Satoshi's Ghost

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About this Piece

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CHAPTER ONE

Satoshi's Ghost

She is, like so many others in Cape Town, homeless.

She is, like so many others, alone.

She is, like many others, afraid.

But something has drawn her, this night, to a new part of town. Victoria Junction. The installation of a new type of ATM will surely bring a new crowd from which to beg some Rand or food. Whilst



thousands flock to the new shelter for a hundred people like her, she heads towards the ocean instead as the pink sun darkens a pinker sky and the hope of a roof for the night fades.

There are more like her now, everywhere you look. Lines form outside the grocery stores, because even those with money don't have enough, and must put some items back once they reach the checkout. How could you decide between bread and apples when you've a family to feed?

As the colours of the sky retract and her feet become heavier, hope begins to leak out and she deflates, shoulders sinking and head dropping, but she marches on nonetheless, eager to see something new and exciting in a city that has long been decaying – though it is not without beauty, like anywhere with a human pulse. She has not yet given up.

There is but one man stood by this new machine, peering down into its little screen for he is tall, and slim. Like her. From a street full of despair to one full of emptiness, she stops and looks at the man, as his black hair sweeps across his eyes whilst he tinkers.

The sun falters and fails, and shadows fall across the woman and the man, rendering the world moments ago full of colour black and white. Save for one colour.

The bright orange of the box-like machine emits a glow that draws them both, and the woman moves closer. The hint of a smile lifts the corner of his mouth as he notes her approach, even with his back turned as it is. His eyes reflect the logo on the box and the screen. A stylized B unlike any she's ever seen before. It looks like it's from the future.

"You're looking at the future," he calls out as if reading her mind, at last standing and turning to her and moving out of the way so she can see the machine.

"If it's the future, how come nobody is here to see it," she asks him.

He thinks about this for a moment before replying.

"You're here." He says.

"That's true," she concedes. "What does this thing do?"

"It helps you buy, sell or send Bitcoin." He replies, gesturing towards the B as if she should recognise it. "You don't know it?" he asks, disheartened, and she sees that he is young. Younger than her, but a man all the same.

"No, I'm sorry. Is it money?"

"It is money yes, but it is a lot more than that too… can I show you?" he asks.

With nothing to do and no one for company besides the fierce hunger of her belly, she agrees to be shown the future of finance and more.

As the man shows her more and more, he becomes more animated and colourful, standing taller and radiating a warmth and kindness not unlike South Africa's early afternoons. Before long, he has handed her a small device.

"This is a hardware wallet. You can plug it into a phone or a computer and send Bitcoin you've bought from a machine like this to it so that it belongs to you. You wouldn't leave your money in someone else's wallet, would you?" he asks with a smile, before understanding dawns and dulls his enthusiasm.

"I don't have Bitcoin, or money to buy it with. Or a phone, or a computer." She says, and though she is not proud, she adds "I did once. Before."

"I understand," he says, reaching into the inner pockets of the smart jacket he wears, and as he does so she takes a moment to glance over him. Dark circles under his eyes and lines around his mouth suggest he might be older and more stressed than she first thought, but his clothes are new and look expensive. He is slim but not skinny, and smiles with his whole face. She smiles back.

He passes her a phone. It's already on and glowing.

"See here?" he says, pointing at the words BITCOIN WALLET written on the screen and displaying a long string of letters and numbers, next to which is one of those new fancy square box codes that have been everywhere since people started avoiding each other and she lost everything.

"I'm sending you some of my Bitcoins, and you'll be able to sell some of them for cash each day at this Bitcoin ATM. It has an upper limit of $750 USD a day." he tells her.

"What is a Bitcoin worth?" she asks.

"What's a future worth to you?" he counters.

"What is your name, kind sir?" she asks.

"Call me Satoshi," he says, reaching out a hand for her to shake. She takes it and feels their connection even as her wallet confirms the 1000 Bitcoin transaction he sent.

She looks down at the screen with wide, wild eyes that flood with tears. Tears of relief, but also tears of charity, and a generosity of spirit.

When she looks up, Satoshi is gone.

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The other vagrants are not helpful. They don't know Satoshi. They don't know Bitcoin.

But she, new to vagrancy, remembers her life as a project manager and has spent all night formulating a plan. She must attempt to withdraw cash from the orange box before the battery on her new phone runs out.

On the walk back towards the ocean, back sore from having spent the night roughing it in box house sharing pap with veterans who eyed her with pity, she checks the phone she has been hiding since Satoshi disappeared. It has but one app on its home screen, called Wallet, and she opens it, noting the battery status indicator ticking down a percentage point as she does. The meter is red.

Numbers and the colour green meet her eyes as she walks and the app springs open. Arrows and charts point skywards, and despite herself she looks up, moon and stars visible still in the clear, breezy November morning.

The value of her 1000 Bitcoin has increased by 50%. She has, by South African or American or by any standard, become a multimillionaire. The weight of the past months lifts from her shoulders and she breathes deep, racing to the orange box Satoshi has called the future, ever mindful of the ticking clock that is her phone's battery.

The walk back to Victoria Junction is a straight one for her, and as she sees the other vagrants with their signs by the Robot (that's a traffic light), some without shoes and others without hope, she resolves to create change not just for herself.

When she reaches the Bitcoin cash point, there are no people once again. Good, she thinks, nobody needs to watch this and steal from me. Whilst she had not – yet – turned to crime, others in city were embracing it.

Mercifully, her phone still has 4% battery as she reaches the box and declares that she would like to "SELL $BTC", and she breathes a prayer of thanks. The machine asks her how much she would like to sell in $BTC or in $USD value and she selects $USD, fingers hungrily typing a one and four zeroes.

A low battery warning flashes up on her phone as the Bitcoin ATM errors and says unable to complete transaction. Yes, there was a daily limit, and she remembers now that it was $750 as she types in that number instead, and her phone alerts her that 2% battery remains.

SEND BTC TO THIS ADDRESS the machine instructs her, and she thinks there is no way she can enter all those numbers and letters in time.

SCAN QR CODE? The machine helpfully asks, and she forgives the humble QR code for being a tool of segregation recently as she scans it with her phone and confirms the address matches the one on the screen.

ACCEPT MINER FEE? Her phone is asking the questions now, as the battery ticks down to 1%. She accepts the $1.5 fee nervously, stepping from side to side as TRANSACTION BROADCASTING… appears on the screen.

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Her phone's screen goes blank as the battery fails and she cries out, sinking to her knees but never taking her eyes off the screen

of the ATM. It is still showing the address of the wallet. She has no idea whether the transaction has been broadcast on the blockchain or not. Whether its hash has been added to a block, ready to be mined. Will it be stuck in the mempool? How long will she have to wait? What if in six hours' time her money prints out, and someone else gets it.

In the time that her moments of questioning and despair have passed, a new message appears on the Bitcoin ATM's screen. TRANSACTION CONFIRMED. The two words are now her favourite, and she hopes to see them much more than "help me."

Her money begins printing out, and it is the most she has seen in what feels like forever in her heart only; her brain knows that months ago she was from one of the areas where the vagrants are moved on. She'd never wondered where they went before, but knows now, regardless.

With enough money in her hands for a month's rent, she must now hide it in her tattered clothes as she heads to the nearest shops.

* * *

Armed with enough Braaipap to feed a small army, she heads to an area on the beach where she first went after being evicted, and the vagrants there were kind enough to feed her some of the maize porridge she would now be delivering to many of them.

Along the way she stops and purchases as many pairs of shoes as she can carry, quickly handing them all out, getting more and repeating the process until she has spent some hours doing this,

and the sun is falling slowly as she sees the first little fires along the shoreline.

Moments later, someone asks her where her shoes are. She replies not to worry, that she'll get some later for the day and the night are still young. The vagrants are grateful for her food, but not her company. They know that she is no longer one of them, and she leaves.

She purchases some shoes for herself along with a couple of power banks for her phone, before heading to one of the few remaining internet cafés in Cape Town. To her delight, the first one she finds has the same stylised B on the window that the ATM had, and there are people inside.

She heads in, plugging her phone in to a computer to charge via USB rather than start using the power banks, paying for several hours of internet time and leaving a tip before opening up an internet browser and typing in the name Satoshi.

Quickly learning that Satoshi is a very popular male name in Japan, and that it means Intelligent History, she also sees that it refers to the name of a popular anime and video game character. She will have to be more specific.

She searches for "Satoshi Bitcoin".

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It's unbelievable, what she reads.

That someone could create something so powerful, and just disappear. That he could be here, and be kind, and be… real.

"I met him," she says out loud.

"I met him, and he helped me, and I fell in love with him," she continues.

"No way bru," a teenager says to his gathered friends whilst looking over at her. "The smelly lady be a DEGEN!"

Quickly they descend upon her, looking at the screen. There are four of them, one girl. She doesn't appreciate the invasion of privacy, but is not concerned.

"Satoshi is a LEGEND bruv!" one of them declares, finger-gunning the air whilst the girl looks at the woman with wide eyes.

"Thanks to Satoshi, we've all got something when we had nothing. We've been coming here to roll Bitcoin faucets for years and we pay for everything in $BTC." She says.

"I met him," the woman says again.

"Can't have done, he's probably in Japan right?" one of them says.

"No way he'd ever be here in Cape Town."

"He's probably dead."

"Yeah, there's no way he didn't get killed."

"I met him," she says once more. "And I'd like to meet him again."

"If I were you," the girl starts, "I'd buy a dress, and have a haircut…and take a shower. You know, just in case."

And so, the woman does.

* * *

The next day, as the woman walks towards the spot she has visited twice now, she remembers a saying about third tries, and

crosses her fingers, offering a prayer to a God she hopes is listening. She is not used to heels, or to her hair feeling soft and clean, or to the hope that warms her body from within as the sun warms it without.

Even after staying in a great hotel, she had cash left over, and gives to every person she passes, rich or poor, because everyone must eat.

She marvels at the way the busy streets become less crowded as she approaches the now familiar spot, and how even the animals seem to quieten and disappear, and all becomes still.

Except for the beating of the two hearts at the Bitcoin ATM.

"Will you let me take you to dinner, Satoshi?" She asks, without fear.

"I will," he replies.

"What is your real name?" she asks.

"Make me a promise, if I answer this question, you'll ask no more, because at dinner it'll be me asking you the questions. But it's Satoshi," he says,

"Satoshi Nakamoto."

Source

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