

Embracing her Asian side

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Sunny was an American girl, of mixed Asian and White background, but above all, she was a classic Californian Valley girl. Not much was Asian in her apart from her almond-shaped eyes which always attracted so much attention from guys. Her mum was a first generation Korean-American immigrant and she had worked hard on herself to be fully integrated into American society, even marrying a white American man, an US army general of full Anglo-Saxon ancestry, who met his wife during a stay in an American base in South Korea. Sunny was raised as a plain American girl and she fit in perfectly well in the multiethnic society of 21st century California.

She was studying political sciences in a prestigious and very expensive college in the LA area. She already had good grades, even excellent ones one might say but she felt like she needed to go the extra mile with her thesis to graduate with honour. Therefore, she discussed with her supervisor a detailed plan to study the indoctrination practices adopted in North Korea to brainwash their citizens into obeying the regime. Despite some initial doubts, her supervisor accepted the proposal and Sunny got fundings for a 2 months-long stay in Pyongyang. Her mother wasn't really happy about the dangers she might face but Sunny was a strong, independent woman who wasn't going to be told was to do by anyone.

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The people of Pyongyang seemed happy and welcoming, a fact that greatly surprised Sunny. Parades of local women in traditional clothes and playing traditional Korean instruments were organised regularly, giving the appearance of a generally happy people. Sunny tried to scratch under the surface to find what was really going on but after a few weeks of research, she was increasingly frustrated by the lack of information the regime allowed to filter.

One day, they accepted her request to visit one of the main government buildings, where she was hoping to find out something more. The guided tour, however, was pretty boring, only showcasing historic memorabilia and narrating how great were the predecessors of the current leader, so when she had a chance, she left her group and began sneaking into areas not open to visitors. Soon enough, however, security systems noticed her and a couple of guards promptly handcuffed her. Realising she had made the biggest mistake of her life, she begged for pardon but it was too late for her. Later, in her prison cell, she ate the food administered to her, soon to realise she had been drugged.

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When she woke up, she felt groggy and confused. Bandages were covering part of her head and all of her personal possessions, including clothes seemed to have vanished. She was laying on a hospital bed, surrounded by North Korean nurses. When they noticed she was awake, a member of the ruling party showed up, together with a translator. The shocked girl was told that North Korean authorities had a very strict policies about foreign citizens not complying to the law, especially Americans. However, given her partial Korean heritage, it was decided that she should be corrected and forced to integrate in the Korean society. Cutting edge biochemical techniques allowed doctors to purge Sunny of her Western DNA, replacing it with pure Korean genes and altering her physical features accordingly. Now she was 100% Korean, both in terms of appearance and genetics.

When they removed the bandages, she realised that her tanned skin had been replaced by a very pale skin with a yellowish hue and any hint of light color in her eyes had disappeared, together with any trace of Caucasian facial features.

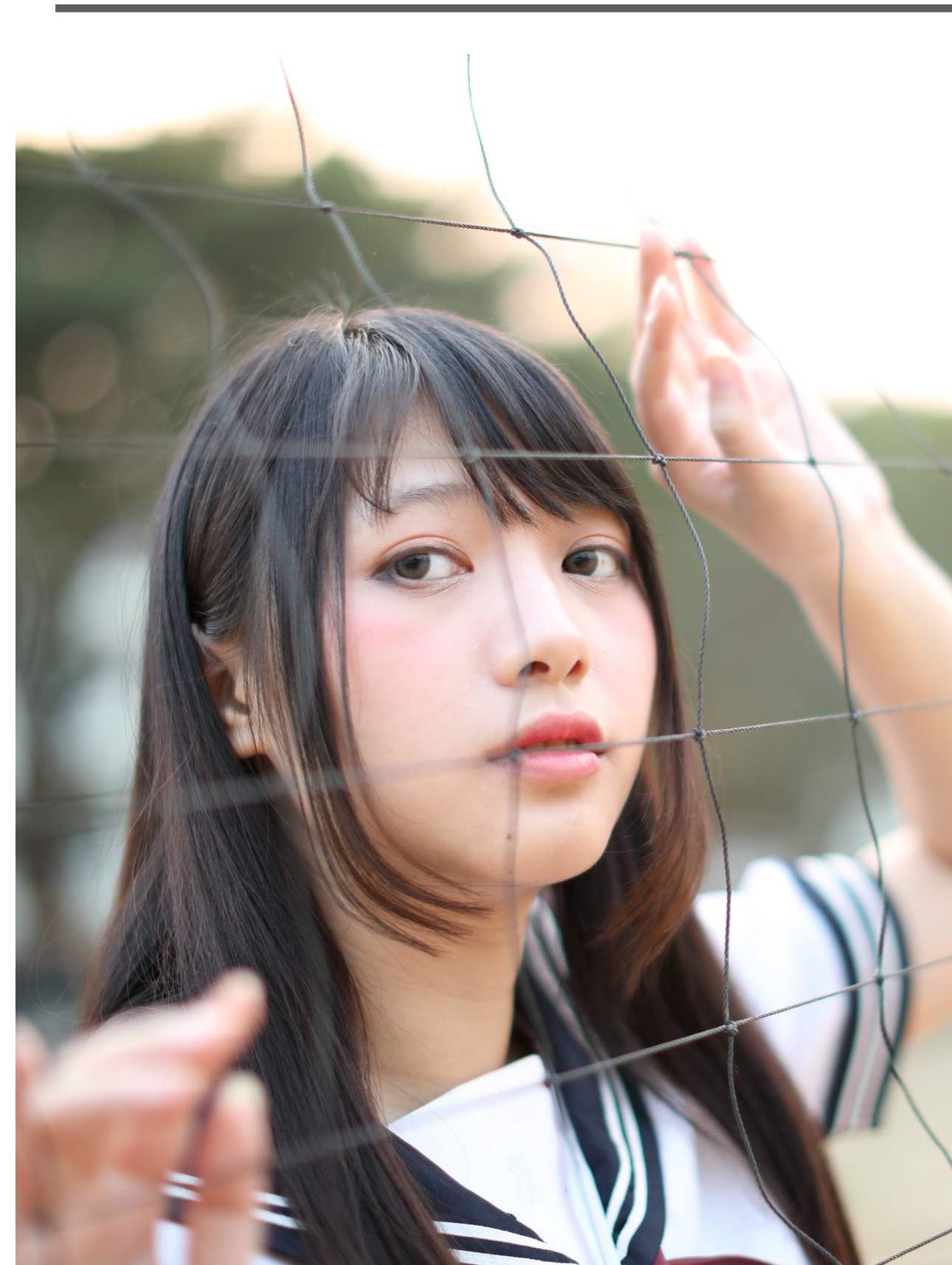
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Sunny was speechless. She had always been more connected to the white part of her heritage and had even been low-key ashamed of being half Asian. Now, being turned into a fully Asian girl was the most horrific nightmare she could think of. She began screaming but even her voice had been altered to give her the traditional high-pitched voice Korean girls were expected to have, which she hated. Sounding and looking like a cute East Asian girl was doing nothing to assert her Western heritage, so she eventually calmed down and avoided looking at her new face in the mirror, accepting her situation for the time being.

Sunny was later informed that she had to recover part of her missing education, so she was enrolled as an 18-year-old North Korean girl in the North Korean educational system. Thanks to her previous partial knowledge of Korean, and very good general knowledge, she was qualified to attend high school - again - with a Korean name, Sunyoung. Losing the freedom to pick her outfit was the last straw to her previous independence. No more shorts and skateboard, now she was forced to wear a school uniform and to behave according to very strict social rules. The school curriculum included extensive indoctrination about the state ideology, named Juche, basically Marxism in Korean sauce, to which Sunyoung tried to resist.

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Her new face was constantly making her feel uncomfortable. She had always strived to feel, look and sound as white as possible, probably for some kind of interiorised racism, and now nobody was going to mistake her for anything else than an Asian girl. On one hand, she came more in touch with her Korean roots, which she had always disregarded, so if she were ever to go back to her normal life, she would have a more balanced attitude. On the other hand, she feared that her past life had been locked out from herself indefinitely.

She was constantly surveilled, so it was extremely frustrating to see the convoy of cars of the American rescue mission sent to locate and return her back home driving past the school's courtyard. She even saw her parents in the car but she knew that making her real identity clear would mean immediate death for her and possibly for her parents too, so she kept silent, hiding her tears. North Korea didn't want to let anybody know about the status of their incredible DNA-changing techniques and would rather let the US think that Sunny was dead by now.

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Ironically, she was given a vintage point to study the process on indoctrination reserved to North Korean students, undergoing the process herself. After a few months, she couldn't deny having developed a certain affection for the portraits of the historical North Korean leaders, even if the realisation of that made her shiver.

On the national day, Sunyoung was forced to wear the same national costume she had seen many women wear in parades during her days as a tourist. She saw it as a welcome change after being forced to wear school uniform for so long but she ended up hating every minute of it. Sunny had always been a tomboy, skating with the boys and so on, so the frilliness of the dress was unbearable as it reminded her of the very feminine manners and role society demanded from her now. Also, she still felt like the same cosmopolitan American girl as always but she was forced to look and behave as a cute and proud North Korean girl.

She spent the whole day parading in front of locals and tourists, many of whom American. She was even asked to take a selfie together with some American tourists. She really wanted to tell them who she really was but she knew she was constantly surveilled, so she simply nodded and took the picture, pretending she couldn't really speak English.

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When the day was over, she took some time for herself before returning to her miserable student accommodation.

She had learned to accept that she would probably never make it alive back to the US and accepted to embrace her long forgotten Korean side, which was probably a good thing, she thought. However, she couldn't accept her fate as a traditional North Korean woman. Being a very pretty girl, she would easily be proposed to by some guy, have kids and spend her whole life as a housewife, a terrifying perspective for the strong, independent woman she once was.

There was only one way out, even if it meant to betray her true values and to maximise the damage to her real country: joining the army. This would give her a more active role in society, she would feel valued, she could have a brilliant career and she would feel in control of her life somehow. Also, the constant brainwashing she had undergone made that option way more palatable than it would have a few months before, even if she couldn't admit it to herself.

"At least, no more frilly dresses" - she told herself, feeling the texture of the pink skirt with her hands. With a sigh, she added: "If you can't beat them, join them!".

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Once local authorities realised how valuable Sunyoung's knowledge of America could be, they eagerly accepted the young woman's request to join the Army. As soon as she graduated from high school, she began her military training.

Life was really hard, but at least she could focus on practical tasks and she was able to feel less feminine now, with rough military uniforms replacing the soft schoolgirl uniforms she was used to. She even began to be proud of her work, although thinking that she was contributing to weakening the US position in the world made her feel a bit guilty.

A few years later, she made it to a rather prestigious position within the Korean army: junior officer of the Korean People's Army Ground Force. She was the first woman to achieve such a position, something she could feel proud of. By then the brainwashing had largely succeeded and she had fully embraced the official ideology of the Worker's party of Korea. She saw what had happened to her as a sheer stroke of luck which enlightened her and allowed her to see the truth: the US were an imperialist nation and North Korea was on the right side of things.