

Yellow on the Outside **Shame** on the Inside



A⁺



**Asian
Culture
Revealed**

by anson chi



Why do Asians *really* get straight A's? Why do Asians *really* become doctors and lawyers? Many people believe that the reason has to do with the pressure to perform and the pressure to conform, however, it goes much deeper than that—much, much deeper! This tell-all, didactic novel reveals the truth about Asian culture, which will shock you to the marrow of your bones and open a hidden world of long-guarded secrets.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anson Chi, born and raised in New York City, is an author, retired engineer, ex-politician, former model, transgressor, and truthmonger. His novel (1st edition), *Yellow on the Outside, Shame on the Inside: Asian Culture Revealed*, has been well-received internationally. He currently

lives wherever you want him to live. (What does that even mean?)

Yellow on the Outside,
Shame on the Inside:
Asian Culture Revealed

Anson Chi

Yellow on the Outside, Shame on the Inside: Asian Culture Revealed
2011 Edition - Published by Truthmonger Books

Copyright © 2008-2011 by Anson Chi. All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.

Any part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, disseminated or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, scanning, uploading via the Internet, or by any information storage and retrieval system; in other words, share and spread this book like hotcakes! Knowledge is a right of the people.

United States Constitution - The First Amendment

"...no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

All parts of this book are done by Anson Chi.

Website: <http://ansonchi.webng.com/>

For questions or comments, please contact ronpauler@gmail.com

THANKS TO:

You, the reader

(Bands that kept me focused while writing, in no particular order)

Warsaw · Joy Division · New Order

The Stooges

The Velvet Underground

Belle & Sebastian

Interpol

The Verve · Richard Ashcroft

The Smiths · Steven Patrick Morrissey

The Cure

And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead

Many, many more...

.

.

.

A NOTE TO THE READER

I don't usually like to write an introduction—any introduction, including a note to the reader—since we all want to get to the nitty-gritty, but suffices to say, this note is important or else I wouldn't have written it.

This didactic novel is based on Asian culture, specifically East Asian culture which includes the following subcultures: Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, Chinese, Filipino, etc. This novel is *not* based on the Asian culture of Russia, Tajikistan, India, or even Iraq—which are all countries in the continent of Asia. I must state this distinction of clarification so that there's no confusion in regards to the ethnicities and racial heritages mentioned in this novel.

Moreover, the philosophy of this novel targets Asians in general, *not* specific. When I say Asians overachieve to get straight A's, for instance, I'm not saying every Asian specifically—I'm saying Asians *in general*. I must state this distinction of clarification so that there's no “but there's the exception of...” since there are always exceptions to every rule.

Furthermore, the information in this book is not intended to offend; it is intended to change. Please finish reading this book before formulating any prejudices, in order to acquire the full grasp of my message.

All in all, this novel is based somewhat on my life but mostly on the lives of others, specifically the experiences, the austere upbringing of the characters, the opinions, the philosophies, the principles, the tenets, and the events—some of them true, even the characters, though I have disguised all their names. Of course, not everything is true because this is a novel after all, thus, you can't sue me; not that you would anyway.

So without further ado, please enjoy the journey from the gospels of a former Asian.

Outset

1

Doctor or lawyer—my only two options. These would be your only two options if you have Asian parents. You would think that you would be able to pick your own career, since you know, it is your own damn life. But not when you have Asian parents. So my only two options: doctor or lawyer. I wonder if my parents even know why I should become a doctor or a lawyer. Is it because doctors save lives and lawyers protect the innocent? I bet they didn't know that doctors these days are only trained in surgery and prescribing medicine and pretty much nothing else; doctors don't know anything about proven alternative medicine, homeopathic remedies, chiropractic therapy, acupuncture, yet they make all the big bucks. And they're treated like gods because they supposedly know it all, even though they haven't cured one disease since what—smallpox? As a matter of fact, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, even acne is on the rise and more prevalent than ever before! Shouldn't these reputable, knowledgeable doctors, with such advanced medical technology, know why there are so many new diseases? And why is there nothing being cured today, not the common cold, not even polio? Maybe it really is all about the money since doctors make big bucks on the sick and dying but not a penny once you're cured. Because once you're cured, you're no longer a customer—I mean patient; I guess the medical profession isn't all that benevolent or caring.

Perhaps I should consider becoming a lawyer; after all, it is my only other choice. I could go to law school and graduate magna cum laude, then my parents would be really proud of their only son. Besides, attorneys work really hard to protect the innocent—or do they? I read in the paper about how a group of lawyers filed motions against DNA testing for prison inmates sentenced before 1970, because many of them would have been found innocent, if they were indeed tested. And if they were found innocent, it would obviously be catastrophic for those insidious lawyers; money over morals, I suppose. Now, I'm not exactly Mother Theresa or the Dalai Lama, but I'd like to be able to sleep at night knowing that I didn't put someone innocent in jail for the rest of his or her life. And besides, they do have lawyer jokes for a reason. My personal favorite: “What's the difference between a lawyer and a gigolo? A gigolo only screws one person at a time!”—hilarious!

So I guess my parents want me to become a doctor or a lawyer for completely different reasons, other than what's important, like saving lives or protecting the innocent from an unjust, inequitable system; reasons being money and status, which of course, lead to power. My parents really want my little sister Jordan and me to become doctors—or lawyers if we couldn't hack it in medical school—just so we can make lots of money and then they can brag to all of their friends. I really can't think of any other reasons, since third place on the totem pole of Asian career options is engineering, and there's nothing moral or ethical about being an engineer; only the paycheck matters, so in the end, it all boils down to money.

So since it's really all about money, I guess I might as well become a prostitute, because I'll make just as much as any lawyer, and both professions are just as equally immoral. Plus, I won't have to put up with going to class anymore and I'll save my parents so much money; it's a win-win situation for everyone. Too bad Asian guys have small you-know-what, down you-know-where, so prostitution is out of the question. Of course, I'm just joking about becoming a prostitute, but I really may not be joking if I don't get into medical school.

Between you and me, what I really aspire to be—ever since I was a wee laddie born and raised in Irvine, California—is a writer. I remember telling Mommy that I wanted to become a writer, inspired by scores of the greats: Chaucer, Hemingway, Joyce, Faulkner, Ellison, Orwell, Gaiman, among many, many others. But she gave me a look, with harsh, derisive eyes, and shouted, “Write? What you write? Bullshit? Stupid boy!”—that pretty much ended my never-got-up-and-running career as a writer.

Well, I guess I'm done with my diatribe. I tend to digress inexorably whenever I have to sit here at the library waiting for Jordan to get done with her studying and her research. I don't even know why she uses the UCI (University of California, Irvine) library, since she goes to Stanford University, for crying out loud. Jordan should stay at Stanford, even on the weekends and not have me take her around everywhere. Just because I wasn't smart enough to get into Stanford doesn't mean I have to be her personal chauffeur.

Instead, my little sister decides to come to my school and take up my time. And she constantly reminds me of how she got a full scholarship to attend Stanford—big deal! It's not like UCI is deplorable by any means—not that it's all that great either. Everyone knows that it's the school to settle for if you can't make it to any of the Ivy League schools. And you're always reminded of how you didn't make it, especially when you drive to UCI on Harvard Avenue, which passes Stanford, Oxford, and Columbia Court Apartments and runs through the

prestigious streets: Cornell, Columbia, Berkeley, and last but not least, Yale Avenue. I guess they're telling us that UCI is just as good as any of the Ivy League schools. Somehow, I don't think street names and apartment courts are going to measure up to that standard. I would have gone anywhere else other than UCI, but I didn't have a choice in the matter since my parents are paying for my college tuition. My parents love the idea of me attending college here in Irvine because it means that I have to live at home, which means that they have absolute, tyrannical control over every little detail of my life—the dream of every Asian parent.

So Jordan goes to Stanford while I settle for UCI. She was always Mommy and Daddy's pride and joy, the wunderkind of our family. Mommy would always say to me, in her FOB—Fresh Off the Boat—broken English: “Johnson! Why you can't be more like Jordan? She very smart and always the best at everything.” Daddy would then add, in his much more FOB, broken English: “Johnson! We don't want just do your best. We want you be best. You first in family to go college. You need make us proud.” Asians here in America would call Asian foreigners FOBs because of their thick and heavy accent, as if they really just got off the boat from Asia. FOB is quite derogatory, needless to say.

Whenever my parents would scold and yell at me, I would drift off into reverie and think about Emilie Lee, the most beautiful girl who I've ever laid my eyes on. I've known her since middle school—okay, the truth is that I don't *really* know her, but I've been in almost every class with her. Let me tell you that she's absolutely stunning in every way: tall, thin, and statuesque. Her eyes are wide but nicely shaped and deep-set with a gleam of chestnut. And her hair—oh my god, her hair—like pure, fine silk matted in black velvet. I can't believe I sound just like a damn romance novel! And she has the most radiantly clear, lightly sun-tanned face that makes her ivory teeth shine so luminously. But it's her insatiably full, lush lips, turned down slightly at the corners, that speak her most resounding feature—well actually, her most resounding feature is her ass. And if you must know, most Asian girls have an ass that's flat like a brick wall with breasts to match. But Emilie totally defies the natural laws of Asian genetics by having abounding, voluptuous breasts and a captivating lower exterior. It's a good thing that she didn't make it to any of the Ivy League schools, or else I wouldn't have the absolute pleasure of staring at her in class. And it's also a good thing that she was forced with the proverbial two options of “doctor or lawyer”—just like me—so that we ended up taking the same pre-med biology classes for our final year here at UCI.

“Are you daydreaming again?” Jordan asks, sneaking up from behind in order to

startle me on purpose. She loves to catch me daydreaming, especially when I'm sitting at a table near lots of people, so that I'm embarrassed as hell.

“No...just thinking,” I reply apathetically.

“Well, we've been here all morning. Have you gotten anything done?” Jordan asks, with a more patronizing tone this time.

“Time flies when you're thinking hard.”

“Whatever. We have to get back home. Mommy and Daddy are waiting for us.”

On our drive back home, I notice the natural—or rather contrived—scenery of Irvine. You'd be surprised at how untarnished and strictly parallel the roads are, with concrete walls along the sides of these roads holding factitious vines and descending sidewalks neatly paved with erect signs posting the words: No Parking At All Times. The City of Irvine doesn't like parked cars because they taint the perfect, suburban atmosphere. Even the trees are in on it, perfectly aligned as if they're bowling pins set in an array of rows. But you never notice these things, especially when they become a part of your everyday life—like the copious number of exact-styled homes with impeccably cut, green lawns, surrounded by spaciouly rectangular gardens of every flower of every color. I just happen to notice these things this time around because I really don't want to talk to Jordan. Besides, she's humming this rather nettlesome tune while I'm driving. She always has a surreptitious way of annoying me even when she's not trying. I can't decide if Jordan is the greatest bane of my life or my greatest envy.

2

As I pull into the garage, Jordan hastily reaches into the backseat for her mountain of books. It's obvious that she plans to walk into the house to present herself as a studious, diligent daughter, while I walk in empty-handed like a forlorn beggar on a rainy day. We get inside, and I immediately notice a myriad of new MCAT preparation books on the living room table, obviously driving the point home even further that my future career is completely controlled by my despotic parents and not by me—thanks, Mommy and Daddy!

“Johnson. Why you have no books?” Mommy inquires, with a dour and inquisitive look. “You no study?”

“Jordan studied hard for the both of us. I'll just live with her when she becomes a rich, successful doctor.”

“Don't make jokes. I want you study hard. You need make us proud,” Mommy scolds with affirmation.

“Yes, Mommy...I'll study hard so I can be a good doctor,” I reply apathetically.

I quickly scurry to my room, before she fires a fusillade of other potshots. I can sum up why Mommy and Daddy are the way that they are with one, single word: culture. Mommy and Daddy are from the old country; and their parents grew up in the old country; and their parents grew up in the same, old country. All of them pretty much grew up with the same antiquated ideology of culture, a culture based on austerity. Therefore, my parents are very stern and stubborn in their ways, more so than normal parents, if there is such a thing as normal parents.

Mommy and Daddy both grew up in a destitute village and had to work very hard to come to America, or so they would say. Mommy and Daddy always lecture me on how they've sacrificed so much to come here to America, for opportunity and success. I wonder if they've ever considered coming to America for freedom, since it's the land of the free and the home of the brave. Then again, with all the dumbing down these days, America's become the land of the sheep and the home of the slaves. But I just find it rather interesting that they didn't come

to America for the freedom of religion; or for the freedom of speech; or for the freedom of assembly; or for the freedom of *anything*. In fact, I've never met an Asian parent that's ever mentioned coming to America for freedom, liberty, or patriotism. I've only heard Asian parents mention opportunity and success—opportunity to make lots of money, their credence for success. It's quite obvious that they came to America just to make money, since in the end, it's *always* about the money.

Basically, the truth is that Asians would never move to America, if there were no opportunities to make lots of money. The sole purpose of their lives is to “follow the money.” This posit—a word in which no normal person would know unless he or she's been forced to suffer countless hours of after-school SAT classes—is the first of what I call my Asian Pride Theorems, starting with money, then status, and finally, power.

With just my three simple Asian Pride Theorems, I can reveal all the truths about Asian culture—whether it's Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Thai, etc.—and all the reasons why Asians do the things that they do. First, Asians are obsessed with money and will do anything to get it. Second, money is conducive to the status that Asians seek, hence “doctor or lawyer.” Third and uppermost, Asians want power: the power to control, the power to influence, the power to persuade, the power from attention, the power over relationships—these “personal powers” do not seem like a big deal (since they're not exactly big powers like governmental or corporate power) but trust me when I say that they're everything to Asians. I know that it's hard to believe what I'm saying, that smart, straight-A, hardworking Asians can be so devious and diabolical. But just give me a chance with this backstage pass to my life and you can see everything for yourself.

Anyway, what's even worse is that my parents changed their religion from Buddhism to Christianity, just so that they could fit in with our church-obsessed neighbors—talk about selling out! Their explanation is that they're minorities and need to do whatever it takes to get ahead, including switching religions; regardless, I know they sold out.

Speaking of minorities, the majority of people here in California are actually comprised of minorities, not Caucasian. And as everyone knows, Native Americans were here first when they massively outnumbered early European settlers, so technically, Caucasians were minorities—even by virtue of blood. The vast majority of Caucasians in America have mixed blood: Jewish blood, Spanish blood, Native American blood, and even African blood. Also, don't you find it ironic that the word Asian is *mixed* into the word, *Caucasian*? Summarily, by

virtue of blood, Caucasians are minorities just like the rest of us. But since there has to be a class of elites and a class of peons, I guess we'll have to be the minorities—even though Caucasians were here *second* just like the rest of us. And since we're the minorities, we've been emblematically segregated as Asian Americans, African Americans, and even Jewish Americans, but the strange thing is that I've never heard of Caucasian Americans. More importantly, why can't we all just be called Americans, since all of us are, after all, *Americans*?

My parents wouldn't care, though, since they only care about money, status, and power—big surprise! I remember last summer when my parents purchased a new BMW 550i, because the outdated BMW 3 series that we had was exactly that—outdated. They explained that we, as a family, needed to “keep up” with the rest of the residents in our neighborhood, in order to stay competitive. If that isn't a good enough reason to buy a 550i, I don't know what is—I love sarcasm.

So let's say that we really are competing with our neighbors and the rest of the residents in Irvine. Who set up the competition then? Who are all the contestants? Do they even know what they're competing for? Oh, that's right: status, the second of my Asian Pride Theorems. They're competing to see who is on top of the “suburban food chain.” Let's say, hypothetically, that my family's on top. Now what? Do we get a trophy? Do we get a lifetime supply of ass-kissing from other Irvine residents? We don't get crap. Actually, what we get—unknownst to my parents—is people talking behind our backs and people spreading gossip. I'm sure they're all saying, “Look at Johnson's family buying that BMW 550i, trying to show us up.”

I often wonder what would happen to all these pretentiously arrogant people here in Irvine, if—or actually when—the big earthquake comes; it can happen at anytime since all of California is on a goddamn fault line. Then their opulent homes, expensive cars, and every precious, material possession would be lost at a moment's whim; would they still be “on top” then? These pretentiously arrogant people are just like everyone else. They have to put on a pair of pants, one leg at a time, just like everyone else; they have to take the same nasty shit in the toilet, just like everyone else. The only difference is that they have an extra electronic digit in their bank account—whoop-de-do! I don't see why it's so special to be “on top.”

Also, I find it rather ironic that we had to buy our vainglorious BMW 550i from a dealer, so in essence, the dealer would be “on top”; but then the dealer had to get his line of BMW's from the person who owns all of BMW; then the person who owns all of BMW is required to

pay taxes, fees, and other expenses to another person “on top.” So even if you go to the very top—say for example, the king—it's still not the top. How many kings have fallen throughout the history of human civilization? Last I checked, kings—and queens—of our current day and age, only have purely ceremonial roles and no governmental power. Britain's Prime Minister has more power than the Queen, same with Norway, even Thailand. I guess that means no one really is “on top.” It's all illusory perception that's completely—and ultimately—bullshit.

An unexpected knock comes at my door. I guess the parental unit is ready for another verbal onslaught. The door opens even before I can say “Come in”—so much for privacy.

“Johnson. You go to Palo Alto this weekend. Your Auntie miss you very much. You never visit,” Daddy commands firmly, with a noticeably condescending tone. I guess it's Daddy's turn to play “bad cop.” Then again, neither of my parents ever plays “good cop.”

“Why can't Jordan go? She goes to school up there and Auntie likes her better anyway.” Auntie really likes Jordan more—a hell of a lot more.

“Jordan see Auntie all the time. You need be good and go.”

“But I have plans this weekend!” I really don't have any plans, but sitting at home doing nothing is much better than having Asian relatives criticize you.

“You have new plan. Go see Auntie,” Daddy shoots back, giving me a serious, stone-cold look—that can't be good. I usually give up whenever he gives me that look.

“Yes, Daddy,” I confirm unwillingly. And then I consider inviting my best friend Gabriel, since best friends are supposed to suffer with you.

“Can I ask Gabriel to come since it'll be a long drive?” Gabriel and I grew up together here in Irvine. He has to deal with the same shit that I have to deal with, except he doesn't give a damn, or at least, he plays it off like he doesn't.

“Gabriel Aoki is bad,” Daddy scolds, very harshly, “and very bad influence on you. You two always go play and never do homework. He never care about straight A. He just like you.” Here he goes again with the straight A's.

“Why are you always talking about straight A's? It's obvious that you only want Jordan and me to get straight A's so that you can brag to all your friends about how much better your kids are than theirs.”

“Not true! I care about you and Jordan future.” Yeah, right; I'm sure we've all heard this before.

“You only care about comparing us with all your friends' sons and daughters and

bragging about who gets the best grades. I'm not stupid," I say smugly, feeling pretty damn good for calling him out.

"You always talk back! Jordan never talks back. She very good...not like you."

"Fine. I'll get straight A's...only if you learn how to drive. I swear, it's because of you that everyone thinks Asian people can't drive."

I could tell that Daddy is a little hesitant on how to reply. He finally musters, "I drive very safe. Not crazy like Americans."

"Sure, Daddy," I reply sarcastically. "If you say so. It's funny how Asian people can solve complex math problems like differential calculus and get perfect SAT scores with our eyes closed, yet, we can't drive worth a damn." I might as well have a little fun arguing, since there's no chance of me winning this one.

Daddy shakes his head, sighing with reproach. "I no want argue. You be good when you see Auntie...not like you bad now."

A gust of wind blows right into my eyes as Daddy slams the door violently behind him; I know that door won't make it past my graduation with all this arguing. But arguments like this one are typical in my loving, caring family; they happen all the time and they never seem to end. I really wish I could live somewhere far away, perhaps Timbuktu, which is in Mali. I know this because I'm Asian; we're supposed to know everything. But if I know everything, then why don't I know much about my parents and their strict, bizarre behavior? Like how my parents don't sleep in the same bed even though they've been married for what seems like "Four score and seven years ago." And it's not just me; it's the same with Gabriel's parents. My parents argue and fight to the point to where a divorce is imminent, however, can't divorce because of custom, and more importantly, "saving face" in the Asian community, as well as "saving face" back in their native country. Saving face refers to always maintaining a good image in spite of bad circumstances. So instead of divorce, the next best thing is to sleep in separate beds and in separate rooms, so that they can get eight hours of sleep alone—aka personal paradise—and re-energize themselves for the remaining sixteen hours together—aka hell.

I told Gabriel about my "separate bed, separate room" theorem a while back and he agreed indubitably. In fact, he reciprocated with a story about the strict, bizarre Asian behavior of child swapping. If a child of one Asian family performs poorly in school, then that family will swap its child with another child, typically from a relative. This can be thought of as a military

school program, to strengthen and discipline both children into exceedingly exceptional students. With all this swapping, Asian parents should become swingers themselves—stupid joke, I know.

Because of these types of strict, bizarre behaviors, it's no wonder that there's a lack of affection in Asian families. Most people don't know this, but it's very uncommon for Asian parents to hug their kids; and it's extremely rare for Asian parents to kiss their kids.

I remember hanging out with Joe Romig, an old friend of mine, back in the eighth grade. I would always go to his house after school because his mom would make the most delicious grilled cheese sandwiches. Food is every boy's weakness—just ask any girl. I don't recall doing much at Joe's house, but the one thing that always caught my eye was his mom kissing him on both cheeks, then his forehead, then embracing him with a very tender hug. I got scared the first time Joe's mom hugged me; it felt awkward because I wasn't used to it. I was used to getting hit by my parents whenever I did something wrong. Hell, I even got hit for just thinking something wrong.

I almost start to cry whenever I reminisce. Most of my past memories involve my parents spanking me with an old feather duster. A feather duster is a thin, rigid stick made from yellow bamboo with endless brown and black chicken feathers sprouting from the middle to the top. Of course, it's supposed to be used for dusting dirt, but instead, it's used for dusting the asses of Asian kids—bad and good. You're not truly Asian until you've gotten your ass whipped with a feather duster; it's a very sick and disturbing rite of passage for Asian kids. I don't get spanked anymore, much to my regret, but I still see that damn feather duster up above the mantle of the fireplace in the living room. My parents like to keep it there as a constant reminder of how I need to fear and obey, kind of like Tamerlane with his pyramid of human skulls, built as a reminder for his enemies to fear and obey. My parents really are like Tamerlane. But at least I had it better than Gabriel. His parents spanked him with a damn ping-pong paddle! We all know that Asians are good at ping-pong so I guess his parents wanted to get in a little practice—maybe practice their spin technique on Gabriel's ass!

Just looking at that old feather duster reminds me of severe spankings: feathers flying off then falling very slowly, simultaneously with the tears from my eyes, every time I received a lick. Spanking was pretty much the only affection that I've ever received from my parents. Every time I got spanked, I would remember Joe's mom hugging me. I've never told my parents about Joe's mom hugging me. They wouldn't care anyway. Asian parents like to use

the excuse that hugging and kissing would make their kids soft, like “those Americans”—aka “White Americans.” Asians typically view “those Americans” as lazy, spoiled, and stupid—funny how they only say this behind their backs. It's also funny how they say “those Americans,” yet they themselves are Americans, even though they don't consider themselves to be. This goes to show that they didn't come to America for freedom, liberty, or patriotism but instead, just for the opportunity to make lots of money.

Anyway, my parents don't want Jordan and me to grow up weak, with all that hugging and kissing. But I don't think that it's weak for parents to show a little emotion and affection. In fact, I think it would actually help make things better. I think Asian families would be a lot more caring and nurturing and not so uncommunicative and distant. So instead of focusing so much on money, they should perhaps focus on compassion and love. After all, Asians can love money as much as they want, but money never loves back. Anyway, I don't think a hug is too much to ask; I really don't. I could honestly care less about a big house, a nice car or all the money in the world. All I really want from my parents is a hug.

3

I got up this morning feeling very fatigued and exhausted, because both of my parents woke me up at six o'clock, so that I would be ready to go visit Auntie up in Palo Alto. You would think that they'd cut me some slack and let me sleep in since it's Saturday but not when you have Asian parents. I've never been to boot camp, but I'm sure this is pretty close, the only difference being that I'm not required to wear camouflage and shoot innocent civilians. I could complain some more, but then I start thinking about my cousins over in Asia. I have it so much better than them. I remember staying at their house a few years ago, and they were getting up early for school, even during the summer! In fact, they had to wake up at five o'clock in the morning, just so that they could get ready for tutoring. After that was done, they had to get ready for more school at seven o'clock. Then after school let out at five o'clock in the afternoon, they still had to go to an after-school tutoring class! By the time it was over, they barely had an hour to eat dinner because of all the homework accumulated that day. I bitch and moan about how I have it bad, but I'm living in paradise compared to my cousins.

Now what really upset me about the whole situation with my cousins was that they accepted this lifestyle without any objection. They never complained, and they never said a word about their struggles to anyone. So before I left to fly back to America, I took the time to talk to them about their abject enslavement. I felt bad for them; I still do. I just had to know why they didn't stand up to their parents. Their answers were the same: "That's just how it is here. If you don't get good grades, then your parents won't love you." I couldn't believe what I heard. How does getting good grades equate to love? Plenty of kids got bad grades and still grew up to become successful—Albert Einstein, for instance. I really got upset when I heard this from my cousins. And I felt such remorse for them as well. No wonder Asians grow up all screwed up, only caring about money, status, and power.

Now I know that it's not just with my family. It's pervasive with Asian families all over the world. So there's really no difference between an Asian parent in America and an Asian parent overseas. Asian children are basically sheep, raised and herded by their parents. And

these prize-winning sheep become doctors or lawyers, aka cash cows for their parents—like an investment or retirement fund. Then when Asian parents grow old, their kids—or retirement fund I should say—end up paying for their retirement and taking care of their every need and desire. No wonder Asian parents want their kids to become doctors and lawyers—that's where all the money's at!

Anyway, I'm spending way too much time talking about sheep and cows, and besides, I need to hit the road asap, considering the fact that there's *always* traffic in LA—24/7, every day of the week. Many people may feel that the greatest mystery of all is the origin of the universe or life outside of Earth, but the real greatest mystery of all is traffic in LA; why is there traffic all the freaking time, even at two o'clock in the morning? A government agency needs to be set up to meticulously analyze traffic congestion, since our tax dollars are being wasted anyway, and it might as well go towards solving a problem that everyone agrees to fix.

All of the sudden, I realize that I'm really in no condition to drive, still sleepy and tired from having to wake up early; so off to the kitchen I go for some delicious, organic coffee—at least there's one good thing about being in this house.

As I start to make a fresh pot, I notice a myriad of calendars on the wall by the refrigerator. My parents would always leave six years worth of calendars, plus the current year. The reason is because the number '6' represents good luck in Asian culture. One thing about Asian parents is that they are completely obsessed with good luck. There's even a book published each year, forecasting the good luck days to get married and the bad luck days not to get married.

At Asian weddings, there's always a tea pouring ceremony in which pouring tea for your relatives is required in exchange for money and gold—talk about using an excuse to get money! Speaking of excuses to get money, the Chinese have an egregiously blatant way of doing it. If you are invited to a wedding, you are required to pay a fee at the reception and if you don't go, you have to pay a portion of that obligatory fee—no exceptions or you'll lose face! No wonder China leads the world in paper production—invitations get sent out like hotcakes! And when you give money at a wedding, it has to be an even number or else it's considered bad luck. Now get this: Asians are also required to give money at a funeral—an odd number or else it's bad luck! As if giving *required* money isn't enough, Asians are even picky about the parity! I can go on all day about Asian superstition, but I really have to get going. I haven't even started packing yet.

Since it's an Asian custom to always dress to impress, especially with my relatives, I start by reaching for my Louis Vuitton suitcase from the top shelf of my closet and setting it on top of my bed. Then I put in a few Banana Republic stretch polos, with matching boot-cut indigo jeans and some Hugo Boss dress shirts with dress pants. I even throw in some designer Dolce & Gabbana boxers and John Bartlett socks to make my traveling wardrobe entirely pretentious. Now dressing up nice and genteel is not uniquely an Asian culture custom by any means, but wearing expensive, designer apparel to every event is. Asian people always get dressed up—even to a barbecue!

I remember seeing this one girl at Gabriel's barbecue, all dressed up in Gucci from head to toe. Normally, guys can't tell one designer from another, but I knew she had on all Gucci because everything she wore had a damn 'G' logo: her sunglasses, purse, even her earrings. Asian people love to show off logos; I'm sure designers are having a field day with all that free advertising. I know I sound like a hypocrite because I wear all this designer stuff—and unfortunately, I am. I'm still trying hard to break away from the ethnocentricity of Asian culture. And it's really hard to break away, especially when you just want to do the right things to please your parents. The problem is that my parents' idea of the “right things” may not actually be the “right things.”

Anyway, my parents bought all this designer stuff for me because they were sick of me wearing my nasty-ass t-shirts and jeans with holes the size of cannonballs. Plus, they love the power to control me—my third Asian Pride Theorem. They also said dressing up will help me get a good job in the future; I hope they don't really believe their own crap.

Now that I finish packing, I just say a simple “Goodbye” to my parents, because remember, Asian families don't hug or kiss. Mommy and Daddy hand me some things to give to Auntie and also the keys to the BMW 550i—I wonder why? Nothing better than to show how well off you are, especially to your relatives, than by pulling up in a BMW and wearing all Hugo Boss, carrying a Louis Vuitton suitcase.

I pull up to Gabriel's house, only a few blocks down the street, since he can't be seen walking to my house in ostentatious Irvine—this shit just never ends. I honk the horn to let him know that I'm outside. I never did like to go inside Gabriel's house. There's always this smell—not malodorous or frowzy, but very distinct and somewhat discomforting. It's not just with Gabriel's house. Most Asian homes have a poignant smell; it really is an Asian thing. I don't know if it's all that damn stir-fry or incense, but the smell lingers forever. I told him about it but

he says he doesn't smell anything. I guess he's so immune to it since he stays home all the time.

I also don't want to go inside because Gabriel's parents are relentless with their interrogation. They have this condescending way of conversing with people, especially with me. They usually start off by patronizingly asking, "Johnson. Are you doing well in school?"—which means: "Are you maintaining a 4.0 or are you failing?"

They would then ask, "Do you plan to go to medical school after you graduate?"—which really means: "Do you plan to sit around doing nothing all day if you don't go to medical school?"

Finally, they would say, "Jordan is so smart to get into Stanford. We know she'll do well after she graduates," which ultimately means: "Jordan is better than you and you're a loser compared to her." It's no wonder that my parents and Gabriel's parents are such good friends—four peas in the same, damn Asian pod.

Gabriel rushes out the front door, as if a mob is chasing him with torches and pitchforks. I notice that he's only carrying a small backpack. That's the thing with Gabriel; he always packs light wherever he goes. He says that Japanese people like to keep things simple and compact. I think he's just pretty damn lazy.

As Gabriel opens my car door, he throws a bag of weed into my lap—my angel from heaven!

"By the way, thanks for coming. I really didn't know if you had a purpose in life, but now I know it's to ride shotgun, so that we can get into the HOV," I say jokingly, just to annoy him like a true best friend.

"Sure, no problem. But I thought my purpose in life was to satisfy your mom," Gabriel replies, a smug smile on his face. He's always been good with comebacks.

"Yeah, that's really original." I've always been awful with comebacks.

"Nothing original about satisfying your mom. Everyone's doing it." See what I mean? Gabriel's a natural.

"Okay, okay. You win. Let's get going or else we'll get stuck in traffic."

The drive from Irvine to Palo Alto is about six hours. I usually take the 101 freeway, but I'll take the 5 interstate this time, since I'm not too anxious to get to Auntie's place. Besides, Gabriel and I are toking up so I shouldn't be driving fast. Orange County cops—I mean pigs—love to pull you over for the smallest offense, even for driving one mile under the speed limit;

that's when they get you for the *big* crimes like DUI.

Gabriel got sent to jail once for a DUI, because the arresting female officer smelled pot on him, even though he wasn't smoking anything; Gabriel just happened to be wearing a dirty shirt, possibly stained with pot residue. It was only his first offense, but they still held him in prison for a week! I didn't have enough money to bail him out since the court purposely brought his charges up to a felony status, and his bail jumped up to the cost of a new BMW. Plus, he didn't want his parents to know so he stuck it out for a week in the OC concentration camp. Gabriel gave his parents the excuse that he decided to go upstate for a week in order to check out some medical school programs—pure genius. Gabriel's true talent is knowing how to bullshit.

Anyway, to get released, Gabriel gladly agreed to the plea bargain of a misdemeanor conviction, accompanied with informal probation, but they still wouldn't let him out of jail! They kept him there the whole night, even after he signed the plea bargain! He told me that the reason they keep you there is because they don't want “convicts” and “hoodlums” walking the streets of Irvine. Instead, they let you out late at night, at a godforsaken hour, in the middle of nowhere, so that no one can see you when you leave. Remember how I told you that people don't walk in ostentatious Irvine? That's because they'll probably think that you just got out of jail! Irvine is trying so desperately to keep their little suburban utopia intact that they'll do anything, like violate your constitutional rights. That's why Gabriel's so anal retentive about my driving, even though I'm a damn good driver, unlike most Asians. He's always checking things to make sure we don't get pulled over: the seat belts, the side mirrors, and right now, the passenger-side airbag. (By the way, Gabriel says that smoking pot in the car is totally okay, since he believes that the medicinal properties of marijuana actually help ease and relieve the stresses of driving—that sounds good enough to me so let's toké up!)

Gabriel analyzes the passenger-side airbag with obsessive-compulsive hands, as if he's an inspection agent. “Why is the airbag on my side so small? It's like the size of a Game Boy,” Gabriel asks. He's the type of person that demands an answer to all of his stupid questions.

“It's the new superficial airbag, which protects the most important part: the face,” I retort, like a smart ass. “As long as the face is protected, 'cause the body doesn't really matter. We all know how important faces are here in LA.” If he likes stupid questions, then I'll give him stupid answers.

Gabriel turns his head and gives me a smile. “You’re actually funny for once, Johnson.”

I smile back. It’s always fun driving with Gabriel. I still remember the time when we first met. It was all the way back in elementary school. His parents moved here from Japan to start a furniture business, and he didn’t speak much English when he got here. Actually, he didn’t speak any English at all, now that I think about it. I had to show him around school and take him everywhere. I actually didn’t like him at first because he was a FOB, seriously fresh off the boat. But we got along and we ended up hanging out a lot. I would always go over to his house to play Nintendo. Back then, the Japanese had the newest games to hit the market. So Gabriel made a lot of new friends in no time, because of that Nintendo. He was funny as a kid, too, and even made fun of himself for being a foreigner. That’s the thing about Gabriel; he’s always up for a laugh.

But I hate it whenever he makes fun of me for not being able to speak my native language, since I was born here in California. I keep telling him that the reason I can’t speak my native language is because my parents never taught it to me. And the reason that they never taught it to me is because they’re afraid that if I had any hint of a foreign accent, then I wouldn’t be able to get a good job. He says that’s stupid and I totally agree with him. In fact, most Asians born in America can’t speak their native language, because their parents are so scared of an accent ruining their chances of becoming a doctor or lawyer. And you already know why Asian parents want their kids to become doctors and lawyers. Asian parents are even willing to sell out their own culture and relegate their native language, all in the name of money.

“Dude. How come you never look at your side mirror whenever you’re driving?” Gabriel suddenly remarks, as I start to change lanes without checking my mirror. He’s still in inspection agent mode.

I decide on another smart-ass thing to say to him. “Side mirrors are overrated. It’s all hype.” I think that’s smart-ass enough—at least stupid enough.

Gabriel gives me a bizarre smirk. “Overrated? It’s a safety device, you idiot.” I can tell Gabriel is a little annoyed.

“Nah, side mirrors really are overrated,” I say to him, continuing to smile. “Don’t worry about it.”

“I’m not worried about it. I’m just *slightly* concerned.” We both laugh. Then Gabriel

slaps my right arm and says, "You know, Johnson, I was thinking about how you're the one that's overrated. But then I realized that in order to be overrated, you actually have to be rated *first*, which you're not, not even a tiny blip on the radar."

"I know you're a huge blip on the *gay-dar*," I rebut, hoping that he would stop his nonsense.

"I take it back about you being funny." Gabriel slouches in the passenger seat and looks out the window.

I want to annoy him some more, since that's what a best friend's for. "Hey, man. Why don't you ever shave? You always have that nasty, thick beard. I don't want people to think I'm hanging out with a homeless person." That should annoy him for sure.

"I'd worry more about the way you look, Johnson. You always have that short, spiky, one-dimensional, Bed Head haircut, just like every damn Asian guy." He's right; I do have that "short, spiky, one-dimensional, Bed Head haircut, just like every damn Asian guy."

"My mom pays for my haircuts, so I can't really grow it out," I say, hesitantly.

"Mommy this and Mommy that, " Gabriel responds cynically. "You have to break out of that typical Asian guy mold. Grow your hair out, stop wearing that Abercrombie and Banana Republic crap, and maybe go to a regular restaurant instead of those in Chinatown or Koreatown."

He's right again, especially about the last part. I do admit that I'm always eating at a Chinese restaurant; or eating at a Korean restaurant; or eating at a Japanese restaurant. That's the thing about Asian restaurants. They all congregate together to form a Chinatown, Koreatown, or a Japantown. And it's interesting that I've never heard of an Iraqtown or an Australiatown or any other 'town' for that matter. The reason is because Asian people are fearfully insecure; they don't think they can get any business unless it has an Asian theme like Chinatown, Koreatown, or Japantown. They can't be unique so they have to share the same archetypal and cultural theme for their stores. They figure that they can make big money huddled up in a theme town—aka Asiatown—versus being unique and different by going independent. Why be a pauper fish in a big pond when you can be a king fish in a small pond? It's always about the money.

"What's wrong with being Asian?" I ask Gabriel, musingly.

"There's nothing wrong with being Asian," Gabriel replies adamantly. "There is, however, such a thing as being *too* Asian. You live here in America, bro. A multicultural

country. Living with just Asian culture is too one-dimensional, like your damn hair. ” He's actually right about “being *too* Asian.” I really do need to change but that's easier said than done. Gabriel's also right about how “there's nothing wrong with being Asian.” There's also nothing wrong with practicing Asian customs, as well as appreciating Asian culture. But the problem with Asians is that they don't wish to appreciate *other* cultures; they have an ethnocentric view that Asian culture is better than every other culture (Ethnocentricity is another reason why Asians congregate together in Asiatowns.) I see so many Asians with “Asian Pride” stickers on their vehicles and “Asian Power” tattoos on their bodies. They think that they are better, but in fact, they're not. No culture is better than any other culture, just as no person is better than any other person. Perhaps Asians forgot to read the *Declaration of Independence*, which states: “all men are created equal.” I guess they didn't bother to read it since they only came to America for the opportunity to make lots of money, not for freedom or equality.

In New York City, for instance, many Chinese people live in Chinatown and stay there for the majority of their lives, without even stepping outside once. They may say that the reason they only stay in Chinatown is because they don't speak English well enough to leave, but there are many non-profit organizations and schools that teach English for free, even at the student's residence for convenience. The truth is that many Chinese people don't want to learn English, because they don't want to assimilate. In other words, they think that their culture is the best—ethnocentricity—and that other cultures are inferior, particularly American culture. So why do they live in America then? Remember what I said about how Asians move to America, not for freedom, liberty, or patriotism? It's always about the money.

As Gabriel mentioned, America is a multicultural country, a country full of different cultures, with the appreciation of different cultures. Asians can learn a lot just by appreciating and understanding other cultures, instead of keeping their false ethnocentric view that Asian culture is the best.

“Gabriel. I'll grow out my hair if you shave your nasty beard,” I say to him, proceeding to make a deal. I know he'll be more than happy to oblige.

“You got it, Johnson. Anything to help your social life.”

Now that's something I really need help with. It's embarrassing to tell you this, but I've never had a girlfriend. Well, not a real girlfriend anyway. I've been out with girls and made out with a few but never anything long term. There's no way to have a girlfriend with all this

pressure from my parents. Plus, Asian parents are very strict when it comes to dating. They don't want us doing it, until at least we graduate from high school. Some don't even want their kids to date until after college! Anyway, I won't have time for a girlfriend after I graduate from UCI because I'll be going to medical school right after that. And medical school will be even much more stressful so I'll have no time to do anything else but study. It's funny that the road to a successful career means death to your social life. Maybe I should just get neutered like our German Shepherd since he never has anything to worry about, except fetching the paper and taking a walk in the park, which reminds me of something that I've been waiting to tell you.

I was walking my dog a week or so ago in the park right by my old high school. I noticed a new, chrome-plated drinking fountain installed near the entrance of the gazebo. As I walked towards it, I could see three separate spouts: one at the top for adults, one in the middle for kids, and to my amazement, one at the very bottom for dogs! There was even a cute, little push pedal so that you wouldn't have to bend down and strain yourself laboriously since, heaven forbid, Irvine residents can't be caught looking like a day-laborer. Isn't this just unbelievable? Dogs even get their own drinking fountains. I wonder what people in third world countries would say about this. Right as I was about to leave the park, a snarly, hefty Golden Retriever ran past me without a leash—or even an owner. I noticed a copious number of dog tags around the neck so I knew it wasn't a stray. Then a car drove past me, with a young woman sticking her right arm outside the passenger window, waving a cane back and forth briskly. I thought it was strange that the car and the dog were both parallel, side by side, going down the street. I then realized that the woman was walking her dog *in* her car! Oh, for crying out loud! Has it really come to this? Irvine residents can't even walk their dogs by feet now; they have to do it by car! Isn't this just unbelievable?

All of the sudden, the low fuel indicator light comes on as I'm driving, so I start looking for a gas station. I didn't fill up before the trip since I'm really in no hurry to get to Palo Alto; I'm really not. I'm going to take my sweet-ass time since I know Auntie's preparing to unload non-stop criticism about me all weekend long! Sometimes, I wish I didn't have Asian relatives; sometimes, I wish I wasn't Asian.

4

I've been driving for several miles without seeing a single gas station, as the scenic route starts to become a little too scenic, with all the expansive farms and endless acres of apple orchards.

I take the nearest exit, in order to find something—anything. I end up finding a gas station at the end of a narrow, dirt road. It's so shabby and derelict to the point that it almost fools me into thinking that it really is abandoned. Nonetheless, with the limited—or rather only—choice at hand, I pull into the gas station. Now I'm not trying to be a prude or anything but this gas station is really run-down; I mean really run-down. There's only one pump in the entire gas station, for crying out loud! And this one pump doesn't take credit cards so I'm going to have to go inside to pay with cash. Gabriel and I both need to take a bathroom break anyway and a little rest will do us some good.

As we enter the store of the gas station, we can't help but notice along the walls are rows of mounted deer, bear, and fox heads, as well as a multifarious assortment of smaller, taxidermic animals. For a moment, we're thinking that we're inside a hunting lodge. But then we remember that we are Asian and Asian people don't do hunting lodges. We continue our way to the bathroom. After we're done, we walk to the front to pick up some potato chips, beef jerky, a couple of organic green teas—much to our surprise that a run-down, derelict gas station would offer such an esoteric flavor—a *Sports Illustrated*, and a *Maxim* for our sexual—I mean literary—perusal.

Gabriel is busy perusing the other magazines so I go up to the register to pay for our stuff. The cashier, himself, is just as run-down and derelict as the gas station. He's wearing a dark-blue, mechanics jumpsuit, heavily stained with motor oil and a multitude of other greasy crap. His stitch-labeled name tag reads *Bob* and I think to myself, He forgot to put *Billy* in front of it. He really does look like a Billy Bob with his dark tobacco-stained teeth, crooked thick-rimmed glasses and a beat-up, red Marlboro cap with a *Vietnam Vet* button. You can tell that

this guy thinks incest is best.

I'm nice to everyone, as far as first introductions go, so I say "Hello" to the guy, and he just looks at me with his strange, beady eyes, not saying a word. For a second there, I think that he may be deaf, but he finally murmurs back with "Hello" as well. Then he asks, "Isn't there some rice you should be picking?" So there are rednecks in California after all!

I look straight at him, unaffected with poise. "Isn't there some cousin you should be banging?"

Billy Bob starts laughing, as if we're old chums sharing dirty jokes from high school. I guess he doesn't realize that he just got owned.

"See here, Chinaman. I'm just yanking yer chain."

"First of all, I'm not from China, Billy Bob. It's certainly alright if you want to be racist, since all Americans have the right to believe whatever they want. But at least get your shit straight. Besides, the war's been over for a long time and *Charlie* ain't coming to get you anymore, so no need to attack every slant-eye that you see." Damn it feels good to set him straight.

Billy Bob doesn't reply back, obviously because he just got put in his place. I finish paying for our stuff so Gabriel and I head back to the car. I tell him about what just happened and naturally, he gets all fired up.

"Dude. Let's kick his hillbilly ass. That is seriously messed up," Gabriel screams, as we drive onto the highway. "Turn back around and I'll revenge Hiroshima on his cracker ass." I start snickering at his remark. "Come on, man! Turn back around," Gabriel insists effusively.

I can understand Japanese revenge, but two wrongs don't make a right. Besides, Billy Bob had nothing to do with World War II, and I really don't feel like calling my parents to bail me out of jail, with the explanation that we *had* to beat up a gas station attendant. In retrospect, it would have felt pretty damn good to kick that redneck's ass, but ignorant people like him aren't worth the effort.

This incident reminds me of an article that I read in the newspaper a few months ago, about a group of teenage skinheads that spray-painted swastikas on neighborhood cars in the middle of the night. Only they spray-painted the Nazi swastika symbol backwards, which incidentally means the Buddhist symbol for love and compassion! Like I said before, I really have no problems with racists because they have the right to believe whatever they want; they just need to get their shit straight! Hell, I'll even help them spray-paint the Nazi swastika

just so I can teach them how to do it right. Ignorant people like Billy Bob are a dime-a-dozen.

I'm just glad that I don't let stuff like this get to me. In fact, I'm kind of glad it happened; it made me feel glad to be Asian for the first time in a long time. The only thing is that I can't remember if there ever was a time before this.

5

I start to fall asleep at the wheel since the drive up is taking its toll on me, so I'm going to let Gabriel drive for a bit. I really don't want to let him drive, since he's a madman behind the wheel. However, he's a special and unique kind of madman because he stays quiet, while other drivers experience road rage and yell bloody murder in order to raise hell on Earth. But even quiet people can be dangerous—and deadly.

I remember when we were driving one night to a club in LA. We had to get there before ten o'clock or else we would have to pay the cover charge. Gabriel drives this Subaru Impreza WRX, because he thinks he's a goddamn racer, like every Asian guy in California. So anyway, he was driving like a bat out of hell, bobbing and weaving in traffic, talking on his cell phone with his left hand, eating a burger with his right hand and even shaving with an electric razor—all at the same time! I should've thrown him three balls just to see him juggle—at least get some entertainment before we crash and die. I would love to make a bet with any thrill seeker or extreme sports fanatic that they would not be able to last for more than a minute in the passenger seat with Gabriel driving. I've talked to him so many times about the way he drives, but he says that he knows what he's doing and that he's a safe driver. He even claims that the other drivers on the road are the problem, that their driving is too defensive. His theory is that they've taken too many defensive driving courses, so there's too much defense on the road and there needs to be a little more *offense*, like in football. Gabriel's theory is that his *offensive driving* will balance out all the defensive driving, thus neutralizing any problem and making everything okay. Theories like his make me wonder why I even bother hanging out with him.

“Hey Johnson. Let's go up to San Fran. I know this place where we can score some pretty good weed,” Gabriel exhorts, almost on the edge of begging.

“We don't have time to visit San Francisco since I'll be ass-kissing my aunt the entire weekend.” Note to self: get some lip balm.

“Dude, we have to have some fun. We can't just hang out with your aunt the entire

weekend.” Gabriel's right. We really need to have some fun. And I can think of only one thing that *all* Asian guys love to do for fun, besides being fake race car drivers.

“You up for a little *Street Fighter*, Gabriel?” I ask with a simper.

“Hell yeah! Let's do it!” Gabriel shouts at the top of his lungs. I know exactly what to say, to get him all hot and bothered.

For those of you who are not cognizant of *Street Fighter*, it's a video game that started out in the late 80's to become the greatest fighting game of all time—and that's a fact! There are numerous international competitions in countries all over the world, even decades after its creation. Classics like *Street Fighter* will stand the test of time. I believe that the real reason Asian guys—and girls—play *Street Fighter* is because most Asians really can't fight! Everyone thinks Asian people know kung fu and karate, but the truth is that most don't know shit. Asians spend all of their time studying, reading books and hiding behind a suit and tie, so they have no time to practice martial arts. Plus, Asian people are generally small, so they typically gang up on people. If you ever go to a club and mess with one Asian guy, a hundredfold will jump out of nowhere to help, like ninjas from the darkness of the night.

“Gabriel!” I shout out loud, as the car traverses into the other lane. I can't believe I'm letting him drive!

“Sorry, Johnson! I wasn't paying attention.” No shit, I think to myself. But why should I even bother reacting? This type of driving is to be expected from a madman. “I'm just so excited to play *Street Fighter*. It's been so long!” Gabriel exclaims with delight, like an anxious virgin on prom night. “Sometimes I wish I could quit school and just be a professional gamer.”

“No way in hell!” I laugh haughtily. “You can't even beat me on my worst day!”

“We'll see about that,” Gabriel retorts adamantly. “Just wait and see how badly I whoop up on you.” Regardless of who is the winner, we're both ultimately losers because we live vicariously through a video game. Gabriel and I really need to get ourselves a life.

As we make our way up to San Jose, I can't help but to notice the copious number of new houses and buildings all along the freeway, with huge banner signs posting *FREE RENT* and *NEW HOMES*, all across the city landscape. It's only been about a year since my last visit but in my absence, it seems that there's a meteoric rise of suburban sprawl that is now infecting the Bay Area like a contagious disease.

“They're building all these new condos downtown,” Gabriel says, noticing the awe in my eyes. “All these yuppies are looking for a piece of the action. I swear, it's like they've all

jumped on the condo bandwagon.”

We finally make it to Golfland, a family fun center with miniature golf, but more importantly, an arcade showcasing the best *Street Fighter* players in the world, most from the city of Sunnyvale, which is about half an hour from Auntie's house—not too close and just far enough away. Gabriel heads straight for the change machine while I venture to the gaming area to scout out the competition. Much to my dismay, no one is there; I guess all the Asians are out racing. Gabriel sees the bleak emptiness of the arcade room and frowns with lament, as if his childhood pet recently past away. Notwithstanding the absence of the best *Street Fighter* players in the world, we both play each other, with much fun and excitement. It's good to relax, unwind and forget about things, even for just a few hours. I then realize that we have to get going or else we'd miss dinner, and Auntie would love nothing more than to scold me to no end—and then telling my parents of course. I haul ass out of the arcade, as I grab Gabriel by the arm.

“I was whooping you *long time*,” Gabriel jokes, strutting and prancing. “Fo' shizzo!”

“Fo' shizzo?” I remark with astonishment. “Since when did you turn black?”

“Oh, calm down, fool,” Gabriel coolly replies. “Don't be a sore loser.”

“I'd rather be a sore loser than be a fake *Blackanese* like you.” I really don't have a problem with Ebonics, the idiomatic African American slang of our generation. I just wish that words such as *fat* and *scared* wouldn't be turned into *phat* and *scurred*. It's astounding to me that monosyllabic words can actually be made more complicated, with the needless change in spelling. And if that's not bad enough, there's a rapper that goes by the moniker, 50 *cent*—they can't even spell their own name right! Many people are avidly concerned about the increase in violence, drug use, and sexual paraphernalia in our generation; I'm more concerned with the horrific spelling and grammar! *Phat* and *scurred* account for the reasons why most young Americans can't even locate the United States of America on a map. That's why I'm almost livid with Gabriel speaking Ebonics.

“Alright, alright. Let's just drop it, Johnson,” Gabriel peacefully amends. “No reason to get your panties in a bunch.” I decide to let that remark slide since I really am sore that Gabriel beat me so many times in *Street Fighter*. Of course, my pride won't allow me to admit this, sure enough, or even accept this. Besides, I have to put on my game face when I see Auntie, and I can't look all whiny and grumpy.

I ask Gabriel for my keys so that there's no chance of Auntie catching him behind the

wheel or else she would tattletale to my parents, with consequences of my slow torture and death. While passing through the neighborhoods of Palo Alto, I can't help but to notice how the scenery is somewhat similar to Irvine, except much more venerable with a veneer of Spanish and Italian flair: houses with straight-barrel mission, clay tile roofs—made famous by the neighboring Stanford University—tall birch and cottonwood trees across wide, verdant yards, teeming with spaciouly rectangular gardens of every flower of every color, just like in Irvine.

Auntie lives right next to Stanford in one of the opulent houses along University Avenue in Palo Alto. Not too long ago, she actually used to live in East Palo Alto, the alter ego of the affluent Palo Alto, since it consists mostly of Latinos and African Americans and not its rich, snobby counterpart. It's truly amazing how East Palo Alto is right next door, shares the same area and zip codes and even some of the main streets, but by adding the word *East*, it then turns into the ugly-stepchild ghetto. If you've ever seen the U.S.-Mexico border from atop a building, then you'll know what I'm talking about—different as night and day.

The drive to Auntie's house is relatively short, as I pull into the driveway and park the BMW there so that everybody can see it, per my parents' instructions—got to show off to the neighbors, remember? I march up the front walkway, stepping over a myriad of shoes and sandals outside the doorway of her house. You can always tell if an Asian family lives at a certain house, just by the copious number of shoes and sandals in the doorway. I press the doorbell and Auntie opens the door, supplying me with an endearing pat on the back and nothing for Gabriel; most people don't like him and the rest, hate him. Of course, I'm only joking—except for my family; they really do hate Gabriel.

Auntie's house is still as I remember it: traditional and passé with antiquated Oriental cabinets, tables, and chairs. Lanterns, small and large, hang from the ceiling. Red New Year couplets, for good luck, stream the walls, along with a myriad of bamboo wall scrolls written in ancient calligraphy—typical inside an Asian house. Of course, a calendar with the zodiac, for good fortune, is hanging on the kitchen wall for all to see, just like at my house except that Auntie displays a total of seven. A new item that instantly grabs my attention is a recent picture of Auntie and Darcy, her son and my oldest cousin, sitting up above the fireplace of the living room. My uncle past away a long time ago before Auntie moved to America, or else he'd be in the picture, too. It may just be me, but it seems like Darcy is frowning next to Auntie in the picture.

Before stepping into the living room, I carefully and punctiliously take off my shoes and place them outside the doorway. Gabriel does the same without the slightest of a hint because all Asian people know this tradition: take off your shoes before you walk inside a house. What most people don't know is that this tradition has nothing to do with respect and courtesy, but instead, has everything to do with the Asian obsessive desire to keep carpet from getting dirty!

Long ago, it was actually considered common decency to step into an Asian family's home *with* shoes on. There's even an old superstition about how wearing shoes inside a house will protect the guests from ghosts entering through the soles of their feet—in other words, protect the soul by protecting the *sole*. Surprisingly, with a sprinkle of sarcasm, once carpet was created, they decided to *invent* a new tradition of 'taking off your shoes' outside a house.

If you don't believe me, then go inside an Asian person's house, and you'll see their best furniture covered in plastic. Furniture is meant for sitting, but for Asians, it's meant for showcasing. The plastic is to keep their furnishings from getting dirty, just like shoes are kept outside to keep the carpet from getting dirty. It has *nothing* to do with respect and courtesy and *everything* to do with Asian indolence and fastidiousness to keep things clean.

Auntie brings into the living room a tea tray, a porcelain teapot on a trivet, and a superfluous number of teacups. It's tradition, even for the younger generation, to drink tea inside an Asian household.

As we sit down, Auntie asks Gabriel a series of questions: What medical school do you plan to attend? How are your parents doing? Do you still live near Johnson?—these questions appear to be innocuous, but I assure you that they are not. Asians love to say things in *subtext mode*, which is an expression for saying one thing and meaning something entirely different. For example, a girl might say to another girl, “That's a nice dress,” but really mean, “That's so dreadful! Why would you wear that?” So if I translate what Auntie's *really* asking, her series of questions would be the following: What medical school would accept a loser like you? Are your parents still in debt? Are you still living in the rich part of Irvine or the poorer section?

Likewise, people enjoy asking the proverbial “What do you do?”—not because they really care about what you do, but to size you up and see if you're worth talking to. Many people have asked me this question and don't seem to be interested in the fact that I'm a

pathetic college student—big surprise! But whenever they ask this question to Darcy, who happens to be an obstetrician and gynecologist, they are immediately suffused with admiration, and their attention couldn't be drawn away by a circus of clowns twirling kittens tied to dynamite thrown through a ring of fire. One word from J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye*, pretty much sums up how people really are: “phony.”

Auntie doesn't ask me any questions because my mom has already gossiped to her behind my back about what a complete loser that I am; I consider myself lucky so that she doesn't waste any of my time. This is why I don't visit her as often as my parents would like me to.

After Auntie's interrogation is over, we take our bags and head upstairs to go unpack. I'm staying in the guest room with Gabriel, since I don't want to stay in Darcy's room, even though he's in England for a medical conference. There's nothing wrong with his room; it's just that I don't really like him. Don't get me wrong. My oldest cousin is a nice guy, but he always brags about his accomplishments. He's an only child, for starters, so he's spoiled right off the bat. Not to mention the fact that he always got straight A's from grade school all the way through college, graduating from Harvard and receiving his M.D. with honors from John Hopkins Medical School. He's also on the top of the list as the best obstetrician and gynecologist in Northern California, or NorCal for short. Plus, his wife is a former beauty queen from Sacramento. Yes, I'm jealous—who wouldn't be?

The only noticeable weakness of Darcy is his name. He got picked on constantly as a kid and has been ridiculed by many a classmate to no end. I got picked on, too, since my first name is a last name but not nearly as bad as Darcy. Asian parents enjoy giving their kids *very* American names like Darcy, Johnson, Churchill, hell, I even knew a kid named Endymion; I wonder if he's still alive because no sane person would ever be able to make it past elementary school with a name like Endymion.

The reason that Asian parents give their kids *very* American names is simply based on their misconceived notion that it's an advantage for getting a good job. They think that having a *very* American name would be more appealing, thus, hireable, instead of a *less* American name, aka an Asian name. That's why Gabriel's parents gave him a *very* American name—the same reason that my parents gave me my name. Anyway, trust me when I say that “more appealing” and “hireable” is absolutely not worth the many years of belittling and suffering that plenty of Asians have endured for having *very* American names.

“Hey Johnson! Come look at this picture of Darcy!” Gabriel shouts brusquely from across the room, picking up the photo on the bedroom drawer. “He looks like such a dork!” I have to see this for myself.

“Actually, he looks much better than you, even with those coke-bottle glasses and that butt-cut hairstyle,” I tease.

“I thought it was just you that's ugly. Now I know it runs in your whole family,” Gabriel teases back.

“He may be ugly but you've seen his wife. She's a mighty fine piece of—”

“Not as hot as my Honey Lee!” Gabriel interrupts, with excitement upon mentioning her name. Honey Lee is a Korean model and a former Miss Korea, but more importantly, Gabriel's biggest infatuation—and presumably every guy in Korea. What I don't get is why her name is Honey. She might as well have the name, Sugar Lee, so it sounds like sugary, then she can be put in Kool-Aid or chocolate cake. And with a name like Honey, she may as well be a stripper and work the pole because no one's going to take her seriously. The thing with people in Asia is that they love to give themselves ridiculous English names.

I remember a missionary from my church who told me the names of several kids in villages all across China: Kobe Chang, Shaq Huang, Pokemon Mah, and a multifarious mockery of other names, including the worst of them all, American Idol Wang! One of the boys actually has the first name, American Idol. I couldn't help but laugh my ass off. No wonder Americans make fun of Asian foreigners; I would too!

“Gabriel, your little Honey Lee ain't all that.”

“Oh you're just jealous because she's hotter than your Emilie,” Gabriel teases, displaying a stupid smile that I would love to smack right off his face.

“I wish she was my Emilie,” I say dejectedly. Damn I wish she was mine. Let me tell you that she's absolutely stunning in every way: tall, thin, and statuesque. Her eyes are wide, but nicely shaped, and—wait! I've already told you about Emilie, haven't I? I really need to snap out of it.

An unexpected knock comes at my door. The door opens even before I can say “Come in”—like Daddy, like Auntie.

“You need go to sleep now. You two go to bed. Church tomorrow. Wake up early.” Auntie slams my door, just as violently as Daddy; I guess the both of them went to the same parenting boot camp. Gabriel is used to my parents' austere behavior, so he doesn't even

bother commenting about Auntie.

I remember when I was a kid, going to Disneyland with my parents' friends and their children. My parents had to go out of town that weekend on a business trip so one of the parents—whose name I've forgotten long ago—announced proudly and confidently to my dad, “If Johnson bad, don't worry. I will spank him like he my own son!” Truth be told, I wasn't as scared as I was pissed. Who does this guy think he is? What gives him the right to discipline me? Gabriel told me that this happened to him before as well when he was a kid in Japan. So I guess Asian parents like to beat up on other kids as well as their own children. Why don't they pick on someone their own size, instead of hurting defenseless, innocent, little children? I guess the reason is because they're really cowards, just like cops. Yeah, that's right: cops. Cops *love* to abuse their power. Many of them are dropouts with an authority complex, beaten up one too many times in high school, so now they think that it's their turn to pick on people. Only they pick on the defenseless—just like Asian parents and dastards.

It's not *really* their fault, though; I read a news article once about the instituted police policy of a “maximum intelligence standard” for new officers, meaning that if you're smart, you can't be a cop, and if you're dumb as a rock, welcome! The “maximum intelligence standard” is set at an IQ of around 99, which is a little below average. They like them dumb enough not to question the law, but just smart enough to know how to shoot and tase the hell out of innocent people. This reminds me of a bumper sticker that I saw not too long ago, which read: ~~To Protect and To Serve~~, To Assault and To Taze. I love wordplay, especially when it's true. Anyway, if you don't believe that there's a “maximum intelligence standard,” just Google it. That's what I did when Gabriel first told me. And you and I both know that Gabriel is full of it, so you always have to double check whenever he tells you something.

I'm still not done talking about cops. Cops these days remind me of the mindless high school football player—not that football players are mindless, just as a cliché—and they only know how to do one thing and nothing else: take orders. Like in Seattle, when a cop tased a pregnant woman because she wouldn't get out of her car fast enough—maybe because she's freaking pregnant and can't move very fast, Officer! How about the time cops tased a wheelchair-bound woman to death in Florida? Or how about the time a cop started beating up a teenage girl and boy in an Arkansas park just for skateboarding? “Cops gone wild” pretty much sums it up.

Of course, cops would always use the same excuse in their hapless defense: “Sure

we're the bad guys, until of course, you need us, then we help you out regardless of what you think of us." What a crock! What do they mean we *need* them? They *need* us; we pay their salaries. They *need* us because they are supposed to *serve* us.

Police officers swore an oath with bond "to protect and to *serve!*" It's interesting that I see that slogan—"to protect and to serve"—everywhere that I go. Whom are they really protecting and serving? I bet you didn't know that a big percentage of law enforcement officers are contractors, aka corporate police. If you go to your local courthouse, airport, even the trolley station in San Diego, you'll notice these "officers" with a corporate logo versus a regular police logo. So "to protect and to serve" is short for "to protect and to serve corporations." My apology for going on a diatribe again; I just get all fired up whenever I hear of hypocrisy, discrimination, and bigotry. Speaking of which, I have church in the morning.

6

It's a beautiful morning, as I stare outside the bedroom window. I can hardly see anybody outside; I'm sure everyone's getting ready for mandatory Sunday morning church service. Gabriel is still sleeping—big surprise—so I decide to get ready by brushing my teeth, taking a shower, fixing my hair and putting on my new parentally-purchased Hugo Boss dress shirt with matching pants, so that I look prim and proper like a good Asian and represent—show off—my family's status.

I walk down to the kitchen to see that Auntie is ready as well. There's a disgusted look in her eyes, as I pass her to get some milk out of the fridge. It can't be because of me, since I'm all dressed up and ready to go to church, so it must be because of Gabriel, who's still sleeping. I decide to skip breakfast altogether and rush upstairs to wake Gabriel up.

“Leave me alone!” Gabriel pleads, as he buries his head under the pillow. He pulls the comforter over himself to form an impenetrable fortress of fluffy cotton.

“Dude, we have to go to church. Auntie's already pissed at you for sleeping so late.” I really don't care about what Auntie thinks, but I do care about what she'll tell my parents.

“Alright, alright. I'm getting up. By the way, I was dreaming about Emilie, my nubile love,” Gabriel mutters with a pestering tone. I grab his pillow and proceed to beat him with it. He laughs and nearly trips over the bedroom rug, as he runs into the bathroom. I'm laughing, too, because he's completely naked.

After Gabriel finishes getting ready, in a record time of *only* two hours, alongside another record of Auntie complaining just once, we pack in my car and drive to Auntie's new church, Unity Mission Church of Christ. Unity Mission Church looks like a giant stadium: tall steel structures supporting double-reinforced concrete walls, stain-glassed windows the size of truck bays, massive marble columns shouldering the mirrored ceiling of the church entrance—and featuring from the inside: a fully-equipped, Olympic-size swimming pool plus spa, an arcade, a car care center, a complete fitness center that could rival 24 Hour Fitness

and even a Starbucks inside for all your caffeinated, praying needs. This is a typical megachurch, the result of too many snobby people with too much money. It's interesting that this is *supposed* to be a Church of Christ, the same Christ who preached against the sins of greed and avarice. The church members of Unity Mission probably missed that particular sermon.

I think about all the poor, starving children around the world as we walk through the church parking lot, which is full of luxury cars: BMWs, Mercedes Benz convertibles, Lexus sedans, among many others. Consider WWJD: What Would Jesus Drive? I know he wouldn't drive any of those cars. I guess Unity Mission Church members don't practice what Jesus preaches. Gabriel points his finger at the cross near the top of the roof to show me how miniature it is in comparison to the entire megachurch.

Upon entering the main entrance, we see a vast sea of people, hundreds waiting in separate lines and many in groups of circles. It takes some time, but we finally make our way into the sanctuary. The inside of the sanctuary is even more impressive, like a grand concert hall: bright lights shining from above the mile-high ceiling, rows of pews cascading down like a torrential river flowing to the bottom, screens literally as big as those in a movie theatre hanging high above, and at the top of the chancel, a sound system with a speaker as wide as a football field and just as expensive, too, from Auntie's explanation.

We sit in the nosebleed section of the megachurch way in the back, as the front and middle sections are already full. I find it surprising that there aren't any event ushers to check our tickets—just joking, of course. Auntie recognizes a friend over in the next pew so she gets up to talk to her. Gabriel and I sit there silently and awkwardly, not knowing anyone.

Once the sermon starts, I notice a number of cameras at the center of the nave. Apparently, this church service is a live televise, broadcasting all over the Bay Area. I'm guessing I can't sleep through service, like I usually do. I'll probably have to babysit Gabriel and keep him from snoring too loud. Speaking of which, he's already starting to doze off—why the hell did I bring Gabriel?

When it's finally over, after about two hours of the same, monotonous stuff that I've heard since I was a child, we walk out towards the main hallway. Auntie sees some more of her friends and walks over to talk to them. I'm with Gabriel, both of us standing silently and awkwardly, just like during service, by the entranceway. All of the sudden, I notice a girl and a guy walking towards us. As they come closer, I realize that I recognize the girl: Emilie! What's

she doing here in Palo Alto? My heart starts pounding fast as I begin to fix my hair, suavely of course. I rub my eyes and nose to make sure that there's nothing nasty visible. I know my breath is okay since I'm chewing gum, even throughout all of service earlier. Gabriel catches her eyes and says, "Hey Emilie. How's it going?"

"Hi Gabriel, I'm doing good," Emilie replies. "How about you?" Gabriel and Emilie used to be friends when they were kids, since their parents were in business together.

"I'm alright. You know Johnson, right?" Gabriel asks. Oh, please say "Yes." Please say "Yes."

"Yes, I do. Hello, Johnson," Emilie smiles with her response. Alright! She knows that I exist.

"Hey Emilie," I say smoothly, as if she's just another person off the street, even though she's the only girl who I ever think about.

"By the way, I'd like you guys to meet Ronald." I totally forgot about the guy that she's with. Why does she have to ruin things by introducing him?!

"Hello," Gabriel says politely.

"Hi," I add perfunctorily, as if he's *really* just another person off the street.

Gabriel notices my tone and immediately asks Emilie, "So what are you doing here in Palo Alto?"

"I'm visiting a few friends, but Ronald is from around here. He lives in San Jose." I wish he would stay there in San Jose and leave us alone.

"That's cool. Johnson and I are here to visit his Auntie." Don't say "Auntie," Gabriel! That makes me sound like I'm a little kid. "Oh, we were talking about you, Emilie, just the other day." Damn it! Don't say that either! Why the hell did I bring Gabriel?

"Oh, what about?" Emilie tilts her head slightly with an inquisitive look.

"Johnson says that the two of you are in the same molecular biology class together."

"Oh, yeah, that's right," Emilie confirms. "We're also in the same lab."

"Well, Johnson was saying how you're really smart and how he really wishes that you could tutor him." I'm really going to stop hanging out with Gabriel—after I kill him, of course.

"Sure, no problem," Emilie turns towards me and smiles, making this the perfect moment to take a picture of her beautiful, immaculate face. "Anytime, just let me know. Well, we have to get going. We're eating lunch with Ronald's parents."

"Alright, see you later then. Have a safe trip back to OC," Gabriel says, as we wave

goodbye to them.

“Gabriel! What's wrong with you?!” I snap at him fiercely.

“Hey, chill, man! I'm helping you out. Now's your chance to talk to her and stop being a shy, little bitch,” Gabriel urges, “*and* you can thank me later. Oh, yeah, one more thing: I saw her a few weeks ago and told her that you liked her.”

“You what? What the hell is wrong with you?” I scream, causing several people to stare in our direction.

“Relax, bro. She said that you're really cute. She wonders why you never talk to her.”

“She said that? Really?”

“Yeah. So do you want to thank me or kill me?” Gabriel asks rhetorically, showing a proud, accomplished smile. Did I mention that Gabriel's my best friend and the coolest person in the entire world?

“I love you, Gabriel. You are indeed wonderful and—wait—why didn't you tell me that you talked to her a few weeks back?” I really am going to kill Gabriel.

7

I finish packing all of my clothes in my suitcase and glance over to see Gabriel's stuff all over the bed and on the floor. Auntie always complains to me about Gabriel's indolence, uncleanliness, disheveled hair, hopeless future, and the list goes on and on. Auntie's probably right about all those things, but I still love Gabriel, especially since he got the ball rolling for me and Emilie. I can't wait to go back to Irvine—even if I hate it there. I wonder how I should approach her. Maybe I should just play it cool and let her come to me. Then again, girls don't take the initiative so I'll need to make the first move. And then there's the matter with Ronald. She didn't say if they were dating, and I've already beaten every last detail out of Gabriel per his conversation with her a few weeks ago. I guess I'll just have to wait to find out when I get back. Now, it's time to pack up Gabriel's stuff. I owe him that much.

As we make our way out the door, I give Auntie a big hug goodbye, since I know she won't initiate it. Asian culture needs to change so I'll start changing it! Gabriel waves goodbye and as he turns towards the car, I can see Auntie giving her usual look of dissatisfaction towards him. She used to give me the same look, but I guess I've been a good boy this whole weekend so she cut me some slack. I made sure I obeyed everything she said, from graduating with honors to marrying *only* after I've established a successful, medical practice. I also answered “yes” to all of her rigid questions—nothing different from when I'm at home.

The drive back to Irvine is unbearable, since Gabriel is teasing me relentlessly about Emilie, joking about how our first date will involve dissecting frogs and making out with eye goggles on.

“I'm letting you drive so don't push your luck,” I advise Gabriel, hoping that he would shut his mouth.

“You get flustered so easily,” Gabriel replies calmly. “It's funny to see you get so defensive. To be honest, I don't know what you see in Emilie. I mean she's pretty and all, but that's about it. She doesn't really have that much of a personality.”

“And this is coming from a person with *no* personality,” I smirk.

“No, seriously. I remember the first time I played at her house, when I was a little kid. She would rarely talk and even when she did, it was only to her dolls. There was this one time when she got mad at me because I drew a picture for her with her name on it.”

“Why would she get mad about that?”

“Because I spelled Emilie with a *y*, like how every normal person would spell Emily. I was just trying to draw her something nice, but she got mad at me for not knowing how to spell her name. Well, excuse me, princess! I swear...girls with *normal* names that spell it differently think that they are so unique. It's not unique. It's asinine! A unique name would be Shaniqua. Spelling a *normal* name differently is not unique. It's called *misspelling*.” Gabriel does have a point, but I don't really care because he's making fun of Emilie.

“Well, if it's just a misspelling, then I'll start spelling your name with a *y*, too, just like the way it should be: Gaybriel. G,A,Y—B,R—”

“And I'll start spelling Johnson with S,M,A,L,L in the front.”

“That's adding an extra word, not a different way of spelling,” I reply with a smart-ass tone.

“How about you shut up and put my doobie bag in my backpack?” Gabriel instructs, trying desperately to change the subject.

“Alright. You know how dangerous it is to smoke pot while driving,” I say jokingly.

“Remember that commercial with those guys smoking pot in the car at a drive-thru, and then the driver's unaware of a little girl riding her bike, so he accidentally speeds up and hits her?”

“Oh, yeah! Haha! What a bunch of crap! Where the hell were the little girl's parents? She just came out riding in the middle of the street without even looking. That's such propaganda. I could do a commercial where those guys, instead of smoking pot, are filling out their voter registration cards, and as they are filling it out, the little girl rides her bike in front of the car, and the driver hits her. So the moral of my commercial: Don't Vote!” Gabriel announces, proudly with confidence. “I love how they demonize pot smokers even though no one's ever died *once* from smoking pot, and 50,000 die each year from drinking and driving.” With Gabriel's wisdom, he should definitely run for office.

“True, true,” I assent. Who am I to disagree?

“But getting back to Emilie, you should really be careful of Korean girls,” Gabriel warns, like a big brother. He's absolutely right. Here's the thing about Korean girls. Of course,

most girls these days are superficial and pretentious, especially those in Irvine and pretty much all of California. Multiply that by a hundred and you have a Korean girl. I'm not exaggerating; I'm really not. It has a lot to do with Korean culture.

Many Korean girls grew up in South Korea without much money, so all they focus on is exactly that: money, especially at a very young age. Then they are immersed with the idea of beauty and superficiality, above all else. In fact, a large percentage of Korean girls actually get double eyelid surgery to make their eyes bigger; that's why you can easily tell if an Asian girl is Korean or not. It's so common in Korea, that parents actually set up a fund—similar to a college fund—for the surgery! If the family and the girl don't have the necessary funds, then the girl usually ends up becoming a prostitute, in order to pay for the surgery, as well as paying for other expensive, inessential crap; I know it sounds harsh, but please hear me out. Obviously, Korean parents don't like their daughters taking up prostitution, but eventually they accept it because they claim that “it's a part of society,” to keep deviants from raping and hurting others. However, it's really because they know that prostitutes earn a tremendous amount of money, which means more than any ethical or moral issue, even if it involves their own daughters. Korean parents are certainly disappointed with their daughters becoming prostitutes, but they certainly aren't disappointed with the enormous amount of money that they make. I know it's hard to believe that so many Korean girls become prostitutes, but just ask the USCIS, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, formerly known as INS, about the crackdown on the flood of Korean immigrants—most of them young, attractive Korean girls—during the early part of this century. These Korean girls work as prostitutes in fronts set up as massage parlors, or “night spas” as many johns would call them. I think that it's sad how society places such a heavy weight on beauty and money that girls have to become prostitutes just to keep up with the “lifestyles of the rich and famous.”

As you can tell, I'm not a big fan of money. As the old adage goes: “...money is the root of all evil.” Don't get me wrong; I use money to buy food, gas, and stuff, which is totally okay. But what's not okay is the obsession with money, to the point of going into prostitution just to get double eyelid surgery.

If money and beauty aren't enough, most Korean girls have the same dream of becoming one thing: a house wife. I was surprised when a Korean friend of mine told me about this. She told me how it was her dream to have a little boy and a little girl and a house in the 'burbs. I asked her if that's all she wanted in life. She gave me an unequivocal “yes.”

That's great if that's what she really wanted, but I ruminated over what she said and realized that she didn't really want to be a house wife, because a house wife actually has to do work: ironing, cleaning up shit, feeding, cooking, cleaning up more shit; it's a job in itself.

What she really dreams about becoming isn't actually a house wife: it's a *trophy* wife, where the husband provides her an endless number of credit cards for shopping, manicures, pedicures, and other luxuriating, wasteful crap. But who wouldn't want to be a trophy wife, driving around in a luxury car, wearing designer clothes, and eating at five-star restaurants? Hell, I want to be a trophy wife! I just wish she would tell me straight up, like Gabriel, who told me once, when we were kids, that all he wanted to become was a businessman, since the sole reason for the existence of Japanese men is to work. I laughed and told him that I wanted to become a businessman *killer*, since the sole reason for my existence was to end his life. He told me that I wasn't funny and now I know that he's right. Anyway, Korean girls really mean trophy wife, *not* house wife.

But it's not entirely the fault of Korean girls. The fault also lies with Korean men, specifically in regards to a stigma that is strikingly true; Korean men are widely known as wife beaters, domineering and controlling, and their actions pervasive throughout the history of Korean culture. Korean men have furious tempers. If you don't believe me, just hang out with a Korean guy after he's had just one shot of Soju (Korean vodka.)

Unfortunately, a lot of Korean women simply accept this stigma, which is why many of them are completely subservient to men, just like other Asian women in other Asian cultures, especially in the old days. In fact, many ancient civilizations in Asia have words based on hierarchy: lower caste words for women and higher caste words for men. Even today, Asian women are still subservient to Asian men. But now it's turning around. You'll see a lot of Korean girls—and a lot of other Asian girls—date non-Asian guys, such as white guys, even black guys, who display domineering Asian father traits. These girls date non-Asians to rebel for all those strict years of upbringing as children and to escape from the stranglehold of their Asian fathers, but ultimately, end up getting the same thing regardless of whom they date.

I will say one good thing about Korean guys: they pay for *everything*. That's why so many Asian girls start out dating Korean guys. Hell, I would start out dating a Korean guy, too, if he pays for everything. But it's a trap! He'll buy all these expensive gifts, such as jewelry, clothes, and mobiles phones, in order to lure the girl in and once he gets her, it's over! The girl can't escape his tenacious, unyielding clutches. That's when the Korean guy proudly rips off

his shirt and tie, like Clark Kent switching to Superman, to reveal his true identity *and* outfit: the wife beater!

Of course, Korean girls aren't the only ones with issues. Many other Asian girls possess the same characteristics, particularly Vietnamese girls, and they can't seem to figure out why they end up with such shitty men. As many people know, Vietnam is a third world country, so the Vietnamese girls over there grew up very destitute. For some reason, when they emigrate to the United States of America, they suddenly think that they're above everybody, like they're hot shit, which explains why they *exoticize* themselves by saying that they're "half-French," "Eurasian," or even "biracial," when they are really quite simply just Vietnamese! Everyone knows the French conquered Vietnam, so no need to make you and your culture sound more exotic by saying you're half-French. This goes for Filipinos as well, exoticizing themselves as "half-Spanish." No, you are Filipino; being conquered by the Spanish doesn't make you Spanish, just like being conquered by the French doesn't make you French.

Worse, these girls even choose to date specific Asian ethnicities by hierarchy—I call it the "Asian Status Hierarchy"—from lowest to highest: Laotian, Cambodian, and the rest of Indochina, including the Vietnamese; then Filipino; third and second place are Korean then Chinese; and the top dog, Japanese. Of course, there are others, but I'll just talk about the essential ones. It's sad that there's a class system even within Asian culture.

What's interesting about this Asian Status Hierarchy is that it's pervasive throughout all of Asian culture. What's even more interesting is that this hierarchical pattern, from lowest to highest, is the same as lowest to highest in nominal GDP—a country's total income, aka *money*! The bottom rung of the ladder is Laotian, who *coincidentally* have the lowest GDP, and the top of the ladder is Japanese, who *coincidentally* have the highest GDP—coincidence, my ass! Asian Status Hierarchy has everything to do with money, just as dating preference has everything to do with money because it's always about the money!

If you don't believe me about the Asian Status Hierarchy, go ask a Japanese guy's parents what they think about him marrying a Vietnamese girl versus a Japanese girl. Now that you know what I know, you won't be surprised at their answer.

8

I can't believe that I actually feel good about being back in Irvine, after many years of loathing and misprizing this city. Throughout the drive home and during dinner, plus the entire night without much sleep at all, I've been thinking about what to say to Emilie. I know I'll see her in class later today. I guess I'll just have to play it cool, then again, I'm not cool, so I'll just be nice. But pretty girls hate nice. Maybe I'll just skip class today so I don't have to deal with this, but then she'll just forget about me entirely. Man, I hate worrying about this! All this pressure and there's still nothing going on between us. I guess this is romance. But then again, I read a book by the Dalai Lama in which he explained that romance is an illusion and a fantasy. If you look up the word *romance* in the dictionary, you'll get the definitions: *imaginative*, *fictitious*, and the aforementioned *fantasy*. In other words, romance isn't real, just like Hollywood isn't real. I'll quote the Dalai Lama from his book, *The Art of Happiness*:

“The idealization of this romantic love can be seen as an extreme. It cannot be seen as a positive thing. It's something that is based on fantasy, unattainable. So, on that basis it cannot be seen as a positive thing.”

This is why the divorce rate is now over sixty percent, according to a friend of my parents, who happens to be a marriage attorney. Please understand that I think relationships are definitely okay; I obviously have nothing against them. But when a girl wants a guy to do everything for her or when a guy waits hand and foot for a girl, that is obsession, and as the Dalai Lama stated: “...it cannot be seen as a positive thing.” That's why relationships fail all the time; that's why marriages fail all the time. A relationship based on genuine compassion and mutual respect is what maintains a strong relationship, not romance. So I guess I better show Emilie respect first, before anything else.

My early morning drive to UCI is as tedious as watching senior citizens play miniature golf, in other words, boring as hell, especially driving the same, mundane route and seeing

the same, old scenery. What makes it worse is the heavy traffic, as you already know. But the good thing about getting here early is getting a great parking spot, right in front of the School of Biological Sciences. Now I have all the time in the world to plan out what to say to Emilie.

I'm in my first class of the day, biochemistry, feeling very tense and anxious. Time is a killer especially when you're waiting for the big moment. So I decide, for the very first time ever, to get out of class early just so I can go to the bathroom to freshen up, you know, to work my magic and get ready for Emilie.

I'm standing at the urinal “doing my thing” when I notice, at the corner of my eye, a guy standing right behind me, looking rather pensive and uncertain. There are a total of five urinals in the men's bathroom, with me occupying the one farthest to the left, the remaining four are empty. For you ladies out there, please understand that a guy should never stand behind you if the other urinals are empty—that's what we call gay. Anyway, I finish “doing my thing” and as I leave the bathroom, I see the guy immediately dashing to the center urinal, to do “his thing.”

I ponder for a moment about his bizarre behavior and then I realize that this guy suffers from shy bladder syndrome—supposedly a new disease according to a news article I read a few months ago—in which a person experiences trouble peeing when there are people around him. I can't believe this is actually a disease. For crying out loud, AIDS is on the rise, cancer is everywhere, but we now have a more serious disease known as shy bladder syndrome! Are you kidding me? What's so shy about peeing? There's a very easy way to resolve his shy bladder syndrome and since I'm so nice, I'll help that guy out: I'll let him hold my penis while I pee, just to show him that there's nothing to be shy about. If I can do it, anyone can! Okay, maybe I won't let him hold my penis—actually, hell no I won't let him—but if shy bladder is a big problem for him, all he needs to do is drink massive amounts of water, then his body will have no choice but to pee, even with people around. Do it enough times and it'll break the mental block, like the mental block a professional baseball player experiences during a slump, in which the skill to hit is there but something is just in the way mentally. By drinking massive amounts of water over time, he'll start peeing in front of people and eventually break the mental block. After time, he'll start peeing normally with no more shy bladder. Who needs medical school if someone like me can start curing diseases like shy bladder syndrome? Anyway, I'll stop playing doctor since I need to get ready for my big moment: Emilie.

Rushing to my molecular biology class, I get there half an hour early and much to my surprise, I see Emilie sitting in the back row, beautiful and captivating, as the clouds rip open the sky, allowing the sun to shine brilliantly with its radiance upon her heavenly presence. Alright, I sound like a damn romance novel, but I can't help just standing there, silent and motionless, with a totally stunned look on my face—the look of love.

Emilie looks up and smiles. “Hey Johnson. Why are you just standing there by the door?” I really hope I don't blow this.

“I just realized that I forgot something in my car,” I stammer, hoping that she didn't catch me staring. I really hope I don't blow this. “But it's no big deal. How are you doing?”

“I'm doing good. How about you?”

“I'm doing great, now that you're here...to help me with my...homework, of course.” I think I'm really blowing this.

Emilie just smiles. I walk towards the back of the room and take the seat right next to her—that's one small step for a man, one giant leap for Johnson!

“Alright. Let me take a look at your homework,” Emilie says, as I hand her my notebook. Just so you know, I purposely missed some answers, to make it look like I really need tutoring. Truth be told, I'm maintaining a 4.0 in the class—or else my parents would bring back the old feather duster for you-know-what.

Emilie looks over my homework, with meticulous eyes and as I expect, she points out my erroneous answers and helps me correct them. After she finishes, we start chatting a little about our past weekend in Palo Alto. “Did you have fun hanging out with *Auntie*?” Emilie says, trying to keep from laughing too hard. I'm going to kill Gabriel for having such a big mouth.

“My *aunt* and I didn't do too much. We just went shopping for some things. She criticized Gabriel most of the weekend. That part I actually liked.”

“Did Gabriel tell you that we used to hang out when we were kids? It's been so long since I've spoken to him.”

“Yeah. He told me that you stopped hanging out with him because he was a loser. And you're totally right.”

“Haha. No, Gabriel's a sweetheart. I love his upbeat attitude and his disheveled hair, even his nasty beard. He's a cool guy.”

“You wouldn't say that if you see the way he drives,” I joke, using my humor and

charm to win her over. “By the way, did you have fun hanging out with your boy toy, Ronald?” I'm trying to find out if they're really going out or not.

“It was okay. Ronald's parents are good friends with mine. He's been asking me out for the longest time, but I don't like him. My parents cajoled me into hanging out with him for the weekend since he knows a lot of people at Stanford Medical. I'm hoping to get in after I graduate here.” This is exactly what I want to hear: “I don't like him.”

“So you two aren't going out?” I ask with a little too much excitement, hoping she wouldn't pick up on this.

“Would you like it if we were going out?”

“I would like it if Ronald and I were going out,” I joke, catching her off guard.

“Oh really?! Why don't I arrange a date between the two of you? It would be my absolute pleasure,” Emilie exclaims, displaying her good sense of humor. I like a girl with a good sense of humor.

“Then it would be my absolute pleasure never to talk to you again,” I counter. We both laugh out loud, attracting several stares from those around us. Luckily, class hasn't started yet or else we'd both be asked to leave.

Much to my surprise, Emilie tilts her head slightly and closer towards me, her eyes locking with mine. I can sense that she's about to ask me something important. “So Johnson, how come we've been in the same classes since middle school, yet this is the first time we're actually talking?” Her question catches me off guard, since I had no idea that she even knew that I existed all the way back in middle school. Hell, I didn't even know I existed all the way back in middle school.

“I'm shy because girls find it endearing,” I say to play it off. Emilie starts laughing at my remark.

“Well, endearing or not, we should talk more,” Emilie says. I can't believe it! Things are really starting to look good for me!



After two hours of torture—I mean lecture—class is finally over. It's now or never so I work up enough courage to ask Emilie for her number. She grabs my left wrist, forming a tight grip as if she's afraid that I'll escape and writes her phone number with her Hello Kitty pen in

big loopy letters on the top of my hand. “Don't wash your hands,” Emilie instructs, “and you better call.” She smiles with a hint of seriousness.

I pull out my mobile phone from my right pocket, scrolling down to select the camera option. With the click of a button, I take a snapshot of her number on my hand. “In the event that my left hand gets chopped off, I can still call you with my right.”

“I like a guy with a sense of humor. Anyway, I gotta get going. Do call me.” Emilie departs through the door, looking fantastic in her ass-hugging jeans. I like ass-hugging jeans—correction: I love ass-hugging jeans.

I can't believe what just happened! I don't know how, but I think I got lucky. Actually, I *know* I got lucky. How could I, a certifiable loser—as verified by my parents and numerous other sources—get the phone number of literally the most beautiful girl at UCI? What can she possibly see in me? It can't be because of the size of my you-know-what because everyone knows that Asian guys are small you-know-where. All jokes aside, can it be that Emilie empathizes with me, sharing the same parental pressure of becoming a doctor, thus, forming a common bond altogether?

Maybe I shouldn't ask so many questions and just be happy with my situation. And I should be happy that things are really changing for me, for the better, much better than I can ever hope for. I've let my parents control me all of my life and in turn, inducing my criticism of Asian culture. It will be different now, since things are really looking up. I'm starting to feel much better about my life. Perhaps it's not so bad to be Asian.

9

I hate grocery shopping by myself, especially when my parents make me come here to Culver Plaza, the Chinatown of Irvine and ergo Orange County. It's always crowded with Asian people of course, all looking for a wide selection of cheap Asian goods. Now when I say cheap, I don't mean just the price; I also mean the quality. Many people are aware of lead toys manufactured in China, but not many are aware of cadmium-laden kitchenware, which has been linked to birth defects and cancer; or chopped up pieces of bleached cardboard in frozen wontons; or contaminated, toxic pet food that has killed a copious number of animals here in the United States; or milk and baby formula laced with melamine, a banned industrial chemical, the same chemical used in the contaminated, toxic pet food; or the extreme levels of formaldehyde—normally for embalming dead bodies—used in clothing, and unbelievably, also in noodles, which prompted the shutdown of one of the biggest noodle manufacturers in China. Not to mention the complete violation of human rights and the advocacy of slave labor, but of course, Asians don't care because it's always about the money, so ethical and moral values go out the window.

It's not just with the Chinese; the Vietnamese also use formaldehyde in their noodles, and the Thais fry their foods with thin layers of plastic lacquer for a crispier texture—whatever it takes to make a buck, never mind your health. I find it interesting that Asian people like to buy the most expensive houses and the most expensive cars, yet, they shop for the absolute cheapest food, groceries, cleaning products, kitchenware—anything else, you name it. Asians will only spend lots of money on items that they can show off but be cheap with items that they can't.

In Asia, for instance, there is a flood of counterfeit—aka knock-off—items from fake designer clothes and accessories to fake Rolex watches and mobile phones—anything else, you name it. Remember what I said about Asians wanting to show off? Asians love to buy fake name-brand clothing and other fake name-brand items in order to show off—Asian Pride

Theorem Number 2: Status; because it's cheap—Asian Pride Theorem Number 1: Money; and it gets them attention from people—Asian Pride Theorem Number 3: Power.

Getting attention is a personal power that really means nothing to anyone else, but as long as they can impress their friends and family, then that's the only power that they need—just like Asian parents with personal power to control their kids; it means nothing to anyone else, but it means everything to them. You can see how all of this goes back to my Asian Pride Theorems; I really can reveal the truths about Asian culture with just my three Asian Pride Theorems.

I completely check off everything on my shopping list so I head back to my car without haste, since my parents always get on my case for taking too long. As I approach my car, I can see a short, old man with whitish-gray hair, wearing a shirt with the acronym CIA and below it: Chinese In America. I giggle a little, thinking to myself, What a FOB, then opening the trunk of my car to put the groceries. He's proud to be Chinese in America—that's cool; I have no problem with that. In fact, I think that's great!

This reminds me of a job fair that I attended last summer at UCI. I saw a group of Chinese students handing out flyers and pamphlets, which proclaimed the burgeoning surge of Mandarin, the traditional Chinese language. They even had a huge banner with the title: Mandarin, The Language of the Future. How is Mandarin the language of the future when it's already been here for thousands of years? I understand what they mean about the growing importance of China politically and economically, thus, the growing importance of Mandarin, but how many people do you know—that are not Chinese—who actually speak Mandarin? And I'm sure that the Chinese students at UCI are proud of the fact that Mandarin is the most spoken language in the world—well, duh! There are over a billion people in China alone! Mandarin is localized to Chinese people. I don't see how it's the language of the future when only Chinese people, and maybe a few missionaries in China, speak Mandarin.

It's like with Yao Ming, a Chinese-born NBA basketball player; every person in China claims that he's the best center in the history of the NBA, yet he's never won a NBA championship, let alone just making it into the NBA Finals. Chinese people just jump on the bandwagon, only if it's something *Chinese*. If Yao Ming wasn't *Chinese*, people in China wouldn't say the same thing about him; if Michelle Wie wasn't *Korean*, people in Korea could care less about her; same with Manny Pacquiao if he wasn't *Filipino* and same with Paradorn Srichaphan if he wasn't *Thai*. Asians love to follow based on their own ethnic skin color. But

following “yellow” doesn't necessarily mean it's good. Would you want to follow Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, or Kim Jong-il? If Asians want to follow, then follow on principle, not skin color. Anyway, in regards to Mandarin, it's not even the official Chinese language! China's official language is Simplified Chinese so even they don't use the real Mandarin!

I get the feeling that someone is looking over my shoulder so I turn around and sure enough, I see the old man with the CIA shirt staring right at me. I decide to stare back, not blinking or moving, like we're engaged in a duel—yet the old man wouldn't budge! So I walk slowly to get inside my car and my eyes continue to lock with his to maintain our rigid, coupled stare. He's lucky that I have to get to the bank before it closes or else I'd be in big trouble. I guess no one's ever told him that staring is impolite.

I also hate going to the bank, especially when my parents make me do it, while they sit at home and watch the news all day, particularly on Asian news channels. Auntie does this as well; Gabriel's parents are the same. I can save them time and tell them what's on the news every single day: bad news, murder, bad news, war, bad news, and on and on. Since every day is the same crap, why bother watching it? The next day will air more bad news anyway, overshadowing the day before, so there's no point in watching it every single day if the news just gets worse and worse.

Besides, all news channels are owned by corporations so you get a daily *overdose* of corporate propaganda. Most people don't know that NBC is owned by General Electric or that ABC is owned by Walt Disney. And since these corporations have investment sponsors, that means that their financial interests come first, not the news. In fact, corporate mainstream media has been caught red-handed many times for airing “fake” news in order to boost ratings. If you don't believe me, just go to prwatch.org. But my parents don't care because they're completely brainwashed by watching so much television every day. It wouldn't hurt if they actually read once in a while instead of watching so much TV; I can't believe I'm having to say this—such role reversal!

At least the line at the bank isn't long today. I usually come here to make a quick deposit each week for my parents, since I'm such a good son—or rather, I'm such a bad son since they're making me do it. I feel a light tap on my right shoulder so I turn around to see an old lady, wearing a navy-blue voile print dress, her white hair pulled back with a large clip. She stares at me like a puppy that just peed on the rug.

“Young man, what is your nationality?” the old lady asks, not knowing that her inquiry

is quite discourteous. I almost got into a scuffle with an old man earlier so I'm not about to make my day worse by messing with an old lady.

“My nationality is American,” I reply correctly.

“No, no. What is your nationality?” the old lady repeats, mistaken with her terminology. I feel bad for correcting her, but she needs to learn not to be so impolite.

“My nationality is American. Nationality means your national status, as in the nation of your citizenship. Perhaps you mean ethnicity or racial heritage,” I correct her, with luminous clarity.

She looks at me with a confused gaze. “So what are you?” she asks for a third time. Luckily, it's my turn to go up to the teller window so I leave her standing there, already answering her question twice. I wish people would understand the difference between something as simple as nationality and ethnicity. If she looks at her U.S. passport, it clearly states: Nationality - United States of America. It doesn't state: Nationality - Old White Lady—for crying out loud!

I don't know why I'm having to deal with old people today. This is the exact reason why Americans put them in nursing homes. Too bad Asians don't put their parents and grandparents in nursing homes, due to their austere obedience to culture and custom—or so they would have you believe. In reality, they don't want their friends and relatives to talk bad about them for putting their parents and grandparents in a nursing home, in order to save face. Many Americans can't stand taking care of their parents and grandparents when they get old. For the younger Asian generation, we don't have a choice in the matter, since our parents and grandparents live with us when they're old. But on the bright side, when they start living with us, it'll be our turn to spank and discipline them, like what they did to us when we were kids! We'll get to tell them what to eat, what to wear, when to go to bed—I can't wait! Payback's a bitch. Now that I'm done running my—I mean, my parents'—errands, I have to get home and start doing my homework. Abject slavery never ends!

I enter my house, enjoying the silence, and walk into the kitchen for some organic orange juice. As I pass by the kitchen table, I notice a pile of letters, most of them opened, sitting on top of some junk mail. What catches my attention is the fact that several of those opened letters are addressed to me. This really gets me angry. I hate it when my parents read my mail. Asian parents think they have carte blanche to go through your mail, read your personal diary, wiretap your phone using electronic eavesdropping and surveillance devices—

okay, maybe that's a bit extreme. But it's not like I have a secret life outside of UCI, like being an agent for the FBI or running tactical reconnaissance missions for Special Ops; it's just simply a matter of respect. I don't go through their mail because I respect their privacy so they should reciprocate as well. Too bad Asian parents don't know what this word means, literally *and* figuratively.

My enjoyment of silence comes to a halt as I hear the piano playing from the living room, which means that Jordan's back home, probably practicing to become an acclaimed concert pianist just so that she can prove how much better she is than me—not that it's really all that hard. Many Asian kids have spent countless hours at the piano, like Jordan and me. My parents forced me to play the piano since I was in elementary school, telling me that I would be successful in life if I played well. It's interesting how they started making me play the piano per the advice of one of their Asian friends. I'm sure that Asian friend advised, “Playing the piano looks good on the resume, for a good-paying job.” It's sad that Asian parents force their kids to play the piano—or any instrument for that matter—not for the love and appreciation of music, but just as a way to get ahead since it looks good on your resume. I personally love playing the piano, from classical to contemporary, for the pure inspiration of music. I resent my parents butchering this with their lust for “a good-paying job.”

“Jordan! Johnson! Come here!” I hear Mommy crying from upstairs. Jordan and I rush up to my parents' bedroom. Mommy is sitting on the bed, while talking on the phone, her eyes filled with tears, yet, none of them falling. She raises her arm, beckoning us over and mutters, “Grand Ma pass away this morning.”

10

Waiting at the airport is easily one of the most excruciatingly painful experiences, right next to getting a root canal. People rushing by, passenger transport vehicles whizzing here and there, baggage carts overflowing everywhere, the terminal like a city of its own, especially here at LAX, Los Angeles International Airport.

My parents booked our flight late last night, right after news of Grand Ma's—my grandmother's—death from lung cancer, due to her smoking more than two packs a day even though Big Tobacco claims that there are no links whatsoever. I did not cry about her passing away, not because I'm heartless but only because I never knew her, like a grandson should. I rarely saw her, only twice during the early years of my childhood, once when my family went on vacation, the other when I just started high school, both of them for only a few days, and now, the third and final time for her funeral. My grandmother, on my father's side, lived in Asia all of her life, never leaving once, not even for a short vacation. I think she was scared of flying. She possessed a very warm demeanor, from what I can remember, always offering candy to Jordan and me and always smiling, even with two missing front teeth. My most salient memory of her involves the news—her watching of it. She would sit in her wooden rocking chair and watch Asian news channels all day from morning until dusk—no joke. Maybe that's where my dad got his news-watching obsession from, same with Mommy, Auntie, and Gabriel's parents, all of them from their own parents.

Grand Ma was a sweet, old lady unlike the typical Asian grandmother, like the one on my mother's side. That grandmother, whom I call Mean Ma, possesses a furious temper. She would scold and order her maids around constantly, even telling members of her own family what to do as if they're her own slaves. She lives in New York—thank god!—which is conducive to seldom visits to the East Coast. Believe it or not, domineering and oppressive grandmothers are a part of Asian culture. That's why I can't step foot into Gabriel's house without his grandmother yelling at him—or even at me! The reason that Asian grandmothers

act this way stems from a type of psychological displacement; they were treated wrong so they must treat others wrong. In Asia, sexism and misogyny are both pervasive, where men can seemingly step over women like they're dirt. With this type of prejudice and discrimination, it's no wonder that Asian women take it out on others, particularly their own children. Also, family structure and hierarchy in Asian culture play a strong role in the development of this mindset. Everyone's familiar with China's one-child policy, but what many people don't know is that many families will throw a baby off a cliff if it's a girl, only stopping until they conceive a male. In Asian culture, the first son is like winning a biological lottery, even though the chances are really just 50-50, go figure. So in Asia, men are meant to rule and women are meant to be ruled and to be subservient. Now I can empathize with why my grandmother, at least the one on Mommy's side, acts like a fascist.

But this doesn't excuse the fact that I don't know Grand Ma well at all. It's actually quite common among the younger Asian generation for us not to know our own grandparents, even the background of our own parents. It's not because we don't care; it's because they don't share it with us. There's a saying in Asian culture, which I'll paraphrase: "People don't remember the loud chatter of the fool, only the silence of the wise." Thus, Asian parents and grandparents are rather silent when it comes to sharing their family history and background. It's the same way with Gabriel. He doesn't know much about his parents or grandparents, even though they all live under one roof. No wonder there's a lack of communication in Asian families—no one talks!

I can't believe that I've been sitting here in the same damn chair for almost two hours, waiting for our flight, the one that's being delayed indefinitely. I've been repeating the words—*slut, twat, douschebag*—nearly the entire time I've been waiting here, without fear or hesitation, because my parents only know common cuss words like *shit* and *fuck* but have absolutely no idea of any other ones. Gabriel and I enjoy saying cuss words all the time out loud, especially in front of our parents, because they have no clue what's going on. Asian parents really need to stop being so ethnocentric with their culture and learn a thing or two about American culture, since they do live here.

Jordan, sitting to my right, is silently reading one of the many textbooks that she brought with her. I think she packed more textbooks than she did clothes, that nerd. I shouldn't make fun of her because I actually packed a bunch of textbooks as well, only because my finals are coming up in a couple of months. If I don't get A's, you know by now what will

happen to me—feather duster!

So you have Jordan doing her homework, my parents reading the paper, and just a few rows in front of us, a woman yelling at a man. And wouldn't you know it?—they're Asian, too. I can't help but to eavesdrop since I'm bored, and besides, I'm not going anywhere, anytime soon; plus, it sure beats the hell out of studying for my finals. From what I can make out, she's mad at him for packing the wrong clothes in his suitcase and forgetting to pack some other items. The man, presumably her husband, tells her not to yell in public, in order to save face. And as you now know, saving face is extremely important in Asian culture. After all, you can't have people thinking that Asians aren't perfect, so everything must look good on the outside, albeit, everything is *completely* messed up on the inside. Asians secretly hide behind a facade of good grades, high SAT scores, big houses, nice cars, successful businesses, but deep down inside the heart of it all, their family lives are extremely dysfunctional. Look at the suicide rate alone for Asian Americans, astronomically higher than whites, blacks and Hispanics. In fact, Asian Americans have the highest suicide rate among women. Moreover, two million women attempt suicide in China every year, with many more not counted due to saving face. And in Japan, it's normal for people to jump off the subway platform onto a moving train. (This form of suicide is actually considered honorable because of saving face. But jumping onto a moving train will actually cause you to lose face—and the head, the arms, the legs, the entire body into tiny, little pieces.) The most disheartening is the fact that Asia possesses the highest suicide rate in the world! Sometimes, it's not so good to be #1.

Many people attribute the high suicide rate to the pressure of performing and the pressure of conforming. Sure there's pressure: peer pressure, parental pressure, financial pressure, blood pressure—just kidding—but not everyone jumps off a bridge because of pressure. So there's definitely more to it than just pressure. It's really because of the lack of communication and the lack of affection in Asian families.

In Asian culture, for instance, seeking help for personal issues is a sign of weakness, and thus, losing face. Once a person loses face, that person is deemed a failure, an outcast, a leper. That's why Asians stay silent and quiet, keeping it all bottled up. Then they find substitutes for the lack of communication and the lack of affection through money, status, and power—because that's all they know how to do! Everyone has to be perfect, no one can have weaknesses, no one can ask for help, and absolutely no one can talk about any problems or issues, in order to save face. Asians think that if they don't talk about it, then it doesn't exist

and therefore, all the problems go away—wrong! The lack of communication is what exacerbates all the problems and the issues. The lack of communication is why Asia has the highest suicide rate. The lack of communication—which I'll go so far as to say *no* communication—is why Asian families are so dysfunctional! There's no one in my family to talk to about my issues, and no one to empathize with what I'm going through because I have to save face, in order to maintain the “perfection” of Asian culture. But I become so alone that thoughts of suicide permeate fiercely within me, almost to the point of palpability. Asian parents have to understand that their children are not mindless robots, programmed to get straight A's and to overachieve beyond all measure and above everything else. We are human beings, too, that need love, affection, appreciation, and communication. That's why I envy so many non-Asian families here in America. They may not have the most money, the best cars, the nicest homes, but they have the most loving, caring and supportive families that will be there for them no matter what the circumstances are and will help pull them through any problem, big or small. That to me is immensely more important than getting straight A's, achieving a perfect SAT score, or even getting into medical school—to know that my family will be there for me unequivocally, with genuine love and undying support. But the only thing I can hope for is to not get a beating from the good, old feather duster.

“Now Boarding: Flight 6025, Los Angeles to...” I hear the audio announcement for our flight, loud and clear, which means that we're ready to board an unbearably agonizing 15-hour, non-stop flight, while watching five continuous replays of the same in-flight movie, eating delicious gourmet airplane food and feeling completely miserable because of the cabin pressure and jet lag—life doesn't get any better than this! Standing in front of us, as we're waiting in line, is a businessman, dressed in a black suit with a dark navy-blue tie—looking very uncomfortable maintaining the look of the status quo—carrying a pager and PDA on his belt, wearing a wireless headset—like he's Secret Service, risking his life in order to protect *innocent* corporations—and handling four distinct carry-on luggages: a blue laptop case, brown nylon backpack, a black leather briefcase and a gray wheeled cabin tote, the trademark of any successful executive, or in my eyes, the overworked and underpaid. This man looks like one of those married to his job, talking loudly about a business deal deadline tomorrow morning. I also overhear him saying that he's been working over 100 hours a week, since last year, just on this business deal! For crying out loud, a job is just a job!—why do people make it more than what it is? You do it to get a paycheck, pay your bills, and that's it.

Who really needs to work 100 hours a week in order to survive in America? And if you really think about it, the manager at a corporation and the cashier at McDonald's are not really that different—both work for a paycheck and both have to kiss someone's ass. Sure, the paycheck is dramatically different, but it's not worth grinding 100 hours a week like a slave, working on weekends, being on call all night and day, having to drop everything on a whim just because your boss says so—not my idea of what you call a “dream job” or “miracle job.” At least the guy at McDonald's doesn't have to be on call or work mandatory full time. Try telling your boss that you want half days from now on. Too many people are brainwashed by corporate culture, this farcical cognitive ideology that you have to give your entire life for the job. A job is just a job, to pay the bills and to have money left over to buy unimportant crap, like the habit of the average American.

Speaking of jobs, a friend of mine recently got hired at a software company and said that it's the dream job that he's always wanted. Just because he has his own little cubical where he gets to put a picture of his family on his desk, along with a cute, little coffee mug that reads: “World's Greatest Dad,” doesn't make it a dream job—he still has to work his ass off! He works at least 70 hours a week, including weekends, as well as being on-call for emergencies—and it's not like he's saving lives; he's just a software engineer! What my friend doesn't realize is that his dream job still makes him someone's stepping stool, taking orders from someone above and having to do whatever they tell him to do. Is a dream job really to take orders like a slave from someone above? It sounds more like a nightmare to me.

And trust me when I say that in any occupational field, there's always someone above you so just because you're above someone else, it doesn't make you all that special—just look up, and there's still an ass to kiss. Plus I find it funny that they give out special, little titles like “Executive Manager” and “Director of Operations,” so that you feel important, when in reality, you're no different from an indentured servant, taking orders from someone above, as I have already mentioned. And the moment your company starts doing bad, you'll be the first to get that pink slip, no loyalty with these *loving* and *caring* corporations. I've heard of people working at companies for over 40 years, only to be fired because their pensions are too much. Remember: everyone's expendable, even the CEO, all working slaves until they don't need you anymore—where's the honor in that? Corporations could care less about you since you're nothing more than a social security number enslaved to make them profit. Ironically, corporations are required by law to make profit, without regard to any moral or ethical value,

so that's why there's no loyalty, and that's why corporations don't truly care about any of their employees. Because once they're done using you, they'll just use someone else. But too many people are living in bliss, in a state of denial and suffering from cognitive dissonance. People need to wake up and understand that our employment system, monetary system and every other system, including our government, are controlled by banks using the power of money. And what is the “root of all evil?”

Our monetary system is really nothing more than modern day slavery, with people having to submit to employment in order to pay off their debts, even though money, in the very first place, is created out of debt through loans by banks, specifically the Federal Reserve, a private corporate bank that is as federal as Federal Express (FedEx). Anyway, you can't pay off debt with more debt so therefore, this system continues to exacerbate, with billions of people working like hamsters, running on the wheel to fuel the empire that is the banking system, which controls the money that controls the wages that controls the labor that controls YOU. The only difference between slaves of the past and the slaves of today is that today, they are paid slaves. As Peter Joseph, producer of the film *Zeitgeist Addendum*, said: “Physical slavery requires people to be housed and fed; economic slavery requires people to feed and house themselves.” In other words, slaves back then were shackled in locks and chains but slaves today are shackled in suits and ties. So instead of living and working like a paid slave, do what you truly love and most importantly, enjoy life—that's what really matters. Of course, try telling that to Asian parents and see if you get the feather duster or steel-buckle belt.

The plane's completely full of passengers packed like sardines, so I try to maneuver the best that I can to my aisle seat way in the back. I manage to get all of my bags up into the top compartment, next to Jordan's textbooks. I've already eaten a full meal before leaving the house, so my plan is to just sleep through the entire trip there. I'm lucky that I'm a deep sleeper, with the ability to tune out my parents if they decide to nag, and best of all, ignore Jordan if she decides to brag.

It's been quite a while since I've been back to Asia, “The Wild, Wild East.” It'll be good to get away from the pressures and stresses of school. Maybe I'll even get to meet some new friends. I just hope that the Asians in Asia aren't as focused about money, status, and power as much as the Asians are here in America—or are they?

11

The plane lands as I start to wake up, the sun shining intensely into my eyes, with a fury like wildfire. Jordan's next to me, reading the same differential calculus textbook that she was reading before we boarded the plane. She's a machine, my little sister. My parents are still reading the same paper as they were at the terminal gate, so everyone's a machine except good old Johnson. Now I'm hungry, and I regret not eating some of that deliciously scrumptious airplane food.

After picking up our luggage from baggage claim, we walk outside the terminal to greet our relatives, just two of them since they came in a small sedan: my oldest uncle, whom I just call Uncle, and my youngest cousin, Bo. We'll be staying with them for the duration of our trip.

Bo walks up to me, presenting a big smile. "How r you?"

"I'm doing good," I politely reply. He nods and picks up our bags, one by one, and puts them in the trunk of the car. That will probably be the most that we say to each other during this trip, since that's the only English he knows, and I only speak English.

Uncle makes small talk with my parents, leaving Jordan and me to discuss how all six of us are going to fit into a compact car. After all is said and done, we pile in, stretching our arms and legs for every little bit of room, grasping for the luxury of comfort. I then realize that not one hug or kiss has been exchanged this entire time.

Driving through the city is a fantastic visual journey in itself: my eyes unmoving and unwavering, like a lion's first glance at its prey, locking onto the vast display of neon lights smothering the cloudscape. Every street looks indubitably the same, narrow and compressed, with food stands overflowing the sidewalks. I see my life flash before me a dozen of times, cars running through stop lights as if red's the new green. No wonder so many Asians drink and smoke; they just live it up now since they'll most likely die driving first. On the bright side, I won't have to worry about getting into medical school if we do indeed crash and die. Uncle rolls up the windows as we apparently pass by a slaughterhouse, our nostrils overwhelmed by the stench of manure and rotting meat. Welcome to Asia!

We arrive at Uncle's house with all our body parts intact; actually, it's an apartment since everything is compressed in the city. Walking up six flights of stairs is no laughing matter; try doing it with jet lag and hunger—and two big suitcases plus an over-stuffed backpack. Alright, I'll stop whining.

Four locks click in sequence, like timed demolition, the large door opening fast and wide, such that we rush in as if it's Black Friday at a shopping mall. Oldest Auntie, sitting in an old rustic brown chair, waves us over with both hands. I notice what's on TV: the news—big surprise. Asians love watching the news all day. The apartment is just like Auntie's house in Palo Alto, traditional and passé with antiquated Oriental furniture. I see lanterns, same as the ones from Auntie's Palo Alto house, hanging from the ceiling, with red New Year couplets covering the walls below, even the wall scrolls appear to be exact duplicates. I guess both Aunties have the same interior decorator.

My parents hand Oldest Auntie and Uncle wrapped gifts and red envelopes while simultaneously bowing, a customary gesture in accordance to Asian culture, for due honor and respect. Oldest Auntie and Uncle bow back, my parents bow again, Oldest Auntie and Uncle bow back once more, all four of them continuing with bows, lower and lower each time, trying to outdo each other. Many people think that bowing is a form of honor and respect, but it's actually nothing more than a form of subservience. Shaking hands, for instance, is a true form of respect because both people are doing it while standing at an equal level, at the same time, staring eye to eye, completely equitable in the exchange. However, bowing entails that one person be lower while the other person is higher, at unequal levels, not at the same time, not staring eye to eye, inequitable in the exchange. Centuries ago, peasants would bow to kings, no vice versa. That's why bowing has become obsolete, because it's a form of subservience. It's only done in Asia because everyone's brainwashed by custom and culture, which brings me to the gift-giving part, a compulsory gesture if you're Asian. Anytime and every time you visit an Asian relative, you must bring a gift or money, hence the red envelopes, which might as well be transparent so that people can show off how much is really being given. I didn't bring a gift when I visited Auntie in Palo Alto because she knows I'm an asshole—and because I'm American. But Asian people don't generally like being assholes so they'll acquiesce to custom and culture, even if they don't want to. When I visit friends of mine, I don't give them gifts; I'm sure you don't. Hell, when I visit my local pub, I don't give my usual bartender a gift—which I'm sure he'd enthusiastically take, while praising Asian culture just for

the sake of getting a gift. What I give instead is a handshake, a hug, a pat on the back—real genuine gifts of endearment, not like cold, heartless cash. Besides, I don't enjoy buying people's opinions of me, with gifts and cash like typical Asian people, so instead I offer my honest and genuine self, like it or not. If I'm required to give someone a gift for meeting them and for them to like me, then I'd rather stay home. For Asians, it's always about the money.

Mommy, Daddy, Oldest Auntie, and Uncle are sitting on the living room sofa while Jordan and I are sitting in imperial hardwood chairs across from them. Uncle pours tea from a black, cast-iron teapot into little porcelain teacups, in celebration of new visitors, as you now know is customary in Asian culture. While he pours tea for us, I can't help but to notice the towering stack of newspapers and magazines on the coffee table, a miniature Leaning Tower of Pisa, ready for a big fall. I glance over to see more stacks of newspapers and magazines, as well as a multitude of opened water bottles on top of the end table, right next to my parents. It's unbelievable how Asians love to collect everything. I've been to many Asian homes, and virtually all of them share the same pattern of mass garbage collection. Mommy's explanation is that Asian people need to protect and acquire possessions that they themselves once lost during times of war and economic depression, so therefore, they store things in order to prepare for the future, an emergency disaster plan of sorts. Her logic appears to make sense, but how the hell is a crapload of old newspapers going to help in an emergency? Better yet, how the hell is a crapload of old magazines going to help save a life in the event of an emergency? The truth is that Asian people collect things because they're too lazy to recycle and too selfish to donate, or in other words, too selfish to give anything up, in order to amass all the wealth that they can. Whether they are cognizant or not, collecting material possessions is a form of wealth, which deleteriously is a product of greed. Don't get me wrong: collecting things itself is not evil. Rather, it's the obsession of mass collecting, which displays greed and covetousness, like with Asians.

Oldest Auntie gets up and clears away the tea set, now full with used teacups and an empty teapot, while Uncle turns towards Jordan and me with fixating eyes that hooks us like we're two fishes caught in his net.

“Both you,” Uncle says, as he rolls up each sleeve of his green, wool sweater, “need study hard.” As if I don't already get enough lectures from my parents about this. “Study hard to be rich.” At least he doesn't sugarcoat the real reason to “study hard.”

“Yes, Uncle,” Jordan and I simultaneously reply, with a perfunctory tone that would be

clearly obvious to any person, regardless of cultural distinction.

Uncle knows that we're blowing him off so he quickly announces, "You study hard or I spank both you." Is he being serious? I look towards Jordan, seeing her jaw drop deeply; I guess that answers my question. "No more talk," Uncle instructs, "now dinner."

It's customary in Asian culture for the men to sit around and not do shit, while the women cook the meal, set the table, serve the food, clean up the table, and last but not least, wash the dishes. In fact, it's considered disrespectful and ill-mannered for men to assist in the process. As you already know, misogyny is pervasive in Asia, where men are seemingly allowed to step over women like they're dirt. Even Confucius said that "only ignorant women are virtuous." Now I'm all for somebody else doing my chores, writing my research papers and taking out the trash on Wednesdays but not at the *expense* of someone else, especially not for the egregious purpose of sexism. Instead of sticking around and not do shit, I decide to take a walk outside, since I don't want to be ostracized for helping with dinner, plus, I don't feel like getting another lecture again about having to "study hard."

Upon opening the main door of the apartment lobby, I can see the sun with reddish-gold highlights surrounding its majestic luster, starting to set below the white cumulus clouds lazing above. It's surprising that I can actually see the sun, with the air so heavily polluted with industrial soot and smog from the deluge of cars; that's Asia for you! Who cares about air quality when there are more important things like money, status, and power. If you know me by now, you know that I'm just kidding.

Walking on the sidewalk is quite a difficult task here in Asia. The pavement seems to merge with the street, more often than not, without warning or indication. What's worse is that my situation is exacerbated by close-range maniacal drivers, seemingly trying to hit human targets—like me—for points. No wonder so many Asians are moving to America. I, too, wouldn't be able to cope with this kind of lifestyle. It's a good thing that I have to head back for dinner, thus thankfully and graciously ending my short and very dangerous walk.

I enter the apartment just in time for dinner. No one is seated yet because assigned seating is customary in Asian culture, with the head of the table generally reserved for the head of the household—that would be Uncle. In Asia, the men usually wear the pants in the family, however, some women like my grandmother, Mean Ma, "have the balls" to wear the pants. Go get 'em, grandma!

With all of us at the kitchen table, Oldest Auntie starts serving chicken feet soup,

handing me bowl after bowl to pass down the family assembly line. Bo, who's been rather quiet, smiles as I give him the bowl with the biggest chicken feet. Most Americans would probably feel squeamish at the thought of chicken feet in their soup, but it's actually quite delectable. Next on the menu is sautéed beef with broccoli and bean sprouts in lemongrass sauce. Everyone digs in with their chopsticks, like sharks in a feeding frenzy. *All* Americans would feel squeamish at the incessant double-dipping of chopsticks in the main entrée. All the saliva, spit, and germs becoming community property for everyone to share. Many people would consider this unsanitary, and I'd say that they're right. No wonder avian flu spreads like wildfire in Asia; they might as well eat food from each others' mouths. But you only live once, so out of sight, out of mind, as I continue to dig in.

Both Mommy and Daddy start talking to Uncle and Oldest Auntie about my future—I mean, their future—plan for medical school. My parents express grave concern about the tuition costs, while Uncle explains that I'll make more than enough money to pay for everything. Oldest Auntie declares that we must sell stocks in order to supplement the medical school fund. Uncle interjects with his idea of selling land, land in the family for nearly five generations. During the entire exchange, I remain reticent for I know that I have no say in this, even though it's my own damn life. Plus, I don't want more spanking threats from Uncle, so I sit quietly, smiling without discernment.

After they're through with me, they move on to Jordan but without worries or concerns this time. They discuss how glad and proud they are of Jordan, unlike me, the black sheep of the family. All of them, including Jordan, continue to denigrate me with insults of indolence and ignorance. I guess the fact that I'm sitting right in front of them is of little—actually no—consequence. Remember the old man with the CIA shirt and his constant, unwavering stare? I guess it's an Asian thing: no shame and no humility. Why talk behind someone's back when you can talk in front of them? Why talk behind someone's back when you can just stare at them? I wish I had the bravado to stand up for myself, to tell them that I'm sick of this Asian culture nuthugging. But like the vast majority of Asians, I have to keep quiet and remain silent about the truth. I just wish that there was a way for me to reveal the truth—or rather truths—about Asian culture to the rest of the world.

“Do you...,” Bo asks Jordan, thinking hard of the right English words to say, “like the dinner?”

“Yes,” Jordan replies with reproach, not even looking at Bo.

“The food's delicious, Bo,” I quickly add, intervening. I know why Jordan's acting this way. She thinks that Bo is below her because he didn't go to college, so he's not worthy to talk to her. What is she—a stuck-up, eminent princess? I find it rather disappointing that Asian people have to “judge a book by its cover.” Bo works in Uncle's restaurant, so apparently, he's a loser. But it's not his fault. Asians are notorious for forcing their children to work in the family business—typically a restaurant. This is one reason why Asians have such big families, in order to get free slave labor from their children. Going back to Princess Jordan, the whole “What do you do?” mentality is pervasive among Asians, sizing you up to see if you're worth talking to. Asian girls are especially guilty of this. I know so many Asian girls who will not date a guy unless he has a college degree. Pray tell, does college teach you how to find the right guy?—no. Does college teach you how to find a good boyfriend?—no. So what the hell does being a college graduate have anything to do with relationships?—one word: status. It's all about status, aka image. Most Asian girls will only date guys who look “good on paper.” Who wants to date a nice guy, with a strong moral character and a benevolent disposition? Screw that! They want a guy that's rich, who buys them all the stupid crap that they'll ever want, a guy willing to be the ball to their chain. That's why I'm surprised that Emilie's giving me the time of day. Maybe it's a good idea that I don't tell her any of this.

“Bo, on behalf of the family, thank you for picking us up from the airport,” I announce, to show him my gratitude. I can tell that Bo doesn't understand what the hell I just said, since he's giving me a blank stare, but he smiles anyway, a smile that reveals genuine respect and regard. This is probably the first time in a long time that anyone's shown any appreciation towards him.

Dinner is almost over, with most of the meal in our bellies. I have a couple of bites left on my plate, but I can't leave the table until I'm done eating everything, every last grain of rice. I've been forced to do so since I was a kid because I was told that wasting food is bad luck, creating an ominous future full of failure and misfortune. But the truth—the truth that Asian people won't dare tell you—is that it's all about control. If you're able to force your kids to eat everything, even the very last tiny grain of rice in the bowl, then you'll be able to control them—control everything about them—at a very young age. After all, children are highly impressionable. If you can make them eat something as insignificant as a microscopic tiny grain of rice, then you can eventually control what they do, how they think, what kind of grades they get and most importantly, what they become, particularly their future profession, if

you care to guess the only *two*. Control them as kids so that you can control them as adults. Make them subservient as kids so that you can make them subservient as adults. That's the reason why so many Asian kids become doctors and lawyers, not because they truly want to, but because they've been conditioned by their parents with this method of control, this power of control. And as I've revealed to you before, Asian children are raised as prize-winning sheep in order to become future doctors and lawyers, ultimately functioning as a retirement fund in order to pay for their parents' retirement, so that their parents can live in a big house and drive a nice luxury car, when it's all said and done. So there you have it: all this control, manipulation, and power starts at a very young age, from the very bottom, with just a little grain of rice. Now you know why the staple food of Asian culture is rice.

12

Grand Ma's wake is scheduled for nine o'clock at a local funeral parlor, just a few blocks down the street near a parking lot, making it convenient for everyone. Uncle, Oldest Auntie, and Bo left approximately an hour ago, in order to prepare for the arrival of guests, because improper funeral arrangements can wreak disaster and misfortune upon the family of the deceased, or in other words, bring bad luck that'll cause them to lose money. My parents are getting ready as well as Jordan and me. I've been told that we're skipping breakfast, to pay due respect for the deceased. It doesn't help that mounds of food—apples, oranges, bananas, crackers and various types of good-luck candy—are placed all over the apartment in large, golden bowls, as a ceremonial offering for Gran Ma's passing. All over the apartment, in addition, are red leaflets and red joss papers, with red couplets overlaying the walls. I find it ironic that it's forbidden to wear red at an Asian funeral, yet homes can be enshrouded with red all over, for happiness and good luck. I guess they don't want that happiness and good luck being wasted on the dead, since they'll need it for themselves and their stock portfolio.

After about half an hour, my parents, Jordan, and I walk over to the funeral parlor, even though I suggest taking a taxi as a more prudent option, since it wouldn't look too good if all of us died at the hands of crazy Asian drivers before the funeral. We make it there in one piece and enter the main entrance of the reception lobby. Each of us is given the following: incense, an *empty* red envelope, and an armband, except that mine is white—so is Jordan's. Uncle, Oldest Auntie, my parents, and the elderly are all wearing black bands around their arms. I understand the reason why: deference. According to Asian custom, older people should not show respect to younger people, dead or alive. The white armbands act as a visual aid, a reminder to put the young ones in their place. Moreover, Asian funeral rites and obsequies, as well as burial customs, are determined by the age of the deceased, but more importantly, status and position in society. So even when you die, you can't escape the money-status-power influence of Asian culture.

Bo greets us as we make our way into the corridor of the main room. He joins us to

light up the incense—provided to each of us earlier—in order to pay our respects, as is customary at an Asian funeral. We approach the tall altar table, constructed of solid rosewood in a dark cherry matte finish, topped with two bowls of fruit and good-luck candy, and a big picture of Grand Ma in the middle. Right below the altar is an urn, full of burned joss paper and prayer money, in order to provide Grand Ma with sufficient income in the afterlife. I think to myself, What could Grand Ma possibly buy in heaven? A BMW? A Big Mac? Cigarettes? That's what got her in this mess in the first place! Even after death, Asian people can't let go of their obsession with money.

Thereafter placing the lit incenses in the burner, we move towards the *obligatory* donation box, as money is always offered to show respect to the family of the deceased, supposedly to help defray the costs of the funeral. I say “supposedly” because that's the same thing I've been told about giving cash at Asian weddings—“to help defray the costs”; the same thing I've been told about giving cash at Asian tea ceremonies—“to help defray the costs”; the same thing I've been told about giving cash at New Year's—“to help defray the costs”; the same thing I've been told about giving cash at every, single Asian ceremony—even for a ceremony that celebrates an Asian baby being alive for just a few months! I hope you are starting to see the pattern here: for every occasion, there's money to be made. No one wants to pay for the costs so make someone else pay for it; plus, you'll likely end up making a profit, which is really the objective anyway, because it's always about the money.

Bo leads us towards the front row, where the seats are completely empty. It's surprising that my other relatives haven't shown up yet. After sitting for a while, I start to get dizzy from the spuming smoke, coming from all that burned incense, my contact lenses beginning to dry up as a result. Jordan hits me on my left arm because I'm sitting too close to her—what love from my little sister. Everyone else around the room is quiet—too quiet—probably meditating, waiting for the sermon to begin. All of the sudden, I hear several ladies crying out, wailing as loud as they can, like it's a competition and the prize is a pot of cash—literally. It's considered good luck in Asian culture to wail as loud as possible, just in case the deceased has left a large fortune, all the riches going to the loudest. Fake crying for money; these ladies should consider a career in Hollywood with their affectation. And the Oscar goes to...

As if this isn't bad enough, all of the lady guests in the room, including those in my family, are dressed up entirely in designer apparel, carrying brand name hand bags, flaunting glittering jewelry from head to toe and wearing full facial makeup as if they are about to do a

magazine photo shoot, again like it's a competition. Remember the BMW 550i competition, the invisible competition between my parents and my neighbors? Are they the same ones that set up this competition at Grand Ma's funeral? What are they competing for? You guessed it: status. In Asian culture, only traditional hemp cloth mourning clothes are to be worn to a funeral. Furthermore, guests are not permitted to wear jewelry, based on the superstition that ghosts will take away all the wealth. I guess they threw this tradition out the window, because how else are you going to show off your wealth, status, and position in society? Even at a funeral, it's always about the money.

Speaking of superstitions, Asian culture has a notoriously long laundry list. From “Never point at the moon or your ears will get chopped off” to “Do not keep a pet turtle or it will slow down your business,” Asians believe and practice the silliest, most asinine superstitions. It wouldn't surprise me if there are more superstitions than there are word characters in the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese languages combined! I remember reading a news article which stated that 90% of China's middle school students have actually had their fortune told; I can only imagine what the statistics are for the other Asian countries. I know that there are superstitions in every culture, but here's what's interesting: see if you can find the pattern for the following superstitions:

1. Do not use knives or scissors on New Year's Day as this will cut off fortune.
2. Sweeping or dusting should not be done on New Year's Day for fear that good fortune will be swept away.
3. Do not wash your hair because it would mean washing away good fortune for the New Year.
4. Black is the color of feces and wearing it will bring disaster and bad fortune.
5. Females should not pierce their ears because wealth would fall through the holes.
6. Bind fingers at a young age so that holes don't develop, otherwise, wealth will leak out of the hands.

For crying out loud! As if Asian women haven't suffered enough from feet binding, do they now have to bind their fingers in order to fulfill a ludicrous superstition? I hope you can see that the pattern has to do with fortune and wealth, aka money. The vast majority of Asian superstitions has to do with fortune and wealth, aka money, since it's always about the money.

Asian people are so obsessed with money that they create superstitions in order to give them a feeling of control, even though they're not in control—and never will be. Remember how Asian parents love making their kids eat every small microscopic grain of rice from their bowls? It's about this idea of control, this imaginary abstract idea of control, that they can control everything, specifically good fortune and wealth, aka money. This illusion provides them that “warm, fuzzy feeling,” so that everything will be okay, when in fact, it's just all in their heads! Asians create belief systems that they use to manage their fears and anxieties; superstitions are a form of those systems. As Edmund Burke said, “Superstition is the religion of feeble minds.” Now you see why there are so many superstitions here at Grand Ma's funeral. Asians are insecure about their own mortality and seek to deny it by using incredibly complex belief systems to downplay its significance, in order to appease their own fears and anxieties. They can't accept the fact that someday they will die so they need to at least believe in something, even something as preposterous as superstitions, just to placate their own fears and anxieties. I'm starting to sound like a damn psychoanalyst!

Jordan punches me in the left arm again, this time signaling me to approach the casket—a simple nudge would suffice! I walk up, passing a salute of white flower bouquets, to see Grand Ma, her wax-like face exhibiting such a peaceful and solemn elegance. I stare at her, my body motionless and my eyes indifferent, not knowing exactly what I should do. I can see my parents crying—the whole room is crying. I just...can't cry. I know that I've never been close to Grand Ma, but something else is preventing me from crying for her, something that's clutching my will to express any emotion. After all these years, now I know what it is: my parents. Though not my parents per se, but the way they brought me up, the way I was raised. I was never taught to express my feelings and never taught on how to react at times of emotional stress. I was only taught to get good grades, to get into a good college, to get into a good medical school, to get a good job—but never taught how to express my emotions. I really am just a robot. I've become a robot, without love or affection from my parents—no hugs, no kisses, not even a handshake from them, my entire life. And now when I'm faced with the need to cry, I can't...I just can't do it. I just don't know how...

I walk back to my seat and sit silently, my face buried in my hands. I need some time to think. Jordan is looking at me with a queer eye, as if I've been vilified as an outcast of the family—and I don't blame her. What type of person can't cry at his own grandmother's funeral? What kind of person can't express a single emotion at the sight of a deceased

person? Am I really heartless? Or did I just never had a heart to begin with?

I continue to sit there by myself, ruminating about the gravitas of my personal crisis. I wonder if I'm the only one in the room not crying. I glance over at Bo, who's also just sitting there, fixed and stationary in his seat. Perhaps it's not just me. Perhaps Bo is thinking the same thing. Our austere upbringing is probably the reason why we're both sitting in our seats, unmoving and static in our body language. I guess it's not just me, so now, I don't feel too bad. In fact, I should appreciate everything my parents have done for me, even their mission to raise me with a strict, austere upbringing. Thank you, Mommy and Daddy, for turning me into an emotionless robot, just for the sake of money, status, and power, so that you can retire in a big luxury mansion at my expense once I'm a rich doctor, even though I've always wanted to be a writer instead; I seriously need counseling.

I've been sitting here for almost an hour so I decide to get up and go outside. Notice I didn't say "take a walk outside" because I really don't feel like joining Grand Ma today. I depart through the parlor hallway and upon opening the main entrance door, I see a group of eight men—most of them elderly—laughing and shouting as if it's a New Year's party and not a funeral. Intrigued and curious, I walk up to them to see what's going on. One of the men, approximately in his late eighties—judging by the intense wrinkles around his eyes and blinding white hair—is holding playing cards in his left hand and money in his right. The man across from him, much younger, approximately in his forties—judging by his receding hairline and slight patches of gray hair—slams down his cards and jumps up in jubilation, waving his hands high in the air, as if he's the main attraction of Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. I can't believe that they're actually gambling, with Grand Ma's casket only a few feet away! I ask the man in his forties why they're gambling, and he explains that it's an Asian custom—also superstition—to gamble in order for the gambling noises to scare the ghosts away. As if the donation box isn't enough, do they now have to make money gambling? Have they no shame? All these superstitions without any sense of respect, morality, or ethics. I guess money is king in Asia. And whom does this king rule over?

Interlude

13

There's no place like home—actually, there is, or rather, there are: Beverly Hills, San Jose, La Jolla, just to name a few, but it's still good to be back in Irvine. My parents planned for us to stay at Uncle and Oldest Auntie's until the weekend, but they had to rush back to work, Jordan had to rush back to study—the nerd that she is—and I had to rush back—against my own accord—to prepare for every pre-med student's worst nightmare, the MCAT. The MCAT, Medical College Admission Test, is a standardized examination, also known as the “test of death” for those who put their entire life's meaning into it; if you're a pre-med student, it will make or break you. And if it breaks you, then you're...broken? Alright, maybe it's not the end of the world, but if you have Asian parents, it's pretty much the end, unless you settle for being a lawyer. Now I have nothing against lawyers, but all Asian parents know that it's second to being a doctor. Anyway, preparing for the MCAT isn't as easy as just cramming the day before. In fact, you'll have to prepare as early as freshman year, by maintaining an exceedingly high GPA. If I have any hope of getting into a good medical school, I'll pretty much have to get above a 3.8, which—don't tell my parents—I don't have, with only a 3.7. The MCAT itself is a grueling day-long examination that covers physics, chemistry, biology, as well as reading and writing comprehension. I really have to do well on my MCAT to even have a chance of getting into medical school. And if I don't do well...I don't even want to think about it.

Now that I'm back, I have to make a few calls. But whom should I call first?—my incorrigible best friend Gabriel or my soon-to-be hot girlfriend Emilie? As the judiciously wise Michael Scott, from the American TV series *The Office*, once said: “Bros before hoes.” But then again, Gabriel can wait, since he doesn't exactly have the nicest ass and sexiest pair of legs like Emilie.

I'm so nervous that I drop my cordless phone on the kitchen floor, right as I'm dialing Emilie's number. What do I have to be so nervous about? I like her and she likes me—at least I hope she still does. Gabriel's right—I really need help with my social life.

I decide to go to the refrigerator to get a drink of distilled water, to soothe my parched

throat and ease my nervousness. Perhaps I shouldn't call her since I'll just see her in class; or perhaps I should let her call me; or perhaps I'm just being an idiot for thinking too much into this.

As I go back to my room to get the phone, I just now remember that I dropped it on the kitchen floor. What's wrong with me? Why am I so nervous? I'm just glad I'm not on candid camera or else I'd be a complete laughing stock. I head back to the kitchen, picking up the phone. I look at it, staring at the numbers, taking a long, deep breath and exhaling slowly, slow enough to be inaudible. I gently press each number, thinking if I should back out by hitting the cancel button. The first ring comes, then the second, then the third. Maybe I'll luck out with just leaving a message.

"Hello?" an unrecognizable voice gently mutters.

"Emilie?" Maybe I dialed the wrong number.

"Johnson?" It's Emilie's voice.

"Hey, yeah, it's me. You sound sleepy. Did you forget whom I was?" I should stop being so paranoid.

"Hehe. No. I just woke up and you sound...different. Maybe you're finally going through puberty," Emilie teases, giggling. "You sound just like my little sister."

I tease back, imitating my best Michael Jackson impression, "Do I, baby?"

"Hehe, that's pretty good. So what's up?"

"Nothing much. I just got back. I wanted to call and check up on you to make sure you're not violating your probation," I continue teasing.

"Well, if I'm on probation, then I guess I'm stuck at home, and I'll never have to see you again," Emilie shoots back. I don't like where this is going.

"You're not getting off that easy. As your newly appointed parole officer, I'm requesting—demanding—that I see you tonight, in handcuffs, cuffed to your bed, for precautionary and safety measures of course."

"Hehe. Pretty smooth but I think I'll pass. Let's go out tonight instead. I don't have any plans. What about you?" Emilie asks, her lack of plans being music to my ears.

"None at all. What do you feel like eating?"

"Being that I'm Korean, let's go eat some Korean food. Maybe we should go to Koreatown. I haven't been there in so long." For Emilie, I'll go anywhere, even ethnocentric Koreatown.

“Sounds like a date. What time should I pick you up?” I ask, jumping up and down in excitement, like a kangaroo shot in the ass with a tranquilizer gun.

“Well, as my newly appointed parole officer, you should know my time schedule and curfew, right?” Emilie jokes, her sense of humor even more resplendent than her beauty.

“Haha...pretty funny. Alright, how about five o'clock? I need to get my nails and makeup done,” I joke reciprocally.

“Seriously?” Emilie gasps.

“No...not seriously. I'm not Gabriel.”

“Haha. Well, if you were, you'd be very pretty like him.”

“I don't want to think of him as pretty.”

“Alright then, five o'clock. Let me give you my address.”

While I'm writing down the directions, I display an ineffably big smirk on my face, as if I've been daydreaming about Emilie all day long. Jordan walks past me and gives me a queer eye, the same eye at Grand Ma's funeral.

“Johnson, why do you look like an idiot?” Jordan dares to ask, not thinking before she speaks—as always.

“I have a date tonight,” I whisper to her, covering the bottom part of the phone with my hand.

“Who the hell would want to date you?” Jordan persists, looking as if she's ready to start a fight.

“Why do you have to be so negative all of the time, Jordan?”

“Because you're a loser.” Jordan walks out of the kitchen and back upstairs to her room. I don't understand her sometimes—hell, all of the time. She never used to be like this. We used to be able to talk without being at each others' throats. But now, something has changed. She's completely different now that she's going to Stanford. Is she stressed out from all of her studying, so she has to take it out on me? Or is it because she thinks that she's better than me since she's going to Stanford and I'm not, thus, giving her the reason to be so indignant with her affronts. Whatever the case may be, she's really starting to get on my nerves. I'll have to deal with her later—at least before I take my MCAT, or else she'll stop at no end with her insults if I perform miserably on it.

I have about four hours before my date with Emilie to prepare for my usual get-ready-

for-a-date routine, which isn't really a routine because I hardly ever go on dates. First, I pick out my wardrobe: a Banana Republic stretch polo with matching indigo, boot-cut jeans—wait—I've worn all this before when Emilie saw me at Auntie's church in Palo Alto, so instead, I'll just put on a blue Salvatore Ferragamo dress shirt with matching boot-cut, beige chinos. Second, I take an hour shower, carefully lathering, scrubbing and cleaning every crevice of my body, like I'm at a car wash, being detailed by a lineup of illegal immigrants. I soap myself up from head to toe, but I don't rinse right away—no need to rush. I let it all soak in, marinating and tenderizing my body like a glazed sirloin steak ready to be grilled. After several minutes, I rinse off all of the suds and get out to dry myself. But it doesn't end there—oh no! I get some of my favorite organic cologne, Herban Cowboy™ Organic Cologne Dusk™, and spray it all over my body like it's water—the scent so strong that you can taste it; that's one way to eat organic. Afterwards, I gel my hair so stiff that a jackhammer wouldn't be able to chisel it. I complete my hygienic marathon by putting on my outfit, to ultimately become the superhero known as “Ordinary Asian Guy.” Last but not least, I look at a full-length mirror and picture myself with the body of a Greek god. Actually, this isn't usually what I do, but I might as well since I have lots of time to spare.



With more than two hours left and my routine completely done, I'm good to go! Maybe I'll get a head start and study for my MCAT before my date. What the hell am I thinking? Why would I want to do that? Studying for the MCAT would make me miserable, too miserable before a date. I have to get my game face on. All this time left is a killer. Oh crap! I totally forgot to call Gabriel. I'll have lots of time to chat with him; plus, he can tell me what to do on my date with Emilie, since I need all the advice that I can muster.

I dial Gabriel's number on my phone and after four rings, he picks up.

“Hey, loser,” Gabriel opens. Why does everyone call me that?

“Hey, man. I just got back. And guess what? I have a date tonight with Emilie,” I announce excitedly, hoping for some praise and acclamation.

“Alright! Dude, that's awesome!” Gabriel replies with the praise and acclamation I was hoping for.

“I know, right? I can't believe it. I'm going on a date tonight with Emilie.”

"I can't believe it either," Gabriel teases. "Maybe she's on crack."

"Who isn't? We're in LA. I can't believe I'm going on a date tonight...with Emilie!" I repeat.

"Yeah, I know," Gabriel replies, "so you want me to chaperone, newbie?"

"Screw you. I think I can handle this...I hope," I confess, not really sure if I'll screw this up or not.

"Don't worry, bro," Gabriel says comforting me. "Just be cool and be yourself...wait...don't be yourself. Just be cool and you'll do fine."

"Gee, thanks," I reply sarcastically. "You're a big help."

"Well, if you screw this up, you can always go on a date with her little sister," Gabriel kids, knowing that she's only fourteen.

"How 'bout instead I chaperone the both of you, Captain Statutory?" I return jokingly.

"Just get through tonight first," Gabriel advises, "and then we'll see. Get off the phone with me so you can do your thing. By the way, in the event that you get lucky, which is next to hell freezing over, leave a pack of condoms in your car and say that they're mine, so that she doesn't think you planned it."

"Gabriel, you're a genius! I knew there was a reason for your existence."

"Yeah, yeah, to serve you, Johnson. Now get off the phone, good luck, behave, stay in school, don't do drugs, and tell me all about it *tomorrow* because tonight, you'll be doing you-know-what!" Gabriel hangs up the phone, finishing his statement with a bang.



I arrive at Emilie's house, which is also here in Irvine, right before five o'clock, not too early and not late. She lives in Shady Canyon, the most affluent part of Irvine, in a commodious two-story, French-provincial styled house with a white-picket fence surrounding the capacious yard and a black metal security gate in front of the long driveway. I pull up to the gate intercom to press the talk button. The gate opens, without me even saying a word, and I park my car near the front door. As I get out, I'm careful not to step on the wet grass and all the shoes and sandals outside the doorway of her house. I press the doorbell and soon after, I can hear rapid footsteps coming down the stairs—thump, thump, thump, thump, thump. Within mere moments, the door opens and I see Emilie, showing her magnificent

smile, which pierces through me with ineffable waves of joy and delight. I just stand there, staring at her remarkable presence; she is the consummate female. Emilie is truly the most beautiful girl who I've ever laid my eyes on. "Hey, gorgeous," I greet her, forthright with conviction.

"Hey yourself," Emilie cheerfully replies. "Should we go or should we just stare at each other all day?"

"The latter definitely sounds fine."

"The latter? I don't feel like going on a date with a dork."

"Do you feel like going on a date with a future doctor?"

"Yes, Dr. Johnson," Emilie quickly answers, laughing.

"Well, let's go then. I'll write you a prescription for a good time." I really am a dork.

14

Halfway through our drive to Koreatown, which is just west of downtown LA, Emilie and I talked about everything: family, friends, college, even the nefarious MCAT. We're both about to take it for the first time, and we're both very nervous about it. It's good to know that I'm not the only one with anxieties about the MCAT; after all, it's only the biggest obstacle of my life. I've thought about the second-place option of being a lawyer, but I'm just not cut out for it. I just can't defend people who I know are guilty, and besides, I hate going to court. Court is like a country club full of backstabbers, betrayers, traitors—otherwise known as politicians—and anyway, I'm not invited; nor do I want to be. I wouldn't make it in law school; there's just no way.

As we approach the outskirts of LA, I can see the intense barrage of graffiti on the sides of buildings along the freeway. Some of the artwork can actually merit an exhibit at an art gallery, unlike one particular piece of graffiti which catches my eye, “The One And Only Joe,” sprayed in pink paint across the boarded doors of an abandoned warehouse. “The One And Only Joe”—of course I know that Joe, since he's the one and only; there can't be any other Joes in this world, since he's the one and only, right? I don't necessarily mind graffiti but at least spray something clever, not something stupid. Does he really think he's “The One And Only Joe?” I should spray “The Second And Other Joe” right next to his, except that I don't carry a can of spray paint with me; plus, I'm on a date and graffiti's not worth my time. Idiocy like this really irritates me to an astounding degree.

Emilie turns off the radio, which is tragic because The Velvet Underground's *Sweet Jane* was playing, one of my favorite songs of all-time—the wonderful things I have to give up for women.

“So Johnson, what do you usually like to eat?” Emilie asks, pulling a compact mirror out of her Coach purse, probably to check her make-up.

“I usually like to eat organic stuff, but my parents always shop at Asia World Market to

buy all of our groceries. How about you?"

"I usually stick with Korean food. My parents also shop at Asia World Market to buy all of our groceries." Asian parents really are all alike, even where they shop.

"Besides Korean food, what else do you like to eat?"

"Anything but Vietnamese food. It's so...ghetto. It's what peasants eat," Emilie stresses, a hint of disgust in her voice.

"I see..." I pause, not saying a word after that. Oh, no—not Emilie! I thought that she would be different from all the other girls. I can't believe she just said that. She probably believes in the Asian Status Hierarchy, in which the Koreans are supposedly better than the Vietnamese. The thing about Korean culture is that the people are very competitive—and extremely superficial. Remember the advocacy of double eyelid surgery for girls as well as parentally-accepted prostitution? Well, it doesn't stop there. Koreans like to indoctrinate and control—what a surprise—their kids at a very young age, especially when they are impressionable babies. When a Korean baby is a year old, for instance, Koreans celebrate by giving gold and cash—what a surprise. Moreover, Korean parents like to lay out certain material objects on the floor to see which ones their babies will grab first, their choice determining their future field of profession: money for finance, mobile phone for technology, prescription drug container for doctor—or if they're not too careful: drug dealer. All jokes aside, it's appalling that Korean parents start their method of control even before the baby can walk. "Start them young to get them young" should be the motto of all Korean—and Asian—parents.

As if this isn't bad enough, Korean—and Asian—parents are willing to make an exception to the doctor-or-lawyer requirement, so long as you make a lot of money to make up for your errant, aberrant behavior. Sandra Oh, a Korean actress born in Canada, is one such exception. Her parents wanted her to become a doctor and were gravely disappointed when she aspired to become an actress. Well, guess what? Now that she's been in major motion pictures and hit television series, her parents have retracted that disappointment and are now basking in her fame and fortune, totally approving her choice of profession, as if they've always known that she would be a famous actress one day. Remember, it's always about the money so if you can't be a doctor or lawyer then you better become Bill Gates.

Last but not least, you'll find this very funny: the Koreans of Koreatown actually held a parade after Alice Kim and Nicholas Cage, a famous actor, got married in 2004. Many

Koreans celebrated this marriage as a “win” for the burgeoning Korean cultural movement, as if they themselves did something to help accomplish this “major feat.” For crying out loud, it's not like they cured cancer. But for Koreans, one of them getting married to a famous American celebrity means more than curing cancer—how superficial and pretentious! Instead, why don't they hold a parade to withdraw all the soldiers fighting in the neoconservative, undeclared Iraq War? Instead, why don't they hold a parade for all the Americans that participated in the World Cup? The reason is because these things do not relate to the big three—money, status, and power—at least for them. If it doesn't affect them directly or in relation to how it affects them, then it's not important. Care to guess what's *truly* important to them?

You're probably thinking, Why am I just bashing Koreans? It's not just them. The Japanese are just as bad, working like slaves in order to show off their money, spending it excessively like they're kings and not giving a damn about anything else, which is why they're responsible for countless atrocities like the Rape of Nanking, the Asian Holocaust, centuries-old war crimes including medical torture experiments on the Chinese and Koreans, as well as the bloody massacre of the Taiwanese, Malaysians, and Singaporeans, along with the raping and killing of the Vietnamese, Filipinos, Burmese, Thais, Laotians, Cambodians, and even Manchurians back in the day; the list just goes on and on, even today with the continuous blatant murder of endangered animals like whales and dolphins. But with the Japanese being #1 on the Asian Status Hierarchy, all these atrocities are forgotten and forgiven since money comes first, which the Japanese spend lots of because they are really just paying for their ego, in order to make up for their small you-know-what.

Next is the Chinese, who work like slaves, too, but are known to be cheap and will do anything—like selling rice made of plastic, painting white sesame seeds black for a premium price, injecting mercury into fish to make them heavier for a higher price, even using dangerous, toxic chemicals on watermelon that cause them to explode spontaneously—just to save money, throwing morals and ethics out the window. Then you have the rest—the Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Filipinos, too many to list—following the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, striving to obtain a small piece of that greed-filled pie. And because they're at the bottom of the Asian Status Hierarchy, they'll use the excuse that they're “oppressed” and “exploited” so that they can break rules and laws and disrespect others for their own selfish purposes. For example, Filipinos are notorious for cutting in line, right up to

the front as if they're red-carpet VIP, as well as smoking cigarettes right under huge "No Smoking" signs! Just because they've suffered in life doesn't mean they get to make other people suffer second-hand smoke and waiting in line longer—because everyone's suffered!

Now it's true that ethnic heritages like Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese are different, but they are all the same when it comes to one thing: money. They all want their kids to grow up to become doctors and lawyers; why?—money. They all want to live in the United States of America; why?—money. Remember, they can care less about freedom, liberty, and patriotism—all that's insignificant compared to money. They would be more than happy to live in a despotic, totalitarian society, just as long as they make lots of money.

Mommy once told me that the reason why Asians love money so much is because it will always be there, unlike governments which fall. Does she really believe her own crap? Has she not heard of the German hyperinflation in 1923? Or the hyperinflation of Chinese currency during World War II and shortly thereafter with the rise of Mao's Communist Party? Even the mighty Romans experienced a complete collapse in their fiat currency. Money will not always be there, so I just wish she would stop making excuses and just admit that she's obsessed with money, like so many Asians. Anyway, all cultures in Asia are different, but they are all the same when it comes to one thing—and you know what that one thing is. And if you still don't believe me about the Asian Status Hierarchy, then ask a Korean mother what she thinks about her son marrying a Vietnamese girl—and vice versa—and see what kind of an answer that you get. Then come and talk to me if you still don't believe.

I decide to take the Vermont Avenue exit, in order to escape the heavy traffic associated with the later exits. I turn left on Western Avenue and continue on past Wilshire Boulevard, the entire area saturated with Korean stores and restaurants, thus, we're now in Koreatown. After driving for what seems like hours because of the traffic, Emilie points at Koreatown Galleria, the shopping mecca of Korean glitz and glamor. In actuality, it's just a small shopping mall with a few Korean restaurants and retail stores, not surprising that the Koreans named it a galleria in order to make it sound grandiose and spectacular. I drive into the parking garage and park my car on the first level, so that it's easier for me to remember. Emilie and I walk in, observing the crowd of Korean people moving about the mall. We coalesce into the crowd, blending in, walking and window-shopping at the same time.

"Oh, look at that dress, Johnson," Emilie directs with her finger, pointing to the white sheath dress in the store window.

“That looks exquisite,” I lie, trying to hide my disinterest. I wish I could fast forward this date and get to the “good stuff.”

“I’m going to try it on. Come on!” Emilie commands, grabbing my right hand and dragging me into the store, with no possible escape in order. If you don’t know what just happened, I got caught in a trap. With Asian girls, you’ll have to buy them what they want or they won’t give you what you want. I’m lucky that I brought Daddy’s credit card for emergency purchases only, emergency purchases such as a white sheath dress in order to win over a girl. I’ll be unlucky with Daddy later.

Emilie asks the store manager to get the dress in different sizes, in order to try them on and find the right one. The store manager comes back holding a mountain of dresses so high that her face is completely hidden. She’s also carrying several other items, apparently different accessories that match the sheath dress, which precipitates a lurid, haunting fear in me with the thought that Daddy’s credit card will soon be maxed out. On the bright side, I won’t have to worry about getting into medical school since Daddy will surely kill me.

Emilie takes the dresses, and much to my excitement, tells me that she’ll model each of them, one by one, for my approval—and entertainment. Now we’re getting to the good stuff! She enters the fitting room, and I grab a chair to sit in, waiting for my supermodel. The store manager comes up to me and asks me if I would like something to drink. I decline since Emilie and I are about to go eat. The store manager then asks, “What is your nationality?” Oh here we go again!

“I’m American, that’s my nationality,” I intelligently reply, knowing full well that she will not accept my truthful answer.

“No. I mean, your nationality. Are you Korean?” she mistakenly asks again, not knowing that I’ve already answered her question.

“My nationality is American.” She looks at me with a condescending glare and walks away into the back of the store. Asians asking other Asians about their ethnicity or racial heritage—*not* nationality—is the same as people asking the proverbial, “What do you do?” Asian people are sizing you up, to see if you’re an ethnicity worth talking to. But why does ethnicity matter so much? It’s not like any of us has a choice to be Asian, Mexican, black, or white. No one gets to choose ethnicity, just like no one gets to choose hair color, body weight, breast size, penis size, or whatever. So if no one gets to choose, then that means we’re all equal in that no one gets to decide their ethnicity; so if we’re all equal, then that means it

doesn't matter what ethnicity you are! But it only matters when there's hierarchy! That's why the store manager didn't like my answer and judges those who do not adhere to the *sacrosanct* Asian Status Hierarchy.

After what really seems like an eternity, Emilie finally comes out, her stunning beauty magnified by the white sheath dress. She walks down the hallway, looking like an ethereally divine angel sent to save me.

“Well, what do you think?”

“You look amazing,” I reply, “but I might look better in it.” I love joking with her.

“How about we have a dress-off and find out who really looks better?” Emilie rebuts, overturning my joke in her favor. I get up from the chair and walk over to her.

“I think you'll look much better in it,” I concede, letting her win for my favor. Suddenly, she kisses me, her soft, tender lips pressing against mine, as the bangs of her hair lightly caresses my cheek. I eagerly yield to her, forgetting everything else in the world. “So if I say that you look better than me in lingerie, will you try that on for me, too?” I kid, playing off her kiss like it was an insignificant moment, though, it truly was the most significant moment of my life.

“Haha. You're lucky you got lip action, hon. Keep pressing your luck and we'll see if you get any more!” Her warning puts me in my place.

Emilie finishes putting on the last dress, not finding the fit copacetic. She decides not to try on any of the matching accessories, including the white gold mariner bracelet that peaked her interest earlier. Emilie doesn't know it, but she just saved my life, as any extravagant purchases on Daddy's credit card would surely mean my death.

We leave the store and head upstairs to the food court, which is comprised of several restaurants displaying a vast array of Korean food. Emilie orders for the both of us, as I willingly put my trust in her. She decides on a simple meal consisting of a few dishes: Bulgogi, thin slices of barbecued beef sirloin in a marinade of special sauces, spices, and other ingredients; Kimchi, fermented cabbage with various spicy seasonings; Chapchae, stir-fried noodles in sesame oil with sliced beef and mixed vegetables; Bibimbap, warm white rice with an egg on top of sautéed vegetables in cooked chili pepper paste; to drink, two bottled mineral waters—and yes, this entire meal is actually simple! I decide to hold off on the alcohol, since Asians are known to get flushed red in the face with just a mere sip. Trust me; it's not pretty. But then again, maybe I should order a few beers so that Emilie can get drunk,

since women are much easier when they're drunk. And when I say easier, I don't necessarily mean sexually—or maybe I do; don't kill me.

After eating our meal, we tour the rest of Koreatown Galleria. Emilie tells me that she wants to check out a bookstore on the upper level, next to the balustrade of the food court balcony. I think this is a great idea, since I need to catch up on my reading. Upon entering, I see a multifarious selection of Korean magazines, newspapers, books—both soft and hardcover—educational toys, and puzzle games. Emilie focuses her attention on the stack of beauty magazines so I decide to peruse the literary section on the other side of the bookstore. A few of the books draw my attention, but I consider saving the money instead and just checking them out at the library tomorrow. All of the sudden, I feel a tap on my left shoulder. I turn around to see Calliope, a classmate of mine from neurobiology at UCI, smiling and holding a pile of books. Calliope—she's named after Homer's muse—is exceedingly beautiful, almost as beautiful as Emilie, but of course, I'm partial to my lovely date, which means I need to be careful since I don't want to get in trouble for talking to another attractive girl; we all know how jealous girls can get. I've hung out with Calliope before, since we were lab partners for many of our school assignments, and she's the typical Asian girl: smart, studious, academically gifted—but without any common sense! She's got book smarts but lacks street smarts; in fact, she wouldn't even know what street she's driving on if you asked her!

I once told her a joke: “What do you call a cow with no legs?—ground beef,” and she looked at me discombobulated, confusion completely overwhelming her. Finally, she said, “Why would ground beef have legs? It's already ground up!” I shook my head in disappointment—and disapproval—and explained to her that a cow with no legs would fall to the ground, thus, it would be called ground beef, like at the grocery store. Guess what? She still didn't get it. That's what you get with so many Asian girls—and Asians guys as well. I'm not saying all Asians are like Calliope, but if you go ask an Asian person something unrelated to academia—for instance, a common sense question such as “How do you weigh a golden retriever accurately with a bathroom scale?” or “How do you tell what time it is at night without looking at a clock or watch?”—I guarantee that you'll get a blank stare. Also, the reason that Asians can't drive well is because it involves common sense; actual driving can't come from a textbook. Book Smarts:Asians::Street Smarts:Not Asians.

I'll elaborate a little bit more on Asian girls and their lack of street smarts and common sense. I was at a restaurant a few years ago with a group of Asian friends: guys and girls.

After we finished eating, we went outside and the girls suddenly started yelling and screaming, hysterical beyond belief. Of course, the guys were trying to figure out what exactly was the problem. The girls pointed fiercely at the ground, at a little caterpillar crawling on the pavement. I stared at the girls—with a “What the hell?” look on my face—and bent down to gently pick up the caterpillar and put it in the grass just a few inches away. Apparently, all that studying didn't teach them how to simply pick up an innocuous, little caterpillar.

Calliope puts her pile of books down and steps over to give me a light hug. I glance over to the magazine section to make sure Emilie is still there—luckily I see her! As I'm hugging Calliope, I'm thinking about how younger Asians don't hug their parents, but they hug each other all the time; it's quite obvious that we need love and affection just like every other human being—since we're not robots—and if we can't get it from our parents, we'll get it elsewhere.

“How've you been, Calliope?”

“I'm doing fine. How about you?”

“I'm doing good. Do you need a strong, bodybuilder like myself to carry those books for you?” I jokingly brag.

“Haha. No, I'm okay. Thanks for asking. So what are you doing here?” Calliope asks, with an inquisitive look on her face.

“I'm here on a date with that girl right there,” I say, pointing my finger directly at Emilie. “You can tell how our date's going so far judging by the fact that we've ended up inside a thrilling and exciting, action-packed bookstore,” I continue joking.

“I'm sure it can't be going that bad,” Calliope consoles, needlessly of course.

“Oh, I was just kidding. I'm really having a good time.”

“But you just said that your date isn't going so well since you're at a bookstore,” Calliope alludes, with a perplexed and bemused look on her face.

“I...never mind. Hey, I got to get going. I'll see you in class tomorrow.”

“Sure, I'll see you tomorrow. Later.” Do you see what I mean? She's an Asian ditz, with black hair instead of blonde. So there you go, guys: if you want a non-blonde ditz, there's plenty with no common sense!

Since we're on the subject of Asians lacking common sense, I'll illustrate the reasons as to why, with an example alluding back to Yao Ming. Yao Ming, as you know, is a NBA basketball player, considered one of China's greatest basketball centers of all-time and

proclaimed as a cultural hero and icon, his superstardom burgeoning beyond the Asian stratosphere. Despite his success as a dominating center in the CBA, Chinese Basketball Association, he does not even come close to that status as a NBA basketball player. Many people use the excuse that he's new in the league and that he's transitioning to the American style of basketball. Well, it's been nine years and that's not exactly new in the league anymore. Nine years is enough time to transition so if he can't do it by now, he'll never be able to do it. The truth as to why Yao Ming is a star player in China and a mediocre player in the NBA is simply because Chinese basketball players are not accustomed to the physical, aggressive style of American basketball—even though Yao Ming is 7'6", he still gets pushed around! Bluntly put, Asians are too timid and feeble, thus, lacking backbone.

And it's not just with sports; it's with everything. Asians lack backbone because of the extremely intensive indoctrination and conditioning instilled in them to follow orders and to serve, which causes them not to think for themselves and not to stand up for themselves; this is critically important to understanding why Asians are the way they are and don't change. This indoctrination and conditioning is a result of the overly extensive use of the power of control—Asian Pride Theorem: Number 3. Remember how it all starts with just a grain of rice? —“Start them young to get them young.”

Throughout the thousands of years of Asian dynasties, all the emperors, kings, and presidents have ruled with an iron fist and formidable will, controlling every aspect of the lives of Asians. Because of the long duration and large-scale domination, it's only natural that Asians continue living lives of subservience and docility. For example, why is there such a huge rich-poor gap in China—1% controls 99%—when they are supposedly communist, meaning everyone is equal in sharing the ownership of wealth and goods? This is the same with North Korea. Asian people can't stand up for themselves, instead, letting themselves get pushed around by those “above.” They only know how to serve and to follow orders, thus, stifling their creativity and mental capabilities, resulting in the lack of intuition and preventing the utilization of common sense. That's why Asians, like the Japanese, generally improve technology versus invent; just follow what's already been done so that there's no need for creativity and intuition to come up with something new. That's why Asians are usually quiet; they don't speak up in meetings or in class, remaining timid and feeble so as not to cause trouble. That's why Asians save face, trying to maintain a good image, yet not knowing that this is ultimately a form of weakness and lack of backbone. Asians are smart when it comes to

high academia—aka erudition—and making money, but when it comes down to the heart of it all, they fail at Life 101.

I tiptoe over to Emilie and tap her lightly on her right shoulder, then move quickly to her left. She turns to her left immediately and asks, “What? Are you in first grade?”

“No, I’m in college,” I respond, with a smart-ass tone.

“Alright, smart-ass, you wanna go?”

“Yeah, you want to go see a movie?”

“Cool, I’ll make sure to pick a chick flick so that you can suffer through it.”

“I won’t be suffering because I’ll be making out with someone *very* special.”

“Good luck with that because I won’t be.” Emilie teases, pushing me back, then walking out of the bookstore while waving her finger to beckon me to follow. In the words of the well-renown Velvet Underground’s Lou Reed: “She’s a femme fatale.”

Upon leaving the Koreatown Galleria, Emilie receives a call on her mobile phone, which is in her purse, and as she hastily tries to take it out, accidentally drops it onto the concrete pavement of the parking lot. Luckily, the phone is still intact, surviving the long fall, but unluckily, the screen is completely blank and shining bright like a torch flashlight, which is kind of cool—but not for Emilie. Mobile phones are very important to Korean—or rather all—girls so we decide to go to the nearest mobile phone retail store to purchase a new one as a replacement. When I purchased my mobile phone last year, it took me about two minutes to decide, but it’s taking Emilie about two hours to pick one, since she’s meticulously matching each phone with her khaki-brown Coach purse, determining the right choice of color. This sucks because we won’t have time to watch a movie, thus, I won’t be making out with her. This kind of crap only happens to me.

After Emilie finally picks out the mobile phone that perfectly matches the color of her expensive purse, she decides to make the purchase, which I offer to pay without hesitation, but she explains to me that the broken phone is insured by her mobile phone carrier so she gets a new one at no cost. I really want to pay, because I really want to let her know that I care about her. But I have to tell you that with Asians, as long as they offer to pay, then that’s all that matters, even though they really want other people to pay instead of them—like the obligatory donation box at a funeral or the obligatory fee for a wedding. Asians are known for playing the “offering game.” You’ll see Asians at a restaurant, for instance, fighting over the bill—literally—and offering to pay, even if they don’t really want to, because it makes them

look good, promoting an attractive status for themselves, Asian Pride Theorem: Number 2. And since offering to pay is free, Asians are more than happy to participate, hoping that the other party really pays. For Asians, it's always about the money; for Johnson, it's always about the truth.

15

Emilie and I both decide that it's getting late—actually only she decided since I wouldn't mind spending the entire night being with her—so I drive out of Koreatown and back onto the 101, heading south. Even at ten o'clock, there's heavy traffic all along the freeway, a constant battle of changing lanes and avoiding accidents with the overwhelming number of cars going bumper to bumper. I know I keep bitching about the traffic in LA, but it's seriously ridiculous, seeing as how I'll be stuck here all night. I'm lucky that I told my parents that I'll be spending the night at Gabriel's, so that we can both study for the MCAT together, which fortuitously, we'll be taking next week—well, maybe not fortuitously. My parents would have gone off on me if they knew that I was on a date, but what do I really have to lose? They already control everything that I do, everything that I wear, everywhere that I go. What else can they possibly do? I guess that if they ever find out that I'm on a date with Emilie, then they'll have the feather duster ready to go, which is no big deal because my ass is immune to it by now.

Emilie turns off the radio for the second time, nothing good playing on any of the stations thankfully. “So Johnson, did you have fun tonight?” Emilie inquires, smiling deeply, waiting for my answer.

“You trying on those dresses for me is enough fun for a lifetime,” I honestly tell her.

“But of course, you would've had more fun if I tried on lingerie, right?” Emilie stresses, beating me to the punch.

“You are wise beyond your years, my dear,” I quickly profess, “and definitely more beautiful beyond your years.”

“The last part doesn't make any sense but I'll take that as a compliment,” Emilie says, giving me a puzzled, yet amiable look. We both laugh as I finally get into the right lane so that I can take interstate 5 and get off the dreadful 101.

If there is a god of traffic, then he—or she, or it—must be in a good mood, because the 5 is wide open and clear for driving. For some odd reason, I don't see a single car on the

road, other than mine, of course, and I've been driving for nearly fifteen minutes. This is a rarity here in Southern California so I definitely won't take it for granted, not knowing if I'll ever have a chance like this again. I'm very appreciative of the finer things in life such as no traffic.

In a record time of only thirty-five minutes, I make it to Emilie's house, driving the entire way without even speeding. Maybe I should be a professional race car driver instead of being a doctor; my parents will be happy to know that they make more money anyway. Emilie tells me the gate code as I pull up to the telecom. The gate opens and I slowly enter the driveway, parking the car near the front door. With no rush to leave, Emilie and I just sit there and the next thing we know, the both of us start chatting about which medical schools we plan to apply to. Her eyes are set on Stanford while my eyes are set on...the MCAT. I honestly don't care about which medical school that I get into since I'm only going because my parents are wanting me to—forcing me to, I mean. So as long as I get into medical school, then I'll be fine and hopefully my parents will finally be proud of me.

“I'm going to be studying all day and night this entire week for the MCAT so I haven't even started looking at medical schools,” I tell Emilie.

“But you must have some idea,” Emilie insists, not believing my answer.

“If I had a choice, it would be Stanford just because you're going.”

“That's sweet, Johnson. But you really need to focus on your future. What will your parents think?”

“Honestly? I don't really care anymore. Ever since I can remember, they've been forcing me to get good grades, get a high SAT score, go to UCI and now, medical school. I never get to make any of the decisions and it's my life! I'm really sick of all this pressure and overachieving. Aren't you?” I ask, hoping that she'll be honest.

“Johnson. You're not the only one that feels this way. I'm sick of it, too, but what can you do? I just want my parents to be proud of me.”

“I do, too. That's why I'm going to medical school to become a doctor and forgetting my dream of becoming a writer. I want them to be proud of me but sometimes, it's just too much...it's just...too much—” I start crying uncontrollably. I can't help it. All my feelings of anger and frustration have been bottled up for far too long and now that I'm finally able to speak to someone about this, I let it all out, without fear or hesitation. I just hope I don't scare the hell out of Emilie, since guys who cry don't exactly look cool.

Emilie unbuckles her seat belt and hugs me, holding me as I weep. I feel like such a

wuss, crying to a girl but sometimes, things are so bad that you just can't help it. "I know what you're going through, Johnson. If it makes you feel any better, I cried last week when my mom told me that I would end up being a prostitute if I didn't get into medical school."

"She really said that to you?" I ask shockingly. Asian parents love to use fearmongering tactics, like Emilie's mom, even though they really don't work and in the end, ultimately hurt everyone involved.

"Yeah. Can you believe it? My own mom saying stuff like that. The things that they'll say just to get you to listen to them. It's not like I wasn't already planning to go to medical school. She just wanted to reinforce the idea, so that there's no chance of me changing my mind. But I don't let her get to me. I know she means well. And we both know that our parents care about us, but they just...have the worst way of showing it. So don't worry, once we graduate, we'll be off somewhere else and we can start living our own lives."

"You're right, Emilie. I'm sorry. You must think I'm such a pussy for crying about this."

"Haha. Not at all. I think you're very sweet. In fact, you want to know something? I've always had a crush on you, even all the way back in middle school. I've always known that there's something about you that makes you different from all the other Asian guys. Don't get mad but just like you crying right now. I find it honest and refreshing, believe it or not. Other Asian guys wouldn't have the courage to cry, not even the courage to share their feelings."

"I don't know what to say." I wipe away my tears and put the biggest smile on my face.

"You don't need to say anything. I think tonight's been pretty eventful for the both of us. Let's just go inside and get you cleaned up."

Emilie opens the door to get out of the car and then I follow, getting out from my side. The only light on is the front porch light, since her parents are out of town and her little sister is spending the night at a friend's house. Emilie and I at her home alone—what can two young, vibrant and energetic adults possibly do?

As I enter her house—my shoes already off, of course—I can see that the inside looks just like Auntie and Oldest Auntie's, traditional and passé with antiquated Oriental furniture, lanterns hanging from the ceiling, red New Year couplets covering the walls below and wall scrolls that are almost identical in appearance—this interior decorator must be making a fortune!

I sit down on the living room couch and grab a couple of tissues from the box of Kleenex on the glass coffee table. I notice a picture of her family in a large, gold garland

picture frame, right next to the box of Kleenex. I bend over to take a closer look at the picture. Emilie and her sister are standing in front of their parents next to a tall willow tree at Heritage Park in Irvine. It's amazing that my own family took a picture just like this at Heritage Park, when Jordan and I were kids. In fact, we were standing in the exact same spot—dépà vu! I think all of us have been living in Irvine way too long, even taking pictures at the same place, in the same spot.

Now that I think about it, Emilie's family is just like mine—except that I'm not Emilie and I'm a dude. But we're alike in that we both grew up with the same austere lifestyle, our parents controlling what we do, where we go, what we become—even what we think. It doesn't really matter if you're Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese—we are all cognizant of this austere programming.

Emilie comes back from the kitchen with two glasses of water, two for me, none for her—I'm only joking of course. She sits down right next to me, which instantly makes me forget about everything else in the world; she has a habit of doing this.

“Is this tap water?” I ask, not trying to be picky.

“Yeah. Do you want something else?” Emilie politely asks, being very hospitable.

“Oh no, it's okay. I just...you drink tap water?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“Do you know that they put a shitload of chemicals in it? From chlorine, which was invented as a chemical warfare agent during World World I, to lead, arsenic, and fluoride. It's really bad for you.”

“But doesn't fluoride prevent tooth decay?” Emilie inquires.

“Well, there's a difference between natural fluoride and the sodium fluoride that municipal water treatment centers use. Natural fluoride, aka calcium fluoride, occurs naturally of course, but sodium fluoride is actually declared as toxic and hazardous waste by the EPA, Environmental Protection Agency. In fact, the Nazis put sodium fluoride in the water to sterilize Jewish prisoners and make them docile. Not to mention the fact that it's the key ingredient in sarin nerve gas and rat poison. Anyway, these municipal water treatment centers purchase sodium fluoride as waste from industries and then pumps it into the water supply.”

“Are you serious? Why doesn't anybody stop them?” Emilie asks, expressing solicitude.

“Are you serious? Why doesn't anybody do anything anymore? Congress passed the

Patriot Act, which violates every single constitutional amendment but no one does anything about it. George W. Bush and John Kerry ran against each other for President in 2004, yet they're both cousins, but no one does anything about it; same with Al Gore being Bush's cousin; even Obama is Bush's cousin! Did you know that John McCain was born in Panama but still became the Republican frontrunner for President? He was born on a military base but even the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE declares that that's not sovereign U.S. territory, so therefore, he's ineligible but no one does anything about it. And with Dick Cheney, the Vice President *from Texas*, selected by George W. Bush *also from Texas*, even though the 12th Amendment clearly states that the President and Vice President cannot be elected from the same state. Well, Dick Cheney has a Texas driver's license, filed his taxes from Texas, owns property in Texas and was even the President of Halliburton in Houston, Texas. So guess what he did? He changed his residency right after he was selected as the V.P. but no one does anything about it.”

“Check out the big brains on Johnson! How do you know so much?”

“I just read and do research. But not the crap that they teach you in school. For example, did you know that Native Americans were made slaves by early Anglo-Americans? You won't find that in your history books because they want you to think that Americans have always treated them fairly, which is totally untrue. Also with Thanks *taking*, which most people believe involves the Mayflower and Plymouth Rock, but actually began as a holiday to celebrate and offer thanks-giving to god for the ambush and massacre of over 700 Native Americans, in order to exterminate non-Christians. Ask any Native American why they don't celebrate Thanksgiving—we are the only ones that do. Anyway, nobody does anything anymore because nobody cares anymore, like with Asians. Don't take this the wrong way but Asians only care about something in relation to how it affects them. They only care about their self-interest so if it doesn't involve money, status, or power, then it doesn't matter.”

“Wow. You pretty much nailed it. You're right. I'm guilty of that too. But you can't blame Asians, Johnson. It's society.”

“Well, last I checked, society doesn't talk, doesn't walk, doesn't have arms or legs. 'It's society' is just an excuse that people use because they don't want to take responsibility for their own actions. Remember the two kids who burned down their parents' trailer and the entire trailer park, because they learned it from watching *Beavis and Butthead*? Then the parents sued MTV, blaming them for the entire incident. Well, first of all, where were they?

Why were two kids home alone? And couldn't they put a lock on the cable box? They didn't want to admit that they failed as parents so they blame someone else, since they can't take responsibility for their own faults. Anyway, this is what typical Americans do—blame society or blame someone else but never blame themselves because it can never be their fault!" I exclaim lividly, getting all fired up.

"Professor Johnson, I bet you can go on all night," Emilie says gently, moving in closer. I think it's time for me to shut up now.

Seizing the moment, I lift my right hand to her face, running my index finger across her left cheek and down softly to her chin, curling my fingers lightly at the tip. I lean in, caressing the lower part of her chin then tilting it up towards me. My lips meet her lips, covering both our mouths with the intensity of passion and lust. Our kiss, even more potent now than at the Koreatown Galleria, shoots a fury of unfurling fire throughout my entire body, consuming me whole. My tongue eventually locks with hers, no key able to undo the embrace, nothing able to sever our unity.

I ease myself on top of her, lifting my right leg as I move sideways and accidentally kicking the box of tissues and the picture frame, both falling to the floor. We ignore the minor mishap and my hands slide down to her hips, pulling her closer to me. I can feel her body shaking, throbbing as I tighten my grip on her delicate hips, my breathing long and deep as I take in her wonderful scent.

Emilie grabs me by the nape of my neck, tenderly kissing and licking the tips of my ear, which sends electricity and frenetic energy down to my pulsating heart. (I don't know if I can take any more of this!) I cup her right breast with my hand, holding it snugly and letting it rest in my palm, then guiding my other hand up on her shoulder to slide down the strap of her bra, setting it free, setting her free.

Emilie stiffens her body as she gets up, putting a stop to our after-school activity. "Hey let's not do this—"

"Yeah I know," I interrupt, "it's only been our first date so we should take things slow and not go so fast."

"No. I mean, let's not do this—here on the couch. Let's go upstairs," Emilie instructs, her smile just like heaven. I'm going to get lucky!

She wraps her hand around mine and leads me upstairs to her room. She turns on the light and I see numerous MCAT preparation books all over the floor and on her bed as well—

what a turn off! She hurriedly knocks them off her bed and onto the floor with the rest of them—where they truly belong—and turns on the desk lamp with the press of a button. She then flips off the light switch and advances towards me in the still, now dimly-lit room—what a turn on! I touch her fabulous face with fondness and gaze into her magnificent eyes, which gleams of chestnut. Emilie then pushes me down to the bed and says “Stay,” like I’m a dog, which I’m more than willing to be. She walks into the bathroom, presumably to freshen up to get ready for you-know-what, and closes the door. I just now realize that my condoms are in the car! I quickly run down the stairs and out the front door, half-naked and shoeless. Grabbing the condoms from the glove compartment, I rush back into the house and upstairs into Emilie’s room. Upon entering, I see her wearing an exquisite red satin, strapless corset with matching lace thong panty and fishnet stockings—I’m a deer caught in the headlights; in the word of the judicious Keanu Reeves: “Whoa!”

Emilie breathes a sigh of relief. “For a moment there, I thought you got cold feet and decided to run off!”

I move in towards her and draw her against my body. “I knew this night would end with you in lingerie.” I run my fingers through her hair and lift my other hand to show her the pack of condoms.

“You’re wrong,” Emilie says, surprising the hell out of me.

“Wrong? Wrong about what?”

“Wrong that it’s going to end with me *in* lingerie,” Emilie declares boldly, untying the front strings of her corset.

“Whoa!”

16

Today is the greatest day in the history of the world! It's good to be alive! It's good to be me! When people say, "Stop and smell the roses," I now know what they mean, because I'm stopping at every flower that I see, taking in all the sweet aromas as I walk over to Gabriel's house. I don't even care that I'm supposed to drive just because I'm from Irvine. I feel like taking a walk and enjoying the fresh, open air because I got laid last night! Today is the greatest day in the history of the world!

I turn around the corner to see Gabriel sitting outside on a bench in his front patio, his feet resting on a pile of MCAT preparation books—the best footrest money can buy! "Hey, loser!" I yell from a distance.

"Hey, winner," Gabriel yells back, his clairvoyance impressing me. "I can see you dancing and prancing so I know something *good* happened between you and Emilie last night."

"I hit it!" I reply, as Gabriel's next door neighbor looks at us, obviously overhearing our loud conversation.

"So how was it?" Gabriel asks, with a smile bigger than a birthday girl given her first pony.

"Let's just say she won't be walking for a while," I brag with intrepid confidence.

"You dog!" Gabriel yells again, his neighbor drawing in closer to our conversation.

"Actually she was the dog, 'cause I canine-d her from—"

"Let's get out of here," Gabriel interrupts and quietly whispers, "since my neighbor is a nosy gossipmonger." We get into his mom's car (Gabriel completely wrecked his car two days ago from racing—big surprise), which is also a BMW 550i, completely shocking that Asians drive luxury cars—I love sarcasm.

Gabriel drives us to the Barnes and Noble bookstore right off interstate 5, so that we can study—diligently, of course—for the MCAT. Gabriel loves coming here because there's a

Starbucks inside. Asians in Irvine and the rest of Orange County love to congregate at Barnes and Noble and Borders, since they can study and get high on caffeine, America's favorite legal drug. Whenever Gabriel drinks just two cups of coffee, he acts like a monkey on crack—and on coke mixed with crystal meth and while we're at it, throw in a bottle of Prozac. That's why I have to limit his caffeine intake, just like what a bartender does for alcoholics drinking beer. Maybe it's not such a good idea to come here after all; I wouldn't want Gabriel starting a Starbucks bar fight with the other coffeeholics. Anyway, we need to get studying or else we'll both do miserably on the MCAT.

After only about an hour and my brain fried like an egg, I decide to quit studying, as I get up to take a walk around the bookstore. The good thing about studying here is the myriad of magazines—including adult ones—that I can read whenever boredom strikes me at its hardest—or whenever studying for the MCAT strikes me at its hardest.

I decide to skip the magazines altogether and go over to the graphic novels section. I love reading the latest collections of DC Vertigo and enjoy checking for new works by Neil Gaiman and Mike Carey. While I'm going through each shelf of books, I see an Asian kid about a few feet below from me sitting on the floor, with piles of comic books next to him. There are also two plastic cups with straws—probably iced mocha, judging from all that whipped cream—next to him as well. He reminds me of a little version of Gabriel, a precocious young lad getting all his daily vitamins and minerals from highly caffeinated, highly sugary beverages. Maybe I should introduce the two so that they can be brothers—hyperactive brothers addicted to legal drugs.

I finish looking through all of the shelves for new graphic novels and I see the kid, from the corner of my eye, getting up and taking off, leaving the pile of comic books and two empty Starbucks cups—what a lazy little shit! That's the fourth—no, thousandth—time I've seen that, spoiled Asian kids coming in here and leaving their crap for someone else to clean, like they're at home and their mommies look after them. Asians take everything for granted because they figure that they'll become doctors or lawyers one day, with people having to serve them, when in actuality, they're the servants—to their parents when they retire. I know that picking up after yourself isn't an Asian thing, but you'd be surprised at how many Asian people don't do it.

I walk back to the table to tell Gabriel about the little bastard, and he immediately waves me over to show me a very detailed—and very good—drawing of a giant penis with

testicles, obviously not his own because Asians have small...anyway, I'm pretty sure his drawing won't be covered on the MCAT.

"Gabriel, you're supposed to be studying, not drawing dildos," I scold, hoping that he'll grow up, at least before next week's exam.

"First of all, it's a cock—with balls. Second of all, why are you walking around then instead of studying?"

"Because I'm done studying," I arrogantly reply.

"Done? We've only been here for an hour. There's no way that you're done."

"I studied before today unlike you, nimrod."

"I'll show you a rod," Gabriel smirks, pointing at his obscenely distasteful drawing.

"Well, if you do bad on the MCAT, you won't have a rod anymore because your parents will chop it off."

"You know why I'm not laughing?" Gabriel asks moronically. He points his left index finger at me, holding a stern look in his eyes and exclaims, "Because you're right."

"And if I do bad, my parents will chop off my rod—and balls, so I'm in the same shitty boat as you are. That's why we have to study or else we're screwed."

"Alright, alright. Don't get your panties in a bunch."

"I got panties in a bunch last night at Emilie's," I say boastfully.

"Har-har. Well, don't worry about the MCAT. Because if you fail, you can always be a comedian," Gabriel advises sarcastically.

"Gabriel, why do people make such a big deal about scores?" I find myself changing the subject. "I mean, seriously. Getting straight A's, high test scores—it's not like they ask you for your SAT score when you check in a hotel or board a plane. Everyone makes such a big deal about scores but in the real world, no one gives a shit."

"Hey, bro, you're preaching to the choir. For most Asians, school is life and life is school. For us Japanese, work is life and life is work. We excel in the classroom and in the office but in the real world, we are outcasts. We are minorities, not just because of the yellow color of our skin but because of our beliefs and our way of life. We're so focused on money, status, and power that we don't care about anything else. That's why no one cares about us," Gabriel finishes saying.

"Your philosophy ranks up there with Kant and Rousseau," I snicker, half-lie and half-truth.

"You know that I'm right about the money, status, and power obsession," Gabriel persists, advocating his tenets.

"Of course, you're right. Actually, I'm right since I'm the one who came up with the Asian Pride Theorems, remember?"

"Yes, Professor Small Johnson."

"Yeah, that's really original, GAYbriel."

"Your mom's original."

"You've used that before, you *un*original prick."

"I'll show you a prick!" Gabriel points at his drawing yet again.

"You've used that before, too!"

"I've used your mom before too." Gabriel won't be stopping anytime soon. We've been here for only an hour, studying for the damn MCAT and neither of us has accomplished anything. We're so screwed.

17

Today's the big day. Today will make or break me—same with Gabriel, Emilie and every other Asian person, at least the ones taking the MCAT, which is probably all the Asians in Irvine. Today is D-Day for Asians.

I arrive at the MCAT testing center about an hour early, so that I can get ready without any complications, since my life is fraught with complications. This place looks just like a prison facility, with plain white walls and welded wire mesh panels covering the windows. I bet this place is just as secure, as two guards walk from room to room—what I wouldn't give to see the look on Gabriel's face when he gets here; I'm sure that he'll be reminiscing about the wonderful week that he spent in jail.

What most people don't know is that taking the MCAT is a day-long marathon. The entire exam is nearly six grueling hours—and you thought the SAT was bad! I'll explain the MCAT exam to you succinctly, which I'm sure will still bore you to the point of mental anguish and suffering, but too bad because I've also suffered, being Asian my entire life. The MCAT is comprised of a total of four sections, in the respective testing order: physical sciences, verbal reasoning, writing sample, and biological sciences. The physical sciences section concentrates on physics and physics-related chemistry. The verbal reasoning section concentrates on reading comprehension but with a focus on social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences—oh, joy! Next is the writing sample, which presents two essay topics for writing. Last and definitely not least, is the biological sciences section, which concentrates on basic biology and biochemistry, the most important part of the entire exam. I can't think of anything better to do with my six hours than to take the MCAT—I love sarcasm.

Also, just to let you know, a perfect score on the MCAT is 45 with T, 15 for each section and T for the writing sample, using a grading scale of J - T, with J being the lowest and T being the highest. I have to get at least a 30 with P to be considered by most medical schools.

Aside from that one day at Barnes and Noble with Gabriel, I've been studying my ass

off, locking myself in my room and avoiding all the regular distractions like television, radio, even my mobile phone. I called Emilie only once this entire week, since she's also studying her ass off. I just now realize that Asians have a compulsive fixation with asses: spanking asses and studying their asses off. Maybe I should make a theorem about this.

I walk into the testing room and sit at the computer assigned to me. I'm allowed a pencil with scratch paper. I've never been to jail but this really feels like it—no talking, no friends and locked inside a room (on the bright side, at least no parents, too.) Many experts suggest taking exams in a healthy test-taking environment that is conducive for maximum score efficiency and results. I don't think they consider jail a really good environment.

It's almost time to take the MCAT. My heart is pounding from nervousness and anxiety, my hands shaking and legs gyrating. I have to suffer through this because those bastards wouldn't let me bring in my stress ball! I keep telling myself that everything is okay, that everything will be fine, that I'll ace this exam, just like the others. I even remember to recite the mantras of good test-taking: utilize time management, pace yourself, maintain a good attitude and keep a sharp mental awareness. I am a MCAT machine, ready to go! But I would much rather be a MCAT machine with the answers, ready to go!

To my left, I see a very attractive Asian girl, probably Vietnamese—and I could be wrong since we all look alike—sitting at her computer, ready to take the test as well. She is wearing a very seductive outfit: a sexy black strapless top, tight hip-hugging black miniskirt, and black stiletto high heels—whoa! It's bad enough that I'm nervous, but now I have this new distraction that I definitely don't need. I find it rather inept that a girl would get all dressed up just to take the MCAT—not that I'm complaining of course.

Someone once asked me why Asian girls get all dressed up to go to class and I told him that it's actually quite normal. The main reason, obviously, is to get attention, hopefully attracting a male with a strong moral character and benevolent disposition—yeah right! They are hoping to land a rich guy to pay for all their stupid crap. The other reason Asian girls dress up, which most people don't know, is that most of them live a sheltered, austere life. Asian parents, particularly the father, are very strict and oppressively dictate what they do, what they wear, where they go—big surprise. So they get dressed up to go to class because they can't get dressed up to go anywhere else. Of course, this isn't the case with every Asian girl but there are a hell of a lot that get dressed up just to go to class at UCI—not that I'm complaining of course.

The instructor comes into the room and notifies us that we are about to begin the MCAT. He reads aloud each of the instructions, as if he's a flight attendant heralding the usual pre-flight safety speech. My hands are still shaking and my legs are still gyrating, but I think I'll be fine once I start taking the exam. After all, what do I have to lose?—everything, of course.

The instructor announces that we are to start now. I click my mouse to see my first question:

“

The orbital angular momentum operator for a particle with momentum $\hat{\mathbf{p}}$ and position $\hat{\mathbf{x}}$ is

$$\hat{\mathbf{L}} = \hat{\mathbf{x}} \times \hat{\mathbf{p}}, \text{ or in component form } \hat{L}_i = \sum_{j,k} \epsilon_{ijk} \hat{x}_j \hat{p}_k,$$

where i,j,k index the Cartesian components and sums go from 1 to 3 (1=x, 2=y, 3=z).

What is the relative ...”

I'm so screwed.

18

"So how'd you do?" Gabriel asks, anxiously waiting for my answer.

"Uh..." I drone sullenly.

"Johnson, how'd you do?" Gabriel repeats, again waiting for my answer.

"Uh..." I drone again sullenly.

"Here, drink this," Gabriel instructs, giving me a bottle of beer in order to comfort me.

We're sitting here drinking at the bar in Gabriel's favorite restaurant, Che, named after Che Guevara, an Argentine Marxist revolutionary leader, also a guerrilla warfare commander, aka terroristic mass murderer. I see so many people wearing Che shirts, like they're so cool, but they don't realize that Che murdered and promoted the execution of many innocent people, people who did not follow him. People need to read their history but in order to do so, they must first learn *what* to read. Anyway, I'm too angry to talk about this since I just bombed the MCAT. It's surprising to me that Gabriel is taking things lightly, since he also bombed it. Sometimes, you just know even before finishing a test that you bombed the hell out of it.

"I'm going to need a lot more than just one beer," I fuss at Gabriel.

"I'm way ahead of you," Gabriel shoots back, an urgent smile on his face. "I just ordered six more."

"I'm going to need a lot more than just six beers," I fuss again.

"Look, drinking away your sorrows won't get you a high MCAT score," Gabriel reasons, trying to make me feel better, even though he's failing.

I lift my head with a stern look in my eyes, as I point to Gabriel with my right index finger and say to him, "You're right."

"I know I'm right. I'm always right," Gabriel arrogantly confesses. "Well, except for the MCAT. I didn't get too many right on that."

"What are we going to do?" I ask Gabriel.

"What can we do except take it again?"

"But we both studied our asses off. Well, at least I did. There's no way we're going to

do well the second time. Plus we'll just lose face by taking it again.”

“Well, let's not worry just yet. I mean, we still have to wait about a month for the results, right? Who knows, we may be totally wrong. We might even get a 45T!”

“I know you're an optimist, Gabriel, but you're also an idiot. I'll be lucky to even get a 25J. I studied so hard...for nothing.”

“Look, not everyone's cut out for medical school. You can always go take the LSAT and get into law school.”

“You know how I hate court. You do, too, Mr. I-Spent-A-Week-In-OC-Jail. There's no way either of us are going to law school.”

“Then what other options do you suggest, Johnson?”

“Well, I would suggest engineering but it's too freaking late for that. Plus, my parents would literally kill me for taking the 3rd place option. Your parents will kill you too,” I remind Gabriel.

“Then I guess we'll have no choice but to wait until we get our results,” Gabriel concludes, wanting to change the subject.

“Dude, listen. If we get below a 25, the repercussions are extremely serious. My parents are going to go ape shit and yours will too.”

“I know, Johnson. But don't worry about a thing; everything will be fine. And again, we have to wait until we get our results. So let's just chill out and relax.” Gabriel's right; he's always right, except for the time that he told me that Jane Tanenbaum liked me in 4th grade—lie; and the time that he told me that girls had a vagina *and* a penis, when we were in middle school—lie; and the time that he told me that Stanford University will accept anyone as long as they're Asian, to fulfill a minority quota—lie. Now that I think about it, he's rarely right. He lies a lot. I just hope he's not lying about how “everything will be fine” once we get our MCAT scores.

After about an hour and about a hundred beers in our stomachs, we both continue sitting there, sobering up and thinking about how we'll tell our parents the bad news. I like Gabriel's approach: lie. I think I'll do that because I can stall my parents until I decide whether or not to take the MCAT a second time. Then again, they'll ask for the results of the first one, which will be in about a month. I think I'll just tell them that I did fine, since that'll buy me some more time to come up with a better excuse, when they do indeed find out that I bombed it.



I arrive at my house late in the night. To my surprise, I don't see Mommy or Daddy—not even Jordan. I walk upstairs to the game room to watch TV and suddenly, I hear “Congratulations!” All three of them are standing there, next to a celebration cake on the circular game room table. I can't believe that they're doing this for me!

“Dr. Johnson,” my parents both say, patting me on the back, the most affection that I've ever received from them. “So how the MCAT?” Daddy asks first, Mommy coming in a close second.

“I think I did well,” I lie, rapidly chewing my gum in order to neutralize my beer breath.

“You think or you know?” Daddy asks, almost turning his smile into a scoff.

“What I mean is that I know I did well. I'm just saying 'I think' because I won't know the results for a month,” I lie again, better than any politician on Capitol Hill.

“Okay. Remember, you need make us proud,” Daddy exclaims, all my life reiterating that same proverb over and over again.

“Yes, Daddy,” I acquiesce.

“So you do good on MCAT?” Mommy asks, as if she hasn't been paying attention.

“Mommy, I'm sure I did very well but I still have to wait a month for my score.”

“That means your date of execution will be in a month,” Jordan insults, like always.

“Har, har. That means your date of ass-whooping will be in a month *after* I get my awesome test results,” I counter back.

“You two stop,” Daddy demands, while pointing at me and not at Jordan.

“Yes, Daddy,” I acquiesce again. “Please don't worry. I'll get into medical school just like you want.”

“It's not we want,” Mommy interjects, “because it about *your* future. You must prepare your future.” Like I haven't heard this before. My future? My future is supposed to be me as a writer, not doctor. They won't admit that it's their future, since I'm their future retirement fund.

“Yes, Mommy,” I acquiesce to the other parental unit.

“You need to listen to your little sister and stop being a loser,” Jordan adds officiously, butting in by throwing another insult. I stick out my tongue at her, like a spoiled, callow toddler. I start to raise my middle finger at her as well when Mommy tells me to come over and cut the celebration cake. Damn the cake looks good: tall and dense with fluffy white frosting all over,

toasted almond flakes along the sides, an assortment of fruit at the top in cascading layers—sliced peaches, kiwis, strawberries—and written in royal blue icing: “Dr. Johnson,” next to a cute, little toy stethoscope and head mirror. This cake sure as hell ain't organic!

I cut the cake into several pieces, giving the biggest slices to Mommy and Daddy. I give Jordan the smallest, and she immediately grabs the knife to cut an even bigger slice for herself. I decide to eat a small slice, since I feel really bad about the whole thing. It's not like I lied to them—actually, I did. I just don't want them to be angry with me. I look up to see the smile on Daddy's face and Mommy laughing out loud—even Jordan's enjoying the occasion. I'm smiling as well, thinking to myself that this is the happiest moment in the history of my family. It's just too bad that it all comes from a lie—well, half-lie (Yeah, yeah, I know: a lie is a lie.)

After I finish my small piece of cake, I excuse myself to my room, carefully thinking about what to say to Emilie. If she finds out that I bombed the MCAT, then she'll drop the bomb on me. I wonder how she did, probably a hell of a lot better than me. She called twice earlier, but I didn't pick up because I was drinking away my problems with Gabriel. Now I have to call her back or suffer the polemical wrath of a Korean girl.

“Hey Emilie.”

“Hey Johnson. So how'd you do?”

“I think I did okay.”

“You think or you know?” What is it with everybody? I bombed, okay?!

“Well, I won't know until a month from now. So how'd you do?”

“Not to toot my own horn but I know I aced it. There was not one question I had trouble with. I really think I got the prestigious 45T!” Emilie brags, clearly tooting her own horn.

“Wow! That would be amazing! I've been told that only a handful of people have ever achieved that.”

“Yeah I know. It would definitely be amazing if I got the 45 also. Oh, by the way, did you get my messages? I called you twice earlier but you didn't pick up.”

“Oh yeah, I did. Sorry about that. Gabriel did really bad so I had to console him...at the...library,” I lie once more.

“Poor Gabriel. I guess he goofed around too much.”

“Yeah, he should've studied as hard as me or else he wouldn't be in such a big mess,” I say, going along with Emilie as if I did just as well as she did on the MCAT.

“Or at least study just a little. Seriously, Johnson, if I was going out with Gabriel and I found out that he did poorly on the MCAT, I would dump him. I don't like screw-ups.” I can't believe what she just said! What a prude!

“How can you say that, Emilie?”

“What do you mean? Look, if he wants to be a screw-up, that's fine. I'm just saying I wouldn't want to be with a screw-up.”

“Okay, so I guess everything for you is based on status, huh? You're such a typical Asian.”

“Excuse me, Johnson?” Emilie asks, not believing what I just said.

“You heard me. I thought you were different, Emilie. I thought you were better than that. I guess I was dead wrong.”

“Fuck you. How dare you talk to me like that?”

“How dare I? Did you even hear what you said? You sound like the typical Asian and you know it. You want to know something else? I bombed the damn MCAT. I did miserably on it. So since you wouldn't want to be with a screw-up, then that means you don't want to be with me.” There's a long pause, longer than anything I've ever waited for.

“No,” Emilie mutters, finally saying something.

“No, what?”

“No, I don't want to be with a screw-up. So goodbye.” I can't believe this. First I do miserably on the MCAT and now my girlfriend breaks up with me. Fuck the MCAT and fuck her! I can't believe all this shit is happening to me. One day everything is great and the next day, everything sucks ass. It sucks to be me! It's sucks to be alive! Today is the worst day in the history of the world!

19

My phone is ringing off the hook—and not in a good way. I know it's Gabriel that keeps calling, since each call is exactly one minute apart. Apparently, he's using the auto-redial feature on his mobile phone. I just don't feel like talking to anyone. It's been three days since I took the MCAT and I still feel miserable. I just want to be alone right now, right here in my room. Being lonely is a blessing in disguise—no one bothers you, no one asks you for any favors, and most importantly, no one criticizes you. That's how so many Asians truly are: lonely. They may have a lot of friends and live in a big family but deep down they are truly lonely because they have no one to share their problems with, no one to confide in, because they are too ashamed to talk to anyone about their personal issues, in order to save face. I know because I'm that way. I can't talk to anyone about how I truly feel, even with Gabriel. We both share the same problems yet we don't talk about how we truly feel, because both of us have been indoctrinated with saving face. I swear, Asians save face just to save their own asses!

“What?” I ask, finally picking up the phone.

“Since when are you so rude,” Gabriel snaps back, ready to fight.

“Since...” I pause for a moment, “look, I'm sorry. You're the one person that I shouldn't be an asshole to.”

“No problem. I know you're upset. To be honest, I am too. But there's no use in worrying about the MCAT. What's done is done. We just have to keep our heads up. So let's go out tonight. We'll go grab some dinner and go clubbing. A friend of mine is working the door tonight.”

“I'm not in the mood.”

“Neither am I. But who cares? Let's just go out and have fun.” Gabriel's right; he's definitely right.

“So is this a date? Because if it is, then I better get *some* at the end of the night,” I joke, lifting up my own spirits.

“Sure, you'll get some. Some of your left hand—or right hand. I'm not sure which one you use regularly,” Gabriel snickers, already lifting up both our spirits to normalcy.

“I use both hands regularly—on your mom.”

“You really need to get out because your comebacks are getting horrible.”

“Give me a break, I've been trapped inside my stupid house for three days.”

“So have I! But I'm still funny, unlike you, Johnson.”

“You're funny looking!”

“See what I mean? Horrible. I'm coming over.” Gabriel hangs up the phone quickly, without the chance of me changing my mind. I really don't want to go out but I might as well. I have no girlfriend, no future, no life—all I have is Gabriel. I really am a loser.

Gabriel comes over and heads straight into the kitchen, right for the refrigerator. He grabs a loaf of organic rye bread, a red ripe tomato, some fresh green lettuce, a pack of organic turkey deli meat and a jar of mayonnaise. He starts making himself a sandwich and all this time he has only said one word: “Hello.”

“If your parents aren't feeding you, I can call CPS and have them arrested,” I kid, watching him pig out on his sandwich.

“You'll be doing me a favor,” Gabriel laughs, his mouth still full of chewed-up food. “Where are your parents?”

“They went up to Palo Alto to talk to Jordan's advisor about getting her into Stanford Medical.”

“I thought Jordan's only a freshman.”

“I thought so, too. Apparently, that's not too young to start applying for medical school.”

“You know what would piss off your parents?” Gabriel asks, changing the subject. “If I started going out with Jordan. Actually, that would piss you off, too, so that's a double-whammy for me...wait...a triple-whammy!” Gabriel exclaims, holding three fingers to signify Daddy, Mommy, and me.

“You'll be doing me a favor. Go out with her so that she'll be miserable, because that makes me happy.”

“Well, if that makes you happy, then forget it,” Gabriel concludes, dropping the subject of hooking up with my little sister—how disgusting!

“Anyway, why are you eating? I thought that we're going to go grab dinner before we head out clubbing,” I say to him, leaning over on the kitchen counter.

“Yeah. This is a snack. I'm a growing boy,” Gabriel jokes.

“Sure. Look, I'm going to go get ready so just hang around and do whatever. But don't surf porn on the computer. My dad keeps complaining to me about all the lesbian and gay porn pop-up ads and I have to keep telling him that it has to do with Microsoft's security vulnerabilities and bugs.”

“First of all, a little porn never hurt nobody. Second, those gay porn pop-up ads belong to you, not me.”

“Third, you used a double negative in a sentence. You have to say 'a little porn has never hurt *anybody*',” I correct Gabriel, looking at him as if he just failed a writing assignment.

“Yeah, people love to be corrected, Johnson. Keep it up, I just love that you keep correcting me,” Gabriel stresses sarcastically, still munching on his sandwich.

With my best Southern accent, I drawl, “Well caution then. I won't learn you no more since you don't like no grammar and all that fancy book learnin'.” I am sick of Gabriel's shenanigan so I head upstairs to get ready. I'm just glad that I changed the password on the computer before he arrived.



I decide to take my car—I mean, my parents'—since Gabriel will drive more recklessly than ever, knowing that a bad MCAT score means a life not worth living. I head straight onto interstate 5, going northbound, all the way up to LA.

“You should let me drive,” Gabriel insists, not giving up.

“You should shut up,” I say, my voice very steady.

“I will. Just tell me where you want to eat.”

“Anywhere, it really doesn't matter. As long as it's not Korean. I'm sick of Korean food—and girls.”

“I told you to be careful with Korean girls.” Gabriel's right.

“And I told you that Emilie's hot.”

“She's not worth it. No girl is worth all that trouble.”

“I think every guy knows that. But guys just can't help it.”

“Women...” Gabriel murmurs, turning on the radio. We both hear The Stooges and

immediately start playing air guitar. Who needs women when you have The Stooges?!

We both decide to go eat in Little Tokyo, the Japanese district of downtown LA, before heading to Club Mode in Hollywood, which is about twenty minutes northwest. Gabriel knows the best Japanese restaurants since he used to come here all the time—not anymore because he's sick of Asiatowns—so I let him take command by choosing our place of dining. We walk past the Japanese Village Plaza towards a wide promenade full of restaurants. Gabriel points to the gourmet restaurant, Seppuku, which he claims serves the freshest sushi and sashimi in all of California, even though he's never been inside. There are several hostesses standing outside, all wearing silk furisode kimonos in various bright colors and wooden Geta sandals, with tightly braided hair in the style of geisha shimada. They greet us in Japanese and welcome us in. Gabriel reciprocates by speaking Japanese and they all start waving their hands, signaling that they don't understand. As we head inside, Gabriel turns to me and says, with a surprised tone, “Those lying motherfuckers. They're fake Japanese!”

“Haha. What do you expect? You're dealing with Asians, for crying out loud. They'll just grab a bunch of immigrants, pay them crap and teach them a couple of Japanese phrases, just to provide the Japanese appeal for customers.” It's always about the money.

One of the hostesses leads us to the back of the restaurant, to a very dim room, with the only light illuminating from candles on each table. Before sitting down, we both notice a red rose with white filler flowers in a small, clear vase, in the middle of our table. The hostess giggles a little to herself and leaves the room before I can say: “We're not gay!”

“A little gay never hurt nobody!” Gabriel laughs hysterically, getting me back for correcting him earlier at my house.

“She thinks *we're* gay, not just me,” I retort, with a look of reproach.

“Oh, yeah,” Gabriel concedes.

“We bombed the MCAT and now people think we're gay. Our lives can't get any worse so who cares. Let's just eat.” Before I sit down, I grab the vase with the rose, moving it over to the table behind us. I don't want anyone getting the wrong idea, not that there's anything wrong with that idea.

I let Gabriel order because he has a culinary eye for Japanese cuisine—since he is Japanese. As Gabriel peruses the menu, I look around the room to check out the other customers. I see a Spanish couple to my right, an Asian couple across from us and an African American couple behind them. We're in a room full of minorities. I hope this isn't intentional

segregation by the restaurant. I find it interesting that minorities all have black hair: Spanish, Asian, African, Native American, even Jewish. I wonder if it's some ploy to relegate people with black hair.

Gabriel finishes ordering and tells me that this will be the best dinner that I'll ever have the pleasure of eating. I tell him that it could be the worst dinner that I'll ever have the displeasure of eating, as long as he's paying. I'm really not that picky, but Gabriel is a connoisseur of fine dining, like many native Japanese.

The hostess that presumes we're gay, brings in another couple into the room, a Caucasian couple this time, to seemingly fulfill the affirmative action quota. We're in a room full of couples, too. "You know, Gabriel, we're the only two guys sitting together. This doesn't look good."

"Quit being such a homophobe," Gabriel urges.

"I'm not. I love the gays. I'm just saying this doesn't look good."

"Have you noticed that none of the couples is wearing a ring? Look at their ring fingers," Gabriel directs observantly, with his habit of changing the subject.

"You're right. Well, we are in LA. No one gets married until...death."

"I just think it's funny that everyone waits to get married in LA and everyone rushes to get married up North."

"That's the same with the Bible Belt states. I know a guy in Texas who just got married, even before he graduated from college, just because he felt pressured from his other married friends."

"Yeah, people just follow. They see their friends and family members getting married so they get pressured into following. Just like everyone here not getting married, so they follow each other not to get married," Gabriel assents.

"Marriage is so overrated. And so antiquated. People think that getting married will solve all their problems, that they'll live happily ever after, like in a fairy tale. Then why is the divorce rate over 60% and more people seeking marriage counseling than ever before? Hell, I know several people who are married and are completely miserable."

"Because being miserable with someone is better than being miserable alone," Gabriel kids, laughing at his own joke.

"Well, we both know that marriage won't help them solve any real problems, even their insecurities of succumbing to peer pressure. In fact, marriage just creates a myriad of new

problems.”

“People give in to marriage and settle with one another, particularly with Asians. Of course, there are people who are truly happy being married, like Congressman Ron Paul and his wife, Carol Paul. But for the most part, people just do it because they see other people doing it, to maintain the status quo,” Gabriel adds.

“Yeah. Let's not talk about marriage. I get enough of that crap from my parents.”

“Me too. Let's just talk about banging chicks. I think we can both agree on that.”

Our waiter, also not Japanese—even though he's wearing a traditional Jinbei male kimono—brings out a huge sushi boat, full of an assortment of delectable items: rows of sashimi consisting of tuna, yellowtail, snapper, albacore, and mackerel; many pieces of sushi including red salmon, sea urchin roe, and cuttlefish; small side dishes of seaweed, tofu, and edamame green soybeans—simply outstanding! The boat itself is actually a small replica of a pirate ship, with all the main parts: sails, masts, a ship steering wheel, an anchor, even a white skull-and-bones black flag—very impressive! “This is just for starters,” Gabriel says, smiling with glee.

After we sink the sushi boat with our ravenous appetite, the waiter comes out and serves our entrées: for me, wagyu beef tartare with white alba truffle pieces in a light aioli sauce dressing, plus, cilantro seasoning; for Gabriel, unagi with foie gras, covered in a rich, savory kabayaki sauce, also with cilantro seasoning—simply marvelous! Gabriel mentions that our dessert will be green tea sorbet, topped with vanilla ice cream and covered in anko red bean mousse sauce—unfurling waves of paroxysmal pleasure go through me, as I make a drooling sound like Homer Simpson.

This is truly the best dinner that I've ever eaten in my entire life. I'll give it to Gabriel; he's definitely an expert when it comes to fine dining. I just wish he's an expert when it comes to the MCAT instead!

We leave the restaurant, full to our stomachs and full of elation, and head over to Club Mode in Hollywood. Most people think of Hollywood as the movie capital of the world, where actors and actresses flow like water from a fountain. That's true, for the most part, except most people don't know that Hollywood has the most crazy people in the world—no joke. I remember seeing a guy walking down Sunset Boulevard in a skiing outfit—wearing actual skis on his feet! I remember another time seeing a little person dressed up as Yoda from Star Wars, painted green all over, carrying the classic wooden cane—and it was not Halloween.

Hollywood is fucked up but it's also a lot of fun. That's why we're going there tonight.

We arrive at Club Mode, in the heart of the Sunset Strip, and decide to skip the valet because we're not a couple of prudes. And wouldn't you know it—the line at the door is full of Asians. In fact, every single person is Asian and the vast majority are guys. Any girl that's there seems to be with a guy already. I swear every time that I go clubbing, it's always a sausage fest, aka *sword* fight, especially at a club full of Asians, with the average guy-girl ratio being 100 to 1, very slight exaggeration, of course. I guess most of the Asian girls are locked up at home by their parents. And I find it interesting that there's always an “Asian Invasion” whenever I go clubbing. Asians like to show off their money and status and there's no place better than at a club, where drinks at Club Mode are at least twenty dollars a shot. Plus, this goes back to my whole theory on Asiatown, like Koreatown and Japantown. Asian people congregate together because they are insecure and too afraid to be different, because of the pressure to conform. They can't be unique so they have to share the same, common archetypal culture, just like those Asiatowns. Why be a pauper fish in a big pond when you can be a king fish in a small pond?

Gabriel and I head straight for the door, avoiding the long line of Asians. We get stone-cold stares—similar to the one that I got from the old man with the CIA shirt—as we get to the front of the entrance. Gabriel introduces me to his friend, James, the manager of Club Mode. James tells us to go in and we are immediately swarmed by Asian people, as if we're celebrities walking the red carpet. Even a little thing like being on the guest list is enough status to attract attention from Asians. One Asian guy comes up to me and says that he'll buy me drinks, if I let him come in with us. Another guy comes up and tells me that he'll get me a table, which provides an ample selection of vodka and wine. I politely decline both offers and as I walk in with Gabriel, two very beautiful and tall Asian girls grab the both of us by our waists—tadow! Both of them are wearing snug-tight camisole tops, ass-hugging flirt skirts and stiletto pumps with straps—oh please have mercy on me!

“You're cute,” one of the girls says to me. She's cuter.

“Take us with you,” the other girl insists, pulling Gabriel in. Whom are we to decline?

All four of us walk in together. There's no better entrance for two guys than with two gorgeous girls—maybe three gorgeous girls, or four, or how about a hundred? Gabriel and I introduce ourselves to Shirley and Janine, our newfound damsels of the night. I ask the three of them what they would like to drink before I head over to the bar.

“A beer—any kind,” Gabriel requests.

“A vodka tonic,” Shirley requests.

“A Perfect Pussy,” Janine requests—whoa!

“Excuse me?” I ask Janine, making sure that I heard right, hoping that I heard right.

“Perfect Pussy. It’s my favorite drink.”

“It’s my favorite now, too,” I happily announce. “I’ll be right back!”

I order the drinks and bring them over. Shirley and Janine excuse themselves to go to the bathroom. Gabriel and I tell them that we’ll be waiting on the top level upstairs.

“So which one do you want?” I ask Gabriel, hoping that he picks Shirley so that I can get Janine—and some of her “favorite drink” at the end of the night.

“I want Janine,” Gabriel answers briskly and adamantly, without hesitation. I knew he was going to pick her!

“Damn it! Let me have her.”

“No.”

“I just broke up with Emilie and my parents are going to kill me for bombing the MCAT.”

“I haven’t gotten laid in a year and my parents are also going to kill me for bombing the MCAT. I win.”

“Actually, we both lose.”

“What?” Gabriel asks, caught off guard by my statement.

“Look below,” I direct, pointing my finger at Shirley and Janine dancing with two other guys.

“Bitches!” Gabriel yells in disbelief. “They played us like two cheap hookers.”

“Actually, expensive hookers; those drinks alone were a hundred bucks.”

“Women...” Gabriel laments.

“Bitches!”

We decide to drink a couple of more beers before we head down to the dance floor. Club Mode is actually rather spacious, with two levels and four bars, two at the bottom, two at the top. There’s also a huge lounge area next to the dance floor and a lounge area here at the top. Most importantly, Club Mode provides a bountiful harvest of scantily clad Asian girls, wearing the sexiest and skimpiest outfits: lacy halter tops, strapless corset dresses, skinny satin pants, seductive swing skirts, and the most erotic of all, come-fuck-me shoes—stunning

spike heel platforms, peeping-tom pleaser pumps, thigh-high leather boots, strappy stiletto sandals—oh please have mercy on me!

Gabriel taps me hard on my left shoulder and points to a go-go dancer up on stage near the mezzanine. She is definitely gorgeous, amplified by the fact that she's almost naked, wearing only a pink bikini bra and panty with white knee-high stripper boots.

"I want to marry her," Gabriel maunders, the girl's ass-shaking dance spell hypnotizing him into a trance.

"You want to marry her? No, you don't. You want to fuck her. Let's get that straight. Would you really want to bring her home to meet your parents? Would you really want her to take care of your kids? How about taking her to church? So no you don't want to marry her. You want to fuck her," I exact, gladly correcting Gabriel yet again. I hate it when guys say that they want to marry a girl but in actuality, all they want is to do her.

"I want to fuck her," Gabriel maunders, accepting my correction, the go-go dancer's ass-shaking spell still hypnotizing him into the same trance.

We decide to stop being wallflowers and go down to the dance floor. There's a sea of Asian girls dancing one-on-one, grinding against each other, their bodies inexorably chafing in heat, as if the friction itself will seemingly cause a fire to ignite—oh please have mercy on me! Gabriel squeezes his way in and starts dancing with two girls, hoping to start a fire himself. I look around and see a voluptuous Vietnamese girl dancing by herself next to the stage. I walk up to her and say "Hello." She stares me right in the eyes, then looks me down from head to toe and on the way up, she gives me a disapproving look and shouts, "Hello my ass!"

"I'm a doctor," I lie.

"Really? Oh sorry, what's up?" she politely greets, changing her tone of voice.

"I will be a doctor," I truthfully say. Actually that's a lie, too, since I'm sure that I bombed the MCAT.

She turns her back to me and proceeds to walk to the lounge area. "Excuse me, princess! You midget hoe!" I scream out, as she disappears into the crowd. See what I mean about Vietnamese girls? They are short, small and grow up not having anything so they put up a front to make people think that they're hot shit, like with so many Asian girls. And coincidentally, when you tell them you're a doctor or lawyer, they'll give you the time of day all of the sudden, letting down their defensive guard of insecurity. It's always about the money.

I rush over to Gabriel and push him out of the way so that I am sandwiched in between

two lovely ladies in a delicious “dancewich.” Gabriel laughs and starts dancing with one of them from behind. We both grind our way into oblivion—oh what a night!

Exhaustion overtakes us from dancing non-stop, so we head straight for the bar to get drinks. Gabriel orders several more beers and I start talking about how much I miss Emilie. He tells me to quit whining and bitching but I just can't help it. She dumped me because I did poorly on my MCAT—and I still don't know my score! That's probably the absolute worst dump in history—to get dumped for something that hasn't even happened yet.

After about eight beers—no...twelve or maybe fourteen...I lost count—I am completely drunk and so is Gabriel. Gabriel maunders to me about how sober he is to drive. I tell him that I'm sober enough to kick his ass if he drives, so he decides to talk to James about crashing at his place, since he lives in Hollywood. Gabriel stumpers back, dangling a key and says that we can go straight over to James's place. That's good news. I'm sick of all these Asian girls—Asian prudes, I should say—anyway.

We leave Club Mode holding one another, with one arm across each others' shoulders, because we are inebriated beyond our normal functions. As we walk together, I overhear a girl saying, “Yeah, I'm going to fuck him. 'Cause he's rich.” First of all, I hate it when girls say they are going to fuck a guy. They can't fuck a guy because they don't have something called a penis. The guy does the fucking and the girls get fucked. Girls always think that they control everything. Second, girls will fuck anything that's rich. Here's a joke, though I may be too drunk to articulate:

A very rich, old man walks up to the youngest, most beautiful college girl that he's ever seen and flat out asks, “Would you sleep with me for one million dollars?” She looks at him for a moment and answers, “Nothing after that? Just one night of sex with you for one million dollars? Hell yes I will!” The man then asks her, “Okay, how about for twenty dollars in the back room over there?” The girl is completely in shock. “I would never! What kind of a woman do you think that I am?” The man smirks and says, “Oh, we've already established what *kind* of woman you are. Now we're simply haggling over the price.” It's always about the money.

Gabriel miraculously guides us all the way to James's apartment, right off of Sunset and...crap, I can't make out the sign—I'm too drunk! Luckily, Gabriel has a higher alcohol tolerance, so we reach the elevator to get up to the fifth floor, the floor of James's apartment.

We both stagger down the hallway, and I finally notice that James's place is really nice and looks really expensive. I wonder whom he had to sleep with to get his apartment.

“Come on now!” Gabriel commands, holding my waist tightly with both of his arms to keep me from falling.

“‘Come on now?’ Why would you have to say ‘now?’ Is there ever a ‘Come on later?’ Just say ‘Come on’ because ‘now’ is implied, thus making it superfluous, so that in itself would be grammatically—”

“Johnson, you can ‘Come on’ and shut the fuck up ‘*now*,’ because we’re here.”

Two locks click and the door opens, as we rush in. Gabriel and I stumble over to the couch and pass out.



It's bright and early morning now, as I hold my head tightly because of an intense headache, probably due to the hangover that I'm suffering at this moment and most likely for the rest of the day. Gabriel's still asleep, not moving as I nudge him on the shoulder. During the night—or really, really early morning, I should say—I heard moaning and squealing noises coming from the bedroom, presumably because James was banging some chic—lucky bastard. I walk over to the kitchen and open the refrigerator door. As I look for bottled water, I hear the bedroom door open and someone walking to the kitchen. I look up to see the same voluptuous Vietnamese girl who blew me off at the club—what a small world!

“Hello,” she says softly and politely.

I stare right into her eyes, then look her down from head to toe and on the way up, I give her a disapproving look and shout, “Hello my ass!” Payback's a bitch, bitch!

Détente

20

Today's the big day. Today will make or break me—same with Gabriel, Emilie and every other Asian person, at least the ones finding out their MCAT score, which is probably all the Asians in Irvine. Today is D-Day for Asians. Today is D-Day for Gabriel and me.

The MCAT scores haven't actually been mailed out yet, but I received an email announcement earlier today stating that they're available online. Of course, I'm too impatient to wait for that damn letter, so I'm going to log in to my computer and find out my score—except I'm too nervous to check. What if I do worse than bomb it? Actually, that's still bombing it. What do I have to lose?—just everything.

I hear my mobile phone ringing, the caller ID flashing Gabriel's name. “Hey,” I answer.

“Did you check your score?” Gabriel asks, impatient as well.

“I'm...no I haven't. Have you?”

“No. I'm too nervous.”

“Me too.”

“Are your parents home?”

“No. Why?”

“Well, my parents are home and I don't want to be here when—”

“Come over then,” I interrupt, without the need for an explanation.

“Okay. I'm leaving right now.”

Gabriel comes over and heads straight for the computer this time, instead of the refrigerator. “I'll go first,” he submits, ready to take the MCAT bullet.



"22T," Gabriel mutters unintelligibly.

"What?" I ask, making sure I heard clearly.

"22T!" Gabriel yells, anger getting the better of him. I let it go because he has every right to be upset. I will soon have that right, too.

"Alright. Let me check mine." As I'm typing in my username and password, I feel a sudden shock rush through me, like lightning through a metal rod in the middle of a wet field. Here I go...

"21J," I yell in anger, louder than Gabriel.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Gabriel asks, clairvoyant in his inquiry.

"Yes. We've already made plans ahead of time, in case of an emergency—like this."

"Alright. Give me a couple of hours to get the stuff." I let Gabriel leave in silence. We both know what we must do.



True to his word, Gabriel comes back in a couple of hours. He's holding a plastic bag, full of the items for our plan.

"You got the stuff?" I utter gently, my voice quavering.

"Yeah, it was easy," Gabriel utters gently as well, his voice not quavering. "That's the good thing about being biology majors. We both know the most potent stuff to use."

"Yeah. You know what's funny? I studied my ass off and you still ended up doing better than me without even studying at all. You even got a perfect T for the writing sample."

"Actually, Johnson, I did study my ass off. I just made it look like I didn't."

There is a long silence between the two of us, a silence that we both find soothing and comforting, a silence that we both experience as mutual harmony.

"I find it ironic," I tell Gabriel, after an undisturbed, peaceful minute.

"What's that?"

"That we spent our whole lives trying to be doctors, with the chance to save lives, and

now we're doing the complete opposite.”

“Yeah, it is ironic,” Gabriel says, not laughing. “You know what's also ironic?”

“What's that?”

“You've always wanted to be a writer. Well, here's your chance to finally be one.”

“Yeah, that is ironic,” I say, also not laughing. “Well, give me an hour and I'll have it all written out.”

I grab a pack of new, unopened multipurpose copy paper from the bottom drawer of my computer desk. I open it, take out the first sheet, and with a despondent hand, I write:

To Whom This May Concern (To Those Who Give a Damn)

Right at the outset, Gabriel and I, Johnson, both assent to the entire content of this letter, so I speak for him as well as myself.

Asian culture, as with all cultures, has a myriad of wonderful traditions and customs that contribute to society, traditions and customs that should be understood and appreciated. However, Asian culture also has a myriad of not so wonderful traditions and customs that impede society, which need to be understood but not appreciated. Contrary to the belief of many, Asian culture is not perfect; Asian people are not perfect. In fact, many people do not know the truth about Asian culture, the truth that it's fraught with problems, the truth that it's fraught with greed, many other truths which I shall reveal. Allow me to delineate:

Asians are known to be quiet and reserved; the reason is because Asians wish to hide their problems and insecurities. For instance, Asians possess many shortcomings (no pun intended). In general, Asians are short, small, skinny, minorities in America—even small down you-know-where. To make up for these shortcomings, they imbue themselves with the practice of overachieving: getting straight A's, high SAT scores, excelling at playing the piano, becoming doctors and lawyers, buying luxury cars, living in expensive homes—in order to conceal all their problems and insecurities, so to maintain a good image, aka saving face. This provides the illusory perception that Asians are very successful and auspicious, but in reality, they are very dysfunctional and maladjusted. Summarily, why are Asians so quiet and reserved?—simple: to hide their dysfunctional and maladjusted lives, just to save face. Why

do Asians overachieve?—simple: to hide their dysfunctional and maladjusted lives, just to save face. Asians can't have people thinking that they aren't perfect, even though they are unequivocally far from it.

I, along with the vast majority of Asians all over the world, have been bred to only achieve success, no matter the cost. We are raised like docile robots, manipulated for the agenda of money, status and power, according to my Asian Pride Theorems, which I will explain meticulously:

1. Money
2. Status
3. Power

It's as simple as that. Asians are obsessed about money and will exercise whatever means necessary to obtain it. With money, they can achieve a high status—economical, societal, political—“Image is everything.” With money and status, they have power: the power to control, the power to influence, any type of power, even the most trivial, as long as it's power—why? Because Asians have many shortcomings and know that they can't really be on top so any power will do. Why be a pauper fish in a big pond when you can be a king fish in a small pond?

Throughout the thousands of years of Asian dynasties, all the emperors, kings and presidents have ruled with an iron fist and formidable will, controlling every aspect of the lives of Asians. Because of the long duration and large-scale domination, it's only natural that Asians continue living lives of subservience and docility, indoctrinated and conditioned beyond belief. Asians, thus, can't stand up for themselves, instead, let themselves get pushed around by those “above.” They only know how to serve and to follow orders, thus, stifling their creativity and mental capabilities, resulting in the lack of intuition and preventing the utilization of common sense. Therefore, Asians lack common sense, ingenuity, and intuition, so in turn, they are easily manipulated into becoming machines to overachieve and overwork. That is why Asians want power, even the most trivial power, because they've been controlled and subservient their whole lives, so these powers—though little—are everything to them, since they have nothing else. Asian culture has been this way for too long.

And for far too long, Asian culture emphasizes the intellect of the mind at the expense of the emotional body. Without the emotional body—and without emotional support from family members—Asians are not able to cope with the pressures and stresses of competition, performance, and having to conform, much less cope with the problems of everyday life. That's why Asians consistently have the highest suicide rate. When their intellectual achievements do not meet the standards that are set up for them and when there's no emotional body or support, giving up on life seems to be the only way out. And this shit continues because this shit never gets addressed, because Asian families don't communicate with each other about their problems, in order to save face. That's why Asian families are so dysfunctional and continue to bequeath that dysfunction to each subsequent generation, a cyclical virus that ultimately hurts everyone, over and over again. You don't need to be a psychologist to figure out that this shit's gotta go.

So the main problem with the cupidity for money, status, and power is that it's cyclical, forced down from generation to generation, which keeps going like a hamster on a wheel, never stopping and getting deleteriously worse and worse. But all this can be changed since life is about change. Life is not static; life is dynamic. It's always changing, just like us. Every day is not the same, even the meals that we eat are very different. So if life's about changing and people do change, Asian culture can also change, for the better.

Of course, many Asians feel that there's no need for change. Then why is the suicide rate for Asian Americans astronomically higher than Caucasians, Hispanics, and African Americans? Why does Asia have the highest suicide rate in the world? Why do two million women attempt suicide in China every year, with many more not counted due to saving face? Why is it considered normal to commit suicide in countries like Korea and Japan? This is not normal. This is abnormal. This needs to change.

I must point out that there is nothing wrong with being Asian. There is nothing wrong with being Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc. In fact, it's okay to practice traditions and customs, so that everyone can understand and appreciate them. However, focusing *only* on your own culture is ethnocentric. Sheltering out other cultures is ethnocentric. Asians must evolve by appreciating other cultures, especially here in America or else the problems will just continue. Many Asians are indoctrinated with the ideology of ethnocentricity. Ethnocentricity is what causes prejudice. By learning to understand and appreciate other cultures, Asians can start understanding how to resolve issues and problems within their own.

Finally, some might say that things are the way they are and cannot be changed, because Asians are too ingrained in their own culture. I'd like to point out that slavery used to be the norm but that changed. Segregation used to be the norm but that changed. In fact, Barack Hussein Obama, Bush's cousin, became the first black president in the history of the USA in 2008, ending the 200-plus-year reign of only white and male. So anything can change, even Asian culture.

The truth is that Asians are too afraid to change, because they've been indoctrinated and conditioned too much to know how—that's why a billion people in China are willing to serve and follow, even though they know that they're living lives of enslavement. But it's okay to be afraid: Gandhi was afraid, so was Martin Luther King, Jr., so was John Lennon. But they gathered enough courage to get people to work together, which is what we must do in order for things to change, instead of being isolated in our own little Asian islands. By working together and helping each other, we can change anything, instead of taking advantage of each other or using one another. As Seymour Stein said: "When things can't continue going, they have a tendency to stop." If the problems of Asian culture can't continue going, they will stop.

In conclusion, if Asians decide to change for the better, then they need to first admit that there are problems with Asian culture—no more excuses. They will then realize that the solution is to build better relationships by communicating more effectively and showing love and affection towards one another—especially towards their own children. It's simple in concept, but Asians make it seem like it's rocket science.

To Mommy and Daddy: I know that I have always been a disappointment to the both of you, my entire life. I know that the both of you like Jordan more, her winning by virtue of comparison. But I just want you both to know that neither of us feel any love from either of you. I am very lonely. I cannot talk about my problems, share my feelings, confide in anyone, because I have to save face. That's how so many Asians truly are: lonely. They may have a lot of friends and live in a big family but deep down they are truly lonely because they have no one to share their problems with, no one to confide in, because they are too ashamed to talk to anyone about their personal issues, in order to save face. I hope the both of you can change, for Jordan's sake.

To Jordan: I know that we have our differences, but please know that I love you.

To Gabriel's family: There's a bag of weed under his bed. Please don't smoke it but get rid of it in case the cops come. Believe it or not, that's all he wants to say.

Summarily, I would like to state that no one person is at fault: not my parents, not me, not society—but everyone. We all must work as one in order to change for the better. Or I will always be yellow on the outside, shame on the inside.



I hand the finished letter to Gabriel. He reads it, smiles and gives me a hug, the hug that I've always wanted from my parents, the hug that I'll never get from them. I lock the door to my room and tell Gabriel that I'm ready. He replies that he's ready, too. I wonder who will be doing our eulogy...

OUTTAKES

Thank you very much for reading my book. I could not fit everything into my novel—for one reason or another—so I decided to include this section of outtakes with proposed scenes.

Scene: Chapter 2 – In Johnson's Room (first-person reflection)

Character: Johnson

Outtake:

The most popular excuse that Asian parents like to use to coerce their children into becoming doctors and lawyers is the old “we've suffered and struggled through so many hardships when we were younger so we just want our kids to have the best life possible” justification; I like to call this justification the “old bullshit routine.”

First of all, *every* parent, not just Asian, uses the old bullshit routine for a multifarious number of reasons: to get their kids to eat their vegetables, to get their kids to go to bed, to get their kids to go to school, etc. For example, parents love to say, “I had to walk ten miles to school, ten miles back, in snow all the way up to my waist even in the summer, while wearing a huge backpack and carrying a hundred books in each hand.” We are all cognizant of this old bullshit routine. This is just parental propaganda to get their kids to do something, anything, like forcing their kids to become doctors and lawyers.

Second, there are many Asian doctors and lawyers today, many who are very wealthy and successful in America as well as the rest of the world. Then why are *they* still forcing their own kids to become doctors and lawyers, even though there's no more “hardship?” After all, these Asian kids didn't have to suffer or struggle with a rough life growing up, since their parents are doctors and lawyers. The fact of the matter is that it has nothing to do with struggles or hardships; it has everything to do with the power of control, per my Asian Pride Theorems, forcing their kids to become

what their parents want, hence doctors and lawyers for the “bling” and the “bling.” It's always about the money.

Scene: Chapter 5 - In the Guest Room of Auntie's House (first-person reflection)

Character: Johnson

Outtake:

I find it rather interesting that the most popular Asian surnames have to do with wealth and power. For instance, the most popular Chinese surname is Wang, which means king, aka power since so many Asians want to be kings. Other Chinese variations include Wong, Vong, and Ong. What's interesting is that the king last name is also very popular with other Asian cultures: the Vietnamese with Vuong, the Korean with Wang, the Malaysian with Ong, and the Singaporean with Ong as well. Notice that the king last name is pervasively similar throughout the Asian cultures; they feel that having a king last name would really give them the power that they desire.

Now let's talk about the wealth surname, starting with the Koreans with Kim, the most popular Korean surname. It's also very popular with other Asian cultures: Chinese with Jin, Chin, and Kim, the Vietnamese with Kim and the Japanese with Kin. Again, notice that they look and sound similar, some of them even the same; Asian culture really is just one pea in a pod.

Of course, not every Asian has a last name associated with money, status, or power; I just find it interesting that the most popular Asian surnames have to do with money, status, power, prosperity, luck, wealth, etc.—you get the idea. It's always about the money.

Scene: Chapter 8 - In Johnson and Emilie's Molecular Biology Class (first-person

reflection)

Character: Johnson

Outtake:

What people don't realize is that college is a business, just like every other business; its primary focus is to make money, *not* to teach. A friend of mine goes to Caltech and he told me that they intentionally increased his tuition by 25% for the sole purpose of competing with the tuition fees of the top Ivy League schools and nothing else! He actually has to pay a lot extra just to make Caltech “look Ivy League” and not for any real purpose like books, room and board, or anything else that would further his “education.”

Moreover, the average college student upon graduation owes almost \$50,000 in student loans. Medical students like me owe on an average over twice as much. Arizona State University, for example, has a total student enrollment of close to 70,000 students. Now imagine all the college students with student loans who attend ASU—you can see how profitable college is as a business. And once these college students graduate, most won't be able to get a job right away so they'll have more debt just from daily expenses and everyday living. When they finally do get a crappy-paying entry level job, they'll have so much debt accumulated from student loans, interest on the student loans, car payments, rent, etc., that they'll have to work like slaves in order to pay the bills, forever at the mercy of debt, just like the average American. It's a sad, sad society that we live in.

People need to realize that you don't go to college to learn. You go to college in order to get a good job once you graduate—that's basically it. I guarantee that virtually no one would go to college if it wasn't a prerequisite to getting a good job. As Mark Twain once said: “Don't let schooling interfere with your education.”

Furthermore, colleges and universities used to provide bachelor degrees with two-year programs. Do you know why it's four years now? Because they make double the money versus just two years. That's why the first two years are filled with “basic courses,” courses that teach the same crap that you learned in high school *and* middle

school; they have to fill up that time with something so it might as well be crap, since you don't learn anything in the first place anyway. One study showed that 73% of college graduates do not work in their field of study. In other words, the vast majority don't even end up doing what they majored in! Then why go to college in the first place?—(Hint: College is a business.)

Summarily, people must understand that learning is a life-long process which does not come from a total of four years of academic propaganda. People must also understand that college is a business, just like church is a business, just like every other business with the purpose of making money; some may wear a different face, but they *all* wear the same idea: it's always about the money.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Question: Why would you write a book that's not true?

My Answer: This book is a didactic novel, aka literary *fiction*. But I know what you mean. I wrote this book based on my cognizance and on the lives of others, including my own life. There are people who wouldn't agree with what I say just like I wouldn't agree with what they say. Life goes on...

Question: Why did you write this book?

My Answer: The suicide rate for Asian Americans is astronomically higher than Caucasians, African Americans, and Latin Americans. In fact, Asian Americans have the highest suicide rate among women. Moreover, two million women attempt suicide in China every year, with many more not counted due to saving face. This needs to change, and I believe my book is conducive as a start for that change. I see too many Asian children indoctrinated and conditioned like overachieving robots, here in the United States and in Asia. This won't stop until we all work together, as I have luminously delineated in the last chapter (Détente) of my book.

Question: Not all Asians are like this so why would you write about this stuff?

My Answer: Please read the introductory section of my book, A NOTE TO THE READER, as I have stated my position with luminous clarity.

Question: Why are you a racist?

My Answer: I'm an Asian American, born and raised in New York City, the largest multicultural and multi-diverse city in the world. My heroes include John Lennon and Martin Luther King, Jr. I don't think racists would have those aforementioned heroes. I tell it like it is and if you don't like it, then write a book—that's what I did.

(continued)

Question: Do you know that many people don't agree with you?

My Answer: Attaining assent and partiality from people—particularly from the general public—is not my objective; my objective is to bequeath knowledge and information unto people so that they can *think* for themselves. People today don't think for themselves, instead letting corporate lamestream media rape their minds with propaganda and subliminal bullshit.

I recall a political cartoon in which a man sitting on a couch and sweating profusely, yells to nine television screens in front him, collectively broadcasting ABC, CNN, FOX, NBC...MSNBC: “I wish *they* would hurry up and make up my mind!”

I have the courage and audacity to write and publish my tenets; you should have the courage and audacity to make up your own mind, not let me or anyone make it up for you, especially not corporate lamestream media. If you don't agree with me, then write a book—that's what I did.

Question: You mentioned that you're a “former Asian.” How can you renounce your ethnicity?

My Answer: In my book, I stated: “...why can't we all just be called Americans, since all of us are, after all, *Americans*?” People are people, regardless of ethnic distinction; just because I'm considered “yellow” or “chink” or “gook” or “slant-eyes” doesn't mean that I have to be. I renounced my ethnicity (Chinese) because I do not like the egregiously selfish and deplorable culture. People have said to me, “You can't change who you are.” Why don't they tell that to those who got plastic surgery? They changed. Why don't they tell that to those who got a sex change? They certainly changed. Hell, people even undergo skin pigmentation surgery to make themselves “white” or “black.” They definitely changed. Summarily, people don't define who you are; *you* define who you are.

Question: I have a question. Can I contact you?

My Answer: Absolutely, by all means; you can email me: ronpauler@gmail.com Many thanks in advance. Have a nice day.