

# BETH OF DEATH

*by Meridith Byrne*

## ACT I



Beth thought the pain of her mother's death was the worst pain imaginable - until she woke up and realized she didn't exist. Like, literally. The air in her room felt wrong, like it had forgotten her name. The mirror offered no reflection. Posters, knickknacks, her life - all vanished, as if grief itself had rolled back time and undone her.

Downstairs, her dad's sobs cracked the stillness. The kind of weeping that didn't ask for witnesses. She herself had not yet cried. Her mind played Axl on repeat singing, "don't you cry tonight - there's a heaven above you, baby . . . " Beth sighed and crept silently past her father's closed door, so as not to disturb him. Downstairs to the kitchen, where her bare feet made no sound on the tile.

David sat at the table, his Froot Loops swirled soggy and untouched in the bowl.

"Dad's finally crying," she said, voice small and hopeful, like maybe that would make things real again.

Nothing.

She moved to reassure him, reached out her hand like a breath of memory, and it passed straight through his curls. There was no warmth. There was no contact. There was no her. It was like trying to hold steam.

She couldn't even feel her heart beating.

The fridge, once plastered with the proof of belonging, now showed a life with her carefully erased. There were still pictures—vacations, birthday cakes, bad haircuts—but her spot was always just empty space.

Then came the gray one. His presence crept in like ash on silk. No sound, no smile. Just gravity, finality, and smoke. The pall of death wearing pressed slacks.

“You’re not even here,” he said.

Beth, ever her father’s daughter, swung. The punch met nothing but silence. Then came the light – too bright, too sudden. The world unraveled and fell away.



# ACT 2



“Welcome back,” said Az, cheerfully, as though she hadn’t just been erased. Beth knew, or rather remembered where she was, the *actual* Paradise City, and she stared at this cherub pretending to be a camp counselor. His cheeks were round, rosy, and impossibly dimply. His eyes sparkling with too much hope and not enough understanding.



Az called himself her “transition coach.” He said her time on Earth was an “internship.” Fifteen years as a human to grow empathy like callouses. “You were never truly one of them,” he assured, patting her arm. “Archangel Uriel sent you to *feel*, so that when you returned, you’d *understand*.”

Beth stared at her arm where he patted, faint ink left over where her human iteration had penned the GNR logo in ballpoint. Heartbreak stitched through her ribs. “So I was... fake?”

“You were real to them,” Az said, softening. “And they were real to you. That’s what matters.”

Is it? Beth mused as she looked up and glanced out the conference room window. That’s when she saw the Procession of Newborn Souls ascending the Golden Steps.

Beth didn’t wait. She bolted from the orientation, through the shimmer-glass doors, and aimed herself towards the Procession. She didn’t know what she was doing – only that she had to find her mom.

She ran past the buffet, the fountain, the halos. She ran until the floor blurred beneath her.

And then she saw her.

Mom. Glowing. Gentle. Laughing softly with Principalities.

Beth rushed forward, eyes wet, arms out. “It’s me!” she cried.

The woman turned. Smiled politely. “Do I know you?”

Beth stopped short, breath punched from her lungs. “It’s me... Beth.”

“I always thought if I had a daughter, I’d name her that,” the woman said kindly. “But I only had a boy.”

The world tilted. And then the gray one came.

Uriel descended like a storm cloud over sunlight. All sharp lines and disapproval. He did not walk or even float – he arrived.

“You do not approach the reborn,” he said, his voice smoke and ruin. “You are not their blood. You are not memory. You are function.”

Beth’s voice cracked through the stillness. “Screw your function.”

Uriel’s eyes burned like cold fire. He turned without a word. But the air hissed with judgment.



# ACT 3



Beth's first assignment for the Power Corps. The hospice room smelled of bleach, wilted flowers, and breath that barely hung on. An elderly man lay, head bandaged, surrounded by the ones who'd never let him feel forgotten.

Beth soul-scanned him, as Az had taught in orientation.

Memories flickered through her like a home movie spliced by love – childhood illnesses, standing in line with boys waiting for shoes, a mother ironing clothes and humming. The one thread that led to Paradise City: Sally.

*That's nice, at least someone's mom remembers them.*

Beth summoned her in.

The man smiled through tears as his Soul Guide arrived. “Mama,” he whispered.

Beth looked away, overcome, and that's when she saw his daughter among the gathered livings. She saw the shadow snaking across her ribs, slipping silent fingers into veins and glands, reaching and probing outward, slithering in search of new systems, wrecking her, infecting her very mind.

Before Beth could step closer, a daisy-crowned figure blocked her path. His macrame tunic was floor length, and his smile was pure summer.

“Whoa there, hot shot,” he said. That one's under my care.”

“You a Guardian?”

“Name's Gryffin,” he nodded. “Mama bear type.” He made claw hands, then peace fingers. “She's got little bit more time yet.”

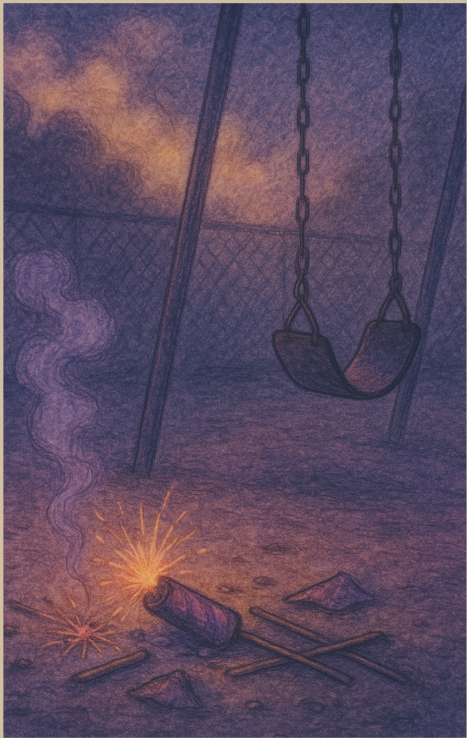
Beth studied him. “Do you always dress like Jerry Garcia’s knitting partner?”

Gryffin grinned. “Better than looking like the undead IRS.”

Beth considered her regulation, Uriel-approved, uniform slacks. The Guardian Angel had made a fair point.



# ACT 4



Az gave Beth an A+ for her work at the hospice, and deemed her ready to take on a younger assignment.

Beth knelt beside the teenager – skin scorched, ribs cracked. She began the soul-scan and saw fireworks. Backyard bravado. A laugh carved into a picnic table. And in the background: David. *David?*



Beth didn't think. She acted. She left the crumbled teen, speeding like a space brain to find her brother - who seemed to be in danger. A danger to *himself*.

She found him in the park that night, passing a joint, laughing too loudly in the dark. The kind of laugh that tries to outrun what hurts.

Gryffin sat perched on a swing set, watching like it was a rerun. "You shouldn't be here," he said.

"Oh, you're the one guarding him? Figures," she spat. "You shouldn't let him near explosives. He sold that kid the fireworks."

"He's grieving."

"He's spiraling."

"He's not your family." Gryffin's tone gentled. "He was your lesson, Beth." She shook her head. "He's my brother."

Uriel's arrival shattered the moment. His gray presence carried heat and silence in equal measure. "Enough," he growled.

"You don't get it!"

“No. You don’t get it. You left that soul untended. Az is with him now fixing your mess. You need a time out.

A snap of fingers. Light.

Beth landed alone in a room with no walls, floor or ceiling - a room that hummed like fluorescents.

Visions came, unbidden. Imagination and fear taking control of her senses: David slipping, no falling, next seizing, no crashing. Each scenario a blade. She curled into herself, wishing for a voice that would explain the rules, or break them.

Az eventually appeared with a milkshake and a face too soft to yell at. He tripped over the threshold, knocking his halo crooked.

He sat beside her. “It’s strawberry. I forgot what flavor you like.”

She didn’t speak. He didn’t leave.

She hated him for being kind. And loved him for not making her say so.



# ACT 5



The call came without warning.

David. This time it wasn't Beth's imagination. Nor was it David's self-destruction. A simple accident. A quiet collapse. His time.

She felt the pull of a thread, and she rose to follow.

Az, cheeks pink and flustered, blocked the gate. "I - I know where you're trying to go, and I'm sorry.

But this is not y-your assignment.”

Uriel materialized, flanked him, a stone sentinel. “He’s correct. You’re compromised.”

Beth assumed a fighter’s stance, not that force worked before against Uriel, but she wasn’t one to give up.

“Peace!” called familiar voice, and Gryffin stepped in, bare feet padding on cloudstone. “I thought you cats might try to hold her back, but she’s not called to be the Power on this one. She’s the Soul Guide.”

Uriel hesitated. Then nodded once, like thunder contained in a cloud.

Beth descended like rain. Descended to be with her brother.

David was curled in bed, breathing shallow, skin too pale. When he looked up, his eyes widened.

“Beth?”

“I never left,” she whispered. She reached for him. And this time, his hand found hers.



# ACT 6



They walked the in-between together – Beth’s heartbeat thundering, David’s soul steady beside her.

Later, in the hush of the return, Gryffin leaned on a railing watching clouds drift below.

“She changed,” he said. “Didn’t just learn. Changed.”

Az nodded, hugging his knees like a kid sitting criss-cross applesauce. “What does that mean?”

Gryffin plucked a petal from his crown. “Maybe it means angels can evolve. Like people. Like love.”

Beth stood at the edge of the overlook, wings trailing sparks. Somewhere, deep in her core, a riff played raw and electric.

Not a hymn. Not a harp.

But something with bite and longing. Something Slash.

She wasn't just death anymore. She was the girl who carried her brother home, loud and full of love.

And if Heaven had a backstage pass, she'd be right there. Dancing to something just shy of wild.





# Author's Note

## *The story that waited.*

Fifteen years ago, not long after my father died, this story whispered itself into my mind.

Dad was the bandaged man in the bed.

His daughter under Gryffin's protection? One of my sisters.

She died six weeks later.

But before she passed, I shared the earliest spark of Beth's story with her. She heard it, felt it, and encouraged me the way family does when they know something's important.

For years, I carried this idea like a small stone in my pocket—something I meant to shape into a novel. But life, grief, writer's block (and more life) piled up. The story became a "someday." Then a "might have been."

Until recently.

I didn't have an epiphany. I didn't wake up magically healed. What I did was harder: I showed up. I dug in. I trained my mind and spirit to remember who I am - not who others said I was.

It took effort. It took therapy. It took tears. It took years.

But like Beth, I'm not one to give up.

Now, the stories, poems, laments, and celebrations that were so long bottled up are finally spilling out. In fits and bursts they're finding air, finding form, and in doing so, making space for me to grow.

Thank you for reading. This one means the world to me.

~ Meridith

