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Addiction

by Lesley Dawson

The sun is shining, a slight breeze is blowing and all should be right with the world. A young volunteer sits down beside him in the garden

“Now then Mick, how are you?”

On him admitting he is back on the booze, she says, “you daft bat. You missed a brilliant opportunity to get clean. Get yourself something to eat, mate and let’s see if we can sort something out.”

So what went before? What’s the story that Mick could tell? Thrown out of the marital home because of constantly coming home from the pub drunk and beating his wife. “Sorry love, I was out of order last night. I promise faithfully it will not happen again,” is his response every time. She puts up with it for a long time but then his children get old enough to challenge him. “I will not allow you to touch my children. I want you out of my house!”

She gets an injunction to remove him from the family home and after exhausting offers from his mates to sleep on their sofas he finds himself homeless and on the street. Mick thinks back to sleeping in shop doorways and begging from kids going or coming from pubs and clubs.

“You need to go to the Mission, mate. They will see you right.” One of his fellow street sleepers tells him that he can get food and clean clothes there and the possibility of a shower.

Sitting in the charity’s garden one sunny day he is joined by a young woman who talks to him about a place called Betel where he can go to get off the booze.

“The regime is tough,” she says, “no alcohol, no drugs, no cigarettes. On top of this you have to go to church every day and do a full day’s work six days a week.”

“You won’t be able to nip home as the place is hundreds of miles from here and you must stick it out for a year.”

“No I can’t do that,” he says and walks away. Months later after being set upon by younger men while he is sleeping in a shelter on the seafront he is so battered and bruised, inside and out, that he agrees to go. One of the volunteers takes him and leaves him there.

Mick thinks back to that first month, “no medication. This was cold turkey but with a difference – someone was with him twenty-four hours a day.” Until he got through the painful nausea and stomach cramps it was hell on earth. After about six weeks he began to feel a bit better and started to eat food regularly.

The big problem was the religious services. “No mate I was raised Catholic and this happy, clappy, so-called worship is too much to take.”

That was when he decided to leave. He can hear the voices in his head saying “Don’t give up now mate. I felt just the same, but you just need to keep going; it does get better.” But he had made up his mind.

He smiled to himself as he recalled hitch hiking, down the M1 and M25. When he eventually hit Eastbourne, he had money from the last man who gave him a ride. He just remembered heading into the nearest supermarket and stocking up on vodka. The next few weeks slid by in a haze and when he had no more money for booze, he landed up at the Mission again.

Listening to the birds in the bushes and the conversations around him he resolves to start again. Can he make it this time?