

M emoir

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Young and Beautiful

I still remember the night when I heard the news of my cousin's death.

It was seven years ago, a late spring night with a little moist breeze. About dinner time, soap opera went on and on in the television like it would never end. My mother got a call in the middle of the meal. I can't quite remember what she said exactly on the phone but at that time, I thought it was just another normal call for chatting. But I was wrong. After she hung up the phone, there was a silence.

"Your cousin's dead", she said.

To be honest, there really wasn't any emotion going on in my heart at that time. I can't really understand the meaning of death, even though he was not the first family member I had ever lost. I can't recall how I finished the meal, how I put down the bowl and left the table. What I knew was that I felt rather numb than sad. I couldn't find a way to persuade myself that I could never see him again. Part of me kept denying it. A man, a young man who's 18 years old just passed away in intensive care unit, yet I didn't even

know he was so sick that he had to stay in ICU before his death.

He had the thalassemia when he was born. You could tell he's sick by his appearance. His head was larger than normal people's with a wide forehead and a beer-belly-like belly, but it's not because he's fat. He's like a toothpick, extremely slim. Every week he had to get a blood transfusion in hospital. I remembered the room where he took the transfusion. A room with the x-ray machine in it, cold and dark, despite the sun shined bright outside the room. The scent of pungent-smelling disinfectant assailed my nostrils. Nobody was talking. Sometimes when I got off from my primary school or on my spare time, I would be there with them too. My grandma would accompany him as she always did and sometimes he would have my aunt's company as well, not his parents' though. They lived in another city with my cousin's younger healthy biological brother and left him to my grandma.

He can't go to school because of his illness. My grandma hired a private teacher for him to teach him Chinese and basic mathematics at home. I think he's a smart one, in an extraordinary way though. He didn't like to be taught, to be kept in one room for hours. I always wonder whether he really needed those courses. I think he was more knowledgeable than any other student I knew in my primary school. He liked reading and read almost every book that he could get access to, especially books about history. So the course, it actually bored him and

sometimes he would have a fight with the teacher, quite violently. When that happened, we would have to find another teacher for him. But I guess no one can actually stand him except our family members and those who knew him well.

Besides those days he stayed at home or went out with my grandma, he needed to take blood transfusion regularly. I remember one day when he took the blood transfusion in hospital. Not a very special day though, just like any other day he took it. A needle was inserted in the back of his hand. Blood was flowing into his vessel drop by drop, replacing and supplying his own blood. I didn't have anything to do except to stare at the tubing and wait for the lunch. After the blood transfusion, he needed to take another fluid transfusion in order to alleviate the rejection. At most of the time, the room had been affected by the silence in the hospital. We didn't talk much during lunch. Though there were just three people in that room, we still had plenty of dishes not from the hospital, but from a canteen we would usually go. My cousin couldn't use his right hand because of the transfusion, so my grandma had to feed him first before she could eat. Even though the smell of various dishes was floating in the air, it couldn't drive the pungent smell away, just like no matter what we had done and how hard we tried, we couldn't have my cousin back.

In the Luna New Year of 2010, four years after his death and the coldest winter ever in our city; My cousin's father, his biological younger brother, my grandma, another elder cousin and I gathered at the yard burning the spiritual money for my cousin. The wind blew up the ashes and they fell on our shoulders along with the snow from the leaden sky. We watched the fire flashing, listened to the sound of burning paper and wished him rest in peace and despite from the torture of the disease. May his soul stay young and beautiful like the fire that will never be extinguished.

END

