

**THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC**

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LOVABLE ECCENTRIC**



**Written by  
Victor S E Moubarak**

**Theodore Luxton-Joyce is a lovable English eccentric from Scottish descent who lives in a world of his own. His every thought and action are motivated by genuine kindness and generosity, yet although he gives the impression that he doesn't think things through properly, the reality is that he thinks them through all right but he does so somewhat late, with humorous consequences for those around him.**

**This book contains a selection of short stories about Theodore Luxton-Joyce, a man born at a time when the world was a different place altogether.**

## FOREWORD

Also by Victor S E Moubarak



“VISIONS” (ISBN 978 1 60477 032 2).

“VISIONS” is a fictional story of three children who see an apparition of the Lord Jesus on their way to church. They tell their priest, Father Ignatius, about it; and pretty soon news spreads throughout town.

People react to the news in different ways. Some readily believe; others mock and scoff in disbelief, whilst some react violently towards the children and their families.

Parishioners seek guidance from Father Ignatius whereas the Church seeks to hush the whole story in the hope that it goes away; whilst Jesus appears again and again.

“VISIONS” challenges readers to ask what they would do in a similar situation – as Christians, as parents or just as onlookers.

A vibrant tale of supernatural events, with a fast-paced storyline and strong believable characters, “VISIONS” is a challenging must-read Christian book for everyone ready for a reality check on what they actually believe.

“VISIONS” is available from all good bookstores and on the Internet.

I pray that God blesses each one of you dear readers, old and new, and may He be with you and your families always.

**Victor S E Moubarak**

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## THEODORE AND IGNATIUS

Theodore Luxton-Joyce was a millionaire widower. He inherited wealth from his father Lord Joyce and he lived in a mansion on the edge of town in beautiful countryside surroundings. He drove a very old classic car which he prized above all else – or so it seemed, and he always wore a three-piece suit made of heavy woollen cloth and a Sherlock Holmes type hat. He carried an expensive gold watch in a small pocket in his vest with a gold chain leading up to a button hole to which it was attached.

He had a thick white toothbrush moustache punctuating a clean shaven thick set jaw and square face.

He often carried a walking stick with a silver plated lion's head for a handle. It was just for effect of course, he being a fit and truly handsome sixty year old gentleman.

He was certainly quite a sight around town in his luxury old automobile, his attire and walking stick, not to mention of course his perfect English accent no doubt taught him in the best private schools.

He was often teased by people saying he'd been born in the wrong age; and he'd fit better in Victorian times or thereabouts. He'd chuckle heartily and say "And what grand times they were for England ... I'd certainly would have improved them by my mere presence ..."

Perhaps he didn't know it, but he was a real romantic at heart, not that he would admit it to anyone of course. It would probably ruin his image, he thought, as the tough talking lord of the manor with no time for such nonsense.

Deep down, however, he was a kind and gentle man and had never forgotten his beloved departed wife. He prayed for her, as best he could, and often asked Father Ignatius to celebrate Mass for the repose of her soul; on her birthday, their wedding day and on the anniversary of her death.

But secretly of course ... he never announced the Mass intention in the Church's Newsletter as was customary in St Vincent Parish. The Mass, always on a Sunday, would be posted in the Newsletter as "Private Intention" and he'd attend and sit on the front pew, and wink gently at Father Ignatius as he came out of the Sacristy and on to the Altar.

One evening Father Ignatius visited Theodore in his mansion, at the man's invitation, for a private chat.

Father Ignatius was rather intrigued as he waited in the large library filled with books which had never been opened or read for ages. He'd never visited the mansion before, and from what he had seen so far, he understood why people suggested Theodore was born in the wrong age. He'd only been there for half-an-hour and he'd already met the gardener busily pruning the prize rose bushes, the butler who opened the front door and the maid who brought him tea served in the best porcelain with expensive biscuits which you would certainly not find at the supermarket!

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Theodore claimed he lived alone, which is strictly true, if you don't count the live-in entourage of staff to look after the house and surrounding land.

Moments later the butler opened the door and in came Theodore. He was wearing bright red tartan trousers, a dark blue open-necked shirt and a large cravat round his neck held together by a red jewel on a ring, and a navy blue blazer with the initials TLJ embroidered in gold on the lapel.

Father Ignatius did not flinch a muscle, but smiled silently deep within his soul.

“How nice of you to agree to meet me ...” said Theodore, as the butler left the room closing the door behind him, “I'd like a private chat if I may ... one cannot be seen visiting you in Church you understand!”

“I understand ...” said the priest sitting down again.

“Jolly good ... but first let me offer you something stronger than Darjeeling tea ... I have the finest selection of single malt whisky ... or a glass of vintage wine if you prefer ...”

Father Ignatius preferred to continue with the pot of tea, whilst Theodore helped himself to some wine.

“Well ...” he hesitated, “I'd like your opinion on certain delicate matters ... you being such a knowledgeable individual and all that ...”

The priest smiled feebly.

“It's about my dear wife ...” he hesitated again, “I really miss her ... do you think she's in Heaven?”

“I would say so ...” replied the priest hesitating in turn and wondering where this was leading to, “she was a good person, and I was there in hospital administering the last Sacraments when she died ... so I would say the angels were with her that night ...”

“Jolly good ... jolly good ...” repeated Theodore as he sipped a little wine, “I really miss her ... as I said ... terrible thing her dying so quickly after such a short illness ...”

“I understand ...” repeated the priest still confused about this conversation.

“How long is it decent to mourn for someone's death ... do you think?” asked Theodore abruptly.

“Well ...” Father Ignatius was taken aback by the question, “there's no set period of decency as such ... different people deal with death in their own way and in their own time. Matilda died six years ago if I remember right ...”

“You remember too damn right ...” interrupted Theodore, “pardon my language

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Father ... and not a day passes by without me thinking about her and hoping she'd be with me here ..."

The priest said nothing and put his cup down on the table.

"Is it right for an old man like me to be in love?" he asked, "I am 60 you know ..."

"There is no set age to be in love ..." continued the priest gently as he was interrupted once again.

"The thing is ... I love my wife ... I love her dearly believe me ... But ..." he hesitated once again, and the priest said nothing, now totally baffled at what was going on here.

"Ok ... let's get to the point ..." Theodore blurted out putting down his glass of wine, "the thing is I have needed an accountant for the last six months or so. I don't have a head for figures and all that ... it is all Greek to me ... yet the tax people want the accounts properly audited and all that ... sheer nonsense I say ... so I spoke to my solicitors ... you probably know them ... Sterling Cash and Banks in the High Street ..."

The priest nodded silently, now totally overcome with confusion at what Theodore was leading to.

"Anyway ..." said Theodore, "the solicitors put me in touch with this accountant ... Geraldine Leamington ... a lovely young lady of thirty odd years ... she's very competent you know ... if ever you want an accountant to do the Sunday collection for you ..."

"Anyway ... as I said ... Geraldine has been coming here for at least six months now ... she's like a magician you know ... she went through those figures like a hot knife through butter ... she checked the books for the past six years ... I'd made a right mess of them apparently ... all Greek to me as I say ..."

"Ha ha ..." he laughed heartily pouring himself another glass of wine, "turns out I'd made such a pig's ear of the accounts that the tax man apparently owes me money ... I've been overpaying for years ... she managed to claim back a tidy sum I tell you ... I received the check from the tax man last week ..."

"You don't need her to count the Sunday collection do you?"

"No thanks ..." mumbled Father Ignatius politely.

"Back to business ..." continued Theodore, "the thing is ... she's been coming here for six months or so and we got to know each other and her family ... and, not to put too fine a point on it, I've fallen in love again and wish to get married ... is that all right do you think?"

"You wish to marry the young lady?" asked the priest cautiously.

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“Of course not ...” said Theodore getting a little red in the face, “what do you think I am? She is half my age you know ... wouldn’t have the energy old boy ...

“No ... you’re way off beam Padre ... I wish to marry her mother. She’s a widow ... about my age ... fifty-nine actually ... but don’t tell her I told you. Women you know ... they never reveal their age apparently ...

“I’ve been meeting Geraldine’s mother in secret for a while ... we meet in the Grand Hotel for tea ... do you know it ... in the High Street.

“We get on rather well ... but I’m not so sure about love at my age ... is it possible? And is it OK to marry again? Will my dear wife understand?”

Father Ignatius asked for a drop of vintage whisky to calm his nerves a little.

The wedding is scheduled in four months time at St Vincent Church with Father Ignatius officiating.

Theodore has still to decide on what music will be played in church on that day. Father Ignatius suggested that he leaves all decisions to his bride to be ... at least then matters would be organized in time!

## INTRODUCTIONS

Father Ignatius had been invited once again to Theodore Luxton-Joyce's mansion in the country. This time the eccentric millionaire wanted the priest to meet his bride-to-be and to discuss the arrangements for the forthcoming wedding. There was no way that Theodore would agree to such a meeting at St Vincent Church. "It isn't done old boy ..." he said to the priest on the phone, "one cannot be seen in public accompanied by a woman if she isn't one's wife you know ..."

"We do meet from time to time, in secret of course, at the Grand Hotel tea rooms where we enjoy a cup of chai and cream cakes ... but I always make a point of telling the concierge there that it is purely business ... she is after all my accountant's mother you know ... and for all any body cares we may well be discussing my finances ..."

"I understand," said the priest shuffling through his diary for a free date.

"After all ... you're not seen in public with ladies are you Padre?" asked Theodore not thinking what he had just said.

"I try not to ..." replied Father Ignatius raising his eyebrows to the sky and scribbling an agreed date in his diary.

On the appointed day Father Ignatius was led to the Reading Room by Theodore's butler. It was a large well-furnished room annexing the Library with a small table at one end with three leather armchairs around it, and another large table at the other end on which a tea service had already been set. Theodore and an elegant tall lady stood by the armchairs. Father Ignatius walked towards them and was welcomed by his host.

"Hello Padre ..." said Theodore, "how gracious of you to attend once again. May I introduce you to Mrs Leamington, the lady whom I spoke to you about at our last encounter ..."

Mrs Leamington shook the priest's hand and said smiling, "does he always speak like that?" Father Ignatius smiled back and said nothing.

Theodore missed the comment altogether and proceeded to say, "My dear ... this is Father Ignatius ... the priest at St Vincent I referred to in our previous conversation."

"Yes ... I gathered ..." she replied sweetly as they sat down, but not before Father Ignatius noticed that the three leather armchairs were emblazoned in gold with the letters TLJ.

No sooner had they sat down that a maid came in the room and placed a plate with a large chocolate cake on the table at the other end of the room. She was accompanied by another maid, a little older, carrying a pot of tea and a pot of coffee on a large tray. The butler waited until they placed their trays on the table and he followed them out closing the door behind him.



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“Let me serve you some refreshments,” said Mrs Leamington standing up, “would you like tea or coffee Father?”

“Tea please ...” replied the priest as she walked to the other end of the large room.

“Tell you what Padre ...” said Theodore, “we went to a lovely new restaurant in town last night ... just off the High Street ... I can really recommend it ... can’t remember the name right now ...”

Then he lent a little forward in his armchair and whispered to the priest, “what do you call that red flower you give someone when you’re in love?”

“A rose?” whispered the priest.

“Jolly good ...” cried out Theodore, and then looking at the other end of the room, “Rose ... what’s the name of that restaurant we went to last night?”

“The Golden Cup” said Rose as she joined them to the table with a tray full of drinks and cake.

“Ha ha ha ...” chortled Theodore and winking at the priest, “I bet you thought I’d say the restaurant was called Rose ... hein Padre?”

Father Ignatius smiled.

“OK ... down to business ...” said Theodore taking control as ever. “As you may know Padre ... I am half English and half Scottish ... and proud of both I tell you.”

“I didn’t know,” mumbled the priest.

“My father Lord Joyce was as English as you can be ... generations of English blood leading back to monarchy I tell you ...” said Theodore proudly, “I once traced our family tree all the way back to the time my ancestors lived in it ...”

He laughed heartily at his own joke, and went on.

“Anyway ... Lord Joyce married Morag Luxton of the Clan Luxton from Northern Scotland. She was an only child and there was no way her father would see the family name die out on marriage. So my father when he wed her changed his name to Luxton-Joyce.

“That red tartan on the wall is her family’s colours. I have bought a lot of cloth and had a pair of trousers made of the stuff and a kilt too ...”

“I see ...” said the priest gently, calling to mind the bright red tartan trousers Theodore was wearing the last time they met.

“So bearing this in mind ...” continued Theodore, as Rose poured him another cup of coffee, “I think I’ll get married in a kilt and full Scottish costume if that is OK ...”

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“There’s no Catholic Church objection to this is there ... bearing in mind the history between the Catholics and the Protestants in England and Scotland ... is there?”

“No ... no objection at all ...” said the priest stifling a smile, “you can get married in Scottish costume if you wish ...”

“That’s jolly decent of you Padre ...” smiled Theodore putting down his cup, “and now something else ...”

“At the end ... after the ceremony is over and all that ... instead of departing straightaway Rose and I, ... I thought if she stays there by the Altar with you I could play a short piece on the bagpipes ... I’ve been practicing for some time ... any objection to this from the Church?”

“No ... not at all,” said Father Ignatius, “the congregation could remain seated whilst you play the bagpipes ...”

“Jolly good ...” enthused Theodore, “I had thought of playing this piece here ...” he said handing over some music score to the priest, “Chopin Piano Concerto Number 1 ... do you know it?”

“Do you intend to play Chopin piano Concerto on the bagpipes?” asked an incredulous priest.

“Better than walking up and down the centre aisle carrying a grand piano ...” said Theodore in all seriousness, “I have adapted it to the bagpipes you know ... took me ages to re-write it but it works quite well ...”

At this point Rose came to the rescue.

“Perhaps dear ...” she said coyly, “you could leave the bagpipes for the reception afterwards ... there would be more guests then to enjoy it ...”

“Never thought of that ... jolly good idea my dear ...” he declared, “and so be it, ... now Padre ... that’s all I had in mind ... any information or anything you’re unclear about for the special day?”

“Well ... there are some formalities,” said Father Ignatius, “I’d like some documents such as Baptism certificates, Confirmation and ...”

“Ha ... paperwork ...” interrupted Theodore, “I thought as much. Fortunately Rose here has thought of that and has prepared a large file with all bits and pieces ...”

“Now if you’ll excuse me Padre I have an appointment with the estates manager to discuss the adjoining land we’ve just bought ... so I’ll leave you to sort things out with Rose.”

And with that he stood up, kissed her hand and walked out of the room.

## THE WEDDING

It was such a lovely, sunny and warm day when Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the eccentric sixty year old millionaire, was due to marry his beloved Rose Leamington.

St Vincent Church had been thoroughly cleaned, not just a quick run-through with a vacuum cleaner, but a proper cleaning reserved only for Easter and Christmas.

Flowers adorned every available space ... on the Altar, by every statue around the church, at the end of every pew; and little bouquets were also given to every lady attending as they came in.

It must have been a florist's dream to have acquired such a contract from Luxton-Joyce ... in fact, if truth be known, the contracts, because there were more than one, went to three local florists.

None of them could cope with the demands on their own. So one florist provided flowers for the Altar and statues, another made little bunches of posies tied in pink ribbon which were attached at either end of each pew in church, whilst the third florist provided the small bouquets to hand out to the ladies present.

The church was full to capacity. Everyone was there. Theodore's relatives and friends, and his entourage of staff, of course. Rose's relatives and friends. And everyone else in town who had heard the news and wanted to come in for a good look. Marriages are after all public affairs ... and you can't keep people out of church can you?

Yes ... everyone who's anyone was there ... Theodore had invited the Mayor who was sitting there up-front in his ceremonial chains of office, the local Member of Parliament who was there too, a few leaders of the Town Council, the Chief of Police, the Chief of Fire Brigade Services and the Head of the local Hospital ... Even Theodore's local postman was there! He had been personally invited by Theodore one morning as he met him in the street delivering the mail.

Father Ignatius and twelve Altar servers were ready to make their entrance from the Sacristy. The organist played a selection of appropriate hymns and matrimonial music.

Rose stood there by the Altar looking radiant in her light pink silk dress and holding a small bouquet of red roses – to match her beautiful name ... as Theodore would often say!

Everyone was ready for the bell by the Sacristy to ring and for the ceremony to begin.

Everyone that is ... except for Theodore. Because he wasn't there.

In fact he was 40 minutes late to be precise ...

Rose's Rolls-Royce had arrived on time and had been asked to go round the block once ... twice ... three times ... until eventually she came out and got into church.

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She posed for some obligatory pictures by the Rolls for the official photographer and for the local press who'd come out to record the event, and then proceeded down the aisle as normal and waited with dignity up front.

Although most people glanced surreptitiously at their watches every now and then, she stood up front facing the Altar for the last ten minutes or so. She knew in her heart that Theodore would not let her down ... she did what she always did at moments of stress like this, almost as a reflex action on her part; she started reciting the Rosary silently in her head.

She'd only half-finished the second decade when there was a loud whirring noise outside the church. It seemed to hover around the building getting louder and louder as it moved from the back of the church to somewhere towards the Parish house nearby.

Curiosity got the best of most people as they stood in turn and filed out of the church from every available exit. She maintained her dignity throughout and walked into the Sacristy where she was met by Father Ignatius.

He led her outside through the Sacristy's back door and there in the air was a large yellow helicopter attempting to land on a flat area in the church's grounds.

Most people ran towards it to see what was going on. The priest held her arm gently and they walked together through the gardens and onto the field beyond.

The helicopter eventually landed and everyone stood there until its noisy rotors eventually came to a silent stop. The helicopter door finally opened and out came Theodore in full Scottish costume ... bright red Luxton Clan tartan kilt, a red beret and carrying a giant claymore in his hand.

He was followed by another man also in full Scottish costume, albeit in a green tartan kilt, carrying a set of bagpipes. He stood by the helicopter and started playing the bagpipes.

"Not now ..." shouted Theodore as he walked towards the crowd trying to find his beloved amongst them.

As soon as he saw her with Father Ignatius he headed towards her, stuck the claymore forcibly into the ground, and still holding it, and to the delight of the waiting photographers, he went down on one knee, took hold of Rose's hand and kissed it.

"I'm sorry I'm a trifle late my dear," he said, "... as I shall explain presently!"

Then turning to the waiting crowd he said loudly "I am sorry I kept you waiting folks ...

"This here is Gregor McBurnish, the finest piper that ever lived ... he rang me at home this morning after everyone had left to say his car would not start ... not an English car you know ... very bad show I say ... don't you agree?"

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“Fortunately I was already dressed and prepared to drive to church ... so off I drove some twenty miles North instead and went to his home ... picked him up ... not forgetting the bagpipes of course ... very important ... what’s the use of Gregor without the bagpipes ...

“And then I thought I’d never make it here in time ... so a quick detour to the local friendly airfield where I picked up this little flying machine ... lucky I learnt to fly in the Air Force ... Gregor here taught me ... he taught me to play the bagpipes too ... as you’ll be delighted to hear later.”

Then turning to his fiancée he added, “shall we get on with it then?”

The rest of the day went on with no further incidents. After the church ceremony, two coaches arrived to take invited guests to a local seaside resort not far away. There they boarded a luxury yacht which sailed a few miles out to sea where they had the most memorable party ever.

And Theodore did get to play Chopin’s Concerto No 1 ... not on the bagpipes though as he intended. Rose convinced him to play it on a small piano instead ... which he did very well.

## FATHER IGNATIUS MISUNDERSTOOD

There are times in life when misunderstandings happen, albeit well intended. And when they happen it is very difficult to rewind time and make things all right once again. As Father Ignatius found out.

It was always his intention to involve as many parishioners as possible in the running of St Vincent's Church. It was after all their church and he was only there as their humble servant.

Since the wedding of Theodore Luxton-Joyce to Rose Leamington, Father Ignatius got to visit the eccentric millionaire and his wife quite often in their beautiful mansion.

He had mentioned at some time that they'd be most welcome to join in the church's activities and events. As a result, Theodore had been encouraged by his wife to join the Parish Council; and she, being far wiser than her husband, decided to give him ample space and not get involved with any church business.

Instead, she joined the Board of Governors of the local Catholic School. This way they both helped the local community but in totally different capacities.

Father Ignatius was in the Chair that evening when Theodore attended the Parish Council Meeting for the first time; and not surprisingly, also for the first time ever, every member of the Parish Council attended that day. There were no absentees whatsoever. They all turned up to meet this millionaire whom they'd heard so much about; perhaps in the hope that some reflected glory would rub on them.

They all sat in cinema fashion in the Parish Hall with Father Ignatius and the Parish Secretary at a table facing them.

"Let us start by saying the Lord's Prayer ..." said the priest.

And then it went on to various Parish business on the long and tedious agenda. The St Vincent de Paul Society gave a short report of their activities, followed by the Boy Scouts, and then the Annual Garden Fete sub-committee outlined what was planned this year – an ice-cream and popcorn stand, a beautiful baby parade, a karaoke sing-along contest and so on and so forth. And as the minutes ticked ever so slowly various Parish groups presented their insomnia healing reports ad infinitum.

Father Ignatius noticed that Theodore sat politely somewhere up front and for once said nothing; which was very unusual for a person always in control and ready to make his views known. The priest realized that unless he involved the man in some activity or other he'd certainly not see him again on the Parish Council.

An item under Any Other Business on the Agenda came to the priest's rescue – repairs to the roof of the Parish Hall. The very place they were sitting in right then.

"May I draw your attention to this important item ..." said the priest introducing the subject, "you will see behind you in that corner that the ceiling has several damp

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patches. Basically, this building has a flat roof which is in great need of repairs or possibly total replacement. Rain has started to leak through gaps in the roof and these will get worse by winter. We have an estimate that replacement would cost up to £1000.

“We need to set up a sub-committee to look into this matter and to come up with recommendations on how to proceed. We’ll need clear indications of costs and how to raise the funds required.

“May I suggest that we ask Mr Luxton-Joyce to chair the sub-committee?”

Theodore jumped in his chair at the mention of his name and, perhaps for the first time that evening, he paid attention to what was being said.

“Hear ... hear ...” said several people enthusiastically.

“Good ...” said the priest, “Mr Luxton-Joyce, would you agree to see to the repairs to the roof?”

“Sure ...” said Theodore, “I’ll take care of it!”

The priest asked for volunteers to serve on the Roof Repairs sub-committee and almost everyone there put their hands up. They all wanted to serve with Theodore. They all put forward ideas on how to proceed ...

“We can organize a tea and cakes evening to raise money ...” said one.

“And we could sell second-hand books; they’re always very popular you know ...” said another.

“£1000 is too much money ...” said a third volunteer, “perhaps we can have a second collection on Sunday!”

And so it went on with everyone enthusiastically volunteering ideas in order to be chosen on Theodore’s sub-committee.

Eventually, Father Ignatius brought matters to a close by selecting six people to join Theodore’s team charged with repairs to the roof. And so the first Parish Council Meeting attended by Theodore ended.

The following morning Father Ignatius and Father Donald were both out travelling separately for the day. Mrs Davenport, the housekeeper, was the only one in the Parish house.

At about 8.30 in the morning two vans turned up and six men started un-loading various equipment into the church car park.

One of the men called at the house and said to Mrs Davenport, “we’ve come to replace the Parish Hall roof.”

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Not knowing any better, she pointed out to them the building in question and left them to it; bringing them tea and coffee every now and then.

By about 7 o'clock that evening they had totally taken away the old roof and replaced it with a new one. They were clearing up debris and generally tidying up when Father Ignatius drove in.

Totally confused he asked one of them what was going on, only to be told that Theodore had asked them to replace the roof. They packed up their equipment and left.

Father Ignatius rushed to his office and rang the eccentric millionaire.

"But Padre ..." said Theodore, "I did as you said. You asked me to fix the roof and I said I'll take care of it ... I'll see to the cost involved ... don't you worry about that old boy ... and I'll send you all the paperwork in due course ..."

"That's very generous Mr Luxton-Joyce ..." muttered Father Ignatius somewhat taken aback by the man's bigheartedness, "it is really very kind of you but ... but ..."

"There's no buts about it Padre ..." interrupted an enthusiastic Theodore, "you have a new leak-proof roof, and I told the fellows who did it to put on an extra layer of top quality fibreglass insulation ... so you'll be as warm as toast come winter if it ever snows on it ... what?"

"Thank you ... thank you ..." muttered the priest, both grateful to the millionaire and yet trying diplomatically to make himself understood, "you see Mr Luxton-Joyce ..."

"Hey ... call me Theodore old boy ... none of this Mr Luxton-Joyce nonsense ... you married Rose and I remember, you're practically family now ... She doesn't call me Mr ... you know ... I shan't tell you what she calls me though ... ha ... ha" he laughed heartily at the thought.

"Yes ... Theodore," continued the priest patiently and digging deep into his reserves of tact and diplomacy, "when I asked you to Chair the Roof Repairs sub-committee ... the intention was that the sub-committee, under your able leadership, would cost the project and raise the funds ..."

"Takes too long old boy ..." interrupted Theodore, "I couldn't be bothered with all that selling of cakes and second-hand books nonsense ... it would take ages to raise £1000 ... I got it done in a jiffy ... what?"

"And that's very kind ... I'm very grateful and I'm sure the parishioners will be very pleased with the work done ... however," Father Ignatius tried once more, asking under his breath for God to come to his rescue, "your kindness and generosity ... lovely as it is ... of course ... has taken away from the sub-committee a sense of belonging. They lost the opportunity to belong ... to your group and your leadership. Did you not notice yesterday how they all wanted to serve on your committee? They all wanted to work for you and to share in your success in raising the funds."



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“What ... by selling cakes at a penny each? Do they not know how many pennies there are in £1000 ... they would never have made it ...”

“Perhaps not,” said Father Ignatius, “but then they would have known that they took on a task, and failed to complete it. That in itself would have been a valuable lesson, don’t you think? People should be encouraged to take on responsibilities, and then try to meet them.”

“I have just got the most brilliant idea Padre ...” shouted Theodore down the phone, “it’s so good that I’m not sure whether it is me that thought it ...” he chortled to himself. “Why don’t we tell them that the roof repairs were such an emergency that it needed to be done quickly before the rains come in and we all drown in that Parish Hall of yours ...

“And instead ... this is a good one Padre ... you’ll be surprised what a good idea it is ... instead, the sub-committee could change their objective from repairing the roof to painting the inside of the Hall. It looked a bit tatty to me, if you pardon me saying so. So why don’t you ask the Roof Repairs Sub-committee to paint the Parish Hall instead?

“They can sell cakes and second-hand books for as long as they wish to raise the money ... I promise you, I will not interfere Padre ... one of them could take over the Chairmanship of the Committee from me.

“I’ll sit back and wait to see the new painted Hall ... as long as they get on with it before my 100th Birthday in forty years time ... ha ... ha ...” he laughed.

Father Ignatius agreed to the proposed solution; the roof was after all in need of urgent repairs, and it couldn’t wait much longer.

He spent the next few days un-ruffling feathers and soothing hurt feelings amongst his parishioners; but all worked out well in the end.

Theodore did not attend any more Parish Council Meetings. Father Ignatius appointed him as “Special Advisor” to be contacted by the priest alone on “matters of great substance and import” to the Parish Council.

And everyone was happy once again!

## GOING UP

Father Ignatius parked the car outside Somerton Towers and out he came with Monsignor Thomas and Sister Martha.

Monsignor Thomas was a small man, rather rotund in stature with a red chubby face which looked like an over ripe tomato. His short body and little legs made him walk like an overfed duck, waddling from side to side as he moved.

Despite her sixty-something age, Sister Martha was very energetic and could out-run anyone half her age. She headed for the front door first and opened it for the Monsignor.

The three walked through the foyer and headed for the elevator only to be met by Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the eccentric millionaire well known to Father Ignatius.

“Hello Padre ...” he shouted at the top of his voice attracting the attention of everyone in the foyer, “rather unusual seeing you here ... don’t tell me you’re a businessman in priest’s clothing ...” he chortled loudly.

Before Father Ignatius had time to respond to Theodore a bell rang once and the elevator doors slid open. The four of them waited for the elevator to empty and then they entered as the doors slid shut again.

Theodore was first at the controls.

“Where are you going Padre ...” he asked.

“Right to the top ...” replied Father Ignatius.

“Ah ... same here ... 13th floor ... right to the top ... nearer to Heaven ... here we go.” joked Theodore.

The elevator moved swiftly upwards as they stood quietly looking at the numbers change on the illuminated control panel. As it reached the figure 12 it stopped violently with a loud screeching noise. Monsignor Thomas lost his footing and nearly rolled on the floor like a giant pumpkin had he not been caught by Sister Martha and Father Ignatius simultaneously.

“Blast!!!” shouted Theodore, then realizing what he’d said, “Oh ... I’m ever so sorry Padre ... and you too Padre ... and ... eh ... Miss ... eh ... Sister ... sorry Sister.”

They said nothing and as they recovered slowly from the shock Theodore took control once again. “Ah ... this panel here ... it should have a phone,” he said as he pulled it open.

He picked up the phone and after a second or two a voice was heard to say: “Engineers here ... how can we help you?”

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“Well ... I’d thought you’d deliver us a pizza ...” replied Theodore angrily, “but in the meantime perhaps you’d care to let us out of this cage ...”

“Which elevator are you in?” asked the engineer.

“I didn’t happen to ask as I got in ... it’s the one on the left in Somerton Towers.” snorted Theodore.

“Ah yes sir ... it has just shown up on our emergency panel ... we’ll be with you shortly ...” replied the engineer as Theodore put the phone back in its place.

“Well ... I hope they won’t keep us waiting for hours ...” he said angrily, “I have an important meeting in a few minutes’ time.”

“I’m sure they’re doing all they can,” said Father Ignatius calmly.

“I don’t like confined spaces ...” he grumbled.

“May I suggest you loosen your tie a bit Sir, and take short breaths to calm you a little,” suggested Sister Martha.

“Oh ... I’m calm alright ...” he retorted, “I’ve always been calm ... born calm ... that’s me ... not crying like the rest of humanity ... but I have an important meeting you know.”

Then looking up he added.

“Now normally in films there’s a trap door in the ceiling ... I could find it and we can escape.”

“I hope you don’t expect me to climb up there ...” said Monsignor Thomas; “I would not fit through any trap door ... no matter how large,” he smiled nervously.

Theodore looked at him and politely bit his lip before saying anything.

“I tell you what Padre ...” said Theodore finally, “I’ll climb up there myself ... I bet there’s a lever up there which will release the door open ... I’ve seen it done in films many times you know!”

“There’s no need for that ...” interrupted Father Ignatius gently, fearing a heart attack or worse mishap happening to the elderly eccentric, “I’m sure the engineers will be here in no time.”

“But ... but ... you’re denying me the opportunity to impress your friends here Padre!” said Theodore winking at Father Ignatius with a smile.

“No one is climbing anywhere ...” said Sister Martha having missed the joke completely, “let’s remain calm until help arrives. Perhaps we could recite the Rosary.”

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“That would take years ...” interrupted Theodore without thinking, “eh ... what I meant to say ... oh never mind ...”

“Padre ... you have not introduced me to your friends ... How do you do Sister and Padre ... I’m Theodore Luxton-Joyce.”

“This is Sister Martha from the Convent near St Vincent Church,” said Father Ignatius introducing his companions, “and this is Monsignor Thomas representing the Bishop.”

“The Bishop? That sounds grand ...” said Theodore.

“Yes ... I represent the Bishop ...” said the Monsignor with a smile.

“I must say ... I’ve never been trapped in an elevator with two priests and a nun ...” laughed Theodore, “in fact I’ve never been trapped in an elevator ever ...”

“Can you imagine ... if the elevator cables broke and we fell to our death ... the newspaper headlines tomorrow would say ... Nun and two priests go down!!! Ha ... ha ... ha ...” he laughed heartily.

They smiled politely and said nothing. Theodore looked at his watch and said,

“Damn those engineers ... my meeting should have started twenty minutes ago.

“It’s very important ... what? It’s a hearing about some stupid objection or other ... Coston Enterprises are being blocked by some non-sense argument from some group or other.”

“Did you say Coston Enterprises?” asked Father Ignatius politely.

“Yes ... that’s me ...” replied Theodore, “I own Coston Enterprises ... we hope to build a farm on a stretch of land up the hill West of town ... pigs mainly ... high demand for pork these days ... bacon ... sausages ... pork chops and all that. I had my eyes on two pieces of land to choose from, so I settled West of town, just up the hill.

“Unfortunately some group or other has complained to the Local Authority. Spoiling the environment ... they say. What nonsense I say ... That’s what this meeting is all about. I’ve come to put an end to all their objections ... can’t stand in the way of farming you know ... business is business after all ... what?”

“That’s us, Theodore!” said Father Ignatius.

“Us what?” asked Theodore, still not getting the point.

“We are the ones who objected to your proposals,” continued Father Ignatius as Sister Martha stopped reciting the Rosary abruptly, and the Monsignor gestured secretly to Father Ignatius to say nothing more.

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“What?” shouted Theodore, “you are the Diocesan Property Holdings Trust Fund? Why didn’t you say so ... old boy?”

“Yes ... Theodore ...” continued Father Ignatius, “it’s a Trust Fund managed by the Bishop. The Monsignor and I represent St Vincent Church, Sister Martha represents the Convent nearby.

“The land you propose to farm on backs onto our joint land, the Church and the Convent. And we feel that a pig’s farm ... well ... it may cause some smell ... and ...”

“Some smell!!!” shouted Theodore, “Some smell you say? It will be a right proper stinko Padre ... I can assure you ... have you never been on a pig’s farm ... what? They do smell to high Heaven I tell you ... but that’s what pigs do ... they smell all right ... but they taste nice too!”

“Yes ... quite ...” mumbled Father Ignatius politely.

“Well ... why did you not tell me Padre? Instead of all this objection nonsense ... I’ve had to read reams of papers because of you ... well not read them exactly ... just looked at the headings and decided it was all nonsense.

“You have my phone number have you not? You could have rung me or Rose ... that’s my wife ...” he said, turning to the Monsignor and Sister Martha, “jolly nice woman ... what? The Padre here married us ... I wouldn’t have had the courage if it wasn’t for him ...

“Yes ... you should have phoned me Padre and we could have discussed it over a cup of chai and biscuits!”

“I didn’t know you own Coston Enterprises ...” said Father Ignatius.

“And how was I to know you’re the Diocesan Property something or other ...” chuckled Theodore, “ha ... ha ... just had a thought Padre ... the stink from the pig’s farm wouldn’t half compete with your incense on Sunday ... what?”

“So ... we objected on the grounds ...” Father Ignatius hesitated.

“Oh ... think nothing of it ... Padre” interrupted Theodore, “I’ll build the farm on the other piece of land ... nearer the highway ... easier access and all that ...

“I can always plant various vegetables just behind your land ... no objection to that I hope? Or would you prefer sweet smelling flowers ... what?”

Father Ignatius looked at the Monsignor who shook his head and smiled. Sister Martha said that they’d have no objection either to turning the land to arable use. Just then the engineers opened the elevator doors and let them out.

“Well then ...” suggested Theodore, “I propose we go to the Grand Hotel to celebrate with a sumptuous lunch ... my treat ... what?”

## THE FOX

It was a lovely warm summer afternoon. Father Ignatius had invited Theodore Luxton-Joyce and his lovely wife Rose to a barbecue in the church's gardens. After all, the priest had been invited to the eccentric millionaire's mansion many a time and it was perhaps appropriate that he should return the favour.

Father Donald was also there of course and had entertained the group with his guitar playing. Mrs Davenport had excelled herself in preparing a lovely meal helped by Sister Martha and a few other nuns from the Convent nearby, who had also been invited.

All in all it had been a lovely afternoon with great food and drink and a wonderful small gathering of friends enjoying themselves and each others company.

Father Donald had just finished his solo performance of some Spanish melody on the guitar when Theodore decided to change the mood of the party altogether.

"I have brought my bagpipes with me ..." he declared, "they're in the car ... let me fetch them and play you a tune or two ... what?"

Before anyone could react to the suggestion, he stormed out of the garden missing altogether the sideways glances between Sister Martha and Father Donald.

"He has been practicing for some time ..." said Rose sweetly with a smile, "I don't see why I should be the only one to enjoy his noise ..."

"It'll make a change from the guitar ..." replied Father Donald in his broad Glaswegian accent, "and it's great to have someone proud to be Scottish ... I would have learnt to play the bagpipes myself ... but it's hard to practice when you're brought up in the tenements of Glasgow ..." he chuckled.

A few moments later Theodore re-appeared with his bagpipes in hand.

"You're from up North Padre ..." he asked Father Donald, "Do you play the bagpipes?"

"I'm afraid not ..." replied the priest, "I learnt the guitar instead as a child ..."

"Oh ... I can teach you if you wish ..." said Theodore enthusiastically, "although I can't think off-hand of any church hymns suitable for the bagpipes ..."

As he started blowing through the pipes and getting ever so redder in the face, his cheeks inflated to the point where they would explode, there was a rustling noise in the bushes at the back end of the gardens; just by the statue of Our Lady.

They all turned round towards the bushes as Theodore stopped playing, and they saw a fox come out of the bushes and fall on its side at the feet of Our Lady.

"Strange behaviour ..." whispered Father Donald, "I'll go there slowly to

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investigate.”

The others remained in their seats by the barbecue and watched intently as the priest walked ever so slowly towards the fox, trying not to disturb it. When he was a few feet away the creature let out a scream but did not get up or even move. It just lay there baring its teeth threateningly. Father Donald stopped and then after a short while he walked backwards slowly to rejoin the group by the fire.

“It’s badly injured ...” he said, “its back leg is bleeding ... probably shot by a farmer in the lands just behind our gardens ... or maybe bitten by some dogs ...”

Theodore pulled Father Ignatius gently aside away from the group and then whispered quietly “I have my shot gun in the car Padre ... shall I put it out of its misery?”

“No ... that won’t be necessary Theodore ... I’ll phone the Animal Welfare Society for their advice,” replied Father Ignatius, “in the meantime, get everyone in the house ... luckily we’ve all finished eating.”

About half-an-hour later they all watched from the safety of the house as the Animal Welfare Society people dealt with the situation. They tried to capture the fox and take it to an animal hospital where it could be treated and looked after until it is strong enough to be released in the wild once again. Every time they approached the animal he bared its teeth again and attempted to bite his benefactors. Eventually, it was caught and taken to the hospital.

“And to think I was prepared to shoot him ...” said Theodore looking out of the window, “luckily the Padre here stopped me ... well done Padre!”

“That fox reminds me of our behaviour ...” said Father Ignatius gently as he poured his guests hot chocolate drinks just brought in by Mrs Davenport in an extra large pot.

“How so ... Padre ... I don’t look like a fox do I?” interrupted Theodore as Sister Martha smiled coyly.

“When things go wrong in our lives we too tend to behave like that fox,” continued Father Ignatius. “We get angry at what’s happened, we’re concerned, frightened even, about the future ... we get defensive and we go on the attack. We believe that God has abandoned us; and we’ve reached the end of the line.

“When we behave like that, we shut off a channel of communication with God.

“When God is temporarily put aside, He doesn’t stop loving us, but we block His influence to do good in our lives. Like the fox, every time God tries to help us we bare our teeth in anger. Our behaviour is futile and un-productive.

“The fox did not realize that by being caught he’d soon improve his hopeless situation. But we should know better, and trust our Lord rather than lash out at Him without thinking.”

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“How true ...” said Sister Martha, “what a good observation Ignatius.”

“Thank you Father,” said Rose, “I’ll remember that next time I feel things are getting too much!”

Theodore put his cup down and declared “Jolly good show that God doesn’t carry a shotgun ... that’s what I say ... what?”



## ROAD TO DISCOVERY

What a terrible winter evening it was that day when Father Ignatius had to visit Theodore Luxton-Joyce at his mansion.

It was about six o'clock in the evening, it was dark and it had been raining all day. It was that kind of annoying drizzle that you get for hours on end sometimes in England. Father Ignatius was glad to be indoors in the warmth when the phone rang and Theodore's butler asked him to come over urgently. There had been some sort of emergency which he was "not at liberty to discuss on the telephone", as the butler put it somewhat pompously.

The priest put on his coat and went out driving in the dark and in the rain. Something which he hated doing immensely.

Half-an-hour later he'd arrived at Theodore's mansion and he noticed a police car parked outside.

The butler opened the door and said "let me take you to the library where all will be explained to you!"

Father Ignatius nodded and said nothing, following the butler and leaving a trail of water dripping from his coat and wet shoes.

Theodore was in the library with two policemen and a man in civilian clothing. As soon as he saw the priest the man in civilian clothing got up and signalled Father Ignatius out of the room again. "May I have a word Sir?" he mumbled as they walked out of the room.

Once out of the library the man asked, "Are you Father Ignatius?"

"Yes ... I am" said the priest.

"It's good you're here Sir," said the man, "I am Detective Chief Inspector George Drayton ... we've been called because Mrs Luxton-Joyce has gone missing.

"She left here at about lunchtime to visit some friends down South. She drove her own car and has not phoned her husband to say she's arrived safely, as previously arranged.

"Mr Luxton-Joyce should have heard from her two hours ago. He phoned her friends and they say she has not arrived.

"He's in a bad state Sir ... he refuses to see a doctor and he's asked for you.

"We're pursuing our enquiries with other police forces and hospitals ... at this stage we're keeping an open mind on what may have happened."

"What do you mean?" asked the priest.

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“Well ... him being very rich and all that ... anyway. I’ll keep a policeman on the premises should you need to contact us urgently ...”

“You don’t mean ...” Father Ignatius hesitated, “you don’t suggest she’s been kidnapped?”

“Well Sir ... at this stage we have very little to go on ... there would have been a phone call by now had she been abducted ... we’re tracing all phone calls. I should be grateful if you could calm him down a little ... in case anyone phones.”

As they entered the room again the detective nodded and the two policemen got out leaving the priest alone with Theodore.

Father Ignatius said a silent prayer in his mind, a habit he’d developed long ago, and approached Theodore quietly and placed his hand on his shoulder. The man looked up from his seat and said “Where is she Padre ... why has she not phoned?”

His eyes were red albeit he maintained his composure.

“I pray it will be all right Theodore ...” replied Father Ignatius gently.

“I’ve been praying too Padre ... I’ve been praying so much I’m tired of praying ... I doubt God is listening ...”

“He is ... just keep believing Theodore,” said the priest, “would you like some tea?”

Theodore shook his head.

“I couldn’t have anything ... I’m so worried Padre ... I couldn’t live without her ... not after losing my first wife ... if anything happened to her I’d die ...”

“Hey ... hey ... hold it right there!” said Father Ignatius firmly, “you’re running ahead of yourself Theodore ... just take a deep breath ... that’s right ... hold it there ... now exhale gently. Do it again a few times.

“Let us trust in God ... let’s keep calm ... the police are doing all they can and they’ll let us know as soon as they hear something ...”

“Yes ... sorry Padre” mumbled Theodore, “but ... what if she’s been kidnapped ... I’d give everything to have her back ...”

“Don’t even think about that for now ...” interrupted the priest, “let’s keep calm shall we ...”

Theodore nodded and said nothing for a few moments, sitting there staring at the telephone and willing it to ring.

“She’s changed my life since I met her ...” he said eventually. “I never thought I’d meet someone else again ... not after my first wife died and at my age ... then Rose came into my life and changed it ...”

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Father Ignatius said nothing, preferring to let the man speak and perhaps calm down a little. Theodore continued.

“I so hate to be away from her ... I have to travel sometimes for business and it’s hell being away from her ...

“When I’m in a hotel alone I go crazy just thinking of her ... when I’ve finished my business meetings and I go to my room ... I dread it ... I dread being there without her ... I sit there and close my eyes and imagine she’s with me ... I hold out my hand and it’s as if she’s there ... I feel her love ... I feel her presence near me ...

“We may be miles apart ... and when I phone her I can see her smile right there as we talk ...

“And when we finish talking I just sit there in my room ... I close my eyes and I’m with her ... I could almost touch her ... I love her so much Padre.”

Father Ignatius smiled gently.

“That’s wonderful ...” he said, “have you ever told her how you feel?”

“Good Lord no ...” replied the elderly man, “you don’t talk like that to a woman old boy ... she’d think you’ve gone soft in the head ... you must be strong old boy ... expected of you and all that ... what?”

Father Ignatius smiled again noticing that Theodore had rediscovered his usual impetuous character of speaking spontaneously without thinking.

“I believe you should tell her how you feel about her ...” said the priest, “I’m sure Rose will love to hear what you’ve just told me ... and how much she means to you.”

“But ... but ... it goes without saying old boy ... she should know how I feel ... there’s no need for me to spell it out ...” blurted Theodore forgetting for a moment the situation they were in.

“No Theodore ...” said Father Ignatius gently, “it does not go without saying ... it needs to be said ... and repeated often ...”

“Sheer nonsense ...” interrupted Theodore, “amorous words and lovey dovey affection is for young people ... not for the likes of me and Rose ...”

“That is not so ...” continued Father Ignatius gently, “there is no age limit on love.

“Love is like a delicate flower which needs to be nurtured and cared for tenderly to help it grow and develop.

“I have met many couples in my days as a priest who love each other deeply ... yet they never say it ... they leave things unsaid ... and perhaps take things for granted ... until sometimes it’s too late ...”

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The priest bit his lip as he realized he'd perhaps said too much. Theodore looked up at him as if awakened from a nightmare.

"It's not ... It's not too late ... is it Father?" he mumbled, his lip trembling uncontrollably.

It was the first time Theodore had addressed the priest as Father instead of the usual Padre which he was accustomed of using. It punctuated perhaps the seriousness of the situation and the depth of despair which Theodore had reached.

At this very moment God must have intervened, because before Father Ignatius had time to reply the door opened and the police inspector came in.

"We have some news ..." he said, "Mrs Luxton-Joyce's car was found half-an-hour ago in a ditch in a secluded country lane. It appears she took a detour on her way to her friends to avoid road-works. She lost control of her vehicle in the rain and slipped in the ditch causing her to lose consciousness. She's been taken to hospital in an ambulance ..."

"Is she all right?" shouted Theodore standing up.

"Yes sir ... she appears not to have been hurt seriously ... I have a car waiting to drive you to the hospital."

Father Ignatius drove back home with a thankful heart that fateful evening when God heard his prayers once again.

And Theodore discovered for the first time not to keep his love silently hidden within his own heart.

## LOVE DECLARED

Three days after Rose had her car accident she was released from hospital and returned with Theodore Luxton-Joyce to their lovely mansion in the country.

The staff there were all pleased to see her return safe and sound. The housekeeper had arranged for a lovely “Welcome Home” cake to be baked and decorated; and Theodore asked every member of his staff to gather in the library and enjoy tea and cakes as well as his best vintage wines if they so wished.

He was overjoyed at celebrating the safe homecoming of his beloved wife, and his employees certainly helped him in the celebrations.

In fact Theodore was in such a great mood that he gave all his employees the day off. After they’d finished enjoying his hospitality in the library he arranged for a coach to call at his home and take all his employees, including the butler, to a private party on his boat moored just off shore.

“But Sir ...” said Xavier the butler, “who will attend to the house and usher visitors in if we all depart together? Surely I should stay behind ...”

“Nonsense ... I shall hear nothing of it ...” declared Theodore grandiosely, “you all go and enjoy yourselves on the boat ... I can open my own front door ... what?” he chuckled heartily.

When they had all left and he was alone with Rose, still in the library enjoying her cup of tea, he sat down gingerly beside her on the settee and fumbled his words ... “Are you all right ... my dear ... what?”

“Yes Theodore ...” she replied sweetly, “thank you for a lovely welcome home party.”

“Jolly good ... jolly good ...” he repeated searching for his next words, “is there anything you need ... another cup of tea perhaps ... shall I make you a sandwich? Are you hungry?”

“No thank you darling ... I am fine ...” she smiled coyly.

“Are you comfortable ... what? Would you prefer another seat ... the armchair perhaps ...” continued Theodore all tongue tied.

“I am fine Theodore ...” she replied gently, “I’m not an invalid you know ... it was just a slight bump on the head ... I am OK.”

“Jolly good show ... no harm done ... a slight bump ... jolly good ... jolly good” he repeated.

“I’m sorry I destroyed the car ...” she said after a short pause.

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“Oh ... think nothing of it ...” he declared, “I never liked the colour ... dark grey doesn’t suit you ... what? We’ll have to choose a better colour this time ...”

She smiled again.

“I have something to say ...” he mumbled after a while, “when you were missing ... a few days ago that is ... the Padre came here for a chat ... he had nothing better to do I suppose ... so I had to keep him occupied ... what? We sat here in the library waiting for your news ... The police were all over the house and I was with the Padre here all alone ...”

“I could see him fretting ... so I had to keep his spirits up poor chap ... he was worried about you no doubt ... as I was too naturally ... but I tried not to show it of course ... I didn’t want to upset him unduly you know ... so I kept him talking to keep his mind off things ... We sat here and talked ... what?”

“That’s kind of you,” she said, “What did you speak about?”

“Oh business you know ...” he mumbled, “I told him how I have to travel a lot sometimes ... stay overnight at wretched hotels ... all alone in miserable parts of the country ...”

“I told him how it must be terrible for you here all alone ... when I’m away on business. Well ... all alone with the staff that is ... the butler, the housekeeper, the cook ... and the ... the maids and ...”

“Yes dear ... I get the picture ...” she interrupted smiling sweetly.

“Yes ... quite ...” Theodore rambled on, “it must be terrible for you my dear ... to be here all alone with the staff when I’m away travelling ...”

“Do you know something Rose? I always wished you were with me on these business trips. Instead of being here all alone.

“Perhaps you could come along with me next time I’m away and you could go shopping or something like that ... or visit museums when I’m on business. Most places have museums ... have they not? Yes ... I’m sure they have ... you could come along with me and visit museums ... that’s what!

“Then when I finish my meetings we could have a bite to eat together ... I can never decide when I read those menus ... you can help me choose ... Yes ... that’s another advantage of you being there with me ... You can select from the menu ... should have thought of that all these times I’ve travelled alone ...”

“Yes ... I think you should come with me on business trips ... then at least I won’t be alone in the hotel ... the rooms are too large you know ... and they look empty ... you could fill any excess space in the room ... what?”

“Thank you dear ...” she smiled, “not elegantly put ... but I understand what you mean ...”

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“Jolly good ... capital idea ...” he went on, “now that this is sorted ... I’d like to add something else ... I ... I ... I do miss your presence when I’m on these business trips you know ...”

“What a nice thing to say Theodore,” she interrupted.

“Well ... It’s just not the same when you’re not there old girl ... wouldn’t want you at the business meetings that is ... terribly boring you know ... but afterwards ... your presence would be most welcome at the restaurant ... and the hotel ...”

“I understand ...” she said putting her cup down and blowing him a silent kiss.

“Ehmmm ... yes quite ... Yes ... it would be very nice to have you there with me ... I would like that very much ...” he hesitated, “yes ... I would like it ... love it even ...”

“Because I love you Rose ... you know that do you not? I told you I love you just before we got married ... did I not ... what?”

“Yes my dear ...” she smiled, “you told me you love me ... and I love you too. What’s led to all this Theodore ... you seem very upset ... I know you love me and I love you very much ... here come sit closer ... I need a hug!”

He shuffled a little closer as she held his arm tightly.

“It was a small accident,” she said softly, “don’t be upset ... thank God I am all right and all is well ... I love you very much Theo and I know you love me too ...”

“Oh ... well ...” he hesitated again, “I’m glad that’s understood ... it was that Padre you know ... he implied that I don’t tell you I love you often enough ... don’t know where he got the idea from ... he said it’s important to tell one’s wife that one loves her ... as if I didn’t know that.

“He must have been stressed poor chap ... worried about you and waiting to hear your news ...”

“He didn’t say how often I should tell you I love you ... he just said it was important to say it ... Pretty obvious I thought ... what? He must think I’m a fool that needs telling the obvious.” At this point the front door bell rang and Theodore got up to answer it leaving the library door wide open. It was Father Ignatius carrying a large bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates to welcome Rose home.

“I told her Padre ...” shouted Theodore loud enough for the whole world to hear.

Father Ignatius looked at him in complete bewilderment. Theodore continued in the same loud voice “I told Rose I love her ... just like you told me to do the other day.”

Rose smiled silently and pretended not to have heard a thing as the two men entered the library.

## THEODORE'S REQUIEM REQUEST

Father Ignatius rang Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the well-known eccentric millionaire who lived in a large mansion in the countryside just outside town. He needed a small favour from this old friend who, although he lived in a world of his own, really had a heart of gold and would help at the drop of a hat.

“Hello Theodore ...” said the priest tentatively, “how are you keeping these days?”

“Oh ... jolly well Padre ... considering old age is creeping in what?” responded the rich man jovially, “I haven't seen you for a while ... perhaps we should meet for a spot of lunch what?”

“That would be nice ... and how is Rose?”

“Oh ... she's very well indeed and looking after me ... best thing that happened to me marrying her ... It's nearly a year now since our wedding you know. Mustn't forget to buy her a present ... I'd better tell my secretary to remind me don't you think old boy?”

“It's about the wedding I'm phoning you ...” said Father Ignatius, “you remember you had someone playing the bagpipes?”

“Yes ... Gregor McBurnish ... Haven't seen him since the wedding. Must arrange a spot of lunch with him too ...”

“I wonder if he could help me ...” asked the priest, “an elderly parishioner has died recently and as it happens he asked for a piper to play by his grave side during the funeral. He was from Dundee ...”

“Dash inconvenient that ...” interrupted Theodore.

“Being from Dundee?” enquired the priest somewhat confused.

“No not that ... just remembered. Must have my tartan kilt cleaned. I wore it at a function last week and forgot all about it!

“Wants a piper by the grave-side you say? No need to bother McBurnish, Padre. I'll do it ... in full costume too ...”

“Oh, I couldn't possibly impose ...” said the priest sensing troubles ahead, “you're such a busy man and ...”

“Nonsense ... It's the least I could do for a fellow countryman. I'll be at the funeral. McBurnish taught me to play the bagpipes you know ... I could also play my own composition ...”

“Your composition?” asked the priest in trepidation.

“Yes ... Chopin Piano Concerto Number 1. Do you know it?”



## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“Yes ... yes ... I do know it. It’s a piano piece, not a bagpipes ...”

“Oh ... I’ve re-written it for the bagpipes Padre,” declared Theodore enthusiastically. “Don’t you worry about that ... It can be played whilst marching up and down or standing still by the graveside. Now you can’t do that with a piano, can you?”

The priest managed to convince Theodore that traditional bagpipes music would be more appropriate and agreed a time and place when he should be there.

He put the phone down nervously and picked up a local map to find the new cemetery which had just been commissioned a few miles out of town in beautiful woodland surroundings. The priest had never been there and his parishioner was one of the first people to be buried in this new location.

On the day in question Theodore dressed in full Scottish costume and drove to the countryside accompanied by his lovely wife Rose who read directions from a map.

Try as they might, they just could not find the new cemetery. They drove up and down country lanes, through beautiful meadows and woodlands, and they were beginning to panic a little as they realized they were lost. There was no one to ask directions from; so they kept searching until they saw an open field, beside a small wooded area, in a secluded piece of land. The digging equipment was still there as well as the crew having a rest; but there were no mourners, nor the hearse, anywhere to be seen.

“Dash it all ...” said Theodore as he stopped the car abruptly, “we must be late! I can’t possibly let the poor fellow down like that. You stay here my dear ... I’ll soon get things sorted ...”

He got out of the vehicle, put on his beret, grabbed the bagpipes and marched towards the men and digging equipment.

He reached the grave and saw a metal box in there.

So he decided to do what he was asked to do. He got his bagpipes ready and played.

He played like he’d never played before; not missing a note and with real Scottish pride. He played all the religious songs he knew ... Abide with me ... The Lord is my Shepherd ... How great Thou Art ... and finished with everyone’s favourite ... Amazing Grace.

As Theodore walked to his car one of the workers followed him and asked: “What was all that about? I have never seen such a thing before ... and I’ve been installing septic tanks for years!”

Luckily, the worker knew where the new cemetery was and he gave them directions to arrive just in time.

## GOD SEND

Theodore Luxton-Joyce the eccentric millionaire made himself comfortable in his armchair near a roaring fire and said:

“It’s jolly decent of you to come and see me so quickly Padre ... I’m in real difficulty you see ...”

Father Ignatius put down his cup of coffee and said nothing. He encouraged Theodore to go on by nodding politely.

“It’s Gregor McBurnish ... you know him of course ... he played the bagpipes at our wedding!”

The priest nodded again.

“Well ... he’s let me down badly ... he’s gone abroad. Australia, or New Zealand I believe ... he went to visit distant family. You can’t get more distant than Australia I say ... what?”

Father Ignatius smiled.

“And now I’m in trouble with Colonel Grant ... old Army friend. That’s where you come in ... I thought. You’re a decent chap ... Never let me down ... unlike McBurnish ... You can help save the day with Colonel Grant ... He is Catholic you know ... but he hasn’t been in Church for years ... Grant that is, not McBurnish. He’s Church of Scotland you know.”

“I don’t think I understand ...” Father Ignatius enquired.

“I need your help to sort out Colonel Grant ... you can handle a gun I take it?” asked Theodore.

Father Ignatius was taken aback at the question.

“No ... no ...” mumbled the priest, “Why don’t you start from the beginning Theodore. What trouble are you in exactly ...”

“Well ... ehm ... every two years Colonel Grant holds a shooting contest at his mansion some thirty miles or so from here ... McBurnish and I are always on the same team ... he can’t make it this year so I thought you’d replace him ...”

The priest breathed a sigh of relief.

“Ah ... I understand. But ... but ... I’ve never ever been near a gun, never mind shoot it ...”

“I suppose not ...” interrupted Theodore, “the Bishop’s crook is more your weapon of choice what?” He laughed heartily.

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“And I wouldn’t be comfortable shooting at birds or rabbits or whatever ...” continued the priest.

“Oh no ... it’s not that.” Theodore interrupted again. “We shoot at clay pigeons ... little clay discs which are thrust into the air by a machine. You shout “PULL” ... the chap at the machine releases the disc high in the air and you shoot it before it hits the ground. We play in teams of two and then there’s a decent lunch at the mansion. You’ll get to meet some new people and you’d be doing me a great favour Padre. It’s in three weeks time and I could teach you to shoot ...”

The day in question was pleasant enough although not Father Ignatius’ cup of tea. As expected, he was paired with Theodore and despite trying his best the priest missed more clay discs than hit them. Fortunately, Theodore was a better marksman and did not miss one disc.

During the buffet lunch which followed Father Ignatius mingled with the guests and it was soon obvious that he had nothing in common with these people. He wondered why he had agreed to accompany Theodore and wished he’d soon return to his more mundane lifestyle at St Vincent Church.

As the priest decided to go out for a walk in the gardens there was an almighty clattering of dishes breaking and cutlery falling in the dining room. He turned round and saw a man fall to the ground ... It was Colonel Grant.

The guests picked him up and sat him in a chair, whereupon he asked to speak to the guest priest.

Father Ignatius approached him and the other guests moved away to give them some privacy. The Colonel was conscious and spoke quietly to the priest whilst someone phoned for an ambulance. Theodore tried to contact the Colonel’s wife who had gone to town for the day.

Eventually the ambulance arrived and took the Colonel to hospital. He died of a heart attack on the way there.

On the way back to St Vincent Church both men remained quiet for a while. Finally Theodore spoke:

“It was lucky you were there Father ...” he said, “God must have wanted you to be there for the Colonel ... that’s why McBurnish had to go to Australia and miss the shoot ...”

“I’ll admit I did not want to go with you at first,” Father Ignatius replied, “but God had something different in mind. He must surely love the Colonel to ensure there was a priest with him in his final moments!”

## **THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE SPEAKS HIS MIND**

Father Ignatius and Father Donald welcomed a visiting Franciscan priest, Father Randolph, to the Parish for the weekend to lead the Marriage Renewal Seminar.

The Seminar was held on the grounds of the Parish Gardens providing plenty of time for the participants to spend time together re-assessing their married life, in preparation for a Renewal of Vows Ceremony to be held after Mass on Saturday evening.

The two Parish priests were pleased that they managed to get twenty married couples to attend the weekend event and looked forward to a successful Seminar for all involved.

The same cannot be said however for Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the eccentric friend of Father Ignatius and very generous benefactor of St Vincent Church.

Theodore preferred to be well away from “organized love-ins”, as he called the Seminar and would not have attended for one moment had he the choice. But his lovely wife, Rose, convinced him otherwise and he, being an old romantic, albeit he hid it well, acquiesced to her request.

After lunch on Saturday the group met at the Church Hall and was addressed by Father Randolph.

He spoke about the necessity of working at a marriage to make it successful, and explained how very often couples tend to drift apart because of the pressures of modern living and having to work hard just to keep body and soul together. He went on to stress the importance of “being aware of the other person in your life”, the importance of “listening” to their feelings, and “showing love” by saying something nice every now and then, by holding hands, giving a hug every so often and not taking one’s spouse for granted.

“Love doesn’t end after the honeymoon” declared Father Randolph, “it’s a precious flower which needs nurturing and feeding every day if it is to flourish for a lifetime!”

At this point Father Randolph noted Theodore Luxton-Joyce raising his eyebrows and looking in the distance out of the window, no doubt wishing he was anywhere else but here.

“What do you think Theodore?” asked the visiting priest, “Do you think it’s important to tell your wife, Rose, that you love her?”

“Every day?” asked Theodore.

The Group laughed and Fathers Ignatius and Donald, sitting at the top table, looked at each other silently.

“Yes ... every day ... why not?” continued the Franciscan priest after the laughter died down.

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“I don’t see the point ...” replied Theodore, “Rose knows that I love her very much ... (then looking at his wife) ... you do know that don’t you?”

“What’s the point of all this adolescent childish talk ... it goes without saying that I love her ... what?”

“I wouldn’t have given up a weekend of good fishing and come here, if I didn’t love her ... don’t you think old boy?”

The Group laughed again.

“Fifteen – love ...” Father Donald whispered quietly to Father Ignatius.

But Father Randolph was not to be beaten so easily.

“No ... it does not go without saying ...” he responded quietly, “it is important to tell your wife, or husband, that you love them. That they are not taken for granted. It is important to say it ... and say it often. It’s important to be nice and to compliment one’s spouse every now and then.

“Very often I’ve seen couples drift apart yet deep down they do really love each other. They just don’t bother, or don’t have time, to say it. With time, they forget what first attracted them to each other. And every time we forget ... love dies a little!

“Let me challenge you Theodore if I may ...”

“Fifteen all ...” Father Donald whispered softly under his breath. “A good return from the visiting priest!” Father Ignatius sat quietly and said nothing.

“I want you to answer quickly without thinking,” Father Randolph challenged Theodore. “Are you ready? Without thinking ... what first attracted you to your wife Rose?”

“She makes a decent steak and kidney pie ... what?” declared Theodore.

The Group broke down into hysterics.

“Thirty – fifteen to your eccentric friend!” Father Donald said to his colleague Father Ignatius.

Father Randolph was astute enough to continue with his talk rather than get into a pointless debate with Theodore. Minutes later he asked the Group whether anyone had personal knowledge or experience of marriages breaking down after a long period together. He called them “mature divorces”.

Theodore raised his hand.

“I bet you regret inviting him ...” Father Donald whispered to Father Ignatius.

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“Years ago ... when I was in the military, one of my people got divorced after twenty years of marriage ...” said Theodore.

“I asked him why ... and he said his wife was violent what? Apparently she threw things at him in an argument ... Anything ... cups ... saucers ... cutlery ... crockery ... anything that came to hand.

“Turns out she threw things at him throughout the marriage ... twenty years of it.

“I asked him why he took so long to decide to leave her.

“He said her aim was getting better ... what?”

The Group burst into laughter to the embarrassment of Rose, whilst Father Randolph tactfully decided to call a short tea break.

“Game ... set ... and match!” declared Father Donald as he got up from his seat.

The rest of the weekend proceeded without further difficulties for Father Randolph, albeit Theodore was the most popular member of the Group.

As they drove back home he asked his wife, “You don’t think it necessary to say ‘I love you’ every day ... do you?”

“It’s nice to hear it every now and then...” she said, “It’s reassuring you know. Women like reassurance!”

“Tell you what old girl ...” he replied, “I’ll write it down big on a piece of paper. You can read it as often as you want when you need reassurance ... what?” he chortled heartily.

She smiled; knowing full well that he was the world’s biggest romantic, yet his up-bringing did not allow him to show it.

## WHEN I'M DEAD AND GONE

Father Ignatius was at the monthly Any Questions Meeting held at St Vincent Parish Hall, whereby parishioners and their guests asked any questions which he and Father Donald would attempt to answer and teach about the Catholic Faith.

The discussion centred about death and our achievements in life.

Father Ignatius said, “Imagine you are dead and resting in your open coffin. Your family and friends pass by to pay their last respects. What would you want them to say?”

Someone hesitantly said that she'd like people to say that she was a good wife and mother and that she always attended Mass on Sunday.

Another person added that he was a good doctor and did his best for his patients.

A third parishioner went on to say that she was a good teacher and cared for all the children in her care.

Father Ignatius noted that Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the eccentric millionaire and generous donor to the church, was scribbling away in his notepad and was somewhat un-interested. He'd only attended the Meeting to accompany his lovely wife Rose.

So the priest asked him, “How about you Theodore? What would you like people to say when they see you lying in your open coffin?”

“I'd like them to say ‘I've seen him move ...’ ” came the swift reply as everyone laughed.

As the laughter died down Father Ignatius continued, “I'm sure they'll say you had a great sense of humour too ...

“But on a more serious note ... how exactly will we be remembered?”

“A parishioner once told me that it was hypocritical to always speak well of the dead. If a person had been nasty and bad in his life, the only difference is that he is now a dead nasty and bad person. And to pretend otherwise would be insincere.

“This is a little uncharitable perhaps; but that parishioner had a point.”

Father Ignatius stopped, as he often did, to punctuate the importance of what he had just said.

He then continued, “Now is the time to ensure that people will be honest when they speak about us.

“We do this by remembering Christ's commandment to love one another. And to practice that commandment.

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“The best gift we can offer each other is our presence. We all have a part to play in other people’s lives. Just think for a moment how many people rely on you ... your spouse, your children, your elderly parents, your neighbours perhaps ... if you’re a teacher or a doctor the children in your school rely on you, as well as your patients ...

“I need not go on. But the point I’m making is that we should be generous with our time with these people. Our very presence on this earth can be a source of great joy and happiness to others.

“When Jesus was raised to Heaven, His disciples missed Him and were sad to see Him leave them. They were totally devastated and confused.

“Missing someone is a sure sign that their presence affected your life in a good way.

“So let us be remembered not for who we were but for what we have done; and how we made a real difference for the good in someone’s life.

“And even though we might not move in our open coffin, as Theodore hopes, at least our lives will have moved others.”



## THEODORE'S DEAL

Father Ignatius visited Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the eccentric rich benefactor, at his magnificent mansion in the countryside to discuss Parish Council business.

But it was obvious that this was the last thing on Theodore's mind.

"Ah ... welcome Padre" he said with a grin on his face like a child wishing to share a secret or surprise.

"How nice to see you once again! Let's go to the library, I have something there I wish to show you. I'm sure you'll like it what?"

The priest followed the millionaire through the large entrance hall and down the corridor towards the library.

"Here ... what do you think?" said Theodore as he threw open the library doors and entered the spacious room.

Father Ignatius said nothing at first; wondering what it was which was supposed to interest him.

"Over there ... just by the window ..." said Theodore "they call it a treadmill. It's a brand new contraption which is all the rage in London you know.

"Apparently, in London they have these in hospitals to give people who've been somewhat poorly much needed exercise. I wouldn't be surprised if some day some enterprising person wouldn't have these machines in a hall somewhere and charge people to use them.

"I might think of doing it myself perhaps. Meantime, I bought myself one ... want to try it?"

"What is it exactly?" asked the priest hesitantly.

"It's an exercise machine old boy ..." enthused Theodore, "that bit down there is a continuous belt which goes round and round automatically. It's electric you know. You switch it on, stand on it, and walk ... Here let me show you."

Theodore jumped on the treadmill and walked slowly for a few minutes before switching it off.

"Simple ... isn't it? You can walk for miles without leaving the house!"

"But, why would you do that, when you have such beautiful countryside around you?" asked the bemused priest.

"Aha ..." replied Theodore still excited about his new acquisition, "with this machine you can walk at any time, day or night, in all weathers."

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

Father Ignatius smiled.

“And what’s more ...” continued Theodore, “you can march to the sound of bagpipes ... I switch on the music first and then hop onto the machine.

“Doesn’t go so well to the sound of classical music of course, but I have plenty of records of military bands marching to the sound of pipes and drums. Takes me right back to my days in the forces ... don’t you know!”

“I’m glad you found something to help you exercise ...” said the priest quietly.

“One main drawback though ...” Theodore went on with a frown on his face “It’s very cumbersome when you’re holding a glass of whisky whilst walking. I tend to spill most of it all over the place. Good twelve years old single malt too!

“I thought of putting the whisky in a small bottle and using a straw to drink ... but it’s difficult putting ice cubes in the bottle. Unless you crush them first of course ... what do you think?”

Father Ignatius was at a loss for words. After a moment’s or two of silence he said, “It’s good to have some physical exercise to keep fit. If only we could also encourage people to have some spiritual exercise!”

“What do you mean?” asked Theodore.

“You know ...” said Father Ignatius putting his hands together as if praying, “more time with Our Lord is good for the soul.”

“Well ... I go to church on Sundays, Father. As you know all too well!”

“Yes ... of course. But I also meant more time in silent contemplation here at home. Reading the Bible perhaps or some other Christian book. Or visiting church more often ... or our Prayer Group meetings ... or ...”

“Oh no ... definitely not that!” interrupted Theodore, “not your Prayer Meetings with people waving their hands in the air and speaking in unintelligible incomprehensible words. My wife Rose has been to the Prayer Meetings and told me all about them ...”

“Yes ... she’s often there.” said Father Ignatius, “she doesn’t wave her hands about nor speaks in tongues ... Yet, she takes part in the singing and prayers. She wouldn’t continue to attend if she didn’t get any benefit from it. Why don’t you join her sometime?”

Theodore said nothing as he poured two large glasses of whisky. You could almost hear the cogs turning in his mind.

“I’ll attend with Rose on one condition ...” he said finally, “You walk for a minute or two on this treadmill and try it out. I’ll hold your whisky for you!”

And that’s how Father Ignatius gained another member to the weekly Prayer Group.

## THEODORE'S BOXING DAY

It had been a busy year for Theodore Luxton-Joyce the eccentric millionaire businessman and he hadn't been in touch with Father Ignatius for some time. So it was a surprise for the priest when the phone rang early on Boxing Day, the day just after Christmas, and he heard the familiar voice.

"Is that yourself Padre?" asked Theodore.

"Yes ... it is. Merry Christmas Theodore to you and Rose ..."

"Yes quite ... jolly good ..." interrupted Theodore, "I was somewhat concerned at getting that other French priest on the phone. You know the one ... you've had him visiting lately ..."

"Yes ... Father Gaston. He has gone back to Paris".

"Jolly good I say ... what? Never liked the French ... Father Gaston being an exception of course ... he was rather quiet and said very little ... just as I like the French to be ... what?"

Father Ignatius smiled and said nothing whilst Theodore continued totally unaware of what he was saying.

"Right ... now that I've got you on the phone rather than that French fellow, I need you urgently to help me out! Terrible spot of bother ... old boy ... terrible I say!"

The priest frowned fearing the worst. "What's happened?" he asked.

"Well ... Rose and I had arranged a quiet after Christmas get-together for this evening and we'd invited the Mortimers ... you know them? He's a businessman working from the US most of the time. No ... Of course you don't know the Mortimers. Have you ever been to America Padre? I'm sure the Vatican has opened a few Branches over there ..."

"Anyway ... back to the Mortimers. They're over here right now for a few days ... visiting family ... that sort of thing. Rose and I thought we'd invite them for a spot of dinner this evening. Disaster old boy! Disaster I tell you!"

Father Ignatius smiled again.

"Well, as it happens ..." continued Theodore never stopping to pause for breath, "the Mortimers can't make it tonight. Jolly bad show don't you think? We've got most of the food prepared and all ... well, Mrs Frosdick, the cook, and her staff have everything prepared anyway. And the Mortimers can't make it for dinner. They're stuck up North because of the terrible snow storms we've been having over Christmas. Totally snowed in and cut off from civilization and a decent drop of whisky I shouldn't wonder!"

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“So I thought of inviting the Hendersons ... now I’m sure you know them Padre. They live about a mile or so from us, just up the hill. I thought I’d introduced them to you some time ago. Not Catholics you know ... but decent people all the same. Better than many Catholics I know, I should say! Anyway ... dash it all ... they’ve decided to spend Boxing Day with the in-laws. Now what kind of nonsense is that? I tell you. Who’d wish to spend Boxing Day with the in-laws? It’s just like being in Purgatory I imagine ... what?”

Father Ignatius smiled once more at Theodore’s continuous rant and wondered what all this was leading to ... and then it came.

“Well Padre ... as neither of them can make it tonight, I thought of you. Would you care to join us for a quiet spot of dinner this evening? We’re having a goose and Brussels sprouts you know ... traditional fare for this time of year sprouts ... and I’ll be playing the latest musical instrument I’ve mastered ... the harmonica ... much less stressful than the bagpipes. I can now play Chopin’s piano concerto on the harmonica as well as the pipes!”

The priest was amused at being the third choice as guest at the millionaire’s luxurious mansion in the country, but he knew that Theodore meant no malice by it.

“It’s so nice of you to think of me ...” he said quietly, “but I’m afraid I’ll have to decline too. The problem is that this evening St Vincent’s Church hosts the annual Christmas Dinner and get-together for the old folks of the Parish. We bring them to the Church Center and Father Donald and I and a few of the nuns from the Convent prepare a Christmas meal ...”

“Bring them along too ...” interrupted Theodore with no hesitation, “we’ll make a party of it ... we’ve plenty of room over here ...”

Father Ignatius knew that there was little point resisting Theodore’s generosity and enthusiasm; so plans were hurriedly changed to reschedule the venue of the Parish Christmas Dinner to the mansion on the hill.

And so it was that about fifty people including the nuns from the Convent went to the millionaire’s house to enjoy Theodore’s and his wife’s genuine kindness. They all gathered in the grand dining room, which had been festively decorated at short notice, where they enjoyed the best food and drinks sumptuously prepared by the catering staff.

Theodore dressed up like Father Christmas to give each guest a gift and then he entertained them with a sing-along which featured him playing his repertoire of the classics re-arranged for the harmonica!

## THEODORE PANICS

Theodore Luxton-Joyce as eccentric as ever jumped into his car, despite the heavy Christmas snow making most roads impassable, and sped towards St Vincent Church.

Half an hour later he was in Father Ignatius' office, having barged through Mrs Davenport, the housekeeper who opened the front door, mumbling about some emergency or other.

“Padre ... we have a problem ...” he exclaimed to the astounded priest sitting behind the desk, “I tried to phone you this morning but you were permanently engaged ... I thought you were probably hearing some late Confessions from sinners who couldn't make it to church because of the snow! Anyway ... here I am. Got in the car and came over as quick as I could!”

“Sit down ... take a deep breath. What is the problem?” asked Father Ignatius fearing the worst.

“I was in the library this morning ... You know, the room annexed to the dining room where we had the old folk's Christmas Dinner last night?”

The priest nodded.

“Well ... just by the section where we have the books of Sir Walter Scott. You must have read him Padre! Scottish novelist, playwright and poet ... you know ... Ivanhoe, Rob Roy, The Heart of Midlothian and so on ...

“Anyway ... just by those books I found this beautiful gold necklace on the floor ... what?”

“Looks pretty expensive to me ... must belong to one of the old ladies you invited to our Christmas party! Must have dropped it when they all went to the library for a spot of Darjeeling. The poor lady, whoever she is, must be beside herself having lost such a valuable piece ... I'd say!”

Father Ignatius took the necklace from Theodore and said, “I'll keep it in case someone phones and asks for it!”

“I'll hear none of it ...” interrupted Theodore, “the poor lady who lost it must be looking everywhere for it ... under her bed ... or behind the piano ... or wherever old ladies hide their jewellery! We must get in touch with them all and ask them if they've lost this necklace!”

Father Ignatius looked up in disbelief. “There were about fifty old people there ... most of them women ... you're not suggesting ...”

Theodore was suggesting just that! And for the next hour or so they phoned most of the old ladies to find the owner of the necklace; with no success.

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“Well that’s all of them ... except these six who are not on the phone,” remarked the priest, “I’ll ask them when I next see them at Mass on Sunday!”

But Theodore’s concern would have none of it.

“I have the car out there ...” he said, “why don’t we visit them right now? I also have a bottle of brandy in the car to keep us warm ... always prepared what?”

Father Ignatius said a silent prayer in his mind seeking forgiveness for what he thought about Theodore right now. Then as a self-imposed penance he decided to accompany the eccentric millionaire on what would no doubt turn out to be a wild goose chase.

And a waste of time it certainly was. At every house Theodore insisted on accepting the invitation for tea and biscuits, or mince pies, or home made cake or whatever other delicacy the old ladies had prepared for Christmas. And at every house he regaled them all with stories about Sir Walter Scott and other Scottish writers and famous people, not forgetting to mention time and again his Highlands lineage and the fact that he could play Chopin’s piano concerto on the bagpipes!

“Where does he put all this tea?” thought the weary priest to himself, “and he hasn’t been to the toilet once!”

Eventually they returned to Father Ignatius’ office at the Parish House both very cold, dejected and exhausted.

“You don’t think we can have a drop of tea to keep us warm?” asked Theodore to Mrs Davenport as she came in to collect the empty cups from this morning.

Father Ignatius held the gold necklace in his hand and admired it pensively.

“You don’t think it belongs to one of the nuns who came to the party?” asked Theodore rather stupidly, “do nuns wear necklaces under their habits Padre?”

The priest smiled and shook his head. “It’s a beautiful necklace with a lovely little rose here in the middle ...” he said, “You don’t suppose it belongs to your wife ... Rose?”

“Dash it all ...” cried out Theodore standing up from his seat, “I forgot all about Rose!”

“That little flower on the necklace should have reminded me ...

“I bought that necklace six months ago for Rose’s birthday in January. I hid it in Sir Walter Scott’s book Rob Roy, which I was reading at the time. I thought no one would find it there ... no one ever reads the books in that library ... what? The necklace must have fallen out yesterday when someone picked up the books.

## **THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC**

“I’d forgotten all about it ... and for the past three weeks I’ve been wondering what to buy Rose for her birthday next month. I got her a bracelet ... I know that for sure ... the thing is I don’t know where I’ve hidden it ... old boy!”

Father Ignatius sought forgiveness from the Lord once again for what was going through his mind.

He gave the necklace back to Theodore and followed his enthusiastic rush to the car and waived him goodbye as he sped back to his mansion on the hill.

## THEODORE'S MINCE

It was just after Christmas day when Theodore Luxton-Joyce called on Father Ignatius at the Parish House to return a book he had borrowed. The priest was not at home so Mrs Davenport, the housekeeper, invited Theodore for a cup of tea and a slice or two of her best Dundee cake in the kitchen whilst she was preparing the day's meal.

"I say this is a decent piece of cake ... what?" exclaimed Theodore, "better than any I have ever tasted ... did you make it yourself Mrs D?"

"Of course ..." she said with a smile big enough to brighten up a cold and grey winter day.

"Then you'll have to give the recipe to our cook," replied Theodore helping himself to another slice of cake, "and perhaps we'd have a decent slice of cake more often ... what?"

"I've often said to my dear wife Rose, if you were not the housekeeper here I'd have you in charge of the kitchen up at the mansion in no time. But I suppose the poor Padre deserves a decent meal every now and then ... and it's a good thing you're here to look after him!"

Mrs Davenport was now glowing with pride as she brought Theodore a plate full of her latest batch of mince pies which she had just made.

"I've made these too ..." she said rather coyly.

"By Jove ... you're a marvel Mrs D ... have you made the mince meat too?"

"But of course," she replied very pleased with herself, "I use a secret recipe my grandmother gave our family. I mix together raisins, currants, sultanas, orange and lemon peel, honey, sugar and spices, a little salt, suet to hold it all together, and to give it a little crunchiness I add crushed walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts and pecans ... and for extra taste I put a generous measure of whisky AND brandy! Not many people do that!"

At this very point Father Ignatius came into the kitchen.

"Ah ... Mrs Davenport's famous mince pies ..." he exclaimed as he picked one from the plate. "Better than any you can buy at the finest establishments in London or anywhere else. Royalty doesn't know what it's missing, Theodore!"

"Mrs Davenport makes her own mince meat, you know. A secret recipe she'll reveal to no one. Even the Bishop remarked the other day on the excellence of these pies!"

"This reminds me ... I have to visit the Bishop today. I'll be going in about an hour or so ... I have some paper work to deal with first. Could I take two jars of your mince meat for the Bishop Mrs Davenport?"

And with that, the priest picked another pie and went up to his office.



## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

Mrs Davenport's warm prideful glow turned into an ashen grey as if she was at death's door, as she sat down on a nearby chair.

"What is the matter?" asked Theodore, "you suddenly look as if you've seen a ghost ... what!"

"If only I had, Mr Joyce," she lamented, "it's worse than that. I've no jars of mince meat left. I made twenty five jars two days ago and some went in the pies whilst others were given away ..."

"Calamity indeed ..." exclaimed Theodore, "but all may not be lost ... what? Is this the jar you use?" he asked picking up an open jar of mince meat.

"Yes ... it's an ordinary jar. Then I make my own labels with the words 'Mrs Davenport's Mince Meat' and I stick them on the jars."

"All is not lost indeed ..." cried Theodore as he stood up suddenly knocking the chair over as he did so, "you make two more labels Mrs D ... I'll be back presently."

Before she had time to ask him he'd rushed out of the kitchen as fast as he could and promptly ran as quickly as his old legs could manage, avoiding slipping in the thick snow, and went to the grocery shop across the road.

Moments later he returned to the kitchen with two of the best quality mince meat jars that money can buy.

"Not up to the standard of your recipe ..." he declared, "I'll soon have these labels off by soaking the jars in some water ... then we can put your labels on!"

"But ... but, that's cheating ..." she hesitated.

"Cheating ... what? Of course not! Would you have the poor old Padre heartbroken as he drove gift-less to the Bishop? The wise men brought with them great gifts all those years ago ... and our Padre will take to the Bishop something no less valuable. Not as good as your original, mind you! But he'll never know!"

"And the Bishop ... well, he lives from day to day pining for a spoonful of your mince meat to spread on his hot tea cakes and muffins.

"So you'd be doing two men of the cloth a great favour ... think of all the days off Purgatory that would buy you!"

Before Mrs Davenport could protest some more, Theodore's enthusiasm had the old labels off the two bought jars of mince and Mrs D's labels stuck on.

He was drying out the jars carefully of any smudges of glue when Father Ignatius came in the kitchen with briefcase in hand.

## THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE – LOVABLE ECCENTRIC

“Ah ... you’ve got me your mince meat” he said placing the jars in his case carefully, “thank you Mrs Davenport ... the Bishop will be delighted I’m sure ... you’re a Saint!”

Theodore waited until he heard the priest drive off and then he beamed “Did you hear that Mrs D ... the Bishop will be delighted ... you’re a Saint!”

He chuckled to himself as he drove off to his mansion on the hill.

A few days later Father Ignatius took Theodore aside after Mass on Sunday.

“Have you anything to confess?” he asked him gently.

“Ehm ... no Padre! I’m far too busy to sin ... what!”

“Something about two jars of mince meat, perhaps?”

“Oh ... she told you!”

“The poor lady was beside herself with guilt,” explained the priest, “she told me as soon as I returned from the Bishop’s.

“You implicated me in your deceit knowing full well she did not make those two jars!”

“Not the jars ... what! I doubt Mrs D is any good at glass-making ...” said Theodore feebly.

“You know full well what I mean.” continued Father Ignatius, “you leave me no choice but to absolve you of your well-meaning sin and for your penance I suggest you apologize to Mrs Davenport.”

“I’ll do better than that ...” declared Theodore, “I’ll buy her a huge box of chocolates ... women forgive you easier with chocolates ... what!”

He jumped in his car as he left a smiling Father Ignatius waving him goodbye.

## FATHER IGNATIUS TEACHES THEODORE

It was Tuesday morning and Father Ignatius was surprised to see Theodore Luxton-Joyce's car in the church's car park. The rich millionaire had not called on the priest at the Parish House so the only place he could be would be in church; rather unusual for Theodore since he only went to church on Sundays.

Father Ignatius entered the empty church and found Theodore sitting upfront, by the statue of the Virgin Mary; on the very pew where the priest often sat to recite the Rosary.

At first the priest ignored the rich man for a while and stayed at the back of the church praying. Then, after twenty minutes or so he decided to approach him; it was after all rather unusual for Theodore to come to pray mid-week, so something must be troubling him indeed.

"Hello Padre ..." mumbled Theodore un-characteristically. He was usually so cheerful and full of joie de vivre, but not this time.

The priest smiled and sat beside him.

"Tell me old boy ..." said Theodore after a while breaking the silence, "does God really listen to prayers? Or is it possible He is more busy with someone else's problems and He has to prioritise. Like I often do in business?"

"Oh, He listens to all prayers, I'm sure of it," replied the priest gently, "but sometimes He doesn't answer straight away. He may say 'No' to our prayers, or 'Not now ... I have something better for you'. But He'll answer your prayers for sure. In His time, and in His way."

"I haven't got time to wait. I need an answer now ... what!" interrupted Theodore regaining his natural petulance once again.

Father Ignatius smiled and said, "It says in the Bible that to God one day is like a thousand years. He sees all. The past, present and the future. It could be that what you're asking for is not good for you in the future. Just be patient for God's answer."

"As I said, I haven't got time to wait ... certainly not a thousand years old boy. I need an answer now ..." Theodore continued, "A few months ago, my Company bought a piece of land north of town on a hill. We planned to grow various crops there ... wheat, oats, barley, that sort of thing.

"At the top of the hill there's a line of trees all along the border between our land and our neighbour. Hundreds of them all in a straight line like soldiers. Next to the trees there are bushes. A bit lower and shorter than the trees but standing beside them all along the border.

"All the time I thought the trees and bushes belonged to our neighbour, but my Estates Manager has discovered that they belong to me. He checked the deeds with the Land Registry; they belong to me all right. The Estates Manager also tells me that by

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cutting down the trees and bushes and replacing them with a wire fence we'd gain more land and increase our crops by about 7 %. That's quite a big margin Padre, I tell you! So I got my people to cut down the trees and bushes. No sooner did they start that the neighbour complained.

"He said I'm disturbing the wildlife ... birds and that sort of thing, living in the bushes. He took an injunction against me stopping me from pulling down the trees and bushes. He's supported by the Council and some local preservationists. There's to be a Court hearing soon. So I can't afford to wait a thousand years for God to respond. Can't you hurry Him up Padre?" concluded Theodore with a forced smile.

"The trees and bushes are yours!" said the priest calmly. Theodore nodded. "If they're mature trees then they must have been there for some years. Possibly a hundred years or so. Whoever owned the land before you must have either found them there, or planted them himself, assuming his family owned the land for generations."

"You're right Padre. The last owner had the land in his family for a number of years. His grandfather farmed there, then his father, and then him."

"Why do you think they did not cut the trees?" asked the priest.

"Dunno ... maybe they didn't have my Estates Manager to advise them. An increase of 7% in crop yield is not to be laughed at ... what?"

"I was raised on a farm." said the priest, "a small holding. Nothing as big as yours! And I remember my father saying that bushes and trees break the cold northerly wind in winter. They shield the land and protect the crops. Especially crops like wheat which tend to bend down and break in high winds. Trees also protect the land from erosion when it rains heavily, especially on hilly grounds. Bushes provide homes and shelter for all kinds of birds; which often feed on insects which may attack crops. So the birds can act as an insect control to protect the crops.

"But then, I'm not a farmer ... so what do I know? I'm a priest and you're a businessman ... and I too would be glad of an increase of 7% in my congregation."

Theodore said nothing for a few seconds and then said pensively, "I remember reading something about farmers in old times planting trees and bushes to shelter crops from the wind. I'd forgotten all about it. But then, I'm no farmer either Padre. I'm a businessman trying to make a good return on my investments. And my Estates Manager is a Business graduate from University; so what does he know? You've convinced me Padre ... those trees were put there for a purpose." Theodore got up to leave with a broad smile on his face.

"It seems that God has answered your prayers after all," Father Ignatius pointed out, "Maybe not the answer you wished to hear, but the right answer no doubt!"

"Quite true Padre ... what?" Theodore beamed back, "and if you want my advice, one way to increase your congregation by 7% is to be more lenient with your penance at Confession."

## CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Father Ignatius visited Mrs Florenti, an elderly widow, in her cottage in the country. She was very distraught and confused. Her five year rental contract on the cottage was due for renewal and her landlord, a farmer, had increased the rent by more than 100%. There was no way she could pay the proposed rent and would have to move.

The kind priest checked the paperwork and it was all in order. The contract was due for renewal and there was nothing Father Ignatius could do apart from sympathize and say a silent prayer to God for help.

As he left the cottage a large farm vehicle drew up to the adjacent field and two people came out; Theodore Luxton-Joyce and another man.

“Hello Padre ...” Theodore greeted the priest, “What are you doing here?”

“Just visiting a friend,” replied Father Ignatius.

“Jolly good ... this is Gerald Thomson, my Estates Manager. We’re here to look at this piece of land ... Care to join us?”

As they walked slowly up the hill adjoining the cottage Gerald Thomson excused himself and went up ahead and started taking measurements of the land with his theodolite.

“Good grazing land this ... what!” said Theodore breaking the silence, “Luscious grass ... and plenty of it. And the land is sheltered from high winds by those trees up there. It’s a great place to raise sheep!”

“Are you interested in this place?” asked the priest.

“Yes ... Coston Enterprises, my Company, have put an offer on this land and we hope to buy most of this hill ... all the way down to where we parked our cars, including the cottage with vacant possession!”

“Including the cottage?” asked the priest rather surprised.

“Yes ... I’ll need that to house the farm labourer ... or shepherd you might call him, who’ll look after the flock! Should you ever need a nice piece of lamb, be sure to let me know Padre ... what?”

“Ehmm ... thanks,” mumbled the priest as he continued, “Theodore, do you know who lives in that cottage?”

“No idea old boy ...” replied the rich businessman picking up a handful of grass and smelling it, “they tell me you can identify good grass by smelling it ... can’t understand it really, smells ordinary to me ... here have a smell!”

The priest took the grass from Theodore’s hand and surreptitiously threw it away.

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“You see Theodore,” hesitated Father Ignatius, “that cottage has been home for an elderly widow for many years. The owner of the house has just doubled her rent, no doubt to get her out. Did you know that?”

Theodore stopped and looked down the hill at the cottage. “No ... of course not. I leave all the business stuff to the Estates Manager, Thomson over there ... He told me he’d found a piece of land suitable for our purposes with a house to put the shepherd in ... and we’ve come here to look at it!”

“I was visiting the old lady living in that house just as you arrived!” said Father Ignatius.

“That’s jolly decent of you Padre ...” enthused Theodore, “you’ve a heart of gold. You came to help her move did you?”

Father Ignatius bit his lip as he silently despaired that Theodore was not getting the point.

“The thing is ...” he said quietly, “she has nowhere to go ... she’s lived here for years at moderate rent. There’s no where she can find a similar rent.”

“She can always come and live with us ...” blurted Theodore, “well, not in our house of course. I doubt Rose, my wife, would like that ... neither would I. The place is already too crowded with the butler, the kitchen staff, and the other employees ... what!”

Father Ignatius said nothing trying to understand the sudden change of events.

“On the edge of our grounds, where I live, there’s a small house on the left, just by the entrance to the grounds ... You must have seen it as you drive in?”

The priest nodded.

“My gardener lives there ... he looks after the grounds. He wants to move out to live with his sister nearby. The place will be empty in a month or so. We can put the old lady there and I’ll have that cottage for my shepherd!”

Father Ignatius was about to say something when Theodore interrupted.

“And you can tell her I’ll charge her the same rent she’s paying for the cottage ... even though the gardener’s house is bigger ... what?”

“And she’ll be next to other people rather than alone on this isolated hill. She can call on us or our staff should she need any help.

“You get her out of that cottage Father and you’ll be doing me a great favour! What’s her name?”

“Mrs Florenti ...”

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“Italian is she?” asked Theodore.

“No ... Scottish actually. From Aberdeen. She married an Italian years ago.”

“That’s all the better” chortled Theodore remembering his ancestry, “you’ll be telling me she plays the bagpipes next!”

Theodore was more wily than he let on, thought the priest to himself.

As the two men walked down the hill again Father Ignatius thanked God silently for solving the old widow’s problem so quickly. Had he left her a moment sooner he would never have met Theodore, and he would never have known the reason for the doubling of the rent by the landlord, and Mrs Florenti would have ended up in an old peoples’ home.

## FATHER IGNATIUS SPIES GOODNESS

Father Ignatius had an appointment at the Cathedral in the City and he happened to mention it to Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the rich benefactor and friend of the priest.

“Oh ... I hate going to the City,” said Theodore frowning a little, “how do you plan going, by train or are you driving there?”

“Like you, I hate the City, it’s far too busy and I don’t like driving,” replied the priest, “I hope to take the train!”

“If they run on time,” chortled Theodore, “the trains are always late these days. Not like years ago when they always left on time and arrived at their destination on time.

“These days they never stick to the published time-table. The only way they’ll keep to their agreed schedule is if they replace the time-tables with calendars!” He laughed loudly at his own joke.

“Yes ... I see what you mean. But for me, it’s better than driving.”

“I tell you what Padre ...” interrupted Theodore enthusiastically, “when are you going? Next week you said?”

“Next Wednesday.”

“I’ve had a capital idea ... what?” Theodore interrupted again, “my wife is away visiting her family next week. I have nothing to do. Why don’t I come with you to the City? We’ll go by car ... my chauffeur knows the way well, so there’ll be no driving for either of us. I can go sight-seeing then meet you at the Cathedral when you’re ready!”

“I couldn’t possibly ask this of you Theodore” replied Father Ignatius, “it’s very generous of you and ...”

“Well it’s settled then ...” the eccentric millionaire interrupted again, “I’ll pick you up at St Vincent’s on Wednesday morning.”

On the day in question the two of them were chauffeur driven in a luxurious car to the City and both went, as planned, their separate ways.

By late afternoon Theodore arrived at the Cathedral to collect Father Ignatius as arranged.

The church was empty so he sat on the pew next to the Sacristy door so that he could see Father Ignatius when he came out of his meeting.



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The rich man looked around him at the splendour of this great Cathedral for a few moments, and then he got up and lit a candle by the statue of St Anthony. No particular reason, it just happened to be the nearest statue to him. He then sat on the pew again and wondered if there is a Saint Theodore. “Theo means God in Greek! What?” he thought to himself.

He got a broken Rosary from his pocket and started praying. “Must mend this Rosary sometime,” he thought, “lucky all the beads are still here ... just the chain is broken!”

His meandering thoughts were disturbed by a noise at the back of the church. He turned round and saw a man come in.

The tall thin stranger, dressed in a red shirt, blue jeans and a tatty overcoat came to the front and sat next to Theodore.

He knelt down and pretended to pray for a few seconds, then he sat down again and turning to Theodore he asked in a strong Scottish accent, “Is the vicar here, do you ken?”

“You mean the priest,” Theodore replied, “there must be more than one in there ... I’m waiting for one of them as a matter of fact!”

“Aye ... a priest will do,” said the Scotsman, “they come out of there one at a time do they? Just like waiting for a bus, is it?”

“Well ... no. If you wait a while, someone is sure to come out.”

“Do you ken the priest can lend me some money?” asked the Scot tentatively.

“You’ll need a bank for that, old boy” chortled Theodore, “these priests are as poor as church mice ... what? They’ll more likely ask you for money than give you any!”

The man scratched his head briefly and then continued, “I’m from Scotland, you see.”

“Yes ... I gathered from your accent old boy! Grand place, so it is. I’m half Scot myself ... the half which wears the kilt!” Theodore laughed loudly forgetting for a moment where he was.

“I came down here in England to look for work,” continued the man. “Things are pretty bad in Scotland so I thought down here might be better. I’ve been in a bed and breakfast for a week. And I found no work here either. I ran out of money and don’t have my fare back home!

“Do you think you can lend me some money to get home to my wife and wee bairns? I’ll pay you back ...”

To the man’s surprise Theodore immediately pulled out his wallet and asked, “How much do you need old boy?”

“The coach fare is about £20 ... it leaves this evening at eight.” replied the Scotsman.

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Theodore took five £20 notes from his wallet and handed them to the astonished man.

“That’s ... that’s far too much,” he mumbled in disbelief, “and they are notes from the Bank of Scotland too ... not English ones ...”

“Yes ... I was in Edinburgh last week.” Theodore smiled.

“Let me have your address ... I’ll pay you back ... a bit at a time ...”

“Think nothing of it,” replied Theodore, “buy something for your family!”

At this point Father Ignatius had just come out of the Sacristy and witnessed the whole event.

Theodore continued, “If you’re serious about moving down here with your family, give me a ring on this number ... think about it with your wife!”

As the man disappeared out of the church hurriedly Father Ignatius asked Theodore “was that a vagrant begging for money?”

“I just gave him some spare change,” lied Theodore, “he’s from Scotland I understand ... what?”

“The reason I asked,” said the priest, “is because this church has packets of food prepared for people who come here asking for help!”

About seven months later Theodore got a call from the grateful Scotsman. He still hadn’t found work in his country. So he and his family decided to move to Northern England and work on one of Theodore’s farms.

## THEODORE'S DEATH FOCUS

Father Ignatius was met at the door of Parish House by an ashen faced Mrs Davenport, the housekeeper, who said in a trembling voice.

“Father, I think Mr Luxton-Joyce is dead!”

“What do you mean ... you think?” asked the priest.

“Well, Mr Luxton-Joyce’s butler rang about an hour ago and said that he had felt very faint and lost consciousness and has been taken to hospital. I haven’t heard any more since.”

Father Ignatius got back into his car and drove straight to the hospital.

He made his way to the main reception where he was well known as a regular visitor and asked which Ward his friend and church benefactor was in.

“Oh ... he’s not in any Ward,” said the receptionist, “Mr Luxton-Joyce is in a private suite on the third floor, and he has brought with him a personal nurse to look after his needs. You’ll need to announce yourself to her.”

The priest hurried up to the third floor and was met by a stern faced nurse who wanted to know the purpose of the priest’s visit before letting him in. She insisted that, in her professional opinion, the eccentric millionaire was not to be disturbed by anybody and that the only visitor with him now is his wife.

The priest tried to reason in vain with the epitome of bureaucracy blocking his entrance to the private suite, when God must have lost patience with her and intervened by making a distant phone ring.

“Wait here ... and do not move!” she said harshly as she went to answer the phone.

Father Ignatius must have suffered another bout of deafness because he didn’t hear her properly and entered the large room to be met by a tearful Rose, Theodore’s wife.

He was lying in bed asleep with an oxygen mask on his face and tubes and bleeping equipment all around him.

“He’s resting at the moment ...” Rose said as the priest sat down on a nearby chair. “He fainted last night after exercising on the treadmill and we phoned for an ambulance. The doctors have checked him out and they said it’s extreme exhaustion. He should take it easy in future ...” she smiled feebly.

The priest smiled back and said a thankful silent prayer. He then brought out his Rosary and they started praying quietly. At the third decade Theodore stirred a little and opened his eyes. He tried unsuccessfully to remove the oxygen mask on his face.

“Take this off me ...” he mumbled, “I’m not a dog to be muzzled like that!”

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Rose carefully removed the oxygen mask and Theodore blinked once or twice and then seeing Father Ignatius he said, “Hello Padre ... are you here as a friend or in an official capacity?”

“How are you feeling?” asked the priest gently.

“Oh ... I’m fine ... not dead yet! At least I don’t think so; although that nurse out there makes me wish I was ... what?”

Father Ignatius smiled.

“I don’t know what the fuss is all about ...” continued Theodore, “can’t a man faint a little without being rushed into hospital?”

“I understand you’ve been overdoing things,” replied Father Ignatius trying to reassure Rose as well as the stubborn eccentric.

“Nonsense ... in business you can’t overdo things. For years I’ve worked hard to be successful and I’ve never slowed down or taken my eye off the ball ... what?”

“At least don’t use that treadmill as often ... and so vigorously ...” pleaded Rose.

“I won’t switch it on ...” he smiled with a wink, “and I’ll take it easy by walking on the treadmill width-wise side to side rather than along its whole length!”

Father Ignatius continued the Rosary prayer and after hearing the man’s Confession he gave him and Rose Communion.

They then discussed the fragility of life and how vulnerable we all are as we walk the tight rope balancing life from death.

In a rare serious moment Theodore admitted that in his pursuit of success, more often than not spurred by an up-bringing where failure was not an option, he had neglected the spiritual more important focus of his life.

“That’s really taking your eye off the ball ... what? Padre!” he chortled.

“Keep your mind set on the things that are in Heaven, not on things here on earth!” replied Father Ignatius with a smile.

(Colossians 3).