

It was summer, and all the windows were open wide. Little Ronnie lay in bed listening to the night orchestra of tree frogs, crickets, and whatever else was lurking around in the darkness. The muggy summer air clung to him; sweat pumped off his body as he struggled to sleep, but he remained under his bed sheet just the same. Ronnie never slept without a sheet. The sheet was pulled up to his chin for the same reason he would never allow his arm or leg to dip over the side of his bed at night. Anything could be waiting for him down there, quietly waiting within the shadows. Waiting for his wrong move.

He knew it was childish. He'd just turned ten, after all, but there it was all the same. He knew there were boogiemen in the world, and sometimes they are closer than you think.

Besides the oppressive heat, what kept him awake was a dull ache. The tell-tale sign that his bladder was full. Once again, he would need to brave one of those boogie men, one that was frequently close. His father's office was straight down the hall from his room, directly in the way of the bathroom. He rubbed his side and winced. The deep purple flesh left over from the last late night potty-trip remained ripe with pain. He shivered despite the thick, hazy, summer heat.

It wasn't his father's fault. Mommy told him so.

BRIAN SCUTT

"Your father has ghosts. He'll be better soon. He's just tired from the war."

All he knew was these ghosts equaled pain for him, and his father didn't seem tired at all. The ghosts came from the Korea; he wasn't even sure what a "Korea" was, but he wished it was never there. He was told that it was where his name came from. Given to him by one of the ghosts, but his father hardly ever said that name. To him he was "kid," or "boy," or "Tyke." Never Ronald, or Ronnie, like his mother called him. Unless he was mad at the Korea ghosts. He called him Ron then, and that meant pain.

Using what moonlight was in the room, he peeked over the side of his bed. His eyes strained to break through the shadows. Nothing there, at least not that he could see. Fear of wetting the bed drove him. He scurried across the floor to his door and cracked it...no sign of his dad. He went for it. The creak of his door made his guts plummet. Noises came from down the hall. His father's office.

A dull glow bathed the area where the office door was. He could see the shadow cast from his father, most likely sitting at his desk, sipping his Old Crow. He always said, "Whiskey is the grown man's water." Ronnie wasn't sure about that, but he knew to stay clear when he had a glass in hand. Swallowing hard, he pressed on. The ache to pee radiated through his body all the way to his fingers. It made his knuckles tingle. His every step sounded like an echoing drum. The night creatures sang their songs from the open hall window. A low muttering came from the office; a conversation of ghosts. He kept his eyes trained on the glowing light and shadows, ready to run if he had to.

Ronnie stopped. The shadow moved. No, it was two shadows and two voices. He couldn't make out what was being said, but something was wrong. The outside sounds stopped. He glanced at the window, startled by the void the lack of chirping left behind. The window was cloudy; something white and sparkly covered it. Breath blew out in thick vapor around him like he was smoking one of his mother's Lucky Strikes.

## KOREAN ROAD

The skin on his arms broke out in bumps as the hair stood at attention. His teeth begin to chatter. A weeping sound came from the office, and he realized the talking had stopped.

Every ounce of Ron's being told him to run, to flee to his room and bury himself under his blankets. Still, he crept on down the hall, making it to the edge of the office door. His body shivered.

*Why is it so cold?*

"Ron, no—I didn't know—I didn't mean to. Oh god, oh god—I'm so sorry."

His father's words echoed between sobs. Ronnie pressed his head to the door casing and peaked inside the study. His father was there, sitting at his old oak desk. His back was facing him. He was shirtless. Large, dark, welted scars crisscrossed his back. His father reached across his desk for his beloved knife, the one he called kaybar. His father began muttering again, but the crying was still stuck in his throat. Ronnie could barely make it out the words.

"Ok...Ron. Yes."

His father turned slightly in his seat. Just enough for Ronnie to see his chest as he drew the knife across it, a trail of thick blood left in its wake, weaving through the mat of hair.

"I didn't mean to, Ron."

The knife twisted in its crimson path and inched towards his father's throat.

"I didn't..."

"Dad?"

The knife stopped. His father's head shot in his direction like lightning. Eyes flat and lifeless, ghostly. His mouth snarled into a deafening, guttural scream, as Ronnie was knocked back from the doorway by a blast of frigid air that dissipated as soon as his small body hit the wall. The summer heat slammed back around him to fill the void as his father raised from his chair.

"Ronald."

It was his name spoken, but not by his father's voice. Ronnie ran. Tears and screams forced their way from his throat. Warm urine saturated his pajama bottoms. He careened

BRIAN SCUTT

into his room, slammed the door and threw himself under the false haven of his blankets, knowing the beating would come.