

BOOK ONE · THE GUARDIAN TRILOGY

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep



DIANNE LYNN AUCHAMP

*“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
Angels watch me through the night,
And wake me with the morning light”*
– 18th Century Prayer

THE GUARDIAN TRILOGY

By

Dianne Lynn Auchamp

BOOK 1

***NOW I LAY ME
DOWN TO SLEEP***

BOOK 2

***I PRAY THE LORD
MY SOUL TO KEEP***

BOOK 3

***ANGELS WATCH ME
THROUGH THE NIGHT***

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

Book One of the Guardian Trilogy

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Prologue

The Guardian Trilogy is a multi-generational narrative that follows the intertwined lives of five individuals: Emily, Charlie, Michelle, Annie, and Mathew, over several decades, from 1957 onward.

Their lives are secretly observed and occasionally influenced by Quinton, an angel assigned to be their guardian as a form of "punishment" that evolves into a profound responsibility and duty.

The story begins with each character in a state of turmoil or transition.



Emily is a young girl overshadowed by a new baby brother, finding solace only with her grandfather until his sudden death leaves her heartbroken.

Michelle is trapped in a cold, loveless marriage, turning to alcohol to cope with her husband Keith's emotional distance.

Charlie is a wealthy, hedonistic playboy living a superficial life of parties and fleeting relationships.

Mathew is a young boy living with the trauma of an abusive father whose subsequent death is shrouded in secrecy.

Annie is a grieving widow who finds new purpose by becoming a compassionate neighbour and surrogate grandmother to Mathew.

Guided by their unseen guardian Angel, Quinton, they navigate life's many challenges, suffering, and joys. Often, their paths cross in subtle and significant ways.

1 · Emily-1957

The only grandchild, on both sides of the family, Emily had received the undivided attention of almost all the grownups in her life. This ended when the stork brought her a baby brother. She heard people say that he would carry forward the family name. She had no idea what this meant but knew that it made her father very happy.

Feeling invisible, resentment grew in her four-year-old heart. Had it not been for her maternal grandfather, the only person who seemed impervious to the new arrival, this might have turned into something far more toxic.

* * *

Granddad fetched her most week-day mornings, only returning her home in time for lunch. She always missed him over the weekend. Her mother would placate her, telling her that he'd collect her bright and early come Monday morning. Most days he arrived only after breakfast, but alternate Wednesdays were special.

On this particular mid-winter's Wednesday morning, he'd let himself in while the rest of the household still slept. Helping her into layers of clothing, he buttoned her up in her warmest coat, wrapped a knitted scarf around her neck and placed a matching beret on her head. "Get your mittens and we can get on the road," he said.

Granddad regularly took her on outings to the park and zoo, but most of all she enjoyed this fortnightly visit to Uncle Cecil who owned a racing stable.

Ensnconced on the seat next to granddad, tartan throw covering her legs, she breathed in the distinctive combination of leather and granddad's pipe tobacco. If her grandfather found her constant chatter annoying, he gave no hint of it. He answered her questions with good humour and elaborated, at times, with anecdotes from his own childhood. Snug and happy, Emily enjoyed every moment of the drive out to the countryside. In later years, she would look back on those trips as a time when she had felt absolutely-safe and loved.

* * *

Once at the stables, granddad placed her bright-red rainboots on her feet. They proceeded directly to the training track, where Uncle Cecil shouted out instructions to diminutive men astride powerful prancing creatures. One of the jockeys brought his mount right up to the rail. The animal snorted plumes of vapour which hung like smoke in the cold air. He looks like a fire breathing dragon, thought Emily. She loved stories about dragons.

For some time, they watched the men put the horses through their paces. Then they followed Uncle Cecil to a compound, which consisted of an exercise yard bounded by an office that took up the full length of the short side of a large u-shaped building. Two rows of stables constituted the long sides.

The office was a fascinating space, the walls decorated with horse photographs. Every flat surface, other than the desk, groaned under silver trophies, rosettes and horse ornaments.

Emily settled in her usual comfortable chair near the fireplace. Heads bent, over an array of little books and scraps of paper, the men studied form. She didn't know exactly what form meant, but she knew that it elicited a great deal of very animated conversation.

After a while, Mrs Guthrie, the housekeeper of the manor house, appeared carrying a tray laden with enormous buttered scones, tea for the men and hot chocolate for Emily.

She served Emily first, complimenting her on her red coat and rosy cheeks. Then removing a quilted tea cosy, made from cheerful fabric, she poured the tea and withdrew.

Emily couldn't finish the scone but drained her mug and asked to be excused.

Granddad warned her not to go near the horses. "The one end bites and the other kicks," he said, as he always did.

Passing between two long rows of stalls, Emily thought the horses very beautiful. One nickered softly, others stopped chewing to watch her progress. Dylan's Luck, a mean natured animal, against which she'd been especially warned, kicked over his mash bucket.

The room at the end of the corridor held her focus. Sadie, Uncle Cecil's basset hound had, five weeks earlier, whelped a litter there. Disappointed when not allowed to hold a puppy the previous time, she'd

been mollified by one of the stable hands. The man assured her that she'd be able to play with them when next she visited.

The tack room smelled of dubbin, leather, and hay. At the far end, a groom sat applying elbow grease to a work-saddle. Looking up, he smiled, a lopsided grin which revealed several missing teeth. "What can I do for you young Miss."

"I've come to visit Sadie," she said, her eyes going to the corner where Sadie's whelping box had stood.

The little ones were starting to get underfoot and had been moved, explained the man, indicating a spot under the stairs which led to the loft. Emily saw that a cosy sleeping area and playpen had been created by using a barricade of hay-bales.

Picking her up, the groom placed her inside the enclosure. Sadie lifted her head and, as usual, her mournful countenance made it difficult to deduce whether she welcomed the visit. Alongside her, six fat sausages slept and the remaining two tugged mercilessly at her nipples. "The little blighters have teeth and are lucky she still allows them to suckle," chuckled the groom, leaning in to detach the pair. The first allowed him to separate it from its mother but the second fought to hold on. "The runt," he laughed, "and greediest by far."

Hoisting Sadie over the barricade, he groaned. "You don't get any lighter, do you lass," he joked before turning back to Emily. "Call me when you are ready to leave."

She could hear the clip-clop of Sadie's nails on the floor as she followed the man to his work station. Little bodies milled about her feet, tumbling one over the other as they vied for her attention. It was all a bit overwhelming. Taking to the only place available, an old steamer trunk, she encircled her knees with her arms.

Without any distraction, the animals turned to serious play and formed bundles of stout flailing little legs, tails whipping about like white tipped antennae.

The runt separated itself from the rest and came to whine at the base of Emily's refuge. Hopping down, she lifted it onto the trunk and clambered back up. The little creature immediately took up residence on her lap. She delighted in the warm weight across her knees. Stroking the long silky ears, she spoke to the puppy as she did to the stuffed toys back home. Whereas the toys simply stared back at her through their cold glass eyes, the puppy rewarded her with licks and wags.

Her mother had made it clear that she did not value the encumbrance of pets. Granddad, however, though he complained that he was too old to deal with a puppy, had agreed that she could select one. The puppy would be hers in name, but live at his house.

"I'll call you Sally," she said, placing a kiss on the silky little head.

Granddad came looking for her and, to her immense disappointment, said that Sally was too young to leave her mommy. "She will be ready next time," he promised.

2 · *Charlie*

Charlie Sinclair attended the best schools and went on to read law at Oxford. As a graduation gift he received a red Aston Martin Spider, and joined the family firm, a financial brokerage. Charlie liked to joke that in the three years since his graduation he hadn't worked a day. Anyone, who saw him routinely arrive at the office after ten, and leave an hour or so later for lunch, might well have agreed with this sentiment. However, his ability to wine and dine clients with *savoir faire* had landed business of the sort that launched Sinclair and Sinclair into the big leagues.

Sporting the best of Savile Row tailoring, Charlie appeared regularly in the social pages with a plethora of starlets and models. He quickly earned the label *Good-time Charlie*. The term had been coined years back, referring to any young man with an affinity for womanising and partying. It was as if his parents had glimpsed the future when naming him, a well-known social columnist was heard to joke. Charlie embraced the title and, rather than deterring people with serious money, it drew them to him.

He'd always excelled at sport, especially tennis and cricket but neither fitted into his new city lifestyle, and so he turned to Squash. Four evenings a week, he'd sweat out the excesses of the previous evening on the court of an exclusive club. Returning to his bachelor flat, he'd shower and dress for an evening on the town.

Many weekends were spent at the family estate, where house parties kicked off on Friday afternoon, the last guests leaving late Sunday. On these occasions, Charlie kept his hand in at tennis, and weather permitting he'd saddle up Lucifer, a magnificent Arabian that had been given to him by his father on his 21st birthday.

The flavour of the weekend, some who were at home in the saddle and others who provided moments of hilarity, would accompany him on these rides. Most of these excursions were followed by a picnic for two under the oaks. Life could not have been better for Charlie Sinclair.

3 . *Michelle*

Michelle and Keith's 6th wedding anniversary approached and she found herself thinking about how they'd met. Keith, a distant cousin of her mother, had visited on Remembrance-day of 1952. Father said that Keith had received a medal for courage under fire.

They attended a ceremony at the war memorial, and later tucked into roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

At first, conversation surrounded the new queen and the monumental task ahead of her. Then, after much urging Keith told stories about sorties flown over Hitler's-Europe.

Not knowing that he avoided discussing the more harrowing events of war, it all sounded incredibly exciting to Michelle's naïve young ears. Keith, in his air force uniform, was the most handsome man she'd ever seen. Before joining her father in the library after dinner, he'd removed the red poppy from his lapel and tucked it behind her ear, while quoting an abridged form of a well-known poem. *"In Flanders fields, the poppies blow between the crosses, row on row. If ye break faith with us who die we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields,"*

The poem spoke of blood and death but to her it sounded like pure romance

* * *

7 months after her sixteenth birthday, they wed at the local parish church. People whispered that it was a marriage of necessity and they

were right, but Keith, ten years her senior, made her feel loved, cherished. Yet, as her pregnancy advanced, he withdrew. Claiming work pressures, he'd arrive home, knock back a scotch, eat his dinner and retire to bed.

Feeling alone and isolated she would join him with a book, but most evenings he'd peck her on the cheek and, pulling the blankets over his head, turn his back to her.

"Many men behave that way when their wives are pregnant," said Eve, her neighbour and new friend. "My own Jack was terrified that he'd injure the baby."

One night, as Michelle read, he began to mumble in his sleep; the words were unintelligible but the anguish unmistakable. In the morning, she questioned him and he claimed not to recall the dream, but she knew that he lied. After that, she often woke to find him moaning in his sleep. Over time she pieced together, not from anything to which he admitted but, from his mumblings, that he dreamed about the war. She became convinced that his strange moods and coldness were linked to these ghosts from the past.

* * *

After the birth of a baby boy, lovemaking dwindled from seldom to not at all. Michelle accepted that more children were not on the cards. Two years later, after they'd been out celebrating their wedding anniversary, something they did to maintain appearances, they'd continued drinking and somehow landed up making love. Nine months later twin girls were born.

Life settled into one of routine domesticity. At times, Michelle regretted the fact that she'd never enjoyed more carefree years like most of her childhood friends, all of whom were no longer friends. At times she longed for the closeness some married couples enjoyed, but it never occurred to her that her life could be any different. Besides, Keith was a good provider. God had blessed them with healthy children. To wish for more was surely ungrateful.

4 . *Annie*

Annie and her husband Clive travelled abroad every summer. They'd just booked a berth on the Queen Elizabeth, for a voyage from Southampton to New York, when Clive was diagnosed with advanced cancer. Four months later he lost the short battle. He'd made Annie promise that she'd go ahead with the trip to spend time with their daughter and her family, who had moved to New York the summer before.

* * *

The time in New York was bittersweet, and Annie returned to the village as the first leaves began to fall. Rattling around the big house, she took to leaving the radio on all day, to drown out the silence, not that it really helped.

Her neighbours of thirty years had moved into an old-age-home while she was away. She missed the comfort of knowing that they were there. She had been home less than two weeks when the new neighbours moved in; a couple with a young son.

Watching them, she wished that she could go back in time to when Julia had romped on the lawn and peddled her tricycle up and down the driveway.

Then, she witnessed something she wished she hadn't. Standing next to the stove, frying up some sausages, her attention was drawn to the other side of the room. A flowerpot had, somehow, fallen from the window ledge into the sink. A Morris Minor pulled into the driveway next

door. The man of the house, whom she'd heard referred to as Gus, stepped around the car to open the passenger door. It was always nice to see a husband who treated his wife with courtesy, she thought. To her horror, the man pulled his wife out by the hair. The woman fought to get loose but he dragged her down the driveway and into the house.

Annie stood rooted to the spot until the pan on the stove caught fire. This jolted her back. Using a lid to stifle the flames, she dialled the number of the local police station. Fifteen minutes later, a constable arrived at the neighbour's front step. The door opened and she could see that it was the woman of the house. The two conversed for approximately a minute and the man left.

She'd heard it said that the police hated interfering in domestic disputes. At best the woman usually denied the abuse and, in extreme cases, she might physically attack the responding officer. Thankfully, her neighbour didn't resort to violence, but she did send the officer off with some or other concocted explanation.

Annie fretted over what had transpired. If the woman chose to remain in harm's way, then it was her business, but there was an innocent young boy involved. A man who abused his wife could just as easily abuse his child.

Fetching Clive's binoculars from the attic, she began to flat-out spy on the family. There were times when she felt silly and at other's almost deviant, but she couldn't give up until she was sure that the boy was safe. For weeks everything seemed normal with the little family. They

appeared to be a happy cohesive unit. She even began to wonder whether she'd imagined the incident.

5 . Mathew

Mathew's mother joked about her clumsiness. He hadn't seen her hit her eye on the kitchen cabinet, something she seemed to do quite a bit, nor had he seen her falling down to leave bruises on her arm, but he happily accepted the explanations.

He sometimes sensed that she might be afraid of his father, but with light hearted words she'd dispel any such impression.

Then, on one perfectly normal day, when hearing a commotion outside, he peered through the curtains to see his father yelling in his mother's face. She had been in the process of taking washing from the line. and held the laundry basket between them for protection.

Without thinking, Mathew rushed to her aid, getting between them. When he refused to move, his father forcefully pushed him away. Stumbling backwards, Mathew struck his head on a rock, briefly losing consciousness.

When he came to, the faces of his mother and the lady next door hovered above him. Tears were streaming down his mother's face and the lady looked very angry. He saw his father sitting on the back step, head in his hands. Everything came back into focus and he remembered what had happened. "We must get him to the doctor," said the lady from next door.

His mother pulled the woman aside. Mathew could see that the lady wasn't happy about something, but with a shrug of the shoulders she

walked back to him. “I’m taking you to the doctor to have your head looked at,” she said.

Her words focused him on something that felt wet at the back of his head. Exploring the spot with his fingers, he discovered that he was bleeding. It occurred to him that seeing a doctor might get his father in trouble. “I’m fine,” he replied, scrambling to his feet. Dizziness had him clutching at the woman’s skirt.

“Mathew, go with the lady,” mother instructed. Father stayed exactly where he was, and the neighbour lady firmly led Mathew away.

* * *

The neighbour lady asked to have a chat with the doctor before he saw Mathew. Sitting alone in the waiting room, Mathew wondered whether he’d be able to leg-it out the door.

The Lady behind the desk smiled reassuringly at him. “Doctor Daniel is very nice,” she said, and offered him a comic book.

Mathew had seen the odd Beano before and he enjoyed the illustrations. Shyly taking the comic from her and flipping through it, he unconsciously reached for the back of his head. The wound had become a sticky mat of blood and hair. It hurt when he touched it.

The neighbour lady appeared in a passageway which ran past the side of the reception desk. She beckoned for him to join her and led him to a small room.

She helped him up onto a high bed, just as a man entered the room. introducing himself as Doctor Daniel. Doctor Daniel had kind eyes and did, indeed, seem to be very nice.

Gently cleaning the wound with cotton-wool and warm water, the man chatted about injuries he'd sustained as a child. These had led to anything from stitches to a plaster-cast. Mathew suspected that he was trying to establish whether Mathew's father had ever hurt him before. Without letting on that he understood, he truthfully shared that other than the odd skinned knee or elbow, and the one time he'd cut his finger on a tin can, he hadn't suffered any injuries.

Assessing the gash to be nothing serious, Doctor Daniel treated it with mercurochrome. He then warned the neighbour lady that Mathew needed to be monitored for concussion.

Mathew spent that night at the neighbour's house. It would give his parents time to talk things out, she explained. Besides, she had promised the doctor that she personally would monitor him.

When Mathew returned home the next day, his father wasn't there. His mother explained that the man would be spending some time at a place that would help him control his anger. When he returned home just before the festive season, things were wonderful.

Mathew helped his mother decorate the house. Ten days before the big day they tackled the tree, adorning it with tinsel, glass-baubles and lights. Father hoisted him onto his shoulders so that he could place the angel on the very top.

On Christmas-Day, father's family came to lunch and it was a festive affair with piles of presents. The gifts Mathew liked best were toy soldiers and a View-Finder with a set of Peter Pan reels.

After Christmas, father drove him and his mother to visit her parents. Unfortunately, he had to return home for work but would fetch them a week later, he said.

6 · *Quinton*

I began my duties as guardian with ill grace. Viewing it as punishment, I started out with the premise that I'd hate every moment.

Of the five placed in my care, Michelle, immediately frustrated me the most. Her self-deprecating acceptance, of her lot in life. makes me want to shake her. I have seen people, in far worse situations, fight against their circumstances and win, while Michelle simply loses herself bit by bit.

Daily, she carries out monotonous chores, and but for the occasional tea date with friends, both a decade older, her only companions are her children.

On the last weekend of every month, her parents visit for Sunday lunch. With the house scrubbed and polished, the children in their best outfits, and Keith on good behaviour, she portrays her life as idyllic.

Every Sunday after they leave, while Keith sits glued to the television, she clears the table, washes the dishes and returns the kitchen to its usual sparkling state. Then she bathes the children, puts them to bed and locks herself in the bathroom. She cries, until the pain of pretence and the knowledge that the pretence will never become reality, subsides.

Keith has started coming home late, claiming overtime at the office. Michelle meekly accepts this. She does not believe him, but will not question him about it. To do so might result in being forced to take some form of action. Besides, since this new development, Keith no longer has

nightmares. For the first time, in years, Michelle regularly enjoys undisturbed sleep.

Unwilling to concede failure, unable to admit to the humiliation of a failed marriage, she continues to search for ways of winning her husband's love.

I have watched her prepare special meals and sit alone, at the romantically set tables, until the candles burn down. I watched, as she sat in the bay window waiting in vain for Keith to collect her for a long-anticipated evening at the theatre. I watched as she spent her birthday alone because Keith hadn't even remembered. I watched her wrap Christmas presents alone, tears streaming down her cheeks. I wondered when she'd rebel and, eventually, she did but in the most self-destructive way possible.

* * *

Four-year-old Emily is a totally different experience. I am amazed to discover that I find her interesting. Seldom does she entertain the sort of things I'd imagined might occupy little people's minds. The child sees the world through eyes of wonderment. Somehow, she finds magic in the most mundane of things.

I watched her collect acorns at the farm. On the road back, she admired her treasures. Polishing each acorn with a delicate handkerchief. She marvelled at the individuality of each, admired the rich brown markings. Removing the little caps, she imagined them on the heads of fairies.

When grandfather stopped at a petrol station, she fixed her attention on the logo. "Have you ever seen a flying horse, granddad?" she asked.

Granddad shook his head. “That’s Pegasus,” he explained, “Pegasus is the horse of the Gods.”

Emily frowned. “Why is he red?”

Granddad smiled at her. “I think that the petrol company just decided to make him red, but my mother told me that he is actually snow white.”

Emily took a few moments to digest this information. “Then he must be an angel horse,” she announced, “because look.... he has angel wings.”

Perhaps,” said granddad.

Emily prattled on, and I mused over the belief that angels sported wings. This had existed in popular mythology since the days of the Old Testament, and many angels adopted wings in accordance with this. I have never felt the need to follow the practice but, from now on, when I guard over this child, I will do so.

On the evening of the visit to the stables, a sense of unease overtook me, urging me to hasten to the side of not Emily, but her grandfather. In a blink, I transported myself to the old man’s bedroom. On the floor, hands clutched to his chest, the man stared up at me in amazement. “You’re an angel,” he croaked, and with those three words I realised two things; I had subconsciously conjured wings, and the man had but seconds left to live. “Look after Emily,” he whispered with his last breath.

“I shall,” I promised, and realised something else. Guarding over Emily now felt less like duty and more like privilege.

I stayed with Emily as she waited for her grandfather to fetch her for their morning together. I was there when Emily's mother grew concerned. I was there when Emily's father, after setting off to check on the man, phoned with the sad news. I stood by helplessly as the family absorbed the loss.

That night, Emily cried herself to sleep and in the early hours of the morning, began to toss and turn. Waking suddenly, she sat bolt upright and stared directly at me. "Did you take my granddad to heaven?" she asked.

Taken aback, I shook my head in denial.

"Oh," she responded, in a matter-of-fact-tone and went back to sleep.

I wasn't sure that she'd remember me, when she woke, but she did. Over breakfast she told her mother all about it.

"It was probably just a dream," said the woman.

"It wasn't a dream," protested Emily, and pushing away her bowl of porridge began to sob.

I had promised myself that I would not form an emotional bond with any of my charges. I knew, at that moment, that I'd be unable to abide by the promise.

7. *Daniel*

Daniel Rutherford had been blessed with loving, supportive parents who believed in him and taught him to believe in himself. He excelled at both academics and sports. Universities vied for him, and it was expected that he would follow in his father's footsteps by studying law before moving on to a career in politics. When he announced that he wanted to take time off to travel, his father endorsed the idea. "I wish I'd done something like that," he said.

After six months of backpacking across Australia, Daniel found himself in Africa, and so began a love-affair with the "dark continent". It was a dangerous place, with widespread poverty, but pulsed with energy and made him feel electrifyingly alive.

Returning home, he began his studies, not in law, as had been expected, but medicine. After graduating, he won a residency in a top London hospital.

On the last day of this residency, his father drove down to London, and over dinner delivered a surprise; Daniel now held a fifty-percent partnership in the village practice. The very practice he'd visited as a child, and then throughout his years in secondary school with a variety of sport related injuries. Some of his more ambitious compatriots would be horrified at the thought of landing up in a medical backwater, but not Daniel. He hadn't enjoyed the impersonal nature of a large hospital and relished the idea of getting to know his patients. Postponing his plans to

do volunteer work in Africa, he settled for donating a couple of weeks a year to *Doctors Without Borders*.

Towards the end of his first year at the practice, he met a little boy named Mathew. Annie, a woman he'd previously been introduced to by his receptionist, brought the child to see him, requesting that she speak to Daniel privately to explain the circumstances. She told him about the events of that day and of a previous assault she'd witnessed on the boy's mother. She'd reported it to the police but the woman had apparently denied it. On this latest occasion, the woman begged her not to report the matter. Her husband was a good man, she said, who came from a very troubled background. He'd sworn that he would never do, to his family, what his father had done to his, but occasionally he would give in to the temptation to drink. This seldom happened, she insisted, and Annie agreed that for the most part they appeared to be a happy family. Annie didn't want to tear them apart, but felt she couldn't ignore the fact that the man might hurt the boy again in the future.

Daniel agreed to visit the couple. If the man entered a counselling program, they could hold off reporting the matter, if not they'd be left without a choice in the matter.

8 · *Quinton*

I had heard that some children possessed the ability to see angels in their projected form, but to be on the receiving end of this gift was quite unnerving. I decided that I would refrain from this form of materialisation in Emily's presence. Yet, as I watched her grieve, watched her parents try to convince her that she had dreamed me and, worst of all, question her mental stability, I settled on a different course.

When I revealed myself to her, a fortnight later, she pulled the blanket over her head and begged me to go away.

The adults had made her believe that seeing angels was wrong. I wanted to tell her not to fear, that I had been sent to look after her. However, communicating with children was forbidden unless expressly sanctioned by The Creator

Expecting an enforcer to swoop down on me. I attempted something I'd never attempted before. Placing my hand on her head, I merged our energy fields.

She dropped the blanket. "Why don't grownups believe in angels?" she asked.

"Some grownups do believe in angels," I replied, "but others only believe what their eyes can see, and not many people can see us."

She peered up at me. "Why can I?"

I wasn't sure whether she realised that I hadn't spoken out loud. "Only the Creator knows the answer to that," I replied and, not sure whether the connection would hold, withdrew my hand.

"The creator," she asked, with a puzzled frown.

"God," I replied, using the title widely recognised by mankind.

Twirling a strand of hair around her index finger, as she always did when contemplating something serious, she stared up at me. "Do you mean, Our father who art in heaven?"

The earnestness of her expression made me smile. "That's the one."

"Is granddad in heaven with our father," she asked.

Heaven and hell, such simplistic human constructs for something infinitely complex. "I'm sure he is," I replied, once again reaching for a half truth.

"Are there lady angels?" she asked.

This, at least, was a question I could easily answer. The entire universe consists of masculine and feminine energy. It is no different with angels. "There are."

I could see that this answer gratified, but didn't entirely satisfy her. Her next words confirmed this. "My Sunday School teacher says that there are only boy angels."

I know that the religious texts mention only male angels but then the texts were written by men. "Because they don't talk about girl angels in the bible some people think that there aren't any," I said, anticipating

that my reply would only elicit further questions. Surprisingly, she seemed satisfied. “I can’t wait, to tell Miss Rudd.”

It was time to address the concern that nudged me to reveal myself to her. “Grownups are afraid of the things they don’t understand, so it will be better if you don’t talk about me,” I said, expecting resistance.

Meeting my eyes, she stifled a yawn. “Okay,” she said, and snuggling down under the covers broke the connection.

Had that been too easy, I wondered, concerned for the child. People, who saw things others couldn’t, were not treated kindly. I have to reinforce the need for discretion, while emphasising it to be a unique situation. That if any human asks her to keep secrets from her parents, she not only could, but should refuse and report the matter to her parents.

* * *

The other child in my care does not seem able to sense me. Whether this is a good thing, or not, I can’t be sure. I had been worried about the child but, ever since the doctor visited the boy’s father, things seemed to have gone well. I know that Mathew’s father is sincere in his determination to control his inner-demons. Nothing, regarding how this will unfold has been revealed to me, and I hope for the best.

9. *Emily*

Emily hugged her secret to herself. After her grandfather's death, she'd felt that no-one understood her, but this loneliness had been greatly assuaged by her angel. He told her to call him Quinton. At first, she felt uncomfortable because to her eyes he was a grownup and she'd been taught that one never addressed adults by their first name. But, after a while, it seemed right. She also started thinking about Sally. She approached her mother, explaining that granddad had promised her the puppy. Her mother remained unmoved. "I'm allergic to dogs," she said. Emily then tried her father who, as always said, "If your mother says no, then its no."

* * *

Several days later Emily's world was turned upside down. Father came rushing home, Nancy her baby-sitter arrived and both parents left with James.

Days went by. Her parents only returned home after she'd gone to sleep. She would see them briefly before they left again in the morning. Then, she heard Nancy tell a friend that baby James had complications due to a heart murmur. When she asked the sitter what it meant, the girl shrugged. "I think that his heart is broken," she said.

This troubled Emily greatly. She desperately wanted to talk to Quinton about it but she never saw him during the day, although she could often feel his presence. That night she asked him about this heart

murmur thing, and he said something about a hole. But not to worry, her brother would be okay, eventually. Much as she felt pushed aside by James, she didn't want anything bad to happen to him.

A couple of weeks later, things started to improve. Her mother smiled once again and father went back to work. Nancy's school resumed after the holidays and she could no longer come every day. This resulted in something exciting.

It was a Monday morning when mother set out Emily's Sunday best. "Hurry," she said, "so that I can do your hair."

Emily hated having the knots combed out, but sensing that a treat lay ahead, she stood still while mother brushed and gathered her shoulder length hair, tying it in two pony tails adorned with blue-polka-dot ribbons, a match for her blue dress. Emily loved polka-dots.

A taxi arrived. It was the first time Emily had travelled in a taxi and she felt quite grown-up. She'd heard the adults refer to the Children's Hospital at Great Ormond Street, and understood it to be where they were fixing her brother's heart. Listening to her mother as she chatted to the taxi driver, it seemed that this was where they were headed.

The taxi dropped them off at the station. Mother purchased tickets and Emily felt a tickle of excitement in her tummy, she'd always wanted to go on a train. Once on-board, she sat at the window watching the activity on the platform until the conductor blew his whistle and they started to move. On the platform people waved farewell. As she and mother didn't have anyone to see them off, Emily waved back.

The train gained momentum and they quickly left the village behind. Sparse winter fields, dotted about with skeletal trees and fenced paddocks, flashed by at a giddy speed. Then they reached the outskirts of the city, and the fields surrendered to grey buildings.

“We aren’t far from St Pancras station,” said mother.

This bit of news came just as Emily was starting to feel bored with the gloomy scenery. The train began to slow, and a building with a huge yawning mouth loomed ahead.

“You see,” said mother proudly, as if she’d conjured the edifice, “there it is.”

The train slid beneath the vaulted roof and came to stop next to one of the platforms. The building was a hive of activity with people alighting and others boarding waiting trains. A baggage-man loaded luggage onto a trolley. They didn’t have any luggage, so they proceeded to the busy arrivals hall and out into an even busier street. Holding her hand, mother guided her across the road and down a flight of stairs. Mother announced that she had an errand to run at Leicester Square. They would have a bite of lunch there before heading to the hospital, she said.

The underground was an amazing place. The train beyond exciting, shooting them down dark tunnels and into bright stations.

The errand, a visit to what appeared to be an office of some sort, was brief. They then grabbed a sandwich and milkshake at a cosy little restaurant. This was followed by another ride on the underground and a shortish walk to the hospital.

Mother explained that Mr Barry, who wrote Peter Pan, had donated all the money made by Peter Pan to help sick children at the hospital. Emily didn't quite understand how Peter Pan made money, but she did think that Mr Barry sounded like a very kind man.

In one of the corridors, they passed a boy who walked with two sticks and had funny things on his legs. Mother whispered to her not to stare. "Poor child has had polio," she explained once they were beyond ear-shot, "Thank goodness you have been immunised."

"Why isn't the boy immunised?" she asked.

Mother looked sad. "Well, until very recently there wasn't anything like it."

"Poor boy," said Emily, feeling really sorry for him. The things on his legs looked very uncomfortable and ugly."

When they reached her brother's ward, mother said that they didn't allow children to visit. From her bag, she fished out a colouring book and a box of wax crayons. "You sit here," she said indicating a bench, "The sisters on duty have said that they will keep an eye on you."

Sitting as instructed, Emily took in her surroundings and for the first time felt real empathy for her baby brother. She wouldn't want to stay in such a place.

A pretty lady came over to speak to her. "My name is Peggy. Call me if you need anything," she said, and left after tussling Emily's hair. Emily didn't like it when people touched her hair, but the lady was nice so it didn't bother her too much.

Colouring was one of her favourite pastimes, and she began with a picture of a fairy sitting on a toad-stool. Working on her lap was uncomfortable so kneeling next to the bench she used it as a table.

So deeply engrossed was she, on her third picture, that she only became aware of her father's presence when he placed a kiss on the top of her head. "Just a quick visit and we can go home," he said.

As they left the hospital, a clock chimed five times, and they joined the flow of office workers who were homeward bound.

By the time they'd cleared the outskirts of London, darkness had settled. Snug under a quilt in the back seat, Emily felt the way she had before James was born, a time when it had been just the three of them.

* * *

The end of November neared, as did her birthday, and still James didn't come home. On her birthday, they went into London early. "I am going to take you to Hamleys so that you can choose your own birthday present," mother announced.

Emily had an idea that Hamleys might be a toy store, yet she wasn't prepared for the veritable Aladdin's cave of treasure. It took her a full hour to settle on a doll called Baby Big Eyes. She decided to name the doll Abigail, a name she'd heard once at the park with Nancy. Nancy regularly met up with another baby sitter and the infant in her care, Abigail. Emily fell in love with the infant, and now she had an Abigail of her own.

After Hamleys, they visited the hospital as usual. All the nursing staff on the wing had come to know Emily. Some of the doctors would even stop to greet her.

After visiting hours, her parents took her to dinner at a posh hotel and then by underground back to Regent Street. The scene that confronted her was one of wonderment. High above the throngs of people, who had come into London to witness the switch-on of the Christmas lights, floated scale models of Edwardian hot air balloons. She had seen the balloons earlier but, unlit, they hadn't looked half as magical.

They proceeded to Trafalgar Square where, next to a large statue of a lion, stood a towering Christmas tree covered in white lights. *Fairy lights*, mother called them and Emily imagined that each of the sparkling jewels was held in place by a fairy. She hoped to one day meet a fairy, perhaps Tinkerbelle, the one she'd seen depicted at the children's hospital.

The tree was a gift from the people of Oslo, her father said. Emily had no idea what Oslo was, but she felt very glad that they, the people of Oslo, had gifted the tree.

That night on the drive home, she felt sure that there had never been a more perfect day. Falling asleep, she was only vaguely aware of father carrying her up to bed and tucking Abigail in next to her. Everything was right in Emily's world that night.

10 · *Mathew*

Mathew reconnected with Matthew, who lived next door to his grandparents. They were infants when they first met and, to differentiate between them, the grownups had called him Mathew and the boy next door Matt. Collectively they were known as *the Mathews*.

He and Matt always had the best time. They played in the meadow, paddled in the little stream and chased insects with grandfather's butterfly net.

Grandfather's impressive collection of butterflies, all neatly pinned in rows on boards with the correct name off each followed by the common name, fascinated Matt. Mathew, however, preferred to see the little creatures fluttering amongst the meadow flowers. Very early on, he realised how easily the delicate wings were damaged by the net, and so he limited himself to catching hardier insects, all of which he promptly released.

* * *

On the second last day of the holiday, Mathew went on a day trip to Brighton with his grandparents and mother. First, they took a walk along the almost deserted beach. Mother explained how, in the summer, the beach would be covered in rented deck-chairs. A stiff wind had picked up by the time they reached the pier.

Grandmother told of summer's days past, when the now rather jaded structure had been a glittering pleasure palace, with promenading,

concerts, and plays. In fact, she had met granddad on the pier. Now, it was nothing more than a fun park. She said this with disgust, but Mathew thought that the place might be great fun, indeed, during the summer months.

Exhilarated by the crisp air, they went for lunch at the Grand Hotel before visiting the Royal Pavilion. Later in the car, while the adults discussed the glories of the pavilion, Mathew sucked happily on a large stick of Brighton Rock.

The next morning, Mathew woke knowing that tonight he would sleep in his own bed. He had enjoyed the visit and was sad that it had come to an end, but he missed his father.

The reunion turned out to be, not, the happy one for which he'd hoped. From the moment his father walked in it appeared that something was amiss. When mother suggested that the two of them go for a walk, the man simply nodded tersely.

Mathew saw grandad and gran exchange worried looks. Time dragged until, finally, grandfather went to look for them.

Mathew had often heard the expression white as a sheet and, when grandfather returned, he finally knew what it meant. "Mathew, go to your room please. I need to speak to your grandmother," said the usually jovial man.

Doing as told, Mathew sat on the neatly made bed, with his packed suitcase waiting at its foot. When no-one came to call him, he curled up and went to sleep. It was already dark when he woke, and going to his

mother's room, he was surprised to find her under the covers. Something was wrong, he could feel it, but not wanting to deal with whatever it might be, he climbed in next to her and went back to sleep.

11 · *Quinton*

I've have seen a remarkable change of late, in Emily, but fear that it won't last. The child has never truly processed the loss of her grandfather. The time spent with her mother, of late, has filled the void, but James is soon to come home. The infant will need a great deal of care, for a while, and Emily's needs will once again bow to his.

It has never been communicated to me exactly how much I am permitted to intervene in the lives of my charges. I could easily overstep but I need to do something.

Miraculously, a messenger hasn't arrived to remonstrate with me for communicating with Emily. One thing is clear; my job entails protecting my wards from harm. Emotional harm is as much harm as that which assails the flesh.

I will risk God's displeasure in order to protect this child.

* * *

Friends of the Hospital regularly donated magazines for relatives of the patients. It helped pass endless hours in the waiting areas. On the day that James was to be released, I arranged for Emily's mother to find, at her finger-tips, a certain magazine. As I'd hoped, she stopped at an article which extolled the value of pets for children.

Mind occupied with plans for her infant son's return home, the woman didn't altogether register what she read, but I had planted a seed.

Days after James's homecoming, Emily came down with a bad dose of the flu.

Dr Rutherford insisted that they could not risk James contracting the virus. Later that day, Emily's uncle who lived in an adjoining county came to fetch her. She was to stay with him and his family until fully recovered.

It was obvious that Emily liked her uncle and his wife, and they treated her with kindness.

Once Emily recovered, her aunt took her shopping in the village. "Tomorrow, you go home," she said, buying Emily a bundle of ribbons as a goodbye gift.

Admiring the beautiful colours, as they waited for the bus, the child looked up to see a man, down on his haunches in the village square, tying a little boy's shoe laces.

I knew in an instant that she remembered her grandfather doing the same for her. Letting out a low wail she began to sob uncontrollably.

* * *

I watched Emily's parents worry about her. Between an ailing son and a grieving daughter, they were having a rough time of it. Neither seemed able to get through to the child.

She has also started to cut herself off from me, and I can no longer read her thoughts. It seems that she can't even see me when I materialise.

Emily's mother tried to involve her in decorating the Christmas tree, but she simply watched with an apathetic air. After she fell asleep,

Margaret and Trevor sat at the kitchen table discussing their concerns. “Do you remember how excited she was last year when we unpacked the glass ornaments,” asked Margaret. Trevor nodded sadly. “She was entranced by the colours, convinced that they were made by fairies. This time she scarcely glanced at them.

Brushing a tear from her cheek with one hand, Margaret placed the other on her husband’s arm. “I’m really worried.”

Trevor took both her hands in his. “I’m worried too. Perhaps we should consult Dr Rutherford. A tonic or something might help.”

Margaret’s expression suggested that she didn’t have much hope of the doctor offering a solution. “I will make an appointment in the morning,” she said.

* * *

Millie, the receptionist, greeted them warmly. “Margaret, I was sorry to hear about your father,” she said.

With a nervous glance at Emily, Margaret thanked the woman and guided Emily over to a row of seats.

I sat next to Emily. If she felt me, she gave no inkling of it.

When their turn came, Margaret left Emily in Millie’s care while she consulted with the doctor. She told Daniel what had brought them to see him. Daniel listened quietly; he needed to examine the child first to rule out anything physical, he said. Once this was done, he called for Millie. “Let Miss Emily choose a lollipop while I have a word with her mother.”

Margaret shifted in her seat, her anxiety palpable.

“Emily’s woes are nothing medicine can cure,” announced Daniel, as the door closed behind the pair. “Have you considered getting her a puppy?”

I hoped that Margaret would recall the article. “I’m not one for animals,” she said.

Daniel continued as if reading from a script provided by me. He told of how a dog had once seen him through a difficult time. They offer a warm body to hug, and unconditional love.”

I have suspected that Daniel, though not one of my wards, is important to the Creator’s plan for the five. This latest encounter has convinced me of it. Daniel Rutherford is a linchpin.

* * *

That evening, while Emily was in the bath, Margaret told her husband about Daniel’s suggestion. “Driving home, I remembered reading an article that said the same thing,” she concluded.

I suspect that Trevor has always been in favour of a family pet. “Phone Cecil, and see whether he still has the puppy Emily was so in love with,” he urged.

Still a little reluctant, Margaret phoned Cecil. The puppies had long since gone to their new homes. Cecil didn’t know of anyone with basset puppies, but a friend of his might be able to help with exactly the right kind of pup.

On Christmas Eve, Margaret arranged for Nancy to come over. “We should be an hour two at the most,” she told the baby sitter.

I tagged along. Cecil’s friend lived about a half hour away, in human terms. She invited Emily’s parents into a snug sitting room where a large wicker basket stood near a glowing fire place. Going over to the basket, the woman bent down. “These nice people are here to see your babies,” she said, and when she stood up two little bodies squirmed in her hands.

Margaret let out a gasp. “They are so cute.”

Trevor laughed “Really cute as aliens go.”

The woman placed the puppies on the floor and reached into the basket for another. “There are only three and I intended keeping them all, but Cecil told me about your little girl.

The last puppy, a little smaller than the others, ran directly over to Margaret. To my surprise she scooped it up. The little creature licked her chin. “This is the one,” she announced, without hesitation.

The woman explained about the puppy’s needs. “...Pugs are not outside dogs,” she said firmly.

I expected Margaret to have a problem with this, but she just nodded.

Perhaps not convinced, the woman continued. “Unlike most other breeds, they have never had jobs of any sort except to be companions to people. Pugs cannot deal with extremes of temperature, and when puppy goes outside to do her business on cold days, she needs a jersey.

Reaching for a brightly coloured pile of wool, the woman held up several little garments. “Fortunately, I have busied myself with knitting. This lot should see her through to adulthood. Handing Trevor the rest, she showed Margaret how to place the smallest of the garments on the puppy. “If anything can reach your little girl, this little one, is it,” she said.

Once in the car, Margaret tucked the puppy into the front of her coat. Seeing this, Trevor smiled. “What about your allergies?”

Margaret laughed, and I realised how seldom I’d heard her laugh.

“I have long suspected that I never was allergic,” admitted Margaret. “I believe that my mother made it up to stop me nagging for a puppy. It was just convenient to continue with it because I didn’t want the responsibility of an animal.”

I expected the man to be annoyed, but he laughed instead. “I always suspected as much.”

“You know me too well,” replied Margaret, placing a hand on his knee. “Besides, this is a little person, not a puppy.”

* * *

Morning arrived and, instead of rising early to wake her parents as most children seemed to do on Christmas morning, Emily snuggled deeper into her covers.

Trevor arrived to coax her out of bed. “Your mother has made crumpets.” he said, bundling her into her dressing gown.

Margaret waited at the bottom of the steps, next to a doll's pram with a big red ribbon attached to its handle.

"Look," said Trevor, "Now Abigail can travel in style."

I knew that Abigail lay discarded in a chest of drawers where Emily had left her two weeks earlier.

"Come see," encouraged Margaret.

Peering into the pram, Emily let out a squeal.

"Let me introduce you to Mignon," said Margaret, placing the puppy in the girl's arms.

The look on Emily's face, as she cradled the little animal, told me that they'd achieved a breakthrough.

12 · Michelle

It was a very ordinary day when Michelle made the most shocking of discoveries. The children were visiting her parents and the day stretched out ahead of her. Then her friend Eve, who was holidaying in Spain, phoned to ask her for a favour. It appeared that Eve's uncle had been admitted to a hospital in a nearby town. Eve's father had been contacted with the news that his brother probably wouldn't survive the day. The man really needed to say goodbye, and Eve would be very grateful if Michelle could use their car to drive him over.

Keith commuted daily with the family car so, Michelle seldom drove and wasn't a very confident driver. The thought of driving someone else's car really terrified her, but she couldn't bring her-self to say no.

An hour later, they were on their way, Eve's father prattling on continuously until her nerves felt stretched to breaking point. When eventually they arrived at the hospital, she delivered the man to a helpful orderly and went in search of parking. The small area allocated for this use was already full, forcing her to look further afield.

Finally finding a spot in a side street, she started back towards the hospital. Passing a little park, she saw a car, that looked like Keith's, parked under some trees. It was a very common make and model but something made her look closer. With shock, as she read the licence plate number, she realised that it was indeed Keith's car. For years, she'd suspected that there might be another woman, and it seemed that she was

about to be confronted with the confirmation of this. Wanting to run, she edged closer instead. Getting a clear angle of vision, through the side windows, she thought for a moment that the vehicle was unoccupied. Then two heads popped up, and she felt her hands fly up to her mouth. One of the heads belonged to Keith, the other to a strange man.

Confused and disorientated she took off in the wrong direction. When the adrenaline subsided, she found herself well and truly lost. Finally, she asked directions and feeling disconnected from her body returned to the hospital. Sitting in the waiting area she tried to order her thoughts. Had he seen her? If so, how would he explain himself? How long had this horrifying thing been going on? And worst of all, what would people say if they found out?

It was late afternoon when she finally reached the sanctuary of her home. Running a hot bath, she scrubbed until her skin tingled. Why she should feel dirty she didn't know, she just did, and for the first time she was glad that her husband hadn't made love to her in years.

With mechanical efficiency, she dressed, applied make-up and did her hair. Then going down stairs she began to prepare dinner.

* * *

Most evenings Keith came home late, she'd grown accustomed to this and would simply put his food in the warming drawer. Sometimes he ate, sometimes he didn't and she'd long given up caring.

On this particular- evening, when she heard his car in the driveway, she was still in the process of dishing up. Surely this meant he'd seen her

and had rushed home to do damage control. However, as always, he greeted her with a perfunctory kiss on the cheek. Asking a few polite questions about her day, he proceeded to eat his dinner in silence, not noticing that she scarcely ate. Finishing the last morsel, he placed his knife and fork neatly on the plate. “I’ll watch a bit of telly before bed,” he said, just as he usually did, on the rare occasions he arrived home in time to dine with her.

Michelle knew that she should confront him, but what would she say? Perhaps if she’d caught him with a woman, it would have been easier. The entire business was too aberrant for her conservative little soul. The horror, of her family, friends or even casual acquaintances finding out, brought her almost to the point of hyperventilation.

Alone at the table, staring at the dirty plates, she willed herself to move but it took a while before she could summon the energy. On any other evening the dishes would already have been washed and packed away.

Her eyes moved to the liquor cabinet and she chastised herself for even considering it. She had been raised to believe that ladies did not drink alcohol. The longer she stared at the cabinet, the stronger grew the compulsion. Just this once she told herself...Just this once, to help her over the shock.

13 · Mathew

The days before the funeral went by in a blur of confusion. Grandmother and grandfather came to stay for a while. Grandfather had explained that his father had slipped and fallen into an old quarry. An accident he said. But, whenever, Mathew entered the room they'd stop talking.

Mathew often heard his mother and grandfather speaking in raised voices behind closed doors. He could never hear what they were fighting about but he knew that it was something serious.

The day of the funeral dawned bright and sunny. Unseasonably warm, said grandmother. The house itself was blanketed in a cold gloom.

Later, as he watched the coffin lowered into the earth, Mathew felt sure that it was empty. It was all a big mistake. It had to be.

That afternoon, the house was filled with people, most of whom he hadn't even met before. Tired of them looking at him with pity and saying things like, "Your father really loved you," or "everything's going to be okay," he finally fled.

Finding refuge, in the back yard, on the swing his father had built for him two summers past, he swung slowly back and forth, the dying rays of the sun on his face

The lady from next door joined him. Sitting on the bench, also built by his father, she said nothing. Rather than it feeling weird, it felt companionable. "I think they made a mistake," he finally said.

“Oh?” replied the lady, in an encouraging way.

“I think they made a mistake,” he repeated, “my father isn’t dead.”

Speaking quietly, she told him about losing her father at a young age. How, for years afterwards, she would think she saw him. How, sometimes, she would still see someone who reminded her of him. Eventually, she’d accepted that he had indeed passed, but she believed that as long as he lived in her heart, he would always be with her. “I even speak to him sometimes. If anyone saw me, they’d think me mad, but it helps me when I’m feeling sad.”

“I can speak to my father any time I like?” Mathew asked, immediately warming to the idea.

“Of course you can,” she said, “and my door is always open.”

14 · *Quinton*

I am pleased with Emily's progress. The girl has settled into school life. Mignon trots happily about the house behind Margaret until Emily returns home in the afternoons. For the remainder of the day, the girl and puppy are inseparable. At night they cuddle under the blankets.

Mathew has come to think of Annie as a grandmother. With her help, he has weathered the loss of his father, although, his relationship with his mother has become strained. Forced to work, the woman found a job at a local news agency. Arriving home late, tired and irritable, she often snaps at the boy over the littlest of things. He relies increasingly on Annie. Annie who always has a sandwich waiting for him when he returns from school.

Michelle continues to frustrate me the most. In the two years since she discovered the affair, she hasn't mentioned it once. In company, she puts on a forced brightness, and it seems that none of the humans in her life know her well enough to see past the façade. When alone, she consumes alcohol to numb the pain of living a lie. I wish I could inject some spunk into her."

Charlie is the one with whom I find the most resonance. It had been my own disregard for rules, after all, which earned me the assignment in the first place.

Charlie lives in the moment; the past troubles him not a bit and the future even less. The girls with whom he associates are mostly on the pill,

and without the fear of pregnancy many are far less inhibited than the generations before. Charlie takes full advantage.

Controversy rages, over the pill's safety and moral implications. When all is said and done, it has given women some control over whether or when they have children. Plans are in the pipeline to make the contraceptive available through the National Health Service. Up to this point, the invention has been limited to those who can acquire it from the private medical sector. The balance of power which has always favoured the male of the human species has begun to shift.

15 · *Emily*

Emily lost her heart to the little pug, who she called baby. When she looked at the tiny wrinkled face, with its googly eyes, she felt as if her heart might explode.

“Let mignon walk before she forgets how,” mother would say.

Emily, simply, couldn’t keep her hands off the little thing. With an infant of her own to fawn over she didn’t feel as threatened by James as she had before. She even began to find him strangely appealing, although not when he screamed fit to wake the dead, as she’d overheard Nancy joke.

Father made a sheet tent for her in her bedroom, and she spent hours inside with mignon and her colouring books. Every day she dressed the little pug in a cute jersey or jacket; these she initially sourced from Abigail’s generous wardrobe. As the puppy grew, she moved on to James’s outgrown baby clothes. She made these more girly by adding ribbons from her hair accessories.

The weather warmed, and mother said that clothing would be too hot for Mignon, and so Emily had to settle on a bow around the little animal’s neck.

Weekends were spent in the garden on a blanket under the sycamore tree. With Mignon snoring softly in the crook of her arm, Emily would often imagine that fairies lived in the foliage, fairies that came out at night to frolic amongst the summer blooms.

Father bought her a blackboard, on an easel, and she spent hours teaching Mignon and Abigail everything she'd learned at school. That the little dog fell asleep almost immediately, and Abigail regularly toppled over onto her side, didn't bother Emily at all.

When she grew tired of playing school, she used an array of coloured chalk to draw butterflies, dragonflies and simplistic birds. She wished she had the skills to depict fairies and angels.

What is this obsession with wings, she overheard her father ask. She didn't know exactly what an obsession meant but she thought it might mean something like love, because she really did love things with wings.



The story continues...

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