

Heaven is vastly populated with highly consecrated free-flowing and fast-moving agents who come to our aid. Angels they're called. Diversely united, conversely excited, by opportunities before them laid working hard to meet our need both with us and on our behalf they plead. Angels they are. They are put forth to redirect us but we must first believe. And they work hard to reconnect us if only we would to them heed. Angels - we have them, we do indeed. And so I invite you on an expedition today in hopes that you will walk away with just a glimpse of our guardian angels and what they might have to say...

CHAPTER 1 “ALL GOD’S CHILDREN GOT SHOES”

Roby always lingered near the newsroom. He was good friends with Herald, and he enjoyed being the first to hear the news. Today’s headline was a real shocker! Roby grabbed the first copy of the *News Testament* to slip off the printing press and headed straight for the Wing Maker’s station. “Have you heard the news?” he provokingly asked as he handed Wingston the latest edition.

Wings could hardly believe the caption he read: *Sadie Montgomery scheduled for ascension*. According to the story, an unnamed source confirmed that Sadie’s last day on earth was fast approaching and she was preparing to take flight for the heavens.

A very impatient Wingston marched straight to the newsroom. “Why am I just finding out about this,” he demanded to know.

Herald all but dismissed him as he nonchalantly responded, “My job, Wings, is to report the news as I get it. Not to run it past you first.”

“Report the news as you get it! For all we know this report could be totally unfounded.”

“It most certainly is founded. I have it on good authority that Sadie Montgomery has been scheduled for departure. My source says she takes flight in two weeks.”

“Two weeks!?! How in heaven’s name am I supposed to get a pair of wings made by then?” Wings turned to Roby, “I guess you’ve known all along. I suppose you’ve already fitted ol’ Sadie for her robe.” Wingston was always suspicious and accusatory when he thought plans were being made behind his back.

“Nope” Roby responded, “I found out from the headline just like you. But, there’s no need of complaining. If the ol’ girls coming up I’ll just have to step up the process and have her raiment ready in two weeks. No big deal.”

“*No big deal*, that’s easy for you to say. A snip here and a tuck there and, boom, you’ve got a robe. Wing making is detailed and intricate, and my staff cannot be hurried. We need time to make a set of wings to carry someone all the way from earth to glory, and two weeks ain’t nearly enough time.”

Wingston left in a huff and made a point of stopping to ask the other division chiefs if they had been given advance notice of Sadie’s arrival. He checked with Tiara in crowns; Courtney in legal; Justice in juvi (*not that he expected Justice to be familiar with an old African American woman like Sadie*) but he checked just the same. He checked with Labon in delivery, but Labon explained, as he often had to, that he deals with out-going – not incoming deliveries. Labon advised him to check with Reggi in admittance, but Reggi was way too busy to entertain Wingston’s tirade. She was purging her registry of folk who years ago had enrolled in Kingdom Building but never actually showed up. Wingston even checked with Hosè in fire-fighting. Nothing! No one person

had any more information on Sadie's arrival than the next, and their apparent unconcern made Wingston boil. Lastly, he went to see Sandfoot the shoemaker. He was received by Solena, Sandfoot's daughter, and as he awaited Sandfoot's arrival he managed to calm down.

Wingston liked Sandfoot a lot. When he was converted from mortal to immortal Sandfoot made sure his shoes fit perfectly. This was particularly endearing to Wingston because he spent most of his life on earth in poverty, and he often wore ill-fitted shoes. Poor Wingston was known for singing the refrain ". . . all God's children got shoes. When I get to heaven, gonna put on my shoes, gonna walk all over God's heaven."

During his childhood on earth, Wingston's dad was employed as a baggage handler for a major airline, and Wings loved to go to work with his dad. His face was always glued to the window. He watched the huge planes take flight and dreamed of being an ace pilot. He didn't get to go to work with dad nearly as much as he would have liked. He had to go to school, and anyway he was one of several children and they all took pride in watching their father do his job. So, Wings had to wait his turn.

Steward enjoyed the company of all of his children, but he was particularly moved by Wingston's enthusiasm with aviation. Of course, it troubled him that his son had such high hopes of one day becoming a pilot. Steward knew that little Black boys like Wings would never be allowed to pursue such goals. Still, he didn't have the heart to dissuade his dreams. He simply

looked away whenever Wings talked of one day becoming a pilot. Wings knew all too well what his dad's silence meant, but he continued his hopeful chatter – inserting from time to time that “the Lord will make a way somehow.”

And, make a way the Lord did. After a childhood of difficulties and hardship Wings earned a scholarship to study aeronautics alongside the distinguished Airmen of Tuskegee. They were strong, proud, African Americans who helped to preserve world democracy during World War II. Nearly a thousand of these airmen were US fighter pilots and fifteen thousand were grounds-crew. Whether in the air or on the ground Tuskegee Airman were known for their commitment to excellence and outstanding service. Their custom was to decorate the tails of their aircrafts with bright red paint. This custom and their expertise at rescuing US Troops from enemy fire earned them the nickname “Red-Tail Angels”.

But Wingston's glory on earth was short lived. He had an even greater assignment in the sky. Not long after the war he became an angel for real. Wingston was given a magnificent pair of wings and he took flight for glory. He was such an experienced pilot that the Lord didn't even send a carrier for him. Of course he flew safely to heaven without a bump or bruise, and as soon as he got there he asked if he could work in aviation. His original assignment was in drop-offs and pick-ups. He loved to mount a new born baby upon his wings, fly her to earth, and safely deposit her in the arms of loving parents. He even liked making pickups. Especially when the remaining mortals understood that taking

flight for glory is a good thing. Wingston was excellent at his work, but of course everyone knew he would be. He had been created, by the Lord God himself, to do that very work.

Before long, Wingston was known throughout the entire aviation department, and he was good friends with old man Pilate, the chief wing maker. Pilate had been in aviation for eons and he had put in a request for retirement. As was His custom, the Lord God told Pilate that he could not retire until he had chosen and successfully groomed his own replacement. Naturally, Pilate chose Wingston, son of Steward, the Red-Tail Angel to be his successor. When Steward learned of Wingston's appointment he finally understood why he had been laden with such heavy baggage throughout his life. Carrying those bags helped his son to achieve his eternal destiny. It all seemed worthwhile then.

It warmed Wingston's heart to recall such fond memories of his early days in the Kingdom. An especially fond memory was the day he was promoted to Chief Wing Maker, and Sandfoot presented him with a pair of winged shoes. They were the first ever of that kind, and Sandfoot hand-made them himself. Wingston's anger was softened as he awaited Sandfoot's arrival.

"What's flying?" Sandfoot asked as he strolled over to the desk where Wingston waited.

"Sandy, have you heard that Sadie Montgomery is scheduled for arrival soon? Has she been fitted for shoes?"

Sandy, with his heavily accented Latino voice replied, "I ain't no last minute guy. Ol' Sadie was fitted darn near a hunned years ago when she first made her decent to earth."

"How could you have fitted her for her final shoes when she only had infant feet?"

"I'm good friends with Philebert. His people have been responsible for eternal profiling for years. As soon as he gets the birth data on a mortal he can plug that information into his computer, and whammy – you have your final profile. You show him what someone looks like at birth, and he can tell you what they'll look like in 20 years, 40 years, and even at the point of death. If I give him a footprint, he can give me a final shoe size. We've been doing it for years. That's how I stay ahead of the game. No last minute shoe making for me. I have boxes upon boxes of shoes just waiting for pick up, and Sadie's have been ready for many, many years."

"Boxes upon boxes of shoes, why that's ridiculous. That's, no doubt, why mortals think they're supposed to have shoes for every occasion. They probably heard that heaven's chief shoemaker has shoes in every style and color and now they think they ought to follow suit." Wingston was getting uppity again. Waste always annoyed him, but Sandy knew just how to keep him in line.

"Not all mortals follow my example. As I recall neither you nor your daddy ever had more than one pair of shoes at a time, and the pair you had never fit right."

Wingston was duly humbled, "I'm not saying it's a bad idea to be prepared, it's just that I'd hate to see all those shoes go to waste." "None of the shoes will go to waste Wings. Each pair has been custom made for a particular person. The last time I made a pair of shoes on the spot was when you were promoted to chief wing maker. I wanted you to have special shoes that could be used for walking or flying. Now, you must admit that those are the coldest shoes you've ever seen. Go on and admit it!"

"They are pretty cool," Wingston replied but that doesn't help me with my problem with Sadie. She's due to take flight in two weeks and I don't have any wings for her."

"That's why this profiling thing is so cool. I am never behind schedule. I can custom make a guy's shoes in keeping with his style and color preference long before he actually arrives. Of course it's never been too difficult with the guys anyway. It's the womenfolk who give me a hard time, 'I don't like this kind of sole or that kind of heel.'

You see, the first profilers weren't nearly as proficient as Philebert. Their equipment was hazy, and they would often report that 'it does not yet appear what she shall be.' But Phile has no problems making a clear and accurate report. His father used a darkened glass, but Phile can see a mortal face to face."

"That's all well and good, Sandy, but the profilers can't help me. I can't make wings years ahead of time. One, I don't have space in the wing shop to

store them, and two, wings decay if they are not used. In the days of old, mortals needed help getting to and from the Throne Room, and even then most of them didn't approach the Throne nearly enough to keep a pair of wings in good condition. But, now days they don't even need them for that. When they're in trouble they shout out to the Lord, and he dispatches one of us. Shucks, if it's a faithful servant he makes the call himself. I definitely cannot make wings in advance. I just need to be informed in enough time to get them ready."

"I have an idea. How much time does it take to make wings?"

"Well, that depends upon the age, faithfulness, and ministry of the servant. Typically wings for the aged are larger and more detailed than those for the young - though not always. The very faithful absolutely have more beautifully intricate wings than the not so faithful, and then there's always the emblem of ministry which must be engrafted. Some emblems are by design more difficult to reproduce."

"Just give me a ballpark figure" "On the low end, it takes no less than four weeks, on the high end four months."

"O.K. what you need to do then is find out the time of death for each mortal, have Philebert give you an end report on them which will tell you things like their age and faithfulness, and you can plan ahead."

"And, how exactly would I get the time of death on each mortal. It's recorded in The Book that no man knows the day or the hour . . ."

“No *man* knows the day, but there are angels who know. Check in with Doc. Cori, she knows the exact date, time, and cause of death for every mortal. It actually slays me that mortals think they can get away with murder. When they get by on earth they think it's over. They have no idea that the Coronados have witnessed every death since Cain slew Abel.”

Wings knew that Sandy's suggestion was a good one, but he was reluctant to take it just the same. He understood the need for Doc Cori and her people, but he was still uncomfortable with them. He avoided the Medical Examiner's Station at all cost. It was always filled with sadness. When you entered Doc Cori's office you could hear the weeping and wailing of mothers who unjustly lost their children, and of children whose parents and grandparents were taken away. Everyone in the Kingdom knew that divine justice would prevail in the end, but until then, the Coroner's Office was the most difficult spot in the Kingdom. In fact, when Corinne took over for her mother Corona she all but demanded that the office be move from the back of the Kingdom (where it had been hidden away) to the front. Her demands were met and she was placed in an office at the very front of the Kingdom near the Throne Room of God. Her rationale was that the people would be better comforted if their cries of distress were directly heard by God rather than by the Coronados alone. She was right. The cries of the people so distressed God that cures that had been scheduled for the distant future were released in advance. Murder trials with outcomes expected to favor guilty defendants were suddenly and

unexplainably reversed. No two ways about it, Corinne Coronado defies all of the negative stereotyping of women and of Latinos. She is a genius. It is no accident that she is an expert in Medicine and Law.

Wings went back to the shop to complete the work he was doing when Roby interrupted him. He was putting the final touches on the wings for a Mr. Chong Soo Leung and a Mrs. Wei Zhou Huang., both scheduled to arrive at the exact same time: one from Korea, the other from the People's Republic of China. Wingston and his staff had been working on the wings for quite a while. He had known for some time that Mr. Leung would be coming. His wife had flown in exactly a year ago to the date. When her flight landed the carrier advised the welcoming committee (among whom was Wings) that she didn't expect the husband to last more than a year without his wife. Carriers were seldom wrong about these things, so Wingston assigned a crew to prepare for Mr. Leung right away.

As for Mrs. Huang, they didn't have nearly as much notice, but they had welcomed several of the Huangs before, and each time a new one arrived they'd put in a request for some other family member whom they hoped would soon follow. Daiyu Huang was flown in about a year and a half ago. During her winging ceremony she slipped a note to Wingston which read: *mother asked that I give you the specifications for her wings.* Wingston laughed at the very idea: a mortal telling him how to make wings. But, there he was a year and a half later checking to make sure that her every request had been fulfilled.

Mrs. Huang was a beautiful silver-headed little woman whose only language was Chinese. When her children and grandchildren encouraged her to learn another tongue she politely explained to them, "I am only living in China. From here I shall go to glory, and the Lord God speaks fluent Chinese." Through the years they could make no headway with her, and as strand by strand of her beautiful hair turned from deep brown to shimmering silver and her small frame drew closer to the earth, they gave up trying. There was little else for Wingston to do in preparation for Chong Soo or Wei Zhou. Each had wings of the richest colors. Wei Zhou's were of varying shades of red and purple. She had specifically requested that there not be any other colors in her wings. She loved only red and purple. Wingston was not accustomed to being restricted to using only two colors: it was quite a challenge. He pulled it off, however. He used every shade imaginable of those two colors: there was crimson, scarlet, rose and raspberry, lilac, lavender, violet and plum and most especially there was candy apple and amethyst.

Wingston stepped backed (a technique he had learned from the Lord God Himself) and looked critically at his work. It was good – very good. Normally, Wings breathed a sigh of relief when he completed a piece of work. This time was different. He didn't feel a sense of relief because he was unprepared for Sadie Montgomery's arrival. There was only one thing left to do. He had to pay a visit to Dr. Cori. As he walked ever so slowly to the Medical Examiner's Station (M.E.S.) he realized that he didn't even know what to ask for.

There was no point in asking Sadie's due date as had been suggested by Sandy. He already knew when she was coming: in two weeks - just like the newspaper said. But, he needed to do something, and talking to Dr. Cori was the best he could come up with. He knocked on the glass of the M.E.S. and signaled for Dr. Cori to come out. She was accustomed to this as everyone hated coming to her office.

"Good to see you Mr. Wingston. How have you been?" "I've been well. I simply cannot believe that you are actually managing the Coroner's Office. It seems but yesterday you were just a child." Corinne had crossed the pearly gates at the tender age of 12 years old. She and her mother had been killed in a boating incident. The mortal records indicate that they were victims of an accidental drowning. The official records show otherwise, but then that's another story for another time.

Corinne knew that Mr. Wingston was beating around the bush, but she indulged him anyway. She figured that he would eventually get to the issue. Finally he did.

"Listen child," he began. "I found out this morning that Sadie Montgomery is expected in two weeks."

"Yes, I saw the headline in the morning edition, but I haven't actually read the article," Corinne interrupted.

"Well, you see, the problem is that I haven't enough time to prepare any wings for her."

“Oh my goodness! So what do you need from me? Extra workers or something? It's actually pretty quiet here. I bet I can spare some of my staff.”

“No, dear. That won't be necessary. The last time I tried to use untrained laborers in the wing shop it was disastrous. I was hoping maybe you could delay Sadie's coming for a while. Just so that I'd have time to prepare for her.”

“Hmm, I see your dilemma. I really do, but I don't have any jurisdiction over these kinds of things. I have to work within the parameters of the schedule as it is issued. Only the Lord himself can make a schedule change, and to my knowledge it has never been done. I'm sorry Mr. Wingston. I promise – I'll help you in any other way I can.”

Wings bid farewell to Corinne with a kiss and hug and walked back to his quarters. He moved slower on the way back than he did on the way up. He was overwhelmed with anxiety. In the history of his tenure as Chief Wing Maker he had never missed an assignment. He had a few close calls, but never a miss. He complained vehemently about the last minute orders, but he always made the deadline. This time it was simply impossible. Wings resisted his urge to cry as he said to himself, “the only thing worse than missing a deadline is missing the deadline for someone as deserving as Sadie Montgomery.”

Sadie was just a terrific woman. She had been faithful in service to the Kingdom throughout her entire lifetime on earth, which by all accounts was nearly one hundred years. There had been heated debates over the years as to Sadie's exact age. No one earth and only two folk in heaven (Dr. Laban in

deliveries and the Lord God Himself) knew for sure just how old Sadie was. Some say she's 90. Others say no less than 95. At Sadie's request neither the Lord nor Doc Labon say anything at all. It didn't really matter though. One thing was certain. Sadie's age, faithfulness, and ministry entitled her to the best pair of wings to ever have been made, and instead she would have no wings at all. Wingston laid down to rest with Sadie on his mind. It had been the longest day of his life. He didn't really expect to sleep (or even rest) but he lay down just the same.

Just as he settled in there was a knock at the door. As he moved toward the door, he wondered who would be knocking so late. It was a new young cherub. Rashid or something, Wings thought, is his name. What in the heavens does he want at this hour? Wings opened the door.

"Mr. Wingston my name is Rashi." Rashi extended his hand; Wingston declined the shake. "I'm one of the guards over in the west wing. West **wing** – get it?"

Wingston got it all right, and he wasn't in the mood for uninvited humor. "State your business young man," he said as he thought to himself what kind of name is Rashi, and what's with these young cherubs referring to themselves as "the guards." "Well, sir, I know that you are trying to keep Sadie Montgomery from getting in, and I was thinking maybe we could work together."

"What the," Wingston almost said an unholy word. "How dare you accuse me of trying to keep Sadie out of the Kingdom."

“It’s written right here in the paper, sir.” Rashi showed Wings the evening edition of the *Testament*.

There it was in black and white: ***Wing maker Flies the Coop at the Thought of Montgomery Coming***. Outraged is hardly an adequate description of Wingston Steward’s state of mind. He snatched the paper from young Rashi and headed straight for the Throne Room. As he stepped across his threshold he saw the Montgomerys coming for him. They were equally outraged by his audacity.

The Montgomerys were well represented in the Kingdom. They were a huge family of African and Anglo decent from the regions round about Alabama. They had endured great hardships through the years and were known for perseverance in the face of adversity. The Anglo Montgomerys were among the first recorded U.S. slave owners; which of course means that the African Montgomerys were among the first recorded U.S. slaves. For years there was bitterness and division in the Montgomery family. Nothing will divide a people like slavery. The Anglos were so self-righteous and dishonorable no one (except the Lord of course) held out any hope that they would get anywhere near the Kingdom. Their deeds against the Africans were absolutely despicable! The beatings, the lynching, the kidnappings, and the cold-blooded murders had all been written in the book. The bookkeepers thought for certain that no white man (or woman) named Montgomery would ever be welcome in the Kingdom. The bookkeepers were wrong.

Many of the Anglican Montgomerys remain in the dank, coolness of the grave, but many of them turned away from their wickedness. Before their days on earth came to an end, they began to ask forgiveness of their African brothers and sisters. They were dreadfully fearful of well-deserved rejection, but the Africans were peculiar people. They agreed to put the past behind them and to press onward to their higher calling. They managed to see the diabolical sufferings of slavery as the means by which the Lord God would bring them to an even greater place of freedom. Occasionally someone will stop and stare when they notice an Anglican with wings who mentions that his name is Montgomery. But, for the most part the Kingdom has come to accept that the Lord God is even more peculiar than the Africans, and He is able to restore even the greatest of offenders.

When Wingston saw the Montgomery mob coming toward him he immediately took flight. The Montgomerys followed suit, but of course none of them could navigate like Wings. He beat them to the Throne Room. Out of sheer panic he rushed right in without seeking permission, as is heaven's custom. Out of sheer outrage the Montgomerys did the same. The Lord God was expecting them all.