

## Harbinger

The little kid picks his way across the lumpy court, the petals (maybe use a noun that fits better with the verb “licking,” or a verb that goes better with petals?) of asphalt licking at his ankles. He grabs the basketball before it hops over the chain fence and then waddles back to the hoop. He shoots, his pudgy little arms too short and too weak to complete a proper arc. The ball bounces off the underside of the rim and in the other direction. He picks his way after it again.

“Johnny!”

He grits his teeth and reaches the ball again. This time he composes himself and launches the ball only after he’s caught his breath. This time the shot is juggled from side to side by the rusted rim before popping out with an air of dejection.

“Johnny!”

His mouth is set in a grimace of determination as he catches the ball after one bounce.

“Johnny!”

The origin of the yell, if you can call such a high pitched and fluttering and wavering wail a yell, is a woman shrouded in a long thick black veil, who stands about a hundred yards away from the boy, if you were measuring by the shortest diagonal. Her aquiline nose and sharp eyes alone take the brunt of the cold biting wind. She is anxious and jittery but knows she cannot approach any further.

“Johnny!”

The little kid gives the first sign of having possibly heard her, glancing in her direction before squaring his shoulders towards the hoop again.

“Johnny!”

He definitely hears her this time, the call jolting his shooting motion enough that he has his closest shot yet, the ball catching on the underbelly of the rim and spinning around twice before launching itself back out into (you mean out of? another geometric error ;) ) orbit.

“Johnny!”

The woman’s call has taken a frantic edge. The shadows are lengthening across the court and it seems that they are reflected in the whites of her eyes.

“Johnny!”

The boy rushes his shot and misses badly. He crushes a little fist of impatience against his forehead.

“Johnny!”

He takes a breath and puts a little more mustard on the shot this time. The shot crests and arcs and finally, *finally* plops through the rim. Yes!

“Johnny!”

He is elated and jumps up high, about eight or so inches from the ground.

“Johnny!”

He recollects (this literally means “remembers” but may be mistaken for a mistake, that is, people might think you meant “collects.” Which is pretty dank) the ball and pauses.

“Johnny! Johnny! Johnny!”

He ponders and hesitates and with a shrug decides to at last heed the woman’s plaintive cries (“at last” should go at the end for maximum conventional flow, but if it’s misplaced for effect you know I’m cool with that shit) . His lips are pursed in annoyance as he takes his time walking across the court and the adjacent grass field.

The woman watches him come closer and closer and her heartbeat begins to slow down just a bit. But she is not easily satisfied by this victory. He is getting harder and harder to control and she despairs at the thought of what tomorrow may bring. She breaks off a cry of pure fear at the thought as the little tyke finally trundles over and looks towards her, through her. He jerks his head authoritatively.

“Let’s go then.”

(upon finishing I advise to move the “at last” to the end.)

I’m assuming this is meant to be taking place in the middle east? If not, you should consider doing that, at the very least it’ll win brownie points with the judges for political/current events/ racial diversity etc etc

In the same vein,

Have you considered changing the kid’s name to something more arabic?

I was struck suddenly by the image of this kid’s disobedience having to do with him being like a a terrorist in the making. I’m wondering if it’ll be really dank to give some subtle allusion to that prospect in the last paragraph. As I’m writing this I’m getting the idea of maybe naming the kid Osama, or to be more current, Ibrahim (leader of ISIL) . Makes the title pretty ominous. I