

Excerpt for *Boy Erased* by Garrard Conley

MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2004

John Smid stood tall, square shouldered, beaming behind thin wire-rimmed glasses and wearing the khaki slacks and striped button-down that have become standard fatigues for evangelical men across the country. The raised outlines of his undershirt stretched taut beneath his shirt, his graying blond hair tamed by the size-five hair clippers common in Sport Clips throughout the South. The rest of us sat in a semicircle facing him, all dressed according to the program dress code outlined in our 274-page handbooks.

Men: Shirts worn at all times, including periods of sleep. T shirts without sleeves not permitted, whether worn as outer or undergarments, including "muscle shirts" or other tank tops. Facial hair removed seven days weekly. Sideburns never below top of ear.

Women: Bras worn at all times, exceptions during sleep. Skirts must fall at the knee or below. Tank tops allowed only if worn with a blouse. Legs and underarms shaved at least twice weekly.

"The first thing you have to do is recognize how you've become dependent on sex, on things that are not from God," Smid said. We were learning Step One of Love in Action's Twelve Step program, a set of principles equating the sins of infidelity, bestiality, pedophilia, and homosexuality to addictive behavior such as alcoholism or gambling: a kind of Alcoholics Anonymous for what counselors referred to as our "sexual deviance."

Sitting alone with him just hours before in his office, I had witnessed a different man: a kinder, goofier Smid, a middle-aged class clown willing to resort to any antic to make me smile. He had treated me like a child, and I had relaxed into the role, being nineteen at the time. He told me I had come to the right place, that Love in Action would cure me, lift me out of my sin into the light of God's glory. His office seemed bright enough to substantiate his claim, the walls bare save for the occasional framed newspaper clipping or embroidered Bible verse. Outside his window was an empty plot of land, rare around this suburban subdivision, an untended grassy mess peppered with neon dandelions and their thousands of seed heads that would scatter across the highway by the end of the week.

"We try to blend several models of treatment," Smid had assured me, swiveling in his office chair to face the window. An orange sun was climbing its way up the back of the hazy whitewashed buildings in the distance. I waited for the sunlight to spill over, but the longer I watched, the longer it seemed to take. I wondered if

this was how time was going to work in this place: minutes as hours, hours as days, days as weeks.

"Once you enter the group, you'll be well on your way to recovery," Smid said. "The important thing to remember is to keep an open mind."

I was here by my own choice, despite my growing skepticism, despite my secret wish to run away from the shame I'd felt since my parents found out I was gay. I had too much invested in my current life to leave it behind: in my family and in the increasingly blurry God I'd known since I was a toddler.

God, I prayed, leaving the office and making my way down the narrow hallway to the main room, the fluorescents ticking in their metal grids, I don't know who You are anymore, but please give me the wisdom to survive this.

Conley, Garrard. *Boy Erased: a Memoir of Identity, Faith and Family*. William Collins, 2018.

Summarize the short story in 3-5 sentences:

“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk bare-head in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum in it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash; soak salt fish overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street—flies will follow you; *but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school*; this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on; this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; this is how you iron your father's khaki pants so that they don't have a crease; this is how you grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how you smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast; this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers—you might catch something; don't throw stones at blackbirds, because it might not be a blackbird at all; this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child; this is how to catch a fish; this is how to throw back a fish you don't like, and that way something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man, and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up; this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so that it doesn't fall on you; this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?

Summarize the short story in 3-5 sentences:

Excerpt from Mexican Whiteboy by Matt De La Peña

Dressed in a well-worn Billabong tee, camo cargo shorts and a pair of old-school slip-on Vans, Danny Lopez follows his favorite cousin, Sofia, as she rolls up on the cul-de-sac crowd with OG swagger.

A bunch of heads call out to her, "Hey, Sofe!" "Yo, girl!" "There she is!" and wave.

Sofia waves back, pulls Danny by the arm toward a group of girls sitting on a blanket in an uneven semicircle. "Oye putas," she says. "Yo, this my cousin Danny I was telling you about. He's gonna be staying with me for the summer." She smiles big--proud, Danny thinks. "Yo, cuz, these are my girls." She points them out and rattles off names: "Carmen, Raquel, Angela, Bee, Juanita, Flaca and Guita."

"Hey," the girls singsong in unison.

Danny nods with a shy smile, aims his eyes at the asphalt. He feels the heat of their stares and for a second he wishes he could morph into one of the ants zigzagging in and out of tiny crevices in the street. Their little lives, he thinks, totally off the radar.

Danny's sixteen, a shade over six foot and only a year younger than Sofia, but unless he's on a pitching mound he feels like a boy. He's long and thin with skinny arms hanging down skinny thighs--his arm length the reason he can fire a fastball so hard. His shoulders are wide, but his muscles have yet to catch up. Sometimes when he sees himself in a mirror it looks like his shirt is propped up by an upside-down coat hanger. Not a human body. Doesn't even look real.

And Danny's brown. Half-Mexican brown. A shade darker than all the white kids at his private high school, Leucadia Prep. Up there, Mexican people do under-the-table yard work and hide out in the hills because they're in San Diego illegally. Only other people on Leucadia's campus who share his shade are the lunch-line ladies, the gardeners, the custodians. But whenever Danny comes down here, to National City--where his dad grew up, where all his aunts and uncles and cousins still live--he feels pale. A full shade lighter. Albino almost.

Less than.

"And just so you know," Sofia adds, "Danny ain't no big talker, all right? He's mad smart, gets nothin' but A's at the best private school in San Diego, but don't get your chones in a bunch if you can't never pull him into a convo." Sofia looks prettier than Danny remembers. Less of a tomboy. Her hair long now, makeup around her eyes.

Carmen clears her throat, says: "He don't need to talk to give me no deep-tissue massage." She gives Danny an exaggerated wink.

"Ain't need no words for us to soak in a nice Jacuzzi bath together," Flaca says. She reaches out, puts her hand on one of Danny's Vans. "We can just sit there, Papi. Backs against them jet thingies. Take turns sippin' a little white Zin and shit. How's that sound, beautiful?"

Danny gives her a polite smile, but inside he's shrinking. He's trying to suck back into his shell, like a poked and prodded snail.

Behind his back he grips his left wrist, digs his fingernails into the skin until a sharp pain floods his mind, makes him feel real.

Angela and Bee comb Danny over with their almond-shaped eyes, devour his out-of-place surfer style like a pack of rabid dogs. Danny cringes at how different he must seem to his cousin's friends. They're all dark chocolate-colored, hair sprayed up, dressed in pro jerseys and Dickies, Timberlands. Gold and silver chains. Calligraphy-style tats. Danny's skin is too clean, too light, his clothes too soft.

Peña, Matt de la. *Mexican Whiteboy*. Ember, 2018.

Summarize the short story in 3-5 sentences:

**Excerpt from *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*
by Erika L. Sánchez**

What's surprised me most about seeing my sister dead is the lingering smirk on her face. Her pale lips are turned up ever so slightly, and someone has filled in her patchy eyebrows with a black pencil. The top half of her face is angry--like she's ready to stab someone--and the bottom half is almost smug. This is not the Olga I knew. Olga was as meek and fragile as a baby bird.

I wanted her to wear the pretty purple dress that didn't hide her body like all of her other outfits, but Amá chose the bright yellow one with the pink flowers I've always hated. It was so unstylish, so classically Olga. It made her either four or eighty years old. I could never decide which. Her hair is just as bad as the dress--tight, crunchy curls that remind me of a rich lady's poodle. How cruel to let her look like that. The bruises and gashes on her cheeks are masked with thick coats of cheap foundation, making her face haggard, even though she is (was) only twenty-two. Don't they pump your body full of strange chemicals to prevent your skin from stretching and puckering, to keep your face from resembling a rubber mask? Where did they find this mortician, the flea market?

My poor older sister had a special talent for making herself less attractive. She was skinny and had an okay body, but she always managed to make it look like a sack of potatoes. Her face was pale and plain, never a single drop of makeup. What a waste. I'm no fashion icon--far from it--but I do feel strongly against dressing like the elderly. Now she's doing it from beyond the grave, but this time it's not even her fault.

Olga never looked or acted like a normal twenty-two-year-old. It made me mad sometimes. Here she was, a grown-ass woman, and all she did was go to work, sit at home with our parents, and take one class each semester at the local community college. Every once and a while, she'd go shopping with Amá or to the movies with her best friend, Angie, to watch terrible romantic comedies about clumsy but adorable blond women who fall in love with architects in the streets of New York City. What kind of life is that? Didn't she want more? Didn't she ever want to go out and grab the world by the balls? Ever since I could pick up a pen, I've wanted to be a famous writer. I want to be so successful that people stop me on the street and ask, "Oh my God, are you Julia Reyes, the best writer who has ever graced this earth?" All I know is that I'm going to pack my bags when I graduate and say, "Peace out, mothafuckas."

But not Olga. Saint Olga, the perfect Mexican daughter. Sometimes I wanted to scream at her until something switched on in her brain. But the only time I ever asked her why she didn't move out or go to a real college, she told me to leave her alone in a voice so weak and brittle, I never wanted to ask her again. Now I'll never know what Olga would have become. Maybe she would have surprised us all.

Here I am, thinking all of these horrible thoughts about my dead sister. It's easier to be pissed, though. If I stop being angry, I'm afraid I'll fall apart until I'm just a warm mound of flesh on the floor.

While I stare at my chewed-up nails and sink deeper into this floppy green couch, I hear Amá wailing. She really throws her body into it, too. "Mija, mija!" she screams as she practically climbs inside the casket. Apá doesn't even try to pull her off. I can't blame him, because when he tried to calm her down a few hours ago, Amá kicked and flailed her arms until she gave him a black eye. I guess he's going to leave her alone for now. She'll tire herself out eventually. I've seen babies do that.

Apá has been sitting in the back of the room all day, refusing to speak to anyone, staring off into nothing, like he always does. Sometimes I think I see his dark mustache quivering, but his eyes stay dry and clear as glass.

I want to hug Amá and tell her it's going to be okay, even though it's not and never will be, but I feel almost paralyzed, like I'm underwater and made of lead. When I open my mouth, nothing comes out. Besides, Amá and I haven't had that kind of relationship since I was little. We don't hug and say, "I love you," like on TV shows about boring white families who live in two-story houses and talk about their feelings. She and Olga were practically best friends, and I was the odd daughter out. We've been bickering, drifting away from each other for years. I've spent so much of my life trying to avoid Amá because we always end up arguing over stupid, petty things. We once fought about an egg yolk, for instance. True story.

Apá and I are the only ones in my family who haven't cried. He just hangs his head and remains silent as a stone. Maybe something is wrong with us. Maybe we're messed up beyond crying. Though my eyes haven't produced tears, I've felt the grief burrow in every cell of my body. There are moments that I feel like I might suffocate, as if all my insides are tied into a tight little ball. I haven't taken a crap in almost four days, but I'm not about to tell Amá in the state she's in. I'll just let it build until I explode like a piñata.

Amá has always been prettier than Olga, even now, with her swollen eyes and splotchy skin, which is not the way it's supposed to be. Her name is more graceful, too--Amparo Montenegro Reyes. Mothers are not supposed to be more beautiful than their daughters, and daughters are not supposed to die before their mothers. But Amá is more attractive than most people. She hardly has any wrinkles and has these big, round eyes that always look sad and wounded. Her long hair is thick and dark, and her body is still slim, unlike the other moms in the neighborhood who are shaped like upside-down pears. Every time I walk down the street with Amá, guys whistle and honk, which makes me wish I carried a slingshot.

Amá is rubbing Olga's face and crying softly now. This won't last, though. She's always quiet for a few minutes, then, all of a sudden, lets out a moan that makes

your soul turn inside out. Now Tía Cuca is rubbing her back and telling her that Olga is with Jesus, that she can finally be in peace.

But when was Olga not in peace? This Jesus stuff is all a sack of crap. Once you're dead, you're dead. The only thing that makes sense to me is what Walt Whitman said about death: "Look for me under your boot soles." Olga's body will turn to dirt, which will grow into trees, and then someone in the future will step on their fallen leaves. There is no heaven. There is only earth, sky, and the transfer of energy. The idea would almost be beautiful if this weren't such a nightmare.

Two ladies waiting in line to see Olga in her casket begin crying. I've never seen them in my life. One is wearing a faded and billowy black dress, and the other wears a saggy skirt that looks like an old curtain. They clasp each other's hands and whisper.

Olga and I didn't have much in common, but we did love each other. There are stacks and stacks of pictures to prove it. In Amá's favorite, Olga is braiding my hair. Amá says Olga used to pretend that I was her baby. She'd put me in her toy carriage and sing me songs by Cepillín, that scary Mexican clown who looks like a rapist but everyone loves for some reason.

I would give anything to go back to the day she died and do things differently. I think of all the ways I could have kept Olga from getting on that bus. I've replayed the day over and over in my head so many times and have written down every single detail, but I still can't find the foreshadowing. When someone dies, people always say they had some sort of premonition, a sinking feeling that something awful was right around the corner. I didn't.

The day felt like any other: boring, uneventful, and annoying. We had swimming for gym class that afternoon. I've always hated being in that disgusting petri dish. The idea of being dunked in everyone's pee--and God knows what else--is enough to give me a panic attack, and the chlorine makes my skin itch and eyes sting. I always try to get out of it with elaborate and not-so-elaborate lies. That time, I told the thin-lipped Mrs. Kowalski that I was on my period again (the eighth day in a row), and she said she didn't believe me, that it was impossible for my period to be so long. Of course I was lying, but who was she to question my menstrual cycle? How intrusive.

"Do you want to check?" I asked. "I'd be very happy to provide you with empirical evidence if you want, even though I think you're violating my human rights." I regretted it as soon as it came out of my mouth. Maybe I have some sort of condition that keeps me from thinking through what I'm going to say. Sometimes it's word-puke spilling out everywhere. That was too much, even for me, but I was in a particularly foul mood and didn't want to deal with anyone. My moods shift like that all the time, even before Olga died. One minute I feel okay, and then all of a sudden my energy plummets for no reason at all. It's hard to explain.

Of course Mrs. Kowalski sent me to the principal's office, and as usual, they wouldn't let me go home until my parents came to pick me up. This had

happened several times last year. Everyone knows me at the principal's office already. I'm there more often than some of the gangbangers, and it's always for running my mouth when I'm not supposed to. Whenever I enter the office, the secretary, Mrs. Maldonado, rolls her eyes and clucks her tongue.

Typically, Amá meets with my principal, Mr. Potter, who tells her what a disrespectful student I am. Then Amá gasps at what I've done and says, "Julia, que malcriada," and apologizes to him over and over again in her broken English. She is always apologizing to white people, which makes me feel embarrassed. And then I feel ashamed of my shame.

Amá punishes me for one or two weeks, depending on how severe my behavior is, and then, a few months later, it happens again. Like I said, I don't know how to control my mouth. Amá tells me, "Como te gusta la mala vida," and I guess she's right, because I always end up making things more difficult for myself. I used to be a model student, skipped third grade and everything, but now I'm a troublemaker.

Olga had taken the bus that day because her car was in the shop to get the brakes replaced. Amá was supposed to pick her up, but because she had to deal with me at school, she couldn't. If I'd shut my mouth, things would have worked out differently, but how was I supposed to know? When Olga got off the bus to transfer to another one across the street, she didn't see that the light had already turned green because she was looking at her phone. The bus honked to warn her, but it was too late. Olga stepped into the busy street at the wrong time. She got hit by a semi. Not just hit, though--smashed.

Whenever I think of my sister's crushed organs, I want to scream in a field of flowers until I'm hoarse.

Two of the witnesses said that she was smiling right before it happened. It's a miracle that her face was okay enough to have an open casket. She was dead by the time the ambulance arrived.

Even though the man driving couldn't have seen her because she was blocked by the bus and the light was green and Olga shouldn't have crossed one of the busiest streets in Chicago with her face in her phone, Amá cursed the driver up and down until she lost her voice. She got really creative, too. She had always scolded me for saying the word damn, which is not even a bad word, and here she was, telling the driver and God to fuck their mothers and themselves. I just watched her with my mouth hanging open.

We all knew it wasn't the driver's fault, but Amá needed someone to accuse. She hasn't blamed me directly, but I can see it in her big sad eyes every time she looks at me.

My nosy aunts are whispering behind me now. I can feel their eyes latched to the back of my head again. I know they're saying that this is my fault. They've never liked me because they think I'm trouble. When I dyed chunks of my hair bright

blue, those drama queens almost needed to be put on stretchers and rushed to the hospital. They act as if I'm some sort of devil child because I don't like to go to church and would rather read books with them. Why is that a crime, though? They're boring. Plus, they have no idea how much I loved my sister.

I've had enough of their whispering, so I turn around to give them a dirty look. That's when I see Lorena come in, thank God. She's the only person who can make me feel better right now.

Everyone turns to stare at her in her outrageously high heels, tight black dress, and excessive makeup. Lorena is always drawing attention to herself. Maybe that'll give them something else to gossip about. She hugs me so tight she nearly cracks my ribs. Her cheap cherry body spray fills my nose and mouth.

Amá doesn't like Lorena because she thinks she's wild and slutty, which isn't untrue, but she has been my friend since I was eight and is more loyal than anyone I've ever known. I whisper to her that my tías are talking about me, that they're blaming me for what happened to Olga, that they're making me so angry, I want to smash all the windows with my bare fists.

Sánchez Erika L. *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*. Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2017.

Summarize the short story in 3-5 sentences:

**“Child of Two Worlds” Excerpt from *Perfume Dreams*
by. Andrew Lam**

“This is the time of year when the guavas back home are ripened,” Mother would tell the family at dinnertime.

So far from home, Mother nevertheless took her reference points in autumn, her favorite season. Autumn, the dark season, came in the form of letters she received from relatives and friends left behind. Brown and flimsy thin like dead leaves, recycled who knows how many times, the letters threatened to dissolve with a single tear. They unanimously told of tragic lives: Aunty and her family barely survived; Cousin is caught for the umpteenth time trying to escape; Uncle has died from heat failure while being interrogated by the Viet Cong; yet another Uncle is indefinitely incarcerated in a malaria-infested reeducation camp; and no news yet of Cousin and family who disappeared in the South China Sea. The letters went on to inquire as to our health and then to timidly ask for money, for antibiotics, for bicycle, and, if possible, for sponsorship to America. The letters confirmed what my mother, who had lived through two wars, had always know: life is a sea of suffering, and sorrow gives meaning to life. Then, as if to anchor me in Old World tragedy, as if to bind me to that shared narrative of loss and misery, mother insisted that I, too, read those letters.

What did I do? I skimmed. I skipped. I shrugged. I put on a poker face and raked autumn in a pile and pushed it all back to her. “That country,” I slowly announced in English, as if to wound, “is cursed.”

That country, mind you. No longer mind. Vietnam was now far away—an abstraction—and America was now so near (outside the window, blaring on TV, written in the science fiction books I devoured like mad)—a seduction. Besides, what could a scrawny refugee teenager living in America do to save Uncle from that malaria-infested reeducation camp? What could he do for Cousin and her family lost somewhere in the vast South China Sea? He could, on the other hand, pretend amnesia to save himself from grief.

My mother made the clucking sounds of disapproval with her tongue as she shook her head. She looked into my eyes and called me the worst thing she could muster: “You’ve become a little American now, haven’t you? A cowboy.” Vietnamese appropriated the word “cowboy” from the movies to imply selfishness. A cowboy in Vietnamese estimation is a rebel who, as in the spaghetti Westerns, leaves town, the communal life, to ride alone into the sunset.

Mother’s comment smarted, but she wasn’t far from the truth. Her grievances against America had little to do with the war and the United States’ involvement in it. Her complaint against America was that it had stolen her children, especially her youngest and one most-filial son. America seduced him with its optimism, twisted his thinking, bent his tongue and dulled his tropic memories. America gave him freeways and fast food and silly cartoons and sitcoms, imbuing him with sappy happy-ending incitements.

Yet it could not be helped. For the refugee child in America, the world splits perversely into two irreconcilable parts: Inside and Outside.

Inside, at home, in the crowded apartment shared by two refugee families, nostalgia ruled. Inside, the world remained dedicated to What Was.

Remember the house we used to live in, with the red bougainvillea wavering over the iron gate? Remember when we went to Hue and sailed down the Perfume River for the night market and that night the sky was full of stars? Remember Tet, when Uncle showed us that trick with the cards?

Inside, the smell of fish sauce wafted along with the smell of incense from the newly built altar that housed photos of the dead—a complex smell of loss. Inside, the refugee father told and retold wartime stories to his increasingly disaffected children, reliving the battles he had fought and won. He stirred his whiskey and soda on ice, then stared blankly at the TV. Inside, the refugee mother grieved for lost relatives, lost home and hearth, lost ways of life, a whole cherished world of intimate connections, scattered and uprooted, gone, gone, all gone. And so inside, I, their refugee child, felt the collected weight of history on my shoulders and fell silent.

Outside, however...

“What do you want to be when you grow up? Mr. K., the English teacher in eighth grade, asked.

I had never thought of the question before. Such an American question. But it intrigued me. I did not hesitate. “A movie star,” I answered, laughing.

Outside I was ready to believe, to swear that the Vietnamese child who grew up in that terrible war and who saw many strange, tragic, and marvelous things was someone else, not me, that it had happened in another age, centuries ago.

That Vietnamese boy never grew up; he wanders still in the garden of my childhood memory, whereas I—I had gone on. Hadn't I? It was a feeling that I could not help. I came to America at a peculiar age—pubescent, and not fully formed. Old enough to remember Vietnam, I was also young enough to embrace America, and to be shaped by it.

Outside, in school, among new friends, I spoke English freely and deliberately. I whispered sweet compliments to Chinese and Filipino girls and made them blush. I cussed and joked with friends and made them laugh. I bantered and cavorted with teachers and made myself their pet.

Speaking English, I had markedly different personality than when speaking Vietnamese. In English, I was a sunny, upbeat, silly, and sometimes wickedly sharp-tongued kid. No sorrow, no sadness, no cataclysmic grief clung to my new language. A wild river full of possibilities flowed effortlessly from my tongue, connecting me to the New World. And I,

enamored by the discovery of a newly invented self (I even gave myself a new name—“Andy, call me Andy,” I would tell each new teacher and each new friend who had trouble pronouncing my Vietnamese name)—I sailed its iridescent waters toward spring.

Now, more than two decades later, in her suburban home with a pool shimmering in the backyard, my mother talks to ghosts. Every morning she climbs a chair and piously lights a few joss sticks for the new ancestral altar on top of the living room’s bookcase and mumbles her solemn prayers to the spirits of our dead ancestors and to Buddha.

To deny her own American conversion, Mother keeps a small garden. Lemongrass and mint vie for space among bitter melons, Vietnamese coriander (rau ram), and basil. The air in the backyard filled with scents of home. She insists on observing the death date of her father each year, complete with burning paper offerings and cooking a favorite dish for the dead. Each Tet, she stays awake all night to make Vietnamese rice cakes. And she tells Vietnamese stories, drenched in sadness, to anyone willing to hear.

Consider this then as a late Rockwell tableau: a sunny living room in Silicon Valley home where a Vietnamese woman sits on her sofa, telling the story of an ill-fated princess to her two wide-eyed American-born grandchildren.

Once, she says, there was a beautiful princess who fell in love with a fisherman who sang beautiful ballads of love each morning as he sailed past her pavilion. One day the fisherman, unaware of the princess’s existence, sailed downriver to fish another kingdom. One season followed another and she, pining for his voice, fell ill and died. And in her ashes, in place of her heart, the king found a bright red ruby. He had it carved into a drinking bowl. And whenever he poured into it, the image of the fisherman appeared, sailing his boat on the water. And his voice is heard singing sweet and sad songs.

Years later, the fisherman came sailing back. He heard of this magic bowl and begged at the palace gate for entrance. Days passed and he despaired and began to sing. And his voice reached the king in his palace and the fisherman was summoned. Into the bowl, tea was poured. Then lo and behold, the fisherman watched in amazement as his own image appeared in the princess’s heart. He began to weep. Had he known of her love! Then another miracle: as one of his tears fell into the bowl, the bowl turned into blood and disappeared.

The story, taking its cue from the tradition of fatalism, does not go down well in America—certainly not with my brother’s children. Back home children do not challenge such an outcome. Back home they accept that noble deeds are rarely rewarded with happily-ever-afters, that broken love is the norm, and that those who do good can be and often are punished. These stories are concerned with their young listeners’ spiritual growth, not with convincing them that they live in a benevolent universe. Considering how the country has been war-ridden for thousands of years and how disasters have a

way of destroying hope, Vietnamese tales have evolved to prepare the next generation for cataclysm and grief.

But my mother's grandchildren are Americans, are Californians, and they naturally resist her tragic endings, they challenge her fatalism with their American wisdom. "The princess only sleeps in the enchanted forest, Grandma. She waits for the Prince Charming kiss." My mother shakes her head and laughs. And she gives in. At her grandchildren's request, she slips in the video of *The Little Mermaid* and they watch the princess struggle toward a happily-ever-after.

What woke the Vietnamese refugee—that fleeing princess—from her millennial stupor, on the other hand, was no Prince Charming kiss but the simply yet potent idea of progression. A cliché to native-borns, the American Dream nevertheless seduces the sedentary Vietnamese to travel halfway around the world. It's the American Dream that kissed her hand, tongued her, in fact, and in the morning she awakes to find, to her own amazement, that she can readily pronounce mortgage, escrow, aerobic, tax shelter, GPA, MBA, BMW, Porsche, overtime, stock options. Gone is the cyclical nature of her provincial thinking, and lost is her land-bound mentality. She finds that she's upwardly mobile, that she is connected to other countries by virtue of her relatives spreading across the globe and by new communication technologies. She can email relatives as far away as France and Hong Kong. She can see the future.

Lam, Andrew. *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora*. HEYDAY, 2019.

Summarize the short story in 3-5 sentences:

Excerpt for *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas

Khalil's funeral is Friday. Tomorrow. Exactly one week since he died.

I'm at school, trying not to think about what he'll look like in the coffin, how many people will be there, what he'll look like in the coffin, if other people will know I was with him when he died . . . what he'll look like in the coffin.

I'm failing at not thinking about it.

On the Monday night news, they finally gave Khalil's name in the story about the shooting, but with a title added to it—Khalil Harris, a Suspected Drug Dealer. They didn't mention that he was unarmed. They said that an “unidentified witness” had been questioned and that the police were still investigating.

After what I told the cops, I'm not sure what's left to “investigate.”

In the gym everyone's changed into their blue shorts and gold Williamson T-shirts, but class hasn't started yet. To pass time, some of the girls challenged some of the boys to a basketball game. They're playing on one end of the gym, the floor squeaking as they run around. The girls are all “Staawp!” when the guys guard them. Flirting, Williamson style.

Hailey, Maya, and I are in the bleachers on the other end. On the floor, some guys are supposedly dancing, trying to get their moves ready for prom. I say supposedly because there's no way that shit can be called dancing. Maya's boyfriend, Ryan, is the only one even close, and he's just doing the dab. It's his go-to move. He's a big, wide-shouldered linebacker, and it looks a little funny, but that's an advantage of being the sole black guy in class. You can look silly and still be cool.

Chris is on the bottom bleacher, playing one of his mixes on his phone for them to dance to. He glances over his shoulder at me.

I have two bodyguards who won't allow him near me—Maya on one side, cheering Ryan on, and Hailey, who's laughing her ass off at Luke and recording him. They're still pissed at Chris.

I'm honestly not. He made a mistake, and I forgive him. The Fresh Prince theme and his willingness to embarrass himself helped with that.

But that moment he grabbed my hands and I flashed back to that night, it's like I suddenly really, really realized that Chris is white. Just like One-Fifteen. And I know, I'm sitting here next to my white best friend, but it's almost as if I'm giving Khalil, Daddy, Seven, and every other black guy in my life a big, loud “fuck you” by having a white boyfriend.

Chris didn't pull us over, he didn't shoot Khalil, but am I betraying who I am by dating him?

I need to figure this out.

“Oh my God, that's sickening,” says Hailey. She's stopped recording to watch the basketball game. “They're not even trying.”

They're really not. The ball sails past the hoop from an attempted shot by Bridgette Holloway. Either homegirl's hand-eye coordination is way off or she missed that on purpose, because now Jackson Reynolds is showing her how to shoot. Basically, he's all up on her. And shirtless.

“I don't know what's worse,” Hailey says. “The fact that they're going soft on them because they're girls, or that the girls are letting them go soft on them.”

“Equality in basketball. Right, Hails?” Maya says with a wink.

“Yes! Wait.” She eyes Maya suspiciously. “Are you making fun of me or are you serious, Shorty?”

“Both,” I say, leaning back on my elbows, my belly pooching out my shirt—a food baby. We just left lunch, and the cafeteria had fried chicken, one of the foods Williamson gets right. “It's not even a real game, Hails,” I tell her.

“Nope.” Maya pats my stomach. “When are you due?”

“Same day as you.”

“Aww! We can raise our food offspring as siblings.”

“I know, right? I'm naming mine Fernando,” I say.

“Why Fernando?” Maya asks.

“Dunno. It sounds like a food baby name. Especially when you roll the r.”

“I can't roll my r's.” She tries, but she makes some weird noise, spit flying, and I'm cracking up.

Hailey points at the game. “Look at that! It's that whole 'play like a girl' mind-set the male gender uses to belittle women, when we have as much athleticism as they do.”

Oh my Lord. She's seriously upset over this.

“Take the ball to the hole!” she hollers to the girls.

Maya catches my eye, hers glimmering sneakily, and it's middle school déjà vu.

“And don't be afraid to shoot the outside J!” Maya shouts.

“Just keep ya head in the game,” I say. “Just keep ya head in the game.”

“And don't be afraid to 'shoot the outside J,’” Maya sings.

“Just get'cha head in the game,” I sing.

We bust out with “Get'cha Head in the Game” from High School Musical. It'll be stuck in my head for days. We were obsessed with the movies around the same time as our Jonas Brothers obsession. Disney took all our parents' money.

We're loud with it now. Hailey's trying to glare at us. She snorts.

“C'mon.” She gets up and pulls me and Maya up too. “Get'cha head in this game.”

I'm thinking, Oh, so you can drag me to play basketball during one of your feminist rages, but you can't follow my Tumblr because of Emmett Till? I don't know why I can't make myself bring it up. It's Tumblr.

But then, it's Tumblr.

“Hey!” Hailey says. “We wanna play.”

“No we don't,” Maya mutters. Hailey nudges her.

I don't wanna play either, but for some reason Hailey makes decisions and Maya and I follow along. It's not like we planned it to be this way. Sometimes the shit just happens, and one day you realize there's a leader among you and your friends and it's not you.

“Come on in, ladies.” Jackson beckons us into the game. “There's always room for pretty girls. We'll try not to hurt you.”

Hailey looks at me, I look at her, and we have the same deadpan expression that we've had mastered since fifth grade, mouths slightly open, eyes ready to roll at any moment.

“Alrighty then,” I say. “Let's play.”

“Three on three,” Hailey says as we take our positions. “Girls versus boys. Half court. First to twenty. Sorry, ladies, but me and my girls are gonna handle this one, mm-kay?”

Bridgette gives Hailey some serious stank-eye. She and her friends move to the sideline.

The dance party stops and those guys come over, Chris included. He whispers something to Tyler, one of the boys who played in the previous game. Chris takes Tyler's place on the court.

Jackson checks the ball to Hailey. I run around my guard, Garrett, and Hailey passes to me. No matter what's going on, when Hailey, Maya, and I play together, it's rhythm, chemistry, and skill rolled into a ball of amazingness.

Garrett's guarding me, but Chris runs up and elbows him aside. Garrett goes, "The hell, Bryant?"

"I've got her," Chris says.

He gets in his defensive stance. We're eye to eye as I dribble the ball.

"Hey," he says.

"Hey."

I do a chest-pass to Maya, who's wide open for a jump shot.

She makes it.

Two to zero.

"Good job, Yang!" says Coach Meyers. She's come out her office. All it takes is a hint of a real game, and she's in coaching mode. She reminds me of a fitness trainer on a reality TV show. She's petite yet muscular, and God that woman can yell.

Garrett's at the baseline with the ball.

Chris runs to get open. Stomach full, I have to push harder to stay on him. We're hip to hip, watching Garrett try to decide who to pass to. Our arms brush, and something in me is activated; my senses are suddenly consumed by Chris. His legs look so good in his gym shorts. He's wearing Old Spice, and even just from that little brush, his skin feels so soft.

"I miss you," he says.

No point in lying. "I miss you too."

The ball sails his way. Chris catches it. Now I'm in my defensive stance, and we're eye to eye again as he dribbles. My gaze lowers to his lips; they're a little wet and begging me to kiss them. See, this is why I can never play ball with him. I get too distracted.

"Will you at least talk to me?" Chris asks.

“Defense, Carter!” Coach yells.

I focus on the ball and attempt to steal. Not quick enough. He gets around me and goes straight for the hoop, only to pass it to Jackson, who's open at the three-point line.

“Grant!” Coach shouts for Hailey.

Hailey runs over. Her fingertips graze the ball as it leaves Jackson's hand, changing its course.

The ball goes flying. I go running. I catch it.

Chris is behind me, the only thing between me and the hoop. Let me clarify—my butt is against his crotch, my back against his chest. I'm bumping up against him, trying to figure out how to get the ball in the hole. It sounds way dirtier than it actually is, especially in this position. I understand why Bridgette missed shots though.

“Starr!” Hailey calls.

She's open at the three. I bounce-pass it to her.

She shoots. Nails it.

Five to zero.

“C'mon, boys,” Maya taunts. “Is that all you can do?”

Coach claps. “Good job. Good job.”

Jackson's at the baseline. He passes to Chris. Chris chest-passes it back to him.

“I don't get it,” Chris says. “You practically freaked out the other day in the hall. What's going on?”

Garrett passes to Chris. I get in my defensive stance, eyes on the ball. Not on Chris. Cannot look at Chris. My eyes will give me away.

“Talk to me,” he says.

I attempt to steal again. No luck.

“Play the game,” I say.

Chris goes left, quickly changes direction, and goes right. I try to stay on him, but my heavy stomach slows me down. He gets to the hoop and makes the layup. It's good.

Five to two.

“Dammit, Starr!” Hailey yells, recovering the ball. She passes it to me. “Hustle! Pretend the ball is some fried chicken. Bet you’ll stay on it then.”

What.

The.

Actual.

Fuck?

The world surges forward without me. I hold the ball and stare at Hailey as she jogs away, blue-streaked hair bouncing behind her.

I can’t believe she said . . . She couldn’t have. No way.

The ball falls out my hands. I walk off the court. I’m breathing hard, and my eyes burn.

The smell of postgame funk lingers in the girls’ locker room. It’s my place of solace when we lose a game, where I can cry or cuss if I want.

I pace from one side of the lockers to the other.

Hailey and Maya rush in, out of breath. “What’s up with you?” Hailey asks.

“Me?” I say, my voice bouncing off the lockers. “What the hell was that comment?”

“Lighten up! It was only game talk.”

“A fried chicken joke was only game talk? Really?” I ask.

“It’s fried chicken day!” she says. “You and Maya were just joking about it. What are you trying to say?”

I keep pacing.

Her eyes widen. “Oh my God. You think I was being racist?”

I look at her. “You made a fried chicken comment to the only black girl in the room. What do you think?”

“Ho-ly shit, Starr! Seriously? After everything we’ve been through, you think I’m a racist? Really?”

“You can say something racist and not be a racist!”

“Is something else going on, Starr?” Maya says.

“Why does everyone keep asking me that?” I snap.

“Because you're acting so weird lately!” Hailey snaps back. She looks at me and asks, “Does this have something to do with the police shooting that drug dealer in your neighborhood?”

“Wh-what?”

“I heard about it on the news,” she says. “And I know you're into that sort of thing now—”

That sort of thing? What the fuck is “that sort of thing”?

“And then they said the drug dealer's name was Khalil,” she says, and exchanges a look with Maya.

“We've wanted to ask if it was the Khalil who used to come to your birthday parties,” Maya adds. “We didn't know how, though.”

The drug dealer. That's how they see him. It doesn't matter that he's suspected of doing it. “Drug dealer” is louder than “suspected” ever will be.

If it's revealed that I was in the car, what will that make me? The thug ghetto girl with the drug dealer? What will my teachers think about me? My friends? The whole fucking world, possibly?

“|—”

I close my eyes. Khalil stares at the sky.

“Mind your business, Starr,” he says.

I swallow and whisper, “I don't know that Khalil.”

It's a betrayal worse than dating a white boy. I fucking deny him, damn near erasing every laugh we shared, every hug, every tear, every second we spent together. A million “I'm sorry”s sound in my head, and I hope they reach Khalil wherever he is, yet they'll never be enough.

But I had to do it. I had to.

“Then what is it?” Hailey asks. “Is this, like, Natasha's anniversary or something?”

I stare at the ceiling and blink fast to keep from bawling. Besides my brothers and the teachers, Hailey and Maya are the only people at Williamson who know about Natasha. I don't want all the pity.

"Mom's anniversary was a few weeks ago," Hailey says. "I was in a shitty mood for days. I understand if you're upset, but to accuse me of being racist, Starr? How can you even?"

I blink faster. God, I'm pushing her away, Chris away. Hell, do I deserve them? I don't talk about Natasha, and I just flat-out denied Khalil. I could've been the one killed instead of them. I don't have the decency to keep their memories alive, yet I'm supposed to be their best friend.

I cover my mouth. It doesn't stop the sob. It's loud and echoes off the walls. One follows it, and another and another. Maya and Hailey rub my back and shoulders.

Coach Meyers rushes in. "Carter—"

Hailey looks at her and says, "Natasha."

Coach nods heavily. "Carter, go see Ms. Lawrence."

What? No. She's sending me to the school shrink? All the teachers know about poor Starr who saw her friend die when she was ten. I used to bust out crying all the time, and that was always their go-to line—see Ms. Lawrence. I wipe my eyes. "Coach, I'm okay—"

"No, you're not." She pulls a hall pass from her pocket and holds it toward me. "Go talk to her. It'll help you feel better."

No it won't, but I know what will.

I take the pass, grab my backpack out my locker, and go back into the gym. My classmates follow me with their eyes as I hurry toward the doors. Chris calls out for me. I speed up.

They probably heard me crying. Great. What's worse than being the Angry Black Girl? The WeakBlack Girl.

By the time I get to the main office, I've dried my eyes and my face completely.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Carter," Dr. Davis, the headmaster, says. He's leaving as I'm going in and doesn't wait for my response. Does he know all the students by name, or just the ones who are black like him? I hate that I think about stuff like that now.

His secretary, Mrs. Lindsey, greets me with a smile and asks how she can assist me.

“I need to call someone to come get me,” I say. “I don't feel good.”

I call Uncle Carlos. My parents would ask too many questions. A limb has to be missing for them to take me out of school. I only have to tell Uncle Carlos that I have cramps, and he'll pick me up.

Feminine problems. The key to ending an Uncle Carlos interrogation.

Luckily he's on lunch break. He signs me out, and I hold my stomach for added effect. As we leave he asks if I want some fro-yo. I say yeah, and a short while later we're going into a shop that's walking distance from Williamson. It's in a brand-new mini mall that should be called Hipster Heaven, full of stores you'd never find in Garden Heights. On one side of the fro-yo place, there's Indie Urban Style and on the other side, Dapper Dog, where you can buy outfits for your dog. Clothes. For a dog. What kinda fool would I be, dressing Brickz in a linen shirt and jeans?

On a serious tip—white people are crazy for their dogs.

We fill our cups with yogurt. At the toppings bar, Uncle Carlos breaks out into his fro-yo rap. “I'm getting fro-yo, yo. Fro-yo, yo, yo.”

He loves his fro-yo. It's kinda adorable. We take a booth in a corner that's got a lime-green table and hot-pink seats. You know, typical fro-yo decor.

Uncle Carlos looks over into my cup. “Did you seriously ruin perfectly good fro-yo with Cap'n Crunch?”

“You can't talk,” I say. “Oreos, Uncle Carlos? Really? And they're not even the Golden Oreos, which are by far the superior Oreos. You got the regular ones. Ill.”

He devours a spoonful and says, “You're weird.”

“You're weird.”

“So cramps, huh?” he says.

Shit. I almost forgot about that. I hold my stomach and groan. “Yeah. They're real bad today.”

I know who won't win an Oscar anytime soon. Uncle Carlos gives me his hard detective stare. I groan again; this one sounds a little more believable. He raises his eyebrows.

His phone rings in his jacket pocket. He sticks another spoonful of fro-yo in his mouth and checks it. “It's your mom calling me back,” he says around the spoon. He holds the phone with his cheek and shoulder. “Hey, Lisa. You get my message?”

Shit.

"She's not feeling good," Uncle Carlos says. "She's got, you know, feminine problems."

Her response is loud but muffled. Shit, shit.

Uncle Carlos holds the nape of his neck and slowly releases a long, deep breath. He turns into a little boy when Momma raises her voice at him, and he's supposed to be the oldest.

"Okay, okay. I hear you," he says. "Here, you talk to her."

Shit, shit, shit.

He passes me the piece of dynamite formerly known as his phone. There's an explosion of questioning as soon as I say, "Hello?"

"Cramps, Starr? Really?" she says.

"They're bad, Mommy," I whine, lying my butt off.

"Girl, please. I went to class in labor with you," she says. "I pay too much money for you to go to Williamson so you can leave because of cramps."

I almost point out that I get a scholarship too, but nah. She'd become the first person in history to hit someone through a phone.

"Did something happen?" she asks.

"No."

"Is it Khalil?" she asks.

I sigh. This time tomorrow I'll be staring at him in a coffin.

"Starr?" she says.

"Nothing happened."

Ms. Felicia calls for her in the background. "Look, I gotta go," she says. "Carlos will take you home. Lock the door, stay inside, and don't let anybody in, you hear me?"

Those aren't zombie survival tips. Just normal instructions for latchkey kids in Garden Heights. "I can't let Seven and Sekani in? Great."

“Oh, somebody's trying to be funny. Now I know you ain't feeling bad. We'll talk later. I love you. Mwah!”

It takes a lot of nerve to go off on somebody, call them out, and tell them you love them within a span of five minutes. I tell her I love her too and pass Uncle Carlos his phone.

“All right, baby girl,” he says. “Spill it.”

I stuff some fro-yo in my mouth. It's melting already. “Like I said. Cramps.”

“I'm not buying that, and let's be clear about something: you only get one 'Uncle Carlos, get me out of school' card per school year, and you're using it right now.”

“You got me in December, remember?” For cramps also. I didn't lie about those. They were a bitch that day.

“All right, one per calendar year,” he clarifies. I smile. “But you gotta give me a little more to work with. So talk.”

I push Cap'n Crunch around my fro-yo. “Khalil's funeral is tomorrow.”

“I know.”

“I don't know if I should go.”

“What? Why?”

“Because,” I say. “I hadn't seen him in months before the party.”

“You still should go,” he says. “You'll regret it if you don't. I thought about going. Not sure if that's a good idea, considering.”

Silence.

“Are you really friends with that cop?” I ask.

“I wouldn't say friends, no. Colleagues.”

“But you're on a first-name basis, right?”

“Yes,” he says.

I stare at my cup. Uncle Carlos was my first dad in some ways. Daddy went to prison around the time I realized that “Mommy” and “Daddy” weren't just names, but they meant something. I talked to Daddy on the phone every week, but he didn't want me and Seven to ever set foot in a prison, so I didn't see him.

I saw Uncle Carlos though. He fulfilled the role and then some. Once I asked if I could call him Daddy. He said no, because I already had one, but being my uncle was the best thing he could ever be. Ever since, “Uncle” has meant almost as much as “Daddy.”

My uncle. On a first-name basis with that cop.

“Baby girl, I don't know what to say.” His voice is gruff. “I wish I could—I'm sorry this happened. I am.”

“Why haven't they arrested him?”

“Cases like this are difficult.”

“It's not that difficult,” I say. “He killed Khalil.”

“I know, I know,” he says, and wipes his face. “I know.”

“Would you have killed him?”

He looks at me. “Starr—I can't answer that.”

“Yeah, you can.”

“No, I can't. I'd like to think I wouldn't have, but it's hard to say unless you're in that situation, feeling what that officer is feeling—”

“He pointed his gun at me,” I blurt out.

“What?”

My eyes prickle like crazy. “While we were waiting on help to show up,” I say, my words wobbling. “He kept it on me until somebody else got there. Like I was a threat. I wasn't the one with the gun.”

Uncle Carlos stares at me for the longest time.

“Baby girl.” He reaches for my hand. He squeezes it and moves to my side of the table. His arm goes around me, and I bury my face in his rib cage, tears and snot wetting his shirt.

“I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.” He kisses my hair with each apology. “But I know that's not enough.”

Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. Bray/Harperteen, 2017.