

MR. TAYLOR'S DOOR



A
Short Story
by
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He was a nice bloke.

A bonzer bloke in fact, as you Australians say.

Considered an institution within an Institution.

He'd been a resident in the Nursing Home for close on 25 years so he had told me once.

Me in employment there for barely three.

He and his missus had bought into one of those 'Self-help' Units from which you could be moved into a more 'intense atmosphere' when and if the condition developed to such an extent that that became a requirement.

A reality.

His wife had died suddenly some 15 years ago.

He had been moved into the Nursing Home proper some months after that because of his deteriorating condition, mostly to do with depression bought on by his wife's demise.

He had bounced back well and was one of the most popular 'inmates' at the establishment.

His bonhomie, charm and impish humour, especially with the womenfolk of the Home, was

well appreciated. So too his ability to play the piano with flair and zest and his masterful leading in all the old fashion dance moves which placed him in high demand with the ladies.

But beneath that wonderful exterior he was a sad man who missed his Eadie greatly.

I would often share a small Scotch with him at the end of my afternoon shift. Sitting on the small shaded patio outside his room. Listening to the myriad bird calls in the large number of trees in the grounds of the Nursing Home. Our conversations varied and interesting. Ridding the world of its problems, though both of us recognising that neither Statesman or Politician would ever heed our conclusions.

Our wisdom.

No subject was beyond him and even at the approaching age of ninety his faculties were as sharp as they had been when he was a young man, I would contend.

It was one of the many things that I found hard to understand for so many years and still have a problem with. That is the laconic, dry wit of Australians. And the ability of many of them to laugh in the face of adversity. Hard to understand yet I have learnt to respect it enormously. I some-time would wonder though, whether that ability would still be a force if these wonderful people were subjected to daily beatings and the ever present danger of death. Of civil unrest, of marauding gangs of heavily armed imbeciles, the guttural chatter of AK47's and the hacking and swishing of machetes on bare flesh. The terror, the heavy weight of fear. The constant search for food whilst vainly trying to hide. To stay unnoticed.

That was one of the very many subjects that we discussed and pondered over, over that small nip of good quality Scotch.

I often wondered were he had obtained it in such a regular quantity as he had no outside visitors as far as I could ascertain.

All his family had preceded him to the grave so he had confided to me once.

But those little talks had helped me enormously. To work through the horrors of my homeland. The brutality that I saw and experienced first hand.

He was one of the few, the very few Patients of this establishment who treated me as an equal. Not as a coloured person.

Nor neither as the Cleaner or hired help!

He was a Barrister, a Queens Counsel of some note and reputation so I am led to believe. His door was always open to any-one within the Home who may have needed his services and advice. Even the Matron was not averse to seeking his counsel on occasions.

Perhaps that is how the steady supply of good quality Scotch was obtained.

On this fine afternoon though, his door was not open.

I knocked, propping it open as per regulations to commence cleaning his room.

I finished cleaning his En-suite and vacuuming the carpet of his small Bed-sitter and was commencing to dust down the various surfaces. His room always took longer to clean than any other, usually because of the conversation between us two as I worked. Him lounging on his bed. If we didn't arranged for that late afternoon Scotch, he would after I had left, take a shower and

prepare to go to the large Dining Room for his evening meal.

To delight the ladies and even the staff with his presence.

This afternoon he was flat. Unenthusiastic. Not interested in any conversational titbits.

'Mr. Taylor?' I asked of him. 'Is something wrong?'

'Mr. Samson. A good afternoon, my friend. I had the results come back this morning on some recent tests.....'

'Oh? Nothing too serious I hope.....'

'At my age Mr. Samson, a cough can be the harbinger of death stalking.' He gave a little chuckle at his own joke. 'Pancreatic Cancer Mr. Samson. But at my age one has to expect to die of something or other.....' He seemed to dismiss the severity of the diagnosis and continued. 'Do you know that it is fifteen years ago to-day that my dearest Eadie was taken from me?'

'That is a long time Sir, to be without the one you love. I'm sorry for your loss, Mr. Taylor. A reasonable excuse for one to be a little melancholic.'

'Yes Mr. Samson. Yes indeed.' He paused, lost in thought for some moments. 'I think that it is time to go. It is best if one leaves this world at a time of his choosing and not be subject to the whims of the Grim Reaper. Could you leave me in peace, Mr. Samson? It has been a privilege to have known you.'

I stood and looked down at the man who looked at least twenty years younger than his fast approaching ninetieth year. Still looking in reasonable health. Perhaps the most gentleman of gentlemen I had ever met. I gathered all my cleaning gear and trolley and silently placed it outside his room in the long wide corridor. Before closing the door, I crossed back over to his bed, gently took his hand in both mine and squeezed it.

Unashamedly, I bent and kissed his forehead.

'It has been a pleasure and an honour to have known you, Mr. Taylor. May peace be with you.'

He was already drifting into sleep. Perhaps descending into something deeper.

I was only half conscious of the empty pill bottle on his bed-side table. The almost empty bottle of water that he held.

I closed Mr. Taylor's door behind me as I left.

For thirty minutes I cleaned and polished the vinyl floor in that section of corridor in close proximity to his room. The vinyl floor shone like a mirror before I worked my way further along the wide hallway, not seeing anything because of the tears in my eyes.

I was suddenly jerked from my sadness by the emergency bell sounding and the soft squeal of nurses' shoes on my clean, polished floor as they hurried along that shiny corridor towards the red flashing light above Mr. Taylor's door.