

Dirck Toll

## Redeemable Anywhere

Rick eased the screen door shut and left the inside door open as he came in.

One of the nice things about this house was that the back door was easy enough to get to from the street, the sidewalk, or the driveway, but still had a comfortable degree of privacy from the neighbors. Rick liked this house, and after all, had chosen it with what he considered great care. Good location, easy access, right floorplan. And in a safe area, too. For instance, on a pleasant day like this, it was fine to go out while leaving the windows open. This was just one consideration, though, and there were many that made Rick happy about his house choice.

Now, he went to work.

He disconnected the cables from the television and yanked the power cords from the wall outlet. The TV went into the kitchen first and was set by the back door next to the little crowbar, followed by the video player. Then back into the

living room for the stereo equipment. Two framed pictures and a vase had to be knocked out of the way, then more cords and cables pulled and disconnected. The tuner wasn't that good, but Rick took it off the shelf anyway, set it down, stacked the amplifier on top of it, took them both to the door, and went back for the speakers.

Rick had just stepped into the hall when the doorbell bing-bonged. He jerked sideways to get behind an archway, and waited. The doorbell chimed again. Rick carefully looked around the arch toward the front door. Through the frosted sidelights he saw a single blurry figure turn and move away. Rick stopped biting his lower lip and continued back to the kitchen with the latest load.

The little microwave might bring a few dollars too, so he started to reach for its plug. Just in time he heard the hard shoes approaching and dropped below the counter and tried to keep his heartbeat quiet.

The shoes came sprightly up the steps to the back door and stopped. Rick closed his eyes. There was a knock. Rick opened his eyes but the rest of his face stayed tight. After a few seconds there was another knock. After another few seconds a male voice called in a hopeful tone, "Hello?" Then there was a briefly sustained knocking with a "Hello?" called above it. Finally there was silence. The shoes went back down the steps, unsprightly.

Rick sagged against the bottom of the counter, and breathed heavily. He peeled off the surgical gloves, wiped his hands on his jeans, and pulled the gloves back on. He'd been sure the guy and woman wouldn't be around before five-thirty at the earliest, but he hadn't counted on anybody dropping by.

That had been bad.

He waited another minute or so, for the person to get away but also for the shakes to pass a little, then got up.

Screw the microwave and the rest of the house, he was going now. After peering through the bottom of the window over the sink and seeing no one in the distance, Rick picked up the tuner and amplifier, backed to the screen door, worked the catch with his elbow, and pushed the door open with his back. He turned toward the steps just in time to freeze as a man in a suit stood up from sitting on the bottom step. The man looked up at Rick and smiled cheerfully. "Hi!" he said. "Has anyone talked to you about Jesus today?"

Rick, his arms heavy, his legs wanting to fold beneath him, his insides yanked to the ground, and his head needing oxygen, could only reply, with unintended aptness, "Aw, Christ."

The man was young, short haired, clean shaven, dark suit, white shirt, blue tie, black shoes. "My name's Bradley. Jesus loves me. And did you know He loves you too? Oh, excuse me for taking advantage of your steps for a moment. I had a busy morning."

Rick started to back into the kitchen. "Yeah, I'm busy myself. No time to talk now."

"Can I help you there?" Bradley started up the steps but Rick let the screen door close between them.

"No. I'm real busy now. Would you mind going?"

"No, I wouldn't mind." He made no sign of moving. "But do you know that damnation is forever? And you can be saved from it? But you can only be saved from eternal damnation by accepting the Savior?"

At his own place Rick would have said, "Ain't interested,"

and closed the door. But here the guy might notice how the inside door had been busted up by the crowbar. "Yeah, I know," Rick tried. "I accept him and I'm all set. Thanks for asking."

"Great! I'm from the Church of the Living Savior, and I'd like to tell you about us."

"Maybe another time."

"Oh, it won't take long. And damnation is forever."

The screen door hadn't shut him up. And it wasn't good to have him standing around outside the house. Rick made his choice. "All right, get in. And say what you gotta say." Rick quickly pushed the screen door open and pulled Bradley in.

"Thank you," Bradley said, regaining his balance after being let go. He looked at the merchandise piled by the door. "Are you moving?"

Hey, this was good. "Yeah." Wait, maybe there was something better. "Uh, no. There was a burglary here and that's the stuff that got taken." Too late he realized it didn't sound so good after all. He tried to save it by narrowing his eyes and looking into Bradley's. "Know anything about it?"

"Oh, no, this is my first time through this neighborhood."

Rick slid his gloved hands into his pockets. "Uh, let's go in here," he muttered, leading away from the stuff, and toward the living room.

Rick dropped into a chair, Bradley sat down near him at one end of a matching couch. They looked at each other.

They looked at each other.

Bradley, his smile maintained, broke the silence with, "Tell me how *you* came to know Jesus. Or how He came to know you."

Rick fidgeted. "I don't remember."

"When did you first accept Him as your Savior?"

“Look, I ain’t really given it that much thought.”

Bradley’s features changed slightly to register concern, but concern with a smile. “I can tell that you’re searching for something. And I believe I’ve been sent to help you find it.”

Rick had a flash. “If I give you money, will you leave?”

Bradley laughed like one who’d just heard the darnedest thing. “We’re not worried about money, we just want to – what’s your name, by the way?”

“Uh. Bill.”

“Bill, we just care about you. Because the only way to cleanse your soul of sin is to take the Lord Jesus as your personal savior.”

Rick’s only way to cleanse himself of this situation was to not make Bradley suspicious and get back to the van and get away from there as soon as he could. He’d already *agreed* with the prick, what more did he want?

Bradley asked, “Tell me what you think of Jesus.”

“I think of him,” Rick looked away and around at nothing in particular, “...as a triangle.”

“You mean the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

“No. I mean like isosoclees.”

“You mean isosceles.”

“Yeah.”

“That’s interesting. What do you mean by that?”

Well, that approach hadn’t worked either. Rick had worked the gloves off in his pockets and now threw his hands up freely. “I don’t know, man! I was just talking!”

Abruptly he realized he probably shouldn’t be antagonistic.

He said again, more calmly, “I don’t know.”

Bradley leaned forward, still concerned with a smile. “Hey,

I understand. I was like that once too. And Jesus came to me. Let me tell you how He came to me.” Rick gave no reaction.

“I was a real wild kid when I was a teenager,” Bradley said.

Rick mentally rolled his eyes and sighed through his nose.

“My parents didn’t care. They didn’t even notice. I lived in a real middle-class neighborhood. You could say it was nice, but I was bored. So I started spending time with the ‘cool’ kids. The troublemakers. And they got me into pot – marijuana.”

Maybe Rick could say he had a doctor’s appointment.

“Pretty soon I lost all interest in school, basketball, everything. I just wanted to get high.”

Rick started to wish he had the nerve to grab a heavy object.

“Then my parents did notice, but all they did was yell.”

Or at least the speed.

“Then one weekend some friends were going on a trip and I went along with them without telling my parents. We went into the city, and of course the first thing we did there was get into trouble. My friends, the ‘cool’ kids, were there to buy drugs, and we had to go into a bad part of town. I’d gotten drunk along the way, and I asked them to stop the car so I could throw up, if you’ll pardon the expression.”

Maybe he could be tricked into going into the basement, and could be locked in it.

“They did stop. And while we were stopped, some guys came up to the car and started a fight about our windshield wipers. I got beaten up pretty badly, but we all managed to get back in the car and drive away. I told them I needed to go to the hospital, but they said no. I started begging. And when one of them saw a building that said *Hospital*, they just stopped the car, pushed me out, and drove off. They were laughing.”

Maybe in the bathroom there was some kind of drug that would put him to sleep, and it could be put in a drink and given to him.

“But I thought, at least I’m at the hospital, and dragged myself to the door.

“It was an animal hospital. And it wasn’t even open.”

Rick had at least fifteen pounds on him.

“I just lay there. I don’t know how long it was. I was in such pain. And then a man was walking by and stopped. He helped me up and asked if I was all right. I said I didn’t know how badly I was hurt. He said a kid like me shouldn’t be around there and said he’d take me back to his apartment and let me get cleaned up.”

Rick was probably quicker too. How long could it take to tie a gag from a sitting start?

“He fixed me up, and gave me something to eat. He was very kind, and I was quite grateful. Maybe too grateful. I don’t want to shock you, but right there I was... homosexualized.

“And the worst part was, I liked it.

“I’d had sex with girls before, and enjoyed it. But this was different. My injuries turned out to be not that bad, and the man said I could stay with him as long as I wanted. I called my parents the next day and told them I wasn’t coming home. I still didn’t think they cared, but I know now that I broke their hearts.

“A couple of months later, I was spending every day stoned on pot, and hadn’t been out of the apartment in weeks. The man worked, so I’d just lay around during the day, watching TV. Then one day I just took some money, and some jewelry and a few other things, and left.”

Hey, something in common. Maybe...

Nahh.

“My life was a mess, I didn’t know what I was going to do, and I didn’t really care.”

Maybe if Rick just said, “Look, I don’t live here, I was just taking some stuff, and I’m real sorry now and I just want to go,” Bradley would be forgiving or understanding or shut up.

“Eventually I ended up hanging around the docks, waiting for ships to come in and men to get off them.

“I could get them drugs, and I could get drugs for myself. I don’t really know where I was staying then; I suppose I just drifted around. And as I spent time with the men from the boats, a strange thing started to happen. I began to desire women again too.

“I guess it was because it was all they talked about.

“I was a sick person. I stole food whenever I wanted it, I stole money for drugs when I didn’t have it. I also vandalized property – stores, cars, homes – when I felt like it, since I didn’t have anything else to do.

“I know now I was truly starting to lose my mind, and my soul. And then another very strange thing happened.

“And, Bill, the moment is still as vivid to me as the second it happened. I was looking through a magazine of pornographic filth. There was a particular picture of a beautiful woman, without clothes, in a pose of temptation. I was staring at her, and I was lusting for her so much that it was painful. I was staring at her...and hurting...and then I saw...that she had Jesus’ face...

“And the pain stopped.

“At first I thought, ‘No, this can’t be!’ And I looked at the

pictures of all the other naked women in the magazine. They *all* had Jesus' face. Then I knew. I knew that He loved me."

Obviously.

"Even after all I'd done, all the suffering I'd caused others, all the stealing, all the sexual promiscuity, all the destroying myself and others with drugs, all the sins I'd committed, He still loved me.

"But I didn't know what good it'd do me then. I'd done too much. I felt horrible. I was walking along a street, crying because I was so unworthy of His love. But He hadn't given up on me. He knew I needed guidance. And He sent someone from the Church of the Living Savior down that street at the same time. And I found out from that person that the way to be saved from damnation, the way to salvation, the only way, is acceptance of the Savior *as* the Savior. That was the start of a new life for me."

Rick had run out of thoughts.

"And now I want to help others start a new life. Because it doesn't matter what you've done. You see, if Jesus could help me, of course He could help you." Bradley stopped.

Rick slowly rubbed his chin with the back of a finger. He asked, "You sure?"

"Oh, certainly. How would you like to come to one of our meetings?"

"What happens at them?"

"Well, we meet twice a week. On Tuesdays and Fridays. And... Um, Bill?"

"Yeah?"

Bradley was hesitant. "Before I tell you more, would you... mind if I used your bathroom?"

Rick's pulse instantly accelerated. "Yeah, great, go ahead!"  
"Thank you."

Bradley remained seated. Rick stayed seated.

Bradley stayed seated. Rick remained seated.

"Oh," Rick said, getting up and starting into the hallway. "It's, uh," he opened a door using his shirttail between his palm and the knob. He found a good supply of sheets and towels and felt hot. "It's, uh," he quickly tried another door, "right here. Here."

"Thank you." Bradley stepped in and closed the door.

Rick sprang to the back door, slipping his gloves back on as he did. He stopped and looked at the tuner, amplifier, video player, still feeling flushed, trying to think.

Trying to think.

Then he ran out, leaving the items where they were.

After a minute or two, Bradley called, "Um, pardon me. Bill, is there a fresh roll of paper anywhere?"

"Bill?"

"Bill?"