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Lottery

Rubik Roy

Mr Fraser was not known for his kindness. His Sunday mornings were usually occupied by reading the paper, falling asleep by the second page, being awakened by the neighbourhood kids, going outside to yell at the neighbourhood kids, having breakfast with his wife, and then going for a quiet walk around town, mainly to note how it had gone to the dogs, especially with the steady stream of immigrants that seemed to be arriving every day.

But this morning was different. It was more than different. It was extraordinary. Mr Fraser had a secret. A secret he kept from every possible soul in the world, including his wife whom he simply adored.

He had won the lottery. He had not told his wife since he wanted to surprise her. It would be their thirtieth anniversary in a week and he wanted to spoil her rotten. He would go to any lengths; no expense would be spared. Vera deserved the best of everything. He had booked two round-the-world first class tickets: London, Paris, New York, everywhere Vera had dreamed of going.

Then there were the bills. The mortgage had not been paid off yet, and there was a closet full of medical bills; theirs and their grandchildren's. Bills, that if put end to end, would stretch around their block. Bills or not, he would now have more money than he could possibly spend in ten life times.

As he walked down Toorak Street, his neighbours noticed a strange difference in him. Gone was the venomous glare as he

walked past the halal butcher shop. In fact, he even smiled at Assad, the storekeeper, through the window. Assad did not smile back.

Mr Fraser cursed his impudence, but let it go at that. He would not be here much longer. The Florida Keys beckoned.

He stepped aside to let a group of young Sudanese boys on bicycles race past him. Normally, he would have yelled at them. Normally, he would have secretly hoped that one of them at least would fall and break his neck. But not this time. He simply smiled at their haste and tried to remember his teenage years. He could not.

He continued to the end of Toorak Street where there was a park and a stream, and a small bridge that spanned it. On this bridge, he noticed, were a couple kissing. As he drew near, he could see the tattoos on her arm, and his gravity-defying hair. The nauseous feeling that would usually rise at such sights was today quelled, and he did not feel any stronger impulse than to push them in the freezing water.

But he could not prevent a laugh when he saw the pair attach a padlock on the bridge as a symbol of their undying commitment. He shook his head with pity. What did teenagers know about love? They were so stupid and immature. But he caught himself before his mind flooded with judgement.

Instead, he recalled how it had been with Vera. In those days you asked the girl's father before you took her out. It was raining on their first date. She had been wearing a blue dress he would never forget. Girls today looked like prostitutes in comparison. Vera had looked like an angel. A thoroughly wet angel. He smirked at the thought. He had seen much more than she had bargained for.

As he walked past the park, one of the Sudanese boys he had seen earlier, around nine or ten years old, came zooming down the street. His short legs were pumping furiously, his back bent, chin close to the handlebars, a determined look in his eye. Not surprisingly, he wasn't wearing a helmet. But neither had he at the boy's age.

The boy, riding on the road, swerved to avoid a car that had emerged from behind a parked van. He neatly wrung his handlebars to the right, missing the car by a fraction, only to see another car coming at him from the opposite direction. The boy braked hard and tried to jump onto the footpath at the same time. His front wheel hit the curb, and at that speed, he was flung spectacularly head first over the handlebars. He somersaulted in the air and landed with a thud on the concrete. His head hit the ground first. It was too painful to cry out. The boy could only moan.

Mr Fraser was the first to get there. He found a speed and agility in himself that he did not know he possessed. There was blood seeping from the back of the boy's head. Mr Fraser ripped off his jumper and wrapped it firmly around the boy like a turban. He yelled at some passersby to call an ambulance. Not knowing first aid, both men just stood there in shock, watching the boy bleeding and writhing in pain. Several seconds passed during which time no one did a thing. Suddenly remembering that the hospital was less than a kilometre away, and not fully thinking his actions through, Mr Fraser scooped the boy up in his arms and began to run.

It is not easy to run with a ten-year-old in your arms even if you are an Olympian. Mr Fraser was in his sixties, had had a disc prolapse just a few months ago, and his bad back sentenced him to sleeping on the floor. But none of these thoughts came to him then. His own pain, while monumental, seemed to disappear. He could feel the pain, of course. But his instinct told him that if he did not hurry the boy would not survive. He considered neither his own pain nor the pain he may be subjecting the boy by carrying him in his arms. All he knew was that he had to get to the hospital. He huffed and puffed and dragged his ageing body by the sheer force of willpower. His legs had collapsed more than once from the crippling pain in his back, but he pushed himself up, always ensuring the boy did not fall from his grasp. He would die if he had to, but he would get to the hospital first.

The nurse on duty took the boy from him. Mr Fraser was by then in tears. He fell to the ground, cursing loudly. There would be a price to pay for the way he had punished his body.

Mr Fraser lay stretched out on the emergency floor, waving away all help. He finally got to his feet when the nurse returned at least half an hour later.

The boy's father arrived as well, and knowing Mr Fraser by reputation, pounced on him and grabbed him by the collar.

'Did you do it? Did you run down my boy? I'll kill you!'

Mr Fraser felt the anger rise inside of him. The need to reply, to vindicate himself was overwhelming. But repress it he did, somehow. He did not need to answer to anyone. He would be in the French Riviera by next week. He simply smiled ruefully and shook his head.

It took all the nurse's energy to restrain the man. She informed them that the boy had been sent for a CT scan.

Mr Fraser did not wait to find out more. He staggered out of the hospital and limped homeward. Vera was at home, waiting for him. She would understand. Only she ever could. If only they knew, they would come crawling back, begging for forgiveness. He could not help laughing at the whole thing. His head was full of headlines. 'Multi-millionaire saves boy's life!' But he wouldn't wait for the papers to get hold of it. As soon as the money hit his bank account, he would take Vera and go. And never come back. He laughed out loud. It was a funny world.

The funniest thing was that he had never bought a lottery ticket. He had never even heard of the World Sweepstakes until he received an email from them two days ago. But that was the way the fates worked. They took with one hand, and they gave with the other. He had given them his bank details and had completed all the formalities, and now all he had to do was sit and wait.

He heard a voice call out his name. It sounded very far off. Maybe it was the nurse. Maybe it was the boy's father. Maybe it was in his head.

Feeling a strange sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, he checked his stride for a moment. His foot hovered an inch, perhaps half an inch, off the ground. And there it lingered while his heart gave a little skip. The lightest of skips; a child negotiating a puddle. But the moment passed; he put his foot down and continued walking, perhaps even a shade quicker than before. He did not dare look back.



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