

PAPER ANGELS

Ten-Minute Dramatic Duet

by
Charles Hall



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AT RISE: *Daytime. The lights come up as the rising sun bathes the room in hues of yellow and orange. MARIE, wearing a housecoat and a lifetime of grief on her face, crosses to the front door and, opening it, finds the morning paper on the welcome mat. FRANK appears, approaching from the street. HE's of Mohawk descent and, like MARIE, looks as if HE's deeply burdened.*

FRANK: Marie Quintero?

MARIE: Yes?

FRANK: My name is Frank Rice. I'd...like to talk to you about your husband.

MARIE: I wasn't expecting a representative from Victor's work until next week.

FRANK: I'm not here on behalf of his company, Mrs. Quintero.

MARIE: **(glancing past FRANK, uneasy)** A muddied pickup truck. You're with one of the search and rescue teams.

FRANK: No, Ma'am. Nothing like that. If this is a bad time...

MARIE: Laura called your office. Didn't she?

FRANK: Ma'am?

MARIE: Victor's sister. She's been after me to hand over some of Victor's personal things to the Medical Examiner's office. Said if I didn't call the DNA Hotline soon that she would. Well, she wasted your time.

FRANK: I see. You sound certain he's alive.

MARIE: **(firmly)** My husband is coming home. **(FRANK nods weakly. HE can barely make eye contact.)** Look, I'm sorry to have to send you away empty-handed. Could I at least offer you a cup of coffee? I was about to make some.

FRANK: If it's no trouble.

MARIE: **(motions to the living room)** Ignore the mess. I'll put on the coffee. **(MARIE disappears backstage. FRANK walks to the fireplace and looks at several photographs lining the mantelpiece. Before long, MARIE returns from the kitchen.)** You're looking at the empty frame. Victor hates the photo that used to be there. He calls it his mug shot. **(FRANK manages a small smile. MARIE sits down in one of the chairs.)** Laura borrowed...took the photo. For the Wall of Prayers.

FRANK: Outside Bellevue Hospital.

MARIE: Right. I didn't see much point putting up a flyer. Victor isn't missing. I know exactly where he is.

FRANK: Oh?

MARIE: After the attempt in '93, Victor promised to be extra cautious. He said at the first sign of trouble he would evacuate. The instant the plane hit the other building, he would've headed straight to the sky lobby on 78.

FRANK: **(more to himself than MARIE)** To an express elevator.

MARIE: He made it down to the plaza or below ground. Then got trapped after the collapse. There's no doubt in my mind. **(FRANK'S look of incredulity doesn't escape MARIE.)** I realize three weeks have passed. But Victor is a survivor. Can I tell you something? The night before the attack, Victor and I had an argument. Our worst ever. I've been pushing to start a family, but he wants to wait until he gets promoted. When we're more financially secure. **(FRANK sits down in the empty chair, listening intently.)** Anyway, on weekdays, I usually drive Victor to the train station in the morning. You know, so I can have the car for the day. But on the 11th, we spent the morning giving each other the cold shoulder. Victor drove himself to work. Neither of us said goodbye. **(pauses to pull herself together)** I haven't let you get a word in edgewise. Tell me, Mr. Rice, how long have you been with the Medical Examiner's office?

FRANK: **(uncomfortably)** Not long.

MARIE: Do you have any children?

FRANK: A 4-year-old. She's at day care.

MARIE: You and your wife decided on just the one child?

FRANK: My wife died shortly after Emily was born.

MARIE: I'm so sorry.

FRANK: For the longest time, her death wasn't real to me. I would be alone in a room and catch myself talking to her. Eventually, I had to come to terms with my loss. For Emily's sake. For my sake.

MARIE: I know a loaded comment when I hear one, Mr. Rice.

FRANK: Yes, of course. I just... I saw the unopened mail addressed to Victor on the mantelpiece and it took me back.

MARIE: I don't know what the last moments that you and your wife shared were like, but Victor's and mine were hateful. Vindictive. God wouldn't rob us of the chance to make amends. I need to know all is forgiven.

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