



The ProChrist

Vensin Gray

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He got out, started walking, but turned and came back to the window, saying, "Let me see your wedding ring."

"My wedding ring? No!"

"It is either you give it to me, or I'll take it off."

I did as he said. I gave him my wedding ring. I didn't know why he wanted it or why he had me park near an exit and keep the car running. If he hadn't taken my wedding ring, I would have left the second he went into the store. I noticed him walk behind my car, bend down, and bother with something. As he walked into the store, I noticed he held my wedding ring in his left hand and my license plate in his right. My license plate, *why?* Now I *really* couldn't go anywhere.

I just sat there, car still running; I looked around to see where I was--the corner of Eddy Rd. and St. Clair across the street from a brick church with white paint. I noticed a lot of guys hanging around, doing nothing. Two guys stood real close to one another. I thought I witnessed a drug exchange. I noticed five guys smoking; all of them wore black sweatshirts with hoods, blue jeans hanging to their knees, and blue wave-caps on their heads. I'd kill Junior if I ever saw him with something like that on his head. I watched people get on the bus.

I hadn't been on this side of town in a while. I heard screaming from behind me and saw people run out of the store. I didn't see the gentleman, though. After a while the door into the store was open enough for me to see the gentleman holding a gun to the cashier's head. He had a bag in his hand. He grabbed a second bag, and punched the clerk in the face. But the tall clerk didn't fall backwards; he fell forward and appeared to be unconscious. The gentleman left the store with everyone staring at him; he walked so cool, like nothing had happened.

Before he got into the car, he turned around and barked in a

firm voice, “What are you guys staring at? The owners of the store are gone. Go ahead; take whatever you want. My treat to you.” He got back into my car and handed me my ring.

“Drive. Go straight down Eddy, go west on ninety, and get off on East 55th. Wake me up then.” He then laid the chair back and closed his eyes.

“Wake you up?” I said in a panic. “Wake you up! You just robbed a store!”

I looked in my rearview mirror and saw folks entering the store just as he ordered. I couldn’t believe my eyes. This guy was a criminal, and I just helped him get away from a crime scene. *I am an accessory to armed robbery! I am going to go in jail!*

“Don’t you dare go to sleep. You hear me? Wake up, wake up! What do you think you are doing? I have a wife and kids, and I am a servant of God and you just made me break one of the commandments: *Thou shall not steal...* or help steal.”

“Just drive, and shut up.”

“Just drive? What about the police? They are going to be after me any minute, and don’t think I won’t tell them what really happened.”

“There won’t be another police car for about an hour, and we won’t see anyone. Just drive.”

I sighed deeply. I had no idea what I was doing, or what I was going to do besides listen to this criminal.

By nine o’clock the rain let up, and I saw the sun set. The stars were actually out. We were on 55th and Kinsman. I couldn’t help notice how dirty the area was, how run down the apartments were. I don’t know how people can live in those apartments. They don’t look fit enough for a dog or a cat to live in, and humans actually live in them. It was late, but there were children playing in a park.

“Pull over by those children,” he finally said something. I

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thought he was going to sleep for the rest of the night. I did as he said. I pulled into the parking lot near where the kids were playing. The criminal gentleman climbed out of the car, pulling some bills out of his bag of stolen money. He walked towards the children, looking stern, standing straight up, head held high. This guy was full of pride, and he appeared fearless. He walked half way to the park where the children were and turned around.

“Aren’t you coming?” he asked me.

It might as well have been a rhetorical question. He knew I would do what he said. I got out of the car, stretched my legs, and took a few deep breaths.

*Dear God, I don't know what is going on right now, but I know you will help me through this hard time with this stranger. Help me conquer him with your word, Lord, so I can get back to my family safely. Amen.* After I prayed, I walked over to the criminal stranger.

“What were you doing?” he asked as he stared sideways at me from the corner of his eyes. I finally noticed the real color of his eyes. They were black. But they had a tiny hint of white in the pupils. I’d never seen eyes like his before. Not in any movie, or magazine, nowhere. His eyes were one of a kind. I don’t know if they were more unique or just scary, but they were amazing eyes.

“I was praying,” I finally responded after I snapped myself from of the gaze of his eyes.

“Ha! Praying, huh? That is a good thing,” he laughed.

I didn’t know if he was being sarcastic or sincere.

We walked toward the park where the children were playing; there were about twenty kids, all of them filthy. I’d ground Victory for weeks if she came home looking like any of these children. Most of them looked about the same age, ranging from nine to eleven, maybe twelve. I can never tell with kids nowadays; they are so big. When I picked Victory up from elementary school the other

day, I could hardly tell the difference between the mothers and the children.

“Hey kids!” the gentleman called out for them to come to him, “I have something for you.”

All the children at once ran toward him as if he was their long time uncle. They went to him so easily, with no fear that he might grab or hurt them. The kids looked skinny, malnourished. The girls’ hair was dry, and matted. And the boys were either bald or their hair wasn’t brushed.

I looked around to see exactly where we were, but I couldn’t tell. I didn’t see how kids could play in this shabby park. Filth and trash were everywhere; the grass was brown and dead. There were no swings on the swinging poles. The sliding board looked frail and dangerous. There were no jungle gyms. No nothing. This place looked like it could be a park for a prison. But even prison yards look better than this.

“Are you girls and boys hungry?” The gentleman asked.

“Yes!” they screamed in unison. I bet they were hungry. I felt so bad for them.

“Well, here. I don’t have food, but I have this.” He brought out a huge roll of bills from his pocket. I didn’t remember him grabbing that much from the bag.

“YAY!” they screamed and rushed to him.

“Now, hold on!” he screamed, “I don’t have time to divide this up amongst you all. So, let me see. You there, come here.” He pointed to a little girl; she looked like the youngest of them all. She was short, red haired, with a fresh scar under her right eye, like she was just in a fight. Her T-shirt and shorts were skimpy and torn. She walked over to the gentleman and gave him a shy smile.

“Don’t be scared now, sweetheart. I don’t bite. Come here. Do you know how to count?”

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She nodded her head yes.

“Good. Now, what I want you to do is give money to everybody here, and make sure everyone gets an equal amount. Don’t be nice to one person and give them more than what you would give her over there.”

He pointed at a taller girl whose bottom lip was bleeding, and her ear was scratched. She had on one decent piece of clothing, but it was dirty. She was dark-skinned, a pretty girl.

“Didn’t you just fight her?”

The shorter girl nodded her head yes.

“Well, make sure she gets just as much as you. Now for the rest of you, don’t give her any problems. Let her give you the money fairly, and you go get yourself something good to eat tonight. Make sure your tummies are full. And when you go home, take the extra money with you for food for your family. I know how much each one of you should get. And tonight before you go to bed, take a shower and pray to the Lord, and thank him for this money. And you pray that he forgives your parents for all their sins. And in the morning, go to church, and thank the Lord again. Okay?”

“Okay!” they screamed again in unison, like they had practiced for this day or something.

The kids ran to the other side of the park, screaming and laughing. Wow! That was a good feeling, watching those kids run and jump. I smiled to myself then looked at the gentleman.

“You think that excuses what you did?”

“Of course not, I didn’t do anything wrong. That store was run by thieves who stole from people, underpaid their workers, overpriced their merchandise, and refused to give God his due.”

“Oh, really? And how do you know all ...” Before I could finish my sentence, another little girl came running over.

“Hey, Mister.”



The gentleman and I stopped and turned toward the girl. She was short with a caramel complexion and dark brown hair, or it may have been black. It was straight like she was part Indian. The girl had a pretty smile; I could see it from where I stood. She ran over to the gentleman and hugged his legs tight.

“Thank you sooooo much. And when I pray tonight, I thank God, but I’ll ask him to bless you, too. Bye!”

“Hey, hold on.” The gentleman reached in his pocket and gave her a one hundred dollar bill. “Now, you get your mom to buy you a new dress so you can look pretty in church.”

“Thank you!” She ran back with the other kids.

All I could do was smile. I guess I forgot how good it felt to give to the needy. I mean I have always donated money to charity, but I never really get to see what happens to it, or what it does. I sometimes don’t even know if the money really goes toward a good cause. All I know is, I give with my heart in the right place, and the Lord blesses with that.

The gentleman and I went back and sat in the car. He was watching the children, smiling like he had successfully recreated a Robin Hood scenario; he stole from the rich and gave to the poor. It was kind of nice, though, watching the kids run and play, counting the money. Sure looked like he gave them a lot of it.

“You think you’re special, huh? Didn’t take you to be a just man.” I said to him sarcastically, still distrusting that this guy had anything to do with Christ.

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive and ye shall be forgiven,” he said, smirking.

*Probably something he’s been studying all his life to memorize. This brute, reciting the Lord’s words, but he steals, smokes, drinks and fights.*

“I hope you didn’t think that was going to impress me,” I said

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to him. He would have to show me a lot more than *that* to impress me.

“Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken, together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measure to you again. Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?”

The gentleman recited the verses without stuttering or stammering. He spoke as if it was some easy sentence to remember. Even the pastors have to glance at the Bible when reading verses, but the gentleman quoted the verse like it was the Lord’s Prayer. I don’t even read the Bible that well. It is a difficult book to read aloud, with the old English and all. I just stared at him. There was nothing I could say.

*“I can see you are confused, so let me introduce myself in a way that will make you believe me. I’ll talk to you, and say all of this in French: Hello Victor Thomas, my name is Sin. Don’t worry. I’m not your guardian angel. I’m here for one purpose and one purpose alone. You’ll get to know it later on as you get to know me, but it is good to meet you. Did you understand me?”*

He said all this to me in French!

The first words about to come out of my mouth were, “I’m sorry. I don’t speak French,” but I understood every word he said. His name is Sin. I nodded my head yes after finally coming out of my trance. I was in total disbelief. Here he just spoke to me in French and I understood every word! I didn’t even take a foreign language class in high school. The only French word I knew was “Bonjour,” but I understood every single word the gentleman said. I didn’t understand the Frenchman from The Masterplan, who spoke to me last week, but I did understand the French this gentleman spoke to me just now! *Puzzling.*

“God is good, isn’t he?” he said to me in a satisfied way, knowing

I was convinced he wasn't of this world. I didn't know who he was, but evil wasn't him. But I was just as unsure whether God was in him.

On the way driving home I finally decided to talk.

"Why did you choose the smallest child to give the money to?" I asked.

"Because she could count better than the rest of them," he replied.

He knew I didn't believe that. "What is the real reason?" I asked again.

He sat there for a while, gazing out the window into the bright lights of Cleveland. I didn't think he was going to answer me after a while, so I just continued to drive.

"I chose her because I could hear her heart," he finally said, "Her heart sounded pure. When I stared into her eyes, I knew she would give the money to each child fairly. She was brave and wouldn't let even the biggest kid push her around. As you could tell, she had been in a fight with a bigger girl. She was also smart; she wouldn't mistakenly give the wrong amount to anyone. She was honest, fair and, despite being the youngest of the group, she was the most mature. And, she was willing to put the fight behind her. She will make it far in life, because she knows how to put things aside to take care of business."

"So why didn't you give it to the girl that came back to thank you?"

"Just because she was polite and nice didn't mean that she would know how to give everyone the correct amount," he smiled for a second, "But she was adorable, wasn't she? The only one to thank me. I know they all meant well, but she came back and thanked me."

"Yes, reminds me of the ten lepers and only one thanked Jesus

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for curing him. And because of that thanking, Jesus purified him.”

“Yes, I know the story.”

“Ha! And you gave that girl one hundred dollars for thanking you. Don’t think I’m calling you Jesus now.”

We both laughed out loud.

“Oh no, not me,” he said, still laughing, “I am not Jesus.”

“So who are you?”

“You’ll learn in due time.”

I didn’t know where we were driving; we were on Lakeshore and 156<sup>th</sup>, near a Walgreen’s and a Citgo.

“Stop, let me off right here,” he commanded. “Right in front of Dave’s Supermarket.”

It was about ten by now. I glanced at my cell phone. I had fifteen missed calls, and five new messages.

“You aren’t about to rob any of these stores are you?” I asked him in a humorous tone.

He grinned at me and said, “No, and you better check those messages. Your wife is worried sick. Don’t call now because she is asleep. If you call she’ll think something is up and panic. Just show up unharmed and safe, and she’ll be okay. And if she doesn’t wake up when you get in, wake her. I’ll see you around, Victor.”

He walked off into the darkness toward Euclid Beach Park, on the right side of McDonald’s. He tilted his hat and walked straight with his hands in his pockets and head down in his mysterious way.

*See me around? I thought to myself, Do I even want to see this guy again? Not really.*

As I drove home I checked my messages. Patrice *was* worried crazy. When I pulled into the driveway I noticed all the lights were out in my house. I got out of my car, and one light popped on. Our front door opened, and my wife came darting out as if I had just

got out of the hospital. She was wearing her yellow pajamas with little bananas on them. Her hair was flipped back in a pony tail, and her eyes were glazed dark brown, like she had been crying all night, but there was an angry scowl on her face. Oh boy, I was going to get it. But she would never believe the story.

“Victor Thomas! Where have you been?” she screamed at me, demanding an answer.

I just stared at her. I couldn’t think of what I could say. *Do I tell her I just helped a stranger, who spoke French to me, and robbed a corner store to give the money to hungry kids?*

“I’ve been worried sick, honey,” she hugged me tight, like she must have thought I was killed or something. I could smell the Victoria’s Secret bubble bath on her skin and winterfresh chewing gum on her breath. She smiled, showing her gorgeous white teeth. Nobody is perfect, but she is close to it. We walked into the house, without saying a word to one another. After the day I had, I don’t think I could make sense of it even to myself.