

# Eternity Beckons

A Novella



**Robert Alan Balaicius**

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It was late fall in the year 1892, on a small island in the Firth of Dornoch, in the North Sea, in the east of the north of Scotland.

A wealthy Scottish lord, Sir Robert MacAlpin Colquhoun was on his deathbed, in the palacious master-bedroom suite of his ancient stone castle. A storm was brewing, inside and out. Outside, in the dark, the wind howled eerily across the rocky cliffs and through the jutting turrets of his fortress, and sharply through any crevice or crack in the walls that the wind could ferret out. Trees swayed relentlessly in the onslaught of the storm and occasionally a sea bird fluttered into the window, attracted by the light, and in the attempt to hide itself from the elements. There he lay, in his stately canopied poster-bed, surrounded by antique furniture, cases of books, statuary, rugs, and paintings of his ancestors. The many candles flickered madly, staving off a little of the damp chill, and danced like fairies—or demons, depending on the mind of the one who experienced the play of shadows and light on the walls and anywhere else perchance they fell. His faithful physician, Dr. Cuán MacGregor was the only soul in attendance.

Dr. MacGregor solemnly said to his patient, after checking his pulse and listening to his heart: “Now, the way of all the earth is short before thee.”

Sir Robert aroused from his silence and replied, "Indeed, life retreats and Judgment and Eternity beckon", he paused, breathed shallowly, and added weakly "—frightfully".

Dr. MacGregor (surprised, but trying not to show it), responded, after a therapeutic pause, "So... you believe in Judgment and Eternity?"

Sir Robert, with characteristic Scottish blunt matter-of-factness, retorted: "Aye, only the most-brainwashed communist or the most simple-minded dolt does not. Though all other scoffers may put up a hard exterior and deny that there is a God or a life hereafter, inwardly the prospect *terrorizes* them; exposing their helplessness and rendering all their wealth and power and schemes *meaningless*—and like fools, like chickens with their heads cut off, they flop around blindly and call it 'life'. They do all they can to fill their lives with busyness and distraction to drown out the sound of the clarion that resounds from within the dark recesses of their souls whence God calleth to them. Other fools, whether completely deluded, or simply trying to convince themselves of what they know is not true, invent elaborate fantasies both about our origins and about how they imagine the next life shall be—equally based on zero evidence. They claim we evolved from monkeys... ho... preposterous poppycock...! But they cannot know the next life when they deny the

truth of this one; and they can no more control reality in the next life than they can control reality in this life. If a man falls—or is thrown—off a tall building or a bridge he cannot by his will, or *pouting* that it is not ‘fair’ or ‘just’, stop the effects of gravity or physics or the other powers, seen or unseen, working against him. And they can no more stop the effects of gravity or physics in the next life, of which they understand relatively nothing, even as they cannot control reality in this life, though they may understand a wee bit more.”

Dr. MacGregor rejoined: “Well, that comes as a pleasant surprise, that you have and *yet do* entertain thoughts larger than ourselves, and beyond our present hill and dale, to contemplate the greater vale. But I have known you for over half a century, and never would have suspected it.”

Sir Robert interjected, “Indeed. A wise man keeps his most-valuable treasures and fears equally hidden.”

Dr. MacGregor, after a moment of reflection, suggested: “You speak the truth, but I can’t help wondering that you cannot take the former with you; while the latter will eternally dog your heels if they are not properly chained down in this life. Thus, it seems prudent to me that one divest himself of both, while he can: to have his affairs in order for the coming realm, through proper prepara-

tion in this one.”

Sir Robert: “With your words I cannot disagree; however, *how* to divest myself of the *latter* seems easier said than done. While there are limitless individuals and ‘charities’ who would eagerly ‘unburden me of my wealth’ with dubious altruism, in order to ‘make my travel lighter’, *how many*, pray tell, would with equal relish and casualness assume responsibility *for my fears—my debts before God and His True Judgment* and relieve me of all obligation to them?”

Dr. MacGregor replied rather calmly, but seriously, “I can think of *but one*; but *he* would *require both*, and not merely the latter.”

Sir Robert, his eyebrows raised like the window blinds that the maid opens fully each morning as the sun arises, retorted, coughing in disbelief and agitation: “What? ...*kawf, kawf, ahkh... akhem*, are you serious? Please, give me a drink of water... *ahh... hmm... that’s better, thank you. No. You don’t look to me like you are telling jokes; nor do I believe that you would, especially knowing the gravity of my predicament. WHO. WHO—and HOW? Come, come now my good doctor, don’t dawdle. Out with it. Time is of the essence. Who, and how, and why have you kept this from me for so long?”*

Dr. MacGregor replied, “*Kept* it from you?”

How could I have 'kept from you' something of which I had no inkling was of interest to you? I am your physician, and thus, for decades I have offered to you the wisdom of my profession that you sought. However, as you never hired me as your accountant, lawyer, or priest, why would you expect me to have forced my opinion on you in any of those areas? —and *had I, how well* would you have received my unsolicited counsel?"

Sir Robert replied, in tones more mellow and subdued: "Agreed. Of course you are correct. I guess it is also partly my own fault as I never entertained you as a friend, a guest—which I *should* have—and sought your opinions in other matters; in *many* matters. Forgive my outburst, which was out of shock, not malice... and... and forgive me for having never cultivated your friendship and possible wisdom in other areas."

Dr. MacGregor smiled warmly, though reservedly, and cordially responded, "Gladly received and granted. I hold you in even greater esteem than before, because of it. Few men have the moral character or even self-awareness to apologize ever, over matters great or small, and your asking my forgiveness for this very minor *faux pas*, even in your dire straits, is merely greater testimony to your noble character." He paused, then continued, "However, in continued answer to your question of