

## Angel Cake

by Susan Norman

*Yet tears to human suffering are due;  
And mortal hopes defeated and o'erthrown  
Are mourned by man, and not by man alone.*  
William Wordsworth

"The life of every human being is precious to Me," I said in My mid-range voice that falls somewhere between the conversational "How's the weather today, Noah?" and My bone-quaking burning bush voice-over. I surveyed the motley scattering of souls trembling before me, each a mere pin-prick of light.

"That said, it is now time to determine your eternal destiny. Will council please draw nigh unto Me?"

Munkir, My prosecuting angel, and Nakir, angel for the defense, approached. Their ethereal presence mingled with the swirling colors of the aurora borealis serving as My judicial robes. Nakir presented the first soul for judgment. "My Lord, in life Monique Silverberg was a loving wife and mother, actively involved in her synagogue and community. Her every thought and deed focused on improving herself for the benefit of her loved ones."

One of the infinitesimal points of light glowed proudly. Munkir countered, "My Lord, as always, my esteemed colleague attempts to gild a bad egg. Monique Silverberg's every thought and deed was about Monique Silverberg. She would not lift a single manicured finger for her synagogue or her community unless she gained recognition and honor. Her concept of a loving family was a Gucci wallet full of photos she could show off to her mahjong club. She packed her kids off to boarding school as soon as they could tie their shoes. She married for money, re-married for more money, and cheated at canasta. Her death resulted from complications arising from a seventh surgical attempt to lift that which nature intended to let fall."

Its glow fading, the pin-prick looked petulant. I never elaborate when handing down My verdict. "Descension," I intoned, and Monique Silverberg's soul sank down and out of My sight.

Next up was an 82-year-old widow from Schenectady who shared homemade marijuana-laced fudge with her fellow residents in the nursing home, thereby raising spirits, encouraging appetites, and easing glaucoma suffering. Her soul Ascended like a dandelion seed caught in an updraft. In less mortal time than it takes a moth to fry in an electric bug zapper, I dispensed with another 769 souls, including a puppy mill owner who dumped his unsold dogs at the county animal control in the middle of the night (“Descension”), a decent though stubborn atheist who maintained I didn’t exist even after I introduced Myself (“Ascension”), and a circus clown (“Automatic Descension”). Then I called for a 2.57 nanosecond recess, during which time I spoke to Munkir and Nakir in My “just one of the guys” voice.

“I have a special assignment for you two. One of My flock is coming up to the brink of mortality’s cliff. His name is Bertrand R. Brunt. He owns a bakery in Oak Valley, California. His case is of special interest to Me because, based on the evidence thus far, he is the first truly neutral person I’ve come across in several centuries. When I balance his every good deed or thought against the bad ones over the span of his 65 years, he doesn’t tip the scale in either direction.”

Munkir and Nakir accessed the divine database and downloaded Bertrand Brunt’s folder. Munkir mused, “Hmmm... divorced, no children, no significant other, few friends. A real Mr. Congeniality.”

Nakir replied, “Since when is loneliness a sin? Bertrand may be a good person. He takes pride in his little patisserie, and bakes with dedication and passion.”

As always, Munkir saw the flip side of the coin. “You call it dedication and passion. I call it pride and conceit.”

“I see he taste-tests and modifies a recipe dozens of times before he’ll serve it in his bakery.”

“As his weight attests. Gluttony is a sin.”

Nakir tried again. “He takes pleasure in delighting his customers...”

Munkir countered, “...and clogging their arteries.”

“He’s generous. Even in this depression, he gives a baker’s dozen and donates pastries to the local food bank.”

“Day-old pastries,” Munkir parried. “Then I see there’s a recurring dream about a Victoria’s Secret model. Why would he dream about drizzling her with melted chocolate and displaying her on a gold doily in his shop window?”

Nakir replied with that naïveté I find so adorable in my angels. “I think humans call that love.”

“Excuse Me,” I interrupted with a barely perceptible thunderclap. “Bertrand is not on trial yet. Perhaps I am mellowing with age, but I want you to visit him before he takes the Big Sleep. If possible, find a tie-breaker so I can send him one way or the other. Otherwise he’ll wind up in limbo-land like those poor souls.”

I indicated a corner of boundless space occupied by a myriad of tiny lights bobbing to and fro, up and down, all in a frantic attempt to duck under a ever-lowering rod of celestial light. The faintest suggestion of a calypso beat drifted over from that direction.

Nakir’s essence shuddered. “My Lord, we will do our best to save Bertrand from that syncopated fate.”

Munkir’s essence smirked. “Verily we will, one way or the other.”

I continued, “You have not been to earth for many human generations, so I will repeat My standard mission briefing...

“I am the Lord thy God: Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent.

“In My omniscience, I created the Angel: pure, innocent, and obedient to My will. Then I created Mankind with what I hoped was sufficient maturity to handle free will. I was wrong about that part, but that’s how it goes.

“Being omnipotent, I have the supreme power of *non*-intervention. As any Jewish mother can tell you, keeping your nose out of other people’s business is quite impossible for mere mortal man. But I gave them free will and I play by My rules, even if they do not. I don’t tell them what to do, and I don’t know what they’ll do next. Yes, I know one could dispute My omniscience in that case, but let’s leave the theologians a *raison d’être*. Just remember, as My agents you may interact with humans. You may comfort, you may reprimand, but you may not reveal the true nature of your being. ***And above all, you must not interfere.*** Heed My warning, lest you fall from Grace.

“And finally, being omnipresent as well, I will keep a frequency tuned to your situation. Vaya con Migo.”

###

Bernie Brunt stopped by the supermarket to pick up a few necessary ingredients. He'd run out of butter and heavy whipping cream and, eager to bake Version 211 that night, he could not wait for the delivery van due the next morning. Turning into the dairy aisle, he noticed an older couple dressed in matching lederhosen and hiking boots, and carrying intricately carved walking sticks. They followed him down the aisle, the man pushing a shopping cart. When Bernie snuck a peek inside the cart, he saw jars of marinated artichoke hearts, jerky treats for dogs, several rutabagas, and a dozen boxes of candy canes, on sale for half-off because Christmas had been a week ago.

"Yosemite tourists are getting weirder every year. These two look like they're trying out for a community theater production of *Sound of Music*. What's next? Lady Godiva riding a big white horse through the produce section maybe?" Chuckling at the thought, Bernie detoured into the men's room next to the pharmacy. When he came out, his heart skipped in surprise as he nearly bumped into the couple loitering by the restroom door. Were they waiting for him? He jerked a head nod as he passed, and moved quickly toward the check-out lines.

"Our man is the nervous type," Munkir said to Nakir, though his lips did not move.

Nakir looked after the chubby man scurrying away from them. She replied, though her lips did not move either. "I like him. He has a comfortable face, like a beagle or an old pocket watch."

She adjusted the shoulder strap of her lederhosen and glanced around at the other shoppers. "Perhaps we stand out as oddities. It's been quite a while since we tried to blend in. Let's do some research and give it another shot tomorrow."

And though Bernie scanned the parking lot for the pair, then tried to guess what kind of car they drove, he did not see them again. Perhaps they'd come in on the tour bus idling at the bottom of the lot... but wasn't that group Korean? Oh well, time to put them out of his mind and focus on Version 211. Perhaps if he soaked the dried apricot pieces in raspberry cordial before adding them to the batter...

"So close, I know I'm so close... Such a shame I didn't get it right in time for Christmas. Maybe tonight will be the night."

###

A few minutes before seven o'clock the following morning, a young man and woman stood on the sidewalk outside Bernie's bakery. Looking up at the sign over the door, the woman read the fancy script: *Just Desserts Patisserie*. The door frame rattled as Bernie threw the deadbolt. He opened the door and moved aside so they could step in. "I'll be with you in just a minute," he said, his words muffled by a mouthful of éclair. He turned the plastic card so the "Open" side faced the street, then went behind the counter to take their order.

Bernie smiled at the young couple, noticing their similar features and long black hair. They also wore matching outfits: jeans, leather jackets emblazoned with Hell's Angels graphics, and hefty motorcycle boots.

"Sibling bikers?" he wondered. "Funny I didn't hear their motorcycles. The oven exhaust vents usually carry in sounds from the side parking lot."

Without so much as a glance at the sumptuous pastries, layered tortes and strudel arrayed before them, the pair ordered slices of angel food cake, no coffee. They each paid separately from identical new wallets with nothing in them except enough cash to pay the check. Bernie felt a nibble of fear... Was he about to be robbed?

The girl's smile dazzled Bernie until he noticed its light did not reach her eyes. "How are you this morning, Bertrand?" she asked.

"Do I know you?"

"No, but we know you. You're Bertrand Brunt. This is your patisserie."

"Only my parents called me Bertrand. Who are you?"

The boy smiled the same bright, brittle smile. "Just visitors passing through. We wanted to meet you."

The couple turned away from the counter and sat down at one of three tables strategically arranged in the small space. They cut into their cake without further conversation, heads tipped to one side as though listening intently to the Vivaldi CD playing in the background. Feeling only a little less anxious, Bernie went back to the baking area to roll out fondant for petit fours.

Munkir sent his thoughts to Nakir. "What a schlemiel. And greedy too. Did you see the way he shoved that gooey thing into his mouth? He could hardly catch his breath. No wonder he's about to jump ship."

"His shop is very clean and did you notice the pastry? Little works of art." Nakir tore a bit of cake into crumbs. "I almost wish I could taste this. Even to be able to smell the aroma in here..."

"Be careful what you wish for. You know the cost."

Nakir sighed and brushed the crumbs from her fingers. "Yes, I know. You're right. But he still doesn't seem to trust us, though I'm not sure why. Let's learn more about this time and place, then try again tomorrow with a different approach."

Munkir rose to leave. "I think if we pushed a little harder, he'd show his true colors. But if you insist. Just remember, we're almost out of time. If we don't nail it tomorrow morning, it will be too late."

When Bernie looked up from his work a few minutes later, the couple was gone. With a sigh of relief, he cleared the table, wondering at the amount of cake left on each plate. "Everyone always finishes my angel food. They say it's lighter than feathers. Did I switch the salt and sugar in this batch? Ordering food and then tearing it to shreds -- is this some kind of new age diet fad? *Feh*. Kids these days don't know from Twinkies."

###

Though Version 211 hadn't met his expectations, Bernie felt hopeful that evening as he creamed butter for Version 212. This time he would add dried cherries along with the apricots, and he'd soak them in spiced rum instead of the raspberry cordial which had imparted a cloying, overwhelming flavor to the fruit. His goal, his only goal for the past ten years, had been to create a special holiday fruitcake. Not your grandma's fruitcake, stiff with petrified candied rinds and pebbly nuts in a matrix of gummy brown batter. Not a fruitcake to be passed around like a football, only twice as tough and three times as inedible. Not a fruitcake destined to sit in the back of the pantry for a year until a crisp bite in the air signaled the season of re-gifting from grouchy uncle to annoying neighbor to near-sighted paper boy. No, not his fruitcake. His fruitcake would be in a class of its own, gloriously rich yet airy, each spicy slice a

stained glass cross-section of fruit and nuts. His fruitcake would make converts out of all the fruitcake loathers in the entire civilized world. His would be a fruitcake to die for... and only he would know when the recipe was perfected. This was his dream, his obsession.

Bernie did not sleep well that night. His alarm woke him at 3:30am, rousing him from a continuous dream that left behind dregs of exhaustion. He recalled disturbing fragments: spinning in a giant mixing bowl down a waterfall of batter; slogging through knee-deep molasses, whirling beaters in close pursuit; Keebler elves pelting him with moldy walnuts and rancid butterscotch chips.

"Butterscotch chips... *Drek!*" Imagining he could taste the vile little turds, he spat in the sink, then aggressively brushed his teeth. He shaved, showered, and ran a comb through his mat of grey curls. Clothes on, glasses on. Out the door and down the stairs to the patisserie to start the day's routine. Coffee on, CD player on, apron on. Were the apron strings getting shorter or was he expanding around the middle? He sighed, and began to mix up the *pâte à choux* for cream puffs and profiteroles. The first three hours of the day always sped by in a meditative rhythm of flour, butter, and eggs combining into delicacies so much more than the sum of their parts.

Bernie was brought out of his baking reverie by the jangle of the bell over the door. This morning the couple was older than the biker kids, younger than the seniors in the supermarket. He was short and broad-shouldered, his beard salt and pepper, his head covered with a tweed cap. She was... she was lovely. The coffee cake Bernie had grabbed for a quick nosh caught in his throat. He choked it down with a hasty gulp of coffee, trying to act nonchalant.

"Good morning. What can I get for you?"

They peered into the case. Bernie noticed their jeans and hiking boots, the typical touristy sweatshirts depicting Half Dome, then wondered why he thought, "At least this time they got the clothes almost right."

The woman looked up and met his eyes. He felt powerless to break away from that sympathetic hazel gaze. "How are you this morning, Bertrand?" she asked with a sincerity beyond a normal routine salutation.

"I'm wondering... How? Um... Who...?" Bernie faltered, not sure how to finish the question.

The man spoke in a gravelly voice, "It's not about us, you know. It's about you." He repeated, "How are you this morning, Bertrand?"

Bernie hesitated. "I'm fine? Couldn't be better?"

The man seemed unconvinced as well. "Are you? We'll see about that."

Nakir sent a furious thought to Munkir. "What are you trying to do, frighten the poor man to death? For Godness sake, try to act normal."

The couple ordered and took their slices of angel food cake over to a table. Bernie's curiosity got the better of his baking to-do list, and he followed them.

"Excuse me, but do I know you?" he asked nervously. "You're not from Oak Valley, are you?"

"No, Bertrand. We're not from around here," said the man.

"Then how do you know my name? Do we have mutual friends?"

"I rather doubt it, Bertrand." Though disagreeing with him, the woman nodded slightly, leaning towards him as if encouraging him to guess again.

Bernie thought, "She is so pretty... and with such a complexion, like Ingrid Bergman."

The woman smiled, and he felt his face grow warm.

Just then the sun crested the mountain range encircling the valley. Sunbeams streamed in through the window, illuminating the couple's heads from behind. Bernie gazed into the woman's radiant face, then his focus shifted to the wedding cake displayed behind her. For a few moments, he stared at the cherub cake topper, then he looked back at the woman. "You're an angel?"

She began to say something, but the man interrupted her with a harsh snort. "Angels? Nah, we're not angels. Whatever gave you that crazy idea?"

Now Bernie's face was on fire. What was wrong with him this morning? His embarrassment took refuge in annoyance. "OK, buddy boy, then who are you?"

On the spot, Munkir scanned the room, trying to think of a logical response. Nakir stalled for time.

"You've been expecting us. This is the big day, remember?" she said.

"I am? It is?" Bernie racked his mind. Had he forgotten something important?

Nakir floundered on. "You know... the thing, the big thing."

Suddenly, Munkir found inspiration in the magazine rack by the door. “Didn’t you get our letter? Yes, that’s right, our letter telling you we want you to be in our magazine. We’re from…”

Nakir followed his line of sight and caught on right away. “We’re from *Happy Endings* magazine. This is Mr. Munkir and I’m Ms. Naki… Ms. Nakimora.”

Bernie’s heartbeat went from a jog to a sprint. *Happy Endings* magazine, the premier publication of professional pastry and dessert chefs, wanted to do an article on him? “This is wonderful news. I couldn’t be more thrilled. I only wish I’d had time to prepare something special. Oh wait, I know… it’s still a work in progress but if you don’t mind…”

Gesturing behind him, Bernie invited his VIPs to join him in the baking area.

“Now we’re getting somewhere,” Munkir thought to his colleague as they seated themselves on stools beside a long, marble-topped table. “We’ll be able to figure out what makes this fellow tick in no time, which is about all the time we have left.”

Bernie straightened his apron, set a clean mixing bowl on the stand, and gathered his ingredients around him like children in a story circle. He was elated to have an interested audience, and chatted freely without noticing the so-called journalists had neither paper, pen, nor laptop computer with which to take notes.

“My full name is Bertrand R. Brunt. I was born in 1944 in Los Angeles. My parents named me after Bertrand Russell. I guess he’s a philosopher, though I don’t know much about him. I was raised as a gastronomic Jew… That means we ate like Jews but didn’t practice the religion. I remember on Saturday mornings, I’d get up early and eat the left-over Sabbath challah with peanut butter and honey. Then my sister and I would go to the matinee movie. It only cost a quarter back then.”

As he rambled on, Bernie’s hands moved with speed and confidence, measuring sugar, cracking eggs, sifting flour, salt, and baking powder. “When I was twelve, my mother showed me how to make the challah. From then on, I was hooked on baking. Cookies, cakes, pies, bread, you name it. After high school, I got a job driving a bakery delivery truck to put myself through trade school in culinary arts.”

With the mixer at full speed, Bernie creamed the butter, then added brown sugar, white sugar, and molasses. “I remember surprising my parents on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a two-foot tall

croquembouche tower of stacked cream puffs. I decorated it with spun sugar and lots of flowers. I tell you, that was something to look at.”

Bernie’s knife blurred as he chopped toffee pecans, dried fruit, a block of dark chocolate. He melted butter in a sauce pan, stirring and watching vigilantly as the milk solids turned golden, then hazelnut brown. “As you see, I am making a classic *beurre noisette*. I’ll whisk in some powdered sugar and a little rum, and marble this in the cake batter. Tasty, no?”

Nakir and Munkir looked at each other, sharing the thought, “Not as though we’ll be able to tell.”

Invigorated by more attention than he’d had in years, Bernie’s memories flowed unabated. “My personal life wouldn’t be of any interest to your readers, but I don’t mind telling you I was married for seven years... Then Doreen got the itch... the seven-year itch, get it? Now she’s married to a nutritionalist doctor, if you can believe such a thing. But our wedding day was very nice... I made a five-tier cake: vanilla *génoise*, light like angel wings, layered with mocha *crème anglaise*, frosted with apricot ganache. They don’t make them like that anymore.”

Pouring the browned butter into a bowl, Bernie sautéed a chopped apple in the sauce pan, then added spiced rum and dramatically flamed the pan. “I’ve lived in Oak Valley for over twenty years. Discovered this place when I went backpacking in Yosemite with some friends. Moved up a year later and went to work right here. It was just a donut shop back then but after a while I bought out the owner and turned it into a patisserie. Say, you two aren’t asking me any questions... What’s your article about anyhow?”

Nakir remembered the purpose for their visit. This was important, urgent even beyond life or death. She needed hard evidence to convince God this man deserved Ascension. Not that she or Munkir were privy to what Ascension and Descension actually meant. No, some things went beyond the knowledge of even the angels who worked in the Godicial system. Some things had to be taken on faith. And speaking of which...

“Bertrand, you said you weren’t raised to be religious. Do you consider yourself to be a Jew?”

Bernie paused in the midst of separating an egg. The half-shell dangled from his fingertips, egg white dripping into a bowl. “That’s part of the article? Okay, well, you’re the writers, not me, so I’ll tell

you. I guess I identify with the Jewish people, and if there should come another Hitler, may he rot in Hell for all eternity and a day...”

“No worries there,” Nakir murmured under her breath.

“...I know I would fight against him, if they would have an alter cocker like me, you should pardon the language. But I guess as far as religion goes, what I believe is summed up by something I read on the tag of one of those fancy herbal tea bags. It said, ‘You are not a human being having a spiritual experience, but a spiritual being having a human experience.’ I don’t know, what do you think?”

Bernie looked directly at Nakir. She met his gaze with compassion. He felt something melt inside his chest like a stick of butter on a sunny window sill. He said, “I think I’ve forgotten to mention what I’m making for you. It’s just a fruitcake, but I hope it’s something special. I’ve been working on this recipe for ten years or more. Always, it lacks something, some key ingredient or step I need to make it perfect. Today I am making Version 212 for you. I tried this recipe last night and I know it’s not the one. Close but no cigar, but it’s the best I’ve got.”

In silence he beat egg whites and folded them into the batter. He soaked the fruit and nuts in spiced rum, and added them along with the chopped chocolate. He buttered and floured a bundt pan, poured in the silky batter, cut in the beurre noisette ribbon. Then he opened the oven door and lifted the cake pan. He turned to put the pan in the oven and tripped over the edge of the rubber floor mat. Nakir grabbed his forearms and somehow managed to keep both Bernie and the cake pan upright. Bernie felt a tingle shoot down his arms and fingers. He could have sworn he saw a lightening-quick flicker of electric blue zip around the rim of the pan. Then contact was broken and Nakir was back on her stool.

Shaken, Bernie put the cake in the oven, made himself a cup of tea, and sat on the stool next to Nakir. “Thank you, my dear.”

He sipped tea and collected his thoughts. “I don’t set a timer. I just know from the smell when to check. If a knife comes out clean, the cake is done. Invert it on a cake rack and let it cool. Whip heavy cream with a little sugar. Turn the cake onto a plate, frost it with the whipped cream and drizzle it with melted dark chocolate, 60% cocoa is good but 72% is better.”

Bernie sniffed the air. “A good baker can tell how something is going to turn out by the aroma when it bakes.”

Nakir pretended she was appreciating the fragrance, then she blinked, raised her eyebrows, and drew a deeper breath. She sent an urgent thought to her cohort. "Munkir, I smell something! Can you smell it too?"

Munkir drew a breath. "No, nothing at all."

Nakir inhaled deeply. "Bernie, that's wonderful. It smells like... well, I don't know what it smells like, but it's heavenly!"

Bernie sniffed again, his brow furrowed. "I made Version 212 exactly the same last night, but today it smells different somehow. There's more depth, another facet... I don't know how to describe it in words... Could I have added something new?" He looked at Nakir with intense, searching eyes. "I wonder...?"

Then Bernie's breath caught in his throat. His hand moved to his chest. He crumpled and slumped onto the floor. Munkir said, "Well, that's that then."

Without forethought, Nakir sprang into action. She laid Bernie flat on his back, turned his head to one side, and began CPR. Munkir yelled, "Stop it! Do you know what you're doing?"

In between rescue breaths, Nakir panted, "No, but I know this man deserves a chance to get that recipe right. He's so close! Call 9-1-1, for the love of God."

Munkir didn't move. "You are interfering. You won't be allowed to return. This is serious, Nakir. This is permanent. Stop it now."

Nakir started compressions on Bernie's chest. She looked up at Munkir, tears running down her face. "It's already too late... I'm crying."

She pushed down with both hands, counting out loud. Munkir watched her with an agonized expression. Then, like a man walking down death row, he went to the telephone on the counter. He picked up the receiver and pushed three buttons. "Hello. We need an ambulance at the Just Desserts bakery. Yes, a heart attack. Yes, it's Bernie."

The next hour passed in a blur of sirens, flashing lights, official voices and uniforms, a stretcher. Munkir and Nakir were questioned and asked to stay in town because of their lack of identification cards. In a sudden silence, they found themselves alone in the bakery, trying to absorb what had just happened. Nakir smiled wanly. "Five thousand years of immortality at God's side, and now we've got fifty

or so years to get it right. Why in the world did you make that phone call? You could have saved yourself. It wouldn't have made any difference to Bernie."

Munkir tugged at his lower lip. "I'm not sure. You were... magnificent. You felt so sure about trying to save him so he could have another chance to save himself. You made the sacrifice without a second thought. I guess... well, I guess I didn't want you to go it alone. And now it seems like such a waste. Bernie's dead and we've fallen."

Nakir sniffed the air. "Do you smell that?"

Munkir inhaled, then coughed. "Is that the cake we've been making all the fuss about? It smells awful."

Nakir opened the oven door. Smoke poured into the room. She reached in, touched the pan, yelled, put on an oven mitt, and tried again. The cake was a black ring of charcoal. "Oh no. Bernie's last attempt and it's burnt to cinders."

Munkir sniffed again. "If you ignore the smoke, you can still catch a whiff of something that's not half bad. Do you think..."

Even though they no longer shared the ability to hear each other's thoughts, Nakir finished his sentence. "...we could duplicate his recipe? It's a good thing angels have photographic memories, isn't it? We can recall everything he did, every ingredient and measurement. Let me get it all down on paper before it slips my human mind."

Nakir grabbed a pad and pen off the counter, then paused. "Oh, there's a problem. Bernie said the cake was a work in progress. He said Version 212 was still missing something vital."

Munkir took the pad and pen out of Nakir's hand and laid them back on the counter. Then he took both her hands in his. "Did you see Bernie's face when he said he was making the cake for you? Do you remember what he said just before he died? I'm not certain, but I think I know what the missing ingredient was. And I think if we bake this recipe for each other, it will turn out to be Bernie's perfect cake."

Nakir smiled a real smile for the first time in her life. "And that might be just enough to bump our man upstairs. Now what do you think about changing our names?"

# # #

1.974 nanoseconds later, Bertrand R. Brunt's soul floated before Me awaiting judgment. The angel for the prosecution didn't stand a chance. Of course I had lost two of My best angels, but what can you do? Now they must make of their lives what they will for better or worse. There will come a day when I will have them back, and then I'll be the judge of that.

# # #

One year later, Bernie's Angelic Fruitcake was a sell-out success. The fragrance alone drew throngs of customers into the patisserie. Even dedicated life-long fruitcake antagonists raved with the first bite. Murray and Nanette kept the recipe a closely guarded secret, even refusing to share it with *Happy Endings* when the magazine featured them in its December issue.