



SHADES OF MORNING

By Marlo Schalesky

Excerpt provided courtesy of www.MarloSchalesky.com

Autumn snow fell like fat angels fluttering to earth.

Emmit sat on the snowbank, his eyes closed, his head tipped back. He was a snowflake too, drifting on the breeze. Cold nibbled at his wings. Ice kissed his lashes. He stuck out his tongue and caught a flake. Why did the snow always melt away just when he finally got some? He reached up and scratched his too-small ears with a too-small hand. Then he adjusted his heavy, coke-bottle glasses.

Something whispered in the wind. He held his breath and listened with all his might. He could almost hear the voices telling him that today he was fifteen years old. It was a big number. They all said so. He was a big boy now. All grown up.

And that meant it was time for the prayer to be answered. Not some little prayer about sniffly noses and friends at school. Not one about nice weather or where to park a car. This prayer was important. It was about love. It was about family. And God always answered those.

Especially today.

Emmit wiggled deeper into the snow. The flakes fell in heavier clumps. He opened his eyes and waited.

The pretty light would be coming soon. The big whirring one on top of the truck that picked up the garbage from the cans on the street. He liked the light. Round and round. Round and round. It would come.

A screen door slammed. He looked back, over his shoulder. A puffy white coat stood on the doorstep with a matching hat perched atop wisps of brown hair. The coat waved.

Emmit waved back. That's how a mom should look. White coat, pink smile peeking from between collar and hat.

"Mighty cold out here, sweetie." She motioned toward the snow as she spoke.

Emmit grinned. "I wait for pretty light."

She nodded and trudged to the mailbox by the street. The box creaked when she opened it.

Then the pretty light came with a chug, a squeal, and the grinding of gears. The light turned and turned, made its way around the corner and up the street.

Emmit watched it. "Pretty light! Pretty light!" He called out to her, but she didn't turn. Instead she stood there, hunched over a stack of white envelopes in her gloved hand.

The wind gusted.

The whirring light rumbled closer. Closer.

Then it happened. A little thing. A simple thing. It shouldn't have mattered at all. But it did.

An envelope skittered from her hand, blew into the street. She went after it.

He stood up. "Stop!" But he couldn't stop it. Couldn't stop her. And worse, he couldn't stop the lights.

Her boot hit ice. It slipped from under her. Envelopes mixed with the angels in the air.

Fluttering, flying, drifting on the breeze.

But they weren't angels. Not at all.

Emmit yelled and yelled. But it didn't help. So he closed his eyes, plugged his ears. He held his breath. But that didn't matter either. He still heard the terrible squeal. The dull thud.

And then, the awful silence.

He peeked out and saw her, a still, white blob on a dirty, white street.

The whirring light stopped.

Emmit sat down and cried into the drifting snow. But that didn't make any difference either.

She didn't get up. She didn't move. No matter how much he cried.

Later other lights came. Red and blue and more yellow. Lights on a black-and-white car.

Lights on a big red fire engine. Lights on a white van with the letters A-M-B-U-L-A-N-C-E printed real big on the side.

They weren't pretty lights. He didn't like them at all.

He shivered. But no one noticed him. They just buzzed around the new lights like bugs.

They weren't bugs. But they still buzzed and shouted and flew away.

And he just kept sitting there, tears freezing on his cheeks, a cold fist rubbing his wet nose.

How could this be the answer? This didn't seem like any answer at all.

This seemed like everything gone all wrong.

He wiped the ice from his face, laid back in the snow, and moved his arms and legs up and down, up and down. Three times to make the image of an angel in the bank.

A perfect angel. A snow angel. Just for her. Because she was what a mom should be.

Because he loved her too. Because she was gone.

The new lights took her.

And then, the snow stopped falling.

* * *

Marnie Helen Wittier hated baby showers. She also hated her middle name, but that was another story. What mattered now was that despite her intense dislike of powder pink balloons, little crocheted socks, and cheap plastic baby bottles, she now wove in and out of handmade tables at her own coffee shop, offering flowered-dressed women fresh pumpkin-shaped cookies and specialty lattes.

The only thing worse would be if she had to wear one of those foo-foo dresses. But a gal had to draw the line somewhere. If not at pink balloons and pastel teacups, then at least at swaying dresses and—gasp!—high heels. She wouldn't be caught dead in heels.

But she could put up with pretty tulips on the tables, the pink and white streamers, and that ridiculous "It's a Girl!" papier-mâché sign, because this shower was for Kinna Henley. And if anyone deserved the perfect baby shower, that woman did. After all last

year's troubles piled onto years of infertility, Kinna had earned the best shower Marnie could think of.

That's the only reason she'd said "of course" when those ladies from the church asked to hold the event here.

Still, that didn't stop her from snatching a pink napkin, scrawling the words *hosting a baby shower...what was I thinking???* on it, and stuffing it in her pocket. The napkin would go into her box of regrets later. A reminder to never, ever to do anything this stupid again . . .

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