

AN EASTER
ANGEL

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AN EASTER ANGEL

There once was a boy named Angel, who, either because of his name or for some other reason, saw angels all around him.

Whenever he looked towards the heavens, he saw them in their rainbowed magnificence singing in massed choirs to the glory of God. Yet he also saw them on Earth, either in their true form or in human guise, affecting daily the affairs of humankind under orders from above.

In an earlier time, he would have been considered holy, but in our time he was considered disturbed. Even though his parents were religious, they viewed his frequent visions of angels not as a gift but as an aberration, and they sent him for treatment, first to a doctor, who treated him with medications, then to a psychiatrist, who treated him with more sophisticated medications, and finally to a psychologist, who treated him with six months of behavior modification.

Nothing seemed to work. Angel continued to see angels and to delight in their presence. As he grew older, however, he became more cautious about telling anyone what he was seeing, and so little by little his parents' worry receded, and under the cover of silence Angel began to live what seemed on the surface to be a normal life.

Even so, underneath that cloak of silence, what glories filled Angel's days and nights! Whenever he

could, he stood alone in the back yard of his house staring at angels swarming like giant birds among the drifting clouds. Their magnificent wings beat slowly as they congregated in the heavens, singing, always singing their joy, though Angel could hear them only rarely, and then only faintly, for they were very far away.

For Angel, the roof of the earthly sphere was transparent, and he could see very clearly the heavenly sphere above, even at times through the masses of angels and saints to the throne of God, where the Lord sat surrounded by His choirs, rejoicing in the beauty of His creation.

One day, however, when Angel was eight years old, a child in his class at school asked the teacher how children on the other side of the world could look up in a direction that would seem to us to be down. The teacher answered that "up" and "down" depended on where one was standing, and illustrated this idea by having the class line up on opposite sides of the room and pointing out that what was right to one side of the room was left to the other.

"The same is true for people on opposite sides of the Earth," he said. "Gravity holds you down with your feet on the ground. 'Up' is away from your feet; 'down' is towards your feet. Everything is relative to where you are standing."

This graphic lesson in relativity touched the flower of Angel's imagination like an icy finger, freezing it, shriveling it up. If "up" were merely a relative direction, where was Heaven? How could he

actually have seen angels above him? Did the heavenly sphere completely surround the earthly sphere, so that it was as much above a child in Australia as it was above him?

Once Angel began to worry about the precise placement of Heaven, his visions of angels became fewer and fewer, more and more dreamlike, until finally they disappeared altogether.

A few months later, Angel's family had just sat down to Easter dinner when the doorbell rang. Angel ran to answer it.

At the door was a tall, well-built young man dressed in black.

"Angel?" he said. "May I come in?"

Angel stood aside to let him in and then accompanied him to the table, where, unaccountably, a place had been set for him.

"Welcome!" Angel's father greeted him as he sat down at his place. "Everyone is welcome at our Easter table. And your name?"

"Angel," the stranger said. "The same as your son."

The little family joined hands for their usual prayer. "Lord, thank you for the gift of life, and for the food we are about to eat. Amen."

They were about to drop hands and begin eating when Angel the angel added, "And for faith in You and in Your angels, which allows us to believe in a world of goodness and love, and to hope for eternal life."

"Amen," they all said, and began to eat.

The conversation quickly turned to angels, whom Angel the angel maintained existed only for those who believed in them.

"That's impossible!" Angel's father said.

"Something either exists or it doesn't."

"These words I'm speaking aren't sound until they touch your ear," Angel the angel said. "Until then they are merely waves of air. Nor are they words until the sounds are interpreted by your brain."

"But that's to me," Angel's father said. "To you they are words the moment you say them."

"Just so," Angel the angel answered. "As you can see, they exist in relation to one's perception of them."

He turned to Angel. "Do you understand?"

"I used to see angels all the time," Angel said. "They were all around me. Above me and by me and everywhere."

"But that's because you believed in them."

"Do you mean that now that I don't believe in them, they're not there?"

"Of course. What is there for you is only what you believe in."

"Aren't some things just true, whether you believe in them or not?" Angel's father asked. "The world is round regardless of whether you believe it's flat."

"To the contrary," Angel the angel said. "For you it's flat until you believe it's round."

"For you, yes," Angel's father agreed. "But for real?"

Angel the angel sighed. "Take today," he said. "It's Easter. Now the question is: Is Jesus the son of God? Did He die to cleanse our sins? Was He resurrected? Does believing in Him lead to eternal life?"

"Does it?" Angel's mother asked anxiously. It was the first thing she said since Angel the angel had arrived.

"Simple," Angel the angel said. "If you believe in Him and in His love, it does. If you don't, it doesn't."

"But it has to be either true or false," Angel's father insisted. "Just believing in something doesn't make it so."

"Believing in something is precisely what makes it so. How could someone who doesn't believe in it have eternal life?"

"How could someone who does believe in it have eternal life, unless eternal life exists?"

Again, Angel the angel sighed and turned to Angel. "Do you understand?"

Angel shook his head from side to side to indicate that he didn't.

"Come," Angel the angel said, holding out his hand. Suddenly they had left the dinner table and were flying through space. All around them stars and galaxies glowed like jewels in the distance, while where they were was a silence and emptiness in which they barely seemed to move.

"You were wondering," Angel the angel said, "where in this endless and magnificent universe Heaven might be."

He reached up and ran his hand rapidly down across the blackness, as though cutting through a black veil with the blade of a carpet knife. The blackness parted, and there was Heaven, just as Angel had previously imagined it from below, with masses of angels standing on enormous pink and gold clouds, singing praises to the Lord.

God Himself sat on a throne almost dissolved in blinding golden light, and in front of Him Jesus bloody and half-naked, as though just emerged from His tomb, with holes in His hands and feet and a long, ugly cut across his left side. Still, he was smiling brightly, holding a pure white dove in His bloody hands, and from the dove came rays of white light that lit up even the brilliant gold of the area around the throne.

Angel tried to step through the tear in the black veil of space, but Angel the angel barred his way.

"Not yet," he said. "It isn't time. We must return now to Earth."

Instantly, Angel was sitting back at Easter dinner with his family. His mother and father were clearing away the serving platters and large dinner plates in preparation for dessert. There was no place next to him for Angel the angel. It was as if the black-clad stranger had never come to the door.

"Do you understand now?" he heard Angel the angel whisper to him from nowhere, from everywhere.

"Yes," Angel thought back to him, knowing that the angel was hearing his thoughts. "Yes, I think I understand."

And from then on, even to the end of his life, Angel was able to see angels both in Heaven and on Earth, taking great pleasure in their beauty. The gift that had almost been taken away from him was returned, and although he continued to look up towards Heaven, he now knew better than to wonder where in the universe it might be.