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On Success

Welcome to America where the players play and if you're not in the game, well then you're probably just screwed. Or maybe not, but have you ever seen a gazelle eat a big cat? Things like this just don't happen, it's rather simple. I remember when my roommate first asked me to watch their dog. I said yes assuming that it would be easy. What could go wrong, right? Who the fuck doesn't think that? "What could go wrong," that is damn near the eternal line for anytime anything has ever gone wrong. Don't worry, that doesn't make you a terrible person for thinking it. It was a Tuesday night, midterm Wednesday morning, and stress ate at my eyeballs like leaches. Then the yelping started. She yelped through those windpipes. Those windpipes carried excitement many times when I opened the front door after a long day at work. Those windpipes carried flesh and saliva. Those windpipes carried mad intent when the other bitch wanted to drive her up the wall, or when she just wanted attention. Come to think of it now, I could syncopate her cries to sets from a music festival and it totally would have made sense each time the fur on her body bounced as kids do at a rave.

I opened the door to let her outside, the sun was setting and the orange hue just lit up the wooden fence surrounding the backyard. The weeds were blazing too. She stepped off the back porch, into the dirt, into the weeds, and took a few steps. Fuck, she started to cry at that point. Everything was coming up, water, grains of food, and it didn't end there. Soon after she scampered off to a corner of the backyard, maybe hoping that I couldn't see her, she was in plain sight. But she tried to poop and nothing passed, just more crying. I stared at her, my hands quivered a bit; I didn't have the slightest inkling of how to help her. My test was the next

morning, I didn't want to fail, yet there she sat in front of me looking impotent, a shoddy parallel of I. Am I a bad person for thinking that?

She came back to the porch, and left a good bit of chunks for good measure; still spiteful even when she's sick. There were threads entwined with half-digested food and what could be water or the fresh insides of her intestines. I picked her up and took her in, shut the door and latched the pin. Then a thing fell upon it; her mess. A thing like grace, or maybe like time, and she stopped crying. I gazed out at it and saw large wings. They were majestic and patriotic. It was a butterfly. It had a blue tinge to the wings that crushed in the middle of each appendage. Then there was black lining that curved as a snake would around a body of water. Do snakes even do that? But the butterfly just stayed there. Steady as she goes, like a raft stuck in riptide; taking a mix of entrails and dog food, yet the butterfly turned it into something else, something different. This butterfly was delicate, when I say something different, I probably see it as something like a rain drop. It's essence exists for only so long, until it hits the floor and is destroyed by rock, or gravel.

That's when I realized quite clearly, I'm fucked. I could outdo my circumstances, actually make something of my life with the shitty hand I have been dealt, yet still face some sort backlash for it. Here are the possible scenarios, don't worry, it won't take too long. If I graduate from college, then attend grad school and parlay that into a job that actually pays about six figures, I am, undoubtedly, a sellout. I will be the black guy who makes it into a better situation, but now I am "too good," to hang around the old people that I used to or the old places that I used to. It is the same situation faced by the protagonist Frank Lucas in the film *American Gangster*. That is probably not the best example considering Frank changed his circumstances by selling drugs, but I digress. Upon trying to share his newfound success with his family, or the

people in his own neighborhood, there was a slight sense of reclusion from them. Why? Because he sold drugs, or because he managed to change his status-quo? It is an issue that is deeply rooted in contemporary black culture. Films depict it, yet without the direct measure that I think the issue deserves. We got a black president, Tyler Perry, and the NBA yet there are still several examples in everyday walks of life where the average black community will not view a successful black man who moves to suburban America as a good thing.

Here's the rebuttal; one of many at least. There is no way to know the accurate responses of a collective community by simple hearsay or guessing. That's bullshit on the easiest of arguments, let alone this one. There are more complexities to the entire issue beyond whether or not blacks can be accepting of those within their own race. But the saying goes, where there's smoke, there's fire. There is a lot of smoke in regards to this issue. One of the most intelligent men in the black community named Henry Louis Gates even speaks on the issue at length. To put it simply, the term agreed upon by scholars for a phenomenon in which a community holds irrational collective ideas in place of ideas which may stir the pot is called, groupthink. In the black community there are several topics of discussion which are in line with this idea. Black success is one, the overall ideology behind masculinity is another, and then that extends to thoughts on homosexuality and gender identity.

Are you confused yet? It is an overall shit show of where to start with an issue that extends beyond black and white. Like the butterfly, we are all fucked in the black community. The ability exists, and it is there in fluorescent shots and minute instances of greatness. But as a hole we can never take flight. We are the butterfly attached to dog food puked up by a sick dog that can't even shit right. Kendrick Lamar is close; he is a source of hope in an otherwise poor situation. He can be the one to lead a new generation of young black men and women into ideas

that challenge long held concepts within their communities, all the way up the chain. Who else do you wager? LeBron James can shine light on an issue, but at the end of the day he is an athlete. He can effect change on a level that is miniscule only compared to how much we really need it. That's how fucked up the game is. The players are either people we can't see or can't touch. Ideas, constructs, challenges, that's where we can win.

That's where something may happen where twenty years from now, a young college student doesn't have to worry about losing his community because he has exceeded expectations that were unwillingly placed upon him. As for me, I graduate in five hours. I'm terrified not of succeeding, but of failing. How do you operate in a world where the Gazelle can't roam free? Wherein the big cat can manage to sink its claws and teeth into something that just wants to hit the ground and glide into the future. The gazelle must evolve. Just like the butterfly does. We must grow some traits of our own; some bite to with the glide. Because the bigger problem is, even though success may include the departure of familiarity and community. Success is the only way to become someone who can actually enact the fucking change in the first place.