

Colours of the rainbow

„Not again," said Milton Abelha to himself after stepping into a mouldy puddle in front of his tin house situated in one of the most urbanized parts of Cazenga district. As he stepped outside the pool of piss and grey water, he looked at his reflection disrupted by circles on water's surface. The longer he stared, the clearer the picture was. He saw a chubby nineteen years old boy with a wide nose and watery-brown eyes seeming too mature and sad for someone of his age. He despised them, for they were too similar to his father's. He spent a year on a battlefield, at the age of twenty-five ended up with an amputated leg and five children to take care of, and never accomplished anything. It was Milton's life-long dream to be different and to live a life he was worthy of; just like Marc Nightingale did.

A few hours later he was standing at his 'spot' by a gas station in central Luanda, waiting for someone to let him clean his car. Pondering on his future and gazing at the road full of cars stuck in a traffic jam, he was thinking about his bright future; he perceived washing cars merely as a way of saving money for later. In reality, the reason why he was there was predetermined about eight years ago, when at that particular station he had for the first time experienced what was it like to smell gasoline.

He, along with his friends, used to soak rags in the liquid coloured as the rainbow and inhale its vapour. It gave them a great feeling of freedom, made their hearts race for their lives and eyes see realms out of this world. He remembered not knowing anything, being empty and experiencing fascinating hallucinations. He would have probably still been on it if it wasn't for his friend Pedro's death. One day he got shot in his head at the age of thirteen as a consequence of being numb in public. Even six years later Milton remembered his scalp falling onto cold concrete and his head cracking like a coconut's shell. That was a wakeup call for others and Milton promised himself that from that day on, he would stay clean and that one day he'll help other children in similar situations and would make sure they wouldn't face the same faith.

“How much?” Asked about a thirty years old Portuguese woman laxly.

"Two hundred kwanzas ma'am," said Milton, hoping she'd say yes and pay him the wage he'd asked for.

She gazed at his desperate look and with a contemptuous smile gave him one hundred and took off.

Every now and then he went to Unicef asking for any small chores he could do for them. He either washed employee's cars or delivered packages and messages for them. He saw it as a way of easing the organisation the process of helping Angolans in need and felt somehow useful. The vice-president of the organisation in Luanda was the previously mentioned doctor, Marc Nightingale. He had completely reformed the state Angolan Unicef was in prior to his arrival. First he made it more attractive for sponsors to invest into Unicef, he built a whole new residency for his organisation and surely did other very useful changes Milton

was just not able to remember at the moment. For that reasons he respected him and every time they met, Milton felt in his presence very humbly. On that day he felt the same.

When Marc arrived to work from his break, Milton was already there, waiting as a hungry dog for an old bone.

"Hello Mr Nightingale, do you have any task for me today?"

"Hello. I might have. We've just got a couple of sacks of corn for villagers near Cuca." said the tall brunette with black glasses.

"You could help me with the bags."

And so he did. Marc was driving and Milton was at the back of the car, keeping an eye on food he was so happy to give away to poor people. After three hours the truck stopped in a small agglomeration of very poor-looking houses. Milton figured that local people must have been hit by a sort of a thunder, judging from the state of trees which had either broken branches or were lying on the streets altogether.

While Mark entered a local market to buy something, Milton stayed on the street keeping an eye on the corn. After a couple of minutes a young girl wearing a worn-out dress approached Milton with a very inquisitive look. She seemed rather shy and with timid and slow steps she approached the stranger sitting at the back of the car, in between sacks of corn. Milton figured she must have been very hungry, judging not only by her figure, but mainly her eyes. They were black like onyx and seemed very kind and desperate. He did not hesitate and handed the girl a husk of corn. Even though she did not thank him, her wide grin, and her look of gratitude satisfied Milton's urge to help. So it was a fair deal for both of them. The young girl left and Milton was again sitting there all by himself. After some time the girl was back and brought about two dozens of her friends. All of the children circled the car and stared at Milton as if he was some sort of a God. He did not however feel that way. He was looking down on the children and felt needed. His view from the top of the car did change his on matters of charity. Till that point he's always been the one on the bottom, but at that moment he became somebody the children looked up to and he knew he'd moral responsibility to help them and to give them as much as possible. He knew he was doing the right thing and that knowledge made him feel safe. So he grabbed a couple of husks and gave them to a girl, seeming to be about twelve and had her baby brother wrapped in a blanket around her tight waist. She thanked him and meekly left. But then there were others, looking as hungry and desperate as their forerunners. He gladly gave them all of the corn from the first sack and would have probably given more, if only Mr Nightingale did not walk from the building and with a raging look shouted at his trainee.

"Milton! What on earth are you doing?"

"I was just giving some corn to the poor, just as you would have." replied Milton bewilderedly.

"But I would have never told you to do such a thing, and who do you think will pay for the third of the corn? How on earth can I get money for that bag?"

"Money?" asked Milton, who seemed to be baffled by the man's aggravating mood. "I thought you were a charity; charities don't receive, they give out."

"Of course we do, we always give out, but sometimes we sell things too."

"But I thought these sacks were a gift."

"Yes, they were a gift, but that does not mean we shouldn't make money on them."

"Oh, but I was only trying to help."

"Yes, I see that son, but sometimes helping does not mean doing the right thing. If you want to become a philanthropist, you have to think like a businessman. You cannot blindly give everything away and take nothing. You have to take for yourself as well. The money you get can then be your motivation to work even harder. That's not being a mercenary, but smart!"

"But shouldn't the fact that we're helping people in need be a sufficient motivation? Shouldn't you do it for the sake of the children? "

"Come on Milton, you can't be that naive, are you? "

Asked the wealthy man.

"Of course not sir. " Said the boy disappointedly.

"Good. So I will be expecting five thousand kwanzas by Tomorrow, OK?"

"Five?" Asked Milton with the air of one from whom all earthly cares were falling.

"Yes five, Milton. I was to earn the money and you threw it away. Now you owe me. And don't be so upset- it's for a good cause. Now get back up. We're leaving." Said Marc and with loud laughter slammed the door of his Toyota.

After that they went to a big house, where Marc successfully sold the other two bags of corn to some local businessman. While they were shaking hands, and telling each other jokes, Milton was trying to figure out how on earth he will find five thousand kwanzas.

When they got back, black sky with stars stretched above the whole of Luanda, and the chubby boy was walking on a street heading home. In his hand he held a dirty bottle of Coca Cola filled with some sort of liquid coloured as the rainbow.