

# **No Hope for Gomez!**

A NOVEL BY GRAHAM PARKE

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Read an article about a group of mathematicians who developed a financial model to accurately compare apples and oranges.

Was stunned. Never thought I'd see the day.

Preliminary indications are that the model allows any two kinds of fruit to be compared, although guava still causes minor rounding errors.

Further testing is ongoing.

-- Gomez Porter, blogspace entry.

# 1.

Blog note: They asked me to keep a blog.

They told me to be meticulous and exact in reporting my experiences. Leave nothing out, they said, no matter how mundane it may seem.

I have no idea what kind of drugs I'm on. It may be some new medicine, an anti-psychotic, or just a pain reliever. I have no way of knowing what kind of experiences would constitute effects or side effects, so I update my blog daily and let them sift through the mess. Decide what's relevant and what's not. What's out of the ordinary and what's expected.

Just write down everything, they said.

Blog entry: Slow day at the antiques store. Spent most of my time updating my blog and reading the paper. Came across this article about a guy found near-dead in his apartment. He had apparently been comatose for the better part of a week.

Normally this kind of story doesn't affect me much. It might tickle the part of my brain in charge of morbid curiosity, it might stir up some momentary apprehension about living alone and dying unexpectedly, but then I'll realize this would bother my neighbors more than it would me, and I'll carry on with my day. But this article had my hair standing up. Not

only did I know the guy, I also had a sneaking suspicion about what had happened to him. And, what was worse, I might be headed for the same fate!

Scanned the article quickly, looking for phrases that proved me wrong, snippets stating the cause of death to be completely natural and, if possible, even somewhat pleasant. Found no such thing. Had to buckle down and read the entire article carefully. When I reached the end, though, I was still none the wiser. So far, police had yet to release any information on the cause of the guy's collapse. They also declined to indicate whether foul play was suspected. There was nothing in the article to soothe my growing dread.

Blog entry: Saturday. Decided to do a little detective work. Headed over to the hospital and queued up at the front desk to ask about visitor's hours. The nurse told me they'd just started.

"Great," I said. "Can I just walk in?"

"You can," she said. "Who did you want to see?"

"A Mr. Miller. Mr. Joseph Miller. He was brought in two days ago."

The nurse consulted her computer, frowned, then shook her head. "No, I'm sorry," she said. "Mr. Miller's dead. He died late last night." She looked up from her screen. "Would you like to see somebody else?"

"What? No! I really need to talk to Mr. Miller. Are you absolutely sure he's passed away?"

"I can recheck if you want." She typed away. "Sometimes this program mixes up some of the... ah, I see what I've done now." She gave me an apologetic smile. "Stupid little me," she said. "I had the stats of several files mixed up."

I breathed a sigh of relief. “So, he didn’t pass away?”

“Oh, no,” the nurse said, shaking her head, “he’s still dead, but he died this morning rather than last night.” She held up her hand with a small amount of space between her thumb and index finger. “You missed him by *that* much.”

“I see,” I said. “Does it at least say what he died of?”

She browsed her screen, bit her lip, and mumbled, “Yes, no, wait a minute. I saw something about... Ah, yes. Yes, it does.” She looked up again. For a long moment we stared at each other. When I finally arched an eyebrow, she said, “Are you a relative? I’m not supposed to give out this kind of information to just anybody.”

I tried to think fast. I really needed that information but I didn’t know Joseph other than from the clinic waiting area. We’d never even spoken. Then, out of nowhere, the perfect answer just came to me. I told her, “Yes.”

“Okay then.” She was about to tell me when her face clouded over again. “You really should be getting this information from his doctor, though.”

I waved it away, told her it would be fine.

“Well,” she said, reading from her screen, “it says here he died of dehydration and malnutrition.”

“He was found passed out in his apartment,” I told her. “Apparently he’d been out for a while. Does it say what caused him to lose consciousness in the first place?”

The nurse perused the file for a long time, then shook her head. “No, sorry,” she said. “I’ll have to get

the doctor for that. Just a moment.” She reached for the phone.

“That’s okay,” I said. I didn’t want to get into trouble for impersonating a relative. “I need to go. Pressed for time. Thank you.”

As I turned to leave, she called after me, “Are you sure you don’t want to visit anyone else? There are some really nice people up on the second floor. Much nicer than Mr. Miller. They’d love to talk to you.”

Blog entry: None the wiser, I returned home, spent the remainder of the weekend wondering what all this meant. It was possible something unrelated to the trial had knocked Joseph out and caused him to die of dehydration, but my mind was still not at ease. I wanted conclusive evidence. I resolved to ask Dr. Hargrove a few pointed questions next time in went in to the clinic.