



The Right Moment

God sent the butterfly. Julia believed that as clearly as she remembered the warm Spring afternoon in St. Wilfred's. Not that she could put a date or time to it now. It had been one of so many times she had gone to the church to find Father Bob. She knew he was often free to talk after Mass. He never minded that she did not come to the service, or that she was not one of his regular congregation. He had become more 'father' to Julia than to many who carelessly gave him that title.

That afternoon Julia had not called for any particular reason she could remember now. Probably just for him to listen. Whenever she came, Father Bob did that. Patiently he listened again and again to her story while she willingly soaked up the comfort - God comfort - which flowed out of this unrecognised saint. No one would ever know the depth of love in this elderly, faithful servant of God. There had been hardly a week he hadn't made arrangements to see Julia during her three years 'inside'. He had carried the messages from Danny, who said he loved her but couldn't bear to see her in prison. Julia realised later just how carefully Father Bob had phrased those messages. He had eased the blow when Danny finally told her he wouldn't be waiting when she came out.

With the same diplomacy Father Bob had pleaded for a reconciliation with her Julia's mother, but to no avail. There were more knots in their family life than her mother had any hope of unravelling. Julia was sure Father Bob's meetings with her mother cost him more than he ever said. In the end he helped her to make a break from it all.

'Religion' had not entered into their conversation for a long time. Father Bob confided later, he how he had ached to share the comfort of his faith with her yet held back believing the moment was not right. When he did it was in response to Julia's searching. To her surprise he responded in a way she had not expected. He spoke plainly about Jesus. It was as though he really knew him. 'But I do know him!' he told her simply.

It was partly through the efforts of the priest that Julia had been able to get shop work and begin to put her life back together again. From then on, until the day Father Bob had to leave the parish, Julia found some time each week to visit St. Wilfred's. While not dependant on him, she needed to know he was there. With his help she had come to understand and to share Father Bob's faith. She spent many a visit with him in front of his crucifix. He always turned it round to the plain side. 'It's a resurrection cross as well,' he would say. 'It's all one story!' Under his gentle guidance Julia rediscovered the meaning of love and its power to forgive. Words from the Bible and simple prayers had meaning for her. However, Julia knew there was something more. Embracing faith was the not the same as knowing it to be personally real. Father Bob had that something extra. His faith was real. 'How can I find it?' she asked on more than one occasion. 'You can't,' was all he said. 'You're trying too hard. When our Lord is ready, faith will find you.'

And so it did that Spring afternoon. It was Father Bob who noticed first. Without a word he pointed. She nodded to say she had seen. In the corner of the window nearest them, blood red in the streaming sunlight, was a small hardened case - a chrysalis. It was moving, slowly, so very, very slightly.

They both watched the case slowly crack open. Little by little the red and purple wings of the butterfly struggled out. It seemed an age before the creature recovered enough to flutter to safety higher up the window.

'I'll put it out later,' said Father Bob. 'It deserves it's freedom.'

'Do you think it hurt,' asked Julia. 'All that struggling'

'Yes. I think it probably did hurt. But it was the right time. It was simply responding to the call to new life. Now the hurt is in the past. It won't remember it anymore. This is new life - a new moment.'

He smiled at Julia. She knew the lesson applied to her.

'Me too,' she said. 'I do believe!'

In that moment - a moment bigger than words - she found herself open to the Spirit of God. Faith had come alive. It was the right time. God had sent the butterfly.