

Dennis

* D is a stand up young dude. He was my first bunkie in B unit. Back when I was beaten down and reeling from abuse inflicted by haters in E unit. Dennis is Vietnamese, late 20s. His parents were boat people. He is a self-described junkie. He knew prison. He was returning to TI for two months on a parole violation.

D was not a reader, but he loved "the Sympathizer", the novel by Viet Than Nguen. He saw me reading it for book group and told me it was the most important book he had read. This began a friendship rooted in ideas. D is the son of a Buddhist mother and Catholic father, raised in San Jose's little Saigon, and a confirmed atheist. We were like two college roomies having all night talks about the meaning of life. We talked a lot about Vietnam. He read my grad school buddy's journal of his trip returning there 50 years after enlisting. D looked up to me as an elder.

When I was taken down with my raging eye infection, D applied ointment 4 times a day for weeks. When it had me in so much pain all I could do was lie on my back with my eyes closed, D sat on my chair next to me and read me the New Yorker.

The night before D left, I sat him down to give him a talk. I knew he was going back to the streets. His parents would not have him in their house, so he was going to live in his car for awhile. I told him he was a good and kind man who deserved to have a fulfilling life. That I wanted him to have that. But if he went back to being a junkie, he would not. I asked him to promise me that he would stay off drugs. He was quiet for awhile. Then he looked me in the eye and said, "honestly, Arnie, I can't promise you that". But he promised to stay in touch with me through my friend outside and that we would meet to go canoeing on Lake Merritt when I got out. I knew none of this would happen, but I loved him just the same. Guys in the dorm would ask me from time to time if I ever heard from D. Knowing we were close.

Almost two years later, walking into the library after dinner, there is D plain as day. All scraggly and disheveled, long unkempt hair and beard. Skinny. My face lit up and my heart sank. D was beside himself with joy. He was back for two months on another violation. He immediately began apologizing for not staying in touch. He asked about my son. I told him that my bunkie who replaced him had just moved out and that his old spot was still open. "A miracle!" he exclaimed. He was in the Annex, the hell hole where new arrivals are often put. We went into the library catch up while preparing the paperwork to arrange for the move to happen that night. D was distracted and jumpy. Couldn't sit still. Leg jigging. He was in withdrawal. Or else high. At one point, while at the book check out window, I started to introduce him to my Taiwanese pal Johnny, who is in the book group. I was updating D about what we were reading. I told him about starting a correspondence with Viet Than Nguyen.

When we sat back down at the table, D leaned over to tell me something.

D: "That guy you started to introduce me to - I don't talk to him. He's a ^{chomo} ~~cheem~~".
Chomo = child molester, prison for sex offender.

A's heart sinks. In the days when D was here before, A had been using a cover story. Following well-intended but wrong advice Which he came to regret.

A: "D, I've got to tell you something. When we were bunnies, I was still recovering from being mistreated by Woods. I was using a cover story. I am one of those".

D: "Arnie - no! How could YOU be a child moester?!"

Arnie explains that here at TI at least no one called a chomo has charges involving contact with children. It is all for possession of images. Not that this is OK, but there is a difference. Those who have done more are not at lows.

D, looking rapidly around to see who is in the room, "Arnie - it's just politics, you know. It's not you. I just can't be seen talking to you." Taking back the form we were filling out to request his move to my bunk.

A does not let it drop: "D, you know me. You know how I live here. If you chose the people who would hassle you for being my friend over our friendship, it is you who will lose out. They are the ones who are twisted. You are a good and kind person. You are better than them. You deserve better than them."

* D = Dennis

Revised AZ

D: "I am so conflicted. It's not that. It's my values."

A: "What I did that put me here was bad. That's true for every one of us. It's true for you. What I do is look at we are living our lives here. That's what we can do something about. I'm asking you to look at what I am doing with my life here now And compare it with what the haters are doing with theirs. And choose for yourself."

D: Looking around anxiously: "I can't talk about this now. I can't talk about this here".

A: "I want us to find a time to talk more."

D: "Yes, I'll give you my contact info for when we get out". Takes out a piece of paper and starts writing on it.

A: "Dennis, no, I want us to talk while we're here."

D: "Not here. After we get out".

A: "Fuck you, D [REDACTED]"

D [REDACTED] picks up his stuff, including the paper with his contact information, and walks out of the room.

A short time later, Arnie sees D [REDACTED] in the hallway. Arnie approaches him and apologizes for saying "fuck you."

D: "It's disqualifying"

Arnie nods, drops it.

Since then, when Arnie and D [REDACTED] cross paths in the yard, which happens frequently, D [REDACTED] looks down, looks away, looks like they never have met.

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