Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Church

Chiwan Choi · Tuesday, April 1st, 2025

“Church” is the first piece from Are You There, Ghost?, the newsletter from our Editor Chiwan Choi. He will be writing about his life of ghosts, visions & hallucinations. Subscribe.

Image from Irish Dominican Vocations blog.

*

it was a sunday. it was a friday. there was a wednesday too, i’m sure. it could have been any day of the week because people seemed to gather any and every day of the week for church.

i was 7. i was 6. maybe 9. because the fact is i don’t remember in ages, but in geography. i was paraguay at the time. sometime in 1975 to middle of 1980—my family living in a red house in asunción, paraguay.

my father was very involved with church, always off on some mission trip with the guaraní. i used

to look at these photos all the time—color faded snaps of dad wearing the guaraní headgear and belts and standing by the piranha infest waters. there was also a lot of soccer, both the league the korean immigrants there had set up, bunch of middle aged men and their sons running around like some korean-paraguayan soccer version of the bad news bears, while the younger boys like me, not even teens yet, mimicking plays on the sidelines while our mothers cooked the 100 pounds of galbi.

then there was the one day where one of the younger men got upset over a perceived foul in mid-field and was berating a 50 year old man and my father ran up from his spot as a fullback and knocked the angry young man out with his right fist.

it's strange how sudden things happen. one second there is yelling, and the next, violence. everything is always followed by silence in one form or another.

the next day. or three days later. maybe it was a week.

i was on the floor counting and bagging the new buttons dad had made. my mom was on the rocking chair near me. the young man from the soccer match showed up waving his gun and looking for my father. he wasn't home. my mother told him he could wait. he sat down, gun on lap. and waited. on a chair between my mother and me on the floor counting and bagging buttons.

and waited.

until he left.

*

i want to talk about church because today is sunday. it has been raining a bit all night. now it's just gray and wet out. there is nothing quite like a gray wet los angeles morning.

i want to talk about a church on a night in paraguay and i will tell you it's a day and i will tell you i am a certain age and i will tell you things that i know i don't remember. it could have been a sunday but sometimes in the way i remember, like now with the sun peeking through the los angeles wet gray, the church feels like a wednesday night gathering.

there was a service happening, a mix of koreans and paraguayos in the congregation. my father is there. i want to tell you that he was the one at the pulpit but would you believe me?

then there was a silence. the one that comes after violence.

and a woman, naked, walking up the center aisle between the sets of pews.

she walked up until she was standing in front of the pulpit. i want to tell you that i remember a terror inside me, but i often feel nothing in the vicinity of death.

she stopped and laid herself face down on the ground, her arms spread out to show us her cross.

*

i tell my therapist that when i try to remember paraguay i hardly ever see anything except myself—8 or 5 or 6 years old—sitting on the wall in front of our house. i am behind this boy me. i

watch as he sits alone staring out into the street, hours and hours at a time, waiting for the sandía man to go by with his horse and carriage full of watermelon, the click clack of hooves on the road made of burning rocks, waiting for the floods, waiting for my father to return from his missions, waiting for the man with a gun, waiting for the dinosaurs from the sugar cane field, waiting for god, waiting for a naked woman showing me how to die, waiting for the post-violence silence, waiting for the pack of wild dogs that roamed our streets, waiting for the fire that ignites on my skin each night.

***

(Featured image from PickPik)

This entry was posted on Tuesday, April 1st, 2025 at 5:50 pm and is filed under Essay
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.