

King of Pain

by Lem Cacho

I woke up around 6 pm today. As always, mum would wake me up. I have this special bond with my bed and parting with her during my most vulnerable is anathema to my nature. Thrice mum would pull my feet and thrice I would groan hoping she would go away. Of course she would, but it would take me another hour, or thirty minutes if I find the courage, to set my bed free. It's always like this.

As everyone prepares for dinner, I got up for breakfast at 6 pm. I still do the same rituals people do in the morning. I brush my teeth three hundred strokes, take a dump for an hour, and shower for another two. That excludes my concerts depending on which musical genre I prefer at the time. I usually sing Sting's in the shower. A lot of "If I Ever Lose My Faith in You." A lot of "King of Pain."

This 6 pm was different. No matter how mum pulled my legs and no matter how long it took with my tossing and turning, I couldn't get up. There was this crisscrossing pain running in my back. It was good it was dark and my room's light was out and I can only see mum's figure thanks to shades of tiny lights that came from streetlamps. Mum said, "Just get up whenever you want, you lazy bastard!" She gave up.

And then there was this fluid running down my cheeks. At first I thought it was saliva. If it were then I must have dreamed of spitting gallons. It was all over my pillow, covering half my cheek. When mum went down to prepare dinner, I slowly got up, amid that shameful back pain, reached out for the switch, and turned the light on. I saw my face on the mirror covered with blood. Then I looked at my pillow. The once white pillow case turned crimson overnight. It's funny because somehow, it took the shape of my face. I sleep on my right side all the time.

If you would have seen me you would have thought I have had five rounds with Randy Couture. All those dirty-boxing and slamming

face down on the floor. Just the thought of it made me dizzy and now imagine the blood I lost during my sleep. I took my Lee shirt off that says "Redemption" across the chest and wiped my face with it. I wiped the blood off as much I could, again looked at my face on the mirror, and went to the laundry area as fast I could. What I usually do is throw my clothes into the washing machine like how Lebron would make hoops, but this time I was quick, I was nimble. I couldn't let mum see the blood. I couldn't especially with her age.

There's just the two of us, you see. Whatever problems I have I keep to myself. When I lost pops three years ago I have no one else to speak to. He was a funny man, my dad. In fact, he's more of a drinking buddy than a father. He's gone. I'm left with mum and she never listens. Whenever I tell her not to go outside the house alone she would still go. We fought about this many times, but she'd always forget. She forgets stuff. That's why I don't want her going out. I'm afraid she won't find her way back home. She's 73 and sometimes she doesn't recognize me. When she does, which is fifty-five percent of the time, she would scold me. But I'm happy she does that. And I'm happier that within that forty-five percent, that moment when she forgets so many things including my name, she doesn't remember I'm bleeding.

It's just the two of us: me, who looks like someone who got sucked by a vampire, and Mum, who forgets my name. I can tolerate the bleeding. I can tolerate the back pain. I can tolerate mum's scolding, but I can't tolerate her leaving and not coming back home.

