

# Zachary

I MAY BE HEAVEN-SENT, but I'm not perfect.

I watch my girl slip the oversize Dallas Cowboys T-shirt over her pink bikini panties and turn in for the night.

That sounds perverted, I know. But I've always watched her dress, undress, shower, and bathe.

Then there was that one blessed weekend last August when the air conditioner broke. She spent a full day in bed buck naked, reading Tolkien under the ceiling fan.

It's not like I *look* look. Not usually.

What's more, it's my job to keep an eye on her 24/7.

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I'm Miranda's guardian angel (GA for short). A newbie created after the first atomic blast in 1945.

Miranda is my second assignment and my reason for being. Not that she has clue one. She can't even see me. Nobody can unless I choose to show myself. That's a no-no. We GAs have our limits. Sure, we help out when we can, but not in any way that's clearly detectable . . . or at least traceable (I'm known to push the limits now and then).

Night after night, I watch her sleep. She's restless. Always restless. I'm forever rearranging the sheets so her legs don't get tangled. Otherwise, she'll wake up.

She doesn't get enough rest as it is. She worries about little mistakes. Or what she frets are mistakes. What other people think of her. What will happen next.

All humans do. I wish they could glimpse infinity. It would make glitches like a C in algebra or a nitpicking parent or being ignored by The Guy feel a whole lot less fatal.

I would love to talk to Miranda. To tell her that.

She woke up crying twice last year around the time of her parents' divorce. I don't know what she dreams about. I've heard that older angels can tap into the mind. Sounds tempting, right? But I wouldn't do that. Or at least I can't.

I'm already so here. Miranda deserves her own mental space.

This is her physical space, though. My fave place on terra firma.

Since she's sound asleep, I risk assuming solid form on a denim beanbag chair, taking it in. Four cream-colored walls, two windows, eight-foot ceilings, outdated gold shag. A twin bed, desk set, tall cedar dresser, and hope chest. The blanket her grandma knitted. The stuffed toy penguin from SeaWorld. The poster of the earth that reads: HOME, SWEET HOME.

Here, I can see the little girl she was. The woman she's turning into.

Miranda began wearing bras like the one hanging off the back of her desk chair in fifth grade. She gave up on the third of her fuzzy pink diaries that same year.

One wall is covered by a bookcase. She reads paperbacks mostly. Lots of series titles. One shelf is jammed full of acting and theater books. The library stack on the desk waits to be returned. The college information packet beside it is from the University of North Texas. The cell phone next to her PC hasn't worked since it went through the wash last weekend.

Beside it rest copies of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Dickens is assigned reading, but Shakespeare is Miranda's ticket to her dream. Today's date is circled in red on the Narnia calendar. Spring-play auditions are this afternoon. My girl is so shy. I'm surprised she signed up.

Mr. Nesbit is taking a drink of water from the bottle attached to his cage. He's good company, for a gerbil.

I dissolve again so I don't have to wiggle up from the

beanbag. It's time to check on Miranda. To breathe in her lemongrass body wash. To study her heart-shaped face. It's something I do almost as often as humans blink.

This time is different. Horrific. I recoil, looking for another explanation. But the ladybug nightlight is still on. The nearly full moon hasn't been eclipsed.

A smoky gray film swirls around Miranda. It clings to her. It twists into long-fingered hands, caressing her cheeks, pawing at her slim neck and shoulders. It lengthens into a translucent sheet, covering her body, sliding up over her head.

It's wrong. It has to be. But I've seen it before.  
My girl is sleeping in the shadow of Death.