

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

GUARDING LUCAS

Mitchell E. Sanford

GUARDING LUCAS

When I see this picture, I think of somebody wanting to be loved more than anything. He's never received the love he seeks, not truly. Other than the angel that guides him. This angel has been there his entire life, watching and guarding against the things that will harm his destiny. When the day finally comes that he loses his ability to hide from his charge, he is given the chance to love.

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Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

GUARDING LUCAS

By Mitchell E. Sanford

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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GUARDING LUCAS

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Photo Description

A man with short dark hair has his back to the viewer. He wears a dark blue suit jacket with the sleeves pushed up, and a beaded bracelet of some kind on his left wrist. He is being embraced—or held up—by a man wearing a tan trench coat over a suit and tie... and with white wings extending from his back. They stare into each other's eyes with a look of wonder.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I've had a tough life. So tough, in fact, that I've stopped believing that anybody is watching out for me. Until one day I avoid an accident and catch a glimpse of a handsome man with wings. Could it be that I actually have a guardian angel? Why do I keep thinking about this man? I can't get him out of my head. Who was he, and who is he now? Is loving your own guardian angel an act against God, or is it destiny?

Sincerely,

Victoria

P.S. A fair deal of angst would be cool, but a H.E.A. preferred.

Story Info

Genre: fantasy, paranormal

Tags: dark, angels, drug use, self-mutilation, alcoholism

Content warnings: main character suicide and rebirth, secondary character deaths

Wordcount: 11,542

GUARDING LUCAS

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CHAPTER ONE

Red. I've always loved the color red. Something about it seemed so familiar. They say that red is the color of passion and desire. But for me, it signified peace and serenity. A sense of calm captivated my body whenever I was surrounded by the color of fresh blood.

The man at the bar was wearing a red T-shirt. Cut low to show off his sexy chest, developed muscles popped through the open length, and at the sight I found myself getting hard. I had my shirt off, and the cool night breeze kept making my nipples perk. Not that I was complaining, I always got big tips when I pulled off my shirt.

The night went by at its usual pace. A sudden and stressful influx of patrons. Then the lull, and then the cleanup from the bastards. A man had the nerve to vomit directly onto the bar, and we had to call a cab.

"Sorry." David smiled and tossed me the rag. "I'm out, y'all. Peace."

God, I hate him, I thought bitterly. David was a Texas frat boy with an astounding body and the personality of a dead bee.

"Well, he's fired." Ryan groaned.

"He was useful as shit anyway." I smirked. David never even went home with me.

While the night was pretty simple in terms of patrons and drinks to serve, my eyes kept drifting to the man at the bar. When he brought up a wrist to glance at his watch, I was impressed with the display of rippling biceps and forearms. The guy was hot, that's for sure. Fuckable, I was certain, with his upturned bangs and tight shirt. Then he dropped a twenty and winked at me. On instinct, I handed him my card with full confidence that we'd hook up tonight.

Oh we did. We certainly did. And he was smoking hot, ripped almost as much as me. His body was clear of ink though, which I thought was lame. But when he leaned back and rode me until I climaxed, I was able to overlook virgin skin.

I slept in that Friday. By some miracle, I had Saturday off and didn't have to go in to cover David's shift. I knew Ryan would find a replacement quickly. If I had to be brutal and honest with myself... I was beat. Tired, exhausted, and every other adjective I could think of. My body stayed curled in my red sheets until the sun positioned itself just right to blind me through the window. And any position I switched to was useless.

"Guess I gotta get up," I moaned, sitting and gathering my bearings. My erection hadn't really softened from last night's hookup. So to keep calm, I lay back down and pumped myself to completion, groaning with delight at the release. Then came the knock at the apartment door. "Shit!"

"Who the hell is it?" I yelled, tossing on jeans and zipping them dangerously close to my "best friend".

"Um... it's Lisa," said a small voice. *Whoops!*

I opened the door in excitement and smiled.

"Lisa!" I cried as I fell to my knees, and the little girl jumped into my embrace. She laughed when I started kissing her head and swinging her around. She was so small, so delicate, so beautiful.

"How are you, Daddy?" Lisa squeaked through giggles. I wasn't really her father. The guy bailed and I knew her mother, Pam, for years now. Together we paid for Lisa's dialysis treatments. "Mom's been crying. The doctor looked real sad too. Why?"

My face fell as Pat showed up on the threshold. Her eyes were puffy and red, tears streaked down her cheeks and she kept swallowing hard.

"Would you like to watch television?" I smiled at Lisa and chuckled at her vehement nod. She scampered off to the couch and skipped through the

inevitable static before reaching the cartoons, which were still blurred horribly. I took hold of Patricia's shoulder and led her outdoors, closing the door behind us. "It's worse?"

Pat nodded and let out a small sob, but she pushed it back inside her before taking a deep breath.

"Stage four. The diagnosis came through. She's... she's..." Pat started sobbing, and I held the woman. Her stick-thin frame felt weak, and I knew from the gaunt, hollowed look to her face she had been shooting up again. But it felt nice to embrace her weakened body, almost soothing to give comfort.

None of my hookups ever let me hold them, or touch them really. And sometimes I found myself desiring that most.

"Do you? Do you think you can help with the bills? Like you did last time," Pat said, stifling her tears.

"No! Jesus Christ. I'm barely making rent working the bar at night, and I don't even get high anymore." My admission felt good, almost four years now that I've been without a drug in my veins. That's how I was able to focus enough to get my body where it is now. Which I was aware of suddenly, and Pat didn't waste a beat. She leaned into me and slid a skinny hand down my pants, finding my naked groin. With a smile, she began to stroke my balls.

"There's always ways I can earn it," she whispered, kissing my earlobe.

Despite an instinctual drive to thrust into her touch, I pulled her hand out and tried to stop the fire in my cheeks. "I said no. Go back to your baby daddy and get the money from him."

"But he said he wouldn't help," she cried.

"Then go to the police or something, I don't know! I can't do this for you anymore. I love Lisa—you know that, but I can only give her love. Not money."

"Fuck you then. Piece of shit," Pat snarled and slammed the door open, yanking Lisa from the couch, down the hall and pulling her daughter out to the bus stop.

"Bye, Luke!" Lisa waved and smiled.

CHAPTER TWO

The day off gave me the perfect opportunity to get to the gym. Which I have been avoiding for the past week or so, ever since the hottest man I've ever seen in my life started to go there. He was always swimming when I was swimming, lifting when I was lifting, and showering when I was showering. I'd think he was following me if he ever made eye contact.

While the man didn't glance my way, I was not so gracious. I let my eyes examine his body carefully as he swam or showered. Naturally golden skin was pulled tight over toned muscles. His body was broad, masculine, but also somewhat soft in frame. His waist was tapered and muscles were quite visible through the healthy layer of fat on his belly. But his legs, God his legs! Muscled and formed and so perfect I found myself watching him bend over and rub at his toe. The muscles rippled in his thigh, and his incredible calves bulged. Muscles were toned down his back and he had a strong and sensual curve to his spine.

At times I looked away and then looked back and the man was gone. I didn't know how he did it, but it was freaking annoying.

Today he was there even more, or at least I thought. I even got close once, but then I blinked and he had vanished.

"Damn. How does he do that?" I thought aloud.

"Do what?" A voice rolled over my ears and I turned with a start. The man was standing right there, and he looked me in the eye for an uncomfortably long while. His eyes were pale blue surrounded with ocean, and they glittered with such beauty I had to blink. He was gone!

Fuck!

Then I saw him again, lifting while I was lifting. He was all the way across the floor, but I recognized the jet black hair cut short and slicked back as if it simply grew that way. Something strange clicked in my body and I felt the need to impress him... despite the fact he couldn't see me. I pushed the bar up

in the press over and over. Until, *crack!* With a gasp I put the bar back and sat up, holding my shoulder as the pain lanced through the muscle.

“God I hate my life,” I whined as I started down the stairs back into the locker room. It was surprising to me how affordable the gym membership was for my pay grade. Some of the clients seemed quite well-off—most were probably taking advantage of the price. I knew to leave by six in the evening when all the “nine-to-fives” got out of work. Just as I was inching my hurt shoulder into the sleeve of my coat, I spied the man as he put on his own tan business jacket. Of course he was a business man, he looked the part.

Night set quickly that Saturday, and I was walking in darkness by the time eight came around. The lights of the streets popped on and the prostitutes came out. The few men I encountered during the hunt were ugly as hell. Obviously infected with something, based on the marks around their lips.

“Come on hottie, you know you could use a good fuck!” one man said, hollering after me as I walked away. “Fine. Go to Hell.”

Oh yes. I would go to Hell all right. It seemed to be the only place I wanted to go. No, forget that—I just wanted to die. And for whatever reason, the desire to cut was building in my mind. So I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to think other thoughts.

I don't need this. I don't need this, everything is fine. You don't need this Lucas. Stop thinking this. Stop. Stop.

I had my eyes shut so tight that my feet took me into the street, directly into traffic. There was a screech of tires, several tires, and horns blaring. Then in an instant I was not in the street, I was back on the walkway, gazing as car horns blared and pedestrians screamed in agony.

“Oh my God!” I cried out. How did I ever avoid that pile up?

“Keep moving,” a voice whispered into my ear, and a hand pulled my arm to the side. I didn't take my eyes from the accident, but in a daze I followed the voice. There was a corpse in the street. It was that male hooker I had

rejected. Blood was pooling around his head, and his arms and legs were twisted in ugly angles. And there were other men and women sobbing and screaming over his death. “Keep moving, Lucas.”

I know that voice!

My eyes snapped to my left, and there was the man. He wasn't looking at me, but he had a hand on my biceps and he was pulling me down the sidewalk. Adrenaline was coursing through my veins now, and as I placed my fingers on the man's arm, he gasped and yanked away from my grip. Then he took off into a sprint, leaving me under a light to watch him leave.

Without acknowledging what had happened, I watched him run away. Not turning back or even looking at me, he just ran. And as he ran under the lights I saw with growing shock that something or... some things were materializing from the man's wide back. They were white, barely visible, and I thought I was tripping on acid as they grew more opaque. Wings—they were wings. White wings like on a fucking angel! And they grew and grew until they were as wide as the street, but folded down to take up less space.

“What have I done?” I whispered to the night air. The man was gone, disappeared in a flash of white as he neared the edge of the street. The cause of the accident was me, I knew it.

CHAPTER THREE

Somehow I made my way home, and didn't even bother locking my apartment door. A detached haze fell over my mind and I wandered to the fridge for my whiskey, intending to finish the bottle. And then I cried.

Years ago I had cried, the time I awoke in the hospital with the bandages over my arms and the drip in my vein, but not since then, the day I failed to kill myself. With the courage born of alcohol I cursed and stood, stumbling to the bathroom and pulling open the cupboard. I avoided my reflection for the most part—no need to see how shit-faced I was—and yanked out a double-edged razor. With tears in my eyes, I put the blade against my wrist and pushed into the pale flesh. It didn't draw blood, but I did feel the resistance my skin exuded against the thin metal.

The scar that flowed down my forearm was still a reminder of my last attempt, and that held me in that pose. Did I need this? Was the release of pain something that was so truly necessary right now that I needed to slide that razor down the soft skin? The blue vein pulsed beneath my skin. It was almost calling for me to puncture it.

But that man popped into my head just before I opened my skin, his voice resounded in my head. A cacophony of memories stirred in echoes. For the past thirty years of my life, I had heard that voice.

When I had broken my arm and had to walk home holding the bone?

Keep moving, Lucas.

When I was raped in my late teens and was forced to walk home bloodied and almost naked?

Keep moving, Lucas.

That night when I had slid that other razor down my forearm for real I was slumped against the wall, utterly at peace with myself as the blood rushed out of my body and onto the white of the bathroom floor. Not just a voice, though, that time the man had knelt before me. Exactly the same as the man from the

gym—I'd know him anywhere. That handsome face, blue eyes, black hair. Soothing, perfect voice.

Keep moving, Lucas.

So instead of cutting, I threw the razor into the bath and turned to punch the mirror over the sink. It shattered, most definitely. But not before opening a gash across my palm, as I accidentally squeezed a piece of glass as it landed in my hand. I bled freely from the wound, but took the toilet paper and pressed into the cut. It wasn't fatal, or even a real cutting attempt. But it was good enough.

I woke up with a killer hangover and a bloody bathroom. My hand stopped bleeding sometime in the night, and I was naked and wet.

“Ugh,” I groaned. My clothes were in the corner. It seemed that I had pissed myself, why else would I would be wet? It wouldn't be the first time that I had peed myself after downing a pint of whiskey. But my wrist was unscathed. Vaguely remembering the feeling of holding the metal against my skin, I leaned over to peer into the pearly white of the bath. There it was, a tiny little weapon of pure release and peace.

“Screw it,” I muttered and lifted the razor with my fingers. I slid it over a very small patch of skin on my forearm and relished the sharp pain that spread across my arm. I let my head fall back as I licked my lips. That's what I needed, the release that was deeper than any emotion I could ever hope to feel.

It was a small cut, not fatal or something that would scar. But with such a sharp blade it bled freely for several moments.

“You're looking rather pleased,” Ryan said as I clocked in and readied my bar. He did a good job of keeping everything in order and properly stocked, but I'll be damned if he was a good bartender. He couldn't mix a drink to save his life. I was his golden boy for sure.

David's replacement was a poor excuse of a man. Obviously hired for his twink figure and beautiful face, but even with his slender neck and full lips he did nothing for my desires. Lame.

A steady stream of customers poured in. No. A freaking team of athletes. The bar was so full that Ryan had to keep people outside. Sweat was running down my back enough that I lowered my arms and gripped my shirt, smiling at the hoots and hollers coming from the drunkards as I lifted the cloth over my head and exposed my immaculate torso. The light seemed to really pull the shape of my tattoo out, and the elegant lines it formed over my chest and shoulder gave me a look of tough and sexy all at once.

Once the shirt came off, the tips came piling in. Of course I did my usual glance for those who could be an enjoyable fuck later that night, but none seemed to get me excited.

Then *he* came in. The man from the gym, the man from the accident, the man that probably saved my life. He walked in, head down, hands tucked into his coat pockets. He found a tiny corner and sat, not looking up or talking to anyone.

Oddly enough, despite him being particularly attractive—not to mention out of place—nobody paid him much heed. I've noticed over the years that when someone seems uncomfortable in a bar, the vultures of society try to swarm to them and see if they can pick off an innocent and pop their cherry. So he caught my attention.

"I'm going on break," I said, to Ryan's displeasure. So I kissed him on the cheek and got more hoots as well as a blush and smile from my boss.

I wandered through the crowd—avoiding the gropers who made instinctual grabs for my groin—and finally got to my destination. The man didn't look up, he just peered to the side. I noticed his gaze lock with the cut on my arm as well as the bandage around my palm.

"Hey." I smirked, and placed my arm on the table. His eyes shot to my chest and I pulled back my shoulders to round my pecs. "I know you. We go to the same gym."

There was a very awkward silence. He just sat there and stared at my chest, then his eyes ran down my abs and then back to the cut on my arm.

“You okay?” I asked him, reaching out to touch his shoulder. He jumped and recoiled, getting up from his seat and pushing back into the crowd. “Whoa, whoa. Hey. Calm down.”

The man locked eyes with me, and they were wide and filled with shock and fear. In an obvious panic, he turned and sprinted out the door.

What... who is he?

CHAPTER FOUR

“Hey fucker,” I snarled, pushing on the man’s shoulder in the locker room. He stumbled and hit the wall. I put my hand to the side of his head and moved close, pressing my body against his. Fully dressed, it wasn’t as uncomfortable as I had anticipated, and I was so angry I didn’t care. “I think you owe me an explanation.”

I moved my lips right by his ear and felt him shiver.

“You can—I,” the man’s voice quaked. “Um. Yes, of course.”

“Name?”

I pulled back but stayed close to the man’s face. He was handsome, masculine, and mystical. He was more rugged, I supposed, but still had a glowing softness in his eyes and demeanor I couldn’t place.

“Um. Jacob.” He dipped his chin, but kept eye contact. They hypnotized me, and I didn’t fight when he pushed on my sternum. “I don’t like bars.”

I backed away and smiled. “Don’t play coy with me, Jacob. What were you even doing there? Or better yet, why were you there at the accident on Lincoln?”

His face dropped and his skin paled at my inquiry. “Um...”

“Okay, fine. Um... I get it,” I mocked. For some reason, I was overcome with emotion, and I had to cover my eyes with my palm while I collected myself.

It was the perfect time for him to escape, but he didn’t move. Instead, I was witness to one of the most arousing gazes I’d ever experienced. It was only a moment, changing almost instantly to a more alert look in his eyes. Love. Total love—I could feel the energy of the emotion.

“So, Jacob. Would you like to go out sometime?” I fumbled over the words, but his eyes lit up and he smiled.

“Okay,” Jacob whispered.

“What do you do for work?” I asked the man. He was smiling so much. His head canted to the side and his smile widened.

“Accountant.” Jacob put his beer to his lips and tilted his head back to drink. I stared at his throat as it undulated and worked to swallow. Beautiful and erotic. “Are you all right Lucas?”

My focus returned and I smiled at those pale blue eyes. “Yes, I’m fine. Sorry, but I swear I’ve seen you before.”

“We go to the same gym. For the past year or so.”

I ran my fingers across the neck of the bottle as I pondered the fact of his evasion. Jacob was not telling me everything. I noticed the subtle flash across his eyes, and how he held his body. How his jaw clenched before he gave his answer. Maybe he was just being cautious.

“Uh-huh. And how do I know that’s true?” I leaned in close and his face went serious. “What are you hiding?”

“Um.” Jacob swallowed, and that was it for me. I took his hand and led him from the bar. He didn’t resist me, walking with his arm in my grip all the way down the street. We turned a corner and I grasped his throat. I pushed him against the wall and moved close, pressing against his body. He tensed but didn’t fight.

“Listen to me. I’m not stupid, not like some people think. I know that you’ve been stalking me, and unless I am totally insane, it’s been years and years. Tell me I’m wrong,” I breathed into his ear.

Jacob made a small grunting noise, and I let some tension from my hand around his throat.

“Please let go of me,” he begged, but I pulled him from the wall just to push him against it again. He whimpered.

“Answer me. Why do I keep hearing your voice, seeing your face? I know what I saw.”

Jacob didn’t answer me or make any move for the longest time. Finally, I took a breath, and that’s when he responded.

“This wasn’t supposed to happen,” he whispered—to himself, apparently.

“What are you—”

Two giant objects flew out from his sides, knocking my grip from his throat as Jacob pushed me away. Stumbling back, I stared in disbelief.

Jacob walked toward me with two giant white wings sprouting from his back. They moved with small rotations and flicked up and down with every step. He looked somewhat angry.

It didn’t matter, now I was in a panic. The tears streamed down my face as the man reached out to grab me. His arms wrapped around me, and I could feel the muscles of his strong biceps flexing with the embrace. Despite my fear of him, I didn’t have the strength—or desire—to flee, not even to push him away. Instead, I cried into his shoulder.

I felt lips press against my head, and a voice whispered, “I love you, Lucas.”

“What’s with you, dude?” a drunk asked me as he collapsed against the brick wall.

My eyes opened to find me standing in the middle of an empty alley, crying and shaking. Jacob was gone—he’d vanished. What did I just see? Wings?

He had held me, and it was like everything that was missing from my life was suddenly there in one moment. It was too much.

I jumped into my car and sped home. I slammed my door shut and took hold of a razor from my bathroom cabinet. Pulling down my pants, I sat on the closed toilet seat and slid the blade across the inside of my thigh, outlining the previous scars there. Reminders of a more inexperienced time. The blood ran freely down my thigh and onto the toilet seat, and I laid my head back and sighed at the peace that the cuts gave me.

So focused, so calm, and so very perfect.

Much like how I felt that moment that Jacob embraced me.

Shit. Listen to me. I sound like a whining little bitch.

But God, did that feel so good.

“Should I even say that anymore? If Jacob is really an angel, then—” I cackled to myself at the notion. An angel? Bullshit. Why the hell would God send an angel to talk to me? He hasn’t ever done anything for me. No... fuck God and fuck angels.

I fell asleep.

CHAPTER FIVE

The entire next week I didn't see Jacob. Not even in the background. Must have scared him off.

And with embarrassment, I found myself desiring the man to appear, just to have something friendly in my eyes. Everything around me seemed so dark, so dreary. Jacob had brightened everything with his presence.

Hmph. Maybe he really was an angel.

“Could I get some whiskey?” Ryan called and I bent down and shoved the bottle across the bar. “You okay?”

“What? Yeah. I just...” My voice dropped and I felt a knot form in my throat. Fuck, I wanted Jacob. The blue of his eyes, the black of his hair, the kindness of his face. His smile, God, that smile. And from what I've seen in his swim suit, a wonderful body.

Now *that* was what made me hard, not the hot guy flirting with me, his hand caressing the bulging muscles of my shoulder and arm while I handed him his drink.

“Lucas. Phone.” Ryan said, holding the receiver for me.

I wiped my hands and answered. “Hello?” I shifted my body away from the crowd and pressed a finger into my ear, trying to hear the distorted voice speaking. “Sorry. You gotta talk loud, I'm working.”

“He's dead, Lucas,” Pat said on the other end of the line.

Shit.

The hospital doors slid open with their usual *whoosh*.

“Daniel Turner. I'm his son,” I told the receptionist. The tired eyes of the nurse went dim as she told me how to navigate the halls to reach him. Not bothering to greet Pat or Lisa, I pushed into the room where the man was

covered with the white sheet. He didn't smell, but the energy of the room was that of death. "Well..." I drifted off, sliding my shoe across the linoleum floor.

"Good-bye Dad. Hopefully you can rest easy now that your... faggot of a son is all alone." The words were meant to be spiteful, but they just made me tear up. He never showed me love, never held me. He never told me that he loved me, he never told me that I could do whatever I set my mind to. And because of this, I sat on the chair and cried.

I didn't cry for my father. No. I hated the man, despised him and didn't feel a thing over his death. Actually, I cried for my loneliness. My father was the last anchor in my world, the last thing holding me in my life. With him gone, I felt lost, but also hopeful. It meant I could finally end my own life and finish what I had tried six years ago. Nothing to live for now.

Nodding to myself with my new resolve, I stood and went outside. Lisa was slumped in her chair, her tiny body even tinier now.

"Holy shit, Pat. Is she getting worse?" I wiped my eyes and rolled my shoulders.

Pat came up to me and hugged my neck, even thinner herself. "I'm so sorry for your loss."

"I'm fine, but you should get her looked at" I gestured to the sick little girl in the chair, the circles under her eyes darker than usual. Pat's skeletal arms were prominent through her long-sleeved shirt, and the haze over her eyes told me everything I needed to know. "Fuck, Pat. Get out of here."

"Oh, come on. You need some comfort tonight, baby. Let me suck that sweet little cock of yours." Pat fell against my shoulder and her hand went down to my groin.

"Go home. Get to sleep. Take care of her, for Heaven's sake."

"Give me a ride home. I'm so tired, she's so tired. Please," Pat begged me. Using Lisa as bait was low. But nothing I wouldn't put past an addict.

Shit. I handed her a twenty. "Get a cab."

Her drugged-up eyes were smiling now, and she planted a sloppy kiss against my neck before waking Lisa, holding her hand while walking away.

I sat in the hospital chair with my head relaxed back against the wall. It was a strange feeling really, to feel numb. I didn't feel that way after cutting, or even when trashed. I felt calm after such things. But this... *this* was numb. I felt nothing, and it was great.

But then I heard the voice.

Keep moving, Lucas.

My eyes shot open and there he was. Oddly enough, I wasn't surprised to see him.

"My dad died," I said.

"I know," Jacob replied, and sat down in the chair to my right. "I took him."

That got my attention. "You... you took him? Oh God. You really are an angel."

Jacob's blue eyes hardened and he nodded.

"But why are you here? Why are you talking to me?"

"I don't know. In truth, you're not even supposed to see me. I have no idea why you can." Jacob's admission was shocking, and a slew of questions rushed into my mind.

Why are you even around me? What do you do? Who were you? Were you always an angel? At least I had one at the tip of my tongue. "Are you my guardian angel?"

Jacob's fine red lips pressed thin before he dipped his chin in a nod. Rage filled me.

"Where the fuck were you? Why the fuck did you let all that shit happen to me? I know you saw it, I know you were there. But you let me get shit on by everyone! God!"

Again, Jacob wrapped his arms around me and held me while I quaked. I wanted to cry, but my tears were dried up. So instead, I just shook in his embrace.

“Take me home. I’ll talk to you. And say what I can.”

So I drove him to my apartment and let him in. Having the man in my home was strangely erotic and sensual. There was a deep-set connection to him I could feel every second. Something saved for those with a life of love between them, which I know I never had.

Jacob was a stranger to me, and now I would find out about the man claiming to be an angel.

CHAPTER SIX

“Were you always an angel?” I asked.

Jacob canted his head to the side and gave me a sarcastic look. “Yes. Always.”

I was unable to suppress my laugh, shocked that he could joke like that.

The angel must have read my mind because he chuckled. “I know.” He came close to me and I could feel his breath on my face. “I remember numbers. I think I was an accountant,” he mused, and I smiled. He looked up to the ceiling and for a moment I was captivated. His neck was long and corded, begging for me to caress the soft skin.

“What’s it like? Do you remember dying?”

The man’s face fell for a moment as if in reflection. Then his shoulders squared. “I was sick. For a long time. No, I don’t remember dying. I was just awake somewhere else...” he trailed off, lost in the memory, and then looked at me. “Sorry. I can’t speak anymore about it.”

“You’re saying you took my father?”

“Yes. He died and I guided him to the next life.”

My hand covered my face. “Fuck. I can’t believe all this... Prove it.”

“Prove it?”

“Yeah. Show me that you’re really what I think you are.”

The man’s blue eyes sparkled, and he smirked, and in the blink of an eye, he was before me. So very close. I watched him, afraid to move. He reached up, placing the width of his strong hand on the back of my neck. Jacob’s face moved closer, his eyelids lowered until they were barely open. He pushed his lips against mine, and I tensed. It was sudden, unexpected, and awkward.

Despite an insane desire to question his actions, I remained quiet.

I found myself on the couch when I opened my eyes. How in the Hell did I get there? Jacob stood before me, his hands held in front of his stomach.

“If I show you this, Lucas”—he undid his belt and pulled it from the loops—“you can say nothing, tell no one, or I will have to disappear and never return. You’ll lose your angel. Understand?”

I nodded my head. In the dim light, Jacob looked surreal, his pale skin and dark hair in vivid contrast. His blue eyes were almost invisible in the low light. Turning around so his back was to me, Jacob crossed his arms and took hold of his shirt. With one slow movement, smooth as silk, he pulled the fabric up. His tapered waist showed first, and then the bulge of his muscles popped as the shirt lifted. The fabric curled and bunched when it arrived at his ribs.

The sight was lovely, sensual, and fascinating. He was just taking off his shirt—why was I tenting?

Jacob reached his arms up over his head, and the entire span of his back was visible, flawless flesh over toned muscles. The shirt fell to the floor, silent as it lay on the carpet. He turned to me, and I had to let my eyes drop down for a moment. Smooth stomach, muscles visible through skin, yet with a healthy layer of fat. And a flat chest, cut with lean muscles. The man seemed to look at me but also somehow unfocused, as if he were gazing through me.

The air shimmered behind Jacob. It wavered like heat rising from asphalt. I gasped as large wings appeared in my vision. They didn’t grow, they simply appeared, growing more opaque and solid as I watched, until they spanned the entire width of my living room. At first I doubted they were real, or maybe I was just imagining things. But as Jacob released a breath and flexed his neck side to side, the wings shifted with the motion.

The angel didn’t move as I approached and hesitantly touched his bare shoulder. My eyes were drawn to the rushing pulse at the base of Jacob’s throat—he seemed almost nervous.

“Go ahead,” he encouraged.

Hands shaking, I slid one over his shoulder and touched the inner part of the wing. It was warm and firm. Life could be felt flowing beneath the feathers.

“Oh my God,” I breathed, entranced. Swirling around his body, I kept my gaze fixed upon his middle back. My fingers explored the flesh around his scapula. Totally normal human skin, but just to the inner part, by his spine, were the protrusions that made the base of his wings. I poked, and touched. Nothing. “What the fuck? How is that possible?” my voice inquired, because I was not there mentally. No, my mind was lost somewhere as I tried to comprehend the actuality of what I was seeing and touching.

“How’s what possible?” Jacob chimed in, the amusement obvious in his soothing baritone.

“I—this—how’s—all of this! There’s nothing there in your body. It’s like they’re just glued to your back, no bone reaching farther in. It’s not possible.”

Giant, beautiful wings flexed together and then they hid Jacob from view. The angel turned around and stared deep into my eyes. He was standing so close, our lips were barely an inch apart. “I can’t explain this to you, Lucas,” he whispered. “But I can say for certain that I am here for you and you only.”

Something broke within me. I pushed my lips against his. Perhaps I needed the solid feel of this creature before me. He tensed a moment, but then pushed back. His arms wrapped around my back and he pulled me against his body. His bare chest was warm and firm as he sighed and pushed his tongue into my mouth. I moved myself against him, molding myself to fit his embrace and found myself shaking with emotion.

It happened in a matter of moments. Jacob was grinding against me softly, groaning with desire as we kissed. And then he was gone. I was left with an empty living room, empty arms, and an unfortunate erection.

Breathing hard, I sat down on the couch, running my hands through my hair. It had grown long in the past few months, and it was the same silky texture I’d grown up with.

“Shit,” I exhaled. It wasn’t difficult for me to sleep on the couch that night, despite my wandering mind.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The gym was starting to be a more frequent endeavor. Something inside my mind felt very good, soothed and relaxed. Lifting was easy, and no one complained when I pulled off my shirt to do my lifts. The stares always stroked my ego, and the flirting that came with it gave me reason to smile. It helps to be smoking hot, this I knew. But at times I caught sight of the scars down my arms. The memory of the razor blade sliding down my wrists was always fresh.

My muscles pumped up, I left the gym. Some patrons smiled at me with hungry eyes. It was a great night, but a working man needs to be punctual. So I sped my way through the city, only to be met by a very suspicious bouncer.

His huge palm spread over my chest to push me back from the door.

“Richard, don’t be an ass.” I smiled and moved in again, but this time he squeezed my bicep painfully. “Fuck!”

He crossed his arms and scowled when I rubbed at my now bruised arm. His eyes were hard, stubborn. Richard was never like that with me, he smiled and welcomed me. So I shifted my stance, watching the man as his eyes softened. Then I understood.

They let me go...

“Sorry. But Taylor works double your hours, and has an even more efficient output. We loved you here, but times are hard and I have to save where I can,” Ryan regurgitated. He’d obviously practiced the phrases several times. I glanced in to see Taylor with his shirt off, the lean, tight muscles of his twink body glistening with sweat while he did his duties. He was beautiful, for sure. But I was experienced and knew the clientele.

“Are you sure this is the right thing to do?” I croaked, my voice rough with emotion.

Ryan gave me a slow nod, and I couldn’t stop the tear from rolling down my cheek.

“Your last check will be in the mail. Good luck.”

When I didn't move, Richard turned me by my shoulder and gave me a little shove. “Get out of here, dude.”

So I stared at the ground and stumbled my way to my shitty car. The creak of the metal seemed obnoxiously loud as the door swung on the hinges. How will I pay to fix this? How will I pay rent? How will I eat? What will I do?

My breathing started to grow erratic, and my chest heaved as I started to break down. I sobbed in my car for a good fifteen minutes before I felt steady enough to go home.

“You'll never be anything, Lucas. Just give up. Nobody wants a faggot working for them,” Dad had said. The memory was clear that night, as everything seemed to be falling into place.

“I guess you were right, Dad,” I reflected, staring at the blank, textured ceiling of my apartment.

“Why is he right?”

“Holy shit!” I jumped up and flexed, ready to fight. Jacob was standing in the corner of my living room, his form more streamlined than the last time I saw him.

“Jacob? I...” My voice trailed off as he walked toward me. It was true, he looked different. His waist was more trim, hair more luminous, skin more flawless. “Why do you look different?”

“It doesn't seem necessary to hide my true appearance from you anymore.” He sauntered over toward me with a painfully erotic gait. He smiled, and it lit up my world.

“Wait. How come you were hiding it from me?”

“We aren't supposed to come into contact with our charges.”

“Then... why are you here?”

Jacob's eyes focused on my face, and he smirked. Even his blue eyes seemed an unearthly shade more sharp. They bored into my own and found the deepest parts of my spirit. I shivered.

“Because, Lucas.” He moved closer. “I broke the rules when I prevented your death that night of the accident. Then again when you confronted me.”

My body felt so weak as he pressed his chest against mine.

“Jacob. I—” I gasped when he kissed me. And I was lost in the moment; my hand slid up to the nape of his neck and into his dark hair. I gripped his skull as I pushed my tongue into his mouth. I wrapped my legs around his waist, inspired by a surge of aroused strength. I ground against his body as he moaned. How could this be happening? Why was this even happening?

Jacob gripped my shirt and pulled it up my back, his finger scrambling through the fabric as I sucked on the base of his throat. He tasted like citrus and cinnamon; my tongue wound across his collarbone and dipped into the notch where they met. The tiny beat of a second as I pulled away and let him remove my shirt was far too long before I desired his smooth lips again. I pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it to the floor. His skin was flushed red with heat as I pulled his back away from the wall.

Keeping our grip on each other, I walked him to my bedroom and laid him on his back. He was gorgeous, every line of muscle and every inch of perfect skin seemed to shimmer in the dim light. I undid his pants and pulled them down, hearing his surprised breath.

Jacob sat up with a jerk and helped me with my belt buckle. In one yank, he pulled down my pants and boxers.

“Oh,” I gasped as his lips surrounded the head of my erection. With a growling moan, he took me into his throat with ease. I shivered and my knees buckled.

There was a sweet giggle as the angel pulled me over onto my back and turned himself around so he was on his hands and knees over me, head at my cock while he sucked me. In return, I grabbed his penis and started to suck him. Hearing him moan was addicting, absolute ecstasy. His cock was smooth,

silky, with bulging veins along the very well-shaped shaft. He yelped when I took a testicle in my mouth, small, fine hairs sticking to my lips as I licked.

When Jacob started to thrust down into my mouth, I worked my left arm over to my nightstand and opened the drawer. I pulled out the lube and slicked up one of my fingers. Giving him no warning, I pressed my finger into his hole. At first he grunted and quaked. Then he moaned as I slid into his body. He was warm and tight, the muscles of his sphincter most likely not used to such intrusion. So I paused in sucking his gorgeous erection to focus on stretching him.

“Lucas. Oh please.” Jacob stopped sucking my length, and buried his nose in my groin, sniffing deep. That made me so hot I forgot what I was doing and just left my finger in his bottom. He reminded me by rocking back onto my fingers.

With a deep groan, I pulled out and yanked back his shoulders. I held him back against my chest as I tilted back his head and kissed him. My hand slipped around his penis and he sighed as I gave him a few nice pumps. Then I had him on his back, he sighed as I bent his knees and slid my finger back into the warmth of his body.

I oiled another and pushed back in with two fingers. His sleek back arched and he moaned as I scissored him and stroked his prostate. When I moved up his body, between his muscled thighs, I kissed him. He pulled my tongue in and stroked at my throat with a content sigh.

“I’m going to make love to you,” I whispered into Jacob’s ear. He smiled and nodded, offering me gasps of agreement.

“No condom,” Jacob said when he heard me rip the wrapper. So I tossed it aside and lubed my penis. I found his entrance and pressed my head against it. There was a very slight resistance before I was in. He blushed a deep red as I slid inside, inch by inch. My cock joined with his bottom fully. “Oh Lucas. Yes.”

I held myself there, hoping the pained look on his handsome face would fade just a bit. When he sighed and smiled, I pulled back a bit and thrust into

his body. The squeeze of his muscles in his body was a pleasure, something I'd never done without the protection of a condom. He was so warm and perfect. My eyes were fascinated with the sight of my erection appearing and disappearing into his body. But soon I was in awe of the incredible creature below me. He writhed and moaned as we made love. I let my hands explore his tight midsection, lean muscles rippled under pale skin, and his nipples were hard with pleasure.

Jacob groaned, and his back arched off the bed. I slid my arm around that narrow waist and pulled him up, slipping across sweat. My tongue found his throat and I sucked on the soft skin at the juncture between his corded neck and shoulder. With a shudder, Jacob ejaculated, pumping several strong globs of his semen onto his belly and chest. He shot hard, even landing on his upper chest. There was no hesitation, I licked up the highest bit and let my tongue slide into his open mouth.

Strong hands gripped my back as he growled and pulled me into a passionate kiss, at which I just thrust harder. Jacob wasn't having it though, he wanted something else. I pulled out and he turned me onto my back, kissing me the whole way.

When his sweat slicked thighs pressed against my hips I smiled and sighed in pleasure. He reached back, holding my dick while he slid down onto me. He rode me, letting his hands explore my barrel chest and my shredded abs. I stared at the angel on my penis, sweat pouring down his face and throat in sensual rivulets, down his toned chest and tight stomach.

He doubled over as I tightened my eyes for own my orgasm. Jacob gasped and fell against my chest while I pumped into him. We were both sticky with sweat and semen, the smell of sex pervaded the air.

Jacob smiled at me with a glister of lust in his eyes.

Utterly spent, I pulled his head to my chest and lay there while sleep rolled over my mind and I was out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The ring of my phone was what woke me. It always startled me when it rang, because I was called so rarely. Usually it was just Pat calling to ask for a ride somewhere, or to take Lisa to the dialysis center. My arm slapped across the bed as I fumbled for the damn thing, knocking it around before getting a proper grasp. At that moment I noticed I was alone, and clean.

Of course it was just a dream.

“Hello?” I murmured into the receiver.

I heard nothing.

“Hello? This is Luke.”

Again, nothing. With a frustrated sigh, I pulled the phone away and as it lit up I saw the name *Pat*. “Hello? Pat? It’s Luke. Are you all right?”

For a third time, I heard nothing. But then there was a small static, maybe a finger brushing the phone. Then a very quiet moan.

“Lisa? What’s wrong, baby?” I kept my voice kind. Another pained moan. “Okay. Lisa, you hang on, I’m coming to get you right now. All right? Stay on the phone with me.”

I threw on my clothes and sprinted out the door, not bothering to lock it. Pulling back from the lot, I crashed my rear bumper against a neighbor’s car and swore. But I drove anyway, trying to hear Lisa on the phone.

“Lisa? Baby. Talk to me. Come on now. Say something.”

Nothing but air.

Fuck! Lisa had a problem like this a year ago. Pat had left her alone to go get high.

I dialed 911 and got the practiced, mechanical voice of the operator.

“I just got a call from a little girl who I think it having serious issues with kidney failure. She sounded like she was in pain.”

“All right, sir, what was the address?”

“Five-thirteen Lincoln Avenue. Apartment twenty-two.” It took everything in my power to stay focused and calm, but part of me thought the dispatcher was being very cold.

“Are you with the girl, sir?”

“No. I’m driving to her and her mom’s place right now.”

The rest of the conversation was pretty simple, and I told them all I knew. When I saw the apartment complex in the distance I dropped my phone and heard the sound of the battery popping out.

Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit!

Her door was locked, but Pat always kept a key under her mat for her hook-ups to enter whenever they felt like it. So I found the key, unlocked the door, and rushed into the apartment. The piles of dirty dishes were attracting flies in the sink and the television was on cartoons.

“Pat?” I called out as I moved toward the couch in the living room. “Oh fuck!”

Pat was sitting sprawled out on the couch with her head back and eyes open. Her lips were blue, skin pale. She’d been dead for a while now. So while I panicked, I stormed through the apartment. It felt so much larger than it actually was while I tried to find Lisa. But when even her room turned up empty, I ran back out to my car. My trembling hands pushed the battery in and I turned it on.

I ran back up to Pat’s apartment, trying not to be drawn to the corpse on the couch. I called Pat’s phone as I stood in the center of the living room. Praying and hoping.

There it was. The familiar chaotic sound of Pat’s ringtone. It came from the kitchen.

“Please. Please,” I whispered while I wound around the counter and found Lisa on the ground, clutching her stomach. Kneeling, I scooped up the emaciated little girl and wept. She was so tiny as I held her against my chest.

Lisa didn't move, she didn't say anything. "It's okay Lisa. Stay with me. Just stay with me. The ambulance is on its way. Just stay with me." I kissed her forehead and licked away the cold sweat that came with that.

Lisa shivered for a moment before tensing against my body. Then with a final sigh, she went limp.

"No. No. Lisa! Lisa!" I cried as I pushed her hair from her face, but she was gone. Her eyes were closed, accepting. With nothing to do but hold the little girl, I wept and sobbed, while I waited in the kitchen, rocking her body against me.

It was like a dream. I had stopped crying by the time the ambulance arrived and they took Lisa from me. A pair of strong, open arms helped me to my feet. They asked me questions, but I didn't hear. They touched me, but I didn't feel. I looked at them, but I didn't see.

I was a cold man—broken and numb. The same feeling like after a deep cutting session, where I'd lost enough blood to be in another zone of consciousness.

So after the questions from officials and the profiling of my own psyche, I was released, assured I was just in shock but would be okay. Yes, I would be, after a lot of alcohol and a knife running down my thigh.

Driving home was odd. It was the middle of the night. While I sat on my couch and stared at the blank wall, I had a realization. I was jobless, friendless, and lost. There was no hope for me.

"Jacob?" I called out, my voice a queer shift in the air around me. There was no answer.

Moving to the bathroom, I pulled off the borrowed sweater I'd gotten at the hospital. I stared at myself in the mirror for a long time.

The physique I had spent years building now seemed so meaningless. Rippling muscles pulling my tanned skin taut were not an ugly sight. The

shredded midsection I was so frequently praised for was now nothing to me but a vain attempt for attention.

“You’re disgusting,” I scowled at the reflection. In that moment of self-loathing, I began laughing maniacally. “Of course he wasn’t real.” The idea seemed preposterous.

I’m alone. I will always be alone, and nobody will ever notice me. The solution was simple.

It was time to die.

CHAPTER NINE

“Here you are,” the teller said, her eyes never meeting mine. The woman played with her pen the few seconds it took me to gather the few hundred dollars in savings I had withdrawn. “Anything else I can do for you?” The detached, disinterested tone of her alto voice bothered me. And I was curious, was she always like that? The woman, named Sarah—according to her nameplate—fiddled with her fingers before glancing up at me. Her shining green eyes locked with mine for just one magic moment. And in them I saw something that was hurt.

“Are you all right?” I asked Sarah quietly. She plastered a fake grin and nodded. “No you’re not. Tell me, I won’t breathe a word.”

“I broke up with my boyfriend,” she admitted, gritting her teeth so that the muscles of her jaw flexed. “Nothing to worry about.”

“Are you going to school, Sarah?”

“Yup. Accounting. He said I was boring.” Her green eyes darted down to scan at the corners of her desk.

“Well. Maybe you are or maybe you aren’t. There’s no shame in being boring. I’m boring, and I know that even though I’m boring, I’m content.”

Sarah was about to speak in response but I took hold of her hands, leaning over the counter. I gripped them tight and pulled until her face was close to mine. She didn’t meet my eyes and she tensed, but she didn’t pull away or cry out.

“You have absolutely nobody that you need to prove anything to except yourself. A young woman needs only to look in the mirror and realize how far she can go if she lets herself.” And with that I dropped her hands, handed her a twenty and left the bank. The words came out of my mouth easily and they felt right. I didn’t hang around the bank after that, thinking people might be wary of my presence. So instead I wandered down the streets and gave random strangers some money. Dispersing my bills among the homeless and the weary.

Turning a corner, I still had about two hundred dollars left of my savings and noticed a very small black boy sitting on a bench. He was clearly poor, because his denim jacket was far too large, and his pants were the same big size. No shoes, and a terrible hat on his head that must have been chewed to pieces by an angry dog.

“Where’s your momma?” I asked the boy. He didn’t respond at first.

“She’s working,” he said. The boy kept his eyes down, but he swung his feet back and forth under the bench.

“Where is she working?”

“Inside the apartment.”

Oh. Nothing needed to be said, I understood clearly. “Can you do me a favor and give your momma something?”

This piqued his interest. He looked up at me with dark chocolate eyes. “Like what?”

I knelt down before him and handed him the wad of money in a small envelope.

“Give this to her, will you? It’s for her only, though. So don’t let anybody have it but your momma.”

The boy nodded, his eyes set with determination.

There was a strange air of freedom that came with having nothing. I found myself skipping a bit as I made my way into my apartment. Popping the cap off the whiskey, I downed it with wild abandon. Lighting a cigar, I smoked until I had none left.

With no sense of terror or hesitation I stumbled into my bedroom, razor in hand. Putting my head on my pillow, my legs down by the foot of the bed, and my back on the mattress comfortably, I sighed.

I slid the razor from my wrist down to the middle way of my forearm, then fumbled with the razor as I cut my other arm. It didn’t hurt, not but a small

tingle. Staring at the uneven texture of the ceiling, I smiled. The memories of my life, and the shit that it was, seemed insignificant as my blood pumped from my arms.

Jacob, the imaginary angel that I had started to feel affection for, was in the front of my thoughts. Shimmering blue eyes that stared into the deepest parts of me. His big hands that almost fit into my own gliding over my body as we made love. Dark hair that was cut short, but not so short that I couldn't pull on it. I thought of him as the world warped, and I began to fall asleep.

“Hey. Lucas, wake up,” Jacob said, shaking my shoulder until I opened my eyes. It was a slow process, as if I had forgotten how to lift my eyelids. His sparkling blue eyes were right before me and I took a weary breath.

“You came,” I whispered. My words sounded fuzzy as I sat up to give him a soft hug. My arms met behind his toned back, and he returned my embrace with a small kiss to my temple. “Why do I feel so strange?”

Jacob smiled and turned away, reaching down to yank his shirt off over his head. Giant, pearl white wings unfurled and filled my bedroom. The light that emanated from the angel was soft and comforting.

“You're dead,” he said without facing me.

It was true. I knew that I was dead. But there was such a strange peace filling my awareness that it seemed unimportant, the concept of my demise. Like a steel wall had been constructed between me and any feeling or sensation of pain, guilt, or sadness, effectively blocking out the negative emotions, leaving me stranded on the other side with only feelings of joy and peace.

“What happens now?” I asked, reaching out to stroke the length of a feather down his wing. I noticed there weren't any marks down my wrists where the razor had opened my veins. When Jacob turned to face me, I lay down on the bed to stare in wonder. His wings flexed and closed so he was able to turn completely. Then he knelt and spread them once more, filling the entire width of the room.

He was so beautiful, it was astounding to see him bathed in such pleasing light. Something was different, though. His strong hand came up to brush across my left cheek, and I tilted my chin to meet the touch.

“I want to give you a gift. But it’s only if you want it.” The smile on his pink, soft lips spread until the skin around his eyes bunched and his eyes sparkled.

I nodded dumbly. “Am I going to Hell?” I asked. Despite the worry I knew I should have felt, there was a strange numbness in my mind as the angel gazed into my eyes.

He leaned forward, moving closer between my thighs until all I could see was the strip that ran from one eye to the other. His forehead pressed against mine and he exhaled, deep and calming.

“No. I want you to join me as a guardian,” Jacob breathed, moving down to press a chaste kiss to my lips. “You have done everything that was needed. You’ve earned your wings, Lucas Turner.”

“But... how? Everyone is dead. Everyone is... gone.”

“My love. Lisa was meant to die young. And she died happily in your arms. You were her angel. Pat died peacefully too, with your beauty in her thoughts. That little boy you gave your money to? He really did give it to his mother. And she’s going to use it to buy herself a business suit, enter a multi-level marketing company and excel. She’s going to send her son to college and he’s going to develop a machine that will save millions of lives. You were his angel.”

My eyes were downcast, focused on the thrum of Jacob’s pulse at the base of his throat. “I was always an angel?”

Jacob nodded, his lips curved up in a gentle smile.

“What about me killing myself? Or being gay?”

At that the angel before me chuckled. “Nobody is hated in heaven. And your death is forgiven, as it was meant to be. Please, come with me.”

But I didn't move. Was this real? Or was it just a dream before my true death? I could have just been bleeding out this entire time.

"Don't you dare," Jacob announced, and his strong arms furred around me as he pulled me close. "This is real. I'm real, you're real. And I love you."

Love? Yes... love.

"I love you too," I sighed, and gave a soft exhale when he kissed me. Deep and forceful, his lips parted and his tongue slid into my mouth. With a groan he moved me onto my back, and I was melted muscle and bone in his embrace. When he pulled back, a single tear ran down his nose and fell upon my cheek.

"Now sleep, Lucas. Sleep and awaken reborn," he cooed into my ear as my eyes grew heavy and sleep seemed inevitable. Everything seemed okay for once. A lonely past was forgotten, and a broken heart was mended by a series of events that led to a fate I could have never imagined. As my mind closed in on itself, I could feel my mouth form a smile and a soft pair of lips pressed against me once more.

My eyes closed, and I did not see darkness. There was light, warm and welcoming. I dreamed of Jacob, the angel who had been present for my life and carefully guided me in the direction I was meant to go. He was my angel, my guard.

"Jacob," I whispered as my life slipped from my body, and I was lifted by strong arms from the world and into an endless sky where my true life would begin.

THE END

Author Bio

Mitchell E. Sanford is a young man who dreams of sharing stories with the world around him. Using his imagination to weave stories of sorrow, loss, joy, and pain, he tries to create worlds that are both gritty and hopeful.

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