THE WATCHTOWER

Written by

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INT. CHURCH - DAY

A group of people gather at the altar around a baby boy. DR. STEVEN SANTIAGO, 45, salt and pepper hair, modern glasses, dressed in white and a cross, stands next to his wife. FRANCIS SANTIAGO, 43, well dressed, sophisticated, wears nude lipstick pass their baby to the godparents (CRISTINE, 43, and BRUCE, 45). Water pours on the baby’s forehead.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE- PATIO- DAY

Baptism decorations hang from trees and sit on tables. Kids run around and couples mingle with each other. Steven and Francis converse with Cristine and Bruce. A waiter offers them hors d'oeuvres.

WAITER
Blintze?

CRISTINE
Yes, thank you.

Cristine takes one. The others say no and the waiter leaves.

CRISTINE (CONT’D)
You’re serving Kosher?

FRANCIS
Just trying to respect all our guests religious needs.

BRUCE
Yea, how much does that respect cost you?

STEVEN
More than the cake, I’ll tell you that.

BRUCE
Says the doctor with the new wine cellar.

They laugh and Steven’s phone rings.

STEVEN
It’s work. Excuse me.

Steven turns around.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
Hello. How many centimeters? I’m on my way.
Steven returns to his wife.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
Sorry, a patient in labor.

FRANCIS
But I’m about to cut the cake.

STEVEN
Save me a piece, okay?
(to the couple)
Thank you both again.

Steven kisses Francis goodbye.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM– DAY

NURSE SONIA, 45, curvy and witty, adjusts a machine. He greets MICHELLE MILLER, 35, hair in a bun and reserved, and HARRY MILLER, 39, Michelle’s husband. Michelle is in labor. Steven enters in scrubs and gloves.

HARRY
Who are you?

STEVEN
Dr. Whitford is sick. I’m Doctor Santiago.

Steven takes his position at Michelle’s feet. Michelle grips her husband’s hand.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
Michelle, you’re ready. Time to push in 3, 2, 1...

Michelle pushes. A few drops of blood falls to the floor.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
Once more.

More blood drips from the gurney. Michelle cries out.

INT. MICHELLE’S ROOM– DAY

Michelle holds her newborn baby. Harry sits beside her, lovingly caressing her hair. Steven watches them from the doorway until Michelle notices him.

STEVEN
He’s beautiful. How are you feeling, Mrs. Miller?
MICHELLE
Tired.

STEVEN
That’s understandable. We had an issue during the birth. A placental abruption.

HARRY
What does that mean?

STEVEN
It’s not serious, but we are going to need to take a few extra steps.

HARRY
Does Dr. Whitford know about this?

STEVEN
I’m going to be attending your wife, Mr. Miller.

MICHELLE
Harry, calm down.

STEVEN
Like I was saying, it’s not serious. It’s a rare condition but it can happen when a woman has had multiple children.

HARRY
So what happens next?

STEVEN
We’ll just give her a simple blood transfusion, and she’ll be alright.

Michelle and Harry are quiet.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
What is it?

HARRY
What happens if Michelle doesn’t have the blood transfusion?

STEVEN
Well... She lost a lot of blood. Her body—

HARRY
Will she die?
STEVEN
Yes, Mr. Miller. Her life depends on it.

HARRY
As a Jehovah’s Witness, her soul depends on doing what’s right by God. We need to pray. You can leave now.

STEVEN
Sir-

Harry gets in the bed with Michelle. They join hands to pray.

HARRY
I have placed Jehovah in front of me constantly. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be made to totter...

Harry holds Michelle to his chest. Steven walks away.

INT. MEDIC CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A large conference table with multiple chairs. A bookshelf and computers align the walls. Steven paces while Sonia sits at the table.

SONIA
All your pacing ain’t going to change nothing.

STEVEN
He’s just going to let her die. Because of some fanatic belief.

SONIA
What did she say?

STEVEN
He didn’t even let her speak.

SONIA
So talk to her on her own.

Sonia stands.

SONIA (CONT’D)
I’m gonna get some coffee. Want some?
STEVEN
Yeah, Black.

Sonia walks toward the door.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
Sonia... I’ve never lost a patient.

Sonia nods and leaves.

Steven moves to one of the computers. He starts searching Jehovah's Witness’ sites.

SERIES OF SHOTS- STEVEN RESEARCH OF RELIGION
A) Jehovah’s Witnesses as a religion.
B) The rules they live by.
C) The Watchtower
D) Articles of children opposing to transfusions and dying.
E) Disfellowshipment in marriages.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY- DAY

Steven walks towards Michelle’s room. In front of her door, a man, late 50’s, THE WATCHTOWER, stands guard. Steven pauses when he reaches the door. The Watchtower steps aside but eyes him as he enters.

INT. MICHELLE’S ROOM- DAY

Steven shuts the door. Michelle stirs awake. In the bassinet near her, the baby slumbers.

STEVEN
Who’s the man outside?

MICHELLE
The Watchtower. Part of our church. He’s here to protect us and our beliefs.

Steven moves towards her, checking a machine near her bed.

STEVEN
Mrs. Miller, your body needs that transfusion. You won’t last long without it.
MICHELLE
I understand, but... I can’t.

STEVEN
Look, if this isn’t what you want, we can find a way. They don’t need to know.

Michelle looks down.

MICHELLE
Are you a man of faith, Dr. Santiago?

STEVEN
I am.

MICHELLE
Then you understand. Faith is more than just passive belief. It’s about your actions. This isn’t just my husband’s decision or the Watchtower’s. It’s mine too.

STEVEN
You just had a baby. Do you really think God wants you to die?

MICHELLE
God lead me to the church when I had nothing else to believe in. When I was in the hospital. How could He not want me to follow their ways.

STEVEN
Mrs. Miller... Michelle— God doesn’t judge. Not like that.

MICHELLE
And how could I tell my children to believe in Him if I wasn’t strong enough in my own faith? I see God in their eyes every time they look at me.

STEVEN
But you’ll die.

MICHELLE
I would rather die than live without this life... without my church and my family.
The Watchtower opens the door. Steven steps away from Michelle.

WATCHTOWER
Is everything alright?

STEVEN
No, it’s not alright. Mrs. Miller needs a blood transfusion or she’s going to die.

WATCHTOWER
I think she’s made her decision clear, Dr. Santiago.

STEVEN
God doesn’t want her to die.

MICHELLE
How dare you assume what God wants for me.

Harry and their children enter the room. MARY, 8 years old girl, BRANDON, 5 years old boy. Mary jumps on the bed and hugs Michelle. Brandon walks to the other side and reaches up to her. Beth is in her father’s arms. Harry glances from The Watchtower to Michelle.

HARRY
Is there a problem, here?

Steven shakes his head.

STEVEN
I’m going to send Nurse Sonia in with some iron supplements. See what that does.

MICHELLE
Thank you, Doctor.

Steven leaves the room.

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL – NIGHT

Steven’s coat lies on a pew. He prays kneeled down with a rosary in hand. Sonia enters.

SONIA
(re: praying)
That helping at all?
STEVEN
I’m losing her.

SONIA
She won’t trust you if you don’t respect her decision.

STEVEN
I respect her faith – I just want her to live.

Sonia sits next to him.

SONIA
You know, I never understood all this. My family went to church every Sunday, like clockwork. They got all dressed up with their big hats, and I just stayed home. I didn’t see the point. I already saw God everyday in them. My family was my temple.

STEVEN
You’re a genius.

Steven grabs his coat on and dashes out of the room.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY- NIGHT

The children color. The Watchtower stands guard. Steven approaches the door. There is a moment when it looks like The Watchtower won’t let him in. Then he does.

INT. MICHELLE’S BED – NIGHT

Steven enters. Michelle’s pale and barely holding on. Harry sits besides her. He places his book down as the Doctor approaches, ready for another fight.

STEVEN
Mr. and Mrs. Miller. I wanted to apologize. As I said, I consider myself a man of faith. I was at my son’s Christening this morning. I should know better than to challenge a belief in God.

HARRY
Thank you, Doctor.
MICHELLE
Yes, thank you.

Steven looks out the window in the door and sees the children. Michelle wheezes as she tries to breath.

STEVEN
So, I guess we’ll just get the unpleasantness over with. Mrs. Miller, you don’t have much time left.

Steven walks to the edge of her bed and looks straight at her.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
You’ll fall into a coma within the next hour. A coma from which you won’t revive. It’s time you said good-bye to your children.

HARRY
But the iron supplements-

STEVEN
They aren’t working fast enough.

Harry nods, understandably and crosses to the doorway to get them, but Michelle is shaken by this. Harry re-enters with the children. The Watchtower tries to walk in behind them.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
I’m sorry sir, but Mrs. Miller already has too many visitors. We need to keep this limited to family only.

The Watchtower retreats, shutting the door behind him.

Michelle is weak and can barely move to hug her children. Harry stands by them.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
Kids, you need to say good-bye to your mother.

MARY
Are you going somewhere, Mommy?

MICHELLE
Yes, sweetie. I am.

MARY
When will you be home?
Michelle can’t answer. She shakes her head.

MARY (CONT’D)
Mommy, what’s wrong?

HARRY
Mommy’s just sick, sweetie. God will take care of her.

Mary nods, trying to understand.

MARY
Mommy, I want you to get better. You have to promise me, you will get better.

Even this is a bit too much for Steven. Harry kneels down to Mary.

HARRY
Give her a kiss, honey.

Michelle can’t take it anymore. She motions for Harry to take them away.

HARRY (CONT’D)
Okay, let’s go see Grandma.

Mary leans forward and hugs Michelle tightly. Sonia walks in and stands next to the monitor. She looks back at Steven. He nods.

SONIA
I’m sorry, but Mrs. Miller needs her rest.

HARRY
Just give us a minute.

STEVEN
It’s time to leave, Mr. Miller.

Harry nods and pries Mary off her mother’s neck. He carries her to the door, the other kids trail behind. Harry looks back at Michelle.

HARRY
I’ll be back as fast as possible. I love you.

Michelle nods, but she knows that’s her good-bye. Harry and the kids exit. Steven shuts the door.
STEVEN
So, Michelle. You see God in your children’s eyes?

Michelle does not respond.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
If you just accept this blood. You don’t have to leave them motherless.

MICHELLE
The Watchtower...

Steven, thinking he’s lost, turns to leave. As he is about to walk out... a raspy voice.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Doctor.

Steven rapidly turns around. Michelle’s eyes are watery.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I want to live.

Steven rushes toward Sonia.

STEVEN
You’ll accept the blood transfusion? The only thing you have to say is yes.

MICHELLE
Yes.

Steven turns to Sonia.

STEVEN
Get it!

Steven gets close to Michelle.

STEVEN (CONT’D)
Nobody will know about this I promise you. I’ll take care of the Watchtower.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY- NIGHT

Steven slips through the door, closing it behind him so The Watchtower can’t see inside.
STEVEN
Can I have a word with you?

He motions for The Watchtower to step away from the door. After a moment's hesitation, he agrees.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Okay, so explain this to me. Why can't she have a transfusion.

THE WATCHTOWER
Dr. Santiago, can’t you just accept-

STEVEN
Yes, I have. But I need to know.

THE WATCHTOWER
God commands us not to ingest human blood in any form. Whether we eat it, drink it or get it as a transfusion.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. COLD ROOM - NIGHT
Sonia gets a blood bag.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY- NIGHT
Harry and the children slowly exit the hospital.

THE WATCHTOWER (V.O.)
The soul of a person can be found in its blood. If we ingest it, we take its soul, and in the process we lose our own.

INT. HOSPITAL KITCHEN - NIGHT
Sonia grabs an empty food tray and cart. She hides the blood bag inside the tray.

THE WATCHTOWER (V.O.)
God viewed the soul, or life, as being in the blood and belonging to Him..
INT. HOSPITAL DOORS – NIGHT

Harry drops to his knees. He turns to his kids and hold their hands. They begin to pray.

INT. HOSPITAL ELEVATOR – NIGHT

Sonia is in the elevator with the cart. She pushes the cart in the hallway towards Michelle’s room.

THE WATCHTOWER (V.0.)
It’s faith, Dr. Santiago, that defines us.

INT. MICHELLE’S ROOM– NIGHT

Sonia enters and rushes to Michelle’s side. Sets up the blood bag on a rack. She injects the needle into Michelle’s arm and hides it behind the curtain. The Watchtower peaks inside. Michelle lies weakly while Sonia writes in her record.

The blood transfusion equipment has been safely hidden from sight.

INT. MICHELLE’S ROOM– LATER – NIGHT

Michelle looks energized and bright. She holds her baby in her arms. Steven looks over Michelle’s stats.

STEVEN
You look great Michelle. Your blood count is up, and you should be feeling like yourself soon enough.

MICHELLE
Thank you doctor.

Harry enters the room.

HARRY
I got back as fast as I c– Michelle...

STEVEN
She’s recovering steadily Mr. Miller. Your prayers were heard.

HARRY
You look so good.

Harry stands besides Michelle, grabs her hand and kisses it.
HARRY (CONT’D)
God had us in His hands all along.

STEVEN
She will have to continue to take
Iron from now on.

MICHELLE
I will, thank you.

HARRY
Yes, thank you, Doctor.

Harry stands next to Michelle. The baby grabs Michelle’s finger. Steven leaves.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY- NIGHT
Sonia approaches Steven.

SONIA
What procedure should I write in
the record?

Steven looks at The Watchtower in the waiting room.

STEVEN
Faith and prayer.

He smiles as they walk down the hallway.

INT. STEVEN AND FRANCIS’S BEDROOM – NIGHT
Francis cradles her baby as she rocks in a rocking chair.
Steven sits beside her, eating his slice of Baptism cake. He
reaches over and kisses his wife and child.

FADE TO BLACK.