

The Story of Sam

An Allegory for our Time

Sam was a rich kid. He went to an exclusive school in the country where he was star of the football team, stroke on the crew and leader of the school council. He was a happy and optimistic kid. He liked people and assumed they would like him, and they did. He was very popular. One year, during Easter recess, he went with a group of students on a holiday weekend to New York City. They arrived in the evening at a big apartment on a second floor, overlooking the street.

Next morning they were awoken by screams from the street. They rushed to the window. Down below them a young woman was being robbed and beaten by a street gang. She was crying for help, but no one was paying any attention. At first Sam's crowd didn't know what to say or do. Then Sam spoke out. "I'm going to help her," he said, and without much further thought rushed downstairs. On the way he passed an umbrella rack and quickly seized two umbrellas.

Sam ran over to the girl, pulled her to her feet, gave her an umbrella and shouted, "I've come to rescue you." She took courage and began to fight off her attackers, as did Sam. Sam hoped the street gang would take alarm and run away, but it didn't happen like that. They just turned on him too. Evidently their gang headquarters was in the vicinity, and as fast as Sam put one mugger out of action, others would just filter in.

The fight went on and on. Sam and the girl could hold their own, but still the gang wouldn't go away. Finally someone down the street put his head out of the window and shouted, "Hey, rich kid, stop beating up on those poor kids. They live here, you don't." Sam's feelings were hurt, but he had no time to explain. Another window opened and a woman stuck her head out. She said, "Fighting never solves anything."

Anyone who's fighting is wrong". Again, Sam wanted to ask her how he could protect the girl without fighting, but she had already closed her window.

Sam was really discouraged by this and a lot of the fight just went out of him. Finally he just got tired. He turned to the girl and said, "Well, I tried to help you, but I have to go now. You're on your own." She said, "You have somewhere to go but I don't. I have no choice but to go on fighting or be killed. Please at least leave me your umbrella. Mine is broken and soon I will have nothing to fight with at all." But Sam was in a surly mood and, for the first time in his life, a poor loser. He just turned his back on the girl and went on upstairs without another word.

Back in the apartment, Sam got a mixed reaction. One friend came up to him and said in a low voice, "Real sorry it didn't work out, Sam, but at least you tried, which nobody else did." He then turned away ^{apologetically} and left Sam alone. Another classmate then came up. He said, "You know, Sam, ~~the trouble with you is~~ ^{your problem} you're stupid. Before you rushed down there you should have used your head. Could you really help her, could you drive off the muggers? Now? ~~But not you!~~ Now she's

worse off than if you'd done nothing, and our weekend is half ruined to boot." Sam was stunned at this reaction, but ~~xxxxxx~~ he hadn't seen anything yet. One of the group was a girl he had always admired but had never known quite how to approach. Now she came over and said, almost quivering with righteous indignation, "Sam, that cut in your forehead, did you ~~get~~ that in the fight?" He nodded, and she said, boldly, "Well, it served you right. Didn't anyone ever teach you to mind your own business? Besides, whoever elected you policeman of the world? That ~~garish~~ girl didn't concern us. She's some sort of Asiatic or something. You just had to ~~go~~ off on your macho kick and you deserve what you ~~got~~." She turned on her heel and walked off.

Sam eased weakly onto a chair and wiped the blood from his forehead. "Look," he cried out, "I had to ~~get~~ in the fight. My family, my hometown, my school - everything demanded that I go to that girl's aid. No way could I stay here and ignore her cries for ~~help~~ and still be me." But no one was listening any more. The whole thing had been an embarrassment, a nuisance, a fiasco. The weekend had been spoiled. Sam had made a fool of himself. Outside, the street gang was celebrating its victory. Some of the neighbors were even joining in. The foreign girl was just lying, battered in a corner. No one noticed, the incident was closed.

On Monday the group returned to school. Sam seemed to be a different person entirely. He had lost interest in football and finally dropped out. His marks plummeted. The school council just bored him. Finally, in desperation, he dragged himself over to the school infirmary. "Doc," he said, "You've ~~got~~ to help me. I've lost interest in everything, no motivation. What is wrong with me?" The doctor queried him at length and then said, "Sam, it's a coincidence you should come in today, because I've just been reading an article in the New England

Journal of Medicine which deals with your case. Your disease has been around for years in Europe and other parts of the world, ~~xxxxxx~~ but never in the United States until now, although the Journal says there were some reported cases of it in the South after the Civil War. There's no quick cure for it, although some say that a patient can be helped a lot by a few ^{STREAKS} ~~streaks~~ of really good luck. But it may just drag on for life. There is one hopeful aspect to it, however. This disease is not genetically ~~transferyable~~ [^] Your kids won't catch it from you. "It's called Vietnam Syndrome."

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