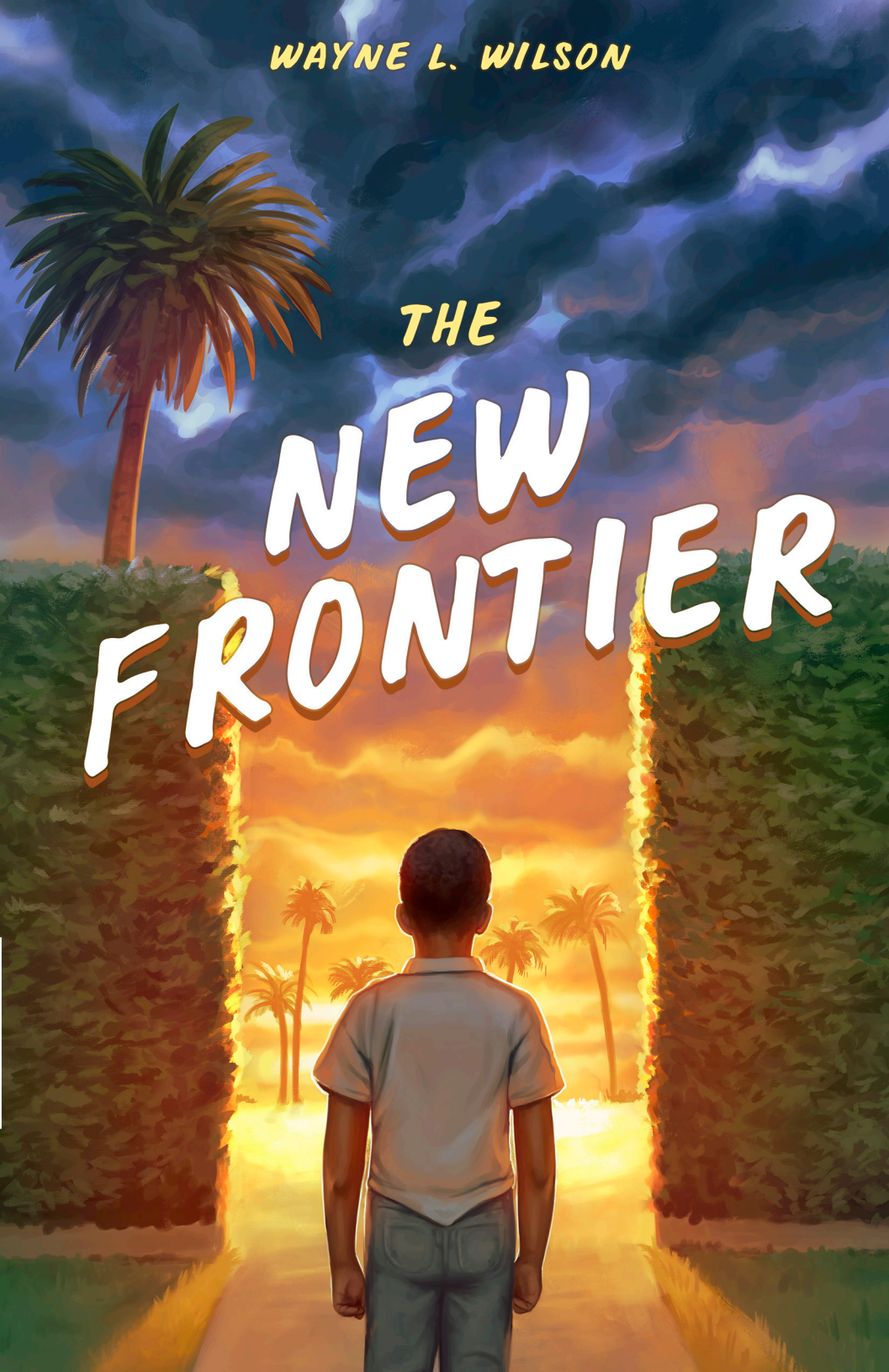


WAYNE L. WILSON

THE
NEW
FRONTIER



THE
**NEW
FRONTIER**

A Novel

by

Wayne L. Wilson



ISBN: 9781951122874 (paperback) / 9781951122881 (ebook)

LCCN: 2024933275

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Content Warning: This book contains descriptions of corporal punishment of minors (spanking and verbal abuse), attempted kidnapping, and racism that may be disturbing to some readers.

Publisher's Note

Content Warning: *Racial Slurs*

This novel takes place in 1961 and involves a Black family moving to an all-White neighborhood in Los Angeles. As such, the characters experience racism and bigotry, much of it involving racial slurs against the Black characters. Scenes also exist that involve Black characters using racial slurs with other Black characters in other context and settings. We have chosen to keep these words within the context of the story as the author wrote them because they are integral to the narrative as well as to the history and time when this story is set. The real impact that these words have on the characters is important to how the story is told and to remove the words, or to sanitize them, would lessen the impact that the author intended. However, that does not mean that either the publisher or the author condones the use of racial slurs, stereotypes, or bigotry either historically or today. While we have chosen to keep these words in the context of the story this does not make it appropriate for these words to be used or spoken outside of this setting and story. Such insensitive language was not appropriate to use at the time this book is set and is not appropriate to use during our present time.

We encourage you to talk with your parents, family members, teachers, clergy, a trusted adult, or your friends about how racial slurs and language were used in the past, how they are used today, and how we can stop using them while acknowledging how their use in the past has shaped the world we live in today.

The Bogeyman: A monstrous imaginary figure used in threatening children; a terrifying or dreaded person or thing.

Webster's Dictionary

Prologue

I became a pioneer at the age of 12. But instead of a covered wagon we traveled to the “New Frontier” in a blue Buick.

Kids posted on the walls and even on rooftops like pigeons, gawking as if we had stepped out of a spaceship instead of an automobile. White faces peered through cracked open front doors, parted curtains, over back fences, and even from behind newly posted “For Sale” signs. A few curious people trod onto their porches. The bolder ones stood on their lawns, arms crossed like they were cemented, and whispered from the corner of their mouths.

For the very first time my dark skin felt uncomfortable on my body.

Hadn’t they ever seen Negroes before?

I already hated living there. I wanted to go back home, hang out on our old street, and play tag with my friends. But that was not to be. I had a new home now.

Maybe, if just one person had smiled, I may have been all right...

But instead, I got sucker punched.

I had no idea I’d left the warmth of my old neighborhood for one that was wrapped around me like an icy blanket.

On a hot and sweaty summer day in 1961, my life dramatically changed. I never imagined that moving to another neighborhood would make me struggle to prove

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to others and to myself that I was just a normal kid like anybody else.

Chapter 1

The first move took place in the spring of 1949. My father and very pregnant mother packed their belongings and popped a bus wheelie out of the small town of Langston, Oklahoma to reap the golden harvest of opportunities Los Angeles, California proclaimed.

I was born months later on June 5, nothing special, except on that same day, six years later, the place of my birth, James Monroe Hospital, burned to the ground in a spectacular fire!

My mother saw it as a sign from God that I was destined for greatness. My father said he read in the newspaper the hospital fire was the result of arson. Daddy joked I was more of a “gift than gifted.” He hadn’t finished paying the last of my hospital bills, and the fire destroyed all the records. Mommy argued that the cause of the event had absolutely nothing to do with its significance.

Daddy remarked, “I don’t know, Jolene... Seems to me as much trouble as this boy gets into, he might be more of a devil than a saint!”

He laughed hard.

Not my mother.

“Grant, that’s not funny.”

“What?” he asked, his laughter dying quickly.

“After all we’ve been through?” she huffed.

“Oh now, honey, c’mon, it was just a joke. Calm down.”

“Don’t you tell me to calm down, Grant Cole! Don’t you

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realize how blessed we are to even have a child?”

Her eyes, filling with tears, shifted to mine. She got quiet and abruptly left the living room. Seconds later the bedroom door slammed.

“Aw c’mon, Jo, you know I’m only kidding,” Daddy muttered to the vibrating walls.

“Kidding about what, Daddy?”

He playfully cuffed me upside the head and cushioned me in his arms.

“Champ, if you’re such a genius, why do you ask so many questions?”

I really don’t think he expected an answer. He held me so tightly to his chest I could barely breathe, let alone talk.

Yeah, it’s true... I drove my parents nuts with questions. Couldn’t help it. To me the world was one gigantic playground bustling with enchantment, mystery, adventure, and monsters... but I’ll talk more about that later.

I just graduated from Perry Avenue Elementary School and will be in sixth grade in the fall. I was excited about it, but I wondered if I’d have as much fun as I did in elementary. Those were the days of the great lunch pail wars—boys against girls, Barbie and Minnie Mouse versus Gumby and Mighty Mouse.

We’d square off during lunch, the girls on one side and the boys on the other, armed and ready for combat with our trusty metal lunch pails. Someone would blow a whistle and you’d hear: “Charge!” Next thing, we’re bonking our opponents with lunch pails. Sometimes it got downright medieval as we fenced and thrust pails at each other. I witnessed some hardcore injuries from those fights—scraped knees, knots, and bruises to the head. I don’t really like to admit it, but to be honest, the girls won most of those battles.

We lived in a cottage on 43rd and Perry Avenue, just below Leona Blvd in South Central Los Angeles. The cot-

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tage hid behind a two-story house where our landlords, Mr. and Mrs. Evans lived. Besides collecting money, they never seemed like landlords. They treated us like family. Mr. Evans worked as a porter at Union Station for over 20 years. He was rarely home, but when he was, he and Daddy would sit on the Evans' front porch, watching people and cars, playing checkers, talking politics and business, and drinking beers. My father still claims no one taught him more about being tight with a buck than Lavay Evans.

To find us you had to cut around the front house and hike down a narrow pathway to the back. We shared a tiny, squared area of grass in the rear with the Evans. Our front yard was the Evans' backyard.

I slept in my parents' bedroom in a little bed until I was five. Then they switched me to a space called a foyer which was near the front door. I don't think it exactly thrilled them for me to sleep in their bedroom, but it suited me just fine. Especially since there was a strange and deadly creature running around loose in the city known as the bogeyman. I heard this beast snatched children during the night and whisked them away to some haunt where they were never heard from again.

The rumor was this monster could slip through a window and be found in your closet or lurking underneath your bed. The best way to prevent it from attacking was to keep a light on in the bedroom. The bogeyman hates light as much as a vampire hates the dawn. I'm a little better now, but when I was younger, I reminded my parents of that fact every time they tucked me in. But, they'd forget, until I'd wake up in the middle of the night, in darkness, and screaming like a banshee.

My father tried his best to convince me that the bogeyman was just a myth, but he was wrong. Every kid knows the bogeyman does not kidnap adults. My suspicion was the creature didn't find them very appetizing.

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I knew all this because my best friends in grade school, Jamelle and Terelle Johnson told me so. They were identical twins and experts on monsters. Jamelle was the oldest by two minutes. He had a tiny scar on his forehead and bragged it came from fighting pirates. Terelle told me different. He said Jamelle got it from tripping over a phone cord and banging into the dining room table.

The twins say they saw the bogeyman one night hunched on a tree branch glowering down at them. Jamelle thought at first it was a cat, but Terelle swore the bogeyman changed from a hideous monstrosity into one.

Who could argue with that? Especially when a man could turn into a werewolf at the mere sight of a full moon.

That's why I constantly checked under the bed with my flashlight. Usually I waited until my father joined me. You see, Daddy wasn't afraid of anything. And, he was big enough to lift the whole house if he wanted to.

My greater concern was for my mother's safety; although, I found out she could swing a pretty mean broom.

One day while lying on my bed and flipping through a comic book, I heard crunching sounds under the bed where I stored my stash of potato chips, cookies, and candy.

Was it the bogeyman?

The noise stopped as soon as I climbed off the bed. I hesitantly lifted the covers and peeped under the bed. Pairs of beady red eyes stared back at me!

"Moouoommmmm!!!"

She swooped into the room faster than a hawk.

"What in the world is wrong, Samuel? I was outside hanging up the laundry until I heard you scream."

My finger shaking, I pointed to the bed.

My mother got down on her hands and knees and warily peered under the bed. Startled, she fell backwards, but in a single motion amazingly bounced back to her feet

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and raced into the kitchen. Instead of calling the police, or better yet, the army, she swiftly returned with a broom.

A broom? Are you serious?

The bogeyman picks his teeth with a broom! I figured she was in shock as she poked under the bed with it. I prayed that the bogeyman wouldn't pull the broom and my mother under the bed with him.

One blink later, mice scurried out from underneath the bed, fleeing in all directions. Screaming louder than Tarzan, my mother whomped the floor with the broom like she was beating a tom-tom. The rodents scampered back and forth seeking refuge. I tried to scoop several of them into a shoebox, until my mother shot me a warning glance, meaning cool it or you'll be the next victim of the killer broom. I wisely grabbed my bat and joined the fray.

We chased the pack outside the open backdoor. Panting victoriously, I combed the house for mice escapees with my upraised bat. That was fun!

Unfortunately, my exhausted mother didn't share my excitement. She immediately examined my arms and legs for bites. Satisfied I was okay, she warned me not to mess with mice or rats because the vermin were dirty and could give me rabies. Later, she went into the kitchen to finish washing dishes.

I surveyed the room once more to see if I could locate any more critters. Disappointed, I went into the kitchen to grab a snack. My mother didn't hear me come in. She sat on the kitchen chair with her back to me gazing sadly out the window. I eased back out the door, hoping my growling stomach wouldn't give me away. The peanut butter and jelly sandwich would have to wait.

That evening my mother and father had one of those muffled arguments behind the closed bedroom door. I couldn't hear everything they said, but it was the first time I overheard a conversation about moving.

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I'd turned 11 the month before one event in particular made me realize we'd be moving soon: Senator John F. Kennedy accepting the Democratic nomination for President on July 15, 1960, at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum:

"For I stand tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier. From the lands that stretch three thousand miles behind me, the pioneers of old gave up their safety, their comfort and sometimes their lives to build a new world here in the West... Their motto was not 'every man for himself'—but 'all for the common cause.' ...

We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier—the frontier of the 1960's—a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils—a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats...

Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past...

But I believe the times demand new invention, innovation, imagination, decision. I am asking each of you to be pioneers on that New Frontier."

My mother sat cross-legged in the middle of the living room floor, me on my knees, as we worked on a puzzle. The box cover design was a brontosaurus emerging from the water and chewing on palm leaves. My father sat stochically in his armchair, a newspaper spread across his lap, and one hand grasping a transistor radio he listened to through an earplug. His eyes were fixed on the television screen. Sometimes a hint of a smile crossed his lips.

I badly wanted to ask him who'd win a fight between a triceratops and a woolly mammoth but figured this might

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not be a good time.

Kennedy ended his speech, the crowd went ballistic, and my father catapulted from the chair like it was a trampoline. His deep bass rumbled: "Jolene, did you hear him? THIS is what I'm talking about!"

He stripped the plug from his ear and laid the radio on the table.

"We are a part of that New Frontier! It's a new day for Negroes and ain't NOBODY gonna hold us back! You're always talking about fate and destiny... Well, our destiny is to be right here in California. Wasn't no American dream for us back in Langston, that's for sure!"

He paced back and forth waving his newspaper, eyes dancing wildly. "Soon as escrow goes through, we're getting out of this rat trap!"

"What crow, Daddy?"

He burst into laughter. "Escrow is not a bird, Champ." He spelled the word for me. "It means we're waiting on the final approval for our new house. But it will go through. You just worry about what color you want your new bedroom to be painted!"

"I get my own bedroom?"

"That's right, sport! And, we're gonna have our own backyard, too!"

Okay, now I was into it.

"See his face, Jo? Tell me that boy isn't excited!"

He squatted and grabbed me in a headlock with those pork chop arms.

My mother continued searching through puzzle pieces for the missing tail.

"What about you, Jo? Aren't you excited, too?" The excitement in his voice dropped. He let me go. I socked him in the shoulder, cracking my knuckles.

"Uh, yes, Grant, I am," she remarked softly, with a weak smile.

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Daddy frowned.

"Oh no, here we go. Thought we already did this dance."

"We did, Grant... it's just..."

"It's just what, Jo? Baby, I know you're not gonna start crying the blues again about leaving this stinking out-house!"

"Call it what you want, but we've had some good times here, Grant. It has been our home... you know... ever since Samuel was born."

"Uh, huh... it's our home, but it ain't our house. We don't own it! That's why you work at the damn grocery store part-time and I work two, sometimes three jobs, so we can save up our pennies!"

"Grant, you don't need to curse in front of our son."

I didn't mind. I'd finally found a puzzle piece for the tail.

"You think I joined the army cuz I loved hanging out with Uncle Sam?!"

"We have an Uncle Sam? Was I named after him, Daddy?"

"No, son," my father sighed, "it's slang for the U.S. Government."

I didn't know what slang meant, but decided to ask another time.

"What I'm saying, Jo, is fortunately, I gained a few skills and saved up a little of that G.I. money. I don't know about you, but I don't plan on living in nobody's shack for the rest of my life like I'm some poor-ass tenant farmer!"

We're poor? I thought you had to be unhappy to be poor?

"Grant, I'm tired of living this way, too. I just wonder sometimes if we made the right decision... you know? Things are moving so fast."

"Not fast enough if you ask me. Jolene, I'm 30 years

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old and sick and tired of paying my dues—it's time!"

My mother quietly sifted through the puzzle pieces.

"Mom, what are you doing?"

"What do you mean?"

"You just put one of the tail pieces back in the pile."

"Oh, sorry."

"It's okay, Mom. I'll get it."

"Jolene, we may live in a toilet, but I'll be damned if I let us get flushed. That's why I gambled when we really didn't have the money and bought that new Buick. For me, that car represents our hopes and dreams for a brighter future!"

"Mommy, I found one of the pieces for the tail!" I declared.

My father rolled his eyes.

"Good, Samuel. Hush now, your father's talking."

"Yes, ma'am." I clicked the piece onto the growing puzzle.

"Jolene, you know a couple of schools gave me scholarships to play college basketball..."

My mother nodded and self-consciously pulled on her forefinger.

"But being the oldest, I had to drop out and get a job to help Mama with the bills and my brothers and sister. She couldn't do it alone. So I enlisted in the service for four years right after graduation to make more money. They offered Negroes some pretty good benefits. I don't want Samuel to go through the same crap I went through."

"I know, Grant, I know," she whispered, her voice quivering. She folded her arms protectively. "It's just... I get real nervous and scared sometimes. I know what to expect here. I don't know what's waiting for us over there."

The flames in his dark brown eyes went down as he scooted over to her.

"Honey, trust me. It may start out rough, but it's all

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gonna work out for us as a family. You, me, and Sam are going to enjoy living there. I promise.”

He kissed Mommy on the cheek and affectionately squeezed her. Finally, she worked up a smile, even though her eyes glistened.

“Honey, I’m as sentimental as you are about this matchbox. We’ve had good times here... especially after this water-headed boy came into our lives.”

He reached across and thumped me on the head.

“Uh, uh, Daddy, you’re the one with the water-head!”

I punched his rock-hard leg with my fist and tried to pretend it didn’t hurt.

“Yeah, this place was cool for a hot minute... but I’m ready to live in a *real* home. Listen, those Negroes ain’t sittin’ at lunch counters all over the South cuz the eating’s good! And the Congress of Racial Equality organized Freedom Rides integrated with Blacks and Whites to battle de-segregation. When those buses arrived in the Deep South, the riders were beaten savagely by White mobs. All these folks are making sacrifices so we can be free to equally live our own lives. Like Senator Kennedy said, we got to be pioneers, too! It’s a new frontier. You with me?”

She nodded before burying her head in his shoulder and holding his arm.

“Mom, I need help finding the rest of the pieces for the tail!” I shouted.

Chapter 2

It took a year before we finally moved. Apparently, something went wrong and the escrow didn't go through on the first house. My father was very upset. I heard him say angrily to my mother that even though he qualified and filled out all the paperwork correctly, it was something he had no control over. But those escrow people learned nothing stops my father from getting what he wants. Finally, the escrow went through on another house. Daddy was over the moon about it and said we were very lucky to get the house. So, we were scheduled to move in sometime in early June 1961, the same month I would turn 12. And once again he talked about us being pioneers.

I really didn't get all this pioneer talk. I mean, I'm sure being a pioneer might be kinda fun... especially if they let us trade in our Buick for a covered wagon like the one at Knott's Berry Farm. And then gave us a picnic basket loaded with their fried chicken, biscuits, and Boysenberry jam! Except Terelle and Jamelle said the stagecoach was better. It was cool when the bandits showed up to rob you.

I got tired of hearing about Senator John F. Kennedy running for president. My father was crazy about him. All he ever talked about was Kennedy this, Kennedy that, and how he's gonna change the country. Daddy cut out every article in a paper or magazine that showed Kennedy's name.

Even in Ike's Barbershop, Kennedy's name was con-

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stantly mentioned with my father leading the pack. Another presidential candidate named Richard Nixon sometimes popped up, but that was usually due to Ike. If you liked Kennedy, Ike LOVED Nixon. If you liked water, Ike LOVED air. Basically, Ike LOVED a good argument. You could talk about anything in his three-chair shop. It was a hangout where everyone could talk about whatever they wanted to. I didn't like getting a haircut, but I always enjoyed being in Ike's Barbershop. I loved hearing all the chatter, loud talking, laughter, and debates, even though I didn't always understand the conversation.

Ike had a sign up outside the door that read: "Ike's Place. The barbershop where we're always cuttin' it up! Come on in!" What I especially liked to stare at was the barber's pole outside the shop. The emblem reminded me of a giant ice cream cone with its red, white, and blue colors spinning underneath a huge white ball.

Inside, the shop was already filling up. As soon as we walked in you immediately got a strong whiff of hair tonics and talcum powder. Five men sitting on padded folding chairs lined up against the wall opposite the barber chairs. We found a spot to sit on a beat-up, faded red couch next to a woman who shook her head disgustedly while combing her son's hair. He restlessly squiggled in her lap.

Above her head was a large sepia-toned print containing photographs of men and boys' haircuts and hairstyles ranging from short cropped, to longer hair, to cuts with parted hair, to hair straightened with lye relaxer or "conked" (Daddy jokingly called conked hair "fried, dyed, and laid to the side"), to a pompadour style featured in a photograph of the wild musician Little Richard. Along the wall, Ike had photographs of celebrities and entertainers you could get your hair styled or cut like, such as Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Sammy Davis, Jr., Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, and Nat King Cole.

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“Junior, stop all that kicking and settle down so I can get these naps out your head. Then Ike won’t have to spend all his time combing through it.”

“Bessie, he messed up your boy’s hair that bad?” Ike questioned.

“Sure did, Ike,” the woman answered. “Next time, I’m waiting till you get back from vacation. He did a horrible job!”

“Sorry about that, Bessie. I’ll talk to Pharris when he comes in later... Probably came in that day all sleepy-eyed from staying up all night with that gal he’s been seeing lately. How about I give you half off today to make up for it?”

“Appreciate that, Ike.”

Ike pulled the chair cloth, which looked like a giant apron, off his customer and shook the hair off it. He quickly swept the hair off the floor as the customer got up and paid him. He then slapped the arm of the metal and leather barber chair with a towel and gestured for the next customer before saying to my father, “Okay... now, Mr. Grant Cole, I sho nuff am glad you’re here today, cuz I got a ton full of questions to ask you.”

“Whatcha wanna know, Ike?”

“All right... can you please tell me why any self-respecting Negro man, such as yourself, would ever want to move south of Century Boulevard?”

Ike’s domed head rose above his crown of salt and pepper hair. He wore thick squared glasses and a white barber’s shirt. He stood with his scissors and comb hovering over a man’s head, eyebrows raised, waiting for Daddy’s answer.

“Aw, Negro, get off the man’s back. He can live any damn place he wants too as long as he’s got the money! Count it, BB—that’s 20!”

Over in the corner near the entrance to the bathroom,

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Chester slammed the domino on the wiggly card table as BB jerked upright. There was a piece of paper underneath one of the table legs to keep it balanced. Overhead, there was a poster of the new movie: *A Raisin in the Sun* starring Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee. BB quickly covered his flipped dominoes with his hand.

“Now ain’t that some stuff!” Ike replied, smacking his gum louder. “Chester, you best keep focusing on those dominoes cuz you don’t know what the hell you talkin’ about. Lynwood is just a hop, skip, and jump away from where Grant’s moving. Not too long ago, my cousin almost got lynched there!”

“Lynched?” Chester peeked over the cupped dominoes in his hand.

“You heard me—lynched!” Ike snapped. “You think it’s any different here than Mississippi? The California sun and the Hollywood stars just hide the glare better! We got our own Klan—y’all remember them spook hunters?”

Chester slid a domino across the table into the zig-zag shape of the dominoes. “Yeah, I remember them bastards... On the back of their club jackets they had this cartoon darky with a noose around his neck. They all lived out there in South Gate, Bell, and Huntington Park. Used to attack any brotha crossing east of Alameda, like a crocodile waiting for somebody to step into the water.”

“Nigga, please... like they waited...” BB grumbled. He straightened out the dominoes. “Sometimes you didn’t have to be anywhere near their neighborhood. They’d hop in the car and drive west looking to beat some colored man’s ass! But that was back in the forties and fifties... They ain’t around no more.”

“Tell it to my cousin!” Ike barked, chewing his gum more rapidly. “They may have new names and faces, but the hate ain’t changed one bit.”

“Yes Lawd!” Chester agreed, intently studying the

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dominoes in his hand. His feet tapped to Howling Wolf singing "Back Door Man." Wolf's gravelly voice and bluesy guitar blasted from a radio that sat on a table loaded with magazines and newspapers such as the *L.A. Times*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *Time*, *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Life*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Popular Mechanics*, and *Boy's Life* and *Highlights* for the kids.

"My cousin stopped at a red light and rednecks threw rocks at his car like it was a bullpen. He stepped on the gas and flew outta there like a bat outta hell!"

Ike popped his gum as he clipped the man's hair. He turned around to the wide cabinet behind him. Three mirrors affixed against the wall sat behind each of his three chairs. Ike sorted through an array of clippers and razors till he found the best one to line the man's hair on the front, sides, and back.

"I ain't done yet... Then a PO-liceman pulls him over and gives him a ticket for running a red light!"

"Say what?"

"Yeah, buddy... that's when he found out the cop was deaf and blind."

"C'mon now, be right."

"If I'm lying, I'm dying. My cousin says he told the PO-lice he ran the light because they was throwing rocks at him. The cop says he was camped out inside his car at that same corner and didn't see no people throwing rocks. So my cousin says, 'I guess you don't hear them hollerin' nigger, either, Officer?' Man, do you know, he say that policeman grinned and said, 'You're right, I don't hear a thing,' and wrote him a dang speeding ticket on the spot."

"What kind of stuff..."

"Yes, sir! My cousin said he ain't been back that way since. So don't tell me you can move anywhere you want just cuz you can afford it!"

"I don't know, seems to me... BB, you put my score down? Okay, seems to me a man pays his money, he's got

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the right to live where he wants.”

“What the hell you know about that, fool?” Ike asked, gum popping like gunshots. “You ain’t paid me for the last two haircuts!”

“Now why you wanna bring that up in front of everybody? You know when I gets paid you is covered... Why you write 15, when you only got 10, BB?”

“So, Cole, I’m still waiting on an answer. Why do you want to move to... where’d you say, Fisher Place? Yeah, that’s it. I mean, look, you a grown man... you can do whatever you want to... but I’m just curious, man... I...”

“Uh, am I going to get a chance to speak, Ike?”

“Don’t start with me, Cole,” Ike said sternly, pointing his scissors at my father and sneaking a wink at me.

My father chuckled, then got serious.

“Look, we got brothas and sistas down South demanding their rights and getting beat up and sometimes killed for it.”

“Amen,” shouted one of the patrons.

“You know, that ain’t right,” another one chimed in.

“No, sir, it ain’t,” shouted BB as he snatched another domino from the pile while Chester smugly grinned.

“All because we want to be treated as equals,” someone said.

“I’m a man like anybody else!” yelled another patron.

“Well, King and all those folks ain’t knocking on the backdoor no more. They’re kicking them open and this time the rope is around Jim Crow’s neck!”

“You ain’t said a wrong word, yet, Cole!”

“Uh, huh, go’n and tell it, son!”

“So, I guess they inspired me. In my own way, I’m trying to do my part. The opportunity presented itself, and like everybody I’m just trying to get mine.”

“Damn... sho can’t argue with that,” Ike replied, scissors clicking. “What you think about what my man, Cole,

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is saying, Mr. Sullivan?"

Sitting in a rocking chair, Mr. Sullivan tugged on his scruffy salt and pepper beard. Piled high on the coffee table in front of him lay *Jet* magazines. He rarely read them. He usually flipped through the pages of each one until he reached the center photo featuring the weekly swimsuit model. He held it close to his face and turned it at all angles.

"Lawd have mercy... this child is blessed with a body that won't quit! Looka here, looka here... I swear she could turn back the hands of time for this old man... yes indeedy... hmmm."

His eyes strained to lift from the photo. "Uh, what y'all asking me? Oh, yeah... the way I sees it... man got to do what a man got to do. Cole can't be worrying about what us folks is saying. He's got a pretty wife at home and that fine lookin' youngsta over there to think about. Shoot, I'd get the hell away from you Negroes myself if I could afford to. Y'all ain't about nuthin' anyway."

His wheezy laughter drifted through the shop as he slapped his thigh.

"Oh, now ain't that cold," Ike said, laughing as well.

"Y'all know I'm teasing... but seriously, back in Alabama, I couldn't even drink out the same water faucet as them crackers. So if Brother Cole can get himself a nice house on the same block as them Caucasians, then all power to him. But ain't no good-byes... I guarantee he'll be back here to see us."

"He better be!" Ike worked Royal Crown pomade into his customer's hair.

"Oh, don't worry, we'll be back at least once a month for a haircut."

"Cole you ain't got a choice," replied Mr. Sullivan. "If you try to get a haircut in one of their barbershops, you might get your head cut off instead of your hair!"

THE NEW FRONTIER

Everyone hooted and hollered, including my father.

Mr. Sullivan returned to the *Jet* center photo. “What-you-say, girl!”