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## REMEMBERING

by

Wesley Turner

Jeremy was changing Mr. Thompson's bed sheets when Sally told him the apocalypse was underway. An asteroid—melting ice caps? Jeremy didn't quite catch it. There was an endless list of things to do, and he had learned long ago to take his days one at a time. But when he entered the rec room during free time, the end of existence was all anyone wanted to talk about.

"Jeremy, is it true Berlin has been swallowed by the sea?"

"Yes, Jeremy, tell us, have the mountains been made low and the valleys made high?"

"Is it true the stars are falling? That the weight of a soul can be measured at death?"

Jeremy felt uncomfortable. All of the patients were facing him. He looked at Sally, his fellow CNA, for answers. She shrugged sadly.

"I don't have any answers," he said finally.

"What?"

"No answers," Jeremy said, loud enough for Mrs. Baumgartner to hear. They all moaned.

"We're afraid," they said, "and no one cares about us."

"I care for you," Jeremy insisted. "Maybe you should contact your families?"

"We can't remember their phone numbers," they said.

"I'm sure we've got their numbers around here somewhere," he said.

"Why can't they call us?" they said.

"Perhaps they don't know our number," he said.

"Can't you make love to Sally?" they said. "We've forgotten what it's like and how it works."

"Sally is married," Jeremy said. "And the chemistry is all wrong."

The patients moaned again.

"Jeremy," said Mr. Pensky, "Tell us about Michelangelo, won't you? I've quite forgotten him. I know he was important once." Mr. Pensky used to be a teacher, or an artist. Jeremy couldn't remember.

"Michelangelo was an artist who lived in Europe. He was a painter and he liked to paint pictures of God."

"God?" said Mr. Pensky.

"Did he have a family?" Mrs. Bennett said.

"Yes," Jeremy said.

"Was he a good father?"

"Yes, I'm sure he was."

"Did his children visit him on Thanksgiving and call during the week?"

"They always called on Thursday, because that was Michelangelo's Sabbath (he so often had to work on Sundays), and Marta brought the sweet potatoes on Thanksgiving, and Boris brought the cranberry sauce. Harry didn't attend Thanksgiving because his shrew of a wife insisted they go to her family's."

“Oh, yes.” And those who could remember became nostalgic for the old days when Thanksgiving was ruined by controlling daughters-in-law.

“And which one is God?” Mr. Penksy asked.

“God is God,” Jeremy said. “Many people worship him.”

“What people?” they said.

“Well, there’s Protestants, like Baptists and Methodists, and there’s Catholics, and I’ve heard of Greek Orthodoxy, and I guess Jews believe in God too, and Muslims. And Hindus believe in more than one God, and Buddhists believe in something as well.”

“And which do you believe?” they asked.

“My grandmother was a Quaker,” he said.

“And which is true?”

“I’m not sure.”

“How does one know which God to follow?” Mrs. Bennett asked, “How can one be sure of their convictions?”

Jeremy thought hard. “We could all make bets.”

“Yes! We like that!” they said. Mr. Bennett bet on the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mrs. Bennett bet on the Unitarians. None of them argued, because none of them remembered where they had worshipped as children. There were a surprising number of votes for the Zoroastrians because Mrs. Abernathy had observed that it sounded like an exotic and beautiful flower. Mrs. Baumgartner bet on Darwin until everyone started booing.

When the very last bet was made, the door to the building flew open, and flames and smoke erupted around the room.

“Can you see, Jeremy? Can you see who it is?” they said. They wanted to know so they could enjoy their winnings for a few more moments of mortality.

Jeremy stared at the person in the doorway for a long time. He saw the features; he could see the eye color and the clothes. But he had no idea who it was.

“Why, it’s Michelangelo!” Jeremy shouted, raising his hands over his head and laughing. There were tears streaming down his eyes. Sally kissed him.

Everyone cheered until, a few moments later, they each forgot about the apocalypse and Ahura Mazda and the weight of souls and returned instead to their dominoes.