Dang, a Red Shirt, crept through the forest towards the sleeping boy in the grubby, torn yellow shirt. The boy’s body was coveredwith scratches and bruises, his feet bare and raw from hours of running. From what or whom Dang didn’t know. What he did know, was that he was in trouble with the government and thatgiving them a dead Yellow Shirt boy would clear him of some of that trouble, or so he hoped.

The rains had made the ground damp and the leaves from the surrounding trees soft, so approaching the boy without startling him was easy. He drew his knife and prepared to pounce. But then the boy stirred and yawned, the eyes trying and failing to open. Such innocence. Dang stepped to the side and dropped his knife. It fell with a dull thud, loud enough to startle the boy into waking. He shrank back against the tree. Panicked, the boy snatched a stick, holding it at arms-length as a weapon to ward off the evil of Dang. In his eyes, however, there was defiance. As young as he was, the boy would fight and die as a Yellow Shirt.

Dang smirked, briefly considering picking up his knife, but instead he felt a pang of admiration, of hope, so he didn’t.

He knelt down slowly, the child a few metres away, with his hands raised and forcing a kind smile. Fear coursed through his veins, he knew full well that the action he took next might very well be the reason behind an early grave,

“Hello, boy.”

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Twenty years on …

Yut, the boy, was now a man. Lean and powerful, his muscles had grown thick from years of reaping and sowing with his father. But his strong will and heart had his head elsewhere. Dang could easily accept the blame for that. He had never told Yut of his intentions the night he found him. All he had told him about was his heritage as a Yellow Shirt and that Dang found him a little broken beneath a tree. The rest of those memories, however faded they now were, belonged to Yut, but he never spoke of them. As far as Dang was aware, Yut didn’t know Dang had intended to kill him.

“We must do something,” Yut was saying between mouthfuls of rice, “The Red Shirts have run this country into the ground. We have to do something.”

Dang rolled his eyes inwardly and prepared his answers accordingly, once again. It was not the first time that they had this conversation.

“When you have a plan,” he replied dryly, “Let me know.”

“I have a plan,” Yut challenged, pausing his meal to look at his ‘father’. Dang raised an eyebrow but did not return the steady gaze,

“Do you? And …?”

“I will let you know when I have everything in place.”

Dang sighed deeply, putting his spoon down and abandoning his *pad thai*.

“This is not the first time you have said this to me but it should be the last,” he said sternly, about to return to his meal with nothing else to say. But Yut had other ideas.

“Why should we fear them? We are in the heart of nowhere, they won’t have ears this far out! Besides,” he shrugged, “so what if they do? Let them know that there’s an opponent on the rise.”

Dang snapped, dropping his rice, pointing his spoon fiercely at his son.

“Yut, don’t talk like that! In fact, don’t talk at all. You can’t trust anyone or anything anymore. To stay alive, we sell each other out. To stay alive, we hunt each other down!”

He was gesturing madly at his son, trying to get him to understand, but his efforts only seemed to amuse the young man.

“*You* didn’t,” he challenged.

Dang was silenced, his argument crushed.

“Perhaps you were a fool?” Yut continued. “But you are my father, because of it. You could have raised me as a Red Shirt but instead you reminded me every day that I wasn’t. Why?”

Dang grimaced. In his core he knew the Yellow Shirts were right. They had fought for a king who promised to hold the country together and fulfil his pledge. But the Red Shirts thought that a democracy was a better option, perhaps not naively and with good intentions. The moment things started to work in their favour, however, the hunger for power grew, the greed was fed and the country began to fall apart and the King went into exile. But he kept these thoughts to himself.

“You *want* change,” said Yut. He leant forward and grasped his father’s hand, forcing Dang to look him. “You want me to be the change, I see it in your eyes every day. I’m a Yellow Shirt. You’re a Yellow Shirt, in your soul at least. We aren’t dead yet, we’re only wearing Red labels.”

The boy was right. Dang pulled his hand from his son’s grasp, aware of the flinch on the boy’s face as if he had been pricked by a needle. He leant back in his chair, his appetite gone; the repeated conversation having finally reached a climax. He nodded, wearily accepting his fate that was sealed all those years back when he decided to take a Yellow Shirt into his home,

“Tell me Yut,” he said softly, “What *is* your plan?”

It was simple. In essence at least. It was to rally behind the king, wherever he might be. Enough people, and the king would emerge. So the theory went.

Dang respected its simplicity. It may not have been the best laid plan, but it would start something, no doubt. For that reason, Dang would not deter his son.

After all, in his soul of souls, this is what he had hoped for. A glimmer of light, a shot at redemption.

Everything started one night a while later, when the moon had reached its peak. Dang woke abruptly with his heart in his mouth. The sounds of explosions were coming in gradual succession.

In his panic, he called for his son but no answer came. Yut had been disappearing a lot as of late.

He got out of bed and made himself go outside into the humid air. His cotton shirt clung to him, his skin already clammy from the wet heat. Smoke rose from the city in a soft swirl many miles away. Even against the hazy moonlight, it could be seen. It was a big bomb his son had planted. Where had he been keeping it?

His worried gaze travelled to the darkness beneath his simple home. Here in the valley, the huts were built on sturdy, wooden pillars to evade flooding. They didn’t get much flood in these parts though so the huts didn’t need be raised much but it was high enough to hide a bomb. In a strange way, Dang felt part of the plan even though he hadn’t suspected a thing. It was where he would have hidden it, though.

He headed back inside and sat down with his head in his hands, gazing in awe and horror at the work his son and, no doubt others, was doing. Not too long after, another explosion boomed followed by more tendrils of smoke.

It was the first such night of many. Night after night, Dang found himself outside on his step, explosions roaring out of the dark. His neighbours often sought him out, asking him the whereabouts of his son and then sitting down beside him. Watching in wonder.

The community was a close one, and caring. But they were mostly too old or too young to take an active interest in war and rebellion. So where had Yut’s helpers come from? The City, Dang concluded. That was where they did all the trading.

He went through the nightly routine, sick with worry but also with a growing pride as his son began to gain a following. Word was spreading about the ‘Red Shirt’ boy who was starting riots. He wondered when his son would call upon him to join in the fight. He wondered how long it would take for them to realise he wasn’t a Red Shirt.

Soon the Red Shirt government called upon the people to hunt down the perpetrators. They were smart with the media, playing the incidents down as if they were nothing, careful not to draw attention to them so as not to fuel the already growing hysteria. Nevertheless, a tense excitement began to ripple through the underground communication networks, and when Yut finally did wake his father up in the middle of the night, Dang was ready.

“It’s time, father. We’re marching on them.”

“Who’s we?” Dang asked, rubbing his eyes with one hand while taking whatever it was that Yut had pressed so forcefully into his chest. He looked down, both horrified and impressed to find a shotgun clasped in his hand.

“Everybody,” he hissed, “riots have been happening everywhere. Tonight’s our night! “Come on. Quickly!”

They hurried out of the hut and piled into the carts that carried them silently through the night to the border of the city where Dang was led away from the main road, followed by a dozen or so men and women. He was astonished at by the amount of resistance that was prepared to rally behind Yut. Some of them familiar faces from surrounding villages, some of them city people.

They reached a meeting point in one of the city’s alleyways. Shivers ran down Dang’s spine as, from beneath a dumpster, Yut pulled a motley collection of weapons out of the bag. They were quickly and quietly passed around the large group; each person taking their weapon of choice. Dang couldn’t fathom where the weapons had come from or what manner of pain and planning had gone into obtaining them.

When it finally came to Dang, he had only a rusty, blunt knife to take. He stuffed it into his belt with a grimace, its blade chafing his side. *I’ll die of infection before I even get to this place*, he thought grimly.

“Alright,” Yut said softly, a deadly calm in his voice, his eyes dancing in the half light, “We split up. Attack the building from all sides. I’ll try and get in through the back entrance and seize it. We’ve got to do it quickly and then hold it. In the morning, we’ll take control of the media.”

Everyone nodded, accepting Yut’s orders with determination. Dang did not,

“You’re attacking the Red Shirt headquarters tonight, Yut?” he said, taking hold of his son’s shoulders, “There are too few of us!”

“No there aren’t,” his son countered encouragingly, “There are more than enough of us to take the building. We’ve counted the amount of men on guard at night. The people will gain courage when they know that we are people of our word.”

“Yut,” Dang stressed, “You’re going to get us killed.”

Yut stared at his father, taking in his words thoughtfully, but Dang already knew the answer. They were going to their deaths, for sure.

“Then go home and stay safe,” Yut answered, a cold edge to his voice and clearly frustrated by his father’s lack of faith. “The rest of us will go … and we’re going *now*.”

Dang was left standing at a loss as Yut’s compatriots weaved around him and then fanned out like ghosts in the night to approach the building from different directions. They were all so young. But he couldn’t very well stand there for the rest of the night.

So Dang followed his own route through the backstreets, winding his way towards the Red Shirt headquarters. At last he could see it, peeking out from behind the gates of an old cotton factory.

But there was nobody there? No guards, no CCTV, nothing? The building was completely unguarded. For a moment Dang thought he was at the wrong place, but then he saw one of Yut’s rebels darting from an alley straight across the road to join another.

He heard a scuffle of feet behind him and spun on his heels, knife ready, but there was nobody. The hairs on the back of his neck stood and a deep unsettling dread welled up in his gut as he was overwhelmed by a fear he could not express.

Something was very wrong. And as no one else was making any move to attack, it suggested the others had also sensed there was a problem. Dang scanned his surroundings for any signs of life. He froze, unable to call out, too fearful to move. Where was Yut?

A blood-curdling scream rose into the darkness not far from Dang. It made his insides clench and writhe. It happened again and then again, growing more frequent until fear flushed Dang and the others from their hiding places. They surged forward into the light, terrified by the now constant screams from the shadows.

It was a trap.

But by the time they realised their mistake, it was too late. Surrounded by Red Shirt supporters, their little band of Yellow Shirt revivalists stood no chance. Automatic gunfire and exploding grenades ripped through them.

Dang didn’t know what to do. Calling for his son through the confusion of bodies, noise and smoke he staggered away.

“Father!”

Dang turned as he heard Yut’s voice, but the rush of relief was short lived. His son hurtled towards him, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him away from the chaos. Near them, a gunshot rang out louder than the others.

Their escape together ended moments later as Yut spun away from him and fell. The old man paused briefly over his son. There was a great, gaping wound in his back and blood oozed out from beneath the already lifeless body.

Dang was alone.

Things went quiet inside his head, he was unable to absorb what had happened, but somehow he had made is way back to his farm.

Numb. Empty. Exhausted.

He just sat, appalled by the brutality that had revisited, by his son and his revolutionary nature, by his own mistakes. The haunting and the days and nights were nothing to him. He didn’t work, he didn’t eat, he didn’t sleep. His neighbours left him food and notes but his life, as far as he was concerned, was over. Until one neighbour refused to leave …

“Khun Dang! You must read this! Please, Khun!”

Managing to muster some intrigue, Dang opened the door to have the newspaper thrust into his face. The article staring up at him was a government warning issued directly to the father of the dead rebel leader. He knew that his days were numbered. He was a dead man walking.

“What will you do, Khun?” his neighbour asked frantically, her eyes wide.

Dang scrunched up the paper and looked up at her,

“I will go to them. There’s not much else they can do. I was born a Red Shirt. But I will not give them the satisfaction of dying as one.” Angrily he scrunched up the newspaper and the ball of paper into his rubbish tip. “The Yellow Shirts were right. They’ve always been right.”

The neighbour looked frightened but she hesitantly agreed with him before glancing around to make sure no passers by had seen or heard her do so. Dang smiled to himself. His worries were over and seeing others worrying about being caught in the wrong suddenly seemed so trivial. Then again, they all still had children to lose.

“Go,” he urged gently, “I will go alone this evening. Tell the people not to give up. I will not have Yut dead for nothing.”

The neighbour nodded. “I will tell the others, Khun.” And she was gone before he could blink, racing down the dirt path, kicking up dust in her wake.

Later that evening, Dang walked into the city. It was a long, hot walk but he wanted to enjoy the beauty of the land one last time. To hear the song birds whistle and the wind shaking the leaves.

The city was eerily quiet. The events of the past few weeks had shaken the people and clearly those few remaining revolutionaries had no stomach for continuing to defy the government. Dang, however, walked straight towards the building he and others had tried in vain to take over.

It was a rubbish bin of a building, the brick crumbling around its edges. Remnants of its working days still clung to its exterior. Dang smiled grimly to himself, wondering as he approached, why he hadn’t just walked straight up to it and simply pushed down the walls.

Dang announced himself to one of the uniformed guards who left his post to enter the building itself. He reappeared moments later with a tall, lean man in a suit with a red band circling his right sleeve. Cupping his hands behind his back, the man smiled down at Dang, his dark eyes glinting with malice in the evening light.

“The father of the devil,” he sneered, “Come to die already, Khun? I expected more of a battle to find you, like a true Red Shirt.”

“I *was* a Red Shirt, my son was not,” Dang said defiantly. “But I am proud of him. I’m honoured to die for his cause. Do what you will, but know that I am done with your ways.”

“We know, Khun. And don’t worry,” the suit smiled snidely, “We will bring no small amount of pain to a traitor. You know what you’ve done is treason, don’t you?”

Dang didn’t answer.

“Very well,” the suit sneered, “Take him.”

Dang bowed his head and waited to die.

Nothing happened. Confused, Dang opened his eyes. In an instant the darkness came alive, with people surging forward with their knives and their guns and their anger.

He hadn’t realised that he had been followed.