

An Angel Whispers

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INT. CHURCH - DAY

BEN, early-fifties sits on a bench near the front of the church. His clothes are crumpled, his hair unkempt. His five o'clock shadow is at midnight, and he's clearly missed a few meals.

The church is typical of most small-town churches. Pretty, quiet, and humble.

PADRE (OS)
You must be the reporter?

Ben turns to see a man (PADRE) in his mid twenties standing in the aisle. He's dressed in black. He's tall, sinewy of build, with kind eyes and a gentle smile.

BEN
Sorry to interrupt, Padre.

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

Ben nods in agreement, musters a small smile back.

PADRE (cont'd)
So, what did you learn of our legendary tale? Fact or fiction?

BEN
Honestly... I'm not sure.

PADRE
As is the case with most stories that rely on faith. The heart is a willing listener, but the mind demands proof.

BEN
I... I want to believe... but...

PADRE
Tell me, with whom did you speak?

BEN
The Father, the Fiancee, and the Sheriff.

PADRE
Remarkable stories, aren't they?

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 small girl echoes in his dreams.

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

The small girl's voice merges into a boy's voice.

BOY (OS)
Buddy? Buddy? You alive?

Ben wakes with a jolt. A teenage boy on his bike RAPS on the passenger-side window. Ben glances at the boy.

BEN
I'm ok. Just takin' a nap.

The boy shakes his head with contempt. Bikes away.

Ben rubs his bloodshot eyes. Peers over at the passenger seat at a set of three 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-fifties. 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; Turns out, you're a modest man. Brave too.

BEN
Sincerely nothin' to brag about.

NORM
Well, for what it's worth, your reporting from Iraq, while embedded with the *Rangers* was... outstanding. Even if they were *Rangers*.

Norm grins and winks mischievously at Ben.

BEN
Was back in my adrenaline junkie days. Back when... when my life was different.

Norm pauses, looks over to Ben and nods sympathetically.

BEN (cont'd)

It's admirable the work you do
with veterans suffering PTSD.

NORM

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

(Pauses in thought)

It was Jimmy's idea. Last letter
he sent, he suggested it.

Ben politely smiles back as Norm pauses in reflection.

NORM (cont'd)

Thirsty?

BEN

Sure.

NORM

Well, you're in luck, 'cos
there's a cold pitcher of ice tea
waiting back at the house.

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 (cont'd)

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 takes a moment to contemplate his next question.

BEN

Your son... was adopted, right?

NORM

My seed notwithstanding, the boy
was mine since diapers.

BEN

Why adopt?

NORM

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

BEN

(Grins)

An angel?

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 very difficult.

NORM

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

BEN

Did you blame him?

NORM

Unfairly. Let him down when he
needed me most. Worst yet, I
betrayed the spirit of my wife.

BEN

Tragedy can skew everything.

Ben looks away, pained by a memory.

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

Speaking of, 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?

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

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)

Yep, that's right. So, a few of us 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... this guy.

BEN

The guy?

NORM

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

BEN

Did you recognize him?

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 - AFTERNOON

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

FRANKIE

I wish you'd come earlier, the
kids woulda loved to meet a big
city reporter.

BEN

Not sure I'm the sorta exemplar
you want at show-n-tell.

FRANKIE

Hmm... You're probably right. We
should be aiming higher than a
Pulitzer prize winning
journalist!

Frankie winks at Ben, and he smiles back.

BEN

I doubt they'd believe I was
anything special.

FRANKIE

My kids here are full of belief.
Our mantra is... '*If you can
imagine it, you can make it*'.

BEN

Does that extend to you?

FRANKIE

Not the old me.

BEN

The 'old you', was his
girlfriend?

FRANKIE

Jimmy was my first love. He was
this unwavering flame that'd
always light my way home, even if
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

(*Scoffs*)

By-n-large you don't see 'addict'
as a listed skill on *LinkedIn*.

BEN

How did you get... hooked?

FRANKIE

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

BEN

The baby?

FRANKIE

I was four months along, when I
lost her and it totally broke me.
I wanted to feel numb. Which the
painkillers helped. 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 tried
valiantly and patiently to get me
clean. But when he found me with
two junkies in our bed... I found
the end of his patience.

BEN

Yeah. I can see. That's pretty-

FRANKIE

Awful. Evil. Disgusting. Trust me, I know. And I'd love to tell you it shocked me into getting my shit 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

Not one I wish to recount.

(Rubs his eyes, irritated)

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 (cont'd)

When you're a junkie, there's no depths you won't plumb to find or fund your next high.

(sighs sadly)

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

You were there to rob them?

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 everyone from what I heard.

FRANKIE

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

BEN

Really?

FRANKIE

Truly. 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? Did you? Did anyone?

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

Can you share what he said?

FRANKIE

The actual words are irrelevant.
What matters is 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

Sounds like a Hallmark card.

FRANKIE

Corny as hell! But, that's the
tale that needs telling.

BEN

Maybe. Yet that won't stop the
skeptics from mangling the truth.

FRANKIE

But imagine the impact of this
story, if people really believed?

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.

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

INT. CAR - DAY

Ben drives with GEORGE, as they weave about the town.

GEORGE is African-American, in his mid-thirties. He's a large, affable man. He wears a *sheriff's uniform*.

GEORGE

Thanks for tagging along, friend.
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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE (cont'd)
the club's extra-curriculars got
to him.

BEN
Such as?

GEORGE
Robbery. Dealing. Smuggling.
Anything outlaw. Truth is, I
loved it. The whose '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
You see, I grew up dirt poor. No
Dad. A mother who worked two
jobs. It was an easy way to feel
like I had something. I was dumb.
Naive. Whatever you wanna call
it.

BEN
Desperate.

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,
(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

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
inspired me, I was crystal clear.

BEN

On what?

GEORGE

My path.

BEN

Which was?

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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE (cont'd)
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

Technically, no. Teenage pregnancy. We were too young to start a family, so the boy was given up for adoption.

George pats the roof of his car, contemplating.

GEORGE

Ah. Ok, I get it. Does um... does Norm know?

BEN

We spoke.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

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

PADRE

I sense their stories did more to confound than inspire.

BEN

I... I just don't get my role in
all this.

PADRE

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

Maybe that's why they chose you.

BEN

Chose me? How? Why?

PADRE

Maybe the story's been waiting
for the right person to tell the
tale.

BEN

Not sure I could convince the
unconvinced.

PADRE

You seek proof in lieu of faith?

BEN

I believe the people here believe
they witnessed a miracle.

PADRE

A miracle doesn't need to be seen
to be believed. But it does need
to be believed to be seen.

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 (cont'd)

If you're going South, may I
suggest stopping at 'Lillian's
Diner'. The peach cobbler with a
side of strawberry ice cream is

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PADRE (cont'd)
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-fifties 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 (cont'd)

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 (cont'd)

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
Lucky how?

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. Ben pauses, as if he's been caught doing something wayward.

BEN
I should've said...

NORM
He had your eyes. And your voice.

BEN
He... he did?

NORM
I reckon he woulda liked you.

BEN
Not so sure. After all, I'm the boy who rejected his child. A father that lost his daughter. A husband who abandoned his wife. And the man, who quit on himself. Not much to like, or admire.

NORM
Yet, here you are.
(Faces Ben)
You see.... those closest to Jimmy let him down the most. But that's not the real sin. The real sin would be neglecting to honor his memory. His voice. His kindness.

BEN

But I'm not sure how...

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 (cont'd)

And you will go far my friend.
Yes sir. Far indeed.

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 nice to meet you too,
Jimmy.

CUT TO BLACK

END