

9. Julia Y.

## A Long Way From Heaven

All she heard was the pounding of feet in all directions. Screaming, screaming, and then silence. Suddenly, breathing hard, Clara woke up. Giving her eyes a moment to adjust to the darkness, she immediately remembered where she was. She was on the street; her parents had kicked her out again. They told her that there was no money in being an artist and that she was not to return home until she had found a real job. But Clara had made up her mind. She was tired of fighting the demons in her head repeatedly. This time, she would let them win, and then and only then, could she finally be free. Forcing herself to get to her feet, Clara pulled her shawl tighter around her. Her feet ached and yet she could not stop until she had reached her destination, the tallest building in the city, the Sunrise Tower. As she waited for the elevator to reach the top floor, Clara counted the seconds until her freedom. She thought about all the times she had considered this but had never done so. Stepping out of the elevator and onto the balcony, Clara sighed with happiness at the thought of release. Putting one shaky foot in front of the other, Clara stepped onto the railing, climbed over, and jumped off. But no. Clara was falling up. Back up to the balcony. "Hey!" she screamed, "What the heck ...?" "Welcome back." said a voice behind her. She turned and found herself face to face with the prettiest boy she had ever seen. He had bluish-gray eyes, sandy blonde hair, and a mischievous smile. "What's your problem?" she demanded. "My problem?" The boy responded. "I literally just saved you from dying and you're asking me what's my problem?" "Has it ever occurred to you that I might have wanted to die?" Clara asked, spitting her words at him. "No, in fact, it hasn't." The boy replied sarcastically. "Tell you what, how about you step down from that balcony? Then we can have a nice long chat." "I don't even know you! Why would I just randomly run off with you?". "Hi, I'm Grayson. Nice to meet you. Now would you please get off the balcony? It's freaking me out." "Fine," Clara said, rolling her eyes. She did as she was told. "Look, you might not know who I am, but know that I will always be here for you if you need me." said Grayson. "You're right, I don't know who you are. But, even if I did, I wouldn't let you help me. I don't need your help. I'm fine by myself. Just because I have depression does not mean I'm a charity case." said Clara. "Okay, okay, I can take a hint. But, just know that I'm always here for you, Clara." replied Grayson. "I'm not even going to ask why you know my name, I'm just going to assume that it's for some good universal reason and not because you've been creepily stalking me." "Okay, good," said Grayson "Now that you're off the balcony and we kind of know each other, want to go get some food?" "Fine, but only because I'm hungry, not because I trust you." "Gee, thanks. I feel so deeply appreciated." "You're welcome. Now, where to?" "Just that café down the street, nowhere fancy." They proceeded to walk to the café, bickering, all the while. "Wait," Clara said. "I don't have any money; I can't pay you back." "That's okay, you don't have to." "But--"

“Seriously, you can just pay me by providing your company.”

“That is incredibly cheesy.”

“I know, that’s why I said it.”

“I’m really, really sorry, for disturbing you.” Grayson instantly blurted out. “I should have left you alone.”

“No, it’s okay. In fact, I’m kind of glad you did. The past few years have been super rough on me. I just haven’t been in the right mental state for a while. I shouldn’t have snapped at you.” Clara admitted.

“I get it. Depression sucks and it sucks even more when your parents couldn’t care less. But you know what? That’s okay. Want to know why? Because we can learn from these experiences, and when we do, we become better people in the process, so it’s not a total loss. Trust me, I know it feels like a big issue now, but in a couple of years, this will all be in the distant past.”

It was those words that helped Clara realize that Grayson was right and that she needed to let go of her grudges in order to move forward. Once she realized that, conversation between them became much easier and the two chatted up a storm. They were so lost in their conversation, in fact, that by the time one of them finally bothered to check the clock, it was two in the morning!

“Aw, crap. I hadn’t meant for us to stay out this late. I’m really sorry, Clara.”

“No, it’s fine. It’s not like I’m itching to return to the street anyway.”

“You sure?”

“Absolutely. Thank you, Grayson, you have no idea how much this means to me.”

“No problem.”

Stepping forward to give Grayson a hug, Clara finally felt herself at peace. Something that hadn’t happened in years. After pulling away from the hug, she watched with wonder as Grayson disappeared into a shower of golden light, leaving her with the words “See you tomorrow.”

Clara woke up to a familiar blinding light stabbing her eyes. Groggily she asked, “Where am I?” But there was no response. Suddenly out of the corner of her eye, Clara saw the silhouette of a familiar figure step towards her. She realized that it was Grayson. Facing him, she repeated her question. “Where am I?”

“You’re in heaven, you’ve been here for the past 16 hours,” answered Grayson.

“Wait, but I thought I just spent ten hours in a café with you.”

“You kinda did and you kinda didn’t, it’s complicated. Unfortunately, your beautiful balcony dive succeeded, and you ended up here, where you’ve been for the past sixteen hours.”

“So, we didn’t spend all that time in a café together?”

“We did, just not in reality. But, it’s okay. You’re safe with me, and that’s all that matters.”

Taking her hand in his, Grayson looked Clara straight in the eyes, letting her know that he would always be there for her and that everything was going to be okay.

It was at that moment that Clara realized that she had finally found the security she had so desperately needed before and that she had found it in Grayson. He kept her calm in her times of anger and despair and he knew just what to do when she was feeling down. In turn, she amplified the good in him, for she was his better half. He was her rock, her emotional support, and that was okay. She could rely on him, while still being her own independent person. Being with him didn’t make her any less of a person, in fact it made her better, for they were two parts of one whole. Two angels in the wide expanse of heaven. They had made it, at last, and they had done it together.