

The sky felt farther away to Jayce. He thought it could just be the smog from the city, or the distant snow lined mountains to the east, or maybe the sky *was* farther away on this side of the equator. He had never been outside the United States until his arrival to Santiago, and though the buses, city lights, and skyscrapers resembled home he always felt like it was another world.

“It’s great down here, you’ll love it, the people are so nice, and you’ll like the city, it’s modern but seems old,” Abby would tell him over the phone, encouraging him to change his plans and come down to Santiago to study abroad. “The classes are great, and it will look good on your application. And I could use a friend from home.”

It was her need of him, a friend, that convinced him to go. Abby and he had been friends for so long, and she had become close to him. At times he would think of her as a sister, but he was never that close to his sisters, and he was attracted to her — her long ballerina neck, sharply sculptured face, and short red hair pulled into a pony tail — he would never be attracted to a sister. Along with Abby the study abroad program was enticing, but foreign countries were dangerous, and they were just that — foreign.

The air was warm with an evening summer breeze, and only a few pedestrians were wandering under the recently lit streetlights. The twilight made the sky seem even farther away to Jayce as he and Abby had walked up out of the metro station and sat down on a cool concrete bench, waiting for their ride back to the hostel.

“What time was he going to pick us up?” he asked, looking down at his watch.

“Eight.”

“So we just wait here then?”

She nodded. As they waited he would watch as Abby, after looking at the time, would look at each road leading to the intersection where they sat, twisting her head glancing over each shoulder like a covert agent looking out for suspicious individuals just before delivering some type of valuable intel. He thought this was funny; on his first night in Santiago he ran into a drunken man on the street that seemed to think that he, Jayce, was a CIA agent spying on him. That night he dreamt that he was a CIA agent, some mix between Jason Bourne and James Bond, and he saved Abby from a group of terrorists planning to put a nuclear bomb inside her, set to detonate when she would arrive back in the States. After saving her life they made love — truly James Bond style. He enjoyed this dream. As a child he watched every Bond movie, and now he hoped to work in government after college. He would often tell Abby about black ops training, and government surveillance tactics but she would never care much. “Why do you care if Mossad or CIA training is best? They both just illegally spy on and kill people,” she would tell him. “It’s sick what they did in the seventies, and did you know that the CIA was behind the

military takeover of Chile and murder of its president? And then they just let Pinochet become a dictator torturing innocent people daily.”

“So? They seem to be doing fine now,” he would say. “It’s intelligence agencies that protect us from terrorists.”

“Yeah, but did you know that it was CIA that gave the Taliban most of their weapons? Intelligence agencies are the ones that start terrorist groups.”

“People make mistakes.”

“You are so pig headed. You really want to be a government goon?” she would say. “Well, it looks like you’ll fit in just fine.”

These arguments were common with Abby and him whenever politics would come up in a conversation, but they stayed friends talking about music, movies, and food when with each other. Knowing what to ignore was necessary to be friends.

“It’s getting pretty dark,” he said. “What time is it?”

“It’s just past eight,” she said. “He must be running late in traffic.”

“What’s the name of this station?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she said looking around for a sign. “There it is. Patronato. That’s right — right?”

“I think so.”

She then swore, her face stretching in frustration. “I think we’re at the wrong station.” Several cars passed through the intersection playing loud reggeton music.

“What station did he tell you he would pick us up at?”

“I thought this one — I can’t remember, but I know it starts with a P,” she said. “I’m an idiot, we’re at the wrong place. You should have talked to him. You know I can’t speak Spanish. Why did you make me take the directions?”

“First, I barely speak any Spanish, and you were the one talking to him while I was still looking in the shops,” he said.

“So you’re saying it’s all my fault?”

“No,” he said. “It’s alright. We’ll just find a taxi and head back to the hostel ourselves.”

“I don’t have that kind of money.”

“I think I have enough.”

“We might be on the other side of the city. It could cost over a fifty mil pesos,” she said.

“What should we do then?” he said. The twilight was completely gone, and only a pair of stars were visible in the city’s black sky. Even the black felt farther away than normal.

“We call someone,” she said starting to look worried.

Most of the buildings around the intersection were now closed. They could see a few kiosks open just down the street about three blocks from the church across the intersection. “I’m sure they’ll have a phone,” he reassured her as they crossed the street. She cursed herself again. On the other side of the street they could now see that the church was Catholic with a statue of the Virgin Mary behind metal bars. “Why is the Virgin behind bars?” Abby asked.

“I think it’s to stop people from stealing it,” he said. “It’s probably worth a lot.”

“Jesus,” she said disbelievingly.

“Actually she’s his mother,” he said. She smiled at the joke as they passed a bearded man with a slicked black ponytail sitting against the church wall. He looked at them as they passed, but they did not look back.

The kiosk they entered was vacant; its glassed display counter held everything from art supplies and toys to cigarettes and wine boxes.

“*Hola*,” Jayce said loudly into the empty room.

A bead curtain on the far end of the kiosk rattled and a short, fat woman with a green and blue flowered apron answered them. He asked if she had a phone. “*Claro que sí*, of course” she answered. “*Ven, aquí esta*.” She pulled out a beat up florescent green plastic phone with a worn coin slot on the side. He gave a few coins to Abby.

As she made the call, the woman asked Jayce if they were Americans. “Yes, we’re Americans,” he said in spanish.

“*No deben estar aquí tan tarde*, You shouldn’t be around her so late,” the woman told him. She then continued to warn Jayce that the street was filled with thieves and *bad people*. “*Mala gente. Mala gente*,” she said. He could hear the concern in her voice, but he did not see any *bad people* in the dark. The street was dead.

“We’ll call a friend,” he reassured her. “He’ll get us.” He looked over to Abby who was finishing the call, and hoped their ride would arrive soon.

“Be careful, *mi hijito*,” the woman instructed as they left the kiosk.

He could see that Abby was relieved, “He said to go back to the station and he’ll pick us up soon. What was that woman telling you?”

“She just said to be careful,” he said.

They talked as they walked back to the station. No cars were on the road, and the few streetlights hanging over the pavement were out, obscuring the street as they discussed how they would go to see the capital building in the morning, and how awful the local reggeton music was. Just as they were about to reach the Catholic Church the crouched bearded man was now standing hunched against the wall, his face dark, almost as black as the night around him. “*Oye. Oye, me da una gambita*, can I have a coin?” he asked pleadingly. “*Porfa*, I am very sick, very sick.”

“*No entiendo. Lo siento*,” Jayce replied shrugging his shoulders. He really couldn’t understand much of the pigeon spanish the man was speaking.

“Please, I sick,” the man said in English. “*Una gambita no mas*, only a coin.”

“What does he want?” Abby asked.

“*Una gambita no ma’*,” the man repeated.

“I think he wants money,” he told her.

“Give him some.”

“He’s a druggie. I’m not giving him anything.”

The man began to wave the two closer. “*Mire*, Look,” he said pointing to his side. As Abby stepped closer to see what he was pointing to he lifted up his shirt, and there slid into his belt was a knife. By the time she was near enough to see what it was, the man grabbed her arm and with the other arm pulled out the knife. The blade was about five inches long and looked like a type of cheep pairing knife. “*Callate*,” burst the now armed man at Abby’s half scream half gasp. “*Oye, tí, me dame la plata ya*, hey you, give me the money.”

Jayce stood shocked looking at the metal blade turned outward protruding from the man’s hand “What?” he finally let out.

“Give him money,” Abby commanded, breathing more rapidly.

Jayce reached into his pocket felt the several plastic like paper bills and pulled them out. “*Aquí*,” he said holding out the bills, his eyes fixed to the gleaming silver of the knife under the streetlights. No cars were on the street, just him, Abby, and this man. No one else was coming, the three of them were in a dance with each other and everything else seemed farther away than before, nothing existed but him, the blade, and her.

“Leave them there,” the man pointed with his lips to the ground just in front of his feet. Jayce obeyed not saying a word, his eyes focused in disbelieving concentration. His fixation on the knife switched swiftly to Abby, her breathing even faster than before, looking terrified, and

not daring to say a word. None of them spoke. The man picked up the money with his knife hand, and broke the silence, “*Que ma’ tiení*, what else do you have?”

He could not understand the man. He stood there fixed when, like a gust of wind, images from spy movies of the hero using martial arts would twist the villain away from his weapon, kill him, and save the girl. The images played over and over, then he was the hero, and then the man became the villain, and then he watched in his mind over and over how he would save Abby, and kill the man. He looked at the man, then the knife, and he could not move — this was real.

“*Oye, huevon*, what do you have? *la corto la mina po’*, *me dame algo o salí*, give me something or leave,” the man said grabbing Abby harder. “*Salí po*, leave.”

He stood there. By now Abby was crying. The man started to tug Abby moving back away from Jayce. “Wait, *Espere*,”

The man stopped for a second, looked at him, pointed with his mouth to the opposite street. “Leave,” the man said softly.

He then understood what the man wanted. He understood just as quickly as the image flashed in his mind of the bearded, black faced man standing over Abby ready to rape her. He could not let this happen. He was scared. Without thinking he stepped toward the man and lunged grabbing the knifed hand. The man released his grip on Abby, swung and grabbed his other hand while Jayce tried to twist the man’s arm to point the knife back at him, but he found that this was much harder than he envisioned. They twisted back and forth, then Abby kicked the man in the side, weakening him enough for Jayce to bend the man’s body to the right, and then he felt the jolt of pain as the blade ripped into his leg. His leg went limp as the muscle tore apart, the blade nearly reaching his femur. As his knee fell to the ground the blade twisted sending another shock through his body, and then the blade slid out covered in red, soaking both Jayce’s and the man’s hands, and as the man attempted to pull the knife away the knife fell to the ground. Jayce’s hands found the hilt first on the concrete sidewalk, he raised it, and when he did the bearded man turned and ran off down the darkening empty street. He ran farther and farther away until he faded into black.

Blood covered the side of his leg. Abby woke from her shock and looked down at the wet leg. In the dim streetlight the blood was black, and was now dripping onto the ground. The adrenaline surging through his blood and out his leg numbed some of the pain while his mind raced retracing what happened.

“Jayce, you’re bleeding,” she said. “Jesus, you’re bleeding. We need to find help. Jesus Christ, Jayce, what the —”

“Just go find some help.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’ll start to walk to the street, but you have to go quick, find someone. That guy could come back.”

“And what are you going to do if he comes back?”

“Careful I’m armed,” he said smiling holding up the knife.

“What is wrong with you? You’ve just been stabbed and you’re making jokes?”

“Impressive, huh?”

She swore and started to run to the intersection where they sat earlier that evening waiting for someone who never would come. After she left he tried to stand, but the pain would not let him. He sat on the concrete leaning against a wall. His hand gripped the wound, but he could still feel the blood rushing out. The pain began to fade, and then he became numb, sitting as he thought about how he saved Abby and stopped the villain. The numbness reached his whole body. It was calming, like falling asleep. He then looked up to the black and the last thought to pass through his brain, as the bleeding stopped, was how the sky seemed farther away now more than ever.