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FYS

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3/26/16

When Good Turns Bad

“Let me show you room” said the small Vietnamese women. We were walking up old worn, whitish-yellow steps to the second floor to our room. As we neared the last few rooms my mom and I hoped to get the last room on the end, thinking it would have a great view of the towering rocks with vivid green brush bursting out, and the murky river below. The women opened the last door, removed her shoes, and held her arm out implying that we entered. After removing our shoes as well, my mom followed me into the room; a small space with two beds, one small table in between, and two chairs next to the door right below the only window in the room, which looked straight out to the parking lot, and mostly frosted over. As I walked farther into the room I saw a door with chipping green paint, and inside an old rusty sink, a towel rack, and a toilet next to a small shower. I guess this is what you get for twelve dollars a night.

It’s hard just to sit in such a plain room, especially when there are no windows looking out at the beautiful scenery. My mom and I decided we would rent motorbikes for the day since our hotel could rent them out to us very easily with all our information on hand. We had a general idea of where we were going with a map my mom had snagged off of a taxi car, but the streets looked more like back alleyways with locals walking every which way and the rundown buildings zooming past. After passing a small truck filled with chickens screeching from their cages, we found the main road which was a cracked, two lane highway with a divider down the middle. This is what we were looking for, now all we had to do was to continue down until we found the river and park our bikes somewhere where hopefully they would not be stolen. We found a little dirt path that we walked along the barely moving river for about fifteen minutes, but felt longer with the dry sun pounding on our skin. Up ahead we saw a small group of about six women that were sitting in boats just large enough for about 4 people to sit in. They looked like they were made out of metal roofing material put together with whatever they could find. As soon as they saw us one immediately jumped out and ran over to us. She was insisting that we take a short ride with her up the river to see the scenery. Vietnamese women are always so pushy, almost demanding. We finally decided we would go with them for a small 200,000 Dong, which is roughly $8.00. The small women despite her size looked old and worn out, grabbed my hand a little too firmly and pulled a little harder than I would have liked. Something seemed odd about this woman who was practically dragging me into her rustic boat, but then again so did everyone in Vietnam, and I knew how desperate some people are just to make a little money.

“Thank god you decided to pack around that umbrella,” I told my mom. She snagged it from this guy on a beach in Ko Tao, a decorative wooden one with banana peel stretched over the top, and birds painted over. It had been shoved in her bag for almost a month, the bottom handle always sticking out and questioned by airport security. We were both huddled under it, trying to use the small round shadow to protect us from the drops of magma being shot down at us from the sun, but the reflective metal which was the boat made a perfect trampoline for them to bounce right back and blind us. The women behind us, who was somehow rowing the boat with her feet, kept trying to make conversation with us, but I was in a dehydrated haze, and only wanted to watch the peaceful landscape drift by. After a while, the woman who was rowing stopped in an eddy and started digging around in what looked like a metal tool box. I heard something heavy clanking around, but what she pulled out was only a few pieces of cloth with some decorative stitching wrapped in plastic.

“I make, you want to buy?”

We were in no mood to buy her shitty sown designs on wearing cloth. “No thank you, they are really nice but we don’t want any.”

“You look it’s okay, very nice”

“Yes they are great but we don’t have any room in our bags.”

“I have more, you look.”

“No, no that’s okay we really can’t fit them we already bought too much stuff.”

“Here I show you, only 50,000.”

My mom and I exchanged glances. Why is it so hard for people to understand? Do they not know what the word “no” means? My mom is a very nice person, it’s hard for her to be firm, get in people’s faces and say no. She continued to look through what I can barely call art.

“Okay just for you I give you good price, 40,000.

“No we can’t, thank you though” I said shoving them back in the lady’s face. She stared at me with a disgusted face for a minute before taking them back. She shoved them back in her box and slammed it shut after taking out her phone. What was her problem? Why did she need the little amount of cash so badly if she has a phone? She quickly dialed a number and still using her feet, rowed us back onto the river, talking overly loud as we went.

Every so often we would reach a towering rock formation taller than a skyscraper, which had a low opening, no more than four feet from the water that it had carved out. Sometimes we would have to duck our heads as we went through so we wouldn’t hit the rock above. It was almost like a natural air conditioned room, dropping a few ten degrees when we entered, extremely pleasant. After we ducked for about the sixth time under the longest rock tunnel we came out at an open but shaded pool with big trees all around.

We were rowed to some dark concrete steps, where the women told us to get out and walk up the steps which lead to a small path, if you could call it that, that seemed to enter into a cave in the rock. I didn’t doubt it since this place was notorious for giant caves. As we neared we saw that indeed this was another cave, my mother loved caves and I was eager to check out what was inside. The entrance was a small hole that made us slides in, sidestepping as we went. Slowly the rock started to expand until we could walk normally; a slight breeze touched our faces, and smelled of wet rock and minerals. The sound of water dripping pulled us in even farther when we turned the corner and saw a red room. There were red candles dripping wax on the floor surrounding a statue that looked like a Buddha, but something was very wrong. It was looking down with a crooked head, mouth wide open and a dim flickering light coming from a third eye resting on the forehead. The wax from many previous candles dripped out from the eyes, nose and mouth making the statue look in pain. Footprints scattered the sandy floor and led to an old clay bowl that had some dark red, almost black liquid resting in it; and in the center floated one disturbing eyeball. My mom’s face said it all; we need to get the fuck out of here.

We turned around and headed for the exit, but as we went around the corner we saw two very large silhouettes, men that were blocking the exit. They started screaming at us in gibberish and walking forward I could see they were holding knifes. I grabbed my mom’s hand as her screams entered my ears. I pulled her behind me thinking there has to be an opening somewhere, if air was flowing through the cave.

“You pay now!” I heard in a deep, threatening voice.

“C’mon, this way!” I yelled seeing a hole just big enough to crawl through to the lower left of the statue. I ran past the eye, but my mom, stumbling to keep up knocked over the clay bowl as we ran past it, and one of the men ran to it and fell to his knees. Almost crying he mumbled something, as the blood soaked into his pants. I was trying to help my mom through the hole but is was no use, it was too small and only got smaller the farther in you went. The second man was keeping a close eye on us still blocking the entry way while the other got up. I could see enraged tears running down his face.

“What do you want!” screamed my mom, “There is the bag, just take it!” as she tossed it over to the one blocking our only exit.

“You pay! Bạn trả tiền cho không tôn trọng tổ tiên của chúng tôi!”

“The money is in the bag! Bag!” she repeated. My mind was racing; I didn’t know what to do, Should I fight them? They’re pretty big I don’t know how they even managed to get through the opening in the rock. I looked around for something to use as a weapon, or at the very least protection. The only things in here are candles and sand. Should I distract them? Try and find a way to get my mom out? I reached down and grabbed a handful of sand. I thought I could at least throw it in their eyes, but it was too wet, it would be like throwing a snowball made of sand. Just when he saw me grab the sand, the one with blood soaked ripped jeans ran for us. I reached back and flung the sand as hard as I could at his face, but did nothing to slow him down. He was heading straight for my mom. She yelled something at me but I couldn’t hear it with all the adrenaline pumping through my veins. I never thought I would be using my years of football and wrestling practice to take on a full grown man. Seeing the knife in his right hand pointing at my mom who was running to the left, I leaped forward, aiming all my mass in front of him providing a perfect collision course. I guess in his rage filled rampage he didn’t notice me as I slammed right into him knocking him to the ground, but not hard enough to knock the knife from his grip. With one hand he pushed me off him, and using the momentum I tried to flee, but was not fast enough. He got one good swing in slashing my upper arm. I whipped around just quick enough to witness my mom jump on the man and wrestled with him. It was weird only having the one fight us as the other just stood in the doorway blocking it, watching, smiling as if getting some king of sick pleasure out of the whole thing. Just then a scream filled the cave, reverbing and amplifying as it pierced my eardrums. My heart seemed to stop. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion as I saw the man straddling my mother, raising and lowering the knife with such force. Blood was flying off the tip of the knife making a perfect arc as it splattered on the walls, ceiling and statue. I took a decisive step forward; there was nothing that could stop me. I pounded into the man so hard I felt like I almost blacked out. I probably would have if not for the massive amount of adrenaline in my blood stream. This time the knife went flying across the cave, making a chip in the rock when it hit. My momentum carried me right over the man as I ended up next to the knife. Before I consciously knew what I was doing I grabbed the knife, and stuck it so far into the man’s chest that only a portion of the blade was visible. I’m guessing that’s what happened because the next thing I remember I was laying over my mother’s dead body watching the blood seep from her many stab wounds. I didn’t even realize the woman who rowed the boat with her feet entered and was standing over the dead man’s body, a gun in hand and a small blue pack slung over her shoulder I recognized to be the one my mom tossed on the ground.“Thật là một sự xấu hổ, ông là người đàn ông tốt nhất của tôi.” The only phrase I heard her say while looking down at him. She didn’t even bother to look at me as she walked out, the second man following behind her.

That was the last time I saw her, and my mother. In fact I don’t think I could find that place again if I tried, and I don’t want to. The past is gone, and there is nothing I can do about it. It’s been about three weeks since that happened, and I’m living day to day on the streets of Hoi An, no food, no water, no company. If you are reading this, if anyone can hear my story, please send help. I can’t guarantee that you will find me, as I am trying to get halfway around the world, trying to find home. I will be walking North, up the coast looking for a ride back to the states. It’s not likely that I will ever get out of this wretched country that ripped my mother from me. What a beautiful place for such nasty people.