

Gem and I

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THE ROOM IS DARK AND COLD, and you can smell death in here. I can feel the walls closing in like I'm in a trap. If I don't get out soon I think I'm going to snap.

"What's your problem, Ike?" What nerve Gem has to ask me such a question.

"This is the second time I've been locked up because of something you did. I did nothing wrong, but just being affiliated with you always seems to get me in trouble."

"Oh, so you did nothing this time either, Ike?"

"No Gem, I didn't do anything. If you think I did something, please tell me. What did I do?"

"You're crazy, Ike. You just don't have a clue. Take a good look at me, Ike. What do you see? You really need to check yourself."

This time Gem has gone too far. I have exams next week and I am sitting in a jail cell. Now he's talking in riddles and making me think I am crazy. He may be drunk, but I'm not.

We were leaving a football game and we had alcohol in our cups, when suddenly Gem decided to get smart with a traffic cop. It also did not help that we are both less than a year away from our twenty-first birthday.

"Well Ike, old buddy, we might as well sit back and do our time."

"Well I don't know about you but I can't afford to do that; I've to get out of here, tonight." I can sense my own anger and frustration coming out of my voice.

I really don't know why I continue to hang out with Gem when I know trouble is always around the corner. After everything, I think I feel his pain. My friend Gemaine moved to my high school about six years ago and the first time we met I know he was a good guy, just troubled. In my sophomore year in high school, I had just joined the varsity football team. Three seniors tried to pull a little hazing stunt by ripping my underwear and Gem saved my butt, literally. All he did was verbally threaten the guys, but he gave them the impression that he was a little off, and they didn't want to deal with that.

Gem seems to have some pent up anger and sometimes he really loses his cool. However, I can't blame him for the way he acts at times. He is an only child and always had to take care of himself, and I know sometimes he feels all alone. His dad left home and it was just him and his mom, and soon, she developed a drinking problem. Of anyone I know, she is the one who really pushes his buttons and can break him down with words that stick like hot darts. Gem's mom is hardly ever at home, so we hang out there. I know he gets lonely, because I feel that way living with just my dad. It's tough living with a single parent that is never at home. My dad doesn't say much about Gem, but I can tell he doesn't like him. He acts like he isn't even in the room. I think Gem and I use each other for our own means, and to provide balance for each other's lives, like the yin against the yang.

During our senior year, I finally convinced him to stay away from the principal and get on the football field. He claimed to have never liked the game, saying it was too restricted, with too many rules. However, he seemed to be free and at ease out there, like the troubles of the world were put behind him. During the season, Gem went from being the crazy, quiet kid, to the popular guy with attitude.

We began hanging out with all types of people, not only at our school, but at neighboring schools as well. Gem started dragging me to all types of parties and I could see the change coming over him. We would go out and he would get drunk, saying things that he normally would not say. He even tried to start a fight with me one night that drew the attention of everyone in attendance. As I approached Gem one night, I was surprised to find him holding a joint.

"Gem, what the hell are you doing?"

"Don't worry about it, just go get me another beer."

“Naw, you’ve had enough. Let’s go home.”

“Ike, you know what your problem is? You let people dictate what you do and control you. You have to be in control of your own destiny and master of your own domain.”

“Come on man, you’re talking crazy. Let’s go home.”

Suddenly Gem jumped up and took a swing at me to get separation.

“Get off of me! Don’t put your hands on me! I’m a grown man, and I’ll go home when I feel like it.” Everything came to a screeching halt and all eyes were on us. Gem bolted out the door and I dragged out behind him. Up until graduation, things kind of went by monotonously. Gem kept up his late night escapades and I watched blindly as he continued his self-destructive path. I could not stop him from himself, I could only hope to contain him and keep him out of trouble.

Then there was prom night, a night where a lot of things changed for me. I went there with my date, Christina Richardson, a cheerleader who started noticing me after the football season. Gem didn’t bother to show up, but he did manage to call me to come to this party afterwards. When I arrived, I noticed that Christina’s ex-boy-friend, Will, was there. Will was a popular guy, but lacked character. He was the type of guy that would bump into you and keep walking like it never happened. He had bad blood for Gem and me, especially since I was dating Christina. I knew it would not be long before our paths would cross and he would come after me.

During the party Will kept his distance, but as we were getting ready to leave, I went to get Gem, and while I was gone, Will took his opportunity to speak to Christina. The next thing I heard was arguing and shouting. As I went to get her, two guys came up from behind me like they were trying to corner me.

“I see you don’t know how to mind your business.”

“So what, Will? You and your guys gonna jump on me?” I gave him a smile as if I were in control of the situation, but as I took inventory of the room, Gem wasn’t anywhere to be found.

“Well, I see your girlfriend left you here all alone.” At this point, I began to worry, so I grabbed Christina and headed out the door, with Will and his squad following.

Fear turned into relief, and relief turned into despair in one minute. As I

approached the car, I was happy to see Gem already outside and ready to go. Gem told me to get Christina into the car and out of the way. Then I thought, *where is he going?*

It turned out that Gem had a gun. Suddenly, shots were fired and everyone scattered like fire ants getting wet. So unfortunately, we both ended up in jail, but thankfully no one got hurt. I lost my part time job, my scholarship, and Christina, over that stunt.

The worst part was I did not have anything to do with the gun being there. After that, I didn't speak to Gem for a while, and I was just happy to be able to graduate and get into a smaller school.

For a couple of years, we have had our ups and downs. I have been able to deal with him enough to make it this far, but he always comes back. I just have that feeling that life just wouldn't be the same without Gem. He keeps me up at night, but he makes things interesting. However, I know this is no place for me and I don't need to be here. "Gem, this has got to stop. I can't go on like this. Going to jail, and now I have a police record, and for what? Nothing! I've got to get away from you. You're like a bad, addictive drug."

"Oh so you still don't think that you had anything to do with this? You didn't do anything, did you?"

"That's right. I didn't do anything."

"You're an idiot Ike, a crazy fool. You talk about getting away from me, but you are the one who calls for me to take you places you've never been."

"What the hell are you talking about now, because you're not making any sense."

"I'm talking about me and you; about me being you, Ike. Don't you understand? You can't get rid of me because you created me. You get tired of being lame and pushed around by people, that you call me out from the depths of your inner walls. You think mom has problems? Oh no, she has nothing on you, Ike. So face it. You are a nice, smart, talented, but crazy guy. Oh yeah, you are crazy. Crazy as can be and you are the only one who doesn't see it."

Gem's words burned my ears like hot matches. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I'm not crazy, just a simple guy from Jersey.

"Gem, that doesn't make any sense. What are you talking about?"

"Well, Ike, if you don't believe me, ask the doctor."

“Doctor? What doctor?” Suddenly two people stand before the cell. One of them is the security officer, and the other is—who is that?

“Hey son, Dr. Stevens would like to talk to you for a few minutes.”