

[HIDDEN TREASURE]

Kade Cao

ELA Benchmark 1

Proud of: my first chapter

Unsure of: the 5th paragraph

Working on: the end

NAMKIL BAEK - 1

Date log October 28th 1970,

I'm writing this early this morning, not out of my own will..but because of my family. I never expected myself to be much of a writer, but I'll do it for their sake. As I write this, my wife is sleeping beside me..my son in his crib. Never thought that punk would look so peaceful. My writing might be hard to decipher, I don't have much light to work with. The sun is still peeking out through the horizon, orange streaks painting against the sky. My bags are in the corner, today, I leave my home to fight for my country. The vietnam war had been undergoing for years, younger me thought I could escape deportation. But as I grew older the more I knew it would become apart of my reality. The army told me they couldn't give me a date I'd be released..I can only count down the days from here. I'm guessing I'll be gone for a few years. Many don't believe it's a long period of time..but I'll miss so much. My son, he's only a few months old..barely able to sleep on his own. I won't be there for his first word..his first step..not even his first day of primary school. I fear that he'll never accept me as a father when I return. By then, he'll be just ten years old.

The truck is on its way, I can hear the engine roaring in the distance. I knew this moment would arrive, yet I can still feel my stomach tie into a knot..like a sudden rush of sorrows overcame my body like the plague. But every time I have the urge to flee, I think about them. I think about my family and their safety. I'd go to war hundreds of times if it meant they could live another day in peace; like another calm down down by the beach, the tides are calm.

If one day, Hyun, if you find this journal..I did this all for you. I know I'm not the most loving paternal figure..but it doesn't stop me from wanting to give you the world. I love you.

HYUN BAEK - 2

Date log July 26th 1978,

Umma (umma means mom, mother*) told me it helps to write my feelings down in a personal journal..just like Appa* (dad, father*). I can tell she's been crying a lot. I think it's because of Appa. I can't remember him, no matter how hard I try. I try so hard sometimes I feel like there's steam coming out my ears! Umma always says he was a good man..but if he was, why did he leave us? Why does Umma cry so much? I know it's hard, taking care of me by herself. I can't help but think I'm just a burden for Umma. So I like to stay outside the house as long as I can.*

My uncles and aunties say I'm a spinning image of Appa, maybe that's why she can never look at me with happy eyes anymore. But I know, even despite her own problems, Umma cares for me. When I come home, late at night I always find my dinner wrapped up underneath the kitchen light. I sit by myself, eating my food without complaint. Half the time I don't even heat it up.

In the kitchen, there's a picture of my father. I place it in front of me, as if he was there with me. I never got to do all the things my classmates do with their Appas. At my first birthday, he wasn't there. He wasn't there for my 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and so on. He was never there to be proud of my good marks, he wasn't there to pick me up from school like the other kids. He never took me out around the city, I never got to play catch with him. I never had my father there to hold me tight when I was upset. So I cry to his picture. I cry so much snot runs down my nose, and my tears soak my food. I feel angry..no, frustrated. That's a new word my teacher taught us. I'm frustrated, but sad. I dream of the day he's home, and he can make up for all the times I was alone.

NAMKIL BAEK - 3

Date log November 13th 1975,

I'm writing this under candlelight, i'm in one of the burrows, stationed..awaiting command. Our messenger had arrived to base, blood dripping from his chin. His face was bruised, teeth knocked out. He fell at our feet managing to spurt out "coming..soon."

The base went into a frenzy, soldiers pouring out into their stations..fumbling for weaponry. So here I am, waiting for the enemy to arrive. I'm anxious, I feel so vulnerable. Unlike my fellow soldiers..some so young they're too myopic for reality. Questions overwhelm me, I've been needing to let these feelings out. My pencil is nearly done for..I cant write much. But I fear I won't make it past this battle. I'll never get to see my boy or my wife. I've been gone for so long..i've forgotten their voices. I miss his small blabbes..I even miss her nagging at me. Its almost time. If my journal is ever found, please return it to my family.

HYUN BAEK - 4

Date log May 23rd 1983,

My Appa is coming home. I cant explain the way I feel right now, it's a mixture of different emotions. I feel..excited but there's a part of me that wants to hate him. 13 years, he wasn't here. I learned to shave and tie a tie on my own. Why would I need him now? What's the point of trying to bond with a man who's never been there for me. As much as I don't want to see him, part of me wants him to see that I've grown without him. I didn't need him, and I don't now. I hate him...but I've never seen umma so happy. I'll bear with it, I know how long she's been waiting for this moment. There's not much to say to be honest. The best way to summarize how I feel is like..the ocean! Like the waves crashing against the shore.

NAMKIL BAEK - 5

Date log May 23rd 1983,

He's so big now. He's not my little boy anymore. "Hello." His first words to me weren't in a small squeaky voice, but as if it was man to man. His eyes weren't soft..but the deep ember color resemble so much of my own. He was wearing his school uniform..he's been waiting for me to arrive. Though his greeting was cold and had no

heart, he had the motivation to see me..that, that warms my heart. Before I could say anything to him, my wife jumped onto me. She looked as young as ever. She took my hand, dragging me into the kitchen, never letting go of my touch. She began to present the feast she had made in advance. I couldn't help but smile as she continued to talk..her talking tuning out. In the moment, I was just glad to be home. But in the corner of my eye..I saw Hyun glaring. "Adeul! Come here, your umma made a feast! Let's catch up on lost time." Hyun gave me a rough sigh before coming over. I tried to pat his back but he brushed me off. I've prepared myself for this sort of neglect, but it still hurt to see it play out. Come to think of it, he's never called me Appa. As if he never had one to begin with. Dinner was draining. My wife kept talking, I don't mind listening to her..I've missed her rants. But Hyun was quiet, silent almost. It saddens me to watch this unfold. My wife left the dining room to grab another dish, leaving Hyun and I alone together. He was playing with the scraps left on his plate, avoiding eye contact with me. I didn't know how to start a conversation, especially with someone I haven't seen in 13 years. There's a lot to say, a lot to learn about him but it doesn't seem like he takes interest in getting to know me as well. "Hyun, how are your studies coming along?" I attempted to make small talk. He didn't answer, so I continued to ask questions. Maybe I pushed it too much, he snapped at me: "Why do you care? You've never even tried until now. No letters or anything! You never attempted to talk to me until now." With that, he stormed out the house. I never chased after him, after all..Hyun was right. I needed to give him space.

NARRATOR - 6

Hyun avoided any sort of interaction with his father, Namkil. From simply hiding in his room, to staying out as late as possible. Over the years Hyun never attempted to even bond with his Father..he resented him. He never celebrated any milestones with him either. Graduation, Marriage, kids. He kept to himself. He never visited, he attempted to forget his father. But, in 2014, Hyun learned of his father's illness. It took some time for Hyun to convince himself to even go to see him. He wasn't going to have sympathy for Namkil, but to get all his years emotion off his chest.

HYUN - 7

I cant recall how long I stood outside his door before finally reaching for the doorknob. When I entered the room, I felt my heart throbbing against my chest. I

was nervous, but determined. Determined to let him know how I felt all those years ago. There he was, sat in his bed, wearing a hospital gown. He was plugged into several different machinery. I stood beside him, clenching my fist. "Appa." I said with a solemn tone. He looked at me, his eyes full of sorrow. "Hyun", his voice was weak, using the last of his strength to reach for my hand, I reluctantly yanked my hand away. "Appa, I hate you. I hate you for leaving me alone for 13 years. I hate that the kids in school would make fun of me for not having you around. I hate how you made Umma cry a lot. I hate that even though you abandoned me, you still had some much impact in my life. I became a man without you. I have a family, and I make sure to be there for them no matter what. Why couldn't you be the father I needed?" Tears streamed down my face as I poured out my feelings to him. Sorrow overcame his look, reaching over for an old journal and handed it to me. I looked at it for a second before slamming it against the door. "You can't give me your shit and expect me to love you." He reached for my hand again, holding on firmly to it. "Appa loves you. I always have." He managed to say. I pulled away from him, picking up the journal and leaving.

At home, sat at my office I began to flip through the pages. It took me an hour before realizing the mistake I've made all these years. I rushed out my home and to the hospital, only for the receptionist to tell me I had been too late. I fell to my knees, sobbing on the white tiled floor.

i love you, appa.

ARTIST NOTE:

I ended up fast forwarding throughout the story, only because of the word limit. Namkil Baek is my grandfather. He was absent from my life up until his passing on December 31st, 2014. He barely wanted to see me, and for a long time I believed I was the issue. He wouldn't look at me when I was over at his house, and never wanted to do anything fun with me. So, I stopped trying to see him so often, he almost became like a stranger I just happened to pass by a lot. I never realized why he was avoiding me. He had a severe illness, caused him to be in and out of the hospital enough. He grew frail and weak..couldn't walk, couldn't talk. He didn't want me to remember him as a weak man, so he tried to not see me as much. He didn't want to ruin my memory of him. I didn't know that until a few years after his passing. And when I learned that, I was honestly a bit hurt. After years of convincing myself I just wasn't someone he wanted to learn to love, he truly just didn't want me to see him as a weak person. At times, though I don't have a special bond with me..I miss him a lot. I wish we could've done things together. I told this story through a fictional pair of eyes, Hyun. Whom does not exist. If somewhere, because he believed in the heavens, I hope he can still watch over me. I wish he knows that I love him, despite never knowing him well enough.