



Joseph Han



A Tour of Why They Scared

I act like I'm smoking a cigar. Knock off some of the ashes. The ball bearing falls between the seats. The tips of my fingers can only spin the metal ball where it's landed in a nest of hair and bits of rubbish.

Slide the magnet between the cushions. Listen. Clink!

Dad's coming. He's holding two bags. One in clear plastic so that I can see the square of a meat tray. The other, a paper bag that he holds a little tighter. I can see the veins in his arms bulge from across the lot.

"Okay I get um," he says. He puts the paper bag between his legs and starts the truck. "Mean eh dose magnets?"

"Yap."

He takes a swig from the paper bag. I know by his smell that I won't be getting a new purple marble bag tonight.

"Remember I told you I got dose from work yeah?"

"Yeah, why?"

"You know how I got um," Dad asks. He shakas to a friend in another car.

"Guess how I got um," Dad asks. He looks into the rear view mirror.

Another swig from the paper bag.

"Your bossman gave um to you," I ask. I dangle one magnet from its end.

"I dunno."

"Give up already?"

"Yap."

"You know why da magnets shaped like dat? We feed um to da cows." I let the magnets fall from my hands. "Yeah, we put in da feed so dat da nails da cows sometimes eat no screw up da stomachs lidat. Try look get teeth marks."

I pick up one of the magnets watch the light reflect off dents and nicks in the metal.

"How dey come out," I ask. He takes another swig while we wait for the light to change.

"How else? Dey shir um out of course." We turn into our street. I smell my hands to see if I can pick out any residual odors coming from the magnets.

"Better wash da magnets befo playing witi um," says Dad.

The last thing I remember is puking when I open the truck door.

He laughs that Joker laugh again. The one I hate.

People making like it's Compton out here, that's why I ain't got no red or blue clothes. But people make like we in Compton 'cause that's how we feel, even though we ain't got guns. People throwing up hands like M and W like we all in one same gang but that's not true. Even though we all listened to that OG shit, that rider music making us dream of owning cars just so we could bump it. Just kick it in one car, no matter if we had to go somewhere. Being in one car was somewhere. No drive-bys around here. But you see one guy you no like on one bike, basically the same thing.

But for real, I don't think nobody knows who the fuck Mayor Wright really was but I heard our housing complex was suppose to be one memorial to him. That guy must have been one real shit mayor then.

Smoke sesh

Our faces light up in the dark backyard one by one and the slow burns make small crackle sounds. Rocco's turn for his hits, and he was the one that said since we cannot go in smoke shops yet, bongs too big, most pipes look like dicks, just use the kazoo, hold the finger over the small hole and there you go, slow let um go. Last week we smoked out Eddie, tonight Rocco's, and this week later my turn. But that's how we been doing, we take turns smoking each other out, take turns buying, burnin' up cash and brains when we can.

In the eye

Gotta memorize who lives where 'cause then that's how you walk certain ways to get to somebody's house. Once in a while you see other guys in groups, hanging around looking mean, so it's better you wit somebody back you up just in case those guys like scrap for no reason. Usually not happen all the time, as long as you no look anyone in the eye, pay attention to your feet and just move. Like that's one sign of respect. But sometimes gotta be careful 'cause what if there's someone there you never wen say sup to, then they gonna

remember that and like throw down later.

Cannip

Don't like doing um at my house 'cause we gotta wait till everybody sleep then stay in the dead outside. I always check Grandpa while he sleep just to make sure he no dead, and when I see his stomach move that's when I know. Been doing that since I was a kid.

Going first, my mouth getting dry faster than the clothes hanging, and now Eddie just waiting on the bench press and he aching for that. Rocco taking long hits and holding it, and he keeps doing that greedy till he gets all those ashes. Can't see anyone's face, only after Eddie packs his share, when he light up there's the orange face and crooked eyes staring at the flame. Rocco was the one that offer to buy the first time, we never like, but got gyped by this guy he knew. Come to find out that guy was middleman and we smoked cannip. We fat high anyway, played some ball, and when we found out was shit, we wanted real and we still chasing that.

For one long time I just stare through the glass window in the dark at the green 'end' sign on the microwave time and wonder if nothin' inside or somebody forgot somethin' there.

"You seen Perry's car? Man, all decked out and all everything man," Rocco says.

"I gotta get me one too. Some sounds too. In the door. Trunk. Then they'll know when I'm around," Eddie says. "And when they no need see me," he whistles and moves his hand by his face, "automatic curtains."

"Yeah man, you don't wanna be pullin' that shit," Rocco says. "They see that hand move? Ghetto."

Eddie doing this thing now where he changes the laces color when he like match wit his tees. I wish mine were better looking. All shit now. I say, "Never mind that. No way. You guys broke forever no matter, not gonna happen."

Rocco sticks finger at me. "So what you guys doing tomorrow?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing."

"We do something then, like go beach or cruise around the island."

"Kay, we go tomorrow."

"Yeah, tomorrow we go."

On the stove

What wit no hot water running, gotta put pots on the stove for heat up, some times that's how kids get baths when they dump that in the tub. Took long as

shit for the Governor to come by, then promise all this money for water heaters and no back out. Even though most families get government assistance or no more job, at least get us some fuckin' hot water running. One small thing to worry bout but those things count when homeboy's cousin gets stabbed by one Dumpster. One actual Dumpster, not where we living, 'cause gotta be specific and say that green Dumpster for garbage, not the one where we living. Gotta tape all our cords to the wall so the rats no eat um. Pain't peeling everywhere, choke roofs leak, our cupboards rotting. Get used to cold water.

Hospital

Grandpa just had one other stroke. Just got back from Queen's. I go over to Rocco's and I see through the screen they in the living room all laid out on couches, all zoned out.

"Ahh shit, sorry man," Eddie says, making like he gonna get up to shake hand. But he doesn't.

"Yeah man."

"Nah, you guys heard? No worries, he gon be alright. It's all good."

"What?" Rocco says. "No we sorry but you never answer so we thought you crashed already. So we smoked without you, rolled um tight man." He not even looking at me but at the TV. They watching one game show wit all these guys trying to run through an obstacle course, but most guys fall in the water. Wonder if it's cold. I don't think nobody ever makes it to the end.

"Forget it. I never show 'cause Grandpa in the hospital right now. He had one stroke."

"For real?" Eddie says. If he wasn't high he would sound more surprised.

Nah, probably same. "Ah, shit man. Tough. He alright?"

"Yeah I said that. Actually, I goin' tomorrow, visit. You guys like go?"

"Shoos. Tomorrow we go."

"Kay man, tomorrow. Ay wait, your turn to buy ah? Ope, check out this baggy, man." Eddie pulls um out from his pocket and has this Spideman face on it.

"Yeah boy, sticky ick-ay. Spidey-man is Crip, man. You miss out."

"Nah, dummy, he Blood and Crip 'cause he wear red and blue, he's both."

Both of them laugh but my mouth shut. Guess it's 'cause of Grandpa, guess it's 'cause I'm not high. Can't be both.

Rocco grabs the remote and turns down the volume and I sit down to watch. The cat comes and sits like it's gonna watch too wit us, and I try my best to listen for splashes and pay attention to those disappointed faces.

Gum

When we was kids, we used to chew bunch of gum and spit um on sidewalks unril our jaws were all sore. Forgot whose idea. Eddie or Rocco. But we would wait on some stairs, people come by going parking lot, we wach um step on all the gum. Some guys got pissed and asked us where we live, and we throw up the M and W wit our hands, then change um to stick middle finger, then ditch. Was always a big score when a lady would step on one wit her back heel. Just like the gum, getting tired of smoking, feel like I not gonna smoke just 'cause they like doing um. And they leaching on me still. I always bought the gum and we never take turns like we should.

Bus

This week my turn to buy, so I walk to the bus stop by the neighborhood and sit down by one old lady one side and one old man the other side. Our dealer suppose to come by, pick up and drop me off down the street, then I suppose to walk around the block and cut through the neighborhood to get back. How the routine goes.

The old man asks me, "You know when the bus comes?"

"Sorry, Uncle, not sure. Waiting for my friend."

The old lady says, "Should come by now. Anytime now."

For a while no one says nothing and I check my phone for the time. I ask, "Aunny, would you know what places some of these buses go? Gotra transfer if like go beach? These always go by mall yeah?"

"Yeah, yeah, you right. Sometimes the farther you like go, got to transfer, got to wait again. Some buses, they go around the island you know."

I wonder bout all the people: who I would sit by, where they going. Where I going, where I should stop.

"But no matter", she says, "they all come back here and you can always find your way back here."

After a while they both get on their buses and say goodbye. I look at the time. I look at this graffiti that says "FUCKA WAT?" in thick black marker on the bench and feel kinda pissed. I feel like lying down but then might be all shame looking like a bum.

Come to find out, cannip smells same as weed when they burn. Maybe when you exhale, not all the smoke leaves but stays inside, you smoke yourself out and all that smoke's what makes the high make believe you lifting up, but really you stuck to the ground no matter what. Maybe cars one time mistake weed for cannip but went crazy for um anyway.

I like go home but I just wait and squeeze the money in my pocket. Feel

like even after I get the stuff, might as well walk around the whole block and come again to the bus stop and sit there forever waiting and watching all the cars goin' places, waitin' to go too.

Patrol

Heard this guy got elected as one president for some association here and he like patrol wit security and some residents until midnight. Give that man one cape for tryin' I guess. Not like police do shit anyway. Guys vandalizing cars and homes, throwing rocks into windows, even breaking them wit bats and BB guns, doing that to people who live here too. Them guys, that's how they got something to do, but can tell these guys guarantee not people living here. It's like, why would you shit on the ground in your cell when you got one toilet right there? But not like that thing flush all the time anyway.

It's always losing

At Rocco's house they both sitting on the couch, and on the table there's one water bottle and got a small pipe wit foil wrapped sticking inside, right next to one bowl of popcorn but most of um look burnt. Toss the baggie on the table.

"There he is, yo man check this out," Eddie says. "I was lookin' on Inter-net—"

"Fucka was lookin' at porn," Rocco says.

"Yeah, Rocco's mom." Eddie sticks finger. "Anyway check this shit out, I kid you not, is dope man we made um wit directions. Save us money." Eddie shakes the water inside the bottle. "Bongs are like fifty bucks."

They tell me that since I miss out last night 'cause I was at hospital, that I get more of my share, and since I bought um anyway, suppose to be more. Not savin' money, it's always losing. And can't take one chick movies if I no more cash and can't even drive. No like time one movie finishing wit if I can use one transfer for go home. Ghetto as hell. Eddie packs his sash and light up, the water inside bubbling, and then he lets go his thumb and smoke rush out. Maybe all the smoke he breathes out coming from his brain like biology, taking out all that grey matter and green money. Now Rocco's turn and I see his cat by the sink licking the dripping faucet. My pocket buzzing and I look and it's Mom. Squeeze the phone so vibrating almost stop, feel um shake my wrist. Forgot we suppose to visit Grandpa, how can forget that kind, my own family like that.

"Ah shit!" I go bathroom and spray wit Rocco's Axe so no smell, suppose to be chocolate scent and I think how stupid. "Gotra go see Grandpa. You guys like go or what? Last night you said you would."

"Bro, what?" Eddie says. "Nah, we go later. Les jus chill."

"No man, better if we go wit my family. Pay respect, man, my Gramps is your guys' gramps too. Come on gotta go. Now." Feel bad 'cause I was gonna smoke and almost forgot. Maybe okay for them forget but not me. I no like people forget me if I was the one.

"Neal, if you gotta go, gotta go. But we no can go like this." Rocco looks at Eddie. "But if can, jus chill out wit us man."

I go grab the baggie and both of them look at me same time kinda glassy eyes, like dogs when you take their bone away. Then I know.

"I see how it is. Doesn't matter if I stay or if I go. Matters where the baggie goin'."

They both looking at me like they innocent, like I'm the liar. "Dawg, don't be like that."

"You know what? Fuck you guys. I not gon do this shit anymore." I toss the baggie to them and put on my chucks outside. Through the screen door I say, "And Rocco, put some fuckin' water in your cat's bowl, it's thirsty as shit."

It's pouring outside and from behind me I hear, "Ay Neall Come on, don't be one girl!"

Time

I used to go nuns when Dad would take us when we was kids to one playground somewhere else. Like visiting one new land. I look at the kids now, playing on those tires painted white thinking, what's so fun about standing on something that supposed to move when there's nowhere to go unless your car not all fucked up by some gang and your Dad not tired and seems cool enough to watch you have fun at one real playground.

Where's the cape?

When go to see the guy that like patrol 'cause Dad said I should go say what's up and volunteer to help um out. Turn the corner and see one broken window, can hear him sweeping glass inside.

Eggs

The corner of my Bruce Lee poster is hanging down, covering his face, but can still see his hand making one fist. Get up and push the poster back up, rub on the old tape 'cause it still got some stick and 'cause I don't think we have any.

Dad's in the kitchen cooking eggs and my cousin Robb on the couch watching cartoons. Mom probably went work already, but Dad's off so he like go beach. Robb yawns and I go rub his head, mess up his hair some more.

Aunty Joannie stay in rehab for meth and I don't know where the hell that punk his dad stay. Robb safe wit us, but still, maybe he gonna grow up like me

trapped in this house. Dad ask me how I like my eggs and tell him over easy. He always asks me even though I say the same thing every time. Think it's 'cause he like make sure, and maybe 'cause I might want something different one day.

Bedbugs

Those fucking things man. Heard this one family had to throw away all their furniture. Now they sleep on the floor on mats. Lucky if somebody else got some extra futons can donate. People look like they got lasers pointing at different parts of their body. Drops of red ink. Some of um like sniper lasers.

Dig your own

Goin' deep already and I try to throw the sand out far so it don't fall back in. Shoulders getting all sore and I gotta make sure all that sand I dig out doesn't come back in. Look out and there's a man parachuting wit a rainbow pattern far away, coming down slow, and I wonder what he's thinking. Hard to believe past all this ocean there's so much far out that I'll never know about, and only from pictures or movies I can. The wet grains crunch wit each other when I scrape and squeeze out my fingers. Dig out a plastic bottle. The hole big enough for me to kick back, and there's one small puddle of water near my shorts.

"Uncle Neal, is there room?" Robb looks down at me.

"Nah, go dig your own hole." Close my eyes 'cause the sun bright, and it's like bright orange TV static. Feel the sand scratching on my skin wit the walls in the hole. Look up and see one pale moon and plane going slow across the sky that disappears past what I can see from the hole.

Centipede

No joke every place you visit around Mayor Wrights smell like Raid. Gotta watch out for them baby ones though. The adult ones know how to control the venom, but the kids, they got no sense so they just let um all out, all the poison.

No even say hi

Go through the garage at this guy's house farther in Kalih'i, nicer Kalih'i, and two long black tables set up, got design on um like tennis court, and a big ripped brown paper bag tapped up to the wall wit brackets and names. Gotta shake hands wit everybody and hug the girls. Rocco the first one notice me, comes up and says hi and going around actin' like this his party, tells me that

I'm his partner for beer pong. People setting up red cups in triangles and popping open beers. Looking at everyone's shirt and one guy got this lady almost naked posing, another guy got this huge diamond on his shirt, cursive word diamond like one neon sign above um.

People talking in small circles, and I see Candace and try avoid her before she sees. That chick nuts. Mike, Taylor, and Blaine, these guys we used to hang wit in the group, passing around one joint. Walk by them and I hear them talking bout this one time we all got drunk at our friend Jason's house in high school, how much puke was on the wall, and I don't know how many times they bring that up before.

"Dawg, got a fake ID," Taylor says, grabbing my shoulder. "Fuckin' Willy Wonka's golden ticket."

"Fefe, we gotta hang," Mike says. "You shoulda seen how huss up we got Jason one time. Mission accomplished. Hit me up."

"Yeah like old times man," Blaine says.

"Okay" I say. Blaine passes me the joint and I put up my hand and tell him, "Later."

Now is like everybody here trying to get back to those high and glory old days when we never had to worry bout SATs or college. Think bout the parachute man I saw at the beach, and no matter, from up there always gotta come back down slow, always gotta look back up and see where you wanna go again. All these bright colors of shirts like the design of the chute.

Look back in the garage from the doorway and Candace on the ground laughing and holding one bottle of vodka wit both hands drinking. She's wearing white shorts ripped on the bottom and one blue tank top. Nor even dimmer time and people getting buss. She looks at me and I go inside the house, hear all this shouting and Eddie telling me come, come. Candace trying to get up swearing, person who gets drunk the most always the one who wants the most attention.

Pass by the bathroom and think about using um but don't 'cause got three people in the tub wit their legs dangling out and smoking from one pipe. One guy keeps burning his thumb when he trying to light up, and all of them look dazed, like babies in one big cradle, and they telling me close the door before smoke gets out.

In the living room everyone standing around behind the counter top by the kitchen, waiting. Hear some guys talking bout their fantasy football teams, and then someone explains that we waiting for Nate to come back 'cause he lost one bet and has to drink his own piss. So many people in one place, most of um kind of know or heard bout, everybody just friends of

friends. Lean against the couch wit my arms crossed, wonder what Robb's doing. Look behind at the flat screen and almost see myself in the black, a shadow in the center. Think bout the FUCKA WAT? in thick black marker on the bus stop.

"Neal you fuckin' asshole, no even say hi." Her breath stinks and is warm on my neck, and she slipping as we rock and it's like she not gonna let go. Tell her I never saw her and she tells me I'm lying 'cause she caught me lookin' at her. Tell her I meant to but she disappeared in the crowd. She probably gonna sleep or knock out soon and I think maybe should take her to the tub too. I turn to make like gotta go somewhere but then she jumps on me.

Feel heavy wit Candace on my back, her drunk weight pulling me down but probably making her feel all light and woozy like she swaying in one current. We bumping into other people and one guy gives me one wink and whispers to me to hit that. I feel some grains of sand in my fingernails when I try take her hands off.

Candace trips and brings me down and too late for me to catch myself wit my hands. When I turn over she mounts me and I look up at all the faces floating up looking down smiling. Some guys cherring and I hear Eddie the loudest. Candace comes close for kiss me wit her mouth wide open but I keep my lips shut, imagine that she holding a bunch of sand in her mouth and trying to pour it into mine and choke me.

Trap

Lay out one—done. Twenty something roaches inside already, big ones too. What is it, that sticky stuff, must be sweet or something. Bet that's how they got Mayor Wrights filled like that in the beginning real fast.

They scared

They scared 'cause they was scared when they was kids and they had to walk by looking at their kicks that they was trying to keep clean if they were new. Scared they was gonna get stomped on. Other guys, they scared they ain't got shit to do so they scared of being bored, and if they tough they not bored. If they high, they not bored.

They scared you got one older brother that they used to be scared of or one dad that can lick their dads, or worse your dad is cool wit their family so you untouchable. They know you go same church but they ain't scared of devils, they scared of moms.

They don't give a shit bout school but they scared anyway. Got homework to do but since they scared they shove the papers deep in their bags and take

um un when they feel bad.

Everybody scared of centipedes. The worst ones catch um and got their boys hold you down, let that thing crawl on your stomach and you lucky that thing don't go to your face or catch some skin. Worst ones put um down your shirt.

They scared you smarter than them and that you do good in school. They scared of doing good in school 'cause that means not spending time wit the boys and them calling you geek, or they scared that come to find out you try hard and you actually dumb.

They scared they never gonna afford one car. They scared you got one future and they don't.

They scared of blue and red.

They scared they never gonna get one girlfriend. They scared they never gonna fuck. But they scared of fucking 'cause they scared of being fathers. They scared they cannot dig out. Or pull out.

They scared 'cause they like scrap. They just gotta hit something. They got knives but they scared to use them. They like popping them out, holding their weight in their pockets.

They scared they gonna live in Mayor Wrights their whole life. They scared of dying in Mayor Wrights. Some of them will live their whole life here, but whole life can be short life sometimes.

They scared that you scared and like know who can get hurt more long as they doing the hurting.

They scared of sleeping, bed bugs, but mostly good dreams.

That's why that one time you walking home after one party and you look up and catch their eyes, at least one of them thinking you eyeing them out, they chase you and they beat you.

Wail is one good word 'cause that's what they doing, wailing on you.

"FUCKA WAT?" You try say that back to them, but it comes out like one groan, comes out as spit and blood. Comes out like one pebble on the ground, no wait that's your tooth. Your mouth filling up like bath water, all warm. You let them let out all their poison.

You want to tattoo those words you trying to say on your face. Like you got nothing to lose, you like everyone know that you looking at them in the eye, that you know why they scared. But you only want to make like you got nothing to lose 'cause it's easy to pretend like that.

You bring out your knife, but you scared that they scared enough to bring one out too and not scared enough to use um.

You hear the patrol guy yell at them and they ditch. You scared of the way

you gonna look for a few weeks. You scared you gonna get one bed right next to Grandpa. At least no more bedbugs.

You scared that you're glass and no one can sweep you up.