

Sunny rushed around a chilled kitchen smothered in a cheap plastic multi-layered apartment complex frozen over from top to bottom. A kingdom, floating on the icy tundra of the Pacific snow desert. Tiny Hart sat by the dining table adjacent to the stove tapping his electronic pencil against a blank iPad screen.

“Sunny, what’s global warming?” Hart inquired of his older brother.

“What’s this for? History?”

“Yep, Ms. Baker wants an essay about the global warming crisis.” Sunny scoffed at Hart’s response and grinned as he minced what little artificial meat he bought.

“‘Global warming’ doesn’t apply to current events at all. Maybe it did 60 years ago, but right now the earth is anything but warm. ” Sunny’s grin fell off his face as he counted the frozen tofu in the fridge then flashed a glance in his wallet, clicking his tongue.

“You okay Sunny?” Hart asked, “Did King Ferg take the bills again?” Referencing a saying their grandfather used to say whenever the king over-taxes.

“He better be funding something other than law enforcement.”

“Y’think he’ll do that?” Hart wholeheartedly wondered. Sunny felt a little guilty, and there was nothing but silence, save the roomba bouncing back and forth through the apartment. As much as he tried to keep up with current events, he could never bring himself to sit down for more than an hour in front of the HyperVision screen. His mind reels back the film of names on a HyperVision screen, tiny, minuscule, insignificant dust in windy weather. So distant and far away from the leftovers of tragedy. Of course, in Sunny’s mind, he only really hears about the royal family. Sunny’s body is shocked back into reality as the scraps of food sizzle cozy in the pan.

“Your food’s done, Hart,” Sunny shot a false smile, “now you won’t have to fight at school anymore.” Hart rolled his eyes. Hart and Sunny shimmied their way into their mom’s car.

After finishing her make-up their mom pressed her thumb on the ignition panel and the car came to life. With a shaky jumpstart, the car lifted off the ground and hovered out of the parking lot.

“How’re you feeling today Momma?” softly arose from Hart’s side of the backseat.

“Momma’s doing just fine,” She responded flatly, sighing, “make sure to be careful today and make sure two stick together.” Looking back, she gleamed and sent an assuring air kiss to the boys before going back to tensely gripping the faux-leather steering wheel.

“Y’know we always do that Mom,” Sunny assured, “why are you saying this now?”

“Things aren’t getting any better for us, I wouldn’t know what to do with myself if anything happened y’know?” She sighed woefully, dropping a hint of shame that Hart saw but didn’t ask out of respect. Hart glanced out the window to notice unfamiliar houses and strange new streets. The faces of the houses were relaxed and more spacious. Compared to the amalgamation of apartments in Downtown States, the houses were courteous enough to move away from each other. Snow sat on top of the solid ice between each plastic-laid house. A warm glow emanated from the houses, friendly and inviting. Hart fantasized about warm nights with a loving family.

“Mom, where are we going? This isn’t the way we take to go to school.” Sunny stared outside with a look of disgust and apprehension. Mom choked back a waterfall. Something inside her was sold off and given into a despotic force that made her confess.

“You’re not going to school today, someone called to see you guys. They said everything will be explained once we meet them.” The houses continued to spread out, getting bigger and bigger as Mom continued to talk. The car halted at the slick front yard of a palace stretching two whole blocks. A well-dressed man waltzed outside with two hulking bodyguards, once close enough the King of New America peered in and reluctantly waved his hands at the car. Sunny

studied his wool-woven and authentic leather coat with a repulsed eye. The king locked eyes with Sunny, challenging his blazing stare while talking to his men. A brief pause occurred and the King broke his stare to glance at Hart, gawking at his lavish coat which beautifully contrasted with the white snow laid ground. King spat into the snow under the car and twirled around muttering something unintelligible to his guards. The guards opened Sunny's door and gestured to the front of the palace. Sunny cautiously hopped down and Hart instinctively followed but the guard slammed the door on him.

"Hey!" snapped Sunny, "Who do you think you are? That's my brother, he comes with me!" lashed Sunny. The man opened the door, Sunny glared aggressively as Hart sheepishly hopped down, silently apologized, and entered the palace with Sunny.

"Don't touch anything, you're nasty. You and your..." The king paused, pointing around Hart, snow-clad and boney.

"Brother, he's my brother. And is no one going to tell me what we're doing here?"

"Your brother's not supposed to be here but you are." King turned away from them, fiddling with a code at the end of an enclosed vestibule just off the front door. A satisfying beep triggered warm steam to blast from vents in the ceilings. The warm feeling tickled the icy coating off Sunny's slick parka and dampened the top of the red hoodie laying underneath that. Hart's patterned, knitted hat was moist from the melted snow. Hart lovingly flicked off some water droplets from the pom-pom of his hat and started gleefully fiddling with it. Tracing stars and hearts aimlessly while his stomach gurgled in its usual manner.

The door opened to introduce a warmly colored interior with a living room area stretching across an open room plan with furniture circling a fireplace. Something Sunny thought was extinct but soon came to understand that it was just a projection of fire, to make it more

homely for the old people, said his highness. Fruits, whether plastic or authentic, are laid on a dining table. The king twirled his big body facing the weak boys.

“Let’s cut to the chase,” King exhaled, “you, dear boy, are the next in line to become King. Don’t ask why. It’s a bunch of legal nonsense created by my great-grandfather. You are my blood, you are of legal right to inherit our royal lineage.” Sunny reeled back, stunned by this shocking revelation that was dropped on him. As Sunny opened his mouth King interrupted with a zipping motion with his hands, “We feast tonight to celebrate. And yes, you can bring that thing with you.” left without another word. Shocked, and offended, they were dragged away to a hauntingly luxurious room. This room stood surprisingly tall with a window to a white room overseeing a green mass with brown occasionally protruding from the bottoms. Fruits of different colors hung and sat relaxed in the green beds that Sunny nor Hart have ever seen before.

“H. Is that grass?” excited, Hart ran to the glass and pressed his face against it.

“Just like in the Ebooks! Sunny, Take a picture for Momma!” pled Hart.

“Might as well, it’s only good for pictures.” Sunny handed his dinky I-phone 13 to Hart. Hart excitedly snapped pictures, only for the door to burst open with King in the doorway with a dull expression and more casual clothes.

“Let’s go for a tour,” He looked at Hart, bent down, “you’re not invited. King’s orders.” Hart nodded, understanding that it anger Sunny if he looked hurt. Sunny left and Hart sat for a boring sixty minutes. Beginning to worry after the two-hour mark Hart left the room and wandered looking for his loving brother.

Entering a hallway of closed doors, Hart sneaked around to find a lit door slightly ajar on the ground floor. Squealing caught Hart’s ears, Hart rushed to open the door to see if Sunny was

inside. Whining rolled over a bin of animal food. A smiley face carved on its body bled a bit and another nonchalantly licked the blood as it leaked out. He compared the mental images of some cartoons he saw to the brownish, rotund family of things with yellow price tags wrapped through the ears. More animals clucked, moo'd and baa'd. A crowd of bloody smiley faces stared back at Hart. Abruptly, hands gripped his mouth and Hart screamed and flailed around.

Sunny strolled with the King upstairs, browsing the posh clothing and art that meant little to nothing to Sunny. A thud cut off King's ranting and he rolled his eyes.

"What was that?" Sunny jumped at the possibility of the worst. The thud sounded metallic and heavy.

"Nothing," King quickly remarked, searching for something to say. "I'll be moving you away from your brother."

"What? Why?" Sunny crossed his arms, his feet tapped while King curtly explained.

"We have the press, you know?" He blankly stared at King, feet tapping against the matte plastic floors so hard it could burn a hole straight to the bottom floor of the palace.

The aforementioned feast lay spread out on the table. Strange aromas that he never knew danced around the miles and miles of empty seats in the dining hall. Ghostly quiet and ghostly empty, the dining room clattered with only the busybodies of two people, King and Sunny. He pushed his food around wishing for his brother or his mother to enjoy this new taste with him. *Being king sounds like a worthwhile opportunity*, Sunny pondered the wishes he could grant. Sunny distastefully pushed his food away, feeling his mom's hunger. King peered at blinking eyes that thousands see through, fixated on his ceremonial dinner with the commoner. A letter on top of the dining table smoothly skated over to Sunny. Reading the letter his hands shook, and the house dropped dead cold if only for a second.

“I don’t want to be King.” Sunny layed down what was in his hands and stood up from his chair. “Take me home! I want to go home!”

“Oh Sunny, I know it’s a lot to take in but let’s go for a walk.” King led Sunny away through a metal door and locked it behind him. Beasts wildly kicked and bleated fearfully.

“Give me him back.” Strong yet helplessly Sunny stood. Cross and wild, what Sunny thought were animals pushed against crowded cages.

King gripped Sunny’s collar, “Everything you know will fall before your pitifully poor eyes.” Restlessly the animals grew, and Sunny shoved the king off of him.

They reached and clamped rotting teeth against thick and royal clothing that got dragged into filthy pens teeming with chaotic bucking animals that landed hefty blows. Hooves trampled in a frenzy that no one could stop without hurting themselves, not that any tried. Every sound reverberated in the private metal room. Sunny’s nostrils flared at the ever-rising smell of blood mixing with the feces of unkempt animals. The screams fell silent and something inside Sunny changed, a crown fell on the shoulders that holds a head that knows too much, heavy and burdening. His stomach still remains hungry but the people he knew before will stay full as long as he stands.