

Big

A modern legend

Sammy had been big ever since he was born. So big, that his mother needed three months to recover from the birth experience. No wonder she didn't want any more children.

He was big in kindergarten too. Whenever he asked for something he got it. Sammy was very polite. He always asked politely, but after some time he forgot that there was a possibility for somebody to refuse him. It never happened in the kindergarten.

It didn't happen at school either. Sammy was always the biggest boy in the class. He was not a good pupil. Actually, he was one of the worst, but they never made him repeat a year. The first time that he failed an exam, he wanted to understand what he had done wrong. He asked the teacher. The teacher looked at the exam, looked at him, and then changed the grade to a passing grade – Sammy didn't understand why. He had passed every exam ever since, even if just barely.

Like most of his classmates, he was glad to go when he received his first summon to the pre-army checks. A few months later they called him back for some additional checks and, after some more time, they informed him the army had decided not to enlist him. They cited medical causes – “a noise in the heartbeat” as the reason for his rejection. Only many years later did he discovered the true reason.

Sammy was sorry for his rejection. He tried to consult with his doctor, to see if there was anything wrong with his health. The doctor consoled him: “That’s nothing important. Many young people have similar symptoms that just disappear after a few years, but the army doesn’t want to take any chances.”

He didn’t go to the matriculations exams – he knew he couldn’t pass them. After finishing school he tried to find a job. It wasn’t easy without having a profession. He eventually found a suitable job; he was a doorman at an institute that employed many nice girls. They liked their work so much they even got sleeping quarters in the company building.

The owner paid him nicely and even allowed him to take out one of the girls once in a while. Sammy used to take them to the cinema or to a restaurant and they usually finished the evening in his room. They liked going out with him and they also made sure he enjoyed being with them. He escorted them back to work in the morning.

It all started during one of those outings. He was with Eva – one of the girls with whom he started having some special feelings. She asked to see a musical film. There was a long queue at the ticket booth. Eva stayed near him while he was on the queue, and then somebody said “Look at that whore, how she is circumventing the queue.” Sammy didn’t understand. How could somebody call Eva “a whore”? He tried to persuade the man to apologize.

They didn’t see the movie. In the argument that took place, Sammy got angry and slapped the man once. The man fell to the floor, blood came out of his mouth, and Eva started crying. Before he could even calm her he found himself in the police car with his hands and feet tied, with Eva crying at his side and the man was rushed to the hospital in an intensive care ambulance.

They deported Eva. They said she worked as a whore in the company he was guarding, which was actually a bordello. She had no citizenship and no work permit. She was not even working on the job that she was promised before coming. They sent her back to the country she came from.

He was charged with aggravated assault. It didn't help him to say that he was sorry, that he never thought Eva was a prostitute, that he was hurt on her behalf and that he never wanted to injure anybody.

"A big man like you should be more responsible to his deeds" said the judge. Luckily, the man he injured lived, though his treatment might take several years and he would probably remain crippled to some degree for the rest of his life. His parents cried. They knew he was a good boy. He might have been somewhat slow mentally and not too bright, but he meant no harm. The judge was not convinced. He gave him five years in prison and five more conditional.

He was also big in prison. The inmates treated him with a lot of respect and so did the guards. Only Sammy had lost any respect towards himself. He suddenly understood that his sheer size made him stay small, that despite his size he was just an overgrown kid instead of a responsible adult man. He knew that he had to change that.

He tried to explain what he felt to the warden. It was difficult. He lacked many words – he had never learned them. The warden had him checked by a social worker and a psychologist. A few weeks later he granted Sammy his request: Sammy was moved to a single-cell, separated from the other inmates "for security reasons". In his cell he had a box full of books and notepads.

He started studying seriously. He first learned how to read and write anew. That was easy – he already knew most of it, although he was surprised by the many gaps he had even in this

basic knowledge. Then he continued studying. He studied meticulously all the subjects of primary school. It took him two years to finish, but when he was done, he continued on with the subjects of higher schools. That took him two more years. He asked not to have his time in jail shortened – he was determined to pass the matriculation tests before being released.

A week after getting his matriculation certificate – he passed all exams with excellent grades – he left the jail as a free man.

His parents waited for him at the gates, intending to take him home, but Sammy wanted to first visit the man that he injured. He wanted to apologize and to ask his forgiveness. His parents didn't think it was a wise thing to do but they accepted his will – as usual.

The man was at home. He didn't expect visitors and certainly not this specific visitor. After five years of medical treatment he was nearly back to his normal medical state, although he had strict instructions to avoid neck movements. He was terrified seeing Sammy at the door – he had never wanted to see Sammy again.

After many sincere apologies and expressions of regrets they parted. His parents didn't understand what caused the change. Their son was finally behaving like a responsible adult.

Sammy wanted to contribute to society. He tried to find out the best way he could do it. He received as many answers as the number of people he asked, and even a few more. It didn't help him at all. He had to decide himself. After long internal debates he decided to learn social work. That way he would be able to help other people. That way he could find the big boys and direct them to become men without following the same painful route that he had.

Three years later his parents wept again when he got his bachelor's degree with distinction. The faculty members wanted him to continue studying and to join them as a lecturer. "You could help so much more as a teacher. You could pass your experience not only to a few needing people but to many more classes of graduates."

A few years later he became a legend.

The professor would start each academic year with a large piece of wood supported by two chairs. During his lecture he would move his hands a lot, breaking the wood haphazardly. At the end of each academic year he would give a party for the graduates at his home, telling them how he met his wife – Eva. He had always had another guest – a small man with a large support bandage on his neck who would always say: "You are grand, professor!"