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**Opening Extract from...**

# Angels at Christmas

Written by Debbie Macomber

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Merry Christmas, Friends!

As you've probably already guessed, I love Christmas. And I have a special fondness for Christmas angels. After all, it was an angel who came to announce to Mary that she'd be giving birth. And later, when Jesus was born, it was angels who first told the shepherds watching over their flocks.

Shirley, Goodness and Mercy have proven to be three of my most popular story characters. Since they first appeared back in 1993, they've shown up periodically through the years. Last Christmas I was delighted to find huge wire angels strung with lights for sale in a local store. Naturally I purchased three and set them up in our front yard.

Wouldn't you know it, soon afterwards we had a snow-storm with blizzard-like conditions. When I woke the next morning, I was dismayed to find my precious angels face down in the snow. My clever husband smiled and said we had three fallen angels. What struck me, however, was that despite the horrific weather conditions, their lights continued to shine.

This Christmas they're shining again, my three angels—in our yard and in this two-story edition—and they're brighter than ever. I hope Shirley, Goodness and Mercy will bring you some Christmas joy and a smile or two. And you can bet that whatever comes their way—and ours—their lights will shine!

Have a wonderful Christmas. Remember there are angels among us...and sometimes we don't even know it.

Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debbie Macomber". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned at the bottom left of the page.

Angels  
at  
Christmas  
Debbie Macomber



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*Those Christmas Angels*

In memory of Sandy Canfield,  
talented writer and dear friend.  
And to Charles Canfield with affection and thanks  
for the 38 years of love and support  
he gave Sandy

## *One*

Anne Fletcher pulled the last box of Christmas decorations from the closet in the spare bedroom. She loved Christmas—always had and always would, regardless of her circumstances. It was a bit early yet, a few days before Thanksgiving, but some Christmas cheer was exactly what she needed to get her mind off her problems. The grief that had been hounding her since the divorce five years ago... The financial uncertainty she now faced... The betrayal she still felt...

“No,” she said aloud, refusing to allow herself to step closer to that swamp of regrets. It often happened like this. She’d start thinking about everything she’d lost, and before she knew it, she’d collapse emotionally, drowning in pain.

Carrying the plastic container down the hallway, she glanced inside her art room and let her gaze drift over to her easel and her latest project. The bold colors of the setting sun against the backdrop of the Pacific Ocean pleased her. Yes, she was divorced, but there’d been compensations, too. Her art had fulfilled her in ways she hadn’t even realized were possible.

How different her life was at fifty-nine than she would’ve

imagined even five years ago—before the divorce. What Burton had done was unforgivable. He'd hurt her, and he'd cheated her out of funds that were rightfully hers.

Once again she stopped herself, not wanting to indulge those bitter memories and regrets. She'd done plenty of that in the beginning, when she'd first learned he'd found someone else and wanted out of their thirty-year marriage. It was a fling, or so she'd managed to convince herself. A midlife crisis. Lots of men had them. Any day Burton would come to his senses and see what he was doing to her and to Roy, their son.

Only he hadn't, and Anne walked out of divorce court numb with shock and disbelief. Not until the judge's gavel echoed through the room had she fully believed her husband was capable of such treachery. She should've known, should've been prepared. Burton was a top-notch divorce attorney, a persuasive man who knew all the ploys. But despite everything, she'd trusted him....

Her friends had been stunned, too—less by Burton's deception than by Anne's apparent acceptance of what he'd done to her. It wasn't in her to fight, to drag her marriage and her life through the courts. Burton had recommended an attorney, whom she'd obediently retained, never suspecting that the man who'd represented her in court would apply to Burton's law firm as soon as the divorce was final. Of course, he'd been hired....

Burton had promised to treat her fairly. Because she was convinced that he'd soon recognize what a terrible mistake he was making, she'd blindly followed his lead. Without a quibble and on her attorney's advice, she'd accepted the settlement offer—one that had turned out to be grossly unfair. Although she hadn't been aware of it at the time, Anne was cheated out of at least two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of assets.



Burton's ploy in this particular case had been simple: he'd strung her along. Twice he'd come to her in tears, begging her forgiveness, talking about reconciliation, and all the while he'd been shifting their assets to offshore accounts. All the while, he'd been lying, stealing and cheating. She'd loved him and she'd believed him, and so had taken her husband at his word. Never had she dreamed he could betray her like this. After thirty years, she'd walked away with only a pittance. And, needless to say, no alimony.

Yes, Anne could fight him, could take him back to court and expose him for the thief he was, but to what end? It was best, she'd decided long ago, to preserve her dignity. She'd always felt that life had a symmetry to it, a way of righting wrongs, and that somehow, eventually, God would restore to her the things she'd lost. It was this belief that had gotten her past the bitterness and indignation.

Admittedly she couldn't help lapsing sometimes, but Anne tried not to feel bitter. At this point, she couldn't see how anger, even righteous anger, could possibly benefit her. She'd adjusted. Taking the little she'd managed to salvage from her marriage, she'd purchased a small cottage on St. Gabriel, a tiny San Juan island in Puget Sound. In college all those years ago, when she'd met Burton, she'd been an art student. She had a flair for art and enjoyed it. Given the demands of being married to a prominent divorce lawyer, she'd put aside her own pursuits to assist Burton. Her husband's ambitions had become her own, and Anne was the perfect wife and hostess.

It'd been a disappointment to her to have only one child, a son they'd named after Anne's father. Young Roy was the light of her life, her ray of sunshine through the years. When she wasn't hostessing social events on her husband's behalf, Anne spent her time with Roy, raising him with limitless love and motherly devotion.

If she felt any bitterness about the way Burton had treated her, it was because of what he'd done to Roy. Unfortunately, Roy was the one who'd introduced Burton to Aimee. He'd never forgiven himself for that, despite Anne's reassurances. Still, Roy assumed responsibility for what had happened. He couldn't seem to forgive himself for his role in the divorce, no matter how innocent that role had been.

To complicate the situation even more, he refused to forgive his father, not only for betraying Anne but for stealing Aimee, the woman he himself had loved and planned to marry. Roy's anger was constantly with him. The anger had become part of him, tainting his life, as though he wore smudged, dark glasses that revealed a bleak, drab world. All Roy cared about now was his business, his drive for more and more, and while he'd achieved greater success than most men twice his age, Roy wasn't happy.

Her son's cynicism troubled Anne deeply—even more than the divorce itself. She'd put that behind her, as much as she was able, and built a comfortable life for herself, doing what she loved best—painting. Mainly through word of mouth, her work had begun to sell at the local farmers' market and then at a couple of galleries in the area; it now provided her with a small income.

Anne would've given anything to help her son. Regardless of how much money he made or how many accolades he received, he remained lonely and embittered. She desperately wanted him to find happiness.

In the five years since the divorce, Roy had not spoken to his father once, despite Burton's repeated efforts. Yet Roy was so like Burton. He shared his father's talents, his ambition. They shared another trait, too, the one that concerned Anne the most. He possessed his father's ability

to be ruthless about marriage and relationships. He was thirty-three, and in Anne's view, he should get married. However, her son resolutely refused to discuss it. His attitude toward love and commitment had been completely warped. He no longer dated, no longer sought out relationships.

The only thing that mattered to Roy was the bottom line. He'd grown cold and uncaring; little outside of Fletcher Industries seemed to affect him. Anne realized her son was in trouble. He was hurting badly, although he seemed incapable of recognizing his own pain. Roy needed someone to teach him the power of forgiveness and love. She'd wanted to be that person, to show him that forgiveness was possible, but in his zeal to succeed, Roy had started to block her out of his life. It was unintentional, she knew, but nonetheless, it hurt.

Roy had established Fletcher Industries, his own computer security company, in Seattle, shortly after he graduated from college. His innovative, cutting-edge software led the competition in the field. Recent contracts with the government and several banks had given Fletcher Industries a solid position as one of the top companies of its type.

Those first years after he'd formed his business, Roy spent far too many hours at work. It wasn't uncommon for him to stay in the office for two or three days at a time, living on fast food and catnaps. That all changed after he met Aimee. Her son had fallen in love and he'd fallen hard. Anne had been thrilled and Burton was, too. Then Roy had brought Aimee to his parents' home in Southern California to introduce her...and all their lives had exploded.

Following his parents' divorce, Roy had quickly reverted