

The Ex-Footballer

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5 I eventually managed to persuade my parents to buy me a new football shirt for the school matches. My old shirt had worn out and made me depressed every time I put it on. But now I had a brand new shirt! I was so excited. The next school match wasn't until next week though! How could I wait that long? I couldn't, so I decided to wear it today for the first time during a kick about in our street...I wish I hadn't! As soon as we had been playing for ten minutes, the shirt sleeve ripped when I made a turn.

I didn't pay much attention to it at first. 'I'll sew it back together after the match', I thought. But then I noticed that it wasn't just the stitch that had come out, the whole sleeve was torn.

10 Only a professional can mend it now. I couldn't tell my mum and dad that my new football shirt was ruined. I needed a tailor. As I walked home, feeling totally at a loss what to do, I was startled to suddenly come across a shop sign...

"All kinds of repairs and services!"

15 I went inside immediately. However, I hadn't seen the step in front of the door and I tripped into the shop hitting a wooden sculpture to the left of the entrance...When I crashed into it, it broke! I looked around the shop feeling embarrassed and blushing bright red.

A man with white bushy hair said calmly, "Welcome!"

"I'm sorry... I broke your sculpture."

"You've broken it in just the right place. This is a repair shop... Repairs are my job!"

20 I looked around the shop...I saw an oud, an iron, broken toys and a broken chair.

"I guess this is the wrong place. What I really need is a tailor's", I said, putting my fingers through the tear in the shirt.

"This tear needs repairing." I said.

25 "Don't worry. This is just the right place, son. Since I opened this shop, I have repaired many things, but never a football shirt. "

"What do you mean? Is this the first time you're going to repair a football shirt?! I hope you aren't going to make it worse... It's new. My parents only bought it yesterday."

"It's OK...I've been waiting a long, long time to repair a football shirt."

"Are you serious? "

30 I held the shirt tight so he couldn't take it from me.

I thought to myself, "My luck isn't in today! I just wish I could just run out of this shop and dive into the first tailor's I can find!"

But...the man didn't let me move. He took the shirt from me, pulling it out of my hand. He sat down on the sofa, my shirt in his hands.

35 "Are you a striker?" he asked.

Before I could reply, "Yes, how did you know?" he asked, "Are you a Fenerbahçe fan?"

Of course, my answer was 'yes' to this as well...

"I play for both the street and the school team."

40 "You have many years ahead of you. We may see you play for a professional team one day."

"Impossible! My dad doesn't see football as a profession. He thinks I should be an engineer, a doctor or an economist."

45 "Not at all...People who choose a career they really desire, become successful and happy."

"Yes, yes you're right! I know what I want to be! I'm not shy when I play football. I have so much confidence...I feel like a lion with a golden mane running towards the goal...I want to play just like Rıdvan does! Even my father likes him!"

50 The man was repairing the tear with thread. He showed me the patch that he was sewing onto the tear.

"Great! The tear hardly shows now. Sorry for doubting you. I was sure you wouldn't be able to repair it."

55 I felt so relieved. He smiled at me with his blue eyes...I noticed other objects waiting to be repaired with small notes attached to them. There was a black and white photo next to the sewing machine. It was a photo of a football team. I couldn't make out which team it was or any of the players from where I was sitting.

I asked him if he liked football. He nodded his head with passion.

"Why didn't you become a football player then?" I asked.

He shook with laughter. He didn't say anything else.

60 He put my repaired shirt in a bag and patted me on the shoulder as I started to leave.

"Follow your dreams," he said.

I had heard that saying a lot from my uncles and aunts... They too often told me to live my dreams.

I wanted to reply "That's easy to say,"...but I held back.

65 Just then he reached under the table and pressed a button. The commentator's voice was familiar. He used to be popular in the old days. He was commentating on a match from years ago.

“The national team is playing South Korea, we’re into the final minute and the score is 6-0...One minute to go...Orhan has the ball at his feet...He’s attacking the Korean defence...andORHAN FINDS THE NET!!!! 7-0 ... And that’s the last action! The referee blows the final whistle...ORHAN, ORHAN, ORHAN!!”

The fans were delirious.

He patted me on the back and asked, “Do you understand now?”

I left the shop. A soft breeze played on my face.

What should I make of that?

Who was that man?

Could he really be Orhan, the ex-footballer? My dad has black and white films of those old football matches. He watches them often to cheer himself up. You can often hear the name “Orhan” mentioned in those films.

If I told my dad all about this he would probably just say, “You must have dreamed it son.”