

An Angel Whispers

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INT. CHURCH - DAY

BEN, early-50s sits on a bench in the church. His clothes are crumpled, his hair unkempt. His five o'clock shadow is at midnight.

The church is pretty, quiet, and humble.

PADRE (OS)
You must be the reporter?

Ben swivels to see a man (PADRE) in his mid-20s stood in the aisle. He's dressed in black. He's tall, sinewy, with gracious eyes and a soft smile.

BEN
Pardon the interruption, Padre.

PADRE
Quiet reflection in peaceful solitude,
does not an interruption make, my
friend.

Ben nods, musters a small smile back.

PADRE
So, what did you learn of our
legendary tale?

BEN
It's unlike anything else I've
investigated.

PADRE
The heart's willing to believe, but
the mind demands proof?

BEN
Normally. But this was different.

PADRE
In what way?

BEN
More... personal, I guess.

Padre, sits at the pew opposite Ben.

PADRE
Tell me, with whom did you speak?

BEN
The Father, the Fiancée, and the
Sheriff.

PADRE
Jimmy's trifecta.

Ben nods, turns his focus to the front of the church.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Ben, half-asleep, leans against the window of his car. The
voice of a young girl echoes in his dreams.

SMALL GIRL (OS)
Daddy? Daddy? Where are you?

The girl's voice fades, replaced by a CELLPHONE ringing.

Ben wakes with a JOLT. Looks around for his phone, finds it
under a bundle of beer cans and fast food wrappers on the
floor of the passenger side. He looks at the caller ID and
frowns.

BEN
Shit.

Ben answers, a voice comes over speakers in the car.

JOHN (OS)
Ben? Where the hell are you?

BEN
Calais.

JOHN (OS)
France?

BEN
Maine.

JOHN (OS)
Why?

BEN
Research.

JOHN (OS)
Another so-called 'miracle'?

BEN
Last on the list.

JOHN (OS)
You're 3 months past deadline.

BEN
Shouldn't take long.

JOHN (OS)
Debunking miracles rarely does.

Ben shakes his head and hangs up the phone. He rubs his bloodshot eyes. Peers over at the passenger seat at a set of 3 *manila files*. He grabs one, which has a name scrawled on the top: NORM CLANCY.

EXT. HORSE STABLES - AFTERNOON

NORM is a tall, strapping man in his early-50s. A veteran of the Marines, the embodiment of '*Semper Fi*'. He's busy sweeping a stable, as Ben watches on.

NORM
Gotta admit... I wasn't keen on havin'
a reporter pry into my family. But
then I looked you up; Turns out,
you're a brave man.

BEN
It's nothing to brag about.

NORM
Take it from a former grunt; your
reports from Iraq were... outstanding.
(winks, grins)
Despite being embedded with the *Army*.

BEN
That was a long time ago.

NORM
So, how does a war correspondent go
from Kevlar and bullets to folklore
and fantasy?

BEN
My life changed.

Norm pauses, looks at Ben and nods sympathetically.

BEN

Tell me more about the work you do here with veterans and the horses.

NORM

They do the work. I provide 'em a safe place to get it done.

(pauses in thought)

Actually, it was Jimmy's idea.

BEN

He's the reason you called me here, right? The 'incident'?

Norm puts down the broom. Dusts himself off.

NORM

Thirsty?

BEN

I suppose.

NORM

Well, there's a cold pitcher of ice tea waiting back at the house.

INT. PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

FRANKIE is in her mid-30s. She sports a ponytail and rimmed glasses. She's casually pretty, with a sensitive smile. She cleans the room while chatting to Ben.

FRANKIE

I wish you were here earlier, my kids would've loved to meet a big city reporter like you.

BEN

Not sure you'd want me at '*show-n-tell*'.

FRANKIE

True... We should be aiming higher than a *Pulitzer* prize winning journalist!

Frankie grins at Ben.

BEN

I doubt they'd believe I'm anything special.

FRANKIE

Ohh... dunno about that... In this class we live by the mantra... *'What you imagine, you can make possible'*.

BEN

Do you practice what you teach?

FRANKIE

I do. But the old me, not so much.

BEN

The 'old you', was his girlfriend?

FRANKIE

Jimmy was my first love. He was the flame that would always light my way home -- even when I deserved to be left in the dark.

BEN

Deserve?

FRANKIE

You wouldn't know it, but back then, I loved Jimmy nearly as much as I loved *Molly*.

BEN

You're right. I didn't know.

FRANKIE

I hear including 'addict' as a skill on your *LinkedIn* profile can be career limiting.

BEN

How did you get... hooked?

FRANKIE

It was during that last year, after I lost my baby.

BEN

Baby?

FRANKIE

I was four months along, when I lost her and it broke me. I wanted to escape. Which the painkillers helped at first. But they weren't enough... and, and, and.

BEN

Hey, I'm not here to judge.

FRANKIE

And I'm not here for a sob story. I can tell you that Jimmy patiently tried to get me clean. But when he found me with two junkies in our bed... I found the end of his patience.

BEN

Right. I can see. That's-

FRANKIE

Awful. Evil. Gross. Trust me, I know. And I'd love to tell you it shocked me into getting my act together. But no, it got worse. And then... much worse after he deployed. I sunk into a pit, and figured I'd end up dead, in the dark. Alone. It's what I deserved.

BEN

Guilt can have that effect.

FRANKIE

You speak from experience?

BEN

(rubs his eyes, irritated)
Not one I wish to recount.

Frankie smiles warmly back at Ben.

INT. CAR - EVENING

Ben drives with GEORGE, as they weave about the town. GEORGE is African-American, in his mid-30s. He's a large, affable man. He wears a *sheriff's uniform*.

GEORGE

Thanks for tagging along, brother. It may be a sleepy town, but with a four person department, we're busy, even when it ain't busy.

BEN

I appreciate your time, Sheriff.

GEORGE

Please, call me George.

BEN

Will do. So... I hear you were close to Jimmy? '*Thick as thieves*', according to Frankie.

GEORGE

We were thicker than thieves and twice as *Thelma and Louise*.

BEN

Best friends?

GEORGE

Since preschool. Man, if we weren't playing LEGO, we'd be on our Big Wheels. Always foolin' around. And as we got older, LEGOS turned into video games, Big Wheels into bikes, games into girls and bikes into cars. No matter the changes, we were inseparable. Or, so I thought.

BEN

What happened?

GEORGE

When I was 17, my cousin, Pico wanted to hook me up with his motorcycle club.

BEN

And Jimmy?

GEORGE

No way I'd do it without Jimbo. So, he got badged too. And he dug it at first... but after a while the club's extra-curriculars got to him.

BEN

Such as?

GEORGE

Robbery. Dealing. Smuggling. Anything outlaw. Truth is, I loved it. The whole 'Easy Rider' vibe appealed to my inner badass. But not Jimbo. Kid didn't have a dishonest bone in his body.

BEN

What did he do?

GEORGE

Politely handed back his vest.

BEN

And you?

GEORGE

Traded away my best friend for the life of an outlaw.

BEN

Why?

GEORGE

I grew up dirt poor. Dad split. Ma worked two jobs. The MC gave me a home. A family.

BEN

Any regrets?

GEORGE

Trust me... I'd rather live in a cardboard box, eatin' dirt, if it meant I could go back and tell that dumbass kid what's what. Instead, I had to see my best friend go enlist, while I got busted for petty larceny.

BEN

You felt embarrassed?

GEORGE

Felt like I let him down. Not that he showed it... in fact, Jimbo wrote me everyday while I was in juvvie. It

kept me sane. Gave me hope. So, when I got out, I wanted to make things right. Maybe even follow in his footsteps.

BEN
To enlist?

GEORGE
Wasn't sure at first. But once he spoke to me, I was crystal clear.

BEN
On what?

GEORGE
My path.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Ben and Norm sit on the porch, as they drink ice tea.

NORM
Good, right?

BEN
Not bad.

NORM
Pretty much all I drink nowadays.

Ben looks over at Norm inquisitively.

NORM
Ten years and 244 days dry.

BEN
Ah. And... before the incident...?

NORM
Let's just say I wasn't about to win any parent-of-the-year awards.

Ben contemplates his next question.

BEN
Your son was adopted, right?

NORM

Unfortunately, Cynthia and I couldn't conceive. Nonetheless, God saw fit to bless us with an angel.

BEN

(grins)

An angel? Seriously?

NORM

You may smirk, but Cynthia believed he was special. Me too...

(sips his ice tea)

...Until she was taken from us.

BEN

What happened?

NORM

She drown saving Jimmy. Down near Lyme Lake. He hit his head, got carried down by the current. She waded in, and managed to get him to safety but it came at a cost.

BEN

Must've been hard on you both.

NORM

More than it shoulda been. Perhaps a more forgiving type woulda done better. But instead of holding my son, I pushed him away, and pulled the bottle closer.

BEN

You blamed him?

NORM

It was easier to make him a scape goat then to deal with the pain.

BEN

Tragedy can turn the best of us, into the worse of us.

Ben looks away, pained.

NORM

I heard about your troubles. I-

BEN

He was a naval aviator, right?

NORM

Top Gun, best-of-the-best. A real officer and a gentleman.

BEN

When did he deploy?

NORM

3 months prior to the incident.

BEN

On that topic, why were you there?

NORM

The church? Mosta the town was huddled there, 'cos of the big nor'easter. It's one of the safest places to hunker-down in a storm.

BEN

Farm like this... you must have a storm cellar? Who go there?

NORM

I do... But, something felt wrong that night. I needed Cynthia. So, I went to the place I felt closest to her spirit.

BEN

Right. Ok. So, when did the 'incident' happen?

NORM

After hours of the wildest wind and rain, it suddenly stopped. Everything got pin-drop quiet.

BEN

Eye of the storm?

NORM

(nods)

Bingo! So, we thought the worse was over and we could head home. But just as I went to leave, the door at the back of the church rattles open, and there he stood.

BEN

The guy?

NORM

As sure and as real as you sittin'
here sippin' ice tea.

BEN

Were you sober at the time?

NORM

Sober enough to know what's real.

BEN

So, did you recognize the guy?

NORM

What with the helmet and wet uniform,
couldn't tell at first.

BEN

What did he do?

NORM

The darndest thing I've ever seen.

INT. PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben and Frankie in the classroom, still at a table.

BEN

So, were you also at the church that
night to take shelter?

FRANKIE

Not specifically. And certainly wasn't
for prayer either.

Frankie pauses, sits down opposite Ben.

FRANKIE

When you're a junkie, there's no
depths you won't plumb to find or fund
your next high.
(sighs)
I did things. Terrible things.

BEN

This was one of those 'things'?

FRANKIE

Sunday night's when they'd count the money from weekly donations, before a Monday bank delivery. Wasn't much. But enough for a fix.

BEN

A church heist?

FRANKIE

What with the storm and all the chaos, I could slip in-'n-out without notice.

BEN

Where were you when it happened?

FRANKIE

Near the front. Keeping tabs on the reverend's office. I was about to make my move when the door blew open. Scared the crap outta me.

BEN

Scared the crap outta the entire flock... supposedly.

FRANKIE

It was actually more creepy than scary, you know? Especially when he walked over to the pulpit. Barely four yards from me... I could smell the salt water on his uniform.

BEN

Were you... using at that time?

FRANKIE

Was I high? Always. But I wasn't experiencing a hallucination.

BEN

Ok. So, what then?

FRANKIE

Then he took off his helmet, lit a candle, and prayed.

BEN

For how long?

FRANKIE

Felt like forever. But probably wasn't more than five minutes.

BEN

Did you see his face?

FRANKIE

No. When he was done, he put his helmet back on and made his way back to the door.

BEN

He didn't say anything?

FRANKIE

Well, that's where it got weird. You see, right as he walked past me, I heard him whisper as clear as if I were to lean over and speak softly into your ear.

BEN

What did he say?

FRANKIE

Depends on who you ask.

BEN

I don't understand.

FRANKIE

Everyone heard something unique. Just for them and them alone.

BEN

That's convenient.

FRANKIE

You're missing the point... See, the actual words are irrelevant. What matters was the aftermath.

BEN

Which was?

FRANKIE

It changed our town forever; Left us infinitely more unified. And through this unity we found new purpose.

Through purpose, peace. And through peace, love.

BEN
You sound like a Hallmark card.

FRANKIE
Corny as hell, I agree! But, that's the truth.

BEN
Maybe. Yet that won't stop the skeptics from doubting the story.

FRANKIE
But imagine the impact of this tale, if they believed? If it came from you... of all people.

BEN
That's a big '*if*'. And don't forget, it took a so-called miracle for that to happen here.

FRANKIE
Perhaps. But then again, maybe the world isn't as skeptical as you think. They just need the right story to spark their imagination to make it possible.

Ben looks down at the toys on the floor. Frowns.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ben and George in the car. They come to a stop.

BEN
What do you mean... your path?

GEORGE
You heard about that night; The guy in uniform. How he prayed. And then-

BEN
The whispers. What did you hear?

GEORGE
'*Protect the innocent.*'

BEN
And that inspired you to law
enforcement?

GEORGE
(chuckles)
Seemed pretty damn clear to me.

George's car pulls up in front of the church, stops.

BEN
You think without the incident things
would've been different for all of
you?

GEORGE
Probably. I mean, it's not just what
he said, it was the timing. You see,
most of us were about to split that
night. No one knew it was the eye. If
we'd left, there and then, we all
woulda ended up like Dorothy and Toto,
swept away by a mean, 'ol twister.

BEN
Quite the miracle.

GEORGE
Some might say. I just think it was
Jimmy being Jimmy.

BEN
When did you find out about him?

GEORGE
Very next day. Navy Chaplain came
through town to see Norm.

BEN
He crashed, right?

GEORGE
Engine failure. Belly flopped straight
into the Indian Ocean.

BEN
Half a world away.

GEORGE
11,472 miles to be exact.

BEN

But it's impossible that he-

GEORGE

We all saw what we saw. Heard what we heard.

BEN

But how'd you know it was him?

GEORGE

The wings on his collar and the call sign on his helmet, didn't leave much to doubt.

BEN

His call sign?

GEORGE

(wry smile)

'Angel'. Ha! Who else but, Jimmy?

Ben gets out the car, as does George from the other side. George looks over at Ben kindly.

GEORGE

Look, I know the answers might not be what you want, but to us, that night... it was sublime.

BEN

What do you mean; *'what I want'*?

GEORGE

I heard about what happened to your daughter. I can't begin-

BEN

No, no you can't.

GEORGE

Did you... did you know the guy?

Ben takes a beat to consider if he wants to divulge.

BEN

No. He lived a few blocks from the school. I... I was late to pick her up. Again. She waited. And waited. And then he offered her a ride.

(fighting tears)

We found her a month later.

GEORGE

I'm so sorry for your loss. Was she.... was she your only child?

BEN

No. My girlfriend at high school got pregnant. We were only 17... too young to be parents. But she still wanted to give birth and have a family adopt.

(chokes up)

Preferably a decent family that couldn't conceive on their own but would love the boy all the same.

George pats the roof of his car, contemplating.

GEORGE

So Norm told you?

BEN

We spoke.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Back in the church, with Ben and the 'Padre'.

PADRE

I sense maybe their stories did more to confound than inspire.

BEN

Not them. It's the circumstances that astound me.

PADRE

Theirs?

BEN

Mine. I've been careening all over the map, in search of lore... with a need to disprove. To show the world 'miracles' are nothing more than the figment of weak minds unwilling to face reality. I mean, why would a God be so capricious as to amaze some and debilitate others? It made no sense. I wanted to take their joy and make them as miserable as me. But then.... I

heard the story. And about Jimmy. It's a coincidence too big to ignore... a convergence of my life with the fiction I set out to impugn. It's practically a, a....

PADRE

A miracle?

BEN

Two days ago I would've laughed at you. Now I just don't know. Like, why now? Why me? What's my role?

PADRE

In truth... others have inquired about the incident. But the town chose to keep the truth to themselves.

BEN

Understandable. It's not something the average person'd believe.

PADRE

Could be why you're here. Perhaps the story has been waiting for the right person to tell the tale.

BEN

Look, I believe the people here believe they witnessed a miracle. But convincing the unconvinced is another story altogether.

PADRE

A miracle doesn't need to be seen to be believed. But it does need to be believed to be seen. And maybe Ben... if you do believe, you could be the herald to sway the unswayable.

Ben pauses, rubs his temples. He gets up.

BEN

I best hit the road, Padre.

PADRE

Of course. It was delightful to finally meet you, Ben.

Ben nods back, a little perplexed. He heads out.

PADRE

If you're heading south, may I suggest stopping at '*Lillian's Diner*'. The peach cobbler with a side of strawberry ice cream is heaven sent... forgive the pun. Indeed, whenever troubled, I'd go there, order that dish, and after a few bites the answers I seek would come into focus.

BEN

I'll check it out.

PADRE

Trust me. You won't regret it.

Ben smiles, and then leaves.

INT. DINER - AFTERNOON

A cheery roadside diner. A few patrons scattered around in booths. Ben sits at the counter. LILLIAN, A kindly woman in her mid-50s stands on the other side.

LILLIAN

I was hoping you'd pay me a visit.

BEN

You come highly recommended.

LILLIAN

I should hope so. Been fillin' hungry bellies 'round here since the Nixon Administration.

BEN

I was told your peach cobbler's '*heaven sent*'.

LILLIAN

Not sure it's divine, but it has won the county fair pie contest!

Lillian goes to fetch the pie from a tray display.

BEN

Would you mind putting a scoop of strawberry ice cream on the side?

LILLIAN

You betcha, Hon.

Ben browses over his notes. Lillian serves up the pie.

BEN

Thanks.

Lillian turns to walk away, but pauses.

LILLIAN

Hmm. Well ain't that a thing. You're here for the story about our Jimmy, right?

BEN

Yes, ma'am.

LILLIAN

Well, that right there was Jimmy's favorite.

BEN

Nice coincidence.

LILLIAN

I's say. Not many like that combination. But then again, Jimmy always was a little different.

Lillian pulls down a picture from the top shelf.

LILLIAN

Last I saw him was right here the mornin' he deployed. So handsome in his uniform.

BEN

Mind if I take a look? Only seen pictures of him as a kid.

Lillian hands the frame to Ben. He stares at it for a moment. His eyes WIDEN. His face pales and the fork he holds DROPS from his hand to the dish. CLANG.

Lillian looks over at Ben, concerned.

LILLIAN

You okay, hon? Looks like you seen a ghost.

Ben looks up at Lillian; bewildered.

BEN
Maybe I have.

Ben snatches the picture.

BEN
Mind if borrow this?

Ben frantically gathers his papers. Throws a *ten dollar bill* on the counter, and bolts outside.

Lillian watches him go, shakes her head.

LILLIAN
City folk.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

FLASHBACK

Back to Ben, when he was with Norm at the farm house.

BEN
Sounds like Jimmy had a big heart.

NORM
He was a good kid. We got lucky.

BEN
How so?

NORM
You never know with adoption... where they came from, good seed or bad. But from what I can tell, the nature part did him no harm.

Norm shoots Ben a thoughtful look.

NORM
He had your eyes. And your voice.

BEN
Jimmy... ?

Norm pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket, opens it up... hands it over to Ben. Ben reads the document.

BEN
Jimmy's adoption certificate? You were
the family? So, he's my...

Norms nods.

BEN
How did you...?

NORM
We've always known.

BEN
Did he?

NORM
No... but by my reckoning, he sure
woulda liked you.

Ben gets up, walks to the end of the porch, looks over the
certificate again with worry in his eyes.

BEN
I'm not sure. Look at me... I rejected
him. Lost my daughter. Abandoned my
wife. And basically quit on myself.
Not much to like, or admire.

NORM
Yet, here you are.
(faces Ben)
Way I see it... In life, Jimmy's inner
circle didn't do right by his heart.
But in death, it'd be a sin to neglect
his soul.

BEN
But I'm not sure how I can...

NORM
It's a journey. He'd be proud you made
it this far. Prouder still of how far
you'll go.

Norm leans back and watches the sun set.

NORM
And you will go far, hoss. Real far.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CHURCH - EARLY EVENING

Ben BURSTS into the church, out of breath.

BEN

Hello? Padre? Anyone here?

All is quiet. Ben pulls out the picture from the diner and walks to the pulpit. He looks at the picture.

INSERT PICTURE

The image is of JIMMY and NORM outside Lillian's Diner. Jimmy's in his Navy Whites. Both are smiling.

A close up of Jimmy's face shows that he is the same person Ben mistook as the 'Padre' in the church.

END INSERT

Ben's shocked. He looks down and sees his feet are in a small puddle of water. He lifts his right foot to find a set of EAGLE WINGS on the floor. The kind worn by naval aviators. He picks them up and stares with awe.

A voice whispers in the silence...

PADRE/JIMMY (OS)

*Now share what you believe, so that
others can see... mi padre.*

Ben shakes his head incredulously and smiles to himself.

BEN

It was delightful to finally meet you
too... my son.

CUT TO BLACK

FADE OUT