

Title: The Human Right; North Korea

Category: Flash Fiction

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*North Korea has the right to know about Christ*

*Dear Jesus...I whispered.*

In the darkness, everything looked the same. Heavy, painted shadows across the door. Floor tiles dipped in black. Even the ceiling sank into the night like a quiet, quiet secret. I didn't like it. Eight-year old boys were suppose to be strong. I knew that. But even the silence made my toes curl in terror.

"Hyun, are you still awake?" suddenly whispered a voice. I sat up to see my Mother peering through a thread of light in the doorway. Her eyes were thick with exhaustion and dark from the night, She was always tired these days.

"Yes, I'm awake," I finally responded.

"It's been an hour since I sent you to bed," she spoke.

"I know." My voice was a whisper.

Mother opened the door, the pale light crawling up the wall towards our picture of Kim Jong Un. Even in the darkness, his faded smile made me shiver. Mother used to say he had eyes everywhere. That even the birds were watching.

"Do you remember what I told you to do when you're scared?" She slipped into the room and sat on the edge of the bed. The scent of warm bread and honey flowers drifted from her apron. Nothing smelled better, I decided. No shadows could reach me now.

"Do you remember the song?" she continued. She had learned it ages ago from an American. From a Christian. I nodded. "Just sing it when you feel scared and alone, okay?" she smiled, kissing me on my forehead with a touch as light as spring.

"Can we sing it together?"

Mother tapped my nose. "You're getting too big for this," she chastised with a laugh, "You'll have to learn to sing it by yourself."

But still, she began.

*Jesus loves me this I know,*

*For the Bible tells me so.*

*Little ones to him belong,*

*We are weak but he is strong.*

“Goodnight,” she finally whispered with a kiss. The warm feeling was lingering in my stomach. And even in the darkness where everything looked the same, I felt safe.

Suddenly the sound of thunder echoed from downstairs. A deafening crash against the front door.

“OPEN UP!” screamed thick voices, heavy with the night. My heart jumped and instantly I saw Mother stiffen. She turned her gaze away quickly, but I still caught the glitter of fear in her eyes.

“What was that?” I trembled.

“Stay right here,” she whispered, “We’ll be okay.” Her voice cracked on every syllable. I dove back into the safety of the blankets.

“OPEN UP, *CHRISTIANS!*”

The birds had betrayed us.

The concentration camp was cold. People walked with gray expression clouding their eyes and stale whispers between their lips. Iron bars and twisted wire snarled like teeth around the perimeter. Teeth that snagged on your elbows and bit at your heels.

“You!” a soldier jeered in our direction. He had a jagged nose and white lips. Mother and I were lined up against the wall. I leaned into her arms, trying to catch the lingering scent of warm bread and honey flowers. But there was only wind.

“What do you want?” Mother spat. There was an edge in her voice. Something cold and silver and bright.

“Christians,” the soldier sneered, “Come with me.”

“Why?” Mother was a stone. An immovable rock in the middle of a river. She was so strong.

But when I reached to clutch her fingers I realized they were trembling.

“Do no question me!” the soldier growled. He had a red ribbon pinned to his chest. He must be someone important. Someone who didn’t like rocks in rivers or immovable strength. He raised his gun. I stared at the nozzle. A deep empty chasm of darkness. Panic roared in my bones.

Mother’s gaze finally wavered and she stepped forward. “Bring your son,” the soldier gestured, coldly. Immediately, terror seized her eyes and she clutched my hand as if I were about to fall off the edge of the earth.

We followed the soldier toward a line of prisoners outside a tent in glinting shackles. I was struck by how shiny and new the chains looked against the worn, broken people in them. A man with thin bones glanced up at me and immediately I flinched as I saw the death behind his eyes. The *hopelessness*.

We stopped in front of the tent. For a moment, no one said anything. The silence made my toes curl in terror.

Then the soldier raised his voice. "These people were found to be publicly practicing a forbidden religion," he screamed into the dry wind. A wind that took little attention from him and yet he challenged it nonetheless. "For their act of rebellion against Kim Jong Un, there will be consequences."

Suddenly, his face turned towards me and his white lips curled.

"You," he muttered, "Denounce your faith right now. Or I will kill your mother." My skin froze. My heart stopped. And everything inside me wanted to drop to the floor. To melt into the dirt and wash away with the rain. Immediately I looked to my Mother.

But her eyes were downcast. And as she took a deep breath, I realized she was about to say something.

No. *Sing* something.

"*Jesus loves me this I know,*" she whispered, her voice a crack in the air.

"QUIET!" the Soldier hissed, jutting the gun under her chin. She flickered her gaze up at him. But now her eyes were burning.

"*For the Bible tells me so,*" she continued. I clutched her hand.

"*Little ones to him belong,*" I found myself answering. My voice was shaking. Trembling. I couldn't sing it right. It sounded awful. But a worn smile pulled at the lines of her face and that was all I wanted to see.

"*We are weak--*" I warbled.

"QUIET!" the Soldier hissed. He readied the gun. "I'M WARNING YOU."

"*But he is strong,*" she finished.

**BANG.**

"NOOO!" I shrieked. Mother crumpled to the floor. Instantly all the warmth left my fingers and everything in me collapsed. Tears flooded my vision and I could feel my legs shaking. I couldn't scream. I couldn't run. I couldn't move. I couldn't...

And then the nozzle was pointed at me. A deep empty chasm of darkness. I was terrified. And alone.

*Dear Jesus...* I whispered, trembling. Tears burned my vision.

Suddenly, the scent of warm bread and honey flowers filled my nose. A touch as light as spring.

I raised a shaky look. I blinked. I breathed.

And then I sang.

"*Jesus loves me this I know,*" my voice came out higher than it should have. But eight-year old boys were suppose

to be strong. I knew that.

“STOP!” the Soldier was delirious with rage now. The gun was cocked and readied.

“*For the Bible tells me so,*” I continued.

Suddenly another voice had joined in. I glanced up. It was the man with thin bones and hopeless eyes. But now his gaze was filled with...something *bright*.

“*Little ones to him belong,*” I sang louder. The gun raised. I closed my eyes. More voices joined in.

“*We are weak but He. Is. Strong.*”

And then the shot echoed.