



The BEST
Angel STORIES
2016

**SNEAK
PEEK!**
Free
Sampler!

Angels
ON EARTH

CHAPTER 4

Angels in Fur and Feathers





Tiny Twinkling Angels

Jennie Ivey

HEADING TO THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK IN JUNE HAD BECOME AN ANNUAL TRADITION FOR A GROUP OF CAMPING FRIENDS AND ME. That's the only time the species of firefly *Photinus carolinus*, the only known synchronous fireflies in the western hemisphere, puts on a not-to-be-missed show.

The darker the night, the more spectacular the experience.

On this particular evening, we were in luck. The new moon was just a pale sliver in the eastern sky as my friends and I crossed the footbridge that leads across Jake's Creek from Elkmont campground. We made our way up a steep, narrow road to distance ourselves from the gathering crowd. Because flashlights are discouraged and must have the lens wrapped in red cellophane, only a couple of us carried one. When we found a spot we liked, we spread quilts on the rocky ground and spoke in hushed tones as the sky turned from gray to dark blue to black.

As total darkness finally descended, the synchronous fireflies began their magic. Dozens at first. Then hundreds. Then thousands. Maybe even millions, if it were possible to count them all. They didn't blink on and off in metronome-like fashion. Instead, a great cluster of fireflies twinkled like tiny white Christmas lights and

then went completely dark. Six seconds later, the twinkling began again. Then darkness.

All up and down the mountain, as far as the eye could see, great waves of twinkling and then darkness swept past us.

I lay back on my quilt and watched in awe. I didn't mean to fall asleep, but that's exactly what happened. And my friends didn't mean to go off and leave me, but that happened too. When the firefly show was over after a couple of hours, they folded up their quilts in the quiet darkness and headed back to the campground. No one thought to call the roll to make sure everyone was present. We were, after all, grown-ups who knew it was important to stay together in the wilderness.

When I realized I was alone in pitch-black darkness, my heart began to race. I wasn't sharing a tent with anyone. Chances were that, once everyone got back to the campsite, they'd all crawl into their sleeping bags in their own tents and not even realize I was missing until I didn't show up for breakfast.

"Hey," I shouted into the black night. "Where'd everybody go?"

My only answer was the rustling of the wind in the trees. I was all by myself, without a flashlight, in an ancient forest inhabited by all sorts of creatures I didn't want to run into in the middle of the night. Snakes. Skunks. Foxes. Bobcats. Coyotes.

And the animal that's the symbol of the Great Smoky Mountains—the black bear. I'd read that, over the past several years, black bears have made such an amazing comeback that it's estimated that there are at least two bears per square mile in the park. Bears who prefer to do their foraging at night. My heart began beating even harder.

"Hey," I shouted again, louder this time, "can anybody hear me?"

Again, no answer. I shuffled through the dew-wet grass until I

felt the crunch of gravel under my feet. I had made it to the road leading back to the bridge. I strained my ears, hoping to hear human conversation. There was none. I wore no watch, not that I could have seen it anyway, so I had no idea what time it was. Perhaps the best thing to do was to curl up in my quilt and wait for sunrise, which could easily be hours away. But before I could act on that plan, a twinkling of light caught my eye.

It looked like a cluster of fireflies, which seemed strange because they, too, seemed to have abandoned me. Had they taken a break and were now tuning up for the second act of their nightly performance? I looked up and down the mountains but saw no other clusters of twinkling lights.

Only this one, hovering so close that I could have cupped some of the fireflies in my hand.

Slowly, the cluster began moving downhill. What could I do but follow? Though I was moving ever so slowly so as not to trip and fall in the pitch-black darkness, it took just a few minutes before the twinkling lights turned to the left.

I reached out my right hand and felt smooth wood. I had reached the footbridge that led to the campground! I placed my hand on the railing, moving more confidently now. The cluster of lights led me all the way across the bridge and then stopped. Suddenly, I realized I could see the flickering of campfires and hear soft laughter and conversation. It didn't take long for my eyes to adjust to the light shed by lanterns and campfires. My tent was only a stone's throw away.

I turned to see if the fireflies were going to follow me all the way to my campsite, but they were nowhere to be seen. God's tiny twinkling angels had led me to safety and then disappeared.

CHAPTER 6

Angels Unaware





The Lady at the Service Station

Geraldine Cerrone

ONE UNEVENTFUL EVENING MY HUSBAND AND I WERE DRIVING DOWN A FRONTAGE ROAD IN OUR NATIVE OREGON. I was at the wheel while my husband slept. It was a quiet night and the road was practically empty. I didn't think anything of it until suddenly I realized the car was very low on fuel. The deserted road became a bit more intimidating as I began looking for a place to pull over and wait for morning. I figured it was our best bet since it was night and we were unlikely to find a place to get gas.

But as I started to pull over to the side of the road, I saw the glow of lights up ahead. I drove a little farther and saw that it was a gas station. I couldn't believe my luck!

The attendant emerged from the station door. She was a small, frail-looking lady, and a sight for sore eyes. She came up to the car window. I couldn't help noticing her flawless features and her calming, soft voice as she asked, "Fill 'er up?"

My husband is a light sleeper, so I figured I would get money from him when he awoke once I stopped the car. He, however, slept soundly. I noticed a twenty-dollar bill in the cup holder. I handed her the bill and she quickly got to work. It took no time for her to fill up our tank.

Before I knew it she'd waved goodbye and retreated back inside the service station.

My husband remained blissfully asleep as I drove away. I glanced down at him, smiling at the fact that we'd avoided spending the night on the side of the road, then I looked back at the gas station through my rearview mirror. The station was not there!

Was it just a dream? I wondered. Then I looked down at my gas gauge. It read full!

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