

Many years passed.

Many stories were told.

Much glee in the faces of all.

But this night, by the light of the fire, all the children could see a special warmth dancing in the eyes of the chief.

The children nearly frothed in anticipation, as something was new.

Absolute silence overtook the children, the chief spoke.

“On this night we have a Returner.”

The children simultaneously emitted a slow whooshing, “Hooooooo...”

With silence's return the chief took his seat.

The Returning Citywalker emerged from behind the chief's chair.

He took center stage and nodded.

“I have Returned to tell the Tale of Ann.”

The children raised their hands, and together let out a soft, “Waaaa...”

The Returner stomped his heel.

The children's mouths closed, hands fell loudly to their knees.

“Ann woke up one summer morn, a calm sort of day. It all began so normal, but that illusion went away.

“Midway through her making ritual, she saw it in the mirror. A halo above her head.

“She grasped it with her right hand and pulled. She encountered resistance the further the halo went from its starting point. By releasing it, the halo would return to its origin.

“Ann marveled a bit longer. She ran her finger along the halo's surface. It felt slightly warm to the touch, tubular and metallic.

“She let out an exasperated sigh. She had work to go to, bills to pay and a halo didn't change any of that.

“Ann's day was greatly complicated by her ethereal accessory. Ann was normally the head barrista at a moderately popular coffee shop in a mildly trendy part of town. By the day's end her job more closely approximated a relationship help columnist working in a very popular coffee shop in a fairly trendy part of town.

“Her venture to a restaurant not 3 blocks away proved far more arduous than normal. Her boyfriend wasn't frustrated by Ann's atypical lateness nearly as much as the stares and

the small group which had followed her.

“The relationship suffered greatly from the pressures created by small crowds whenever they left the home. The glowing golden circle and the frequent serenades and caroling made intimacy increasingly constrained.

“Ann began to feel used at work, her celebrity had become quite a draw, which she began to resent. She welcomed the chance to appear on a daytime talk show.

“She planned on showing how she was a normal and flawed person, to deflect suspicions that she was an angel or saint. She failed.

“By exposing her flaws she showed herself to be something very different than the viewers. Her celebrity grew, but she couldn't see why.

“Booking a second talk show was not at all difficult due to the ratings spike of her first appearance. This time she selected a show with a religious host to dispel any religious credence attributed to her.

“Ann was greatly frustrated during her interview, as that religious host proved to be a fan. Ann disclosed more and more of her wrongs, ejecting all skeletons from her closet. At the interview's end Ann exclaimed, 'This halo doesn't make me special.'

“The host nodded, 'That is true Ann, it doesn't make you special, your heart does.'

“Her following deepened and widened, Rick dumped her, and a major network came forward to have Ann host her own show.

“Ann accepted and even agreed to the show's name, Angel Ann. In her first episodes she sought to be defrauded. She'd often be incredulous and hostile to her guests and deride them for putting too much faith in her.

“But slowly Ann saw the true power of the halo for what it was. She was making a positive difference in the lives of her viewers. Her viewers believed in her and when she said there was hope, they believed.

“Ratings continued to increase over the course of its first three months. Near the third month's close Ann was shot. The bullet shattered her sternum, pieces of which scattered throughout her chest cavity, most found their way into her lungs.

“Matt Rousche had pulled the trigger from eight feet away. When Ann fell he was greatly shocked. He dropped his gun and rushed to her side, and began to apologize. Many witnesses to the crime were avid viewers of Ann's as Matt began his flurry of apologies those viewers became free of their shock and pulled Matt violently away.

“When the response team arrived they found Matt with a broken jaw and a fractured arm, and Ann was dead. Her halo floated slightly wildly seven feet above her permanently closed eyes.

“An unbiased jury was a hard find and Matt was sentenced to death.

“Ann's halo floated one foot over her grave and was often used in failed pranks and scientific examination.”

The Citywalker stamped his foot on the wood stage.

Laughter fell from the mouths of the children

The Citywalker stomped again.

The children became silent, stood and filed out of the room.