

Free at Last!

The Road to Reconciliation



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By

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Houston, TX 77065
www.sbpra.com

ISBN: 978-1-62857-858-4

Dedication

To my dear grandchildren

Timothy, Sean, Justine, Neil, Ella Marie

Chapter 1

St. Brigid's was a state-of-the-art hospital built by private enterprise and it catered mainly to well-to-do patients. Besides employing the topmost medical staff and offering the best service to paying clients, it also funded a modern research unit that attracted the best brains in the medical field.

Paul Goodison was receiving treatment in the intensive therapy unit, having been brought there in a comatose condition from Botswana by police inspector Kevin Tyler. The latter had traveled there after learning that Goodison's attacker was the same person accused of killing Paul's wife Pamela. The ensuing disaster saw the victim fighting for his life and a girlfriend and the assailant dead within days. Paul's sons, each happily married, had taken the first flight available to be near their moribund father, but had been lost at sea in an airplane accident.

The inspector was devastated. He had no clue as to his next course of action. Would he go back home, his official duty done, or should he take it upon himself to see to the patient's needs? Part of him felt that he should have caught the villain before he had time to find his prey again. Had he really done everything possible to see him behind bars? A sense of guilt overtook him, riveting his attention on what was best for the dying man rather than on his own

professional duties. A whole family lost! Couldn't he have done that little bit more to guarantee their safety? He had to act fast so that the best care might be afforded to Paul, a compatriot after all, and a man who had become almost a friend.

Throughout the past two months, Tyler had practically kept a daily vigil at the hospital. What he saw did not do much to lift his morale. The interior decorators had done their best to enliven the intensive care unit with brightly-coloured walls and pleasant looking furniture, but constantly seeing helpless patients, fitted with pipes and needles for possible attachment to machines surrounding their beds, was depressing and demoralizing. There were times when the doctors seemed resigned to losing this severely wounded man—the operations performed on him only done as a last resort, with the likelihood that he would die on the operating table.

During his frequent visits, the inspector invariably found Goodison unconscious. Looking at the sick man from behind large window panes, he repeatedly meditated about man's existence, that was often a wonderful dream of high expectations, but turning out to be a hollow one, mostly ending in hardship and untold suffering. He recalled Paul, so handsome, so successful, so loved, so happy, so rich! Even if he pulled through, what would become of him? He questioned man's folly in running after what he increasingly saw as a mirage: a high income, prestige, excellent position in society, and financial power; these were some of the situations men ran after.

In the course of those moments of introspection, he often thought of his own wife Janet, always practical and down to earth, dedicating her time to those in need. She had never

entertained ambitious designs; her sole purpose in life was to love her family and her neighbors. Other benefits were only a bonus to which she never gave much importance. She was always cheerful and positive in her attitude.

One particularly gloomy day, a frail friar brought the officer back from his reverie. The priest, who was holding a chalice with blessed hosts, nearly stumbled while passing along to give Holy Communion to the patients who had asked to receive the Lord. The accompanying nurse reached out and caught his arm, or he would have fallen near the door leading to the intensive care unit.

Taken by surprise, Tyler was startled. He did not like to be found daydreaming. To cover the embarrassment of the situation, he said, "I don't imagine you have many patients here who are able to receive Holy Communion!"

The priest stopped and straightened himself, though still relying on the nurse to keep him steady. His seventy years plus were all signed on his face, but his voice was vibrant.

"True," he said, "but wherever the Lord leads, I don't mind walking the extra mile... Do you have a relative here? It's not the first time I've seen you pensively peering through these glass panes."

"Not quite a relative, though he seems to have become one. He's a friend who has seen better times and who is now there fighting for his life, a victim of an attempted murder. The criminal is dead and the person he wounded is still here lying unconscious and struggling to survive."

"What's his name? I don't remember reading such news in the newspaper."

"Paul Goodison . . ."

"Paul Goodison! . . . Is he around fifty, tall, and handsome?"

“The name is correct, but in his present condition ‘handsome’ is the last word that comes to mind!”

“I know him. I celebrated his wedding. He wasn’t one to befriend criminals.”

“It’s a long story, Father. One day I’ll tell you about it.”

Luckily, Paul did survive. On his visit that Thursday, Tyler was told at the reception desk that Paul Goodison had been moved to the room just in front of the nurses’ bay because he was no longer in danger. They had put him there for their peace of mind and as an extra precaution where they could keep a constant eye on him. The inspector was also told that the ward doctor wished to speak to him before he visited his friend.

“Come right in,” said Dr. Brightwell at Tyler’s abrupt knock.

Tyler opened the door, walked straight to the doctor, and shook his hand “What’s the matter, sir? Don’t tell me you have bad news about Paul to give me. He has been through so much. Isn’t it time his luck turns a little bit to the brighter side?”

“That’s exactly what I wish you’d clear up for me,” said the doctor. “In his delirium, Mr. Goodison was continually calling out ‘murder’ and ‘murderer’. You see, this hospital has earned a name for all that is best. We’ve managed to attract patients who want to receive specialized care together with a comfortable stay, not least because they are prepared to pay handsomely as long as they are treated like royalty. You understand that these words suggest images of criminality that we’d rather our clients did not hear in this place. What exactly is his story? What was his involvement with murder?”

“Dr. Brightwell, be sure you couldn’t meet a more honest and upright man than Mr. Goodison. He is respected

nationally in the world of business as somebody who was able to reach heights in his career that are not scaled by just anybody. Many entrepreneurs regard him as reliable, trustworthy, and respectful of others. He has helped many to establish their own businesses and see them flourish.

“It was exactly because of his magnanimity that two former employees who were under his charge decided to get back at him,” Tyler continued. “One had been caught defrauding his employer of thousands of pounds and the other left his work after an attempt on Paul’s life of which he was never officially accused. Spitefully, it seemed, he decided to start working again at the same place, but was not accepted.

“Together, these two hatched a plan to kill their old CEO. As things turned out, Paul’s wife was killed instead. She was a beautiful, loving woman adored by her husband. We only caught one of the crooks; his accomplice fled overseas, but his thirst for revenge had not been sated. Paul, too, spent some time abroad with the excuse of doing some research, but actually to forget his great misfortune.

“In Botswana he came face to face with his wife’s murderer who once more tried to kill him. What Paul doesn’t yet know is that his two sons who were rushing to their father’s deathbed were also killed in a freak airplane accident. I don’t have the courage to tell him the truth, and if I don’t do it, I don’t know who will.

“You may rest assured that Paul is a good man and the criminal is now dead, so he will not have any more problems from him. Let me also put your mind at rest about payment of bills. I’ve taken the responsibility to bring him to the best hospital at home because I couldn’t give him any less. Paul is a very affluent and generous man. He won’t hesitate to pay whatever is due.”

The inspector affirmed these words emphatically to leave the doctor in no doubt that all expenses would be met.

Dr. Brightwell shook his head and said, "It wasn't the money that was worrying us. It was the repeated call of 'murder' that alarmed us a bit. But your explanation has changed all this. We've done all we could for him and I'm happy to say that he's now out of danger. With regard to his sons' death, you don't need to tell him yet. Let's just give it time."

They both stood up and Tyler went to Paul's room, hoping that at last he would be able to communicate with him, even with just a smile.

* * *

Paul was lying in bed with a myriad of tubes attached to his feeble body. Though the patient seemed to be asleep, the visitor sensed that he was conscious and drew his attention with, "Hi, Paul!"

When the patient turned his face, it looked more like a corpse who was actually trying to catch a glimpse of the life that had left him. His eyes were sunk deeply into their sockets. The deathly pallor of his skin, emphasized by his grey hair, gave witness to the path of death he had trodden. Tyler's heart swelled with pity for the man who had suffered so much at the hands of a vindictive murderer.

Goodison's moribund face troubled the normally tough inspector. In the police force, Tyler's word was law; he did not have to repeat an order for it to be promptly carried out. In his presence, his subalterns rose eagerly to undertake their duties. Despite all this, Tyler stood solemnly, his eyes brimming with tears, hardly able to hold back the sob that stubbornly threatened his usual composure.

Paul recognized the inspector. He had not seen him since he was in court as a witness to his wife's murder, but the incident was immediately recalled when he said, "Hi, you're here to remind me of my dear Pamela?"

Paul's words hit Tyler hard. His sense of guilt for not having caught the criminal was highlighted by that poignant allusion to Pamela. "I've just come to say hello and to see how you are today. You look much better now."

"How long have I been here? Where am I, actually?"

"You're home now. I brought you here after your accident."

"Not an accident. I can clearly remember Ramton forcefully thrusting his knife into me after I discovered his disguise. Hatred burned in his eyes."

"You don't need to fear him anymore. He's dead and gone now," Tyler assured him.

"Damn him! He ruined my life, my whole being. I haven't had a moment of happiness since he killed her."

"I know, and I'm sorry about it, but now just think of regaining your health. You've been through quite a bad patch. Don't you think you deserve a good rest? And then you can start thinking positively so that we may soon see you busying yourself again," advised Tyler.

"Where are my sons? Shouldn't Patrick and Philip be here? Are they so taken up with their work?"

Just in the nick of time, he was saved from having to answer those questions. At that very moment, a nurse came in to remind Tyler that his visiting time was up. Paul was still weak and could easily be tired. The inspector stood up to leave, promising he would see him again the following day.

The nurse stayed to arrange Paul's bedclothes and to check his drip. Paul took advantage of her presence to ask for

his sons again, saying, "Has anybody asked to see me besides the inspector? I have two sons, each a father of a toddler. Has anybody contacted them? Perhaps they don't know that I'm here."

"I've only just come in for my night duty. I haven't met any other visitor here." The nurse went straight to the doctor and informed him that Mr. Goodison had asked for his sons. Dr. Brightwell told her to just give him his medicine and tell him he would see him again in the morning.

It was not the first time the physician had to give bad news to his patients or their relatives. His love for his work coupled with an innate consideration and respect for others had always stood him well in such difficult situations. Dr. Brightwell did not easily give up on an illness and was able to build a level of confidence sufficient for his staff and those he cared for to implicitly trust him. Nevertheless, he had never had to announce to any person the near total annihilation of his family. Having practically brought Paul back to life, he wondered what kind of life it would be when his patient had not only to face living without his wife, but also without his two sons who must have been his only remaining source of pride and hope.

When Dr. Brightwell entered Paul's room, the sun was shining through the wide window that had been left ajar to let in the fresh morning breeze. It was a brilliant morning, the kind that warms up the heart to sensations of regard and goodwill towards others.

"Hello, hello, good morning. You're looking much better today. Let's check you out a little!"

With that he took hold of his stethoscope to examine his heartbeat and lungs. He then produced the gauge to measure his patient's blood pressure. "Okay, okay! Trying hard, aren't

you? This is the best result since I first saw you,” said the doctor. “You’ll soon be up and about and you’ll definitely be rid of us.”

“Doctor, I demand to see my sons. Don’t they know where I am? Aren’t they aware of what has happened to me? Have they forgotten me?”

“Maybe they got lost, you can never know,” the doctor calmly replied, keeping his circumspect eyes on his patient.

“Lost?” Paul questioned incredulously. “Are you telling me that they can’t find the place? They are both mature, intelligent boys and they don’t need anybody to tell them how to find their way.”

“Not lost in that sense. They were supposed to visit you when you were attacked, they wanted to be by your side, but we haven’t had news of them since.”

Despite his precarious physical condition and complete emptiness in his heart, Paul made that extra though feeble effort to contradict the person who had saved his life. “What do you mean ‘no news’? Is it so difficult in this day and age to find out where they are?” Paul insisted, trying to solve the enigma.

“It’s true, but the airplane they were on was lost. It seems there were no survivors.”

In a split second, Dr. Brightwell found himself struggling to keep all monitors and devices from toppling on Paul who, in a desperate move, freed himself from all the tubes that were attached to his body. The doctor pressed the alarm frantically with his right hand while with his left he tried to hold him down.

Soon a whole army of nurses entered the room. Some held Paul down while the doctor sedated him. In the meantime, others readjusted all the equipment that had

been disturbed. The window was closed, the blinds rolled down, and the patient was only allowed to rest under the vigilant eyes of the staff.

Paul must have slept for a long time, because when he woke up, his room and his bed were bathed in sunshine. The rising sun had reached his room quite early that morning, but the warmth it imparted to the floor and furnishings did not reach him. The coldness in his heart, the feeling of profound loss triggered in his mind fantasies of death, where he might find peace at last.

He noticed that many of the machines to which he had been attached had been removed, leaving only two needles piercing two veins at the back of each hand that were well bound with bandages attaching him to two drips at each side of the bed. So useless did he feel that he did not even bother to arrange the sheet that had left part of his body uncovered, nor did he care to wipe a silent tear that trickled down his cheek. He was completely and utterly unwilling to recognize any sign of life within himself. A gentle knock on the door brought him down to earth. He did not trouble to answer. It made no difference to him who it was.

* * *

The door opened slightly and a bald head crowning a round face peered in. The eyes danced merrily as the booming voice inquired, "May I?"

The unanswered question heralded the presence of a friar, not exactly in the prime of his life, probably in his late seventies, but who still seemed to relish a good laugh. His broad smile showed a set of teeth that were breached by bare

spaces at the side, possibly caused by neglected visits to the dentist for a number of years.

Father Martin was a Capuchin monk who had answered the call for a vocation when in his late twenties. He had spent his youth in the company of women, falling in and out of love as regularly as he left one job for another. He never seemed to settle down anywhere. His parents were concerned that their youngest son was unsettled and disoriented. His older brothers and sisters had gotten married and started their own families, but Martin never seemed to be able to put his life in order.

The only qualities that redeemed him were a big heart and his sense of humour. Everybody sought his company and friendship and delighted in the way he could tell one story after another. Then one day, to everybody's amazement, he announced at home that he had decided to join the Capuchin Order and become a friar.

He had been frequenting a convent without the knowledge of his close relatives and friends. Yet he did not divulge his closely kept secret until he was sure of his vocation. When he celebrated his first Holy Mass, he requested to be sent to the missions. Three years later, he was sent to Ethiopia where he spent five years until he contracted malaria. Being weak and exhausted, he was brought back to his convent to convalesce and after some time was elected Guardian of his community.

When his term was up, he asked again to be sent to the missions and this time, he was sent to Kenya where he endured much deprivation. Those years of sacrifice and denial had taken their toll on his health, but he never lost his smile, his raucous laugh, and his contagious sense of humour that attracted the old and young to him.

“Ah, ah, that’s the boy! Relaxed and comfortable while I trudge along God knows where, trying to find him!” he declared with a smirk.

“Who are you? What do you want?” Paul was abrupt in his manner. The last thing he contemplated was a monk talking to him about good tidings from heaven.

“Ooooh! So you’ve grown too big for your boots, huh? You don’t even recognize your friend when you see him.”

“No, I don’t know you and, to be sure, I don’t wish to know you, either,” Paul retorted bluntly and angrily.

“Ha, ha, you don’t remember me? Let me ask you a question. Who was the priest who celebrated at your wedding?”

Paul was stunned. He could hardly believe his eyes. When he last met Fr. Martin, he was a well-built, confident young priest, his extra weight giving him an aura of good health rather than of stoutness. The person in front of him that morning was lean and pale and Paul got the feeling that his tunic hid a body that had known hunger and sickness, all for the sake of his idiocy in believing that he loved his Lord by helping others. He could hardly recognize him as the same monk he knew some thirty years previously.

Paul turned his face away from him and shouted, “Get out!”

Fr. Martin hesitated at first. He knew Paul well enough and felt he could take the liberty of staying near him even though he had just been chucked out.

“Come on, Paul. Have you lost all recollection of me? We used to spend so much time discussing so many topics. Once, you told me that I had done you a load of good when you were at a loss about what to do with your life and had

difficulty choosing your career. Please, Paul, for old time's sake!"

Paul seemed to relent slightly, but kept silent. In his heart he was confused—vaguely glad to meet an old friend, but still desiring to leave this abhorred world. Looking at the old monk, noting in his mind the physical change and seeing him so wasted, the patient started brooding over the course he should take.

He judged that if he ever needed a shoulder to cry on, Fr. Martin's was certainly the one. Yet he did not wish him to know how he had spent the last year of his life, his debauchery, his dealing in drugs, and his alcoholism. The last thing he thought of then was God. Church and religion were not part of his life. There was no restraint to his whims; he'd felt completely in command of himself without any inhibitions.

Would the monk change his opinion of him if he knew? Would he be disappointed in him? Would he give him up as a good-for-nothing who did not know an opportunity even when it stared him in the face?

Observing indecisiveness, Fr. Martin pulled a chair from the foot of the bed to be able to see his friend better.

"My son, tell me, are you still in pain? You've got a nasty scar on your neck."

"It doesn't matter. In fact, nothing matters any more. Who cares if I'm in pain or not! I don't deserve any better."

"I do care. That's the reason I've come to see you."

"You're just being inquisitive, that's what. The world is full of selfish people, only out for gain or pleasure or to satisfy their curiosity."

"What do you mean, Paul? You're generalizing now."

"You'd better stay away from me. I have a curse, I'm doomed to misery."

“Oh no, my son, you’re not! God loves us. He has been so lavish with His gifts to us, knowing that we’re worth His immense love. If we’re worth His love, then surely that’s reason enough to be happy.”

“That’s nonsense.”

“Don’t you believe that God is love?”

“I believe that God can hate and I must be one of his most hated.”

“My son, you must be in severe pain. I understand why you’re reasoning like that.”

“God shattered my life, snatching away my beloved wife in the most tragic way. Then He came after our two boys, both young fathers; they were gone in a damned accident. I was nearly killed twice and a dear friend who was with me was killed trying to save my life. What do you think of that? That’s love, huh! That’s his punishment for me,” said Paul, and then he gave out a heart-rending groan.

“Yes, you’ve been through a very dreadful time . . .”

“Besides, all my friends have abandoned me and my career has been reduced to smithereens. What else can I expect? Is there anything else I have to endure before he picks me up at his whim to end this physical pain? No, I assure you, he won’t win this time.”

“I’m sure He is not competing with you.”

“I won’t give him that pleasure,” said Paul, turning his head to look away from the friar to indicate that he was not prepared for any more talking.

Fr. Martin realized that his one-time protégé was not disposed to listen to his entreaties. His best bet was to change the tune.

“I’ve been in Africa for so long that I lost touch with events here. I spent a few years in Ethiopia and later a few

more in Kenya. To tell you the truth, I didn't ask to come back. There's still so much to be done there that after all those years, I feel I have hardly started. "Yet my superiors thought otherwise. They said I'd been doing missionary work long enough and that I should now have a rest. I understood they thought I was getting old so I didn't complain much.

"When I came back, I tried to look up some friends to see what had become of them and renew old ties. I looked up your name on the Internet and found a newspaper report saying that you had been involved in a case of attempted murder.

"I didn't understand how you got into this and I could hardly believe it. I didn't know how and where to look for you. Botswana! How did you end up in Botswana? Were you there on business?"

Paul had guessed correctly, the priest meant to interfere in his private life, but he himself was in no mood to answer any questions. On the contrary, the friar was getting on his nerves. The patient could not stand him anymore and blandly answered, hoping he would get the message, "Yes, my business!"

"Okay, so you don't intend to tell me anything about yourself. I'll tell you about myself then."

Paul pulled his sheet over his face, making it clear he was not interested. Nevertheless, Fr. Martin started on a long monologue about his life in Ethiopia. It was as if he was speaking to himself, reflecting on certain incidents and drawing unasked for conclusions.

"I arrived in Ethiopia with the burning desire to proclaim the love of God to the poorest of the poor. I was not so much intent on preaching, but my aim was to love those people in

a practical and tangible way, in order to show them God's love in my actions. I believed my vocation was to serve Him by easing their suffering and using the resources He had given me for their well-being.

"It's true that back home I had friends who were willing to give me money, lots of it really. But these people, not only lacked financial means, but they also struggled every day to keep at bay hunger and disease. Moreover, certain superstitions contributed much to increase their suffering. They needed schools, hospitals, a home, water, clothing, and other basic necessities. Where was I to start? Building schools and hospitals was a worthwhile plan, but what was I to do when their requirements were more immediate? The money I received from home served mainly to buy food and medicine. I also embarked on a housing project where families could live safely and with dignity.

"One day, though, on returning to my convent cell, I saw a boy of around fifteen running out trying to avoid me. I saw that the door of my room was wide open and concluded that he had tried to get his hands on the money he thought I had. I shouted for him to stop, but he disappeared in a flash.

"In the evening, I was picked up by the police as the boy could not be found. I was accused of murder as the authorities thought that I had killed him and hidden his body. I was kept in prison for a week during which I was treated very badly. At the end of those seven days, the young man reappeared; he had hidden out of fear and only came out when he saw that nobody was after him. I was released, but came out looking emaciated and more like a sick man than the picture of health that I had been before. A few days later, I was diagnosed with malaria."

The priest thought he could get Paul's sympathy by describing his misadventures. Apparently, it did not occur to him that what Paul had endured was much more serious than any of his missionary mishaps; perhaps the friar could not even begin to understand that what his friend had been through had broken his will to live.

It seemed to Paul that nothing and nobody could empathize with another person's woes, let alone this man who had no idea what it was to love a woman and one's own children, his very flesh and blood. Exasperated, Paul uncovered his face and looked squarely into the monk's eyes.

"Will you do me the favour of leaving me alone?"

"But I haven't finished yet," answered the holy man apologetically.

"Get out!" bellowed Paul at the top of his voice.

The doctor and a medical assistant came rushing in. They both looked at the patient and the friar in turn. Fr. Martin was too embarrassed to speak. He meekly stood up and left.

* * *

The doctor stayed near the patient, trying to calm him down and asked him what the matter was. Paul, very agitated and his hands trembling, insisted that the priest should not be allowed to get anywhere near him again.

"As you wish," Dr. Brightwell reassured him while the medical assistant administered his medicine. After ensuring that Paul had regained his composure, the doctor advised Chris, his assistant, to stay by the patient a little longer whilst he continued his rounds. Actually, Chris had been yearning for the opportunity to be alone with the patient.

“I admire you, Paul, for getting rid of that pest,” Chris said softly. He did not want to lose that golden opportunity of befriending a new ally of his personal convictions. His intention was to subtly tackle him.

At first, Paul looked at him without uttering a single word, but a moment later, he decided to loosen his tongue. “I need your assistance. Will you help me in something very important for me?”

“That is the reason I’m here, to help patients.”

Paul was about to confide in him his desire to terminate his life when he heard a brief knock at the door that opened slightly at the same time.

“You have a visitor. I’ll come later and we can talk with greater liberty,” said Chris, excusing himself.

Inspector Tyler came in rather hesitantly, as he seemed to sense something amiss in the room.

“How are you today, Paul?”

“I don’t really care how I feel. As if I bother whether I live or die. My wife died because of me. My sons, too, met their death as a consequence of my selfishness. Have I got anything to be proud of? Have I got anything to live for?”

The inspector grasped the reality of the situation. Paul had gotten news of the tragedy that had befallen his sons. He did not blame him for reacting that way, yet he tried to do his best to comfort his friend.

“Don’t take it that way, Paul. I know family is important, but a man has also many other worthy considerations that can help him feel fulfilled and satisfied. Remember your brilliant career, your friends and colleagues, your beautiful house that you could afford to buy through your own personal efforts . . . The qualities that were there when you succeeded in life are still with you.”

“I did well because I had Pamela. No man can succeed without a solid foundation at home. She loved me and made me feel safe and secure in her love. I knew I could count on her, whatever happened. She was faithful and completely dedicated to me and our two sons, our pride and joy. In her, both our sons and I found solace and support. The stability she gave us was the reason we succeeded. She was our mainstay. Family is what counts, and when a man loses it, he flops.”

“I’m sure you’re not going to shy away from the challenge that awaits you. You’ll choose to build your life again, maybe in a different way but you’ll nonetheless acquire the happiness and satisfaction you crave.”

“Tell me, inspector, what really happened to my sons?”

“To tell you the truth I don’t know the details. I was waiting for them at the airport in Botswana and then we got news that the airplane had lost radar contact and before long, it was reported that the aircraft had plunged into the sea with all passengers lost. But let’s not talk about this now. Your sons loved you and tried to be with you. They were good boys; remember them as the jewels of your life.”

“What about their wives? They each had a child.”

“I’m aware of that! Kaye, Philip’s wife, though not exactly related, is like a niece to me. I’ve known her since she was a child and I was always fond of her, and she of me. I haven’t had time to visit her since her husband’s death. And then, I only know Patrick’s wife Helen by sight. I’m sure they’re trying to cope with life as best they can.”

“They will surely need money. Call a notary so that I can pass on my money to them.”

“Hey, what’s the hurry? You’re not going to die yet.”

“You never know, I must write my will to make sure they’ll not suffer in any way. Please help me. Fetch me a notary.” It

was obvious that Paul had other intentions. His exaggerated inclination to settle his affairs and divest himself of all his money indicated last wishes rather than any projects for the future.

“I will make an appointment for you with one. In the meantime, you should calm down. Right now you’d better think about how you can cooperate with the doctors to improve your health.”

“You don’t understand!” Paul interjected woefully.

“Yes, I do. But I insist you think of yourself now. Try to regain your health. I’m sure you’ll be able to help your grandchildren.”

“What use am I? Was I able to prevent my wife from being killed? Was I able to look after my sons once she was gone? Who needs me anyway? One fiasco after another, that’s all I’m capable of.”

“Everybody makes mistakes and occasionally falls flat on his face. But we must react and rise again. I learned this fact through Janet. I have a wife who goes round helping people in need in our parish. I have often neglected her due to my work and my unearthly roster. Yet she has found a way of being useful. I admire her for it and I feel more relaxed knowing that she fills her time with volunteer work that gives her pleasure and fulfillment. We never had children of our own, but she pours her motherly instinct on the people she cares for and who seem to appreciate her contribution and love her enormously. You can also discover for yourself what you can do with your life. I’m sure that you will find within you what it takes to rebuild your future.”

“Shall we say that right now I don’t think there’s a future, let alone have a plan what to do with my days? My only concern at present is to ensure that my daughters-in-law and

especially my grandchildren do not suffer want. I wish to pass on my wealth to them. I don't need money whereas they will find many uses for it."

"One of these days, I'll visit Kaye and will see for myself how she and the baby are faring. Maybe I can also ask about Helen and her child and check on how they're coping. You don't need to rush things. Let's give it time."

"Time? What time? There's no time. A person in my situation doesn't speak of time. There's only today and probably not even that."

"You're exaggerating now, Paul. Consider your options and reflect on what you can do."

Goodison understood that he would never be able to get his ideas across to Tyler. His only option was Chris who might help him achieve his final objective. He felt exhausted by the sheer exertion of trying to persuade the inspector to take immediate action. He closed his eyes and said, "I'm very tired."

Kevin Tyler understood the hint and stood up to go.

"God bless you, Paul. May the good Lord look after you in your sleep and help you be better every day."

He went out and asked to be received by the ward doctor. In his office, the inspector expressed his uneasiness about Paul's evident depression. He had understood Paul's concerns and ultimate aim perfectly well, even though he had pretended not to.

How could Paul's gloom and utter dejection be warded off in order to put him back on the right track to full recovery?

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