

MY SURGEON TALKS TO ANGELS

A JOURNEY FROM SCIENCE INTO FAITH

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CHAPTER 1: DELUSIONS

Delusion is a medical term used to describe people who believe they can see or hear spirits, voices, angels or God. But I am standing in the operating theatre and they are all around me. The man lying under my scalpel is elderly and his long deceased wife Martha is sitting next to him, holding his right hand.

Angels have been around me my entire life. They were a constant part of my life as a child. Over the last four decades they have come and gone in my awareness. They are here now as I stand operating on a patient.

As I walked into theatre the nurse's CD player was playing *Sunshine makes you Happy* by John Denver. The lyrics caught in my throat and I felt a shiver down my spine. It was the song my late husband always played for me to make me laugh and cry at the same time, during long car trips through South Africa. It was also a bad omen for me and warned me to watch out.

I put my worries aside and got on with the job, but I couldn't face the feeling it was going to be a tricky surgery.

I was right. Not long into the operation, despite the anesthesia, the elderly patient twitched and the delicate lens capsule detached into his eye. I was

trying to save his vision but now I knew my task was going to be harder to pull off.

With patients over the age of eighty years old, there is an increased risk of this as the little fibers that suspend the lens in the eye degenerate with age, as do all the tissues in the human body.

Combine this with an aged, rock-hard lens and the power needed to shatter the lens, the fragile zonular fibers break first and the lens starts tilting southwards.

This is a dreaded sight for an eye surgeon. It means calling for the extra capsular tray, converting the operation into a manual one, cutting the cornea open with scissors and delivering the lens with manual pressure, before it disappears backwards, toward the retina. It is a long and tricky process and it ends with closing the wound with sutures after putting the intra ocular lens and removing any unwanted vitreous jelly.

This all means the operation will take longer than it takes the anesthetic to run out meaning the patient will be in pain soon and the tendency to move is higher.

I shift gear and I move into my private zone that feels far away from this surgery. I take deep breaths and slow myself down. Then I pray to God and ask to surround the patient and me with as many angels as possible.

Immediately I feel calm and the room fills with light and a calm, comforting presence. I know they are coming. They always do when I call for them. In seconds the entire physicality of the patient on the table changes. From being agitated he relaxes and his body goes limp. In seconds he starts snoring.

I don't need to look up to know there is an extra presence in the operating room. I can feel her already.

A female ethereal being with long dark blond curly hair in a long white shirt sits on a chair holding the patient's right hand. She loves him.

Then I sense that she feels puzzled and feels me staring at her. She turns and smiles.

Martha is her name. I hear it clearly in my head. She is his deceased wife.

I have to stop myself from asking the old man in my surgical hands whether his wife's name was Martha. I know it is. This is not the first time spirits have come into my theatre while I am performing surgery on their loved ones. I see them here all the time. I myself call on angels and my beneficial spiritual helpers whenever in need and at the start of any challenging procedure.

I want to tell my patients they are here and that they are protecting them.

But I know that I cannot tell them.

I am a highly trained scientist. My practice has over 11,000 patients. Since I was widowed two and a half years ago, my three little children rely solely on me to provide for them. It is bad enough that the other doctors hear me pray out loud. Hervey Bay is a conservative town on the Fraser Coast in tropical Queensland, Australia.

Martha wants to tell me things. She wants him to know she is there. But to say this out loud would be professional suicide. I am already under a huge threat. I was fighting deportation from Australia a few months ago. Even three thousands requests from my patients and other supporters in town and the

voice of the local government officials on the six o'clock news and the front page of the newspaper couldn't keep us in the country where two of my children were born.

I can't let people think that I am different. I can't let them know that I am 'The Surgeon who talks to Angels' as some of the nurses once called me. I found out a long time ago that anything that deviates from the scientifically proven in the medical world is chased out. I have been called a witch. My career almost destroyed. I know better now than to let people know what I am – a psychic and intuitive healer.

I have lived and worked as a surgeon in Australia for eight years but now I need to pass another test with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists to be able to continue practicing. My entire professional life is under threat. But it seems to me the most important thing that keeps me sane is this private space I have when I connect with the Angels at my side.

I want to tell my patient that his deceased wife's spirit is here. I want to tell him that she is always there if he needs her. And that she loves him and is watching over him.

But I can't put a foot wrong. I can't allow even a hint of it to get out. I work in a conservative world of medical science and if they thought I was a "woo woo" quack I would never work again. I have fought too hard to get where I am and to build this career. Getting a training place in ophthalmology is for the select few. In Belgium where I studied the competition is ruthless. It takes more than a decade to graduate. It took me seven years in medical school in Leuven, Belgium to graduate as a doctor. Another four years in Antwerp to become a specialist ophthalmologist and a further four years in South Africa to become a vitreoretinal surgeon. That is 15 years of time and money and tons of hard work to arrive where I am now. The competition is even rougher in countries like Australia, where medicine takes on a more commercial angle. Here

students fight for places and patients in a manner I find really sad for the Art of Medicine. And this is where I am working and I need to keep my head down!

So I turn my back on Martha, lower my head, take up the scalpel and get ready to use my training to save my patient's vision.

CHAPTER 2: LEARNING TO FLY

Autumn and winter days are short in Belgium. Behind the grey, heavy clouds the sunlight remains obscured for most of the day. It was the 1968 and Belgium was having an economic swing upwards. My mother worked as a hairdresser and my father worked for the government. They started of working at the respective ages of 16 and 20 for small salaries but it was the habit of the time that children gave their income to their parents. But that changed after they had children of their own. My parents had saved up to built their own home so they could finally move out of my mum's parental home.

My mother and father lived next to each other when they were 12 and started dating in their teens. My father moved away to the next village for years but they continued dating. They were each other's first loves. It was the Second World War and it was austerity and rations. They never let go of this mentality. I was told to wash only once a week. I had to wear my brother's hand-me-downs. In the Golden 80s Belgium enjoyed an economic boom. My father's salary doubled and we suddenly had money. We got better food. We would eat fancy foods like frog legs fried in garlic (yum) and *crepe Suzettes*.

My mother lived in the same town of Heist op de Berg, until a month ago in 2015 when she died.

My father was quiet and my mother was domineering. I learned to tip toe around her my whole life. My aim during my childhood was to avoid her wrath. One story that has defined my relationship with her happened when I was just one year old. She put me at the top of the stairs and left me there. She would not come when I called. So I called and called. Then I tried to come down and fell down the 24 stairs. Although I was too young to remember this, it was told

to me and it speaks of my eternal relationship with her – she never listened and never came when I needed her.

I lived in the same house with my parents until I left aged 18 for university. I was born in the local Maternity Hospital, run by Catholic nuns as an extra large baby. Bless the local general practitioner; he managed to get me out without too much damage to either neither my mother nor myself. At that time there was only one family doctor and this omnipotent man carried the responsibility for the whole town's lives and deaths.

I was only two years old and travelled on my father's shoulders through art museums and through the Antwerp Zoo. Once a year I got to feed raw peanuts and animal shaped biscuits to the elephants, giraffes, monkeys and other wild animals there.

I loved the sound of the waves and the ringing of cords against sailing boat masts on the Belgian Esplanade during our summer holidays and the smell of iodine in the salty sea breeze.

At night my father tucked me into my cold oak toddler bed in the little sewing room with the little pink and purple flowers on the wallpaper. It was the best feeling in the world to slip between the sheets and feel that my father had already warmed them with a hot water bottle. I felt safe and loved.

Every night we did the same thing. My father would read me a bedtime story from Hans Christian Anderson the only children's book we seemed to have at that time.

"Make it a happy ending, Papa" I used to say.

After some initial resistance my father changed the end of the scary old tales and removed most villains and acts of cruelty from the story. Before I went to sleep he would kiss me and draw a Christian cross on my forehead with the outside of his right thumb.

Every night he called on the angels to protect me in my sleep. Then he closed my third eye with the last sweep of his thumb.

I was an unusual child. I couldn't wait every night to go to sleep. That was the time I would fly around the world. For most of my childhood before the age of six I left my body every night and travelled with an angel through my dreams. Most nights it was a conscious choice and I remember deciding before I slept where I wanted to go flying that night.

I was a small child and hadn't seen anything of the world beyond my street and suburb. But at night I flew across the town and across the country. Sometimes I flew across the world and out into space and into other galaxies. I was never afraid. I was with my friends.

Was there another being there with me? For sure. There was always an angel flying next to me, sometimes holding my hand. I saw them as clearly as if they were physical. But being so young I didn't question who was taking me or if it was right or wrong. It felt like my will was taking me where I wanted to go, and then bringing me back to my bed later in the night. As I lay down I would be excited. I wasn't going to simply sleep tonight. I was going to fly. I didn't do it every night. Only the nights I felt like it.

No wonder I loved sleeping. I still do. It is the time where I leave earthly duality and visit the silence and peace of the other reality; the meeting place of like-minded spirits, ancestors and soul friends.

CHAPTER 3: GUARDIAN ANGEL

When I was six year old, my mother decided I should fulfill one of her own dreams: I would learn how to play the piano. She even bought me a new cherry wood Rossler wall piano so I could practice every day and fill our home with beautiful music. Unlike violins and saxophones (invented by the fellow Belgian Mr Sax), it is hard to make a piano sound disharmonious. Most of the time, I produced nice sounds while practicing musical keys, Czerny and Mozart.

My weekly hour of piano lessons started off really fun. Every Wednesday afternoon I practiced old and new tunes with my gentle young piano teacher. She wore her long blond hair back in a thick braid, Rapunzel-style. As soon as I arrived she took my hands and examined them.

“Beautiful fingers,” she said to my mother.

“She should either become a surgeon or a concert piano player,” she continued, inspecting both of my hands. “ Nice straight and long fingers”.

My mother couldn't have been less interested in my fingers.

She had a frown between her eyes when asked my mother:” Why is this right digit finger bent?”

“That finger was crushed in the car door,” my mother said while she looked down at her feet. She had crushed it there! It was the first time anyone had shown interest in my finger. But it was clear to me, and everyone there, the subject of my crooked finger was never to be raised again.

My mother came to the lessons that first day only. But after that she never came again.

The music lesson was fun, but there was more. Every week I had two to three hours of lessons in music theory and music history. The other students were double my age.

I had just started primary school and now I was supposed to pass music exams based on several thick, small print study books. I was just learning to read! I loved the music but I could not keep up with the theory.

After a full year of showing up and trying my best to comprehend the teachings, I was miserable. I started begging my mother to let me please leave music school. But she refused. But this wasn't the only reason I wanted to leave. I was terrified of something else as well.

The school year in Belgium starts in September. The days become shorter and it was already dark outside when I finished the music classes. The main street *De Bergstraat* stretched two kilometres from the school to my home. It was named after the little hill at the centre of town that carried the town's church, built in the year 800.

I had to walk home alone in the dark.

My mother was the only mother that didn't fetch her child after class. All of the other parents waited outside until the kids spilled out onto the streets.

Her reason? She wanted to be home between 5 and 6pm to be ready when my father came home from work with a delicious home-cooked meal. Food

was the vehicle she used to express her love for her family. Her meals tasted delicious but also created a bit of an emotional eating tradition in myself.

“When I feed myself, I love myself” became one of my subconscious beliefs. I was the one in the family she loved the least. My mother had a deep love for both of her sons, and her husband. But somehow she left me out of that totally.

“I was happy until you came along” she had told me. She had some other mantras she drilled into me over the years.

I had to give up my job and become a housewife when you were born.

I preferred to be a professional woman who could socialise with clients who made me feel appreciated – now I am stuck at home.

I am not happy at home.

Never have kids!

Never get married. You will only become your kids’ and husband’s slave” she cursed me.

So while she busied herself cooking this meal of love she left her six-year-old daughter to walk home after music class through the dark streets alone.

I was scared of the street.

One evening, I was all alone walking down the desolate street. The streetlights were glowing yellow. The tiled pedestrian sidewalk was shiny from the humidity in the air. My short legs were moving as fast as possible.

The heavy schoolbag hindered my movement.

I walked past a few dark alleys on the way through town. In one of the alleys an older man was standing in the dark next to his bike.

“Come here” he called, “I need your help.” I wanted to run but I was scared to defy an adult and fighting my intuition, I moved into the alley. Somehow it has always been difficult for me to refuse to help anyone.

‘Have a look here’ he said. His eyes were looking at his crotch.

At that moment I saw he was holding his penis in his hand. “I need you to rub this for me. I am in pain,” he said.

I was frozen in fear. As I tried to listen to my instinct that was shouting ‘run!’ The man grabbed me. Because the bike was in between us, I was able to escape his grasp. The bike dropped to the slippery street and my little body took off like a rabbit being chased by a fox. I ran all the way home at a personal record-breaking time. I burst through the door in tears. My mother was home. I tried to tell her what happened but she didn’t have ears for me.

“Oh Veerle, I am sure you imagined it,” she said.

I begged her to let me quit music school or at least to collect me in the evenings to no effect.

The next time I had to walk that road again I stepped outside the school. The street was dark and deserted. In seconds all the other children were collected by their parents. I was left alone.

My fear was so potent I felt as if I was vibrating with it. I closed my eyes and said a prayer to God, asking for help and protection.

I felt a warm hand slip into mine. I looked around to see a beautiful man standing next to me. It was an angel. He had glossy shoulder-length blond manes. He was very tall and slender with long arms and fingers.

I say he was an angel because I just knew it. I can't remember ever actually seeing wings on him but I knew he could come and go without respecting gravity.

I left my hand in his and smiled. I felt safe now and I knew that nobody could hurt me. I walked with confidence at a steady pace with a smile on my face. He was next to my side the whole way and he covered me with a cloud of love and protection.

As soon as I arrived at the backdoor of the veranda, at home he disappeared.

I was never afraid in the dark again.

I knew I always had him around if I wanted to.

He was there every time I came out and he walked me home every single time.

I enjoyed his presence so much that I continued with music school for another five years.

I gave up music school when I was about 13 and that's when my weekly walk with the angel stopped. This is the age that my mother put me into a girls-only Catholic Convent School. She thought that locking me up in a prison of religion was an effective way to keep me unaware of the opposite sex. What

happened is that it locked away all my connection with spirits for a very long time.

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