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ADRIAN'S STORY

by

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In the vast lobby of the timeworn Hotel Dajti in Tirana, Albania a few years ago, a young man sat behind a little table piled high with brochures trying to sell Time Shares at a Bulgarian Black Sea resort. With the shares not exactly selling like hot *byreki* (a popular Albanian snack), he seemed to have lots of time of his own to share.

In occasional chats with me, he made it clear that his future wasn't focused on the Black Sea at all, but rather his dream was to go to London one day. When I told him I lived in London, he asked if I wouldn't mind if he contacted me if he ever got there. Hardly one to discourage youth and bright hopes, I gave him my business card..

Several months later I was duly startled , when this young man telephoned me from London's Euston railway station. "Came to England a week ago," he blurted in a voice trembling with nervousness. "I wanted to surprise my cousin in Stevenage," he said, "but she offered no welcome. 'You can't stay in my flat,' she told me. "Too small...no room""

After a week in a North London hotel, Adrian from Albania, his funds all but gone, was now frantic for a place to stay. I suggested he meet me in Kensington High Underground Station next day at 1 PM. I told him I knew of an inexpensive hostel near there. I added, "maybe you could take one of those jobs up in the country picking apples or working on a farm where they give you a place to stay." Adrian thanked me profusely.

Next day, when I emerged from the Underground in Kensington Adrian greeted me like the longest lost of brothers. As we lugged his hefty duffel bags and two ponderous suitcases along Kensington High Street to Holland Park, he thanked me no less than ten times.

At the dormitory-style hostel in Holland Park Adrian signed in, but the clerk, despite the evident mountain of luggage, insisted he pay for his bed in advance. Adrian rummaged through his pockets and came up far short of the 25 Pounds required. The impasse was embarrassing. I offered Adrian 70 Pounds from my wallet. He swore he would never *ever* forget this kindness and would pay me back as soon as possible.

Next morning I telephoned the hostel to see what Adrian had decided to do. The clerk told me he had left very early, luggage and all. And I never heard from him again.

Later that same year I decided to rent out my London house to tenants and I went to live in America. But two summers later I returned to London to see what my tenants were doing and how they were doing it. I stayed nearby in a Bed and Breakfast residence, owned by a kindly lady named Heather.

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Early one morning I called on my tenants, discussed the weather, enjoyed their cup of breakfast tea, and left, satisfied the house was in good order. As an afterthought, I gave them the phone number of the Bed and Breakfast place just in case they needed me.

Late that afternoon I was greeted at the B and B door by Heather who told me someone had phoned asking for me and had arrived shortly afterwards with a letter. The letter lay on my bed. I slit open the envelope and out dropped two bank notes: 50 Pounds and 20 Pounds. Tucked inside was a letter of deep apology for taking so long to pay me back. The letter, from Adrian, told of incredible hardships. Homeless for months, he had slept in parks and hidden in public buildings. Getting legal immigrant status and finding steady work had been an endless odyssey. If I still felt like speaking to him because he had been so long in repaying the loan, Adrian gave me a phone number where he worked as a night clerk. I called to thank him, not for the money, but for bolstering my faith in people.

I marveled at the amazing coincidence of Adrian finding me at a time when I actually was in London. But I marveled even more at the innate honesty which had survived the lonely desperation, the rootless wandering in an alien city.

Heather, the landlady, observing my reactions to the “mysterious” letter, was curious to know “what it was all about.” When I related the details, she reflected for a moment.

“How wonderful,” she announced, “I shall tell that story to everyone who owes me money !”

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