

# No Good Deed ...

by  
Jamie Louwrens

This is a work of fiction, none of the characters and events portrayed in this story are true.

***John, forgets that he is a little too old for heroics when he sees a young woman being assaulted by three burley young teenagers. He rushes to her defence and wakes up in hospital to find himself being charged with rape and assault. A foreign veteran, he feels lost and bewildered by the mess he finds himself in.***

It was dark and it took me a while to realise where I was, in hospital.

My head throbbed and I could not see out of my right eye. My whole body ached but the worst pain was between my legs. I could not sit up, or raise my arms and my hands felt pretty sore too. I felt groggy and kept drifting off to sleep.

It was around mid-morning when I realised someone was talking to me.

“Can you hear me, Mr. Veldman?” It was a female voice.

I could not see the person, and didn't want to turn my head, having tried during the night and regretted it.

I tried to speak, and croaked, my mouth felt all wrong, and my tongue kept getting in the way.

“Just blink your eye if you can hear me?”

I felt the bile rising in my throat at the thought of having lost an eye. The beeping of a monitor must have worried the person, as she moved and I could see her.

“Take deep breaths Mr. Veldman, you are going to be fine. Deep breaths.” She looked into my eye and smiled, “Don’t worry, you are in good hands.”

I tried to talk again, and managed a croaking version of, “What’s the damage?”

The woman nodded, “Nothing for you to worry about at the moment. I’m going to fetch the doctor, and she will tell you more.”

I heard her leave and concentrated on my breathing, and trying to sense what was wrong with me. I have no idea how long it was, but it felt like an eternity. I figured that I had at least three broken teeth, a couple of broken ribs and had been kicked several times between the legs. I had some movement in my fingers, but they had been strapped, so I guessed a few broken fingers on each hand and maybe broken collar bones or dislocated shoulders.

I cast my mind back. It had been a normal Friday, and I had gone, as I did every Friday morning, to Seagall’s nursery and Garden Centre, they were my best client. I did a couple of hours there every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Routine stuff mostly, keeping their pond and drip line filters clean and working, checking on the electric gates, generator and pumps.

The doctor looked half the age of the nurse.

“Good morning Mr. Veldman,” she said, “I don’t suppose it feels too good for you, but you are alive and in remarkably good health considering the beating you have taken.” She had the sort of no-nonsense midlands accent that I liked.

“Have I lost an eye?” I managed.

“Not as far as we can tell, but we will have to wait and see. The eye socket has been damaged, as well as your cheek bone, both your collar bones have been broken, along with several teeth, five fingers and three ribs. Your testicles are swollen but they should be fine.”

She held a light to my good eye and peered at me from close range, “No brain damage, hopefully. Any questions?”

“How long will I be in hospital?” I asked.

The doctor pulled back and made a face, “I’d say two weeks minimum, but only because of the head injury. A lot depends on what we find when the bruising subsides.” She stood back and regarded me sombrely, “There is a policeman outside, waiting to talk to you. Do you feel up to it?”

“I suppose it is better to get it over with,” I said. I really wasn’t looking forward to it.

The doctor left and the nurse, who turned out to be a sister, asked me if there was anyone she could call.

“Not at the moment,” I said, “What about my things? My wallet, keys and cell phone?”

She pulled open a drawer and held up a clear ziploc bag. My cell phone was in pieces, but at least my keys and wallet were there.

I woke up again when the police came in. Two of them, a sergeant and a constable, both male. They didn’t look friendly, but they were polite enough.

“How are you feeling, Mr. Veldman... am I pronouncing that properly?” asked the Sergeant.

“As well as can be expected,” I said, “Is she alright?”

“To whom are you referring Sir?” asked the Sergeant, I sensed the constable sharpen his focus on me.

“The young woman that was being attacked,” I said, “I didn’t get to see her face, but she was wearing Seagall’s Garden Centre uniform. I told her to run.”

The Sergeant made a show of writing in his notebook, then looked at me, "Perhaps you should start at the beginning Sir, tell us what you remember? What were you doing at the Garden Centre at that time of the evening? It was quite late wasn't it?"

"Yes, just a few minutes before eight PM, I think," I said, "I had just replaced a drip line filter... I got the replacement earlier in the day..."

"Why did you leave it so late to replace?" asked the Sergeant, "As I understand it, you had already been there early that morning?"

I was stumped for a moment, and could not shrug; it hurt too much.

"Well, it's a small job, and I had other things to do, I just decided to do it on my way home to save time and fuel," I said, "Maggie, that is the owner, Mrs. Veenstra, was locking up as I left. I heard a scuffle in the bin enclosure and ..."

"How well do you know the owner, Mrs. Veenstra?"

"I was good friends with her late husband forty years ago. I can't say I know her that well, but I've been looking after their pumps and filters for the last three years." I said, "Why do you ask?"

"Just curiosity, Sir. You said you heard a scuffle in the bin enclosure. What were you doing in that vicinity?"

"I was walking to my car, I had parked next to the bin enclosure."

The Sergeant nodded and asked me to continue.

"I pushed open the gate, and saw three young men attacking a woman," I said.

"Did you recognise any of them?" asked the sergeant.

"Not at first, but they were all wearing the red garden centre polo shirts and blue jeans," I said, "Two of the men looked familiar when we got into it..."

“Just go back a bit, Sir,” said the policeman, “You said you saw three men attacking a woman, describe exactly what you saw please?”

“I saw a woman on her back, her belly and breasts exposed. A man was kneeling over her head, on her arms trying to undo her belt with one hand and punching her in the side with the other hand. Two other men were on their knees, each holding onto one of the woman’s legs. She was struggling.”

“Did you recognise the woman?” asked the Sergeant.

“No, her polo shirt had been pulled over her head,” I said.  
“What exactly did you do after pushing open the gate and seeing the fracas?” asked the Sergeant.

“I think I shouted for them to stop, then ran at them and kicked the head of the man punching her.”

“You attacked them?” asked the constable. The sergeant looked annoyed.

“Yes, I suppose I did,” I said, “They were hurting that girl...”

“So you did recognise her?” said the Sergeant.

“No, I have already told you I do not know who she was,” I said, trying not to show my frustration, “I still do not know who she is.”

“I just want to be clear, Sir,” said the Sergeant, “What happened next?”

“One of the others hit me, I think,” I said, “All I can remember after that is wishing I had kept hold of my adjustable spanner, and yelling at the girl, telling her to run when I saw her getting to her feet.”

“What about your spanner?” asked the Sergeant, he seemed suddenly more interested.

“It is a big one, twenty-four inches,” I said, “If I had thought to keep hold of it, I would probably not have ended up spending the night here in Hospital.”

The Sergeant looked sharply at the constable, who went red.

“Where was this twenty-four inch spanner? asked the Sergeant.

“In my tool bag,” I said, “I must have dropped it when I went for the men.”

“Can you remember where you dropped it?” asked the Sergeant.

“I really don’t remember,” I said, “Probably by the gate.”

The Sergeant was quiet for a moment, studying his notes. When he looked up, I sensed a change in his attitude, he seemed less hostile, “Is there anything else that you remember Sir?”

“Sorry,” I said, “Not at the moment. I got smacked about a bit. Perhaps I will remember more later, but I’m pretty sure that I lost the fight. I just hope the girl got away... but there is a camera you know! That’s why I park near the enclosure, there is a camera that covers that area. You should be able to get something from the camera footage.”

The Sergeant almost smiled, “Thank you Sir, the constable is going to take a statement from you now.”

It seemed to take forever, and my head was pounding when it was over. I couldn’t sign it, and the Sergeant asked if I had any objections on having the statement read to the ward sister, who could sign as a witness.

Sister Joyce agreed and listened quietly while my statement was read out. The Sergeant asked me, in her presence, if the statement was accurate, and I said it was, to the best of my recollection. The Sister then signed the statement and went with the constable to make some copies.

“The young lady got away, Sir,” said the Sergeant quietly, “But unfortunately, things are not that simple. For what it is worth, and off the record, I want to believe you.”

When the constable returned, I was charged with assault and attempted rape, warned and cautioned. The constable remained and sat outside the room. I could make out the back of his head through the obscure glass in the door.

Somehow, despite the frantic pounding of my heart and feeling of dread and despair, I managed to fall asleep.

I was woken for food, supper by the look of it. Sister Joyce came in to check on me while I was trying to explain to the young woman trying to feed me that I did not eat carbs, and that included boiled carrots.

“Are you on some sort of diet?” asked Sister Joyce.

“Yes, a carbohydrate restricted diet,” I told her.

She frowned at me, “Is this for a medical condition or just a self imposed thing?”

“A year ago my GP told me that I was pre-diabetic and had to lose weight,” I explained, “I lost thirty kilograms and don’t intend to put it back on again.”

“Well your blood tests were pretty good,” she said, “I’ll speak to the nutritionist.”

I thanked her. I slept badly that night, and was not helped by the regular “observations”, I don’t know why they call them observations, when they kept taking my blood pressure, temperature and shining lights in my eyes. At least they used a digital thermometer and did not shove it into my mouth or bum.

I was given scrambled egg with tomato in the morning. Sister Joyce came in to check on me and returned later to ask if I needed anything.

I must have looked surprised, because she apologised for not asking me earlier. She then told me that a Miss Cornwall had wanted to visit me but as she was not family, she had not been permitted.

“I don’t think I know anyone by that name,” I said, “Did she say why she wants to see me?”

Sister Joyce went very red, “It is the young woman you saved at the garden centre,” she said, “Billy Cornwall.”

“It was Billy? Is she alright?” I asked.

“She was knocked about a bit and has a few loose teeth, but nothing was broken,” said the Sister, “Is it alright for her to visit?”

“Yes, that’s fine,” I said, “Anybody else?”

Sister Joyce nodded, “A gentleman called Paul Spence, he left a number and asked to be called when you were awake and able to see visitors.”

“How long have I been here?” I asked.

“Since Friday night, today is Wednesday.”

I struggled with that, and only half heard her explaining that I had been kept unconscious while the bruising in my skull was reduced.

The doctor was more pleasant as well. It didn’t make any sense to me.

The nutritionist was a young man, he immediately realised I was on a ketogenic diet and seemed to approve.

Paul arrived while the nutritionist was with me.

He shook his head, “You crazy fucker,” he said, “You look like shit and guess you feel even worse. What were you thinking?”

“I just acted, didn’t have time to think,” I said, “I can think of all sorts of things I would do differently now, but at the time... well, it’s done and here I am.”

“Want to tell me about it?” he asked, sitting down.

I told him what I remembered. He nodded. “I heard that version, but I have to warn you, there’s other versions going around.” He shifted uncomfortably in the chair, “I didn’t want to believe it, but the lads said you were up to your nuts in that girl’s guts, and that they thought you were raping her. That’s why they kicked the shit out of you, only the girl turned on them as well. They say she has a granddaddy fetish.”

“Seriously?” I asked, but I began to understand the hostility I had sensed from the hospital staff and the police.

“The girl claimed that you saved her, but the press preferred the other version,” said Paul, “Two of the lads are the sons of .. well, local big shots. The press have you down as a pervert.”

“Fuck,” I muttered, “That’s all I need.”

“Cheer up,” said Paul, “I believe the girl, or I wouldn’t be here. Need anything?”

Paul took the bits of my phone and returned that evening with a new phone. He spent an age setting it up to work on voice control, and was incredibly patient about showing me how to use it. He told me I could pay him later.

Billy also visited that evening. Her face was black and blue and her left eye was very red. She brought me some chocolates, which Paul cheerfully ate.

I asked Paul to take my keys and move my car from the Garden Centre car park to my lock up garage.

After Paul left, Billy came closer, "I'm so sorry Mr. Veldman, this is so unfair."

"Not your fault Billy," I said, "I'm sorry for what happened to you."

"The police... well, they seem to be taking me seriously now. I suppose you have heard?" She glanced at the TV set on the wall.

"Paul told me," I said, "Apparently the press has had a feeding frenzy while I was unconscious, I am really sorry."

"They have been horrible," said Billy, "But things have changed and I have a lawyer now - she wants to visit tomorrow, is that OK?"

"I have already admitted assaulting the men that attacked you," I said, "The police have charged me with assault."

"But you were just trying to help me," said Billy, "They were charged today with attempted rape and assault."

The night sister insisted that Billy leave then. I managed, after several attempts, to make a call to my brother in Germany. I told him I was banged up and in hospital, and not to worry. He asked me what had happened and I said I'd picked a fight and lost it. He laughed and told me to remember that I was an old geyser now and asked if I wanted him to visit. I said I would prefer if I could come and visit him as soon as I was out of hospital.

I tried calling Maggie and kept being sent to voicemail. The same with my landlady. I guess they thought I was a rapist.

Sister Joyce said as much before she left and told me that Fenwick and Daniels fathers were wealthy toffs, and that they were saying that they had dragged me off the girl, saying that I was having sex with her, that they thought I had forced myself on her but that she had got hysterical and turned on them after they had dragged me off her.

I lost count of the days. Eventually the swelling around my right eye reduced and I could see well enough.

Paul apologised and said he couldn't move my car till I had paid for new tyres as all of them had been slashed.

Billy came to tell me that she was going back to work and that Maggie had gone to South Africa the day after the attack - her sister had been admitted to hospital.

"Can I fetch your mail?" Billy asked, "Water any plants? Feed any pets? Clear out your fridge? I live quite close to you, just behind the Berkeley Arms."

I agreed to let her take care of what she could, and got more bad news: my landlady had served notice. I arranged to have my stuff put into storage.

I had the catheter removed that evening, I nearly screamed, but it was such a pleasure being able to use the toilet, even though I still had to have someone wipe my bum.

I spent eighteen days in hospital before being allowed to leave, Paul found me a lodging with one of the British Legion regulars. Because of my age, it was fairly easy to get home help, as I still could not use my hands or arms properly. Zamir, a Syrian, took turns with Angela. Zamir was great, but he had a long drive to and from Littlehampton each day. Angela lived in New Bosham and cycled, though she always had a reason for not turning up on time, or going early.

By June, three months after the incident, I was able to look after myself, and started working again. I had lost a lot of work in three months, and very few of my old customers wanted me to continue with them. Maggie was back and great, but I realised I would have to find another way of earning money. I was not getting much from my books, but I could survive, just.

Billy came to see me with a lawyer, a woman called Victoria.

"Miss Cornwall has informed me that you have not engaged a lawyer, Mr. Veldman, is that wise?"

I had invited them in and was making coffee.

"I am not sure if it is wise or not," I replied, "Please call me John?"

"Were you not advised by the police to engage a lawyer?" she asked.

"I don't remember being told that I would need a lawyer," I said.

"You are aware that the police were reluctant to charge the three men with rape and assault?" said Victoria, "All three of them say that you and Billy attacked them?"

"Well, I did attack them," I said, "I can give you a copy of the statement the police recorded from me."

"I have a copy, thank you, but ... this is serious Mr. Vel... John," she said, "You could end up in prison, you need a lawyer!"

I shrugged, "I am not convinced Victoria. I was there, and I hardly remember what happened after I attacked the men. If I find myself facing a jail sentence, then I will consider getting a lawyer. I don't have much of a pension, I have lost three months of work and most of my clients, I cannot afford to pay a lawyer, and really don't want some unpaid legal aider representing me."

We argued back and forth for a while, but in the end she gave up and left with Billy.

The preliminary hearings at Chichester Court were a total waste of time, but they had to be endured. The case was referred to Lewes Crown Court. Victoria seemed happy about that. I was not so pleased.

I had to attend the Crown Court on Tuesday the fifth of July. I got there over an hour early and sat quietly in the corridor listening to music till I was called in and wished I had worn more comfortable shoes. I sat at the same side of the court as Billy, at a table by myself.

The Judge asked me why I did not have a lawyer, and seemed unimpressed with my answer, but allowed me to sit.

I was told by an official to remove my ear buds and switch off my phone.

I had taken my iPad in with me, but I had only intended to use it to keep writing my tales. A man has to earn a living, even if it is a pitiful one. In the end I did very little writing.

Victoria was very much the David to the defendants' three lawyer Goliath team.

I was painted as a lecherous old man. They had dug out all sorts of details about my life, and made much of my early failed relationships but didn't mention my long, untroubled marriage. They had even read my books, which gave me some grim pleasure as it meant that they must have bought the books to read them. They tried to make inferences about the violence and sex in the books. They also tried to depict Billy as a girl with a Granddaddy fetish, I learned that she had been raised by her grandparents after her parents had died in a yachting incident, and that her grandfather had only recently been diagnosed with dementia and had been moved into a care home. The three young men stuck to their story; that having heard what they thought were groans of pain they had gone into the bin area and found me having what they thought at first was non-consensual sex with Billy. That I and then Billy turned on them when they confronted us. It did not help that the CCTV camera covering the bin area was not working at the time of the incident.

I was grilled for hours, three times, once by each of the defendants' lawyers. I did not have much to say and did not find it difficult to stick to my story. Victoria spent some time questioning me, but was not aggressive, and made much of my military background and character references. The photos of my injuries were not very pleasant viewing, but I was secretly pleased when I got to see how much damage I had inflicted on the three young men, especially Fenwick and Hobbs.

For the most part, Victoria was polite to me during the trial, and only once gave me advice; a note that she passed me when I sat down after my grilling by Fenwick's lawyer. He had ended by asking me if I had any regrets, and I answered that I regretted dropping my tools before rushing to defend the woman I saw being attacked. When he asked me to explain, I said that if I had got hold of my twenty-four inch adjustable spanner, I might have ended the assault more quickly and without suffering a head injury, broken bones and damaged teeth.

Victoria had written; "Do not elaborate. Stick to simple answers of fact. You are doing well."

I was more careful after that.

Maggie's testimony made all the difference. She stated that Daniels, Fenwick and Hobbs had clocked out shortly before Billy took the office trash bags to the bins, and that she was waiting for Billy to return and clock out when I left. I did not clock in or out, as I was not an employee. She said that Billy had run back to the office crying and asked Maggie to call the police.

Victoria saved the best bit for last. We had already been told that the car park camera covering the bin area was not working that night. Victoria asked Maggie if she had any idea what had happened in the bin area that night. Maggie nodded and said yes when prompted to answer verbally, and then said that she had spent some time going through the garden centre camera storage drives before attending the trial, and found some of footage showing three men; Hobbs and Daniels were clearly visible and one man had his back to the camera. Hobbs could clearly be heard saying, "OK, so we take her in the bin yard tonight, it's her turn to take out the trash bag. We do her there tonight, before they fix the camera. Fuck, I'm getting hard thinking about it."

The video footage was played in the court. I felt very relieved, but the nightmare didn't end with the trial.

The press were all over us. I did not know people could be so intrusive. I ended up driving to Haye on Wye and staying for a week. I was pleased at how many more of my books were being bought.

I had switched my phone off, and was unimpressed, when I got back to my lodging, to find another summons to court on the seventh of September. I decided to take the train rather than drive, and was there far too early again. I had walked past a cafe on my way to the court and retraced my steps, ordered a cappuccino and retreated to a corner table. I heard my name being called and looked up from my writing to see Billy and Victoria.

“May we join you?” asked Victoria, she looked cheerful and relaxed.

“Have you changed your phone number?” asked Billy, “I tried calling...”

“Sorry,” I said, “I switched it off after the trial and got used to leaving it off unless I want to make a call. It was too much... after vilifying me for weeks, all of a sudden they want to pretend that they think I am a hero. It is sickening.”

“Well you are a hero, my hero,” said Billy with a smile.

“What’s happening today?” I asked, “Are they appealing?”

“They tried and failed,” said Victoria, “The Appeal filing was rejected. No, today is about establishing the level of compensation. It should not take more than a few hours. You would know this if you engaged a lawyer John.”

“I know it now,” I said smiling, “Thank you.”

She slid an envelope towards me, “I prepared this for you. Please read it before we go to the court?”

Victoria had drawn up a list of my losses through injury, adding provisional sums, in brackets, that she suggested I ask for in each case. She was very thorough and even included the replacement of

the clothes I had been wearing at the time of the attack and my phone.

“We get paid for being victims?” I asked, astonished at the figures.

It was good to hear Billy laugh.

“I have bought all your books, John,” said Victoria, reaching into her bag, “Would you mind very much signing *The Well* for me? If you ever decide to have any of the other books printed, please do let me know?”