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The Stranger

Walking down the lane one evening, rambling through the side pocket to locate his money bag, Dan suddenly got hit by a street light. After a few seconds when he gained consciousness, he was still feeling drowsy. He could hear a man saying, “Are you alright? Should I call the doctor?” Gradually, he tried to help Dan get up. Dan was holding his head, his legs were shaking but he stood up and was finally feeling alright.

“You fine now? You okay?” said the stranger. “I saw you from a distance, I was screaming from the other side of the road to caution you about the street light but alas! You didn’t listen.”

“I’m so sorry man, I was so lost in searching my money bag, I couldn’t anticipate this,” replied Dan. ‘By the way, thank you so

much for helping me,” The stranger started laughing, “It’s so easy for you white lads to get lost in the thought of money...nevertheless no need to say thank you.”

“Ah-uh you were trying to say something? Some lost or money, something like that?”, Enquired Dan. “Oh forget it! that’s nothing, well, if you have hurt yourself somewhere, I can take you to my home, it’s very near to the central market,” the stranger insisted.

“Oh no, thank you so much but I feel good now,” replied Dan.

“Yes, of course, why would you even agree to come to a black man’s house, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have asked this. Never mind,” the stranger replied in a satiric tone.

“Why are you saying so, man? I see that you have something to say but... nonetheless now that we have met you can count me as your friend and if you say so then I’m ready to visit your house. Let’s go,” said Dan.

“What? Friend? Did you just call me your friend? I’m surprised. I mean this is so unusual...forget it, I’ll take you to my house”. Dan was still confused by the words of the stranger, he couldn’t really make out any sense of whatever the stranger said.

In about ten minutes, they were inside the little flat of the stranger. “Wow! You have a really great room,” Dan mentioned gazing at the different photographs of famous footballers pasted all across the bedroom walls.

The room was dimly lit. The furniture was not very fancy. The carpet had a huge red stain with no signs of removing effort. The stranger rumbled over the clothes piled over the bed to make some space for Dan.

Dan was busy staring at the room walls.

“Are you a football fan?”, enquired Dan. The stranger was looking outside the window as if he did not listen to the question. “Ahem! hey! You didn’t answer me?” Dan pointed out.

Turning his face towards Dan, the stranger replied, "oh yes, I used to be but not anymore." "That's very strange! Why so?" enquired Dan.

There was a pin drop silence. Dan thought very awkward and thought he shouldn't have asked the question. He tried to divert the situation and asked, "Hey! Never mind, do you have a tobacco roll?"

The stranger was still silent and turned to him. "What? Tobacco? I thought you guys don't... leave it. I don't smoke tobacco, I don't like it," said the stranger.

Dan was exasperated at the strange behavior of the stranger. "I don't really understand this, he doesn't like tobacco? But why? I met the first person in life who doesn't like it," Dan whispered to himself.

"Do you know tobacco is so relieving whenever I feel low, I smoke tobacco. I insist, you should have it once," suggested Dan not anticipating what was to come.

The stranger with a furious face lashed at Dan, "You feel relieved? Oh yes, you guys feel all your leisure by drinking our ancestors' blood. You will never understand...Leave it."

Dan could not get even a single word of what the stranger said. He became even more curious to know the stranger. He asked, "Why are you behaving like that? You always say something that I don't understand. Please don't hold back, you can share with me, I'm like your brother, please tell me the things you're hiding."

The stranger jumped up immediately, anger and fury were boiling out of his face, he ran towards the posters hanging on the walls. In about a second, he started tearing off all the posters and threw them on the floor. Dan was perplexed, he couldn't figure out what to do. He went near the stranger and tried to stop him.

"What are you doing? Why are you destroying them like this?" shouted Dan. The stranger stopped at once and turned towards Dan. "Why shouldn't I? What have they done to me? Did they help me be a footballer? No, right? We black people have never got it the easy way. We had always had to struggle for getting what we deserved,"

sighed the stranger. "Do you want to know why am I not a football fan anymore? Then, listen."

Dan sat down on a broken chair and focused all his attention to what the stranger had to say.

The stranger looked out of the window and narrated his story, My grandpa was a slave who worked under a very cruel white master. He had three more sisters but he never saw them more than once. He always alone sitting in a dark and dingy cell. My father grew up in a very poor condition. He wasn't allowed to go to school and my grandfather was not given any money for his relentless toil. One day my father...

"What happened to your father?" Asked Dan.

When my father was about twenty he was married to my mum and after one year I was born. My father wanted me to study in a good school therefore he worked day and night to earn enough money for my admission. Me and my mother managed to fly off from the clutches of our master. We hid in a forest for days but finally got a place to live at the mercy of one old lady. My father tried his best to locate us and used to send us few pennies every month. We had no idea from where did he got the money. I was growing up. I had a huge love for football, I used to play day and night.

When my father finally came back, we built a small house for us. He always told me "You need to study, because education is the only tool to attain freedom"

Finally, One day, he took me to a school which was supposedly for the white people. We were stopped at the main gate. The guards started shouting 'Blacks are not allowed' and then started beating my father. I was very small to save him, still, I shouted and screamed in vain. After a huge fight my father fell down, his eyes were closed, he didn't utter a word..' Since then, I never met my father again.

A lot of people came by, rallies went on, posters were made with my father's name on it. I couldn't understand what happened to him.

What I did understand was that I have to come out of this long-lived atrocity. I had a dream of becoming a footballer, I started playing football at a very young age. I wasn't allowed to play with the white boys still I practised in my backyard. I decided to participate in the district football championship, my mother sold everything to buy me a football kit. Finally, the selection day arrived. I kissed my mother and said, "I will win." That day I went for the selection with all the confidence and enthusiasm. But then...

Dan's eyes were welling up, he couldn't utter a single word, still, he gathered some strength to get up, touching the shoulder of the stranger and he managed to ask, "What happened then? Could you qualify?"

After a long pause...

"No, Because just like my father, I was lying in front of the gate," replied the stranger.



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