

# NO TITLE 2

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

I was bullied a lot when I was a kid. Something about the shy and the meek always brings out the worst in kids. They equate shy to weak, which is very stupid of them.

In sixth grade, there was this kid, Luis, who took the same afternoon bus I did. He sat next to me one day in class and whispered “pimplehead” in my ear. My eyes brimmed with tears as I tried to ignore him. That afternoon, on the bus, he sat behind me and said it again, but louder. The other kids laughed. This went on for a few weeks; he got creative with the names. I never said anything. Then one day, he sat down next to me and started talking to me like he really wanted to be my friend. For a moment, I felt safe. I stupidly thought that he wasn’t so bad, that maybe I saw how cool I can be and decided he wasn’t gonna tease me anymore. Then he rose onto his knees on the seat and said, “Au-Co, say ‘fuck.’ Say ‘fuck’ and I’ll never call you names again.” I pursed my lips together and looked out the window. The other kids chimed in, egging me to say the word as well. Finally, his stop came and he got off, not before pleading with me one last time to say ‘fuck.’ I didn’t even look at him. Strangely enough though, he never bothered me again after that.

I learned something about myself that day. I learned that my mom didn’t need to worry about me and peer pressure. It wasn’t so much the word itself, but the fact that I was being forced to say it. It was like the pressure those people put on me to be “normal” makes my brain clamp down even more stubbornly than it naturally does. I’ve never liked settling into society’s demands. I’m not a rebel in any sense of the word; I’m too much of a coward. But I like to live my own way in the world. I dress the way I dress because I like how it looks, not because it’s fashionable. I talk, read, speak, do what I do because that’s what I feel comfortable doing.

To this day, I don’t really like making people do things they don’t want to do because I remember how uncomfortable it made me feel when someone else did that to me. I don’t want anyone to dread seeing me because they’re afraid of the pressure I put on them to do something they don’t want to do.

We’re freaks, all of us. We’ve all been called names, felt hopeless, thought that we were worthless. The secret is trying to hang onto that part of ourselves, the freak, the meest of us, despite the hurt and the put downs.

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