

Roy's Rum Shop

By : **Juggernaut**

Roy inherited the rum shop from his dead uncle. His uncle has no family; he lived alone in the back of his rum shop. Just before he died, Roy was informed of a distant uncle living on eastern side of the island. Roy, then in late twenties has no experience of running a business or for that matter of experience in doing anything except liming. He arrived at Cummuto, a small sleepy village on Eastern side of the island. May be a twenty miles drive easterly from Cummuto, the road would end up in a freshwater swamp known for shell fish.

Always wearing sleeveless white undershirt and flimsy boxer shorts, Roy walked barefooted inside and outside the shop. His skimpy clothes exposed his pale skin and thin limbs. He was never in a hurry. He spoke and moved slowly, everything he did was in slow motion.



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ROY'S RUM SHOP

Subba Rao

A very short drive separates the rural and urban areas on the island but again the island is small. A dirt road quickly turns into a four-lane highway, all of a sudden high rise apartments, office buildings, and shopping malls would appear just like that. To get away from campus life, on weekends Juggernaut visited his friend Esau living in the outback. Surrounded by cocoa and orange groves, Esau lived in their ancestral home with extended family. The red dirt road in front of the house twists and turns like a flexible hose. On one corner of the big bend was Roy's rum shop cum grocery. Here one can get staples for daily living and also aspirin and laxatives.

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The rum shop was a rectangle shape wooden structure with galvanized metal roof painted green to match the surrounding bush. The long front porch was storage as well as space for people to lime (hanging out). Liming is a way of passing time for people on the island rich in oil reserves. When other countries spent millions for making coal tar to use on road surface, on this island, coal tar oozes out from the ground. And yet the rural roads badly need resurfacing.

Juggernaut's foreign accent attracted more attention at the rum shop. Roy in particular treated Juggernaut as a special guest offering free drinks all the time. Juggernaut favorite spot in the bar was on top of a stack of flour bags at the corner. Sitting few feet above ground, he used to sip beer or rum or whatever drinks Roy offered for free. Roy an habitual drinker himself was always holding a drink in his hand while serving customers.

Esau, Daddy and Doc were regular visitors to the rum shop but were also buddies to Roy. Daddy and Doc were only nicknames, Daddy worked in public works department and Doc drove a cab. Esau worked on the University campus as a technician. On weekend, Juggernaut joined the gang at Roy's rumshop. After closing the shop, Roy like to hang out with Esau, Daddy, Doc and Juggernaut when he was visiting Cummuto.

“We go for hunting tonight,” said Roy.

“We are going to forest to hunt?” excited Juggernaut.

“No, boy, we can hunt for Agouti or Opossum whichever comes first right in our backyard.”

Bare footed, Roy started walking in his boxer shorts with an old gun that was rusty and ancient. Juggernaut followed him into the bushes. After walking for half hour, “boy, I shot an Agouti,” shouted Roy holding a small animal in his hand.

“That's look a big rat,” Juggernaut stood far away from the animal.

“No boy, it is Agouti, it taste good good when curried,” Roy placed the dead animal in a plastic bag and started walking back home. Juggernaut followed him.

Placing the dead animal on a raised wooden platform like structure outside the kitchen to clean it up Roy said

“you go call Esau, Doc and Daddy to come for the cook up.”

“How about Lucksy?”

“Why you want her for?” Roy looked puzzled.

“I don't know she always want to lime with us.”

“You mean with you,” Roy smiled.

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â With everybody including me.â Juggernaut was defensive.

â OK, go call her too,â Roy started cleaning the Agouti.

Esau, Daddy, Doc and Lucksy live not too far from Roy's rum shop. Every time Juggernaut visits rum shop, Lucksy make special attempt to visit the shop just to meet Juggernaut. She was a chubby, fair-skin Indian woman in late twenties, worked as a clerk in local government office.

With a small knife, Roy ripped opened the underbelly and threw out the innards, and skinned the animal in few minutes.â Esau don't want curry he wants stew with tomatoes, scallion and soy sauce,â said Juggernaut arranging the dinner plates on a wooden table cluttered with nick knacks.

â Why?â

â He said you put too much hot pepper in the curry that makes him shit like a hound.â

â OK, I will make a stew for him and curry for all of us then,â Roy started cooking in two separate pots. Lucksy was first to arrive and all excited to see Juggernaut.

â What kind of a name Lucksy, that doesn't sound Indian?â Juggernaut tried to start a conversation.

â Well, my daddy calls me Lucksy because he thinks I brought good luck to his taxi business just after I born,â Lucksy sounded proud.

â I love people from India.â

â Why?â

â My forefathers came from India and I love Indian movies and you came from India too, that's why,â Locksie was not shy.

Roy started playing old Indian melodies on the record player.

â You dance with me,â Lucksy started dancing Indian style.

â I don't know how to dance Indian,â Juggernaut was shy.

â You just follow me,â Lucksy started waving her hands in the air as if she is changing light bulbs.

â I know how to jump for calypso, rock back and forth for reggae and slow dance for Carpenters and Abba music,â said juggernaut and started slow dancing with Lucksy holding her closely.

â This is dance music boy you don't dance holding her like that,â shouted Esau laughing loudly.

â How come you are from India and you don't know how to dance Indian?â said Lucksy.

â I never did Indian dancing.â

â Just look at me, raise one hand and twist your arm as if you are replacing a light bulb and place your other hand on the hip, then twist your hips sideways, that's it,â Lucksy started dancing Indian style for a song by Asha Bonsle, a noted female singer known for dance music.

â Are you going stay here after your done your studies?â Lucksy was curious.

â No.â

â Your are going back home?â

â No.â

â Students, professors, Cricket players and business men from other countries come here for a short visit and stay put forever here you know,â â This country is sweet sweet, where else you can get gas this cheap?â

â I don't have a car.â

â Well, you will have once you get a job.â

â I don't know.â

â What you don't like here?â Lucksy was persistent.

â I love this place but I don't want to live here.â

â Where you are planning to go then?â

â I don't know, anywhere I get a job outside this island.â

â So you don't like us then.â

â I stayed long enough here, I have to go.â

â You kind of a gypsy.â

â You can say that.â

Juggernaut got busy in finishing thesis work, for several weeks he did not visit Cummuto. Before he left the island to take up a job in a distant island, he visited Cummuto to say good bye to his friends at Roy's rum

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shop. He was disappointed not see Lucksy around. Roy looked pale and sickly. After few years, Juggernaut revisited the small island on a job related trip. Roy shop was closed for good, Roy died from the complication of liver disease. Doc, the taxi driver died in an accident on a narrow winding road along the eastern coast. Daddy migrated to the United States and started a new life operating a Roti shop in Brooklyn, New York. Esau continued his job on the University Campus. "What happened to Lucksy?" asked Juggernaut. "She moved to the City, never saw her again," said Esau.

"I wish I learned Indian dancing from Lucksy," a thought comes to Juggernaut whenever he replaces a light bulb.

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