

THE MIRACLE OF EDITH STEIN

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. AUSCHWITZ TRAIN YARD - DAY

A cattle car, one of many. The door opens on EDITH STEIN (50s). She wears a brown nun's habit -- and a yellow Star of David. Behind her, scores of female PRISONERS wait.

With dogs and rifles, S.S. GUARDS coax the prisoners out. Clinging to her sister ROSA (50s), Edith searches the crowds for someone.

She's still searching as the guards herd the prisoners toward the camp gates. SUPER: "AUSCHWITZ, 1942."

INT. TRIBUNAL BUILDING - CHAMBER - DAY

Opulent, regal. SUPER: "BOSTON, 1992." DOCTOR RACHEL KLEIN (30s), seated at the table, reads off a sheet:

RACHEL

"I, Rachel Klein, swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth regarding all that I will be asked about concerning the presumed miracle" -- Presumed?

Across from her, the tribunal panel: A MONSIGNOR (50s) who could've been her father; a PRIEST (30s) who could've been a heck of a prosecutor; and a DOCTOR (70s) who could've been the toughest prof in med school.

RACHEL

Whatever.
(reads)
"presumed miracle attributed to the intercession of Edith Stein, so help me God."

She tosses the sheet back to the Monsignor.

TRIBUNAL MONSIGNOR

Thank you, Doctor. Have you ever heard of Edith Stein, also known as Blessed Teresa Benedicta à Cruce?

RACHEL

I've heard of Edith Stein.

TRIBUNAL MONSIGNOR

And how did you come to be involved in the case of the little girl?

INT. BOSTON HOSPITAL - PEDIATRIC I.C.U. - DAY

TERESA BENEDICTA SALEM (2) writhes on a gurney. NURSES rush her through the doors and down the aisle.

They pass the bed of DAVID (2), half-dead and looking it. Beside him, Rachel breaks the bad news to David's MOTHER:

RACHEL

If we'd caught this before David was two months old, he'd have a much better chance.

DAVID'S MOTHER

He's two years old.

Gurgles from the bed. David tosses and turns in fitful sleep. His belly's swollen like a famine victim's.

RACHEL

We can refer him for a liver transplant. I can have the team ready to move, soon as one becomes available -- anywhere in the country.

DAVID'S MOTHER

What if one doesn't become available?

The matronly HEAD NURSE watches. Come on, Doc, give the poor woman something. Nothing. Mom's losing it.

DAVID'S MOTHER

How could this happen?

Rachel looks to the Head Nurse to bail her out.

RACHEL

There's these ducts that are supposed to drain bile from the liver to the small intestine.

DAVID'S MOTHER

No -- I mean why didn't anyone catch this? Why did he get this in the first place? You're so fucking smart, can you tell me that?

The Head Nurse steps in, embraces the hysterical mother, calms her down as best she can. Rachel backs toward the door, but she's ambushed by DR. JAKE JOSEPHS (30s).

JAKE

Not so fast.

He drags her toward the new patient, hands her the charts.

RACHEL

Jake, I've been here almost two days.

JAKE

This kid's dying to meet you.
(re: patient)
Teresa Benedicta Salem. Mom calls her "Benny."

On the gurney, Benny lies half-unconscious. Her abdomen's as distended as David's.

JAKE

Been throwing up for twenty-four hours. First I thought meningitis, but the CSF showed her transaminases are through the roof.

RACHEL

Done a blood screen?

JAKE

Still waiting on the results. But you're the expert.

Rachel studies the child. Jake and the Nurses watch, silent, waiting for some wisdom from their oracle.

In rushes MARIAM SALEM (30s), Mideast complexion but 100% Soccer Mom, with four more CHILDREN in tow. A nurse rushes to intercept; Mom sends the kids out with her.

JAKE

Mrs. Salem?

Mariam nods, too distraught for words.

JAKE

This is Doctor Klein, our pediatric gastroenterologist.

Rachel doesn't take her eyes off Benny, scanning the toddler like she's got x-ray vision.

RACHEL

Anybody sick at home?

MARIAM

Flu's going through the house. Five kids home sick, my husband's out of town.

RACHEL

What's everyone taking?

MARIAM
Tylenol. But Benny didn't get any.

RACHEL
What kind of Tylenol?

MARIAM
I don't know. Tylenol.

RACHEL
What color's the bottle?

MARIAM
Not a bottle. Doctor gave us
samples, in those little wrappers.

At this, Rachel looks up. Mariam figures it out, gasps.

MARIAM
She couldn't have.

A nurse rushes in, hands Jake the test results. Rachel
snatches them from Jake. Flips through, stops, nods.

RACHEL
Wanna bet?
(to Jake)
Start lasix and aldactone. Keep
her blood sugar up. And get her on
mucomyst.

JAKE
Isn't it too late for mucomyst?

RACHEL
Probably.

MARIAM
"Too late?"

RACHEL
Your daughter has sixteen times
toxic levels of acetaminophen --
the active ingredient in Tylenol.

This hits Mom hard. Takes her a moment to recover.

MARIAM
So what do we do?

RACHEL
That's the good news. Keep her
hydrated, and in forty-eight hours
she'll pee it all out.

MARIAM
Two days in the hospital?

RACHEL
It could be worse.

Across the unit, David's mother keeps vigil. Mariam nods, steps aside as nurses scurry about. Rachel grabs Jake, heads for the doors.

RACHEL
Take me home.

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rachel picks at takeout Chinese, sips her beer. Jake ponders a guest list to rival Charles & Diana's.

JAKE
This wedding is getting out of hand. Israel? Australia? I think my mother's making up relatives.

RACHEL
I ought to quit practice. Go into research.

JAKE
Are you breaking up with me?

RACHEL
I'm serious. I'm tired of watching kids die.

JAKE
You don't just watch. And they don't all die.

RACHEL
Why? Why do some kids live and some die, no matter what we do?

JAKE
"Why" is not our problem.

RACHEL
Then what do you tell the parents?

He takes her hand, role-playing the compassionate doctor:

JAKE
"We're going to do everything we can to save your child."

She snatches back her hand, grabs her beer.

RACHEL
Asshole.

EXT. BRESLAU CEMETERY - DAY

A handful of mourners. An open grave. On the headstone, the Star of David and SIEGFRIED STEIN. SUPER: "BRESLAU, GERMANY, 1893."

Seven CHILDREN weep for their father, as does their mother, AUGUSTE STEIN (44). But little EDITH (2) doesn't cry. She just observes from Mama's arms.

The RABBI closes the book. Each child tosses a handful of dirt into the grave. Auguste puts Edith down, scoops some dirt.

The toddler looks at the grave, searching for something. Then she turns and runs. Auguste chases after her.

AUGUSTE
Edith! Edith!

INT. BOSTON HOSPITAL - PEDIATRIC I.C.U. - NIGHT

Benedicta thrashes on the gurney while Jake and the nurses scramble around her. No sooner do they insert IV tubes than the screaming child rips them out of her arms.

Nurses strap down Benedicta's wrists and ankles, then smother her in breathing apparatus.

MINUTES LATER

Rachel rushes in. Jake pulls her aside.

JAKE
Stopped breathing. Put her on
Pavulon to get the tube down.

RACHEL
Then she's stable.

JAKE
If you call being in a coma
"stable."

Just outside the scrum, Rachel notices FATHER JOHN SALEM (40s), in priestly black, comforting a tearful Mariam.

RACHEL
(re: priest)
It's not that bad yet.

Jake drags Rachel over to the couple for introductions:

JAKE
Doctor Klein, this is Father John
Salem -- Benny's dad.

Huh? A bemused Rachel still manages to shake hands.

FR. JOHN
I know: The father and a father.

RACHEL
Rachel Klein. I'm the gastro-
enterologist.

FR. JOHN
The wife of Jacob.

Rachel and Jake look to each other, even more confused.

RACHEL
Actually, we're just engaged.
(to Jake)
Did you tell him?

FR. JOHN
From Genesis. Rachel was the
favorite wife of Jacob.

What the heck do you say to that?

JAKE
And someday, she'll be my favorite
wife. But enough about us.

Rachel turns to the child, drugged and trapped in a
spiderweb of tubes.

RACHEL
Good news is, ninety-five percent
of children with acetaminophen
poisoning make a full recovery.

FR. JOHN
And the other five percent?

RACHEL
Liver failure causes the kidneys to
fail, or the lungs -- we call it
multisystem organ failure: three
or more systems.

FR. JOHN
Her liver's already failed. She
can't breathe on her own. That's
two strikes.

Father John looks across the unit. Rachel looks as well --
at David. From his bedside, David's helpless mother looks
back, empathizing with the new arrival.

JAKE
We're going to do everything we can
for your child.

Fr. John turns to his wife, the mother of his children.

FR. JOHN
Take the kids home.
(to the doctors)
I'll be back.

The troubled parents depart.

RACHEL
You know that bit about Genesis?

JAKE
Been a long time since Hebrew
School.
(re: Benedicta)
Should be O.K. for the night.

Rachel looks over the sleeping child. A pink rash has developed, just above Benedicta's diaper.

RACHEL
What's that rash?

LATER THAT NIGHT

Nurses scurry about the child. Rachel and Jake confer with Fr. John -- away from the bed, like Benny might hear them.

RACHEL
Septic shock. It means her kidneys
are failing.

FR. JOHN
Strike Three.

Awkward silence.

RACHEL
We can refer her for a liver
transplant.

JAKE
First we're gonna call an expert.

Rachel looks to Jake: We are?

JAKE
(to Fr. John)
The Regional Poison Center. Worth
a call.

FR. JOHN
I'll hold down the fort.

Father John trudges back to his chair beside Benny. He bows his head, prays over his daughter. Rachel pulls Jake aside.

RACHEL
I'm the expert. What's some guy going to tell you over the phone?

JAKE
We are out of ideas. Let's get a second opinion.

RACHEL
But you already have mine.

INT. BOSTON HOSPITAL - KELLY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

DR. LIAM KELLY (50s) refers to a medical journal as he lectures at the speakerphone on his desk:

KELLY
The literature is clear: Your patient is on the predicted path to recovery.

INT. BOSTON HOSPITAL - JAKE'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Rachel stands over the speakerphone. Seated at his desk, Jake scores the debate.

RACHEL
Did it predict her kidneys and lungs would fail? You couldn't survive that much Tylenol.

INTERCUT telephone conversation.

KELLY
I do not have the liver of a two-year-old. She simply cannot metabolize that much acetaminophen.

RACHEL
Obviously she can, since that's what killing her.

KELLY
I am looking at her numbers.

RACHEL
I'm looking at the patient. She needs a liver transplant.

KELLY

At least wait the forty-eight hours.

RACHEL

She might not have that long.

KELLY

Doctor Josephs, this is your patient.

Jake squirms in his chair.

JAKE

We just wait and she'll get better?

KELLY

Essentially.

JAKE

We've been waiting.

(weighs the decision)

Thank you, Dr. Kelly.

KELLY

In two days, you will remove her from the transplant list and look like a fool.

JAKE

Hope so.

Jake hangs up, gets up.

RACHEL

You tell the parents.

INT. BOSTON HOSPITAL - PEDIATRIC I.C.U. - NIGHT

Jake and Rachel confer with Father John.

JAKE

A liver becomes available, anywhere in the country, two doctors from the transplant team will go get it; the other two will prep Benny.

Benedicta tosses and turns, like she's in a bad dream. Father John's calm. Serene, even.

RACHEL

But in the meantime --

FR. JOHN

You'll do everything you can for our child.

Father John stares across the room. Rachel and Jake follow his gaze...

to David's bed. It's empty. Like he was never there. Rachel fights back the tears.

FR. JOHN

I gotta make some calls.

Rachel and Jake watch the priest leave. Jake escorts Rachel from the unit. She can't take her eyes off that empty bed.

LATER THAT NIGHT

The unit's deserted. Except for Benedicta and her father, seated beside the bed and bowed in prayer. Rachel peers through the window wall, then enters, approaches the pair.

RACHEL

How's she doing?

FR. JOHN

You tell me.

RACHEL

We're gonna come back in a few minutes, run some more tests.

Rachel notices something pinned to Benedicta's pillow. A medallion -- the Star of David.

RACHEL

Is she Jewish?

Father John chuckles, shakes his head. He unpins the medallion, shows it to Rachel.

FR. JOHN

This is for Edith Stein. A nun who died at Auschwitz.

Inside the Star, a Christian cross.

FR. JOHN

When she became a nun, she took the name "Teresa Benedicta à Cruce": Blessed Teresa of the Cross. That's how Benny got her name.

RACHEL

So she was Jewish? I mean, she didn't go to Auschwitz because she was Catholic.

FR. JOHN

Long story.

He takes back the medallion, pins it back on the pillow. Not knowing what else to say, Rachel leaves. Father John gets down on his knees.

LATER

Alone in the dark, Father John kneels beside Benedicta's bed. Head bowed in prayer, he lays hands on his daughter.

Another pair of hands rest on the child.

They belong to Edith Stein herself, looking just as she did at Auschwitz. The long-dead nun kneels across from Fr. John, head likewise bowed in prayer.

Outside the doors, Rachel peers in through the windows. Is someone else in there?

She bursts in -- but it's just Fr. John and Benedicta in the shadows.

Nurses follow Rachel in. Lights come on. Absorbed in prayer, Father John blinks, gets to his feet.

He stretches, then shuffles out, nodding to Rachel. She scans the room, but whatever she saw left with the shadows.

INT. BOSTON HOSPITAL - JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rachel rushes in, results trembling in her hands.

JAKE

We lost her?

She shakes her head, then hands him the results.

RACHEL

First I thought we screwed up the test. But we did it again this morning, and the numbers are even better.

He has to laugh.

JAKE

Don't know how you did it, Doctor.

RACHEL

I didn't do anything. Nobody could do anything.

(re: results)

And nobody could do that.

JAKE

Fine. I'll take the credit.