Bereaved

He stood statue-still in the centre, gazing at the emptiness that surrounded him. The troubles boiling within him created this expressionless mask that he wore as his face; nothing could penetrate the icy barrier. Yet despite this, the eyes exposed the soul since its history of tears was imprinted into its surface as clearly as impressions in clay. The wrinkles of joy by his eyes were hollow and lined with dust.

I pity him – poor Will. He was defeated.

The hollowness in his eyes reminds me of the time when we went to Dad’s childhood town. Near where he grew up, he showed us this deserted village. It had beautiful stone bungalows, bigger ones that looked like stores, and a huge hotel, yet not a soul inhabited the place. Dad told stories and myths which he and his childhood friends created. One was of the architect who took his life when his great masterpiece went unfinished and that his ghost still haunts the village. This was how Will looked: like an abandoned body haunted by the souls of his parents.

I remember thanksgiving and can still taste the cranberry jam that was made every year from the recipe. When Mum passed away, Will and Dad made the meal. Dad would be making the mashed potatoes and steaming the brussels sprouts, while yelling every 5 mins ‘Check on the turkey!’ to Will, who was stirring the cranberries with unbroken concentration. It was chaos. And yet, when it was all finished, we sat. The cream-white tablecloth ran along the middle of the table with mini orange pumpkin decorations scattered by every plate; the chairs were always filled with neighbours, friends and anyone else who wished to come. I remember how he cherished those moments.

When the news came of Dad’s passing, Will bled an ocean through his eyes, feeling his soul as wafer thin. His body trembled and chilled. His entire existence and purpose had vanished with the blink of an eye, and in that single everlasting moment he had learnt more about pain that he ever wanted to know.

I was desperate to help Will, but he seemed so distant, as if his soul had left and only the mould of his body remained. I cared for him for weeks, asking what he wanted, what he needed. But he wanted nothing. He needed nothing. I suggested grief therapy, but the idea seemed to push him deeper into the hole that he was carving himself into. It was only after a couple months that he would go to the store to buy food: up until then he had been eating minimally off cans of beans that were stacked in the pantry. Sometimes he would even buy his old favourites, and once I saw him perplexed, staring at a jar of cranberry jam amid the ‘Jams and Spreads’ aisle. I tell myself that I couldn’t help him, yet the guilt still overcomes me from time to time.

Now, as Will stood here, his mind wandered. It won’t help, he thought. It may even make things worse by reconjuring memories, making new wounds in his scarred body. He thought of the absurd idea that went through his mind when he agreed to this and walked into the room a few minutes ago. As he placed his foot in the direction of the exit door, a smiling face entered and shook his hand.

‘Hi, sorry for the wait, I’m Graham Davis, and will be your grief therapist for as long as you wish. Please take a seat Will, and we shall begin…’

‘Hi’ I reply