

FROM YEMEN TO OAKLAND

A University Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of
California State University, East Bay

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

By
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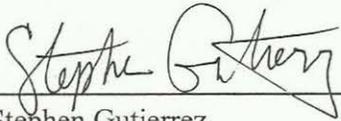
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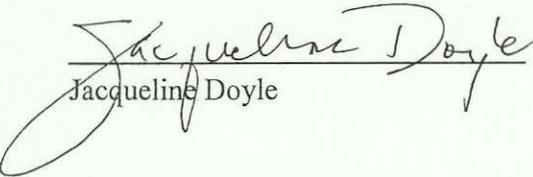
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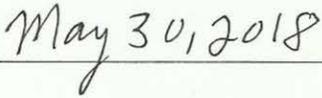


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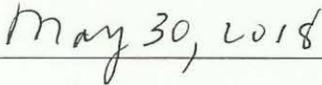


Jacqueline Doyle

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The Nomad

The pink plastic bags drifted into the streets. Packs of used *Kamaran* cigarettes were stepped on carelessly by the people. Wads of tiny green leaves were being meticulously chewed by short, dark malnourished men, who walked the streets aimlessly. Black veils and burkas covered the women from head to toe only leaving their eyes visible to the public. The women were all exiting city buses that took on the form of *Mitsubishi Delicas*. Those same women were also mothers, and they balanced bags of raw meat and fresh produce on their heads as they exited the buses with their children. The children followed the eyes of their mothers. The fathers, although absent, were nearby wandering the streets of *Sanaa* looking for a place to partake in their daily ritual of chewing *Qat*. These were simpler times of course.

“Look Abdul-Gowee, I didn’t ask you for your life story. I asked you why did you travel to Jordan before coming to America if you are originally from Yemen? Do you understand what I’m asking you sir?”

“Yes, I understand your question Mr. Officer.”

“Good and I’m not an officer. I’m an agent. Now answer the question: why did you travel to Jordan?”

“Again, Mr. Agent, I understand your question, but in order to give you a sufficient answer I must start from the beginning before the cholera outbreak, before the Houthi regime, before the failed assassination attempts on President Saleh, and before the Arab Spring.”

“Listen Abdul, we don’t have all day. The longer you take to answer my questions then the longer you’ll be detained here.”

“Time is of the essence is so cliché. Don’t you agree Mr. Agent?”

“Yes I suppose so, but Abdul my patience is running low. I am trying to accommodate you as much as possible, but you are putting yourself at risk the longer you take to give me straight answers.”

“My apologies Mr. Agent. Where was I? Ah yes the streets of *Sanaa*.”

The people of *Sanaa* filled the bustling streets. Each person had a different agenda, but similar objective. After *Dhuhr* prayer, the women came home from local markets to prepare lunch, the youth were idly in school, when school was still a cornerstone institution of Yemen, and the men flooded the *Qat* markets before deciphering on where to chew for the next six hours.

At that time, I was a college student studying for my TESOL at a university that ceases to exist due to Saudi Arabia’s air strikes on cornerstone institutions. You know the usual bombing of a mosque, school, hospital, or wedding suspected of holding rebellion weaponry.

“Abdul-Gowee, please stop getting political and answer my first question: What business did you have in Jordan?”

“Yes I’m getting there Mr. Agent. I see you are getting frustrated, so I’ll give you the compressed version of my story.”

War, yet intricate, is a very intimate entity. People are stripped of their bare necessities, leaving only their natural survival instinct intact. I saw the best of humanity

and I saw the worst of humanity. People think of war as gunfire, explosions, and all out anarchy, which is true, but there is a certain layer to war that isn't covered through propaganda media. Now of course the news covers the bloodshed and the fallen victims, but what they forget to cover is the everyday life of the ordinary person just trying to get by in a time of crisis. Imagine if you didn't have access to normal government institutions. Schools were shut down. As a result, people that could originally prosper through education by obtaining a student visa no longer eternalized a hopeful future of opulence and success. The American Dream was obsolete for the youth in my country. Furthermore, hospitals became a cesspool for bacteria and infection. Emergency rooms were no longer a place where someone goes to live, but instead it became a place where people went to die. After money was replaced by IOU's, people eventually abandoned their jobs, which included the doctors. Nurses stayed behind to help during the cholera outbreak, but doctors were rarely available to the general public. When people think of jobs they think of income or revenue, but certain jobs or careers entail certain responsibilities and privileges that make a society function. For example, the department of sanitation, although lacking in privileges, holds dire responsibilities. After the garbage men quit and the flash floods occurred, we were left with contaminated water.

“God damn it Abdul! There's no violin playing for your sob story! Answer my fucking question already about Jordan.”

“I traveled to Jordan for my dad.”

“Did you travel to Syria while you were in Jordan?”

“No.”

“Do you know Mubarak Mohammed al-Otaibi?”

“No.”

“Now Abdul, I want you to explain to me what you and your dad were doing in Jordan? Why did you guys only stay a month?”

“Again, with all due respect Mr. Agent, the only way I can answer that question is by giving you the context of my story. Maybe I can’t give you my whole story, but at least I can give you the context of it.”

“Proceed, but make it quick. If you take any longer then my superior is going to be busting through that door ready to water-board your brown ass.”

“Understood—

“Do you really understand?! Because we’ve been sitting in this office for over an hour and I haven’t gotten a straight answer out of you! Now answer me, why were you in Jordan with your father?”

“Again, I apologize, but I must go back to why we left Yemen for Jordan in the first place.”

I last left off on the topic of war, or better yet the aftermath and intricacies of war. Not only does war cripple the infrastructure of a country, but it handicaps the inner-workings of a family. My father in particular lost the will to live after losing his job. We weren’t always city folks. In fact, my family and I were raised in the village. We were the first generation in our family line to migrate from the village to the city. We had no choice, we were forced to move. *Qat* crops take an abundance amount of water, and the

country's water supply was scarce. My father is a *bedwee* or a villager. All he knows is the outdoors. He butchers his own meat, farms his own crops, and walks his own cattle. My entire family idolizes my father. He's our gatekeeper. He's our beginning and our end. Not only is he our sole financial provider, but he's also our guide in this complex thing we call life.

The lack of water in the villages of Yemen forced a mass exodus to the cities of Yemen. Our family was one of the last families to leave our home village. Initially, my father refused to leave despite my mother's plea. In truth, it wasn't until my father fell ill did he surrender to my mother's suggestion to move to *Sanaa*. He required medical attention. The interim doctor at *Sanaa International Hospital* diagnosed him with the common cold.

Our family business of selling *Qat* crops and cattle earned us a modest income, but those funds didn't last us long in *Sanaa*. I reverted to my studies as I always did in a time of crisis. I watched my father's health deteriorate in front of my eyes due to the common cold. He was unable to physically work and even if he could, his *bedwee* skills were useless in the city. I was the oldest sibling in my family, so it was up to me to provide for my family, or at least that's what I thought at the time. I was still a child in the eyes of employers. Nobody wanted to hire a young, scrawny 18-year old bookworm especially when physical labor was in such high demand. It felt like I was rejected from more jobs than I actually applied for. My mother and siblings witnessed my failure to secure a job, to secure a source of income, and to ultimately secure a beacon of hope. A mother can only witness her child fail for so long before intervening. Many women from

the villages had some background in medical training. From home remedies to self-made tourniquets, my mother was skilled in the arts of medicine. It was only a matter of time before she began working as a nurse at *Sanaa International Hospital*. My father was against the idea of his wife working, he was against the idea of a woman becoming the breadwinner in the household, and he was against the idea of my mother becoming our family's leader. It didn't matter what my father was against or supported because he was too physically weak to argue.

My mother worked at the hospital for months, as I went to school and took care of my siblings and bedridden father. My mother encouraged my academic lifestyle. On the contrary, my father discouraged me from school. He told me I wasn't a man. He said only women stay home and go to school. And only men are supposed to provide for their family. It was sad to see my father's traditional philosophy die along with his health and his country. We took my father to the hospital several times and got second, third, and even fourth opinions from different doctors at different hospitals. Each time he got a different diagnosis, which ranged from Alzheimer's disease to the Zika virus. My mother thought it was cholera, but his symptoms didn't match the illness. My father didn't suffer from diarrhea or seizures. Instead he suffered from weight loss, fatigue, and unbearable pain. I never heard my father scream in agony until he became sick in *Sanaa*. Again, I panicked, so I withdrew to my studies.

Before I knew it the school year was over and I had finished at the top of my class at *Sanaa University*. All of my professors encouraged me to teach English abroad in the UAE or Qatar. The thought of leaving my family frightened me. The fragmented family

is such a western philosophy. Nobody in our lineage has ever left the country of Yemen, which is an anomaly itself given the dismal situation Yemen is in. See, most Yemenies are currently surviving because they have family members in America, Britain, or other first world countries supporting them. My family and I only had each other, which sounds like we we're less fortunate than our fellow countrymen, but believe it or not we were considered well-off. The Yemenies that were gravely suffering from famine and disease were the ones that had nothing before the cholera outbreak, before the Houthi regime, before the failed assassination attempts on President Saleh, and before the Arab Spring. The people who had something before the apocalypse occurred, in return, had held onto hope afterwards, but the nobody's who had nothing to begin with were only left with death and destruction afterwards.

“You know what Mr. Agent, I see that I'm getting a little off topic, so let me refocus my story before you get angry again. Mr. Agent, where are you going? Please come back! Well then... I will continue my story to the two-way mirror and cameras in the room. If I'm not documented then at least my story will be.”

I had to leave Yemen for the sake of my family. We needed the money and my father needed medical treatment, which by the end of my school year was nearly impossible to find. Hospitals were no longer operational. Doctors only helped the very wealthy while nurses stayed behind to help the enormous caseloads at local hospitals. My mother was no longer getting payed with money or IOUs, but she continued to help at *Sanaa International Hospital*. We never saw our mother. She was gone night and day. My father no longer had the energy to complain let alone talk. I was 18 years old raising

my siblings by myself. Food and basic supplies were running low. Yemen's current status harbingered vulnerability that people took advantage of. The air strikes from Saudi Arabia created the biggest hysteria in our neighborhood. False reports were sometimes given to citizens to exit their homes due to an incoming airstrike. Citizens would evacuate their homes only to return to a looted house. We didn't know who to trust anymore: President Mansur, President Saleh, the Houthis, the Sunnis, the Saudis, or our neighbors. Trust was gone, so compassion was gone. Every family had to fend for themselves.

“Ah Mr. Agent you startled me. I didn't see you come in. I see you brought a big sturdy friend with you. Is this your superior that you mentioned earlier? I know what you're going to say. Answer the question: why did I travel to Jordan?”

“Shut up and go to the corner of the room!”

“Oh is this water for me? How kind of you Mr. Agent. How did you know I needed to make *wudu* before *Dhuhr* prayer? Well as you two fine gentlemen are rolling up your sleeves allow me to fast forward to the conclusion of my story in order to finally answer your question about Jordan.”

Before my university blew up, I took the advice of my now deceased professors and applied for a work visa in the UAE, but I was quickly denied. With confidence and rations running low, I quickly applied for a work visa in Qatar right after being rejected from my fellow Gulf brothers in the Emirates. Unfortunately, refugees are frowned upon by the very wealthy. Jordan was my only option. The country is truly a melting pot of the Middle East. Refugees from Arab countries have been seeking salvation for centuries in

Jordan. Think of Jordan as the New York City of the Arab world. After months of back and forth with the embassy, and a few closures due to local bombings and foreign airstrikes, my father and I were finally granted a temporary visa to Jordan. Regrettably, this meant I couldn't work legitimately in Jordan. We were desperate, so we didn't care. My mother gave me what little money she did have left to pay for our trip. She advised me to seek medical attention for my father as soon as possible, and then to obtain a job by any means necessary. I kissed my mother on her forehead and told her she was now our family's gatekeeper before departing to Jordan.

My father slept for most of the journey. Luckily for him he didn't witness Saudi troops harassing Yemenie children, women, and senior citizens while we connected in Riyadh. All flights from Yemen must connect and then depart from Saudi Arabia ever since the fall of President Saleh. The government of Saudi Arabia claims that it's a safety issue. America enables this oppressive policy because the Saudis are helping the U.S. combat terrorism.

"Again, I'm sorry. I see that I'm getting too political and straying away from the question. You see Mr. Agent, it's just so hard not to tell my story after everything we've been through. During all the war and famine, nobody ever asked how we were doing? Including ourselves because we were too busy surviving. I see that the water is ready and so am I. May you two excuse me as I disrobe and get ready for *wudu*?"

"What the hell is wrong with you Abdul?"

"Hmmm...I see by the looks of your confused, yet disgruntled faces that both of you are not budging. Well suit yourselves."

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“There we go, all finished. May I please have a prayer rug?”

“Ugh, here this is all we have, Abdul.”

“That’s an odd prayer rug. It’s completely made out of plastic saran wrap, but that’ll do. Thank you. Now then, give me five minutes to pray and then I’ll conclude my story.”

“Man you weren’t lying. This A-rab is unbearable! I’ve been here for half an hour and still haven’t gotten a single answer out of him.”

“I’m finished, gentlemen. May we please exchange salutations before the conclusion of my story? It is customary for one to shake the hands of neighboring people after prayer.”

“Just answer our damn question!”

“Okay no need to slap my hand away. My stay in Jordan, although brief, was unforgettable.”

The first thing I did when arriving to Amman, Jordan was listen to my mother’s advice. I took my father to the local hospital where he was finally and accurately diagnosed with testicular cancer. The doctor had to perform emergency surgery and remove both of my father’s testicles. By then the surgery was too late because the cancer had already spread to the rest of his body. My father didn’t get to see much of Jordan other than the hospital. On the other hand, I saw a lot of Jordan because that was the only job I landed. I was an American tourist guide for the city of Amman. My English was the best at *Petra Travel & Tourism Co.* Jordan, although segregated by demographic and

economic differences, offers its citizens opportunities through education and perseverance. In my case it didn't matter if I was from the village or the city. It didn't matter if my family name was of low or high caste. The only thing that mattered was that I was highly skilled at my position. The more successful I became at my job the less healthy my father became. I secretly lived at the traveling agency office I worked at while my father lived at the hospital. All of my earnings went towards my father's chemotherapy. As far as food and clothing, I relied on my generous American customers' tips. The burden of aiding brown refugees is truly a first world problem that I can't sympathize with, but I can take advantage of.

During my one month stay in Jordan I saw unbelievable sights that I've only read about in books. I prayed at the cave of the seven sleepers, I swam in the Dead Sea, I explored the archeology of Petra—

“Shut up! You had your chances to answer my question, Abdul. Now get on your knees and lean forward!”

“Ahhh! Stop I can't breathe, Mr. Agent!”

“Those frantic yelps can't help you now.”

“Please someone help!”

“Those people on the other side of that two-way mirror are agents like me. They want you to drown in this bucket of water if you don't give them the information they need.”

“Okay, my father was kicked out of the hospital! He was given weeks to live! The cancer’s damage was irreversible! We were only in Jordan for a month because my father wanted to be buried in Yemen!”

“If your father is dying soon then why are you here in America?”

“Huh? Hold on...ugh my breathing...is still erratic from that first dunk... Okay I’m good, I think. I traveled to America to pay for his funeral.”

“Liar!”

“Mr. Agent, my father lived his last few years on this earth without honor, so the least I could do is have him be remembered with some integrity. A memorial service, a tombstone, and a coffin are the things I want for him, nothing more or nothing less.”

“Let him go.”

“What do you mean let him go?”

“I’ve just been informed that there’s a mob of protestors waiting for him and the rest of his kind in the terminal?”

“Yeah, but he could be a threat.”

“I don’t give a shit! The only threat I see is me losing my job over some PC liberal bullshit. The mob has spoken and right now it’s chanting free all Muslim immigrants.”

“Thank you, Mr. Superior. I’m overcome with joy.”

“Just get out of here before I change my mind, Abdul.”

“And you Mr. Agent, I would be lying if I was to say it has been a pleasure meeting you.”

“So don’t lie and get the fuck out of here!”

“Before I depart, answer my question: Why did you do this to me?”

“Abdul, it’s a common mistake. You fit the profile to someone very dangerous.”

“I understand that and the logistics of your department, but why did you personally do this to me?”

“You want the truth, Abdul?”

“Yes, Mr. Agent.”

“I did this to you because I can. Now get out of here. You gotta crowd of strangers waiting to greet you.”

“Welcome to America...”

“We love you...”

“Let them in...”

“NO BAN...NO WALL”

“Here let me get your bags for you hon. I saw you slicing through the river of protestors and news reporters like a pro. Let me walk you to the shuttle line outside the airport. Are you catching a Taxi, Shuttle, or Uber?”

“Thank you Ma’am. I suppose I’m catching a Taxi.”

“You’re welcome. And my name is Samara.”

“Samara? Are you Arabiee?”

“Half. My father is from Palestine and my mother is Italian. And where are you from?”

“It’s complicated.”

“More complicated than a half-Palestinian, half-Italian lady protesting a Muslim ban at an airport?”

“Well it’s not complicated. My origin is just dense and extensive.”

“It sounds like your story is just long.”

“Yes that too.”

“Well you look like you’ve been through a lot, so whenever you feel like telling me your story, give me a call. Here’s my card.”

“Samara Abdul-Fatah: Journalist for the *East Bay Express*?”

“Yup, the one and only hon.”

“Samara, do you genuinely want to listen to my story or do you want to merely publish my story?”

“I want to genuinely listen to your story, so I can genuinely publish it.”

“I see.”

“Wait hon, is something wrong?”

“No and my name isn’t hon or honey. My name is Abdul-Gowee.”

“Abdul-Gowee, I love that name. It means strong slave, right?”

“No. My name means the slave of the strong one.”

School

“Good morning, honey!” John shouted while barging through the bedroom door.

“Baby, what are you doing?” Susan questioned while holding back tears.

John, the love of Susan’s life, had surprised her today with breakfast in bed. He came in carrying sun-dried tomatoes, mushrooms, and spinach tofu quiche, her favorite. The blonde haired, blue eyed man placed the tray of food on their nightstand. This romantic gesture eased Susan’s tension for the events that were soon to transpire.

“Well hon, I just wanted everything to be perfect for your first day of school.”

John said this with an enchanting smile on his face.

“Oh babe, you’re the greatest!” Susan sprung out of bed and jumped into her fiancé’s arms. John began to bear hug Susan. He squeezed her so tight as if today was their last day together or their first day together, but it wasn’t. The two of them routinely embraced each other every day, so this morning’s warm and loving hug was no different from yesterday or the day before that. Susan washed down her vegan dietary breakfast with a cup of Santa Cruz Organic Apple Juice. She turned to her dresser and picked up her iPhone 6 that was charging. Susan continued her morning ritual by checking emails, social networking sites, and various liberal news feeds. Buzzzz! Buzzzz! Her phone began vibrating in her hand. Susan’s parents were facetimeing her before she starts her first big day at work.

“Hi Sweetie! Me and your father just wanted to wish you good luck before you start your first day as a teacher, Ms. Snowden.” Susan’s mother gestured a huge smile through her small digital screen.

“Thanks mom.” Susan replied reluctantly smiling while rolling her eyes. Meanwhile, John is in the background discreetly pointing and laughing at Susan almost as if he is chastising her for having such an imposing mother.

“Where’s dad?” Susan inquired through her glaring iPhone 6 screen.

“Oh, your father is right here. Hank. Hank! Get over here and wish our daughter good luck before she starts school!” Susan’s mother exclaimed with a very commanding tone.

“Huh, what? Oh, hey Suz. Do you see what I have to put up with?” Susan’s father, Hank, said very dejectedly.

“Oh hush up and tell her good luck already! I swear sometimes—” Susan’s, mother was cut off by Hank unexpectedly.

“Put a sock in it Betty!” Hank threw his partially used pair of socks that he was currently wearing at Betty’s face. Betty quickly dodged the projectile, which ended up landing on her cell phone and causing Susan’s screen to turn black. Laughter soon broke out amongst Susan’s parents followed by the sounds of pillows being fluffed up and slammed against a hard surface.

“Hello? Mom? Dad?” Susan’s tone was inquisitive but not worrisome.

“Oh, sorry sweetie. Me and your father have to finish our pillow fight, so we’ll call you back later on this afternoon when you finish your first official day.”

“Okaaaay?” Susan agreed while trying not to laugh.

“Bye Susan!” Both of her parents yelled in unison.

“Bye guys!” Susan replied.

“Bye Hank and Betty!” John chimed in, but it was too late the call ended.

Susan looked at John puzzled. Susan thought to herself: why does he wait so long to acknowledge my parents? Betty and Hank have been happily married for 25 years now. Susan was looking for that same kind of relationship with John. She was looking for someone to unconditionally love her now until forever. John was looking for the same type of relationship as well, but he was normally apprehensive as any man should be. The closer they got to their wedding date in July, the closer John got to getting cold feet, which was understandable for the amount of pressure their relationship was under. John was always comparing his relationship with Susan to Hank and Betty’s relationship. His parent in-laws were the exemplar married couple. And his own parents were divorced and hated each other. John’s parents, Kyle and Marie, were the reason why no loving man and caring woman should ever get married. On the contrary, Susan’s parents dispelled all rumors about any marriage not being able to survive due to having a monogamous relationship.

At this point, Susan couldn’t dwell on her love-life because she was on a mission. She finished breakfast and hopped into the shower just before brushing her teeth and flossing. Susan put on her best Hilary Clinton pants suit and wore her hair up. She was dressed in all black, which was advised by her veteran mentor, Ms. Jackson. She could hear her now, “Susan, wear all black because the color is psychologically intimidating to

our kids.” Susan kissed her fiancé goodbye before picking up her keys to her brand new Subaru Outback. The two of them lived in the N.O.B.E. (North Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville) district. Gentrification had made it possible for affluent citizens to finally move into Oakland in a safe manner. Susan backs out of her Victorian style home and drives down MLK, which will lead her to the 580 freeway entrance. While driving down the 580, Susan opened up her Pandora App and sang along at full blast to Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Want to Have Fun.”

“I come home in the morning light

My mother says when you gonna live your life right

Oh mother dear we're not the fortunate ones

And girls they want to have fun

Oh girls just want to have fun”¹

Singing is a ritual Susan uses to calm her nerves. She was embarking on a new career. This was her first day as a full time teacher at D.E.E.P. (Dedicated Equitable Education Possible) East Oakland High. The school is 20 years old and was the first charter school in Oakland. The building is located on 83rd and Dowling, which is the epicenter for criminal activity. The 800 blocks of East Oakland are known as “The Shady Eighties” to the younger generation, which is a true melting pot of African Americans, Cambodians, Mexicans, and Arabs who have all infused this neighborhood with different cultural, yet segregated boundaries throughout the area.

¹ Cyndi Lauper. “Girls Just want to have fun.” *She’s So Unusual*, Portrait Records, 1983.

Susan exited Edwards Avenue and continued to get in the zone by singing Lauper's lyrics at the top of her lungs.

*"Some boys take a beautiful girl
and hide her away from the rest of the world
I want to be the one to walk in the sun
Oh girls they want to have fun
Oh girls just want to have!"*¹

Susan arrived at D.E.E.P. High at 7:30 AM for an early staff meeting before school starts. All 30 teachers were crammed into the staff break room to hear the principal give one last motivational speech before the school year starts. Ms. Sanchez was a glorious principal. She was a strong Hispanic woman who wore no makeup, had no significant other, and had no children. Although it was only her first year in administration, Ms. Sanchez had dedicated her life to education as a teacher and counselor. Susan noticed that her principal was naturally beautiful with her caramel brown skin, hazel eyes, black silk hair, voluptuous curves, and her slight Spanish accent when she rolled her R's. Susan envied Ms. Sanchez because she was ethnically more unique than her. Susan looked at her own pasty white skin and sighed.

"Today, teachers, you set the tone for the rest of the year! Yes we are saving lives, but it starts with classroom management. Be by your front door introducing yourself to students before they walk into class. Make sure your boards are all configured. Don't be that teacher where students can't learn in your class because it's too rowdy or loud. Our kids are coming in traumatized, that's true, but never use that as a crutch for them

because they deserve an equal education like every other child in America regardless of their background. Now as far as logistics, we will all meet in the auditorium for a school wide assembly. From there we will introduce our ever changing staff, school policies, and pass out class schedules. Any questions?”

All of the teachers were attentively mesmerized by Ms. Sanchez’s inspiring speech. They were ready to conquer the world, including Susan. The only teacher that wasn’t in tune was Ms. Jackson who was in the back of the room with a smug look on her face. Here we go again is what she thought to herself.

The entire staff: teachers, administrators, counselors, security officers, and custodians made their way to the auditorium for today’s assembly. Students, grades nine through twelve, and select parents packed every seat in the auditorium, which housed 500 seats in total. Ms. Sanchez began by thanking everyone for being on time and wishing them all good luck for the new school year.

During the principal’s speech, Susan couldn’t help but notice all of the chaos that was ensuing. Children cursing, walking out of their seats, throwing paper balls at their peers, and parents were on their cell phones or talking to other adults including staff. Susan was startled to say the least. Apparently she’d missed her principal’s entire speech because she was too busy bi-curiously passing judgement on this brand new community she has been thrown into. The speech was over and Ms. Sanchez had opened the floor up for questions from the audience, which included adults and students.

“So ya sayin if my child gets punched in the face, and he hits the dumbass kid who hit’em first, my child still gets suspended...is that right!?” The parent delivered this question with sass in her voice and gyration in her neck.

“Well, first of all thank you for the great question. I believe Mrs. Jefferson is alluding to what happens if a child fights in self-defense. Currently, OUSD doesn’t have a policy in place that alleviates the consequence for students who are defending themselves. With that said, both parties the aggressor and the self-defender would be suspended. Of course, every situation is a case by case matter, so it’s difficult to give you such a blanket claim.”

“Thank you Ms. Sanchez.” Mrs. Jefferson sat down and mumbled “that’s some bullshit!” underneath her breath.

The questions kept rolling in for the next ten minutes and Susan stood there like a deer caught in the headlights. Susan was appalled by all the horrifying and shocking questions students and especially parents asked. Finally, questions were over and Ms. Sanchez began introducing her staff. When Susan was introduced the boys hooted, hollered, and whistled at her. She was the only white woman in the entire building. Susan’s pasty white skin turned tomato red. She was not accustomed to so much attention especially from young men.

Introductions were over and teachers were dismissed from the assembly five minutes before students in order to set up their class one final time. Susan entered her classroom and it was just the way it was last week when she came in on a Saturday to decorate it. There was a “Hang in there baby” cat poster on the back wall; the side walls

were covered in AP English strategies ranging from prefixes, suffixes, root words, literary devices, and argumentative writing techniques. Lastly, the front board had her last name and the objective, agenda, and homework for today. Her classroom looked perfect.

The bell rang for first period and Susan was filled with excitement and nerves. She stood by her door, which was across the hall from Ms. Jackson. Before students began piling up into her room, she suddenly remembered that she needed to log in to Illuminate.com on her desktop computer in order to take roll. Susan left her door and stormed into her room to turn her computer on. As she logged in, she noticed from her peripheral that students began entering her class one by one. Susan hastily left her computer to greet students by the door. Antonio, Malik, Jerrod, Jimmy, Kelly, Jamila, Jackie, Adrianna, Sokgeetah, Sherry, Justin, Miles...these were the only names that Susan could remember from the top of her head. She thought to herself: how am I supposed to remember all 35 names?

“Okay class the warm up question is on the board. Please respond to it on a blank piece of a paper. I’ll be taking roll during this time.” Susan went back to Illuminate.com and started calling each child’s full name out loud.

“Tang...-...ane...-qua?” Susan stumbled through the girl’s first name, but was quickly corrected.

“It’s pronounced Tan-ja-neek-wha!” The student stated with a very condescending tone.

“Oh, I apologize.” Susan’s face went from a regular pasty white to a ghostly pale color.

The litany of incorrectly pronounced names followed by a barrage of haughty corrections from students ensued for the next fifteen minutes. Susan struggled with the online interface of Illuminate. She knew how to mark students late or absent, but didn’t know what to mark if students were on time. After wasting a quarter of the class on taking roll, Susan began her lesson, but it was too late.

After Susan left her desktop computer she noticed that students were off task: standing up, moving around, socializing with friends, texting, listening to music on their phones, and cursing. Of course it wasn’t all 35 students who were off task, but the few who were misbehaving contaminated the rest of the class. As a first year teacher, who graduated at the top of her class from Stanford University’s Teaching Credential Program, Susan was oblivious on what to do now. Not knowing what to know is what frightened Susan the most. She didn’t know if she should tell the children to sit down and stop talking, but even if she wanted to, how would she address multiple students at once? Should she ask one by one, or make a general statement to the whole class? Susan felt intimidated. Most of the boys in her tenth grade English class were bigger than her. She was only 5’1 and weighed 99 pounds. If it wasn’t for her blonde hair, green jeweled eyes, and pallid white skin she would’ve blended right in with the student body due to her small 23 year old frame. Susan finally mustered up the courage to address the entire class.

“Excuse me. Class. I need your attention...Hello? Yoo-hoo!” Susan stated with a very fearful tone. Half of the class couldn’t physically hear her due to the side conversations of teenagers. The other half of the class that could hear her didn’t acknowledge her presence.

“Pssst, Ms. Snowden. You have to get their attention first. Use some type of sound and visual signal that the whole class can notice,” whispered the helpful, yet unobtrusive student.

“Thank you...umm...child?” Susan replied.

“My name is Joey. You should start the class by introducing your name and who you are because most of them won’t read the board unless you tell them.”

Susan thought providing a brief autobiography wasn’t part of her original lesson plan, and wondered if it would be appropriate to talk about herself for a little while until the class settles down. Anything is better than nothing at this point, so Susan started with Joey’s initial suggestion by using a sound and visual signal. She took out her iPhone 6 and plugged it into her classroom speakers. Then she opened up her Pandora App and started rocking out to the same stereotypical feminist song of the century from this morning by screaming along with the lyrics. Simultaneously, Susan began violently shaking her head back and forth while at that same time raising up her index and pinky fingers to the sky.

“The phone rings in the middle of the night

My father yells what you gonna do with your life

Oh daddy dear you know you're still number one

But girls they want to have fun

Oh girls just want to have!”¹

All of the students turned their undivided attention towards the front of the room. All of their eyes were glued on this pint-sized rocking buffoon. Students now focused all of their energy on ridiculing Susan. The hurtful comments were like little daggers to Susan’s confidence and heart.

“Oh this bitch trippin!”

“Now I heard of Lady Gaga, but this hoe sounds like Lady Caca!”

“And that hefa got some small ass titties, but I’ll still smash!”

“Yup, she got little mosquito bites for titties!”

“Hell yeah, she should be the president of the itty bitty titty committee.”

“This white-ass bitch looks like Casper the unfriendly ghost!”

“And look at that trick’s name Ms. Snow white?! What the fuck?!”

An eruption of laughter fills the classroom. Susan breaks out into tears, breaks out of the classroom, and breaks out of the school never to return ever again. Joey puts his head down in shame and frustration during Ms. Snowden’s exit. The dream of helping colored inner city youth died with Susan’s confidence at that very moment.

“Wake the fuck up bitch! You gonna make us late!” Tony shouted.

“Bruh, what is you doing?” Joey questioned his brother with frustration.

“Joe, I already showered and changed and yo ass is still in bed. Wake the fuck up!” Tony shouted again with a more fierce tone.

Tony, Joey's older brother, was his only parental guidance in the morning since their mother would already be at work. Tony had five older brothers and sisters who have all moved out of the house years ago. Tony's older siblings all worked and attended school part time at Merritt Community College. Therefore, Tony was in charge of his six younger siblings, including Joey. It was Tony's Job to make sure everyone ate one bowl of cereal and drank one cup of juice before leaving to school. Also, it was Tony's job to make sure his two youngest sisters (Shelly and Sharon) got to East Oakland Pride Elementary school on time, and that his three youngest brothers (Dante, Jermaine, and John) made it to Alliance Academy Middle School on time as well. Time was of the essence for Tony's entire family, but it frustrated him that Joey has yet to learn the importance of time.

"Joe it's 7AM and you aint washed yo ass yet. You wanna be late for the first day of school and get whooped by me?" Tony stated his question while kicking Joey softly in his ribs to wake him up.

"Alright bruh, I'm getting up." Joey complained with a very passive attitude.

"Don't be playin lil bruh. I'm gonna go wake up everybody else. I'll be back in five minutes. If you aint in the shower by then I'ma give you a swollen lip for the first day of school."

Tony exited as his little brother looked at him cock eyed. Joey yawned and stretched his arms before jumping out of his top bunk bed. Joey shared the converted laundry room/bedroom with Tony. The youngest girls shared a bedroom together and the younger boys shared the basement together. Finally, Alice, Joey's mother, slept in the

living room on a pull-out couch. This overcrowded house was the best Alice could do. Alice's family originally stayed in a beautiful five-bedroom house in North Oakland about a decade ago, but sadly she lost the house due to economic restraints. Alice and her kids were pushed out of the blossoming or gentrifying North Oakland neighborhood and shoved into the entry point of West Oakland, which is also known as Ghost Town due to its lack of infrastructure and poor institutions. Unfortunately, Alice and her family didn't stay long in West Oakland because their lease was criminally rising each year to the point where her family was forced to move out again. Lastly, with the help of her older children, a loan from her ex-husband, and a lifetime of saving, Alice was able to finally buy her own house. She refused to finance this new house because she remembered her first house in North Oakland, and how she lost it due to illegitimate mortgage payments. Thus, Alice paid cash for the full purchase price of the house and she did so by choosing a smaller, dilapidated house in a rougher neighborhood. Safety and education were Alice's biggest concerns when moving to the Shady Eighties, but ownership and being able to pridefully pass something down from generation to generation trumped everything else.

Joey knew none of this for he was only five when his family first moved out of North Oakland. Joey didn't know many things, but the few things he did know he excelled at. Joey knew how to read exceptionally well. In fact, he was reading multiple grade levels above and was considered the top reader at his high school, D.E.E.P. East Oakland High. Joey was intelligent and socially conscious, but at times he was ignorant

to his adult responsibilities that were forced upon him due to his set of circumstances.

These circumstances were beyond the comprehension of any ordinary 15 year-old mind.

Joey shifted his body awkwardly to avoid the washer and dryer before exiting the bedroom/laundry room. He rushed down the hall and entered the only bathroom in the house. Joey thanked God he made it to the bathroom early and not because of Tony's hollow threat, but because he was the second one to take a shower, which guaranteed him hot water for today. Joey looked at himself in the bathroom mirror and began prepping himself for the first day of school. He hoped that the tenth grade would be more promising, encouraging, and academically rigorous. Joey was hopeful, but not delirious, so he prepared for the worse and hoped for the best. The little boy broke away from his morning mirror prayer ritual and began brushing his teeth with a box of baking soda before disrobing and jumping into the shower. The hot water from the shower began to fog up the bathroom mirror and steam started to seep out from underneath the bathroom door, which caught the attention of Tony.

"Joe, hurry the fuck up! And you better not be taking all the hot water. Save some for the rest of the kids." Tony yelled his commands through the bathroom door.

"Tony, leave me the fuck alone for at least five minutes!"

"Okay, I'll leave you alone for five minutes, but after that if you aint in the kitchen helping me with breakfast I'm beatin yo ass."

Joey finished his shower and opened the bathroom door to Tony's mean mugging face. No words were exchanged between the two, but their body language sent clear messages to one another. Tony was disappointed with Joey's tardiness and Joey resented

Tony's promptness. The time was now 7:30 AM and Tony knew his younger siblings wouldn't have enough time to shower today, so he lined each one of them up by the bathroom sink and ordered Shelly, Sharon, Dante, Jermaine, and John to brush their teeth and wash their faces.

Joey made his way to the kitchen to help prepare breakfast. He entered the vinyl floored room and reached for the box of Lucky Charms from on top of the refrigerator. He then grabbed the gallon of milk from inside the fridge. Joey began placing bowls, cups, and spoons on the kitchen table. Before Joey sat down, he raced to the fridge one last time to grab the half gallon of Sunny D. The little boy examined the amount of cereal and Sunny D left and soon realized that there would only be enough cereal and fruit drink for one person. In a hasty panic, and not knowing what to do, Joey quickly ate the last of his family's rations. Although the boy was filled up on sugary goodness, he was not satisfied because guilt began to eat away at his stomach. Before Joey could dispose of the evidence, Tony and the rest of his siblings caught him red handed. An onslaught of hurtful comments directed at Joey pursued:

“Oh this little faggot ate all the damn cereal!” John shouted.

“I'ma beat this bitch's ass!” Jermaine yelled.

“And look ya he was trying to hide the evidence like the little bitch he is!” Dante pointed out.

“Was you even gonna tell us you ate the rest of the cereal?” Sharon questioned.

“Now what we gonna eat? You pig!” Shelly demanded.

“Alright ya let’s just calm down. Everybody already knows Joey’s a little bitch for eating our food. How about I just make us something else real quick for breakfast?” Tony’s composed demeanor always provoked a sense of tranquility amongst the siblings.

Joey, in disgrace, ran to his room and began reading in solitude. He picked up Plato’s *Republic*, and although he has already read that book three times it seems to always put his mind at ease. Meanwhile, Tony and the rest of the siblings were munching on syrup and sugar sandwiches in the kitchen. Water was the only beverage Tony could supply his brothers and sisters for their breakfast. After their subpar meal, Tony announced to the kids to wash up and put on their backpacks and shoes. While the younger siblings were getting ready for school, Tony went to go check on Joey in their bedroom/laundry room.

“Joe let’s go everybody is ready.” Tony said this while biting his tongue, hoping not to curse or yell at Joey again.

Joey raised his head from his book and looked at Tony straight in his eyes and asked, “Why do you guys hate me?” Joey said this while fighting back tears.

“Ah come on Joe. Nobody hates you.” Tony said this with a reassuring tone.

“Then how come ya always treat me like shit? I’ve been called a bitch four times already and I’ve only be awake for about an hour.” Joey shrewdly explained.

“Listen, in this family we give each other a hard time especially when someone fucks up. You fucked up eating all the Lucky Charms and drinking all the Sunny D...am I right?” Tony asked.

“Yeah I know I did, but I don’t have to be crucified for it.” Joey rebutted.

“That’s true, but there needs to be consequences for your actions, especially when your mistakes fuck up the lives of other people like your brothers and sisters.” Tony compassionately retorted.

“I know and I’m sorry Tony. I should have made six tiny bowls of cereal and six small cups of Sunny D, so we could all eat something.” Joey confessed.

“Forget it. Don’t worry about it lil bruh. Just be mindful of your actions next time. You know we all love you here. Now enough of this gay ass sentimental talk. Let’s hurry up and get to school before we all late.” Tony demanded.

The seven children exited their house each adorning their backpacks. The family stayed on 80th and Holly St., which was adjacent to East Oakland Pride Elementary School, so that was always the first stop on their two and a half mile trip. The kids walked pass their neighbor, Mrs. Scott’s house and turned right on 79th Ave, but not before passing up Holly Market, which was the neighborhood liquor store. As early as 8:00 AM, alcoholics flooded the corner to purchase their breakfast, which consisted of half pints of Taaka Gin. The kids saw the adults’ drunkenness, but ignored it or were immune to it. The children witnessed grown men slurring their words, pissing their pants, and flirting with young school girls. After passing up the corner store, only a few hundred feet separated the children and their first stop of the morning. They passed up Plymouth St. and then Arthur St. At last, they reached East Oakland Pride Elementary School. Tony kissed his little sisters goodbye and wished them both good luck for their first day of the school year. The boys returned to Plymouth St., but this time headed south for about half

a mile. Dante, Jermaine, and John began complaining during this grueling hike. The boys whined about how they were too tired to walk and that they should catch the bus instead. Tony refused for any of his siblings to catch the bus because the AC Transit was a cesspool for gang activity. The bus is relatively safe to ride, but not unless one has feuding enemies on their bus route. Tony had recently defended a young girl's honor on the AC bus to summer school this past month. Consequently, some of Tony's peers didn't like this and they expressed their dislike by violently accosting Tony and the girl he was defending. Ever since then Tony no longer rides the AC bus to school with his siblings. Not out of fear, but out of safety for his younger brothers and sisters. In fact, Tony still rode the AC bus freely when he was by himself, but never with his younger siblings. The younger brothers and sisters knew none of this except for Joey since he attended the same high school.

After passing Cherry St., the kids made a right on 98th Ave, which was a livelier street for all the wrong reasons. Crackheads pushing shopping carts of recyclable cans filled the streets, prostitutes poured in from in from East 14th St., and drug dealers posted in their 1990 Buick Regals adorning candy paint and 24 inch rims. All of the kids registered what was going on. They saw the addicts, the whores, and the drugs, but they didn't question any of it. Instead, they accepted it as normal.

After walking a mile and a half, the children made it to Alliance Academy Middle School. Instead of kissing his younger brothers, Tony decided to give each one of them a fist bump in lieu of not embarrassing them in front of their peers. Tony and Joey were the last ones left. Before making a left on Bancroft, Tony spotted a familiar face. A

crackhead named Earl the Worm Johnson greeted Tony and Joey. Earl extended himself to Tony and Joey looking for a handout. Tony gave him five dollars, which illuminated his face with a bright, glowing smile. Earl was ecstatic, he was so happy he could barely talk:

“Thank you boy. My god you’ve gotten so big. Now you takin’ care of me now. Aint that some shit?” Earl prophesized.

“Yeah...aint that some shit.” Tony bluntly replied.

The two boys made a left on Bancroft and made nothing of Earl’s confrontation. Joey connected the dots over the past few years and concluded that this man, Earl, was Tony’s father. Although, the family never spoke of Earl or who Tony’s father was, Joey knew the truth because he was meticulously observant. Over the last half of a decade, Joey took note of how many times Tony stops to talk to Earl and help him. Tony never helped any of the other addicts, Tony never conversed with them, and Tony never acknowledged any of the other crackheads in Oakland except for Earl. Joey thought to himself that the two of them always had an odd relationship. Earl would always look for support and comfort from his son, and Tony always provided money and a sense of nurturing relief for his father. Every time the two boys would depart from Earl, Tony would always question Joey about his father:

“How’s Jim doin?” Tony asked.

“Pops? Uh...he’s doin good. He should be back by winter break.” Joey reluctantly responded.

“Damn already? Is it going to be six months in December?”

“Yup. He’s gonna dock on December 5th. And this time he’s gonna stay all the way through the summer. That’s gonna be the longest he’s ever been on land since starting his job as a sea merchant.” Joey talked about his father with pride and excitement, but regretfully realized he may have been gloating.

“That’s great Joe! I’m sure Shelly, Sharon, Dante, Jermaine, and John are all gonna be happy to see their dad too.” Tony said with a genuinely enthusiastic tone. An awkward silence filled the air between the two kids, but was quickly dismissed by Tony changing the subject of conversation by focusing their discussion on school.

The two brothers continued to walk and talk before arriving to D.E.E.P. High. The boys turned right on 83rd and Dowling. By this point they were only a few hundred feet away from school and a few minutes late to school. This gave Tony a chance to deliver one last pep talk to Joey.

“Look Joe, I haven’t told anybody this, but I’m leaving the house next year. I’m gonna be attending Cal State Northridge in the fall. I wanna tell mom and the rest of the family myself, so keep your fuckin mouth shut about this.” Tony demanded.

“Alright I will, but why the hell you tellin me first?” Joey questioned his older brother with a very puzzled face.

“Because you’re my brother. Plus you need to start being the man of the house. Yeah your dad’s coming back, but he’s also gonna leave again for work. You need to listen to mom and help your little brothers and sisters. They look up to you.”

“Okay, I got you Tony.” Joey responded with agitation in his voice.

“No you don’t. It’s not about doin shit for me anymore or just blindly following orders. You gotta know the difference between right and wrong for the sake of our family. When shit aint right you gotta stand up against it!” Tony exclaimed.

“Bruh what is you talking about.” Joey asked.

“Lemme give you an example. Now I already know you heard about me gettin jumped last month, but do you know why?”

“Them Shady boys are just fuck boys. Didn’t they just jump you for your phone?” Joey inquired.

“No. I mean they ended up takin my phone, but that wasn’t the reason. I stood up to them because they were damn near trying to rape Kelly. They were groping her and saying fucked up things to her. I had to stand up to them.”

“Why Tony? That’s suicide, you tryin to fight three Shady boys.”

“I had to because if I was just gonna stand by and let them do that to Kelly then it was like I was damn near raping her too.”

The two brothers finally made it to D.E.E.P. High, and they were greeted by all the stragglers who were late to class. There were kids towards the front steps of the school listening to music on their headphones, there were students still playing basketball on the blacktop well after the bell rang, and lastly the rest of the student body were entering the auditorium for the beginning of the school year assembly. Tony and Joey entered the school and were quickly greeted by security officers wearing aviators and adorning non-lethal weapons around their waist ranging from prepper spray to electrical Tasers. The policed state environment for the children at D.E.E.P. High actually extended

beyond the walls of the school house because OPD officers constantly patrolled the outside of the school in their squad cars. In most cases extra security means extra safety, but in certain cases extra security can sometimes imply extra tyranny due to the overwhelming sense of constant vigilance.

During the assembly, most kids paid attention to their new class schedule by comparing and contrasting courses and teachers with their peers. Both Tony and Joey weren't too thrilled about their class schedule because the majority of classes they had were taught by new teachers, which meant their classroom management skills would be horrendous. Joey saw that his first period class was English Language Arts, which was his favorite subject. The class was taught by Ms. Snowden, a first year teacher.

The assembly concluded and students were ordered to go to their first period class. Tony soon mingled with his senior peers and headed to class. Joey, although brilliant, didn't have too many friends because he came off as socially awkward mainly due to the fact that he always wanted to discuss Shakespeare, Baldwin, and Faulkner with his peers. Joey understood the culture that his neighborhood offered, but rejected it with remiss. Joey still had the power to codeswitch anytime he wanted to, but he often chose not to. Joey still had the common courtesy to greet his peers and genuinely spark up brief, yet polite conversation.

Class was now in session. Students entered Ms. Snowden's classroom talking to each other. No one was to be found greeting kids at the door upon their entrance. Ms. Snowden was preoccupied with her digital roll sheet on her desktop computer. Joey quickly realized that Ms. Snowden had her hands full. The little boy knew that if his

teacher loses control of the class on the first day of school then the entire school year was ruined. Joey sat quiet, but was anxious. By this time most students were out of their desk wandering the classroom. Joey's peers conversed with each other and consoled one another. Most students lose family members over the summer due to unfortunate circumstances. Students were sincerely pleased to see each other, but all of this joyful reconnecting only sounded like noise to Ms. Snowden. Joey saw Ms. Snowden grow increasingly agitated. He saw the students take over the classroom. Finally, he saw his teacher in need of help, so he acted or reacted:

“Pssst, Ms. Snowden. You have to get their attention first. Use some type of sound and visual signal that the whole class can notice,” whispered Joey with a soft tone hoping not to be detected by any of his peers, which could lead to violent repercussions for him at lunch.

“Thank you...umm...child?” Ms. Snowden replied.

“My name is Joey. You should start the class by introducing your name and who you are because most of them won't read the board unless you tell them.” Joey pointed to the board that had his teacher's name on it.

Joey could have never predicted what Ms. Snowden's next move was. She decided to play a culturally irrelevant song to the class. The song was not offensive in anyway, but the kids were perplexed by Ms. Snowden's unusually dancing, which mirrored an unmanned fire hose. And her loud singing just confused the class even more due to her off key high notes. When faced with something new and different, kids at

D.E.E.P. High commonly ridicule the unknown, and Ms. Snowden's singing and dancing were no exception. As a result, the students lashed out at Ms. Snowden's differences:

"Oh this bitch trippin!"

"Now I heard of Lady Gaga, but this hoe sounds like Lady Caca!"

"And that hefa got some small ass titties, but I'll still smash!"

"Yup, she got little mosquito bites for titties!"

"Hell yeah, she should be the president of the itty bitty titty committee."

"This white-ass bitch looks like Casper the unfriendly ghost!"

"And look at that trick's name Ms. Snow white?! What the fuck?!"

Joey saw his teacher crying like his little sister and put his head down in frustration. Joey knew that this school year was going to be the same as last year, which consisted of a revolving door of teachers. Sadly, he tried to help the situation, but only made it worse. After running out of the classroom and threatening to quit, Ms. Snowden was stopped by Ms. Jackson, the veteran teacher, in the hallway. Ms. Jackson attempted to calm Ms. Snowden down and allow her to reconsider her decision for the sake of the kids:

"Don't stay for me or even yourself, but stay for our kids." Ms. Jackson stated with compassion.

"They are not my kids! If they were they wouldn't have called me a bitch or ridiculed my body!" Ms. Snowden protested.

"Well are you a bitch? Do you have a funny body?" Ms. Jackson asked sarcastically.

“What are you trying to say Ms. Jackson?” Ms. Snowden demanded.

“What I’m trying to say is that if you truly aren’t a bitch then what difference does it make if a child calls you one or makes fun of your body for that matter?” Ms. Jackson stated this with calm and ease in her voice. For Ms. Snowden and the rest of the world, it isn’t normal for students to curse at their teachers, which makes teaching at D.E.E.P. High abnormal. Therefore, it takes a special type of person to teach at Joey’s school, and both teachers realized this anomaly during their conversation.

“So I’m just supposed to let them curse at me and humiliate me?” Ms. Snowden pleaded.

“No. Always correct their mistakes and teach them how to grow from them. Our kids crave structure since most of them lack structure outside of this school.” Ms. Jackson snapped.

“Correct their mistakes?! Our kids need structure?! The only mistake was me teaching here. And all the structure in the world couldn’t help these kids!” Ms. Snowden shouted.

Ms. Jackson grew furious, but remained professional, “Ms. Snowden, I thank you for your service here at D.E.E.P. High, but I believe it’s time for you to go.”

Ms. Snowden stormed off and remained mute on her way out of D.E.E.P. High. Meanwhile, Joey’s class was still roaring from Ms. Snowden’s departure, but Joey was not. He was standing by the doorway facing the hallway. Apparently, he heard the entire conversation between the two teachers. It dawned on Joey that Ms. Snowden was white and he was not. The alcoholics at Holly Market, the prostitutes on East 14th, the

crackheads on 98th Ave, and the students at D.E.E.P. High hardly any of them were white
Joey thought to himself. *These are not my kids* is one of the last things Joey remembers
Ms. Snowden saying. And with Ms. Snowden's last proclamation imprinted within Joey's
DNA, the little boy said to himself, "And she aint my teacher!"

The Arrival

Where do I begin? The sense of hope I believe is a lost cause. Others may say that hope is eternal, meaning that hope is the driving force for us to wake up in the morning and live a prosperous life. Although true, hope can also be a mirage to a fictitious lifestyle that is perpetuated by materialism, opulence, and other inanimate objects. I would be considered a pessimist for presenting a problem without a solution; therefore the driving force or eternal mechanism that gives us purpose in this world is simply love. Ironically enough, this is a story about hope...and love. The question still remains where do I begin? The beginning or starting point shouldn't be centered around me. In fact anyone's beginning shouldn't be focused on the individual at hand, but rather the beginning to anything should be contextualized and critically analyzed from multiple cultural views. Consequently, the most obvious starting point for my story would be the arrival of my father into the new world.

Sufyan El-Gabeely, my father, arrived in America during the early 1970's. Sufyan was a smooth slick talking young man when he first arrived to Detroit, Michigan. Although Sufyan knew all the right things to say to just about everybody, his only flaw was his heart being exposed on his sleeve. Of course like many young Yemenie immigrants, Sufyan had to leave my mom, Sumaya, and oldest brother, Abraheem, back in our home village, Gedeeya, due to financial restraints. Ah yes the good-old pre-9/11 days, when an A-rab could sneak into America by being adopted by his second father with the right papers. Freedom is no longer free unfortunately. With that said, Sufyan's last name is a lie just like the persona he adopted when first arriving to Detroit.

Sufyan befriended an older Yemenie named Musa upon his arrival to the States. Back in the day a lot of Yemenies would arrive to America and link up with a friend of the family. Amu Musa, as I like to call him, was the epitome of a brute. Musa was grimy, unshaven, and suffered from Napoleon complex. Sufyan and Musa highlighted each other's qualities. Together they and other desolate A-rabs they knew from their past and present painted the motor city red, white, and black. Sufyan and Musa were infamous for their late night escapades, which would end with midnight toking and fellatio stroking. As my father put it, "We were the first ones in the club and the last ones to leave the club!" My father and Musa's auspicious reputation was incredulous to hear as a child, but as I became wiser I soon realized that the true identity of a father could damage a poor child.

Like most non-educated immigrants, my father performed grueling manual labor jobs during his stay in Michigan. He started off as a busboy in a tiny restaurant in Detroit, and then he worked as a janitor in Hamtramck, until finally settling as a line worker at the Ford factory in Dearborn. Historically we, A-rabs, are nomadic. My father was and is never content. I could hear him now, "Ismaeel, son, our work is never done. Nobody's perfect because we are living in an imperfect world, which means there is always room for correction." For the lack of education my father received, overall he was still a wordsmith in Arabic or English. With that said, my father never settled down in Michigan. It wasn't until 1978 that my father finally settled down in Oakland, California.

Sufyan's arrival to the west coast was epic. My father was obsessed about living the American dream. TV shows and movies corrupted the young soul of Sufyan. He was

addicted to Clint Eastwood and slapstick comedy sitcoms. These mainstream media manipulations would later cultivate the family values my father bestowed upon us. When Sufyan moved to Oakland, the yearning for middle class America acceptance became amplified. He was no longer praying, he was drinking like a pirate, and smoking like a hippie. Anything that reminded Sufyan of the motherland, he soon forgot. Maybe intentionally or coincidentally either way my father forgot his roots, which led him to forget where he was truly headed.

The year was now 1979, and my mother began anxiously questioning her marriage as well as her husband's intentions. Sumaya patiently waited for nearly a decade before finally seeing my father again. During these years Sufyan was trying to economically establish himself as a success. And believe it or not he accomplished his goal of the American dream by owning a white picket fence house and running his own business. He was an entrepreneur without even knowing what the term meant. Unfortunately, during this process he lost sight of what truly mattered, which was his wife and only son. Sumaya knew she had been forgotten, and it wasn't based off the gossip she heard from fellow villagers, nor was it based off her own insecurities as a woman, it was merely based off the sole fact that Sufyan never physically came to visit her in Yemen. The only communication the two of them ever received was letter writing, which was delivered by friends traveling back and forth to Yemen. Sufyan always remembered to deliver money and a care package with each accompanied letter, which had the patented American items that Sumaya and his son, Abraheem, could brag about to other fellow villagers. From Maybelline mascara to leather jackets, the both of them

were always in style, which made up for an absent father in the minds of every villager at Geddeya, except for the hearts of Sumaya and Abraheem. My mother was frustrated, so she orchestrated a desperate scheme to finally get my father's attention.

At this point, my father's liquor store in West Oakland was booming. The location was perfect. "West Coast Liquors" sat adjacent to one of the busiest intersections in Oakland; it was across the street from a freeway ramp, and two blocks away from a hospital and school. Sufyan kept the store stocked with groceries, fresh produce, and deli meat, but the real profits were in the Haram alcohol and pork he sold. In the few years he operated the store, he was able to buy out his business partner and co-owner (Amu Musa) as well as buy his own white picket fence house he always dreamed of, regardless of if it was in the middle of the hood or not. Things couldn't have been better for Sufyan at the end of this decade: he had his own business, he had money, and he had every woman crawling all over him from Alameda to San Francisco.

The year of 1979 was coming to a close, and my father's New Year resolution was sustainability. He wanted his success to continue, he wanted longevity, but little did he know nothing lasts forever, everything burns, crumbles, or falls. And that is when the love of his life gave him the ultimate ultimatum. Sumaya sent Sufyan a letter, which suggested that Sufyan bring her and Abraheem to America otherwise the two of them will leave him indefinitely. Through all of his infidelity and disregard that he showed towards his wife, Sufyan did truly love her in a cruel and maniacal way. My mother demanded very little from my father and seldom did she speak her mind freely, so whenever she did my father knew my mother was serious and so he obliged for several reasons. The most

obvious reason why Sufyan adhered to Sumaya's request was for the simple fact he was going to lose his wife and son, but more importantly his honor was at risk. Honor was and is Sufyan's driving force, it's his eternal mechanism. The honor of his family name, the honor in saving his family from the clutches of third world poverty, the honor in building his prideful Yemenie-American legacy to a pedestal level in which every village idiot could gossip and brag about for generations to come were all deciding factors that motivated my father. Sumaya knew all this, and so she challenged his honor and consequently his pride when presenting the immediacy of her ultimatum.

Sufyan was on the first flight back to Yemen to see Sumaya for the first time in years. He temporarily left "West Coast Liquors" in the hands of Amu Musa, who remained loyal to my father after all these years. Sufyan was beyond nervous on his way to Yemen. He thought of all the family members he hasn't seen in years: his father, mothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, in-laws, half-brothers and half-sisters. More importantly, the love of his life, Sumaya was waiting for him. What drove Sufyan insane was thinking about his son. The last time he saw Abraheem he was two-years old. Sufyan's son was now nine. Abraheem graduated the second grade at the top of his class, he was a true scholar. Sufyan knew that his son was one of the smartest boys in all of Gedeeya, and it saddened him that he wasn't there for his son's success. Sufyan also knew his self was the only one to blame for his absence as a father. Back then everything was circumstantial, and Abraheem knew this, so did my mother. For example, Sufyan had to financially provide for his family the same way his father attempted to do so in the past. The circumstances were explicitly clear, which was leave the village, make something of

yourself, then come back and save your family. Sufyan remembered the former, but forgot the latter. Sufyan witnessed the death of his younger brother, Saber, who died from diarrhea at an early age. My father vowed to never let anything like the death of Saber happen to any of his family members ever again. My father hoped and prayed that his son would understand why he left for so long, why he built an empire, and why he ultimately abandoned him for the greater good of his family. Abraheem was beyond his years, so he did understand the concept of why my father would leave his wife and only son, but he didn't accept it. Either way one culturally or circumstantially analyzes it, Sufyan abandoned his son, and that is what Abraheem chose to accept, and that is what cultivated the unspoken tension between a father and his son for years to come.

Sufyan didn't know how his son truly felt about him because every letter he ever received from him was very cordial and respectful, yet each letter lacked a genuine tone. The relationship between Sufyan and Abraheem was simply father and son, nothing more nothing less. The irony is Abraheem couldn't express his frustration because he was privileged by Gedeeya's standards. Abraheem had shoes on his feet, he was healthy, and he went to school. Most kids in the village dreamed of being in Abraheem's place and what made things worse was that Abraheem never truly appreciated his status or privilege. His peers admired and respected him in front of his face because they were hoping for a handout, but secretly they despised him because he represented everything they can never become. Abraheem knew all of this, but my father knew none of this.

On the plane ride to Yemen, Sufyan couldn't sleep during his 24-hour trip. Other than dwelling about the dynamics of his father-son relationship, he kept thinking about

how much money to give each family member. Too much money for one family member could imply that Sufyan was arrogant. Not enough money for another family member may mean Sufyan was greedy. To solve his problem, my father decided to give every family member the same undisclosed amount. After resolving his fiscal conflict, he started thinking about what he would say to his wife and son. After his long and grueling trip the best thing he could think of saying was “*Aslaam wa Alkaam* (may peace be upon you).”

Sufyan landed in Sanaa, Yemen on a Friday morning. He was greeted by Musa’s cousin, Abdul-Rheem El-Doshan. Most people called him Doshan for short, which loosely translates to the loud and abrasive one. Doshan was the only one that came to pick up my father due to circumstantial reasons. One reason being that the capitol of Yemen, Sanaa, was the closest city to Gedeeya with an airport, the second reason being that Sanaa was three hours away from Sufyan’s home village, and lastly Doshan was the only person my father knew with a reliable car. Doshan has been back and forth from Yemen to America and never truly stayed in one central location. Doshan has lived in NY, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, El Habesha, Sanaa, Gedeeya, Aden, and Socotra, which truly makes him the front runner for nomad of the century. My father hated relying on Doshan because he was a loose-cannon. Yes, Sufyan was guilty of being a Yemenie Casanova, and his best friend Musa was a stern caveman, but Musa’s cousin, Doshan, was unpredictable to say the least. The main reason why Doshan was so nomadic was because of his uncanny ability to burn so many metaphorical bridges between friends and family members. Musa and Sufyan were the last two people in his corner. At the very

least, my dad felt hesitant when requesting Doshan's assistance in driving him from Sanaa to Geddeeya.

My father exited customs and saw Doshan distinctively waving at him from a distance. Sufyan inspected his disturbing friend from head to toe. Doshan had on cream colored platforms, a pair of flannel bell bottom pants, a polyester button up shirt with a butterfly collar, and finally an afro the size of a basketball. My father was embarrassed for him, which was revealed in the form of an awkward laugh.

“Ehhhh...ahahahahah-”

“Shut ub ya pitch!” Doshan said jokingly.

“*Wallah* (I swear) you look like me from five years ago.” My father responded cunningly. American style takes a while to reach Yemen. In fact a five year delay for bell bottoms makes Doshan look like he's ahead of the curve.

“Okay, you bunk. First you're supposed to say *aslaam wa alkaam*, not make fun of yo prother.” Doshan looked hurt, which could be the result of him coming down from all the various drugs he takes or possibly the result of his only friend taking a stab at his ego. Either way, my father could easily read Doshan's vulnerability, so he quickly changed the subject by reaching into his carry-on and handing Doshan a wrapped package.

“*Hah Helaake* (here I got something for you).” My father presented this gift to his friend, who turned to him doe-eyed as he reached for this mysterious peace offering.

“What's this, a jacket?”

“Not just any jacket. It’s a Suede Leather Car Coat Jacket.” My father has a tendency of attempting to win over the people he loves by using gifts or money as an act of persuasion.

“Woah! *Heaya* (come on), thank you ya pitch!” This time Doshan gestured a friendly “pitch” or bitch towards my father.

“Yeah yeah, *yallah* (let’s get going). I wanna make it to Gedeeya before Asar (late afternoon prayer).”

“*Heya*, why you in a rush? I wanted you to come have lunch at my house. Blus I have a few pusiness errands to run.” My father knew exactly what he meant by “business errands,” which was code for sex and drugs. This is what my father was dreading, but Sufyan prepared for this moment on the plane ride here.

“Oh no, *Wallah* I had a big meal on the plane. How about you go take care of your business and I go buy a few things for the long car ride to Gedeeya. After I’m done shopping I’ll go pray *Jumaha* (Friday prayer) at the *Masjid* (Mosque) on Taiz Street. Then you can pick me up after *salaah* (prayer). What do you say, Doshan?” Doshan was puzzled by this abrasion. Everybody in all of Gedeeya knew Sufyan was an alcoholic, or at least his close circle of friends and family knew. Those same people, like Doshan, also knew Sufyan stopped praying years ago, so this lie that my father concocted to avoid his friend who he hadn’t seen in years truly offended him.

Doshan stood up straight in his tall white cream platform shoes and coherently gathered his thoughts before telling my father: “Listen yea cuzz, I know you are trying to clean ub before you see your family, so do what you have to do.” Doshan bowed his head

down then shrugged his shoulders before turning his back on my father and walking aimlessly away.

“Wait, Doshan!” Sufyan said with a sense of urgency and regret. Before turning around, Doshan devilishly smirked and yelled out, “*Yallah*, let’s go!”

And just like that Sufyan was back to his old habits. He tried his best to stay sober while in Yemen, and possibly upon his arrival to the States since he was a soon-to-be family man again. This internal promise that Sufyan made to himself for the sake of his family was quickly forgotten.

The two of them leave the airport in hastily manner. On the way to the parking lot, Doshan took it upon himself to kick the orphanage children, who sell Q-tips, chicklet gums, and fine tissue for a living, out the way. When they made it to the parking lot, Doshan ordered my father to sit in the passenger seat while he loaded up his Toyota Tacoma with my dad’s luggage.

“No *Aybe* (rude)! You are guest! You didn’t fly around the world to lift luggage!”

“I can help. You don’t have to break your back or tip some kids to load up the truck.”

“Just wait in the truck and but in the tabe, ya kalb (you dog)!”

My father sees a cassette of Marvin Gaye and quickly pops it in. Simultaneously, Doshan jumps through the open window and into the driver’s seat like a raging lunatic. In the same process accidentally kicking my dad in the face and forcing him to bear a black eye.

“Ouch! What the fuck!” Sufyan exclaimed.

“I sorry. *Wallah* I was trying to be like Bo Duke. I love that show.”

“Well good job. Now we need to pick up some ice. I don’t want to show up to Geddeeya with a swollen face!”

Doshan felt ashamed for his actions. Constant mood swings have become all too familiar for him. He puts the keys into the ignition and starts revving up the engine. Doshan peels out of the Sanaa International Airport parking lot and breaks the wooden barricade without even paying for his fare. Sufyan looks at him perplexed. Doshan notices this, so he quickly tries to escape the fact that he kicked orphans out the way of his car, kicked his best friend while imitating The Dukes of Hazzard, and nearly ran over pedestrians for the sake of avoiding a 25 cents fee. The two of them can now hear the backdrop of Marvin’s lyrics:

Mother, mother

There's too many of you crying

Brother, brother, brother

There's far too many of you dying

You know we've got to find a way

To bring some lovin' here today²

Doshan was in tune with the lyrics, so he raised the volume a few notches. He looked over to Sufyan, and noticed that his best friend was agitated and could care less about “What’s Going On.” At that point while driving; Doshan lets out a barrage of off-beat lyrics:

² Marvin Gaye. “What’s Going On.” *What’s Going On*, Motown subsidiary Tamla, 1970.

“Father, father

We don't need to escalate

You see, war is not the answer

For only love can conquer hate

You know we've got to find a way

To bring some lovin' here today”²

Doshan looks at Sufyan again. This time making eye contact until Sufyan reluctantly forms a crooked smile. Doshan is now hoping Sufyan chimes in and sings along on the second verse, so he screams at the top of his lungs:

“bicket lines and bicket signs

Don't punish me with prutality

Talk to me, so you can see”²

My father finally realizes it's a hopeless battle, so he joins in with Doshan's insane rendition of “What's Going On.” Both of them sing in unison on the chorus:

“Oh, what's going on

What's going on

Ya, what's going on

Ah, what's going on”²

The two of them begin to laugh. They reminisce about their childhood in Gedeeya and their teenage years in Detroit as Marvin Gaye continues to sing in the backdrop. Sufyan looks out the window and realizes Sanaa has changed in the past seven years. More hotels have popped up, more cars are polluting the busy streets, and poverty is

made more apparent based on all the orphans and homeless individuals sleeping under bridges and in alleys. Doshan pulls up to *Bab El-Yemen* (The door of Yemen, a historic marketplace) and stops the engine. Then he announces, “We’ll bick ub some ice for your eye and a few groceries for Maryeem, my wife, to make lunch today.” Sufyan agrees to the itinerary for today.

One thing that never changes about Sanaa is Bab El-Yemen. Sufyan finally sees the cultural void he’s been missing for the last seven years of his life. He sees a neighborhood of nostalgic Arabian stone houses, he sees Arabic calligraphy fill almost every window mantle, he sees barefooted children running down cobblestone roads while pushing old, rusty bicycle rims with sticks, he hears swindling merchants yelling out obscenities, he hears the *Ethan* (prayer call) of *Jumah*, he smells the burnt tart scent of roasted corn on the cob from every street vendor on every corner, he smells freshly roasted *Shawarma* (roasted lamb in pita bread) from the nearby café, he feels his roots finally cultivating from within him, he feels an urge to pray *Jumah*, he feels rejuvenated, and he finally feels at home.

During my father’s epiphany, Doshan took it upon himself to smack my dad back into reality. At that moment Doshan literally smacked my father upside his head and stated:

“Heya, Mal Umaak” (Hey, what wrong with your mother)?

“Ahh! What’s wrong with you?” My dad asked with a frustrated tone.

“I sorry, put you look like a girl.”

“What the fuck you talking about?”

“Yo face was like a pitch!”

Doshan proceeded to ridicule my dad by imitating the face Sufyan made when entering Bab El-Yemen, in which Doshan had his hands clenched together, his eyes were opened wide, and he started reverberating puppy noises. My father looked at him perplexed. Sufyan had only one response for him, which was:

“I’m going to go pray.”

“HAHAHAHAHA!” Doshan erupted with condescending laughter.

“I’m going to pray.” My father repeated. Sufyan had a look in his eyes that signaled he was serious. Doshan knew this and was saddened by my father’s sudden religious revelation. The masjid was Doshan’s kryptonite.

“Listen, if you don’t want to come in that’s fine. Just wait for me outside.”

“Yeah that’s fine. You are guest! I’ll go get the groceries for lunch, the ice for yo eye, and some Gat (leaves that are chewed as a mild narcotic) for the road. I pe pack in one hour.”

Doshan never picked up the groceries, never picked up the ice, and never picked up the Gat. Instead, Doshan stuck to his daily routine, which consisted of him going down to the Sheraton Hotel and getting drunk with European tourists while conversing at the bar in broken English.

Meanwhile my father was in the Masjid listening to the weekly Khutba (religious sermon). Sadly, my father didn’t reach enlightenment while listening to the Imam (priest) preach. Instead, Sufyan fell asleep and dreamt about the life he left back in America: the

drugs, the sex, and the money all felt like they were infinite. Sufyan woke up right before prayer to join the Jemaha (group prayer). The prayer lasted only five minutes, which is typical. After praying and exiting the Masjid, Sufyan didn't feel enlightened, in fact he felt nothing. It was as if he never prayed at all. This depressed Sufyan, so his only resolve was to purchase religious fulfillment. He gave donations to the homeless women and children outside the Masjid, and he purchased a Gameese (long gown used for prayer), Koran (Islamic Holy Scripture), and praying beads from a nearby stand.

Sufyan, now dressed in his new Islamic attire, looked at the busy intersection of people in front of the Masjid hoping to spot his mode of transportation, but he couldn't find Doshan. He started to walk further down the intersection until he finally exited Bab El-Yemen, and he was back in the same trash filled parking lot in which he and Doshan first split up. Sufyan knew Doshan hadn't changed at all, so he knew his routine was still the same even after all these years. Sufyan caught a taxi to the Sheraton Hotel. As he was arriving up to Hadaa Street he noticed the streets went from dirt to paved, the trash was properly disposed of, the bums have miraculously disappeared, and the brown, unshaven A-rabs have been replaced with white pasty, blond haired people. This reminded Sufyan of the same segregation and gentrification that he sees in America till this day. The taxi pulled up to the enormous entrance gate to the Sheraton Hotel, which was preceded by a mile long accession and was followed by a huge parking lot.

Sufyan payed the driver and exited the run-down taxi that was in need of an upholstery repair. The hotel was grand, the parking lot was massive, and all of the people were beautifully cynical. My father turned his attention towards the task at hand. He

started pacing back and forth thinking of what to say before encountering his frustrating friend. With a strike of courage, Sufyan determined he's going to finally tell Doshan the truth about his detrimental behavior. My Father stormed through the hotel entrance, zoomed by the hotel lobby, and quickly caught the elevator before the doors slowly closed. The elevator led him to the swimming pool area, which included a tacky Tiki style bar. My father grew enraged as he saw his driver, Doshan, nursing a fifth of Jim Beam. Sufyan could recognize that ridiculously sized afro from miles away.

“Doshan! What the Fuck!” My father shouted. Doshan turned around and faced my father with his blood shot eyes and mumbled something incoherent, it was neither English nor Arabic, but a combination of both tongues twisted together.

“You are an alcoholic!” My dad exclaimed with a very condescending tone.

“What?! I like women ya pitch!” Doshan stated with frustration and confusion.

“No. You are a drunk!” Sufyan explained.

“Oh, El-hemdallah (thank God). Haha, I thought you called me a faggot.”

“Doshan, we need to get going. Wallah I don't care that you've drunken away your life. Everybody thinks you're a piece of shit, including your own family and even me, sometimes. But now is your chance to make up for your mistakes. Please, yahee (my brother) just drive me to Gedeeya, so I can see my son and wife.”

“Listen cuz, I fucked up, I know, but please don't lose faith in me. I know you're scared about coming back home. I'm on your side Wallah.”

Doshan began tearing up as he stated his last proclamation with a very genuine tone. My father respected Doshan's honest words, but couldn't trust his corrupt actions,

so he took extreme measures by snatching the bottle of Jim Beam from Doshan, who was cradling the fifth like a baby. Sufyan slammed the bottle of alcohol down to the ground breaking it into a hundred pieces of glass. Out of desperation, Doshan dove to the marble floor and began licking every drop he could while in the same process cutting his tongue from the broken glass. My father yanked Doshan by his collar from off the floor and slapped him in his face, which, culturally, is the worst physical offense you could deliver to an A-rab. Doshan started to cry and slowly began to wail. Sufyan didn't have time to reconcile his friendship with Doshan because he first had to reconcile his relationship with his son and wife.

After making a scene, the two of them left to Gedeeya. Sufyan decided it would be wise for him to drive instead of a passed out Doshan. My father needed no form of navigation. He remembered the long winding roads, the ascension and decline of mountains, the neighboring villages, children selling tangible goods from their communities such as Gat, pumpkins, and honey. Nobody ever forgets their home village, and that's where Sufyan was heading.

On the way to Gedeeya, he remembered to buy a bag of Gat for him and Doshan. The green, leafy substance would help Sufyan recover from the jet lag after a long flight, and for Doshan the Gat would help him recover from his hangover. Two miles out from Gedeeya, Sufyan began splashing water on Doshan's face, while driving the Tacoma. After a few failed attempts, my father finally successfully woke him up.

“You up bitch!?”

“Yeah...and you pitch not me!”

“Listen, I don’t want my family to see you hungover, so I’m going to pull over on the main street. Wait for me here, okay.”

“Why you embarrassed of me?!”

“No Wallah, I just don’t want people talking bad about you, especially my family.”

That was a lie. My father was and is only worried about his reputation. Honor is my father’s Achilles’ heel. Sufyan has grown accustomed to lying over the past several years. My dad doesn’t lie to deceive or swindle, he merely lies to ease tensions and balance the universe, but of course this is the same pathological lie he has told me.

Doshan agrees to my father demands mostly due to the fact he knows the amount of pressure a father feels after migrating and feeling exiled. Doshan’s own kids and wives all have a dreadful relationship that has spawned into a hatred for one another. Doshan knows how it feels to fail as a father and a husband, so internally he is rooting for my father to win back Abraheem and Sumaya.

They finally arrive to the only road in Gedeeya. Sufyan jumps out of the driver’s seat. He carries one luggage with him and leaves the rest in the truck. As Sufyan is walking through this rural village he begins to reminisce through all the sights, smells, and sounds he once knew as a child. He sees the endless amount of Gat crops that are tirelessly draining the country’s water supply, he smells the heard of goats that are eating on a nearby grass valley, and he hears children popping fireworks for recreational purposes. SPLAT! During his nostalgic observations, Sufyan accidentally planted his foot in a puddle of saheel (sewage drainage). Gedeeya still doesn’t have a sewage system, so

most houses typically run off waist into the middle of the dirt road creating a gray muddy substance, which we call saheel. At this point, my father is embarrassed and disgusted. He finally remembers why he escaped this place. The lack of institutions ranging from proper schools and decent doctors to asphalt roads and stabilized electricity were all characteristics of Geddeeya that my father hated. For this reason, my father didn't plan on staying long. Also, he couldn't take too long because his driver was unpredictable and unreliable.

Sufyan finally arrives at the front door of his father's stone, clay home, and is quickly greeted with warm salutations from every father, mother, uncle, aunt, cousin, in-law, half-brother and half-sister. The last two people to greet him were his wife and son. My brother and mom were both startled by his appearance. Sufyan came bearing a black eye, a shitty foot, and an outfit that a Mudawieh (a religious muslim) would wear if he were from Saudi. All the pictures he has sent them didn't match the appearance of the man in front of them. Abraheem and Sumaya were used to Sufyan wearing a thick gold chain, aviators, loud colored clothing, and an afro with thick pork chop side burns. The man that stood in front of them today was a disheveled imposter. Every family member knew of this façade that Sufyan was putting on, but none of them made it apparent except for my brother and mother. Other family members were always looking for a donation from Sufyan, so they pampered him instead of peppering him with inquisitive questions that might be mistaken for an act of imposing. Not only was our family looking for financial compensation for their sincerity, but they were also genuinely proud of my

father. Sufyan was the first one from his family to successfully make it out of Gedeeya. Again, the term “success” is a very elusive term for us A-rabs, but originally success meant financially providing for one’s family, but now it has sporadically branched out or evolved to mean many different things.

After an hour of warm welcomes, opening gifts, and eating lunch, Sufyan announces to the twenty plus family members that he, his wife, and son must make haste and get on the road before sundown. The family members argue with my father back and forth insisting he must stay longer: hours, days, weeks, months, years. My father debates back to my family explaining that his driver is already waiting for him on the one main road in Gedeeya. My mother is already packed and has her luggage resting on the side of the front door. She has a gloomy look on her face that my father assumes is from her leaving her village, family, and home. On the contrary, my mother is ecstatic to leave Gedeeya and explore the new world with the love of her life. Her dejected feeling is attributed to her son’s whereabouts. My father, who is busy playing American guest with the rest of the family notices Sumaya’s distorted look. He tries to console her, but he quickly realizes the root of the problem is coming from Abraheem.

My brother was alone in his bedroom studying for upcoming finals. Abraheem had to walk ten miles every day to Makaan, which was the closest community with a decent school. Sufyan walked into his son’s bedroom and at that moment, my father thought proudly of my brother, who was studying vigorously even when he’s getting ready to leave his current school. Before my father sparked up conversation, he noticed his son’s room was decorated with everything he has ever given him in its original

packaging. Remote controlled RCs still in their original boxes collecting dust on a top shelf, leather jackets and sued shoes still in their original Macy's gift bag, expired Snickers bars were tucked aimlessly under his bed.

“He never opened anything.” My father whispered to himself.

After further examination, Sufyan noticed Abraheem was studying attentively as if he was taking his final exams here in the foreseeable future. He also noticed his son hasn't packed any of his bags.

“He's not coming.” My father gasped to himself.

Abraheem didn't leave with his mother and father because he wanted to stay and finish the third grade at the top of his class just like he did in prior years. My brother saw no point in starting the school year late in America. He thought to himself why not finish with strong grades in Yemen this school year and start off fresh at the beginning of the next school year in America. My father argued, pleaded and begged my brother to come with him, but there is no convincing Abraheem once he's made up his mind. I have experienced this first hand as his younger brother. My father's ego was obliterated by his nine year old son. Abraheem not accepting his dad's invitation to America baffled the entire village. People were left to think that Sufyan didn't raise his child properly, and that Abraheem was embarrassed of his father. None of Geedaya's gossip bothered my father. For the first time, my father didn't care about his honor, pride, ego, or family name. The only thing that my dad cared about at this time was Abraheem. Sufyan was genuinely hurt that his son didn't love him.

Finally, after a sorrowful goodbye, Sufyan left Gedeeya with his wife, but leaving his son behind. As they walk to the road, Sumaya explains to Sufyan that he is your son and he will forgive and forget. She goes on to explain that they will all be reunited a few months from now once Abraheem finishes school, but Sufyan wonders if this is true. Doshan obediently waited for Sufyan and Sumaya on the main road as they agreed upon. Sufyan's driver, Doshan, is kept busy by chewing Gat for hours. Sumaya was surprised by Doshan's appearance mainly because he has been banished from the Gedeeya community for quite some time. The three of them load up into the truck and hit the road. After not seeing Abraheem, Doshan notices my father's teary eyed face, and attempts to cheer him up by playing the only American cassette he has, Marvin Gaye's Greatest Hits.

"Father, father

We don't need to escalate

You see, war is not the answer

*For only love can conquer hate..."*²

The Sideshow

“Wazzup bruh, who got the drank?!” Citas shouted. He always gets into a frenzy around this time of night. I already bought the dro and the wraps, so one of these muthafuckas better buy the bottle! We are all underage, so we gotta buy the hen’ from the neighborhood A-rab, Sam, so all my friends load up into my Buick Skylark, which is now looking like a car full of amigos that just crossed the border, and headed to Sam’s. We finally make it to our destination, but not our final one of the evening. We enter the mecca of our hood, *Sam’s Store*. Sam is from Arabia or Pakistan or... some shit; I don’t know, but what I do know is that he’s from one of those terror threat level orange countries. With all seriousness, Sam is cooler than a polar bear’s toenail. He is always showing us love, letting us slide if we’re short, and informing us if dem’ boys are blurping. One could hear news that ranges from who got fucked up, to who got sucked up, to who got locked up, and finally to who got it on lock. Oh damn, I apologize for the town jargon, but it’s all true, you hear it all, and see it all at *Sam’s Store*.

We all walk up to the register and that’s when Citas points to a fifth of privilege behind the counter. Sam grabs it and proceeds to slam it down on the counter, but to Citas’ surprise he has no money to pay for the bottle. That’s when T-bird yells out to Citas, “You a j-cat!” Citas reluctantly replies, “Fuck you bruh! I forgot my wallet.” The boys begin to scuffle until Sam kicks us out of the store. The rest of my boys and I finally break up the fight.

T-bird is always the one calling out Citas on all his bullshit. I think it’s good to have that balance with any group of friends. Citas is a hothead and we need someone like

T-bird to check him when he is out of line. T-bird is a little bit more mature than the rest of us because he was held back for two years at Tech when he was a sophomore. After they finish brawling, we all get back into my car and head to the east. While driving, I try to diffuse the explosive tension between Citas and T-bird by yelling out: “Aye! can one of you girls start rolling up or are you bitches still on ya period!?” T-bird and Citas both respond with dead silence, but the rest of the gang responds with an outburst of obnoxious laughs and the iconic YEE’S. The resounding YEE’S are street callers, signifiers, or better yet when nobody has something important to say they yell out YEE!

We finally make it to the east and the night is still young just like us. It’s so early that the show hasn’t even started yet. We park in an empty and safe parking lot where T-bird, sitting shotgun, presumes to hand me a blunt the size of a baseball bat. While the rest of my boys roll up their windows, I spark the first one of the evening. My Buick quickly turns into a heavenly cloud. I relax and melt away into the driver’s seat. The roadblocks of my life quickly dissolve away: school, money, parents, and girls all disappear. I become numb to all the dysfunctional aspects of my life. I know I have to eventually come back to reality, so I focus and begin to roll the next one. While breaking down the dro I hand my last bag to Citas so he can roll it up as well. Minutes later, we’re in heavy rotation and my lungs begin to tighten. I kill the roach and announce that I need some air. Citas calls me a pussy for fucking up the rotation, T-bird joins me outside, and the rest of the gang responds with a monotone: “YEE.”

I ask T-bird, “You feel like walking up to *Giant Burger*?” T-bird responds with a classic “yeah, I aint trippin.” Out of all the people I kick it with, T-bird is the most

reserved. He never has much to say, but when he does decide to speak everybody shuts up and listens. As we glide down Macarthur, T-bird begins to preach. He becomes very judicious after one or two blunts.

“Listen bruh this is your first time driving at the show, so be coo tonight and don’t try to do too much when you at the show.” T-bird lectured with a very protective tone.

“Come on T-bird, I’m good. Everybody knows I got handles.”

“I know you got bars, but this is the show. It aint like doing figure 8’s on the block outside your house. Anyway bruh I know you good, I’m just seeing where yo head’s at.”

“Good looking, but for real I’m gonna be safe tonight. I got you.”

We both keep walking and talking. I don’t even realize that I’m still walking because I’m so mesmerized by what T-bird is preaching about. It’s like my legs are controlling themselves with such ease and grace; it feels like I’m moonwalking all the way to *Giant Burger*, and then an awkward pause occurs between us...

“Sooo... wazz up with Jasmine?” He asks me this while leaning in with his shoulder.

“I broke up with her, but now she’s talking about she got one on the way by me, but I aint never raw dogged her! She said the rubber must have busted because I was the only one fucking with her at the time. I don’t know what to do T-bird!”

“Listen bruh just calm down. Bitches be lying. She’s just testing you to see if you’ll come back to her. To keep it one hundred with you I don’t even think she’s pregnant, but if she is and it’s your kid just man up and take responsibility. I mean if you

aint mature enough to deal with the consequences of sex then maybe you shouldn't be fucking in the first place," T-bird states in a non-condescending tone.

"Yeah you right... Oh shit we here." I respond very passively because T-bird's advice doesn't fully resonate with me...yet.

"Look lil bruh these next couple years of your life are gonna determine what kind of man you're gonna be for the rest of your life. The shit is gonna get crazy and the earlier you decide on who you truly are then the easier your life is gonna be."

"I hear you big bruh," I say in a frustrated voice.

"I know you hear me, but are you listening?"

"Yeah! I got you bruh," I exclaim.

I quickly enter *Giant Burger* hoping to avoid this increasingly agitating and frustrating conversation. What we hate the most is being told what to do. As if we are inadequate of living life. Yes just living life, not surviving, not accomplishing, nor succeeding life, but merely living life. But somehow we always succumb to life. Wait what the fuck am I talking about? Damn, I must be high!

Ah yes, *Giant Burger*; we finally make it to our destination, but not our final one of the evening. I enter a domain of classic American cuisine: cheese burgers and French fries, but I am quickly greeted at the register by an Asian man with a name tag that reads "Phuong." I try to order my food, but he doesn't seem to understand the words that are coming out of my mouth. Soon I become frustrated and hungry, so I demand to make my order with another employee, but it doesn't help because the next employee is named "Ping." I start to make a scene inside the restaurant and T-bird looks at me with a slight

sense of disgust. I point at the number 2 meal on the menu while simultaneously holding up two fingers and yelling like a raging maniac: “LOOK HERE PINGPONG I WANT A N-U-M-B-E-R ...2!” The whole place erupts with laughter and I finally get my order through to the bing bings. Astonishingly, T-bird doesn’t order anything, but I make nothing of it. Unfortunately, T-bird makes something out of nothing. He claims that he doesn’t want to eat because he’s disgusted by my behavior. My little outburst with the Asians forced T-bird to lose his appetite and forced me to react like a child who is obviously in trouble. I give T-bird an innocent look and ask him: “what?” What’d I do?” Fuck! I just reignited his lecture from earlier and this damn conversation continues to derail me.

“Look bruh I’m tryin to get you on track and that little outburst of you showin out is the kind of shit that’s gonna kill you. It’ll be the death of you!” T-bird bellows.

“What! I was clownin them because they was fuckin up my order,” I say defensively.

“Aight but you aint gotta show out like that and make a big ass scene!”

“Maaan I was just tryin to get my point across and plus Citas made an even bigger scene last week here when he threw his burger at the manger because it wasn’t cooked well done.”

“Oh so now you wanna be like Citas, that’s what you’ve decided,” T-bird says in a worrisome voice.

“No that’s not what I’ve decided, bruh.”

In fact that was the last person I wanted to be like. Don't get me wrong I got love for Citas, but I would never imitate him. Citas is a hothead, which is a dangerous attribute to acquire when we're already burning in this melting pot of a town.

"Look bruh I don't mean to preach...just do you," T-bird says unconvincingly.

"Don't trip I got you, T-bird"

"Gechya self before you get me."

"Well fuck you then bruh," I say teasingly.

"Ok lil bruh."

T-bird laughs at my non-threatening act. I'm infected by T-bird's contagious laugh, so I chime in and we both laugh together on beat. I hear my number called on the intercom and then walk to the counter.

I finally get my food and proceed to sit down and eat. T-bird pulls out his SideKick and starts socializing. T-bird informs me of a party that's going down at San Jose State tonight and that we should all go, but I'm hesitant to agree. I'm comfortable in my own surroundings, my own environment, and my own... home. It's not like I never leave the town, but I'm the type of person that likes to look at every possible scenario and analyze every situation. Citas and the rest of the gang coming to San Hoe with us, isn't helping T-bird's case of persuading me to go. Once again Citas is a hothead and San Jose is a city drenched in kerosene. Our town burned years ago, so there is nothing left to ignite. Yes, sadly Citas is the type to attempt to burn the unburnable. As for the rest of the clique they're predictably passive. One minute they can be cool like the other side of the pillow and the next minute they can be hot like the underside of hell. The way the team

acts is determined by whoever persuades them the most. For this reason, I ignore T-bird's San Jose State request and focus on the burger at hand.

Two juicy, medium-rare, all beef patties stacked on top of each other. Two slices of fresh crisp pickles sit atop of two deli sliced bright red tomatoes. Chopped red onions grilled to perfection with a smell so potent it can melt your nose right off. A mountain of fresh, crisp lettuce, blanketed with a slice of cheddar cheese. Finally, this melee of tasty goodness is drowning in a red sea of ketchup. The fries, golden straws, salted to perfec-- "Bruh!" I'm immediately interrupted by T-bird. He proceeds to go on a rant, "What the fuck! Are we going? Or am I just gonna have to watch you make love to your food all night?" We both laugh and then I reluctantly agree to go to the San Jose State party. T-bird has this power over me and a lot of other people. He's not intimidating. He just knows how to butter people up. He's social when he wants to be, when he has something significant to say or when he desires something or someone. I'm still not fully convinced about going to the party because I'm going to be rolling around in downtown San Jose in a scraper on 22's filled with hotheads.

"T," I call him "T" for short only when I'm trying persuade him about something and in this case I'm trying to convince him San Hoe is a bad idea, "you know San Jose got some asshole cops and they gonna fuck with us any chance they get." He sighs, pauses, and then collects his thoughts before telling me:

"Look bruh, we aint gonna do nothing hot I'll keep the boys in check. We aint gonna have no drank in the car, so you can't get a DUI. We just gonna go to the party for a few hours and then come back to the town in time for the show."

“But T--” I’m quickly interrupted again by T-bird.

“Jasmine is gonna be there.”

He knows what buttons to push. He knows I haven’t talked to her in weeks. He knows she’s my kryptonite. T-bird tells me that Gabby, Jasmine’s cousin, is throwing the party at her dorm. I need closure with my girl, so I finally agree to go. I finish devouring my food then I get up and announce to T-bird:

“OK... You asshole let’s go!”

T-bird smiles with a devilish grin and enthusiastically says:

“Let’s gooo!”

The time is now 11:00PM it’s been an hour since we smoked. My high is starting to come down, so we have to get some more dro before leaving the town. I only smoke grapes and since we have no real connects in San Jose, I might be stuck buying boo-boo from some bootsy ass college j-cat.

Once again my apologies for another one of my town tangents; oh dear I must’ve lost you at hello. Now that I think about it... did I even say hello? I’m sincerely sorry that I have provided no formal introduction or invitation for that matter. But honestly who sends out an invitation to the land of the lost? Yes of course I want The Universe to understand my universe, but only in an authentic spoon fed matter and not in a way where my culture is artificially crammed down one’s throat. Wait who the fuck is I talking to?! I guess I’m still high as fuck!

We leave *Giant Burger* and rendezvous back with the rest of the boys at my car. I find Citas sitting in the driver’s seat persuading some fellatio performing females to work

for free and the rest of the squad are crouched outside the car shooting dice. Ah yes the youth idly at work. I quickly reign on their parade by ordering the chicken heads to go back to their coupe. I'm on a mission. I push Citas from the driver's seat to the passenger seat and rev up the engine before peeling out. We still need to re-up on dro, so I head to the taco truck on 23rd and link up with Diaz, but everybody calls him D-boy. D-boy is the man; he's an icon in the hood. The measurement for our heroes today are the weight of how much weight one moves plus: money, drugs, bitches, guns, and whips; henceforth all this weight is put on our shoulders. This same distorted measuring rod is not the same one once used for Huey and Bobby because back then they were men and today we are merely boys! Wait what the fuck am I thinking? I need some more dro in my system, so I pull up to the taco truck where Diaz works at and purchase a dub bag.

The transaction was short and sweet with very little dialogue, which is normal, but I look at Diaz before leaving and he looks back at me with a troublesome look as if he wants me to ask him for help. I think to myself what the fuck is he looking so vexed for? He has everything: money, cars, and women. Everybody loves D-boy here and they would do anything to be in his position. I don't make too much out of D-boy's disturbed look I just proceed with the transaction as usual and depart from him.

Now we're cruising down the 880 and getting in our party mode. I'm rolling up while driving, Citas is bragging to everyone about how he is going to get the most pearl, T-bird is in the back rolling up another blunt, and the rest of the gang are all going dumb and singing in sync to Gucci Mane's latest hit, "Big Cat Laflare." The squad recites loudly at the top of their lungs:

“YOU FUCK WITH ME YOU FUCK WITH THEM

YOU FUCK WITH THEM YOU STUCK WITH ME

BIG CAT LAFLARE

WE DON'T FIGHT FAIR

*BIG CAT LAFLARE NA WE DON'T FIGHT FAIR.”*³

I finally finish my work of art and begin to ignite. I hog the blunt until I'm half way through before passing it in rotation. I bought the dro... these muthafuckas are always getting a free high and a free ride off me so I guess me handing them the end of the blunt is the ends justifying the means...whatever that means.

Hot boxing on the freeway isn't half as risky as boxing in Downtown San Jose, so I quickly roll down the windows before exiting off the freeway. Citas is outraged and he starts bitching about how I fucked up the rotation twice tonight. He doesn't understand that we aren't in the town anymore and that San Jose police don't fuck around. This is and will be the downfall of Citas, which is that he's too brash and irrational to view any situation logically. This is the plague that is killing my youth...ignorance...lack of knowledge, but once we as individuals can equip the knowledge we learn from the town and acquire it to the rest of our life outside of the town then that's when the glass ceiling brakes and the sky is the limit. The knowledge we gain here is only useful outside the town because if we remain here then we are merely pawns to an elaborate trap, so we must escape the trap like Sonny and his brother otherwise we remain stuck with the blues. Damn! There I go again. What's wrong with me?

³ Gucci Mane. "Big Cat (Laflare)." *Hard to Kill*, Big Cat Records, 2006.

Finally after all my deep reflective thinking, we make it to Gabby's dorm. It was like my mental script was missing a few scenes because one minute I'm exiting the freeway and the next minute were knocking on Gabby's door. I make nothing of it and enter the party like the rest of my goons. Instantaneously we own the party. T-bird is in the corner of the living room with 5 dimes. Citas is at the kitchen drinking like a pirate and bragging to all the naïve San Jose testosterone driven boys about how he shot 50 men. Citas has never killed anyone or let alone operated a firearm. I start cutting it up on the dance floor with the rest of my boys. All of a sudden I stop and realize why I came here in the first place. I scope around the whole dorm, but I fail in locating Jasmine. I grow agitated and refuse to dance for the rest of the evening. Later on at the party I catch T-bird exiting Gabby's bedroom, that's when I forcefully back him into a corner and say: "You bullshiting cuz. If you wanted to come all the way out here for some pearl that's fine, but you aint gotta lie about Jasmine saying she gonna be here!" T-bird simply points out to the balcony. And there she is...Jasmine. I turn back around and quickly try to apologize to T-bird, but he cuts me off before I'm able to verbalize my words and tells me: "It's all good bruh. Go handle yo business." He nods and proceeds to finish handling his business in Gabby's bedroom. I'm walking slowly towards the balcony because I'm contemplating in my head what to say to her and I'm also thinking how the hell did she sneak by me because I checked every inch of this god dam dorm, but somehow I missed her or maybe she walked in when I was drunk off rage. All that doesn't matter, what matters now is that she's right here 10 feet away from me. 'She's drinking?!' I say to myself and that's when I grow even more intoxicated with rage. In fact I become a

belligerent drunk off rage. But I'm quickly relieved after the anger dissolves away and rationality begins to settle in. Thank God she's not pregnant because I'm not ready to raise a kid, shit I'm a kid myself. The emotional roller coaster finally stops at sadness. I'm truly hurt. Why would Jasmine lie to me, why would she scare me like that? I need an answer. I'm suddenly right in front of her grill. We both stare blankly at each other and then she begins to smile. Tripping off her own guilt she begins to confess and apologize:

"Look, obviously I'm not pregnant." She says this while chugging down a shot of *Alize*. "I wanted to tell you the truth face to face this week on spring break. I was actually headed home tonight right after Gabby's party. I lied about the pregnancy and I'm sorry for lying."

"Yeah you sorry alright."

"Listen little boy. I aint one of these hood-rats that you could just use and abuse."

"Who called you a hood-rat?"

"Your actions did. Your behavior did. The way you treated me was wrong."

"I never lied to you though Jazz." I call her Jazz whenever I plead with her.

"Yeah you right lil' boy you never lied to me, but you were never faithful to me either. Just because you were honest with me about fuckin' all those nasty ass bitches don't make it right!"

"So how can I make it right?"

"Stop cheating on me stupid ass! Stop hanging around yo fake ass gangbangin' friends! Stop being a little ass boy and grow the fuck up!"

“Watch ya mouth Jazz.” Luckily we’re still alone on the balcony, so none of my friends are present while Jasmine is castrating me to death. Good thing too because I would’ve been roasted by my patnas’ for days.

“I’m sorry again. That was uncalled for. It’s just sometimes you bring out the worst in me and I don’t think that’s healthy for either one of us. I’m afraid that we’re just drifting further apart, especially now that I’m attending San Jose State and you’re still back at home finishing up your senior year.”

“So what are you saying Jazz?”

Before she can even semantically cement her sorrowful saying, someone yells: “FIGHT!” Immediately I know at least one of my boys are involved in the fight. I swiftly depart from Jasmine on the balcony and she gives me a look that lets me know that this is the type of shit that fucked up our relationship; actin hella hyphy, rollin around with hotheads who all eternally stand for nothing, but fall for anything. My look of rebuttal is honest guilt, as if to say yes this is who I am, but I hone or own up to this life. My facial expression lets Jasmine know that the only thing I’m guilty of is being myself, so accept it and respect it. Once again, the lack of communication kills any type of real love in my community. We are taught to say less and not express ourselves, which incase ruins relationships. Jasmine and I both agree non-verbally that this will probably be the last time we see each other. I guess nothing is meant to withstand the test of time, especially products of the town.

I’m in the midst of the fight, I quickly realize that Citas is the root of the problem, but my boys and I don’t care if he started it as long as we finish it. There were two guys

jumping on Citas, I grab the one hanging off the back of Citas' neck and T-bird grabs the other one jabbing at Citas' gut. The rest of the gang swarms in on the two poor corporates, we then stomp them all out like we all each have 20 legs. "R.A.!" someone yells in the distance. The whole party scatters and the R.A. as well as campus police are trying to detain everyone. I see Jazmine from a distance, but she's lost in the shuffle of the crowd. I can make out a look on her face that lets me know our relationship is over. She was shaking her head and lip-synching the word "no" over and over. I look back at her while throwing my hands up in agreement. My amusement park of emotions are now in full swing: disappointment spins my head right off, hurt is a gluttony of poison that my stomach is already full of, and anger cuts my already shredded heart into a thousand more pieces.

After I disperse from Jasmine and the rest of the crowd, and I disburse my emotions, I finally link up with the gang at my car. I look at Citas in disgust. We load up in my car like a 100 round drum and automatically head back to the town, but before we hit the freeway I see flashing blue and red lights in my rearview mirror. We're pulled over by San Jose police. My worst nightmare has come true. Paranoia from the eighth of dro I've smoked tonight sets in. I'm high, my whip is about to be towed, they probably been on us since the party, I'm goin to jail are all the thoughts that are racing through my head. T-bird looks at me and notices my anxiety. T-bird tells me to relax and says, "Bruh it's probably nothing major, they probably don't even know about the party. Watch it's just a random bullshit search, just don't trip, and give them nothing to trip off of."

“License and registration,” Officer Dick says piercingly. I hand him both, but he doesn’t seem to notice my registration is expired.

“Oh it looks like this guy is from Oakland,” Officer A. Hole states sarcastically.

Officer Dick begins the emasculating process: “Young man, are you on parole or probation?” He says bi-curiously.

“No,” I say firmly.

He continues: “Have you ever been convicted of a violent or drug related crime in the last year?” T-bird was right they don’t have a clue about our fight back at the party. This is just a random bullshit search. Fuck! Ok I have to be cool and follow protocol.

“No,” I say sternly

Officer A. Hole chimes in: “This car is way too packed. You guys aren’t even wearing your seatbelt!”

“Write them up!” Officer Dick says proudly.

“Ok everybody out of the car with your hands up! I need everybody lined up sitting down on this curve holding out your ID in your left hand.” Officer A. Hole exclaims in disgust. Before Citas gets out I notice him discreetly slipping something under my driver’s seat.

Officer Dick tries to ease the nervous tension by saying, “listen kid, as soon as my partner is done searching your car and friends you’re free to go. I mean as long as you don’t have 20 pounds of marijuana in your car because I can smell the bammer weed on all you potheads.”

“Bingo! an 8-ball of coke, so you think you motherfuckers can start trouble in my city?!” Officer A. Hole instinctively says.

Officer Dick is the voice of unfair reason: “Ok kid, start singing. Whose is it? Because if you and all your homeboys give me that snitches get stiches bullshit then only you’re taking the fall. Yup the coke was found under your seat.”

“I don’t know where that coke came from, you pigs probably planted it there,” I mistakenly project. Damn! It was over. After my pig line I knew somebody was going to the morgue or prison tonight.

Officer Dick erupts: “You miserable little fuck! I’ve been an officer here in the great city of San Jose before you were even shitting in your diapers!” At this point we’re all in handcuffs and that’s when both of the officers slam me on the hood of their car. And read me my Miranda rights.

“It’s mine you pig faced faggots. The coke is mine,” T-Bird reveals.

The officers throw me on the ground and stampede noble and admirable T-bird. They arrest T-bird and let the rest of us go.

When we’re in the car driving back home I confront Citas about the coke, but he denies it. I had seen that son of bitch slip something under my seat, but he won’t fess up. Fuck! Here comes the anger crawling up my spine. I need to do something to contain it otherwise I’m going to kill Citas right now. Suddenly, the rest of the gang starts asking me if we’re still going to the show because the time is now 2:00AM. Something comes over me and I want to blow off some steam, so I adhere to their sideshow request. I don’t know why, but it seems like whenever I’m waist deep in trouble I tend to drown myself

quicker by submerging my head. Remember folks I am attempting to humanize a very dehumanizing society, a society where anger is the only emotion a man can show. I want to cry for T-bird, but I can't, so I yell at Citas. The dehumanization process in the town starts with emotions. For instance, if I'm incapable of showing my true emotions appropriately then I truly am less than human...wait am I rambling to myself again?! God damn it I need some mo dro, I'm becoming delirious. Once we finally reach the town, Citas lets me know we're out of trees, so I stop by Malcolm's house to re-up. Malcolm doesn't have the best trees, but he lives next door to Jasmine and I'm curious to see if she was telling the truth about going home tonight. More importantly, I want to see if she made it home safely. Citas warns me not to go, saying: "Na Blud we can't go there. I'm beefin with Malcolm, so he might wet up your ride if he sees me in it with you. Matter of fact, bruh stop by my hut. I gotta pick somethin up real quick." For some reason I oblige to Citas' request. Fuck! Jasmine is right there down the street. I can almost see her house, but I'm not allowed to go there freely when I'm with Citas anymore. Perhaps never by myself too because Malcolm knows I kick it with Citas tough. Yes in the land of hate we inherit feuds blindly similar to the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud. I digress once again. The night is repeatedly young and so are we; therefore we head back to Diaz, since it's already on the way to the show. Once again, Diaz has a disturbed look on his face during our second transaction of the night. And once again nobody puts anything down on the dro. T-bird would have dropped something, unlike these damn vultures!

We finally make it the show, ah yes the sideshow our destination of the evening, but not our final one. We hit Bancroft doing 80 on the opposite side of the road like the

rest of the cars in the hyphy train line. Doughnuts and figure 8's shortly proceed, followed by the smell of burnt Pirelli tires. Sounds systems start slappin' from almost every car, which causes all the license plates to start rattling. Damn, it seems like everybody has two 15's in their trunk, including me. Every scraper is draped in candy paint and sitting on dubs. It seems like everyone's mobbbin or yokin some kind of whip tonight, and each car is filled with dread heads and hotheads banging their turf:

“SHADY’S...500...THE VILL...MURDER DUBS...GHOST TOWN...900...”

Everybody at the show is either thizzed out, smoked out, pissy drunk, or all three. This is what I needed, yes, theater at its best.

The show takes a brief intermission at Seminary Gas, and that's where I spot a beautiful girl that reminds me of Jasmine. She has long black hair that's smooth like silk, she has vibrant butter pecan skin, and she has awe striking eyes that are shining like rubies. “Clear out!” someone yells. The show is starting up again, but the cars are all stuck in traffic at the exit of Seminary Gas. That's when Citas reaches into the trunk of my car to get out his toy he picked up from his house, which will apparently break up the crowd faster. I'm not even aware of what Citas is doing because my eyes are still glued on this mysterious girl. I'm truly sprung.

BRAAP!! BRAAP!! BRAAP!! BRAAP!! A melee of bullets is sprayed into the air. The crowd of cars disassembles and the beautiful girl that reminds of Jasmine is left lying in her own puddle of blood. Citas and the rest of the gang are all in the car waiting for me in a rushed panic. I don't intend to aid the girl instead I leave with my friends and drive off. Could Citas be guilty of such a monstrosity? His look of anxiety answers my

question. I quickly drop off the gang at *Sam's Store*, which is now closing. I tell the gang I'm going to take Citas home. I inform Citas to lay low for a while because the boys are going to be out looking for a suspect and as for the rest of the dialogue which ensues...well it isn't relevant to the point I'm trying to make. I refuse to entertain with pain. There is no point to highlight certain flaws if there is no way to correct those flaws, basically there's no need to present a problem without providing a solution for that problem.

The whole car ride home I yell at Citas and he subjects himself to all of my cruel venomous verbal attacks. He doesn't get mad because he knows he's wrong, instead he grows numb. He looks at me and his face turns to stone. Citas is bitter at who he's become. The identity which he has lastly chosen is a malicious and careless person. It's too late; Citas has finally chosen to be vindictive versus being virtuous. No matter what I say, Citas will not have a change of heart because his heart is finally no more. I criticize him to the core, but there is no use now, but I still begin to lecture him while I'm pulling up to his driveway. He starts to take some of my advice into consideration, especially since some of it might save his life. Finally before he exits my car I tell him one last thing: "Citas you aint shit!" He looks back at me broken and although I don't break a smile I feel happy that I finally cracked his hard ignorant shell that has been protecting him from reality.

I drop Citas off and head home, which is the final destination of the evening, but something happens to me while I'm driving home by myself, a salty liquid discharge begins to drizzle down from both of my eyelids...tears! I'm crying, but I don't know

why. Am I guilty tripping myself for making Citas feel worse than shit? Or is it the death of that mysterious girl? Or did she survive? It must be T-bird and him falsely going to prison. No, maybe it's Jasmine? These are all questions I ask myself before entering my house. I enter through the backdoor, so my mama doesn't know I'm coming home late again. I become preoccupied with the teen ritual of sneaking pass the standard parental security system. The mission of making it to my room without being detected keeps me absentminded about everything that has happened tonight. I forget about the drama filled night until I lie in my bed. The darkness of my room swallows me like a black hole. It feels like I'm falling. Then suddenly, I begin to remember everything that happened tonight scene for scene. I remember Citas, the girl, T-bird, and Jasmine most of all. I begin to weep. I cry until it physically hurts me. My breathing becomes erratic; my throat seems to have something caught in it because I can't even swallow my own saliva, and my stomach! Oh my stomach feels like it's upside down and inside out. Then the crying suddenly stops and the gift of logic settles in.