

Tommy's Ojek Repair Shop by Carol Greene

Derek – 2017

“God damn it! Running late again.” Derek dumped his coffee into a silver TPD – Toronto Police Department -- travel mug and grabbed his badge. It was April and the few plants in his yard – remnants of a previous owner’s efforts – were pushing out their blooms. He heard chirping and looked up while locking the back door.

“Oh, shit! A bird’s nest. A fucking bird’s nest.”

It was a tiny intricate nest, made of slender strands of plants, animal hair and feathers. It sat atop a pillar, sheltered under the porch’s ceiling. Two tiny robins with bulging eyes and translucent beaks strained open, were waiting for their next feeding.

Derek marched to the shed and grabbed the rake. He caught the edge of the nest, pulled it to the ground and stomped the life out of the chicks. Wiping his shoes on the soft grass, he pulled out his fob and beeped open the car door. He had to get to work.

Derek had been a beat cop for 15 years. The pay was good, but by that time he was fed up. Fed up with the traffic scofflaws, the vagrants, the misdemeanors, the wife beaters, the drug addicts. Always making excuses, always reoffending. He’d seen a lot of humanity on the force during those 15 years, and hated most of it.

When the Cyber Investigative Unit was being expanded for the Toronto force and they were looking for new team members, he put up his hand. They were offering training and a clearer career path to seniority. There was also a slight pay bump and the job, for the most part, would be a at a desk job. “This wave of cybercrime is a wave I’m going to ride on,” Derek told himself. “I’m going to be ‘white collar,’ and pretty soon detective.”



Joko – 2036

Joko was proud of his bapak - his dad. He was the best motorcycle repairman not just in Bogor, where they lived, but on the entire Island of Java. People, especially the ojek drivers who depended on their bikes for a living, drove long distances to have Tommy service their bikes.

There were thousands of ojets, unlicensed motorcycle taxis, on Java. Most were cheap, domestically made Hondas, Yamahas and Suzukis. They often carried the driver and a couple passengers at a time. Ojets were a faster and less expensive option than normal taxicabs. With the crazy traffic congestion in Bogor – really on most of the island – ojets were a popular option.

Growing up, Joko spent endless evenings watching and learning from his dad. He knew his dad, Tommy, wanted him to work at the repair shop and eventually take it over. Joko loved motorbikes just as much as Tommy. He could hear when the hum of a bike was off, and then when it was back in rhythm. When

the pistons were in sync, moving up and down in the cylinder block: tiny explosions of fuel and air powering the bike smoothly forward.

But Joko didn't want to fix bikes. He wanted to ride them. So, when he left school at 15, he worked for a year in the shop with his dad until he'd saved enough to buy his own motorcycle and became an ojek driver himself. He opted for a Kawasaki Vulcan. Still domestically made, and he liked the styling of the sport bikes more than the cruisers. They were sleeker and racier than most of the motorcycles used as ojek. His was shiny and black. He loved it.

"Joko, you'll do well. You're confident and smart – and a good haggler, just like your mother," laughed Tommy. "Never take less than 5,000 rupiah for a ride of any distance. And ensure they pay the agreed sum up front, Joko. You will do well and can start saving to start your own family. Someday, I will be just as proud a grandfather as I am a bapak," said Tommy.

Tommy was a quiet man. He rarely voiced opinions and never spoke of his past. When Joko asked his mother, Krishilla, who went by Risha, why, she said, "I only know what you know, Joko. He moved to Indonesia from Canada in 2020 and has never looked back. This is his home now. We are his family and he loves us so much, 'more than words can ever tell,' as he always says. There is nothing more for us to know, my child."

If it wasn't for his height, Tommy could be easily taken for an Indonesian. He looked Asian and had mastered the local dialect of Northern Bogor very well, with lots of tutoring from Risha, of course. He rarely felt the need to leave their district and was happiest either working in his shop or making dinner with Risha, and listening to the stories about her large extended Javanese family, and the many funny and sometimes strange travelers who had stayed at their Happy Hopeful Hostel in Jakarta. Risha had worked there before she met and married Tommy.

Risha, who could speak formal Javanese and several of the other island dialects, helped Tommy in the shop by phoning in the replacement part orders and contacting customers when their motorcycles were ready to pick up. But most importantly, she negotiated the cost of the repairs.

Tommy was too shy and unsure of his Javanese to haggle with customers. But Risha was neither, and knew their wellbeing depended on fair payment for Tommy's work. Fifty percent up front, and the full balance when they returned for their vehicle. Once Tommy walked them through the fixes, the replaced parts and other services provided, Risha waited for payment. Then and only then could the customers drive away on their newly restored bikes. They made a good team, Tommy and Risha. In business and in life.



Miyako – 2020

The hypertension started in 2018. Miyako had always lived a good, healthy lifestyle. Committed cyclist, balanced diet, little to no alcohol – just the odd glass of wine on special occasions. She hadn't felt well for a while, though. She put it off to stress.

But the high-blood pressure steadily, quietly crept up on her, damaging the walls of her arteries day after day, until in 2019, experiencing severe chest pain, she drove herself to St. Joseph's Health Centre on the Queensway in Toronto. She told the nurse at the emergency reception, "I don't know what's wrong with me, but I'm sure I am going to die.

And she did. In late March 2020. Massive heart attack. She was only 54. It was a quick cremation with a small, family-only service. Funerals were not happening because of the COVID-19 pandemic lock down, which is just as well because Miyako couldn't have afforded one. Despite her teacher's salary, and having once owned her home in Toronto, she died in debt.

Miyako's parents flew in from Japan, and her brother and sister-in-law from France. Their son, Thomas, joined them from Kingston, where he was attending Queen's University as a foreign student studying philosophy. The five of them, plus Miyako's ex-husband Jamie and their daughter Luna made up the entire funeral party.

Miyako and Jamie's son, Jay, was unable to attend. He was in prison.



Jamie – 2019

Jamie had quietly harboured the hope that he and Miyako would eventually get back together. He understood her anger at having to remortgage their house in popular Bloor West Village to pay his debts. The debts were the result of his failed dream, his restaurant "Jamie's".

"I should have leveled with her about the how much it cost to renovate and refurbish the place. How much all the kitchen equipment cost, even though I got it used. How hard it was to keep any decent staff, and how poorly the restaurant was doing despite my 70-hour weeks. I should have told her," Jamie lamented. But he hadn't. He couldn't really face the problems himself. The penny dropped though when he had to close because he couldn't afford the wages of the few employees he was able to keep. The debtors came fast and furious.

That was the end of the restaurant and their marriage. But just the beginning of their troubles.

Their daughter Luna did fine at school. She had lots of interests and friends. She kept a part-time job, balancing it with her schoolwork and other commitments, like designing her high school yearbook. Luna was an easygoing, happy child.

Jay, her younger brother by two years, however, struggled. He struggled with his grades, with making friends, with expressing himself. He was tall, pimply and awkward. The divorce hit Jay particularly hard.



Jay – 2017

Although Jay's mom, Miyako, was born in Japan, he looked more Indigenous than Japanese. He was big and tall, with a broad forehead and square face. The kids at school called him "Crazy Injun Jay."

"Hey, Crazy Injun Jay, fail another math test?"

"How come you're such a dumbass? Was your mother an alcoholic, Jay. You got fetal alcohol syndrome or something?"

"Your daddy sniff glue all day, Injun Jay. That why you both living in a crappy basement apartment?"

The taunts and jibes were nonstop. And it was physical, too. They'd shove or trip him as he made his way down the hallways to class or the cafeteria. Jay just closed into himself, becoming increasingly withdrawn and moody. He spent most of his time in his room, surfing the web -- surreptitiously following the social media threads of the kids who were making his life a misery.

That's when Jay discovered the 'dark web'.

He'd been checking out some porn sites. All the guys at school did it. They were easy to find and if you knew where to look, you didn't have to pay to watch the porn. The sites made him uncomfortable and excited at the same time. These sites pretty much formed his ideas of what sex should be like. "Kinda scary," he worried.

One of the hard-core sites led him to a really hard-core site, where he saw videos of men killing girls and women -- "Snuff films," they called them. Scratchy, violent images with screams, gun shots, knife gashes and blood. Lots of blood. Sometimes the men videotaped themselves fucking the victims and then killing them. Some liked to kill them first and then fuck them. "Necrophiliacs," he learned.

Jay thought he was pretty 'badass' seeing all this on the dark web, as no one else at school had ever mentioned watching snuff. "This for sure will give me some cred with those assholes," he thought. But he thought wrong. Now they called him "Creepy Injun Jay, and along with continuing to shove and sucker punch him in the hallways, they wrote lewd comments on his locker. "Pervie Jay," "HR Snuff n Stuff." "Mr. Necro..."

After that, Jay stopped going to high school altogether. Now, he spent all his time in his room, playing video games and cruising the web. His dad was never around anyway. He was either working whatever cooking gigs he could find to chip away at his debts or trying to woo his mom, Miyako, back.

On certain sites, Jay had seen ads for weapon-use certifications and gun permits. He decided he wanted one -- a gun. Needed one to be able to face the guys at school and get them off his back. "One flash of a handgun and those pricks will stop messing with me. They think they're so fuckin' tough. They're gonna get schooled."

He was 17. He went online, responded to one of the ads and was led to another site that led directly to illegal handguns -- which was good because he learned he couldn't go through the certification and permit process because he was underage. He immediately received a text back from the site. It said, as a student he would "receive a 50% discount. The gun, regularly \$246, is only \$123." "Awesome," Jay thought! Jay said he wanted to pay in cash (because he didn't have a credit card) and they agreed on a place to meet the next day.

It was in a warehouse in the Junction area, not too far from his dad's place.

He got another text the next day, saying there were a couple complications, and they'd have to lay low a couple weeks before delivering the gun to him. "NP," Jay texted back. When the time came, he went to the warehouse. That's where he met Derek.

Derek – Cybercrime Unit 2017

Derek's cybercrime unit was working with the NARC squad trying to reduce the number of illegal firearms in Toronto. The number of shootings had been escalating and becoming more brazen – gang members and drug dealers opening fire in crowded shopping malls and parking lots in the middle of the day. They thought if they could catch more of the people trying to buy illegal guns, that would lead them to the drugs and gangs.

The whole snare operation wasn't very sophisticated. They just posted ads for the gun training and permits, pushed links to the illegal firearms on the dark web and waited for the fish to bite. Not many did.

Seasoned criminals knew you didn't get guns online by responding to ads. Derek's supervisor was actually becoming impatient with the whole initiative and its lack of progress. That's when Jay took the bait.

Once Derek got his cell number and ran it through the police databases. Once he saw his birthdate, he realized Jay was just 17. But if he put their exchange off for two weeks, he could arrest him an adult. Juveniles got passed off to another unit and didn't count toward his quarterly targets. "This little shithead will help me make my targets this quarter and show the boss this is all worth the effort," Derek smiled.

When Jay showed up at the warehouse with his \$123 in cash, they arrested him. As an adult.

Driving to his mom's to inform her of the arrest, they had the siren blaring and lights flashing. Like proud peacocks, fanning their tail feathers. Jay was handcuffed in the back of the squad car, crying.



Jamie and Miyako -- 2017

Jamie's basement apartment wasn't far from Miyako's place. He rushed over as soon as she called.

"They've arrested him! Trying to buy a gun. A gun! They said it's a federal offense. He's likely going to prison! Prison. Jesus Christ! We've totally failed him. We've totally failed Jay."

"Calm down," Miyako, "calm down. This is his first offense. He made a mistake. We'll figure this out," Jamie tried to hug her.

She pushed him away and continued to pace the kitchen. "How can this be happening!" Jamie attempted to hold her again and she screamed, "Don't you, don't you dare! I need to know how we're going to deal with this?"

"We'll deal with it. We will, Miyako. We'll get him a good lawyer. He's just a kid. A confused, bullied kid," Jamie reassured her.

"A lawyer. Ha! You know how much a criminal lawyer costs? All the debt we have! Where are we going to get money for a lawyer. Can you tell me that, Jamie?"

"Listen, we'll figure it out, Miyako. First, let's go down to the police station and take him home. Bail him out, or whatever."

"Bail him out? They said he'd have to stay in jail until his arraignment --- when he's formally charged. He's going to have to stay in jail. Our little boy in jail, Jamie! Jesus Christ..."

"For how long?"

"They said at least a couple days."

At that point Jamie melted into a kitchen chair. "Oh my God, Miyako. Let's just go down to the station and see what we can find out. See if he's okay."

Miyako grabbed her jacket and car keys.



Jay in jail – 2017

When they were finally able to see him, Jay was embarrassed, but seemed almost amused. "Mom, Dad, I of course wasn't going to do anything with it, right? I just wanted to scare off the kids who've been hassling me at school. I wasn't even going to get any bullets or anything. It was just for show. No big thing, right? I'm not sure why everyone is making such a big deal of this. Why don't the police go and pick *them* up. They're the real criminals. When can I come home? Can I come home, now," Jay smiled and raised his shoulders around his ears. "Please?"

"Jay, you're not hearing us or these police officers here. You have to stay in jail. They say you're in here for at least four days, when your arraignment is scheduled. You have to stay here, Jay."

"I have to stay in jail!"

"Yes, in jail. Jay, this is a big deal. This is a very big deal." Tears fell down Miyako's clenched jaw.

The colour drained from Jay's cheeks and his tears came again, dripping onto and darkening his orange jumpsuit.



After the formal charges were laid against Jay at his arraignment, they had to put up a bond and he was put under house arrest until his trial, which was tentatively scheduled 18 months away. The wheels of justice grind slowly. Miyako's parents paid the bond.

Jay and his parents cycled through a couple legal aid lawyers, most of them not much older than Jay. They finally realized all they would get was yet another young, inexperienced intern, so they stopped that tack. Then there was all the psychological testing, all the check ins with therapists and parole officers. All the rules Jay had to abide by. Curfews, parent always present.... Lots of rules.

They waited and waited for the trial date. Jay fell deeper into a dark place. He held onto the part-time job cleaning at a senior's centre, which the John Howard Society had set him up with. But beyond that, he did little. He couldn't focus on his classes, which he was supposed to be completing remotely. He was never good at school, and he was even worse at studying independently.

Jamie and Miyako couldn't focus, either. It was like their lives had been thrown into a perma spin. Jamie resigned from his chef job at a retirement residence in Markham. He couldn't cope with the demands of running a kitchen and managing staff, not to mention the – in his opinion – “too highly involved and opinionated Resident's Committee," who all seemed to think they knew more about food than him.

Miyako took stress leave from her elementary school teaching job. She was in a constant state of worry. Her hair was thinning and seemed to go grey almost overnight. She couldn't eat, couldn't sleep and some days just couldn't get out of bed.

Luna was the only one managing through the ordeal. She carried on with her Graphic Design program at Sheridan, kept up her part-time job at Old Navy, saw her friends, dated, and generally tried to cling to some sense of normal. She knew she needed to stay clear of the black hole engulfing the rest of her family.

After two years of dealing with the police, legal system and courts – still without a firm trial date – Jamie decided to buy motorcycles for himself and Jay. They needed some diversion from the gloom and taunt string Jay's future dangled from. The bikes would give them both, Jamie hoped, some sense of freedom – some release from hopelessness.

Jamie had to borrow money to buy the bikes. He tapped a buddy for \$30,000. The friend had also opened his own restaurant, Snout to Hoof. But unlike Jamie's, his friend's culinary venture was a big success, especially with the business set downtown. He didn't hesitate, just wrote him a cheque, said pay it back when you can.

Jamie used it to buy a 2018 Harley Davidson Road King for himself, a cruiser with lots of shiny chrome and green leather, and a 2019 Suzuki Sport for Jay. It was all black except for the chrome mufflers.

They took lessons and went for their tests together the same day - both easily passing. They got out on the bikes whenever they could, riding the winding backroads of Toronto – north, west and east of the city. It was revitalizing for Jamie and life changing for Jay. On his bike was the only time Jay smiled. It was different than playing Excitebike and his other video games. It was a whole mind and body experience. His hands working the clutch, turn signals and front brake. His right foot working the rear brake, left foot working the gears.

He was fully engaged: All his nerve endings alert, managing his speed, leaning his into the curves. He felt keenly alive. Being on the bike was intense and relaxing all at once.

Jay loved anything and learned everything to do with motorcycles.



Jay's Trial – December 2019

Jay's first hearing didn't happen until three brutal, destroying years later. They all felt the judge seemed fairly sympathetic. There was a clear grimace on her face when she heard the police deferred his arrest until a day after he turned 18.

Also, Jay's whole extended family filled the benches in the courtroom. Only Luna wasn't there. She had taken some of her earnings from her first year of full-time work and gone travelling with her boyfriend. She sent them regular postcards from all kinds of exotic places -- Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Fiji and Indonesia.

The judge said she rarely saw this show of support in her courtroom. That Jay was lucky to have such dedicated family and friends.

Despite their optimism, after three hearings, Jay received a three-year federal prison sentence. He was credited with having served three years under house arrest, with no breaches. But he still had to serve two years. He'd be serving them in the same town where his cousin, Thomas, was studying. Kingston. The cousins were actually the same age. But Thomas would be getting a philosophy degree. What awaited Jay was less clear.



Jay's transport to prison - 2020

When the police officers arrived at Miyako's to remand Jay on a cold January morning, one blithely quipped, "Won't you be fresh meat in there."

Jay held his mom back as she gasped for air and flailed her fists at the cops, "You bastards. What did you say? What did you just say! You goddamn bastards." Jay held her lightly against the narrow hallway wall until she melted to the floor. Sobbing, defeated.

Jay hung his head and let the officers lead him out to the back of the paddy wagon. There were no sirens this time. Just the wail of his mother's cries.



Jay in Prison – February 2020

The insults, slings and arrows of high school were nothing compared to the ever-present menace in prison. Jay, who always struggled with communication and confidence, was easy prey. It was mortifying.

He was devastated when they told him his mom died of a heart attack. It piled onto the shame and pain he already carried.

Soon after Miyako died, his dad Jamie died in a motorcycle crash. The police said they didn't know if it was an accident or not. It was a single vehicle incident. He hit a low guard rail and went over the Old Mill Bridge. He died when he hit the Humber River below. It was a bridge Jamie and Jay knew well. They had ridden across it many times when they were cruising the back roads Oakville. Jamie died instantly after the 50-foot drop into the rocky river. He didn't leave a note or anything, but his landlords said he'd been pretty low since Jay's incarceration.

Jay was sure at that point he'd be leaving Kingston Penn in a body bag. He didn't know what he had to live for anymore. He had the same recurring dream in the pen: There was a dark shadow standing, waiting, at the bottom of his bed. Jay wasn't ready yet to give himself over to this terrifying visitor. But he knew sooner or later he'd let the shadow take him. He felt now, with both parents dead, it was the only thing that awaited him.



Jay Released from Prison – 2020

By April 2020, the province had been in lock down for two weeks, trying to bend the curve of Covid. But in detention centres, the virus was surging like wildfire. To protect the inmates and reduce the spread, the authorities decided to reduce the prison population by 50 per cent. Given Jay's comparatively minor offense and good behaviour while in prison, he was granted a release, with the condition he live with a family member and continue under all the same conditions of his previous house arrest. By that time, the only immediate family member he had left was his sister, Luna.



When he arrived back in Toronto and was delivered to her apartment door, Luna answered with her mask on and handed one to Jay. She signed the release, agreed to all her responsibilities as his family sponsor and motioned for Jay to come in. They didn't hug, much as Jay longed for it. There was a pandemic. No one hugged.

Luna and Jay ate a mostly silent meal of spaghetti and salad. She didn't really care about food, which she knew was a constant irritant to her now deceased dad. Luna had a tiny overpriced one-bedroom in Liberty Village in Toronto, and like every other office worker in the country, she was doing her graphic design job from home.

As Jay cornered a slippery noodle on his plate, he asked "What should I do, Luna? What should I do?"

She stabbed a soggy piece of lettuce and said, "Run."



Luna – 2020

Luna, with her digital design skills and the help of a downtown connection, had taken Jay and their French cousin Thomas' passports and merged them. It was Jay's photo, but the rest of the information was Thomas'.

When Thomas had come from Queen's to attend his aunt's - her mom's – funeral in March, he'd stayed with Luna. He'd asked if he could crash there, as no one wanted to stay in hotels at that point. He'd also opted to remain in Canada instead of heading back to France during the pandemic. He thought Canada was doing a better job of managing the outbreak and said he “relished the extra time to read more widely in philosophy.”

“Quelle tragédie!” Thomas repeated. “Jay has done this! He has caused Aunt Miyako all of you - so much stress. So much suffering. Quel idiot. Quel bete!”

She didn't particularly like her cousin. *Privileged little prick*, she thought. “Don't you dare diss my brother. You have no idea what's he's been through.” It was then she decided to nip his passport. Wasn't planned. In the spur of a moment, she decided *This could be helpful*” and it was.



“Here, Jay. Take this. It's Thomas' passport. The airlines are still letting nationals return home. Take it. I've booked you a ticket on Air France. Don't ask how I doctored the passport, just take it. And here's five thousand dollars. It's all I have. Keep it safe. Once you're in France, book a return flight to Jakarta.”

“Where the hell is Jakarta?”

“It's in Indonesia. Don't even leave Charles De Gaulle. Don't leave the airport. Just go and book the ticket.”

“Won't I need a visa or something?”

“No, France has a reciprocal Visa Exemption with Indonesia. Just like Canada. I didn't need one when I visited either. But you do need a return ticket and a destination address.”

“Here's 100 thousand rupiah – the local currency. It's not much, just what I had left from my trip there last year. It's only about \$100 bucks Canadian, but that goes pretty far there.”

“Wow. I don't know, Luna. This is breaking all the rules. What about an Indonesian address? What should I do about that?”

“When you get there, go directly to the Happy Hopeful Hostel in Jakarta. Here's the address. Take one of the motorbike taxis. They're the cheapest. They call them ojek. When you get there, ask for Krishilla. No, no -- ask for Risha, that's what most people call her. Let her know you need a little help getting settled. Don't tell her you're my brother or anything else. She is a kind person. Her whole family was so good to me when I stayed at their hostel. I have no doubt they will help you.”

“Thank you. Thank you for all you’re doing for me, Luna.”

“You’re my brother, Jay. I love you and I am so sorry all this has happened,” she reached to hug him. He recoiled.

“No. No, Luna don’t!” He took a step back. Luna did, too, hurt by his response. “Wait.” He said, leaning over to grab his mask. Jay pulled the elastics around his ears, covering his mouth and nose, and turned back to hold his sister. Tears darkened streams down their paper masks.

“You’re going to be fine. I know it. I believe in you. But don’t contact me or anyone else from over there. Once you’re settled, though, send me a postcard that says only ‘Happily hopeful, Joko.’ That’s how I’ll know you’re okay.”