

THE MAN IN CAMOUFLAGE

by Shadman Rakib

From the living room, I heard someone banging on the door.

I stopped playing with my toy fire truck and carried it with me to the window. I pulled the white floral curtain aside slightly and peeked through the window.

A tall man in camouflage, who was carrying a gun, was kicking the door.

I needed to protect myself, so I aimed the fire truck towards the door.

"Open the door," the man screamed. "I'm Colonel Jinping."

I didn't respond.

The door frame finally broke, and the door swung open. The man barged in and cocked his rifle.

I screamed, hoping the neighbors would hear me, and threw the toy car at his shiny forehead.

He barely flinched.

"You little piece of shit," he said. He rushed towards me. "Get on your knees."

He took out handcuffs from his pocket.

I couldn't let him get me. I ran barefoot out the door and towards the end of the block.

Jinping chased me. It wasn't a fair race because he was a grown man.

He tackled me to the ground, handcuffed me, and dragged me across the sidewalk.

He released me in front of the white van parked in my front yard.

"Stay put," he said.

He opened the back door of the van.

There was a boy about my age who was wearing khakis and a white sweater sitting on the floor of the van. He was continuously blowing on his fingers.

"Get up," Jinping said.

"No," I said. I spat on him.

He lifted me and threw me inside. I landed on my belly and groaned.

"I'll be back," Jinping said. He slammed the door shut.

"You okay?" the boy asked.

I nodded.

"Look at my papercut," he said. "It's so cool, right?"

I paused.

"Yeah, I guess it's sort of cool," I said, moving next to him. "I'm Uymus. How about you?"

"I'm Innois," he replied.

"You're also a Limmus, right?" I asked.

"Yeah."

Jinping opened the van's back door and got into the back of the van.

"Did I say you two could talk?" Jinping said.

He took out dirty white rags from a pocket in his pants and tied our mouths with them.

"That'll keep you shut," Jinping said.

I tried to speak, but my voice was muffled. I moved my mouth and jaw around, trying to wiggle out of the rag, but it was tied too tightly.

Jinping got out of the van and shut the door.

A few seconds later, I heard the van's engines rumble. There were no windows in the back, and the wall behind the driver's seat blocked my forward view completely. I had no clue where we were going.

I couldn't talk or move my handcuffed hands. I couldn't sleep because Innois was snoring. Instead, I counted the number of bumps that I felt during the ride.

More than 100 bumps later, Jinping finally stopped driving. I heard the click of his seat belt unbuckling.

The van door creaked open. Jinping jumped onto the back of the van. He had black bags in his hands. He put the bags on our heads and tightened them.

All I could see was pitch black.

I felt Jinping grab me and drag me away from the van.

I heard a loud thump.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Jinping said. "You're an idiot, Innois."

After a while, Jinping stopped shoving me around. He took the bags and the dirty rags off of Innois and me.

I was in a concrete room behind bars. A light bulb in the middle of the room lit two beds and a toilet with a yellowish hue.

I was definitely in prison.

"God!" I said. "Why does it smell like rotting fish?"

"I didn't fart," Innois said. "I swear."

Jinping left the cell and locked the door.

"Yaakov," Jinping screamed. "Weren't you supposed to throw out the garbage? Do you want to lose your job this quickly?"

A man who had powder-white hair walked towards Jinping.

"Sorry, sir," the powder-white hair man said in a thin, rasping voice. "Won't happen again."

"It better not," Jinping said. "Also, since the teacher couldn't make it today, you'll substitute for him."

"But, that isn't part of the job," Yaakov said.

"Do you want to get fired?" Jinping said.

Yaakov shook his head.

"Go get the lesson plan and orientation papers from my office," Jinping said.

Jinping transferred us to an empty, white room that had two desks and a whiteboard.

Jinping left the room, and Yaakov entered.

"Welcome to vocational training camp," he said, reading off a piece of paper. "This camp will deradicalize Limmuses that are a threat to society."

"But, I am good," I said.

"I don't know," he said. "It says you're a terrorist. I'm just supposed to read this."

"Wait a minute," Innois said, slapping his forehead. "I'm a terrorist. I should've known."

"How are we terrorists?" I said.

"This says you're evil," Yaakov said, shrugging.

"I promise to be good now," Innois said. "Can I leave now? I've got to watch TV."

"How do we threaten freedom?" I said.

"I guess because President Emmanuel Macron says so," Yaakov said.

"Can you take me back now?" Innois said.

"No," Yaakov said. "Just listen. There's no need to cause problems."

"But, we're just kids!" I said. "We don't deserve to be in prison."

"You should understand," Innois said. "You look old, so you probably have kids."

Yaakov's eyes became watery. He turned away, but I could hear him sobbing.

"What'd you do?" I whispered to Innois.

"Nothing," Innois said.

"Are you okay?" I asked Yaakov.

"My son would've been in his 30s," Yaakov said, wiping his face with his shirt sleeve.

"What happened to him?" Innois said.

"When he was thirteen, a robber shot him for not cooperating," Yaakov said. He wiped his face again with his sleeves. "We've got to get back to work."

I nodded. I didn't want him to lose his job.

Yaakov made us chant "Long live the President, our national hero."

About an hour later, Jinping walked into the room.

"Did they behave?" he asked.

"Yes," Yaakov said.

"Let me hear the chant you learned today," Jinping said.

I chanted, but Innois stood silent.

"I want to go home," Innois said, kicking the wall.

"No," Jinping said.

"Take me home," Innois screamed, punching Jinping in the stomach.

Jinping pushed him back.

"People like you will never learn," Jinping said. "It's better to get rid of you now than try to change you."

Jinping cocked his rifle and handed it to Yaakov.

"You're his teacher," Jinping said. "You should do it."

Yaakov stood frozen.

"Why aren't you shooting him?" Jinping said. He tried to take the rifle out of Yaakov's hand, but Yaakov pushed him away.

"Soft man," Jinping said. "Watch. I'll do it with my bare hands"

Jinping shoved Innois against the wall and grabbed him by the neck. Jinping tightened his grasp. Innois gasped for air. His eyes rolled back and reddened.

"Stop," Yaakov screamed. "Stop!"

"No," Jinping said. "Man up."

Yaakov's eyes were wild, and he seemed to panic. He swung the gun around and shot Jinping right in the chest. Jinping fell to the floor, and a pool of blood began forming underneath him.

Yaakov was breathing quickly, and sweat broke out on his forehead.

"We got to get the hell out of here," Yaakov said.

Disclaimer:

I have not committed academic dishonesty. I have received feedback and criticism from Mr. Francis and my peers.