

Trouble in Paradise

By Megan S.

My eyes fly open to a blinding, unforgiving sun. Sticks and leaves scratch my skin. Something crawls over my hand. I panic. Where am I? Who am I? What happened? I begin to hyperventilate. *Breathe in. Breathe out.* I repeat this to myself over and over until my panic begins to subside. Wanting to test my voice, I choke out, "If I keep this up, I'll die-"

Instantly, images sear my brain. A ram runs rampant through my skull tearing through all layers of my conscience. It is agonizing pain unlike any other. Pictures. People. Places. All flash through my mind at the speed of light. They're too fast to comprehend, but each brings on a new wave of emotions. Guilt, grief, and sorrow are like knives to the heart. Misery and anger boil my blood. Until finally something peaceful settles over me, I can feel all of my worldly pains melting off. I'm going to a better place. Right as I pass through the light, that joy and bliss is yanked away.

I jump to my feet. A wave of nausea passes over me, but I barely notice. There's too much on my mind. After all, my life literally just flashed before my eyes. I know I'm dead, but why am I here? As these thoughts swirl around my confused mind, I begin to realize I'm here for a reason.

After such a traumatizing experience, the stress gets to me, and I start to laugh. I laugh about my idyllic "life after death" being ripped away and my uncertain future. Then the world goes fuzzy around the edges, and I pass out from exhaustion and stress.

Please let it be a dream. I think to myself when I begin to return to consciousness, but I know it isn't. This could not get any worse.

"Oh good you're awake," a cheery, male voice says.

My eyes snap open, but I'm too scared to turn around. Who could this be? I hear the person get up and begin to come over. Before this new threat gets the chance to get any closer, I jump up and attempt to tackle him, but when I turn around, he's no longer there.

"Well that wasn't very nice," the voice says right in my ear.

I whip around to see a vision in white. He wears a blinding white suit, a sparkling smile, and are those wings? All of a sudden, my fear gives way to confusion, and I freeze not knowing what to do.

Then he speaks, "Hello, human, my name is Michael, and I'll be your guardian angel today," he says in a loud, slow voice. "This may come as a shock to you, but you're dead." He stands there for a minute waiting for my reaction, and when there is none, he continues, "Every person wishing to continue on to their awesome paradise must complete a quest." Again he stops his speech and waits. "Don't worry, I will tell you your mission momentarily. Also make sure you don't fail, the consequences are harsh to say the least. Do you have any questions you wish to ask me or grievances you would like to take up with the Universal Guardian Angel Association, or UGAA? Once you've finished asking your questions or addressing the UGAA, I will then give you your quest," at that Michael finishes his speech, and I'm left speechless. As I stand there processing it all, I realize I **do** have a million questions, but I can only stand and stammer unintelligibly.

“Since you have no questions, I will continue on with the procedure. Your mission is to answer a single question, and let me remind you that during this test you and those around you could perish. You have one hour to answer the question that determines your whole future. Are you ready?”

I’m excited and scared, but I am ready for this. After a couple more moments of silence, I mutter, “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“The question is would you be willing to take a life to save a life? I will be on hand if you have any questions. Your time starts now.”

I sit down for a few minutes and think. *Well it all depends. Will I know these people? Is that person evil enough to deserve to die?* With fifty minutes left on the clock, I make my decision. I call Michael over and utter one word, “Yes.”

Michael nods his head, makes a gun appear out of thin air, and says, “Please justify your answer.”

Suddenly two men appear, they have a blank look in their eyes as if they don’t quite know what’s going on.

“On the right we have Brian, he’s your typical average Joe. He has two kids, a wife, and a good job. On the left we have William, he was in in the prime of his life. He has a fiancée and just won the lottery, but he was diagnosed with cancer and won’t last much longer. Your answer is locked in, and someone has to die for the other to live. Who do you choose? You have forty-five minutes to decide.”

I stand horror struck at what I’ve done and what I have to do. I’m rooted to the spot for forty minutes, and I have to make a choice. Four more minutes go by, and I know what I have to do. With thirty seconds left, I lift the gun and fire. *Bang!*

I felt nothing as the bullet passed through me. I know I failed the test, but I wouldn't be able to live with myself if either of those two men died. I open my eyes ready to see what horrors await me, but I only see Michael.

He makes a few notes on his clipboard, and then he looks at me smiles and says, "Congratulations, you have completed your mission. Welcome to paradise."