

I stood by the bed. There was no sign of life save the heavy breathing.

"My friend, I said in a distinct voice, I am a Catholic priest. Are you a catholic?"

"With a quick flutter the eyelids moved, there was a flash of intelligence and they dropped shut. Just then the orderly entered and said respectfully: Father, he is unconscious. He will die in this stupor; the doctors say there is not the slightest hope. I motioned him away.

"My dear friend, I said to the patient, I think you are conscious; if you understand me, and wish to go to confession and Holy Communion, I have the Blessed Sacrament with me. Let me know by pressing my hand, and I took the swollen hand in mine. Instantly I felt a strong pressure. I turned to the orderly.

"The man is speechless, but he is conscious, I said, and I mean to hear his confession; stay outside till I call you.

"The orderly gave me an incredulous look, but obeyed and closed the door. I began by telling the poor sufferer I would make his confession and he must press my hand. It was touching, and almost drew tears from my eyes, the effort he made to respond. I was perfectly satisfied. When I told him I had our Lord with me, he tried to extend his poor swollen tongue to prove to me his desire to receive Holy Communion, and when I gave him the Blessed Sacrament, a great tear rolled down his face. There was a glass of water near, and I assisted him with spoonfuls, to swallow the Sacred Particle. When he did so I anointed him, scarcely finding a healthy spot for the holy oil.

"All this time his eyes spoke the most pitiful language ever seen in a human face. My feelings almost overcame me. I never thought of contagion. I gave every consolation of the Church to this poor, speechless, disfigured Christian and left with the conviction that another soul would soon be in Paradise. I knew now the destination of the second Sacred Host, so strangely placed in my pyx.

The young priest paused. We were both touched. I grasped his hand.

"God-speed your journey," I murmured. "Come back well. We need you.— Father Alexander.