

Little South of Heaven

"Active Listening"
(Pilot)

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INT. CORRIDOR OF GENTLE REST HOSPICE.

LINDSAY HARDING, thirty, very petite, cute with wildly curly hair and glasses, walks swiftly along, talking into her cell phone. In her other hand, she holds a pager, which she holds up to read.

LINDSAY (INTO PHONE)
It's something bad
isn't it? (pauses to
listen) Then why can't
you just tell me? Are
you dying or something?
(pauses to listen)
Fine. I'll come, but
you know I hate
surprises.

LINDSAY (V.O.)
Yes, this place looks
like a hospital. But
it's not. And although
I'm wearing a staff
badge, I'm not a
doctor. If I were,
people would understand
what I do - I'd be
going around all day
like my friend Anna,
doling out pills and
checking vital signs.

LINDSAY passes a patient's room, where ANNA, a beautiful palliative care doctor (40), is preparing a syringe to inject a patient. ANNA waves the syringe at LINDSAY in greeting.

LINDSAY (V.O. CONT'D)
The patients I see are
wounded, all right, but
the pain I'm trying to
ease goes a little bit
deeper.

QUICK INSERT SHOT: LINDSAY sitting at a bar next
to a HANDSOME GUY. Loud music plays in the
background.

HANDSOME GUY
(half yelling and
bobbing his head to the
music)
So you said you work at
the hospital? You a
doctor?

LINDSAY
Not a hospital. A
hospice. I'm a
chaplain.

HANDSOME GUY
(continues bobbing
head. Pretends to see
someone on other side
of the bar and walks
toward imaginary
person.)

QUICK INSERT SHOT: LINDSAY sitting at same bar
next to a HANDSOME GUY NO. 2. Loud music plays
in the background.

HANDSOME GUY NO. 2
(half yelling and
bobbing his head to the
music)
So what do you do?

2.

LINDSAY

I work at Gentle Rest
Hospice. I'm a
chaplain.

HANDSOME GUY NO. 2

That's like a priest,
right? Man, this is
amazing, because I
really need somebody to
talk to.

(looks around
furtively)

I need to get some
things off my chest,
you know what I mean?
(pauses)

Whatever I tell you,
you can't tell the
cops, right?

QUICK INSERT SHOT: LINDSAY sitting at same bar
next to a HANDSOME GUY NO. 3. Loud music plays
in the background.

HANDSOME GUY NO. 3

(half yelling and
bobbing his head to the
music)

So what do you do?

LINDSAY

(pauses)
Umm. I work in a
factory that
manufactures robotic
donkeys. I operate a...
cellophane wrapping
machine.

HANDSOME GUY NO. 3
(scoots closer)
What kind of
cellophane? Are we
talking biofilm or
polycarbonate or what?

Lindsay grimaces toward camera.

CUT TO INT. -- HOSPICE ROOM - NIGHT

LINDSAY is seen speaking to an ELDERLY MAN (80+) who is lying in a hospital bed.

LINDSAY (V.O.)
But the truth is, I
don't make robotic
donkeys.

The ELDERLY MAN is seen talking to LINDSAY. He pauses, smiles at her, and takes her hand. She smiles back and squeezes his hand.

LINDSAY (V.O. CONT)
I hold hands.

CUT TO INT. - HOSPICE ROOM - EARLY MORNING

LINDSAY is seen wearing a surgical mask speaking to a BALD LAUGHING TEENAGER (15). THE GIRL'S MOTHER sits next to LINDSAY. The TEENAGER holds up an iPad to show them something and smiles. THE GIRL'S MOTHER smiles sadly and squeezes LINDSAY'S hand.

LINDSAY (V.O. CONT)
All kinds of hands.

CUT TO INT. - OFFICE - DAY

LINDSAY is typing on her computer, surrounded by files.

4.

LINDSAY (V.0. CONT)
I fill out paperwork.
So much paperwork.

CUT TO INT. -- HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY
LINDSAY is at the bedside of a MIDDLE AGED WOMAN
(60) who is sitting up in bed, talking.

LINDSAY (V.0. CONT)
And I listen.

MIDDLE AGED WOMAN
So then when I was
twelve, we got another
cat. We named that one
Spaghetti-O. He used to
pee on anything
plastic. Barbies...
Tupperware... soda
bottles...

LINDSAY nods encouragingly.

MIDDLE AGED WOMAN
I had this little
Mickey Mouse alarm
clock. Peed on that,
too. Anything plastic.

CUT BACK TO INT. CORRIDOR OF GENTLE REST HOSPICE
LINDSAY continues speaking into cell phone.

LINDSAY
Look, I've got to go.
(Examines pager again)
Some kind of Holy Ghost
emergency, apparently.

(Over shoulder to camera)
Gentle Rest is one of central North Carolina's most progressive medical facilities, so don't ask me why we still use pagers. Maybe in case 1992 has an emergency and needs to get in touch with the future.

HOSPICE ROOM - DAY

Glass and screens from window panes have been removed and leaned against the wall. Sun shines intensely through the open windows.

MRS. PEECHUM (70) lies in the hospital bed with a breathing tube under her nose. Eyes closed, breathing heavily.

LUTHER PEECHUM (40) balding and scrawny, and his WIFE (40) looking prim in an ankle-length denim skirt and very long braided hair, stand next to the bed.

In the far corner, a PRETTY NURSE (35) hugs a clipboard tightly to her chest.

The family and the nurse stare at each other. The NURSE unclips her pager from her waistband and sighs impatiently.

KNOCK, KNOCK on the door of the room.

LUTHER
Come in.

6.

LINDSAY peeks her head around the door. No one says anything. She enters, catching her white coat on the door handle and stumbling.

LINDSAY
Oh, hello. I'm
Lindsay...uh... Lindsay
Harding. I'm one of the
chaplains here.

LINDSAY extends her hand to LUTHER, who reluctantly shakes it.

LUTHER
Luther Peechum.

He indicates the younger woman.

LUTHER (CONT'D)
This is my wife.

Gestures to the bed.

LUTHER (CONT'D)
That there is Mama.

Mrs. Peechum opens her eyes slowly.

MRS. PEECHUM
(wheezing heavily)
Welcome, Reverend.

LINDSAY notices a mosquito on her own arm and slaps it.

LUTHER'S WIFE
It's best to just leave
'em be. Killing 'em
only makes the bite
itch worse.

LINDSAY
(cheerfully)
I suppose you're right,
but I never could stand
by and watch while a
mosquito sinks his
teeth into me.

LUTHER'S WIFE
They ain't teeth.
That's a proboscis. And
it ain't a him. Only
the females suck blood.

They all stare at Lindsay, while she awkwardly
scratches at the back of her wrist.

LINDSAY
(slightly less
cheerfully)
So, what's going on
here?

NURSE and LUTHER'S WIFE answer
simultaneously

NURSE
Congestive heart
failure.

LUTHER'S WIFE
Atheism.

LINDSAY
I heard there was a
little misunderstanding
about the window
screens?

LUTHER

(Looking pointedly at the nurse)
No misunderstanding.
Windows are open so the Holy Spirit can enter to heal Mama. The doctors and nurses reckon that jabbing her with needles and stuffing her with pills is going to heal her better than the Lord can.

LUTHER'S WIFE

(Almost crying)
They've got no faith.
That's why she keeps getting worse.

NURSE

She keeps getting worse because she has a serious, chronic condition. She is in hospice because she has explicitly chosen to spend her remaining time in comfort.

LINDSAY (V.O)

When I was studying to be a chaplain, we learned that a technique called Active Listening can almost always defuse a tense emotional situation like this one. It's simple, really. Just reflect back what someone is saying so they'll know you're listening.

LINDSAY

It sounds like everyone here is frustrated. I hear the Peechums saying the nurses and doctors lack faith. The doctors and nurses seem to feel that Mrs. Peechum can be made more comfortable if they are given the freedom to treat her.

LUTHER

(Nodding)
Yeah, like you said. They're Godless heathens.

LUTHER'S WIFE

(Pointing finger at NURSE)
Heathen!

NURSE

I happen to be on the bake sale committee at the New Life Baptist Fellowship. And I led our youth group's mission trip to Dollywood two years in a row so don't you start again or I'm gonna call Security.

EVERYONE starts arguing loudly.

LINDSAY

(Yells in stronger accent than usual)
Shut your mouths, y'all, 'for I start passin' out the slaps!

LINDSAY (V.O)

Now, I'm pretty sure
screaming isn't a
technique endorsed by
the Association of
Professional Chaplains.
But I'm also fairly
certain the Holy Spirit
isn't about to climb
through these windows
like some kind of
miracle-spewing cat
burglar.

LINDSAY (TO MRS. PEECHUM)

We all want to help
you. Tell me what you
need me to do.

MRS. PEECHUM

I need your prayers.

LINDSAY

Well, okay, then. That
we can do. Right?

LINDSAY gestures for everyone to join hands

MRS. PEECHUM

Why don't you lead us,
Luther, honey?

LUTHER

We pray for the Holy
Spirit to enter Mama
and make her whole
again...

LUTHER'S V.O. praying low in the background

LINDSAY (V.O)
 (Eyes closed, self-satisfied smile on her face) This is why my job is so gratifying. To be able to help families in distress and get everyone to come together to do what's best for the patient. Days like this make the overnight on-call shifts, and the low pay, and the lingering deaths, and the burnout worthwhile.

LUTHER and HIS WIFE begin to spasm and shudder. LINDSAY opens one eye. LUTHER'S eyeballs roll back into his head. The words of the prayer are no longer English.

LUTHER'S WIFE
 Lay your hands on her,
 Reverend. The power of
 the spirit is in you

LINDSAY
 (Uncertainly at first,
 but then with gusto)
 Ora pro nobis
 peccatoribus, nunc, et
 in hora mortis nostrae.
 Santa Maria!

NURSE'S STATION - AN HOUR LATER

LINDSAY and the PRETTY NURSE stand with ANNA

ANNA

I can't believe you convinced the Peechums to get with the program. Looks like they've done a total 180 with the old lady's care plan.

PRETTY NURSE

Guess they needed someone from their own religion to do all that speaking in tongues and whatnot.

LINDSAY

I have no earthly idea what religion they are. Snake handlers?

PRETTY NURSE

If you're not one of them, how did you know how to do all of that?

ANNA

(Looks at LINDSAY quizzically) All of what?

PRETTY NURSE

All the speaking in tongues mumbo jumbo and the laying on of hands.

LINDSAY

That was the Hail Mary in Latin. (Shrugs. The other women stare at her.) The Lord works in mysterious ways, and sometimes, so do I.

EXTERIOR PARKING LOT OF THE MEX-ITALI RESTAURANT
- EARLY EVENING

A tattered Italian-Mexican fusion restaurant.

LINDSAY walks toward the restaurant. Uniformed Deputy Sheriff WARREN SATTERWHITE (30s, tall, handsome, red-headed) is standing near his patrol car. WARREN notices LINDSAY.

WARREN
Lindsay Harding, is
that you?

LINDSAY
Warren Satterwhite. As
I live and breathe. I
heard you were living
down in Raleigh.

They hug.

WARREN
And I heard you'd gone
up North to marry some
Yankee in Cleveland.

LINDSAY
That didn't work out.

WARREN
Sorry to hear it.

LINDSAY
Don't mention it.
Honestly, don't.

WARREN
How long has it been?
Maybe the summer after
we graduated high
school?

LINDSAY

Don't mention that
either.

WARREN

That was a memorable
summer.

LINDSAY

(Blushing and changing
the subject) What
brings you back to this
little slice of
paradise? Had a
hankering for the
famous Mex-itali
enchiladas marinara?

WARREN

No such luck, I'm
afraid. I'm working. I
moved back up here a
couple months ago to
take a job with the
Sheriff's Department.
My dad passed on in
January, and I wanted
to be a little closer
to Mama to help out.

LINDSAY

I heard about your
father. I'm sorry I
couldn't be there for
the funeral. That was
right after all the
stuff with Tim, my
fiancé. Ex-fiancé.
Anyway, I'm sorry.
How's your mom doing?

WARREN

She took it hard, but she's hanging in there. Your dad delivered a real nice sermon at the service. We all appreciated that.

A black law enforcement vehicle pulls up.

WARREN

Well, looks like my date is here.

LINDSAY sees that the car's occupant is a burly SBI OFFICER (60), and raises her eyebrows.

WARREN

(Smiling) He's from the State Bureau of Investigation. He wanted to talk to me in person about a parolee who just got released and is moving back here. Some kind of big-time fraudster with a record a mile long. Guess he wanted to give local law enforcement a heads up.

LINDSAY

I didn't know anything big-time happened in Mount Moriah. Guess we'll all have to start locking our doors.

SBI OFFICER gets out and walks toward them.

WARREN

Well, I best get myself up to speed on Mount Moriah's answer to Al Capone. Hope to see you around.

INTERIOR - MEX-ITALI RESTAURANT

LINDSAY'S father, JONAH HARDING (50, nice-looking) sits alone at a booth. LINDSAY walks in and joins him.

JONAH

I was beginning to think you weren't coming.

LINDSAY

Sorry I'm late. Work got a little... weird this afternoon. I was surprised to get your invitation. Don't you lead Bible study on Wednesday nights?

JONAH

Vernon Young is covering for me.

LINDSAY

I didn't think you let anybody else lead Bible study. (Notices the table is set with three place settings). Is somebody joining us?

JONAH

(Takes her hand) I've got some news for you. Big news. Our lives are gonna change.

LINDSAY
Are you transitioning
to become a woman?

JONAH
What? No. Wait, why
would you think that?

LINDSAY
I don't know.
Everybody's dad's
transitioning lately.
Just tell me what's
going on, okay?

SARABELLE (OFF CAMERA)
Hi, honey.

Lindsay spins in her seat to face her mother,
SARABELLE HARDING (50, still pretty, but a bit
faded)

LINDSAY
Sarabelle! What the
hell are you doing
here? (Turns to JONAH)
You knew about this?

JONAH
Not for long. Just a
month or so. I'm sorry
I didn't tell you. But
I thought it'd be
better this way. In
person. I know you
have, um, strong
feelings when it comes
to your mother. (He
gestures to her hand,
where she is gripping a
butter knife like a
weapon)

SARABELLE

I know you're surprised, honey, but hear me out, okay? I don't want trouble. I'm turning over a new leaf.

LINDSAY

You've turned over new leaves before. The last new leaf you turned over got you 5 to 10 down in Statesville.

SARABELLE

It really is gonna be different this time. Your daddy helped get me a job in town. I'm gonna be decorating cakes down at the Food Lion. The people there are real nice. Mr. Price? He's the manager? Says he'll try me out for now, and if I do a good job, he might want to take me on permanent. He says I'm real fast.

LINDSAY

Yeah, I bet a lot of men say that about you.

JONAH

Lindsay, you be civil.

LINDSAY

Where are you living?

JONAH and SARABELLE exchange looks.

LINDSAY

Jesus, Dad, you're not
letting her stay with
you are you?

JONAH

Whatever she's done,
she's still my
lawfully-wedded wife,
and I'm obliged by my
vows to try to work
this out. And I will
not have you taking the
Lord's name in vain.

LINDSAY

Well, you might need to
excuse yourself from
the table then, because
I'm about to take the
Lord's name a couple of
places I expect it's
not used to going.

QUICK INSERT SHOT - EXT. - LINDSAY'S CHILDHOOD
HOME - DAY

Police cars are parked in front. CHILD LINDSAY
(8) is standing to one side, watching as JONAH
and SARABELLE are led away in handcuffs.

LINDSAY (V.O.)

There's something I should probably explain. For most of my childhood, my parents were the main suppliers for marijuana for the greater North Carolina Piedmont region. When they got busted, I spent six years living with my great aunt while they served out their sentences. My dad had a genuine jailhouse conversion and came out a new man. Sarabelle, on the other hand, had an extra eighteen months added onto her sentence for setting up a gambling ring inside prison.

QUICK INSERT SHOT - EXT. - RIVERBANK IN A FORESTED AREA-DAY

TEENAGE LINDSAY, SARABELLE, and fellow parishioners are on the shore in white robes, awaiting baptism. JONAH is in the water. Uniformed officers emerge from the woods and handcuff SARABELLE, leading her away.

LINDSAY (V.O. CONT)
Every time she gets out, she says she's going straight, but every time, it ends the same way. You know how in cartoons, everybody's got an angel and a devil on their shoulders giving them a choice between doing right and doing wrong?

QUICK INSERT SHOT — INT. -COLLEGE GRADUATION - DAY

LINDSAY is on stage, accepting her diploma. Uniformed officers handcuff SARABELLE and lead her out.

LINDSAY (V.O. CONT)
Well, Sarabelle doesn't have the angel. The worst part is, I think my dad really believes her when she says things are going to be different. He thinks that if he can just be patient with her and get her to come to his church, she'll magically change into a completely different person.

CUT BACK TO INT. MEX-ITALI RESTAURANT

SARABELLE
Ain't this nice? All of us together again?

LINDSAY

Again? When were we ever together like this? Do you mean two Christmases ago when Dad and I visited you in prison, and we all ate Slim Jims out of the vending machine?

SARABELLE

Your hair looks real pretty like that. I like how you got it to frizz out at the sides. Kinda like your ears are smoking.

LINDSAY

You know what? I can't do this.

Lindsay stands up and heads outside.

EXT. - PARKING LOT MEX-ITALI RESTAURANT - EARLY EVENING

WARREN is saying goodbye to the SBI OFFICER.
LINDSAY walks up as the SBI OFFICER pulls away.

LINDSAY

That was about her wasn't it?

WARREN

Oh, hi, Linds. Did you finish supper already?

LINDSAY stands in front of them with her arms crossed.

WARREN

Look, I didn't know it was your mother he wanted to see me about, okay? I would've given you a heads up. Promise.

LINDSAY

What did he say?

WARREN

Nothing much, just routine stuff.

LINDSAY

You said she was involved in something "big time." I don't understand why they let her out. Why would you want her on the loose if you know she's into something?

WARREN

I can't really talk about it.

LINDSAY

Look, what about the seal of the confessional? I'm a minister.

WARREN

I thought that was just Catholic priests.

LINDSAY

Okay, so, technically that's true, but how about this? If you don't tell me what you know about Sarabelle, I'm gonna post those pictures I have of you wearing my dress at the junior prom on Facebook.

WARREN

Let me get this straight. You, a hospice chaplain whose father is the minister of one of the biggest churches in Mount Moriah, are threatening to blackmail a sworn officer of the law?

LINDSAY

When did you become so boring?

WARREN

You haven't changed one bit. I wasn't sure what to expect, with the whole hospice thing. Anyway, I've been meaning to look you up since I got back, but I didn't know if you'd want to see me. We left things kind of strange.

LINDSAY

What were we, nineteen?
Everything was strange
back then. And of
course I'd want to see
you. After all, who
else do I know in law
enforcement who can
give me access to top
secret information
about Sarabelle?

WARREN

Nice try.

LINDSAY

Seriously, you've got
to give me something.
This is my mother we're
talking about. Nothing
she's into would
surprise me.

WARREN

Let's just say it'd
probably be good for
you and your father to
steer clear of her
until we get some
things figured out.

LINDSAY

That's going to be
tough since she's going
to be living in my
dad's house. And also,
she's working at the
Food Lion bakery. I'm
going to have to
completely overhaul my
eating habits in ways I
don't even want to
contemplate if I'm
going to avoid that
place.

WARREN

Just keep your eyes out
for anything that
doesn't seem right.
Here, take my card.
Just call me if you
want to get together.

LINDSAY

I thought you weren't
allowed to tell me
anything about
Sarabelle.

WARREN

(Flirtatiously) We
don't have to talk
about Sarabelle.

LINDSAY notices his wedding ring. Static and
voices can be heard over the patrol car's radio.

LINDSAY

Maybe we could go out
and talk about your
wife.

JONAH and SARABELLE emerge from the restaurant.

WARREN

(Sputtering) Oh, right.
My wife. We're not
really together.

JONAH

(Holding up plastic
bags) We got take out
instead. Maybe we can
go back to your place.
Your mother hasn't seen
your new house yet.

LINDSAY
(To WARRREN) Well, I
hope you work it out
with your wife.
Marriage is sacred, no
matter what. Just ask
my dad.

Static and voices on radio continue.

LINDSAY
You'd better answer
that. I expect
trouble's brewing
somewhere.