

The Plight Of Us All...

A closet is filled with five charcoal colored suitcases emblazoned with the Samsonite crest. My mother's three bags are larger than the two of mine. She attributes this lopsidedness to her sexuality. "Sometimes I wish I was a man. Us woman have so much to consider when traveling," she'd say while sorting through clothes strewn out on her bed. Over the years, this back and forth has gotten us nowhere, and through many unnecessary quarrels, I have learnt to fall back.

A week and a half has rolled by since our sojourn from the arid landscape of Arizona, to the deep mysterious marshes of South Carolina. Thankfully, I've yet to see fluttering confederate flags affixed to the backsides of rusted trucks speeding by. Today the rain eased off, and a warm sun is drying a terrain cloaked with wet leaves. My excitement is palpable as I dribble around a puddle-laden driveway and heave a basketball at a war-torn goal. Next month a basketball tournament will take me to Asia and after 20 minutes of repetitious activity, right at the point where small beads of sweat begin to develop on the surface of my skin – my mother and older sister step outside. "Ade you should come walk with us," suggests my older sister. "Yeah, you can play basketball anytime. It's not often that you get the chance to spend time with family," added my mother. I glanced at them both. My knees were bent, contorted in a 'triple threat position.' A classic basketball stance which allows an offensive player three options; shot, drive left or drive right. The basket was twenty feet away from where I stood on the cracked asphalt reminiscent of a dry lakebed. A light wind swept through, kissing my forehead as it passed. I glanced up at the goal, then at two of the five most important women in my life. "If I make this shot you walk alone. If I don't make it, then I'll come with," I said confident in my ability to deliver.

Overhead, a squirrel tightroped across several power lines while birds danced around a blue sky like a squadron of planes. Below, my mother's pace was brisk. With 2lb weights gripped in each hand, she walked a few feet ahead of my sister who moved purposefully on the inside of the road. A missed shot placed me on the outside of a road bereft of a sidewalk. Though a little lopsided, I still couldn't figure out how the ball managed to roll off the rim the way it did.

The majority of people we passed were good-natured, impartial Caucasian folk. Mothers and fathers walking off hearty holiday meals, trailed several feet behind their elated sons and daughters brandishing freshly opened Christmas gifts. Earlier I'd learned that this neighborhood called Richmond Hills was once a community vastly occupied by white political figures. I can only imagine a time not too long ago in the Deep South when crisscrossing paths with people of comparatively lighter colored skin would leave someone of my pigmentation either angered, physically damaged or emotionally broken. But that was not the case. They were everything but. Some even went as far as to inquire on the status of our day.

Thirty minutes later we were bearing down on the public library located at the edge of the community. Up ahead the stone building was beautifully shrouded behind autumn trees stripped of their colorful spring leaves. Though the library was closed, this stretch of the road had vehicles packed in tight against the roadside. Recessed in several feet from the road was a likable brick home with a red door and a chimney. Hot grey smoke was rising out from within the chimney and the red door was slightly ajar. From

afar I could see similar sable individuals moving like ants in and out from within. A sort of festive familial gathering perhaps was taking place. As my mother, sister and I pushed forward we waved our arms united like synchronized swimmers. The individuals sitting out on the front lawn looked at us and our outstretched arms with a limp gaze reminiscent of a soldier who had just finished three tours in Iraq a second ago. They were expressionless. One young lady who had just pulled up to the house managed to exit her shiny sedan in a manner that repelled any friendly discourse. "Not even a Merry Christmas," I said, more saddened than disturbed at the way kindred folk treated other kindred folk." "You should have said Merry Christmas to them, Ade," barked my mom. She could feel my anger. It was palpable just as my excitement was thirty minutes prior. "They saw us waving. Yeah I should have yelled out Merry Christmas, but I looked right at them, they looked right at me. Then I smiled and waved my hand. I just don't get it. What's with black people sometimes? With the current climate in this country, I'd think extending a simple flap of the arm or hand to your fellow 'brotha or sista' would be automatic, " I said shaking my head as we moved down the road passed the brick home. If in 1914 opposing forces out for LITERAL BLOOD came together on a cold Christmas morning in the deep, muddy trenches of Northwestern France, then why the hell can't we people? If WE really matter, then WE first gotta love and appreciate each other.