The Skinny Samaritan

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FADE IN:

EXT. HOSPITAL FOYER - DAY

The foyer door opens and out steps KENNETH ANSTRAM, 58, frail and emaciated.

He wears an aging sweater, a pair of hospital scrub pants, hospital socks, and old loafers.

He smiles at the beautiful day.

He holds a clear plastic bag with a few possessions in one hand, and wears a wristful of hospital bracelets on the other.

Slowly, Kenneth starts walking down the sidewalk, away from the hospital and back into the regular world.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

It's down the street from the hospital.

A couple people wait for the bus to come, including GREGORY HINDS, 40's, and ROSALIE HEYWOOD, 50's.

SARAH BAILEY, 30's, and her young DAUGHTER, also wait.

JARVIS, early 20's, listening to music on his earphones, approaches them.

He pulls out one of the earplugs so he can hear them.

JARVIS Excuse me? Does anybody know what time it is?

GREGORY About twenty-til. We got a little bit of a wait.

JARVIS

Thank you.

Kenneth walks slowly, one step at a time, in the background.

Gregory reads the name tag off of Jarvis' work shirt.

GREGORY You new around here, Jarvis?

JARVIS

(nods) From Columbus. I've been here a couple weeks now.

GREGORY I thought so. I ain't ever seen you at Charlie's before. Jarvis smiles and puts the earphones back in his ears.

Behind Jarvis, Gregory sees Kenneth walking towards them in the distance.

GREGORY Hey, they let Mr. Kenny out.

Everybody at the bus stop except Jarvis, who can't hear them, looks.

Rosalie frowns at the old man.

ROSALIE I don't know why. They should be force-feeding him in there.

SUSAN I didn't think he'd make it this long.

ROSALIE It doesn't look like he has much longer to go. Dang fool.

Jarvis notices them all looking at somebody. He turns around and looks behind him.

Kenneth, weak, walks patiently by.

Jarvis notices the skin hanging off the man's bones.

He takes an earphone out to listen as Gregory calls out to Kenneth.

GREGORY Mr. Kenny! Take a seat, my friend.

Gregory gets up to let Kenneth take his seat.

Kenneth shakes his head.

KENNETH

No, thank you.

Kenneth looks at the empty spot on the bench Gregory made for him.

KENNETH

I think my bus riding days are over.

GREGORY

They finally let you out of there, huh?

Kenneth looks at him and smiles.

KENNETH

Not exactly. I'm feeling good, though. I'm ready to get out... Finish whatever's left.

Gregory nods. Rosalie shakes her head with disdain.

GREGORY I got it if you need money for the bus. You took care of us for a long time.

KENNETH I've been cooped up most of the week. The walk'll do me good.

GREGORY I hope to be seeing you again.

Kenneth nods and continues on his way past them.

Gregory sits in his spot on the bench again.

Jarvis reaches into a pocket and pulls out a pack of peanut butter crackers. He jogs over to the weak man.

JARVIS

Hey.

Kenneth turns around and looks at him.

Jarvis offers the pack of crackers.

Behind them, Gregory laughs.

Kenneth smiles and shakes his head no. He pats the young man on the arm.

KENNETH I appreciate it, though.

Kenneth turns back around and leaves Jarvis with the crackers, who pockets them and walks back to the stop.

Gregory smiles at Jarvis.

GREGORY Don't feel too bad. He's starving himself. He's been on a hunger strike for a little while.

JARVIS People still do that?

GREGORY

He is.

JARVIS

Why?

Cause he's a hero.

Rosalie quickly puts her two cents in.

ROSALIE He ain't no hero. He's a thief. And a hunger strike is just a nice way to say he's committing suicide.

GREGORY Giving your money away doesn't make you a thief.

ROSALIE When it's not your money in the first place, it is.

GREGORY

It is his money.

ROSALIE It's the taxpayers' money, not his.

GREGORY

And he's paid those same taxes for thirty years, he can do whatever he wants with it.

ROSALIE

Well that's not what the government said and they put a stop to it, didn't they?

Gregory ignores her and looks over to Jarvis. Susan listens closely, too.

GREGORY Kenneth Anstram has taken care of this town with his own money for a long time.

ROSALIE

Oh, please. It's barely enough to do anything with.

Gregory turns back and addresses her again.

GREGORY

It's gotten hundreds of people lunch when maybe they couldn't afford it. And as a matter of fact, I don't ever remember you turning the ten down whenever he handed it over to you. ROSALIE

When he was working and it came out of his own pocket, I took it. I never once accepted it after he went on disability.

Jarvis looks at them, waiting for somebody to explain.

Gregory points to Kenneth, now way down the sidewalk in the distance.

GREGORY That man rode the bus everyday for twelve years straight. Once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

Susan nods her head to testify to it.

SUSAN

He is really a legend around here.

GREGORY

After he got on, he used to count every person that got on after him. Whenever the tenth person got on, Kenny stood up, walked over to whoever it was... Man, woman, child, drunk or rich, and gave them a ten dollar bill.

JARVIS

Twice a day?

GREGORY For twelve years. He never missed a day.

Jarvis does some quick math in his head and nods, impressed.

SUSAN I never knew, why'd he ever start that, anyway?

GREGORY

He got hurt a while ago and wasn't able to work. He applied for disability and they kept denying him and denying him. He had doctor's papers and everything.

Two pedestrians walk by the bus stop and cross the street to the other side.

GREGORY

Soon, he couldn't pay for his house anymore and couldn't make it without working and no help. He had to go and stay down at the mission. Susan frowns at the story. Jarvis just listens.

GREGORY When he was finally able to work again, he figured he didn't mind the mission too much and decided to stay there.

Gregory has to raise his voice a bit as three loud teens walk by behind them.

GREGORY That's when he took his money and started doing the bus thing.

ROSALIE That's when he was a hero.

GREGORY After a while, he got worse and wasn't able to work again.

Gregory shrugs.

GREGORY

Eventually, he finally did get accepted. And when he did, he started giving his disability away, too. Ten dollars at a time.

ROSALIE

That money's taken from working folks and given to a person to survive, not to give away.

GREGORY And Mr. Kenny's worked whenever he could.

ROSALIE If he doesn't need the money, he shouldn't take it.

Jarvis ignores them as they get into their same old argument.

He notices a business man walk by the stop.

GREGORY What if he gave it to church? Would you approve of it then?

Rosalie has to think about it for a moment.

ROSALIE That wouldn't be right, either.

GREGORY (laughs) Really? Church blood money?

ROSALIE It'd be shady money. It'd be like sneaking money to God.

GREGORY Not to God, to church. They're two different things.

ROSALIE I don't think God would like it.

GREGORY Isn't it all God's money anyway?

ROSALIE

It's money given to Kenny for charity in the first place.

GREGORY

Not 'given' to him for charity. It's money given 'back' to him that was taken from him in the name of Social Security in the first place when he was working.

ROSALIE

Given back to him to survive. For rent, for clothes, for food. Not for him to give away. And he ain't doing it for God anyway.

GREGORY

No, he's doing it for people in general. I still say. It was his money, it's his choice.

Rosalie adamantly shakes her head. Gregory looks over to the occupied Jarvis.

GREGORY What do you think about it, Jarvis? You're a working man.

Jarvis doesn't say anything.

Behind them, he sees a nurse, probably on break, walk by and cross the street to her car.

Jarvis sees everybody is waiting for an answer.

JARVIS

Seven.

They're all confused by the answer.

What?

Jarvis goes back to his earphones, and Gregory just blows him off.

SUSAN

I feel bad for Mr. Kenny. Why'd he decide to go on the hunger strike, anyway?

GREGORY You remember that story the news did a couple months ago on him? 'The Good Samaritan of the Transit Service'?

SUSAN

Yeah.

GREGORY

Well, they did that without his permission. They were trying to interview him for years, but he never would. Finally, they just ran the story with clips of him getting on and off busses from a distance.

Another pair of nurses on their break walk by the bus stop.

GREGORY

The powers that be saw the story and when they realized Mr. Kenny was giving his disability away, they cut him off.

Rosalie nods in agreement with the government.

GREGORY

What little bit he was using to feed himself, he wasn't getting anymore, so he refused any food offered to him and from the mission and vowed not to eat another thing.

Gregory looks in the distance, though Kenneth's long gone.

GREGORY It looks like he's coming to the end now, though.

ROSALIE

I don't agree with what he's doing on that, either. It's nothing but straight suicide.

Gregory shrugs. He doesn't have an argument for that.

GREGORY Well, he's doing it for what he believes.

ROSALIE He's trying to be a martyr against the government.

GREGORY

Maybe.

Jarvis sees a MAN walk by behind them. He looks at the group sitting at the bus stop.

JARVIS

(announcing)

Ten.

Gregory, Rosalie, and Susan all look at Jarvis, confused.

Jarvis digs his wallet out and chases after the man that had walked by and calls out to him.

JARVIS

Hey.

The man stops and turns to him. Jarvis digs out two five-dollar bills.

He doesn't have a ten.

He gives the man the bills without a word and walks away, back to the bus stop.

MAN What's this for?

Jarvis just shrugs and puts his earphones in. He looks at everybody looking at him.

Gregory smiles from ear to ear.

JARVIS I don't know if what he's doing is right or wrong, but I can see where Mr. Kenny's coming from.

Jarvis looks at the confused man walking down the street, staring at the bills to see if they're real.

Jarvis nods, assuredly.

JARVIS

It feels good.

Gregory laughs.

The bus pulls around the corner from up the street and they all gather their things together.

Jarvis smiles.

JARVIS

I don't know about that. But maybe I'll start doing it whenever I can.

Everybody else at the stop smiles, even Rosalie.

They stand as the bus pulls up.

Jarvis and Gregory let the women get on the bus first.

FADE