

## 7 The Waters under Heaven

“Why do you keep trying to go back?” a former Watcher taunted the brooding Miranda as she stared intently into a spy-pool, its surface slick and reflective like toxic mercury. “You know, no matter what you do, Lightbearer only favors the Original Third who sided with him in The War. We’ll always be outcasts, even in Hell.”

“I don’t give a damn for Lightbearer,” Miranda shot back. “This has nothing to do with him.”

The ex-Watcher sneered, “You don’t have the ability to tempt, Miranda. Remember your last attempt – the man was schizophrenic, dying of cancer, and was double-possessed by you and Ariel. But not only did you lose him to his sister, you enabled the redemption of Ariel!”

Miranda grabbed the ex-Watcher and threw him against the outer wall of the vast prison fortress called Pandemonium, two leagues away from the fiery sand banks of a lava river where she had sat to brood and plan alone.

She knew that returning to Earth was madness, as her role – as were all the Watcher angels who fell after Lightbearer and his army, the Original Third, fell – were relegated to menial guard duty in the infernal prison, while it was the Original Third who were assigned guerilla missions of wreaking havoc in the souls of mankind, in a proxy war with Heaven itself. Her home was Hell now.

But her hate, which served as the entryway to Hell, also served as her exit as her hatred against the Architect of the Reboot was as strong, if not stronger, as Lightbearer’s hatred against the Father of the Son. She burned with the desire to hurt the Architect who had hurt her, even when every attempt to do so, in the eons after the Reboot, only kept open the gaping wound of her double loss – the loss of Heaven, but especially the loss of her Earth-bound family.

It was the latter that kept Miranda separate from the other fallen angels, even separate from her fellow ex-Watchers. Every rare opportunity that she could leave Pandemonium for the spy-pool shore she took, looking for another way back to Earth.

She frowned into the spy-pool, for the other fallen angel, although in service to Lightbearer, spoke closer to the truth about her most recent failure than she would admit. She watched and waited, willing herself to remain patient even though she knew, if she didn’t return to Pandemonium soon, someone would arrive to get her – after all, she was as much prisoner of Hell as guard.

Then an image of a drowning man floated to the surface of the spy-pool, and she smiled mirthlessly.

*Yes.*

She tilted forwards, the force of her hate overwhelming Lightbearer’s bonds of Hell, and disappeared into the spy-pool.

#

The hard rain came down like bullets, exploding out of the lightning charged night sky. It battered the ink-dark sea, its waters roiling and crashing, creating mountains of water that, in an eye blink, would collapse and churn.

In one breathless moment, the mountains of water collapsed upon a little boat, churning the debris like a tornado in the ocean. Kicking and grabbing for a piece of debris – anything to hold on to – was an old sailor who had been trying to live just one more time the sailor’s life.

As a wave crashed upon his head, sending him deep underwater before he could get a full breath of air, he knew that he may die the sailor’s death.

He fought to reach the surface, his tired arms and legs working frantically. But another wave crashed down, and it reached down deep, well below the surface, knocking the old sailor around like a fly. He could feel his lungs burning, screaming for air, as he began to feel dizzy, in the darkness of his failing eyesight seeing firecracker afterimages of light. Exhausted, on the verge of consciousness, he thought sadly, *Amy, Zoey, Jamie, I’m sorry.*

#

Even though he was still very drunk, Seaman Recruit Zack Fitzpatrick could spot a pretty woman when he saw one, even in a midnight trip to a civilian hospital’s emergency room.

“Hey there,” he said, trying to sound smooth and casual – which was difficult as his mouth felt ten times its size, what with having been punched in the face in a not-so-well executed bar fight.

The young nurse who was attending him only rolled her dark eyes, not even bothering to reply.

“Hey – easy!” He sucked in his breath as she prodded an investigative gauzed forefinger at his mouth.

She laughed at that. “When the booze wears off, it’ll really hurt – lots.”

“Gee, thanks.”

“No problem, sailor boy.”

“How’d you know I’m a sailor?” He glanced at his jeans and T-shirt.

She laughed even harder at that. “Your haircut isn’t exactly in fashion. And we’re the nearest hospital to the nearest bar to the base. It ain’t rocket science.”

“Is that a fact?” he replied, trying to smile slyly but failing miserably, saying, “Ow.”

“Sailor boy --”

“Zack.”

“What?”

“My name’s Zack.”

“Okay. Fine. Zack, you’ll be fine. No broken bones, no weird clotting. But you look like hell, and you’re not even my type. So stop with the flirting, okay?”

He stared at her, still feeling very drunk but still seeing her clearly. She seemed to glow with a warm green, even though it seemed spiky with irritation and tiredness. “You’re beautiful.”

“Oh Jesus --”

“No, really. Really.”

She squinted at him, and then sighed. “Right.”

“Seriously. I --”

Then one of the ER doctors on duty swung by to check on him and confer with the nurse and, sooner than he’d prefer, Zack was cleared to go, along with the two buddies he was with.

But before they left, he heard a name, but didn’t quite catch it. “What?” He looked up and saw the pretty nurse as she just passed him.

“Amy Hernandez.” She slipped into another patient’s room.

“Hey – fast work, Z-man,” one of his buddies declared as the other one laughed.

Zack frowned. “Shut up, guys.”

Several weeks later, Zack found himself in his dress whites, recently dismissed from his graduation rites, slipping away from his buddies and their families, back to the civilian hospital’s ER unit. There, he looked blankly, as the memory of that night was hazy through the booze except for the pretty nurse and her name.

“Excuse me, but I’m looking for Amy Hernandez,” he asked at what looked like an information desk.

The woman behind the desk gave him an appraising look. “And who may I ask is inquiring?”

“Uh --” He struggled to explain himself and decided to tell the truth. “She treated me when I was here a few weeks ago. I was an ass, but she was kind and told me her name. My name is Zack Fitzpatrick, and I just wanted to say thanks before I left.”

“Huh.” She decided to believe him. “She’s on her lunch break – cafeteria. Here.” She pointed at a map.

“Thank you, ma’am.”

After carefully negotiating the maze of corridors, Zack arrived at the cafeteria – mostly empty as it was 3PM. The look on Amy’s face when she saw Zack approach her table was unreadable until she opened her mouth. “You clean up good.”

He laughed nervously. “I didn’t forget you.”

“Obviously.” She pointed at an empty chair across the table and saw him sit down. She glanced at his sleeve. “E-3. Well, well, ambitious are we.” She smiled at his surprise. “Nearest hospital to the nearest bar to the base, remember?”

“Oh – right.” He suddenly felt awkward. “Okay, look. I just wanted to thank you for putting up with me back then, and to say I’m sorry.”

“Well. Will wonders never cease.”

“Huh?”

“You’re the first man who’s ever apologized to me for being a chauvinist pig. Even the doctors won’t do that.” She looked at him anew. “Okay, I’ve decided that you’re not a creepy stalker.”

“Oh, gee, thanks.”

“So, Mr. Zack --”

“Zack Fitzpatrick.”

“So, Mr. Zack Fitzpatrick, where do we go from here?”

“Uh --” He suddenly went blank, so he said the first thing that came to his mind. “Can you be my pen pal?”

The cafeteria lunch lady who had been eavesdropping burst out laughing.

To Zack’s great relief, Amy wasn’t. “Sure,” she said, shrugging. “What harm can it do?”

One year and three duty stations later, when Amy met Zack at the altar, her wedding dress as white as the groom’s uniform, he leaned in and whispered, “Do this count as harm?”

She laughed in reply.

Zack loved being a sailor and a husband, but nothing prepared him for being a father. His own father left him and his mom when he was young, and he didn’t even have a father-in-law as a role model, as both Amy’s parents died with she was a teenager.

So when he held his firstborn, his baby daughter Zoey, for the first time, he felt a prickly sensation between his eyes and the back of his neck which, joined together, made him want to laugh and cry at the same time. *Oh my God*, he thought as he bore this attack of overwhelming love, *what did I get myself into?*

Two years later, when he held his son Jamie for the first time, the attack of love was so strong that he felt like his heart would explode, and that strange sensation of being all-powerful yet absolutely scared shitless hit him on top of everything else.

Being away nine to eleven months out of the year from Amy and the kids didn't help in getting used to these powerful paternal feelings, and when he came home on leave, he'd always be shocked and saddened by how big his kids were getting, by how many milestones he had missed, even as he would hide those emotions by being “fun Dad.”

But he couldn't hide them from Amy, and one Christmas, after the kids had opened their gifts and gone to take a well-earned nap, she pulled him aside in their bedroom and said, “Zack, stop it.”

“Stop what?”

“Stop feeling guilty.”

He opened his mouth to protest but then closed it, for that was exactly what he had been feeling ever since the kids were born.

“Zack, I married a sailor, and I knew then what that meant. Zoey and Jamie were born in a Navy family, and that's all they've ever known. That means, you married a woman who's strong enough to be a Navy wife, and you have kids who miss you when you're gone but know their daddy is a hero, protecting them, their mommy, and their home. So --” she pulled him to her level so that he could be eye-to-eye to her, “stop mourning the nine or ten or whatever months you've lost with us and start living with us *here* and *now*. You hear me?”

“Yes, ma'am.”

“Good.” She lay down on their bed, smiling. “Now, let's not waste a good nap.”

He laughed, but quietly so as not to wake the kids. “Yes, ma'am.”

And, for awhile, everything was perfect.

And then, suddenly, it was not.

On another leave, when six-year old Jamie and eight-year old Zoey were down for the night, Zack sat heavily before the kitchen table, staring at the rivulets of condensation of his half-drunk beer bottle as Amy's voice cut in and out of his concentration.

“—the second phone call from his school this month,” Amy said. “Something's not right with Jamie, Zack. They think it's autism, but when he's at home with Zoey and me, he's fine. But away from us, he's silent and won't really interact with people. His teacher says he's obviously a smart kid, but kindergarten is also a lot about social skills, and he's not doing them.”

“Is he hitting any kids?”

“Well, no.”

“Is he yelling or screaming or disrespecting his teachers?”

“Well – no.”

“Then I don’t see the problem.”

“Zack. Stop staring at your damn beer and listen to me.”

He looked up at his wife, who was so frustrated that she was near tears.

“Our son isn’t a bad kid – but he’s not a typical kindergartner either. It’s like he’s suddenly angry at people, Zack.”

He exhaled deeply. “You’re right. You’re right.” He took a long drink from his bottle. “I’ll talk to him tomorrow.”

The next day, when Amy and Zoey went on base to do some shopping at the exchange, Zack took his son out for a walk in the nearby woods. The season was starting to turn, and their feet crunched on newly fallen leaves as Jamie watched out for acorns and squirrels.

Zack watched his son, still a little guy in sneakers, jeans, and a flannel shirt and looking so much like Amy, with his dark hair and piercing dark eyes. But the creeping fear that he felt last night had remained, as he prayed that his son did not take after him on the inside.

“Hey, Jamie?”

“Yes, Daddy?”

Zack’s heart beat hard, as his son’s reply pulled him back to that hospital room when he first held Jamie and felt the dual attack of overwhelming love and fear. “Jamie,” he said, and he was now squatting down in front of his son so he could see his son’s face, “what color do you see in me?”

Jamie stared at him in surprise but then started to cry in relief. “You’re blue and green, Daddy. You’re always blue and green.”

Without a word, he hugged his son, letting him cry until he had calmed down. Zack forced himself not to shed tears, even though he knew that Jamie would be able to feel and see them in his deepening blue. After a minute or two, when the little boy’s tears turned into sniffles, Zack pulled away. “You’re blue and green, too, Jamie.”

His little boy stared at him. “You see it, too?”

“I do.”

“But – but my teacher says I’m being funny, I’m making it up. The kids in class tell me I’m making it up, too.” He frowned. “I hate them.”

“Jamie, don’t say that.” Zack looked into his son’s angry, dark eyes. “Don’t hate them just because they can’t see what you can see. Most people don’t believe what they can’t see.”

“That’s what Zoey says.”

“Does she?” Zack asked, surprised. “Well, your sister’s right.”

“But Zoey doesn’t believe it, either.”

“Jamie --”

“She doesn’t! She’s not mean, like the other kids at school, but she doesn’t believe it’s real.”

“Well, son, she can’t see people’s colors. Neither can your mom. Most people can’t.”

“So why can I do? Why can you do, Daddy?”

Zack shrugged. “Same reason why Zoey has my blue eyes and you have your mom’s brown ones. It’s a family thing. But it’s super special, so it shows up in only a few people.” He paused, making sure his son was looking straight at his eyes. “And Jamie – being mad at people who can’t see people’s colors is like being mad at people who can’t see at all.”

“That’s being mean?”

“That’s being mean.”

Jamie’s eyebrows furrowed, deep in concentration. “What do I do, Daddy?”

“You’ll see the color, but just don’t pay attention to it, like the color of people’s hair or the color of their skin. Everyone has a color that’s always there but, after a while, it just becomes a part of who they are, but only just a part. You don’t really know a person unless you talk to them, work with them --”

“Play with them?” Jamie interrupted.

“Yes, Jamie. Play with them. At least try.”

Jamie shrugged. “Okay, Daddy.”

“Good boy.” Zack pointed at a tree. “Look, there’s a squirrel.”

Happy for the distraction, Jamie ran after it, looking up as the squirrel scurried up the trunk and into a particularly gnarled branch of an old, golden-leaved oak. “Daddy, does Mommy know you can see people’s colors?” he asked carefully.

“No, son.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I’d gotten so good at not mentioning it to people before I met your mom that I didn’t think to mention it, even to her.”

“Because you didn’t want to hear Mommy say she didn’t believe you?”

Zack sighed deeply. *Out of the mouths of babes*, he thought. “Yes, Jamie. That’s probably why.”

“It hurts my feelings when people don’t believe me.”

“I know, son.” Zack, who had walked over to the squirrel’s tree, tousled his son’s hair affectionately, like a young puppy. “I know.”

Nine months after that talk in the woods, Zack and his family left behind those woods for yet another duty station on the other side of the country. One year later back to the East Coast, but this time in Virginia. Then a year in Texas, near Amy’s hometown of Dallas.

With every move, Zack was grateful for a supportive Navy wife who had put her own career on hold, for a son who no longer had the schoolyard reputation of “weird” and “creepy” but simply “shy” and “quiet,” and for a daughter who was doing her best as the oldest child and big sister. He was grateful that he didn’t have to worry about the home front as he advanced to higher ranks, better pay grades, and more challenging responsibilities.

The next move to the Western Pacific came with his promotion to Chief Petty Officer. Barely six months later, he got a phone call from a frantic Amy. “Come home. Jamie’s had a psychotic break.”

Zack could only stare at the phone’s receiver, the heavy hum of the ship all around him, as his ears roared with the rush of blood pumping through an equally frantic heart.

The next two months were a mindless blur of psychiatrists and psychotherapists, of arguments over what was best for Jamie. *I should tell her, I should tell her*, Zack’s mind pounded its message, but not even Jamie’s diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia could bring him to reveal to Amy what he and Jamie shared, for he refused to see what Jamie had clearly seen – Zoey’s green and yellow, blotted out with corrosive gray and shot with oozing black.

With years of practice behind him, Zack turned a blind eye, willfully forcing Zoey’s color to fade away from his vision in order to focus his full attention to Jamie’s treatment. But in yet another argument with Amy, Zoey herself ripped away those blinders.

“Mom – Dad – I’m sorry,” she whimpered.

As she collapsed onto the kitchen floor, Zack stared in shock, seeing the inky blackness pour out of Zoey’s abdomen like hemorrhaging blood.

“Zack! ZACK! Jesus, Zack, HELP ME!”

Amy’s barking orders broke through his paralysis, and he rushed to aid his wife get their daughter into the car and to the base hospital.

With his little girl hooked up in ICU, Zack and Amy would sit vigil in the evenings after visiting Jamie in the inpatient psychiatric wing of the hospital complex. With two children sick, Zack sat helpless, until one stormy evening, Zoey, delirious with fever, whispered, “No, Father Tony, don’t.”

Zack’s head jerked up from his hands as he heard Zoey’s words, Amy’s gasp, and the nurse on duty dropping her clipboard.

“Who the hell is Father Tony?” Zack demanded from his wife.

“Macinas. Father Tony Macinas – Our Lady of the Hills Church – our church,” Amy stammered, and she watched Zack leap out of his seat. “Zack, what are you going to do?”

“Nothing.” He marched out of the hospital room, out of the hospital complex.

It was raining hard, but he drove without caution, careening towards the church and the rectory next to it. The church and rectory stood dark and empty as he pulled into the parking lot. But before he stopped the car, he saw a trail of inky darkness heading out of the rectory, down the parking lot, and out to the road.

Zack swung the car around and followed the trail, which even the wind and rain could not wash away. It led him to a lonely bit of beach, where he parked and got out in order to follow the trail onto the sand.

There, barely seen in the deepening gloom of the evening and the incoming typhoon, was a man wading into the stormy surf.

Zack stood still, watching the man wade farther out as it became clear what he was trying to do. But the farther the man waded, the more the waves pushed him back to shore, as if the waters themselves rejected him. Then it looked as if the man was changing his mind as he stopped wading in waist-deep water, and Zack found himself running down the sand, into the water, to make the man do what he himself could or could not do.

Up close, even in the dark of the evening and storm, Zack could see the man, a fellow only a year or two younger than he was, in swim trunks, sobbing as his color – primarily a dark, depressive blue – fought with the inky blackness that suffocated him. The man suddenly saw him, and he immediately recognized who Zack was. As if Zack brought the impetus the man needed, the man slowly but deliberately nodded and then fought his way into deeper waters until Zack could no longer see the man among the violent waves crashing towards him and the island shore.

Suddenly aware of his own bodily danger, Zack rushed back to the island, in time to see the dark trail fade and disappear. Running and stumbling back to the safety of the car, he drove away as the storm scrubbed clean all evidence of both men’s appearances on that lonely beach.

As he drove home, Zack’s body gave way to violent shakes, and the car weaved jerkily in the dark rain. At the empty house, he stripped off his wet clothes in the kitchen, threw them in the dryer, mopped himself and then the wet floor with a towel, threw that in the dryer, and turned the dryer on. Gooseflesh rising on his naked body, Zack tried to breathe deeply as his thoughts screamed across his mind.

*He’s dead. I wanted to kill him, but he killed himself first. No, he changed his mind, but then he saw me. Did I make him kill himself, or did I help him kill himself? I wanted to kill him, but he killed himself first – so why the hell do I feel guilty?*

“Dammit,” Zack said out loud, his voice an odd mixture of anger and fear. He checked his clothes – they were cool to the touch, but they were mostly dry, so he put them back on.

He got wet again in running to the car and, once back at the hospital, running from the car to the hospital’s entrance, but nothing like wading into the ocean.

Only Amy was in the room with Zoey, who was still unconscious. She looked at Zack as he resumed his seat next to her. “Where were you?” she asked, so quietly that Zack almost didn’t hear her.

“Just clearing my head.” The lie slid out easily before Zack had a chance to stop it.

She nodded and then rested her head against the edge of Zoey’s bed. Her body shuddered once and then went still.

“Amy, there’s a couch over there – why don’t you get some sleep? You’re exhausted.”

Her head gave a small shake. “No. Not sleepy. Too much shit going through my head.” Her fists clenched in her lap. “Why Zoey? Why? Why didn’t I see it? Why couldn’t I protect her? Isn’t that my damn job? And Jamie – why Jamie, the sweetest and smartest little boy in the world? Why him?” She turned her head, her anguished eyes looking at nothing. “What the *fuck* kind of world allows a so-called man of God to rape my little girl and allows an incurable mental illness to beat down a little boy? Why? Why? *Why?*”

By the last word, Amy had stood up, in near hysterics, and Zack could only hold her as she beat his chest and cried angry, bitter tears, all the while the dark hole where his guilt was grew deeper and larger with her every fist beat, with every raging tear.

The next day, during the clear day after the storm had passed, news spread of the priest’s body found washed up around the rocky outcroppings of Orote Point, which the police ruled as an accidental drowning. When she heard the news, Amy only looked at Zack but asked no questions, as Zack only stared into space and remained silent.

Two days later, when Zoey finally awoke from her coma, Zack still remained a silent witness, watching Zoey – still grayish from her ordeal but now weeping a familiar shade of dark blue – staring at her hands as Amy – her joy a shining golden green – cried and embraced her.

He put up no protest when Amy declared that she had found a reputable pediatric psychotherapy program in her hometown of Dallas and that she and the kids would be relocating there. He filled out and signed the necessary paperwork to ensure a smooth transition for the move to Texas for his family, and for his own move to single-member housing on base as he served out his current two-year stay.

In the airport, Jamie was quiet, zoned out on antipsychotics, while Zoey was also quiet, brooding to herself. Only Amy put up a brave face, smiling madly as she said, “I’ll write often – you write, too.”

“Okay.”

“Come home when you can.”

“Okay.”

“Zack?”

“What?”

She glanced at the kids, but they seemed to be in their own world. She stared straight into Zack’s eyes. “This isn’t home.”

“What?”

“This isn’t home anymore. Over there is home. *Our* home. Not just me and the kids, but your home, too. When you can, come home. And when you can, come home forever. We’ll be waiting.” She squeezed Zack’s hands. “I’ll be waiting.”

“Amy --”

“Stop feeling guilty.”

He opened his mouth to answer but then closed it.

“You’re a good husband. You’re a good father.” Her stare became more intense. “You’re a good man. Stop feeling guilty just because you’re only human. Stop it.”

“Amy --” He paused again. “Amy, I’ll try.”

“Okay, then.” She released his hands and wrapped her arms around his neck. Not caring that their kids and complete strangers could see, she stood on tiptoe to give a long, farewell kiss.

For Zack, it was a kiss that reminded him of their first kiss, that reminded him of those stolen opportunities when he would be on leave and the kids were asleep, that reminded him of why he fell in love with Amy in the first place.

When he pulled back, he found his face wet with tears – not Amy’s, but his own. He turned from Amy towards the kids and hugged them, too, not caring if they hugged him back with the same intensity as he.

But they did. Zoey hugged him tightly and said, “Bye, Daddy,” with such fear in her eyes that Zack almost changed his mind – that he would go with them, too, somehow – but he pushed the thought away. Little Jamie, drugged as he was for the trip, strained to see Zack’s color, as Zack could tell from Jamie’s stare, as intense as Amy’s was.

“It’s okay, Jamie,” Zack said, hugging him tightly.

“Are you sad, Daddy?” Jamie asked dreamily. “Is your color sad?”

Zack closed his eyes and hugged Jamie even tighter. “Yes, Jamie,” he whispered. “Yes and yes.”

The call for boarding came, and Zack watched his family leave the waiting area and disappear into the long jet way to the waiting passenger plane below. He remained as he was as the jet way moved out of the way, the plane rolled back, and it taxied and then ran along the concrete pathways of the airport runways. He placed his hand on the wall-to-wall glass as he saw Pan-Am flight 33 take off and ascend into the sky, the white and blue craft all too quickly disappearing into the cloud bank, disappearing from Zack Fitzpatrick’s life.

He closed his eyes again, his forehead resting against the glass, which felt cold to the touch.

Zack hadn’t meant to miss Thanksgiving and Christmas. He hadn’t meant to neglect writing back to Amy’s letters, her letters about a new life in a civilian world filled with a return to nursing, to helping her kids heal, to being lonely, to missing him. He hadn’t meant to run farther and farther away from a return to a home that Amy would insist was his home, too, by accepting one far-flung deployment and then another one and then another. He hadn’t meant to do any of those things, but he did. He kept himself so busy with his military career that he had no empty spaces in his life to be bothered with “why.”

Consequently, two and a half years after he witnessed his family leave his life, he was both surprised and resigned to receive Amy’s request for a divorce. He did not contest it, agreeing to everything that Amy and her lawyer wanted from him and, in one surreal moment three months later, he read about the official death of his marriage from his copy of the official divorce decree, arriving on a beautiful, sunny day along the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea.

Slowly, deliberately, he ripped apart the decree into postage-stamp sized pieces and then threw the resulting confetti into the waters below.

Four years later, when Zoey’s letter found him to say that Amy was dead, he ripped apart that document, too, this time feeding the cold north Atlantic.

*Amy*, his mind cried, even as his face remained as cold and still as the icy November air. *Amy*. Then the image of the man nodding his assent and then disappearing under the stormy waters flashed through his mind’s eye and, for the first time, he understood what Tony Macinas felt that day.

*I’m sorry, Amy. I can’t stop feeling guilty.*

#

Exhausted, on the edge of consciousness, the old sailor thought sadly, *Amy, Amy, I’m so sorry, Amy. I’m so sorry.*

Another wave crashed down like an exploding depth charge, slamming the old man deeper into the roiling waters. This time, he stilled his limbs. This time, he stilled his breath. This time, he let the vast sea take him to wherever it would take him. He was slipping away.

Catching him unaware, Miranda slipped in.