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For Your Eyes Only

Please understand that if you are interested in stories with happy beginnings or endings, then this isn't the story for you. I'm advising you to look away now, and get round to doing that thing that you've been putting off... like finally putting together that flatpack furniture you bought from IKEA last month. You have no obligation to read on, but if you do... then know this is something from me to you... a perspective, and a story, that is for your eyes only.

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Part 1: The Bad Beginning

See Pops (dad) always told me that I would have to work at least twice as hard as a white person... because if a white person and myself were competing for the same job, and had the same qualifications, I wouldn't get the job. He would always say never give them an excuse, never give them a reason to stereotype you; Therein lies the creation story of someone I like to call Terry 2. I figured at a young age that if using ghetto grammar (slang), wearing tracksuits, and being overly loud or passionate would lead to stereotyping, like a potter molding clay I would create a persona, a facade, a shield. 10 hard years of learning what to say, or not say, what to show, and what to hide. After 10 years of crafting a facade, my code-switching abilities were bloody impeccable. I walked into that room on the first day of university confident Terry 2 would hold, so what was happening right now was a joke.

"Erm", he uttered.

I had spaced out, my animated expression had been reduced to the liveliness of blank canvas. I sighed.

"I'm not into that, I don't sell it, and I don't know anyone who does, sorry" I said.

Questions were ricocheting all around my head. Damn it! Was it the dark skin, nappy hair, or did a little slang slip out? Had he seen through my facade? Wait if he did see through, could all he see be just a potential drug dealer? How could I let this happen? Hmm, maybe Terry 2 needs an upgrade, or has a bug, yeah that's it. I mean even apps have bugs right, that's all it was, one wrong line of code that had messed everything up.

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Part 2 - Shedding Skin

Dear Terry, I know the world only seems to reaffirm the very things that your pops said, but you need to know this now. That day was an injustice, so please don't blame yourself. You're not lines of code, and there was no bug, what happened is not on you. Have you ever stopped to think about what people would think of him, not you?

These words are from the changed perspective of an older you, who meets a group of great people from all over the globe, who share their eyes with you. You just wait, you'll see how it feels to not feel judged and be able to act... well like you. Believe it or not, you even plan a birthday or two, but it's not just the people, it's the services at university to - when you need help don't be afraid to reach out: to friends, the university counselling services, or even the chaplaincy too. There's still a stigma around mental health but you'll be helping to change that too. You also pitch for funding to create a short film surrounding the impact of racism on ethnic minorities and get that too! This university will break you, then build you anew.

But there's something I need you to do, please embrace and use your weapon, in a way only you can do. The weapon is your voice, I need you to find it and use it, not just for yourself but for all the people who feel the need to create version 2's. Just know these words are from the changed perspective of an older you... a perspective, and a story, that is for your eyes only.

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Part 3 - The Test (Present day) My dissertation supervisor tells me there is this essay competition, and the theme this year is change. I read through the guideline and see 'you can [even] write about negative experiences'. I chuckle and think to myself yeah right. The university would never accept this, not a story like mine. I guess I could enter and start off with something like...

My legs burn from the mountain of steps I have just climbed... Dammit! I am running late, coloured people timing what can I say. That's probably one thing about me that will never change. In my culture, if a party is due to start at 3 pm you start getting ready at 5 pm. Yep you guessed it I am running late, it's my first day of university... I burst into the classroom greeted by a sea of faces... This is going to be an interesting 3 years.

That just doesn't feel right, it's not true. I think to myself well whether they accept my story or not that doesn't make it any less true, but still though best not to do it eh?