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Mr. Davis

AP Language and Composition

### Life: Just One Big Metaphor for Flight

On January 7th, 1931, Guy Menzies flew the first solo non-stop trans-Tasman flight from Australia to New Zealand. In this same year, Macon III Dead, the third child of the Dead family, was born. This is no coincidence. Macon III, a great-grandson to Solomon, is born to the lineage of flight. Throughout the book, *Song of Solomon*, Macon III “Milkman” Dead departs on a life-altering journey that not only changes his perception, but his purpose in life. From birth, he grows into an immature boy who cares little for his own life and the people in it. However, as he grows older and less childish, he ages into a man who finds his place in life. His flight through life is certainly not a smooth one, overcoming unexpected turbulence and misfortune, but he emerges a better man.

There are, however, more passengers on this flight. Milkman meets several people during the course of this flight. These passengers reveal more about Milkman’s character in how they interact with him. Hagar Dead, his cousin, starts using Milkman’s desire for her sexually to manipulate and tease him. Slowly, as the story develops, she grows more and more desperate for his attention, resulting in a murderous obsession that ultimately leads to her death. Milkman abuses their relationship, using her and then tossing her away once he’s bored. He compares her to a ‘third beer’, stating, “...But the third, the one you drink because it's there, because it can't hurt, and because what difference does it make?” As one of Milkman’s only friends, Guitar is

supportive and loyal. They grow up together, they get in trouble together, and they work together. However, they eventually reach a rift in their relationship that causes them to grow apart. Guitar criticizes Milkman about his frivolous lifestyle. Milkman is taken aback by the fact that Guitar is part of the Seven Days, stating that he is a murderer. Towards the end of the story, Guitar attempts to kill Milkman, believing he stole the gold that they promised to share. The gold, foretold by Macon II Dead (Milkman's father), was merely Macon II's greed overcoming his common sense. At first, Macon II despises Milkman before his birth, insisting that Ruth abort the pregnancy. However, their relationship soon morphs into a business partnership after Macon takes Milkman under his wing. Milkman begins to behave very much like his father as a result of this; he becomes extremely greedy and self-absorbed. Like Milkman's mother, his father never really views Milkman as his own person. Ruth Foster views Milkman as more of an item, the product of the last time she was made love to by her husband, Macon II. She is very self-absorbed in the way she goes about their relationship, using Milkman as a way to indulge herself. As she raises him, she stunts his maturity, keeping him blind to the rest of the world. However, as he breaks away from his parent's embrace, he comes to grips with his family and the truth.

As a young boy, Milkman was almost unaware to the rest of the world. His mother breastfed him well into his childhood, a practice he was unaware was taboo until well into adulthood. It was not until he met Guitar, Pilate, and Hagar that he slowly began to truly grow as a person. All three of these people gave him something. Guitar gave him freedom. Pilate offered him the truth. Hagar gifted him his sexual independence. However, the more he grew, the more inconsiderate he became. He abused the relationships he had forged as a young man. He was

narcissistic and selfish. It wasn't until his arrival in Shalimar that he realized what exactly he had become, and grew from the shell of a man he used to be. In Shalimar, he finds his passion for living. In Shalimar, he discovers not only his family's past, but himself as a person. In Shalimar, he discovers the secret to flight.

As the main character, Milkman influences the plot more than any other. After years of 'dating' Hagar, his cousin, he comes upon the realization that she is no longer useful to him, and decides to break up with her. She grows more and more distraught and obsessed with him. For several months, she attempts to murder him. Though it may seem like it, this series of attempted murders is not out of rage, but passion. She is so devoted, so obsessed, that she develops a "if I can't have you, no one can" mentality. This passion ends up killing her once she realizes that he doesn't love her, and is never going to. She dies of a broken heart, metaphorically speaking. Ruth Foster is obsessed with her son in an altogether different way. Milkman confronts her after following her to her father's burial sight, armed with the incestuous information provided by his father. She denies this, and offers her own version of the story. As a character, Ruth Foster is a victim to her life, never really living, never really moving forward. She clings to the attention and affection of others, but she is a victim to the cruelty of life. When she realizes that she is never going to be touched (or made love to) again, she grips tight to the one person who ever cared for her, her father. This is revealed in the confrontation between the two at the cemetery. Motivated by the promise of treasure, Milkman leaves his hometown in order to recover the gold prophesied by his father. He flies out to Virginia, attempting to retrace his father's steps. After staying in Shalimar for a few nights, he realizes that there is no gold. Susan Byrd tells him of Jake, aka Macon Dead, and his wife Sing. He realizes that the Pilate's green sack contains her

father's bones. He is overjoyed over having figured out the truth about his family's past. Not only does he recover this knowledge, but he recovers a part of himself, lost by the years of carelessness.

Throughout the book, Milkman stumbles through life. It is not until he reaches Shalimar that he discovers who he truly is. Along with this, he discovers the secret to flight. While he doesn't grow a pair of wings and fly off into the sunset, he discovers the secret to *living*. He realizes that one must surrender to life, and jump at every occasion in order to *truly* live.