

A Car Ride Home

By A. C. Zito

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We'll talk about this when we get home. I heard that same sentence over and over again all my life. I heard it when I was dreaming; when I was about to fall asleep; when I woke up in the morning; eating breakfast; eating lunch; eating dinner; out to the movies with friends; when I had my middle school basketball tournaments; even on my high school dates with Sarah Pricket. I felt clueless. I wanted to know what was going on.

We'll talk about this when we get home. I heard it again. And I heard it again and again and again. And I heard it all the way up into my old age. And now I was an old man on my deathbed. And what was new? I had had a great life, I was on my way out of Earth and onto Heaven, and who knew what was next? A lot of my friends who left before me weren't as optimistic as I was before they left. But I... I felt like optimist was the name of the game. I knew that as long as I had hope everything would be okay. Hope and faith. Hope, faith, and love... Hope, faith, love, and charity... well, I knew I had to keep all those virtues deep and close in my heart. Some people say you need more faith. I say you need more hope. Others say you need more love. And some say you need more charity; when, in reality, you really just need a lot of all of them; all of them and more. But I won't go against what other people believe. I don't believe you can be right or wrong in a belief. For the fact that the belief exists, that's all the truth you need.

"What should I have my last words be?" Those words *were* my last words. I woke up in the back of a minivan; I would have rather it be a Prius but no one's fussy.

"We'll talk about this when we get..." the man driving the car looked behind me. "Oh," he said, "Look at that. We're almost home." I nodded and he turned back around and focused on the road.

"Where..."

"Are we?" he finished for me, "We're moving to that new town they'd been building an awfully long time. Heaven's the name I do believe. I heard the mayor is a swell guy too."

"And you are?" I asked.

"Well my friends call me Angel. You can just call me Angie for short. I know what you're thinking..." he paused to let what he had to say sink in. He said what I was thinking: "You're thinking that Angie's a girl's name. Well, on the contraire... I like it so I don't care. I know plenty of guys named Courtney... or Marian... or Sally... so Angie can be a guy's name. I was actually thinking of having a boy and naming him Brittney. I never saw anything wrong with the possibility, do you?" I shook my head. Then I thought about it.

“He might get bullied at school. I know life comes with its advantages and disadvantages but still... one day I went shopping with my four year old little boy back when I was young, and he wanted to buy a Barbie for his G.I. Joe so the action figure could have a girlfriend, and I let him get it. But what if he just said he wanted a Barbie just to play with the Barbie and the Barbie alone? I’m torn to this day wondering if I would’ve said no. I don’t think it matters. I think what I would’ve done would’ve been buy a toy truck like the macho father in me would’ve wanted for the son. I’ve had masculinity pegged as one thing all my life, and I still feel torn understanding what it really is to be... well, just to be a human in general, I guess. It’s not always a cut and dry answer, but it’s not always a clear answer. That’s only in my book. I can’t say about everyone else’s. That’s when the topic becomes choice. Like a choice piece of meat.

“I couldn’t say,” said Angie. “I’m vegetarian.” I could tell he said it in a joking manner but still... I wanted more out of the conversation; but changing the topic:

“So I’m dead, huh?” Angie shrugged his shoulders.

“Not necessarily, Mickey. Mick... you still have some trial tests to run.” At that Angie drove off into an empty field with separate crowds of people and animals all gathered around in it.

“What is this?” I asked. He took out a pen and paper.

“A test,” he replied as we got out. “Test 1: pick a dog, any dog.” He pointed to a crowd of dogs as we stepped into the field. I saw my childhood dog, out of the hundred, right away.

“Sparky!” I screamed out. Sparky came out of the crowd and we were reunited after forty some odd years.

“So...” Angie asked, smiling: “Which dog do you pick?” Sparky licked my cheek. I laughed feeling a surge of joy from the reunion.

“I wouldn’t pick any other dog in the whole wide world! Sparky’s my number one!” Angie smiled down at the duo and said:

“Test 2: pick a cat, any cat.” Sparky and the crowd of dogs vanished before my eyes and now what lay before me were a crowd of cats.

“Hey,” I said. “What kind of game is this?” Angie shrugged.

“Don’t you see a cat that you like?” They all began to meow around my feet when suddenly:

“Felix,” I gasped. It was the cat I gave the last bit of my tuna fish sandwich to on the bus ride from Okinawa to that beach over by that one bridge I saw the geese on. Those geese were a magnificent bunch if I don’t say so myself. I remember flying out to that one island the next day like it was yesterday where I met the love of my life, Sharon.

“Hurry up and pick a cat, Mickey.” Angie seemed impatient.

“Well, alright,” I felt unsure about this. “Felix was a good cat. He might be a scraggly, old thing, but he has a good heart he does. I pick Felix.” Angie smiled at me while Felix and the rest of the cats vanished.

“You’re catching on. I don’t think the next tests even matter, do they Mickey? Here’s a group of brothers. And you’re, of course, going to pick *your* brother, Sal. Here’s a group of sisters and, of course, you’re going to pick *your* sister, Henrietta. Here’s a group of mothers, of fathers, of uncles, of aunts, grandfathers, grandmothers, sons, daughters, group of friends, group of significant others... do you get the picture, Mickey? Do you get what this is all about?” I felt a tear roll down my cheek as I looked out into the crowds and crowds of people.

“Yes,” I whispered. “Yes, it’s about love.” Angie nodded and led me back to the car. He smiled gently at me as he nodded and replying sweetly:

“Yes it is. And we’ll *keep* talking about it when we get home. Now let’s go home.” And we did.