

CHAPTER 2

code 0: unspecified

ONE YEAR EARLIER.

Three, two, one. At the end of every school day, like clockwork, Jeremy watched the red hand of the school clock trail toward due north and then bolted out the door of English class before the bell fell silent. It was a game that he played with himself. The type of game that only a single child could create, and laugh about, as if he had a make-believe friend to share in the laughter.

Jeremy was a loner who took refuge in himself. With no siblings and a father who had abandoned him long before he could remember, he trusted no one. Not even his mother, or so he thought.

At ninety pounds with chestnut brown skin, blue eyes, and untamed curly hair, he was the product of teenage parents. Children having children. Middle school was difficult enough, but being a mulatto bastard child made for challenging days in the rough and tumble world of middle school. Every time he looked in a mirror he saw a kaleidoscope of colors. Red, green, and blue or the combination of any two creating his mix of black, brown, and white skin color. Adults had names for everything, but none that he understood: mulatto, mestizo, biracial, multiracial, the list long. When he asked his mother about his

“color,” her answer had confused him as much as his reflection. “You’re a product of the world, your ancestral past as vast as the globe. African, European, Caribbean, North American,” Clare had said.

Choosing a race/ethnicity to fill out on the Scantron sheet of his eighth grade standardized test added to his confusion.

Code 3: Black or African, not of Hispanic Origin.

Code 4: Hispanic.

Code 5: White not of Hispanic origin.

Only allowed to choose one, Jeremy laughed, looking over at his classmate Haruto Suzuki.

“This is easy for you. Code 2: Asian,” he said.

“No,” Haruto said. “My mom says I’m not Asian, because it includes Chinese and I’m Japanese.”

“You’re sure you’re not both?” Jeremy asked.

“Pure Japanese according to my mom. The Chinese are mules, a mix between horse and donkeys, she told me. And they eat dogs.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“We have two dogs, and if I were Chinese they would have run away. Dogs know. They just know,” Haruto said as he filled the circle marked Code 0 with his number two pencil. Jeremy followed. Code 0: Unspecified.

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