

One
MIRACLE
After
Another

The Pavel Goia Story

G R E G B U D D



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Say Not, I Am a Child

“I don’t believe there is a God!” Pavel Goia blurted into the darkness. “I’m tired of the whole foolish notion. I feel as if I’m going crazy! How could I have allowed myself to be duped? Believing in a Being who doesn’t even exist has stolen all the fun from my life. My friends are out having the time of their lives while I lie here feeling lost and condemned. How many more nights do I need to toss and turn without sleep? I hate listening to the seconds ticking endlessly away. Lying here with thoughts of guilt echoing and reechoing through my mind feels like a nightmare. I would give anything to silence that haunting Voice: “Pavel, if you die tonight, you’ll be lost forever!”

One thought after another bombarded the troubled young man attempting to escape the torture of his soul. Poor Pavel—he had no place to run and nowhere to hide. But he had made up his mind to bring his misery to an end. “I have to put these crazy ideas about God behind me and just enjoy life the way all my friends do,” Pavel said half aloud as he pulled the covers aside.

“That does it. I’m going to town to have some fun—I can’t sleep anyway,” he muttered under his breath as he scanned the room for his pants.

Attempting to find his clothes in the shadows of a darkened room was not an easy task, but with a little persistence he succeeded. Carefully calculating his escape, he tiptoed from room to room so as not to awaken his parents. But when he reached the living room, he stopped in his tracks. The moonlight shining through the window outlined the silhouette of his father kneeling in prayer. Pavel had often happened upon his father in prayer, but why tonight? His praying father was the last thing his troubled mind desired to see as he made his escape from home and his parents’ God.

His pace quickened as he stepped out into the darkness. From the dim

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lights lining the street, he glanced in the direction of shadowy objects stretching out before him. The haunting image of his father praying followed him from shadow to shadow as he hurried to the city and his waiting friends.

“Hey, Pavel! Glad you could make it!” called one of his friends with a bit of a slur as he approached their usual hangout.

One of the central parks known as the Little Market had become a favorite spot for his friends to pass the evening hours drinking and smoking. It was also an ideal spot to watch for a young woman to happen along. Many factory workers had to walk by this strategic location on their way home from work as the second shift ended. Whenever the young men were fortunate enough for it to be a woman, she instantly became the center of attention. A fanfare of loud whistling greeted each approaching prospect, and a barrage of suggestive invitations followed as she passed in front of them. The routine was nearly the same each time. The young partyers enthusiastically continued their little charade until it became clear that their subject had not been duly impressed by their antics.

“We’ve been having a real good time,” chimed in another. His claim was quickly validated by a concert of loud, drunken laughter. In the dim light Pavel could see the evidence on all sides. The “market crowd” had obviously arrived much earlier than he had. With piles of cigarette butts strewn carelessly about and nearly empty bottles dangling in hand, it was not difficult to see that a valiant attempt to have a “good time” was in progress.

“Pavel, how about one of your jokes? Have you got one for us tonight?” called out a familiar voice. Within a few moments Pavel was the center of attention as he recited a favorite from his repertoire of off-color jokes. He was in his element as the entertainer.

No one offered him anything to drink or smoke since he had never desired to join them in their vices. But he sure knew how to make them laugh. Pavel knew more dirty jokes than the rest of them put together. However, he really didn’t fit with this rough and rowdy bunch, even though he had been spending a lot of time with them. Many of them had shown little interest in school, and nearly all came from homes lacking in moral support.

In contrast, Pavel was from a third-generation Christian family and made almost perfect grades in all his classes. Often he felt like a misfit in this group of young men aimlessly adrift. They lived from one “good

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time” to the next. No one seemed to mind that Pavel was a little different; his quick wit and ability to tell stories kept them laughing for hours night after night.

Once again he had his audience smiling and laughing with his evening entertainment. “Hey, look over there at that babe headed our way,” interrupted someone from Pavel’s intoxicated audience. The unexpected approach of a young woman in their direction created an instant distraction. Now she had the undivided attention of his audience. Lewd and obscene suggestions accompanied by loud whistling ensued as the unsuspecting young woman approached.

As she attempted to pass the inebriated young men, several of them quickly surrounded her. Frantically her wide eyes searched for an escape, but she was completely blocked in. Terrified, she pleaded with them to let her go, but it was no use. Pavel watched in horror as his friends began to taunt her with some very suggestive and inappropriate gestures; they seemed to have lost their minds. After a moment or two he could endure no more of their outrageous behavior. Facing her captors, Pavel yelled, “Let her go!”

The smiles that had recently covered their faces as they listened to his stories and jokes dissolved into angry looks and sneers of disgust as Pavel earnestly protested their behavior. “Come on, you guys, let her go! What you’re doing is wrong,” Pavel pleaded with all the boldness he could muster.

His attempted defense temporarily shifted their attention from the captive young woman to her defender. Angrily one of the leaders lashed back, “Who do you think you are, telling us what’s right and wrong? I don’t remember anyone inviting you to tell us what to do!”

Repulsed by their behavior, Pavel stepped back. Wanting no part of their passion-driven madness, he wished only for a way to assist the sobbing young woman pleading to go free. Realizing he was equally helpless, he continued his retreat.

“Get out of here and don’t come back,” they sneered. It was clear that they were not about to be swayed from their intentions. A sick feeling filled his stomach as he turned to walk away from the drunken, cursing “market crowd.” Were these the same guys he thought were his friends just a few moments earlier? Nothing about them felt very appealing now. This night had gone anything but the way he had hoped it would.

Pavel’s attempt to run from his guilty conscience to his friends in town

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had not quieted his troubled thoughts or given him the peace he was so desperately seeking. His journey home was more miserable than his escape had been.

The rest of the night was anything but peaceful; once he was in bed, it was only more tossing and turning. Adding to the pangs of his guilty conscience were the fresh images of the horror-stricken eyes and the sobbing voice of the young woman pleading to be set free.

He began the next day tortured by turbulent emotions. Scenes from the night before refused to leave him, and now he felt worse than ever. Before long the scenes that troubled him became the passionate disgust of the neighborhood as news of the previous night spread from neighbor to neighbor. "Have you heard about the young men in town last night who violently abused one of our innocent young girls? The police have every one of them in custody. I hope none of them ever sees the light of day again. If they throw away the prison keys, it would be too good for those worthless bums."

As Pavel learned the fate of the girl he was horrified. The sick feeling he had experienced the night before instantly returned. Those he had thought were his friends would no doubt spend many long years in prison. But he had been spared. In reality he knew he could easily have been sitting in jail at this very moment waiting for a trial if he had not walked away when he did.

He began to feel extremely grateful for the rejection he had experienced from the market crowd. Imagining the terrified young woman pleading for her freedom removed any lingering sympathy he may have had for those he thought were his friends. The image of his praying father returned as he contemplated his narrow escape from a lengthy prison sentence.

With sleep escaping him once again, he lay thoughtfully looking at the same shadows on the ceiling he had stared at the night before. However, this night was very different from his recent ones filled with anxious, guilt-ridden thoughts. This one would be spent not running from God but *to* Him. In the stillness of the night Pavel's mind began to retrace the earlier years of his life.

Growing up in a Christian family in Communist Romania had not been easy. Christianity was viewed as a crutch for the weak and simple. Attending church was openly ridiculed, and Bibles were forbidden. For those who insisted on embracing faith, limited employment opportunities were just one of the consequences that could be expected. Many times his

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family had endured extremely difficult consequences resulting from their faithfulness to God.

As Pavel replayed the many challenges his family had faced, he couldn't help feeling grateful for the strong Christian heritage his grandfather had passed along. Feelings of thankfulness replaced the resentful, bitter sentiments of the night before. What a different perspective just one night had made.

He now understood his praying father, kneeling night after night, to be the only difference between himself and his companions incarcerated in concrete cells. They no doubt would experience some sleepless nights of their own.

Pavel couldn't help smiling as memories of his early childhood came vividly back to mind. Growing up in Turnu Severin in the southwestern part of Romania along the Danube River had provided him a vast countryside to explore, and the river had many wonderful places for him and his sisters to swim during the hot summer months. Ancient Roman ruins not far from his home also became a favorite place for exploring. Only the imagination of a young boy could rightly bring back to life all the history that had been resting in silence for countless centuries.

Fond memories of his church and the love they had shown him came flooding back as his sleepless night continued. As a very young boy he had been gifted with an exceptionally sharp memory. Reciting memorized Scripture passages to the church members was something he looked forward to each week. The older members especially anticipated his oratories. He had come to love the praise and attention following each of his perfect performances. The rewards were not only flowery compliments but often candy and other treasures known to be appreciated by children. The numerous rewards provided him strong motivation to enhance his performances, and in a short time he was reciting entire chapters from the Bible, much to the delight of the congregation. Enjoying the special attention from his admirers, he added singing special music to his ecclesiastical repertoire.

Singing had been part of his family worship experience for as long as he could remember. With a gifted voice and a sharp memory, learning songs to sing at church came easily. Many well-meaning members had no doubt been too free with their compliments, praises, and gifts, and very early in life he came to view himself as a spiritually superior Christian.

The hairstyles for boys began to change, but not Pavel's. To add further to his image of the "good boy at church," he faithfully went to the