

Prologue

I was still alive when I opened my eyes. The material beneath me was soft cloth but I could only remember dying in a different place. As I faintly sat up and scoped with a blurred vision, I was in a large room with the walls illuminated by the exterior light of aurora. The room was filled with bunk beds, perhaps thirty of them of which none occupied a user. Besides the scene itself, the complete silence would have been very disturbing for any normal person. If I had died, would this be heaven or hell?

At this moment, the wooden stairs creaked. The sound was approaching steadily but the most unsettling part was its rhythm. The synchronization of the steps sounded heavy and slow. It was the sound of death and I recognize the emissary. It didn't matter. I was too tormented, too heartbroken, to feel and taste the blood of fear. The doorknob turned and the light of aurora began to shimmer on the sickle. The beauty of the glow mesmerized me. As I sat face to face to the encroaching steps, it was not fear but guilt that filled me. I understood the precociousness of this gathering, its advancement was simply a punitive measure for the sins I have committed. What would I have done differently if only I had another chance? It was the face of Carrie that floated into my mind. I would tell her that I loved her since the first time I saw her. The sickle dropped and my vision blurred like the falling of a video camera.

When my father came back, like I said, "I hated him." But slowly, I started to recall his features from a distant recollection. Tears covered the face of my grandmother while my father smiled and reassured us a quick return. I always thought that memory was only a dream yet the same man stood in front of me. The innocent rancor inside me subsided though I still never forgave him. I remember believing for the longest time that the man wasn't really my father. That somehow, some other man with the same face had come back to abduct me and take me away from my familiar home.

My life changed completely when he came back. Though I had not known why, his apparent disappointment overwhelmed me. Before, I ran with a street gang and fought with other kids in school. In Taiwan, teachers used to beat students in front of other students. I still remember how every afternoon before we leave; all the worst kids would be bamboozed in front of the whole school. Off course, I was a regular guest. I didn't care because I had no shame. It is amazing how much change time could make looking at my scars today. The worst beating was always with my grandfather. Once, after finding out missing money from his savings, he came to the school during recess and started beating me right there. It took five teachers to separate us. Ironically after being saved by the teachers, they beat me in front the entire school for disturbing peace that same afternoon.

But with the arrival of my father, everything changed. I no longer could go out as I pleased nor even be near the gang. He spent all his time forcing me to study. He wanted me to grow up to be something, and someone.

It was the worst and the best time of my life. The difficulty of the sudden change shocked me. Instead of being out in the streets, I learned mathematics, science, literature and a whole new world outside of what I ever fathomed. At first I didn't understand the purpose of learning. I argued with my father often on "Why care about how silk worms make silk?" or "Why should I learn English? They should all speak Chinese." I realized fortunately that I did care. I have always wondered why the sky is blue. How airplane worked? And where babies came from? Well, my father didn't answer that question too readily hoping to push the responsibility to my mother. The truth is that the ignorance of an individual is not measured by the questions they ask, but the question they don't ask. I simply stopped asking because no body cared enough to answer. And for once, somebody did care and that changed my life forever. For once, somebody took me to a park to throw Frisbees around. He took me out fishing in the ocean. He taught me how to swim. It was my era of reconnaissance. The teachers stopped beating me and I started gaining respect from my peers. The social groups that surrounded me changed and I became a different person.

Although I spent the majority of my childhood beaten, surprisingly I never considered myself abused. Perhaps the prevalence of domestic violence integrated itself so deeply into our culture that I actually considered myself lucky. I always

knew that my corporal punishment based solely on what I did wrong, but some of my friends were less fortunate. My best friend in Taiwan lived next door to me. His father would show up late at night drunk and the screaming would start. My bedroom window was connected to his. I could have climbed into his window from mine if I didn't worry about the fall. Due to this proximity, I saw with my eyes closed the supplication of her mother and the impact of each whip. Mrs. Chen often had bruises on her face the next day. She claimed that she was not careful and fell but everybody in the neighborhood understood the forbidden truth. Other women nodded in sympathizing agreement.

As you might imagine, Taiwanese people have tons of stories about harsh childhoods. My father often told me stories about his childhood before I was born. My grandparents had six children and my father was the oldest son. Being the eldest, the responsibility of caring for his sibling mounted largely on his shoulders. Everyday after school, he used to walk miles to the forest to bring fire wood home, he would then split them to prepare to dinner. This one time his little league baseball team won the national and the coach ordered him to stay after school for practice. Being the most important player, he stayed. When he got home the family didn't have any firewood for cooking and he was tight up and beaten. He skipped the practice the next day and my grandparents forgave him. The coach smacked him the day after that in front of the whole team. His team lost to America that year without him and he quit school soon after. My father was always a bright student in school but my grandparents forced him to quit after middle school to become an apprentice for cooking. Being an apprentice during

that time period further worsened his conditions and the beaten that he received was outside of even what I could imagine.

Having such a childhood probably explains many of his impulse actions later. He once promised himself that he would never repeat what his parents did but his profound scars never left him. He did beat my mother and he did beat my sister and me. My mother often told me stories about how bad it was when they just arrived to America. She was living in a foreign land where she didn't speak the language. She had no body to go to and no where to go after a beating. She had lost some of her hearing because he slapped her so hard once. My mother stayed because she had no choice and she kept hoping that things would get better. I will never forget some of the nights when I woke up hearing them screaming, then my father would start hitting her. My sister and I shared the same room and neither one of us dared to move because we were so scared. I was fifteen when I witnessed it the first time myself. My father and I had gotten into a major fight and he came after me to hit me. To protect me, my mother stepped in between us and my father decided to hit her instead. I can still see her falling to the ground when I close my eyes today. My heart sank when she hit the floor; I promised myself that I will never hit a woman.

In a way, the incident had saved me because my own aggressive tendencies were also manifesting itself at a very young age. At such a mental stage I victimized the only female I had power over, my younger sister. I forced her to play the punch game all the time. Basically, she would hit me as hard as possible, and I would do the same to her. Being a female and two years younger, she always lost the game. After she lost, I

would play the doctor's game to make her feel better by hitting her even harder. It sounds sick, but it made me feel powerful. I did it simply because I could. This is not even the most violent thing I have done. But what can I do? It was the only way I knew how. I didn't want to be like my best friend's father but I understood his imbued impulse. That night, it was my own mother's pain that finally saved me once and for all. I never want my children to repeat my life.

Chapter 2 El Camino

I woke up screaming in a room full of faces. It took five people to hold me down but my madness was not quelled. Where was I? Was this a dream? Why was I still alive? Finally I relaxed my muscles, and the grimaces faded. It had let me go. My consciousness sluggishly returned but I still could not understand the chatting that surrounded me. It was French. I laid there waiting for a single coherent sentence and I heard, “¿De dónde eres?” I replied in Spanish that I came from America and that caused a commotion in the room. My features were obviously Asian. I had not seen a single Asian on this pilgrimage and my presence in the room was evidently a rare occasion. The girl had black curly hair that seemed as smooth as silk. Her tanned skin made me guess that she grew up in the south, maybe Granada. Her eyes shined brightly when she smiled at me. I felt as if I was in the presence of an angel. The girl continued in Spanish, “You are at the albergue of Melide we found you lying face down on the trail.” Among the crowded mass that surrounded me, I only noticed one man standing alone. He had long brown hair down to his shoulders and his eyes somehow conveyed anguish, my anguish that he took on willingly. Behind the rest of the incredulous expressions, I noticed the same room with the same bunk beds, perhaps thirty of them. The aurora lighting had switched but to a single candle. I had returned to the same room in my nightmare but somehow something differed, less menacing. I looked at the scars and the blood all over me. I was sure that my prolonged reticence provided them the confirmation of my insanity. “Gracias por salvarme” I reply snapping back to

reality. With a very poor French accent, a man asked me in English if I felt hungry. They were eager to hear my adventures and dinner was probably the best bribe on this pilgrimage. My memory did not recall the last meal; it must have been long ago.

The dinner was relatively quiet; their inquisitive questions were somehow deferred due to politeness. The predicament was that neither I spoke French nor did they speak much English. “My name is Chieh.” In Spanish, I spoke first after tasting their French wine.

“¿Chey, like what they say in Argentina?” in French accented Spanish, asked a random voice and the whole room laughed.

“Yes, like what they say in Argentina.” I repeated after him calmly and the room fell back into a solemn stillness.

The Spanish girl quickly broke the uncomfortable situation “¿This pilgrimage is a walk to the self; what motivated you to uptake this journey?”

I winced from flashbacks of that night. The sky cried with interminable dark rain, and we were both completely soaked. We had kissed passionately for hours. It was in words of Shakespeare that “Parting is such a sweet sorrow.” She parted and told me she would love me till the day she dies. I turned around and walked away. My flight for Spain was tomorrow and she promised to marry another man. That was the last time I saw her. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I replayed the entire event. The inquisitive ambience immediately died as sympathy took over and they decided not to pursue.

I actually felt guilty for being such a mad man in front of the kind hearts that saved my life. Trying to mend the situation, I blurred out “I needed the time to think.”

“¿So where in America did you come from?” wisely, the Spanish girl quickly changed the subject.

“¿Are you from New York?” another voice asked.

“No, I’m from New Hampshire.” The crowd fell into a pensive mood to figure out if New Hampshire was even a state of America. Not willing to look ignorant, nobody proposed further questions. I don’t blame them; New Hampshire is esoteric enough for even Americans. “New Hampshire is a beautiful state.” I continued. “I have seen almost all the states and it is definitely one of the most beautiful places.”

“¿Have you seen LA?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact I had a road trip starting from California as I zigzagged across the United States. On the way, I saw all the most illustrious sites like Hollywood, Las Vegas, and Grand Canyon. I almost drowned in Grand Canyon.”

“¿And somehow you end up in Galicia, España.?” The man with the bad French accent asked.

“It sounds like you die often.” Another voice speculated.

“Somebody up there must like me a lot.”

“¿So are you born in United States?”

“No, I was born in Taiwan and I lived there for the first eleven years of my life. My parents had left me behind with my grandparents in search of the American Dream. I was too young, as far as I concerned I was an orphan. I refused to talk to them on the phone.”

“¿Wow, what was that like?”

“I hated them.”

“¿Hated them?.”

“My father only came back because my tabu was dying. He didn’t come back for me. I still remember seeing him for the first time after ten years. Before, I had only seen his pictures all over the place as if he was some kind of celebrity. I didn’t even recognize him.”

“¿What’s a tabu?”

“It means great-grand mother in my dialect of Chinese.”

“¿But wasn’t it because of them that you were able to go to America later?”

“For that I am grateful, I would never have a future in Taiwan.”

The truth of the last statement surprised me. I would have never gone to a college, much less a prestigious one. Although my parents had abandoned me for the first nine years of my life, they did deliver a better future for my sister and me. It was a future in Taiwan that only fairy tales dared to imagine. A poor orphan of a small town one day suddenly had his long lost father of America back. “His father is American!” It sounded as if my father was king of some distant land. To Taiwan, Americans symbolized nobility and America symbolized infinite wealth. The roads were paved in gold, and the dollar reigned from the sky. Everybody wanted to follow the yellow brick road. Well..... some just wanted to collect

the yellow bricks. People were willing to cram into a tiny boat for months just to see that large lady with the torch. In my opinion, Americans were ridiculous. Taiwanese and Chinese children starved to death during Christmas Eve while they spent hundreds of dollars for shoes.

“¿Hey, are you still with us?” A female’s voice sounded.

The voice jerked me back into that dinning hall so violently that I put up my hands to protect my face, an imbued mechanical motion. How long have I been daydreaming? I must stop this. I have been told that I stare into blank space during conversations often. It would be minutes at a time where I appear as if my soul had escaped.

“¿Yes, I’m sorry. What were we talking about?”

“Your parents”

“¿What about my parents?”

The Spanish girl interrupted, “it’s getting late. You must be tired.”

As I stood up from the table, I wondered why I didn’t stay in my comfortable apartment in Madrid. Instead, I took nothing but a backpack and started walking. Within these couple of weeks, I had slept on streets, begged for water and food, and asked God for forgiveness. Ironically, it wasn’t God’s forgiveness I needed but my own. Deep down, I knew clearly why I had walked away from the city I loved to suffer hunger and homelessness. I just don’t want to face them.

My parents must have lived through such hardship to reach America the first time. I didn’t realize that my parents originally entered United States illegally until much later. They had risked everything just to take that one chance that most people feared. They didn’t want to work in the same mediocre job, the same mediocre place for the rest of their lives; like what most people did in Taiwan. Of course my grandparents left that minor detail from the neighbors. If anyone had asked, my parents upheld important occupations in America. My mother worked as a bartender while my father cooked at some Chinese restaurant; so much for important occupations. Niania once told me how she begged my father not to go. People often went and few came back. My father survived and did come back with all the glory like the return of a famous knight. After all, he spoke English and that convinced enough people within ten miles radius.

“I want to thank you for saving my life. I don’t know how to express myself very well.” As these words came out, sound of footsteps suddenly alerted me from outside the Albergue.

“Get down!” As I screamed, machinegun shots rang out and innocent pilgrims immediately fell with blood gushing out of their chest. The first gunman burst into the room with an intense gaze trying to focus on his pray. I crushed his kneecap and redirected his gun towards the second gunman. Pulling the gun out of his hand I shot the last man. The first gunman fell to the ground and I aimed directly at him.

“Who sent you?” I asked and the Asian gunman did not understand.

“是誰叫你來的?” I asked again in Chinese.

“我不要死, 我麼什都不知道.” The gunman replied timidly.

As I looked closer, this person sitting down in pain was no longer a fierce killer, but simply a boy of about seventeen years old. It didn't matter that he knew nothing about my termination; I already knew which organization decided it. I understood this boy without words, because this Nationalistic party was what my best friend Chen and I always dreamed to join during my delinquent years. Perhaps if I never left Taiwan, the position would have reversed. He was just a boy following orders.

“Please let him go.” The Spanish girl begged with a trembling voice like the heart of a true pilgrim to plead for the salvation of a murderer. The death of all her friends was the sin of their executioner and she took the consequence willingly. I thought of the man on the cross a long time ago when he made the same request to his father.

I moved the aim suddenly towards the door to face the barrel of a 45 magnum. The familiarity of its owner struck me. He was a tall man dressed in a black suit with sunglasses, but his aura belonged to a boy I recognize. He had given up the chance to end his work and spared me during the boy's interrogation. He was my childhood best friend Chen.

“吳捷孜?” He called me by my Chinese name.

“好久不見了.” I replied acknowledging that I recognized him too. Neither one of us put the gun down.

“陳媽媽好嗎?”

“被我老頭打死了.” The sudden shock jerked my eyes to shut tight. I saw the images of her serving us lemonade during the summer and inviting me over for dinner. I saw the image of Mr. Chen beating her and heard her screams. Mrs. Chen had always treated me as her own son during my orphan days. God rest her soul at a place where Mr. Chen can no longer hurt her.

“You traitor, I would never in my dream to guess that you were the American spy we are trying to kill.” Chen snapped in English.

“I see you finally learn English.”

“Don't insult me, you American dog; you sold your soul to America.”

Actually, I was running away from America, running away from Taiwan, running away from my past, but my mouth could not answer him. Instead, I asked him to bring the injured boy on the ground home. Without taking his eyes off me, Chen redirected his gun at the boy and shot him 5 times at the head. Machineguns once again started shooting from outside the albergue and I took the chance to quickly jump out the broken window. As I struggled to escape, I scrawled toward the near tall grass field and started running deeper and deeper into the darkness.

My foot suddenly kicked a large object and I tripped to see the ground coming towards my face. Without hesitation, I pulled out the gun, aimed and saw the Spanish girl putting her hands up.

“I’m sorry.” I apologized.

“They are all dead.”

“I’m sorry, but I have to keep going.” I turned around to continue.

There she sat holding her knees in the middle of a priori, helpless, and abandoned by life and God. She placed her face down and started to whimper.

“I’m sorry but I have to keep going.” I repeated but my legs did not allow me to progress.

The shockwave of another explosion pushed all the tall grass around me uniformly. Should I leave her? I asked myself.

“You can’t come with me, all your friends died because they were near me. Why don’t you just go home?”

“I have no where to go. I was an orphan before they adopted me as a pilgrim.”

I closed my eyes and immediately the image of my childhood flooded my vision. The kids were asking me who my parents were.

“How come your parents never came?”

“I don’t have any parents.”

“Sure you do, everybody has parents.”

“Yeah, they are the ones that feed you.”

Within seconds, the entire room’s attention turned to my mysteriously missing parents. Not knowing what to say, I ran away. Run and run, I am always running, but where am I running to?

Slowly opening my eyes, I turned around and pulled the Spanish girl on her feet. “We have to find a place to stay for the rest of the night. They are probably looking for me right now.” She smiled and wrapped her arms around my waist. Between her tears and her smile, I held her and promised myself to never allow any harm to her.

It was a cold and dark night as we sluggishly made our way through the forest. The dense cloud covered the Galician moonlight and the tall grass covered our path. Besides the peeping of crickets, the field slept serenely even after a night of violent explosions. How insignificant are we I thought? Regardless of all our personal problems, we seldom grasp the irrelevance of our individual being to the universe. The death of millions will not stop the sun from rising, the water flowing, nor any force of nature that existed before the advent of her brutal children. We proclaim to be in the image of God, that we live in the center of the universe. We are so often rapped around ourselves, our needs, our success; we forget the force that bound us together.

Finally, we reached an open grass field with a dilapidated hut. The hut came up to my height and it appeared to have been abandoned for a long time. Half of the ceiling had fallen apart and ivy wrapped itself around the side of the structure. The open field resembled a once perfect circle made

by Aliens with the hut in the center. We approached the hut carefully as if we were thieves entering the stranger's property. Several animals raised their heads showing distaste in the coming of trespassers. The Spanish girl jumped as I quickly aimed. A swift of wind cracked open the thick clouds like a spotlight on the grass hut. From there, I saw more cats surrounding that hut than all the cats I have seen in my life. Better cats than snakes, I thought to myself.

“This must be where all the abandoned cats go.”

“Do you think we can go in?” The Spanish girl desperately enquired to conclude this endless nomadism.

“It looks like it is going rain.”

“I am so cold.”

I held her closer and continued to approach the hut with caution. The cats made way for our arrival with reluctant approval.

The moss covered wooden door tumbled when I pushed it to enter. The loud crashing sound startled the nearby cats and us. With half of the ceiling missing the moon light lit the interior with an unusual visibility. The hut was no larger than seven by ten feet square and dry straws covered the floor with several cats sleeping. I thought to myself how we just walked into a death trap; the rotten wood that formed the walls of the hut will not block bullets. I looked around; the Spanish girl already found herself a space of dry grass to sleep in the fetus position. She kept pilling more dry straws to cover herself as if the coldness would go away.

This is just the way we are. Everything is just an illusory comfort. Like a bolding man combing his hair to cover his insecurity. Like falling in love with love itself instead of the person. Like a beaten wife hoping that the husband would stop drinking. The list goes on and on yet people hide inside walls of false pretense for the fear of the truth. The reality never existed outside of our mind yet so few people take notice of it. After all, that's all it is, a comfort that so few of us can live without. Like this hut providing us a false sense of protection. I felt her forehead and realized her worsening fever. Holding her tighter, she allowed herself to drift into a safer place while my fatigued eyes opened wide and my alerted ears waited for our doom.

Chapter 3 Jason

Being a sixth grader in the middle school is never an easy task, especially if you are the new kid on the block. Besides fending off eighth grade bullies, it is also the confusing beginning of the teen years. Drastic changes occur within your physical body, and the hormones take over the thinking process. But most importantly, it is a time the children enter a world where the cruelty amplifies by thousands. Take the name “Shroom-head” for example; the bully that endorsed the name considered it a gift to Jason’s best friend now officially appended with the nickname. The origin of the name started with his peculiar haircut that came out to appear like the head of a mushroom. (Also a specific appendage of the male specie) Being short and pudgy, the poor Shroom-head became a sure bet for an instant confident boost. That day after being pushed to the ground, the bully announced his crime for walking like a girl. As the ruler of the school ground, he proclaimed his rightful duty to punish heresy.

“Hear me out friends. What would this world be like if men start to act like women?” A crowd started to gather as the Bully begins to speak. “Friends, we cannot allow gay acts in the school. Since the beginning of time, homos always had their positions in the most powerful nations, the Romans, the Athenian Greece, and England. Within a hundred years after accepting them, every nation ends up losing their ground. Now it is our turn, and we are on the brink of accepting those damn homos. The states are already accepting gay marriage, what’s going to be next? Gay president? No, I will not endure it. I will

not allow what our country has worked so hard to plunder for the pleasure of the few. Do you know God hates homos? In the bible it is considered as an abomination. Do you want God to be angry at us? Why should we be punished for the crime of the others? Yes we surely deserve punishment if we keep our silence. By not speaking we are according with homos and we stand by their side. What can we do? We must start today and now. We must stop sissy boys today and turn them into men. Most assuredly it is our duty to act now! For the murderers of the past powerful nations who all the years through have sold our soul to the devil, they are the same men who will plunge us into the depths of misfortune. We have the duty to speak since in the near future, when we have gained power, we shall have the duty to take these criminals and hang them on the gallows to which they belong. These scoundrels even today, go against us. From the recognition of the facts comes the will to rise again. We owe it to our children, our future, our God to rebuild a new school ground.”

Complete silence followed. Ten seconds went by, and then ten more seconds passed. Some of the boys looked at each other nervously, some wonder what “abomination” meant, some wondered if it was a reverberated speech with some nouns changed, some were too scared to speak against the overwhelming power, but the majority had no idea what the bully said and went along since it wasn’t their head on the guillotine. Everybody wants to be the amicus curiae during a trial. Not one child had the nerve to speak out against the absurdity of the situation. Nor did anyone predicted to become the next victim that everyone would turn against.

The bully stared at Shroom-head approvingly understanding the hidden meaning of the silence. “From today forth, I will officially take over the responsibility of overlooking the welfare of all of us, and punish the wrong doers accordingly. Who will be my assistants?”

Even when Jason recalls this fragment of memory today, he still wondered the subconscious motive of the first three volunteers. Did they truly believe the words of the demagogue, and intended to save the world from homosexual corruption? It is after all logical for boys to desire that mythical glory of a hero. Being so young, with so much ambition, it is so easy to mislead the drive into something destructive. The entire situation almost reminded him of Lord of the Flies. Jason would always sigh and recognize how similar children’s interaction would exemplify adult’s world.

Or maybe, just maybe, he was overly complicating their motives. Rather than pride and honor, greed and fear propelled their sycophantic acts. Like any other living soul in the animal kingdom struggling for survival and approval. Many adolescents from inner cities often join gangs searching for that sense of belonging, a place where they are valued. Isn’t this what most people spent the most of their lives searching for? Who doesn’t want to be accepted, to be important and to be cared for? So how are these adults differing from children? Regardless of these speculations, the fact of matter was that three children of the age around fifteen volunteered and many other followed.

“For your punishment today, you will now and forever be the Shroom-head.” The crowd laughed at the nick-name

recognizing the similarities and the bully walked away feeling proud of his accomplishment.

Over the next couple of days, the councils of the nascent government gathered by the swings and discussed fervently. The bully had himself a very charismatic manner with the others; as if the words flowed out like the spells of a wizard bewitching the crowd in awe. Any PHD psychology professor would effortlessly foretell the germination of another young sociopath. He cast himself as an icon of idolatry of which his followers sacrifice to seek approval. He gave them pride and convinced them their elite status. He promulgated and demanded only the best from the members. The members followed and results further reinforced the validity of the bully. Jason observed and understood the entire process, this is called the self-predicting prophesy. The members believed that they were elite and this premise dictated their actions. The bully created this world of illusion; and only inside this world would his members succeed.

The bully’s natural appeal emanated an invisible cloud of aura that seemingly drew all the power in the universe. Besides his psychological characteristics, his physical beauty also became another factor that captivated people’s attention. Naturally blond, his bright blue eyes would flash with a twinkle at a smile. His body resembled the sculpture of David by Michelangelo and his face radiated Athenian beauty. Isn’t this that of which our society taught us to follow? He looked like the prince in the fairy tales that once upon a time slew a beastly dragon and save her beautiful princess. The princess would wake up from a dream, fall deeply in love with the prince and live happily ever after. The story would end there and leave the

readers assuming eternal bliss for the couple. Or did the story end there because no body cared about the story of the princess. After all, she found a good looking prince and what more can she ask for? Fortunately, the story left out the time he gave her a black eye, or the time she caught him fucking their maid, or the disappearing trick he performed five years ago after she got fat. Who would want to read that? By now, her prince charming is probably in the next tale slaying another dragon and saving another beautiful princess.

“We should probably make up a set of rules for everybody to follow. They can be the basis for punishment.” One of the council suggested.

The crowd silenced and stared at each other in a dither. Up till this point the bully took ninety percent of the discussion and no one dared to disabuse his words. The council had stopped thinking all together and fallen into the Agathism notion that as long as they follow without questioning, they will be taken cared of, and everything will be just fine. To have an idea and to think for themselves almost seemed like treason against their care provider.

As a result, the council did establish a set of rules that dictated specific punishments, mainly corporal. They also set up a tax rule of collecting a *small* percentage of the lunch money and allocated policing throughout the entire school. Ignorant about the under-the-table lunch tax, the teachers embraced this self-ruling structure and further supported the council. From the teacher’s perspective, the structure simplified much of their disciplining. The kids accepted into

the council always excelled in school, comported with well manner, and treated them with the utmost respect. The best aspect of the council acted as a self-policing that kept all the students at bay.

The council’s arrogance finally reached unbearable a semester after Shroom-head’s incident. By now the council had taken over the school policing completely and teachers rarely stayed during recess. Without adults’ supervision, the council owned the school and punished the students harshly. It all started from doing push ups, but by the end of the semester kids were forced to stand in the middle of the school ground with their pants down for the entire recess. The nerds became their prime target for pants wetting.

What is pants wetting you might ask? If you have never heard of this expression, you shouldn’t because this expression started and ended right inside this school. If you are a female, regrettably you might never understand, but let’s try this simple explanation for the non-female readers. To understand this abstract concept, you must first understand the boy’s bathroom architecture. Like any other restroom, it has its toilets and urinals. Since this setting was before the year 2000, the school still didn’t have the automatic flusher and it must be manually flushed by pulling the lever. The urinal is the white kind, shaped like a mini-bathtub hangs on the walls; some hangs higher while the other lower for the little people. This idea came one day as one of council washed his hand while a four eyed nerd timidly unzipped to urinate at one of the lower wall hanging bathtubs. The council took a step forward to stand behind the nerd and shoved the poor nerd’s entire body into the urinal so that his penis made contact with the white porcelain.

The council then pulled the lever over and over again as tears ran down the cheeks.

Pants wetting became the worst nightmare of everybody and it became the ultimate punishment. Fortunately, revolution started and other political groups also formed to check the rampant corruption of the current system. Many of the “popular” students got away without paying taxes while the nerds paid double to avoid the pants wetting. The school ground started breaking into different factions. The bully’s council took the prominent power and land influence, one half of the school ground fell under the iron curtain of the bully.

One of the first groups formed in opposition to the council was the United Students Federation lead by Johnny Hancock. A brilliant lower class men nerd that suffered the most severed group pants wetting. Prior to the revolution, the council named him “Johnny with a Cock in his Hand”, and forced him to endure the most excruciating public humiliation.

Unlike most students, Johnny never once paid tribute to the bully also now known as Caesar, nor did any form of torture fazed him. His audacity attracted many nerds that underwent similar abuse, his popularity grew, and his influence among especially the lower classmen became a daunting mass. An adage once stated that a man's power over another is simply his willingness to do what others will not. Johnny's unprecedented stance against Caesar gave people hope, and freedom from suppressions similar to the relationship that Scotland and England once had.

Recesses area divided into half at what is later known as the 38th parallel. It was actually a bike rack that parked 38 bikes parallel to each other. Off course, this area inherited many other titles; the bike rack, 38 bikes, parallel parking,

parallel parking bikes, the Berlin Wall, Vietnam, etc. If you scrutinize these names, 38th parallel actually sounds like a professional name that a history book might use. At the time, not so much did the name matter rather its strategic location. The control of this bike rack symbolized domination similar to the control of Eurasia. The power over this region seems to ensure in a domination of the rest of the recess zone, hence their entire world at the moment. So the leaders on both sides arranged for the early arrival of their bikes comrades to park as many bikes as possible. Unfortunately, this strategy of containment proved feebly as a transient solution. The domination only lasted one day, the power shifted back and forth day by day depending on which group arrived earlier. Until finally both sides decided to just leave their bikes to hold the positions.

Chapter 4 waking up

I don't know when or how.
I stared forgetting my name.
that sound became so unfamiliar
and that face in the mirror became so obscured
in the darkness, lost all directions

Within the darkness that surrounded me, the light stood before my eyes from what appeared to be far away. Its warmth gave me comfort that wrapped around my body in the form of pure love. I heard music inside yet the music came from my heart. I saw the past, and sensed the future. I don't want to go back.

The light transformed to be a soft breeze on the beach. The same pilgrim from the Albergue walked next to me. The same man standing in the background when everyone surrounded me with curiosity. His eyes emanated pain that belonged to me.

“Why do you take my pain willingly?” I pondered.

“Because I love you.”

“Why do you love me?”

“Why should he not love me?” I stopped and wondered.

People are so concentrated on why we don't deserve love; few people asked why we do. Are we simply trained at a young age that love is something you must earn? I don't want to love because only the people I love can hurt me the most. I don't want to love because love is not suppose to be free, or is it?

How do you love somebody if you can't make them love you back? If you can't tell them to never change, to never be mean to you and to never leave you. I want them to love me back, I do. But I cannot control that. I can't control them so I refuse to love them, and I push the people I might love away. Until eventually no body is around to hurt me.

Before I found her, I always felt like I was missing something. So I kept searching, but I never realize how much more painful it would be to have found her. My heart felt crushed slowly without her, and suffocated when she didn't smile. I could not smile when she didn't and I had no power to take her pain away. I felt so worthless, if only I was more perfect for her, and more powerful, and more of everything she ever wanted. But I wasn't and I didn't deserve her love nor do I deserve his love.

The beach disappeared as my senses returned. The darkness persisted while the sunlight through the crack stared at me with the same warmth. I remained in the same position in fear of losing the light, losing this eternal bliss that I have long forgotten.

...es tan raro que las personas que lo encuentran, se convierten en un mito. La verdad es que existe, porque lo he encontrado una vez. Y cuando se encuentra, no tendrías ni un hueco de duda en tu corazón. Vivirás sólo por su sonrisa, el perfume de su cabello, y sus caricias. Cuando estás sin ella, pasas el tiempo como sin aire, como una piedra encima de tu pecho constantemente. Si encuentras a alguien que tenga todos los elementos, no tengas dudas en la cabeza, porque el corazón no se equivoca. Si siempre llevas dudas y tienes miedo de equivocarte, perderás algo que hace la vida valga la pena.

Chieh

