



A familiar, sonorous voice began streaming out of the radio. It was full of charisma, diplomacy, sometimes even irony; he was completely in his element. My dad was discussing a recent outbreak in Sri Lankan politics with his fellow presenters, and he was not holding back on his trademark satirical undertones which he skillfully sugar-coated in humour. He engaged his audience with his ideas and his words, holding them captivated; it was genuinely impressive. He had been doing this his entire life, yet every time he got up on stage or went on air, he was transformed, and it utterly shocked me. Don't get me wrong, it was not a bad kind of shock, but rather the kind that occurred when witnessing the unravelling of a rare phenomenon, which often times left the beholder oddly speechless. Completely in control, he was in his own environment, Sri Lanka, and he was poised and self-assured.

Sometimes I wondered why my family ever came to Australia. By the sounds of it, they indulged in an exceptionally lavish lifestyle before they chose to move here. Dad was almost about to be promoted as head engineer, and mum was a successful accountant. They had lived in a luxurious three-storey house with a beach view, palm trees and three dogs. Then my sister came into the picture, and my parents thought it best that they gave her the best opportunities in life; opportunities that could only be reached outside the scope of their humble homeland. They did it for us and their decision was validated with every certificate, every award, and every accolade we ever received. What I had never understood was that, this decision was not an upgrade, but a compromise. Our success was like the first blooming leaf after a

Yes Dad... Now I know...

devastating fire; it had come at a great loss. Every time I caught my mother massaging the soles of her feet, I slightly despised myself; I flourished through my parents' sacrifice. In the summer of 1997, they moved to Australia and all I have ever known is the aftermath.

We were unaccustomed to eating out, but occasionally my mother would relent and indulge us. Tonight in Carlton, through fatigue and an insatiable need to satisfy our cravings, we decided to eat Italian. It was not a cuisine that was familiar to my family and my father had to be cajoled into it - upon seeing our desperation though, he relented. His unnecessary fear of venturing into new territory always surprised me. It didn't matter whether it was Italian, French or Spanish; once we escaped the realm of his familiarity, we would be faced with the glass ceiling of his stubbornness. It was at times like this, when it felt like we were testing his boundaries, that I witnessed the vulnerability underneath his unshakable façade; he was unsettlingly fearful about something. It was often in the pettiest of moments that I witnessed my dad's identity terrors, but it was unmitigable; in a foreign land, a place that he could never grasp onto for emotional stability, my father had every risk of losing his sense of self, his sense of control, his sense of identity. In Australia, there

was never any solid ground he could hold onto. He always seemed to be treading on quicksand, constantly trying to remind himself that panicking only makes you sink faster, but nonetheless the land was always giving way underneath his unwelcome, unbidden feet.

We stepped into a warm room illuminated by the crystalline facets of chandeliers while waiters carried around bottles of matured chardonnay; it was clearly beyond our budget. We sat down and when we opened the menu, immediately the doubt surrounding our choice was magnified. After analysing the menu, we came to a mutual decision of spaghetti carbonara, one of the more affordable options. The waiter, a fairly young man with slick blonde hair finally came to us with his notepad and asked us for our order. My dad hesitated for a bit, but then he started saying it, however halfway through began stuttering, "Car-carbonar..." he was getting flustered; I could see it in the way his eyes kept losing focus, zoning in and out of the of the situation, trying not to let the terror overtake him.

The young man remained where he was, eyebrows raised. The corners of his mouth were stern, and his hazel eyes were narrowing; I couldn't pinpoint what it was, but his expression made me un-

comfortable. Perhaps it was the hunger, or maybe it was the unbearable glare of the chandelier, but it all made sense to me at that moment.

Many years ago during a visit to Sri Lanka, my dad decided to take my family down to the beach. After a long drive, I was a little confused, that we had arrived at such a remote location; there were so many more popular and closer beaches we could've gone to. As we approached the shore, my confusion was heightened by the vision of many dark creatures in the shallow water. Then I suddenly realised; they were the sunburnt flamingos - at least, that's what I called them. In fact, they weren't flamingos at all, but rather fishermen perched on their wooden stilts. My dad told us that, the still fisherman along the main beaches were just posing for the tourists, not fishing at all, just a way to cash in an extra buck for the photography. Here, they were the real deal. Their sense of balance was incredible; an unwavering sense of control I had never witnessed before. The wind seemed to guide their rods across the water, and their expressions were as tranquil as the gold-tinged ocean, rippling ever so gently. They trusted the earth beneath them, they knew its ways more than they knew themselves. That evening, a same sense of trust was reflected in my father's eyes; he knew the land beneath him would never give way. However tonight, my father trusted nothing. He was trying to keep his balance but the stilts were snapping into splinters beneath him.

I realised why my dad hated buying Italian food and why he liked online shopping. I understood why he never made it as a mechanical engineer in Australia and why he loved writing novels. I realised why he liked taking strolls along the beach, and why he smiled every time he broke open an imported, Thai coconut. I realised why he always put off travelling to England but went to Sri Lanka every year. Most importantly I realised why I was always left so damn bewildered every time he spoke live on the radio. This man, who couldn't pronounce spaghetti carbonara in English, could manipulate his words so perfectly, so confidently in Sinhalese. When he was in the studio, something felt right, just like that evening on the beach; for that small instant, this small man became so big, bigger than I could ever imagine.

I wrote this as a creative piece for my VCE English exam this year. It was lightly inspired by real events, however I chose to take my writing down a more fictitious route as well.

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