

Bedtime

“Dad?”

“.....”

“Dad?”

“Huh? Oh... What’s wrong honey?”

“I can’t sleep Dad”

“Why? What’s the matter? Did you have a bad dream?”

“No. It was something at Grandpa’s today...”

“At Grandpa’s? What happened Bobby?”

“Well, you were outside in the porch talking with Grandma, then...”

“Then what?”

“Grandpa and I were watching Animal Planet. It was a show about these prairie dogs that live in the desert and do this special alarm when hawks are around. But then Grandpa’s face changed. Like he suddenly thought about something and he got really serious. So he pressed that button that makes the T.V. go quiet and just sat there for a little while. I asked him if he was okay and he said he was but then he asked me if I wanted to listen to this story.”

“A story?”

“Yeah.”

“What did you say?”

“I said sure.”

“And what was the story about?”

“It was about this boy, around my age who loved playing football with his friends and always scored all the goals like I do. Only this boy didn’t really have a nice house and his parents worked through the day and sometimes in the night too. So he would go home and find the house keys in really weird places like under flower pots and stuff. His parents would leave him enough money for a tortilla with beans and sometimes cheese which he ate because it made him feel less hungry. Can you imagine eating that all the time?”

“Some people do Bobby.”

“I don’t think I could Dad. Anyways, the boy grew up and went to the university even though it was really hard for his parents to pay for it. The boy’s parents wanted him to become what Grandpa called an ‘accountant’ I think, which is basically someone who works with numbers, because at the time he was sure to get a job afterwards and make a lot more money than them. But the boy was like me and didn’t really enjoy adding and subtracting so he got bored easily. He knew it wasn’t right but he stopped going to most classes.

Instead he made new friends who loved to play football and do fun things outside of class. They all started reading these interesting books that were coming from really far places like China and Europe. Grandpa said it was difficult for the boy to get these books and his

friends did their best to hide what they were doing. He also said that during those days there were a lot of exciting things happening in the country, changes, like the start of something new. The boy felt excited too and started learning more and more. I didn't really understand what Grandpa meant by something new."

"It's complicated Bobby, keep going."

"Grandpa said the boy also began noticing some things. He and his friends would usually meet in a small apartment close to his university and watch La Selecta play because very few of them owned television sets in their own houses. Other times, someone would bring a guitar and they would play music and sing these new songs which were becoming popular. But he really noticed things during the football matches. There were games when the boy's friends would turn the volume all the way to the max and become really serious. Then they would give the boy a few coins and tell him to buy more soda or chips even though there was still plenty left for them in the apartment.

This was when the boy really changed. He told his friends he wanted to do what they were doing, that he was old enough and he could help them, no questions asked. His friends said alright. It didn't take very long for the boy to work in these tunnels, right underneath the university like the prairie dogs, Grandpa said. The boy watched an entrance to one of these tunnels where his friends and all sorts of other people came in and out. He was given a gun and taught these codes that the army soldiers didn't know. But the tunnels were really well hidden so he never had to confront anyone who didn't belong there. It's a pretty crazy story right?"

"Yeah, I guess it is."

“Well, here is when it gets kind of sad. Grandpa said the boy had been watching the tunnels for a few years and he was becoming tired of doing the same thing over and over again and he was barely seeing anyone he knew anymore. It seemed like a lot of other people felt that way too. Grandpa said there was a stalemate going on. So then the boy started hearing about these lists which were going around. The man who was in charge of all the tunnels told him about them and then things became really different.

The boy started to hear all sorts of rumors about these lists. Some people said they were the names of traitors while others complained about none of them being done fairly. The boy just kept his mouth shut and continued watching his tunnel entrance. He became close the man who was in charge so every once in a while he was able to look at the names. As time went by he realized a lot of his old friends were on them. Grandpa said there were also students, musicians, normal people, and even this really amazing poet; all just names on a list. The boy asked what would happen to them. He was told they would go on a well-deserved vacation, somewhere far, where he couldn't see them, call, or even write to anymore.

Grandpa said the boy became even more tired but the war was finally coming to a close. The boy was told to prepare for a final attack where he would leave the tunnel for good. A lot of new people came from outside the city and it seemed as though they could really win the whole thing in one move. Like one of those check-mates I've been teaching you, Grandpa said. But once again the attack only resulted in another stalemate, the final one. A lot of people had died and there barely food and money left to fight with anymore.

Grandpa said that this was when peace really began. The boy was told to leave the tunnel, go back home, and hide his gun along with the rest of his belongings. They would give him

money eventually, once things got sorted out. The boy did everything they said and waited. I asked Grandpa what the boy waited for. He said he didn't really know. Was it the money? No, he said, it was something else..."

"What happened next Bobby?"

"Grandpa stopped talking. His voice got shaky and he told me to go in the kitchen to look for batteries for the remote. He didn't say where they were but I went anyways. I sort of remembered the white drawer under the microwave where Grandma keeps a lot of stuff. I was going through it when I heard a really loud voice coming from the living room talking about how prairie dogs create these huge colonies underground. I found the batteries and went back to the living room. Grandpa turned down the volume and thanked me but I could tell he'd been crying because he had his glasses off and his face was really wet and shiny."

"..."

"But Dad, I couldn't sleep because I really needed to ask you something"

"What's that Bobby?"

"Where did all of Grandpa's friends go on vacation and how come he couldn't get in touch in with them?"

"They probably went to the ocean..."

"You mean like when we go swimming in the beach?"

"Yeah, only they kept going, probably in little sailboats, way deeper, until you couldn't see them even if you squinted with all your might."

“Will they come back?”

“I’m not really sure. It could be beautiful there and maybe they’re happy where they are.”

“Do you think Grandpa wants to go there someday?”

“I think so. But why don’t we go down to the kitchen and get a glass of milk. I’ll tell you another story. It’s a really silly one about why I became a writer.”

“Can I have some cookies too?”

“Sure, but just this once.”

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