



I felt so wonderful that morning. Everything, before, about a girlfriend named Josephine who suddenly appeared out indeed, had contributed to my state of happiness. To start with, I had experienced such a revealing and enjoyable dream, the night of the fog. I came out a winner from my dream-like situation.

In the course of our dealing, I tried everything to dissipate that *girl's* gloomy mood: jokes, wits, wisdom, kisses, flowers and sweets, but in vain.

Then, my intelligence and my imagination playing their part, it seemed that I started to speak like an inspiring poet for the first time in my life and I became an actor and witness of my spiritual transformation.

The poetic dialogue went on,

“Josephine,

Why are you so sad?”

“I don’t know, Sir,”

She answered angrily.

“But, Josephine,

Do you like music?”

Antoine Archange Raphael

“No, Sir.”

“Please, try this anyway:

“Go to a music place.”

“What for, Sir?”

“You will enjoy yourself.

You will dance to

Rumba,

Cha-cha

Jazz,

The blues,

Meringue,

All kinds of pleasant sounds:

Lively ones,

Joyful ones,

Sad ones....”

“No, Sir!” screamed Josephine.

“I don’t want to listen to

Rumba,

Cha-cha

Jazz,

The blues,

Meringue...”

The young wise man

*“Then,” I screamed back,
“Since, Josephine,
You are not interested in music
And that you want to be impossible,
Get out of my way,
And let the music,
Like a limpid river,
Flow;
Like honey,
Soothe the souls.”*

*Then,
Josephine,
To please me,
For the first time,
Listened to
Rumba,
Cha-cha,
Jazz,
The blues...
And she smiled,
And she joined me,
While I was singing*

Antoine Archange Raphael

And dancing.

Whatever I had done to shake me off the positive and magic effects of that dream on me had proven unavailing.

It had remained in my mind during my morning shower, my breakfast, my dressing up, my getting on my parents' car to be dropped in front of my school, my entering the institution premises, until my encounter with Doctor Thomas James, our principal.

In a way, I owed him a debt of gratitude for speaking to me and for distracting me from *my dream, my wonderful dream*; because I figured out that a permanent state of euphoria would look like some kind of profanation in a world of miseries.

"Derrick, Derrick," said the school executive in a sweet tone, "I want to speak to you."

"Really, Doctor James," I inquired in a perplexed manner. "Do I find myself in deep trouble?"

"Of course not," assured the school authority. "Is there anything wrong to speak to my favorite student?"

"I am, am I not?"

"Of course, you are."

"In other words, Doctor James, I stand above reproach, don't I?"

"Yes, you do."

The young wise man

I got a good reason for being apprehensive. To start with, the school authority kept repeating my name, which made me suspicious; for, calling me once would suffice, as I had keen ears.

I insisted smilingly, “Dr. James, let me see if I get straight. You agree that I stand above reproach, and, yet, you still want to speak to me?”

“Yes, I do,” he insisted. “Is it forbidden to speak to you, young man?”

“I don’t think so.

“Doctor James, I have experienced a lot of situations in my adolescence, however, I haven’t yet received the titled of the king of the hill.”

He put his hand on my back and with a motion of the head beckoned to me to follow him.

“Let’s go to my office,” he added. “We have to talk about something important.”

He sat comfortably at his big desk and showed me a chair set in front of him.

He took a deep breath.

I got definitely worried.

I said to myself that I had committed a blunder, a big mistake unknowingly. Therefore, contrary to the school authority primary belief, I did not stand “above reproach”!

Yet, what could I have done wrong? The authority wouldn’t tell me at once; and this time my memory let me down.

Antoine Archange Raphael

Certainly, the school authority would not make a fuss about my grades: they had remained among the highest. Actually, I had received all my transcripts that came up to my parents' satisfaction and mine.

"Derrick, Derrick, my friend," went on Doctor James, "you are a born leader."

"My God, I reach the end of the line," I thought. "Apparently, I have no way out of troubles I have caused, this man knows how to stir up and maintain the guilty feeling in others. Besides, to make matters worse, he starts repeating my name again.

"Why can't this man just tell me all the facts, how painful they may be?"

Then, after a pause, he added, "I keep abreast of my students' activities and I know about your club."

His revelation made me less tense, and I smiled.

Then, I insinuated, "Doctor James, for the last five minutes or so, you sounded like a bird of bad news, to such a par that I had to make a great effort not to jump to the conclusion according which I would witness an apocalyptic event soon.

"But now you sound so much better, almost like the harbinger of something not too bad I will cherish and enjoy for the remaining of my life."

"Oh, Derrick, listening to you, apparently, you've done something evil. Tell me about it.

The young wise man

“To tell you the truth, as a son of Eve, our beloved common mother, I love secrets; and I have my phone line directly connected to the neighborhood police precinct.”

“I’ve done nothing evil to my knowledge, which would require the police intervention.”

“Then, my friend, you should have a clear conscience and be less jumpy.”

“Yes, I should.”

He kept silent for a while before adding, “As I have said, I know about your club and have awareness of what you have done for your peers the majority of whom are finishing secondary school like you.

“Better still, the youngest students have been following in your footstep.”

“Oh, that club!” I exclaimed with a sigh of relief. “Frankly, Doctor James, I couldn’t do it without my peers and the support of their parents.”

“Why do you say that? Apparently, you are too modest.

“People I spoke to let me know that the club expresses the materialization of your personal.”

“Reality, Doctor James, goes sometime beyond a simple explanation.

“Anyway, people’s, in this respect, lacks in accuracy.”

“Explain yourself, young man.”

I took a pause before explaining, “Doctor James, in order for someone to put your gifts in good use, he must have shown willingness to act right.

Antoine Archange Raphael

Don't you think so? My peers might have got tired of nonsense going on in the neighborhood, so they have promptly responded to my inviting them to a positive change.

"Therefore, according to me, all of us deserve the credit you have given me."

"I granted to you, my friend. I admire your modesty and sense of fairness. However, how could you explain the display of sportsmanship you put on the other day? I can't ascribe it to anyone else but to you.

"They told me that you had looked like a *magnificent Samurai* and had subdued one of the most vicious criminals in the neighborhood.

"I didn't know you were a street fighter?"

He looked askance at me, smiling while waiting for my answer.

"Doctor James, you look very puzzled," I answered mischievously. "But you should have no surprise at learning that many have shared your puzzlement.

"Would you believe it, I have tried hard to figure myself out."

The school authority burst out laughing, while uttering, "That's incredible. You are a piece of wonder."

Then, after a short pause, he inquired jokingly, "Derrick, do you think I get mixed up about your age?

"For a split second, I had the impression of dealing with a senior citizen."

The young wise man

“No, Doctor, I haven’t yet reached the senior citizen status,” I quickly replied. “But, would you believe it? I start working on welcoming this stage of life. Since I cannot stop maturing, why can’t I accept the ageing process smilingly?”

“In addition, before you know it, it is there.

“Time flies. I remember when I was four years of age. It is like yesterday.

“Actually, I met with an eighty-year-old man, the other day; he made a similar remark. Nevertheless, he expressed such idea in a more colorful fashion than I do.

“He said to me, and I quote, ‘Young man, old age has sneaked on me’.”

“Well, Derrick, you sound like an old man full of wisdom,” repeated the school Principal. “Thus, if you lie about your age you will get in deep trouble.

“For one thing, I will tell the board of education that an adult has posed as a teenager to attend our school. Again, have you lied about your age?”

“If I have made a mistake about my age, Doctor James,” I explained, “then, you should blame my parents, not me.

“Although they still look young, I can’t claim seniority over them. They declare every day and they swear on the Bible to have *fashioned* me seventeen years ago.

“You know? I believe them, since, to the best of my recollection, they have never lied to me.

Antoine Archange Raphael

After a short moment of silence, I went on, “Besides, well...

“What is it, my son,” insisted the Principal.

“Besides, they have never given me the impression that I have almost reached adulthood.”

Both of us gave a full-throated laugh.

Yet, in my mind, I knew that *sweet little Doctor Thomas James* didn’t invite me to his office to tell me about my qualities of leadership, my display of sportsmanship, my dubious age and many other odd qualities I might possess. He had to worry about something of higher importance.

“Listen,” his voice sounded more businesslike, “I have no right to impose on you. I should have done my own selling.

“Additionally, your peers and you may have your own agenda to go to a specific college.

“However, my dear student, an anonymous wealthy person has sent me this check...

“I must act within a day or two in order to give this generous donor cause for satisfaction.”

Slowly, he opened an envelope, pulled a check and showed it to me.

I had a shock. I thought I misread the amount. Then, I implied, “Doctor James, since I have stepped into your office, I have gone from surprise to wonder. You may preside over an enchanting place!

“Please, correct me, have I seen a genuine check for one million dollars?

“Are you joking?

The young wise man

“Tell me that I should have my eyes examined.”

“No, you don’t have to see an eye specialist,” replied the school authority. “Yes, Derrick, it is a check for one million dollars. And the money belongs to your group.”

“It belongs to my group! You have said that!”

“Yes, it belongs to your group, but under one condition...”

“Such as?”

“All of you must attend *Queens City College* and promise to pursue graduate studies.”

“Good Lord!”

“I want you, Derrick, to break the good news to your peers. They will listen to you.”

“But, Doctor...”

The principal took some delight at my confusion. Then, he made a motion of the hand to cut in.

Shortly after, he argued, “Listen, Derrick, I know what you think; but I must tell you that if you and your peers accept, your decision will represent a positive step for all of us. Your younger followers will take it for the symbolic possibility of immediate reward for good behavior. Then, it will allow you to pursue studies in one of the finest schools in the country.

“Next, it will symbolize a booster to our borough, which you seem to love very much.

Antoine Archange Raphael

“Finally, it will enhance the image of our school in which you take great pride.

“Therefore, my dear son, believe me, from whichever aspect you look at your positive answer to this donation, all of us will come out winners.”

He made a welcoming gesture with the hands and concluded, “How about it?”

I didn’t see any *inconvenience* with my accepting the grant *personally*, which would make me a *young millionaire*; however, I could not grab the check and disappear to some exotic island. It required a wholesale commitment.

Of course, I knew my schoolfellows, but some of them might have their own plans to do whatever they wanted to or to go to colleges of their choice.

Others might not have thought of pursuing any college studies at all.

Yet, how could I displease Dr. James? He meant well. He cared so much about our future.

“Doctor James, let me speak to my friends,” I suggested. “I will use all my power of persuasion.

“You never can tell; I may be lucky.”

He gave me a vigorous handshake and stated, “It’s all I want to hear from you, my good friend that you try.

The young wise man

“Yes, my son, if you keep trying to do the right things in life, you will succeed. In fact, you need no encouragement from me; I get the feeling you will be my pride and joy, which I will happily remember during my retirement.

“Now if your peers agree, I will send this check to the designated college along with the benefactor’s will. Otherwise, I will return everything to the issuing bank.”

“By the way, Dr. James, when do you expect us to give you an answer?”
I inquired

“I would say as soon as possible,” he replied.

“Then, let me go to the classroom now and speak to my peers.

“I will get back to you today. I promise.”

“Good.”

I stood up and got ready to leave, when the Principal said, “Derrick, my good friend, I think that you will have a bright future.

“For some unexplained reason, you have good vibes around you or whatever they may be.”

“Doctor James, do you think that I will have a bright future?”

“Of course I do.

“Let me tell you the reason for thinking this way. You are smart and full of wisdom. In my book, you do have a recipe for success. Believe me.

“You will make a lot of money. You love money, don’t you?”

Antoine Archange Raphael

I thought, “What is my principal driving at now? Does he intend to give me a test of integrity?”

Then, I replied loud, “Dr. James, don’t get me wrong, but we all need money to satisfy our common human needs.

“However, it does not constitute the main ingredient of happiness and the assurance of a bright future.

“And, Doctor James, don’t get alarmed if I tell you all this, I learn it from the Master.”

“You learn all this from the Master? Young man, what are you talking about?

Who is he?”

“You are, Dr. James; no one else.”

“Why do I receive this title from the naughtiest of my students? Do your peers and you gossip about people?

“Have you been saying things about me?

“Derrick, you have unhappily surprised me.”

“No, Dr. James, we haven’t said things about you. Actually, we have tried as much as we can to avoid malicious gossip.

“To appease you, let me tell you that my peers and I have nothing but praise for you. “

“Then, why do you call me Master?

“Derrick, you have a lot explaining to do.”

The young wise man

“Dr. James, listen to me. You have achieved the highest degree of studies anyone can think of. Yet, you have devoted your entire times to make sure that our young minds receive the best education in the world.

“Now, Doctor, if I make a mistake I won’t feel any shame that you correct me: if you took interest in money so much, you would have yearned for a more lucrative position with a big corporation, wouldn’t you?”

With a motion of the hands, the school authority showed me the exit door. Then, while smiling, he said, “Get out of my office, before I call the police.

I knew that I didn’t make any mistake when I thought that you were older than you claimed to be.”

I feigned dread and advanced quickly, “I am leaving at once before you change your mind.

“However, before I do, Dr. James, I would like to know whether the law of the land has forbidden older persons to attend high school. It is the only way to get access later on to college studies.

“To the best of my knowledge, it’s the normal path to follow to reach higher education.”

“Since you mention it, I don’t know any piece of legislation that forbids this kind of scenario,” answered a smiling Principal. “And, Derrick, I must agree with you and believe that an adult may attend high school.”

“I see.

Antoine Archange Raphael

“I was right: no such law exists.

“Nevertheless, I am leaving right this minute anyway; for, you may have some influence and alter the national jurisprudence against me.

“I don’t want to take this chance. So, goodbye, Dr. James! See you later.”

We both burst out laughing.

I left the Principal’s office with my optimism starting the night before with my *fabulous* dream, my poem, and my music and so many positive elements of it. In that dream seemed to appear, out of the fog, my *imaginary Josephine*, a gloomy girl, at first, then who danced with me later on to Rumba, Cha-cha, Jazz, Meringue, the Blues and all kinds of sweet sounds, lovely ones, joyful ones (and sad ones too).

Then, this optimistic feeling grew stronger by the *lure* of one million dollars.

“It’s simply incredible,” I murmured. “It’s my lucky day. Maybe I should try doing something impossible.”

The classroom, full of students, seemed permeated with an unprecedented atmosphere of joy, to which I added my personal felicity.

I looked around and got the passing funny feeling that my peers did have the same dream I had experienced the night before and they all came out winners.

Then, I snapped back to reality, the reality of an adolescent, with plenty in her mind.

The young wise man

Actually (I remembered), our joy did not come from my dream, which I wrongly believed my classmates shared, but from our spending our last week in the classroom before starting summer vacation.

Thus, we would no longer come back in this place as students; since we had finished with the *trials* of secondary school and that we would pursue higher learning at college levels elsewhere (in the country or abroad).

I felt particularly pleased to see myself not only completing this level of studies with honor, but also, to my great delight, to see so many of my friends reaching together with me that first step towards a more positive future.

I had a special reason for taking pride in ourselves, because the majority of us belonged to *The Neighborhood Youth Club*, Doctor James, the Principal, had shortly alluded to.

Our English teacher, Dr. Rosemary White, asked me (all of a sudden) if I had to make any announcement to make to the whole classroom.

Then, it dawned on me that beautiful teacher took part in that *sweet conspiracy*, along with the Principal and maybe the entire teaching staff.

“Definitely, one has to keep a sharp eye on these pretty learned ladies,” I thought. “They may also embark on ‘conspiratorial activities’.”

Everybody welcomed my little speech with enthusiasm. My peers had decided to forget their individual plans to go in for this wholesale commitment to attend *Queens City College*.

Antoine Archange Raphael

Maybe they meant to preserve that family-like bond we had formed.

Without beating about the bush, my beautiful girlfriend, Monique Rowley promptly answered, first, to my suggestion about accepting the wholesale grant.

She had never stopped worrying about the possibility of our parting from each other, with the uncertain prospect of seeing each other only during long school recesses.

However, that anonymous benefactor would allow us to stay *together* forever and ever.

“That’s so nice,” I thought.

Well, this new positive development was a long way from our previous predicaments: few months before, evildoers had thrown our neighborhood into in a state of great despair and confusion. I will do my best and take some time to tell you about our ordeal, on the next pages ahead.