**Reflection:**

**I feel like writing cannot be taught. Students learn grammar, proper sentence structure and how to literally write but I don’t think as educators we can teach writing. I think our job is to provide prompts; writing prompts, creative prompts and encouragement. Allow a student to find their voice by not limiting them to a specific one. Many courses focuses on essay writing, paragraph writing, reader response, etc. Students have all these limits and rules. While I find that these courses are important and necessary it is also just as necessary to teach students to be free. Untraining them in the specific writing habits is difficult and may be met with some resistance. You can take the horse to the water but you cannot force it to drink.  
 This course has allowed me to grow a lot in the past 4 months, more than I have in any writing class that I’ve ever taken. I feel like you have given us weekly inspiration and encouragement to take a leap of faith. The freedom I feel in this class is refreshing. I’d like to take a moment to say Thank You, Carl for providing a space in which I can rediscover my enjoyment for writing, reading, aspire to be published one day, and ‘living poetically.’ The one thing that I will come away with after this course is time. Make time for writing and it will happen. Once the school year got busier I wasn’t able to make time as often as I’d like and I felt like I had a buildup of ideas that needed to make its way on to a piece of paper.  
Not all students are inclined to write but all deserve the opportunity. If as teachers we can provide a safe space for them to experiment with their voice we’ve done our part.**

**This is extremely long but I cut quite a bit out, hope I don’t bore you too much Carl!  
  
  
  
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Waiting**

They say you cannot learn to love another until you learn to love yourself.

I had to move across the world to love me.

I had to grow in a different environment to appreciate me.

I had to let go of the past and yearn to live everyday full heartedly.

And then you came to me.

Right on time—just like they said.

Where have you been all my life?

Waiting for me to find me.

**ROA**  
  
Please don’t call me onomatopoeia, my name is so much more than that.

It’s nothing like ‘Nahaspeemapetilon,’ although it is tough to pronounce.  
  
Announce each syllable, let it roll, bounce, dip, twist, curve, vibrate, gyrate off your tongue.

Fell the spice, life, culture and the heat of it.

Appreciate it.

Or don’t.

Just don’t call me onomatopoeia, my name is so much more than that.

Osei-Appiah— there’s so much power in my name.

I wear it like a mane, a majestic cloth made of the finest silk, the clearest diamond, the purest gold, it’s everything I behold.

When I die, all I have is my name.

Engraved.

**Red Pick Up Truck**  
  
I used to concentrate  
  
  
 strain my ears for the sound of a pickup truck.  
  
Crushing thousands of tiny pieces of gravel.  
  
Anytime after 4pm on a weekday is when I could expect this melody.  
  
I’d stay in my parents room because thewindowfacedthebackyarddrivewayandthatwastheonlyplaceIcouldglimpse

the red pickup truck.

**Giuseppe Zanotti**  
  
It was like a scene of out a movie, everything around you went dim and muffled.

A light shone upon you like you were center stage in a theatre, the room packed full just for you.

No one else, nothing else was there. I only saw you.

My breath quickened and eventually stopped.

I didn’t want to change the air around you— nothing about you was imperfect or a mistake.  
  
Your smooth color, your uniqueness.  
  
Everyone noticed you.  
  
You weren’t like any other.

You whispered my name, you knew me already.

I couldn’t wait to know you.

I loved the way your name rolled off my tongue, the way you felt against my body, the spring in my step when you were with me.

Each step in sync with my heartbeat.

Giuseppe. Giuseppe.

I had flashbacks of many years before, the first time I fell in love.

I had to save up my courage to claim him and I was prepared to do it again.

They said you’re love was going to cost me more than a pretty penny… I didn’t care.

I needed you, I had to have you and now I do.

Now you sit upon my shelf, glowing outshining all the others.

Yet you’re sad because my love isn’t faithful.

I met a woman named Isabel Marant.  
  
  
**For a Dark Skinned Girl**  
  
“You’re pretty for a dark skinned girl” he said.  
The annoyance had to have shown on my face  
Because it was certainly boiling inside of me  
From my dark blood  
To my even darker heart.  
  
Countless times I’ve been told this  
I guess it was delivered as a compliment  
But really it was a slap in the face  
  
  
  
A reminder that I was singled out  
I was special because I was pretty  
But not because I was dark skinned  
  
From the glorious land of Africa  
To the massa’s plantation field  
My color was a curse  
A reason to be ‘you’re worth something for a dark skinned girl  
A pardon for mistreatment  
To be less than anything and more than anyone wanted to notice  
  
Dark skin had a story of lashes and lynching  
Memories that would distraught the devil himself  
Who wants to dance this dance?  
I was torn down before I was born  
My color an imperfection before I knew it was  
  
People told me to bleach my skin,  
Stay out of the sun,  
Do whatever was necessary to appear just a few shades lighter  
few shades whiter, a few shades brighter  
  
As if being black wasn’t problem enough  
Now I gotta be a specific kind of black  
The kind that lets people know you’re alright  
You might be mixed with Portugese, Chinese or anything that goes down ease-Y  
  
Being dark skinned was a bad hair day I couldn’t tame  
Oh don’t get me started on black hair  
Weave it up, braid it down, wear it natural, just don’t be loud about it  
You’re already a distraction.  
  
I’m tired of this dance.  
Do light skinned black women know this choreography?

I never had a chance to ask  
  
My girl Ntozake says being colored is metaphysical dilemma  
So why don’t my brothers and sisters support each other?  
  
Plantation fields only happened yesterday  
We lost the white massa only to gain the light skinned one  
Some of them staring down at us from the house window  
  
But my Complimenter wasn’t light skinned   
No, he was dark like me  
Clearly not understanding his own worth or just slightly color blind  
Just slightly confused about the various shades pretty comes in  
  
Somebody told him it has a particular hue  
He was fooled  
I’m not though.  
He can keep his compliment  
Being dark skinned is an equation   
An equation of an Ashanti goddess and her equally stunning suitor  
I haven’t quite figured out the answer as yet  
I was never good at math  
  
But I am good at being dark skinned  
Or at least I’m getting better at it  
Sometimes people put doubt in me  
Like this guy smiling, wide faced in front of me

He’s waiting for a response  
Thinking I’m going to accept this backhanded compliment

And maybe leave this place with him  
“Anyfuckingways”

**Currently Un-named.** I remember when it all began. There was a time when I didn’t understand. There was a moment when I was just a teenager living as much of a normal life as I could. Ignorance is bliss is what some say. I wish I was still ignorant to the world around me. I was too busy trying to fit in to the world I thought I belonged to. Not realizing that the world that my parents grew up in was part of me also. Being in Canada doesn’t mean that your heritage stays in your homeland. It comes with you through stories, scars, accents, memories and tradition. Now the world I thought I knew is gone and I’m fighting to stay alive in between two worlds.

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I awoke to the strong odor of mutton pulav and fish and the low sounds of voices coming from downstairs.

“Ugh, I hate fish,” I grumbled. I rolled over to the colder side of my bed and peeked through my window. It was a cloudy day but the sun was trying to push its way through. Today was Nouruz, a Zoroastrian holiday. It’s the celebration of New Years. My mother and my dozens of Aunties were downstairs cooking enough food to feed all the homeless of the Downtown Eastside.

I glanced at my bedside clock, 1:53pm, it read. People would be arriving soon to celebrate and I didn’t plan on being here for it. New Years was months ago. I never understood why my parents insisted on celebrating all of these Indian holidays. They’re in Canada now, do as the Romans do, or whatever the fuck the saying is.

I got out of bed and headed for my bathroom. Today was a big day and not because the sun crossed the equator but because it was two months away from my 18th birthday. I’ve still got lots of planning to do. My party has to be *the* party of the year. It’s the weekend right before the student body votes for valedictorian. I need to win that and I need this party to be a success. It’s the way things are supposed to be, it’s the Canadian right of passage, a huge party and then graduation. It all had to be perfect.

“Calm down Priya. *Manashni, Gavashni, Kunashni.”* Good thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds. If my parents brought anything useful from India it was that saying.

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I pulled into the Starbucks parking lot. This was one of the few Starbucks that my father owned. When he bought the first one my mother told him he was making a huge mistake. “Who drinks coffee? A tea shop is what people want!” She would tell him. When my father was in Talasari he used to spend a lot of time at a man named Anna Purna’s chai stall. It was there he got the daily news of the town, joked with his friends and wasted hours. He had hoped that Starbucks would have the same vibe as Anna’s. He didn’t know that Starbucks already had a vibe of it’s own and constantly shook his head at the people he saw glued to their phones or laptops ignoring the company around them.

“You kids” he would say.

I sat down, in the same spot I sat the day I saw him…. I sat in the plushy green chair across from my friend Kayla. I had a lot of white friends but she was the one I hung out with the most. I met her when I was in kindergarten and we’ve been inseparable since. Her mother used to be scared that I was going to ruin her. She would encourage Kayla to hang out with the other kids “like her” and leave “the brown ones” alone. But once she realized I wasn’t trying to convert Kayla and that Kayla and I weren’t that different she relaxed a bit. She did continue to remind her not to eat at our house and not to bring up the fact that she and her family ate cows.

“Who’s the new guy?” She gestured over to the counter. I looked over and saw Varesh, the new barista. He was tall, with a strong upper body. I could tell he worked out. The Starbucks apron looked so miniscule on him. He had dark, uncut hair and ordinary dark brown eyes, yet I felt like there was something buried deep in them. My mom used to tell me that I would know I found the one when I looked into his eyes and could see more than just a color. So I constantly stared into boy’s eyes hoping to see something more. And since I usually wanted something more with that particular boy I always found something in their eyes. I don’t think that’s how my mom intended it work but hey, to each it’s own.

“Uh, hello?” Kayla waved her hands in front of my face.

“Hm? Yeah, uh, he’s the new barista.” I glanced over at him again and we locked eyes. He smiled. *Wow*. I remember feeling like I had to throw up with excitement.

“Well what’s his name?” Kayla interrupted.

“I’m not sure.. but there’s this thing called a nametag. If you read his you just might find out.”

“Ha…ha” she said as she threw a piece of her blueberry muffin at me. I didn’t want to tell her his name. For some reason I felt like I wanted to keep him a secret. I mean there was nothing to tell—yet. Maybe mom was right about the eyes.

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After downing a coffee I head to my parents home. My mother never approved of me drinking coffee so I did so secretly to keep her sanity and my own. Sitting down at the kitchen table I took in the aromas. The room smelled of warm milk, cinnamon and my mother’s perfume. As a teenager I managed to escape this house and my parents restrictions every chance I got, with volleyball games, study sessions, trips to Starbucks and any other teenage duty they somewhat approved of but Saturday mornings I reserved for my mom and our chai. For as long as I could remember we shared Saturday morning together over a freshly made cup of chai. It’s in these mornings that she would take me to the past I was soon to relive.

“Priya, I wasn’t expecting you,” she says with a warm smile as she shuffles into the kitchen wearing her worn brown house slippers. Those slippers were nearly as old as I was. She says this to me every Saturday morning, it’s the only joke my mom intentionally tells, it still makes her smile and makes her eyes crinkle with laughter. I got up and kissed her cheek and she held my face and examined it. She nodded her head, with what seemed like approval, and said “Fancy meeting you here”. She released me and walked over to the cabinets and pulled out the cups.

“Fish was on sale at the market. I bought some for you and Gurdev, make sure you remember to take it from the freezer when you leave.” This was her response to the bruises on the right side of my face.

“I’m sure he would like some fish for dinner,” she continues. *That* was her reminder for me to be a good wife and accept these bruises that often appear on my body. After all didn’t she warn me? Didn’t I see her own bruises? I realized that after a while I no longer noticed hers. It was like a birthmark, the same bruise only in a different place. When I didn’t see it I assumed it had moved to a new spot, concealed under her sari.

*Fancy meeting you here*. I hated when she said that. I absolutely fucking hated it. She would say that to me whenever I was reliving something she had experienced. Instead of advising me or at least comforting me with useful words of advice she would say “fancy meeting you here.” The first time I heard her say that I thought it was one of those *Ims.* ‘Ims’ was a word my cousin and I coined when we were younger; it meant ‘immigrant sayings.’ Whenever a newcomer from India would say something and use it out of context we would laugh and scream “Ims!” It started when one our Uncle Harpinder, fresh off the Air India plane, would say “It’s raining cows and donkey’s” instead of cats or dogs. Our all time favorite was when he told his daughter to “cut off her tongue” instead of “bite your tongue.”

She sat down at the table with the warm full of stories tea. As a child I thought the tea held all the stories and she would just be the vessel the tea used to communicate these stories. Now I think it’s the tea that gives her the courage to speak the truth, no matter how hard it is to relive. Each spice is her body of armor, protecting her heart from the pain of releasing each memory she has kept so neatly tucked away in her mind.

“I’ve been making and drinking this tea for many many years. Each time it surprises me. You know I have never made it the same twice. It’s like a box of cookies, you never know what you’re going to get.” *Ims*— she got that from my Uncle. “My mother taught me how to make this. We too would sit and drink together. She would stare at a book and drink her chai. She could not read, she could only recognize a few words, but she would pretend to read many books and then tell people what she thought they were about. She told me many stories of her books. She did not know that I secretly read all of her books. When she would tell me an entirely wrong story I would lay next to her and listen, never correcting her. I did not correct her because I trusted she knew the story. She has lived many years before me and experienced many things. I trusted her completely. Even though I did not understand why she pretended to read and then tell me false stories I did know that she meant for me to hear that story and its lesson.”

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“Hey! Hey!” I turned around to the shouting voice trailing after me in the Starbucks parking lot. It was Varesh.

“You dropped this inside,” he said, short of breath. He held up one of the invitations to my birthday party. Glancing at it he said” ‘You are invited to Priya’s 18th Birthday.’ So am I invited too?” He said with a grin. I had never been this close to him. There was always a counter or a table in between us. I never noticed how wide the counters were until he started working there. He smelt delicious, not like I want to eat you like a muffin delicious, but delicious like I can smell his shampoo and cologne. I just wanted to hug him and inhale. I’ve had crushes on boys before, but never one like this.

I contemplated playing hard to get but decided against it. I had been coming to Starbucks twice as much in hopes that his frequent stares and smiles would lead to a conversation. I refused to be the one to approach him because Kayla said girls should never chase boys; it takes all the fun out of it for them. Considering she has had many boyfriends and I none, I chose to take her advice even though I was so anxious.

“Yeah, sure, you can come” I said with a not too big that would show my eagerness and excitement and a not too small that would make it seem like I was disinterested and saying yes out of pity smile.

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In the weeks leading up to my birthday Varesh and I hung out all the time, secretly of course. My parents would never approve of me spending time with a boy that wasn’t a relative. I was supposed to study hard in school and when I was done I was supposed to be prepared to be married to someone of their choosing. My older sister tried to avoid this, and it seemed like the inevitable; unless I wished to no longer be part of this family. I thought it was a load of crap, there was no way my parents would force me to do that. I understood that my skin was Indian but that didn’t mean I had to do everything a traditional Indian girl would do. I was so tired of hearing my parents say that fucking word. *Tradition.* If they wanted to preserve their tradition they should have stayed in India. I had my own plan. I was going to get a scholarship to a great university and they would try and set me up with someone but I would tell them that I wanted to finish my degree first, since they valued education they would allow this. By the time I was done my degree my parents would see that the Canadian way was the only way when you’re in Canada and they would drop this arranged marriage bit. I had it all planned out and thought it would work, I was such a teenager.

We spent every night on the phone. He was very different from all the other boys I’d met. He was extremely genuine in everything he did. If he was happy, which was majority of the time, he was genuinely happy because he was appreciative. He wasn’t born in Vancouver like I was, he moved here from India with his family eleven years ago. The way he described his life in India I could see why he was so happy. Canada had saved him and why shouldn’t it have? It was the land of opportunities. His father worked on other man’s land to make a living. He had lived in a small home on the land. When the landowner’s children came outside to play they would tease him and throw rocks at him. He still urged to play with them but after a while his mother would stop him from attempting. “You fool” she would say, “you aren’t like them.” This upbringing is what was hidden in his eyes. He saw Canada as a land of opportunity and he strived to work hard and show everyone that he *was* like them. Varesh opened my eyes. He told me about an India that was worth leaving. I only ever heard stories of the “good ol’ days.” He came from a different world than my parents. He talked of discrimination, poverty and feeling worthless. A plight he said Irani’s pushed them into. I understood racism in Canada, but I didn’t understand racism in India. When I was in elementary school some of the kids would tease me when my mother would pack me roti for lunch and when I would wear my hair in one long braid. I demanded my mother make me sandwiches and let me wear my hair down like the other kids.

“So feisty, feisty Priya. Vithu, your attitude is rubbing off on your sister, see?” But my sister understood, she had experienced it too.

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I would spend more time at Starbucks so I could see him and sit and talk with him during his breaks. My father rarely came into the stores so I wasn’t too worried about him catching us. One Tuesday afternoon after school Varesh and I were at my favorite table, the same one I sat at with Kayla. I was drinking a coffee and he water, he hated most of the beverages at Starbucks.

Varesh was telling me why his family decided to come to Canada. He told me that his grandmother had wished that his mother would find and marry a man who could build her a big home and fill it with children. She desired this man to be someone who could provide for her daughter. She imagined her daughter staying home, being a wife, while her husband made a name for himself and lavished their family with anything and everything they desired. She had hoped her daughter would have an even better life than she had. But Varesh’s mother had not married such a man. She married a man who owned land but also owned an impossible taste for alcohol. His desire for a belly full of booze was what caused him and many like him to lose their land. He drank more than he could afford and he traded his land to clear his debt. Varesh, his mother and father lived in a poorly built small home on the land that once belonged to them instead of the lavish house that could have been theirs.

Throughout the story I could see Varesh’s father’s guilt on his face, his mother’s sadness and the pain that it caused them all. When he told me stories of his life in Talasari, his dark eyes clouded over. He transported himself back to India to retell these stories; much like my mother’s stories, they were painful memories. When he snapped out of his trance his eyes were lit again and his face was at peace. Canada was a new beginning for him. Here he hadn’t felt oppression from his people. He was not treated like he was dirt, he was under the radar and he liked it that way. In his school he had a few friends, he played on the soccer team, and worked after school at Starbucks to save money for college. He finally felt normal, like the kids from different races and religions that he was surrounded by. This is what Canada was to him, a place to feel normal. When he went out with his friends his mother never tried to hold him back, she too saw that Canada was a new beginning for their family.

My mind had been opened to a different kind of life in India. The stories my parents told me were nothing like Varesh’s. I opened my mouth to ask him about the landowners when I felt a firm, heavy hand on my back. An unmistakable voice boomed out “What is going on here?” My father’s fury was buried deep in his thick eyebrows and thicker accent. The moments that happened next were a blur to me. As soon as I saw the look on Varesh’s face I knew that his life in Canada was about to change. The look he had on his face was the same look he mastered when he told me about the time the landowner accused him of stealing money from his home. He had been in his home playing as his parents worked on the farm. He heard his mother’s cries outside of his home. He came outside to see what was going on and met his mother and the landowner. The big, caramel skinned man held his mothers arm tightly as she tried to wriggle free from his grasp.

“This your son has taken from me!” He screamed as he pointed a long finger in Varesh’s face. His finger close enough that Varesh could smell the clean soap the man had used earlier to wash his hands.

Varesh’s mother pleaded her son’s innocence but it was not enough to convince the man. He slapped Varesh across the face, hard enough that the man’s hand stung. When Varesh’s mother pounded against the man’s back in retaliation he beat her. He beat her in front of the workers who had gathered to watch. Amongst those workers was Varesh’s father. Who stood back and cried as he saw his family suffer because of him.

Varesh mimicked the same look as my father yelled at him while holding me by my right arm. Every word my father aimed at Varesh landed on him effectively. “You think you’re good enough?” *Blow*. “How dare you violate my daughter.” *Blow.* “Go back to the village you came from you piece of shit.” *Blow.* “You’re fired, Warli.” *Knockout.*

Later that night I lay in my bed replaying the afternoon’s events. I could hear my father yelling at my mother, like many nights before this. The only difference between those and this was this time it was about me.

“You let her run around being like these white teenagers, she knows nothing of her roots. Things will change around here. She will be married when she graduates and you will make sure she is ready. I won’t have my slut daughter ruin this family.” There was a pause, in which I assumed my mother said something to anger my father more. He replied with his fist while he screamed more insults.

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My mother crept into my room and caressed my head. We stayed silent, our own thoughts filling the room. I thought of Varesh and how he had thought Canada was a place for new beginnings and equality but yet again his people were holding him back. He and his family were like the BC tides, moving forward but always being pulled back. When would they be able to move onto new land without the moon pulling them back?

“Mom?”

“Uh?” she said.

“What was life like for Dad growing up in India?

“What do you mean?”

“Where did he live, what did his parents do for work?” I asked. What I really meant to ask was ‘were Dad and his families the one giving the orders or the ones receiving it?’

“Your Father grew up on a farm. His father owned the farm and before him his father, and his father. It has been in the family for many years, now your father’s younger brother owns the land. The land has seen many great things and many horrible things but that is what it is made of, memories. So many lives have been born into that land and many lost. Yes…” She paused. “So many lives have been lost, some at the hands of their brothers.”

“Their brothers?”

“Yes, we are all one people, one family. Some of us worship different Gods, some of us are different colors, some of us came to Talasari different ways at different times, some of us speak different languages, but we are all one family. Many do not see this. Your friend, he is a Warli yes?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Your father does not see him the same. Do not blame him or be angry with him. He only knows what he has been taught, and he was told that he is not to mix with the people like your friend.”

“Well, why do you think so differently from Dad?”

“I once had a friend. She was a Warli girl, with skin very dark like a cocoa bean. My father had a store and on the weekends he would take me to the store with him. My friend’s mother sold fruits nearby, she did not have a store, she could not afford the rent. She would push a very big cart and park it on that street and stand out in the hot Talasari sun. She was a strong woman but very little. I remember I admired the muscles in her body, the curves they made in her skin and the way they shone with sweat. My friends name was Meena. We would play together every weekend and every day in the summer. The other children that would come to the shops with their parents never wanted to play with us. They would tease her for being dirty and poor and they would tease me for playing with her. ‘Don’t you know your kind?’ They would ask me. But I saw no difference between the two of us. We ate the same foods, played the same games and understood each other. She was my friend and that is what my kind was. I never saw difference in them and me. My family was different though. I remember seeing our Warli house servant cry when my mother yelled at her after she caught her in bed with my father. My mother knew my father had forced himself on her but she refused to admit it. She threw the girl into the street and humiliated her in front of everyone. I watched it all from behind my sister’s leg, where I grabbed on in fear for the Warli woman. The people in the street spat on her and threw rocks; they called her names and drove her out of the neighborhood. The fear she had in her was enough for a dozen people. She was a victim because of her title. I knew then I felt different but my family and your father does not. You must obey your father Priya because your family is everything. We cannot change who we are. You are not a little girl you cannot blindly play with anyone you wish because you are ignorant. You must understand who you are, who your family is and how you make us look. You are an Indian girl and you must not shame your family. Know the difference between right and wrong, but honor your family first *that* is the most important.”

My mother’s words stayed with me but I did not wish to put my family before my heart. How could she tell me to know the difference between right and wrong and then tell me to obey my father who was wrong? I knew I loved Varesh. Until I met him I was never connected to my Indian heritage. In these couple of months I learned more about Talasari than I had learned all my life. He made me open to it. I spent years trying to be Canadian, to appear normal to all the other kids. I denied myself the knowledge that would allow me to grow. I knew the Canadian world and I had just been introduced to the world of the Warli’s and the world of my people, the Irani’s. Three worlds but I could only live in one.

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I called Varesh for weeks but he refused to answer any of my calls or reply to my texts. I knew I loved him and I had to tell him in person. I did not care that my family didn’t approve, I didn’t care that he was from a different tribe. I just knew that he had removed my blindfold and I needed him. We would find a way, eventually my family would see. The day of my birthday party I called him and he answered. I asked him to come to my birthday and he asked me if my family would be there.

“Yes” I told him.

“Then, I’m not coming Priya, I can’t. Your father made it clear.” He explained to me that his parents had also heard what had happened and they were disappointed and ashamed in. He had shamed their family.

I lied and told him my parents were okay with it. He reluctantly agreed to come. I didn’t fucking care about tradition, I didn’t care about tribes. I was Canadian born; Varesh was in Canada now too. Our parents had to stop living in the past, they were the only ones who believed there was difference between Varesh and I. I knew there wasn’t, Varesh knew there wasn’t and that is all that mattered.

I met Varesh outside in the parking lot when he arrived at the hall. I had butterflies, like the first day we made eye contact. I had not seen him in weeks and I craved the depth in his eyes, his humble smile and his clean smell. Today I would tell him that through all of this shit I was going to try, we were going to make it. When I saw him all the nervousness and anxiousness I felt evaporated, I was just elated. I flung my arms around his neck and kissed him gently. He pushed me away.

“Priya, there’s people looking.” He said as he glanced at the few people lingering in the parking lot.

“I don’t care.”

“You should.”

“Why?” I said. “I love you.” *There.*

He stepped back and dropped his arms from around my waist. “I came here to tell you that we cannot continue this, we—“

“Oh shutup,” I interrupted him, “this we are from different worlds bullshit is getting tiring. We don’t have to be the same, we don’t have to have come from the same world. What’s the worst that could happen? We’re the fucking same Varesh!” I yelled.

“But we’re not and the fact that you do not see that despite what I’ve told you shows me that you don’t understand. Our families have been indifferent to each other for years. Your father humiliated me, fired me, made my parents disappointed in me. We left Talasari to put this behind us and it was behind us until you came into my life. When my parents learned what happened they told me about my cousin. He is the same age as your sister. He liked her and tried talking to her on several occasions. She entertained the idea but never gave him a chance. When the other boys in your sisters school saw him constantly bothering her they decided to corner him one day on his way home from school and they beat him. They beat him up Priya, for talking to your sister! Just talking. You really think your family will accept me? They won’t and mine won’t either. This just won’t work.”

I had never seen him with so much fury in his words. His eyes were dark and angry. I just needed him to understand that we didn’t have to be like our parents; this could work if we wanted it to.

“We could run away” I tried again. “I have enough money to take care of us, we could go away and be together Varesh.” The moment my words came out of my mouth I saw the pain flash across his face.

“I don’t want your money Priya.” He walked away ashamed, hurt and disappointed, it was all on his face. The moment he had turned his back I realized what I said had been wrong. I assumed he couldn’t take care of me and that I would have to be the one to do it. I didn’t assume this because he was Warli, I assumed it because— I couldn’t think of a reason why.

I started to cry. I cried because I lost him and because the very thing I had been fighting all my life is what drove him away—being Irani. I always saw myself as a Canadian child born of immigrant parents; they were the Indians, not me. Everything I had learned from Varesh and my family had not made me see clearer, it made my vision blurrier. I thought I was better than Varesh and I hadn’t realized it until now. I cried until someone, I’m not sure who came and collected me from the parking lot. For weeks I cried.

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After Varesh left I didn’t care to fight it anymore. I realized being born in a place didn’t make you belong there. I was an Irani woman. My ancestors predetermined my fate and there was no point in fighting it. I lost my determination when I hurt Varesh. Knowing that I hurt him was more painful than knowing I had lost him. I graduated school in June and I spent the summer at my mother’s side. My parents had arranged a marriage for me and it was set to take place in the first week of September. I accepted it, *why shouldn’t I*, I thought. This is part of who I was supposed to be. My mother taught me how to cook Talasari dishes; how to clean, how to sew, she taught me everything she thought I needed to be a good house wife. The day we started our lessons was the first time she said ‘Fancy meeting you hear.’

“You will like Gurdev Priya, he is a nice boy. You will love him too.”

“I love Varesh mom.” That was the first time I had said his name in weeks. Even the name made me sad.

“I had a Varesh once too… fancy meeting you here.” I didn’t bother asking her anything about him. I didn’t care; she didn’t end up with him. Her fate, just like mine was predetermined based on her tribe. The people of the present are supposed to write the future but apparently the people of the past do when you are Indian. I wondered how many generations it would take before the Irani’s and Warli’s stopped their feud. I wondered how many more Varesh’s and Priya’s would be separated. The Irani’s lived such privileged lives while the Warli’s suffered. At least racism in North America made sense. People hated each other because they had different skin colors, who the fuck hates someone who’s practically the same as them. Indian’s, we can’t even get racism right.

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Gurdev and I have been married for 8 months. He owns a construction company that inherited from his father. He works long hours and I don’t have to see him too often and we both prefer it that way. I heard that he had a white girlfriend before we got married and that his parents made him break up with her. I know he still thinks of her and I think he hasn’t let her go and that is why he is so distant. I cared but I was relieved to have extra time away from him. The first few months of our marriage we were pleasantly nice to each other. I think he was scared too. Neither of us knew what to do, a few months before I was in high school and he had just recently finished university. We slowly developed a routine. We’d wake up in the morning, I’d make breakfast, he’d leave for work, I’d clean the house, do laundry, run errands, come home make dinner, he’d come home and eat, have a couple of drinks, maybe have some of his friends over, he’d climb on top of me and grunt and moan for eleven minutes, we’d fall asleep and wake up and do it all over again. A couple of drinks turned into three and then four and then I lost count. The first time he hit it had been at his father’s encouragement. His parents came over for dinner and his mother noticed that I had dishes in the sink. I overheard his father point out that once I started getting lazy with the chores everything would go downhill from there, ‘Son, you must set order in your house.’ He hated being chastised by his dad; he was constantly seeking his approval, which is the only reason he agreed to marry me. When his parents left he hit me for the first time. Since then he’s hit me thirty seven times.

After chai with my mother I left her home about an hour earlier than usual. I wanted to tell her that she would be having another grandchild but her story kept replaying in my mind. I wondered if she had ever told me a story or said something to me that would have forewarn me of my future. It seems like being an Irani woman was inevitable and that I was being ignorant trying to escape it. I wasn’t Canadian, Kayla was. I don’t think people like me get a chance to be Canadian, there is always going to be someone pulling you back to your roots, reminding you that the way you are doing things is not the way it’s supposed to be done. There is always going to be a tradition, belief, family member or something that will make you feel obligated to your home country. No I wasn’t Canadian. For some time I thought I was a hybrid, a contender for both worlds but I can’t have both. I don’t know how to separate the two. I haven’t found a median between making my parents happy and being happy myself.

I pulled into my driveway and saw Gurdev’s car parked there too. He must have come home early from work. From the bottom of the stairwell in my home I could hear her. I walked slowly up the stairs so that I could not be heard. As I got closers the moans grew louder, I could hear Gurdev clearly. The door was ajar slightly and I could see a blonde haired woman on top of *my* husband. I stared for what seemed like moments as her long hair bounced with the rhythm of her body. I finally tore myself away and walked back down the stairs towards my car. I imagined my mother’s mother saying ‘Fancy meeting you here’ in my ear. Yes I was an Irani woman, there was no need to pretend I was Canadian. I was no longer a contender for both worlds. My ancestors decided for me what I would be. I would be a good Irani housewife like my mother said.  
  
 **Progress and Community in a Changing World**

We journeyed to Cape Coast, Ghana in the summer of 2010 to experience a part of Ghana we had yet to see. A small town yet overcrowded with people. The dry dirt had many brown, almost camouflage, lizards scurrying about attending to their own business. Mother goats and their babies scurried across roads when truckloads of people approached honking their horns. The trucks sped past despite the many people standing so closely on either sides of the road. The dust that the trucks spew into the air didn’t seem to faze any of the locals—you would only see the tourists and visitors fanning the dust from their faces. In the distance and hills you could see massive trees growing. These trees appeared as if they had been growing for thousands of years. The trunks looked like they had been there when the Earth was created. In BC we saw trees but we never really saw them. In Maxine Hong Kingston’s “A City Person Encountering Nature” she takes notice of animals and critters that she has never paid much mind too. We took note of our surroundings like it was the first time we were seeing it. Being in Ghana awoke all of my senses. I wasn’t just seeing trees; I was seeing different hues of green, luscious, life. I followed a lizard until it disappeared down a sewer. The people watched me and laughed, they would never pay a lizard any mind. I wanted to experience everything Ghana’s beauty had to offer me. I had been there many times but I was always looking for the city I was used to within Ghana. I never looked for what Ghana had to offer me. I only paid attention to what they didn’t have.

The palm trees were my favorite trees. It reminded me of a picture I had found on the internet; full of trees and a clear blue sky and a body of water mirroring; it read *Paradise.* The many tall palm trees cast sparse areas of shade along the sides of the road. Inhabited within these areas of shade were the various tables of goods that the locals were selling. Carvings with elongated bodies, various shapes and meanings crowded the wooden tables. There were tables full of beads, hand woven fabric bracelets, key chains that embodied the Ghanaian colors, necklaces with *Gye Nyame* (“Only God”) hanging proudly from them and the beautiful, richly colored, full of emotion paintings on canvas. Behind these tables the locals beckoned you to “come by” they all had good deals just for you they said. Tables with *Kenke (*a starch dumpling) wrapped in tinfoil in big tin buckets beckoned your increased appetite. You saw old strawberry jam containers so full of deep red *Shito* (a hot pepper stew) that you can see the palm oil within it dripping down the sides of the jars and pooling around them. Bunches of green plantain cluster so high on tables you could not see the store owners faces. Loaves of freshly baked tea bread try to seduce you with their smell. But their smell is no match for the diesel fumes from the cars and the smell of burning leaves and garbage. Ghana always smelt like diesel and burning leaves. No matter where I am, if I smell one of the two it immediately brings me back to the Motherland, my Mother’s land.

After walking off the busy streets and into a neighborhood full of homes with tin roofs we approached the barber shop. The barber wore khaki shorts with a faded grey shirt that read “Nike.” He sported a big flashy watch on his left wrist and his right wrist wore two beaded bracelets and one red, yellow, green bracelet with “GHANA” printed boldly on it. He moved quickly although he had a limp, one of his legs is longer than the other. He had a star shaved on the right side of his head. This star represented the *Blackstars*, Ghana’s soccer team. His clothing shows the influence western culture had on him. Many opted for wearing traditional shirts with western pants or shorts. His watch resembled the *“Movado*” watch my brother was wearing at the time although his was called “*Mavado*.” The Ghanaian beads, the “GHANA” bracelet and the star on the side of his head all showed his pride and support for Ghana. How many Canadians, prior to the Olympics, do you see wearing a bracelet with “Canada” embroidered across it? His pace showed that he was determined; he would not allow his disability to effect him or his everyday life. His skin was of a dark brown tone, it was so black it was flawless. He resembled one of the carvings on the street. The contrast of his skin made each of his features so defined. This was a common sight in Ghana. The locals said they could immediately tell we weren’t from there because of our skin. We hadn’t been blessed by the kisses of the sun to make our skin glow like the carvings.

Kweku, the barber asked us where we had just come from.  
“The Cape Coast and Elmina Castles” my brother and I replied in sync.

“Hmph” Kweku said. “I used to work there. Not even for one week did I last” he laughed.

We giggled along with him and prompted him to tell us more. He told us of his experience at the Cape Coast Castle. When he finished high school his uncle got him a job at the castle. He was supposed to have one week of training but didn’t make it past day four. The more he learned, the more he felt like he wanted to separate himself from the history of the castle.

“They don’t teach you the whole truth in school” he added.

Like us, he had thought that his ancestors did not have much to do with the slave trade. But the more he learned during training taught him otherwise.

“They took people from everywhere. If you were big and strong like him” he pointed at my brother, “you were taken. If you had a pretty face like yours” he pointed the comb at my face, “you would be taken and raped too.”

People from his tribe were stripped from their homes, brought to the castles and branded as slaves. His aunts were raped, his uncles were beaten and his cousins starved. The tribe that his family descended from lived in the town surrounding the castle and majority were taken from this town. He learned that his ancestors were indeed slaves.

“That place is wicked. Because of the evil that took place there you can still feel the spirits all around. It’s not scary, it’s sad. You feel their sadness add to your own sadness. And it stinks, you can still smell the rotting bodies and the feces.” The slaves had all been locked away in one dark room. There was one window at the very top.

“A small, small window” he said. We nodded simultaneously. We had seen the window.

The slaves would use the washroom in this room, fight for the small morsels of food given to them in this room and die in that room. The dead bodies wouldn’t be collected for long periods of time. The urine, feces and dead bodies would be knee high for the slaves.

“That place is wicked,” he repeated.

He said when he had left his fourth day of training he had felt two things, pain and anger; pain for his ancestors and anger towards the people who did this to him.

“*Obroni foh”* (the white people) I stated and somewhat asked.

“And our people too,” he replied.

The tour guide at the Cape Coast Castle never mentioned that the people who captured the slaves that managed to escape were the people amongst them. The *Asantehene* (the king) and *Asantehemaa* (the queenmother) had made deals with the English. If their people, meaning those in their family not those they ruled over, were safe then they would always return runaway slaves and provide slaves to them as well. To protect themselves the royals would turn their own people in. They would help support the slave trade that lasted for hundreds of years.

*“Eh! Hema foh, weh wicked, pah*!” (The royals are very wicked!) He exclaimed.

“Who’s idea was that?” My brother asked.

“They said that Kumawu *Asantehene* brought the idea to the other *ohene’s* (kings- less formal version) and *ohemaa’s* (queenmothers- less formal version).

“Kumawu is four hours away from here, why would they be concerned?” I asked. “

*“Eh!* Four hours is nothing, people still went missing from there. When it started happening that is when *Ohene* did something about it to protect his family. These royals, they didn’t do enough to protect their people. They protect themselves first, even today.”

My brother had a straight face and didn’t ask any more questions. Neither of us was ready to know more. I looked in the direction of the door and eventually ventured outside. Our mother’s family was from Kumawu, her sister was currently the *Asantehemaa*. That side of our family had been Asantehene and Asantehemaa for hundreds of years. Which meant one of my ancestors helped encourage that treaty. We had once thought that there was a possibility one of our ancestors had unfortunately been taken as a slave when we learned that there were slave castles in Ghana. But we never thought that one of our ancestors were the reason that many were taken as slaves. This realization dramatically altered the perception my brother and I had of our ancestors and their involvement of the slave trade that affected millions of people.

Being in those castles brought tears to my eyes and many of those around me. The pain that you feel for those people is unbearable. Many of us can barely handle having a bad day. These people had bad lives. These castles marked the beginning of their journey. They were abused here and if they survived they faced a much worse fate across the ocean—if they survived that. Being an outsider looking in was hard enough. How could someone have it in his or her heart to be apart of this. These small towns were strong communities. But they turned their backs on each other. I was disappointed in my people. That trip really gave me a sense of belonging within the Ghanaian community once I had started to appreciate the nature of it. I became apart of the community only to quickly become disappointed with it as well. I learned that you could not take the good without excepting the bad. I had to accept the beauty of it and the history that allowed that beauty to form.   
 My brother came out of the shop with his hair freshly done. He looked at me and said, “What would you have done?”