

The Price of Revival

Rohan Verma 2009

Had I the chance to choose any other location for my growth, I would have most certainly given to a serene, lackadaisical setting. Yet here I was imagining this fantasy, for what was most likely the third time today, entrenched in a filthy, decrepit orphanage. For as far as I could remember, this had been my home, but only in the most physical sense of the word, for I shared no attachment to it, whatsoever. There was no sense of comfort or stability, but instead remnants of must and death in the air. Confined to a corner of the city, forgotten, I myself had forgotten who I was. All I had was a mirror that revealed my reflection back. My dark brown eyes showed no light, and stared back at me dully, without feeling. I had long dark hair that distinguished me from everyone else, if the need be to be separated. The city had taught me that each person is so insignificant, and their existence is only a small part of the meaningless picture which humanity had blotched out onto the canvas.

Crime-ridden would make the city streets seem like a safe place. Even in the daytime, the smog and scowls of the people gave off a light-sucking air which zapped whatever life the sun had tried to provide. At the orphanage, we rarely went out into the daytime as it was, for we were taught to be as discrete as possible. Without parents to "guide" us we were useless to society and might as well just waste the people's care and time inside four rotting walls. Unfortunately, this kind of life had hardened me, as well as the others. We felt no emotion, no happiness, no excitement. In the mornings I awoke to the sound of the waking city, slowly and groggily making their way to their established niches. During the day, I was halfheartedly taught and educated, which I gained nothing from. The only things I wished to know I was told I could not know. I was fascinated with the universe, with death, and sadly, with sin. Every day I spent hours figuring ways to determine how existence worked, and why it worked this way. What was earth, I would think to myself, but an infinitesimal dot in a scheme that not even the greatest of minds could comprehend. Why would we, as inhabitants, develop so differently from the rest of the creation that had existed before us? What would happen to not the physical being, but our spiritual self after death?

So much yearning for answers nearly led to me to feel insane. The only thing that kept me on the right side was surprisingly, the sounds of the city at night. Each night I fell asleep to the sounds of sirens, screams, sin. Smoke seeped through my window and I begin to like the smell. Occasionally I felt the lingering vibrations in the air from someone's thumping heart. I was curious to escape and witness it for myself, and I knew in my heart that one day I would. For now I was forced to be content in my current situation, passing through each day as it came, waiting for something to take me away. Little did I know that this opportunity would soon arise.

One day, a peculiar man came to the orphanage, and spoke of his ability to entertain and occupy the children, in hopes that he would be given some time with us. Of course, being no other better alternative he was allowed to, and we were gathered together in a room, uncomfortably. Once he was sure we were all together alone, he savored the moment, and looked directly at me, with a crooked smile. Before I could read anything into it he looked at the rest of the orphans and scanned their inexpressive faces. His voice began to fill the air, at first in a story-telling manner, to enchant us. But as the ears perked up, it became bolder, and more convictive. I felt myself drawn into his world, his promises, and most strongly, that crooked smile. He spoke of a world in which we could know all things, in which we were no longer orphans, but instead, the ones who looked upon the others. Eyes gleamed and never before was there so much emotion gathered into such a small area of the orphanage. Suddenly I knew something was not right. While the others sat mesmerized by this stranger, I looked him directly in the eyes, challenging him. He noticed immediately and met my glare with a spark of fires in his eyes that subsided immediately. I knew no person could promise such fantasies he was. All my life I had run into the wall of reality, and yet this complete stranger promised a way around, to undo the past and tell me things I did not know about myself. It angered me, it consumed me, and I found a fire in my stomach I had never known existed.

In rage I stood and screamed at the orphans, pointed at the man, and released my frustrations upon all. I was greeted with unsympathetic glares and total rejection from peers. It was at that point that I knew I had lost them. The stranger calmly smiled at me.

He came back each day, with new stories of new places, promises even better than the last, and complete control of the minds of my fellow orphans. No one suspected the slightest change, but I watched it right under my eyes. The stranger was preparing the children for a new life, one where he would become their undisputed leader and where they would be his pawns. His promises and lies were fed so tactfully to the starving youth that I was virtually helpless. I knew I was the only hope now, not just for the orphanage, but the whole city. If the man was left to his bidding then the whole city would be gone, and my only home, though I despised it, would be left smoldering. There were plans to kill and torture, and curse the dark city to its demise, for it to become a whirlwind of dark smoke and destruction. As days passed by I couldn't help but feel this man was responsible for so much more wrong, and that his elimination was necessary.

One particular night, I remember because I could not fall asleep, as the city noises were particularly quiet, I made up my mind. I got up and looked around at the other orphans with me, who had grown now to abhor me for my refutation of

their leader. Scanning their conditioned faces, my ears picked up a tiny sound from downstairs. I made my way to the staircase, and crept slowly down each step, careful not to make any noise. A lifetime's worth of knowledge of every stair made this possible. Poking my nose around the corner, my eyes darted to the darkness, and quickly numbed at the sight.

Lifeless bodies floated in the air in a mass, swirling around surrounded by a cloud of purple light. My pulse quickened as I switched my glance to the other side of the room where the once-stranger stood, conducting the ceremony, with an intent expression of concentration and concealed happiness. I did not recognize the bodies; they seemed like random corpses. That is, until I saw the unmistakably similar face of one: the same dark brown eyes and long dark hair I saw when I looked into the mirror. Curiosity gripped my body and out of impulse I lunged forward into the room, startling the stranger. He angrily screamed at me.

"What are you doing here? No one can know about this!" he shouted at me. I demanded an explanation back. He seemed reluctant, but he must have thought of something, for he began to explain without hesitation.

"I come from an old lineage of people, you have never heard about. We have surpassed the barrier that the rest of mankind struggles to even comprehend." His eyes began gleaming at me. "I do not understand why you refuse to accept my power over your mind, as I do with the other children. Perhaps it is some innate quality you hold that the others do not. Well I tell you what: I am going to exploit it. I know you already discerned the face of this man here, to be your father."

My knees trembled, and emotion welled up inside of me. Not since the days of my childhood had I cried, wishing I could be like a normal kid, with parents, accepted.

"I can give you what you want. I know what it is you seek. But you will have to pay a price." He said to me, calmly.

"I'll do anything you want!" My inner child had grabbed hold of me. I knew that a nurturing parent, someone to love me and teach me, was what I had always been longing. The magician whispered into my ears what it is I had to do. My eyes grew wide as he told me.

"No..." I thought to myself. "I'll do anything, but that..." The man smiled back at me. "You have no other choice" he repeated. If I am to give you something you desire, then I must take as well."

I solemnly pondered over what had to be done. Then, without a word, I grabbed the blade he held out toward me. I heavily trudged up the stair, taking one at a time, my heart heavy. When I got to the top, I took one last look down, at the smiling face of the man. I turned away and walked into the room of orphans, sleeping peacefully. These were the children I had grown up with. They hated me now, but I knew that they would never harm me, and deep down they were still fond of me. We shared the burden a pain, something that shared is more bonding than love or happiness. But still. I had to do it, if I wanted my father back. Paradoxical yes, as I gutted the heart out of the first child. My early obsession with sin, nature, and death, were all removed. I reached inside the corpse, my hands covered in blood. There was faint beating sound, but as I grabbed my hand around it and ripped it out, it stopped. I felt cords rip away and the blood on my hands spread all over me. I screamed, waking up some of the children. I still had so many more to go. I locked the door. Becoming normal had its price I told myself constantly. Rolling up my sleeves, I sighed. Only 14 more lives to take with my bare hands. There was no turning back. Upon making it to the last body, I stood over, without emotion. Just as I was about to complete the deed, the stranger stumbled in, bloody. There had been an attempted robbery, and he had been shot. Blood spouted from his chest and he looked at me with dying eyes.

"I'm sorry..." he said weakly. And with that, he hit the ground limp. And with him, went any of my hopes, my dreams, my craving, to be a normal child.