¨Ava! Let's go!¨ I shout to Ava trying to hurry her. ¨Im going, Im going” she responds back as stares at the pastries and walks slowly down the aisle. We head out the aisle to go to the cash register, getting out our money as we walk. We stand in the everlasting line, waiting with the rest, as the privileged stand in the other line discussing and laughing, happy, as we stand silent, fearful. It sounds sad now, but we were used to it. The line continues to move like an aged turtle, silent and sluggish. When me and Ava finally make it up to the cash register I hand the bottle of vodka, bread, and canned soup to the sweet old lady that worked there everyday from 7am to 9pm. “How’s it going baby?” she says softly to me in her southern accent. I respond back, almost like a reflex, “I’m doing great Barb, how’s your shift so far?”. “Oh ya know, another day, another dollar” she responds back, not really paying attention anymore, but rather, on checking out my items. I could tell she was tired, exhausted from the long shifts she has to work, working like a dog but still making close to nothing. Barb was one of the many that had to bust their assses for the privileged and still get close to nothing in return, slavery may have been gone but sometimes I think that this might be worse. After an awful thing over, everyone has hope, just for it to come crumbling down, only to realize that nothing has changed and that they are stuck in this cycle of black people always being treated badly.

I take my usual route home with Ava as we walk past all the broken down houses and dead lawns, as we sweat enough to fill two buckets worth, we cut through yards and step on the cracked roads until we turn the last corner past Ms. Janice steadily rocking on her old rocking chair (Ms. Janice hadn’t changed for the last 20 years I’ve known her she’s always just sittin’ on the porch, rockin’ away on that beat up rocking chair, watching as everyone passes her by, the old bat was basically dead, but not quite yet. I felt bad for her, poor thing, having to suffer in this cruel world as her age kept her on the cusp of death, teasing her as she doesn’t get the bliss of a peaceful death, so she just sits and waits and watches people pass her by while she blankly stares and says nothing). I run into the house as I temporarily say goodbye to Ava, “Bye, I’ll be back after I see ma”. “Aight, Imma be doing the same with my ma, we’re real lucky ain’t we Maya” she responds back, joking sarcastically, “the luckiest” I say back to her.

I open the squeaky screen d oor holding the grocery bags in my hand and call for my mama “Ma! Where are ya?” I yell throughout the house until she yells back from the living room “I’m here! Whlsewould I be other than this god forsaken house, get me a drink”. I walk into the kitchen filled with cracked tiles and broken cabinets and set the bags down on the counter and start to grab the vodka out, along with a glass cup with beautiful detailing, that cup is the only expensive thing that we own, and it’s strictly for mama, I only ever touch it when I’m washing it or when I’m pouring her a drink. Mama had a bit of a drinking habit, I’m worried for her, everyday she gets more and more like Ms. Janice, just sitting and waiting for death, the only difference between the two is that Mama talks and yells, and of course, drinks, but other than that, she just sits all day. She got fired from her job over 5 months ago, she got yelled at for drinking on the job. She was a maid for Ms. Mary, this gorgeous little thing of a woman, she had golden hair and always wore white pearls and a tight little skirt that flattered her smooth legs. She was one of the nicer privileged, she was the type to always be presentable and have bouncy hair and had cookies out on the kitchen table. Her house was also huge, with a beautiful big staircase right in the front when you walked through the front door, her house was made of dark wood with little knick knacks all around the house on display, like vases and tea pots and little statues. Oh how much I missed Ms. Mary, she was so kind to me and she used to let me wait until my mother was done cleaning while I did my homework on her kitchen table. But so much had changed in the 5 months since Mama lost her job. Ms. Mary and I don’t talk, I didn’t have any homework since I had to quit school, and now Mama was less cheerful and we were struggling for money.

I walked over to Ma and hand her the elegant glass filled with the sweet drink she liked sipping oh so much. “What took you so long? Were you daydreaming again, damnit Maya, what I’d tell ya bout that dreaming that you do” she said to me in a judging tone. “I know, Ma, dreaming isn’t good for nothin’ besides hoping and hoping ain’t good for no one, sorry” I apologized to her but I knew I didn’t mean it, she became a cruel shell of herself when she drank, but I knew that the bitterness was just something I had to learn to swallow, just like Ma with her vodka.

This was the everyday routine with her, go out on Saturdays get the vodka and whatever groceries we needed for that week, come home make her drink, and then go to Ava’s house to complain and probably just take up time of doing nothing. My favorite part of this routine though, was when I got to spend dinner with Ava’s big family and we laugh and talk and stuff our mouths full of food, it’s the only time I feel happy and content. On the days where I don’t go to get the vodka and eat dinner with Ava, I’m working with Ms. Amy, I clean her house and watch her babies. I had to quit school and get a job since mama stopped working.

Ms. Amy was pretty good to me, I guess, we usually didn't talk but she was never too harsh and she taught me some important things. Ms. Amy was a key role in my life, she gave me money kept my family going and she kept me busied always. Me and Mama were lucky, we always got the good ones, we got good employers who didn't boss us around too much or make us work with no breaks, she was pretty good to me and my Ma. The work she made me do was simple enough, things like cleaning the house and making her food and taking care of the baby, I was the maid of the house. Her babies were the most beautiful creatures you would’ve ever seen. She had a boy and a girl, Maddie and Elliot, they were only about 1 and 2.

Routine is important, it gave me a set schedule, something I could rely on. I always valued discipline and obedience over all things. My morals were why I always listened to my mother no matter how much I disliked whatever words or whatever tasks were thrown at me, I never complained, I lived in a life that wasn’t mine. But I thought it was better being controlled, following the rules then to break them and get punished. But Ava on the other hand, she was the complete opposite. She was such a free person, going by her own rules, always speaking up for herself, living her own life. I didn’t understand her ways, why she did it when she knew the trouble it could get her in, at times I found her quite unsmart. I thought it was silly and foolish to testify the rules when the risk was so large, but she felt the same way towards my way of thinking, she used to call me cowardly and stupid for not speaking up for myself. I never understood her, but it was also one of the things I admired about her at the same time, I may have thought it was foolish but I also thought it was so bold to never be afraid to say something, I feel like that’s why I loved Ava, why we were best friends, we balanced each other out. Ava was like my little bit of happiness in a world with dullness and routine.