

Chapter 1

“This is really Earth?” Will, the apprentice angel, asked, lying on his stomach on a low-flying cloud with his three mentors. His eyes widened as he gazed down on the crazed activity below.

“This is Earth,” Mercy informed their young charge with a tinge of pride. For all its problems, Earth was a fascinating place to visit with the tall buildings that butted up against the sky and people milling about with such purpose, most of them unaware of the spiritual world that surrounded them. More times than she could remember Mercy had lost patience with humans. Those who were considered the apex of God’s creations appeared to be slow-witted and spiritually

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dull. Yet she loved them and treasured her Earthly assignments.

“It’s New York,” Shirley added, resting her chin in her hands as she gazed longingly below. “Oh, I do so love this city.”

“Manhattan, to be more precise,” Goodness clarified and ended with a little sigh, indicating that she, too, had missed visiting Earth.

The four hovered near Times Square, watching the clamoring crowds jockeying for space on New Year’s Eve.

Will’s eyes widened as he intently studied the scene taking place in the streets below. “Is it always like this—so busy and crowded, I mean?”

“No, no, this is a special night. The people are gathering together to usher in the New Year.” Time was a concept reserved for Earth. In heaven it was much different. Consequently, the time restriction placed on the three Prayer Ambassadors when given Earthly assignments had caused more than one problem.

“Did Gabriel want us—”

“Gabriel,” Shirley gasped, and quickly cut him off. “He doesn’t exactly know that we’ve brought you here. It would probably be best if you didn’t mention this short visit to him, okay?”

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“Yes, please, it would be best not to let *anyone* know we’ve shown you Earth.” It went without saying they’d be in all kinds of trouble if Gabriel learned what they’d been up to.

“Gabriel means well but he tends to get a little prickly about these things,” Goodness explained to their young charge.

“Why is that?” Will stared at all three of them.

“Well, you see, we . . . the three of us . . . thought we should give you a bird’s-eye view of Earth and these people God loves so much—strictly for training purposes.” Mercy looked to her friends to expound upon their intentions, which were honorable if not a tad bit sneaky.

This Earthly visitation had been a spur-of-the-moment decision. Mercy had been the one to suggest it. Naturally, Goodness was quick to agree, and after some discussion Shirley had seen the light as well.

Will, an apprentice angel, had been placed under their charge, and given this honor, it was only right that he get a glimpse of the trials and tribulations that awaited him once he started working as a Prayer Ambassador. The job could be a bit tricky, and the more Will understood the idiosyncrasies of humans, the better he would do once given an assignment from Gabriel.

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Mercy was certain that under their tutorship, Will would make a fine Prayer Ambassador one day. He was young and enthusiastic, eager to learn about Earth and the role he would play.

As Mercy, who had falsely been labeled a troublemaker, had pointed out, theirs was a duty that required serious dedication. She wasn't alone in believing this. Goodness—oh, poor Goodness—had gotten something of a reputation, too, and Mercy felt partially to blame, but that was another story entirely. Shirley tended to be a bit more on the straight-and-narrow path and had worked hard to reform her friends. In fact, Shirley, a former Guardian Angel, had done such a marvelous job, Gabriel had offered to let them train the promising young angel who was with them now.

Naturally, it was understood that if the three of them accepted this assignment training Will, then of course there would be no hanky-panky, no tricks, no nothing. All three had agreed. This was a high honor indeed and their intentions were good.

Now here they were, New Year's Eve in Times Square, in one of the most amazing cities on Earth. Mercy breathed in deeply, savoring the moment. Bringing Will had been a good excuse, but the fact of the matter was that she had missed visiting Earth. It'd been a good long while since

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their last assignment, and she missed the razzle-dazzle of the big city.

“Isn’t Earth just marvelous?” Goodness said, her huge wings fluttering with delight. “Just look at all those neon lights. I’ve always been especially fond of light.”

“As we all are,” Shirley reminded them.

“Can we go down there with the people?” Will asked.

“Absolutely not.” Shirley’s loud protest was instantaneous.

“I don’t think it would hurt anything,” Goodness countered, her gaze still fixed on the bright lights of the city below.

Will glanced from one to the other.

“How will he ever learn about humans if he doesn’t have the opportunity to mingle with them?” Mercy asked, siding with her dearest friend. Shirley could be such a stickler for rules. Okay, so they’d originally promised not to get anywhere close to humans, but this would be a good teaching moment for Will.

“How will he ever learn how to work as a Prayer Ambassador if he doesn’t become familiar with humans?” Goodness protested.

Shirley wavered. While she might be opinionated on a number of topics, she could be easily swayed, which was the best part of working with her, Mercy felt.

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“Well . . .”

“Do we hear the humans’ prayers?” Will asked.

“Oh, no,” Shirley explained. “Only God hears their prayers, and then He talks matters over with Gabriel and then . . .”

“Then Gabriel passes along those requests to us.”

“And we assist in answering them.”

“One of our roles is to help humans realize how much they can do for themselves with God’s help,” Goodness clarified.

“We try as best we can without *interfering* in their lives,” Shirley added quickly, glaring at Goodness and Mercy.

This was a warning and Mercy recognized it the instant her friend spoke.

“But first, and this is the most important part,” Goodness emphasized, “it’s our duty to teach these humans a lesson. Then and only then are we able to help them with their troubles.

“The real difficulty comes when they don’t want to learn.” Goodness shook her head because this aspect of the job was often a challenge. “Some people seem to want God to step in and do as they ask without making a single contribution to the effort.”

“It doesn’t work like that,” Mercy said, although she’d