

My Brother, A Hot Afternoon, and Me

By Ayandele Olusolapo

I am young. 13 going on 14 and in what Americans call the ninth grade. I am narcissistic. I am selfish. I am confused. I have a little brother. He has just started the first grade. He is confused. He is lonely. He looks to his older brother. I am not there. I am running away. I do not see the car.

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Faster! Faster! I scream to my legs. In my stupid, underdeveloped brain, I think that if I run fast enough and wish hard enough, I can out run my past. My feet pound down hard on the hot concrete walkway of the International School, Lagos, Nigeria. I am moving as far away from his classroom as humanly possible. I am running faster than I have ever run before.

“Solapo, wait for me!” Fefe yells over the 3:30pm bell, his voice ripping through me like a jagged knife.

I close my eyes because the humid wind against my face is making my eyes water. I grit my teeth and shut my eyes so tight I see hot white. But my mind’s eye is wide open and I see Fefe’s face. He looks exactly like me, only a little darker. He has the same wide nose, funny lips and a widow’s peak that just doesn’t sit quite right. The same bright eyes, large as the full moon, only this time, they reflect the huge grin on his face because he has seen me. He sees that he can smile because he is safe. He knows that I get why he doesn’t like Spiderman or Batman and he would rather make up heroes and stories in his head because I am the same way. He cannot wait to tell me the latest adventure of “He,” our superhero for five years now that we have never bothered to name. I open my eyes and let the wind bite into them and I keep on running. I want to believe that I didn’t hear him call to me.

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It is an extraordinarily hot and humid day in October. The 3:15pm sun is out in all its blazing glory. Heat waves emanate from the ground, distorting reality in their climb to the heavens. Every

sensible animal is in hiding from the infernal heat. My class bell rings, marking the end of the academic day. Finally, hour after unrelenting hour of math, science, and grammar is over. My mother will not be picking me up for another hour and a half. I am free. I look down to examine myself. I smile. I don't need to look in the mirror; I know I look good.

I am going to hunt for a cute classmate whose mother won't come to get her until late. I want to figure out why all of a sudden I need girls. I am extremely attracted to several of my classmates who barely two years ago I made a point to avoid. I am discovering their delicate smooth hands. The black tightly platted hair that glistens on Mondays only to get duller as the week rolls by. The thin long legs that escape into their skirts, into the unknown. The shapely growing chests that accentuate the round backs. The pretty soft faces. Those beautiful brown oval faces with dark brown eyes and ruby red full lips. I am consumed.

Then it dawns on me. It's a truth I know yet refuse to know. It is he. Fefe. His mother won't be picking him up for an hour and a half. I need to be by him. I have to keep him company, push away the fear and anxiety that comes with the first weeks of first grade. He is going to take me on a new adventure with "He," an adventure he probably dreamed up during recess while his classmates droned over which dull comic book hero would win in a fight against some other boring comic book hero. But then I hear high-pitched laughter. It comes from the mysterious lips of a classmate. She is laughing with me. I get up and walk toward the avocado tree. I know I will have to sneak by Fefe's class. I know I will hear him when I walk by while he waits excitedly for me. I step into the bright sunlight. I shut my eyes tight because the light against my face makes my eyes water. I begin to run.

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I trip at the entrance to the International School's parking lot and now I am falling. My arms fly into the air, hands searching desperately. They try to grab the humid air; they fail, miserably. I look around, ready to accept defeat at the hands of gravity. Then I see her. She is sitting with friends under the avocado tree at the other side of the parking lot. The wide green avocado leaves protect her from

the fiery sun. They give her a hue, an aura that radiates to rival the fumes of the burning asphalt of the lot. She is only meters away.

“Solapo! Wait, please! I--” Fefe yells to me. His voice reaches to grab me, to stop me, to hold me back even for a second.

I clench my fists. My legs tighten. I put a determined foot in front of me. I fight my fall. I place the other foot further in front. I beat my fall and I kick gravity in the face for good measure. I let out a pained smile. Almost there, I say to myself, almost there.

Something is wrong. Fefe’s voice is gone, replaced by the menacing roar of a monster careening toward me. I smell dark fumes from a car engine. Fear grips my core. I cannot move. My legs are jelly, fused to the asphalt by the sun. I bite my lower lip and I close my eyes. I pray that getting hit by a two-and-a-half ton 1999 Mercedes-Benz SL300 only hurts a little.

I feel nothing. I know I roll down the hood of the car and ricochet off the side. I know it drags my legs into its tires and that each one climbs over my legs, popping my knee sockets in the process. I know the car screeches to a halt and then reverses over me, popping my knee sockets further out of place. Through it all, nothing; needle pricks hurt more.

“Solapo, please be okay!” Fefe screams at the top of his lungs as he runs toward me.

I crawl out from under the car. I get on my knees. I feel fine. I place a hand on the car and prop myself up to the side of the car. I try to stand on my own. My knees buckle under my weight. A sharp pain begins to radiate from my knees, expanding throughout my legs and into my body. I feel lightheaded. I feel lightheaded. I close my eyes and slide down the side of the car. Somewhere in the distance I hear someone sob, “Somebody please help my brother!”

The Mercedes-Benz doors swing open. Dress shoes crunch into asphalt and rush toward me. I open my eyes and pain immediately slams them back shut. Time bleeds into the pain in my legs until suddenly, I am lifted off the ground. The pain drifts into numbness; I am weightless and floating into nothingness. Then I hear the pitter-patter of size six shoes against hard asphalt. A tiny seven-year-old

hand slips into mine.

“Solapo, wait for me,” Fefe whispers softly as he walks in step with the man carrying me to the nearby hospital. Fefe smiles reassuringly at me. I look away from him. I am thirteen. I can no longer hold back my tears.

Process Notes:

“A Hot Afternoon, My Brother, and Me”

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In writing my narrative essay, “A Hot Afternoon, My Brother, and Me,” I discovered emotion as a creative avenue. The events I depict in the narrative are true and they played a large role in the creation of who I am today. However, I had never thought to tap into my deep emotional experiences until I took the First-Year Writing Seminar. In the past, if asked to write a narrative, I would write about generic events and experiences with obvious moral undertones (sometimes, events and experiences I had made up to fit the assignment). However, in FWS, I was encouraged to deeply explore the complications in the events surrounding my accident through bouts of free writing. The final product turned out to be the most enjoyable essay I have ever written at Boston College. Through revision, the First-Year Writing Seminar then helped to make the essay even better.

In class, my classmates, friends and professor continually helped me revise my essay by pointing out mistakes and suggesting solutions for them. I took each suggestion and examined it through the context of how it might contribute to my final draft. Every other night (no joke), if I could spare the time, I revised my narrative, keeping many of these suggestions in mind. By the time I submitted my narrative, the essay was powerful and succinct. At the risk of sounding cliché, the essay came straight from my heart to the paper and I couldn’t be more pleased with it.

And yet, for all FWS has taught and introduced to me, I still do not find writing essays to be a

bed of roses. It's difficult to commit to free writing and exploration; I am still easily frustrated and I can procrastinate when I encounter writing obstacles. But I know that through practice I can improve upon my writing and overcome these obstacles. I am happy with my current progress and am even glad that I can recognize the room for improvement. I advise others in this course to put in the effort through practice. Because of the tools I have accumulated I now enjoy writing and have even become faster and more effective at it. I can't help but be proud and glad to say that I am now an effective essayist with plenty of avenues on which to draw inspiration for my newfound love of writing.