

Punched By An *Angel*



Ryan Gray

Part Three

I peered down at my ticket, rechecking the gate number.

“A16. How many times do I have to tell you?”

“I heard you the last time. I’m just double-checking.”

“No, you are triple checking because you still don’t want to believe I’m real. You keep looking for excuses to ignore me and my message.”

“Wow, quite the sensitive little cupcake, aren’t we?” I chuckled and began the trudge toward Terminal A.

“What is that supposed to mean? Hey, get back here. Don’t you walk away after making that snide remark.”

I located the walkway to Terminal A and began the trudge as I spoke. “I just think it sounds like you have been doing this job too long. Otherwise, how do you explain getting so bent out of shape from me not trusting you to know the gate number? You yourself said you are not God and therefore aren’t perfect. So you could be wrong.”

“But I wasn’t.”

“I think you are overly sensitive to folks ignoring you.”

“No, John, I’m overly sensitive to YOU ignoring me. A sensitivity that has grown for more than a decade. More importantly, ignoring THE Spirit inside of you. A Spirit that took the Bosses thousands of years of implementing an intricate plan so you could be the envy of the entire universe!”

“Oh, come on, ignoring? Are you saying I have completely ignored the Holy Spirit? How about all those hours and hours of prayer meetings and words for my people after Sunday service? Was I ignoring the Spirit then too?”

“Oh, of course not. Mr. Big Shot Pastor got all the accolades he wanted and more. Besides that, it’s convenient and comfortable to minister to those in YOUR building when YOU planned it. But let me ask you this, ‘Pastor,’ when did you last have the notion or faith to pray for someone on the street? Or, do you save your prayers for YOUR people who support YOUR ministry?”

I stepped off one moving walkway and walked to the next one, “Oh, that’s different; I have thousands of congregants. When do I have the time to go find more folks to minister to?” I scoffed at the notion.

We stepped onto the next moving walkway and stopped behind an elderly lady gripping a purple rolling bag. “When did ‘not having time’ permit you to stop sharing the good news?”

I rolled my eyes, “Fine, *Your Worship*. Like every other successful pastor in modern history, let’s suppose I have been neglecting my ministry and only helping myself, as you are SO plainly implying.”

“Which I am.” Denzin agreed and nodded his head.

“Why would God help me with words or give me prophecies that come true? Shoot, we even see folks get healed! Explain that!” That last two words I spat at his face.

The older lady with the purple bag in front turned, responding to my harsh words. Seeing that I was alone and speaking 'to myself,' she smiled at me awkwardly, then shuffled up the moving walkway quickly to escape me.

I opened my mouth to explain myself but instead waved my hand at the air, defeated. "Whatever. Who cares?" I looked up to see Denzin with a massive grin on his face. "What?" I snarled, "Do you like me looking insane?"

"No, but we do like to hear that you don't care what others think: again, progress!" I rolled my eyes.

"And to answer your question, you forget your duty. When praying with your congregation, you are ministering to them. It's their faith and their prayers that are being answered. It has NOTHING to do with you other than standing with them. If anything, their prayers were answered despite you being there, not because of your presence."

My jaw dropped, "Well, that's a sucker punch to the man parts."

Denzin shrugged his shoulder and turned to face the end of the moving walkway, "It was meant to be."

We both hopped off the moving walkway. I took about ten steps towards my gate but froze, "Out of the frying pan...How did she even know to be here?"

"I can manage a text without you knowing, son! Besides, now you both can reignite and catch the fire together!" Denzin finished my euphemism for me.

I released a massive sigh, then forced a charming grin onto my face and stepped forward, my heart around my ankles, tail between my legs, "Hi, sweetie, so happy you met me here."

Janine turned to face me and raised an eyebrow, "Husband." She returned my kiss on the cheek with an obligatory peck, then asked, "Why am I here?"

"We are doing a last-minute overnight to Mexico," I furrowed my brow, "But what about the kids?"

"My sister is staying with them." Her stare dared me to respond.

I accepted the challenge - and failed miserably. "I thought we had agreed, no cloven hooves in the house?" My wife's gaze narrowed. But I was still too immature not to continue, "No bother, as long as she keeps from shedding all over the furniture, I'll be happy." I hefted Janine's bag, carrying both mine and hers together as we strolled towards the gate.

"That was not very nice," Denzin hissed at me as he walked between us, about one and a half paces back.

My wife took a deep breath, "She was nice enough to come over last minute to indulge my husband as he loses the last of his marbles."

I frowned, "Touche, my love."

"Better," Denzin quipped.

We walked in silence to a row of fake leather cushion seats suspended by a chrome frame. After we sat down and my wife checked herself in a compact mirror, she asked, "So, why are we going to Mexico?"

"There are 200 orphans who are about to find themselves homeless in the next few days unless we do something about it." I summed up, hoping that would pull hard enough on her heartstrings to keep any probing questions far from me.

My summation did not shield me from Janine's interrogation.

“How did you discover the needs of these orphans?”

“I had a very nice cleaning lady tell me. She told me when I was at the hotel that I had,” I hesitated, looking for the right words, “Been told to take a break at.”

“Hmmpf,” she jumped ahead, “So, what you are saying is that God had me kick you out of the house, so you ‘just’ happened to be at the right hotel room at the right time?”

I shrugged my shoulders, “Um, yeah. And met a lady whose sister needs \$650,000 for 200 orphans to have a home.”

My wife sneered and began digging through her handbag, “So what, we don’t have that kind of money. Well, unless we...” Realization stopped her from digging and made her jaw drop. She turned to me, her face turning a shade of red I had not seen since she gave birth to our son, “If you cashed out our entire retirement, I swear...”

I winced at the comment, “Yeah, I would not say that...and besides, I did warn you.” I blurted this out much louder than I meant to, garnering unwanted attention from other passengers. I leaned in and lowered my voice and pasted on a fake smile, “That’s why you kicked me out of the house, remember?”

“No.” Janine shook her head, “I kicked you out of the house because I thought you were losing your mind. Then, after this craziness passed, you would come to your senses and...”

I shook my head, “No, this will not pass. We have been tasked with keeping 200 orphans off the street.”

“Tasked by who? Did God Almighty come down and tell you? If so, why won’t He tell me? After all, it’s my money too!”

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught Denzin’s expression. First, his jaw dropped, then he stood, and his jaw clenched, and his fists tightened. I held up a finger, hoping that he would not do anything rash. I then took my wife’s hands and placed them on my lap. “Love, when I have ever done something I felt God wanted us to do, and I was wrong?”

Janine frowned, “I don’t know.”

“And I know you care about orphans.”

She rolled her eyes, “Yeah. But why can’t Jim help pay for it, and the church?” She smiled slightly, “Maybe we all go thirds, that way, we are still helping but we can still save...”

“You don’t get it, love. I have been arguing every point you can imagine, but the answer I get is...” I hesitated, not having any clue how the following statement would be received.

“What...what else are you not telling me, John?” Janine demanded an answer. Her voice was wary of how I might reply.

“It’s not ours.”

“Huh?” She sat back, “What’s not ours?”

“Any of it.” I replied with big shocked eyes. “Cars, clothes, house, money, it’s not ours.”

“Well, yes, technically, everything we have belongs to God,” She rolled her eyes again.

“No, I mean, basically we take way too much from the church budget. Our salary, house, lifestyle, all too much!”

“Wait a minute.” Janine gasped, “Are we supposed to just live like 18th century nuns, nothing but an extra habit and a bucket?”

“No, I don’t think so,” I looked over at Denzin, still pacing back and forth, listening in on our conversation. He shook his head, NO, and laughed out loud. I continued, “I think we are just meant to live like the folks we minister to and use the rest for the gospel.”

"The gospel?" She sat back in her chair and picked up her designer handbag, then dropped it in her lap out of habit, "That's a word I haven't heard in a long time."

I swallowed hard and sat back in my chair. We both stared across the airport terminal and out of the window. After several moments of silence, I spoke, "I know it's been a long time since you've heard that word. That's my fault. I've ..." I drifted off thinking, then suddenly turned to my wife, "I don't know where this will go or how crazy it will get, but you have to believe me when I say I'm not going nuts. This stuff is real, and if I don't comply with "

"What, John? What else are you not telling me?"

Usually, my first name on my wife's lips meant she was mad at me. This time her tone wasn't only furious; it was confused, angry, and concerned. I was her husband and the leader of my family, but Denzin was correct. The direction I had been leading our family was similar to the rest of our friends and neighbors. I was leading us alright, but I failed to recognize the signs of slipping off that sometimes rocky, narrow path that was blessed with simplicity but often confused with boredom. That simple narrow path often led over mountains and through dark, perilous woods but allowed for the warmth of the sun on one's soul.

Since our kids had been born, and the church had exploded in growth, our path had become too easy, too comfortable, and less and less warmth to be shared within our souls. The fact was, our family had to do some massive backtracking if we were to link back up with that difficult yet satisfying narrow path.

I turned to my wife, "If I don't make these serious changes now, I will be forced into retirement, permanently!"

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