Angel View

“So, what’s shaken’ down there?” Gabe asked Raphael, a seasoned guardian of an American church.

“Looks like they’ve gathered to worship,” Raphael said as he squinted down at the entrance.

“What’s that lady carrying in? Looks like some kind of package,” Gabe asked

“Probably a casserole,” came the matter-of-fact response.

“A casserole?”

“Must be having a special ‘something-or-other’ after worship.”

Gabe tilted his head, confused. “So, this is what they call worship?” Gabe had been assigned to the churches in Asia, where they worship secretively. So, it was a little startling to see that big cross and that sign out there in front of God and everybody.

“No pastors getting whisked away to sketchy tribunals? No believers getting disappeared?” He paused, taking in the half-empty parking lot. “So, you mean to tell me they’re free to worship? No restrictions? Crowd seems a little on the lighter side.”

“Well, they have more options over here. They can stream, listen to other pastors, or get the highlights on TikTok. Plus, YouTube is full of pastors that are, according to them, more viral. I think they’re just used to worship. They’re comfortable with it all, and they just want to come whenever it fits into their plan.”

“Really?”

“I’m not kidding. I’ve been watching over this church for

years. Lots of churches in North America are like this. It’s more of a social thing.”

Their conversation was interrupted by raised voices from the church steps. “Hey, look over there! That guy looks pretty upset.”

Raphael sighed. “I expected this. It’s been boiling for quite some time now.”

“What’s been boiling?”

“This feud. It started on X. Those two guys have been egging each other on for weeks. They’re all in a fuss over the church finances.”

Gabe’s eyes widened. “That church has money?”

“Of course. This is America, the richest nation in the world. The church even pays its leaders.”

“Wow!”

But it’s deeper than that. This church is filled with people who are all focused on all the MAGA controversies, still arguing about Covid, where it came from, lots of other stuff too, Epstein files, whatever…”

As they watched the congregation settle into their cushioned chairs, Gabe grew restless. “I can’t wait to see what worship is like. When does it start?”

“It already has.”

Gabe observed the scene below with growing bewilderment. “That’s worship? Everyone’s watching. Nobody’s doing anything!”

“They’re tired. They’re a very busy group: travel ball, fellowships, their jobs, their hobbies and Netflix rolled out three new limited series. It’s a lot,” Raphael explained with

practiced patience.

“Are they just going to sit there?”

“No, they’ll stand a time or two. With those padded chairs, I can’t say I’d blame them for sitting.”

The singing began, and Gabe listened intently. “Who’s the guy with the mic?”

“That’s the band leader. He leads them in a kind of group karaoke. They follow along on the screens.”

Gabe squinted down at the stage. “Nice wings on his tattoo, though. Quite impressive artwork.”

The service continued, and when someone came to the microphone, Gabe leaned forward expectantly. “Finally, they’re praying!”

“Enjoy it while it lasts, they don’t really pray much. Hardly ever in private… Prayer closets are rare and prayer meetings are filled with lots of medical jargon. This is the extent of being ‘prayed up’ for most of them”

As the service wound down, Gabe looked at the empty tank behind the stage. “I guess that’s the baptistry.”

“Right. It broke a couple of years ago. Something with the plumbing went haywire but they don’t really miss it anyway.”

Raphael studied his companion’s troubled face and asked, “What do you think happened to them?”

“Kind of a Laodicea situation?” Gabe observed.”

“Right. No passion. No change. Just check the box and get back home before the game.”

“If only they could have seen what we saw in the first few centuries of the church.”

“Or even the Christians across the ocean who face persecution right now .”

As the service concluded and people began filtering out, chatting casually about weekend plans and rating the sermon, Raphael yawned and said, “Gabe, I miss the days when things were cookin’ in America and I’m not talking casseroles.”

“Sorry, bud. You’ve got a tough assignment,” Gabe said empathetically. “Well, I’d better head to our division staff meeting. We just got prayed into some new assignments from believers in Nepal, Bangkok, Tehran, and Bogota.”

“You always get to go to where the action is. I’m stuck with Americans impressing each other on Instagram.”

“Hang in there, Raphy. Things could turn on a dime here. All it takes is a remnant.” Gabe said as he patted Raphael on the back.

“I hope so. It’s been a while,” Raphael said to himself gravely as he watched Gabe disappeared into the evening sky.