

a variety of herbs, applied both internally and externally. He spooned thin soup into the patient, kept him cool when he was hot and warmed him when he was cold.

One morning the stranger awoke, his eyes wide and clear. "I believe you have saved me, padre. I must thank you."

"It's nothing," said the priest. "What is your name?"

"I am called Rodolfo."

"Tell me what happened. Who left you to die in the reeds, and why?"

Rodolfo turned his pockmarked face to the window. "My brother. For years he has longed to keep our father's farm for himself. I am the eldest and would have had it soon, since our father is ancient. I told my brother he could have the land himself — I am no farmer. I long to wander. But he would not believe me, always saying that I

would come back and claim what was mine. He feared that greatly. When we took ill, my father and I, I was too weak to resist when he dragged us to the cart, and my father ... my father, where is he?"

"Gone to God, my son. He died in the reeds where you were left."

Again he gazed out the window. "I see."

"Rest now. Rest. I will get you some soup."

* * *

A day later, Rodolfo stood at the door, ready to leave.

"Where will you go?"

"I will begin by avenging the death of my father."

"No. You must not."

"I will."

"I have not cured you for this." Fabrizio stood and shook his head, a pained expression on his face. "No. I have not cured you for this. You must not kill. I have not cured you so you can take another's life."

Rodolfo spoke calmly. "Padre, the cure is a gift — once given, it no longer belongs to you."

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The author adapted this story from his novel, *Fabrizio's Return* (Knopf Canada, 2006), which received the Trillium Book Award.

Ottawa poet and novelist Mark Frutkin has published 11 books. His latest work is *Erratic North: A Vietnam Draft Resister's Life in the Canadian Bush* (2008).

Time to heal thyself: Christmas Eve

It is time. I have levied love enough
I have showed it to them, wrapped in a bow.
It is Christmas, and it is time
for me to stop doctoring the books.
I am a mere recorder, a cheerleader for time,
watching men and women work
with what they are given, mostly chasing grief.
I am the Santa Claus of regurgitant hearts,
of watching the driven snow pelt on a white Christmas Eve.
I make the most, but tonight I refuse to make too much.
Wrap up the end of the day in a bow for me,
no longer a crutch to limping souls, but to my own.
For I will give it away soon enough,
as a heartfelt pawn.

Shane Neilson MD
Family physician
Guelph, Ont.