

The Silence of Governor Lyle

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Amin had never been beyond the island. It was not as if he was unaware of the world beyond it. He had seen maps of the world beyond, and had even heard stories of how, in the past, the people of his village- Tukara- would travel to the mainland on a semi-frequent basis. Yet he had never gone. He simply never needed to.

Of course, this did not mean that the island was fully cut off from the rest of the world. Governor Lyle called the island 'San Iago,' a name which had been kept out of habit more than anything else. Long ago, long before Amin was born at least, a mine had been built on the island, which people of Tukara had, for many generations, used to derive wealth through mineral exploitation and refinement. When the governor had arrived, this policy had changed; they simply mined the ores as they were and gave it away to the boats that came by every week. Amin was one of the workers in that mine. The governor paid him in coins imported from his homeland, but most of it simply went towards his parents' basic expenses, and Amin saved up the rest for no particular reason. He woke up at dawn every day, and worked in the mine for roughly six hours, before spending the next four in school and having the rest of the day off.

Governor Lyle had always been something of a constant in his life. A cruel man, to be sure, but one who had administered San Iago for so long that it was difficult to imagine a world without him. He hadn't come from the island himself. According to Amin's parents, he'd simply showed up at the port in a boat and announced that he was in charge. Apparently, San Iago had been, according to the governor himself, "overlooked by the colonial policy office," whatever that meant. There was resistance, of course, but Lyle's men- armed with modern weapons of the time- put stop to those rumblings quickly. So, for much of Amin's life, he had been naturally

shaped by Governor Lyle's policies. For example, he had been genuinely surprised when he learned from his parents that children his age had not always worked in the mine.

This wasn't to say that Amin was ignorant as to the nature of the system he worked under, of course. Governor Lyle set quotas for the workers to meet- if they didn't, there were consequences. Amin himself had failed to meet his quota once, and consequently was caned and had his pay cut. His parents were angry, of course, but they could not do anything but stay quiet. But in many other ways, there was always a dichotomy to the man's rule. He built roads, but they usually only led to the port and his residence, and were always named after unfamiliar figures that nobody in Tukara understood. Infrastructure was built, but only for the purpose of resource extraction. Modern technology and electricity came, but so did curfews, expropriations, and the erasure of dignity. This was all normal to Amin. He simply had never needed to consider anything else.

So, like every other day, Amin woke up and ate as he usually did, before going to the governor's house. Yet, something was different today. Typically, the governor would wake up at roughly the same time that Amin did. This time, though, he was nowhere to be seen. So, Amin waited outside the building. He waited for some time, pacing, kicking the dirt, and humming tunes to keep himself occupied. Perhaps the governor had simply slept in? Once an hour had passed, a crowd started to gather around the house, with workers all as confused as he was, demanding answers. Eventually, one of the men lost patience, and knocked on the door. No response. Tentatively, he tried the doorknob and was surprised to find that it was still open. Hesitating for only a moment, he pushed against the door and swung it open-

-only to find that there was nobody there. While many of Governor Lyle's tools remained, his bed was empty and his clothes were absent from still-opened drawers. Amin blinked as he

peeked in, realizing the reality of the situation. The governor... was gone. He must have left in the night- or would it have been the early morning? After realizing that none of the adults were talking, Amin cleared his throat.

“So... what do we do now?”

It took another two days for the news to be confirmed. Governor Lyle was gone. His boat had vanished. Questions abounded immediately. Was this merely a temporary state of affairs? Would the governor come back, perhaps with soldiers from the mainland? Was he being replaced? Had priorities changed in the mainland that necessitated his disappearance? It all seemed too good to be true. The governor had simply vanished in the night without so much as a word. Mareta, the matriarch of the village, had effectively taken the entire thing in stride. The governor's old residence was looted, not for valuables, but documents. Decrees were shredded. Ledgers burned. The servants working there all left, not seeing any point in continuing to work for a ghost. For the first time in nearly fifty years, the people of Tukara were effectively on their own. Roads that governor Lyle had paved were renamed, broken irrigation ditches were fixed, and the pier that Lyle had neglected for years finally started to get worked on.

Nevertheless, whispers still persisted. One of the guards said that he'd seen someone leave in the middle of the night for the sea. He'd assumed it was merely a ghost, a trick of the light at the time, but had become utterly convinced that the man had been swallowed up by the sea for his arrogance. Most didn't believe that last part, but the fact remained that both the

governor and his boat had vanished, so it was only logical that he had fled by boat. Nevertheless, despite multiple attempts to contact the mainland, no response ever came.

Amin didn't care much for any of it, though he did notice that school was getting a bit more interesting. The Elders were teaching again, and instead of just reading and numbers, Amin also learned about stories, maps, and songs! Though, he did notice that nobody in school was speaking Artish anymore. Matriarch Mareta said something about "cultural contamination," whatever that meant. Well, that just made things easier for him, so it wasn't like he was complaining. Also, he didn't have to work anymore, since the adults said they would do everything themselves. Amin also noticed that the neighborhoods themselves changed a lot- the street signs were all painted over in Tuolsic, and the drums that the governor had banned for no particular reason began to beat in the streets once more.

At least, until the mainland sent someone back.

Amin had never liked the council meetings. He was never required to attend, and rarely ever felt the need to when Governor Lyle was in charge, since it was mostly just him proposing some new boring policy that hardly ever affected him.

He frowned a little as he looked at the new person who had showed up just a few days ago. Not a new governor. Not a person of any concrete authority. Simply... a politician, as he called himself. Amin wasn't even sure what a 'politican' was supposed to be. From what he'd seen so far, all it entailed was laying out a spreadsheet and saying big complicated words that didn't make any sense to him. Leon was his name. He said he had originally been from Tukara

himself, and had went to the mainland to study, or something, though Amin didn't know why an adult would need to study. If nothing else, he seemed incredibly fluent in Artish. Amin couldn't even tell what he was saying sometimes.

“We must modernize,” he said, “and adopt a global language of trade and commerce. Only then can San Iago truly reach its full potential as an independent nation. In light of this, I propose that Artish be recognized as San Iago's official language.”

His accent was a bit clumsy, which made Amin laugh, but the adults did not. His father smacked him in the side, which shut him up quickly. Matriarch Mareta was the next to speak, her voice aged, but still containing a fire and sharpness that Amin could not help but jolt at.

“With all due respect, Councilman, I was raised speaking Tuolsic. I settled disputes in Tuolsic. I blessed my daughter's birth in Tuolsic. And you want me to tell my grandchildren it's now illegal to learn it in school?”

Several murmurs of praise followed those words. The elders, all seated behind her, nodded in agreement. Matriarch Mareta had always been one of the chief forms of resistance to Governor Lyle, and more broadly,

Leon shook his head. “I said *official*, he emphasized, “not *illegal*. Of course, people may speak it in their homes, their songs, their stories. But the state- our institutions- must speak clearly. Uniformly. And that clarity simply is not possible in Tuolsic. It is a purely oral language that cannot be written down.”

“That's not clarity. That's erasure.”

“It’s alignment, Matriarch.” Leon put his hands behind his back. “We can no longer afford to raise children in a language no university accepts, no trade partner understands. We must ask ourselves: is this a preservation of dignity, or merely delaying the inevitable?”

“We are not *fools*,” Mareta snapped, “and I would prefer our children know who they actually are rather than speak Artish like a clerk.”

“Identity is not a museum, honored Matriarch. It evolves, or it calcifies. San Iago is no longer isolated. The tides bring ships, radios, currency.”

Leon paused for a moment, as if thinking, before gesturing outwards. “I ask everyone here a question. Do we not want our children to have a better life? Do we not want them to have access to better opportunities- jobs, trade, modern institutions? None of these things are written or conducted in Tuolsic. The world does not wait for sentiment. We must choose: remain romantic, or remain relevant.”

At that, the murmurs intensified. Amin swallowed as he looked around. Truthfully, he understood very little of this. He didn’t know anything about any of this. He was just... just a kid, a kid who just a month ago had worked in a mine under a cruel governor. He had no idea how any of this worked. But he *did* know that people were reconsidering their stances. Some for, and some against. This vote would be close.

Privately, however, he was wondering why children were coming up so much in this conversation. If they cared so much about children, then maybe he should speak up? But one glare from his mother ended those thoughts as quickly as they started. He’d just embarrass himself. But those thoughts were instantly ended when Mareta slammed her foot on the ground, face full of fury. A hush fell over the room, and even Leon seemed surprised.

“Our language is not primitive just because it scares those who cannot speak it! Tuolsic is not *unstructured* merely because it does not fit on a chalkboard, and it is not *imprecise* simply because it does not perform for colonizers!”

The hush only intensified. It was a challenge, and everyone knew it- an attempt to regain control. Straightening his tie, Leon seemed to swallow for a moment before replying.

“It is not about chalkboards. It is about global literacy, economic fluency, and legal integrity.” He paused, before continuing on in a softer voice. “Tuolsic is a beautiful language. But beauty is not enough. We must be practical.”

Mareta’s fists clenched, her voice sharp like obsidian. “If we silence Tuolsic, it won’t vanish, Councilman. Children will whisper it like a secret, and one day, long after we are gone, somebody will come back for it. And what will we say then? That we gave it up for stacks of paper and foreign medals?”

If they come back for it,” Leon said, “then let them find something worth returning to- a nation strong enough to stand with the rest of the world. Not one stuck repeating the past because it’s afraid to imagine anything else.”

The rest of the meeting came and went in a blur for Amin. Much of the details went over his head. But the final ruling didn’t. Leon’s proposal was voted on and narrowly passed by the council. Matriarch Mareta and her followers stormed out immediately after the vote was finished, but Amin knew, instinctively, that this resistance was hollow. From this point forward, the official language of San Iago was Artish, and Leon, it seemed, was free to pursue his own agenda.

It didn't take long for Amin to start seeing the effects. The curriculum in his school changed only a few days later. All of the textbooks containing useful information on Tuolsic was discarded, and a new policy was laid out: while in classroom settings, children were not allowed to speak Tuolsic. Everything would now be in Artish. Still, it wasn't too bad, all things considered. A bunch of new teachers arrived from the mainland, with fancy clothes and wonky accents just like Leon. All you had to do to avoid getting in trouble was avoid speaking Artish.

So, Amin had no reason to believe that this day would be much different from any other. He did what he usually did, which was show up earlier, since he didn't have to work in the mine anymore. He sat down in his seat, and waited for the teacher- a man named Mr. Welles- to start class. Mr. Welles was of an odd sort, always wearing some different color of tie and carrying around a ruler that he never used. Not a bad person, just a bit... strange. Perhaps that was why he was teaching about 'civic behavior and public decorum,' whatever that meant. Amin had never been good at doing his homework.

"Lysa. A sentence with the word 'responsibility,' please." Mr Welles' voice didn't exactly boom throughout the room, but it wasn't quiet, either.

Most of the class looked over at the student in question, Amin included. Lysa had never been a poor student, exactly, but she had a tendency to get nervous when put on the spot like this. She swallowed, before blurting out:

"Um... *naka te hanu'a*... responsibility for the garden is shared by..."

She paused. Or, perhaps, the proper term would be that she froze. A collective hush fell over the classroom, as practically everyone understood what had happened at exactly the same

moment. Amin wasn't sure exactly what was going through Lysa's mind, but he could see the wheels turning, as she realized. The words had slipped out like breath.

Mr. Welles raised a brow, and tapped his desk with his ruler. "Pardon?"

Lysa swallowed. "I-I meant to say... the garden is everyone's-"

Whatever she was about to say didn't get very far, as Mr. Welles spoke again, his voice as flat as usual, but considerably colder than Amin had grown used to over the past few days.

"Come up to the chalkboard, Lysa."

Instinctively, everyone knew what was coming next. Lysa's eyes were as wide as dinner plates, but she got up anyway, and walked up to the chalkboard with her head hanging down.

"You will write '*I will not speak backwards*' 100 times."

A collective gasp went through the entire classroom as he said that, but nobody dared speak up. A part of Amin wanted to stand up for his friend, but he knew if he did so, he'd be up at that board too, so he stayed quiet.

Lysa picked up a piece of chalk with trembling fingers, but didn't write at first. "I... I didn't mean to-"

Whack. The sound of Mr. Welles' ruler hitting the chalkboard right next to Lysa's ear made Amin instinctively wince. So *that* was what the ruler was for. To her credit, Lysa only jumped a little bit, but she got the message, and started to write. Amin wasn't sure how long it took for her to write those words a full 100 times. He wasn't sure when she started to cry, either. The words blurred after a while, but eventually, the entire chalkboard had been filled. Mr. Welles nodded in satisfaction, before turning to the rest of the class.

“Let this be a reminder. My job as an educator is to teach all of you practical skills. This includes how to *speak properly*. Nobody in this room will speak Tuolsic. Is that understood?”

For a moment, nobody said anything, the sheer shock of the event overriding everything else. But eventually, Amin swallowed, and mumbled out a half-hearted “understood,” and the rest of the class followed. He tried to avoid Lysa’s gaze as she walked back to her desk, still crying from the humiliation of the entire affair.

Amin never saw her speak Tuolsic after that.

Amin went home alone that night with his satchel on his backs, but the weight he felt was not from his books, but his guilt. The idea of hanging out with his friends felt... wrong, after practically selling out Lysa. Still, he went down the route he usually did, merely keeping his head down to avoid being seen. Yet, as he rounded a corner that led down a road directly to his parents’ house, he noticed something... different.

A man in blue coveralls stood on a wooden ladder, unscrewing the wooden sign that had always hung crooked from the pole. Like most things in Tuolsic, it wasn’t written- more of a symbol- but it was pronounced *Hanu’aka*. It meant ‘path of the salt wind,’ a reference to how you could feel a salty breeze from the ocean when walking down it. The man pulled it down, tossed it in the back of a government truck, and replaced it with a fresh, flat sign: *Ferreira Avenue*. Black letters on white metal. Cold and exact.

Amin stopped. The man looked down. Middle-aged. Greying at the edges. His shirt bore a stitched badge with a crown and the initials P.I.W.- Public Infrastructure Works.

“You lost, kid?” the man asked.

Amin tilted his head. “No,” he said, “I live just down that lane.”

“Not anymore you don’t,” the man said, half-smiling. “Now you live on Ferreira.”

Amin frowned. “What is Ferreira?”

The man paused. Shrugged. “Some Artish war man. Don’t know. Doesn’t matter.”

“What happened to *Hanu’aka*?”

The man scratched his neck and leaned on the ladder. He looked tired. Not just end-of-the-day tired. The kind of tired that sits in your bones when you've been doing something too long that doesn't feel quite right.

“Orders,” he said. “Old names confuse the delivery people. Easier this way.”

Amin looked at the discarded sign in the back of the truck. The wood was weathered, but the carved symbols were still proud, cut by hand long before he was born. The man didn't say anything else. Just finished tightening the bolts, climbed down, and drove away.

Amin stood there a little longer, looking at the new sign. Was this what progress looked like? Was it erasure, as Matriarch Mareta had proclaimed? The washing away of old names like chalk in rain? He didn't know. Amin reached into his satchel, pulled out a pencil stub and a scrap of notebook paper, and wrote:

“The salt wind doesn't care what you name the street. It still knows where it's going.”

Then, he walked over to the side of the road, and tucked it beneath the bark of one of the trees, a way that his ancestors used to leave messages out during storms. Maybe someone would find it. Maybe they'd laugh. Maybe they'd think about it a little. Or maybe nobody would find it at all.

A breeze hit him, and he smelled the familiar scent of salt as he looked down the lane. He didn't know if the sound was the sea attempting to warn him of something, or Governor Lyle laughing from the grave.

When Matriarch Mareta died, nobody was surprised. She had been near the end of her life even before the departure of the governor, and even Amin could tell that she was not quite as sharp as she once was. As was customary, the funeral was held in the center of Tukara. It was fairly typical for a funeral for public figure on San Iago. The Matriarch's coffin was held aloft over a bonfire, and, after remarks were made by those close to her, it would be lowered into the flames, allowing for her ashes to rise into the heavens as smoke into the next world.

It wasn't as if Amin had known the Matriarch in any way. He was just an ordinary child. Still, he remembered her legacy well. A symbol of resistance, even to the end. First against Governor Lyle, and then against so-called erasure. Amin finally understood, at least a little bit, about what she meant by "cultural contamination." Many people spoke, from many ends of the spectrum. The other elders, fellow townspeople, even Leon himself. It was all mostly typical, despite the significance of her passing.

But he would never forget what happened next. Halfway through the ceremony, a government official interrupted the proceedings, and requested that, for record keeping, the ceremony would have to be restarted.

In Artish, of course.

Many wonder what happened to Governor Lyle. Nobody, from his home country or San Iago, knows how he escaped or where he went. Some say the island itself swallowed him up, and others say that, even now, he remains in Tukara, decades later, pretending to be amongst them. While most of the man's extravagant monuments had been torn down, one small statue still remained, a carving of his head at the pier.

In time, long after Mareta and Leon had passed, children would be told that Tuolsic had never been a real language at all. That it was merely a collection of noises and phrases, and that the adoption of foreign tongues had made them civil. When these children passed the port of San Iago, and looked at the statue of the long-gone governor, they would ask, "who is he?"

And no one would answer in Tuolsic.