

My Angel by Gary A. Hughes

Have I ever seen an angel? I'm not sure. The Bible does speak of entertaining them *unawares*. I've never seen one in the classic, flying painted cherub sense but they don't have to appear that way. There have been times I've wondered whether people have been quite who they seemed. Like that Saturday during my Bible college years in the early nineties...

Ah, the carefree student life. Well, it would have been carefree but stuff kept getting in the way, such as homework. As for cares, money always seemed a bit tight, maybe that's where the *free* in carefree comes in. So we always looked for nice, low-budget things to do. Be that as it may I took a couple students, a Malaysian and a Japanese, down to the big Goodwill store one Saturday. They're both pastors in their respective countries today and were men of hope and vision back then too. I was an older student, even at that time but we all had a lesson coming.

The Malaysian bought books. He was on a mission, stocking a library in Kuala-Lumpur. The pickings at Goodwill were not as theological as they were at the Baptist thrift store over on the West side but he usually found something. Having the last surviving eight-track deck on Rocky Butte I usually spent between two and three dollars on twenty-five cent tapes. There were advantages to remembering the seventies two decades later. I forget whether the Japanese guy bought anything. He was perhaps the most sensible and thrifty of us, being perfectly happy to look, shop, and spend time with his friends.

The trip was pretty routine until we went to leave and the car wouldn't start. It turned over and cranked but nothing caught. I pumped the gas a few times, nothing. I held the pedal

down and cranked—nothing. Not knowing what else to do, I opened the hood and dug out my briefcase toolkit, the one I carried on electronic service calls. Small tools, not really automotive.

Words from a mechanically minded pastor echoed in my mind. *An engine requires three things to run: gasoline, compression, and spark. A problem must be in one of those three areas.* He was making a spiritual point in his sermon of course, but the words came back to me when the engine didn't run. I was pretty sure about compression and gas as those don't tend to go instantly missing so I unhooked the lead from the coil, had one of the fellows turn the key, and looked for a spark. No spark.

Opening my tool kit, I took out a voltmeter and started poking around. Twelve volts went into the coil, nothing on the ground lead. So far so good, we had primary power. About this time I became aware of a stranger looking over my shoulder.

“Having trouble with your car?” He looked so much the type I only gave him half a glance: grizzled hair with unshaven stubble on his weathered face, khaki shirt with a pocket protector and a few grimy screwdrivers, a prime specimen of the alcoholic shade-tree mechanic. A man who would know every car problem there was and could fix them too, as long as he didn't have to work under anybody else's deadline.

I told him what I'd done so far.

“Yeah, you ought to have a spark there,” he rasped in a nicotine rich voice. “Them coils just go out like that, all of a sudden with no warning.”

“So it's the coil then?” I was over my head already in terms of what I knew about auto mechanics.

“Yeah,” he said as he pointed under the hood, “This one comes in two pieces, an upper and a lower, and they go out together so you have to replace ‘em together.”

I was beginning to feel some confidence. The screws I’d need to work with were all quarter-inch hex, well within the scope of my little tool kit. But there was another potential deal breaker... “Is there any alignment or timing I’d need to do?”

He shook his head, “Nope. Just drop ‘er in and off you go.”

“Well, thanks!” My statement was heartfelt. Faith had caught fire within me and I could almost hear the car start up and run again.

Suddenly we had a very awkward moment, as though the conversation was over but neither of us quite knew how to properly end it. I couldn’t tell whether he was hoping I’d beg him to fix the car or if he was afraid I’d ask. No hard decision there, I didn’t have the money. The auto parts store would take my credit card but I had nothing in either wallet or checking account to cover a mechanic, even of the low-overhead variety like this guy. I thanked him again and packed up my tool kit.

Phoning a store within walking distance, they confirmed his evaluation. The coil had two parts, an upper and a lower, they did need to be replaced together, and they were in stock. Wow, that had to be God right there! In those days, parts houses in Portland didn’t stock much. *It’s in the warehouse, we can have it for you tomorrow.* But they had my parts, right there, just waiting for us to come get them.

At the store they confirmed the diagnosis again. *Yes, the coil comes in two pieces. You have to replace them both at once. They just go out like that, suddenly with no warning.* It felt right. This was in the mouth of three witnesses!

On the walk back I reflected on the goodness of God and His amazing provision. Of all the ways a car could fail, here was something I could fix—with a little help, of course. I thought about the fellow who appeared so providentially to fill in the exact missing pieces of what I already knew. The Lord had to have sent him! I concluded he was either just what he appeared to be, a seedy character who knew about cars and couldn't resist the sight of a raised hood, or an angel, in disguise and on a mission.

Come to think of it, he was just there, and then he wasn't. I hadn't seen him come, and hadn't seen him leave. After he left I looked around to see which way he was going. I couldn't find him. I never once looked him full in the face and made eye contact. I wouldn't recognize him again if I saw him. That wasn't unusual when I was in technical mode, but still...

And then there was that awkward moment, as though, *having delivered his message, he did not know what to say next!* Granted, putting two technical guys together can establish a lower level of social skills than the ambassador's hamster, but still...

"Maybe we should pray," suggested the Malaysian, "and God might send us an angel to start the car."

I had a hard time keeping a straight face, "I think he already did."

"Who?" They both jumped in at once.

“Oh, the old guy.” I shrugged, “He told me exactly what I needed to know.” I could tell by the way they each caught their breath we were in trouble. My angel did not meet with their approval.

“Gary, you can’t trust just *any* old angel...” began the Malaysian.

The Japanese brother was more theologically tactful, “Now ... not *every* angel is from God...”

“Come on guys, he’s not your angel, he’s mine, okay? If you want a Japanese angel or a Malaysian angel, pray one in of your own but this one was mine, right there, just when I needed him!” I couldn’t really fault them, sheltered as they’d been from everyday American culture, how could I explain the rich mechanical tradition this rough looking fellow actually represented?

They offered their counsel until it was obvious I was past listening to reason. (The sack in my hand contained parts I’d purchased with money I hadn’t earned yet so I was pretty much committed.) Having fallen significantly in the estimation of my friends we proceeded rather silently back to the car.

Speaking of silent, that’s how I was praying, somewhat concerned to find myself out on a limb. Just the same, I knew my life and gifting and going over the chain of events, every link rang true. I thought of Pharaoh, when he took his army galloping into the Red Sea. Don’t jump into the middle of someone else’s miracle, it’s not smart. Getting the tools out, I installed the new coil.

Knowing the car would be seriously flooded and the battery close to exhaustion, I pushed the pedal down and held it, hoping the engine wouldn’t backfire and blow the muffler off or

something equally embarrassing. It cranked weakly, exactly like before for about ten long seconds, coughed, and then began to sputter and miss, picking up speed as one by one the fouled cylinders came back to life.

From outside I heard an international cheer, “The angel was from God! The angel was from God!” We had revival all the way home.

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