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STORIES FROM THE AIRPORT
AND BEYOND

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OINTMENT – FIRST STORY

Many years ago, during a summer, I was with Sean the Irishman on a mission of a few months through Morocco or Algeria, I can't remember well.

Sean didn't know a word of French, so, please forgive my apparent lack of modesty, I was his guide when it came to conversations in the language of Molière.

Being rather Irish by nature and proud of it, well, you know, islanders, he avoided asking for my help whenever he could, using a worn-out dictionary instead, probably inherited from Saint Patrick.

A few times, though, karma showed him that it can be “a real biatch”.

The first time was when he bought a pair of headphones from the bazaar, to listen to music at the beach or when we were traveling by plane.

Back then, Bluetooth couldn't be found everywhere, so he got infrared headphones.

And because he was in the mood for spending money, he bought some waterproof ones, conducting a series of tests under the shower, in the pool, or walking among the sprinklers in the villa's courtyard where we were staying.

After the episode with the headphones, he got himself a dog, only Saint Comgall from Bangor knows why, a cute little mutt that cost him a fortune.

He soon realized that the poor dog only understood a kind of Franco-Arabic language, more Arabic than French, even barking in that language and having no inclination towards the Germanic languages, like Irish or the enemy from the northern part of the island, English.

So, he took the dog back to where he got him from, and from the money he got back, not all of it, since he did use the dog, he bought another pair of headphones, this time with radio transmission, because, I quote, “those with infrared don’t go through walls”, end of quote.

One day, he fell asleep on the beach with the headphones on and got sunburn on his back.

I had been out in the bazaar and we met at sunset by the villa’s gate.

“Where have you been, mate, my hands hurt from talking to those French people,” he started complaining.

“Well, didn’t I tell you I was going to buy some lamb, because I wanted to make tagine?” I replied, showing him a bag I had in my hand. “Which people? What happened to you?”

“I fell asleep on the sun lounger and got sunburn on my back,” he bent a little. “And I went to the pharmacy and asked for a cream, an ointment, something, for burns.”

“Yeah, and in what language did you ask?” I teased him, showing my dark side of the Force.

“I said ‘Ow! Ouch! Oof! Big boo-boo!’ and I pointed to my back with my hands, like this,” he mimicked the conversation with the pharmacist. “Well, in the end, she understood me and gave me this box with cream, come on, please apply it on me too, it really stings.”

“Come on, let’s go inside!” I said when my Jedi half won. “Here, give me the box!”

We enter his room, open the box, and I burst into laughter instantly.

“What’s so funny all of a sudden?” Sean asked, taken aback.

Trying not to choke, I managed to stammer, “Man, what the hell signs did you make to the pharmacist, that she didn’t give you burn cream, but suppositories!”

OINTMENT – SECOND STORY

It was night, it was raining, and I was at work, at the airport.

At one point, I went out for a coffee and bumped into Luke Piewalker, who started complaining about his knee hurting and having a sharp pain in his back, and how he couldn't wait to go home.

Then Papa John, the veteran of our technical team, showed up.

"Oh," he says, "wait, I'll fix you up. I have a Chinese ointment, my sister got it from some tourists in Marseille, and it's amazing, nothing like it. It's a little red box. I use it on myself from time to time. Wait here, I think I have one in the locker room."

"Oh, you're a lifesaver!" Luke says happily.

Papa John returns with the miraculous ointment, Luke opens the lid and takes a sniff, as an experienced user of medicinal ointments would.

"Nice," he says. "Thanks a lot, Papa John! How long does the effect last after applying it?"

"Well," smiles Papa John, "it lasts until it hurts again."

ASSISTANT

I was with the guys, about two days after New Year's, preparing a plane for flight, when I got a call from an intellectual friend from Romania.

Happy New Year, good health, all the best, how are you, and so on.

"I'm a bit dissatisfied," he says, after listing what he ate for Christmas and New Year's. "I'm still just an assistant professor and my name doesn't appear in any books or papers I work on. I don't know, I feel like life is passing me by and I'm unimportant."

"Dude, hold on a sec," I say. "It's not true, assistants are the foundation everywhere, including in higher education."

"Seriously?" he says skeptical.

"Yeah, man, I'll give you a motivational example. Look at Brown, for instance."

"Brown? Which Brown?" he asks.

"Brown, the botanist" I clarify the identity of the example. "Well, he mixed some paramecia with euglenas in a petri dish, saw everything moving randomly, and called his assistant, 'John, I've discovered a new movement, I'll call it *helter-skelter movement*.' 'Hold on, boss!' the assistant

said. 'You can't call it that, it's vulgar and unacademic.' And thanks to the assistant's intervention, he called it 'Brownian motion'. So, you see? The assistant is the foundation, man," I conclude my argument.

"Ah, I see now!" he says on the phone. "Well, happy New Year to you too, man."

RAZOR

Santa Claus came and everyone wants to brag about what they received, because I don't know anyone who doesn't enjoy receiving gifts.

We gather around for a coffee and start discussing what we found under the tree.

"I found the gas bill," Greg the Egg laughed.

"I found a check, but it's in my wife's name, ha ha!" Peter Saucepan chimed in.

"What did you get?" I asked curiously to Luke Piewalker.

"I received a marvelous beard and mustache grooming gadget," he proudly said. "I found it between my gift and my wife's. I didn't wake her up to thank her because she was sleeping when I left for work, so I could test it out. Look at the contours on my beard and mustache," he boasted to us.

"Yeah, cool, take care of it," I said. "I could use something like that too. Can you give me the model?"

"Of course!" Luke kindly said. "Here, search for this model on the internet."

And he mentioned a brand and a number.

We looked it up online and burst into laughter.

“My dear,” I could barely speak, “did you even look at what’s written on the box?”

“Well, is written beard grooming gadget or something, right?”

“No, man, look at what it says on this model you gave us,” I laughed out loud. “It’s not for shaving your beard, it’s for your wife to groom her pussy.”

AFRICAN ADVENTURES – EPISODE 1

I was with a charter flight in French-speaking Africa accompanied by my technical comrades Hans the German, Tibor the Hungarian, Luke Piewalker, and Greg the Egg.

We arrive at an airport with sunshine and palm trees, drop off the passengers, go to the hotel, but before we can even unpack, we receive a call from the pilot.

“Hey guys, the hotel is being requisitioned,” he says. “The President of France is visiting the city and his staff needs rooms, so you 5 need to move to another hotel, just as cool but further down, in the shade.”

We say “OK!”, grab our luggage, get into a minibus provided by the airline, and leave.

Dark Side Dave, our driver, says, “Oh, you guys are so lucky, the hotel we’re going to now is new and my friend is the manager there, you’ll see how great you’ll feel.”

We leave and around lunchtime we arrive in front of a kind of big chicken coop like, cream-desert colored, arranged on 3 floors and surrounded by palm trees.

We go into the reception, and behind the counter, someone smiles at us, warmly greets Dark Side Dave,

which made us deduce that he's the friend who's the manager, and they start speaking in their language.

As soon as we entered the hotel, our noses were hit by the pungent smell of paint, and our ears by a cheerful symphony of hammering and buzzing.

"Guys, I think they're now building the walls in the rooms," says Greg.

After a couple of minutes, Dark Side Dave reappears and says, "Guys, they only have two finished rooms, but don't worry, in about 2-3 hours the rest will be ready. Just hang out here, have coffee, beer, something."

"OK," we say, and then we sit in a side hallway next to the reception and crack open a beer each.

After about 6-7 beers, the manager comes and gives us the rest of the rooms.

Greg was right, they were putting up tiles and dry-wall!

We barely managed to get out one guy who was painting the windowsill.

"Don't take a bath tonight," the painting guy says before leaving the room. "The tiles haven't dried yet and they might fall off."

"Thank you for the advice," I say closing the door and chuckle to myself.

As I fumbled around the room trying to find a spot for my luggage and making sure not to touch anything freshly painted, it became dark outside.

I go to the bathroom to at least wash my face and armpits, but unsurprisingly, no water was flowing.

I go down to the reception and encounter someone with beaver teeth.

“There’s no more water,” he says. “Some British tourists used up the daily quota.”

And while he was speaking, poof!, the power goes out and a profound darkness falls upon us.

A few seconds later, a light appears up beyond the counter, which made me jump in fear at its sudden appearance.

“For washing, a water truck comes twice a day, in the morning at 07:00 and in the afternoon at 16:00,” chimes a pair of teeth. “So if you want to get water, you need to remember these hours. Well, you can also go to the river to bathe, but you have to scare away the crocodiles first.”

“Huh?” I blurted out, totally surprised.

“But lately they don’t scare easily, they’ve gotten used to people,” smiled the teeth. “Well, they’ve never eaten a whole person, just a hand, a leg, and things like that, but thank God, no one has died.”

“Well, when does the power come back?” I manage to stammer after hearing this valuable tourist information.

“Oh, the power, I don’t know,” said the teeth again. “But tomorrow morning, at around 05:00, my cousin from the neighboring village is coming, he’s an electrician, he took a two-week course and he’s going to check the generators, they’re a French brand and we don’t know how to work with them, that’s why they easily disconnect.”

“So, we won’t have power until morning?” I ask a bit desperate.

“That’s right,” the guy replied. “Look, I’ll bring my lighter to make some light for you to get to your room.”

In the morning, I go down to the restaurant and only find Luke, no one else.

After having a coffee with a croissant and some melted butter with jam, a jolly man appeared.

“You need to order now for lunch, because the kitchen is not yet functional and we bring the food from a guest-house in the neighboring village,” he says.

And we start babbling hopefully about some soup, beef steak, chicken dish, each one wanting something different.

That diligent guy notes everything down and at the end he says, “Thank you very much, but just so you know, I’m bringing fried chicken and potatoes for everyone.”

“Well, why, huh?” I ask amazed.

“Because that’s the only thing that the guy we work with delivers,” he replied with a big smile.

“And why did you take our order then?” Luke asked, surprised.

“That’s the procedure,” he replied, still smiling.

We finish our coffee and leave the restaurant,

At the reception, we find Greg chatting with the doorman and the local painter.

The painter had spread his paintings on the floor, hoping to convince Greg to buy something.

At one point, out of nowhere, Tibor and Luke show up.

“Hello, guys! What are you doing here?” and, bang! They step on that guy’s paintings.

The painter instantly gets furious.

“What are you doing, huh?” Greg shouts.

“Oh, my god, I’m so sorry!” Tibor jumps up, apologizing to the painter. “I didn’t see well, I thought it was a mosaic on the floor.”

I finally calmed down the painter, poor thing.

In the end, we each bought a piece of artwork to be forgiven.

It was a bit past lunchtime, the sun was shining brightly, and the generators were failing every fifteen minutes.

We settled under a large ceiling fan and leisurely sipped on a local mix of pineapple juice and beer.

Dark Side Dave shows up.

“Boss, should I bring you a girl for a high-class Thai massage?” he jumps straight to the point.

Before we could even answer, a lady appeared, not ugly, not beautiful, not tall, not short, not fat, and not slim, just like in the stories of Brothers Grimm.

She took off her blouse with lazy movements, and through her tight undershirt, breasts like bowling balls were peeking out, you could even use them to demonstrate the theorem of the three perpendiculars.

They seemed to vibrate a bit, and the air created by the ceiling fan immediately made her nipples pop up like royal cherries.

“She’s very talented,” Dark Side Dave said with a wink.

The girl continued to take her clothes off.

“Dave, what the hell is this girl doing?” I asked half amazed, half laughing.

“I asked her to undress because I had a client who asked for a girl and got a transvestite,” Dark Side Dave answered, smiling.

“Well, okay, but here?” I continued.

“Well, you are the only guests in the hotel,” Dave replied, widening his eyes and signaling the lady to continue.

When she took off her pants, she had perfectly natural fur on her legs, and her armpit hair looked like walrus mustaches.

When she got to her panties, I ran away because I was afraid she might trigger an avalanche of pubic hair onto me.

I went to the room, washed two T-shirts and went to the rooftop to hang them in the sun.

There I came across Hans, who had just hung several pairs of underwear on an antenna to dry.

I waited for him to leave, brought two bottles of water, hid them behind some crates, and then until the end of the day I watered the underwear every hour.

I met him at dinner.

“Hey, I wanted to ask you something,” he said. Have your clothes dried?

“Yes, a long time ago,” I replied.

“Man, I don’t know what’s up with mine,” he said with a surprised face. “They might have come into contact with some damp air or something, because they’re still wet, even wetter than when I washed them.”

I told him about the prank the next day at lunch.

After about two days, there was a local celebration or national day, I don't remember, and some people came to the hotel to give us gifts on behalf of the company.

We had to choose between ceramic statues representing their deities or fruits.

"Screw those damn statues," Greg concluded. "What the hell do we need ceramics for?"

And he said to the unsuspecting person who brought the box, "Hey, bring to papa some of those mangoes too, but go deeper in the box with your hand, so they can be riper. And put some peaches and a couple of bunches of grapes next to them."

After half an hour, Luke came to my room to ask if I had tried any mangoes.

"I don't know, man," I replied. "I gave them to the maid, I don't like them."

We opened a beer each when, boom! boom! Someone knocked on the door.

It was Greg, who looked like he had bitten into a crowbar and the crowbar didn't like it.

"Who bumped into you, man?" I asked.

"Fuck those fruits and the person who gave them to us," he said angrily. "I bit into a peach and it was ceramic!"