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Lord of the Fries

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Lord of the Fries

By: Daniel Bandini

Madrid during the summer time is a beautiful place filled with life, sunshine, and people from all over. The dry hot air fills the streets of downtown Gran Via, keeping people rooted to the local bars desperately seeking to quench their thirst. One can witness the relaxed energy of the city in every street, as people converse in plazas and kids play football against the neighborhood walls. Everyone knows that anything goes in Madrid. I had just returned from my first year of college abroad, and all I had in mind was to meet up with my lifelong friends and roam carelessly around the city. Bouncing back and forth between friends' houses and parks, seeking refuge from the raging sun was all we did. Boredom became my ally during summer time in Madrid, as it drove me and my mates into thinking creatively. We would spend our time playing music, visiting museums, discovering new bars, or consuming our time in the plazas simply hanging out. This was the beauty of Madrid for me.

On a hot July day, my mates Miguel, Javier and I were wandering around my neighborhood in Fúcar seeking something to do. Javier began insisting we should cruise over to a new artsy venue that was a major attraction for art enthusiasts. He began describing this venue as a new mecca for us to hangout in, as it was a space for free thinkers, artists, and musicians to relax and find some peace within the noisy city. The venue was called the *Tabacalera*, which was an old tobacco factory that was shut down decades ago. It became a refuge for many street artists to share their art and do as they please without police knocking on their door. Between the city mayor and the artists, they restored the building and declared it an open space for anyone to enjoy, unless you were a cop. The men in blue were not allowed inside, so one can imagine what goes on in there. Definitely not an ideal place for your average law-abiding citizen. Javier had me and Miguel sold within seconds. Being able to experience absolute freedom within a city filled with laws and signs telling everyone what to do, was a very attractive idea for some teenagers simply wanting to get high and drink some beers in peace under the warm sun.

As we made our way down *calle Atocha*, into *Embajadores*, we saw the old *Tabacalera* from the distance. I was shocked how bad it looked from the exterior. A big dark structure that seemed to be ready to fall apart, with broken windows along the whole second floor. A big fence barricaded the whole venue, blocking any view of the inside. I was completely drawn by this place as it seemed so mysterious and spooky. We approached the main gate and knocked hoping some magic dwarf would open and lead us to some kind of heaven. Nevertheless, some grumpy painter splashed with paints all over his hands from his current project, opened the door and scanned us briefly and then shut the door. The painter made himself clear and didn't want us to disturb whatever was going on inside. In major disbelief, we turned around to make our way back to my neighborhood, but we startled upon a group of West African boys who were heading towards the *Tabacalera*.

They were an interesting set of individuals at first sight. One of them was rocking long dreadlocks with a Lion of Judah shirt, and his buddy next to him was wearing bright flashy clothing with rings on every single finger. It was like seeing Bob Marley hanging out with some midtown hustler. They both approached us while the rest of their friends waited at the gate, and asked if we had any tobacco for their spliff in English. This completely took us by surprise but it led to a friendly conversation in English. As we began to chat, the natty dread introduced himself as Tobo and his flashy friend was Bryant. Bryant insisted on being called that name even though we understood this to be some kind of joke, judging how his friends were laughing behind him. Bryant seemed to be the joker of the group, as he was constantly fooling around with his clothing and trying to make jokes. As Tobo finished rolling up his spliff, he asked us if we wanted to come in with them into the *Tabacalera* and kill some time together. We explained our situation to him but he just told us to be quiet and get in. One of Tobo's friends opened the door from the inside, and greeted every single one of his friends in their local language. Miguel, Javier, and I being some random city white kids, we got a friendly "hello my bruda". I was completely intrigued on what was going on and who these kids were, but as soon as we got inside they vanished into one of the many hallways of the old factory.

The three of us began to explore the inside of this mysterious venue, and our minds were blown due to the vast amounts of art everywhere. There were half sculpted molds laying

around the floor carelessly. Painting of doodles and more complex images filled every inch of the main hall. Everything was disorganized yet beautiful colors filled the corridors with life. The bottom corridors lead to rooms filled with bright graffiti with strong political messages. I could tell this was the ideal refuge for many artists, who simply wanted to express their ideas in peace. However, the real and raw story waited for us outside in the main *patio*. We needed a break from the art inside, so we headed outside to the *patio* for some fresh air. Our friends Tobo and Bryant were hanging out with ten other guys on top of a hand built quarter pipe against the main fence. They had their spot all built up for summer with a nice small plastic chair holding a big stereo that was blasting French rap. We became the center of attention as we were the only white boys in the whole yard, roaming around clueless. We were unsure whether to approach them and join their shindig or just keep minding our own business, until Bryant spilled out a great performance for our introduction. He slid down the quarter pipe with his half-torn Ipanema flip-flops and called us in with a friendly whistle. As the three of us made our way towards the group, we heard the older members of Bryant's and Tobo's group discuss this invitation while they gave us cautious looks. Bryant chased us with his spliff and wrapped his arm around me and led us to the quarter pipe. After some brief introductions, we felt it was a nice gesture to invite them all for a smoke as they were already in the process of their second spliff. The energy suddenly became smooth, and all the uncertainty from before disappeared. Miguel, Javi and I split up and began our own individual conversations with whoever we sat next to. I sat next to a 19-year-old young man called Mbaye, from Ghana. I had never met a person from Ghana before as their country is 4 thousand kilometers away from Madrid. We began chatting in English as his Spanish was still in its initial stages, nevertheless his English was better than many Spaniards. We discussed football, and how football was his passion and sole reason for being in Spain. He told me he played semi-professional football back in Ghana and wanted to try out for a lower division team in Spain. We shared our views on European teams and who we thought were better. It was truly amazing how football could connect people from vastly different countries and cultures, it was beautiful.

As the spliff slowly made it our way, we both started opening up more with each other. The laughter and the good vibes took control of our conversation. I felt I was connecting with

Mbaye in so many ways, however he had a look in his eyes of struggle and torment. I could feel his inner conflict, and I couldn't help but ask what was his story. Mbaye took a long puff and looked at me with a fake smile and said "I see some shit man. My journey here has been long." I instantly could feel his pain but my curiosity kept on pushing for answers. Mbaye then confessed he was one of the immigrants on board the Aquarius ship that just ported on the east coast of Spain two weeks prior. He even pulled out his immigration papers showing he had legal asylum in Spain for 45 days. I had been tracking the news of the Aquarius briefly, but it baffled me to actually meet a rescued member of the voyage. He was one of the many West Africans that survived the journey across the Mediterranean from Libya seeking a better life. The Aquarius voyage had been tracked by the Spanish national media, as we were the only country that decided to take in the immigrants. The Aquarius vessel carrying 629 rescued refugees was rejected from ports in Italy and France, until they reached Spain in June. The vessel carried out rescue missions all throughout summer, picking up any refugees they would find in the water. Mbaye described the voyage prior to being rescued by the Aquarius as a living hell no young man should ever live. This spun my head 360 degrees and left me in shock. I was on the borderline of getting a yellow. I couldn't find the words to respond, all I could offer was an attentive ear to listen to his remarkable story. As Mbaye passed on the spliff, he began describing his experience in Libya as a wild survival journey. He explained how one of his friends is still in Libya after authorities raided their camp and broke both his legs. Libya to him was a country filled with corruption and hate, where authorities purposely target immigrants, haunting them with violence. He later went quiet and began staring at the ground. That was my cue to stop being a drag and asking him questions. I felt I owed him some positive twist to the end of his story, but he beat me to it saying how happy he was to finally be stepping on safe grounds. He expressed his love for Spain and his desire to stay here. "I love Spain, I love its people, and I love its football", was something Mbaye said I will never forget. I felt I couldn't really respond to him with anything else than a funky handshake, a "glad to have you here Mbaye" and a smile. No sane mind could understand the hate towards individuals like Mbaye. We shared so many human qualities with each other except our skin color. I couldn't understand how he and his friends were seen as a threat to European political stability. To me

they just seemed like kid's eager to work and rebuild a new life a thousand miles away from home. They had better professional qualities than half the work force in Spain, so why reject them?

Bryant skid down the quarter pipe again, showing off his amazing balancing skills when intoxicated and reached over to the stereo to increase the volume under the request of the group. Tobo queued Bob Marley's Midnight Ravers track, and then the party started. We were in our safe haven where no race, no war, no authority could ruin this moment. Whatever was happening in that space of time, we proved everyone that unity was possible. By now we were all high as a kite and erupting in uncontrollable laughter. Bryant was giving all of us a bit of a show with his intense West African moves while Tobo just bobbed up and down behind the stereo, enjoying every bit of the song. Miguel and Javier alongside their new friends rushed down to search for a ball in order to get a small football match going. The old grumpy painter came out with a big smile on his face carrying an old Adidas ball that seemed to have more years under its skin than the *Tabacalera* itself. It was a scene worthy of freezing for eternity. As the warm Madrid sun began to fade behind the fence, we all rallied down to the concrete. Tobo and I set up some goals with some bricks laying around, and the game was on.

Daniel Galy Navarro
D. Busman
HCOM 330
April 2nd 2018

Aquarius Cover Letter

For the social action segment of the class I wrote Aquarius. The story of *Aquarius*, was my favorite one to write as it is based on real events and dives into complex social issues. I had been wanting to write about this event since it happened last summer but due to lack of confidence in my own creative writing and being choked with time with other nonsense scientific writing. My first copy of the story, presented a strong idea for me to develop. My character development was still weak and I didn't really have a clear structure to the story. Once the story started to develop more, I really wanted to emphasis on description of the whole journey that day. Moreover, I really wanted to stress how spontaneous it was to meet our new friends in the Tabacalera. I was aiming to make the story flow like a screen play. Very easy to follow and understand.

For my revised copy, Debra and my colleagues gave me great feedback in order to improve my piece. I tweaked certain details throughout the story but I added more overall dialogue to the story. However, I didn't want to add made up dialogue too much, as I wanted to keep the story as authentic as possible. The short dialogues offer some deep character detail, as much as I could offer due to the fact I had just meet these kids. Finally, I was also trying to

achieve a more journalistic style in this piece by offering a first person narration of all the events.