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 Fiancée, 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.

(CONTINUED)
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?

(CONTINUED)
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

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.
CONTINUED:

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?

(CONTINUED)
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.

(CONTINUED)
Yeah. I can see. That’s pretty-

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.

Guilt can have that effect.

You speak from experience?

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

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

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

Frankie pauses, sits down opposite Ben.

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.

This was one of those ‘things’?

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.

You were there to rob them?

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

(CONTINUED)
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.

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

BEN
Such as?

GEORGE

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)
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.

(CONTINUED)
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.

(CONTINUED)
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.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

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