

The Visit

By Frank A. Baburek

He sat on a bench located in the south end of a park enjoying the aroma that the trees and foliage provided in this small section of downtown. He came here at least twice a week and spent the time watching the traffic and people who went about their daily concerns just 20 yards away along the street which marked the east end of the park. It had rained the last several days so the noontime Sun and its warmth felt good to be out in. His age bestowed upon him many aches and pains but today he felt especially relaxed and distress free. It was a disposition which was coming all too infrequent as the years rolled by.

A curiosity awoke within him as he watched an approaching woman make her way down the street across his field of vision. He couldn't help but stare at her for the whole length of time that she walked by. He was somewhat stunned when she briefly glanced over at him and smiled. When she passed from his sight, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone punching an assortment of numbers. "Jimmy," he said into the small device, "you are not going to believe this but I swear I just saw Judy walk right by me."

"You're right," came the reply, "I don't believe you, Judy has been dead now for over a year."

"I know that," he replied, "this gal is a dead ringer for our sister bro." The pun of the statement hit him after he said it.

"Listen Frank," the voice on the other end of the line said, "get your soiled Depends back here. We have a poker game with Don and Billy this afternoon and I can use some of their retirement money. I need new guitar strings."

"Yea, I will be there. Don't worry about it," he said irritated by the brush off from his older brother.

"Later" came the response and the phone went dead.

Frank went back to looking in the direction that the woman had disappeared. He was part of a family with eight siblings, five boys and three girls. During their childhood years, being part of such a large brood brought on resentment and sibling rivalry but as they all entered adulthood, a strong bond developed between them. This kinship was enforced by their parents and fortified by the ability to make each other laugh. This humor was a trait that they all seemed to have and increased the enjoyment they felt when together. No matter where in the country they lived through the years, they would always find

ways to reunite for a gathering on an annual basis. When their parents died, they all swore to keep in touch and never end the nexus that kept them together. Though time was now drawing them all into old age, the loss of Judith, being the first of the eight to pass but not the oldest, devastated the group. It was a signal to them all of the things to come. The connection between them now became tighter.

Deep in thought, Frank never noticed the figure that walked out of the trees in the park, up to the bench and sat down next to him. He glanced over only after sensing a presence and nearly fell off the bench.

“Holy Crap,” he said composing himself after the initial shock, “Lady you scared the hell out of me”

“Good,” the woman replied. “You don’t want anything to do with that place.”

Frank hesitated in a state of confusion, the woman who just minutes earlier he watched walking away was now sitting on the same park bench with him. How did she circle around him so fast? He was not sure about engaging in a conversation with the stranger but his curiosity overwhelmed him. “I don’t know who you are Lady but you look just like my late sister,” he finally said.

“There is a good reason for that,” she replied in a nonchalant way, “I am your sister.”

Frank was taken by surprise at the proclamation. He now had some wacko sitting on a park bench with him who looked exactly like his dead sister and now claimed she was her.

He decided to call her bluff, “So, what by chance would be your name dear dead sister?”

“Why dear alive brother, it would be Judith,” she said with a smile. She then leaned over and pinched him hard on the arm near the shoulder.

Frank let out a yelp and rubbed the area while glaring at her. It was something that Judy did to him and his younger brothers when they were kids. It was her way of showing them that she was older than them and could boss them around when their parents were not nearby.

“Oh, by the way,” she added ignoring his stare, “Mom and Dad said Hi, and your departed wife sends her love.”

Frank felt a pang of grief at the thought of his deceased wife. He almost lost it at her passing but his kids and the family helped him get through it.

“If you’re dead,” he asked, “aren’t you supposed to be someplace else?”

“Well, I was but I was granted a short visit back to the living. Kind of like a weekend pass, only shorter.”

Frank nodded his head. This woman sure sounded and acted like his sister. “What’s it like to be

dead.” He asked. He was still unconvinced and trying to find a flaw in her facade.

“Dying sucks,” she said glancing back and forth at the people walking by, “but it gets better after that.”

“So there is something after death, that’s always good to know. I suppose then that there is also a place down below?” Frank questioned still unsure about this whole discussion.

“Yea, they told me to watch out for those things,” she replied with concern on her face. “Right now they are all over the Earth what with the decline in morals and stuff that is going on down here. You know the Big Guy isn’t very happy with you the living.”

Frank raised his arms in defense. “Hey, not me sis, I’m doing my best.”

“Yea I know,” she said with a glazed look in her eyes, “it sure isn’t like when we were kids.”

Frank could not believe he was having this conversation. Why he felt so comfortable with the situation befuddled him. “So, I suppose I’m the only one that can see you and everybody else walking by just sees an old man talking to himself.”

“You got that right bro, why should that bother you?” She asked.

Frank just lifted his shoulders briefly. In truth it didn’t. His vanity left him a long time ago with his youth.

“Have you visited any other family members like Flo or Phil?” he asked. Florence was their older sister and Phillip one of their younger brothers.

“Naw,” she answered. “Flo lives up in Canada now with her youngest daughter as you know and it’s just too cold up there for me. Phil and his wife are living in Florida. Right now it’s hot and humid and they have those nasty bugs which I hate.”

Frank wanted to laugh. If she was a ghost or spirit of some sort, why would cold or bugs bother her? “OK then, what about Joe, Alice or John? They all live around each other back East.”

“Listen Brother,” she said now with a serious expression written across her face. “There is a reason why I’ve come to visit just you.”

The obvious implications of her statement and appearance only now hit him like a sack of bricks. “Oh Crap,” he mumbled in a defeatist tone, “Don’t tell me it’s my turn to take the dreaded dirt nap.”

“No, no,” she said shaking her head, “you still have... A dirt nap? Where did you come up with that analogy of death?”

“At the senior center, some of the guys use the phrase,” he said while feeling the relief that his time

had not arrived yet.

“The reason why I’m here,” she began again, “is that it is time for Jimmy to pass on. I know how much you and Jimmy have bonded together since he moved out here and well, I just wanted to prepare you for his moving on.”

A deep sadness washed over Frank. She was right. He depended on his older brother a lot. Frank’s kids and grandkids were in the area and he would visit them often but they had their own lives to live. Jimmy was a day-to-day companion. He wasn’t sure what he would do without him.

“I do have a suggestion though,” Judy said. “You know our youngest brother John finally retired and he spends a lot of time in his apartment back East alone. I worry about him. Maybe you can get him to come out here and keep you company.”

A brief smile crossed his face. Big John, it was what their Dad called him. Every brother and sister was a comedian in the family and could make the group laugh, but John; well he was the King of the comedians. He could insult you and make you laugh about it. He applied his humor across a wide range of subjects and could keep the family laughing for hours. It would be great to have John move near him.

“What about Joe and Alice?” Frank asked, “They still live nearby him.”

“Well, as you know,” she said, “brother Joe is still working even though he needs a power chair to get around, and lil’ sis Alice, she doesn’t have much time to spare with writing all those books of hers and taking care of her animals. John needs something like you and Jimmy have.”

Frank felt a conflict of emotions. On one hand the loss of Jimmy but on the other hand hanging out with his little brother John. With the eight of them now past sixty, there was no fighting the passage of their generation. It was a fate now facing them all and to do it alone, would really suck.

Judy stood up and turned to face him. “Well brother, it is time for me to go. I hope I helped you.” She then turned and headed for the trees in the middle of the park.

Frank called out after her, “Thanks sis, love you, tell everyone up there I miss them.”

She turned and for a brief moment nodded her head. She then said, “Tell the family down here that I said Hi and love them all.” A sly grin spread across her face. “That should put thoughts in their head about putting you in a Home,” she added then smiled. She then turned and continued on. He watched her as she walked past one of the trees and then was gone.

Frank got up from the bench and headed for his apartment complex. When he was within two blocks of home, an ambulance raced by him with lights flashing and the siren whaling. In the distance, he could

see a fire truck and a crowd gathering in front of the building where he and Jimmy lived. In a voice barely audible, Frank mumbled as he continued to walk, "Goodbye Jimmy, you were a great brother, and a close friend. I will miss you bro." He then thought about where he placed that little black phone directory with all the family telephone numbers. He knew the remaining brothers and sisters would come for the funeral. Maybe his first call should be to his little brother John.

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