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Caught In The Act

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As soon as sin was their choice, the cover of darkness was their preference.

Lysa TerKeurst, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*

Sam was an usher at a movie theater. His daily duties included walking down the aisles of the theater after a screening to collect debris left behind by the patrons. Armed with a grabber reach tool and a wastebasket, he would retrieve the discarded wrappers, empty containers, popcorn kernels, and other detritus, which sometimes included unexpected items such as socks and prophylactics. After a summer of work at the theater, Sam believed he had seen just about everything, enough to leave him disgusted with his fellow human beings. “We are such pigs” he bemoaned, “that we don’t deserve to survive as a species, and will take the planet down with us when we go under.”

He was going through those morbid thoughts one Sunday evening, during his 4 pm collection run between the end of the matinee and the first evening screening, when he detected – stuck between the armrests of two middle seats in the front row – a crumpled piece of paper that resisted his efforts to retrieve it. After a couple of tries, he gave up using the grabber and leaned over to pull the item out by hand. It was sticky to the touch; he picked it up gingerly and was getting ready to dump the sheet in the wastebasket when he noticed a crude message, extending across the paper’s surface: “RIGHT HERE SAME TIME TOMORROW.”

The sight of couples carousing in the darkness of a movie theater was no news to Sam. His duties as usher included escorting late comers to empty seats after the lights had been dimmed and the projection of a movie onto the screen was already in progress. The flashlight he brandished to identify empty seats sometimes illuminated the bodies of patrons engaged in acts of debauchery. Upon spotting such licentiousness, Sam would quickly move the beam of his flashlight away and pretend he had seen nothing; it was none of his business and pursuing the matter would only lead to unpleasantness.

This message, however, presented a new problem. Sam could not in good conscience ignore a notice that twenty-four hours hence a couple would probably sit on these same seats and engage in a carnal act whose performance in a public place was a misdemeanor punishable by law. What was his duty under the circumstances?

Sam’s initial reaction was to report the incident to his supervisor, the movie house manager, and let him decide on the appropriate response. The problem was that Homer, the manager, was a pusillanimous sort who shied away from controversy, and would resent Sam’s forcing him to deal with the situation. Sam was already on probation due to lateness and missing work a couple of times; it was likely that Homer would fire Sam on some pretext after this and Sam was dead broke and really needed his job. So, he better handle the matter himself.

But what to do? He could just not interfere and let things run their course. He was not a prude and would not be morally offended if whatever these people planned to do actually took place. On the other hand, there was a possibility that one of the participants was a minor, in which case his inaction would become aiding and abetting a serious crime. He needed at least to find out what was going on and act accordingly.

So, he would be on the lookout and, once he saw the culprits, he would decide on the next steps. Perhaps if they were a regular couple, he would ignore the situation or at most shine his light on the participants to alert them of being discovered and move on. What if it was a same-sex couple? Same thing.

What if the guilty parties ignored his warning and continued to carry on? This was unlikely, but were it to happen he would have to take action, lest he be deemed an accomplice and become subject to potential legal consequences. He would probably need to get the police involved.

It was with great trepidation that he came to work the following day and, about 3:45 PM, he stationed himself at the head of the ramp that moviegoers would have to traverse to reach their seats. It being a workday Monday, the theater was almost empty, and nobody suspicious seemed to be headed for the lowest rows.

Four o’clock came and the screen became illuminated as the trailers for upcoming attractions started being displayed. Sam let out a sign of relief – maybe nobody would show up and he would be spared the need to take any action. He pivoted, getting ready to return to the lobby, but took a final look at the nearly deserted room. There was a couple sitting in the middle of the front row, leaning towards each other across adjoining seats. In fact, there were FOUR people sitting there: the two on the left kept apart from each other; one of them had pulled out the extended footrest and was reclining in a supine position. The two on the right were the apparent carousers of the previous day.

Sam rushed down the ramp and shone his flashlight on the quartet. The ones on the left, a couple of grade school girls, blinked in surprise. Next to them were two older boys. One of them was in the process of handing a lit joint over to the other.

Sam detected the pot's acrid stench before he reached the guilty couple and adopted a censorious look. "Guys, put that joint out. There is no smoking in this theater. Plus, you are too young to be doing weed."

The boys squirmed in their seats and the one with the reefer stubbed it on the seat's armrest.

"I don't want to see you doing this again, or I will have to let your families know" warned Sam, adopting the most threatening voice he could muster.

He turned around and went back up the steps, his heart beating with relief inside his chest.

THE END



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