

A GOD SENT ANGEL
1982

All the dark vastness of his mind vanished into white the moment he opened his eyes. "Where am I?" he thought. The pure bright white of the hospital room hurt his eyes as the sun from the large windows gleamed in through the glass. The only sound he could hear, his only sign that he still lived, was the "beep-beep", "beep beep", of the heart monitor on the side of his bed.

Suddenly, the door burst open, and two men, and a woman, who followed, walked into the room. "Look, he's okay!" the lady yelled. Who was she; where had he seen her before?

The two men each walked to both sides of the bed; one checked the pupils of his eyes, the other played with the machines.

"Can you hear me?" asked one of the men, "do you know who or where you are?"

"Angel," James, the patient, blurted out, "where are you?" Then he thought, who was Angel? From the look on the lady's face, this was not her. "My name is James Serling; am I in the hospital?"

"Yes, James, you are. Can you see me clearly, James?"

"Yes, could you please lower a blind? All this light hurts my eyes." Then it came to him. Pammy, this lady was his wife Pammy. Who was Angel? Who was the girl in his mind he kept seeing glimpses of? Who was she?

"Pammy, my love, hold me; tell me I'm okay, tell me what happened, baby," James cried out.

The lady moved quickly around to the side of the bed. She sat beside him, and held him as he had requested.

"James, all we know is you left almost a month ago from L.A. on one of your business trips, and they found you on a small raft just off shore yesterday morning. You were pulled ashore down by Santa Monica, and brought back here to the hospital. How do you feel?" Pammy asked.

"I'm okay, I could use a drink though."

"Sorry, Mister Serling, you shouldn't have any alcohol for a little while, at least," said the doctor, as he recorded something from the machine.

"He really needs more rest now, ma'm; we all best leave him alone," the other doctor stated.

"James, if you need anything, I'll be right outside, okay? Now you just get some sleep," Pammy told him.

The three all left together, leaving James alone in the dim room to think. Hell, he thought, "I can't sleep, I've been asleep for two days." His mind wandered back to the woman in his mind. He rolled over so his back was to the windows. He thought, if he could just recreate the trip in his head, maybe it could come back to him.

He had left L.A. early in the morning; he was making a run to a small island just north of Oahu. He was smuggling marijuana as he had been doing since he lost his job in 1980. He had to pick up the shipment and return it to his buyers in L.A. All went well that morning, but late in the afternoon he ran into a mess of clouds. It made for a beautiful sunset, he thought.

"Angel, huh, who the hell is Angel?! Some chick you picked up in Oahu!? You slime, how dare you embarrass me like that in front of those two doctors. I should have left you long ago, Buster, once more, and I will. You're nothing! I should have listened to my mother."

James was shell shocked as she turned, leaving the room as quickly as she had burst in.

"Pammy!" was all he could shout; she was gone. As he looked up at the blank ceiling, he tried to figure out where he had stopped. As soon as he figured it out the doctor came back in.

"Mr. Serling, I have some very good news. Today you're allowed to get out of bed and walk around the floor. Tomorrow you can go home. How does that sound, sir?"

"Just super, can I have a drink now too?" James replied.

"Sorry, sir, remember, no alcohol."

The doctor then checked one of the machines, and took James off of it. He moved it away from the bed, and rolled it out the door, leaving James alone once again.

"I can't stick around this room any longer," he thought. He climbed off the bed and put his feet on the cold floor. "Slippers?" he said aloud. "There they are." It took him a minute or two to get his footing, but it came to him. He strolled out the door.

James was not prepared for everything he was about to encounter. The hospital had run out of room, so they were very crowded, but in the process James had to be put on the psychiatric floor. This floor was very dark, all of the hallway lights were covered over with dimmer paper. As soon as screams were heard from a room, several nurses

would run in, and close the door, and the screams would stop. Groaning, laughing, pure silence, James heard as he passed by each room. "I gotta get off this floor. I'll go to the cafeteria, downstairs."

After a moment James found the elevator and took it down to the next floor. He asked an intern where the cafeteria was. James had never seen so much suffering, and death before in all his life. Young people, old people, women, men, and there were eight more floors just like this, he thought. He arrived at the cafeteria, but found he had no money. A small bald-headed man, with a large threaded scar across his scalp, quietly gave James all the money he needed. The man didn't say a word, just turned, and walked away with his tray of food. Doctors, nurses, and patients were all eating or talking in the large white cafeteria. James sat by himself in the distant corner. He hadn't quite started to eat his sandwich when an obese woman came right over, and squeezed into the chair in front of him. She winked at James.

"Hey, good lookin, I's seen ya own my flow. You new, huh?"

James wasn't quite sure how to answer or even if he should. He ate faster. Small droplets of saliva began-to-dribble-down her rolled face. James became sick to his stomach, and suddenly got up, and ran out of the large room. He went straight to the elevator. He almost ran down each hallway to get to his room. It seemed they were all out for him, coming out of their rooms, haunting him like sick ghouls. He walked faster to the safety of his room.

He pushed the door open, and ran to his bed. He dove onto the sheets, and put the pillow over his head. He tried to relax, but each time their faces came back to him. I

gotta think of something else, something peaceful to get rid of it all. Angel, he pondered, where did I leave off.....

I had left, sunset; that's it, that's right. He put his head down on the pillow, and stared at the ceiling again. He thought to himself, what went down there. He closed his eyes, and he could see it all once again. He became more relaxed as he thought about the sea.

He sat on the deck hoping he was headed in the right direction. The gentle south pacific wind blew in the night as the soft salt-filled waves caressed the sides of the small vessel. The boney white ribs of clouds stretched over the dark blue of the sky, just enough to block out any stars for navigating. There was only a small sliver of moon that was almost always covered by puffs of clouds. He thought, guiding the ship was hard enough at night, let alone with no stars, but he had confidence in the sea; it had never let him down yet.

A hollow knock on the bottom of the boat startled him from his dozing state. He stood up as it came again. "I wish to God I could see something out there", he said out loud to no one. Then, as unexpected as a storm at sea, he was thrown to its deck, as a large coral reef ripped a hole in the side of the deck. The ship was sinking. In a panic he looked around the boat, then to the horizon as if to spot land in the blackness of night. A small, but eerie glow of orange caught his eye. As for the ship there was little or nothing he could do. With the instinct of a drunk he grabbed a bottle of bourbon from under the seat cover and took a long drink. He recapped the bottle and jumped overboard with it.

He just remembered finding the light again, and swimming toward it. He then fell sound asleep.

A nurse woke him the next morning, and asked him to please get ready to leave; the hospital needed his room. So he climbed out of bed, and took a free shower, they even cleaned his clothes. While he was getting his things together a nurse brought up a wheelchair. She took him down to a waiting taxi cab. Passing down the hall was tolerable today, most were still asleep, or in therapy.

It was a long ride to his house, and his mind was still asleep. He told the cab driver to take the quickest route. While passing through the lower parts of the city, James, again, saw things that made him think. Several bums sitting against a building made him think, what if I was as bad off as them? He thought for a little while longer then came back to the question, what is a bum? Someone who has nothing? Then what did he have? What set him apart from these guys? He had a nice apartment, a lovely wife, and made good money in his trade. That's when his mind then went on to something different.

When the meter in the cab got to the same amount James had on him the cabby let him out. I can walk from here; it's only a few blocks, he thought. The sun was hot, and he became very tired quickly from lack of food. He decided to stop in a bar. A buddy of his owned the bar, and he just wanted to get something to eat. He explained to his friend his problems over a beer, and a sandwich. He went right on drinking until late afternoon when his friend sent him home. He stumbled out the door. His saturated mind started to drift, being depressed now didn't help.

"What do I really have, I'm forty-one, almost. My wife is threatening a divorce. I have no children. I have no money because I screwed up my last job."

He arrived at his apartment, and fumbled with his keys. He unlocked the door and pushed it open as if to say "honey, I'm home"; but he didn't.

The apartment was empty. On the living-room floor was his toothbrush, the only object in the whole place. Furniture, carpet, food, T.V., everything was gone. He started to cry. He thought to himself, now I'm a full-fledged bum! I have nothing left in the world except a dream that may have come true.

Even in James' book that wasn't a lot to go on. He went into the back room, and lifted up the floor board. She had even taken his last bottle of bourbon. There was another bar a couple buildings down, and James found himself enroute.

On the way, James thought about his life. How he had gotten to this place. He had watched his dad farm for years, back breaking work. Then one day, when James was about 16, his dad had just dropped dead. The doctors had told his mother that he had just worked himself to death. James knew that was not going to happen to him.

That first run had been euphoric. He could still taste the salty spray and see the deep green water. The only sound was the hum and splash of the boat. The money he'd made put his mind at ease about breaking the law. At that moment, he had become what he had become.

He remembered when they had returned to shore, waiting outside the bar for the mystery man to simply walk up to him, ask if he was James, and hand him the first envelope. He hated waiting but it was so worth it.

He was already pretty drunk, but now it was time to drink memories away. Angel, now far from his thoughts, was thinking mostly about all the bad had gone wrong. His job at first, then he went into smuggling, he never had kids, now his place was empty, and his wife was gone. He continued to drink himself into a stupor. Talking out loud to himself, falling off the barstool, and crying more often, told the bartender this guy had better go home. He got some guys to help him up, and get him out into the street. James stumbled around for almost an hour, not real sure where he was going. He crawled up the steps, and somehow found his keys. He started to put the key into its slot when the door opened.

"Pammy, you're back!" he shouted as the door flew open. Suddenly two large men pulled him into the living room. One held him while the other beat him in the stomach. He could hardly breathe. The man then asked him questions, and when James could not tell him what he wanted to hear, he would punch James in the face. "Why didn't you tell us you were back, James", said the larger of the two men, James only coughed. "Where did you stash the stuff? Tell me where," the man went on.. James fell to the floor as the other man struck him across the temple.

A knock came at the door, and the men just looked at each other then ran to the now open window. "We'll be back for you later, James," said the one quietly. The door opened, and the landlord came in to find James bleeding upon the floor.

"You smell like a distillery," he shouted "Where is last month's rent? I want it now!"

James couldn't even hear him. As the landlord turned and left in disgust.

He found himself alone and on an island. A warm breeze blew through his graying, brown hair. There she was, walking down the beach toward him. He called her They, then kissed as if they name. They ran to each other, and embraced. had known each other from grade school. This Angel, in his mind, was everything he could ever want in a woman. She was young and pretty. The kind of lady that would always be next to him, not too far in front or too far behind him. Her blond hair seemed to flow on the warm, gentle wind, as the sun danced in her deep sea green eyes. From just a glance into her eyes he knew she cared about him, still he didn't know why.

He laid there on the floor in a small pool of his own blood. He had passed out now, and would wake early the next morning after a dreamless sleep.

The dawn came shining in his bare windows, and woke him. Without even thinking he carefully got to his feet, and made his way into the bathroom. The cold water felt good on his tired face as he noticed his wrinkles. The blood he used as a pillow last night now came off his face. He cleaned his hair under the bathtub faucet, and cursed the fact he had no towels to dry on. He could feel his heart beating in his head as he made his way down the flight of stairs and into the sun beaten street. It was still very early. In desperate search for a friend, he found himself at the docks where a fellow business man gave him twenty bucks to get him some medical care.

In his mind he had a plan, and although a great deal of pain was there he prayed to God that it would work. He went to a nearby drug store for aspirins and a bottle of

bourbon. He went to the grocery next door, and bought two cans of beer, a fishing knife, a lighter, and as much clothes as he had money left to buy.

He put it all in the duffle bag he had from the hospital. Now, did he need anything else? If he did it didn't matter, he didn't have any money left anyway. He went to the bar his buddy owned. He knew if he started to drink he wouldn't stop, and if he was drunk he couldn't pull off what he had planned.

There was a small shower in the back of the bar that the bartender, more than often, used to try and sober up people with to go home. Needless to say, James knew it was there. His friend, and proprietor of the bar, Nick, was a short but very well built man. He was gentle though, and knew how to talk to people. He realized the problems James was having, and said he would help him out anyway he could just short of letting him stay at his house.

James took a long shower, a lot had happened since his last. He cleaned all the blood, and booze out of his hair, and off his body. He knew he couldn't go back to the apartment, but that was useless, nothing was there anyway.

He found some odds, and ends of clothes people had left at the bar, that made up for what he couldn't buy. After his hair was dry he sat down at the bar, and ordered a club soda. He sat and went through his plan once again.

After that he lost himself in thought of his wife. He didn't know where she was, and since she left him when he needed her most, he didn't care where she was. It should have dawned on him what she was up to when he was in the hospital, he was just feeling sorry for himself, and he lost her because of it. There was nothing left for

him on land, he had to find his treasure at sea. As his friend, Nick, came back to talk to him, he came back to what was happening in the sand sea.

"You sure clean up good," Nick stated.

"Thanks, man, for all you've done for me, if there's any way I can ever repay you just tell me now, and it's done," James said.

"Nope, nothing I can think of, but I'll get back to you if something would pop up," Nick replied.

James knew this was Nick's last chance, but he could not tell him.

"Oh, by the way, you said once you used to work for Sony, or someplace like that. Well, I gotta old tape player I found in my basement. It still works, it just needs to be cleaned up. I was gonna pitch it, but I thought maybe you could use it."

James didn't know what to say so he just said, "Yes, okay, that's great, thanks a lot".

"It's in the back room, you can go back and check it out. I gotta get back to work.

There's a small tool box you can use if you need it. Catch you in a few," Nick said.

Both men got up from the stools, and went their separate ways. James found the tape player on a small table in the back room. In no time at all he had it cleaned, and sounding as good as new. He sat back in the chair, as it played, and fell sound asleep.

It had been dark for several hours when Nick came in and woke him.

"You can have all those tapes too, I don't use 'em," Nick said.

"What time is it?" James asked.

"10:30," Nick told him, "You gotta go?"

"Yea, but don't worry about me, and thanks again for it all," said James.

"No problem, what are friends for anyway?" Nick. James pulled up his bag, and grabbed the tapes and player. He shook hands with Nick, and walked out into the street. He put his gifts into his bag so he wouldn't drop either of them. He took the long way to the docks, walking slowly, and enjoying the night.

Now it was time to execute his plan. He arrived at the docks, a little after 11:00. He walked silently through the grassy median then onto the concrete pier. He glanced at each boat. There she was, A1A, a boat from Miami, Florida.

This boat belonged to his buyers, and James knew it. That's why he picked it; for revenge from the pain that he still felt when he breathed. He, first, looked around him to make sure no one saw him, then he quickly climbed on board. The A1A was about the same size of his old ship, but it was much newer, and a little bigger on deck. He pulled out all the ropes, and started up the engines. The water started to swell behind the vessel, and he knew he could make it out of the harbor safely. The boat disappeared into the blackness of the night and soon the sound of its engine was gone too.

James was at peace now, out on the sea. He locked the wheel in the direction, and walked out on the front deck. He pulled out the player, and put in a tape. He sat down, and took out the bottle of cheap scotch he had bought at the drug store earlier in the day.

The world is a cruel place, he thought. Not just death, but suffering, slowly, painfully, with nothing to be done. People with nothing, out in the cold winds of life, with no protection from the cold, but where did he fit in? He took a long drink; the bourbon

stung his throat like it had not done for many years. It was good alcohol, why did it react like this? Why did he drink this if it hurt him like this?

He recapped the bottle, and thought why did he drink at all? As he reasoned the fact that it gave him false security, clouds started to roll across the sky as a warm breeze picked up. Then it hit him, what was happening. It was just like in the dream. This time though he would be sober enough to remember it. He took the bottle, and turned it over, pouring all the contents into the rolling waves. He couldn't even see it go all the way to the water, it was so dark. James sat back down, and looked up at the lines of thick clouds; on the left, a sliver of moon, on the right a small glow of orange.

Mother, Mother Ocean
I have heard you call
I've wanted to sail
Upon your waters
Since I was three feet tall
You say it all, you say it all.
Watch it it'll roll you
Switched from sail to steam
In your belly you hold the treasure
Few have ever seen
Most of 'em dreams.
Most of 'em dreams.
Yes, I am a pirate
200 years too late,
The cannons don't thunder,
There's nothing to plunder,
I'm an over forty victim of fate
Life ain't too great,
Life ain't too late.....
Jimmy Buffett A1A