

The Girl Who Played Chess with an Angel

By Tessa Apa

I will never win the lottery. Some things in life are certain and that's one of them. Now that I'm two weeks away from being fourteen there are a number of things I know for certain. For instance I know that if you drink too much too fast you'll get sick. And depending how much you drink the feeling sick part will last much longer than the feeling good part. I figure it's a bit like sex not that I've done it yet. From what I've seen and heard the feeling good bit doesn't always last as long as the consequences. I know this because I am just such a consequence and my mother has never forgotten it. I don't need to ask her if it was worth it because I already know the answer. For certain.

If I asked you to choose between a crisp flat sweet smelling hundred dollar bill and a lottery ticket with a jackpot of thirty million what would you pick? I've asked lots of people that exact question and most need a while to think it over. Me, I'm different. I'd take the hundy no flippin question. I know the lottery is drawn every single week and I know I'm not going to win so it's easy to answer that question. Everyone says you have to be in to win but what does that really mean? There are lots of things in life I'll never ever win and being in isn't going to make one dot of difference. It's a simple case of arithmetic just like the lottery. I'll take a guaranteed something over a possibly maybe any day. That's why I don't drink. The odds are no good and neither is the profit.

I keep a list of all the things I know for certain. Certainty is all that matters and everything else connects to it whether you know it or not like a great big spider's web. The certainty is the glue that keeps it all from falling down and disappearing forever and that includes the hairy legged spider.

I also know that no one will ever read my diary. Not ever. I write it inside my head so that no one can see it but me. Me and maybe God if he's interested. It's important to do things that guarantee certainty. Like not having sex being the only certain way not to make a baby, unless of course you happen to be Mary and in that case she ended up with some serious profit. Certainty and profit, if you have enough of them nothing else can touch you.

I'm also certain I will never get fat. That's because I don't eat dairy or lollies or anything from a deep fryer and I walk everywhere. As long as I keep doing that I'll never get fat. My mother on the other hand has no certainty and she sure as heck will never be skinny. I'm very extremely certain of that even though it's not on my current list.

Lots of people think I'm strange. That's because my mother is strange. But I'd like to ask them a question: Are you certain that I'm strange? Or do you just think I'm strange? Or maybe you haven't thought about it at all, maybe you just puked up an opinion and stuck it on me without any thinking or certainty. And if you did that, it makes you the strange one not me.

You're probably wondering how I got to be so wise at such a young age. Not that I'm really so young any more being nearly fourteen. The reason is another one of my certainties. Angels. I know they exist because I saw one. It looked into my eyes and gave me a healthy dose of certainty and after that everything was better. Seeing an Angel isn't as rare as you might think. Lots of people see them but they don't know what they're looking at. I on the other hand knew immediately that it was an Angel.

I got lots of answers to lots of questions, you know the dumb questions you ask when you're only ten. I wish I met that Angel now that I have better questions. The Angel told me you can't go changing your mind about the big stuff willy nilly. Not like my mother, every day she has a completely different list of certain. One minute she thinks the world's gonna end and the next she only cares about what's on the tele.

I don't watch television. There's just no payback no profit nothing. Television makes you fat, you only have to look at my mother to know that's a fact. It also makes you dumb and never want to leave the house in case you miss something. I've tried telling her it's all just pretend but she doesn't listen. She cares more about that old lady on Coronation Street than she does about me. Instead of tele I do things that have guaranteed profit, or at least no risk of becoming a fat shut-in. Risk neutral is okay too as long as everything you do isn't neutral. There has to be profit, just ask Mary.

I don't worry about dying even though it's a certainty. I don't wake up and wonder if today is the day. Not like people living in Afghanistan, they must wonder every single day.

No, I wake up thinking about adding stuff to my list. I wake up knowing things that nobody else knows. I usually wake up after dreaming of my Angel but not always. These dreams are different because I can feel the wind on my face and smell it too. You can't do that in normal dreams. In normal dreams there's never any wind and nothing has smells.

Do you know who invented chess? People think it was some indian guy back in the very first century but they're wrong. Angels invented chess and I know that because I played chess with an angel. Okay it was dream chess but like I said these aren't normal dreams. These dreams have smells and I can tell you one thing about Angels that you're not ever likely to read in a book. Forget about the wings and feathers and reflected light, it's their smell that really sets them apart.

You can smell an angel without being close to it. It's like an invisible shawl that reaches out and covers you ever so gently but just enough to make the temperature feel better no matter how you felt before. An angel's smell is like sunshine and moonlight mixed together. Like fresh grass and rolling hills and peace and quiet. Like a warm house and lots of food in the fridge, it's like every good thing you ever thought or saw made invisible and wafted over you. It gets in your hair and under your nails and down your throat and into your brain. An angel's smell makes sense of everything all at once no matter how hard it is. From emptiness to everything in just one whiff.

Did you know every chess piece has a different power and that's just like us. Some of us are knights and some of us are bishops and some of us are just pawns destined to be forgotten even though we're the ones who keep the whole game from ending too quickly. Angels invented chess because they wanted to feel what it is to be human. Who knows why angels would want to be human but they did. They wanted to have rules and choices, to win and lose and plan and that's why they invented chess.

My theory is the angels got a bit jealous after Jesus came down to have a look around. It's true you know because chess came into being just six years after Jesus died which isn't long considering God blinks once and our whole life is over. Eternity is like that you know and it's the reason we whinge and complain and blame God for everything bad and nothing good. Eternity is something we just don't get because we can't be certain of it. If we were

certain we'd believe and that'd make all the difference. We wouldn't get so messed up by death and dying and checkmates. We'd know in just one blink the pain would all be forgotten. That's why the angels were jealous of Jesus' humanness even though he died a horrible painful slow death with dirty nails and nakedness. They knew it'd be worth it regardless of the dying part. Sometimes death stalks slowly and sometimes it's quick, but either way it's just a blink.

My friend Brad doesn't believe in hope. He says that hope is not a strategy and I agree. Certainty and profit is a strategy. You can't believe in hope the way you can believe in certainty and you should only ever believe in something you know for absolute certain otherwise it's a waste. A great big fat waste of energy.

There are lots of rules in chess and angels know every single one, on top of that they know every move and every combination of moves. They never consider cheating either, they don't even want to because they're certain all the rules are there for a reason. I guess that's the differences between us and them. When we play chess we can learn just enough to not embarrass ourselves or we can really try to understand the game. Angels are amazed we argue and cheat and pretend a rule doesn't exist just because we feel like it. Like if you wanted to sacrifice the queen or even the king you could. It would be a dumb thing to do and everyone would know it but you could do it all the same. My dad did that. He chose to kill the king and you know what that means. I reckon the reason he did it was he didn't know the queen and didn't have anything to be certain of like rules and eternity and angels. But one thing's for sure the game didn't end completely even though he lost out big-time. The game still went on because there were other pieces left on the board. Pieces like me and my mother. The Angel told me that. You can kill the king on purpose and break all the rules but the game still goes on. That's how I got to be certain of eternity and why I don't worry so much about dying because once upon a time chess didn't end with checkmate. We changed the rules to suit us because we needed a way to quit.

I reckon we'd all be angels if we followed the rules just like they do but we'd have to be certain of every single one of them and I don't know if that's even possible. I believe in some of them especially if there's proof and profit and certainty, and that feeling you get deep down when you just know, kind of like when you smell an angel.

After playing angel chess I learnt one very important thing. There is no He. There is no She. God is We. I don't know who ever said 'he' in the first place but it sure as heck wasn't God or Angels and I know that for a fact because a real angel told me that God is We. And you don't get to be friends with God or Angels and you don't buy into any of the rules for certain until you understand We. That's because there is always a choice. Angels never ever say He. They only ever say We. Everything they do and say and think is We because they're joined to God the same way my mother is joined to her tele. They're part of each other one hundred percent and can't be separated and that's the real reason they don't break the rules and why they say We all the time like God is their friend and constant companion and stuff. Its only people who get all wound up about he and she, angels don't care about that kind of stuff.

The Queen is special for lots of reasons not just because she's the most powerful. She's calm even though she knows there are lots of people out to get her. I'd be calm too if I had a whole team looking out for me. She isn't scared even though everyone wants to see her fail because the rules keep her safe. That's the difference between the queen and the rest, and that's the difference between the angels and us, and that's also the difference between you and me because I am going to get to know the rules and nothing will ever touch me. And it won't make any difference that my dad did a checkmate because I'll know all the rules, and better than that, I'll believe in them for certain and for real and forever. The Queen still sees all the good and all the bad and she still cries real tears and even though the knife is just as sharp on her skin as everyone else's, the cuts aren't as deep and the tears aren't as salty when you know stuff for certain.

Angels have it all figured out you know and every piece on the board means something. They had to make all sorts of pieces because humans are so complicated and they had to do a white set and a dark set because they know all about war and evil and karma and stuff. The only way you can play chess and win is if you know the rules. Those angels are so clever.

Take rooks for instance. They are nearly as important as the queen because they can move forward or back in any direction and on any coloured square. They start off on the outside corner but that doesn't matter because it doesn't take long for them to move where it

wants to. And rooks understand about sticking up for each other unlike some of the people I know. They're strong and powerful even at the end of the game when there isn't much to hide behind and even though they start out in a weak position they can still win the game. I reckon I'm just like a rook because I didn't start out anywhere good, I was right out there on the very edges of everything watching it all but you know I reckon I'm getting closer to the action and I can probably win the game and even if I don't win everything I will win something.

I like the how bishops can only go on either black or white squares and they aren't ever allowed to cross over like the other pieces. That's what makes them special because they just stick to what they believe in and nothing can make them change. Nothing at all, not even death. Angels are like bishops because they never ever change what they believe in, they just stay looking straight ahead and moving forward. But angels don't make mistakes like us and we can easily get on the wrong path and think it's the right one and just move forward on it oblivious to the way we're headed.

Even though some chess pieces are worth more than others it doesn't mean they can't capture a stronger piece and I like that. It means really and truly that the game is fair if you know the rules. Man those angels are clever. I might not be worth as much as some other people who have two parents and a warm house and stuff but that doesn't mean I can't learn the rules so well I can capture anything I want. Chess is all about winning an exchange and we do that every single day. Just little ones sometimes but every day is about capturing what we need to make it through, and if you know the rules you can do it. Me, I'm learning the rules and I'm extra lucky because I don't bother learning a rule unless I'm certain of it first. If you're not sure about a rule you should probably just wait until you are, that's how to operate from a position of strength. An angel taught me that.

Knights look just like a horse and they are really lucky because they can jump and they are the only piece that can do that. They're powerful right up close to the action because if you're not careful they'll appear out of nowhere and land on you. They play best in the middle of the board and everyone else better watch out because they can jump in any direction they like and if you're not careful you'll get hammered. Those knights are so sneaky and they're allowed to move first as well even before pawns if they want to and they're the only piece that can do that. You have to be careful of knights because they can surprise you.

Knowing the rules is like that too because there are surprises every single day and sudden advantages that you never even knew you had and all of a sudden you can win in any direction. The angels can't figure out why we don't learn the rules and have a better strategy for winning the game. They think maybe we're not clever enough to grasp it but I know the real reason, and that's because we're lazy.

You might think I'm more of a pawn than a rook and I wouldn't be offended by that. Pawns are prepared to be sacrificed and they know they're the weakest piece on the board but there are also more of them than anything else. They stick together those pawns, they have to in order to stay alive and they know that too. Pawns understand all about sacrifice and value and that sometimes sacrifice is a good thing and sometimes it's the only thing. Pawns can weigh it all up and make selfless decisions and they don't think they're better than anyone else and even if they die they're not sad about it because they know they did it for a good reason. They start up in the front row looking way out straight ahead and if they know the rules, they can most of the time make the first move. This makes them brave I reckon and all of a sudden I want to be a pawn and not a rook.

The truth is we're all pawns some of the time and that's okay because the angel told me all of us are everything and part of the strategy is working out when to be what. What's not okay is to think you're one thing all the time because it doesn't work like that. I look at everything a bit different now because tunnel vision never did anyone any favours just look at my dad. He only saw one option and he didn't look very far ahead or to the side or anything. He just looked into the same black hole every day. My dad thought he was only ever a pawn and he had sacrifice all mixed up in his head but what he didn't know was pawns never give up. They should always just keep moving forward one step at a time and if they're really clever and know all the rules they'll get to a place where they become a hero because if a pawn makes it all the way to the other side of the board it can be changed into anything it likes and no one would be saying anything bad about that pawn anymore. That's a certainty worth believing in even though my dad didn't.

I haven't forgotten to tell you about the king and queen but what the angel told me was hard to believe even for me and I was the one talking to an angel. I doubt you'd believe it either but let's just say the king and queen are meant to be together forever just like a

beautiful marriage the kind you dream about and read about but hardly ever see. Everything about chess tries to keep them apart. The queen will do anything to protect him you know and even though she tries her hardest if the rules aren't learnt it just won't work and they'll end up apart. I'm working on it and that's why this was my favourite angel dream. It was my first one too and it's at number one on my list.

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Thankyou for reading, I hope you enjoyed!