

SNOW ANGELS

By

Kitty Hoffman

Let's make angels - it's easy.

The little girl saw her friend suddenly drop down flat onto the snow and slowly, carefully move her arms and legs out to the side and back. Her arms were wings, and her legs made the outline of a skirt, so that when she stood up there was the image of a perfect angel pressed into the soft snow.

Although she wasn't quite sure what it was, the little girl sensed that there was something bad about this. Her clothes would get snowy and wet, she would come home ruffled and messy. Her mother would know what she'd been up to, and whatever it was it would somehow fill her mother with dread, with fear of disruption of the tight bright world that she had managed to create. The girl tried hard to avoid these disruptions, to match the rhythms of her day to the structures of her mother's need, to avoid at all cost the desperate ragings of her mother's terror.

And yet, there was something irresistibly appealing about the fresh snow, the soft twilight, the magic of the quiet street filled with her mind's echoes of the Yiddish words they'd been learning. Under a streetlamp she saw her spot: a slight incline, a pure expanse of white, a tender invitation. Her heart beat faster.

The bank of snow was comfortable as her bed at night. Slowly she stretched out her arms, her legs, and moved them rhythmically back and forth. Slowly she opened her eyes, and through the softly falling snow she saw the early stars. And slowly they came - Tchicheh Roseh, Feter Ahrin; a young boy with bruised knees, two girls dancing, the rabbi waving his finger in a moral lesson, the tall young men home from studies abroad; a young bridegroom bravely hiding his bashfulness, a peddler with his sack of clothes, the head of the town council in his arrogant silk waistcoat.

At first, they moved slowly, gently, across the sky. Then with more liveliness they joined hands in a circle. Suddenly the klezmerim were there, playing a freilachs on clarinet and fiddle; they were all dancing together, even the rabbi, even the head of

the town council, even her distinguished Feter Ahrin, whirling across the sky in a triumphant circle of life. They stamped their feet; their eyes flashed; shouts of joy escaped their lips. Her mother's town, dancing in the sky; all her family, dancing in the sky. The snow melted away; her clothes, her skin, her bones, melted away.

She rose up to meet them, they made a place for her in the circle, her hands joined in the chain of generations. They twirled her around, spinning faster and faster, singing the old songs of the holiday table and leaping in joy. Suddenly they all linked arms over each other's shoulders, and before she knew what was happening, she was being lifted off her feet, twirled through the air, spun around the sky on the strength of the town. They were all one now, one whirling shouting mass of energy, twirling in the sky, beyond time and space, beyond history, all generations linked together, beyond death, beyond life, a mass of energy whirling in the sky, ghosts and angels.

The little girl closed her eyes, and then opened them again. The stars twinkled in the sky; the snow fell softly. She rose gently, careful not to disturb the outline of the angel she had made in the snow. Carefully, she brushed herself off. It was time to go home; her mother was waiting.

Author's Note

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Author Biography

Kitty Hoffman has lived in several cities and travelled the globe. Conceived in a refugee camp in Germany, born in Norway, and raised in Montreal, she has a deep interest in identity, exile, and spirit. Her award-winning writing has appeared in literary anthologies and journals including *The New Quarterly*, *Boulevard*, *The Commons*, and *Prism*. A spiritual director in Montreal, she is presently working on a book of literary nonfiction about her medieval ancestor, the father of European kabbalah, and her childhood among Holocaust survivors.

