

-1-

## The Kids And The Big Issues

### *Freedom*

They are singing in the back seat of the car as we drive through Marshall Ave. Nobody choruses like them. A spectacle of tunes stifled and sifted through a sieve of yells, screams, and clatter the Oxford English Dictionary will not bother to confer with. But I may need to find out what this release is about far away from the seashore of confederate categories of legitimate enjoyment.

Behind the wheels I picture uvula, epiglottis, pharynx, larynx, tongues, and tunes spilled out and piling up on the car's carpet. They are dancing too; against their cumbersome belts. The windows are down. They slide forte falsetto from *Treat You Better* to *Uptown Funk* and whatever else the radio in the car is giving away freely, freely.

The kids are raw. They jangle in their seats like damp leaves mounted on the back of angry clouds *who just got poked at. And the car goes in staccato. And I am now an expired audience whose taste can't be trusted anymore.* Towards the outside they swerve, throw their organs away. Other drivers and passersby must not miss the flow. And the kids explode, shrill, and sing as loudly

as they can with *Diamonds* or *Just Give Me a Reason*, like they weren't asking anyone's permission to charge freedom.

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What else do I need? There are no reasons not to stifle bubbles freedom in the open air like water you sprinkle out in brilliant streaks you assume won't come back to you. No one has yet declared ownership of the open air. But too much happiness leads the lamb to the butchery. I will have to refrain their energy. I restrain my enjoyment. The gentleman crossing the street right before us has his fingers suddenly clutched in a fist. Just last week a driver pulled the trigger on another driver driving before him. The other driver was driving too slowly, too happily too, I suppose. Children screaming, shouting, singing, and feeling what they feel are no good signs. I pull up all the car windows, ask the kids to calm down. They scream, they shout they sing we live in a free country! And Before, I realize Spangled Banner has become Strangled Banner.

I calm myself down. The new era is on parade, unflinching; and the old, so unintimidated. Truth is, freedom is the saccharine you receive on your tongue in small sifting doses. Definitely not the appropriate moment for an allied definition of bondage in the Youwès, I mean freedom, well, forget it. *Cheap Thrills*.

### *Ramsey vs TCA*

It will be TCA. My daughter wishes for Ramsey. In the small of her back like a permanent ghost, the schoolmaster with basic training in population control. Her friends from her elementary school will start middle school at Ramsey. A few friends of mine, African born and raised, advise for TCA. One never thought of keeping a record of things the way one counts the dead as if moved by survivor's guilt. But you

notice Erica Garner departing a few years after Eric Garner; a five-year-old boy staggering when he sees the police or buying Nerf and darts and guns with each Target gift card; he dreams of being a policeman and this isn't enough to put him on the side of the survivors. His second-grade reading level will advise the government on new measures against felons, pardon, black cons. You slowly begin to contemplate what you ought not to see in the cycle of things unfailingly repeating themselves. I am being a bit historical, here.

With some of that in the small of my back, I show up one morning for a surprised visit to Ramsey. The building is silent, heavily secured, and the staff friendly, wanting, and waiting. They have time for an unannounced visitor, no kidding. I do not mean to keep track of things. Besides, in the entanglement of who does what to whom, I may as well be the object upon which calculations and tracks are tallied. Survivors are not inclined to see themselves tallied upon. And guilt sometimes is oblivion, sometimes judgement, and other times, innocence. I exchange emails and phone numbers with one of the state counselors. The kinds who are trained to instruct me on how my people group is good at nursing, at carpentering, and taxi-driving if they are lucky enough to avoid the prison ceiling. The point is that I do not keep score. Inseparable from that terror, you wait for the name of the next pupil to align with the Garners. You also notice that surviving is slowly dying with a bit of hysteria inside.

The state counselor and I will talk over the phone to set up an appointment. In my agenda we will talk about how a good school is not good for all its children. The school counselor is a black woman. I will tell her black to black and woman to woman you can't fool me, tell me the truth. I will talk about differential expectations, flawed preconceptions, misbehaved status quo, and made-up minorities. A song the state counselor already knows. We will sit face to face. I will empty my gut and continue telling her things she knows, like the story of another state agent who told one of her pupils they should not dream

too high. This is not even the problem. The state counselor knows the real problem the way I know of a school mistress in another establishment who told a minority student they are not fit for colleges and universities. The state counselor I am meeting with will say, we are different, we are better, I will agree. And I will continue telling her things she already knows and talking and not listening. I am already defeated, distorted, and in the wrong. I bet she calls her pupils who are of my daughter's tribe, minorities. But this, I won't tell her, that no survivor is a minority, their number are too expansive see what I mean? I have a suspicion: the school counselor is a survivor.

I am leaving the facility. The camp is clean, the staff safely unguarded, the high torture chamber, dramatic. And you enhance the solemnity of the moment by marching with your two footed body on the ground and holding your shoulders up high, like the steadfast soldier with a rested prisoner inside. I find my way in between large walls made up of steel and bricks, in between high doors with small windows at the top and from which students are to be observed. I feel highly secure. The state counselor owes allegiance to Ramsey no matter how much she already knows. She will not throw in the towel for a pretentious stranger who seems to have been to the prison system herself and have survived it with guilt, blame, and oblivion, but not with innocence.

I leave the Bastille for good. At home I throw at my daughter, that I am deliberating upon it. Ramsey vs TCA. I will not call the state counselor. I will not sit with her to be told things I already know. I will not tell her about things she already knows. Between the two of us, I can only imagine all the noise and the imagined communities putting to sleep so many things to account for, like the school counselor in derangement with the state. Anyway, TCA, this is it. And I still don't know in what way this inclination makes things any better for my daughter.

*Fast but slow*

They cross the street fast. Go to the grocery store fast.

They crunch fast the potato chips they cart fast from the grocery store. They run a walk. They work their reading compositions fast and have a blast over the words and the sentences they fast. They race the rain, walk home swift and fast, and take the stairs fast to fall asleep steadfast in their wet clothes drying fast. They swab the living room fast, wash the dishes fast, and swallow fast in half-clean plates their meals and their left-over crap. They hop in the car fast, buckle up fast, and ask very fast about the fastest race I've ever fastened. And in between your teeth you connect very fast: a McDonald Big mac + Beware bipeds and pets at play + An elected president who reads as slow as molasses. They talk and dance and write and move like winds rolling and breaking things swift and tight. They say I am slow I drive slow I read slow I talk slow. The only thing I am fast at is eating and drinking they say of the way I eat fast while standing and running and fasting. They are right that I would also miss the click in the photo shoot that goes too fast, then too slow. I am a slow walker, a slow thinker, a slow learner, and enjoy being just that, a sloth. I wonder now very fast where I had gotten the idea that slowness is the proper way to go. And doing it all over again in slow motion, I would fast the line about the commander-in-chief who is, now that you think of all the preceding, believably slow.

### *On 8 hours*

I have never given serious thought about my children or myself having ADHD or Asperger's syndrome or other expected accepted orderings. In the Youwès, some bodies are normal, others are reordered unproductive. A normal body stands up for 8 hours or more each day to produce goods, then go home in the evening to drive their family to the shopping mall where they pay for the TV or the latest pillow or the new electronic gadgets, the gods, the goods they have assembled and put into packages days or weeks or months before. After the trip to the shopping mall, the normal body is summoned,