

Joke

By Daniel German

My life is a joke, Paul thought to himself as his hip broke the ice that he just slipped on. Outside of the bar he was heading into, a chilling wind added to the cold ground that Paul had now connected with for a second time today.

“Ouch, that looked like it hurt.” A female voice came from Paul’s feet. A young woman held out her arm to help Paul up. “You look like you could use a drink,” she said.

Paul got up clutching his side. “Do I know you, lady?” he asked.

“Jillian Glossman, we meet a couple months ago, I helped during your— “

“Right, you were on Mary’s side, fun times.”

“Yeah, sorry, now I really feel like I should get you that drink, come on.” With a wave of her arm, Jillian guided the limping Paul into the bar. Two men sit at the table that Jillian was headed to, waving as she came over.

“Jill, who is this?” the man on the left said. “What’d dad tell you about bringing home strays?”

“Well, Jeremy, all I remember was having a cat for over ten years.” Jill sat down and as she took a preordered drink from Jeremy’s side of the table.

The other man, who now sat in-between Jeremy and Jill, smiled at Paul and offered a chair opposite them. “So, I’m Jake, who are you, stray, and why has our beloved sister brought you here on such an auspicious occasion?”

“Name’s Paul, if you want more I’m going to need a very stiff drink.” Paul laid his head on the table and sighed deeply.

Jill called the waiter over and got Paul a vodka on the rocks and a beer.

Paul inhaled the vodka, and chugged half of the beer.

“Rough day?” Jake asked.

“Rough year,” Paul replied. “Your sister, found me after I slipped on the ice outside, second time today, first being outside of work, right after I got fired. What’s this occasion?”

“Well, I passed my seminary courses, though, we can hold off on that if you want to talk.”

“Jake, what did we agree on?” Jeremy said

“Jer, not now, Paul is going through some hard times,” Jill said.

“Perfect, Jake here is now officially able to help you in your time of need.”

“Jeremy, don’t be rude.”

“No,” Paul said. “I want to hear what the priest has to say.”

“You don’t have to,” Jill said.

“Nonsense! Help him, Pastor Jake, you’re his only hope,” Jeremy said.

Jake chuckled and look to Paul, who nodded in acceptance. “Okay, so divorced, fired, and slipped on ice—twice, that’s what I’m dealing with, right?”

“Strange way to summarize my life, especially for a priest,” Paul said.

“Except, that wasn’t a summary of your life. The last couple of months maybe. But seeing that you are, at least, over the age of 21, this is an incredibly small portion of your life that’s been bad. What I mean is, though life has you down right now, this temporary inconvenience will pass and your life will get better.”

Paul scoffed, “You don’t know that. I could die tonight.”

“Dude, you know as much of the future as I do, which is to say, you don’t know. There’s a chance that your life gets better, and you look back on these months as a low point in your life, but thankfully it never got any lower. The question is, are you willing to take that chance? Or will you use that gun in your pocket to stop playing the game?”

“Nice catch on the firearm, Jake, then again I only got the idea now. Just so I understand, are you asking me to gamble with my life?”

“When speaking with suicidal people, no matter what stage they’re at, every word is a gamble, whether you know it or not.”

“You sound like someone who’s lost the gamble before.”

Jake nodded. “Our mother killed herself in front of me.” Jake noticed Paul’s eyes widen. “She took a razor to her jugular. She told me that her life became a joke, and then she was gone.”

The words echoed through Paul’s head, and his hand shook as he lifted his drink for another sip. Blindsided he whispered, “How—how are you here? How are you this way?”

“In this situation, there are two paths you could take. Path one, dawn a green wig, white face paint, and go around asking people why so serious. Or you can go to the church you mother used to take you to, cry to and yell at God, a lot. And then, between sobs you can look around you, and see all of the people in the church hugging you. Spiritually holding you up and

comforting you in every way they know how. In that moment, I learned to accept all forms of love around me.”

“That’s great for you, Jake, but I no longer have love around me.”

“Again, sorry,” Jill said.

Without warning, Jeremy stood up, just as a waiter came over and placed Jake’s drink in front of him. “People of the Glossy Glass Bar, I ask you to raise your drinks. In this bar, our father’s bar, a place where my sister received her acceptance letter to Harvard law school, this place where I meet my fiancé like my father met my mother, and this place where my little brother literally cried over spilled milk— “

“You spilled it in my eyes, Jer,” said Jake.

“I just want to take this moment and express our love, to our stray, Paul. May he never feel like a stray again.” Jeremy then held out his glass toward Paul.

With three smiling faces beaming at him, Paul met Jeremy’s glass with his own, it wasn’t until he opened his mouth for his last sip, that Paul noticed that he was crying. He smiled as he wiped his face.

“Jer, look at what you did,” Jill said. “We’ll never let him live down the time he cried in dad’s bar.”

“Speaking from experience, I can honestly tell you, that never gets better,” said Jake.

The siblings laugh, and for the first time in a long time, Paul laughed too. On his way home Paul threw his gun into a river, and he walked with his new siblings, telling jokes and laughing in the night.