

The Struggle for Justice and Truth

by

Tomas Cudzis

Part 1 – Becoming You . . .

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Author's Advisory

Welcome to my book. As you continue to read, you will notice that in certain parts, there will be something that appears to be a reference to a song followed by a lyrics sample. You will be right. The purpose of the songs stated in the book is to evoke emotion in you, and to further support your overall experience while reading that certain section. For better immersion, I suggest that you listen to the songs as well.

What I really wanted to do, if I could, was to make a movie. I'm not even a writer – or active reader, for that matter – and I'm sure you will be able to tell that very quickly, as my book is probably very different in writing style, unique to others. Hopefully not in a bad way.

Watching a movie and having an emotional response is much easier than when reading a book, because you already see the movements, the colours, and hear the sounds. The use of that sensory input can capture your attention and invite you to draw more and more into the movie. Even smell could be subconsciously imagined based on the imagery you see. For me, it is so much easier to be connected to a movie.

On the other hand, in a text, there is hardly any emotion. All your emotional responses are based on your own imagination of what you read.

Therefore, everyone can have a different – I should say, unique – response, for better or worse, based on your own mental imagery capability and your personal traits.

I cannot make you see what I want you to see. I cannot put in your head the sounds that I would like you to hear as you read my book. But I believe that through those songs that I carefully selected, I can encourage you to feel what I intended to express when writing that part of the

story; what I felt and imagined while listening to the song. Not to prescribe or script, but to improve your overall experience. That is what it is all about: better experience. Experience that produces an emotional response in you.

In most sections, I would advise that you play the song after rather than before you read, but do whatever suits you the best. At the very least, it should be obvious that the section was dedicated to the “prescribed” individual song, and it is a tribute to the song’s lyrics itself.

The goal being, it should look like Linkin Park were making the soundtrack for the book, and not the other way around.

I’ve included the track’s length so it’s easier for you to identify the correct version of the intended song. If you are unable to find the correct version, then my advice is not to use any other version of that song. Musical artists can convey different emotions in the same song, depending on how they sing it. (Take, for example, Paul Anka’s album *Rock Swings*.) This could impact my original intent of the emotion that I hoped you would have experienced listening to that specific version of the song. It could destroy or amend the “atmosphere” that I originally hoped to create for you.

I do not own the rights to these songs, and I know it may not be convenient for you to go and find them (YouTube). However, if you play the right songs in the places I recommend you listen to them, I’m sure you will have a much better experience. Give it a try! Either way, enjoy, and thank you for taking interest in my book.

Kind regards,

Tomas Cudzis

Caution: *Please be aware that the book contains some strong language and also depicts graphic violence.*

Disclaimer:

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events, is intentional at times, but still a fiction. The biggest challenge for the author was to create an exciting story out of the lyrics of predominantly Linkin Park songs, and order it in one smooth, logical storyline for the reader to follow. The author had no other agenda creating the storyline, and it doesn't represent the author's personal, political, racial, social, etc., views. The author is aware that many sections in this book can be found extremely offensive in regard to some characters' opinions or actions. To create offensive content wasn't the author's intent, and it was only done so to create drama, fit into the lyrics' narrative, and to define some of the characters' personality traits.

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Acknowledgement:

I would like to acknowledge and thank the music band Linkin Park for their life's work to date. Their music influenced my life heavily. Their songs moved me in ways I'm trying to express in this book. They're the only music band to date that doesn't have a single average song, in my humble opinion, never mind a bad one, despite every new album being very different and unique.

This whole instalment of four parts is a tribute to their work, and is evolving around one point of view of my personal interpretation of their songs. Any additional songs in certain sections of this book are used for better immersion or connecting the storyline purposes only. Linkin Park's songs were ground zero for my inspiration, and all of them are present within the Quadrilogy of this tribute book series.

RIP Chester Charles Bennington (March 20, 1976–July 20, 2017)

Gone, but not forgotten!

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Part I: Becoming You . . .

Chapter 1: Until the Upper Hand Is Mine

John Murphy – Sunshine (Adagio in D minor) 4:26

Tomas had a small frame for a guy. As a boy, he had to face a lot of remarks on his skinny appearance. Somewhere around 12 years old, his father mounted a pull-up bar high in the hallway of their home flat. Tomas made a promise to himself that day. He promised to himself that he was going to transform his body. That bar was the first step in the right direction! Every time Tomas would pass below the pull-up bar going from his room into the living room, or to the bathroom, or kitchen, or back to his room, he would do as many pull-ups as he possibly could.

Beginnings were hard, at least for the first two days, when Tomas couldn't do a single pull-up at all. But since he was moving around his parents' flat quite frequently, the number of daily attempts were no less than twenty. With every new attempt, Tomas was getting closer and closer to his first full pull-up ever!

He still remembered it vividly even many years later, as if it was yesterday . . . the moment when he jumped up to grab onto the pull-up bar (it was so high that he couldn't stand on the floor if he was holding it), the heaviness of his body, the first pull that he did so many times before to no avail. On that day, Tomas could make it into the mid-range! There, he would get stuck again, as always.

The thought that went through his mind was: *Not again! Not this time!* The five-second struggle followed when Tomas couldn't move up no matter how hard he tried. Then, something that even he didn't really believe in, did happen. Tomas finally got through it, slowly raising up, past the sticking point. All of Tomas's power, everything that he had in him, was in the game! Finally, he believed!

All of Tomas's focus was on the level of his chin. He just wanted to get his chin higher than the bar, nothing less. He made it that far . . . past the sticking point. *Surely, it can only get easier after this.* And it did! Slowly, Tomas gained speed after being stuck at the sticking point momentarily, and then he started to elevate himself closer to the bar that seemed to be so high up above him. Then, his chin did raise higher than the bar level! Yes, he did jerk his body on the

way up. Yes, Tomas was kicking his legs like mad and his face looked like he had a hard time on the toilet. But he made it all the way up by himself.

Something that was impossible just two days ago, or so it seemed at that time, had happened.

Tomas was convinced that none of the boys at school, or friends, and friends of friends, could do it. This was the moment that Tomas was waiting for, for so long. The moment when his dream would turn into reality. The moment that confirmed it for him. It was possible, and he was right to dream about it. To even attempt it.

Audiomachine – Reaching 3:13

Tomas jumped off the bar, exhausted but happy, a smile on his face. *Finally!* he thought, and couldn't help but giggle. You cannot imagine what it felt like to him in that moment.

How could you? Not many people will ever feel what it feels like when you win against all of the odds. When nobody would believe in you, when everybody would tell you to just forget about it. That it is not meant to be for you. But you did it; you did win! And you made it without any support, on your own. The moment is for you to enjoy, to see the surprised faces of all of the disbelievers. It feels as if you performed a miracle! It's a reminder for them that it is possible to dream; it is possible to strive for better things despite the odds.

The admiration he received and the respect he gained were something Tomas didn't have in his life. Would it be so hard to understand that respect would be so important to him? Of course we hold important the things we don't have. Often, we don't appreciate things we DO have. Because we have them, our ignorant brain will tell us that it isn't that important. It has no value until we lose it. Only then will we understand what we had and took for granted.

This seemingly small thing of raising his chin above the pull-up bar morphed into deep philosophical thinking; how much someone's life can suck, and yet, they had it all, but couldn't see it. It's a paradox of life. Instead of appreciating what we do have, we spend our lives focusing on things we don't have, especially if we can see other people having it. Like more money, for most people. Or respect, in Tomas's case.

It's natural instinct to improve oneself, to have a purpose. Something to chase after. Love? Tomas had plenty of it (from his mom, mostly). Respect? Everyone had it but him! You know how it feels for a guy not being respected? Same as for a girl not being considered worthwhile. If you are a guy that guys don't respect, it means you can't do anything within your circle of peers. What will you do? They can say anything to you, or do anything to you, and you cannot do anything back!

Then, of course, no female will respect you either, or find you attractive. There is no hope for you; your life will be pain. If you're a straight man, that is. Almost everything about you as a man is about that single thing, respect. Yet, almost all men have it. That's why they can't see the value of it, nor care for. If men and women respect you, you can feel as a "man". Quite important if you are a man, if you would ask me!

And then, you finally get that respect, or at least it feels like you are on the way to getting it, and it feels like achieving a goal. Like being poor all your life before winning the lottery big time. Never to work again, long after you had lost any hope. True happiness? Maybe. Except, winning the lottery is just luck. In fact, it means that you are for one, stupid enough to even try with those odds, and second, not even considering working hard to make your own fortune. Yeah, those were arrogant statements of Tomas, but you get the point. You would fly high in the skies should that happen to you. That's what it felt like for Tomas in that moment. Like his life had a chance, even though everybody else was trying to convince him otherwise before the pull-up and that it would always be the same.

Tomas couldn't wait to show it off as soon as possible, but he had to make sure first. And yes, even the second attempt shortly after was successful! Tomas was happy as never before.

Tomas wouldn't care about people saying that "if you don't try, you cannot win," as with the lottery. His position on fighting impossible odds was: "If the chance is one in ten million, which is still optimistic, even if you buy a million tickets for five million pounds or whatever it is, you're just going to be five million pounds lighter in your bank account."

But then again, someone must win. If that someone would be you, you would feel what Tomas felt in that moment when he accomplished the impossible – getting his chin over that pull-up bar, not once, but twice! Everybody tried to convince him that his odds in life were impossible, but he refused to believe it.

Hard Rock Sofa & Swanky Tunes – Apogee 2:51

At first, Tomas was hiding this fact. Didn't tell anybody. Just to his mom, dad and sister who naturally knew. They were quite impressed with what Tomas accomplished in just two days. However, there was a small stain in their statements, saying that it is only because of how small and light he was! Tomas always said back in his defence: 'It is as hard for me as it is for you! I have no muscle to lift my body, right? I am so lanky, and yet, I can do this! You might be heavier, but you're also a lot stronger, right? So why can't you do it?' Well, it never really worked to his full satisfaction because Tomas could always overhear people to say how light as a feather he was and looked like a stick in the field, or a 'coat-hanger', or the 'grim reaper' (as an actual skeleton). This has fuelled his determination even more and made every repetition on the pull-up bar easier. Before his first week of training on the pull-up bar was over, Tomas could do easily ten almost good pull-ups every single time that he passed by. That could have been easily around two-hundred pull-ups a day!

Before the first month on the bar was over, Tomas had gained visible muscles on his back and a little bit on his arms. No one else could really tell. When Tomas was dressed in his clothes, he still looked like a stick. But that didn't matter to him. He knew at some point later it will show even through his clothes.

A few weeks later, Tomas was doing around twenty-five pull-ups on average when he was passing by the pull-up bar. he even started to add more sets (series of repetitions). Tomas did his

first set as he should have when he passed by the bar, then he waited for a bit to do one more a while later. It was very hard. Tomas was barely getting eight, maybe nine pull-ups on his second set. But the feeling that he got from doing it!

He didn't know it then, but that was his first pumped up moment, when you have pumped so much blood into your muscles that they get swollen, bigger. Sometimes, Tomas felt like his skin would burst from so much pressure. But it wasn't painful. Actually, maybe it was, but it was a good pain; a very addictive feeling. It was the only time when Tomas felt like he was really big and strong. When he felt like a man. When Tomas felt like he could say or do something back. Like, he could demand respect!

Tidemann Esbjug – Find Yourself Piano Cover Zyz 2:39

It was only understandable that respect really mattered to him. People in general want to do things that other people tell them are impossible. 'You can never do that, keep dreaming!' Tomas had heard it so many times before . . . but even a lot more now. Mainly from his friends and family, who were aware of his training. They were really impressed with what he managed to do so quickly, but still, kind of dismissed that achievement by saying it was only because of his feather weight.

The worst thing was, they knew what Tomas was trying to achieve and still said, 'You will never be big or strong; you are not built like a man.' His mom hurt Tomas's feelings especially with her remarks. 'You have the Rumancik build.' (That was his mother's maiden name.) 'All of our family were skinny and thin; just look at your uncle Ivan.' Ivan was around 50 years old then, and stood almost six feet tall but weighed only around sixty kilograms (132 pounds).

Deep down, Tomas knew it was true. He was 12 years old and weighed barely thirty kilograms (66 pounds). His peers were weighing in at forty-plus kilograms (88 pounds). It was a real embarrassment every time there was a school nurse check-up. Everybody could see his weight or his body (welcome to post-Soviet Union remnants of that time).

Tomas felt betrayed by his friends and family for saying those things. Still, he knew it was only because they were trying to protect him by not getting his hopes too high, so he would be prepared for the disappointment coming down the line. Tomas never believed it though. His whole soul refused to believe that he could never feel like a man; that he was never going to feel safe in the face of the other males. That he couldn't protect anyone, at any point in his life, because of how small and weak he was, ever. That he stood no chance. That he would never get any respect from men or the attention of females that he'd started to desire so much.

Tomas never had any of it. He was always overlooked by everyone, always dismissed with, 'What are you going to do about it?' Girls laughed at him when he tried to impress them by pretending that he could go beat [insert any person's] ass. They laughed at him! Justly, he had to admit it on the inside that at that time, it was probably true.

Linkin Park– Hit The Floor 2:44

***“There are so many things you say that make me feel you cross the line,
but what goes up will surely fall and I’m counting down the time.”***

Tomas was lucky that he never got seriously bullied. Now and then, someone tried to make him a target for abuse. But he was quite popular with the other boys because of his personality. A feminine trait (he thought), which made him feel even more like a pussy. He was quite funny and was full of lots of good ideas – smart almost. So he had a lot of friends, and they always stepped in as soon as someone else tried anything.

Tomas was glad, really, but at the same time, hated it. He hated the fact that he knew he stood no chance alone. It was embarrassing for all of the girls to see that he needed help. Still, Tomas was glad that his friends stepped in, although now and then, he could hear even them talking behind his back about how pathetically lanky he was and that he needed their protection. To impress the girls mainly, of course.

Every now and then, his friends put him down in front of the girls for their own benefit, something Tomas would never do – or he promised himself never to do – even when he reached his goal. Tomas wouldn’t want to be like them, putting someone else down to pull yourself up. Sometimes, Tomas confronted them later, after he overheard the conversation, only to get in response: ‘Would you prefer if we just stood by the next time?’ Of course not. Tomas wasn’t ready for that yet. *Yet*. But he was carefully waiting for the day when he would have the upper hand. He would show them all! This had to change! This had to stop! Tomas had enough of that feeling that he was being stepped on by everyone, being lied to, seemingly everyone around him trying to shatter his dreams before they even started. *Lies. All lies! I will never trust what you all say again. I’ll wait; the upper hand will be mine in the end.*

Sometimes, his family and friends would feel guilty, asking him how he felt, what was on his mind, if he was mad at them. As much as Tomas wanted to oppose them, he protected them out of courtesy by pretending that everything was OK. And because real men don’t complain, they find solution. Tomas continued his training regimen. He stopped caring about what others said. Tomas learnt that no matter how much progress he would make, he wouldn’t get any support from anyone because of how far away his end goal was in their eyes. They couldn’t see that far, couldn’t believe this would continue long enough for him to see it through. And he couldn’t wait to prove them wrong.

Clint Mansell– Requiem for a Dream orchestral version 6:34

By the third month of his pull-ups routine, Tomas was doing fifty pull-ups in a row, with decent form as well (at least, he thought so). The time was right to start showing up. Even his family looked really surprised that he could do that. Tomas was still almost the same feather weight as before. They were incredulous. ‘Fifty pull-ups? Multiple sets?’ It was something that was supposed to be impossible.

Tomas even started to do push-ups, first thing in the morning and the last thing before going to sleep. Those push-ups seemed easy to him from the very beginning, as he could do around twenty of them at his starting point.

At school, Tomas would find any elevated surface possible and say to his friends, ‘Look at me!’ then proceed to do multiple push-ups with just his fingertips, to everyone’s great surprise. Potential bullies noticed. Girls noticed. There was one, maybe two really bulked-up boys in the whole school that could do a few pull-ups with a great struggle. Tomas, though, he seemed to be able to do infinite numbers with ease. Tomas always did quick ten–twelve pull-ups just to amaze everyone, and then stop while showing no signs of fatigue at all.

Everyone was stunned; mainly because of his size, really. The fact that Tomas was so skinny was their explanation at first, with five–six pull-ups, but to see him doing ten–twelve very quickly, without any struggle, without showing any fatigue, was just amazing. Mind-boggling. Little did they know that at that point, Tomas was doing fifty pull-ups around twenty times a day! By then, Tomas did implement multiple sets of pull-ups each time he passed below the bar; perhaps a total of one-thousand pull-ups a day!

People even started to notice that his arms were getting a bit bigger, and that he was definitively wider too. Tomas felt great satisfaction from it. But he knew that the weight didn’t lie; he was still about the same weight as before.

One day at school, a teacher noticed him doing his pull-up show again, as now Tomas was getting stopped by random kids that he never knew before, to demonstrate. He didn’t mind; it made him happy. The teacher was also really impressed and asked, ‘Tomas, that is really impressive. How many can you do?’ Tomas said that after a short break, he could try for his maximum, but it should be around fifty. ‘Fifty?’ She was shocked. Everyone stared in disbelief, but didn’t laugh. Even though Tomas was doing ten to twelve pull-ups very quickly for the show without any signs of fatigue, no one could believe that.

‘Well, at home I do fifty in one set, but that is on a proper pull-up bar, not like here, hanging by my fingertips on top of doors frames or windows. Normally, I do fifty and stop, but that is not my maximum. I think, with a bit of a struggle, I could do around fifty on my fingertips too.’

Almost hundred people gathered around for the show, multiple teachers included, as it was the break time in between scheduled classes. Tomas got very nervous, but very excited. This felt like his moment, like he was a superstar, a superman, a showcase for everybody to watch and marvel at his strength!

The first ten pull-ups were easy, as always, but before Tomas passed number fifteen, he had to slow down to a normal speed. When he reached twenty-five, everybody was already amazed. They just stared at him in awe, waiting to see if he really could do fifty.

After thirty pull-ups, it got as hard as after forty on the pull-up bar at home. Nothing too hard yet, though; and it was not like Tomas hadn't overcome the impossible before. He remembered how much effort it took to do the first pull-up ever. How much pain and determination it took. Now, this was a walk in the park for him. Something that others would have given up on by now. Not him though! For Tomas, discomfort was a common friend, and struggle was his best friend. Tomas embraced it and looked forward to it. It almost didn't feel right anymore if he didn't experience it!

Tomas wanted to show everybody what kind of struggle he was capable of overcoming. How much determination he had within him. And how wrong they all were about him!

Zyzz Motivation – Pain Is Temporary 6:17

“Pain is Temporary! It might last a minute, or hour, or day, or even a year; but eventually it will subside and something else will take its place. If I quit however, it will last forever...”

Everybody was watching. Tomas slowed down to half speed at 35 repetitions, but he still kept going, maintaining his tempo onwards. At forty-two pull-ups, he stopped completely for the first time, but he didn't let go of the window's frame. Everybody broke their silence and started chanting. 'You can do it, Tomas, come on! To-mas! To-mas! To-mas!' That gave him what he needed and suddenly, Tomas was going for more! He even sped up!

Tomas got to fifty repetitions with a lot of struggle, showing visible pain in his face. The last rep looked like it could have been his last. But no, Tomas kept going!

A second wave of chants arrived in disbelief. 'He's not finished! You go, Tomas!' Even the girls that stood in silence so far started to support him. His closest friends were in a total frenzy, chanting their lungs out in disbelief and awe at the same time. They witnessed a real miracle. As much as Tomas was impressive before with his demonstrations . . . this was something else . . . something that should have been impossible. To see their friend going through that horrible struggle that he was in and he still kept going despite it was very inspiring to them.

The teachers tried to interrupt at this point. 'Tomas, that is great, but enough now. We need to go back into the classes; all of you kids!'

Tomas didn't listen to them just yet. He wanted to see if he could do one or two more repetitions himself. It was about as hard as his first one ever! Possible, but barely. Tomas had been in that position before though. Could he possibly go into a bigger struggle and still win?

At fifty-four repetitions, he had to stop after every rep for about seven seconds before he could even attempt the next one. *Pain is temporary!* he thought to himself. That statement had got him through a lot so far. 'It will work now too!'

He got up to fifty-five . . . fifty-six . . . Tomas stopped halfway on fifty-seventh; it seemed that he could never go past it. He just simply wasn't moving up anymore, but Tomas kept fighting! Fifty-seven! Everyone was clapping, chanting, with the exception of the teachers, who were trying their best to disperse the crowd and to send them back into their classrooms. Tomas was about to try his fifty-eight rep when not even on quarter way up, he realised, *This is it*, and had to let go.

Massive applause! There was a smile on Tomas's face, relieved he didn't disappoint the crowd, and himself. He had a true sense of achievement and feeling that things were about to change for him now. At least at the school.

He was right. In less than a week, the whole school heard about the "strength feat" that he'd made. Out of nowhere, his PE (physical education) teacher started to look at him as the leading guy, as opposed to the very last and lankiest just a week prior. He started to ask Tomas for demonstrations of feats of strength on the ropes, rings, etc. Tomas did them all with ease, impressing everybody that it was not just a circus trick of pull-ups, but a real strength showcase and application of it. On the ropes and climbing walls, Tomas was like a spiderman, jumping around with ease, holding and hanging only by one hand, or climbing the rope only with his hands, very quickly and easily, all the way to the top.

Boys started to ask Tomas for advice; they wanted to train with him. Many started, but gave up as soon as it became too hard for them, too intense.

Tomas was very proud of himself. Everybody noticed and respected him now (if they knew him), but even after two years of training and many, many pull-ups, push-ups, and sit-ups, he'd still barely increased his weight. Tomas got more "ripped" (lean, with clear separation of the muscles), and was very strong for his frame, but at 14 years old and around forty-two kilograms (92 pound), he was still behind his peers by almost ten kilograms (22 pounds). Tomas needed to step up his game; he just didn't know how exactly he was going to do that. His ability to recover was already stretched out to the maximum and he knew it.