



III. CROSSING: ACTS OF IMAGINATION

JANE ST. CLAIR

SECRETS OF MAMA KARDASHIAN

What surprises people about the TV show, *You Guess the Price*, is that their producers do not pick the contestants randomly. Now Shirley Diemski knew this in advance. In fact, knowing how they pick contestants was part of her strategy to get on the show.

Shirley knew that the producers divide the entire audience into groups of twelve, and then they take those little groups into interview rooms. She also knew they're more likely to choose you if you're vivacious or if it's your birthday or if you're wearing an Armed Services uniform or a homemade T-shirt customized with the show's theme. With all this in mind, Shirley got a ticket for the show that fell on her birthday and wore a T-shirt made by her best friend Vera with a hand-painted portrait of the show's host. So it really was no big surprise to her when the show's host, Yip the Lip Serge, yelled, "Shirley Diemski, come on down! You're a contestant on *You Guess the Price!*"

Shirley knew to act surprised and teary-eyed, and to jump up and down as if she'd swallowed a jalapeno pepper. The truth was the only thing that surprised Shirley, who always taped every show to watch after work, was how loud Yip's voice was. He didn't need to yell like that. After all, he had a microphone.

If you're like Shirley and watch the show every day, you also find out that they use the same prizes over and over, so if you're watching the show all the time and taking notes, you get a feel for how much the usual prizes cost, including the big screen TV, the all-expense paid seven-day trip to Cancún, and the smallest American compact car.

So when Shirley went up against three other contestants to guess the price of a big screen TV, the actual retail price and not the price people really pay after they go online and check at Walmart, Shirley guessed \$1200. When the highest bid was \$1100, all she had to do was bid \$1101.

Next Yip Serge asked Shirley if she would like to win . . . *a six-day*

vacation to Martha's Vineyard! Yes, Shirley, we'll fly you and your guest from Los Angeles to the Franklin Stone Manor, a fabulous resort where you'll experience the lifestyle of the rich and famous! Plus you and your guest will receive two all-day passes to the Bambi Pamper Day Spa for eight full hours of pampering, hair styling, mani-pedis and massage. This fabulous vacation is all yours if you guess the price!

As Yip the Lip kept blasting Shirley's eardrums, she had only one thought. She was going to win this trip for herself and her daughter Brooke. She pictured them in that Bambi Pamper Day Spa, stretched out on fur-covered tables next to the likes of Barbra S and Hillary RC herself, chatting them up and sipping herbal tea with organic honey. On second thought Shirley decided the spa's tables would not be fur because nobody sharp does fur anymore. Shirley thought how Brooke would be proud of her for once, and how excited she would be when her mother presented her with this fabulous vacation. After all, Brooke could handle Martha's Vineyard. Brooke was so classy, you'd think she was BFFs with Chelsea and Ivanka—either one—Brooke was right up here with them.

The game required Shirley to rearrange the number 7363 to mirror the price of the trip. When she guessed \$6753, the prize was hers. Her luck ran out after spinning a roulette wheel that eliminated her for a chance to win the grand prize showcase. It didn't matter for Shirley had won *prizes worth over \$8100*, an unbelievable amount when you're only making \$21,000 a year as a full-time groomer at PetSmart.

As Shirley and Vera drove from Hollywood back home to Tucson, Shirley phoned Brooke with the good news. Brooke never answered her phone. Brooke was living in New York City and so she hardly ever picked up her phone because there is so much else to do there.

"If she can't go, then you've got to take me," Vera pleaded. "I want that spa day."

"It might even be the spa where Jackie Kennedy went to lose weight," Shirley said.

"Jackie never had to lose any weight," Vera replied, swerving to avoid hitting a coyote, "because she lived on hard-boiled eggs and lettuce. I read that in her nanny's book. But come on, I need that spa more than Brooke."

"The thing is . . ." Shirley began, "The thing is . . . I've been thinking a long time about Brooke and me. About taking a road trip just Brooke and me. I got the idea from watching the Kardashians. Whenever one of the Dash

DANISA BELL

PRINCESS

I once heard Ree Ree Walker call Mandi and her mother poor white trash. It was right out in front of our building at George Washington Carver Homes, Goshen's only housing project. I didn't understand it then, back in 1996, for we were only six and seven, Mandi and I, but Mandi was more than just poor. She was *dirt* poor. And incredibly so. Some nights for dinner she ate jelly sandwiches with Vienna sausages. And once when I spent the night with Mandi, the next morning for breakfast we had butter and sugar on hotdog buns with dill pickles and cold black coffee. Whenever I would go after that, I would sneak food into my overnight bag. One time we had Twinkies and ham slices; another time, a jar of peanut butter and a box of Ritz. And we would fill our bellies late at night under the sheets with a flashlight while her mother slept.

Mandi didn't have a lot of toys like the other kids in Carver Homes. No bike, no Barbie dolls, no nothing really. Just this little fat half baby doll named Ruthie that she almost always carried with her. And Ruthie was always naked. She had chopped-off brown hair and no legs, only arms and hands with shiny purple nail polish where the fingernails would be. And when you laid Ruthie down, one of her eyes would close in that peculiar way that made you think she was winking at you when she wasn't, while the other stayed fixed on the ceiling or the sky, depending upon where you were at the time.

Once though, Candace Taylor, who was ten and liked to boss around us younger kids, and always with her hand on her bony brown hip, told Mandi that she was lucky, rich or poor, toys or no toys, because she was white. "One day you gonna marry a doctor or a lawyer, Mandi, and go to London and Paris. All white people go to London and Paris!"

But Mandi didn't care about being white, or about doctors or the European enticements of London and Paris. "No way, Candace!" she shot back. "Me and Ruthie are staying here! For the rest of our life! We like it

here!"

"Yeah, Candace," I chimed in. "She's not going to get married! She just moved here in kinnygarden! And we're blood sisters, see?" I held up the tip of my pinkie finger for her to see the barely visible prick I had made with a safety pin.

"Yeah, see?" added Mandi, holding her pinkie finger in the air next to mine.

"You shut up, Tatiana Williams!" said Candace. "You just think you're better than everybody else!"

"No I don't!"

"Do so! You wanna be white like Mandi. Why don't you just go in the house and read one of those fancy books your momma buys you so you can get skipped another grade again since you know so much!" The other kids exploded into a thunder of laughter and began to nod in agreement with Candace. All but Mandi.

Suddenly I could feel the pain of every dark emotion pulsing through my veins and rushing to the tips of my throbbing fingers. I wanted to lash out at Candace. Tell her she was stupid and didn't know anything, but Candace was bigger and stronger. I looked at Mandi. We were the same. Same height. Same size. We both had ponytails and both liked to pull the cheese off our pizza and eat it last. And now we were sisters, no matter what happened. Now we had the same blood. I took her by the hand, and we went back to our own building to play with Ruthie.

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Instead of toys, Corsica Pate allowed Mandi to write and draw on the walls in their apartment with crayons and colored chalk. "A way for her to express herself," Corsica Pate would always say. "Mandi is so creative." But the other parents just shook their heads and said that was one crazy woman. First for living in the projects when she was white, and second for letting that little child scribble up their apartment.

And although she wrote and drew on the walls, what Mandi wanted more than anything else was to be a fairy princess. "Just like Snow White," she would say. "Like at the movies." Mandi didn't have a long flowing gown, or seven dwarves to follow her around, but every day when we came home from school, Mandi would change into her provisional princess outfit her mother had pieced together for her from the Goodwill.



ROBERT STINSON

BRINGING RASPUTIN HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

I had come home for Thanksgiving that first year of college but remember almost nothing about it, except that I drove with an upper-class girl whose number I plucked off the dining hall ride board and who talked on and on about problems she was having with her boyfriend. Halfway home, sensing that my minimal responses betrayed a freshman's innocence, she began discoursing on the shafts, orifices, and fragrant fluids in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, *Kubla Khan*, glancing at me over the tops of her glasses to suggest there were naughty things a freshman had yet to learn.

This was more interesting than the quiz I was facing after Thanksgiving on another poem, Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body*. I had dutifully put that book in my suitcase. But any poem longer than a sonnet seemed more trouble than it was worth. *John Brown's Body* was "an epic poem of the Civil War," our professor had said, "Pulitzer Prize material!" He meant these as selling points, but to me they signaled pages and days of tedium. I remember a sleepy half hour on my bed at home, leafing back and forth, looking for a point of entry and a message for my time—this was the fall of 1960, right after Kennedy's election—and finding neither. Indeed, I thought one place near the end especially sappy. It was where Benét has Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln, before they go off to the Ford Theater, talking amiably about what they would do once he left office: "They would go back to Springfield, find a house / Live peaceably and simply, see old friends . . ." Benét deftly steps around the assassination, letting you imagine it or not as you please. I decided not to and Tuesday of the next week, back on my college campus, deftly failed the quiz. Whatever else I did over Thanksgiving was less memorable than even those few pages.

Coming home for Christmas a month later was different. I remember everything about that, especially, this time, the train. My school was on the Erie Railroad, in Pennsylvania, maybe four hundred miles west of our New



IV. ADVOCACY: WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

MARIAN MATHEWS CLARK

MY STUDY ON STAY-PUTS

You can do your studies on us migratory types all you want. My sister Rose came home from school last year saying that's what you stay-puts call us. I told her you're probably the same guys yelling White Trash Bastards go home when we drive through Salem. She says, no you wouldn't yell at us. She doesn't think you even talk to us. She says you just check up on how many months we don't go to school and how many kids we have and how many weeks we're hungry in the off-season. I ask her why you don't mind your own business but she tells me you're not hurting anybody, just writing up these studies called "Our 1965 Migrant Population" or "Movements of Migrants in the Sixties," that kind of thing, where you put us in categories.

I tell her you're not the only ones who can sniff out what makes types tick. I'm figuring out stuff, too.

She says, Lily, you're thirteen. Nobody'll listen to you.

But what does she know? I'm doing my own study on one of your kind. This girl came straying into our fields a month ago when strawberries the size of Grandpa's tumor were crouching in their bushes, all juicy and red. Just ripe for plucking, my fourteen-year-old brother Louis said, then laughed to himself.

The last five years at strawberry time on Oregon Sunrise Farms the big bosses have hired Marie, this scrawny woman with hair chopped off to her ear lobes, to drive a painted-over school bus into town to pick up a bunch of jack-off kids.

A month ago, when Marie dumps off her first load for the season, this girl I'm doing my study on catches my eye right off. Me and Rose always watch them close, staggering off the bus at seven, an hour after we get here, and dragging themselves over the rows like they don't know where they are. Maybe their mamas stuffed them into Marie's bus while they were asleep. Me and Rose have the types named, and the first day we usually pick out which stay-puts go with which type. Name The Stay-Put is something I came up

with one real bad summer when the sun was beating down hotter than usual and you couldn't roll your pants up because your legs would burn and blister, and dirt and berry juice would creep under the blister and smart like crazy. So you kept your pants rolled down but you felt sweat trickle down your legs all day. Naming stay-puts took your mind off juice and blisters.

This year I have to name them by myself because Rose, who's sixteen, has started hanging around with Butchie, clinging to him too tight to pick much of anything, let alone help me lay out the types. By the end of that first day I have them pretty much lined up, though, except for this one girl I'm doing my study on.

I can tell right off she's not one of the Kick-Asses who Marie will yell at all summer and threaten to can if she catches them throwing berries one more time or smashing bushes when they chase each other over the rows. Last year this Kick-Ass everyone called Red landed in our section with his foot in Louis's flat. Louis told him if he ever saw him close enough to see red, he would beat the crap out of him.

Three days later Marie canned the kid for stuffing the bottom of his flats with dirt, then covering it up with berries. I said that'll show him. Won't show him a thing, Louis said. I reminded him about Ray Halvery in quonset five who got his whole family canned for stealing two flats of raspberries. Ray was crying and the whole family was awful scared.

That's different, Louis said. Kids like Red don't have to worry about coming here year after year, so getting kicked out is nothing to them. I didn't argue with him, but something didn't sit right about the whole thing.

This girl I'm doing my study on doesn't hang with the Gossip-and-Giggle-Girls either. Louis calls them GAGS. They come out here in their little groups and yak all day and cackle over the Kick-Asses stumbling around making fools of themselves. Once I had a row next to a GAG. She yapped with her friends about the extra school outfits she was going to buy with her berry money and how clothes in the stores were running to orange and red and bright colors this year. She said her boyfriend thought she looked best in pale pink, though, so she probably wouldn't buy any new thing unless she wore it at home.

For a minute she sounded like Rose, who moons after some boy every summer. I guess if Butchie said he liked a certain color, Rose might wear it for him, but the only pink thing she has, used to be a white blouse that rubbed up against my red sweatshirt in the wash. Wearing colors for somebody seems



MARK D. WALKER

MY LIFE IN THE LAND OF THE ETERNAL SPRING: THE COFFEE PLANTATION

Though I had lived and worked in Guatemala for seven years, it was a brief encounter with my young daughter, Michelle, on the San Francisco Miramar coffee plantation, perched on the side of the Volcano Atilán that would determine my direction in life. It was a few days before Christmas, and I was strolling through the Big House when I came upon her in the living room. She stood, her feet planted on the orange tile floor, hugging her new Airedale puppy, Tiky, and gazing with wonder at the Christmas tree twinkling with colored lights and filled with handmade decorations. Below the tree, a number of brightly wrapped packages sat in contrast to the stark white walls. On the wall were a number of photographs of my wife's family members.

It was a perfect holiday moment until I noticed a dozen small children directly behind her pushed up against the screen door which opened onto the patio beyond. A soft evening afterglow highlighted the children, and I couldn't distinguish their faces behind the screen. They stood, dressed in simple cotton shirts, jeans, and flip-flops, silently peering into the room. These were the workers' children, who lived in little block homes below the Big House. The children were all so cute, so inquisitive, so innocent. None of them dared to open the door and come inside to join Michelle or touch the presents; they were relegated to peering in from the outside.

This scene would be branded into my memory as it represented the vast difference between the options open to these children in comparison to my daughter. Because I had married Ligia, the daughter of the *finca* (plantation) owner, Michelle was part of the family. Seeing the workers' children reminded me what it felt like to be on the outside looking in. I'd never be totally accepted by Ligia's grandfather and key family members, nor would I be invited to do anything but occasionally visit the plantation during holidays

ELIZABETH BURTON

DAY AND NIGHT

When Amangul's father invited Grace to an event at the local Xinjiang government center, she wasn't sure what to expect. He was president of the Uyghur part of the university, and therefore an important man in Kashgar. To invite her to see the private performance of a troupe of champion folk dancers was an honor not typically bestowed upon anyone outside government circles, so Grace gladly accepted. It was only as the event drew closer that she discovered Amangul wouldn't be among the attendees.

"It's only for significant people," Amangul had tried to explain. "Like my father; like you."

"But I'm just a teacher!" Grace said. "What's so significant about me?"

"You're American." To Amangul, that explained everything.

When the night arrived, Grace donned her best Western dress and took a taxi to the center. Usually, she either walked wherever she needed to go or took a donkey cart, but something told her she needed to arrive in a more glamorous fashion. And indeed, a uniformed doorman was waiting to help her out of the taxi and direct her to the event.

Feeling a bit of a fraud, Grace entered the plush auditorium she hadn't known existed before. Chinese women in evening gowns circled the room, selecting from a lavish buffet of fruits and Chinese food. Looking down at her own clothes, what her mountain grandmother would have called her "Sunday-go-to-meeting" dress, she almost turned around and left. But Amangul's father, a portly man in his fifties, appeared at her side.

"Welcome!" His smile was genuine and she relaxed a bit. "We have a seat reserved just for you." He took her elbow and steered her gently around the buffet table. "You're our honored guest."

"This is all a bit more grand than I was expecting," Grace said, indicating her dress.

"Nonsense! You look lovely; that blue matches your eyes." He touched

the tip of her nose the way he would a child's, transforming her worried look into a smile. "I am glad my daughter has such a friend."

"Is this our guest?" A Chinese man Grace guessed to be in his forties suddenly blocked their way. She immediately mistrusted him, his manner so smooth she could have slipped on it. "I am Chang, the Deputy Governor." She could tell he assumed she knew the importance of his title, but she could only guess at the privilege that went with it. "It's lovely to meet such a pretty young American friend."

It was all Grace could do not to raise an eyebrow, but she smiled politely. "I'm pleased to be here." She turned to Amangul's father, who was still holding her elbow, "Thank you for inviting me."

"Ah," Chang said. "He did so at my direction, didn't you Abdulsalam?"

"That I did, sir. That I did." His tone was overly deferential, almost toadying, and Grace disliked Chang even more.

The Chinese man, though, didn't seem to sense her discomfort. His laugh was too loud, as if he were trying to make it carry through the room. "Come," he insisted, "Let's show this beautiful lady to her seat."

The men fussed over her while she settled into the chair, and she fought the urge to chase their hands away. Where there would have been a fancy rug to eat off of in Uyghur homes, here, Grace sat in front of a delicate table with a fine, red silk tablecloth. Instead of the traditional Chinese presentation of food, though, with selections served on a Lazy Susan turntable in the middle, Grace found herself surrounded by half a dozen small plates including all the selections from the buffet. She was grateful she wouldn't have to mingle with the women in the beautiful dresses.

Her relief was short-lived. An attractive young Chinese woman in an ornate Western-styled gown settled into the chair beside her. "And here is Miss Chao," Chang said. "Two lovely ladies dining together!"

"Hello." Grace smiled at the other woman and extended her hand. "I'm Grace."

The woman looked at her with what could only be disdain, but she took her hand. "Chunhua." Her "It's nice to meet you" was said in perfect English but with little enthusiasm. She reached into her purse and pulled out a pack of American cigarettes, offering one to Grace. When Grace shook her head, she lit her own with a tiny red and gold lighter. Grace swallowed a cough.

Chang and Abdulsalam were seated across the table from Chunhua and Grace. "Dinner first," Chang said, "and then, dancing!" *Dancing* was said

CHARLES D. BROCKETT*APPENDIX: SOCIAL MOBILITY & INEQUALITY*

We have always known in the United States that we have had both rich and poor but the essence of the American experience has been the domination of society by our vast middle class. Supposedly this set us apart from the Old World and certainly from the newer countries of the developing world. Each generation could expect to be better off materially than the one before. With more hard work than luck, the enterprising could also climb up the social status ladder, perhaps even up to among the wealthy.

Such social myths take hold because they have roots in reality. Up until recently generational material progress had been the norm. Stories of social mobility are legion, including in this anthology. The U.S. indeed was once more egalitarian than Western Europe.

But as the evidence that follows demonstrates all too clearly, there have been dramatic changes in the United States across the last few decades: inequality has been increasing while social mobility has been in decline. One's chances of climbing the social status ladder are now better throughout much of the rest of the advanced industrial democracies than in the U.S.

As a society we are increasingly aware of serious strain between our myths and our social reality. Out of that strain comes change. We encourage you to not only consider the following evidence but to follow it back to its source materials. Share this information. Let's make some changes, let's make America more egalitarian again.

