

Peach Pits And Angels – A Short Story

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David could tell he was being followed. But he didn't want to turn around and see who was there because then the person might want to talk to him. And he didn't want to talk. His daily walk home from Dalton High School was his time to think, his time to be away from the noise of the day, his time alone before walking into The Serious.

Ever since summer he'd named his home The Serious, because that was when his mom stopped baking cookies and singing in her rose garden and reading jokes out loud from the Internet. That was when the whole house had turned quiet and fragile and had gotten much too sober for his liking.

He walked faster, hoping whoever was trailing behind would leave him alone.

Just then, something hard hit him squarely on the back of his head.

"Ow!" He rubbed the spot on his skull and turned around to glare. A frumpy girl with bright blue eyes, freckles, and long, wavy hair stood there revealing her multi-colored braces in a smile. She looked to be about his age.

"You threw a stone at me!"

"It wasn't a stone. It was a peach pit. Well, technically, peach pits can be called stones. But it wasn't a rock, if you know what I mean."

He picked up the dried peach pit and flung it into the street. It skipped and rolled and came to a stop

against the curb on the other side. Turning toward home again, he tried to will away the stone-throwing girl with his thoughts.

“An angel threw it. It’s her signature. So people know she’s been around.”

She pulled up beside David.

Pretending to be alone, he increased his stride.

“She was just playing.” The freckled girl kept pace alongside. “Her name is Georgia.”

“Do you mind?” he stopped and glared. “I’d like to be *alone*.” He started walking again and hoped she’d get the message.

“But you asked for help.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did. Besides, Georgia thinks I should walk with you.”

David *hadn’t* asked for help. Not from her or from anyone else. He raised his voice in irritation. “You have an angel named Georgia who throws peach pits at people’s heads. Aren’t you special?” Sarcasm dripped from every word.

“Don’t you think it’s peachy? And by the way, everybody has an angel.”

He rolled his eyes at her moronic joke.

“You have an angel too.”

Looking at the redhead beside him, he realized he’d never seen her before, and he was nearing The Serious. If he walked into his home she would know where he lived.

Shifting the weight in his backpack so it would be more evenly balanced on his shoulders, he stopped on the sidewalk in front of his neighbor’s home.

“Oh.”

The girl was gazing at something beyond him.

“Do you know the people who live there?” She pointed directly at his house.

“Okay, that does it. Are you stalking me?” He’d heard of those types. People who tracked others. They sat outside homes for hours at a time; stared into bedroom windows; watched when people left and returned; noted any peculiar habits and all regular activities.

“I only asked, because Georgia just walked in that front door. Someone in that family probably needs her care.”

He stared, incredulous. “What do you mean, Georgia walked into the house? And how do you know about my mother?” David sucked in air and groaned audibly. It was out of his mouth before he could stop it, and there was no taking it back. Even if she didn’t know about his mom’s blood disease, now she knew it was his house.

“That’s where you live! Oh, so that explains everything!” Her blue eyes brimmed with unruffled confidence. “Come on. I’d like to visit with your mother.” She grabbed his arm, meaning to walk beside him as though they actually knew each other.

He yanked his arm free and backed away.

“Who *are* you?”

“Georgia’s in there. Don’t you think we should find out what she’s up to?” She cut across the grass without waiting for his answer.

“You can’t just barge into my house! I mean, I don’t even know your name! And my mom’s probably asleep!”

She stopped and held out her hand. “I’m Rachel. Like the wife of Jacob.”

Without a clue as to who Jacob was, he shook her hand and his head at the same time. This kid was unbelievable. “I’m David.” Why was he putting up with her?

Reaching his front stoop, she stood and waited for him to open the door.

The last time he felt so bewildered was when his parents had thrown him a surprise party for his thirteenth birthday. He'd thought they were driving him to the Rec. Center so he could apologize for a smart remark he'd made to the basketball coach.

But when he'd walked into the gym a loud chorus of voices yelled "SURPRISE!" It had taken him at least ten seconds to figure out he didn't have to sweat bullets anymore about the dreaded apology.

This was a little like that. Everything was turned upside down.

He couldn't believe he was going to do it. Almost surreally, David opened the door and let her go in ahead of him.

"Thank you," she said, and walked right into his foyer.

Inside to their left was the formal dining room. Only, when the whole house had turned into The Serious, his mom's hospital bed was moved into that space. So now it was a bedroom, a visiting room for friends, and a place for the whole family to be able to hang out.

"Mom! You're awake!"

Shutting the front door, he tossed his backpack on the floor and ran over to his mother's bed. Lately she'd been sleeping almost non-stop. But at the moment she was propped up on a pillow, looking more alert than he'd seen her in weeks.

"Hi honey, welcome home!" she said weakly, and smiled her thin smile.

He felt the girl move next to him. Before he could form words to explain why there was a stranger in the room, she was introducing herself.

“Hi David’s mom, my name is Rachel. Rachel, like the wife of Jacob. I’m a friend of David’s.”

He tossed her a look that let her know she wasn’t his friend.

“Hi Rachel,” his mother said, “I’m Mrs. Jordan.”

“Did you meet the angel yet? Her name is Georgia.”

David cringed. His mom was having a good day. This Rachel girl was wasting precious quality time with her nonsensical conversation.

“An angel?” He couldn’t tell whether his mom’s eyebrows were raised in surprise or disbelief.

“But not everybody can see Georgia. She’s standing behind you and she’s got her hand on your head.”

He watched his mother’s mouth as she laughed. The sound was musical. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d heard that beautiful sound, that wonderful sound.

“Thank you, Rachel, what a creative thing to say. Maybe that’s why I’m feel a little better.”

The kid winked at him.

Rachel moved to the far side of the bed and gently took hold of Mrs. Jordan’s other hand. “You’re going to be just fine, Mrs. Jordan. Georgia and I can guarantee it.”

“Oh really?”

“Yep. God sent Georgia and me to help you.”

Mrs. Jordan wheezed. Something caught in her throat. She choked and then the hacking cough started, the kind where she always held her ribs so the pain wasn’t overwhelming.

David grabbed the glass of water from her nightstand and offered it to her. She took it and drank a few swallows, and at last the coughing stopped.

“You’ll see. Things will turn out just peachy.”

He gave Rachel a cold, hard stare, but she didn't see it because she was smiling at his mother. The light caught her iridescent braces and sent a small rainbow reflecting out from her teeth.

Was this ridiculous girl blind, or just incredibly insensitive? Hadn't she seen his mom wheezing and holding her side in excruciating pain? At the start of *The Serious*, his dad had sat him down and explained everything about his mom's blood disease and the breakdown of her immune system. He knew the doctors could only delay her dying. She would never be cured.

"Rachel, stop it. I think you should leave now." He didn't want his mother to feel bad at hearing such lies. Not on one of her better days.

"Honey, don't worry. It's all right. Rachel meant well."

His mom set her glass down, stroked his hair and smiled into his eyes.

He was amazed she was able to say so many sentences in a row without going back to sleep. This really was an outstanding day. Smiling back at her, out of the corner of his eye he saw Rachel bend down toward the floor.

"How was school, David?"

His mom was staring at him affectionately. Her question about his daily life felt strange. Because of her sickness, they hadn't talked about school for weeks. By this time, every normal answer had piled up in his brain as a silent, jumbled mess that was impossible to sort out.

He shrugged and said, "okay."

"That's it? Just okay?"

Searching for something important to say while she still had energy and could focus, David pinched his brows together in thought. And at that moment, while staring intently into space, he realized that girl had never

stood up from bending over. His mind jumped tracks and pulled in her direction.

“Hey! Where’s that kid?” He walked to the other side of the bed and looked around. She was going to get a piece of his mind, because this certainly wasn’t the time or place to be playing hide and seek. Getting on his knees, he looked under the bed, and all around at ground level. Standing up, he stared at his mother blankly. “What in the...?”

She was gazing at something in her hand. “Well, I wonder where this came from?” Holding her open palm toward him so he could see the object, she said, “I haven’t eaten a peach since the summertime.”

David gawked at the dried peach pit. “But I threw that away!”

“Threw what away?”

“On the way home from school, that girl Rachel threw a peach pit at me. It hit me on the head and I picked it up and pitched it to the other side of the street.”

“I wonder how it got here.”

“Where did you find it?”

“Well, I’m not sure. I...” his mom stopped to think. “...I looked down and there it was, in my hand. But I have no idea how it got there.” Her expression was quizzical and a little sheepish, as though she felt embarrassed to admit such a thing.

He went into the foyer and searched beyond, to their living room, their family dining room, the kitchen, and in the bathroom next to the kitchen. No sign of Rachel. Walking back into the formal dining room, he caught his mom standing up beside the bed.

“Mom!” he yelled, and ran to her side. “You shouldn’t be out of bed! You’re too...”

She interrupted. “Why shouldn’t I get out of bed?” Her legs wobbled a bit and she steadied herself with a

hand on the bed. “I wonder what happened to your friend. When did she leave?”

“I don’t know. But she wasn’t my friend, Mom. I never saw her before today, when she hit me with that peach pit.”

Flotsam from his wacky conversation with Rachel floated to the surface of his thoughts, and at that moment he remembered. When The Serious had come to hover over his home like a hostile alien spaceship, he’d been provoked to do an Internet search on the existence of God. But sorting through the Buddha god, the Hindu god, the Muslim god, the Christian god and all the other god options had been too confusing. In frustration he’d finally talked out loud to his computer screen. “Whoever you are, will the real God come and fix my mom? I need her. We need her. Please. She can’t...” He hadn’t wanted to say the ‘D’ word. A real god would know what he meant. But only plastic silence reflected back at him. He finally gave up and let the gods roam inside the computer’s search engine to work out their own existences.

He *had* asked for help! That girl was right. His mind returned to the present and he glanced at the peach stone in his mom’s hand. “Did she give you that pit?”

Mrs. Jordan grabbed her housecoat from the nearby recliner and began to put it on. “No, I told you, I didn’t notice it until...well, I think it was when you started looking for Rachel.” She sat on the edge of the bed and tied the belt of her robe. “Didn’t she have the bluest eyes you’ve ever seen?” His mother smiled and stood again. “I think I’ll take a stroll into the kitchen. It feels wonderful to be standing and walking!”

Wide-mouthed, David began to protest. But who was he to stop his mom, when she was obviously stronger than she’d been in days and weeks?

“Uh, I think I’ll take my backpack into my bedroom. I’ll be back.”

“Okay, sweetie. I’m not going anywhere.” She grinned at her little joke. They both knew, except for doctor’s visits she hadn’t been out of the house for a long time.

Walking into his room, he tossed his backpack onto his bed, sat down at his computer, and startled. There on the keyboard was a peach pit. He picked it up and raced out to the kitchen.

“Mom! Do you still have that peach pit?”

“It’s in my pocket.”

“Can I see it?”

“Sure.” She pulled it out and showed it to him.

He was too stunned to move.

“David, what’s wrong?”

He held out the pit in his hand. “It was in my room.”

“Isn’t that strange!” Mrs. Jordan shook her head. “The girl used that word. Do you remember? She said things would turn out just *peachy*.” Smiling oddly, Mrs. Jordan added, “and she said God sent her and the angel—what was its name? Oh yes, Georgia—to help.”

For someone who had long ago given up, experiencing hope was something like jump-starting a rusty old motor. David’s heart sputtered and caught, and finally pounded to life.

“Mom. How are you feeling? Are you okay?”

She gave him a peculiar glance. “I haven’t been this strong for a long time, have I?” Opening the refrigerator door, she said, “I must say, I rather like being vertical.”

He wasn’t sure how to ask the question without creating suspicion, but he had to know the answer. “When did you start feeling better?”

Rummaging through the chaos of Chinese take-out containers, a pizza box, and various TV Dinners strewn

throughout the refrigerator, she said, “You and Dad haven’t been eating very well, have you?”

“Mom. When did you start to feel better?”

“I don’t know, honey. A few minutes before you came home, I suppose.” Grabbing a bag of baby carrots, she closed the fridge door and sat down on a stool at the counter. “Isn’t it wonderful?”

David watched in absolute amazement as his mom ate a carrot. A carrot! After she’d lost her appetite, he and his dad practically forced her to sip pureed soups and fruit juices.

And there she sat, happily chewing a carrot.

“I’ll be right back.”

Without waiting for her response, he hurried into his bedroom, closed the door and leaned back. Gathering his thoughts, he said out loud, “I have no idea what just happened. But if that girl was right...” he looked up at the ceiling, just because it seemed like the best place to look while talking to a real God, “...if my mom...if the peach pits...” he had no idea how to put his thoughts in order, “...if you *did* answer me and you are helping my mom...”

He slid down the door into a sitting position.

It was all too fantastic to believe.

But how did that girl, Rachel get out of the house? TWO people were in the room, TWO people saw her, and she was suddenly just not *there*.

And how was his mom was standing up? Walking? Eating real food?

And where did those peach pits come from?

And why on earth would an angel use peach pits as their calling card?

The last question had nothing to do with figuring out the sequence of extraordinary events, but it was bothering him. Who knew? Maybe angels had a sense of humor.

“So, if you’re fixing my mom,” hope massaged his emotions and he said softly, “thank you.” Maybe he should also thank the disappearing girl, and Georgia. “And thank Rachel and Georgia for me.” He clutched the peach pit in his hand.

Time to check on his mom and see if she was still vertical. He stood and opened the door, directing one more thing up toward the ceiling: “And I’d really like to know which one of the gods you are, because if this is actually happening—you’re *awesome!*”

Opening the door, he walked through the formal dining room, past the empty hospital bed, and into the kitchen where his mom sat munching raw veggies.