has singing penguins in it.”

He quickly followed and looked inside the cottage. The penguins were wearing hats and scarves while holding sheet music. A small musical tune played from a speaker on the outside of the cottage as all the penguins heads moved back and forth as they sang.

“I bet in real life they sound terrible,” he teased.

She shot him a skeptical look. “Real penguins don’t sing,” she laughed. She walked to the next display. The next cottage looked like a small log cabin and it had a mini porch on the front of it. Looking through its windows you could see a rocking horse and a chair sitting next to a fireplace.

“It looks so cozy and warm inside, doesn’t it?” Ari asked.

“Yes, it does.”

“You can tell it’s the home of a small family.”

“How? There aren’t any people figures in the scene.”

“She pointed to the table that was next to the chair. “There’s a picture of the family and look how happy they are.”

He didn’t notice the picture until now. The family looked very happy in the portrait like she said. He found himself wondering what it would be like to have a family. Shocked by his sudden thinking, he quickly shrugged it off. He wasn’t supposed to care about having things like that for himself. It must be because Arianna’s family is so important to her, he thought. He found that sometimes when he helped Earthbounds, their thoughts and feelings affected him, which helped him to do his job better.

Do you want some hot chocolate?” He asked her, thinking it would make the thoughts and feelings go away.

The chilly night air was making her nose red. So, a cup of hot chocolate sounded good.

“Sure, but let’s finish looking at the displays first.”

Ahead of them was a larger house that had stairs and a ramp on each side of it. Several children and their parents were lined up on one side, while others were exiting from the opposite end.

“What is that building over there with the line?” he asked.

“That’s Santa’s Castle.”

“What is Santa’s Castle?” He was genuinely curious about this house.

She looked at him and was about to make a smart remark until she saw Trevor’s eyes. They were wide and serious as he looked at the building and the people around it. “Santa Clause is inside. The kids line up and take turns sitting on his lap and tell him what they want for Christmas.”

“Hmmm, that is a curious thing,” he said quietly.

“What was that?” she asked leaning towards him.

“I said, do you want to go and sit on Santa’s lap and tell him what you want for Christmas?” he teased.

“You’re very funny,” she replied with a bemused smile. “It’s only for children.”

“We are all children...” he began.

“Okay, children younger than us.”

Leaning down, he looked into her eyes, which caused her to blush at his boldness. “And what do you want for Christmas Arianna?”

“You’re joking, right?”

“No, I really mean it. If you could have one thing, what would it be?”

Her eyebrows drew together and she pursed her lips while she thought about her answer. “The one thing that I really want for Christmas would be for my dad to find a job. His being out of work has been hard for him and my family.”

“Nothing for yourself?” He wasn’t surprised by her answer.

“I would gain a lot from him getting a good job. My mom would start smiling again and...” she stopped in midsentence. “I miss hearing my dad whistle.”

“Now I’m confused. Why would you miss hearing him whistle?”

“He used to always whistle when he was happy. I’m not sure he even realizes this.”

She was definitely the most unique Earthbounds he had ever met. “I hope you get your gift.” He looked at her and their eyes locked onto each other’s.

Ari blushed and quickly looked away. “Okay, now that I have put a damp mood on our evening, let’s brighten it back up. Come on, let’s go see what else there is.”

They followed the path as they viewed the rest of the cottages, and different light displays. Some of the displays were funny while others had a serious tone to them, which added to the mood of the whole village. Off in the distance music was playing then the sound of an audience applauding erupted into the air.

“There is a concert tonight, would you like to go and listen for a while?” Trevor asked.

“I would love too.” Ari stuck her gloved hands into her pockets as they walked over to the amphitheater.

The amphitheater was an outdoor venue with a stage for performances and built in seats in front of it. Most of the seats were filled with people wrapped up in blankets and heavy coats. They sat quietly and listened to a young woman who was standing on the outdoor stage singing

Christmas carols. Ari was immediately intrigued by what she saw and heard.

“I have never come here to listen to any of the concerts before,” she said quietly, as she watched.

“Look, there are two seats towards the front, why don’t you go and sit down and I will hurry and get us some hot chocolate.” Trevor pointed to the two open seats not far from the stage.

“Are you sure? I could go with you, then we could go and sit down together.”

“No, the seats may not be there, so hurry and go claim them,” he coaxed.

Ari smiled. “Okay, see you in a minute.” She quietly made her way through the crowd and over to the seats then sat down.

Trevor watched her as she found the seats. When he planned this evening, he had meant for it to be a special night for Arianna. What he didn’t expect, was how special it was going to be for him too. He tried to shake the feelings; but the more he felt them, the more he wanted to remember them. After this evening, he was sure that Arianna wouldn’t need him anymore, so he wanted to make sure that it would be a memorable one for her as well as him. Then the feelings he was experiencing would go away, so why not enjoy everything while he still could?

Ari listened as Danielle, the young woman on the stage, finished singing *What Child Is This*. Trevor handed her a cup of hot chocolate. “Oh, thank you. I’m feeling a bit chilled,” she said

rubbing her hands together for warmth. "I'm sure the hot chocolate will help."

Trevor sat in the seat next to her. "So, what do you think so far?" he whispered.

"It's wonderful." She smiled at him. She hadn't realized just how blue his eyes were. Her face reddened a bit as she quickly turned away.

Trevor smiled at her reaction when she looked at him. She had beautiful eyes too he thought warmly.

The young woman sat down in front of a keyboard and began to play *In The Bleak Midwinter* and Ari began to smile and hum along with the tune. Trevor watched as she did. "What is it about this song that you like so much?"

"Listen to the piano then the words and I will tell you after if you still don't know." She put her finger to her mouth in a hush motion then turned to listen to the tune.

Trevor listened and watched Ari. The song was about the birth of Christ and those who were around him, watching over and protecting him. But it was the ending that caught his attention. He looked at Ari as the song ended and she smiled warmly at him.

"Did you figure it out?"

"Yes, I think so. You don't have to give Christ gifts of gold, silver or anything tangible. The only gift he wants from us is our heart."

"Yes, our heart which is full of love for him." She reached over and moved her hand into his and gently squeezed it.

A strong surge of hot energy shot through him like a bolt of lightning through a tree. He

## Paper Angels

immediately pulled his hand away from her. Ari looked at him in surprise then the look on her face quickly turned into one of horror.

“I’m so sorry, I didn’t.... I mean.... Oh, I’m so sorry.” She hastily jumped to her feet and darted away through the crowd of people. Her face burned with embarrassment as she headed into the crowd. She didn’t know where she was going as she quickly ran. All she knew was that she made a mistake in grabbing his hand and ruined the whole evening.

(Note to reader: To hear Danielle music, go to [daniellevaughnmusic.com](http://daniellevaughnmusic.com)).

# 11

“They believe in us  
and never let go.”  
.”



Trevor immediately chased after Ari. He had to explain to her that she wasn't at fault for his reaction to her touching him. Never in all of his being had an Earthbound touched him, and he didn't know he would have the reaction he did. He wasn't sure what he could tell her, but he had to let her know one thing, it wasn't her fault. He hastily made his way towards the back side of the park when he abruptly stopped.

"Jace, not now, move out of my way," Trevor demanded as he tried to move around him, but Jace moved over in front of him again, blocking his way.

"You have gone too far Trevor, and you know it."

"I didn't touch her, she touched me," he defended as he tried again to move around Jace. His frustration with Jace was beginning to mount with each blocked move.

"You know it doesn't matter if you touched her or not. You still created the mood that encouraged it to happen."

Trevor threw his hands into the air, gritting his teeth. "Have you ever touched an Earthbound Jace? Has one ever touched you? Accidents happen and at this point in time, I don't regret it. It

was nice to actually feel and be felt. Have you never once wanted to experience this?"

Jace looked at Trevor. There was sadness in his eyes. "It can never be Trevor, you and I both know it."

"Why not Jace, tell me, why not!" He raked his fingers through his hair then got in Jace's face. "Don't tell me it can never be," he seethed. "Anything is possible. We have witnessed and created many miracles ourselves."

Jace didn't flinch as Trevor moved inches from his face. "Angels and Earthbounds can never be. This is how it has always been, but you already know that."

"Well, there is always a first isn't there? Now, get out of my way and I mean it this time." The look of rage on Trevor's face made Jace move to the side.

"You can't change what has always been." Jace called after Trevor as he ran down the path.

He didn't care about the rules or what Jace had said. The rules weren't realistic anyway. How could angels properly do their job, if they weren't allowed to feel emotions? To be able to feel what their Earthbound was going through and have the right compassion to do the job, an angel had to be able to experience emotions. He ran faster down the path as Ari's presence became stronger and stronger, he had to explain to her what happened.

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Ari ran to a bench in a dark corner of the park and flopped down onto it. Tears were

streaming down her face while she thought about the whole evening. For the first time in a long time she felt happy inside. She enjoyed being with Trevor, he made her feel good about herself. She liked the innocence of him too. How many guys would react to Santa's Castle or singing penguins like he did?

"Oh Ari, you should have known better..." she whispered, her face in her hands.

"You should have known better for what Arianna?"

She quickly turned around. Trevor stood behind her. She sighed heavily. "Nothing. Listen, why don't you just take me home and let's call it a night." She turned back around she didn't want him to see that she had been crying.

He walked around the bench and sat down next to her. "I don't know how much time I have left, but we need to talk."

"What do you mean you don't have much time left, are you dying?" Now he had her full attention and she was beginning to feel guilty.

"No, I'm not dying." He moved to put his arm around her then stopped. "May I?" His arm was in midair and not quite around her.

"Yes, I guess so."

He slowly put his arm around her, then gently rested it on her shoulders. Again, the warm feeling shot through him. This time he knew what to expect and it didn't surprise him as it did before. The longer his arm rested on her shoulder the more he liked the closeness he felt with her.

Pulling her in to him, he looked at her eyes. They were still wet with her tears and this

tugged even harder at his heart. Reaching up, he wiped at her tears with his fingers. He had never touched a tear before and found it to be soft and wet as he rubbed it between his fingers. “Arianna, I have to tell you something, but I don’t know how to do it and get you to believe me.”

“Oh great, are you wanted by the law for doing something terrible?”

He was amused by her assumption that he was a wanted criminal. “No, it isn’t bad at all, in fact, most would consider it a blessing.”

She shook her head. “I don’t understand you at all. Right now, we are sitting on a park bench with your arm around me, but not more than fifteen minutes ago, I tried to hold your hand and you acted like I did something horrible.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong, I am the one who did. It’s against the rules for us to touch Earthbounds and I encouraged you to do so.”

She stiffened. What had she gotten herself into?

“You can stop thinking that I escaped from the funny farm. You are perfectly safe with me.”

She immediately pulled away from him. “What the—”

“Will you let me explain and hear me out before you make any more judgments?”

“I can’t promise you anything, you are beginning to scare me.” She began to stand up.

“Do you believe in angels?” he hastily asked.

“What kind of a silly question is that?”

“Do you?”

Huffing she looked hard at him. “Yes.”

## Paper Angels

“What would you do if I told you I was an angel?”

She started to laugh. “An angel? Wow, now I know that you really are crazy.” She looked him up and down. “Angels don’t wear jeans and snow parkas. They wear white gowns and have wings.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes.” She rolled her eyes.

“How can I prove to you that I am what I say I am?”

She gave him one single answer. “Fly.”

He smiled wickedly at her. “Okay.” He stood up then stepped away from her. Gradually he began to float up. He went as high as ten feet then slowly came back down. “What else?” he said smugly.

Ari was speechless. “How did you do that?” She waved her hands over the top of his head and around his shoulders.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m looking for wires.”

“You won’t find any.”

She stepped back away from him.

“It still isn’t enough for you, is it?”

She shook her head. A part of her was screaming for her to run and another part told her to stay and hear him out.

How was he going to convince her he was an angel? He thought for a moment, then an idea came to him. “How about if I tell you why I’m here and what I’m supposed to do?”

“Okay,” she said quietly.

He moved back over to the bench. “Will you sit with me?”

She hesitated at first, then nodded her head. They both sat down onto the bench, Trevor was on one end and Ari was as far as she could get on the opposite end.

He tried to hide how amused he was with her. “I was assigned to come and help you,” he began.

Her eyes were wide with surprise. “I don’t need any help. I’m not sick.”

“Angels don’t just help the sick. We help in many, many ways. We help and comfort the lonely, the lost, those who feel despaired and much more. Not all Earthbounds we help are in trouble either. Sometimes we assist in inspiring those who have talents that will be shared for centuries. Take Ludwig van Beethoven for instance, he became completely deaf during his career as a composer and pianist, didn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“His angels stood by him and kept encouraging him to write and compose music. He didn’t exactly live in a time when people were kind to those with disabilities, so he needed extra help. Over two hundred years later, his music still brings smiles to people. Then there’s Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave who made thirteen missions to rescue slaves. Did you know that she never lost one person she was trying to rescue?”

“Are you trying to tell me that an angel helped her?” she said skeptically rolling her eyes.

“No.”

Ari stared at him, her eyebrows drawn together. “But I thought you just said—”

“She had many angels assisting her. What she did required an army of angels to help her succeed. All Earthbounds have angels watching over them and helping them, but sometimes they need more. When you do acts of kindness big or small and give of yourself willingly, you allow more angels to help you.”

“Why did I need you?”

She was beginning to believe what he was telling her and he didn’t want to lose her now. “You actually had two others before me; they tried to help you but failed. You were labeled a hard case.”

“What? I have never been—”

“Wait hear me out,” he smiled. She was getting defensive and that was good. “Think about it Arianna, since graduating from high school seven months ago, what have you done?”

“Well, I have... well I got my job at the assisted living facility which is the field in nursing I want to go into. Then I ... I...I got my job at Garland’s too, so I have been too busy to do much else.”

“Exactly.”

“You don’t understand Trevor. My dad lost his job quite some time ago and there has been a lot of stress on my parents. They have been trying to take care of me and my brothers and sister and pay the bills, buy groceries—” She stopped abruptly. “Angels don’t have tough times, everything is provided for them, unlike us... what did you call us?”

“Earthbounds.”

“Yeah, Earthbounds. The economy is really bad right now and many people are out of work and looking for the same jobs. I need to help my parents right now. College has to come later,” she insisted.

“I agree, it is a tough time right now, but you have been working so hard and so much, that you forgot to enjoy your life.”

She was quiet as she wrung her hands. “I know, but it’s what I have to do right now.”

“No, it isn’t. That is why I was sent to help you.” He scooted a little closer to her. “I have been helping you for the past several weeks. I tried different things to pull you away from work like, free movie tickets—”

“I remember the tickets,” she interrupted. “I took another shift at Garland’s so I couldn’t go.” She looked at him in defense of her actions. “I did give them to another coworker who couldn’t afford to go to the movies. It made her really happy.”

“I know and your generosity has been acknowledged.”

The way he was looking at her, made her blush.

“I also tried other things like keeping your coworkers from asking you to take their shifts. After a while, I realized you didn’t need me to interfere with you taking extra shifts or give you tickets to the movies. No matter how hard I tried, you still found other shifts, so I had to come up with another way to get you to take time for yourself. I eventually realized that all you needed



was a little encouragement to give yourself permission to have some fun. Nothing grand or out of the ordinary, just something simple, something you loved and had been denying yourself to do.”

“That’s impossible,” she insisted. “All of those things could be coincidences.”

“Like playing the piano for the residents because your guest player called in sick?” She didn’t say anything; instead she just stared blankly at him. Proof, she needed more proof. “Okay, then how about this.” He pulled a paper angel out of his pocket and handed it to her.

Her mouth gaped open as she stared at the angel, it was just like all the others that had been left for her. “Where did you get this?”

“I made it, just like I made all of the other angels you have.”

She looked at the angel then turned it around. The back of it was blank. Trevor saw the corners of her mouth turn down. “What’s the matter?”

“Oh, nothing I guess. It’s just that all of my angels have something written on the back of them.”

Grinning he took the angel from her and turned it over. Gently he wiped his fingers over its smooth surface and handed it back to her.

She looked at him curiously. “What did you do?”

“Just look at it now,” he coaxed.

She turned the angel over, it was no longer blank. On the back of it was the word *Believe*.

Her eyes widened as she immediately looked at him. “You gave me the angels?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“After observing you for a while, I realized that you needed to be helped little by little. When I saw your face when you picked up the first angel, I knew that simple, but thoughtful words of kindness about you would help, and it did.”

She didn’t know what to say; instead she pulled his face around to hers and looked into his eyes. “Tell me again you are an angel and don’t look away from me while you do.”

He leaned in towards her, his nose touching hers and stared straight into her eyes. “Arianna, with all of my heart, I am an angel, I wouldn’t lie to you, I can’t lie.”

She felt goose bumps rush up her arms, and quickly shivered. “You really are an angel, I don’t know how I know but I do,” she whispered.

The air around them was silent as they sat in the dark, their eyes locked on each other’s. She scooted over closer to him. “What now?”

Without thinking he leaned in to her and tenderly pressed his lips against hers. She shyly returned his kiss. He gently moved back from her and looked at her.

“We shouldn’t do this. It’s beyond going against the rules. There will be consequences for me.” He put his hand behind her neck and pulled her into him. The two tenderly shared a longer kiss, enjoying the closeness they shared.

Trevor had no idea how wonderful it could be to touch an Earthbound, much less share a kiss

with one. He had seen many kisses before, but never understood the reason for wanting too, until now. At this moment, all he wanted to do was spend the rest of his days with her. It was his job to make her feel alive; instead, she made him feel alive. He had no idea what he had been missing.

Ari pulled back and leaned her head onto his shoulder. She felt as if she were a part of him, but didn't understand why. There was something about Trevor, the way he moved, the way he talked, the way he kissed...

"You need to quit thinking the things you are right now. I'm sure it won't be long before Jace or some of the others come to get me and make me leave." There was a great deal of sadness in his voice and it panged her to hear it.

"Can't you tell them you want to stay here or maybe even hide from them?"

"I won't be allowed to stay and there is no way to hide from an angel. All we have to do is feel the person's thoughts and we know exactly where they are."

"Is there someone you can talk to, maybe even..."

He held her tighter to him. "No, we don't get to speak directly with God unless He summons us. We too have to be tested before His eyes and show Him we can live His laws."

"It's very complicated, isn't it?"

"Yes." After tonight he was sure he wouldn't be allowed to work with Earthbounds again. Then what would he do? He sat quietly while holding her; he wanted to remember this feeling for as long as he could.

Trevor stood up and pulled Ari up with him. Gently he put his arms around her waist and held her. Looking down into her eyes, he leaned in and kissed her again. Ari put her arms around his neck and returned his kiss. Never had she experienced a kiss like this one, it had so much power over her, that she felt weak and tingly all over. She felt as if she were floating she was so happy.

She pulled away and looked at him. “You make me feel so light and good about myself, I have never felt like this before.”

He held her even tighter and looked down. She followed his gaze and looked down too. Her heart stopped as she realized she was floating about eight feet off the ground. Panicking, she gripped the back of his neck with her fingers and pulled herself tightly into him.

Laughing softly, he gently turned them. “You don’t need to worry about falling Arianna, I would never let you go.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” she said as she pressed her face into his chest, her heart beating wildly.

“It’s okay, just relax and I’ll show you. Trust me.”

Bit by bit, she began to relax and loosen her grip on him. He held her as if she were light as a feather. “Just don’t go any higher. I don’t like heights.”

He gently pulled her chin up. “I was sent here to help you find inner happiness and instead you showed me the happiness I have been missing... and didn’t know it.” He kissed her

again, but this time his kiss was more demanding. She forgot all about being in the air and returned his kiss. This moment between them was one neither wanted to ever forget. Off in the distance the sound of music and laughter filled the air adding to the magic of the evening.

Reluctantly Trevor pulled away from her and gradually returned them back down to the park bench. "I need to take you home. I don't want to be here in the park and have them come and get me while you are here. They wouldn't leave you here alone, but it would still worry me."

"Can't we just stay a little longer, please?" She looked up at him, her eyes were pleading. Now that she had him, she didn't want to let him go.

"I wish we could, I would love nothing more, but it isn't possible," he said in resignation. "Come on, we need to get going." Standing up, the two held each other's hand as they slowly walked back to the car.

# 12

“Like a heavenly shield  
they protect us always.”

Both were quiet during the return drive to Ari's house. Ari kept trying to find ways to keep Trevor here and he kept interrupting her thoughts and telling her it wouldn't work. She sat back into the seat but kept looking at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Trevor, you can't just give up and I don't want to either. Haven't you ever had to fight for something you wanted?" she asked anxiously.

"No, I have never had to fight for myself, many others yes, but not me. There has never been a reason too. I have always been content with my existence—."

"Until now," she interrupted.

"Until now I didn't know there were other things," he looked at her. "Better things out there... until I met you."

"Then don't go," she pleaded. "We just met, but I feel like I have known you much longer. There is something special between us... I mean I just wish that we had more time—."

"I wish there was something I could do so I didn't have to go. I just don't know what I can do so I can stay."

They slowly pulled into the driveway and he tightly gripped the steering wheel. "Jace is here, and he isn't alone."

Ari looked out at the driveway and around the front yard. "I don't see anyone."

"You can't because they don't want you too."

Jace walked up to the car. "Trevor it's time."

"And what if I don't want to go?" he said defiantly.

"You know you don't have a choice in this matter," Jace stated.

Trevor leaned his head back against the seat and closed his eyes. "You have no idea what you are asking me to do Jace."

Ari sat in silence as she listened to the one-sided conversation. It seemed odd to her, the conversation and everything else that happened tonight.

Trevor looked at Jace then behind him. There were several other figures standing near him. "Who else came with you?"

"Kole, Tyler and Lexi."

"Thought you needed help, so you brought some guardians with you?"

Jace didn't say anything; he just looked at Trevor with a solemn face.

"Tell Ely, that I'm not coming back. I do have my free will and I am choosing to stay here."

"Only Earthbounds have the choice to use free will—"

"You don't know that," Trevor said between clenched teeth. "I'm as old as you are and I have never heard that."

Kole, Tyler and Lexi moved over by the car. Jace put his hand onto the door handle to open



the door. He signaled for the others to surround the car.

“Don’t,” Trevor warned them.

Ari’s heart beat wildly as she listened to Trevor. “What’s going on, what are they doing?” she demanded. Not knowing what was happening all around her was unsettling.

“There are four angels and they have surrounded the car. Jace is trying to open my door.”

Her breathing started to become rapid and Ari began to shake. “Trevor, I’m scared.”

He put his hand onto her leg and she immediately began to relax. “It’s okay, they won’t hurt you they just want me to go with them, but I’m not going.” He put the car into reverse and backed out of the driveway and onto the street. Stopping he turned the car, shifted gears and stepped hard onto the gas pedal and sped down the street.

Gulping hard, Ari held on tight to her seat and looked around them. “Are they following us?”

“Yes, I can’t outrun them, but I’m not going to make it easy for them either. I have always been faster than Jace and he needs to know that I’m not going to go without,” He looked at her. “a fight.” Trevor speedily turned the car around a corner and out onto the main road.

Jace and the guardians followed the Mustang along its side with ease. As fast or as sharply as Trevor maneuvered the car, he couldn’t lose them. They were like trying to shed magnets from a large piece of metal. He looked at Ari and her eyes were wide with fear and he could feel the

hard-pulsing beat of her heart. It was then that he slowed down the pace of the car. He turned it around and drove back to her neighborhood.

“I can’t do this to you or leave you like this,” he said. His concern was for her and he couldn’t let his own selfish reasons cause her to be frightened.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m taking you back home. It isn’t right for me to involve you in this matter. I have already broken too many rules and it’s selfish of me not to think about what this is doing to you.”

“You already have involved me and I’m not going to let you go without a fight,” she insisted. “I’m stronger than I look.”

The corners of his mouth curled up. She was a fighter and he liked that, especially right now. He had accomplished more than getting her to allow herself to be happy, she was fighting for what she wanted.

“Don’t laugh at me.” She was insulted by his reaction.

“I’m not laughing at you. I have just never met anyone like you. You can let some situations bring you down, but others bring out the fighter in you.” He looked at her. “You are very different from all the other Earthbounds I have helped, and that’s what partially attracts me to you.” Attraction to another being was new to him too. He was attracted to vintage cars, but that was different, they were objects. An attraction to another being was a whole new kind of joy.

She blushed and was at a loss for words at his honesty.

They drove back into her driveway and he turned the car off. Jace and the others surrounded the car again. A bright flash of light spread out around them like the flash on a camera, then disappeared quickly.

“What was that and who are they?” asked Ari as she blinked her eyes several times trying to regain her vision. For a quick moment she saw four figures, three males and one female.

“You saw all of that?”

“How could I have missed it, it was so bright. I saw four figures. Are they the ones who are trying to take you away?”

“Yes,” he said surprised. Earthbounds weren’t supposed to see angels unless the angels let them, but Ari was able to see Jace and the others without their permission.

Trevor looked out in front of the car and saw another figure. As the person came closer he recognized the tuxedo and grey hair that was pulled back behind his head. It was Ely. Ely walked over to the car and motioned for Trevor to roll down the window.

“What’s going on Trevor? You look worried, more than you did before,” asked Ari.

“It’s Ely,” he answered as he rolled the window down.

Ari shook her head. Everything was so confusing; she didn’t know what to think. “Who is Ely?”

“I guess you could say he is the manager over the Tutelary Angels.” He could feel her frustration and confusion over this. “Maybe guardian angels will make more sense to you. I’m

a type of guardian angel, but my job leans more towards helping Earthbounds to feel and seek joy.”

Ari didn't respond to what he was saying. She wasn't sure what to think.

“Step out of the car Trevor, this needs to end,” Ely gently said. He stood outside the car and waited for Trevor to exit on his own.

“I can't Ely. I need to stay here. This is my destiny now,” Trevor explained. He had to make Ely understand why he didn't want to go.

“I know you think it is, but it's not to be.”

“I don't believe you. Isn't our existence about learning and trials that will eventually bring us the ultimate joy of returning to our Father?”

“For Earthbounds yes, but not angels.”

The car doors opened by themselves. Ari watched as they swung open, her jaw dropped as they did. “Trevor, what just happened?” She grabbed onto his arm.

“Ely is standing on my side of the car and he's the one who opened the doors.”

“He is standing right in front of you?” She stared hard into the darkness.

“Yes.”

Ari looked at the open driver's side door; she couldn't see anyone so she got out of the car.

“What are you doing?” Trevor asked in surprise.

“What I should have done a few minutes ago. I am going to tell this Ely guy that you can't go, that I need you and that you... that you...” She stopped and looked at him. “That you need me too.”

Ely watched Ari get out of the car and walk around it towards him. He was a kind and gentle soul and motioned for Trevor not to stop her. "Let her talk," he instructed.

Ari stood facing the car and began, "Listen a... Mr. Ely--"

"He is standing to your right," Trevor interjected.

Embarrassed, Ari turned to her right. "Better?" she asked Trevor.

He nodded.

"I don't understand your rules or what all you do, but I do know one thing, Trevor will never be the same and neither will I. We all deserve to make our own choices and accept the consequences that come with them. All I'm asking is that you listen and try to understand what Trevor wants to do. Maybe it's his destiny to stay here and not go back." She was at a loss for words. All she really wanted to do right now was get down onto her knees and beg Ely to let Trevor stay.

Ely listened to what she said in her words and in her heart. "Tell her I heard her and that I will take what she said into consideration, I promise." He turned back to face Trevor. "But right now, I need you to come with me." Ely looked down at Trevor and extended his hand to him. "This is out of my charge too Trevor. Please take my hand."

Trevor always respected the older angel. Ely's wisdom and insight to things was something he valued greatly. "May I have a moment of privacy with her, please?"

Ely nodded and stepped back.

Trevor exited the car and walked over to Ari. She began to panic. “What are you doing? They will take you...”

He took her hand and guided them over to the stairs by the porch. “I have to go, I don’t have a choice.”

“But why, you are happy here.” Tears began to well up in her eyes and a large lump was forming in her throat. She only knew him for a very short time, but it was enough for her to know that there was something special between them.

He hated seeing the pain in her eyes and feeling it in her heart. “This is the way it’s supposed to be. I don’t like it either, especially now that I know there is so much more to just existing. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoyed helping the Earthbonds, but now... I feel so alive when I am around you.” He stopped talking; he couldn’t find the words to finish what he wanted to say.

“Then don’t go.” Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Trevor pulled her into his arms and hugged her. “I will try to come back, I will try to let you know I’m okay,” he whispered. “But promise me, that no matter what happens, you won’t go back to just working. Promise me that you will keep smiling, not just on the surface, but deep in your heart too. If you don’t, then all we have experienced together will have been for nothing.”

She gulped back the large lump in her throat and nodded her head. “I’ll try, I promise.”

He leaned down and kissed her hard and long. He wanted to keep this memory in his heart

forever. She returned the kiss with just as much passion and longing. She too didn't want to forget what she felt for him.

Pulling her away from him, he looked deep into her eyes. "You will be okay Arianna Nance."

"How do you know that?"

"I just do." He hugged her one more time. "Stay here... please."

She stood by the stairs and watched as he walked towards his car. Ely, Jace and the others stood by, but she could only see Trevor. He stopped and turned to face her, then smiled and winked. "I love you," he whispered.

A bright flash of light was followed by a loud crack of thunder as it pierced the stillness of the cold evening air. Ari closed her eyes to the bright light as she stood perfectly still. When she opened them, she stared out at the empty driveway where Trevor and his car had been only moments ago, tears ran down her cheeks. He was gone.

She heard the front door open and quickly wiped at her tear stained face with her gloves. Turning she faced both of her parents.

"What in the world was that?" her mom asked as she looked up at the sky. It was completely clear, not one cloud floated in its surface. "I could have sworn I heard thunder."

Her dad too was looking up at the sky. "I don't know, maybe it was one of the jets from the base flying over."

Ari smiled to herself. She knew exactly what it was, but would never be able to tell her parents. She walked up to them. "It was quite spectacular, wasn't it?"

While her mom and dad looked up at the sky, she looked at the empty driveway. Shaking her head, she went inside.

She sauntered into her room and flopped down onto her bed. The whole evening had been incredible. She was remembering the look on Trevor's face as they looked at all the exhibits. He reminded her of a child who was seeing the village for the first time. Then there was the concert. The song the young woman sang had always had great meaning to her, but for Trevor, it touched him deep within his heart.

Smiling, she rolled over onto her side. A small crunching sound got her attention. She sat up on her elbow and looked down onto her pillow. Lying on top of it was a small paper angel. She promptly grabbed the angel with her fingers and sat up. Hesitantly she turned it over, on the back of it was the word *Love*. Immediately a comforting feeling surrounded her.

“Thank you, Trevor,” she whispered.  
“Thank you for everything.”



# 13

“Out of love, they  
clip Our wings  
and let us go. But  
they are never far  
away.”

The following week passed by more quickly than Ari thought it would and she was grateful. The first several days after Trevor left, she kept looking for any kind of a sign that would let her know he was still around. But as each day passed, and nothing out of the ordinary happened, she tried to not get discouraged. Keeping herself busy seemed to be the best remedy. She reached into her pocket and pulled out the angel that had *Love* written on it and studied its delicate folds, small face and hands. At least she had her paper angels to remind her of him, and the special, but short time they had with each other.

Christmas was only a few days away and there was still a lot going on. The crowds of shoppers were getting bigger and bigger. Many of the customers were cranky, but most were in good spirits, which far outweighed the cranky ones. Ari found that the grouchy ones didn't bother her as much as they did... "Before Trevor came into my life," she sighed then smiled to herself.

The night Trevor left; she made the decision to look at everything with a more positive attitude. She noticed the difference this was making since everything seemed to get better and better with each day.

When she woke up that morning, she looked out her window. A new blanket of snow covered the ground during the night, and the clouds had already cleared away. The morning sky was painted with a beautiful orange tint and the snow sparkled as the sun light touched it. She had already eaten her breakfast and was walking out the door to go to work when the phone rang. She watched and listened as her dad answered the phone. At first his face was serious and Ari was afraid that he was being given some bad news. Then his mouth broke out into a big smile.

“Yes, I can start on Monday. Thank you too,” he said as he hung up the phone. He then let out a loud “WOO WHO! I got the job!”

Ari’s mom ran into the kitchen with a worried look on her face. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing is wrong, in fact everything is great!” her dad exclaimed as he picked her mom up and swung her around. “I got the job and I start first thing Monday morning.”

By now, Ari’s brothers and sister were all in the kitchen watching their parents.

“Why is dad swinging mom around?” Kaiya asked. “Mom said we aren’t allowed to rough house inside.”

“They aren’t rough-housing dork, they’re celebrating,” stated Alex.

“I’m not a dork! Mom Alex called me a dork,” Kaiya whined, her arms crossed over her chest.

Mark put Alice down. “Alex, your sister isn’t a dork so stop calling her names.”

Kaiya looked at Alex with a triumphant smile. Alex rolled his eyes and mumbled something under his breath, but stopped immediately when his mom shot him a harsh look.

“Well, if you aren’t rough housing then what are you doing?” asked Kaiya.

“I just got offered a really good job and I start on Monday,” her dad exclaimed.

Everybody started cheering at the good news. Things for her family were getting better and better too. Ari looked up and whispered a quiet thank you.

“Hey, who are you talking to?” Kaiya asked.

Ari smiled. “The angels.”

Kaiya tilted her head, her mouth was a straight line with one eyebrow raised. “And Alex called me a dork. At least I’m not the one who thinks she can talk to angels.”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about Kaiya.”

Insulted, Kaiya huffed and stomped away.

“Nope you have no idea,” Ari said as she walked over to give her dad a hug and congratulate him. Things were getting better just as Trevor said they would.

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Ari walked briskly down the hall at Lake View Assisted Living. She had promised Leona that she would finish reading *Gone With The Wind* to her today. As she turned the corner there was a

lot of activity in Leona's room. She rushed over to Pat who was standing outside the room.

"What's going on Pat, is Leona okay?" she quickly asked.

Pat looked at her, there were tears in her eyes. "Leona passed away during the night."

Ari felt like she had been punched in the stomach. She knew that Leona hadn't been doing well the last few days, but when someone suffered from Alzheimer's disease, it was always touch and go with their health. She knew that Leona had suffered from this horrible disease for a long time, which left her feeling partly relieved that Leona wasn't suffering anymore. Another part of her was sad that she didn't get to finish reading the book to her.

With a heavy lump in her throat she looked at Pat. "Would it be okay if I stepped in to tell her goodbye?"

Pat nodded.

Ari walked in and looked at Leona's lifeless body as she lay in her bed. There was a peacefulness about her that tugged at Ari's heart. "I will miss you Leona," she whispered, "but I'm glad you aren't suffering anymore. Now you can be with Billy, I'm sure he has been patiently waiting for you to join him." She patted Leona's hand. Tears began to stream down Ari's face and she gently wiped them away with the tissue she had in her pocket.

"Pat," she asked the older woman who was still standing by the door. "How long until the funeral directors come and get her?"

Pat looked at her watch. “They said they would be here around eleven. So probably in about forty minutes.”

Ari looked over at the night table and saw the book she had been reading to Leona. “Would it be okay if I sat and read the ending of *Gone With The Wind* to her until they come?”

“I think that that is a wonderful idea. I will let Dennis know where you are and tell him that you will be busy for a while.”

“Thanks.” Ari pulled a chair over next to the bed and picked up the book then opened it to the last chapter. She sat and read to Leona in the quiet stillness of the room. When she finished reading, she gently closed the book. “You know Leona, I never really understood why Scarlett couldn’t see how much Rhett loved her, until it was too late. She spent too much time pining for Ashley Wilkes, when all along a good thing was standing right in front of her.” She shook her head and placed the book down onto the table. “I hope you enjoyed the story.”

The peacefulness of the room disappeared when the funeral directors entered pushing a gurney in front of them. Ari looked back at Leona one more time, then excused herself and left the room.

Pulling a tissue out of her pocket, she didn’t know whether to cry or be happy. She stopped as she realized the need for crying was for herself; but the need for rejoicing was for Leona who was no longer suffering. Wiping her nose with the tissue she decided to quickly go and visit Mimi. She hadn’t visited with her for over a week

and wanted to thank her again for the make-over she gave her for the mini piano concert she performed for the residents. Since then, Ari had been very busy and wanted to check on her. Knocking on the door, she waited outside in the hall. When no one answered she knocked again.

Lorraine, an older lady with graying red hair, who was one of the senior nurses at the facility walked by and looked at Ari curiously. “What are you doing Ari?”

“I wanted to talk to Mimi, but I guess she is at one of the activities.” She put her arm down and turned. “I’ll try her again later.”

Lorraine’s eyes were wide as she stared at Ari. “Ari, we haven’t had a resident in that room for nearly a month. Are you sure you are at the right room?”

Ari looked at the door. The number 116 was hanging on it. “Yes, this is the right room. Maybe you’re mistaken? I was in this room a week ago talking to a resident named Mimi who lives here. She is petite, has grey hair that is cut in a bob. She’s really sweet and friendly too.”

Lorraine didn’t know what to say as she stared at the younger woman in front of her. She reached out and took Ari’s hand and patted it. “We don’t have a resident named Mimi here. I would know, since I go over the records from every shift, and I know all the residents here. Maybe you would like to come into the break room and sit down for a few minutes. I know you have been working two jobs, so you must be tired and think you spoke with a woman named Mimi.”

She began to gently guide Ari down the hall, but Ari stopped suddenly.

“If you don’t mind Loraine, I need to go see Jean first and then I will meet you in the break room.”

Loraine looked at her skeptically.

“I promised her that I would come and see her Christmas tree before lunch. It will only take a minute.” She didn’t want Loraine to think she was crazy so she quickly added, “I also need to make sure that Pat contacts Leona’s nephew to let him know about her passing away. He is her only relative.”

“Okay, but don’t take too long. I really think you need to sit down and eat something.”

“I will, I promise.”

Ari watched as Loraine walked down the hall, then waited until she turned the corner. Hastily she reached out and grabbed the door knob. When it turned she let out a sigh of relief. Quietly she entered the room and shut the door behind her. The room was completely empty. She walked around the studio apartment and opened the closet doors and looked in, hoping to find some kind of evidence that Mimi had been there. To her disappointment, the closets, like the rest of the room, were empty. She peeked into the bathroom and took a quick look. It was also empty. She put her hands to her face then raked her fingers back through her hair in frustration.

“I was in this room and with a resident named Mimi. There is no way I imagined her,” she spat out. Too many people saw her hair and make-up and the pretty sweater Mimi had given



her. Her back to the wall, she slid down it as her knees bent. Sitting on the floor, she looked around the room remembering with very vivid detail all the decorations that had hung on the walls. The portrait of Mimi's husband was right next to the window and above Mimi's recliner. She slammed her fist down onto the floor. Part of her wanted to cry and another part was very angry. There was no way she made any of that up. She was in this room with Mimi and she still had the beautiful sweater to prove it.

She jumped as the pager hooked to her belt began to vibrate. She pulled it off and looked at it. Pat was paging her. Slowly she stood back up and walked to the door. As she reached for the door knob, she noticed a small box sitting on the floor next to the wall. Bending down she picked up the box which was wrapped in gold foil paper and a red bow on top of it. A small tag was tucked under the ribbon. She pulled it out and read it.

Written on the tag was: *To Ari, With love, Mimi*. She gasped as she looked at the tag and reread it several times. Carefully she removed the wrapping paper from around the box. Her heart began to beat faster and faster as she pulled the lid off. Inside lying on a small red velvet pillow was a gold angel pin. This time she couldn't stop the tears from pooling in her eyes as she touched the pin.

"It's beautiful," she whispered. She removed the pin and attached it to her sweater and smiled. The pager began to vibrate again, so she hastily put the box and paper into her pocket, and rushed out the door.

# 14

“An angel’s love for  
us is an eternal  
gift from the  
Master.”

Ari hurried down the hall to the front desk. Pat's mouth was a straight line and she was tapping her pencil on the desk showing her impatience at having to page her twice.

"Sorry Pat, I got the first page, but I was really busy and couldn't leave at that moment—"

"You have a visitor in Dennis's office."

Pat interrupted.

Ari's eyebrows drew together. "A visitor? Why would someone want to see me?"

"All I know is he is dressed in a very expensive suit and wants to talk to you. You have kept him waiting, so I wouldn't dilly-dally anymore and get right in there." Sometimes Pat could be very abrupt in her mannerisms and this afternoon was one of those times.

Rolling her eyes upward, Ari walked over to Dennis's door and lightly knocked on it.

"Come in," Dennis called out.

She hesitantly walked in. Dennis was sitting at his desk wearing his usual oxford shirt and khaki pants. In contrast to him, on the other side of the desk sat an older man with silver-grey hair and as Pat had said, he was wearing a very expensive black suit. Ari looked around nervously wondering if she was in trouble and about to be fired.

“Sit Ari,” Dennis directed as he pointed to a vacant chair. “This is Andrew Henderson, he is Leona’s attorney.”

She sat down onto the chair. Inside, she was a bundle of nerves, anxiously awaiting the verdict.

Mr. Henderson looked at her. His eyes were a pale blue but far from kind. “I take it you have spent some time with my client, Mrs. Leona Yontz?” he asked sternly.

“Yes,” Ari quietly answered.

“Is this the book you have been reading to her?” He held up the copy of *Gone With The Wind*.

“It looks like the one that was in her room.”

“It is the same one.” He cleared his throat. “Mrs. Yontz made some last-minute changes to her will a short while back. She asked that you be given this book upon her death. Inside is a letter she dictated to me. You are to read it when you have a private moment. She was very specific that there was to be no delay in getting this to you. I personally found it to be quite peculiar that she insisted this all be done on the day of her death. I am most grateful you were working today, it made it much easier to locate you.” He handed the book to her.

Ari looked at the book and gently brushed her fingers over the cover. “Thank you. This is something I will always treasure.” She stood up to leave when Mr. Henderson stopped her.

“That is not all Miss Nance. Mrs. Yontz has also asked me to inform you that I am to see to

it that your entire schooling tuition, fees, etcetera to become a nurse is taken care of.”

Ari fell back into the chair; her head was spinning at the news. “This must be a mistake; I think you have me mixed up with someone else—”

“I don’t make mistakes, Miss Nance. Mrs. Yontz has instructed me to take care of your tuition and everything else that your education will require of you.”

“I...a... I...don’t know what to say.” She shook her head and looked at the floor. Her head was spinning even more with this news and she felt like pinching herself to see if this was all real.

“Ari, are you, all right?” asked Dennis. He jumped up and darted over to where she was sitting. “You look very pale. Put your head down below your knees and breathe deeply before you pass out.”

Fanning her face with her hands, she did as he instructed and began to feel better as the blood rushed back to her head.

“That is not all Miss Nance. My client’s nephew flew into town early this morning and would like to meet with you this evening. He has asked that you dine with him.”

Ari began to feel nauseous. To have her schooling paid for was one thing, but now the long-lost nephew wanted to see her. No doubt he wanted to question her about being in the will and was going to attest it. It would be easier to tell Mr. Henderson right now, to not waste either of their time, and tell the nephew that he can keep everything. The book is the only thing she wanted.

“Mr. Henderson, I can appreciate all of this generosity but, I can’t accept all of this. Please tell Mrs. Yontz’s nephew that I won’t fight him about the college tuition—”

Mr. Henderson waved her off with his hand and looked at his watch. “The tuition is not any of his concern, nor should it be yours. The limousine will pick you up in two hours.”

All of a sudden, the reality of everything hit Ari like a bucket of cold water in the face. Her head snapped up. “Whoa, wait a minute that will not give me enough time to go home and change, since I don’t get off work for an hour and a half.” She looked at Dennis pleadingly.

“That too has been taken care of.” Behind Mr. Henderson was a garment bag that was hanging from the hat rack Dennis had in the corner of his office. “Everything you need is in there.” He nodded to the bag.

Ari looked at Dennis. “What do you think I should do?”

He smiled at her. “You will be fine, I think you should go.”

She smiled then weakly said, “Okay.”

“All I need for you to do now Miss Nance, is sign right here on this line, verifying that I have given you the book and informed you about your college expenses.” He slid the paper over on the desk and held up a pen.

Ari walked over and quickly read the piece of paper, then signed it. “Is that all?”

“Yes. I will be contacting you in the next few weeks to discuss your education plans.” He stood up, and then reached for his leather

briefcase. "Have a good day." He nodded to Ari and Dennis, and then left the office.

Ari looked at Dennis. "Did all of this really happen or am I dreaming?"

He laughed. "If I hadn't witnessed it for myself, I never would have believed it. Wow, what a nice gift," he commented scratching his head in disbelief. "I knew that you were close to Leona, but I never would have seen this coming."

"Me either," responded Ari.

"Hey, why don't you just work until five then go and get yourself ready. I will see that the rest of your shift is covered."

"Are you sure? I wouldn't want to create any problems for you—"

"Just go," he said as he scooted her towards the door and handed her the garment bag.

"Thanks Dennis, you are the best." She took the garment bag and hastily left.

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The next hour passed by quickly. When her shift was over, she rushed into the restroom in the employee lounge and unzipped the garment bag. Inside was a beige sweater, a pair of jeans, boots, and a scarf with matching gloves. It wasn't at all what she had expected. Her imagination led her to believe that the bag contained a fancy dress and matching shoes. She found herself feeling relieved that the clothes were more casual. She slipped the clothes on and was surprised that they fit perfectly.

Looking in the mirror she frowned. The curls she put into her hair in the morning were almost gone. She searched the garment bag again and was happy to find a thick knit headband that matched the sweater lying on the. She slid the band over her head, and then pulled her hair back with it. Her hair fell behind her in long loose waves. In her purse, she found a tube of lipstick and applied enough to pinken her lips. Stepping back, she looked at herself in the small and smiled, then abruptly stopped. Quickly she picked up her other sweater and removed the angel pin from it, and pinned it onto the new beige sweater.

“Now I’m ready,” she smiled.

She walked out front to where the limousine was already waiting for her, but was surprised by the car. It wasn’t a long sleek black limousine; it was a 1964 Rolls Royce Silver Cloud limo. The last time she saw one like this was at a car show she went to with her dad last summer, and then all she got to do was look at it, not ride in it.

The driver met her at the door and escorted her to the car and opened the back door of the limousine. She slid in over the leather seat as he shut the door. The driver then got in and the car began to move. Ari stared out the window but her mind was more on where she was going than the view in front of her. Butterflies began to build in her stomach as the anticipation of the meeting with Leona’s nephew began to interfere with her thinking. At one point when the limousine stopped at a light, she felt like opening the door and bolting, but common sense told her to stay.



The limousine turned onto the main boulevard of down town Ogden, which was beautifully decorated with lights and holiday banners. The driver slowly pulled into the parking lot behind the city building. Off in the distance Ari could see the lights of Christmas Village.

The driver stepped out and opened her door. Her head tilted up as she drew her eyebrows together. "Is this it?" she asked puzzled.

"Yes, Miss Nance, it is. Mr. Yontz is waiting for you over on the bench." He pointed towards a bench just off the main pathway to the village.

Ari's shoulders slumped down in disappointment. For some reason, she had hoped for more, maybe a restaurant or something, but it was obvious Mr. Yontz wanted to get this meeting over with as quickly as possible.

"Is everything alright Miss Nance?" asked the driver.

"Yes," she smiled, making him think she was fine, but inside she was feeling worse by the minute. Taking small steps, she began to walk over to the bench, where she could see the lone figure of a man sitting. Taking a deep breath, she picked up her pace. It was best to hurry and get this over with.

He didn't turn around when she approached him which made her feel even more awkward. Clearing her throat, she said, "Excuse me, Mr. Yontz, I'm Ari Nance, you asked me to meet with you." Still he didn't say anything. "I appreciate the new clothes and the ride in the

limousine, but if you don't mind, I would like to make this meeting quick and go home."

"Why do you want to go home so quickly Arianna?" he asked.

"Because, I'm sure you have better things to do. I have already told your aunt's attorney that I won't contest the will. All I really want is the book, if it wouldn't be a problem."

He turned around and her jaw dropped as her eyes widened. "Let me formally introduce myself. My name is Trevor Yontz, and I'm pleased to meet you." He looked at her and smiled, his deep blue eyes twinkled with the reflection of the lights in the park.

She took a few steps back away from him. "Is this some kind of joke?" she gasped.

"No, it's really me Arianna, but this time I'm all flesh and bones." He stuck his hand out for her to touch.

Hesitantly she moved forward then reached out with the tip of her finger, and touched his hand. Chills ran up her arm as she felt his skin. "Are you here to stay or are you only here temporarily?"

"I'm here to stay, if you'll have me?" His long blond hair had been cut short above his ears. He stood up and walked over to her. Without warning, he scooped her up into his arms. She instantly put her arms around his neck. He leaned in and kissed her tenderly at first then harder as her hands clasped the back of his head.

"When...how?" she asked between kisses.

"When I left, Ely could see that I would never be able to do my job again. He said that I

had become *too human* with emotions and such. He arranged for a meeting with some of the hierarchy, and they all agreed to let me come here and obtain an earthly body.” He looked at her, his eyes were serious. “Do you still want me?”

“Of course, I do, do you need to ask?” She hugged him tight to her.

“I’m glad to hear you say that,” he laughed as he swung her around. “I’ve had to wait until I grew up and for you to grow up too before I could approach you. It has been a long time waiting for this day to come.”

“Why? Why did you wait so long?”

“Because if I didn’t wait until today, I could have altered your course of destiny and we may never have met.”

“I’m glad you waited then.” She smiled as she looked at him. “So, are you really Leona’s nephew?”

“I am. We were very close when I was younger. Aunt Leona used to babysit me all the time. Then one day my uncle joined the Air Force and they moved around a lot. We mostly kept in touch through letters and phone calls. Sometimes during the summer, I would go and stay with her and my uncle for a few weeks. She never had any children of her own, so I was like a son to her. She was very special to me as I was to her.”

“She was special to me too.” Ari thought back to the time she spent reading and talking to Leona. She had a very kind heart.

He set her down, but didn’t release her completely as he kept his arms around her waist. “I’m glad you came.”

“Me too. I got both of your angels, thank you for sending them to me.”

“I only left you one angel on your pillow; it was all I had time for.”

“No, there was one more.” She opened her parka and pushed the scarf aside so he could see the small angel pin. “See? I found this one this afternoon. It was wrapped up in a pretty box.”

“I didn’t leave the pin for you; it must have been someone else.”

At first, she was disappointed, then her eyes widened. “Trevor, are there really such things as ghosts?”

He laughed then stopped when he saw the hurt look on her face. “We call them spirits. Ghosts are a name that man made up to explain these spiritual beings. Why, do you think you saw one?”

“Yes, and her name is Mimi. I’ll tell you about her later.” There was a lot she wanted to tell him but realized that she didn’t have to do it all right now. They had all the time in the world and she planned to use every minute of it.

He smiled as he watched her face. “I like not being able to read your thoughts anymore. It adds to the mystery of getting to know you better.”

She blushed as she looked down. “I’m glad you can’t either.”

Off in the distance they could hear music and the applause of an audience. “If you don’t mind, I would like to pick up where we left off the

## Paper Angels

last time we were here. I think I hear your favorite song.” He held his arm out to her and she grasped it tightly. She had no intention of ever letting him go again.

## About the author

Christy Frazier, is an internationally published writer and award-winning photographer. She received her degree in “Art Commercial Photography” from Weber State University. She lives in Utah with her husband, two kids, two point five cats, one of which fetches like a dog and a vegetarian yellow lab dog. She has been teaching advanced learning children, grades K-6 for over fourteen years. Her combined passions of writing, photography, and teaching children have inspired her to write and photographically illustrate many stories including her newest novel due for release in February 2018

“Imagination is a powerful tool.”

- Christy Frazier

Paper Angels

# The Bench

By

Christy Frazier

Introduction

According to science, death is the complete failure of all vital functions that keep a living organism alive. The religious sect believes death is not the end but a beginning. For the living, death separates them from a loved one and causes deep emotional feelings of sorrow. The intensity of the loss varies from one individual to another. Grief then surfaces as we naturally mourn for those we've lost and hold on to their memory.

If you had a chance to talk with someone who has passed on would you do it? What would you say? What if it was as simple as sitting on a bench...

## **The Bench**

**Due to be released in February 2018**

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