

ANTHONY LE MOIGNAN

# A LONG GOODBYE

*Can you outrun  
a slow death  
sentence?*



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GOODBYE**

*This is Anthony Le Moignan's first published novel, written whilst self-incarcerated in an isolated shed on his farm. He was expelled from school at the age of 16 and is an ex-European croquet champion. He resides in Jersey, in the British Channel Islands.*



To Dad

For the many, many sufferers  
One day, let there be a cure

## 1

Tuesday 09 May 2017 - Midday

Simon hadn't attempted a personal best on the way to Orchard. He was wearing a tracksuit as well, which wasn't optimum gear for a new record. It was also pouring with rain.

He was definitely the most athletic future care home resident that Emma had ever met.

He was also soaked, so the first thing she did after shaking his hand was locate a bath towel.

'You poor man, we could have picked you up, you know? Would you like to go into one of the bathrooms and dry off properly? We can give you some dry clothes too. Maybe take a hot shower? I'm Emma, by the way – I work here. It's a pleasure to meet you.'

It had been a long while since Simon had given a single thought to his appearance. Sure, he shaved every day and went to the barber's every three weeks, but his dark hair was short enough that it never needed any attention – it always looked the same, with maybe the additional grey hair or two. Yet now he was wishing he'd taken a taxi to avoid the drowned rat look.

'It's no problem, really, but thank you. Nobody ever died from a drop of rain.'

They looked each other in the eye, and there was an awkwardness tingling in the air. Why had he said that? What a fool he was.

'And I'm Simon, though I guess you knew that? I've seen you in your car a couple of times when I've been running around here.'

A glow of recognition sparked in Emma's face.

'*That's* where I know your face from – I never forget a face. You run very fast. Did you used to be an athlete? Oh, no wait, I didn't mean '*used to be*.' I'm so sorry; I meant that ...'

'It's okay. No, I never ran at a club. I used to run for my school and to work and back most days in London, but after the diagnosis, I've begun to take it more seriously. I guess that sounds a bit weird, but it gives me a purpose trying to beat my best time – that sort of thing. Just something to do to keep fit. Well, you know, fit as in ...'

The air shivered again as they both looked at each other's shoes. Water was beginning to pool on the tiled floor around Simon, who still hadn't thought to use the large towel in his hand.

'Hello, I'm Simon.' He looked up and smiled, extending his hand to shake hers.

'Hello, I'm Emma.' She smiled back. Emma was fluent and at ease with this type of dialogue – she had over 20 years' experience of it.

'I should say at this stage that I didn't accidentally repeat myself just then. I just felt the first exchange hadn't gone to plan so thought I'd have another bash at it.' He grinned, and Emma's jaw dropped. Then she laughed, despite herself.

‘But I can’t guarantee I won’t repeat myself quite a lot in the future, and might not be able to apologise for it.’

Emma stopped abruptly in mid-giggle and coloured slightly.

‘Sorry for the confusion there, Ella. It is Ella, isn’t it? Don’t tell me I’ve got that wrong already?’

Emma put a hand on his shoulder. ‘Simon, it’s anything you wish to call me. Sometimes I even forget my own ...’

But he interrupted her again.

‘Gotcha! Just tricking. Oh God, I’m so sorry, Emma. I don’t normally muck around like this. Let’s put it down to nerves, eh?’

She feigned frustration and seriousness.

‘Not a problem. I allow everybody two strikes, but then you’re out. You’ve got one left, Mr Carter.’

It lasted less than a second, but Simon was taken in. Then they both pointed a finger at each other and burst out laughing.

And Maddy came out of Emma’s office.

‘Hey, good to see you guys have met. Simon, you’re soaked! Tell me you didn’t run here?’ She grabbed the towel out of his hand and started to wipe the sides and shoulders of his sodden tracksuit.

‘Thanks, I probably shouldn’t have run. Maybe I’ll take up that offer of a hot shower if it’s no trouble? I don’t fancy sitting through lunch like this.’ He took the towel from her and started to rub his face and hair.

Emma had the solution. ‘Why don’t you go with Maddy. She’ll show you where a bathroom is, and there’ll be a dressing gown there to get into. Pass her your clothes, and I’ll put them in a dryer – they’ll be dry in half an hour. Then we’ll meet back here and go to lunch. Fair enough?’

It made a lot of sense to Simon who was beginning to shiver despite the warmth of the environment.

‘Okay, it’s a date. Make sure you don’t iron creases in my tracksuit bottoms, though. That would be *really* naff. And what colour dressing gown, by the way? I’m quite fussy about that sort of thing.’ He winked at Emma and followed Maddy down the hall.

Emma watched them go and smiled to herself. Simon Carter was going to have quite an impact on life here.



## 2

Wednesday 27 July 1988 to Tuesday 09 May 2017

Emma Thornton was fully aware of her responsibilities. Substantial responsibilities they were too. 18 years ago, she'd started as a junior carer with Orchard Residential Home in the village of Histon just north of Cambridge. It was anything but a financial decision. She'd achieved a First Class Honours degree in Psychology and could have commanded a very attractive wage in a variety of other careers.

Her first year after university was spent gaining the specific qualifications necessary to care for people much less fortunate than herself. It wasn't a vocation – at least she didn't think it was. Emma traced it back to when Nan, already in her 80s but still fiercely independent and living on her own in Newmarket, had taken a tumble at the supermarket.

It was near an ice-making machine in the height of a long, sweltering summer. Cubes lay scattered on the linoleum floor, forming miniature lakes in seconds. Nan had slipped while lugging her groceries out to the car, landed badly, then passed out from the pain. Rushed to the hospital, the x-ray had shown a hairline fracture of the hip.

The injury wasn't uncommon for elderly people, but that made it no less serious. With age came the brittleness of bones, and Nan was never the same again. She missed her car more than anything, her independence snatched from her. Physiotherapy had helped, but her mood grew darker. With her parents' blessing, Emma, then only fourteen, had moved in with Nan for the rest of the summer holiday. She lived in a cottage in Cheveley, some three miles away from Emma's family home.

What started out as errands and companionship turned into something much deeper and more meaningful. Through that autumn and winter, she formed a bond with her grandmother which never previously existed. Three years later, she was living at Nan's cottage permanently, now able to personally drive her around the town.

The old lady's fighting spirit had dissipated over the years, and her mind had started to wander. Emma was initially unable to deal with the same questions being repeated over and over again. She gently reminded Nan how repetitive she was becoming, but it seemed to make no difference. If anything, it began to antagonise her gran, so Emma adopted a different approach and constantly refined her ways of communicating. It brought them both much more happiness, and Emma began to engage with her grandmother in a way she'd not thought possible.

Whether Nan felt the same way towards her granddaughter would never be known, but to Emma that wasn't important. Nan's happiness was the only thing she focused on, and the present was the only important time. Yesterday was old news, and tomorrow was the future they'd reach later. *Now* was all that was relevant.

It was the first family funeral Emma had experienced. She'd never forgiven herself for not being with her gran at the end, but Fresher's Week at King's College in Cambridge was something her parents had not wanted her to miss. Nan had been in hospital for a few days, but the prognosis wasn't bleak – the antibiotics seemed to be working. Then she'd suddenly gone downhill with pneumonia. Nan passed away overnight.

Although Emma hadn't discussed it with her parents, she knew her future lay in the care industry. Through choice, her psychology degree had dealt extensively with diminished mental capacity in an ageing society. She'd excelled, though refused to apply the letters after her name that announced her academic status, much to her mother's disappointment.

She'd met guys and had good times during her years at university, but there was nothing serious. A couple of relationships had continued long enough to leave her miserable for a while after they ended, but she readily accepted it was all part of the learning curve. She was prepared for her career to produce much more heartache than she could imagine, so the end of one or two college relationships was nothing to get too morbid about.

In Emma's first year at Orchard, a senior carer had taken more than a passing interest in her. He'd been with the company for three years and was her immediate boss, though they both answered to the Home Manager. Michael Lowry was 25, a year older than Emma, on the fast track to managing a residential home with The Collins Knight Young Care Homes Group in the not too distant future. It was hardly an inspiring name for a care home group, and he'd never met any of the founding partners

who insisted their names be included, but the title didn't seem to stop them from becoming a considerably large company.

Michael was from Liverpool – a dynamic guy with a broad scouse accent and a wicked sense of humour. She wondered why these two traits often seemed inextricably linked. He was a natural with the residents who all adored him. He was always cheerful with everyone and regularly teased residents and carers alike, though in the gentlest of ways.

Of average build and height with a permanently cheeky expression, his dominant feature was a shock of grey hair – something he'd developed whilst a teenager. He constantly took the mickey out of himself, telling people he'd rather ridicule the colour of his hair than have others do it for him. Emma didn't believe the explanation – Michael had the appealing personality of someone who was genuinely self-deprecating.

Their courtship was the best thing she'd ever experienced. Friends told her how lucky she was, and she knew it. They'd honeymooned three years later in the Maldives. Michael was now manager of Orchard, and although not earning a fortune, with prudent saving and booking far enough ahead to get a great deal, he was able to give her the most amazing two weeks of her life.

The couple decided early on in their marriage that they wanted children. More than a decade later, they'd come to terms with the stark and painful reality. Neither openly admitted their feelings to each other, but it was a devastating blow.

By then, they were seeing less of each other because of Michael's promotion to Collins Knight Young head office in London. Emma had taken his position as manager at

Orchard. They were apart during the week, but he would come home for weekends, or she'd occasionally travel down to his rented flat in London. It was far from ideal, but they still loved each other and were determined to make things work.

For Michael's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, they returned to the Maldives, to the same hotel they'd stayed in during their honeymoon. It was another wonderful fortnight, and they convinced themselves they could still have a child. Emma was nearly 39, and perhaps time was running out.

The following days were torturous. The home pregnancy tests had always been disappointing and painful, but they'd pinned all their hopes on this month. The eventual outcome was soul-destroying.

Michael's work schedules proved more and more stressful, resulting in more weekends apart. The couple made love less and less frequently, though never argued – neither had that type of temperament or personality.

By the time of Emma's 40<sup>th</sup> they'd discussed and decided against adoption. It was the obvious way forward, and their friends knew they'd make wonderful parents, but it wasn't to be. Michael and Emma's life goal had been their own biological children –there could be no substitute for that.

A few months later, Emma was offered a position at head office. It was a chance to live with her husband again, and the company would provide accommodation in London as part of the package. It was a substantial salary rise for Emma, and they had the opportunity to rent out their own apartment in Cambridge.

Emma turned the offer down. She'd managed Orchard for five years, and it was more than a job to her – much more than that. Orchard Residential Home was now the focus

of her life, the residents more important to her than anyone or anything else.

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The weekends Michael and Emma spent apart began to escalate. Their lengthy daily calls became shorter, and there were occasional days where they had no contact at all. A text message started to replace a short conversation, and eventually, a month went by when they didn't see each other.

There was no suspicion during their times apart, and no jealousy felt by Michael or Emma. This was understandable as neither had eyes for anyone else – they just didn't seem to have eyes for each other.

By now the Collins Knight Young Group had become the largest care home provider in the UK. Michael had been offered a directorship and a substantial salary increase. He'd never set out to be financially successful. Nobody who dedicates themselves to being a carer ever does. But against all the odds, Michael was now a success.

He spent much of his time in Ireland where the company was currently expanding, and latterly on the west coast of America. He was required to manage delicate negotiations for the takeover of a large Californian care home group – a far cry from his first days as a junior carer at Orchard.

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Emma didn't count the hours she worked – it was irrelevant to her. Her team looked after 96 residents at full capacity, and Orchard was always at that level. Not only that, but there were always people on the waiting list. It

was rare for any space to become available before the funeral home had been called.

The property had three floors divided equally, with 30 rooms on each level, two larger ones dedicated for couples. The top floor housed people with medical problems, and this carried the biggest age range – from mid 60s to late 90s.

The middle floor was dedicated to people with dementia-based issues, while the ground floor looked after elderly but still mobile residents with less severe memory problems. Orchard had a slightly higher carer to resident ratio than most homes, with nine full-time staff on each floor. Four worked the morning/day shift, three the day/evening shift, and two stayed overnight.

Apart from the carers, Emma had someone at reception, a bookkeeper, and four kitchen staff. There was part-time staff who helped with auxiliary duties, plus two maintenance handymen who doubled up as gardeners.

The logistics involved in her job were substantial, but it was Emma's interaction with the residents that meant far more to her than anything. As often as possible, she made it her duty to visit all the residents and spend some time with them, however brief that may be.

That some of them may no longer be aware of her presence made no difference – they all deserved her individual care and attention. And love. She wouldn't let these people down the way she felt she'd let her Nan down 25 years ago.

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Death was a tragic but unavoidable part of her routine, but there were always new faces to welcome. Many of these

residents were moving to a care home for the first time, and special help and affection were needed.

Where possible, Emma would always stay with these people as much as she could for their first week or two. At 43, she had always been considerably younger than all the people she looked after, but this was about to change. Someone was moving in today to the 1st Floor, with the start of one of the cruellest of all diseases – early-onset Alzheimer’s.

Simon Carter was just 40.

It was rare that she didn’t meet all the residents before their arrival at Orchard. There were preliminary procedures to make sure everyone was suitable for the environment. Just as important, to make sure the new residents were happy living there too.

Emma had been on a rare weekend break with Michael in Ireland when Simon was due to visit Orchard. Having read his notes, she was keen to greet him, but this trip had been planned for weeks. It would be at least a month before she saw Michael again, due to yet another lengthy business trip to the States.

She’d only met one other person suffering from early onset Alzheimer’s. It was at a home in Southampton whilst Emma was on a three-month course. Lisa was in her early 40s and a beautiful person, both physically and spiritually.

Emma had kept in touch with her for a couple of years, either by telephone or the occasional visit when she could. The two of them once had a memorable weekend in Brighton before the disease took its inevitable hold.

Lisa died three years after she’d first moved to the home. At the funeral, apart from staff of the care home, there was only one relative in attendance. Emma had wept for days.



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Emma was unaware of Simon Carter's appearance as photos weren't used in a potential resident's application. Maddy, the senior carer and 2<sup>nd</sup> in command, had seen Simon in her absence and was full of admiration for the man. He was cheerful and initially shy but had a lovely sense of humour. He came on his own and wished to admit himself while he could still make rational decisions.

Simon was due to arrive at midday. Emma had set time aside to welcome their new guest and show him his allocated room. A lunch would follow in the main dining room. She was already aware of his change of address since his initial visit with Maddy – he was now only a few miles away from Orchard. Studying his notes once more, Emma could see that Simon had been diagnosed with his condition eighteen months ago.

Unfortunately, this never represented the start of Alzheimer's. In every case, the diagnosis always lagged behind the earliest signs. The average period between the initial symptoms and a formal diagnosis was nearly three years, so it was fair to predict that Simon had probably been suffering with the illness for five years.

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Among Simon's indicators were the classic memory problems interfering with everyday life. He was a successful accountant and a partner in his practice. His work was always excellent, and his calculations were flawless. However, messages relayed to him were sometimes forgotten, and occasionally he'd forget a client's or even a colleague's name.

He'd also had two incidents on the road – one as a driver and one as a pedestrian.

Both occasions related to a failure to judge speed correctly. Walking across a road near his home, a car had come close to hitting him. The irate driver screamed abuse before driving away in a squeal of tyres. A neighbour who'd witnessed the incident confided that although the driver displayed appalling behaviour, Simon had actually stepped out into the road almost right in front of the guy's car.

A few weeks later whilst driving, Simon had pulled out of a junction into the oncoming traffic. On this occasion, the driver was unable to avoid him, and there'd been damage to both cars, though thankfully nobody was hurt. He'd gone to court and pleaded guilty, losing points on his licence and being fined.

Simon's doctor had referred him to an ophthalmologist – the diagnosis was posterior cortical atrophy. After jokingly clarifying that it wasn't a problem with his backside, he'd been informed it was an inability to judge speed correctly.

Further tests followed, and second and third opinions were sought until his GP eventually had to conclude that Simon was regrettably suffering from early onset Alzheimer's. The following day, Simon handed in his driving licence to the authorities and started planning for the future.

He'd been separated from his wife for some time, and they had no children. There'd been the occasional relationship since then but nothing serious. He still saw her occasionally and got on well with the new partner.

An amicable divorce had taken place before he'd received his diagnosis. Simon intended that his ex-wife should never learn of his illness.

He called a board meeting at work and shocked the whole practice with the announcement of his early retirement,

though he was careful not to divulge the true reasons for his decision.

His parents had both passed away when he was in his mid-30s. His mother died from Alzheimer's and his father, another successful accountant, from a lifetime of smoking. Simon chose to believe his dad had passed away from a broken heart, and not broken lungs.

He'd met his brother only once, and for just one brief afternoon. Simon had a photo on a wall of his drawing room to prove it. Paul had lived for 23 weeks inside their mother and twelve days in an incubator. He missed him now even more than he missed him then.

The substantial house in London didn't need to be put in the hands of an estate agent. Rarely a month went by when a hastily written note or letter didn't arrive through his letterbox, guaranteeing a higher price than anyone else if he ever wanted to sell.

Home was a three-storey Victorian house in South Kensington, very close to The Victoria and Albert Museum. He'd inherited it from his parents who'd bought it for £400,000 more than 30 years ago. It was now worth at least twenty times that.

With all the spare time he now had, Simon did what he presumed everyone would do after being handed a medical death sentence – he studied his disease online. For many weeks it became his obsession.

There were times when he became deliriously excited and optimistic about moving to America for a pioneering miracle treatment, but then he depressingly came to his senses with a bump. He had a prison sentence that ended in death. A death which often involved the inability to swallow or cough, the brain having given up barking out orders to even the most basic of functions.

Simon now knew more about early onset Alzheimer's than most doctors. The information he'd gathered helped him formulate some logical conclusions. He'd move into a care home before he physically needed one. It would be somewhere his few friends, colleagues, and any distant family would never find him – nobody should have to deal with this except him.

The thought of people feeling obliged to visit him as he gradually forgot them in front of their eyes was deplorable, depressing, and disgusting. The thought of them seeing him die was worse still.

And on that subject, he also reserved the right to take his own life, illegal or not. If need be, they could prosecute his ashes. With that in mind, he gained a similar level of knowledge on how to commit suicide.

The consensus was that his illness would grant him between three and twenty years from the first symptoms. He'd already had a good five of those since first noticing people staring in an unfamiliar way, wondering why he'd repeated himself or didn't know their names. His last relationship had ended after forgotten dates and *'being weird'*.

He'd assume there were five years left, the latter half veering towards an unacceptable standard of life. For the moment, he was still healthy in his body, if not in his mind. He intended to keep that level of fitness up for as long as possible.

Simon had always run to and from the office every day, come rain or shine. There were very few days when he deemed the weather to be too inclement. Now he ran twice a day and twice as far. He kept a log which told him he covered about half a marathon every day. He wouldn't

increase on that distance but would work on the time it took.

When selecting the care home where he'd spend his final days, he put emphasis on one that had a gym. This narrowed the choice down enormously - nonagenarians and running machines were rare partners. Most of the places offering this facility were in London, so immediately ignored. He didn't want to run the risk of someone from his past coming to visit.

He found a healthcare group that seemed to be dominating the British market – Collins Knight Young care homes. He dimly remembered reading about them in the Financial Times when they were floated on the Stock Market a while back. With their head office not so far from his own company in West London, he'd decided to contact them to see if he could bag their accountancy requirements.

But then he'd forgotten – he chuckled at the irony.

He studied their website and found just one residential care home outside London which offered a small gym and indoor hydrotherapy pool. It was even in substantial grounds which could afford him some running space when he felt unable to face the roads any longer. There was a waiting list for a room, but this was hardly a surprise – he made the call and arranged a meeting.

He was invited to have a look at the home and enjoyed the time he spent there. The staff he met were friendly, the residents seemed happy, and the facilities were just as described. He particularly got on well with a senior carer called Maddy – a delightful woman and clearly dedicated to her work.

He knew he'd found the place he needed to be and told her so before he left. Sure, he'd be the youngest resident by a good twenty years, but that didn't trouble him if it

didn't trouble anyone else. He knew that was almost certainly going to be the case wherever he ended up. Maddy said she'd discuss it with her boss, and they parted, already good friends.

He received a letter a couple of weeks later to confirm he was on the waiting list. She reminded him that once on the list it could still be up to a year before he joined them, but sometimes it was less – she could make no promises.

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With the swift sale of his house including all the contents, he moved to a pleasant rented apartment within running distance of the place that would one day be his final home. He brought few personal belongings with him – if he were short of anything, he'd buy it.

He left no forwarding address for anyone, and there were no leaving parties. He owed nothing to anyone and had more money than he knew what to do with. It would be fun deciding who he left it all to over the coming months and possibly years.

Sure, any private detective worth his salt could find him in a very short period through a credit card trail, but he hoped nobody would want to get in touch with him that badly. He *really* hoped that wouldn't happen.

Time passed slowly, which to most people was a drag. To Simon, it was a joy. If two and a half years ended up feeling like a lifetime, that worked for him. He never veered from his routine, running past Orchard care home twice a day, pushing himself harder and harder as his times came down.

Some of the carers had noticed him over the past few months, and occasionally one would wave as he passed the

car park on his regular route. A couple of times he'd seen the manager of the home driving out of the entrance, though she would have had no idea who he was. He recognised her from the photos of all the carers displayed in reception on his visit. He thought the name below her picture was *'Emma'* but couldn't be sure. She was an attractive woman with a lovely smile. Simon was looking forward to meeting her when a place became available.

He'd moved to his little apartment in November and spent a first Christmas and New Year on his own. It was much easier than he'd feared. He took pleasure in seeing the happiness on other people's faces as they went about their daily business. It was as if he was in the middle of a never-ending film, an invisible voyeur watching all the actors play their respective parts. Nobody saw him, nobody noticed him, nobody knew him.

In the middle of January, Simon celebrated his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. He worried that a birthday card may arrive in the post, but there was nothing. He went to a local wine bar and got quietly and effectively drunk on two pints of Guinness, a bottle of Champagne, and a dozen oysters. Rarely drinking alcohol anymore he slept for 12 hours, missing his morning run for the first time. He ran that afternoon and evening to make up for it.

He set himself tasks to test his mind – to check the deterioration. He completed the crossword in his daily newspaper on most occasions, plus the fiendishly difficult Sudoku puzzles. He bought an almost impossibly difficult double-sided five thousand piece jigsaw puzzle and completed it, then started all over again. And he read avidly, spending hours of his day at the local library between his runs.

Winter turned to spring, and his running times continued to improve. Simon thought he may be running faster than he'd ever managed before, but he didn't let his achievements bubble over into optimism for the future. He was *very* careful not to allow that to happen.

His mantra was '*Seize the Day*'. He tried not to look back nor wonder about the future. And as a reminder, he had '*Carpe Diem*' tattooed on his right forearm – his first and his last tattoo.

In May, he received the call he'd been waiting for – it was Emma Lowry. She had some positive news for him and would he like to meet with her next Tuesday for lunch at Orchard.

She asked if he'd require transport as he was a few miles away, but he'd declined the kind offer. Was it okay if he was in shorts and a T-shirt or should he dress more formally? She'd be delighted to meet with him in whatever clothes he found most comfortable and looked forward to welcoming him at midday.

He wrote the day and time of the meeting down immediately.