

The winter sky slept peacefully. Its cheeks glowed an eerie grey, engulfing the sunlight which enriched the malnourished city. The mother shivered as the crisp, cold air sunk its fangs into her leathery skin, wincing as it surged through her nostrils. The nurse's footsteps echoed in the halls; thuds which dimmed to a dying scurry, each as oblivious to her plight as the clock hands which slowly and monotonously degraded everything under its influence. He was her everything now.

The fresh faced young man stepped from the gates of the Sydney high school. His rigid figure demanded respect and his pearly smile earned him the affection of women. She remembered the youthful hands clasped around the beautiful girl at the dance, the legs which oscillated like pendulums and the eyes which dilated, drowsy with infatuation. She stared, pitied at what had become. His powerful, proliferating voice, reduced to a pathetic wheeze. A wavering hum drowned out by the incessant beeps of the brightly lit machines. The ridges forged in the mother's skin deepened as she coldly smiled. A dismal happiness.

Everything had changed after her son was conscripted. 10th September, 1965. Vietnam. She remembered, the agonising suspense that cemented her blood and the hijacking myriad of emotions plastered across her son's face. Hopelessness in his eyes, The gaze of a criminal, seconds from imprisonment. But despite his guiltlessness, death grasped at his wrists. It tugged at his ankles as he half heartedly clambered up the stairs of the Boeing 727.

As the mother stepped into the church a year after her son's return, the glass windows, stained with various shades of colour only served to intensify the stubborn pain, evoking images of the purple bruises painting her son's body. The vivid burns and perforations. Craters left by shrapnel. Tragedy had degraded her faith in anything. Assuming a sombre expression the pastor assigned her a seat and reached out, gently laying his hand on the mother's shoulder.

"Time heals all wounds," the pastor murmured, breathing heavily.

The mother hoisted herself from the chair, shuddering, with frustration. She flung the chair at the pastor in a fit of resentment, "Time does not heal. Time creates wounds. It opens them. It allows them to fester. It penetrates the skin. It pierces the heart, and the only reason why we perceive them to heal is because the wounds which open as we speak cause us to forget the old ones."

For years she resided in the hospital beside her son daily, uncomfortably squirming in her brittle plastic chair; her awkward posture delivering jolts of pain through her nerves. Her son's shrivelled eyelids would briefly flutter. His numb sweaty body, still drunk from the potent anaesthetic which anchored him to the bed whilst the tangle of weedy wires choked him.

Gracelessly grasping the rigid rubber mattress, the mother pulled herself towards him, lowering her chin until her grey skin massaged her son's sandpaper stubble.

Daily, she relapsed into her memories. The musky scent of tobacco on his diesel soaked skin. The sweet aromatic smell of the pine which oozed as her son sawed through the timber. How she held the ladder as he hammered each nail into the wooden skeleton of the house. All that, replaced with the piercing sunlight which highlighted his pale, empty skin; a sterile effluvium which exacerbated the glossy hospital walls.

But, even memories fade like photographs. Years later, the fingers which were enfolded within her palms became lifeless. That day, the winding vines which branched from her irises shuddered, and a cascade of salty droplets emerged from its deep black wells, but the winter sky remained asleep.

The nurse's footsteps still reverberated throughout the halls, each as oblivious to her plight as the clock hands which slowly and monotonously degraded everything under its influence.