

Scars that Remain (continued)

Two hours had passed and Emma stooped over Benjamin to take his vital signs. When she finished, she stood at his side for a moment, looked down to him, and murmured, “Poor Benjamin. Maybe it’s best, if you don’t come back.” Gently she tugged Benjamin’s bed covers a little tighter around him.

Swollen raindrops splashing against the window almost drowned out the ping – ping – ping. Emma thought of how fitting it was that heaven wept for this youth. She sighed and tore herself away from his bedside to continue her rounds.

But the rain stopped as that night wore on. Later, through the window the full moon looked down on the boy. No one noticed Benjamin’s eyelids briefly fluttering. They remained still for a time before twitching again. Ping – ping – ping – another hour passed.

Slowly, like the sea’s ebbs and floods, the sound of the monitors began to pound into Benjamin’s mind. With each new wave his pain grew more intense. An advancing storm, it forced its way into his consciousness. Benjamin wanted to open his eyes, but he could not. Each attempt required more strength than he could summon. He felt spent and tired. Pain ravaged his being. “Where am I?” It was his first coherent thought.

Another hour crept by. Benjamin wanted to cry out, but only a pitiful groan escaped his dry lips. For 37 days he had made no sound. For all that time the heart monitor’s ping, ping, ping had been the only sign that he was alive. “Where am I?” Benjamin wanted to shout it, but his muffled gurgle died unnoticed in the night, and pain cut off his next thought.

But Benjamin struggled on. He fought the pain. “Please God!” his inner voice screamed, “I can’t remember?” When dawn edged into the room, blurred images of exploding windshields flashed before him. *Am I in my car?* He wondered. Ignoring the pain he strained to open his eyes.

It was barely perceptible, but Emma, who had come to Benjamin’s room on her last round, thought she had heard a brief, pitiful moan. She turned on the light above his bed. Wide-eyed, she stooped to his side. “Benjamin, can you hear me?” she called out. Unconvinced that he could hear, she watched him. Suddenly she flew into action. “His lips twitched,” she shouted silently.

During the days that followed Benjamin regained consciousness. His family and his girlfriend were ecstatic. Emma came to work with a lighter heart. The doctors who gathered to examine him smiled reassuringly. But anguish raged in Benjamin’s heart.

What happened after I drove my Mustang away from home, he wondered? Remembering the exploding glass, he silently lamented, “My face will be scarred forever.”

Emma heard his first spoken words, “What’s happened to me?” She tried to look cheerful. “Your right arm was broken in three places, but is healing nicely with the help of pins, and that cast.” She tapped the cast lightly thinking, *please don’t ask anything more*. Quickly she continued, “Flesh wounds of the left arm, broken ribs, and punctured lung are healing too.”

He greeted his parents that day with, “Tell me what happened?”

Suppressing visions of the mangled Mustang, his father replied, “You had an accident.”

“But you’ll be fine,” his mother added quickly with a brave smile. Yet, the serious glances his parents exchanged, when they thought him sleeping, unsettled him.

“You had a skull fracture and neck injury,” his doctor told him later. That he had no feeling in his legs drove icy fear into his heart. He wanted to cry when the physician sat down at the edge of the bed and said, “Benjamin, I have to tell you that another operation will give you only a 50/50 chance to walk again.”

Silently Benjamin vowed to fight on. With time his spirit grew stronger. “I must walk again,” he murmured when he was alone. “I’m young. I’ll do anything to walk again.”

Yet doubts also ravaged his thoughts. In the stillness of the night they kept him awake, and threatened to overcome his determination. *Half a chance is a good chance*, he reasoned. But doubts shouted back. "It's an equal chance you won't play ball again."

Painful images of sitting in a wheelchair opposite Melody who was dressed in a bridal gown haunted his mind. Struggling to dispel those thoughts he determined to tell the doctors that he would have the operation. "I'll do what it takes, spare no pain until one day I'll hit a line drive again, and beat the ball to first base," he argued before he drifted into a fitful sleep.

Benjamin woke the next morning happy to be alive. At midmorning the examining physicians nodded with a satisfied smile when Benjamin said, "I'm going ahead with the operation." They commented on the strength of his spirit, and laughed with him at the get-well card that Emma had brought him. It hurt him to laugh, but he enjoyed the moment.

Swollen clouds outside his window that day did not shake his hope. He smiled at his parents visiting in the afternoon. "I really want that operation," he exclaimed. He looked from one parent to the other trying to understand their silence. "I'll do it. Wait and see."

Nodding his mother smiled at him. His father leaned closer to him. "We were hoping you'd want it, but we wanted you to decide."

Benjamin breathed a sigh of relief. Suddenly he wanted to know about the world outside the hospital. He flooded his parents with questions until he slumped exhausted into his pillow. After a short silence, a shadow crossed his eyes. "Why has Harvey not come?" he stammered, surprising his parents.

They remained silent, and exchanged those glances he had seen on their faces on other visits. His father fumbled for words. "Harvey was in the car with you," he finally said looking away.

Fearful, Benjamin tried to digest the information. "Well then, how is he?" His voice quivered. "Let's talk about it another day," his mother whispered.

His father touched his hand. "Harvey didn't make it. He died instantly. I'm sorry, son."

"No!" Benjamin cried out, "no, dad." His first cry had filled the room, and brought a nurse running to his side.

For days Benjamin ate little. The aids who fed him tried to reason with him, but it was Emma who finally convinced him to fight on. "Would your friend not want you to get well?" she asked. "And think of how much good you could do sharing your experience with other young people."

Slowly the determination to fight on resurfaced. A poem, Melody had written and read to him, touched him deeply. It helped to quicken his resolve. With the poem she had dispelled his fear that she would find their relationship difficult should he not walk again. "I'm having the operation," he told her, when she bent over to kiss him good night.

"I'll be there when you go in," she smiled, "and I'll be there when you come out." She turned at the door to wave to him.

The operation, although difficult, was successful his doctors reassured him. "But it'll take months of physiotherapy and hard work. You'll have to be patient."

Although the joy of being alive had vanished, Benjamin began to exercise soon after the operation. Within weeks he was able to use his arms. The day also came when he could shuffle from his bed to his wheelchair. His parents and Melody celebrated the occasion.

Benjamin continued to exercise daily. He felt his body healing and knew the headaches he still suffered would disappear. But the scar in his heart hurt unabated. The afternoon he left the hospital, Emma walked alongside his wheelchair to the entrance of the hospital. "I want you to remember that in the universe there's no one like you, Benjamin." Her encouragement touched him, yet the heaviness in his heart remained.

A crowd of family and friends had gathered to welcome him. Before he wheeled far up the walk, they burst from the house swarming around him laughing. But after they left, he felt restless. In his

room he wheeled to the window and stared into the distance to Harvey's house. Several times he surveyed the telephone, only to rivet his eyes down the street again.

His mother brought him a glass of juice. "Dad and I are so proud of you, Ben. We've prayed for this day when you'd be home for dinner." Benjamin did not see her furrowed brow when she left. He did not touch the juice. Slowly he circled his room until he faced the telephone. Biting his lips he dialed.

"Hello," Benjamin heard Harvey's mother say. He tried to speak, but words failed him. He began to sob.

"Benjamin," Harvey's mother spoke softly.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

"We know, dear." Her eyes too filled with tears.

"I'm sorry," he sobbed again and placed the telephone down slowly. Shaking, he stood up to reach the light switch to dispel dusk's entrance.

"I hate nighttime," he murmured. It was at night when his thoughts tormented him most. "Time can heal broken bones," he whimpered, "but can it take away the pain in my heart?"