

BLACK-EYED SUSAN

by David Orr

Sample Pages 1-5

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FADE IN:

LIGHTNING illuminates a stained-glass window as a CRASH OF THUNDER rips through the air, reverberating loudly in a SUSTAINED RUMBLE.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

SHUTTERS CLATTER outside as THE WIND shakes the edifice with a GUSTY HOWL. The CONGREGATION stirs uneasily in their pews.

FATHER TIMMONS
 (calm, assuring presence)
 I guess even the Almighty wakes up on the
 wrong side of the bed from time to time.
 Fear not, my good people. Fear not.

A powerful burst of air pushes open the church doors, startling several churchgoers out of their seats. An USHER rushes to fight the tempest and with some muscle latches the doors shut.

FATHER TIMMONS
 If you faint in the day of adversity,
 your strength is small! Proverbs 24:10.
 The Word of the Lord. Let us pray.

The congregation kneels.

In the back pew, OWEN SHARP, 30s, gaunt, stern, adjusts his kneel pad, directing his six children to join him.

Obeying their father, RACHEL, 10, MICHELLE, 9, THADEUS, 7, the twins LILLIAN and JILLIAN, 5, clasp their hands and close their eyes for prayer.

Unsupervised, the youngest Sharp, BABY SUSAN, 2, climbs off the pew and waddles out into the aisle.

FATHER TIMMONS
 Almighty God, to you all hearts are open,
 all desires known, and from you no
 secrets are hid.

Thadeus elbows Michelle, who returns an elbow of her own. Rachel "shhhs" them. The twins giggle. Owen snaps his fingers at all of them to behave.

FATHER TIMMONS
 Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the
 inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we
 may perfectly love you, and worthily
 magnify your holy Name. Through Christ
 our Lord.

CONGREGATION
 Amen.

The congregation returns to their seats.

Lillian and Jillian notice Susan playfully bouncing from one pew to the next. Owen leans over to the twins:

OWEN
 (forceful whisper)
 Get your sister back in her seat.

An ACOLYTE enters the altar from the sacristy door, hands Father Timmons a note. Unfolding the note, the priest reads to himself.

HANDWRITTEN NOTE: TORNADO WATCH UPGRADED TO TORNADO WARNING

Father Timmons looks out at his congregation.

They sit rapt in attention, seemingly unconcerned with the storm brewing outside.

Father Timmons crumples the note in his hand.

FATHER TIMMONS
 Today's lesson comes from the Book of
 Acts, Chapter 3.

Lillian and Jillian slide to the end of their pew as the congregation opens their Bibles.

LILLIAN
 Susan... Susan...

A few churchgoers smile with delight as Susan wanders past them.

FATHER TIMMONS
 True miracles are created by men when
 they use the courage and intelligence
 that God gave them.

JILLIAN
 Susan...!

Susan glances back at her sisters.

FATHER TIMMONS
 Words penned by the French playwright
 Jean Anouilh. What exactly was Anouilh
 saying? Miracles are created by man? Is
 it possible that you or I could actually
 perform miracles?!

LILLIAN
 Susan, come here...

FATHER TIMMONS
 One day Peter and John were going up to
 the temple at the hour of prayer, the
 ninth hour.

Jillian waves wildly for Susan to come to them.

FATHER TIMMONS
 And a man lame from birth daily sat at
 the gate of this temple which is called
 Beautiful to ask alms of those who
 entered the temple.

Susan giggles to herself as she heads back to her family.

FATHER TIMMONS

Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, 'Look at us.' And this lame man fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something.

A step away from their pew, Susan's attention turns to the doors of the church and the steady RATTLE OF ITS LATCH.

FATHER TIMMONS

But Peter said, 'I have no silver and no gold, but I give you what I do have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth - walk.'

The RATTLE AND HUM INCREASES as the storm gathers outside.

Susan stares at the shaking doors, transfixed.

FATHER TIMMONS

And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong! And leaping up, he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God! It was a miracle!

Rachel tugs on her father's sleeve, points out Susan.

OWEN

Susan. Come here, baby!

Susan's smile fades as she turns her head to her father...

FATHER TIMMONS (O.S.)

A true miracle!

THE LATCH SNAPS -- THE HEAVY DOORS BURST OPEN AND ONE OF THE DOORS TOPPLES OFF ITS HINGES AND CRASHES DOWN ON BABY SUSAN!

LIGHTNING illuminates the stained glass as THUNDER BELLOWS WITH INCREASING FURY.

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPER - TITLE OVER BLACK: BLACK-EYED SUSAN

WOMAN (O.S.)

Are you looking for angels?

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

CHANCE REVEILLÉ gazes out the window, his forehead pressed to the glass, his thoughts lost in the clouds.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Let me know if you find any.

Chance turns to the sweet, saintly WOMAN sitting next to him.

CHANCE
I'm sorry, were you speaking to me?

WOMAN
I asked you if you caught sight of any angels dancing on the clouds.

CHANCE
Oh. No, I guessed I missed them.

WOMAN
Think me silly, go ahead, but my father told me when I was a little girl that if you look hard enough you just might see the angels playing in the clouds. I guess it was just his way of keeping me calm while flying.

CHANCE
Oh. Right.

The woman pulls out a small flask from her purse.

WOMAN
Now it takes more than chubby little cherubs to keep me calm.

She opens the flask and discreetly takes a sip.

WOMAN
My, where's my manners?! Would you care for a little heavenly bliss?

CHANCE
No-no, I'm fine, thanks.

WOMAN
It's skyway robbery those little bottles they give you up here.
(chuckles to herself)
Get it? Skyway robbery.

Chance smiles easy, revealing his natural charm as his dimples light up his weathered face.

CHANCE
Yeah, I get it. That's a good one.

He turns back to his window, his dimples fading as he peers downward.

CHANCE'S POV

The rural landscape passes below, the land like a patchwork quilt divided by property lines, each section a different hue of green and brown.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

TRISH HARDY, smart and sexy, classic Howard Hawks, watches the PASSENGERS depart the plane through the terminal window.

Chance steps out of the plane, a leather tote over his shoulder. He makes his way down the stairs to the runway with his seatmate right on his heels chewing his ear off with perpetual chatter.

The passengers spill into the small terminal. The chatterbox puts a sock in it as Chance spots --

-- Trish leaning against the window with her arms folded coolly. She flashes a devilish grin at him.

WOMAN

Ooh, there's your angel. Toodles, Mr. Reveillé, it was a pleasure.

The woman blends into the crowd as Chance steps up to Trish.

CHANCE

I'm suddenly feeling warm and fuzzy all over.

TRISH

Is it me or the humidity?

CHANCE

Oh, it's definitely...the humidity.
(smiles)
It's good to see you, Trish.

Chance sticks out his hand for a shake.

TRISH

Put that hand away and give me a hug.

They embrace warmly then turn to walk.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

Trish drives fast, stealing nervous glances at Chance. Outside the tinted windows, miles of farmland sprinkled with cows.

CHANCE

We really are in the middle of nowhere.

TRISH

I like to think of it as the middle of somewhere.

CHANCE

Sorry. Just not used to seeing so much open space.

TRISH (V.O.)

Mississippi to me is the beauty spot of creation, a dark, wide spacious land that you can breathe in.