

Benched

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Picture an unshaven man wearing a disheveled suit sitting on a park bench on a late spring afternoon. He's been there all morning sipping bourbon from a metal flask, looking down to the ground in abject grief, waiting for something to happen, praying for something to happen, but nothing does. His soul has been tormented by a recent decision that he has made.

A second casually dressed man approaches and sits to his left. He yawns and stretches his limbs as he enjoys the fine spring day.

The first man glances at him and then snarls, "What are you doing?"

The second man looks about the bench, feels the bench with his hands, and responds, "Sitting, my feet hurt."

The first man smiles slightly and offers his flask. "Want a snort?"

Man two shakes his head. "I don't drink. It's against my religion."

"Religion! I've been sitting here all day hoping that this bottle would make me feel better."

"Sometimes God calls upon you when you least expect it."

Man one shakes his head. "I'm in agony. I killed my grandson because of a business decision that I've made. I placed pharmaceutical profits over safety, and now I can't forgive myself."

"Did you really kill him?"

"No, but I ramrodded a new drug through safety protocols. The risk was deemed acceptable to the public, but when my own grandson took it. . ." The first man cries into his hands for a moment before continuing. "My wife is divorcing me. My son has deserted me. I'm alone, and I'm destined for hell."

Man two shakes his head, "That's not your decision to make."

"There's a way out?" Man one clears his eyes with his hands.

Man two leans closer to man one and puts his hand on man one's left shoulder. "Yes, ask for forgiveness. Serve others, that is the key to heaven. Seek guidance from the pastor who is approaching on your right."

The first man turns to see a wrinkly, old, weather worn pastor coming into view.

The elderly pastor smiles and says, “How are you enjoying the weather on this fine day?”

“It’s beautiful.” The first man motions to his left. “My friend here says that we should talk.”

The pastor turns his head as if something is amiss. “But. . . you’re alone, my son.”

Man one turns to his left as a light breeze swirls several small feathers before his eyes; they lift up to heaven with sunlight glistening from their edges. A voice whispers into his left ear: *Everything happens for a reason. Grieve no more.*

The first man rises and accompanies the pastor realizing that his prayer has been answered.

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From that day on, man one funds illness charities, provides housing for the poor, works in a low paying job as a cook, and feeds the poor at a local soup kitchen. Penniless at death, he readily clears Saint Peter’s passage into heaven. His old friend awaits him twirling the keys to heaven in his right hand.