At the Road’s End:

A stagnant warmth covered the dirt road and the passers-by. Thin layers of chatter could be heard throughout the street but not a single clear word could be made out for each was kept to their own private conversations. Rows of small huts lined the road with many merchants and vendors huddled close between and in front. Horses could be seen dragging villagers on their way and in some cases villagers could be seen dragging horses on their way. And while the sun was kept out of view by the tall reaching trees, its power radiated off the dirt road and wafted its heavy lulling smell into those nearby.

Staring up at the small slits of sunshine through the trees was a little boy who had lodged himself in the middle of the road in hopes of finding a better view.

“Out of the way, boy! Don’t you know you should be on the right side!” An angry cart rolled by. The boy quickly shuffled towards the right side. He once again looked for the sun but this new position only showed the trees.

Disheartened, he continued on his way, shuffling and dragging his feet through the sticky heat. The smell of fresh bread and fruits caused him to slow down so much that it was hard to believe he was still moving forward. The pit in his stomach was empty but the markets’ aromas led him to believe he had eaten.

“I can’t. Not today. I have no money.” The boy noticed towards the huts that two men were arguing. He pushed his way a little closer and saw that one was holding a large greasy fish.

“It doesn’t matter. I need money or I can’t stay open.”

“I’m not asking for free, just a little more time. You know I always pay back.”

The large man with the fish looked down at his produce and back at the other man. “Okay, but you must know that you have to pay back. Or else I’ll have to shut down. I’m thin enough as it is.”

“Yes, of course. Thank you, sir.” The man grabbed the fish and went on his way. The boy looked back at the large man. A hint of worry spread across his face but he altogether maintained a solid countenance.

Just then, the stench of the fish hit the boy causing him to rush back out towards the road. But, for all his worries, he continued to think about the transaction. That large man, he got nothing in return. Not even an inconvenience fee? Why would he give to someone who won’t pay! His business will fail! He kicked the dirt under his feet. The boy was smarter than the merchant, yet he wasn’t successful. How many fallacies lay under society! How many holes were left unpatched!

The warmth had settled in heavier with only his hunger to match it. So many vendors lined the street covered with meats, sauces, fruits, and juices. He stood eyeing a papaya that had fallen off one of the stands. Surely no one would notice. He went to retrieve it when a man approached, thickly bearded and with legs as tall as he.

“Excuse me. What do you think you’re doing?”

The boy stood frozen there for a minute, his hands still gripping the skin of the papaya. The man loomed over him greatly and cast his shadow over him. The warmth had left but now it was cold, too cold. Suddenly, he wanted to be out on the road again, hot, sweaty, and tired. There was no justice in this town. The man will do as he pleases in retribution for his thievery.

He took off in a run, not looking back. His bare feet pounded the firm dirt.

“Did you want this?” The man held up the dirty papaya, unfit for sale due to its fall. But the boy was out of sight now. And he would not come back.

Swarms of people were clogging the road as the boy kept on running. So many selfish people! All out to get me and no one here to help! Have we no pity left in the world!

After running for some time he found a spot at the road’s end. The people were gone and he had left the market far behind. He was hot, sweaty, tired, and hopeless. What a shame it was to be in this situation. And what had gotten him out in the first place? That stupid sun! The illusive shine that hides behind the trees, draws you in and burns you! It was the sun’s fault, and the people’s fault, and the papaya’s fault. Yes, even the papaya! For it had given him a hope that he knew he’d never meet. Yes, this world was contemptible and everything in it was more rotten than the next. He only hoped that maybe the next world proved different.