

## The Red Flower By Jana

I don't know if it was her fault or mine. Although I was driving pretty fast, she was walking so slowly with a very unsteady gait, looking so much like a movie character running in slow motion. But, it seemed that I pressed the car's brake at a perfect time, considering the fact that I did not see a police man that night and that the girl was alive. After pressing the brake so hard, I automatically stepped out of my car to make sure she was fine. And there under the appealing street light of that cold December city night, I saw a six-or-seven-year old girl on the ground, tightly hugging a red bouquet of flowers, skinny, weak, shivering, and wearing shabby pants, a torn sweater, and some ill-fitting shoes. When light penetrated more into her face, I could see her wide-opened eyes on the verge of crying, her skin apparently injured by winter's hailstones." Are you okay?" I finally managed to say, while helping the young kid to get up. To my surprise, the girl stared right into my eyes, and played a smile through her cracked lips, and said-in an almost begging tone of voice-while handing me a red flower: "Sir, would you buy this beautiful lovely red flower?"

"I will buy that flower" I thought to myself, ironically proud of the wave of mercy that kicked suddenly into my heart. As I was scanning my wallet for the smallest paper of money I could pay, I heard the girl's breath growing so fast. She was inhaling and exhaling so heavily, and then faded into my arms. I didn't know why- despite being the reckless and indifferent man I am- I felt my heart pounding in fear, and caught myself praying for the girl while driving her to the nearest hospital.

"The nurses told me everything. You saved this poor girl's life. You got her here at the perfect time." I heard the doctor addressing me after two hours, with so much respect and gratitude." Hadn't you rescued her, the girl would have died of malnutrition, hunger, cold, or simply of those harsh skin irritations of hers. She must not get out of the hospital before morning. This girl needs help." he assured me as if I was some sort of a hero checking for people's miseries and waiting impatiently to offer them help." We could put her in an orphanage or a charity, but until we find one, she should stay safe between the walls of a house. You know, streets are not so good at keeping homeless kids safe." "Well" I said, my voice a bit different as if coming from a stranger's throat,"she can stay in my house until then."

Next morning, 10 a.m., the sunlight passing shyly through the yellow curtains of my house, the TV screen playing a silly Disney movie with a princess making a fool out of herself and speaking to some birds and mice, the wooden table presenting, for the first time in a while, a yummy breakfast of buttered toasts, white eggs, and two mugs of tea. And there I am, the depressed man who refused to see any of his family members or friends for months, having breakfast with a six-year-old girl who sells flowers and walks slowly in front of fast cars, and apparently not so annoyed.

"Thank you for buying me those cute clothes ,sir ,and for this amazing breakfast." The girl said joyfully.

I nodded.

-“You are so lucky, sir.” She added, while sipping tea and eating toast without taking a breathing break.

I nodded, this time a bit more interestingly.

-“At mornings, you get out of your comfortable bed, and look out at the blue sky ,reassured that this beautiful window would protect you from the weather, and that neither the summer glowing sun can hurt you,nor the chilly winter air can bite deep into your heart. And, you could have breakfast even if you couldn’t sell at least five flowers the previous day.And,you are not obliged to smile at the face of mean ladies and gentlemen,begging them to buy a flower for the people they love.You could instead ignore them,together with the people they love. And when you’re afraid or angry or sad ,you can simply hug your mother.And when you’re bored,you can drive your amazing car to a calm place,or read a book-whatever that means,I hear people speak about books so romantically in the streets-or you can wrap this yellow curtain around your waist and pretend you are a Disney princess. And at nights, tired and sleepy, you arrange your pillows and surrender safely into a deep sleep.”

I smiled, thinking about the girl’s words.

-“You don’t speak so much,sir.”

-“I am boring” I said while playing a wink.

-“No you are not. You are a very good man,sir.”

“Am I?”I thought to myself.

The girl continued as if she read my thoughts “You are a very very good man,sir.You saved my life.Not far ago, I was hit by a car and the driver simply left me in the ground,injured and crying for help. You could have done that sir,leaving me to die like an abandoned cat or dog,but you chose not to.”

I opened my eyes, shocked from the little girl’s big violent words.

“People don’t notice us ,sir.They walk by us everyday,look at our faces disgustingly, as if our misery is contagious, and continue their way.When we are lucky,some kind people agree to buy a flower from us.Sir,may I tell you a secret?”

I nodded.

“Sometimes,when people ignore me badly,I convince myself that I am invisible,and that people would treat me very soft-heartedly if only they could see me.You know sir,it is easier to convince yourself that you’re invisible,than to accept the fact that people do not want to see you. But when you rescued me last night, I knew somebody has finally managed to see the invisible creature I am,after three days of not-sold flowers, and thus of no food. Sir, you saved my life, and I can’t thank you enough. I just don’t know how to return this favor.”

This time,I moved my face away,shedding a tear and answering the girl silently:“You already did. While I was saving your life,you saved mine without taking notice. And by seeing the microscopic you, I managed to see myself and my life differently. Yesterday’s night was

supposed to be the last night of my life. Yesterday, I was driving fast into my end, planning to drown myself together with my car in the sea, driven by a strange belief that life is very void and unjust with me, and that I am so bad and useless. But, you reminded me of the smallest and purest moments that have life sparkling through them. You told me, the sad figure you are, how happy I am supposed to be. You added meaning to what I thought was meaningless. You dreamt, with all your heart, with what I took for granted. You assured me that I am good, and for that I am forever thankful. You were a little admonition from the universe, a cute reminder that life is full of details so worth of living. You taught me how to live joyfully and simply, even if that means wrapping a yellow curtain around my waist and pretending to be a Disney princess. Sweetie, that red flower you handed me last night is growing so fast in my heart..."