

Writing Contest Entry  
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Creative Non-Fiction

## SUN SHOWER

Everyday was the worst day for me. For everyone else...I can't say the same. There were smiles that all seemed so unfamiliar to me. Like a spring day, everyone seems fluid and drifting through air with angelic wings on their backs. My wings are clipped. Their smiles take me back to the childish joy I'd feel on Saturday mornings. Dad would make the only thing he's good at cooking: cinnamon banana pancakes. Mom would be in the bathroom fresh out of a shower because she wakes up later than everyone. And Dane, Inari, Tsunai and I would sit at the small chrome antique table that grandma gave us and talk while we waited for breakfast. It's like that scene in *Ratatouille* where Anton Ego tastes Linguini's- no *Remy's* ratatouille and he has this theatrical moment of nostalgia where he's reminded of his younger self looking forlorn and unsure of himself. Then he's blessed with his understandably favorite meal and is brought into that happiness. The most joyful, relaxing, peaceful and rapturous feeling.

I crave it.

Sometimes I'd lose myself in the thoughts of searching for this feeling. I'd ravage all ends of the world for this feeling in hope of reassurance that I am human. I'd take as many 'soul searching' trips that I can afford to just to be able to find purpose.

"Alex, you see where Ma left her keys at?" I didn't hear him come down the stairs, but Tsunai was leaning on the frame of the kitchen doorway, waiting for me to answer. He looked drained in his athletic wear that was drenched in sweat around his neck and armpits.

"No," It's the first time I've heard my voice for the day and I'm disappointed, " She needa leave them on the hook by the door. We go through this everyday, how can she not remember?" I said irritably. Tsunai visibly sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. He has a habit of putting more stress on himself than he needs to sometimes. It worries me that one day he'll break. Tsunai and I were born in the same year. We don't look much alike but we'd always tell people that we're twins. It's deeper than just sharing the same age though; it's like we're mentally interconnected. He feels when I'm anxious. His joy becomes mine. My depression becomes his. It's deeper. I'd never say this out loud, but sometimes I think and realize that, for me, he's that friend in everyone's life that they can talk to until 4 am, about nothing in particular and enjoy each other's energy while yawning and wiping tired tears from our eyes. Tsunai is literally my best friend.

After coming to the conclusion that Ma's keys are somewhere in the jungles of her purse, he sighs again and flops his hands down to his sides creating a slapping noise on his thighs. "I'm finna go to Walmart real quick. You wanna come?" He knows that I do.

“You know it.” I joked while putting on a Bootsy Collins ‘accent’ that he just chuckled and shook his head at.

As we’re getting into the car, Tsunai stops midway with one foot in the car and looks around as if he forgot something. Then he shakes it off and gets in.

For most of the ride we were silent. At one point Pretty Sweet by Frank Ocean came on and it reminded me of GTA V. I instantly felt like 2013. I know Tsunai felt it too. I was zoning out again and staring at an uninterrupted part of the sky where I could see the weird patterns in my eyes that I see when my eyes are shut. Why do we see patterns when our eyes are closed? Or is it just me? How is that even possible? We passed a McDonald’s and I was so close to saying - “You not gonna tell nobody, right?” He asked in that deep baritone voice, speaking lower than he usually does. From the corner of my eye I could see him swiftly turn his head to look at me. Like a child trying not to get caught in the act, he kept looking back and forth between the road waiting for me to answer even though he knew that I wouldn’t.

Being in this car felt like our world alone. As far as I can feel nothing else exists beyond these four doors. It feels that way, yet there’s a world beyond us knowing nothing of our conversation. Knowing nothing of the tension, they are just existing in their own lives, as they should. What if the whole world was able to see and hear us right now. Would they think I’m rude for not answering? I have a right to not answer...the subject is hard to wrap my head around. No amount of time can allow me to figure out what I should say. I almost always choose silence...

What if the world thinks that I’m a coward? Should I even care though? I don’t even think I’ve done anything to make me a coward...Maybe avoiding this talk is why they’d think I’m a coward.

“You *have* to say *something*, Alex.” He can be so demanding sometimes. I’ve noticed that years ago and it’s annoying. At times, back at home, it’s like he’s the second dad in the house. His person holds so much power that he gives off a ‘fatherly energy’. Now I’m the one that needs to reassure him.

“Where do you even get them from?” I asked. It’s probably not the right place to start but I have no idea where to start.

He loudly groaned and tightened his hold on the steering wheel. His knuckles were blushed contrasting with his mahogany skin. “That’s not what I asked you.”

“I don’t care, I asked you a question,” I quickly retorted, “You gave no other details besides...what was said. How am I supposed to help you if I literally know nothing. I needed a few days to figure this out. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do. Like you really-”

“A friend of one of my teammates.”

We pulled into Walmart’s parking lot.

Upon walking into the entrance, he grabbed a shopping cart and lazily nudged it forward. There aren't many people here at this hour, everyone is at work or school. Tsu and I decided to stay home today. He has a lot going on and I'm afraid to leave him home alone. Alone..that reminds me.

"I think I'm gonna go to the same school as you." I mumbled. Just by the way he threw his head back I knew that he was peeved. It's not the fact that we'll be in the same school: but the fact that I'm making this decision now. I had always planned on going to FAMU and Tsunai is stuck between community college and UCLA. He's always dreamed of going to school on the west coast. Me...not so much.

He continued to trudge and craned his neck down different aisles. I could tell he was trying to find the right words to say to me without pissing me off because he kept shaking his head and moving his mouth to form sentences but nothing came out. We walked into the freezer aisle where I contemplated between grape popsicles and Bryers butter pecan ice cream. These grape icees have a lot of flavor in them. And they'll last longer than the ice cream. What the hell is taking him so long to say something? But then again do I really feel like chewing on nuts right now? I should throw one of these at him. I think I'll get the popsicles.

"You know you don't have to babysit me right?" He said in a matter of fact tone.

I scoffed. "It's college though... that's when a lot of...*experimenting* happens." Ok but now the butter pecan is starting to look good. I can't take my eyes off this damn ice cream. Tsunai pushed the cart forward and forcibly grabbed the box of popsicles out of my hand and threw them in the cart.

"Get the icees, stupid." I couldn't help but chuckle as I put the ice cream back in the freezer and jogged after him. We didn't bring it back up for the rest of the time we shopped in Walmart. We spent almost an hour looking at games and electronics to put on our christmas lists. I have a newfound interest in photography and Tsunai wants playstation games *of course*. And a VR set. One of those he's not getting. It wasn't until we were on one of the longest lines that I've ever been on, that he brought it up again.

"Look," he sighed and scanned the place before looking me in the eyes, "Look. I don't want you to not go to the school that you been wanting to go to because of me. You don't need to do anything but *not* tell Ma and Pops. That's it. Dane and Inari either." He gave me a stern look that literally meant nothing to me. All I heard was "You're not gonna chaperone me, Alex. I'm grown and I'll do what I want blah blah blah..." I hate this because it feels like allowing someone to walk into a trap where you know the possible outcome, but that person is so adamant and blase that they jump head first into a whirlpool failure.

I don't want to fail Tsunai...

Sometimes I'd think back to those days that me and Tsunai shared and wonder what more could I have done to save him. At times I felt like he knew that all I tried to do was pointless. He had already made his decision to break and there's nothing I could've done to prevent it. Something my grandma would always say: "You can't help somebody that don't wanna be helped." I was too young to understand her because I always thought she meant that I shouldn't help people at all...and that's just not who I am. She'd follow up with something along the lines of, "You doing all this stressing over somebody who don't give two damns about how you tryna help them. Now you look stupid," She'd wave her hand in a way of saying 'forget it' while shaking her head, "It just makes no sense." Now I understand what she meant but it hits different when it's someone so close to me, when it's someone I care about til' *beyond* the death of me.

*We were the closest in the house. Damn near TWINS...why couldn't you talk to me?*

*Was I not making myself available to you?*

*Were there cryptic codes I missed?*

Sometimes I'd see him around town. On good days he'd try to 'dress nice' with chinos and a dingy wife beater that made his torso seem two times longer. Seeing him made me want to cry, so much that at times I'd pretend like I couldn't see him.

Our parents were disappointed and embarrassed, everyone was. Here's a kid with a blinding bright future ahead of him: good looks, respectable, well spoken and *educated* young black man with the world on his shoulders. He had so many problems that I was unaware of and the betrayal I felt after learning of them was heartbreaking. I remember seeing him one day standing outside of a Burger King downtown. I almost didn't recognize him because I was in such a rush and also because he had lost about twenty pounds. He was more than a one trick pony now. I could tell by the state that he was in. Abnormally skinny yet muscular arms, his face had aged about twenty years and the inner of his lips were a light pink. He was reaching into corners that I knew nothing about.

"H-hey, sis." From the corner of my eye I saw a frail figure emerge from behind the door and stand next to me, peering at the child on my hip. I wasn't able to get a look at the person who held the door open for me, only muttered a quick "Thank you!" and hurried out.

I swiftly stopped and turned my head, alarmed at this stranger walking so closely beside me. “If you don’t back the f-” It was like...by looking into his eyes I had seen every bit of our past. Every event of the cuts and scrapes on our legs from our adventurous childhood, sneaking into mom's liquor cabinet only to take a small sip of something way too strong for twelve year olds to consume, and feigning being drunk. I saw every distant look at the dinner table while everyone else laughed. I saw the talks after where I told him he can always talk to me, and when he’d chuckle and nudge me away to blow it off. I saw eyes that I did not recognize.

“What’s up, sis?” He slowly scratched his arm, now seeming unsure of how I would respond to him. Somehow the scratching he was doing was the LOUDEST scratching I’d ever heard. He had a weird smell that was something similar to funk masked by a cheap cologne. His hair was unruly and matted, littered with lint balls and other pieces of dirt that probably latched onto his coils from the ground. His light brown eyes seemed darker now, however his teeth looked perfect. He always took good care of his teeth.

“Is that my niece?” He asked while averting his eyes to the toddler I was holding. He’d never *met* her but he knew *of* her.

“Um hi, Tsunai.” His name felt foreign coming out of my mouth. I avoided everything about this man because it hurt too much to face reality. I’d nearly cry. He didn’t say anything for a while. Just softly smiled and whispered “wow”. I had always wanted him to meet her but giving the circumstances, I felt like it would be too much for me to handle emotionally.

Anyka is so much like him. Their personalities are so similar: she has his same snarky attitude yet loving nature. I just know that if things were better for him, he and Anyka would be so close. She and I are actually close, the opposite of how I was with my parents growing up though.

“You know she look just like you...and Ma.” He chuckled while leaning back and sliding his hands in his pockets. There was a weird silence that followed because I couldn’t find my tongue and he felt bad for making me feel this way. “How’s Ma and them?” He finally looked me in the eye again and I honestly I hated it.

“They’re doing good.”

He nodded his head and scratched his beard while looking off to the side. “Ok, Ok. That’s good.” He eyed me up and down and widely smiled. “I see you doing good for yourself now...got the lil Fendi jacket. Got my niece looking nice and well put together. Ok...ok.” He grabbed the end of her sweater and shook it lightly.

It was so hard to not smile even if it was the tiniest most unnoticeable smile, but I still did. He always wanted me to make it and he always let it be known that he's always proud of me no matter what I did.

Avoiding the smile in his eyes I said "You need to go to Mom and Dad...they can help you." His smile slowly faded. "I have too much going on at mine so...Mom and Dad's would have to do. They miss you."

We had had this conversation multiple times before. I had said the same line over and over again and yet, every time I found the courage to speak to him I still said the same thing. Tsunai sighed and stepped back. The more our awkward interaction went on, the more we avoided eye contact. "Look," he looked at me, "I'm gonna get back, ok. But I'm gonna get back on my time." I remember him saying that and the immediate look of 'boy what the hell are you talking about' appearing on my face.

"Tsunai-

"What's her name?" He motioned towards her with his chin and started to smile at her again to which she giggled and buried her head in my neck. I almost didn't want to answer him because by now my blood was boiling and the burning tears in my eyes were threatening to fall.

"Anyka."

And that was the last time I saw him. Before, a month never passed before I saw him somewhere in the city. None of us had seen him in years. Not Mom or Dad. Not Inari and not Dane. Anyka, who was four when she first met him and is now seven, asks about him frequently. At times like this, and when she remembers a promise I made to take her to the park, her good memory annoys me. This isn't the first year we've had a holiday without Tsunai and it probably won't be the last. But now we have this creeping feeling tugging our arms in a dark corner trying to show us that he's probably dead somewhere. It's not something I want to think about but thinking is all I can do in a time like this.

I'm so in my thoughts that my surroundings are nonexistent to me. Daydreaming has become more frequent for me lately. It's never of anything specific, just anything to keep my mind occupied. Sometimes I feel like I'm going to overload because I think of too many things at once. So many things to wonder about. So many things to do. So many things to avoid thinking about... I was startled when my mother let out a loud yelp and jumped up from her seat at our large Christmas dinner. I feel my husband grip my leg and lean in to whisper "Alex, are you ok?" I absentmindedly muttered "yes" while looking around for Anyka. Apparently she had answered the door that was knocked on while I was daydreaming. Mom had jumped up with Dad right

behind her and ran to the front door that was out of my view. Inari and I stood up and peered around the corner just in time to see Ma with her arms wrapped tightly around someone with a crisp dress shirt on. She's holding this person so tight that I could see her body shake from squeezing so hard. Dad joins in the hug and I start to hear sniffing and the repeated mumbling of "I had to get right" through tears.

And then I got chills. Only when I heard just three words did I begin to realise...just three words: "What's up, sis."