It was 2 a.m. Earth time and Zoe was driving through Golden Gate Park. She was also very drunk. Being her guardian angel and knowing she was unhappy, I had been expecting this sort of thing for some time. But I didn't know it was going to be that particular morning like some guardian angels do who know everything in advance. Those other angels like to rub it in, too, especially Morton who watches over a certified public accountant who lives on Epsilon and never does anything out of the ordinary. But I had chosen Zoe of all creatures to guard when my turn came up. Maybe it was because in my last life I lived on Earth. Maybe it was because even though I was a man then and loved only men, I felt sorry for this Earth girl no other angel wanted.

She certainly kept me busy for her twenty-one Earth years. Now that's only a moment to us angels, but then most angels don't have Zoe to guard. They can take off on a vacation for three, four years at a time knowing, their charges won't get into trouble. I haven't had a vacation yet, except for the time when Zoe was eight and spent all her time reading. That was thirteen years ago. I went to a lecture then that Edgar Cayce gave for angels in between lives called "Where to Next."

Things became really hectic when Zoe passed puberty. Just a few days ago I brushed wings with Morton at a seminar on "How to Guard Your Charge Without Being Obtrusive," and he smirked at me and said, "Keeping busy, Miles?" almost like he knew that I had spent all my time keeping sperm away from eggs in Zoe's young body. "How's your CPA, Mort?" I asked, being polite, but not really wanting to know. "Just fine," he said. "Studying his numbers diligently." Just then one million sixty three thousand and one sperm shot into Zoe's body and I excused myself. I made myself small and floated down into her and stood in front of the egg. I punched out one million sixty three thousand sperm very easily, all but that last sperm. He was a real fighter. I held him back for a long time. Then he did something I've never seen a sperm do. He swam backwards, came charging at me, knocked me down and burrowed into the egg. "I'm finished," I thought and my drooping wings flapped me home.

My Celestial Counselor, who looks a lot like Jean Hersholt, straightened my halo and told me not to worry. "Everything for a reason, Miles," he said.

I watched Zoe closely for the next few weeks. I watched her cry when she knew she was pregnant. I felt her sadness the way angels do. I wanted to reach down through the clouds and pat her head and tell her everything would be all right, but she wouldn't have heard me (me being an angel and all). I watched her the day she went to the clinic. I knew she thought of getting rid of her baby. I said nothing. Angels can speak to consciences if they have to, and they should (like they taught me at Angel School), but I waited. I kept quiet and when the doctor came to examine Zoe, she fled out the door in the clinic gown.

I don't understand Earth women very well. I've never liked them much. They're so greedy. And they pretend to be hurt when they really aren't, and they pretend so well that most men believe them. That's why I've always loved men who at least were honest and told me to get lost without meaning come back. Zoe was different, though. I had never seen her commit an unloving act. I don't think she was ever dishonest in her whole life. True, she was a female Earth creature and she knew how to get around the staunchest of men, but she never lied to them. She called the man with the strong sperm and I thought she was going to tell him she was carrying his child (angels can't read minds even though Catholic children think they can), but she hung up before he could answer the phone. "Why did you do that, Zoe," I whispered down to her. Just then Mort floated over to my cloud, peered down, sneered and said, "Knocked up, eh Miles?" I hate to be bitchy, but I turned to Morton and yelled some unprintable words. I never flew with Morton again.

Zoe didn't tell the man with the strong sperm she was with child. She didn't tell anyone. Her parents remarked if they have to, and they should (like they taught me at Angel School), but I waited. I kept quiet and when the doctor came to examine Zoe, she fled out the door in the clinic gown.

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of an emotion I had never felt before--me, a queer angel and not too fond of women. One time I felt this new emotion very strongly. A wanting to protect. A wanting to curl up against Zoe, to enfold her in my wings and tell her she could stop hurting. And then as I was feeling this way, a warm wind blew up from Earth, penetrated my cloud, blew my white robes up around my wings and enveloped my sex. It was Zoe's sigh. I think I fell in love with her then. Halo over wing. So when I say I had been expecting some sort of disaster, I say it with the understanding of a lover who sees his beloved bent on self-destruction.

That particular morning, 2 a.m. Earth time, found Zoe leaving another strange bed and, as I said, she was drunk. She fumbled for her car keys, found them and fell into her car. She stared at herself in the rear view mirror for a long time, then said to herself, "See you in the hereafter, kid-do." I watched her weave through the empty streets and head for the park. There's a tree in that park that is infamous for jumping out in front of cars. It's called an Abracadabra tree. Now you see it. Now you don't. I knew she was looking for that tree as she stepped on the gas. "No, Zoe!" I yelled. "Don't do it!" I flew all over heaven looking for my Celestial Counselor. I barged in on him while he was teaching a class of prophets headed for Earth.

"What is it, Miles, that you need disturb me so abruptly?" he said.

"It's Zoe!" I yelled, my wings flapping violently. "I need it now, Wise One. Please hurry." I pleaded.

He nodded his head and reached into his robes for the Materialization Dust all angels can use but once. He said, "You realize, don't you Miles, that once a guardian angel materializes, it means that angel is ready to move on to another existence?" "Yes, Oh, please hurry, Wise One," I said. "I understand." He sprinkled the dust on me and in an instant I found myself dressed in faded jeans and a flannel shirt, my wings gone, going sixty miles an hour in a beat-up Volkswagen through Golden Gate Park. I was racing towards the Abracadabra tree. Zoe was coming at it from the other direction. The tree loomed large in front of me. I yelled, "Abracadabra!" covered my eyes and heard the tear of metal and the clinking of broken glass. Then nothing.

When I opened my eyes, I was laying on a grassy embankment and Zoe was leaning over me.

"Oh, thank God you're not dead!" she said, wiping some blood from my cheek. "You came charging at that tree over there and I gunned my car to get there first so you wouldn't hit it. You crashed into me instead. You shouldn't drive a Volkswagen. Those cars crumple like tin foil. Look. You didn't do anything to my tank."

I turned my head slowly. It hurt. There was her car. Two inches from the tree.

"You didn't hit the tree," I murmured.

"No, of course not. I'm an excellent driver," she said. I laughed, a small laugh, then a deeper laugh and I just kept laughing even though it hurt. "You didn't hit the tree. Good driver. You didn't hit the tree." It was so funny. Zoe stared down at me.

"You sure you're okay? Maybe you got a concussion or something?" she asked.

"No, I'm fine," I assured her. "Could you please help me up?" I really was fine except for the cut on my cheek. I also had a dull ache in my shoulder blades, but I found out later that it was psychosomatic pain for my lost wings. Zoe helped me stand. I tingled at the touch of flesh holding flesh. It had been a long time. I ran my fingers through my hair. I tasted the blood from my cheek. I inhaled the night air. I had forgotten the joys of physical existence. Zoe watched me in my revels, then stepped back and asked, "Do I know you from somewhere?"

"I doubt it," I said. "I just flew into town."

You look awfully familiar. Not your face, but something," she said.

"Are you sure you're okay?" I laughed, tapping her forehead.

"Yeah, I'm great. Everything is intact," she said. Then she started shaking and sobbing. I reached for her and drew her to me and felt her shaking in my arms. I kissed her on the top of her head.

I was holding Zoe, reveling in the touch of her, the scent of her, when my Celestial Counselor appeared behind her back.

"Time to return, Miles," he said.

"Not just yet, Wise One. Just a few moments more," I said, stroking Zoe's back.

"You know the rules, Miles," he said as he disappeared.

"Zoe, could you drive to a phone and call an ambulance for me?" I asked. She looked up at me and I realized my mistake. I had called her by name.

"Sure, who-ever-you-are," she said as she stared at me. "I'll get you one." She backed away from me and said again, "Are you SURE I don't know you?" I waved goodbye.

I met my Celestial Counselor a few moments later in heaven. He took me into his office and picked up my past-lives file. He said, "Miles, for some reason you have chosen to be homosexual in several incarnations. That's fine. All creatures are allowed choice in these matters. But when a counselor notes a repeated choice of the same lifestyle in one of his students, he begins to worry about his student getting into a rut. What possibilities for growth are there in having a similar personality time and again? I see here that all the mothers you have chosen have been all of a kind, too. Since you have chosen to return to another existence, may I suggest that you choose a different sort of woman to be your mother this time?"

"I agree, Wise One. I'm ready to go," I said.

He gave me the Cup of Forgetfulness so that I would not be burdened with past memories and I drank it down.
I started spinning, slowly at first, then more rapidly. Spinning and spinning. Light and darkness. Falling down. Ever down.

I'm floating now. It's warm here. I hear a swishing and feel a beat all around me. I'm home.

Zoe returned with the ambulance to the scene of the accident. The man was not there. "I wonder where he could have gone?" she said. And, as she said those words, she felt a slight movement, like a butterfly, in her belly.