April 12, 1861, 0100 hours, South Carolina. The US military installation at Fort Sumter stood still and upright just like any other day. Darkness engulfed the site, putting everyone in the Fort into a deep slumber of wondrous dreams. The dreams were “wondrous”; at least it was just tension between the two sides.

Civil war was going to erupt. At the fort, which was geographically isolated by the confederates, guns were quickly mounted and the young slave who had just escaped had no excuse for assisting in hurried attempts to reinforce the fort. For a moment, the fort acted as a source of shelter an comfort, but everyone knew it was a fertilized egg that would crack sooner or later -and there was no way to get out. It was an island-like fortress surrounded by water with confederate soldiers occupying the whole stretch of the shore nearby.

Just a few days passed, and the young escaped slave, now a shoemaker who made shoes for a living knew soldiers waiting to meet head to head with the confederates would wear those shoes. Sweat trickled down from his forehead as he took longer and longer to make the shoes – making shoes for those who had the tinniest chances of returning was no comfort to him. He had reason to fear this, because confederate shells were busy whistling, which was one of the most terrifying sounds a person in the fort would hear. It was like submerging in a World War 2 submarine while depth charges loomed in the water and drew closer until the hull was split and torn apart amidst the dreadful and deadly sound of metal being crunched, sealing the fate of those on board, but that was the American Civil War. In less than a week’s time, any efforts to return fire had proved to be fruitless and the egg was cracking just like a submarine being ripped apart by sheer force. All that took was time for the fort to fall as more shells poured in and the confederates were going to seize it like hot knife through butter.

Fire seized the fort as more shells rained, raging till night until the flames obscured the stars. Plans for evacuation were drawn up, but the confederates already had a foothold. Letting union ships filled with those ever-important supplies was too hazardous. Now, it seemed surrender was inevitable. But there was something else to fear besides surrender for the shoemaker. He had come face to face with the Confederate general who was only known as Wirz, and he was the one who had beaten not just him, but also his friend, Brad, when they were slaves until tears meant nothing, until the scars on their backs looked like permanent streaks of lighting stunning the subjects not only via physical means but also right through the heart of the individual. Wirz had been known to starve slaves brutally and “dispose” those who were weak. Nothing could be worse than being recaptured and sent back to slavery, and then “disposed” brutally.

The shoemaker still remembered that he had made for Brad a pair of shoes as a token of friendship. He would never forget the lines,

“If you want a friend then you will have to be his first, if you want the friendship to last then you must persevere for him to preserve it, and if you want him to be a true friend then you must show that you are his true friend, for it is inspiration that keeps one going when crisis tugs the line of friendship”.

Brad was the one who had seen him, knew him and been with him, so the young shoemaker could not refrain from giving him those pair of shoes.

Unfortunately, by noon that day the fort had been surrendered and confederate troops were pouring in. Brad was part of the union army that was stationed at the fort and did not participate actively in combat.

When Brad surrendered along with the Union Army, he raised he head until the sun nearly blinded him, and in respect and memory of his shoemaker friend he wore those shoes with his name carved in it.

The shoemaker escaped again from the fort and managed to reach within a seven-month period the Union Capital. While travelling on his escape route the shoemaker had come across headlines that made him unable to fall asleep, and one in particular struck him. “Murder of prisoners-of-war by Brute Confederate Officers and Generals” left him silent for one day. He was reminded that his friend Brad was still at the camp situated in the fort, and was worried that he was, or was to be “disposed of”.

The shoemaker started a shoemaking business when he reached the Union Capital. Many people bought the shoes that he crafted so meticulously and beautifully for his shoemaking skill was great. But whatever emotions he displayed to the customers, or to the world for that matter, were not what he felt in the inside. He was having insomnia, as he started remembering the daunting, dark days of slavery. What was all the more disturbing was that he had never heard from Brad again. He still recalled the times when he and Brad comforted each other after being tortured and abused by Wirz. The shoemaker realised that he had lost one of his best friends, and this thought sent a wave of sorrow crashing down upon him. This was all because of Wirz!

Wirz. Just that nefarious name itself was enough to send shivers down the shoemaker’s spine. Even after the war ended, even as he tried to put his traumatising memories behind him, he found that he could not, and would never be able to forget the W-name.

One day, the shoemaker was busy making his shoes, and one of his customers said to him that there was a war crimes trial going on. After hearing that this trial was for a certain confederate general, he hurried to the scene. There were many people there, most of which were urging for the execution of the general. When the shoemaker recognised that this general was Wirz, a mixture of feelings erupted within him. Anger. Sadness. Happiness. All of these jumbled up together and compounded many times. But yet the shoemaker still did not have the courage to look up at Wirz, and instinctively bowed his head and looked at Wirz’s feet.

The verdict came swiftly and mercilessly. Wirz was to be hanged. But the shoemaker noticed something. The shoes he was wearing seemed very familiar. As the crowd cheered and sneered, curiosity got the better of him, and he jostled past the jubilant crowd to sneak a closer look. He gasped when he finally saw the shoes clearly. What emotions overtook him, he did not know. Shock? Astonishment? Or was it just plain relief?

For the shoes had the name “BRAD” carved unto it.

“Good deeds beget good results, and bad deeds beget bad results.” When the confederate general shot Brad for refusing to pass him the meticulously and brilliantly carved shoes and also for shouting expletives right in his face, he was sealing his own fate in that reflection of friendship and justice. It was due to his hatred of the slaves that he got others to hate him and would in turn lose his shoes probably, but it was his life instead. Or maybe it was just hatred.

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