

WORDS WITH THE ANGEL

A Play in One Scene

Written by  
Ethan Warren

617.721.0672  
ewarren17@gmail.com

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

BEN (mid 20s): A slight, childish man with a disturbed gleam in his eye

WOODROW (late 30s): A grizzled Civil War vet with a joyful glint in his eye

## SETTING

The kitchen of a modest home in the Texas panhandle, the 1870s.

*(Ben sits in a rocking chair, polishing his shotgun. A fire crackles in the woodstove, lighting the room with a dancing glow. Ben speaks as though to an imaginary friend, listening during the ellipses.)*

BEN

So I said, you take one more step, son, and I can't be liable for what I have to do...Well it sounded better at the time.

*(He listens, laughs, shakes his head, and polishes his gun. He stops polishing and looks up.)*

BEN

How much of what I say do you report to him?...You know, *him*. The man in the fancy chair...No, I know, I know. But still, what do you tell him? Am I getting in? You know, after? Do I get in?...Right. Fine. I understand.

*(He polishes the gun for a moment. There's a knock at the door. Ben looks up in alarm.)*

BEN

No, I know. Be quiet.

*(He stands, holding his gun tentatively at his side. The knock comes again.)*

BEN

Be quiet, I said!

WOODROW (offstage)

Benjamin? Benny? I hear you in there.

BEN

Shh! I know him!

*(He slides the gun under the chair, obscuring it behind a blanket.)*

BEN

Woodrow? That you? It can't be, right?

*(The door opens and Woodrow enters.)*

BEN

It's not. You can't be here.

WOODROW

I am, Benny. I'm here, in the flesh'n the blood.

BEN

You're dead.

WOODROW

I ain't.

*(Ben touches Woodrow's arm.)*

BEN

You're not. But we just thought - when you never came back. We just thought -

WOODROW

Just thought I'd took one between the eyes?

BEN

I suppose.

*(They stare at each other for a moment.)*

WOODROW

So who's you talkin' to? You get yourself hitched?

BEN

*(anxious)*

Nobody. I wasn't talking to anyone.

WOODROW

I heard you talkin'.

*(He takes a seat at the table. Ben hovers nervously.)*

BEN

I was writing a letter. I say them out loud when I write them.

WOODROW

I heard you tellin' someone to hush.

BEN

You didn't.

WOODROW

Fair. So, Ma? Pop? They...

BEN

*(nodding)*

A few years ago. I came home after. I was riding with the Texas Rangers, but I thought I'd come home and keep the place up.

WOODROW

Hot damn, you's a Ranger?

BEN

We put a gravestone for you out back and all! You been gone ten years, Woodrow!

WOODROW

That's the truth.

BEN

Where you been? The war's done six years. What else we supposed to think except that you up and died?

WOODROW

And I'll tell you all about it. But how about a little coffin varnish to get the words flowing?

BEN

I don't have any liquor.

WOODROW

T'were an offer, not a request.

*(He produces a flask and Ben gets a mug. Woodrow pours some whiskey into it, and pushes it at Ben, then takes a sip from the flask. Ben hesitates, then picks up the mug and sits back in his rocker.)*

WOODROW

Awright, so spring of sixty-five, I'm travelin' up in the east.

BEN

Now hold on, I want to hear about the battles.

WOODROW

Talkin' about all that don't interest me much.

BEN

Come on. Where were you? Fredericksburg? Were you at Fredericksburg?

WOODROW

In sixty-five, I was travelin', up in the east. Keepin' my head down, didn't want too many folks knowin' which side of the line, I'd been on. And I was in this pub one night, and I met this woman. Older woman. Negro lady. Name's Bee-trice. She gets to tellin' me about this place she lived. Called it a utopia.

BEN

What's that?

WOODROW

Just a place where everything's perfect. A place where nothin' could ever go wrong and everyone's as happy as they could be as long as they live.

BEN

Sounds nice.

WOODROW

Was nice.

BEN

You went there?

WOODROW

You bet your ass I went! The way she talked about it, you couldn't'a kept me away.

BEN

So what's it like in a - what'd you call it?

WOODROW

A utopia. It's nice there. Real nice. Quiet, out in the forest. Small cabins, not much in the way of worldly goods and all. We farmed.

BEN

Coulda farmed on your own.

WOODROW

Weren't just the farmin'. There's certain elements of the lifestyle that I found...engaging.

*(Ben sips his whiskey, raising his eyebrows  
to encourage Woodrow to go on.)*

WOODROW

Well, suppose we felt someone could use a bit of...improvement. We'd all get together, we'd sit the fella down, and we'd all talk about what it was he could be doin' better.

BEN

Sounds like Hell on Earth.

*(Woodrow chuckles.)*

BEN

What's the joke?

WOODROW

Nothin'. A humorous serendip'ity. But I never said that's a pleasant way of spendin' an afternoon. But man alive, did it do a world of good.

BEN

Still don't see why a fella like you would end up there.

WOODROW

Anyhow, there's another idea that makes a utopia a mighty attractive proposition. Ever hear the words *free love*?

BEN

Naw.

WOODROW

Means you can go roll in the hay with anyone you please. No wives'n husbands, no sweethearts. Just a roll in the hay anytime you want, day or night.

BEN

I dad!

WOODROW

It's the truth.

BEN

There's a place in the world where you could dip your wick with any woman you laid eyes on?

WOODROW

Long's she said yes. And they always said yes.

BEN

Seems like that could lead to a lotta little ones.

WOODROW

Only ones who procreated were the ones matched by the elders.

BEN

*(thinking he misheard)*

What's that?

WOODROW

Council's elders got to decide who could and couldn't squeeze out a junior.

BEN

But you said -

WOODROW

A man mostly went with the women who'd stopped their bleedin'. Kept numbers low.

BEN

But no wife? No companionship?

WOODROW

Companionship's overrated. Seems you'd know.

BEN

But the negro lady -

WOODROW

No relationships, Benny. That's the A number-one rule.

*(He takes a long slug of whiskey.)*

WOODROW (CONT'D)

Reckon I'll step outside 'n water the flowers. Don't go noplace.

*(Woodrow steps out.)*

BEN

*(quietly)*

He's a good man, my brother....Shh! He's right outside...Sure, I looked up to him. Quite a bit. He was the big man. I was just happy to be around him...Well, then he was gone. And I had to figure out how to just be me. And then I met you....What'ya gotta say a thing like that for? He's a good man....He *is* a good man!...You can't talk about him like that. I won't allow it. That's where I draw the line...You know, you haven't told me anything about it in ages. What do I gotta do?...I don't like tests.

*(Woodrow steps back in, adjusting his pants, but Ben doesn't see him.)*

BEN

*(agitated)*

Then what's it all about? What're you talking to me about all the time?

WOODROW

Benny?

*(Ben looks up in alarm. Woodrow walks over slowly.)*

WOODROW

Who you talkin' to, Benny? What's goin' on in here?

BEN

It's nothing. You're joking, right? Is this a joke on me?

WOODROW

I heard you, Benny. And before. Weren't no letter.

BEN

You didn't.

WOODROW

So how come you left the rangers? I don't know many men stopped rangerin' to come home and sit about.

BEN

Ma and Pop died. I had to come home.

WOODROW

You don't have to leave off adventurin' and capturin' outlaws to come tend a patch of dirt. What happened?

BEN

I had to tend our family's land! It's a responsibility and a privilege and I had to!

WOODROW

Did ya now?

*(Ben looks away in steely silence.)*

WOODROW

Whatever happened, it can't be as bad as you think. You can trust me.

BEN

*(through clenched teeth)*

It's not bad. It's not bad at all.

*(small, quiet)*

It's beautiful.

WOODROW

Then why not tell me?

*(Ben looks at him, considering.)*

BEN

*(pained)*

I talk to an angel.

WOODROW

*(unfazed)*

See, didn't that feel good?

BEN

*(shocked)*

You don't think I'm batty?

WOODROW

For talkin' to an angel? I dad, boy, that's a privilege. What's it like?

BEN

*(nervous)*

It's fine. What else would it be?

WOODROW

Is he talkin' to you now?

BEN

He's always talking to me. Sometimes I can block him off a bit if I need rest.

WOODROW

He talks to you all the time?

*(Ben nods.)*

WOODROW

Hot damn. Never heard of anythin' quite like that.

BEN

I really thought you'd think I was a loon.

WOODROW

Benny, the work of the Lord is the damndest thing. I learned so much these past few years. D'you know Jesus Christ actually came back more than a thousand years ago? The rapture happened. It's over.

BEN

*(shocked and disturbed)*

What?

WOODROW

It's true! I got so much to tell. All this time, it's just been up to us to bring about paradise here on Earth. We wasted too much time, but we still have a chance. We could rid the whole Earth'a sin, we just need t'work together. We could have paradise on Earth, Benny! Wouldn't that just be the damndest thing?

*(laugh)*

A real Golden Age, all our own.

BEN

You don't know what you're saying.

WOODROW

It's the truth, Benny. I seen things. I felt things. It's all true. It's just up to us.

BEN

You can't say that. You can't let him hear you say that.

WOODROW

Your angel?

BEN

*(wild)*

Any of them!

*(He hunches, breathing fast.)*

WOODROW

All right! Shh, it's OK, Benny. Listen, I got a little more of that coffin varnish in my pack outside, let me fetch it and we can talk it all over. I think you'll be happy when you hear me out. It's such a thrill, learnin' the truth.

BEN

No. No no no. Hush.

WOODROW

It'll be sublime. We'll have a good talk. Brother t'brother. We'll figger it all out and tomorrow, we start work. The great work. The work'a the future.

*(He stands and goes to the door, then turns back.)*

WOODROW

Heaven, Benny. Here on Earth. Can you imagine?

*(He laughs and goes outside. Ben sits, tapping his foot.)*

BEN

No...no, no no no...I don't believe you...I won't...I can...all right...fine.

*(He reaches under the chair and takes his  
shotgun back out.)*

BEN

All right...just this once...if it's the test...I know...I hear you! I will! Stop!...Please  
stop...please stop...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know...I know.

WOODROW *(offstage)*

You best ask your angel's advice. We're gonna need help. Heaven on earth.

BEN

*(continuing, under Woodrow's dialogue)*

I know...I know...I know...I know...

WOODROW

Paradise. A heavenly kingdom in old Texas. And me an angel!

*(laugh)*

BEN

I know...I know...I know...

*(He readies his gun. The fire crackles and  
dances. Fade to black.)*