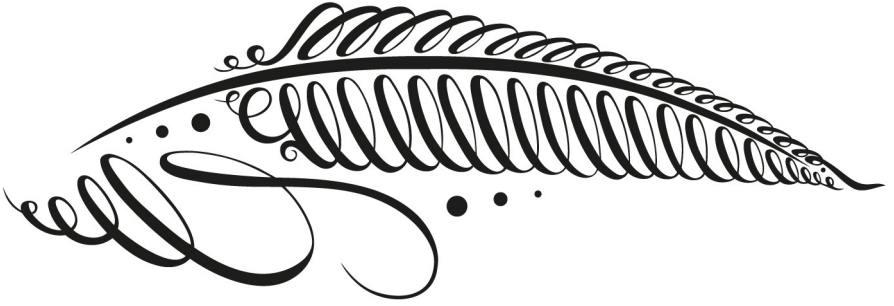


Angel



Book 1

‘The Guardian’

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Smashwords Edition

Dedication

Thank you to Kim White, a beautiful lady who gave me these spiritual and life-changing experiences.



Ella

Have you ever had the feeling that someone is watching you, but you can't see anyone? The hairs on your arms stand to attention. After gulping down a quick breath you stop breathing so you can listen, but all you can hear is your heartbeat thumping. You turn and glance behind, your eyes darting everywhere, but nothing is there.

I had this feeling on my way home from work tonight. My body tensed, it told me something was amiss. Did I listen to these warning signs? Well, I did, for a moment I stopped walking and listened, then dismissed it, a watery smile forced into place, I was just being a coward.

The train station is just around the corner from my home. A short alleyway leads to the station. During the day I love to walk along it, there are no houses, just beautiful trees and gardens where I love to watch the butterflies dance.

My boss at the café, kept me behind, she wanted to talk about my roster and I missed my usual train. Knowing that I wouldn't make it home before dark, my friend Emma offered me a lift home. But I told her no, the train is fine. Emma's

house is in the opposite direction, it would have been out of her way to drop me home.

As I entered the alleyway I found it difficult to see. The clouds had closed in and were blocking out the moon, so I stopped and pulled out my phone as a light. It was then that I felt a flutter on the back of my neck. Had a bird flown past me or maybe a butterfly or a grasshopper? Strange for that to happen at night. I stopped and looked around but nothing was there. I continued on, humming softly to myself. Then I felt it again, more noticeable this time. A bat, it had to be a bat! I faltered, my breath caught in my throat. There was nothing there, just me and a bat!

Tentatively, I took a few more steps and felt air blowing on my back. My heart was beating out of control. Wildly, I swung around and once again, I was met with nothing. Nothing but my overactive imagination. I sighed and shook my head and continued walking.

It was then that the eerie sound of footsteps cut through the silence. I could barely see the figure dressed in dark clothes approaching me from behind a large, old oak tree on the side of the road. I didn't know what to do. At first I froze. I felt rooted to the spot and then as if I had been jolted awake, I started to run as fast as my legs would carry me. I looked back and was horrified to see three dark shapes chasing after me.

Looking back was a huge mistake. My feet tangled, I tripped and fell flat on my face. My phone flew from my hand. I was trapped. They had surrounded me, three men dressed in dark clothes. I could see the whites of their teeth smirking at me. A primal scream escaped from the depths of my being and one of them roughly slapped his large, calloused hand over my mouth, pushing the back of my head into the jagged stones of the road. Cries for help were extinguished. They still hadn't spoken, but I knew they intended to hurt me. They were tall, dressed in black with hoodies over their heads. They smelled of hate and I could sense their evil intentions oppressing me.

One of them was tipping out my bag. He grabbed my wallet and started going through it, pulling out the notes and cards. The one with his hand over my mouth, to stifle my screams sat on me. I desperately tried to wriggle free and hit him. It was then that I knew I was in terrible danger. He put his other hand around my throat and slowly squeezed. I couldn't breathe. My lungs were screaming for air and my throat was being crushed. He was squeezing the life out of me. Finally he spoke in a low and eerily calm voice, "Yell, or hit me again, and you're dead!"

My heart was beating so wildly I thought it would explode and then he took his hand off my throat. I gasped, trying to suck in air. Hot tears flowed down my cheeks. I knew I was in deep danger. And then the third guy started to undo my jeans. Oh My God! They were going to rape me! My throat was still rasping for breath when he roughly shoved his hand over my mouth again. My still silent screams for help went unanswered as my jeans were pulled off.

I squeezed my eyes shut and my body shuddered at what was about to happen. It was then that I felt and heard a flutter of wings. His hand came off my mouth and he fell backwards away from me. I lay there blubbering, speechless and incoherent. And then I noticed that the men were running away. They were screaming too. Blackness descended and I plunged into nothingness.



“Can you hear me?” It was the sound of a soft female voice. I opened my eyes and a nurse was standing over me. I looked around. Lots of bright lights and white sheets. “You’re okay Ella, you’ve bumped your head in a fall, you’re safe, we’re looking after you,” Words of encouragement that I was so relieved to hear.

Then Mom appeared, “What happened Ella? We found you in the alleyway, out cold, your bag contents were scattered everywhere.”

“Mom, did they rape me?” I had to know.

“What are you talking about Ella?” she replied with deep concern etched on her face.

“There were three of them. Before I blacked out...they pulled my jeans off.”

“Ella, your jeans were on. Were there men chasing you? What happened?”

Mom quietly asked the doctor if I had been sexually assaulted and he replied, “No, but she does have a nasty cut on her head and her hands are scratched and bruised from her fall.”

“I think a bird attacked them, it must have been an owl or a bat,” I yelled. They all looked at me in sympathy.

The doctor put his hand on my shoulder, sincerely looking into my eyes, “Head

traumas can cause the brain to imagine stories to explain your accident, Ella.”

I tightly clinched my eyes shut. None of it made sense. If it was a dream, well it certainly was a realistic one! I went back to sleep, feeling a deep sense of confusion, but knowing I was safe.

The next morning I was released from the hospital with a warning to take it easy and to carry a torch in future so I don't trip in the dark. I gave the doctor a strained smile and thanked him for his help.

As soon as I arrived home, I checked my bag. My wallet was still there and the money and cards were in it. But how could that be?

My throat was sore, but the doctors had explained that I had strained it in the fall. As the day wore on...bruises started to appear. Fingerprints. I knew it! It was real! I had been attacked in the alleyway. I just had no idea what had saved me.

Aiden

I first noticed her when I took her older brother, Tommy, to the light. Tommy had struggled for years with a terrible cancer that ate his body until he could fight no more. I sat with him for the last two weeks of his human life. Holding his hand and telling him that it was going to be alright. I assured him that when the time came, I would take him home.

Humans struggle with death of the physical body. I think it is because they are unsure of what will happen next. Some don't, and that's because they know. Tommy knew. He was so calm. His only real regret was the sadness that he was aware he would leave behind. He loved his family and they dearly loved him.

Tommy's little brother, Jack, could sense me. He would walk towards me and stand there and smile. I would send him love and I could see his body relax and his aura soar.

Just before Tommy passed, Jack told his parents that the angel was waiting to take Tommy to Heaven. His Dad looked shocked and in a breaking voice told him not to be ridiculous, then he walked out of the room and burst into silent tears. His Mom assured Jack that indeed Tommy would go to Heaven and that he would be loved and cared for. His sister, Ella, walked over and gave Jack a huge hug and then she lay on the bed with Tommy, cuddled him and kissed his forehead. She showed him pure love and that was when I could see right into her heart. There was nothing bad in this 17 year-old girl. She had no agenda, there was no falseness or nastiness in her core; she was pure and loving. The way she gently pulled her fingers through Tommy's hair and rubbed his weary and aching legs was beautiful.

As an angel I see all types of people. I'm not supposed to judge them, they are all on their own journey. But Ella was different. She was fascinating, beautiful; so warm and caring.

I watched her heart break as her brother took his last breath and his spirit left his body. She said a silent prayer that only she, Tommy and I could hear. Ella asked for Tommy to be loved as much as she loved him, for the rest of time. As Tommy and I went towards the light, he stopped, went back and hugged Jack, Ella and his parents. I told Tommy that he could visit his family whenever he wanted. He liked that idea and told them that he was free now and that he felt

wonderful. With a radiant smile on his face he asked them not to be sad. The good spirits always ask for this. I wish the humans could hear, it would help them so much. Tommy also asked me to watch over his family. I promised, and took him to the light.

And that is how I met Ella, the most beautiful soul I have ever come across.

The night she was attacked I tried to warn her. She could feel me, but being a human she didn't realize it was a warning, she thought she was being paranoid. Angels are not supposed to interfere in human life. But I had promised Tommy and I couldn't stand by and watch three dark and dirty souls invade Ella. They didn't know what had knocked them away from her. But it was obvious from their terror that they knew it was a force not to be challenged.

Taylor

Sometimes girls are so needy. My girlfriend, Ella called me this morning. She had an accident yesterday and wanted me to come and spend time with her. I do love her, let's face it, she is hot! But I am a busy guy, you know, I've got things to do, people to see, places to visit.

I first met Ella in our final term at school, she couldn't help but fall for me. James and I had a bet on who could date her first. James is smooth, he describes himself as a "girl whisperer". He thought he'd win and to be honest so did I. That's why I went all out. I bought her flowers, carried her books, went to Ella's house and studied with her and I even charmed her good old Mom. She had no choice but to say yes to a date.

Our first date was to the movies and I chose a "girly" romantic comedy. I didn't watch the movie, I just worked on making Ella feel good. I snuggled against her and gently held her hand. Then we went for a walk and had coffee. She told me all about her life. I realized she is actually pretty interesting. She is really caring and kind. Ella is really different to all the other girls I have dated.

My last girlfriend was Tiffany, she was a cheerleader for my football team. Long, long legs, a super hot body, beautiful long blonde hair and big green eyes. Even now, I feel steamy just thinking about her. She wasn't as smart or as nice as Ella. Tiff liked to hang out with the "cool" group. Appearance was everything! I can remember her losing one of her fake nails, it was like the world was going to end! After a month she dropped me. A new player had joined the football team, every girl wanted him, including Tiff.

As I was saying, I'm not the type of guy who wants to sit around and talk all day. I like action. And today my friends and I are going mountain biking down a new track one of the guys has found. I lied to Ella and told her I was too busy with schoolwork. Girls believe the most incredibly lame excuses.

I told her I would come around tonight and see her. She didn't seem very happy, but she isn't going to control my life. She's my girlfriend, not my mother!

Ella

Mom and Dad tucked me into bed. I felt like a little kid again, but I needed their gentle touch. Last night shattered me. I'm still totally confused and I feel scared.

I phoned Taylor and asked if he could come around and spend the day with me. He's busy, his English assignment is due tomorrow. That is something I love about Taylor, he is really committed to his studies. Often he stays at home on the weekends, studying. He told me that his parents have paid a lot for his education so far and he wants to be the best he can be, just for them.

Taylor and I have been dating for 2 months now. He's my first boyfriend and I love him. He swept me off my feet...he's so romantic. I'll never forget the first time he held my hand. I think I stopped breathing! Tingles raced up my arm and I felt so warm, soft and excited. On the next date he kissed me on the lips. At first I was shocked. I didn't expect it to be like this. His tongue pushed between my lips. I didn't know what to do, so I just went along. I have to say I didn't really enjoy that first kiss.

Taylor wants more, but I'm not ready yet. He is so sweet, he totally understands and respects my wishes.

Nothing is on TV, so I figure I may as well relax and try to catch up on some sleep.

Nightmares invade my dreams. Flashes of the attack hit me like short sharp lightning strikes. In the darkness I can see eyes shining in the distance, the smell of stale sweat, the sting and pain of being pushed into the road and a flutter of wings. I quickly sit up and look around. Only a dream. But not really, I know this happened. I'm scared. Mom and Dad race in, they have heard my screams. Holding me in their arms I feel safe again, and drift off once more.

Ella

Yesterday, I finished my final exam for high school. What a relief! For the past month I've done nothing but study and finish assignments. Things with Taylor are going well, but we haven't seen each other much lately, so today we went to the Fun Park together. I warned him that I love scary rides and that he had to come on every one of them with me!

He looked gorgeous when he arrived to pick me up. He was smiling his beautiful smile and wearing the T-Shirt I gave him for his birthday. He was so funny the way he walked up our garden pathway modeling his new clothes, pretending he was on a catwalk. Little did he realize that Mom and Dad were watching him as well! He spotted them and gave a bedazzling smile. "Hi, Mr. Hudson and Mrs. Hudson, don't you just love this shirt Ella gave me? Your daughter is one of a kind, I'm so lucky that she likes me."

"She is lucky to have you too, Taylor," smiled Mom. Dad didn't say anything, he still doesn't trust any boy around his "princess".

We said our farewells and jumped into Taylor's car. He has a VW convertible, it is an older one, but it's so cool! Taylor beeped the horn and slowly drove off. Once we were around the corner, he turned the music up and went a lot faster.

We arrived at the Fun Park and Taylor opened the door for me. The day was sunny and warm, exams were over and I was with the most wonderful boy in the world. He makes me feel so happy and special. And then I blurted out, "Taylor, when I am around you, my heart feels full."

He turned to look at me in a quizzical way, his head tilted to the side and his eyebrows raised. But he said nothing. I could feel the heat rising through my body as a bright red blush crept across my face. Why did I say that? I felt so embarrassed and stupid. I looked down, unable to meet his eyes any longer. Taylor reached out and put his finger under my chin and lifted my face. Then a slow smile emerged and his dark eyes softened. "Ella, you have no idea how good those words make me feel," and he kissed me on the forehead. My body relaxed, I let out a sigh of relief and gave him a hug.

He took my hand and we walked through the entrance. I could feel tension rising in Taylor's hand, but I didn't understand why.

I love fast and dangerous rides. Taylor doesn't. He didn't say anything about his fear. So I chose a spinning one to start off with. The speed and force of the ride pins you against the wall. Taylor was looking quite serious as we stepped on, but I was too excited to really take any notice. As soon as it took off he started screaming. It was a loud and piercing scream. At first I thought he was joking, then I saw his face, his eyes were bulging.

Finally the ride stopped and we walked off. Well, I walked off and Taylor stumbled off. He could barely stand up. His face was ashen white and he wasn't talking. Then he struggled over to a bin and threw-up. I grabbed some water and sat next to him on the ground. Poor Taylor, it took him half an hour to recover. I felt so bad. He admitted that he never went on fast or spinning rides because his body always reacted like this. I felt so guilty. He only went on the ride for me.

I suggested we go into the house of mirrors, something a little less thrilling, but perfect for Taylor. He loved it and we had heaps of fun, especially with the ones that make you look wider and distorted. It was then that I thought I saw a beautiful man behind me. He was really tall and had the most gorgeous face and blonde hair. His eyes were shining and very intense. I turned, but nothing was there. Strange, it must have been a reflection from another mirror. I looked around, but there were no other people near us. Then Taylor jumped out from behind a mirror and scared me, he is such a clown.

We stopped for pizza on the way home. I had just chomped into a piece of pepperoni pizza when Taylor put his arm around my shoulders, looked into my eyes and said, "I love you Ella."

I was so shocked, I almost choked on the food I was eating. It became caught in my throat and I started coughing. Chunks of pizza were flying out of my mouth all over Taylor. I couldn't breathe. He hit me on the back and a huge piece landed on the table.

This was the first time Taylor had expressed his feelings and I had ruined it. I burst into tears and Taylor just stood there looking at me. Then he began laughing, he could see the funny side. Watching him laugh started me laughing too. We couldn't stop. Everyone in the restaurant was watching us. Tears were steaming from our eyes. Covered in pizza, we quickly cleaned up our mess and ran out to the car.

When we jumped in, I asked Taylor if he really meant what he had said. He told me yes, and I told him that I loved him too. We laughed all the way home. It was the most romantic and funniest date ever, certainly never to be repeated!

Mom

Ella seems to have found a great boyfriend in Taylor. He is polite and really focused on his schoolwork, and he is very fond of my daughter. I'm so happy for her. She was devastated when Tommy died. I still am, and so is my husband. But at least it looks like Ella is having fun again.

It has been a year since Tommy passed. We live one day at a time and sometimes it is so difficult to see where the future will lead us. My husband, Harry, is always subdued, he never laughs anymore and just wants to stay at home and watch sport. Occasionally he will smile, but it never quite reaches his eyes and it disappears quickly. He shuns our old friends and finds it difficult to engage in a conversation. I can't talk to him about Tommy, it is still too painful for him.

I've started exploring spirituality. I want to know what happens when we pass on. What happened to Tommy, did he just die and that is it? Or did he go to Heaven or somewhere else? Is he happy? Is he being looked after? Can he see and hear me? I have so many questions that I need to explore...and no answers. Most people I know grow up in a house where the whole family goes to church, so those people have belief and faith. I don't have that. I'm forty-four and I still don't know. Before Tommy passed it never really worried me, but with him gone, I need to know.

Jack told us that Tommy visits him. This may just be his imagination...young boys have huge imaginations. He seems to have an imaginary friend. I sometimes hear him talking when he is playing in his bedroom. And maybe it is just his way of dealing with losing his big brother.

Harry doesn't want me to investigate the afterlife. He says that we'll find out when we die. But I just think that is being like an ostrich, he wants to bury his head in the sand. I've signed up for a class called *Explore the Beyond* and I'm hoping Ella will come along too.

Jack

My whole family is sad. When Tommy died, they cried and cried. I didn't feel sad because I can still see Tommy. He visits me in my bedroom. He sits on the end of my bed and we talk. Tommy told me that the others, Mom, Dad and Ella, can't see or sense him. I am the only one. We talk about kindy, my friends and our family. I've just started playing soccer and Tommy wants to know all about it. He doesn't come often, usually only when I am sad or upset. He seems to know when I need him.

I tried to tell Mom and Dad that Tommy visits me. Mom burst into tears and Dad got angry. "Don't be silly Jack, you're upsetting your mother," he said, giving me a dark look. I guess they don't want to know. So now I keep Tommy's visits a secret.

On Tommy's first birthday after he passed, Mom made a cake for him. She didn't decorate it with candles or special icing and she didn't say it was for Tommy. But I knew. Tommy had told me it was his 19th birthday. Mom was about to cut it without singing Happy Birthday. "We have to sing Happy Birthday," I demanded. She just looked at me and said it wasn't a birthday cake. "It is a birthday cake and we HAVE to sing Happy Birthday!" I yelled. Dad got up and walked into the laundry. Mom followed him. Ella quietly said, "Stop it Jack, you're upsetting them."

They came back and sat down. "Can we sing Happy Birthday now?" I asked. The whole family joined in. They sounded strained and sad, but I sang it as brightly and happily as I could. Tommy gave me a big smile and a wink. He loved it.

Ella

Taylor and I were hanging out together at the beach today. His phone notifications kept going off and he was really secretive about answering the messages. “Who’s calling?” I asked. He stammered that his friend, Sean was trying to arrange a gathering. He didn’t look at me and changed the subject straight away. “Come on let’s go for a swim,” he said throwing sand on my stomach. Cheeky boy, I chased after him and we splashed around in the waves.

I went back to the towel first, I was freezing and Taylor stayed in the water to catch a few more waves. The sun’s rays quickly dried my skin and I began to relax. Taylor’s phone was going off, messages were coming in constantly. I leaned over to see who it was. Tiffany’s name appeared with a series of love hearts and several question marks. My jaw dropped. I scrolled through his phone, Taylor had been talking to her all morning. There were at least 50 messages. He had lied to me, Sean wasn’t messaging him, it had been Tiffany.

Now, I’m not very experienced with relationships, this was my first. I didn’t know what to do or what to say. Maybe I was wrong, Maybe Sean had messaged him earlier. I decided to play it cool. Taylor eventually returned and flicked water all over me. Sitting next to me, he looked at his phone and smiled. “Who has been sending all those messages, Taylor, your phone has been going crazy!” I said, hoping for an honest answer. Taylor, threw his phone down and replied with a sweet smile, “It doesn’t matter, nothing matters when I am with you Ella, you are so beautiful and I love you.”

I felt so mean, doubting my boyfriend. I smiled and opened my arms and we lay on the beach snuggling. Taylor nuzzled into my neck and playfully nipped me on the ear. All thoughts of Tiffany and her crazy text messaging had disappeared, I felt totally in love.

Aiden

Let me explain to you how the Angel world works. I am not a human, I never have been. There are an infinite number of angels watching over all of the Creator's creatures. We all look different, some of us are male, others female and we don't look alike. I have never slept or eaten. I can't smell or taste. However I can hear peoples' thoughts and I can see into their soul.

Humans are such strange creatures, they are all so different. We angels are not supposed to judge, just observe and help them when it is time for their spirit to pass on, but sometimes this is difficult.

Every passing is different, this morning I sat beside Grant Smythe, a 63 year-old man who had a massive heart attack the night before. He struggled with dying, fought it until his last breath. But it was his time to go, so I patiently waited. This man had a very dark aura, it was muddy with his negative thoughts about everyone and everything. He had been totally self-centered during his life, not really caring about his wife and children. An alcoholic for most of his life, he could only think about getting his hands on his next bottle of rum.

They sat around him watching him in his last hours. His daughter cried when he passed. She mostly cried for the loss of a father she had never really had. His wife just sighed. When she stood, I could see the burden lifting off her shoulders as her back straightened. And his son was angry, it was radiating from him. He had both loved and hated his father and he silently swore that he would never be like him.

When Grant's spirit lifted from his body, he looked terrified. He was jittery and about to flee. I told him everything would be fine and that he was returning home. His parents came to meet him. As soon as he saw them, his spirit softened and relaxed. They greeted him with absolute love as they embraced him and then we all went towards the light.

Sometimes the really dark ones refuse to come, they howl and run. I can't force them to go into the light. Just like in life, spirits have free choice. Some decide to stay Earth-bound, they roam the Earth wishing to be mortal again, trying to make contact with humans.

That is why it is foolish for humans to invite spirits into their home. They don't

know who is going to come in.

Then there are the beautiful souls who pass peacefully and embrace their journey. Their passing room is often embraced in a pink mist, full of love and acceptance. These souls come out smiling and they move towards the light with their arms open and their eyes shine with acceptance.

Most humans can't see us. Some seem to be able to sense us when we stand nearby. You can see the hairs on their arms raise and they often turn around to see if someone is there. The only people who can truly see us are ones who have opened their hearts and minds to look beyond their human world. Often young children will see us and they usually smile. Have you ever seen a baby turn their head and smile at nothing? Or heard a toddler talking to an imaginary friend? Not only can the little ones see angels, but sometimes they see spirits. Children who have passed on at a young age often go back and visit their family. I've watched them playing with their siblings in their bedrooms. As children get older they mostly lose this ability and it is forgotten. Perhaps this is what the Creator wants, so as not to confuse the dimensions of life.

Sometimes I envy humans. To have someone love you so much they would sacrifice their own life to save you. To feel the touch of fingertips lovingly trace over your body. To laugh so hard you cry. To cuddle someone and feel so secure you fall asleep in their arms....

And sometimes I just don't understand them. They can be so foolish. Lying, cheating and violent; stealing and hurting the ones they love. Power seems to be a dangerous emotion that many humans desire and lust after. It causes wars and conflict, both large and small.

I find this frustrating and disappointing. As I said earlier, angels are not supposed to judge or interfere. This is something I struggle with.

Ella

Today I had my final fitting for my prom evening dress. It looked fabulous, so elegant and flowing. My Mom had tears rolling down her cheeks, “Ella, you look stunning, I can’t believe my little girl has grown up to be such a beautiful young woman.” This was one of those special mother daughter moments I will never forget. We decided not to show Dad until prom night.

The next week flew by...full of appointments for hair, make-up tryouts and shopping for shoes and accessories. I was the happiest girl in the world and prom night was going to be the best night of my life. Taylor ordered a suit to match my black dress. He has been incredibly busy, but he still found the time to send me several texts a day, saying the most beautiful things.

The night finally arrived and excitement buzzed through every cell in my body. The hairdresser had curled my hair and worked on it for hours to create a loose updo. Then the make-up artist totally changed my face. She gave me the most incredible smoky eyes and perfectly shaped red lips. At first I was shocked... who was this sophisticated woman in the mirror.

Dad cried when he saw me, he told me that I was stunning and how proud he was of me. I almost cried too. The last couple of years had been really hard for all of us. Then Dad took me in his arms and gave me a cuddle. Stepping back, he took a small gift box from his pocket and gave it to me, “This is for you, my gorgeous girl, I am so proud of you.” It was a beautiful silver ring with an S surrounded by purple amethysts. We hugged and didn’t let go. Mum and Jack joined us and we all stood there feeling blessed to have such a wonderful family.

Taylor and his father arrived in a fancy Mustang they had hired. The look on Taylor’s face when he saw me was priceless. He stood there with his mouth hanging open. Dad squeezed his shoulder and Taylor shook his head, “You look so different, you are so hot! I’m the luckiest guy in the world. Bye Mr. and Mrs. Hudson, I have to take Ella to the prom and show her off.”

I could feel my face blushing, but I secretly felt pleased to get such an overwhelming reaction. Taylor held the door open for me and kissed me on the hand before running around to the other door and sitting beside me. “I love you Ella and you are all mine, I’m the luckiest guy in the whole world.” I could feel my heart melting, it was beating fast and I couldn’t stop smiling. “I love you

too, Taylor, you look so handsome, all those girls are going to be so jealous.” Little did I know that these words would come back to haunt me.

After all the formalities and some very funny speeches, Taylor and I hit the dance floor. It was like there was nobody else in the room, just Taylor and me. He took me by the hand and led me to the drink table. “I’ll be back in a second,” and off he went towards the toilets. I took a deep breath, smiling to myself, this was like a fairy tale.

Two hands reached around my waist, I turned to see who was cuddling me. “Hey Connor, isn’t this exciting!” I said as I gave him a quick cuddle back. Connor and I had been friends since elementary school. “Ella, you are the best…” And he fell backwards hitting his head with a loud clunk on the concrete floor. Gasping, I leaned forward to check on him and felt my arm being pulled back. Taylor had a firm hold and a stern look on his face. “Keep your hands off my girl, Connor. Next time it won’t just be a shove,” Taylor warned in a menacing voice. Connor sat up rubbing his head, “What’s wrong with you man?” he looked quizzically at Taylor.

“Don’t touch my girl again, if you know what’s good for you!” he yelled while sneering and cracking his knuckles.

In shock, I couldn’t believe what had happened, it was like a bad dream. I looked Taylor in the eyes, “Taylor you could have hurt Connor, why did you do that?”

“He was harassing you Ella, I’m just protecting you,” he hissed while glaring at Connor.

“Connor has been my friend for years, he wasn’t harassing me and I can look after myself,” and with that I stormed off to the bathroom. How could my perfect night turn around so quickly? Tears began to roll down my cheeks, my smoky eyes started to run… I grabbed a tissue and forced myself to get a grip. That was when Tiffany walked in.

“Hi Ella, what’s the matter?” she asked looking concerned.

I shook my head, “I’m fine Tiffany, it’s just Taylor acting like a possessive caveman.” And then I realized I shouldn’t tell her any more, after all, she was his ex-girlfriend. “It’s nothing really, I think I’m just overwhelmed by how exciting tonight has been.”

A few minutes later, I returned to our table. Taylor was sitting by himself and as

I approached, he quickly stood and held his arms out to me. Holding me, he apologized. “I don’t know what happened Ella, I’m so sorry, I love you so much.”

He asked me to dance, but it felt more like a chore to move to the music and keep smiling. There was a certain unease in my feelings and I felt shaky. Then the Principal walked up to Taylor and led him to another room. I could see that Taylor was arguing with him. Then Ann, Taylor’s mom, entered and joined in the conversation. She turned and walked towards the door. The Principal stood there with his arms crossed, staring at Taylor. Taylor shook his head and followed his mom. He stopped before he walked through the door and waved to me and said something to the Principal. I limply waved back. What had just happened? My best night ever had turned into my greatest nightmare.

The Principal drove me home. He wanted to come in and talk to my parents, but I asked him not to, making up an excuse that they were sick with the flu and would be in bed asleep. I walked inside, told Mom and Dad I’d had a great night, took off my dress and crashed into bed. Laying there, staring out my window at the moon, I felt confused. A crushing sadness drifted over my body, enveloping my every thought. I sighed and told myself to stop over-thinking the night and eventually fell into a deep sleep.

Connor

Ella and I have been besties for years, ever since Grade 3. Since we started High School we have drifted apart slightly. You know how it is? Part-time jobs, schoolwork, sport and hanging out with different friends, but that doesn't mean that I still don't care deeply about my buddy. When we were ten we promised each other we would be friends forever, no matter what! And when we catch up it is like we have never been apart. Some people think that we are more than friends, but we aren't. It is more like a brother-sister type of relationship.

Ella has been through some really tough times over the last couple of years. I sat next to her at Tommy's funeral and held her hand. Her hand was cold and shaking, her hold was so strong that it hurt. When the curtains were closed around his casket, her body went slack, she couldn't move. We sat there and she cried on my shoulder. Eventually her Dad came in and carried her to their car. My heart bled for her. I cried too, but mostly for Ella, I hated seeing her that way, I wished I could take her pain away.

At the prom party I saw Ella from across the room. She literally took my breath away. I had never seen anyone look so stunningly beautiful. My jaw dropped and I stood there staring at her. My friend, James, slapped me on the back, "Hey Connor, are you okay?" That brought me back to my senses. I looked around and everyone was laughing and smiling at me. James encouraged me, "Go get her tiger."

But she was cuddling up to that moronic boyfriend of hers, Taylor. What can she possibly see in that jerk! He is so fake and definitely not good enough for Ella. Then Taylor moved away.

"Back soon boys," I smiled as I raced across the room to say hi to her. She was so excited to see me, then that ape of a boyfriend appeared out of nowhere and shoved me so violently I fell backwards. My head hit the floor, making the most dreadful noise. I could hear it above the music. Everything went dizzy and my eyes were blurry for a moment. Then the pain started. I looked up and saw Ella bending over me, concern etched on her beautiful face.

That ape threatened me about leaving Ella alone. I hate him with a passion, if it wasn't for Ella, I would have jumped up and smashed him. But I didn't want to ruin her night, so I just stood, said goodbye to Ella and went back to my friends.

They were all horrified at what had just happened. After seeing the egg-sized lump on the back of my head, James insisted on taking me home. My Mom took me to the hospital's emergency department. An x-ray and three hours later, I was allowed to go home. The jerk!

When Ella noticed I had left the party, she phoned to check on me and I told her I was fine, just a bit of a headache. She apologized again and I told her not to worry. But in my mind I wanted to scream, GET AWAY FROM HIM ELLA, you deserve SO much better! I told her a joke to break the tension and she giggled. When Ella laughs she lights up everything and everyone around her. Then I told her that tonight she was like a diamond among plastic stones. As humble as ever, she said to me that my head condition must be causing hallucinations. It was my turn to laugh. We said goodnight and promised to catch up the following week.

Tony (Taylor's Adopted Dad)

My name is Tony, I'm Taylor's adopted Dad. Ann, my wife, and I couldn't have children, we tried desperately for several years, but it just didn't happen for us. For many years we fostered young children...the ones who needed a safe and loving home. Poor kids had been born into some terrible circumstances.

Ann worked as a nurse at the local hospital in the maternity section. She loved to hold the newborns and help their moms adapt to motherhood. This is where she first met Taylor. He was born to a drug-addicted young woman. Crack is such a devastating drug. Poor Taylor came out screaming, he was hooked on the drugs his mother had taken throughout her entire pregnancy. Ann was torn apart watching this innocent little baby writhe in agony. His mother was more interested in smoking and playing on her phone than dealing with her newborn son. She refused to even try to breastfeed him and told Ann to go and get a bottle. When he cried at night, his mom would put her earphones in and ignore him. Ann would go in and take him back to the nurses' station, massaging his little body and cuddling him.

After three days, his mother checked out of the hospital. Her reason...it was too boring. Ann offered to visit her at home, but she was flatly rejected, "Why would I want you coming to my place? Mind your own business." And with that put-down, Taylor began his life in the big wide world.

Three years later he was admitted to hospital, black and blue. He was malnourished, bruised all over and two of his tiny ribs were broken. Ann was shocked when she saw him, how could anyone treat a toddler like that. He couldn't talk, he didn't respond to his name, he wasn't toilet trained and had the worst nappy rash the nurses had ever witnessed. The poor child had been abused and ignored for 3 whole years. Ann cried when she came home and told me that he didn't even know his name.

His mother never came to visit or collect him. She simply disappeared! The police checked the address she gave when she admitted Taylor and it was false and so was her phone number. Having no other option, the hospital kept Taylor there so he could recover from his injuries and gain some weight. Once again, Ann was his main carer, she spent most of her time at the hospital watching over him. It was then that Ann fell in love with this helpless little boy. She taught him his name and he started to learn how to speak. As the weeks progressed he

started to enjoy being cuddled by Ann. To begin with he rejected close contact with most of the nurses, Ann was the only one he felt comfortable with.

Three months later, on a Monday morning, a group of officials walked through the door of the Children's Ward. They were there to take Taylor to a foster home. Ann was devastated. Tears streaming from her eyes, she asked if she could foster Taylor instead. "He knows me, he's had such a hard life so far, let me take him home," she begged. But bureaucracy was in motion and he was taken away. Ann was reassured that the foster parents would take excellent care of Taylor. And then he was gone. It was like she had lost her own child. Sadness and depression descended upon her like a heavy veil. She lost her laugh, the sparkle in her eyes and in her heart. I bought her a poodle puppy and she loved it, but nothing would ever fill the hole in her heart that Taylor had left behind.

Taylor's new foster parents were wonderful people. They gave the little boy the love that every child needs. By the time he turned four, he was thriving and this made Ann feel a little better. But Taylor seemed to be born with bad luck hanging over him.

After a fun-filled trip to the local playground, Taylor's foster mom was happily walking him home in a pram. She stopped to help a beautiful butterfly that had flown into a spider's nest. The spider was almost upon the butterfly and as she reached up to break the web...a car ran up onto the footpath, hitting her from behind. Taylor's pram was flung meters away. He screamed, "Mommy! Mommy!" but there was no response. She had died right in front of him. He was brought back to the hospital in an ambulance to be checked for injuries. Nothing. He had no injuries whatsoever, but his Mommy was dead.

Taylor screamed for her for two days and then he stopped screaming. He said nothing, nothing at all. Everything about him became mechanical. He would only eat when fed by hand. He refused to play or even watch little kids' videos. He was in shock and so was his foster Dad.

They went home together, silent and in pain. After a week, Taylor was removed from the house and put into another foster family. Once again, Ann tried to convince the authorities that he should come home with her. Again, she failed.

The second foster family had their own children, a girl aged 8 and a 6 year-old boy. At first the children were thrilled to have a new baby brother to play with. But they soon grew tired of him and saw him as an intrusion. These foster parents weren't as kind. They had fostered Taylor because they needed extra money and he was simply ignored. In no way did he receive the love and

attention that he desperately needed.

After three months in his new home, Taylor was attacked by the young boy. Taylor had eaten the boys' Easter eggs while he was at school. It wasn't hard for the boy to work out how his eggs had disappeared as Taylor had chocolate all over his face and t-shirt. "Why did you eat my Easter eggs!" he yelled at Taylor, kicking and punching him as hard as he could. Despite screaming loudly, nobody came to his rescue. Eventually the foster mom entered the room and pulled her son off Taylor. Taylor was bleeding from his nose and unconscious.

Wanting to avoid trouble, she kept Taylor at home, locked in his bedroom. The bruising was severe and even after a week he was still mostly green and blue. The potty in his room was full and the room was littered with dirty plates and cups and pieces of left-over food. Flies had laid their eggs in the scraps and maggots crawled over the floor.

It must have been Ann's strong connection to this little boy that forced her to visit the family. Knocking on the door, she received no response, so she left and headed down the driveway towards the street. Looking back for a moment, she happened to spot a small face peering out at her through a window. It was Taylor. Ann ran to the window and looked through. What she saw was shocking, almost unbelievable. She called the police and within ten minutes, she was inside the house holding Taylor.

The police spoke with the family who were huddled together in the kitchen. At first, they refused to cooperate and said that nothing had happened to Taylor. The policeman then took Taylor by the hand, to join the group. "So how do you explain these bruises?" he asked, with an expression of absolute disgust.

"He fell down the stairs a week ago," replied the foster mom, her eyes focused intently on the floor.

Ann took Taylor from the policeman's arms and walked outside. After yet another trip to the hospital, we were finally allowed to bring Taylor home. And we have been his family for the past 12 years. We fostered him for a few years before Ann tracked down his birth mother. She was a crack addict in the next town. Ann begged her to sign the adoption papers. But the answer was a firm no. Dejected, Ann turned away from her and walked towards her car. As she was about to drive off, someone banged on her window and motioned for her to put the window down.

"Give me two hundred and he is yours," she was blackmailing Ann. What a small price to put on her own son's head! She was nothing better than trash. Ann

gave her the cash, she signed the papers and we became Taylor's permanent parents. He was a very happy nine-year-old, no more rejection, lots of love and all the attention in the world.

When Taylor was around us he was well-behaved, considerate and helpful. But at school, the teachers found him to be quite difficult. He found it hard to concentrate and fell behind at school. The paediatrician told us that this was typical of children who are born drug-addicted.

As he grew older, he also began to experience friendship problems. Angry outbursts and schoolyard fighting led to frequent visits to the Principal's office. Kids would call him a retard because of his learning problems and this would aggravate him terribly.

As well, he had problems with the kids in the neighborhood. And to be totally honest, I don't blame them for rejecting Taylor. When he was about ten years old, he started developing some cruel tendencies. He liked to torture and kill small animals. First of all, he began catching flies and pulling their wings off. Of course I told him this was cruel and made him promise never to do it again. He kept his word, he never pulled the wings off another fly, but his cruelty didn't stop. Over the next couple of years we found other signs, like cockroaches with their wings glued together, a mouse with its tail chopped off and a lizard with no legs.

Ann took Taylor to see a child psychiatrist. He totally manipulated this well-educated man, completely convincing him that he was a sweet young boy who was being misunderstood. "There is nothing wrong with him, Ann, he's a normal boy." Ann disagreed, she was worried and so was I.

When he turned eleven, his obsession with hurting small animals moved onto the neighbor's pets. First of all he shaved all the hair off their cat. When questioned, he refused to admit his involvement. Even when Ann found the razor that he had used and cat hair on the floor of his bathroom, he continued to lie. "I didn't do it, you always blame everything on me!" he yelled. "I love that cat, I wouldn't hurt it!"

Everyone, including the kids next door, knew that Taylor was the culprit. He was no longer invited to join in games, birthday invitations ceased and he was generally ignored.

Several months later, a fluffy white dog that belonged to an elderly couple who lived at the end of the street, was painted with black stripes. The poor dog was in great distress and so were the dog's owners. They came knocking on our

door, very angry and convinced that Taylor was responsible. I called out to Taylor and told him to come to the door. When he saw the dog he smiled, "I didn't know you had a zebra." Then he started laughing hysterically, he had tears running down his face. Everyone else stood there in shock, staring at his inappropriate response.

It was then that I noticed black paint on his feet. Pushing Taylor back inside, I quickly apologized and told the owners to send me the vet bill.

"There's something wrong with that boy of yours...he's not normal," the old man yelled as I closed the door.

Taylor already had a reputation in the neighborhood, but now he was considered to be evil and possibly insane. Nobody would acknowledge him or us, we were pariahs in our own community. The local kids called him 'Sicko'. He often came home with bruises and scrapes. When we asked what had happened...he'd tell us he tripped or fell. If we pressed him further he would withdraw to his room and roll up into a ball on the floor.

Ann and I were under great stress. How could this be happening? We decided to give Taylor a fresh start and moved to the other side of town so he could attend a new school. We talked to him over and over again about how to get along with people and the difference between right and wrong.

The move was great for all of us. Life returned to normal and Taylor soon made new friends at school. No more tortured cockroaches were found in his bedroom and the neighbor's pets remained safe. After a year we felt like we could relax again.

When Taylor entered High School, we were terrified about how he would adapt to the new changes. But he seemed to breeze through his schooling. Gradually the fears we had about his personality faded and we told ourselves there was nothing to worry about, he had grown out of his anti-social tendencies.

It soon became clear however, that Taylor had a very keen eye for pretty girls. His first girlfriend was Tiffany. Ann took an instant dislike to her. I thought she was okay, maybe a bit vain and self-absorbed, but I thought that was pretty typical of many girls her age.

After a month or so, she dropped him and Taylor came home in a rage. He walked straight to his room and punched a hole in the wall. Ann ran to him and found him lying on his bed, his hand bleeding and he was crying hysterically.

She asked him what was wrong. His answer, through a red face with clenched teeth was, “She is a bitch Mom, a bitch!” Ann cradled him and rocked him to sleep, just as she had when he was a baby.

Then along came Ella. What a beautiful girl...soft, gentle, polite and intelligent. Ann was thrilled and so was I. Taylor adored her, he treated her like a princess. We had never seen him so happy and confident. Life was great! Taylor was blossoming. I drove them to the prom and in all my life, never felt so proud.

Ann

Tony doesn't know this, but Taylor attacked a boy at his prom. The Principal called me at work, "Sorry Ann, I have some disturbing news. Your son has just attacked a fellow student. I apologize, but you'll have to come and take him home."

I left work immediately, driving as quickly as I could. Taylor was waiting with the Principal in the foyer, sitting on a chair, his back slumped and his head in his hands.

"What happened Taylor?" I asked, concern etched on my face, I prayed that it wasn't starting all over again.

He didn't answer, he just shrugged his shoulders, not looking at me.

"He aggressively shoved another male student, resulting in the other boy hitting his head on the concrete floor. It seemed to have been unprovoked."

Taylor stood and walked towards the Principal, eyeballing him, "He had his hands all over my girlfriend, what did you expect me to do, just take it!"

The Principal took a step backwards, "Calm down Taylor, you need to go home and think about your actions."

A huge sigh escaped from Taylor's mouth. He started walking towards the door, then stopped and faced the Principal again, "What would you know you stupid old idiot!"

The Principal's face turned a bright shade of red, he turned around and walked back into the prom room, slamming the door behind him.

Not wanting to aggravate the situation further, I simply walked outside, hoping Taylor was following me. We got into the car and he burst into tears. "Mom, it wasn't my fault. Connor had his hands all over Ella. I was protecting her." And with those words he broke into huge sobs.

As we were about to enter our street, he put his hand on my arm, "Mom, please don't tell Dad, I'm begging you. I feel so embarrassed, I've let everyone down, please Mom?"

Tony and I had never kept secrets from each other. I didn't know what to do! I was torn, my son was begging me to do something that felt very wrong.

“Mom, just let me go inside to my room. Tell Dad that I'm tired and have gone to bed with a huge headache, please Mom, you know I love you so much.”

I looked at my wedding ring. “Okay Taylor, but please never ask me to lie to your Dad again.”

The next day I quietly phoned Connor's mother and apologized. Such a good-natured woman, she was very thankful for my phone call, but also expressed concern about Taylor's behavior. She wasn't the only one who was worried.

Ella

The next morning I checked my phone, there were at least one hundred text messages and several missed calls from Taylor. Panicking that something was wrong, I called him. He sounded groggy, “What’s up?”

“I don’t know Taylor, that’s why I’m calling, you left so many messages last night,” I explained.

“Oh, I just wanted to talk to you and say how sorry I was about last night, I feel like such an idiot.” His apology sounded sincere. Then he asked, “Can I make it up to you tonight and take you out for dinner and a movie?”

To be honest, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to see him so soon, then I gave in. “Okay Taylor, I’ll see you later,” trying to sound enthusiastic. My mind was in turmoil. Did I really love this guy? Which is the real Taylor? Am I over-reacting? I decided to try to forget about the previous night and just get on with having fun. After all, I’m a teenager and so is he and we all make mistakes, don’t we?

We ate at a new Mexican restaurant on the other side of town. Both of us were tired so we decided to skip the movies and go for a walk along the beach. Strolling along, holding hands, everything felt right again. We were standing together staring at the moonlight playing on the waves when Taylor grabbed me by the shoulders and stared deep into my eyes. Abruptly, and without warning, he kissed me on the forehead, then lightly on the lips. His hands caressed the sides of my face and then he pulled me close to his body, wrapping his arms around my back, almost crushing me. His lips became hard and he thrust his tongue into my mouth. I wriggled my arms loose and tried to pull slightly away. I was finding it difficult to breathe. He lifted me in his arms and lay me gently on the sand. His fingertips traced over my shoulders and continued to my chest. Then I really struggled to breathe. I was scared and excited at the same time. My body was tingling and I wasn’t sure what to do.

“Taylor...” I breathed...I was unsure if I wanted this to happen.

“It’s okay Ella, I love you and I know you love me, just relax,” he reassured me.

A strong feeling of doubt came crashing down. I wanted to get up and go home to my nice warm bed. I wanted to escape. “Taylor, I’m not ready for this, stop, please stop.”

Time stood still for a few seconds, his dark eyes piercing mine. His facial expression was cold and determined and his teeth were set in a frozen grin. Was he really smiling, I could not tell. Sitting up slightly but still leaning over me, he said in a low measured voice, "Ella, you have been teasing me for weeks. I've been patient, but enough is enough and tonight, it's my turn to have some fun."

At first, I felt paralysed with fear. I lay there looking into his eyes, not moving, not even breathing. I stayed stock still as he leant over me and began to lift my top. But, with a burst of courage and determination, I took a deep breath and pushed him away. "That's my decision, Taylor and I am saying NO!"

I jumped up and started racing back towards the road; willing my legs to move faster! Running in the sand felt like I was in slow motion. With only meters to go, my legs gave way. Taylor had tackled me to the ground. I struggled with him and he lifted his hand to hit me. I could see the strong fist coming towards my face but abruptly he stopped and fell backwards. Once again I ran. "You bitch!" he screamed after me.

A family came running towards me. The lady cradled me in her arms and her husband called the police and my parents. Sobbing uncontrollably, I told the officer what had happened. Two officers went down to the beach, found Taylor and took him off in the police car. He sneered at me as he walked past, his arms handcuffed behind his back.

Mom and Dad arrived soon after and took me home, they were shocked at what had happened. Taylor had always been the "perfect" boyfriend in their eyes. Mom poured me a hot bath, I was covered in sand and feeling quite sore. Dad made me a hot chocolate and told me how much he loved me. He sat in a chair in my room the whole night watching over me. Soothing me when I woke... dreaming about Taylor.

Waking up to the sound of Dad's gentle snoring, I vowed that I would never again have anything to do with that guy. I should have listened to my gut feeling after the prom.

Aiden

I couldn't stand by and watch her being hurt again. Why couldn't she see the depth of blackness in his heart? Ella shines with light, while he is surrounded by a muddy aura and a cold darkness. I'm not supposed to interfere, humans have their own life path and lessons to learn. But watching his arm angrily swing back, about to strike her...I couldn't help it. Grabbing his arm, I twisted it, he fell back, allowing Ella to escape.

Taylor swore at Ella as she ran off. He was about to chase after her again so I planted my foot on his chest and held him there. He was terrified. Tears began to run down his face and his anger turned to fear, wondering why he couldn't get up. Why there was a force crushing down on his chest. He lay still, almost paralysed, curled into a foetal position for a long time. Then we both heard voices coming towards us, it was the police. I let him go, but he just lay there blubbering like a baby.

“Are you Taylor?” they asked. He ran to them, sobbing and clinging onto the policeman, refusing to let go, he was pathetic. The police arrested him for assault and took him to the police station. He babbled on about being held down, all the way there. The police tested him for drugs and asked for a psychiatric evaluation at the hospital. That will teach him to hurt Ella!



Remember that I told you I'm not supposed to interfere in human life? Once is forgiven, twice is frowned upon. I was summoned to meet with Archangel Raguel, he is the overseer of all angels.

Raguel took me to a beautiful crystal forest. As we walked, he explained that he could understand my desire to protect Ella, but it is against Divine order to physically interfere with and hurt any human...even those with black souls and evil intentions.

I tried to argue, “But what is the good of us...I can't stand by and watch the evil ones attack the innocents.”

Raguel took my hands and looked into my tormented face. I could feel his powerful loving energy piecing into my very core. “Aiden, this is not your purpose, you are there to guide departed souls to the light and ease their journey into Heaven.”

We walked a little further. I stopped, shocked by what I saw. In front of me were hundreds of angels, frozen in ice.

“You have been warned Aiden, if you interfere again you will be placed here, frozen and unable to help anyone.” His eyes penetrated my very being.

I was speechless. How could an Archangel be so cruel? “Are they frozen forever?” I asked, fearing the answer.

“No,” Raguel replied, “only for a short time to think about their folly, but if they try to interfere again, they freeze immediately. These are the ones who continued to intrude into human life, they used all their chances and will remain here forever.”

“Now return to the humans you care for, remember your duty and carry it out in a harmonious way. No more violence, you can warn them if they are open to your messages, but you are not to act against any human. Do you understand, Aiden?” his power was overwhelming.

I lowered my eyes, “I understand.”

He embraced me and sent me flying back to Earth.

The conflict this caused me was immense, it was like a hundred voices arguing in my thoughts. If I tried to help again...I would immediately be frozen and could be kept away from Ella for quite some time. The question I continued to ask myself was, ‘Can I do this, can I stand by and watch her being hurt?’

Ella

It's been a fortnight since Taylor attacked me on the beach. I know it's silly and rather pathetic, but I feel really sad. In fact I feel absolutely miserable. How could everything have turned so quickly? In some ways I really miss him, but I'm scared of him as well. Earlier tonight he send me two messages. He sounded so sad and lost, I almost replied. I almost gave in. But this time I listened to my gut feeling and did nothing.

Lying in bed, feeling really alone and lost, my mind was swirling...going through the whole Taylor scenario in my head...and then I sensed something. It was really strange, I felt like someone was in my room, but I couldn't see anyone. I wondered if Tommy was visiting me. Jack says that Tommy visits him all the time. I closed my eyes, willing myself to see Tommy. It was then that a smell filled my room. Mom must have planted roses outside my bedroom window. The fragrance was sweet and beautiful as it drifted in through my opened window.

That night I dreamed that Tommy had visited and told me that he is happy and watches over all of us. In my dream we talked about the fun times we had camping, getting up to all sorts of mischief, making tree-houses, sliding down giant sand hills and surfing down the rapids in the creek. He told me he is in Heaven with Grandpa, Grandma and our dog Tyson. And then he was gone, he just disappeared.

Thinking about my dream the next morning, I couldn't believe how real it felt. I jumped out of bed and went outside to look at the roses. There was nothing in the garden bed outside my window.

At breakfast I asked, "Mom, do you have any rose bushes in the yard?" Mom replied that she didn't have time for flowers. Maybe the smell was part of my dream....

Then Jack called out, "Tommy smells like flowers." Mom and I stood very still, looking at each other. She held my hands tightly as a tear silently trickled down her cheek. She half smiled and walked outside.

"Jack, don't say things like that, you know it upsets Mom," I chastised.

"But it's the truth Ella!" his voice had an edge of desperation to it. "Why

doesn't anyone ever believe me?" and he ran off to his bedroom, slamming his door.

I quietly entered his room, lay on the bed with him and gave him a big sister cuddle. Poor little guy was sobbing his heart out. "It's okay Jack, I'm sure Tommy does visit you."

"He does Ella, he visits all of us," he said in a soft and earnest voice. I wiped away his tears and offered to take him out for an ice-cream. That put a smile on his cute little face.

Mom (Diana – Ella’s Mom)

This week I didn’t have to drag Ella to *Explore the Beyond*, she was actually quite excited about going because she was bringing her friends Emma and Connor along.

Ella had told them about her experience with Shelby...how she had described her grandparents and they were fascinated.

Connor lost his Dad in a car accident when he was three and was really interested in the afterlife. When Tommy died he wanted Ella to have a séance with him to see if they could contact Tommy through a ouija board. Ella didn’t really want to do this, but she did for Connor’s sake. Nothing happened, which I was really happy about. After that night, Connor gave up trying to contact his Dad.

Emma was also excited and wanted to join in. Her parents don’t believe in God or the afterlife, she has never been to Church or Sunday School. “You two are NOT leaving me out of this, I’m coming too,” she demanded. “I’m really interested, I have no idea what to believe in.”

When I phoned Shelby, she was happy to take on another two teenagers. “They are coming for a reason, Dianna, their angels are guiding them towards me.” When I told her about Connor’s Dad and how he tried to contact him with a ouija board, she was horrified. “Oh no, that is so dangerous, he is inviting spirits in and not all spirits are good, I’ll talk to him about it when he comes.”

We started off with a meditation where we had to put our problems in a bucket and sent them to the sky, asking the universe to take our worries away. At first I could see that Connor felt uncomfortable...he was the only male attending the class. But after a while he settled in and really enjoyed the session. Shelby asked if he would like a spiritual healing. He looked at Ella and raised his eyebrows, not knowing what to say. Sensing his unease, Shelby offered for Ella to come along for one as well. I saw the tension disappear from his shoulders, he was more than happy to have a healing, as long as Ella was there with him. Shelby arranged for both of them to visit her the next day after lunch. They walked out smiling. “Well Ella this WILL be interesting,” whispered Connor. I felt a little sorry for Emma, but Shelby obviously didn’t feel that she needed spiritual assistance.

As we were about to drive off, Shelby ran out to the car. “This won’t take long, can I talk to you Ella?” And she motioned to Ella to join her outside the car.

“I wasn’t going to say anything, but I feel totally compelled to tell you this,” she sounded almost anxious. Shelby moved closer and took Ella’s hands and looked straight into her eyes. “You had the most beautiful angel standing beside you all night. I have never seen one so bright and radiant. Don’t be afraid Ella, he is your guardian angel. You are one lucky girl. I’ll see you and Connor tomorrow, goodnight Ella.” And with that she turned and casually walked back inside.

Ella just stood there...perfectly still and then she smiled and got back into the car. I had heard the whole conversation, but her friends hadn’t, they were too busy talking about how wonderful the night had been.

“What did Shelby say to you Ella?” asked Emma.

For some reason Ella didn’t tell her friends. “Oh, nothing really, she is just so glad that my two wonderful friends are coming along on this journey with me.”

Watching them in the rear mirror, they all smiled and hugged each other. I drove off and turned on the radio. Robbie William’s song *Angel* was playing. Ella obviously hadn’t told her friends about *Stairway to Heaven* playing the previous week and they didn’t really notice the song. Ella and I did though. She winked at me and we both burst into laughter. The other two looked at us like we were going mad and then they joined in laughing as well.

Connor

Today I went with Ella for a spiritual healing session with Shelby. Ella and I both felt a little anxious on the way there. My hands were sweaty and I felt really nervous going into her healing room. There were crystals and candles everywhere and Shelby was dressed in a beautiful white gown with no shoes on. She welcomed me with a hug and told me to relax, “Don’t worry Connor, everything is going to be fine.”

I got up onto what looked like a massage table, but it was covered in white velvet. Shelby put on some soft background music and told me to take a few deep breaths. Then she ran her hands over my body, not touching, but I could feel where they were. The heat radiating from her hands was amazing. And then she stopped over my heart. Shelby’s eyes were open, but she wasn’t looking at me. They seemed to turn the lightest and brightest blue possible. It was almost as if her eyeballs were bulging outwards.

“Connor, your heart needs healing. Your aura is full of beautiful pastel colours, lots of pink and this shows that you are a loving person, but you have dense white above your heart.” I didn’t know what to say, so I said nothing.

Then she continued, “Your Dad is here, Connor, he has a cheeky grin and can I say he is very handsome. Dark curly hair, quite tall about 6 foot 3 and he has a mole on his left cheek.” She was describing my Dad. Up until she talked about his facial mole, I was a bit sceptical.

“He is telling me that he was sad to go and leave you, you were so young. He wants you to remember the tiger toy he gave you just before he left. He says he got it for you because that was his nickname for you, Tiger.” I gulped. How could Shelby know that? Not even my friends knew about my old nickname. After Dad died, I wouldn’t let anyone call me Tiger. I was angry at Dad for leaving me and I threw my toy tiger in the rubbish bin. My thoughts and senses were going crazy. Tears started to roll down my cheeks.

“It is okay Connor, let your grief come out, don’t bottle it up,” she whispered, bending over me, her eyes piercing into mine.

“Your Dad’s name was Dean, but everyone called him Dino. He was a funny man, always playing practical jokes on his friends and family. He is telling me

about the time he took you camping in the bush, just you and him. You caught your first fish and you were so excited, but you couldn't kill it so you let it go. He was so proud of you, Connor."

I could remember that! I hadn't thought about that since I was a little kid. How could she know that?

"He is telling me that he has visited you every night since he passed. He sits on the chair next to your bed and talks to you about what it takes to be a man of integrity. A man who is honest, faithful and kind."

My Dad visits me...I smiled through the river of tears.

Shelby kept her hands over my heart as she continued. "He is also concerned about you trying to contact the spirit world. He says to be careful, it is not safe, you could attract the dark spirits."

I nodded, never again would I use a ouija board. "Don't worry Dad, I won't," I said out loud.

"Connor, your Dad is really insistent that I tell you to be aware of dark humans as well. I think he is saying the name, Tyler, Taylor.... Do you understand what he is saying?" she asked.

I nodded, he was warning me about Taylor.

"Your Dad is going now, he just wants you to know that he loves you with all his heart and he never would have chosen to leave you. He is with you always Connor. He is so incredibly proud of the man you are becoming. He wants me to tell you...bye Tiger."

I couldn't speak. The words stuck in my throat, I told Dad through my thoughts that I love him too and I miss him. But knowing he is still with me...means everything.

Shelby told me that Dad had gone and that she'd pulled out much of the sadness from my heart. "Connor, how does your chest feel?" she asked.

I told her that it felt really light, it was like a lump had been removed. She smiled and thanked the angels for helping her.

Shelby helped me to sit up and gave me a box of tissues. "Let it all come out Connor, you are healing as I watch you. Your aura has turned to a bright emerald green and the white over your heart has turned to a soft pink."

I took a deep breath, I could feel the air go all the way to my stomach. Then I stood, “How can I ever thank you Shelby, knowing that Dad visits me has changed everything,” I said to her as she gave me a hug.

She led me out to where Ella was waiting. Ella could see that I had been crying. Her face had concern written all over it, Ella had never seen me cry, ever! In fact, I haven’t cried since Dad died. “Are you okay Connor?” she asked as she took me into her arms.

“I’m fine, Ella, actually I feel incredible,” I assured her. Then I sat down to process what had just happened, while it was Ella’s turn.

Shelby may have been able to find out that my father had died when I was a toddler. But how could she know all the personal details about him? Her words played over and over in my mind. It is impossible that she could know about Dad calling me Tiger and about my first fishing experience. There is no way that Shelby got that information from my friends. Hell, I could only just remember him myself. I felt tired, but totally elated and I couldn’t stop smiling.

Ella

I walked into Shelby's healing room feeling quite concerned. Connor never cried, he didn't even cry when he fell out of a tree and broke his arm when he was 8.

"Don't worry Ella, Connor is fine," Shelby reassured me.

The room was beautiful, but very warm. Shelby explained that she was going to use Reiki to heal any emotional or physical blockages. I had never heard of Reiki, so I didn't know what to expect. She moved her hands over my body. They radiated heat. She stopped over my lungs. "You have asthma, Ella." She wasn't asking a question, she just knew.

"You are still carrying grief from losing your brother, Tommy," she said, holding her hands just above my chest. Then using her hands, she started to pull away from my chest towards the ceiling.

"Ella, Tommy is here." I held my breath and my body went rigid.

"Relax Ella, it is okay, Tommy visits you and your family all the time. He is telling me that Jack is the only one who can see and hear him."

"But Shelby, how do I know that this is true?" I asked with a tear running down my cheek. Shelby just looked ahead, not talking to me for a moment.

"Ella, Tommy wants to show you a sign that you might recognize." And Shelby stood totally still, staring down at me. Suddenly the room smelt of roses.

Shelby and I smiled as we looked into each other's eyes.

"He is telling me that he loves his little sister forever and he is really glad you kept his coin collection, which was really special to him. He is saying that you helped him to have a peaceful and love-filled passing. He is worried about your Dad, he says that he is holding everything in and has sadness all around him. He wants you to help your Dad to understand that he is happy and free of pain... that life doesn't end at the death of the body."

Shelby looked down at me and asked if I understood what he was saying. I nodded, too choked up to talk.

“He is telling me that your guardian angel is looking after you. He is really insistent that you need to listen to your sixth sense. And he says to keep away from a boy. He is agitated. He is yelling at me to tell you he is dangerous.”

Shelby stopped and focused her eyes on the wall. “Ella, I think he is saying the name, Taylor. That is the second warning today about this boy. Do you know who he is?” she asked. I nodded again.

“He also said that he wants candles on his next birthday cake, does that make any sense, Ella?” I thought back to Jack’s tantrum over the cake. “He is laughing Ella, and he says he wouldn’t mind a present as well,” Shelby shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

“Jack, you haven’t changed!” I blurted out and started laughing.

“He is saying goodbye and wants to remind you to be careful and help Dad. And one more thing...don’t forget the present, and make it a good one,” relayed Shelby.

The rose smell disappeared from the room, I knew he had left. Shelby looked down at me, “He is so gorgeous Ella, what a smile he has.”

“Yes, that’s definitely my brother,” I quipped.

Shelby focused her hands and eyes over my chest again. “This should help your asthma Ella, make sure you buy him a gift for his next birthday and listen to his advice.”

As I was about to leave her healing room, I turned and asked, “Was Tommy talking about the same angel you saw at the last class?”

Shelby put her hand on her chin, “What do you think, Ella?”

I nodded yes, and she smiled.

What a gift Shelby had given us. I walked home with Connor, feeling totally elated. He didn’t stop talking the whole way home. Several times he repeated the words that his dad had said. I’ve never seen him so high and excited.

Just as we reached my house, Connor suddenly stopped. His brow furrowed and he cleared his throat. “Ella, I forgot to tell you this. Dad warned me about Taylor, he said he is dangerous. He wants me to keep away from him and that won’t be hard because I hate the guy, but you need to keep away from him too, Ella. He is a loose cannon. Please promise me you won’t see him again,” he

pleaded.

“Tommy gave me the same warning. Don’t worry Connor, I don’t want anything to do with him,” I replied, in a determined tone.

Connor smiled and shook his head, “OMG Ella, I’ve been going on and on about my Dad, what happened when you were in the room?”

“Nothing much, Connor,” I said in a dejected voice with my eyes looking at the ground. “Nothing except...Tommy coming into the room and talking to me through Shelby!” I laughed excitedly, jumping up and down.

Connor came into the house and I told him and Mom all about Tommy. Mom was crying, but this time they were happy tears. What a day! What an experience!

That night when I went to bed I said goodnight to my goofy brother and he gave me a whiff of roses.

Taylor

It's been a very long and tedious two weeks since Ella and I broke up. My parents made me go to counseling, but that was easy. I'm not stupid, but the counselor was. She fell for me. You know the type, she's probably never had a good looking guy like myself pay attention to her. After four visits she told my parents that I was a caring and sensitive young man who had simply become overwhelmed with emotions and teenage hormones.

I'm not letting Ella go. She is mine! I'm determined to make her realize this! If she thinks she is going to move onto someone else, well I have news for her.

Tonight I sent her a FB message...

Ella, I miss you. I love you. You are my everything, we are meant to be together forever. I am SO SORRY! I don't know what happened at the beach, I think it was the stress of our final exams. Please, I beg you, let me make it up to you. I don't think I can live without you. So sad. Can I talk to you please, my love? xx

She didn't even bother to reply. I know she saw it. How can she be so mean to me? I don't give up that easily Ella.

I sent her a text...

Ella, my heart is broken. I can't go on living without you. Please answer me. I love you! Xxxx

Once again, there was no reply. I sat there staring at my phone for an hour. Disappointment, hurt and anger...all these feelings whirled around inside my head. She must have another boyfriend. How dare she, the bitch. She isn't moving on! I won't allow it.

As the night wore on, I became more convinced that she was interested in someone else and my anger grew. An image of Connor and Ella flitted before my eyes and I punched my bedhead so hard, it hurt my hand.

She will get back with me. I'm a patient guy. I'm the only guy for her! She is mine!!!

Ella

Today is my first day at university and I feel incredibly excited and nervous at the same time. I'm studying Early Childhood Teaching, I've always dreamed of being a teacher to cute little kids. I only know one girl in my class. But, can you believe it? It's Tiffany! Yes, Taylor's old girlfriend. She greeted me like a long lost friend with her big, fake, perfect smile.

"Ella, thank God you're here too, I don't know any of these people," The words spilled from her mouth as she gave me a bear hug. I rolled my eyes, waiting for her claws to come out.

"Hi Tiffany, fancy us being the only two students from our old high school," I replied, trying to sound enthusiastic.

"And we have so much in common, I mean, well, we both dated Taylor," All the while, her fake smile remained plastered to her face. I just stared at her. Talk about insensitive!

Thankfully, there was no time for any further small talk. We headed quickly into a packed lecture theatre and sat in the second row. Our first lecture was an introduction to art education. Art, especially painting, is my favorite subject, so I was really looking forward to this. The lecturer looked like a slightly younger version of Albert Einstein. Glasses sitting on the end of his nose, long grey frizzy hair and extremely pale skin.

He introduced himself as Professor Dylan or *Berty* as the students at this university liked to call him. So happy to see that he has a sense of humor. He told us that to be good at art we need to be observant. Then he asked, "What is the difference between a male and female head?" Everyone sniggered.

"Girls are pretty and guys are ugly," called one of the boys, from the back of the room.

"No, good try, and I probably agree with you, but that wasn't the answer I was looking for," he smiled. "Any other ideas?"

Silence filled the room and then he pointed straight at me. "Miss, could you please come up onto the stage."

Surely he wasn't talking to me!

Tiffany gave me a shove, "Up you go Ella, he's pointing at you."

Immediately my heart began pounding and my face turned a bright shade of red, every eye in the whole room (and there were about 100 students there) looked at me. I stood and walked hesitatingly up to the stage, wondering what was about to happen. Why did he choose me? Why did he have to pick on me on my first day at university!

Then he pointed to a boy in the audience and asked him to come up as well. The poor boy had exactly the same reaction as me. Red as a beetroot, he begrudgingly trudged up the stairs and stood next to me.

"Can you two stand side on to the audience please?" he asked.

It was like a bad nightmare. I could hear my own heart beating, there wasn't another sound in the room.

Then he put a ruler on my head. "This girl has a classic female's head shape, you can see how it slopes down towards the forehead," he explained. "And the boy has a flat head, see how the angle of the ruler changes." "I bet that none of you have ever noticed this difference before and yet it is right in front of you every day."

I could hear people sniggering. They were probably making comments about my sloping head! Then he thanked us for being models and said we could return to our seats.

I kept my eyes downcast and only briefly looked up to see everyone smiling at me. Of course Tiffany had the biggest smile of all. Finally I reached my seat, slumping into it and trying to lower myself as much as possible, I just wanted to disappear. I don't think I heard another word *Berty* said for the rest of the lecture and as soon as it finished I rushed out the door and quickly walked around the corner... out of sight. Leaning against the wall in the sunshine, trying to regain my composure and dignity, I looked up to see a man in front of me. He was beautiful. Not just handsome, but breathtakingly gorgeous. Then he just disappeared. I put my sunglasses on to see more clearly as the sun was shining into my eyes. There was nobody there. I smiled, now I'm going insane. What a day!

The rest of the time passed without any problems. When the lecturers asked for volunteers or answers, I just put my head down and pretended I was writing. I

know I shouldn't get so embarrassed, but I don't like being the center of attention, I'm way too quiet for that!

Ella

Tonight Mom, Connor, Emma and I went to Shelby's house for another session of *Explore the Beyond*. Connor and I were extremely keen after our session with Shelby.

Shelby asked us to stand in front of a mirror and say that we loved ourselves. I found this really hard. Feeling totally embarrassed, I couldn't help giggling. Emma kept looking over at me, rolling her eyes with an expression of *let's get out of here*. I thought Connor would be horrified, but he took it seriously and really focused on looking into the mirror. As he said, "I love me," to the mirror, I could see tears rolling down his cheek. It is funny how everyone in the class reacted in a different way.

After the crazy mirror activity, Shelby asked us to relax on the floor and she told a story that led us on a journey through the woods to a crystal palace where we could leave all our worries behind. This meditation was great, really relaxing and I could feel myself floating. I know that sounds weird, but what happened afterwards was even weirder.

Everyone sat on a chair in a long line. We had to put our hands on the back of the person seated in front and send them good thoughts and love. It's called a healing train and all the positive energy is directed at the person who is at the front of the train facing everyone else.

It all seemed very peaceful, until Shelby sat behind me and put her huge and really warm hands on my back. She started whispering in my ear.

"Ella, your grandfather is here. He is standing next to me, he is tall, bald and he is wearing a suit and brown slippers."

Well this seemed to describe my grandfather, who died when I was only 10. I was his favorite. When he died from a massive heart attack, everyone else cried for days, he was such a beautiful man. But I didn't cry and I didn't feel sad. I felt as though he hadn't left me. At night, I was sure he was sitting at the end of my bed, smiling at me.

She continued, "Now your grandmother is in the room and she is so different to your grandfather. She has a completely different energy. She is noisy and bossy, she is quite pushy. Let's see, she has reddish hair, she is short in height and she

is wearing an apron and flicking flour off it. Oh and she has fluffy slippers on. What is it with your family and slippers?" Shelby asked with a quiet chuckle.

I had no idea. The scary thing was that she was describing my grandparents and there is no way she could have known them.

"Ella your grandmother is telling me that she is looking after your kitten. There is a little black and white cat playing on the floor beside you."

Now this really freaked me out! I've only ever had one cat when I was quite young and it was a black and white kitten that died from cat flu when it was about 9 weeks old.

"Your brother is here Ella. He loves you so much. He wants you to tell Jack that you know about me now. He is saying that Jack is really sad because he thinks that nobody believes him."

I took in a long deep breath and smiled. Tommy again.

"The room is filling up with your relatives, they are so proud of you. There is a man who is surrounded by blue, he is leading everyone and they are cheering for you and saying how proud they are of you," Shelby said with a smile in her voice.

My Godfather's nickname was Bluey. He passed away a few years ago, it had to be him.

When it was my turn to sit facing everyone else, I closed my eyes and tried to focus on receiving the loving energy. The rose smell reappeared. It was so strong that I was absolutely positive someone had placed a bunch of roses under my nose. Of course, when I opened my eyes, there was nothing there.

At the end of the class, Shelby called me over for a private chat. "Ella, I hope you don't mind that I told you about your relatives in the room, they were incredibly insistent."

I thanked her. I really did not know what to think of what had just happened.

Walking back to the car, Mom asked what Shelby was whispering to me. I took a deep breath and quietly told her. She started crying, silent tears dripping gently from the corners of her eyes. And when I explained about Tommy, she broke down and began to sob. Tommy's death was still so raw.

"Let's get you home, Mom," I said as I started the car. The radio came on and as

We pulled away from the curb, the announcer said, “This song is for everyone out there who has lost someone special.” And Eric Clapton’s song, ‘Tears in Heaven’ began to play.

We looked at each other and Mom nodded, shaking her head in disbelief. We turned to look at Connor in the back seat and could see his mouth hanging open along with a glazed look on his face. The song seemed to go on forever. It lasted the entire trip home and just as we pulled into Emma’s driveway, it ended.

“I think that was a sign,” Mom said softly.

“A sign...that was unbelievable! Connor gushed.

Emma had been silent during the trip home. “Thanks everyone, I’ll see you tomorrow.” And as she was about to close the door she popped her head back in, “This has been the weirdest, most fascinating experience I’ve ever had. I love you guys.” And she ran inside.

We all laughed and drove to Connor’s house. “I love you guys, too,” he said as he jumped out of the car with a huge smile on his face.

Dad greeted us and asked how it went. “It was great,” was the only thing that Mom said as she headed through the house towards her bedroom.

Later in the night, Mom came into my room to show me some photos. A picture of my grandfather with a suit and brown slippers. I gasped, “Shelby was right!”

Then she showed me a picture of grandma in the kitchen with her apron on. “Ella, she always wore fluffy slippers and she often wore an apron on the weekend as she would bake for the whole family,” Mom explained.

“And Tommy was there, oh Mom, I miss him so much, but now we know he is okay,” I cried softly on her shoulder.

Taking me by the arms, she whispered, “Remember how you smelt flowers at the end of the healing train...Jack is right, Ella. Tommy does visit you and I think he is showing you he is here, with the rose smell.” I just looked at Mom then and we sat there for what seemed like an eternity, trying to take it all in.

“Are you going to tell Dad?” I asked.

Mom looked thoughtful, “I don’t know Ella, I’m not sure if he would believe us. Let’s just keep this between ourselves for a while, until I work out how to tell your father.”

Eventually I fell into a deep sleep and had the strangest dream. There was someone sitting on the end of my bed, watching me. He told me he was an angel and he was the one who took Tommy to Heaven. What a night! I woke up screaming and Dad ran in and woke me up. Of course, no one was there.

Aiden

Tonight I watched over Ella, she feels confused and bewildered. Tommy watched over his Mom, she couldn't sleep and was crying silently. Tommy wanted to hold her and tell her everything is okay, but she is not open to receiving signs from him yet. Hopefully, working with Shelby will awaken her senses.

Tossing and turning, Ella opened her eyes. She frowned and cocked her head to the side, then she wiped her eyes and looked straight at me.

“Who are you?” she asked with fear rising in her voice, gripping the sheet tightly over her chest.

She can see me!

“Don't be scared, Ella. My name is Aiden, and I am here to watch over you.”

Her eyes scrunched up, “Is this real, am I dreaming...you don't look real, you are shining, almost translucent. Why are you here?”

“I look after you Ella. I am an angel, I took Tommy to the light when he passed over. He is happy and wants you to know that. Tommy visits you, he loves his family so much.”

“You took Tommy! Get out! Get out! Why couldn't you just let him stay! He was too young! Ella screamed.

“It's okay Ella, Tommy is no longer in pain, he is loved and it was his time to go...” I tried to explain.

Then her Dad ran in and held her. Ella thinks she was dreaming, I'm not really sure why she could see me. Usually the only humans who can see angels are the ones who are about to die and some highly evolved humans who have strong spiritual connections with the other dimension.

I left her room, feeling sad that she was so angry towards me.

Ella

I love university! So much better than high school! The lecturers are really cool and I've met heaps of new friends. I'm studying to be a teacher. I want to work with young children and help them to be confident, kind and positive. It won't just be about academic work, I want to make a difference to little kids' lives.

Today, after my lectures had finished, I was walking to the library when Taylor walked past me. At first I was shocked to see him on the campus, then he explained to me that he had come to enrol in a course.

“Hey Ella, how are you? Girl, I haven't seen you for such a long time. You look absolutely wonderful. How is your family, have you missed me and how's Uni?” the words gushed out, he was obviously very glad to see me.

“Hi Taylor,” I replied, I couldn't help smiling at him. “What's with the twenty questions?” I laughed.

“Sorry Ella, I'm just so excited to see you...you are so stunningly gorgeous, you honestly take my breath away.” I looked down, he was making me feel uncomfortable. “Please forgive me, I am so sorry about what happened. I don't know what came over me. I know you can never forget what I did, I was stupid and horrible and I'll live with hurting the most important person in my life, forever.” Tears welled in his eyes and he bent his head as he looked down at the ground.

At that moment I felt his pain. He was hurting and I felt partly responsible for his misery. Reaching out and raising his chin with my hand I looked him in the eyes, “It's okay, Taylor, I forgive you, don't worry about it.”

He slowly raised his head and softly said, “Losing you because of my stupid jealousy, that was the worst and most stupid thing I have ever done in my life, what a fool I was.” And he started crying out loud, in front of all the students walking past.

I embraced him, whispering in his ear that everything was going to be all right. He held onto me and placed his head on my shoulder. His familiar smell and touch were reassuring and we just stood there holding each other.

I was the first to move. “We can still be friends, Taylor, you know you will

always have a special place in my heart.”

He stared at me with his sad eyes, then came the question I didn't want to hear, “Would you take me back Ella? I love you, I've always loved you and I miss you so much.”

He was almost begging. His words shocked me, I hadn't expected this. I felt like the weight of the universe had landed on my shoulders, I couldn't move or even speak. My breathing stopped and I had to tell myself to suck in some air.

Taking a step back, the words finally came, “I'm sorry Taylor. I can't. I just want to be friends.”

His eyes narrowed and darkened. His body tensed, straightening to his full height and then he turned around and stiffly walked away, not saying a word, not waving goodbye... I stood there watching him. Not once did he look back.

Taylor

Today I “accidentally” ran into Ella. Well, to be totally honest, it was not an accident. I’ve been watching her for the past week. Obsessing over her. Desiring her body, her touch, her smell! She really does lead a boring life...working in a café serving boring middle-aged people, going to Uni, hanging around her family. When she was with me, we were always going out and having fun. I thought that surely she must be missing me by now.

Occasionally she goes out with her girlfriends Emma and Julia to grab something to eat. They went to see a movie this week. When it was dark in the theatre, I snuck in and sat behind them. She cried all through the movie and when it finished they went to a café for hot chocolate.

I opened up my heart to her. She was coming onto me, cuddling and saying nice things and then she blew me off! I felt like grabbing her and shaking some sense into her. Stupid idiot, what is wrong with her! Playing hard to get. She should be thrilled that I’m even interested in her. I managed to control myself and walk away.

It isn’t over Ella. You can’t just dump me like that!

I have to work out how to get her back. I just have to. Tonight, I’ve been playing the words I need to say, over and over in my head. Thinking of ways I could “run” into her again. And thinking about that stupid friend of hers, Connor. It’s so obvious he wants her. He’s probably told her heaps of lies about me, putting me down, making me out to be a bad guy. I’ll fix him one day. Soon.

Ella

Taylor totally shocked me today. I don't think I can be friends with him...I know I can't be friends with him, he is just too intense.

Just as I was going to bed, he sent me a message on FB:

Ella it was so nice to run into you today, can we meet up for coffee tomorrow?

Having no idea what to do, I called my best friend, Emma. Emma just listened as I blurted out my feelings and then she gave some sensible advice, "Ella, keep away from him, he is unstable."

I thanked her for always being there for me. Staring out my bedroom window at the beautiful night sky I made my decision. I would have nothing more to do with Taylor, even friendship was out of question. After agonizing over the right words to use, I sent him a message:

Hey T, really sorry but I think it is best for both of us if we go our own ways. I wish you all the luck in the world for your future. S

No kisses or smiley faces, I wanted to get my message across in the nicest possible way, without giving him any hope that I may change my decision in the future.

I lay in the dark waiting for a reply, dreading his anger. No answer. Phew, that had been easier than I thought. Finally it's over.

And I drifted off to sleep.

Taylor

Who does she think she is! Sweet little FB message...trying to hide her nastiness. She thinks she can control me. But we aren't finished yet! Ella and I have unfinished business. I tried to be nice, to do the right thing. But she put her little princess nose in the air and rejected me again. And why???? I just wanted to get closer. She's old enough and I went through so much with her, buying her gifts, flowers, taking her out, charming her parents, listening to her go on about school. She owes me.

I have a strong feeling she's interested in someone else, so I'm going to continue to keep an eye on her and see what she's up to.

But then it dawned on me, Connor! That little creep! I was right! How can she have feelings for him! I may have to pay him a surprise visit and sort things out.

Of course, I'm not really enrolling in Uni. But it's a great cover story for why I'll be constantly bumping into her. Ella will be mine again. And nobody will stand in my way! Including Connor!

Aiden

Ella is really enjoying her life again, it is so sweet to watch. Her only problem is Taylor, he is obsessed with her. Possessive, a liar and capable of violence...she needs to keep away from him. The more she speaks to him, the more compulsive his need for her is.

Tommy has been watching her as well and is worried about Taylor. He has asked me to intervene if Taylor tries something. I tried to explain to Tommy that Angels aren't supposed to intervene in human life. He smirked at me and shook his head, "I know you have done it before, Aiden."

How do I answer that? It's true, but Ella is special. There is something about this girl that makes my heart sing. I can't help smiling when I think about her. Everything about her is beautiful, the softness of her skin, the silkiness of her long brown hair, the way she moves and her affectionate soul.

Angels don't sleep. We spend our time looking after the families assigned to us. They can be all over the world. Our main job is to guide the departed ones to the other side. Some refuse to follow us. Humans have free will and angels cannot influence their decisions. We usually can't get into the human mind until close to the end of their physical life. If they are awake to the spiritual world, sometimes they can pick up our messages.

Some people have great darkness in their souls, they are the ones that howl and run when they leave their body. Sometimes we can convince them to cross over. There are others who refuse and stay Earth bound, miserable and scared. They are attracted to similar humans and stay in the shadows. These types of spirits like the dark.

When people die in an unexpected accident, they are often in total shock. Most of them stand next to their human body, staring at it, and then try to work out how to get back in. When I appear, they are even more shocked. They don't know that they are dead and it takes a while for them to realize what is happening.

It is such a different experience compared to people who have a slow, expected death. Towards the end...as they drift in and out of consciousness, many of them see me. At first they just stare, I can see their eyes questioning who I am. I

talk to them and explain that I will take them towards the light and to the other side when they depart their physical body. By this stage, most people are ready to go, they long to escape the pain and misery. But at the same time, they don't want to leave their loved ones.

That's why it is really important I explain that others are waiting for them, and that they can watch over their loved ones and even visit them after they pass. Knowing this, gives them a sense of peace and acceptance. Coming out of their body isn't as hard if they understand that death isn't final. It is just the death of the physical body. Relatives often notice this acceptance, they comment about how their loved one looks relaxed. They see the tension release from their face and body.

Last night I guided a Scottish gentleman to the light. His relatives were playing the bagpipes and his Lassie dog was waiting for him beside his hospital bed. He looked down at his body, smiled at me and flew straight towards the light with his spirit dog beside him. It was truly beautiful. His passing to the other side was full of joy and happiness.

I'd love to be able to talk to Ella again. I want to warn her about Taylor, but I have to be careful not to scare her. And I can't intervene anymore, she needs to be more aware of her safety around him.

Ella

Maybe it's because of last night's FB message, but I feel very uneasy today, I keep thinking I am seeing Taylor among the crowd. When I was boarding the train to go to work I looked out the window and I was sure that Taylor was standing amongst the crowd, staring at me. I gasped and quickly turned my head. As the train began to move I looked again, but he wasn't there.

Dad always says that I have an overactive imagination. And I do tend to talk to myself, which I know is a bit strange.

Then as I got off the train I thought I could see his car in the car park. But once again, I told myself to stop being so paranoid. There must be hundreds of old VW's like Taylor's in this city.

I grabbed a soda and started walking towards work. The familiar sound of a noisy car engine came up behind me. The hairs on the nape of my neck stood on end. Then a horn tooted.

“Hey Ella, jump in and I'll drive you to work.” It was Taylor! He looked pretty relaxed and had a smile on his face.

“It's okay Taylor, thanks for the offer, but I'm enjoying the walk. Bye.” And then I continued walking. His car was still behind me and I could hear him slowly catching up to me. I could hear Shelby's warning in my head.

“Ella,” he called again, “No hard feelings, I just want to be friends, I feel really bad about yesterday and I just want to apologize.” He actually had tears in his eyes.

“No apology needed, Taylor, everything is fine,” I said, debating whether or not it was safe to get into his car.

I was torn and really not sure what to do. So I opened the door and told him I could talk for a couple of minutes. As soon as I sat down, he bent towards me and grabbed my hair, then he leaned across and slammed the car door shut.

Shock ran through my body, I was paralyzed with fear. I tried to scream and a pathetic squeak came out. Taylor looked like a madman as he sped off. I reached for the door handle, planning to jump out of the moving car before it went too

fast. But he still had hold of my hair, he pulled me towards him until I was bent over the gear stick.

“Taylor, let me go!” I yelled at him. Hot tears ran down my face, I turned my head towards him. “Please Taylor, I want to get out,” I begged.

He yelled at me, he sounded demonic. “Shut up Ella, you had your chance, this is ALL YOUR FAULT!” And as his range built, his foot pressed harder on the accelerator.

The car was revving loudly and swaying all over the road. It was obvious that he had to change the gears. I was hoping he would let go of my hair and put his hand on the gear stick. But instead, he pulled my hair even harder and changed the gear, yanking hard on my head and almost tearing my hair out. The pain was excruciating! Tears of agony and fear ran down my face. I had to think. I had to have a plan. Fear and adrenaline were taking over. I knew that if he crashed at that speed, I’d have little chance of surviving.

My head throbbing in pain, I managed to turn my face towards him. He was red and sweating and the veins on his neck were bulging. He looked crazy. “Taylor,” I begged, “please don’t do this, you are hurting and scaring me.”

In a sickeningly sweet voice he cooed, “Poor Ella, I don’t want to scare or hurt you.” Then he squinted his eyes, took his free hand off the wheel and slapped me across the face. “You forced me into this...you and your pathetic little boyfriend,” he spat the words, his features distorted and cruel.

“I don’t have a boyfriend Taylor, you are the only boyfriend I have ever had,” I cried, wondering what he was talking about.

“YOU LIAR! I’ve been watching you and that dweeb Connor, I’m NOT STUPID!” and he pulled my hair even tighter.

Trying to stay calm, “I’m telling you the truth, Taylor. Connor is just a friend. We have known each other forever, he is just a friend!”

“Well your friend is tied up on the back seat, under the blanket and he won’t be your friend for much longer!” he said this in a low, almost guttural threatening tone.

Taylor had totally lost control. “Connor!” I yelled, hoping that it was a lie. And then I heard a mumbled reply. I twisted my body and reached out towards the blanket, pulling it off the figure that lay still on the seat behind me. Taylor pulled on my hair again, but not before I was able to get a quick glimpse of

Connor, his face battered and bleeding. He had a rag tied around his mouth and he'd been hog-tied with rope.

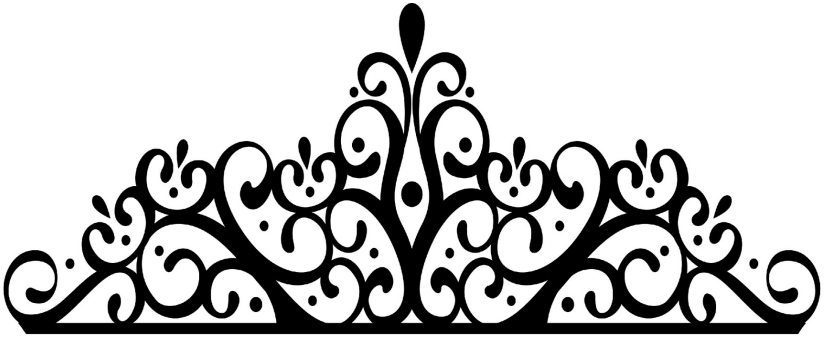
“Connor!” I screamed, “Taylor let him go! He’s not my boyfriend. Let him go, please!”

Connor’s eyes had been full of fear. How could this happen to my wonderful friend? In my mind it was clear what I had to do. I had to get help.

I forced another look at Connor and closed my eyes tightly. Then, taking a deep breath, I yelled at Taylor once more. “You’ve killed him, he isn’t breathing anymore!”

Taylor let go of my hair and turned to look behind him. I took my chance, opened the car door and jumped out, hitting the road with a sickening thud before catapulting into the air. I landed again and rolled along the side of the road. Sharp pieces of rock scraped my skin, ripping it apart. Strangely enough I felt no pain, nothing.

I lay there staring at the blue sky and a fluffy white cloud that seemed to be moving quickly across. Then a man’s face looked down at me, he was saying something, but it was a muffled sound and I could not understand his words. I had no idea who he was, but I could sense his goodness. And then the deepest blackness fell from the sky, engulfing my entire being.



Thank you for reading my first book in the Angel Series.

*Reviews are gold to authors...if you enjoyed this book,
could I please ask you to take a couple of moments to
rate and review it?*

My sincere thanks and appreciation.

Katrina ♡

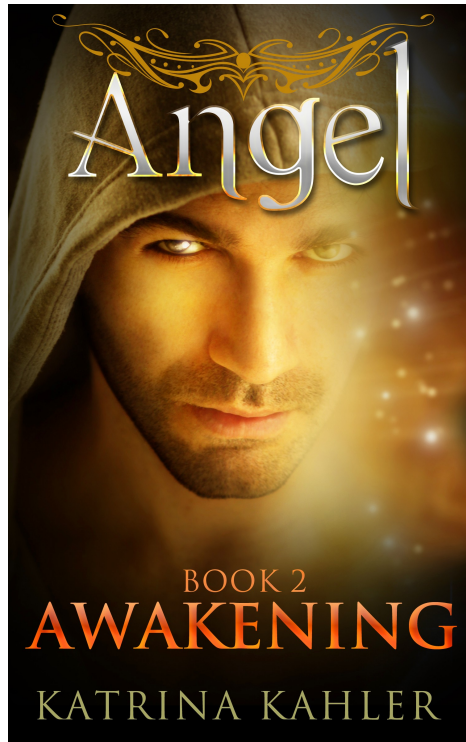


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