

Metamorphosis

By Elizabeth Tan

Since young, I had always pondered about how life would be like if my family could exit the poverty circle to live the comfortable lives we craved. Growing up, I understood more and realised that there was hardly any way to get out of the vicious circle we were stuck in. Our government was nothing but corrupt. Embezzlement of funds, water rationing and eviction was a common sight in my country.

Politicians often used the taxpayers' money to fund the lavish lifestyles they lived. Their spouses were often seen wearing branded gowns and carrying the latest bags launched by leading fashion brands. Their houses were said to have marble-cladded walls with lap pools in their houses. Contrastingly, we stayed in run-down houses with overly-rusted zinc roofs. Our living conditions were starkly different: the rich were given plenty of space to dwell in the city, while the impoverished were made to cramp into tiny spaces. There was a wall built in the middle of the two different groups of people, to make sure none of us could enter into the grounds which were only meant for the upper-class. We were close in proximity, not anywhere near in terms of our social status.

I stayed in a slum. My parents earned little, yet a hefty forty five percent of their income was used to pay tax. We had to live from hand to mouth as their earnings from selling vegetables were not significant to sustain a family of six. The government constantly promised us that they would use the money we paid to improve our standards of living. But it was all a lie; a lie that was echoed around the slums for the past thirty-four years.

In our city, water was divided such that we locals gained access to about a tenth of the water, while the rest were diverted for the politicians' families and tourism uses. I absolutely loathed the system as it created social unrest and seeing children as young as five carrying huge buckets of water home was not unusual. These children missed school to obtain water, and lost out on their fair share of education.

There were no avenues where us peasants, could voice out any displeasures towards the biased system. Anyone who opposed the new leader was immediately arrested and executed. Hence, these immoral political leaders were never changed and our living conditions were still as poor as before. Before every election, they would show pretence and come around the slums to garner supports from us slum-dwellers. Every single time they promised to make a change, the thought of hypocrisy would surface in my mind as these leaders voided all our votes.

There was not much I could do to help my family out of this predicament we were in, except to work doubly hard in school, with the hope of earning a decent pay to get my whole family out of this vicious circle.

This was the life I led.

When I graduated from school as the valedictorian, I immediately began working for the government. I wanted to understand how the system was run from the inside out. As I rose up the ranks through my hard work, I became more and more well-liked by the citizens of the country as I refused to participate in the corruption that plagued our society. I was a shining beacon in the darkness of the civil service, and there was nothing our overlords could do about it. Incarcerating me would cause too great an uproar because I was backed by the vast majority of the citizens; citizens who had been oppressed for too long.

Within a few short years, the rich had left for greener pastures where they could continue their immoral exploits. Without their support, the dystopian empire that was in place for so long finally collapsed.

Now, I stand as the president of my country. I am proud to have eradicated corruption from my country's shores by using the heavy hand of the law. Although we are still rebuilding, I believe I can lead my country to rise up from the ashes of our past, and metamorphose into a clean, upright utopia of the future.

(699 words)