

## The Battle

A lorry had veered onto the wrong side of the road, swinging violently around, a snake lashing out at the cars in its path. Red brake lights flashed warnings to drivers following behind, with microseconds to respond, people swerved, desperately slamming their feet on the brakes in a futile attempt to avoid a collision.

The crash when it came was sickening; it ripped through the night, violent and unforgiving; the impact of metal against metal, rag dolls ripped apart within.

The devil danced in delight.

The occupants of the first car were killed instantly. Life, which only seconds before had breathed and moved within them, vanished as if some bird in the sky, soaring up and away from the scene of blood and shattered bones.

Only silent bodies remained, twisted into strange positions that were not possible in life. No more idly spoken words between the driver and his wife, no more shared stories or bottles of soda, no more jokes about being lost. The journey they had been making together was terminated; there was no room for afterthought or regret. There would be no more reversing, turning back, parking of the car to get their bearings, changing direction. The final choices had been made.

Where once there had been tenderness and familiarity, now stood the awful strangeness of death. The Angel of Death moved gently amongst the bodies of the dead, touching the face of the woman who only moments before had been laughing with her husband. Her face was now blue and red. He lay twisted around the steering wheel, staring at his wife, as if just resting on the wheel but his back was broken and there was a harsh angle to the line of his body which spoke of the unnaturalness of death.

She touched their faces in blessing and moved through the night air, her dark blue form trailing silver, gossamer threads as she passed over the city. She moved like a rising flood, gentle but inexorable in her motion. Hers was the movement of deep stillness, which neither time nor place could confine or control. She knew there was no death, only the ever present, wonder of existence, flowing in and around her. The Grim Reaper, stayed behind to feed on the power the scene gave him. Fear was his work, not death. His darkly cloaked form was the last thing the Angel saw.

A deep sadness filled her heart that the tragedy had been necessary, but she knew it must be so. There were complex, inexorable laws at work which only the bigger picture could reveal. Now she must do what she could to soften the blow. Passing swiftly across the skies she reached the house of a mother and father, waiting for their son and his wife to arrive for dinner.

The devil was fast on her heels.

A policeman and woman were walking up the driveway to the front door. Their faces were somber, dreading the business ahead of them. They rang the doorbell and looked at each other nervously.

The Angel swept into the house, calling on her consorts to aid her. From a great distance they responded to her call, immediately by her side.

The mother and father heard the doorbell and twitched nervously. The clock had been pounding in their minds, like some inexorable drum, as the time of their son's expected arrival had blazed into the present and then unable to hold onto it, had slipped into the past, with no phone call to explain the delay. Now the harsh, breaking daylight of the doorbell. As if some bright, spotlight shone into their minds.

The policeman rang the doorbell again. The devil was coming up the driveway.

The angel's consorts worked quickly.

Silence, trailing long threads of peace behind her, gently wrapped the mother's heart in a cocoon that nothing could penetrate, all would seem like a terrible dream. The dark opiate of disbelief would deaden her senses. Wisdom, with the dark green of the forest trees, filled the father's bones and blood with strength that came from the very lifeblood of the earth. It was the strength of wisdom that upheld the father as he walked down the hallway to answer the door.

The devil was dancing with glee outside, prodding the police with hot little fingers, until they felt stressed and uncomfortable. Grief was waiting with her head bowed in submission by his side, a chain around her neck and, like two screaming vultures, Anger was fighting with Pain in the darkness above the house, both wanting to descend first when the devil gave the signal.

The forces of Evil, met the forces of Good. A child had died, an adult child, much cherished by both parents as they moved into their older age with hopes of grandchildren and a happy retirement. The devil delighted to himself, a golden opportunity to turn their minds towards his darkness, surely the shock of losing this child would be enough to destroy their faith in all that was good.

Silence and Wisdom protected the man and his wife. Patience was there too, her transparent golden body seemingly no match for the violence of Anger and Pain jumping around in the night sky. Still she was not deterred, wrapping her loving arms around the father as he felt the first waves of shock descending into his heart at the sight of the police outside his door. The father hoped against hope that it was an accident, not a death, not a death.

For a moment, time was as if suspended, the policeman went through the formalities of checking they were at the right house. The man would not allow them to come in, knowing instinctively that his wife would want it to be his voice that told her any news.

Then the words were spoken and the awful, finality of death exploded in his mind, into his heart and a great violent sickness threatened to rise up within him. He felt as if his whole body would break into tiny little pieces at the violence of those words. His little boy was dead, his precious child, his son.

A great scream tried to rise up within his chest, he must roar with the pain of it all. Anger and Pain were spinning around him, trying to get a foothold in his mind. Only just in time, Wisdom reached through and injected strength into his heart so he was able to calmly ask the police to wait on the doorstep, whilst he went to tell his wife.

He closed the door behind him. The sanctuary of the house was theirs alone. Then he walked in a stunned silence, into the kitchen where his wife was softly moaning, she had seen the Police at the door. She knew something terrible had happened but for a few moments, she would not look at him when he entered the room. He waited numb with shock, knowing no other way to tell her than to wait for her to be ready to hear the news.

With a terrible effort she lifted her head, forcing herself to look upon the familiar face of her husband, so many years known, it would just take one look to understand what had happened. And there it was, the look she had never seen before but knew immediately, trembling and white across his face, the look of grief.

For a moment, she was suspended, as if hovering over the scene from a great height, looking down upon the two of them. She must hear the words; there was still hope whilst the words remained unspoken. It was still possible that her son, would walk through the door and they would sit down for dinner as they had planned on the phone only that morning.

Then he spoke the words.

The woman's screams did not stop for at least an hour. In their awful tearing of the heart and mind, where no words were possible, grief walked numbly into the kitchen and tied herself to the woman's mind.

The father pushed his own feelings violently aside, forcing his mind to focus on his wife. More than at any other time in their marriage, she needed him. He wanted to stand tall and strong for her, protecting her from the force of the storm that howled around them. He would be her shelter, even if no other could be found. Anger and pain screeched around his head, but were unable to find a way into the mind of a man who had chosen wisdom to withstand the thunderbolts of change. The storm lashed around him, the tree of his life groaned under the strain, but stand tall he would.

The mother's screams eventually subsided until she was curled up like a wounded animal in the corner of the room. Her soft, low moaning as she rocked herself back and forth. Silence wept to herself but she gained comfort from knowing that the cocoon she had placed around the woman's heart would protect her from Grief's suffocating presence. The mother might keep the cocoon there always to protect her from the reality of her loss, but there was no other way. The father's love must be the means of bringing love and warmth back to the mother's heart.

The devil danced on the roof, enjoying his small victory over the mother's mind. The Angel of Death took comfort in seeing the father put his loving arms around the moaning, rocking form that was now his wife. No thought for his own comfort could be found in his mind. There was the real victory.

Another battle between the forces of Good and Evil had taken place. The battleground, the trenches of people's minds as they moved through the pitted territory of life.