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About 730 words

Soul Searching

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I pulled over to the side of the road, sick to my stomach. Although sick to my stomach might not be the right phrase. I was sick to my soul, from my soul. I was sick somewhere deep inside that I didn't know existed.

Just then the car felt too confining, too restricting. The big-bodied old school car that I begged my uncle to help me pay for, was too tight around me now. I wasn't bragging about the bucket seats or the real steel frame. Now I needed to get out, I needed to get away. I opened the door and nearly fell into the misty night. I must have looked like a mental patient, stumbling out of my car in the dead of night. At best someone might think I needed help, at worst they might have thought I was a vagrant. Hell, someone might call the police if they see me. Not the best time to be a black man and have the police called on you in the dead of night. Great, just great. First pain was part of the equation, now there was fear too, a perfect storm of lunacy. As rain pelted me over the head, I wondered how I could explain this.

I hate waking up at dumb 0'clock in the morning, but the bills have to be paid. When I should be partying and stumbling home with a friend, I'm brushing my teeth and putting on a suit and tie. They say the corporate ladder is hard to climb. That's not true, it's just hard to wake up to. But I digress. So, driving in my lovely, now small as a box and suffocating car, I turned the corner. Another car turned from the opposite direction and joined me. They must have been in a hurry because their tires squealed and they sped in front of me. There was enough rain on the ground to send some spattering on my windshield when the car flew past. My windshield wiper knocked the water aside and I noticed a small speck up the road. It was a skunk.

My first thought was, I would be able to smell that skunk for the rest of the day. Great, rain, early morning, tight suit, long day and the smell of skunk dancing through my nose. I knew it was a perfect storm. I watched the skunk skitter across the street and I remembered the car that passed me. They had somewhere to be. They wouldn't care about the smell of skunk on their car. They cared about far less than a simple smell.

The car slapped the skunk across the face. All they had to do was veer a little to their right and they would have missed him completely. But they didn't. They didn't even slow down. The skunk spun and landed on his back. I never heard such a wail of agony as a slowed my car. The skunk screamed as he sprayed the last of his defensive mechanism and the other car sped into the night.

I didn't know what to do as I watched the skunk die in front of me. My car was in the middle of the road, next to a skunk in the second lane. I took off my sports coat, wrapped the skunk in it and drove to a nearby park. I couldn't just leave him there to die alone. What about the skunk friends that he left to go do his skunk business? How would they know? Who would

mourn him? I buried him in a shallow grave in the park on the hill. He died among trees, among the grass, near a friend.

Now I sat on the sidewalk a few blocks away, heaving for air. The car was too small, too tight. Not because of the smell of skunk in my clothes, but because it closed me off from the rest of the world. What about my friends? What if something happened to me? Who would know? Who would mourn me? As the tear-filled gleam in the skunk's eyes flashed across my mind again, I reached in my pocket and pulled out my cell phone. I wasn't going into work today. I had a life to live, for me and the skunk.