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Three Little Snakes

It's all my fault. His pearly white eyes rolled back into his head. His motionless and drooling mouth gaped open. His limp body lay on the ground surrounded by an ever growing pool of thin blood. It's all my fault. The tour guides panic and scream and dump water on his hot face. The bustling crowd of culture-shocked tourists gasp and hold each other back. But all I can think is that it's all my fault. My Dad is going to die and it's all my fault.

About two hours prior, my Dad and I had never been more full of life. For our cruise ship had just ported in Spanish Town, Jamaica. Shortly after, we had ecstatically boarded a hole-in-the-wall school bus with our flip flop wearing, dread lock bearing tour guide as we prepared to ride up the Jamaican countryside. Every inch of the interior of the bus was covered in Bob Marley posters. It shook like a jungle gym as we walked through the narrow aisle to find a seat. Sitting in the driver's seat was a man who looked no younger than 200 years old. His left eye had a cataract as big as a dinner plate and I couldn't help but wonder how this man who couldn't possibly see got a job as a bus driver. Whatever. This is Jamaica. Outside, birds chirped and insects buzzed and tourists were escorted onto various golf carts and segway tours. Fully removed from the first world luxuries of air-conditioning and seatbelts, I noticed our fellow tourists beginning to whisper in disgust to each other, hiding shamelessly behind their Gucci visors and Michael Kors fanny packs. But my Dad had raised me as a global citizen. As

an ally of the impoverished. As a friend of the voiceless. As a lover of people and places and languages and culture and most importantly, as a lover of music. And as we sat down on the torn up leather seats that scraped up our legs in ways that Michigan mosquitoes could only dream of, I looked my Dad in the eyes and realized how much I loved him and much I appreciated his unapologetic desire to give me the best childhood I could ever have. And with that, the bus started to roll forward atop the unpaved and dusty road.

The violent Jamaican sun pierced through my porous skin like a hot knife while the smell of saltwater playfully stung the inner walls of my nostrils. Sweat dripped down my face as the rickety bus bumped along the dirt road. And then the tour guide spoke.

“Okay errybody, how we all doin’ today, ah? Who’s ready to go to Bob Marley’s childhood home, ah?”

‘This is it. It’s really happening,’ I thought to myself.

My Dad and I were only a bus ride away from stepping foot in the childhood home of one of the greatest musicians, songwriters, activists, and human beings of all time; Bob Marley. The tour guide introduced himself as ‘Rusty’ and instantly began to shout out random trivia facts about Jamaica and reggae and Bob Marley as he would continue to do for the next two hours, much to the dismay of our fellow tourists but much to the delight of my eager-to-learn Dad and I.

“Who ‘ere knows what country had electricity first? Jamaica or da United States?”

Not surprisingly, it was Jamaica. And as Rusty babbled on endlessly, we climbed steadily up the long road that wound through a seemingly endless rainforest. Long branches scraped against the trees of the bus like fingernails on a chalkboard.

As we continued through the bush, my Dad turned to me with the widest smile I'd ever seen stretch across his face and said, "Are you excited, Adam?"

"Yeah, I am," I replied.

In that moment, I had failed to recognize that for him, this was not just about going to see Bob Marley's childhood home. It was about making an insanely cool memory with his son that would undoubtedly remain in the forefront of his mind for the rest of his life. My Dad looked at me in a way I had never seen before. He smiled widely and elegantly, his eyes sparkled like polished marbles, and he wrapped his muscular arm around my thin shoulders as if to say, 'It's you and me son, you and me.'

Meanwhile, the bus rolled on. We were now hundreds of feet above sea level. The steep dirt road opened up into a dusty and flat plateau as we had moved on from the thicket of the rainforest into a much more inhabited and developed area. But not developed in how we think of the word. There were no McMansions and Mustangs here. As we were now miles away from the touristy ports, I had a cold and hard look at the naked truth of Jamaica. Poverty, hunger, and the heat that suddenly seemed 10 times hotter. Dozens and dozens of shacks made of metal plates crowded on top of each other. Small dark figures poured out of the cracks in between the houses and ran up to the bus. They yelled playfully and pointed and waved. A tall brown cow the size of a small building, much bigger than any cow I had ever seen before, stood idly by. It

wagged its tail and chomped mindlessly on some dead grass. Its ribs showed through its stomach like fingers on the inside of a t-shirt yet Rusty bragged that Jamaica has the biggest cows in the world. Whatever. This is Jamaica.

About an hour later, I looked out my window and saw a red and yellow painted sign that read, 'Welcome to nine mile, the home of BOB MARLEY LEGEND.' I frantically turned to my Dad with eyes as big as silver dollars and said, "Dad, we're here."

The bus took a sharp left turn and jolted to a halt in front of a white house that instantly gave off an aura that can only be described as holy. We had made it. We were at Bob Marley's house.

Rusty escorted us out of the bus as our feet carefully balanced upon the uneasy and dusty soil.

"C'mon errerybody, dis way, dis way," he said.

I looked up and was instantly possessed by the realization that I was in the presence of where a legend was born. Where dreams were not only made, but realized. In the midst of poverty and oppression this young man had blossomed into becoming a symbol for hope and happiness and love. I took it all in, every imperfection of the pearly white, cobblestone shack of a house. But I had yet to advance 10 yards before I was approached by a large man with dreadlocks down to his ankles, holding open a briefcase.

He said, "Aye mon, you wanna smoke dis spliff?"

My Dad looked onwards hesitantly. I looked at him. I looked at the joint. Back at him. Back at the joint. My Dad bit his nails nervously and shook his head in

disappointment as I reached for my wallet. Before I knew it, I was puffing away on a joint as thick as a hot dog. But what could I say? Whatever. This is Jamaica.

And as I puffed away, my Dad looked onwards with a look of confused disappointment. For some sick reason, my only reaction to his undeniable disappointment was to hand him the joint and say, "C'mon man, we're at Bob Marley's house! Live a little."

And with that my Dad, shaking his head and looking at me in shame took the joint out of my hand, smoked it, and coughed up a storm. We had made our way up to the patio of the house. I could feel the heat of the sun-baked cobblestone floor cut through my sandals like a hot knife. The tour guide spat out information about Bob Marley, his family, and the small town in which they grew up like he was an auctioneer. Talking faster and faster through his thick accent as the sun beat down on our tired, fragile, and touristy heads. I was starting to feel the high create tingles underneath my skin. My head felt heavy and my throat ached for water. Then I felt a tap on my shoulder. And I turned around to see my Dad, at least that's who it looked like on the surface, nod back and forth and stumble towards me as if he was piss drunk. My first reaction was to laugh and sarcastically say, "Dad you feeling alright?"

He shook his head slowly. No. But it hadn't occurred to me that my dad sometimes has an iron deficiency in his blood. We hadn't eaten or drank anything since we left the restaurant 2 hours earlier. It was at least 90 degrees and we were over a mile above sea level. Oh yeah, and he hadn't smoked weed in over 20 years. A perfect

storm. But I was too absorbed in my immature lust for memory making to realize any of this. The love for my father and my moral compass were thrown out the window without second thought as he continued to mumble a frantic array of words towards me. "I.. I don't like this," he said. "Ohhh... why did I do that. I don't like this," he exclaimed as he leaned against the railing of the patio.

Our tour group had progressed 10 yards. 15. 20. 25 yards in front of us as my Dad leaned against the railing with his hands pressing into his head as his eyes squinted and his jaw clenched in pain. All of a sudden his eyes rolled back in his head. The whites of his eyes looked at me as if to tell me this was my fault. And his feet stumbled backwards uncontrollably. I frantically realized that something was wrong and I reached to catch him as his body tumbled downwards. But he slipped through my arms. And then the most horrible noise I had ever heard occurred. For my nearly 6 foot tall Dad had passed out before he fell, and his arms were unable to break his fall. His skull smacked against the concrete in a loud thud like a glass being slammed on a table. His head bounced up as his neck bounced around helplessly. The tour group behind us gasped in shock. Rusty and the other tour guides frantically called for water and an ambulance as they struggled to have the group keep their distance. My Dad's eyes were still white and barely hung open. And the highest degree of fear and paranoia instantly overcame me. Between the frantic breaths of anxiety, all I could think to myself was this. My Dad is going to die. My Dad is going to die and it's my fault. But whatever. This is Jamaica.