

The Railway Angel

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Published by Julie Day at Smashwords

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people:

Dr Hilary Johnson for her many edits and copyreads of this book.
Joleene Naylor for the great cover.

The Railway Angel

“Come on, you can do it!”

The shout made me stop, and I toppled forwards, nearly falling through the cloud I was sitting on. Flippin’ ‘eck, why did they say those words? Gave me a fright.

I looked around, up and down, but no one was around. So where had the voice come from?

“Come on, Craig!” There it was again. It sounded like someone about my age. But I hadn’t seen anyone else since I’d arrived here.

Then came laughing and I felt the floor beneath me ripple like someone moving a carpet under my body. I gazed down and gasped. The whiteness evaporated and blue sky took its place. Then the scene took focus and I gasped again. Down below a young boy wearing a light blue denim jacket and jeans with trainers stared at the tracks in front of him. Oh no, he wasn’t going to kill himself, was he?

Horrified, I closed my eyes briefly. On opening them, I heard another voice, nearer. “You’ve just seen what I can see down there, haven’t you?”

I shook my head. Slowly I turned round, not sure what or who I’d see. There behind me was a young woman, about thirty, I reckoned, smiling at me. She wore a pale pink blouse, which flowed into a long, swishing brown skirt, and a thin scarf round her neck. It was all set off by her long, blonde hair and her blue eyes that were sparkling with that smile. I was struck dumb at the sight of her. Where had she come from?

I didn’t realise I’d asked this aloud until she said, “Sorry I startled you. I didn’t mean to. You’re probably wondering why you’re here, where this is and who I am. We can’t talk here, so why don’t we find a room to chat.” She glanced to the left then.

Oh my, I thought, as through the whiteness I realised I was no longer on a cloud but in a building, and what I saw to the left was the shape of a door.

As she stepped forward, the cloudy whiteness parted and the door opened. Huh? Did I just see it open on its own?

I followed her, or was it glided as I felt I was walking on air, in to the room that appeared.

As I entered the room, my eyes widened. I saw chairs and desks in rows. What kind of place was it that had doors opening themselves? I gulped.

“Have a seat,” she said.

I sat on one of the chairs near the front, and she sat on a chair facing me.

“First thing’s first, I’m Miranda Robson, one of the staff here.”

Staff, I mused. What was this place? A school?

“Yes, I’m a teacher here at this new school for lost angels,” she carried on.

“Angels?” I couldn’t help blurting out. Angels? Didn’t that mean? And then it hit me. If I was an angel then I was...

I felt a hand on my arm and looked up to see Miranda regarding me with kind eyes.

She said, “You’ve arrived here at the school because you were lost. I know you’re Lizzie, and I have been watching you, waiting until you got here. My role is to help and guide you to find your way to being a proper angel. To become a fully-fledged angel, you need to pass a test. And this is where I come in. I’m here to teach you as a trainee angel. You can call me your mentor, if you like. You took the first step when you saw that scene down below.”

I nodded and said the first thing that came to mind. “Stupid kids.” I clenched my fist.

“Let’s talk about it.”

“About what?”

“What we’ve just seen. As I mentioned before, to become a proper angel, you have to have a test,” Miranda said. “I know you haven’t been here that long, but after hearing what you thought about that scene I felt that you could help the people down below a lot.”

“Really? How?”

“OK, take a look down there and tell me what you see,” she said.

I leaned forward and peered down.

What I saw brought back memories, and not good ones either.

“Lizzie?”

“It’s a train station. Why?”

“Because of how you got here.”

I took a deep breath and looked down again, slowly as I felt my body tense in expectation.

“Oh my God, what are they doing? Playing with their lives like that on the tracks. Don’t they realise they could get themselves killed?”

Miranda looked at me.

Then it hit me, like that train did. “Oh that’s what I did, didn’t I?” I said, appalled.

“Yes, you did. Now you see why I think you can help them?”

I nodded.

“You want me to go down there to stop them from ending up here like me.”

“Exactly. Do you think you can do it?”

I nodded again. “How do I get down there?” I asked, feeling an unexpected thrill of excitement.

“If you’re ready then sit over there with your back to the wall and relax as though you’re going to sleep.”

I walked to where Miranda had pointed, sat down and tried to relax, letting my arms hang by my side. “You’ve got to relax,” I told myself.

“Now, close your eyes and imagine yourself there. Good luck, Lizzie. Show me what you can do. This is your test.”

I closed my eyes and recalled the scene I’d witnessed. Slowly I drifted away from my new world as my body loosened and I felt myself melt into the floor.

A tannoy announcing a train shook me awake, as though it had vibrated right through my body.

I woke up with a start, eyes dazzled, blinking to adjust to the bright light and loud noises.

Where was I?

Slowly the ticket booths across the way came into focus. The train station.

It was time for my test. I was a trainee angel!

Pushing myself up from the ground, I saw dust on my jeans but took no notice of it. There used to be a time when as soon as my clothes got dirty, they had to be washed immediately, but not now, not in my new world. More important things mattered there.

I took a good look at myself then. Where had all the dirt gone? I was sure that when I’d met Miranda I was covered in it and my hair was a mess, all matted. Now, apart from the dust I’d just sat on, I was clean. It was as if I’d gone through a washing machine and been ironed on the way from up there to down here, my clothes now being so clean and neat.

I made my way out of the foyer and towards the light.

Striding out into the open, I passed rows of people on the platform, waiting for the next train to arrive.

So many people getting on with their lives, intent on just catching their train and going to work. All interested in themselves. They weren’t important.

I felt the vibration of an oncoming train and looking up, saw it in the distance.

I had to find the boy, Craig, before he did anything stupid, so I kept an eye out for the blue denim.

Then I heard a shout of, “Craig!”

I glanced up and saw two boys on the platform opposite, waving.

I followed the direction of their waving, then I saw him. He was at the end of the platform, so I walked to the seat shelter and watched him from a distance.

It was almost time for the test. You can do it, I told myself. See it as a challenge.

I saw him look down at the tracks. Oh no, he was going to do something stupid, but what?

Then I heard, "Craig, you can do it. Come and join us."

The other boys were jumping up and down, and...beckoning him across to them.

"Come on, you can do it," I heard one shout.

I froze. There were those words again. Surely they were there to haunt me for ever.

Then he stepped down on to the tracks and started to run across the other side to his mates. Oh no, I'd failed to stop him. How could I make him see what he'd done was idiotic and could have ended my way?

But then I heard a whisper, "Oh no, he's stopped in the middle of the tracks."

Glancing up, I saw that he had indeed stopped in the middle. Why?

Then I felt myself go stiff as a plank, and somehow knew that this was what Craig was feeling. Oh my. He was struck with fear in between the tracks, with a train coming. I had to get him away from there.

I went to move forward but my feet stayed firm, as though they were stuck to the ground. Come on, feet, I have a test to complete. One to earn some wings and a halo, hopefully.

I felt a vibration go through me then and looked sideways. Oh heck, the train was coming. I didn't think he'd make it to the other side in time. How could I reach him to move him? Especially as my feet wouldn't work. I had to be facing him to do it.

All at once I felt my body, as it was, turn floppy, like unset jelly, and I became taller as first I saw above the train, then the step bridge. Eh?

As my head reached the bottom of the bridge, I went dizzy. Oh no, the height was affecting me. No, no, no. Then suddenly the bridge disappeared, then the platform was getting closer and closer, and...boing, ow, my body sprang back to its normal height on the platform. Great, that power wasn't helping me. You don't think the test would be that easy, do you? I told myself. Use your imagination.

The train was getting nearer, so I had to do it fast.

Maybe I could stretch across not up, I thought.

Whoever was in charge of my powers, must've heard me, because I felt my body stretching again, and this time my eyes were level with the gate on the other side.

When my head reached the middle of the tracks, next to Craig, I felt my body spring back to normal, causing me to do a roly poly on the hard ground.

As I dusted myself off and stood up, I was facing Craig. He was staring at me, his blue eye, sparking with...fear? At me? Or at his situation? Or both?

“Sorry about that. I’m new to this angel lark. Wasn’t meant to be greeting you like that,” I said.

“That was some roly poly,” he said.

“Maybe, but not a good idea on hard ground. Right, down to business. What do you think you’re doing?”

“What’s it look like?” he retorted, his eyes darkening into a deep sea colour.

“What it looks like to me is that you’re about to risk your life. But something must’ve stopped you cos you didn’t reach the other side.”

“So, what’s it to you?” He put his hand on his hips. I saw his lip quiver and knew he was scared, despite his bravado.

I bet he thinks a girl wearing jeans, T-shirt and strappy sandals, all spanking clean, must be posh or something. How wrong he was.

“My best friend fell and died here three months ago. I was with her. She was only fifteen,” I lied.

Had I seen him hesitate and go pale? I hoped so. “How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

“That’s too young.” Especially for a good-looking boy like him. He probably had girls lining up to be with him. Why would he want to do something as crazy as he had just attempted to do?

Thinking about my own family, I asked, “Do you have any brothers or sisters?”

He nodded. “A little brother.”

“I bet he looks up to you.”

Craig nodded again, making his dark floppy fringe swing from side to side. “He can be a pain at times.”

“And you’re thinking of risking your life. What would happen if you fell like my friend? How do you think they would react?”

He dropped his head, and his fringe fell over his eyes, so I couldn’t see them to know what he was feeling.

“What happened to your friend? How’d she die?” he asked.

It had to come. I blinked back the tears I felt waiting to burst out.

Gazing up at the sky, I sensed Miranda was probably watching. Did I carry on with the lie or tell the truth? Which was more painful? Still, it was my test and I knew what I must do.

I took a deep breath. "Actually, I lied, it wasn't a friend...it was me."

Craig looked at me. "You're...a ghost?" He ran his fingers through his floppy brown hair, his face suddenly pale.

I was getting to him now.

"No, I'm an angel, your guardian angel for today."

"You're an angel? Where are your wings? I don't see any." Craig smirked.

"That's cos I'm only a trainee angel and I have to earn them. I have to pass a test to get them and this is where you come in."

"Me?"

"Yeah, you're the test. I have to stop you risking your life and ending up like me."

"How?"

"By telling you why I'm an angel."

At least I'd got him thinking. "Well, you don't think I looked like this all the time, do you? One morning I had a huge row with my mum." A shiver like an ice cube going down my back went through me at the memory. I scrunched my eyes up and brought to mind that fateful day.

It was Craig exclaiming, "Oh, my God," that made me open my eyes and I blinked at the image in the air. Eh? How did my memory come alive like that? No, concentrate on the boy, I told myself.

"That was me that day. I loved my clothes and that was the problem."

"You were pretty, especially your eyes. A shame you had to end like you are, and make those green eyes of yours sad."

I wiped at the tears I felt slipping down my face.

"I stormed out of the house, slamming the front door. I went to find my mates who were always good for a laugh."

I put my hand to my head to block the memory. "I took this personally, thinking everyone was against me.

I knocked at my mates' houses and we went for a walk and ended up at the train station, laughing and joking all the way. By the time I'd got there the row with Mum was nearly forgotten until..."

"Until what?" Craig asked.

"Until the girls started a dare."

He raised his eyes. Ah, so that was what he'd been playing at.

"What was the dare?" he asked, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down as he spoke.

"The dare was to walk along the edge of the platform and whoever managed the furthest won. I was the first to go."

"What happened?"

I needed to show him again what could happen, so scrunched up my eyes and called up that memory, making me shudder as though the train was coming.

"There you are," Craig said, so I knew it had worked again.

I slowly opened my eyes, afraid to see the image of myself risking my life.

"Where do you wanna go?" Kate asked.

"Anywhere from here," I said.

"Oh no, you've not had another row with your mum, have you?" Kate asked.

I stayed silent.

"I take it that's a yes then."

"What was it about this time?" Marianne asked.

"What do you think?" I replied.

"Not clothes again? What was it this time?"

"She wouldn't give me money for them."

"Come on, let's get you away from here and have some fun," Kate suggested. "Ah, here's the station. Let's get on a train and see where we end up."

But as they went through the ticket barriers, collecting their tickets, Kate stopped, causing Marianne and me to bump into her.

"On the other hand, I've come up with a better idea. How about a game of dare?"

"That's for kiddies, not us," I moaned.

"This one isn't."

I saw a gleam of mischief in Kate's eyes. "What's the dare then?" I said.

"Right, you have to walk along the edge of the platform and the one who walks the furthest without swaying wins. Who wants to go first?"

OK, so you're not brave enough to be, I thought, but said, "I will." Anything to take my mind off Mum's anger. No, you've got to get her out of your mind when you do this.

"OK, Lizzie, along you go." Kate pushed me forward. "Come on, you can do it."

"Be a devil," said Marianne, and she giggled.

The scene playing out like I was watching a TV programme, I realised that Marianne by her giggling had been nervous. I hadn't heard it then. If I had then I probably wouldn't have gone ahead. I thought both my friends were brave enough to do it.

I watched myself step on to the edge of the platform, then put one foot in front of the other. I tensed, knowing what was to come next.

One minute I'd put a foot down, the next I saw myself sway.

"What happened then?" Craig asked.

My eyes shot open again and I breathed a sigh of relief at not having to go through the rest of that memory.

"I had one too many distractions on my mind, teetered and fell sideways, towards the tracks, just as a train came in. The poor driver didn't have a chance and..."

"You were killed?" he finished for me.

"Yes," I croaked, tears sliding down my face.

"What about your family?"

"They were devastated. Mum was beside herself, even blaming herself for not giving me that money, saying if she had then it wouldn't have happened. The family went to pieces. The funeral was the worst thing. Seeing that coffin being lowered into the ground and the family collapse in tears. Oh that coffin, it gave me the shivers when I saw it." In more ways than one, I thought now.

I let out a groan as I recalled what I'd seen that day.

I knew I had to show him how his family could be affected, so scrunched my eyes up and shuddered as I brought the day of my funeral to life.

"I'd been in limbo, floating from cloud to cloud, not sure what to do, when I heard a familiar voice moan, "Oh God, if only I'd given her the money that day, we wouldn't have to go through this.

"I looked down and saw my mum wearing black. It was my funeral and my mum was blaming herself for my death."

The image came into focus when a small voice called, "Mum, is this suitable?"

"That was my little sister," I whispered and saw him wince. "This is what I saw."

"It'll be fine, her mum replied, and then burst into tears. "Oh Lizzie, I'm sorry, forgive me."

The family left the house, and her mum collapsed upon seeing the coffin. Her dad stood still, silent. Her sister tagged behind, shuffling her feet.

They watched the procession to the gravesite and then the ceremony, and as the coffin was lowered, my heart nearly broke again when I saw Mum fall to the ground, crying, "I'm sorry, darling, I wish I'd given you that money now, then you wouldn't be up there and me down here."

Mum looked up at the sky. Had she known I was looking down? I liked to think so. "Mum," I whispered, "look after each other and keep an eye on our kid. Talk to her."

I smiled when I saw Mum get up from the ground and reach out to my sister and whisper something. I suspected it was to do with me looking down on them as my sister looked up and a fresh set of tears coursed down my face.

"They didn't talk to each other, so fell apart," I told Craig, my arms dropping like my heart did at reliving that day.

"Oh," he said, his eyes fixed on me.

Great, I now have him interested in me. So far, so good. Now what do I tell or ask him? Well, I'd been talking about leaving family behind so that would be it – the big question.

"So, can you tell me how your family would react if you did what you just did and fell like me?"

Tears welled up in his eyes, and I put a hand on his arm, making him shiver. I guessed I'd do that to people.

"I see that you have two options. Here's the first. I really don't want to show this but...here's what you could end up like, like I did when it all went wrong and I was killed."

I shook uncontrollably as the memory came alive. Shaking with nerves. I had no idea what I'd looked like when I was killed. I was dead.

I scrunched up my eyes and brought back the scene of the railway where I had been.

Craig put his head in his hands as we watched me sway, then fall on to the tracks.

The train station came into focus and with it my two friends clinging to each other, crying and screaming.

I bowed my head, thinking, if they were reacting like that, no wonder Mum and Dad had been so distraught at my funeral.

Then slowly, as though my eyes as a camera were reluctant to see it, in slow motion the scene went to the body on the tracks. My left leg was at an awkward angle, as was the rest of

my body and I was covered in blood, especially my hair. My lovely chocolate hair, that I'd cherished.

Craig whispered, "All that blood. How comes there's no blood on you now if you come from up there?"

"Well, I've been thinking about that too. I think that once we get to where I did and start to find our way, then your image is cleaned. Angels aren't meant to be bloody and scary."

I shook myself to rid my head of that awful image. "Would you like to see the other option?"

Craig nodded. "Please," he begged. Yes, that image had shaken him up. It had shaken me up too. God, what had I done to my family and friends?

"OK, here goes."

"That's me again and Danny and Tommy on the other side," Craig said.

We watched as they waved and heard a shout of, "Come on, you can do it." How I hated those words now.

Craig shook his head, left the station and a couple of minutes later appeared on the other side with his mates. They all got on the train, which had arrived, laughing.

I opened my eyes and said, "That was the other option. What are you going to do now?"

"I want to do what that scene showed, get on the train this side of the station. But I'm scared. What if I don't make it by the time the train's here?"

"I'll help you. OK, touch me, anywhere, and keep holding on," I told him. I hoped my idea worked.

When Craig touched me, I stretched my body again, to reach the other side of the station near his mates.

As I hoped, Craig was with me, and as I roly-polyed on to the ground, I was sure I'd have bruises after this, he was standing there.

"Just in time," he said.

I saw the train just round the corner.

"By the way, what's your name?"

"Lizzie. Now take care of yourself and be good."

At that I faded into the air, but could still see and hear him. I heard him whisper, "Thank you, Lizzie, my guardian angel."

I waited for a while, and once I saw him climb into a train, I wandered back to the foyer and sat down where I'd woken up.

I huddled up in the corner and closed my eyes, smiling. My job for today had been done. My first success. If only I'd had a guardian angel then, I'd not be here like this now.

A tear slid down my face. One family saved from the grief of a tragic accident, I thought, unlike my own.

A voice saying, "There's no need for tears, you did a good job, Lizzie. You can wake up now," brought me back to the world I'd come to know.

I opened my eyes to see that I was now surrounded by chairs and desks. Miranda was standing over me.

"I think I did it right," I said, giving a shy smile.

Miranda beamed. "Yes, you did, and you can see now if you come here."

I went and stood next to Miranda.

"Have a look down below."

I did and saw Craig chatting away with his mates on the train.

One boy asked, "How comes you didn't do the second part of the dare as planned?"

Craig replied, "Life's too short to risk it."

I smiled. Good, I'd taught him that lesson.

I sighed. "I wish I had had someone like me, who could have stopped me from doing what I did to end up here."

There was a knock on the door.

"I think I know who that is," Miranda said. "Come in, Jerry."

The door opened and a man with a pale face and white beard and moustache came in.

He smiled at me and, feeling drawn to him, I smiled back.

"Lizzie, meet Jerry Milton, my boss."

"Hello, Mr Milton."

"Afternoon, Lizzie. I heard what you just said before I appeared and I'm glad you said it."

"Oh?" I replied.

"Yes, I like to keep an eye on who arrives here as well as what is happening down there.

Which is what I want to talk to you both about. Tell me, Miranda, have you noticed recently that there seem to be a lot of youngsters coming here?"

"Now you say it, yes I have," Miranda said.

"It's a sad thing when a child dies before its parents, especially if it's unexpected. I have been watching down there the last few years and what those teenagers do with their lives

makes me go white, well, whiter than I can be.” His voice deepened and became husky when he said this.

My mouth twitched. His tone didn’t go with his sense of life, which was as large as his stomach was, and as loud as his bright blue shirt.

“This is where you can both help.”

“How, sir?” I asked, raising my eyebrows.

“I want to set up a team of teenage guardian angels who are here because they self-destructed and who you feel can help prevent others from doing the same thing down there. This is your job, Miranda.”

“Ah, I see why I had the test now. That’s a good idea.” I smiled.

“So how about being part of the team and helping Miranda find the second candidate?” Jerry asked, his green eyes twinkling at me.

“I’m the first candidate? Wow, I feel privileged.” A hum of excitement buzzed through my body for the first time since I’d arrived here. It was as if my body was coming alive again. Not that that could ever happen.

I’d been given a job to do and one I could do well.

Then I recalled part of what I’d done to help Craig. “Er, there’s one thing that I need to ask...”

“I think I know what it is,” Jerry said, “the magicking up of your memories...”

I nodded. “And the stretching.”

“You want to know how you did it. Well, that’s easy. You see, this is where the school up here is different. Whoever arrives here automatically receives certain magic powers as well as bringing your memories to life. Because it was your feet that got you here they were scared to move, so the rest of your body did it for you, hence, it stretched like it did. It worked though, didn’t it?”

“Oh yes, it made the boy change his mind.”

“Hopefully you’ll find the longer you’re here, the better your powers will become, and your wings will grow on you with each challenge and test you face and pass. Well done on the good job, Lizzie, and Miranda, I’ll leave you to think over what I’ve said. Good luck.”

“See, you did a good job and I’m proud of you. I know how hard it was for you to go there. Congratulations, Lizzie, you’ve passed your first test.”

“Why it had to be there, I don’t know.”

“To conquer your demons and put your past behind you.”

“It was hard, really hard.”

“I know; I saw when you hesitated after that lie.”

I blushed, feeling my face heat up like a burning flame. “I looked up and sensed you watching me and knew then what I had to do, tell the truth, which is what the test was all about, wasn’t it?”

Miranda nodded. “You can be proud of yourself, now that you’ve done it. You’ll find you’ll accept being here.”

“I will do, thanks to you and Jerry, and the magic powers.” I laughed.

“Now that you’ve passed your test, I need to show you something. Come with me,” Miranda said.

As we neared the end of the corridor I gasped. For as we got nearer, a doorway came into focus through the whiteness.

“Where does that lead to?” I asked.

“I’ll show you,” Miranda replied.

I followed and tried not to gasp again as, as we went through the doorway, stairs appeared. Miranda seemed to know where she was going, so I continued following her. Down the stairs, through another door, that appeared when we got there, into another corridor like the one we’d just come from. And there along it, were more doors, which as I walked past, saw desks and chairs.

“Classrooms?” I asked.

“Yes. The first one is called ‘The Persuasive Room’ for practising your persuasion skills like you did today; the next one is ‘The Magic Room’ for practising your magical powers to persuade others; the third is ‘The Scene Room’ where you can practise scenes where you could be needed and the last one is ‘The Team Room’ where you can bond with the other team members, when you are all together at last. Now I need to show you your room.” I followed Miranda back through the door at the end of the corridor and up two flights of stairs this time, into a bright sunshine yellow light.

“This is your dormitory, and the boys will be in the room next to it.”

Miranda opened the door and I walked in, to see a bed on the right and another on the left.

“As you’re the first here, you can have first choice of beds. I’ll leave you to settle in for now and no doubt will see you soon. Good night and good luck, Lizzie.”

“Night,” I replied, as I watched Miranda walk out of the room.

Feeling exhausted, I fell on to the first bed.

I tried to take in all that I’d seen and heard. Maybe it wasn’t going to be so bad up here after all. Not now that I knew I was needed and had a purpose.

As I thought this I felt my back tingle like something was tickling it. My wings! Were they starting to grow already? I twisted my head round over my shoulder to try to see my back but couldn't see anything, so I eased my hand round to feel instead and thought I felt something soft and furry there, like hairs growing.

I smiled. All I had to do was pass more challenges especially with my powers and they'd become whole. Wow! I couldn't wait.

Dear Reader

Thank you for buying and reading this book. If you enjoyed this one, then good because there are a few more to come about the trainee 'Guardian Angels.' The next book is Danny's story, who briefly featured in this one.

About the author:

I live in SE London. I have been writing for 19 years and have had published reader letters in green, health and writing magazines, short stories in small press magazines Creature Features and Crystal, and my first children's fiction book was published in 2009 called Rosie and the Sick School, about healthy eating at school with magical elements. I am currently working on my third book for 8-12 year-olds called Georgina, Queen of Clean about using natural beauty products at school with magical elements.

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