

## Impossible Puzzles

By: Wen Li

The snow fell heavily. With the help of the bitter cold wind, lashing like a whip, cutting into the flesh every time it blew, it succeeded in making the usually crowded streets nearly deserted. A handful of pedestrians coming out of the subway station were met with an onslaught of snow. Climbing up the steps with agonizing slowness, I stepped out of the gloomy station. Turning my head, I saw the soggy, deserted playing field of a nearby middle school. It was now covered with a sheet of white with but a few withered trees. A sudden sense of loss and regret filled me as I observed this field. A voice rose, first soft, then imperative for me to recall my story.

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It was a cool, crisp autumn afternoon. I was playing football with my usual friends on our school playing field. I watched my punt soar high in the air, spinning awkwardly as it hit the ground and hit a nearby man who was tuning his violin. I raced up to him and apologized before retrieving the ball. However, the man seemed to have gone right back to work and ignored me.

After the game was over, the man was still there. Seeing him, I was reminded of the incident earlier and tried to apologize to him again. This time he nodded in acknowledgment. Then, taking the football out of my hands, instructed me to sprint down the field. The idea of playing catch somehow did not strike me as all that expected. I stalled a moment before I finally dashed off.

I'd never seen a better spiral on a football, and it was quite a beauty, how it floated in the air and slowly descended. Looking just as good, I caught the ball with ease. I huffed and puffed the

next hour, running all over the field, never receiving a moment's rest. After every pass, he had a word of advise on how I could've done better. I had a certain amount of respect for this man from the moment he threw that perfect pass, and I suppose that was what compelled me to listen to every command he uttered. A radiant smile lit his wrinkled face every time he brought his arm around for another flawless pass. It seemed to bring back pleasant memories. However, I noticed something was different about this man, but I couldn't quite grasp what it was just now. I finally decided it was too late for me to stay outside any longer but asked to see Jeff (he told me to call him that) again.

A couple of nights later, I met Jeff at the subway station. There, he played out a beautiful tune on his violin. Riders now and then would offer their sympathy by giving a dollar or two. Jeff showed no discomfort on seeing me. He played on and nodded only slightly. My attention immediately shifted to the patched up, worn out clothing he was wearing, and the pair of shoes that looked like Swiss Cheese. I blamed myself for being so unobservant. Then, an overwhelming sympathy consumed me and I felt the need to offer what I could. Immediately withdrawing a five dollar bill I had intended to buy some frozen yogurt with, I placed it in the basket and walked away.

From then on, Jeff would watch me play football a few days out of the week. When the game was over, he'd give me great tips on how I could've played better. I had learned more from this man in the last two weeks than any coach ever taught me. I often gave up my allowance those days. After finding out Jeff was homeless, I also brought a blanket from home for him to keep warm on chilly nights. I couldn't be more proud of myself, and it felt great to aid someone in need.

My charity did not go unknown, though I wished it would've. School became the place of taunting and teasing, while

home was where I received lectures about the cause of homelessness. Mom said I was encouraging the man to go on being homeless by just giving him things. She said that this is the consequence he receives for actions and choices made earlier in his life. I ignored her remarks, believing Dad would understand once he came home from his business trip.

A week later, Dad did come home. On hearing about what had happened in the last few weeks, he was furious. He stated that he would not allow his son to take in another family member. He said homeless people needed to solve the root of their problems before people could assist them. I could help the man once in a while, talk with him occasionally, but I was reminded of the fact that we are on different levels of life. He assured me that his words were not words of cruelty but words of truth, and that I should think it over.

I was left in stunned disbelief, unable to believe my father, one whom I admired and trusted more than anyone was forbidding me to help out a fellow companion. I pondered my father's words all night long, it all seemed like gibberish and nonsense. The more I looked into it, the less reasonable everything seemed. We give relief to poor countries by giving food and donations, we always say, "help the poor." What about the homeless? Few ever mention them. Many, like Dad, straight out condemn them, not wanting to get near one, assuming that they are lazy bums who get through life begging for money. Others simply, like Mom, feel they should receive no sympathy from people for their actions. But doesn't everyone deserve a second chance? Was this where our world had gotten to, where we cannot forgive others? Were we moving at such a rapid pace we cannot stop and pick up those on the side of the road? But Dad would never hurt me, he knew what was best for me. It would be best for me not to befriend a man just because he's homeless? Oh, I was so confused, thoughts and

images whirled through my mind as I tried in vain to piece together these impossible puzzles. Tears filled the rims of my eyes, obscuring my view and dividing the objects in sight like a kaleidoscope. Then, I fell into a heavy slumber.

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I proceeded, head down, following the rest of the crowd. I was in deep thought. It had been more than two months since the day of the outburst by Dad. I listened to him, I guess in the end it was he whom I trusted.

Just this morning, I decided to see how my old friend was doing. Not knowing where he was, I visited the homeless shelter to see if they had any record of him. They knew who I was talking of and told me sadly he had died of a stroke a week before. Sure, I was depressed, but strangely, I shed no tears. My brain was working too hard to think of crying. I wondered if I had done the right thing listening to Dad. Should I just feel fortunate to be born into a nice family, or help those who were less fortunate, and to what extent should I help them, and what kind of people should I offer my hand to? What should I've. . . what could I've done to help out my homeless friend but at the same time avoid a conflict with my father? The sidewalk didn't show any answers, and this world certainly didn't either.