

FADED

Chris was an average kid, not too shy, not too outgoing. His hopes and ambitions weren't particularly exceptional, and nothing about him was extraordinary, other than the fact that he was an east coast kid in a west coast high school. His family had moved to California over the summer, and this was his first day.

Chris was really worried about fitting in. He wanted to be liked at this new school, make a good first impression, get in with the popular crowd. This was his chance to start over. But he realized within minutes that he, in all his east coast getup, was not dressed for success. This was Cali. Everyone was dressed in that style unique to the Golden Coast, that style typified by the likes of PacSun, Hollister, and California Republic. Indeed, Carolina blue kicks were fresh on the scene.

Fortunately for Chris, one particularly welcoming kid approached him and introduced himself. The kid was the definition of a classic man, only in kid form. He was number one in the class of which he was president, owned his own business, spoke like a god, and dressed like Colonel Sanders. The kid asked Chris his name, where he was from, what he liked to do for fun, etc. Chris talked to the kid for a while. He talked about life on the east coast and how everything was so different there. The kid listened intently and provided the appropriate amount of feedback. It really was a good conversation. Then the kid began detailing what California life was all about, where all the local hang-out spots were, who the cool kids were, which girls were worth writing a symphony for and which were only worth showing the door, why Chris should come to all the sporting events, and why he should eat exclusively at California Pizza Kitchen. By the end of the conversation, bear flags and bro tanks were so violently dancing around Chris's head that it was literally spinning. The kid asked him if he was all right.

"Yeah," Chris said, trying to regain his senses. "It's just... a lot to take in."

"Hey, just remember..." the kid said. "If I could only tell you one thing, I'd tell you to get faded. That's it. Get faded and stay faded." The kid wished Chris good luck and then walked away whistling *California Love* by Dr. Dre. The first bell rang. Faded... What does "faded" mean? How does one get "faded"? These were Chris's thoughts as he ambled off to class, still drunk in his California stupor.

Chris met all kinds of new people throughout the day. He had never seen so diverse a student body. But despite their outward differences, every kid he met asked him that question: "Hey, are you faded?" Chris didn't know how to answer them. Nobody would tell him what "faded" meant. They would see his look of confusion and only nod their heads, comforted by the fact that they knew something only an insider, only a Californian would know. And so Chris carried on in ignorance, infinitely infuriated by the fact that he didn't know what "faded" meant, by the fact that everyone else knew something he didn't. Desperate, Chris resolved to bake this cake... even if it killed him.

After school Chris mustered his courage and approached a group of popular kids in the halls. He tried to act cool as he asked what "faded" meant. But the popular kids only laughed at him. "You don't know what 'faded' means?!?!" they said, roaring with forced hysterics. Chris shook his head. Eventually the laughter died down. Then it began again. Then it died down again. One of the popular kids grinned and said "Hey, CJ, tell him what faded means. You

know... ” CJ nodded, put his arm around Chris in feigned concern, and led Chris off a ways. He told Chris there would be this little get-together that night, a little “friendly gathering” where Chris would have plenty opportunities to get “faded”. He said everyone would be there. He gave Chris the address of the place and said he hoped to see him there. Chris thanked the popular kid, who slapped Chris on the back--still feigning concern--and then returned to his groupies. Chris was ecstatic.

That night Chris had his mom drive him to the address the popular kid gave him. It was an abandoned warehouse in an old industrial district. Strobe lights, spot lights, and laser lights of all colors of the rainbow streamed out of the warehouse’s windows, some of which were broken, all of which were cloudy. The air pulsated with loud music coming from inside. There was a dejected-looking kid sitting out front, his back against the warehouse, drinking something out of a brown paper bag.

“Thanks, Mom,” Chris said, getting out of his mom’s car.

“Be safe, dear,” Chris’s mom said. Chris said he would, and she drove away. Chris approached the warehouse. Chris looked at the kid drinking from the paper bag. The kid nodded to him. Chris turned back to the warehouse. It’s time... Time do something, time to be somebody... It’s time to get faded! Chris jumped up and down a few times and then ran into the warehouse.

Chris’s senses went into overdrive. He was bathed in three stories of flashing lights, vibrant colors, and EDM. The place was packed with people going insane, getting crunked, going wild, getting rowdy, you name it. People were getting f#@%&d up and having a grand time of it. They were dressed in all sorts of bizarre costumes, some straight out of *Lord of the Rings*, some straight out of *Star Wars*, some straight out of the local zoo, others *Straight Outta Compton*, and still others straight out of nowhere in particular--just random combinations of craziness. Someone was even dressed as Slider, mascot of the Cleveland Indians. Many of these costumes were quite skimpy, and almost everyone was wearing neon body paint. Glow sticks were everywhere: around necks, around wrists, around legs, around... other places. People were twirling them around and tossing them into the air. Chris picked a glow stick off the ground and put it on.

Then Chris noticed the tables of suspicious-looking liquids and piles of powder. People were grabbing drinks or handfuls of powder, gulping or snorting them down--or otherwise intaking them--and then running off to continue going berserk, kamikaze, apes@\$t, whatever. Point is they were getting so f%*#&\$d up that it was raining inside that warehouse. There were also pills of all shapes and sizes circulating. The air alone was intoxicating, thick as it was with smoke and vape. There were even some needles lying around...

Chris didn’t know what to do. He started moving his body in mysterious ways, trying to blend in with the messed up masses. But he couldn’t do it, he couldn’t get into the right state of mind. He grew distressed, angry, and then sad. This was his chance to fit in, to start anew, to get faded... And he was blowing it. Chris was about ready to go sit outside with the dejected kid drinking from the paper bag when he had the good fortune of recognizing the kid who invited him earlier that day. The kid recognized Chris, shouted, flailed wildly about, and then stuffed some pills into Chris’s hand. “Get faded, brotha!” the kid exclaimed, and then grooved off into

the distance. Chris looked at the pills in his hand. So this was what it meant... This was it, this was his chance. Faded...

Chris didn't go to school the next day. Or the next day. Or the next. In fact, Chris would never go to school again, because he died that night. No, I'm just kidding. Chris very well could have died that night, but he didn't. He just needed three days to recover. He was that f\$%#@d up. Fortunately two of those days fell on a weekend, so Chris ended up missing only one day of school. Score. Still, Chris would never be the same again.

As Chris was walking to his first period class, he noticed the kid who introduced himself that first day, the kid who had told him all about "California life". Chris was filled with rage. He stormed up to the kid.

"Hey! You're the one who did this to me!" Chris yelled at the kid while gesturing toward himself. Chris was disheveled, not quite... "all there". Something was definitely off about Chris, something that hadn't been off before.

"What do you mean?" the kid asked, keeping calm like a boss.

"You told me to get faded! You started all this!" Chris said, again pointing to his f#&\$%d up appearance.

"Oh..." the kid understood. He looked regretful. "You thought I meant faded as in 'get high, get crunked, get f#@%&d up' faded. No, that's not what I meant. I'm a classic man, I don't do that sort of thing. I meant faded as in F.A.D.E.D. Fresh all day every day. That's what I strive to be. That's what I think anyone should strive to be." With that, the bell rang. The kid apologized and said he had to get to class, leaving Chris alone in the hallway. Chris was too stunned to feel anything. His eyes glossed over. His pupils dilated. He started simultaneously sweating and shaking. His vision swam. That was what the kid meant... F.A.D.E.D.... But it was too late. Chris... needed... to get faded...