



Stick To Your Purpose

By:
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“Paul. Paul! Wake up. What’s the matter?”

The screams were still echoing through the dark caverns of Paul’s fading subconscious mind. His pajamas were soaked, he clutched his pillow like a lifeline. The sensation of falling had stopped abruptly, but there was no impact. Just the feel of Joan’s hand on his shoulder and her voice in his ear.

“It’s okay, Paul, it’s just a dream. Just a bad dream.”

Paul opened his eyes. By what right was he back in his own bedroom? “What time is it?”

“It’s not even six yet. Try to get some more sleep, okay?”

Paul tried to lurch out of bed, but Joan pressed him back down. Too exhausted to fight, he closed his eyes and tried to put it all together. It couldn’t have been a dream. It was too real. Maybe being in heaven was just lying in bed with Joan snuggled against his back, knowing he’d never fall again.

“Paul?”

**IF YOU’RE NOT ENJOYING THE JOURNEY, YOU’LL PROBABLY BE
DISAPPOINTED IN THE DESTINATION.**

“Hmmm?”

“Who’s Rafe?”

“What do you mean, who’s Rafe?”

“You were talking in your sleep and said that name a lot. You were screaming it when I woke you up.”

Paul just groaned and tried to push himself up, but Joan pressed down against his shoulder as he tried to rise. “Paul, it’s not even six o’clock yet. You don’t have to get up. Sometimes the most important thing you can do is resist the temptation to do something when it would be more valuable just to stop for a while.”

Paul surrendered to Joan’s touch, sinking back into the bed. Eyes closed, his mind teetered between consciousness and sleep. “Rafe? Rafe?” No answer. In the lonely darkness fear held him trapped as it all came back to him. Today was the day he would lose it all. The school, the bank, falling off the cliff; everything came back to him as powerfully as a memory of something that had already happened—a memory of the future. He drifted off to sleep with the fear of falling again paralyzing his will even to crawl out of bed.

“Give what a name, Paul?”

Joan shook Paul’s shoulder softly, dragging him back out of the nightmare confrontation with fear.

“You were talking again, saying ‘give it a name,’ like it was really urgent.”

Paul stretched and looked at the clock. It was nearly seven. “I don’t know, just a bad dream, I guess.”

“Don’t go to work yet, Paul. Let’s take a walk, like we used to do in the mornings. It’s been too long since we really talked.”

Paul pulled himself up and sat on the edge of the bed with his face buried in his palms. “Sure, Joan. Let’s take a walk.”

As they walked, Paul’s breathing gradually untied the knots in his stomach.

DON’T BE IMPRISONED BY GOALS THAT YOU HAVE OUTGROWN.

How long had it been since he’d really heard the birds’ morning songs, smelled the fresh new air? Then, like an unwanted intruder, the familiar voice reminded him:

Today is the day you lose everything.

“Joan, I haven’t really been honest with you.”

“How so?”

“I’ve been keeping up a brave face for you and the kids, but I don’t see how we’re going to make it. Today the bank’s going to take everything away from us. I’m afraid the dream is over.”

Joan stopped and looked out across the bay. One of the reasons they had built their house in this area was the morning stillness of the woods. “Paul, the dream ended a long time ago.”

Paul stiffened, not sure whether to be annoyed or angered. “What are you talking about? We turned that old warehouse into a real school, we’ve got nearly two hundred kids enrolled—and if it weren’t for running out of money, we could keep growing.”

“Think back to those days in law school, Paul. You weren’t dreaming of becoming an administrator, a fund-raiser, a bureaucrat. Your dream was to spend time with kids who had problems, to help them cope in a hard world. Sure, you’ve got the school now, and we’ve got a nice house, but you almost never spend time with the kids anymore. Not our kids or the kids at the school.

You’re always in meetings or working on budgets.”

“But that’s not the same. What I’m doing –“

Joan’s raised hand cut him off. “Your cause is noble, but anyone who looked at what you actually do every day would scarcely be able to distinguish you from all your classmates with their jobs in law practices and corporate offices. For the little contact you have with kids, you could just as well get some high-paying job and donate the money to hire a manager for the school. Your dream is dead, Paul. It’s been dead for a long time.”

Paul looked down at the little picnic area where they used to take the school kids before classes got so big and budgets so tight. “My God.” Paul sat on a park bench, cradling his head in his hands. “How did I get so far off track?”

Joan lifted his chin with her fingertips. “That’s the wrong question. The right question is how can we get you back on track?”

“Okay, how can I get back on track?” “Your dream is to help kids, right?” Paul nodded.

“Well, how about instead of packing up your briefcase and rushing off to the office, you go home and spend some time with Sandra and Jeff. Maybe give them a ride to school. If you listen, I bet your own kids might even have some good ideas.”