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Author

Tran, Minh-Ha

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The Path of Darkness

Minh-Ha Tran

Abstract

This submission represents a depiction of street-life demise. It was inspired during a medical student rotation at the San Bernardino County Coroner's office, where one morning our subject was a 14 year-old innocent bystander—killed by ricochet from a drive-by shooting. She lives on within this work, albeit in different form, 'the house next door, a bullet stray, kills a daughter born yesterday'. It was written nearly twenty years ago—a creative outlet to deal with the tragedy wrought by its imagined protagonist.

The path of darkness once begun could not the raven back to light. As from the laughing, cruel surround, 'round each corner, peering eyes; suspicious glance at empty faces; unknowing when the Reaper strike.

Seek not a road of different end, but lived for that day just for then.

Why try why seek why self-improve – when 'future' is not taught 'round here. Each day to see only tomorrow, eyes unable to see in years. Years that could bear fruit and blossom traded in for days and weeks. Weeks that could be lived enjoying, discarded, trashed in lieu of glory.

Glory false though, raven-haired, as glory won with sword and might is quickly gone, the burning ruins – now standing still, in stillness speaking – 'Death is cheap, come one, come all.'

Raven-haired to listen not, and pack cold steel and steeled heart. To rush forth to midnight's call, small white pills and dark eight ball – swallow all to help forget the painful things that he recalls. The grip the grab the fist the stab a noose to hang, the pull the bang, a flash, the night; a life thus wiped, bright red blood pools in concrete. The moon reflected, fingers cold, and raven-haired with empty soul.

Yet still the Reaper's scythe lays waiting, dark glances gleam from shadowed alley, intent maligned with evil seething. Raven-haired... his friends die young.

Street-corner soldiers, armed and ready, skirmish warfare over land – divisions drawn down darkened streets. Wrong part of town, wrong place and time, with anger pop the Glock and 'nine. Copper-jacket rounds through walls, littered streets as skitters trash 'cross grime and grit and broken glass.

Car lights bright and then pulls up, raven-haired and pack through window, staccato pops as triggers pulled and screech the tires, shooters flee. In their wake, a mother crying, beside her son lies dying, dying – the house next door a bullet stray, kills daughter born just yesterday.

'I don't care cause I got paid', conscience clear and dealings deepen, further sins 'pon souls are heaping.

Keys to start 400 horses, out to highway, swerve and courses, off the shoulder dust is flying – life is flashing ‘fore red eyes, metal screeches car is crashing, and with hoarse breath beseeches Death – ‘Not now...’

And out the door pours raven-haired, as flashing lights close in that quickly. Out from jeans the ‘nine is ready – cops now circle, bleating bullhorns, faces mirthless. ‘Throw down gun put hands on head’, responded to with hollow points, trigger pulled by bleeding hand. Cops shoot back as chopper spotlight heats the air of falling night.

And all the while sparks fly from grindstone, scythe made ready – the Reaper’s blade.

Down embankment stumbles he, falling cuts and bruises knee, lungs are burning mind is racing heart is pounding sweat is pouring hands are trembling, ‘can’t it stop?’ – again he hears it, ‘pop! ‘pop! ‘pop!’

Dogs are barking, canine units, spotlights searching rocks and rubble, he knows he’s in the worst of trouble. Raven-haired – a broken body, blood down cheek, falls to the street, it all now looks so grim so grim as Reaper grins and grins and grins.

Blue shirts draw near, and choppers circle, see suspect black ‘nine in hand – the barrel raises, orders shouted, ‘drop the gun or you’ll be killed!’ Tonight it’s clear that blood will spill. The spotlight bright through darkness sweeps, ‘We’ve got you now, you are surrounded’, dogs move back by orders shouted.

But ringing ears bring piercing deafness, sees only ghosts seered in by bright – pupils struck by hot, hot light. Takes trembling aim, but before then, the rounds they puncture, kill and maim, blood and life pour out like rain. Pain-panic-fear, the scythe appears, oh raven-haired – the Reaper’s here...

And in his wake, a mother crying, beside her son lies dying, dying, chest is heaving, won’t be long eyes glazed dilating... last breath gone.

About the author

Minh-Ha Tran is the Associate Medical Director, for Transfusion Medicine and Pathology in the School of Medicine at UC Irvine.