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“I, Too, Am Hungry”

With the setting sun at my back, I hustle to catch one of the three chartered buses parked outside Renowned’s main gate, which will take me—along with ninety students—to “Young, Gifted, & Black,” the end of the year celebration for the Black Students’ Union. I get on the first bus and see many familiar faces. Everyone here is a student, save for one resident counselor, the bus driver, and myself. We start catching up about work and life. Naturally, talk turns to the must-see TV show of the moment, *Scandal*, and Olivia Pope’s many misadventures. Someone then asks what I did over spring break, which was two weeks before. “Besides catching up on sleep,” I say, “I cooked, ’cause usually I eat with y’all.” I extract my phone from my pocket to show off pictures of my new favorite dish: salmon and shrimp and grits. I describe the meal as my phone gets passed around, explaining how I season the seafood with black pepper, cayenne, and crushed red pepper; Lawry’s Seasoned Salt; and lemon juice. And then I mention the grits, with pepper jack cheese melted in. The uproar is instantaneous. From three

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rows back, someone yells, “Where was my invite?” Another shouts, “Way to leave me out; you know I was here. No love!” Oh, the shade that was thrown my way. Joshua, a fit young man with a joker’s smile as broad as his muscular shoulders, stares me dead in the eyes and says, with a straight face that lasts only until he gets the last word out, “Well damn, Tony, *I, too, am hungry.*”

We all shared a laugh after this talk of food as the bus rumbled through winding city streets, but then the conversation turned somber. The lively reaction from the students was not solely a response to my burgeoning culinary skills or my lack of sharing. Rather, something more serious was afoot. Students’ responses reflected a troubling reality that many of them, and others at Renowned University, had to contend with each March: the university’s policy of closing all cafeterias during spring break.

With comedic seriousness, Joshua (DD,B) had adeptly appropriated the “I, too” campaign slogan that swept colleges around the world in the spring of 2014. In that campaign, students of color at various campuses put together multimedia projects documenting insults and offenses that had been directed their way by white classmates—some intentional, some not. Joshua’s quick reaction switched the focus from the interpersonal to the institutional. He highlighted the painful fact that a university with a multibillion-dollar endowment, where the cost of attendance surpasses \$60,000 a year, suspended all meal services during spring break. Partly because of the assumption that all students leave campus. Partly to save money. Most students at Renowned were oblivious to this policy, since they were at home or on

the privileged poor

vacation somewhere. But for those students who stayed on campus, usually because of circumstance rather than by choice, the absence of the food service was keenly felt.¹

A particularly brutal irony is that one of the largest donations to Renowned in recent decades was made in the name of recruiting poor, academically talented youth. The closing of the cafeterias distressed exactly those students the college had so eagerly worked to bring to campus and left those very same recruits suffering from food insecurity—not knowing where their next meal was coming from. Little did Joshua realize that in choosing Renowned as his academic home, he would confront an old truth he had learned when living in an abandoned barn after his family had been evicted from their home: hunger hurts.