

When God's Name Was Francis



by
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"Mommy, I've got a new friend," said the light blond, blue-eyed five-year-old little girl.

Now Mommy wasn't quite sure how to take that comment, or for that matter really any other comments right now. The trim thirty-two-year-old woman with a naturally lovely face, light colored hair and white freckled skin stood in the kitchen with the mail in her hand. She's in a situation where more than a few things are going wrong. It seemed even life has gone wrong. The envelopes are cut off notices and collection letters. The situation is getting serious.

For sure she can't let any of it come out when she sees Bill tonight. She will leave them right on top of her pillow now so she will be forced to open them when she gets home from the hospital. "The car's not running right. It's making some weird noises", were her thoughts next as she heard her precious child speak.

Taking the moment to respond she asked in a kind voice that was a reflection of the love she has for this only child, "What do you mean you have a new friend honey?"

"Well, Mommy you said last night that because of Daddy being sick and you working two jobs and everything that you didn't have much time to play with me. There aren't any kids in the neighborhood so you said that I need to make some friends at the day care. But I don't like any of those children Mommy so I have found a new friend that I like a lot."

"Where is your new friend honey?"

"Oh....., she comes when she wants to and she leaves usually when people are not looking".

"What is your new friend's name Alice? "asked her Mother, now bending over a bit to speak to her daughter.

"My friend's name is 'God', Mommy".

Beth was thinking to herself; "oh my now this. Our little girl is so lonely that she's created an imaginary friend who is God." Not knowing what to do,

Beth responded in the only way she knew, with love. "Sweetie, that's wonderful. I think it's great that God has found such a wonderful friend in you."

Beth tossed a few things in the washing machine on the way to the bedroom to change clothes. Oh my, what it would be to lie down for a while, but we've got to get going to make it to the hospital in time to see Bill.

Soon they were driving down the coast highway north of San Francisco where they lived in an isolated home that was one of Bill's deals. Beth thought to herself, "bless his heart he's always been such a dreamer!" But this time, it had backfired. The last of their money they had used to buy this isolated house with the leaky roof and the few acres that came with it. Bill was sure that a development company would pay any price in the world for the place.

Dear Bill, oh how she hoped that his health would improve. Their situation was getting worse by the day. She was starting to get scared. Her parents didn't have but enough to get by themselves. And her sister; what a mess she was in. Beth wished so much that there was someone that she could go to for help if she had to. A week ago she thought she was coming down with the flu and it really worried her. She was working two jobs and coming into town every night that she could to see Bill in the hospital.

The weight of the world was on her. She felt like Atlas from Greek mythology with the weight of the world on her slender shoulders. It was then that little Alice spoke up, "Don't worry Mommy. Everything is going to be OK because God told me."

"Alice, do you mean your new friend whose name is God?" asked her mother.

"Yes Mommy, God says everything is going to be OK".

Thinking about what the kids at pre-school and others might say about Alice's new friend being God, Beth responded, "Honey, I think we need to get a new name for your imaginary little friend. What do you think would be a good name?"

"If you think we need to do that I will talk to God about it and I'm sure God will know." The little girl was quiet for twenty minutes. As they pulled into the hospital parking lot she spoke, "Mommy, I am going to give God the name of Francis. It's a nice name and it will work for either a girl or a boy."

It hit Beth pretty hard that Alice picked the name, Francis. However, the little girl could not have known why. Beth had lost a baby in the fifth month of pregnancy. She wouldn't let the hospital people tell her if it was a girl or a boy. She couldn't stand the pain of knowing. In her mind, she gave that child the name she had already picked out. It was her grandmother's name, Francis. She had prayed and prayed for that unborn child when the doctors told her she might not make it through the pregnancy. She couldn't pray for a child without a name so she had given the child a name. She prayed for Francis.

The tears swelled up in her eyes but she couldn't let them out. She'd gotten good at holding back tears with everything else that had happened. Now at the hospital was where she did her very best at restraining the tears because she couldn't let Bill see her cry. Not in the condition that he was in.

Dear Bill; to be less than forty and needing a heart transplant. Who would ever have believed that the guy that was the strongest tight end in high school not so many years ago would be incapable of walking more than fifteen yards? He was a great guy with a big smile, broad shoulders, and black wavy hair. Who would ever have believed that all this could happen?

To shed a little more light on their situation Bill had a good job but was always a dreamer. He was going from one grand scheme to another. Bill thought Beth believed in each one of these projects but really that endless listening and those brown eyes were speaking of love, not of her belief in his latest "re-invent the wheel" project. Beth hadn't married Bill for fame or fortune. She loved him because she loved him. It was because he was the other half of her.

After trying for a long time they had finally gotten a baby. Beautiful Alice! This little girl was so very beautiful! Alice was the flower of their love. Beth's heart longed for another child. That brought with it a pain for that next child was never to be. First, she had a very early miscarriage. Then another, and another. Bill was at the point of begging her to stop trying. After each miscarriage, Beth's tears would flow more and more. It was a pain that he could not take away. Only little Alice could bring relief to her Mother. Beth would go in and sleep on the floor by the little girl's bed. It was the only place she could get any relief. Bill would get up in the night and his own tears would come as he would stand in the doorway of Alice's room and see his wife asleep on the floor in front of the little girl's bed. Beth would curl up like a child to fit under a baby blanket that she would cover herself with.

Finally, it looked like they were going to make it. Month after month, counting and praying that the months would pass, until the number five. Then it all happened so quickly. There were the first problems and the pains that would come and go. More prayer mixed with denial. Then the day that the pain doubled her over and she knew it was the end. The baby was five months old, but not well enough nor strong enough to have a chance. However, for several hours the little life had hung on. She couldn't bear to know if it was a boy or girl. Beth begged her doctor and Bill to never tell her if Francis was a boy or a girl. All Beth's prayers were for Francis.

Then Bill had taken the little bit of money that they had and made the down payment on this isolated house that was really a dump, and the land that went with it. Bill said that he could fix it up and that he had figured out that this big development company was buying up land secretly. He was sure that they would want to buy this run down an old house and the ten acres of land that went with it.

The view of the ocean was magnificent! The surf coming was like the heartbeat of the planet. She had not much time to enjoy it for they had only been in the house for a month or two when Bill got sick.

The thing that worried Beth the most about the old house was that it had taken their small savings and it was so isolated that there were no children for Alice. Now, that fear seemed to have partially come true for Alice had an imaginary friend who was God. To top that all off Alice had picked the name of Francis. "Oh, how could she have picked that name?" was Beth's last thought as she opened the door to Bill's room. As she did so she left every problem at the door and brought only the love that she had for Bill into the room.

It was harder to cheer Bill up. His condition is getting a little worse every day. You can see it on his face. There is something about how he seems to need the oxygen more and more.

On the way, home in the dark Beth's thoughts wandered to all the different burdens of the day. It was then she heard Alice whispering. She was talking to her imaginary friend. She was explaining that her name was now Francis.

The next days were more and more of the same. Beth was always rushing from one thing to the other. From one job to the other, one store to the other, picking up Alice and then going to the hospital. Every day it seemed as if

Bill was a little worse. God, what Beth would give for a bit of good news! At least tomorrow was Sunday and for a change, she was going to have a day off. To sleep late is a luxury that only tired parents can fully appreciate. It was one of the few Sundays where she was not scheduled at either of her jobs. The weather was supposed to be good and the only plus to this dump they were living in was the view of the ocean.

Beth was more concerned about Alice. She seemed to be pulling back pulling back from other kids. When she asked, Alice had said that it was because she was having fun playing with her new friend Francis. One of Beth's last waking thoughts of the day was that maybe tomorrow she would focus more on Alice than on Bill. She continued to be uncomfortable with God as an imaginary friend for her precious daughter.

Alice woke her up because she wanted to go play by the Ocean. It was only a hundred yards away. It was hard to say later and get extra sleep to someone that your heart is full of. Especially when she might be...lose her Father. The tears swelled up in her eyes as she caught herself thinking the unthinkable thought; that Bill might not get well. Could it be that Alice had sensed something terrible in the future for her Daddy and that was why she had picked God to be her imaginary friend?

She took a quick look into Beth's room and then headed for the back door. As she was going through the kitchen Alice came in. She had something in her hand that she was looking at as she spoke to her very anxious Mother. "Mommy, Francis gave me something to give to Daddy today. She said that it would start making him well again." Alice was looking at her hand and raising it up to her Mother as she spoke. Then she turned her hand over and opened it.

There, on the little girl's palm was a seashell that had some painting on the inside. Beth bent over and in a quiet, almost reverent mood picked the sea shell up. On it were a few brush strokes of different colors and in the colors the word "Health" was very lightly written.

"Mommy, all we need to do is to give this to Daddy and he will get well! I know it! I know it will work because Francis made it. Francis made it so Daddy will come home". This time, Beth could not hold back, tears came. Warm, tender, sweet tears that rolled slowly down her face were full of love for her daughter. All of the pain, all of the fear, all of it came out as if let loose by this simple act of such innocent love. Little Alice had gone to the seashore and gotten a sea shell. Her imaginary friend was God, no doubt born out of the fears she had

and saw in her Mother about the possibility that her Daddy would not get well. That her Daddy would die. That there was no one to take care of them. That they would somehow be lost in it all. Beth had been able to pray. However, Alice was a child. This imaginary friend must have been her way of expressing her fears and love for her Father. She must have taken the sea shell to her pre-school and gotten someone to write the word Health on it.

For a long time, Beth held Alice in her arms and cried as she held the seashell in her hands. A very long time.

In another setting, a different kind of conversation was taking place between Bob Chester and his boss. Bob is the original "company man", or at least he was until there wasn't much of a "company" anymore. There was only a corporation. The founder of the real estate development company where he had worked for twenty-seven years died during the last year. When he did Northern Development had died also. It had been sold out to a "conglomerate" from New York. The "New York" people were everywhere like ants ravaging for food after a picnic.

Bob Chester looked the part of a company man. He wore a department store suit, barber shop haircut of what little hair he had remaining and a worn white shirt. He had a ten-year-old tie with two pens and an Eversharp mechanical pencil in his shirt pocket. The years had left a few extra pounds with their passing. It's the uniform of the all the average guys at the end of their careers.

His boss, if you could call him that for Bob had a different name in mind was standing in front of his desk. Thirty-two years old, an MBA from an Ivy League school young Mr. Philbeck, (heavy on the Mr. please). He was bound and determined to be a CEO by the age of forty. It didn't matter how many shattered lives were behind him on his path. Forty or else! The "or else" was for everyone around him.

"Chester, (not even giving him the respect of addressing him with his full name or even a Mr.), I am ordering you to get this Greenbay Project completed in the next two weeks. No excuses, no dialogue, no more of your memos on how with a little more time you can save the company some money. None of that bullshit! Two weeks and the deal is over! Got it?" said young Mr. Philbeck in the very sharpest of tones.

"Yes, sir. I have gotten the message" said Bob Chester as he leaned back a bit in his metal office chair behind a green metal desk that had been his home

for the last twenty-seven years. There has been no fancy offices anywhere around here until the buyout and then only for the Mr. Philbecks that had shown up. They were living in Taj Mahal type offices at the same time they were laying workers off everywhere throughout the organization. Good people that had given much to the company for years.

As he was to leave, short Mr. Philbeck turned back around on the toe of his expensive alligator shoes, "Another thing Chester, we don't want any more of those memos from you where you've saved the company a few millions on land acquisition. That makes the planners look like fools! They are some people that I'm doing some networking with now and I don't want them embarrassed"

"But Mr. Philbeck, how can it be wrong if we treat everyone fairly and we save the company millions of dollars?"

Philbeck raised his voice in anger, "Chester, damn it! You still don't get it do you? The only thing that matters is the price of the stock. That's what makes our options worth their weight in gold. That goes for the President as well as the rest of us in "the group". The price of the stock is all that matters! Besides, if you aren't smart enough to get yourself taken care of in these land purchases then there is nothing I can do to help you."

As he turned the door handle in his hand Philbeck spoke loud enough that everyone down the hall could hear, and he did so quite on purpose, "One last thing Chester, when the Greenbay project is finished, on time and in two weeks, you're fired! Plan on moving out of this office right away. We're developing a fitness center for the executives and we're going to need the space."

"Wait a minute Mr. Philbeck", said Bob Chester, "I've got twenty-seven years in with the company and I only have to put in three more to get my full retirement."

"The company doesn't give a damn about your retirement Chester, or anyone else's. The price of that stock is all that matters. The public relations guys think that if do a "layoff - downsizing" announcement before the next quarter that we can get the stock up another three or four bucks."

Bob Chester was looking at the picture of his grandson on his desk thinking to himself desperate thoughts as he spoke up to Philbeck, "Philbeck, look that's nothing to kid around about, I've got a grandson to raise and I have to make it to retirement."

"Chester, we don't give a damn. We can replace you with a clerk. It's all in the price of the stock, the price of the stock."

"Mr. Philbeck I'll do whatever you want, but I have to make it to retirement for my grandson, I'm all....."

Philbeck cut him off, "Yeah, yeah, I heard about your daughter driving into the train that killed your wife and messed up your grandson. We know that your daughter killed herself over it all, but this isn't a charity Chester. We've got to get the price of that stock up!"

Bob Chester started to speak again. His face was turning red from embarrassment as he could see that everyone in this part of the building was hearing what was being said. The most humiliating part for some reason was not the possibility of losing his job but how disrespectfully this young son of a bitch had made those comments about his daughter and his wife. It was all a horrible accident that train in the fog. Bob felt that life with his wife Edith had been full and complete so he was able to move past the loss of her. But his daughter Patti, she felt it was her fault and she never got over the guilt. Then, in the end, Patti was lost also. Dear Patti, she had been through so much and nothing anyone could do brought her any peace.

He'd like to slug Philbeck and then throw him out the window. But no matter what it took, even groveling to this piece of trash he would do it. All his health benefits for Bobby, his grandson were tied into his job. He had to keep his job until Bobby's surgeries and his physical therapy were completed. He only had two more surgeries left at worse. Maybe one. Only one more.

But before Bob could get anything out, Philbeck stepped back in his office and as he put both hands on the front of the desk he spoke in a quiet tone, "Look here Chester, the company's only concern is about being on target. If you haven't taken care of yourself in these land deals by now you don't know how this all works."

It was a virtual admission of what Bob Chester had not only suspected but he'd been keeping some copies of records to put the trail together. He'd never thought of doing it to blackmail anyone, only to be able to protect his name. That's what a man has when it's all over; his name. Now here was this jerk trying to make Bob Chester, who had given twenty-seven years of faithful honest

service to this company and never taken a dime, the excuse that he "should have taken care of himself". Bribery! That son of a bitch!

Then Bob Chester did the most devious thing that he had ever done in his life. He said, "Yes Sir Mr. Philbeck".

With that, Philbeck turned and was gone.

Bob Chester sat there in stunned silence. Twenty some years and then to be treated like this! When Mr. Orion had still been alive they called each other Mr. they did it out of respect. Since he had died and the company had been taken over Bob Chester couldn't believe this had all happened. All these years he and so many other people had taken such pride in where they worked.

"Well, by God I know how to fix these boys!" thought Bob Chester.

Visiting hours were at three that Sunday afternoon so Beth got to play Mom to Alice by making a real home cooked lunch. The table was never right without Bill, but still, it felt good to be a Mom. Alice insisted on putting a few things in a napkin that she said was for her friend Francis if she got hungry while they were gone. As they were getting gathered up for the drive to the hospital Alice put them on a plate next to hers at the table.

Bill looked noticeably worse. Beth had a need for the extra rest she had gotten this morning by sleeping in. It always seemed like God provides a way and today that was the extra rest, for it took additional strength to act like everything was ok. Bill was developing this gray color in his skin. That color meant bad things were happening. The color that made Beth scared. It didn't take a doctor to explain what the color meant.

They were finishing up their visit early. The nurses had asked it be limited to only an hour today because they said, "that Bill was a little tired". Alice spoke up in the most buoyant of tones! "Daddy, this is a gift from a new friend of mine who is God. But I'm not supposed to call her that. It's going to make you all well Daddy! All you have to do is put it in your pocket and you'll get better and come home!" Her Father slowly took the sea shell and placed it in the pocket of his white hospital gown while holding back tears of his own.

Then he smiled at Alice. It was the best smile that Beth had seen out of Bill in a long time. She hurried herself and Alice out of the room before the name Francis came out. She didn't want anything to upset Bill and he knew

about the name. Beth knew he'd heard her crying out one night in her sleep. She called out the name Francis. (Actually, Bill had heard her do a lot of crying for Francis)

It took quite a bit of strength for Beth to make it out of the hospital room without showing a tear. Somehow she got it done.

The next day a letter came. It was from a company called Affiliated Real Estate Developers. They were interested in buying their house and property. Oh my God! What good news! Bill will be so excited to hear it! Can it be true that Bill was right and someone is interested in buying their property? It must be because the letter said that. A man by the name of Bob Chester was going to call and then come to their house to talk. Oh my God! Beth was so excited that she let out a yell.

Alice came running in, "What is it, Mommy? It is good news isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes honey, it's very good news. But how did you know?" asked Beth.

"Francis told me that good news would come today. Francis said that it is going to come twice in one day Mommy".

With that, Beth had a puzzled look on her face as the phone rang. "Mrs. Olson, this is the nurse at the cardiac care center". My God! Beth thought something has happened to Bill. Oh no, could it be this is the call that she's feared the most?" The voice continued, "We think you and your daughter need to come to the hospital as soon as possible".

Beth was frozen. She took a deep breath but her lungs wouldn't let the air out so she couldn't speak. The nurse sensed it as she spoke the words that gave Beth relief, "its good news". "Good news?" exactly what could that be. Is it possible they have located a donor for a heart? Is it possible that Bill is better? Is that possible?

She scurried around yelling for Alice to get some things together quickly so they could get on their way to the hospital. As they got in the car to leave, Alice who had surprisingly not asked what this was all about said, "Mommy, I've been talking with Francis and Francis said that Daddy is going to be feeling better and he is going to get better every day."

The letter from Affiliated Real Estate lay on the kitchen table where she left it. Bill was all that mattered now. Dearest Bill.

Arriving at the hospital Beth got her first clue that things were better when she saw the nurse smiling to greet her. She couldn't help but walk so fast that she was almost running. She burst into Bill's new room which was close to the intensive care ward he had been in. There he was sitting up in bed and Beth couldn't believe it. Not anything that was going to be said to her would mean as much as the color in Bill's face. Real color! Real human color in his face and his hands! That little trace of pink that means so much about human health. Bill was better. My God, Bill was better!

The doctor had a few guarded comments. It had to do with Bill's heart and the electrical signals getting somehow, mysteriously more organized. It was the electrical function that was all messed up, it had never been the heart muscle itself except the damage it had incurred from the heart attacks. Bill got tired pretty quick. Being happy carries its own set of energy demands. In the new room, Alice could be with them all the time.

When it got time to leave Alice had one thing to say to her father, "Daddy, be sure that you keep the seashell in your pajamas pocket. Francis says that you have to keep it close until you get all better."

Strange, but it was harder to leave Bill this time than it had been many times in the past. Beth leaned over to give him a kiss and she placed her right hand on his chest as she did. She could feel the seashell inside his pajamas pocket. It felt warm. It must be her imagination.

Bill had one question as Beth was headed out the door and it caught her off guard a bit from his choice of words, "Beth, who is God's name is Alice's friend named Francis?" Beth didn't have much of an answer. It went over and over in her mind as they headed home, she couldn't stop thinking to herself, "who in God's name is Francis?"

"Who in God's name is Francis?"

The next day Beth woke with more hope. During the break at her first job she called the man from the real estate company and made arrangements for him to come to their house this evening. Beth refused to call it their "home". It wasn't their "home". It was an absolute dump that was barely habitable. Bill

had one of "his ideas" about the land and maybe there was something to it. That thing people called hope seemed to be coming up again.

The real estate man, Bob Chester, arrived exactly on time at 7:20 that evening. Beth had gone to Alice's room to check on her and heard that she and Francis had been having cookies and milk. There were two little glasses. The cookies on both sides of her little table had been partially eaten and the milk was half gone. That would have struck Beth as another cute thing of Alice's but Beth had the eeriest feeling that she could almost hear a strange little girl's voice coming from Alice's room before she got there. There was this feeling. Beth shrugged it off and hurried back to the living room to meet with the real estate man Bob Chester.

The man was a gentleman and had honesty about him. He reminded Beth of her own father. God, she wished that her budget would allow her to call Dad more often. Mr. Chester said that they were going to try to put together a large parcel of real estate for a housing development. However, it was all very complex. Beth didn't know what to ask him, it was Bill that always had a million questions. Bill thought he knew a lot more than he did. Dear Bill, he would always be a dreamer. It was time to go to the hospital when she got up the courage to ask the main question, what did Mr. Chester think they would be able to pay them for the house and land? She was already doing the math in her head, ready to subtract the 96,000 that the mortgage company's last letter had said they were in default for.

"Three hundred thousand dollars! Cash!" She couldn't believe it! My God, what could be better news? Cramming the letter into her pocket Beth called for Alice.

They were in the car pulling out of the driveway headed towards the hospital with the first bit of real hope that Beth had in months when in her rear view mirror she thought she saw a child walking back from the driveway. The child was walking past the house towards the ocean. Slamming on the brakes Beth turned back to look and as she did she spoke, "Alice honey, did you see anyone around our house?"

Alice in a calm quiet voice answered as she played with one of her dolls, "Mom, it's only Francis going back to the ocean".

Beth looked at the little girl in the most puzzled of ways as she repeated over in her mind what Alice had said, "It's only Francis going back to the

ocean". But she shook it all off and drove to the hospital. She must have imagined it.

Headed the other direction was Bob Chester driving back to a rehabilitation hospital to see his grandson Bobby. He kept going over in his mind what he was going to do. Through a phony company that he had set up, Affiliated Real Estate Developers, he was going to buy the property from Beth and Bill Olson. The husband was sick and they were going to make some money on it anyway. Then the phony corporation was going to resell the property to Northern Development Company for \$850,000. The project would still come in close to its projected land acquisition costs and he would have made \$500,000. It was plenty of money to take care of his grandson and retire. Plenty of money..... Plenty of money..... It made Bob Chester sick at his stomach to even think about what he was doing.

Two days later the intercom switch at Bob Chester's desk rang. It was Madge the perky new receptionist everyone liked that had come six months ago, with the news that there were two "small people" who wanted to see Mr. Chester. Bob was more than a little surprised to see Alice Olson, and the girl that was with her. He's caught a glimpse of the second little girl who appeared to be hiding around the corner at the Olson house.

As he greeted the little girls he spoke, still surprised that he should have these visitors during the middle of the day, "Why Alice, I see you've brought your friend with you. What can I do for you?" Bob Chester said, but having these little girls in his office seemed to bring back part of the darkness of the guilt. Guilt about what he was about to do. Guilt about a life that had not been spectacular, but that had been good, for he had been good until now.

"Well, Mr. Chester," Alice said as she and her friend took a seat next to her, "we're here not for what you can do for us, but for what my friend says we need to do for you."

"Alice, your friend is mighty quiet. What exactly do you think there is that needs to be done for me?" asked Bob Chester.

The two girls put their heads together for a moment and whispered. It was then that the quiet one, who always seemed to have her head, tilted downward a bit where you couldn't see her eyes pulled something out of the pocket on the left side of her dress. She handed it to Alice. Alice spoke, "my friend says this is something that you need."

Alice reached out across the desk and placed two small sea shells on top of a file that was laying there. It was the file about Affiliated Real Estate. The very file that contained the papers Bob Chester was going to use to take \$500,000 from the company that he had worked for so long and a poor young woman whose husband was critically ill with heart trouble.

Bob picked up the little White Seashells and as he turned them over and saw the word painted on the inside he then looked up directly into the gaze of the quiet little girl. It was as if he'd been hit by a freight train. The eyes, the little girl's eyes. There were his Edith's eyes. Exactly her eyes, the light green eyes that were soft around the corners. As he stood up he started to speak the words that were in his mind and his heart, "My God, it's my wife. It's my Edith's eyes. She's watching me do this terrible thing".

He sat back down, stunned, completely without the ability to speak. He turned the sea shells over in his hands and on the underside of one was written the word, "peace" and on the other was the word "healing".

It was then that Alice spoke up, "Mr. Chester, Francis said for me to tell you that one of the sea shells would make your grandson Bobby get all well. Alice then leaned over as the other girl, Francis whispered into her ear and then she spoke, "and the one marked peace, that is for you Mr. Chester because God says that's what both you and your daughter need."

There was silence in the room as Bob Chester looked at the two sea shells in his hands. That silence was broken by a sharp pounding on the open door as Mr. Philbeck entered the room. "Chester, what are these child..." Philbeck froze in his tracks as the girl named Francis looked up at him. Then he took a step back as Francis got out of her chair and was walking towards him. Philbeck almost stumbled as he backed up! He was staring into the eyes of the little girl. Steel gray eyes set back deep. Eyes that had a tired sadness about them.

After the girls had left Bob Chester sat there, looking at the seashells. What did it all mean? Why did the shells seem to almost tingle with energy? Then he heard Mr. Philbeck at his door, visibly shaken, "Bob" he said, "who was that little girl? The one with the strange eyes?" Before Bob Chester could respond, young Mr. Philbeck spoke with a voice that had a tremble to it, a tremble that could only be fear, "Bob, did you notice anything unusual about that girl's eyes? Did you notice anything unusual? Does it make any sense that her eyes

could be like my father's? That's not possible, is it? I mean it can't be possible. You see my father is dead. We had this argument about something I'd done that was wrong, and I lost my temper and I..... and I"

"Get out of my office Philbeck!" Bob Chester snapped.

With that Philbeck left, almost running backward as he looked towards the elevator where the girls had gone. After he got to his lushly appointed office with the built-in bar he poured himself a stiff drink. He spilled as much as he got in the glass. However, that wouldn't chase the fear away and so he locked the door. Then he took a chair and wedged it against the door handle to keep the door from being forced open. He turned the lights off so no one could see in and closed the shades. He then pulled the phone with him as he crawled under his desk. Young Mr. Philbeck was still shaking as he called his Mother. She hung up when she heard his voice.

Young Mr. Philbeck, under his desk crying with fear from what he'd seen in the eyes of the silent little girl. His Father!

It was a far different mood at Bill's hospital room a week later. The nurses and doctors had made a cake and had decorated his room with a Bon Voyage theme. Bill was going home today. One week after the shell had come from Alice and her imaginary friend. Bill was all smiles! He looked great despite the strength and weight that he had lost! That all seemed to be coming back in a hurry and he was eating like a horse.

The final measure of how much his health had improved only Beth would know and she certainly wasn't going to tell. Last night after Bill was eating his final dinner at the hospital Alice had asked to go outside to the patio because she wanted to talk to her friend Francis. As Beth had gotten up to open the door she had turned to one side from the bed and as Alice went through the door that it happened. A little pat. A little pat from Bill on the backside. Beth was so surprised that she twirled around surprised and not understanding what had happened! There was Bill smiling that smile with a twinkle in his eye that only Beth knew! It was then, that moment, after all, she had been through that for the first time she believed that Bill was going to be OK.

She leaned over to give him a kiss and as she did she placed her right hand on the pocket of his pajamas. She could feel the little seashell inside the pocket and it made her hand warm like it had before.

For the rest of the evening, Beth returned that twinkle in Bill's eyes with the little blush in her cheeks and this look in her eyes. Her eyes were full of him. My God, Bill is going to be OK she was repeating in her mind when the words caught her. "My God, My God" and the other name that came up at the same time. The name of Francis.

Much changed in a hurry for it was only two weeks later when Beth was packing up the final boxes for the movers. What a miracle she thought to herself! The house and land had sold and they had hired movers to come get everything. Their destination was a beautiful blue trimmed red brick house on a quiet street with trees. It had three bedrooms and a little room off the master bedroom that the Realtor called a sewing room. However, Beth had this feeling, this wonderful feeling that settled in her heart. It was this peaceful feeling that it wasn't a sewing room at all, but a nursery. The house was all paid for and it was their home. No matter what came they would have a home.

The nice man from the real estate company had come and said that after going over everything they had revalued the property. A half a million dollars more! Can you believe it! Beth liked him even if the price hadn't been raised. He seemed like a burden had been lifted from him. He looked maybe ten years younger. When Beth had asked him why he seemed so happy he said that a lot of "miracles" had recently happened in his life. He had retired from his job and had immediately gotten a generous offer from the widow of the founder of the company he had worked for to manage some properties. She had told "Mr. Chester", as she referred to him, that her husband had said that he was the most honest man he had ever known.

Also, his grandson, who evidently had been in an automobile accident several years ago had made a huge recovery and would not have to have any more surgeries. He even was dreaming of someday playing football. The last thing he said was that he'd recently come to a point of peace about the loss of his wife and daughter.

When Beth had told him about all the wonderful things that had happened to her family, Mr. Chester hadn't seemed surprised. Beth was surprised though when Mr. Chester asked to see Alice and her friend Francis. Beth at first thought he was kidding. He had reassured her that he was serious.

As Bob Chester walked to the car he saw Alice approaching him and her friend standing at the edge of the house. "Mr. Chester", Alice called, "I have something for you".

She reached her hand out and gave him another sea shell. "Francis said that she saw you give the one with Peace to your daughter by putting it on her stone at the cemetery. Francis wanted you to know that she got it and she is at Peace."

"Alice, I don't know if it's fair for me to get another seashell," said Bob Chester, "two miracles are a lot for anyone".

"Francis said you would say that and to tell you that when you give a miracle away to someone you love, that God always brings another one." Alice turned to join her friend as they went to the beach. When she got close to Francis she whispered something to Alice. Bob Chester had his car door open when Alice called to him, "one other thing Mr. Chester. Francis said that your grandson would play football and that your daughter and wife would be able to see him".

Bob Chester got in his car and closed the door. Then he turned the sea shell over and read the word in the colors. It was a surprise! The word was Love. He waved to the two little girls and Francis turned back coming towards him where he had a clear view of her face. He recognized her eyes. They were dark brown eyes. They were very peaceful now like when his daughter was little and she would be asleep in his arms. When he would put her gently into her bed Patti would look up at him and speak with those brown eyes to her Father.

"Thank you" he called out as he waved goodbye. He knew now that like when she was little, so long ago, that Patti was at Peace. Dear Patti was at Peace.

When he got home the phone rang, it was Mrs. Orion. She said that an idea had come to her this afternoon about a picnic her church was having next Sunday. It was at her estate and she needed someone to help carve all the roast beef. Would he and his grandson be able to attend? At the end of the call in a soft voice, she said "Thanks, Bob". He looked at the phone for a while after he hung up and he reached up and touched the sea shell that was in his pocket. It seemed to be warm.

It was that evening when Madge the new receptionist at his job came walking up the sidewalk. Bob Chester was sitting outside with his grandson who was feeling an incredible amount better and they were talking about football. There were two serious-looking men in dark suits that accompanied her. He didn't know what this was about, but Madge was sure a kind soul. She'd helped

him clean his office out and had even made a "retirement" cake for him although everyone at work knew he'd been fired.

Madge pulled a wallet out of her purse that had a badge on it and said that she was an FBI agent. One of the fellows with her was also and the other guy was with the Justice Department. It turns out that there was a criminal investigation into insider trading and fraud concerning the "New York crowd". Bob went to the garage and gave them the file he'd prepared about improper dealings. Madge let Bob's grandson touch her badge, but she told him was against the rules for him to touch her gun.

It was about three weeks later when Philbeck and his crowd made the front page of the newspaper. Bob noticed the fingerprint ink on Philbeck's hands. He hoped it would never come off. That's the way of it; dirty money leaves something on the hands that won't wash away.

Back at the house, Beth was completely finished and the moving truck was pulling away. She knew that Alice had gone to the ocean. Alice said earlier that she needs to say bye to Francis. Beth thought to herself, "This must be the end of the imaginary friend".

When she got to the dune that overlooked the beach and the outcropping of rocks she froze. For at first she couldn't see Alice, but she did see a little girl. Almost Alice's age and size the girl had mid length hair that seemed to drape down covering most of her face. The little girl had long thin arms and no shoes on. She was seated on a rock and seemed to be painting something that was in her left hand.

Beth couldn't make out what it was that the girl was painting, but she seemed to be concentrating. As Beth went a few more steps she could see Alice playing on the sand next to the mysterious little girl. It looked like the little girl was handing something to Alice and then Alice would toss it out into the water. When she got close to them she could see what Francis was painting. It was a little fish. The fish was about the size of the palm of a child's hand. They were tropical fish that are brightly colored. The girl named Francis was holding one in her left hand and then with the first finger of her right hand she was painting them with the brightest colors you can imagine without any source of paint. Then Francis would hand them to Alice and she would toss them out in the water. They didn't make a splash. They simply disappeared.

Alice looked up as Beth got close, "Hi Mommy. Francis is coloring fishes and I am helping". Francis never looked up from her work so Beth couldn't get a clear view of her face.

"Hello Francis", said Beth but the little girl didn't respond. She only slowed her work enough to acknowledge that someone had spoken.

"Mom, Francis doesn't like talking to grown-ups"

"Really honey, why doesn't Francis like talking to grown-ups?"

"Because they won't listen to her and so they keep hurting each other. When grown-ups hurt each other it hurts Francis a lot and it makes her cry. That is why she doesn't like talking to grown-ups anymore. She says she's already told them what they need to know in a lot of different ways, but they won't listen".

"What's Francis doing?"

"She's coloring fishes, Mommy. Francis likes to do that and every time she colors one a different way then there is a whole new kind of fish".

"Those look like fishes that come from the warm waters of the Caribbean. What's Francis doing with them here?" Beth asked.

Alice got up and went over to Francis. She leaned her head over, close to Francis and Francis whispered something to her. "Mommy, Francis said that you are right, these are fishes from the Caribbean. But in the time that she is creating them this is the Caribbean. That's why the fishes don't make a splash when I throw them in the water. It's because they are going back to the time when Francis created them."

Then Francis got off the rock and went to the water where she put her open hand into the water. A little plain gray-colored fish swam into her hand.

"Why aren't the fishes afraid of Francis?" asked Beth.

"Mommy, Francis said that animals are not afraid of God. Only grown-ups are afraid of God."

Alice went back to Francis who had set the fish back into the water and she whispered something else to Alice. "Mommy, I know we have to go now."

"Does Francis need us to do anything for her? Does she need us to take her home?" asked Beth.

"Mommy, the Earth is Francis's home. All she needs for us to do is to Love each other. That's what Francis needs".

It was then that Francis got up off the rock and walked over to Beth. She reached out and took Beth's left hand and the instant she touched her there was a wonderful tingling feeling that went completely through Beth. It was a feeling of peace and of Love. It was if everything was where it's supposed to be. The little girl put something into Beth's hand and then closed it. Then, Francis looked up into Beth' eyes.

Beth was overcome with the beauty of Francis's eyes. Big, beautifully soft, almost glowing blue eyes. Eyes that seemed to hold Beth close to her. They stared at each other for a long time. Then Francis turned back to the water and reaching down she picked up another fish to color.

"Mommy, Francis said that God will give people what they need if we will give to God what God needs. Francis said that what's inside your hand is what you need in your heart."

With that, Alice turned back and gave Francis a hug from behind. Then she turned and taking her Mother by the hand led her back to the house. Looking up at her she said, "Mommy, don't worry about seeing Francis again. She is always close. She is all around us and she is inside of us."

As they walked back to the house the moving van was pulling away. It was taking them to a new house. The house that would be their home forever. Beth saw another of the sea shells as she opened her hand.

Beth saw a splash of color and a single word that only she could see in the colors. The word was "Baby". It was a baby, a baby that came nine months from this day. A perfectly healthy baby. A beautiful soft warm baby. A little boy baby.

A baby boy with the most beautiful large, deep glowing blue eyes you have ever seen. But Beth, she had seen those same eyes once before. She

had seen them on a seashore with a little girl that colored fishes and gave away seashells that were miracles. They named their dear baby, Bill Jr.

All of this,

When God's Name was Francis.

Written for our beloved daughter and her children in Heaven.

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