

# Me No Want

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Anthony Paul Griffin

## THE RANT

Jamaal Wedgeable wrapped his feet under and around the stool, cupped his hands under the seat's edge, and firmly pressed his back against the stool – all to hide his excitement. Wedgeable is at his favorite bar, Sam's. Sam's is not large; the Fire Marshall has only permitted occupancy for 100 people – it always seems to be at or over the limit. Sam's has been located at the same building for fifty years, situated in the northeast corner of a historical hotel in downtown Cleveland. For those seeking glitz, Sam's is not for them; Sam's instead emits warmth and comfort. On this cool Ohio day Sam's ambiance seemed even greater. Mother's Nature cooling breathe firmly pushed those who entered, the golden leaves dancing on the sidewalk below of only enhanced the play of colors, textures and history.

Although Sam's is possessive of old world touches, the bar's décor is complimented by modern technology sprinkled throughout. The touch modernity is not at all garish but has been placed in a complimentarily manner throughout the space. Wedgeable loves the warmth provided by the dark walnut which graces the walls and bar. He firmly believes the leather covering the stools and couches would make wonderfully comfortable shoes. For years now, Sam's has been known for having the best jazz in town. If there is any doubt Cleveland and Sam's have benefited from Wedgeable's comedic success, the remaining few doubters have long been silenced.

*Sam's gotta have paid all 'em pretty women to come to his place. The*

*most pretty women per square plank  
than any place in the country.*

Wedgeable has used the same line in his act night in and night out. The more he comments about pretty women, the self-fulfilling, and rather prophetic nature of the joke has made Sam's a designation. Those seeking to determine the truth of Wedgeable's persistent reference to his favorite bar are drawn to Sam's doors. Sam's is also the place to be for those on the prowl, and this night is no different.

Wedgeable is not working tonight, at least not on stage. There is no adoring crowd. There is no routine to execute. Before coming down, he promised himself to control his wandering eye, and not let it get the best of him. He is here to talk business. Jamaal Leon Wedgeable has just completed his second decade as a comic. The critics laud his unique and biting style. Rolling Stone described his performance as a "raw and unvarnished experience." Six

months have now elapsed since his appearing on comedy specials for HBO and Showtime; it matters not they are competing cable shows. Jamaal Wedgeable is a unique talent. He is known by his last name; there are few who called him by his first name, his mother is one, Elaine, Larry's wife, is the other.

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Elaine is a native of Los Angeles. Elaine and Wedgeable worked on the same television program for five years; she as a producer; he as a writer. Elaine is quick witted, a manager of people and decisive in action and manner. She came to the program at a time few women were given producing roles. She came as graduate of University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Wedgeable also was a new employee, he had been with the show for six months at the time of Elaine's arrival.

Elaine and Wedgeable first met during lunch. The seating in the restaurant

was crowded that day and Elaine asked whether she could share his table. Wedgeable barely looked up when she inquired, did not initially recognize her as the new producer; he was too consumed with his own worries and fears about surviving as a writer in Hollywood. He felt he had moved to a strange land and was living among even stranger people. Wedgeable had yet to adapt to Los Angeles.

Nothing particularly eventful happened during their lunch. He respected her space, she his. They did talk and they learned immediately they loved each other's mine, so much so it absolutely scared Wedgeable to death. If he would care to admit his fears, he believed Elaine could read his thoughts. He never lied to her because of this, he kept his distance sexually, but she generally was the first person he called, outside of Larry, if he wanted to work through personal issues. They remained friends after each left the

show, Elaine moving to Cleveland to take on other challenges in the industry. Wedgeable stayed in the City, even when he ultimately made his decision to become a comic.

Wedgeable still performs on the college circuit but on a selective basis. This new decade has seen other comics pitching projects to him. He is in Cleveland to meet his friend and lawyer, Larry. Their relationship is now in its twenty-fifth year; the relationship predates Wedgeable's foray to the stage. Larry represented Wedgeable when he was a television writer, something for which Wedgeable received considerable recognition. The decision to become a stand-up comic was something these two friends and colleagues discussed a many nights over drinks. This meeting tonight was arranged at Larry's suggestion; Larry wanted to pitch a new project.

Wedgeable knew little about what the new project entailed, but he did know it was to be based in Los Angeles.

Wedgeable's excitement tonight is borne out of his recent successes. He held on the stool, and reflected back on his expressing to Larry his desire to explore opportunities in film. He wrapped his feet tighter just from the thought of the possibilities.

Larry had told Wedgeable earlier he would be running twenty to thirty minutes behind. As a former writer and as a working comic, Wedgeable simply couldn't resist: "I told you're colored". Even though both he and Wedgeable knew the joke was trite at best, none of this bothered Wedgeable – he bragged about his having no limits on his comedy. Wedgeable oft-time referred to these short exchanges as his *Bob Hope jokes* - short, rapid, and corny. Wedgeable said his *Bob Hopes jokes* kept him agile. He never explained what "agile" meant, Larry never asked. Larry played the appropriate foil and chuckled. While Wedgeable waited he filled the time listening to the conversations floating about him. Always

working, he took notes on the napkins given to him by the bartender.

Larry entered the bar about six thirty, he noticed Wedgeable was sitting exceedingly erect; Wedgeable did not see Larry approach. Larry touched Wedgeable on his right shoulder, "Hey man, how are you!" Wedgeable turned and responded, "My brother"! Their embrace was a manly hug accompanied with appropriate guttural grunts. When they broke, they patted each other's arms and backs in a friendly, but violent manner.

Larry moved to Cleveland ten years ago to marry. He met his wife, Elaine, through Wedgeable. Elaine when told Larry's last name was Jeweesh thought it was another one of Jamaal's jokes. She thought Larry and his family were in on the joke. They weren't and it wasn't a joke. His last name is Jeweesh. She didn't realize any of this until they were getting their marriage license. "Oh, my God, it is his

name”. Larry explained to Elaine, again, he has always been Methodist. He didn’t understand why Elaine spent the rest of the evening laughing out loud.

Elaine and Jamaal were friends at the time Larry was introduced to Elaine. Once Larry attempted to determine the extent of the friendship but Elaine stopped the inquiry cold. “I’m not a virgin and if you think you are marrying one, we can stop this relationship now. If you want to explore every relationship I have had, we can stop the conversation now.” Without taking a breath, Elaine continued, “or do you want to play twenty questions”?

No, she didn’t scream when she took her stance. Even though she didn’t raise her voice, Larry read other signs. The hair on her eye brows extended outwardly; those which occupied her arms stood at attention. Elaine eyes became affixed in place. Larry knew to stop while it was safe; he never asked again, he never accepted her

invitation to go tit-for-tat. They hadn’t dated – Elaine and Wedgeable - they are just good friends. Elaine is the one person who is able to peer to the bone of Wedgeable’s soul. Her ability to read him is too uncomfortable for Wedgeable; he long ago answered the relationship question with a firm *that will never happen*. They are friends from a distance with Larry’s marriage to Elaine. Wedgeable avoids getting into anything other than surface conversations with Elaine. It is as if he knew Elaine saw too much when she peered.

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Both Larry and Wedgeable refer to Los Angeles as the City, not New York, not San Francisco, not any other place on the face of God’s green earth met their definition of the City. Both came to Los Angeles by different means, but both loved their *City of Angels* nonetheless.

Larry was an Iowan by birth – a product of Des Moines. Even though he

was nearing his sixty fifth-birthday he remains in remarkably good health. Seemingly, Iowa's bountiful farmlands contributed to Larry's good health – at least that was Larry's view. Larry is a silently vain man, always has been. He is possessive of a meticulous beard and a head of hair which told the secret of the well-kept nature of his existence. Physically Larry Jeweesh stands six four, exceedingly proud of his physique but never one interested in participating in organized sports. He loved his brain more. Larry came to Los Angeles as a promising scholar; he attended Boalt Hall, University of Berkeley's School of Law. After leaving Berkeley, Larry's intention was to remain in Los Angeles and work in the entertainment industry representing the array of talent found in the City. He made good his stated intentions, up until the time he was introduced to Elaine and fell in love. He now calls Cleveland his home.

Wedgeable came to Los Angeles at twenty-one, looking for work as a writer; he was a graduate of a Prairie View A & M University. Prairie View is a historical institution which was borne out of slavery; it was the State of Texas' first institution of higher education for Negroes. His alma mater was known for producing a greater number of black engineers, than most institutions of higher education in the country; their numbers put most other institutions to shame. Wedgeable belief in his chances of making it in Los Angeles was just as foreign as his having an idea of travelling to Houston, lying fifty miles to the east, and succeeding in his dream. He told his father he could also fail in Houston, why not try Los Angeles. His father didn't argue with him anymore with regards to his decision and did everything he could to help his son succeed at his strange dream.

Wedgeable grew up in Hempstead, Texas; a small town. Hempstead is one of

those country towns where everyone knows each other, but close enough to the Houston in distance to know where Houston lies, but far enough away where your everyday reality was a step backward in time and manner. Hempstead is located in Waller County, the same county as Prairie View. By the time Wedgeable came through the school system, integration had taken place. He was of the generation who was allowed to dream of other possibilities the world had to offer. His generation was the first generation of Blacks who were granted the privilege to actually attempt to live their individual dreams – *color be damned*. This writing dream still remained a strange dream to his father. When Jamaal told his parents he wanted to be an entertainer, his father blamed his mother. He reasoned she was so in love with that damn jazz artist she blessed our son with his far flung dream. *Negro don't you know you from Hempstead*. Jamaal was not the class clown; he was a

quiet child. He never entered a play, never took a drama class. He consumed books as if he was looking for some secret to life. His parents did notice however when their son became a master at voices, and impersonations at sixteen. This talent reared its head when he became angry. His father agreed to name him Jamaal but insisted his wife add another “a” to the name. He couldn’t explain why he wanted another “a” added, but he knew his jealousy just got the best of him when his wife swooned over another man when she played Ahmad Jamal’s albums.

When Jamaal Leon Wedgeable left Prairie View, he had in his hands a bachelor’s degree in English, and little else. The lack of money did not matter to him much, he had made his decision that his survival or demise would occur in Los Angeles. Wedgeable is just as vain as Larry, only he is more vocal about his belief in his physical attributes - this is something his

parents blame on Los Angeles. They never noticed the boy had the shiniest shoes in elementary, junior high and high school. His dad did wonder how he kept his shoes so shiny with them living on a dirt road. Wedgeable's pants were always pressed, his nails always clean. His hair always kept. All these facts did not matter to his parents – his vanity was pure and simple because of California. When he travelled to Los Angeles, he stood six three, was exceedingly proud of his physique, and loved books, movies, and women more than he loved sports.

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“You look good man.”

“You too man.”

“How long you've been waiting?”

“Twenty five minutes.”

“I'm sorry that I was running late.”

“I've been good.”

Wedgeable then told his joke, their joke, about the pretty women at Sam's, but

in a more sexually explicit manner than he cared to tell on stage. Their meetings generally consisted of catching up, but also the telling and retelling stories formed during their long-term friendship. It was not uncommon for them to make reference to the *softer sex*. Alcohol helped this boys will be boys reunion, but it wasn't necessarily required. On this day however, Larry's couldn't resist teasing Wedgeable with regards to his good behavior declaration. “What did you do, wrap your leg around the chair”? A bitten smile escaped from the side of Wedgeable's face before his meekly response, “how did you know”? Their laugh was now more pronounced – as stated earlier, alcohol was not required for these friends to enjoy the other's company.

Wedgeable did the honor and ordered two beers. He said he hadn't started drinking because he didn't want to get too far ahead. With his back still straight, his



legs still wrapped around the stool's base, Wedgeable turned to his friend and told him again how good it was to see him and then added, "You could have texted". Larry, not to be outdone, answered in a dead-panned manner, "it's good to see you too man, you could have emailed". They now bellowed. Even though they have had this same exchange hundreds of times, shame was not part of their relationship. Their exchange was their running joke in which they had no intention of abandoning anytime soon.

This friendship has survived their respective divorces, a spot of bladder cancer, which touched Larry's life, and their respective life-cycle difficulties. They do not see each other as much as they did in the past, but they have kept in touch by virtue of their business relationship. They talk on the phone often, they take business trips together; they even insert long, handwritten notes in their business correspondences. Larry doesn't text, Wedgeable hates emails;

both are too paranoid to fully explore social media. Their friendship has not suffered because of their generational maladies. Larry left a large law firm in the City for love. Wedgeable proclaimed he would never leave. While Larry loves the ground Elaine walks, he is a man of few words and is not one to say he loves her. He believes he should show his love on a daily basis. Wedgeable on the other hand loves the words, *I love you*, and he uses them often. He has heard more than once he didn't know what love is but this seems not to bother him. Wedgeable's habit is to revert to jokes, all while his relationship crumbles, once more, in ruins.

The bartender filled their orders and turned immediately to take the next order. Patrons stood three deep placing orders. A vocalist intoned across the room. People mingled about, all the seats at the bar are now occupied. Sam's appeared to be coming close to its limits. Bodies brushed

against bodies; perfumes and colognes mingled.

Wedgeable took only one sip of his beer before his curiosity took hold. He asked Larry “why are you punishing me”. Before Larry could answer, Wedgeable answered his own question with a question - “Talk show, movie”? Larry answered, “No and no”. Wedgeable immediately inquired and demanded at the same time: “Damn it, then what is it”?

Wedgeable laughed at himself and grabbed another napkin. He knew he used to place God in front of damn at one time. He now flinches when he uses the word damn. He still saw the hand of his sister slapping him for the use of the wrong word combination. She had never struck him before; well not since they were children. He never forgot; he never combined the words again. On this night he laughed at his own contradictions. Our comic may be raw and unvarnished, but he is not fearless. If

his critics only knew he has a greater fear of his sister than of their criticism of his often profane rants – his career path would clearly not require parental guidance. Larry laughed internally at Wedgeable’s impatience. He too couldn’t hide his own excitement anymore.

The offer was for Wedgeable to be the head writer for a new “culturally relevant” show exploring how games are played in different cultures. “The proposal is still in the concept stage, you are being asked to flush the concept out. There is also an offer for you to serve as the host. It’s good money, big money, a long term deal my friend.” Larry anticipated the same type of excitement from his friend when he announced the cable television specials. But on this occasion, no such excitement was forthcoming. Wedgeable took another sip of his beer and turned his seat so he could see Larry’s eyes. In a whisper scream he thanked him for his efforts, but he felt he

had to decline the writing part of the offer. He also added that if he couldn't write, then he couldn't be the host either. Larry was shocked by what he thought was broken circle logic; silly logic. He didn't expect this response and had no idea what his friend was talking about. "Surely, you're joking. Surely, you are fucking kidding me man"! Wedgeable moved immediately from his stool, stood next to the bar and put his right hand on the bar before he began his rant. He was oblivious to those who surrounded him.

"No, I am not kidding. My mother use to complain about Black folks who couldn't keep their mouths shut. She said the butchers use to give salt fat bacon and neck bones away because they were scraps, the waste part of the animal. 'We ate them to survive'! I can still hear her complaining. But what did we do, we went on television. We wrote articles about how good they were and the White folks obliged us and started charging for scraps"!

Wedgeable now paced in a small space between his stool and the wall. His rant stayed focused however, "Now scraps are more expensive than some of the choice cuts. We let them hear blues, and they stole that. We let them hear R & B, and the other day I was watching this show and this Korean girl sounded better than Whitney. Come on man".

Larry just sat drinking, not knowing whether this was all a new joke, a new routine. Wedgeable leaned from side to side; he then changed course and swayed back and forward. His dark suit flowed with his every motion. As dancers are trained to go to their toes, Wedgeable's body movements were all performed on the tips of his.

Wedgeable's rant continued, "Man, I can't do it. How we play ordinary games is unique. When we play spades, we don't just play spades. We play spades! We let the days, weeks and years of frustration come

out. Everybody, every subject, every mistake is game and subject to ridicule. ‘Silly mother ..... No, you didn’t play that card! Are you crazy? Must be blind! My partner must be blind’. That is how we talk to our partners. How in the hell am I am going to write without affecting how we play too; it would be the same as telling our secrets”.

Wedgeable looked up and screamed at those who surrounded him, “Don’t laugh”! They had seen his last special, they laughed. Their laughter didn’t stop him, “I have seen knives placed on the table at card games. I have seen guns pulled; we all understand when the knife or gun comes out, you don’t’ back down. Call the other side a name and then tell them to get their asses up from the table”!

Larry injected his disbelief, “What are you talking about! You can’t be serious”!

Wedgeable ignored Larry’s brief inconvenient interruption, “Look man, we understand the losers play their roles, bluffs and get their asses up from the table. Our elders, if not at the table, are in the other room allowing us to express our words in the most vile, vicious way possible. ‘This Negro! This colored boy! He has enough nerve to play that card, get your ass up from the table’! Man, I can’t do a game show and not be true. As long as my mother is living, I can’t do it. She will call me a pussy and a pimp for not keeping just one damn secret”.

Wedgeable took the napkin and wiped his shoes. Even in his most possessed state, his appearance still mattered. He came out of character for this brief moment and laughed at himself, an inward laugh. He repeated the line, “My mother will call me a pussy and a pimp for not being true”! The crowd had now become denser and moved closer, their chuckles seen rather muted at this point. Some of Wedgeable’s audience

didn't know whether this was part of a routine, or a reality show; others thought he was just drunk.

Even with a now muted voices and responses, Wedgeable was not deterred, "Man, in the South dominoes is a contact sport. They get the nastiest and most sturdy table they can find and match wits, skills, and mathematical possibilities to determine whether the other person has a particular bone in their hand. They say Black folks can't count. They say we can't do mathematical calculations. I disagree. I don't think those pyramids got there because we didn't understand math. But I can't say that on television, can I? I can't say Egypt is in Africa; can't admit that can we? Hell, Sheba is a black name." After his reference to Queen of Sheba, Larry was now totally perplexed. He said nothing. He did nothing. He just drank; he was now five beers deep.



The proprietors always keeps Sam's thermostat at sixty five degrees, but you could never tell it by Wedgeable's appearance; he is sweating profusely. His forehead now matches his words.

But let me get back to my point. How do I write such a show where you take out the slamming of bones (a domino reference) on a table? If I am true to the culture, I would have to tell the truth, and I can't do that – then everyone would then play the game the same way. A whole nation of folks telling their opponents, *get your ass up from the table. I ain't, I can't, I won't do it.*

Larry listened and thought - *the alcohol isn't working.*

And if I can't write, then I can't host. Look man, I know it's a great offer, but I can't do it. I just can't do it.

Wedgeable didn't wait for a response from Larry, but continued his ranting, "... one last example ... I was playing a game of Scrabble the other day and my sister had the

nerve to tell me *ain't* wasn't a word. If *ain't*, *ain't* a word, then you *ain't* real. I don't give a damn what no damn dictionary says, they didn't visit us when they wrote that thing. Frederick Douglas, Nat Turner, Fannie Lou Hammer, Dr. King, they all used Black English. Every civil rights leader since slavery has used some form of Black

English. And don't give me the self-hate speech. You ignore real language then you Scabble everything this world has to offer. You and Ms. Scabble can kiss my ass. She nor anyone got up from the table. My sister repeated, '*ain't*, *ain't* no damn word'! She also called me a silly fool and then told me to get my butt up from the table"!

## ME NO BUY ...

Larry was astonished by what was happening. *This fool is serious.* Larry is now on his eighth beer; in fact he stopped sipping when Wedgeable started talking about salt fat bacon and neck bones. Larry did try to talk sense in Wedgeable's head, "I offer you good money, consistent employment and a long-term contract and you are talking about some damn secrets. It's a damn show based on how games are played. They want you to take the lead in writing. Sure they want to explore new ground and I have no doubt they will have no problem with you incorporating the Black culture in the show's content. What is your problem man"!?

Larry has every right to be mad at Wedgeable for seemingly renegeing on their prior discussions. They had spent many an hour laughing over what a show would look like. When they were last in Los Angeles they closed down a restaurant and bar dying

laughing over how the typical game show dynamics would change. As he watched his friend go off this day, he remembered one such example where they used the *Price is Right* as their building block.

There are three contestants (as usual), one White female, Mary, one African American female (Jo Anne) and one Chinese female contestant (Linda). Mary is in her early twenties; Jo Anne is in her early thirties; Linda is in her late thirties. The contestants are asked to price a pair of Stacy Adams worn by a Hispanic male; approximately sixteen (call him *Pachuco*). The host is Wedgeable.

After explaining the rules of the game, Wedgeable asked Mary first for the price of the shoes. Mary, unfamiliar with Stacy's, responds, "I don't know. They look cheap, I'll say \$15.00". The host then says, "Hey *Mi Hijo*, did you hear what she said your shoes costs." *Mi Hijo* is the *Pachuco*.

Before Wedgeable finishes his question, *Pachuco* says, “*She’s estúpido*”.

In that audience participation is encouraged the audience began to chant, *estúpido, estúpido, estúpido*. As the crowd chants, *Pachuco* dances a Mexican two-step. Each time he quickly turns, the audience screams, *estúpido!* Of course, it is the host’s responsibility to get control of the crowd, Wedgeable screams, “*Sit your asses down!*”

“Jo Anne, you’re next, you have heard Mary say \$15.00, what is your guess?” Jo Anne asked “what sto”?” Wedgeable pretends to be confused and says, “What? “What sto”” Wedgeable then responds, “Oh what store”! “And why do you ask”?” Jo Anne not deterred by his lack of understanding of the English language responds, “I can get you a pair on the street for \$25.00. At Stacy’s downtown, the lowest \$150.00; if you got them in my neighborhood store, you gonna get jacked for at least \$350.00. Like I said, what sto”?”

Wedgeable responds honestly, “I don’t know what store”. Wedgeable should have seen the clash of cultures with his response and should have known he had sat himself to be the brunt of the joke (should have seen it coming), Jo Anne responds accordingly, “*Then you’re stupid*”. *Pachuco* dances in an excited frenzy. The crowd erupts.

Wedgeable knows he has lost control and has to get the crowd to sit down again. “Y’all need to sit y’all butts in those seats”! After gaining a moderate degree of control, Wedgeable continues, “We have one more contestant. Linda”?” Linda’s response is, “Me no buy”. Wedgeable then responds, “No, no, no, we are not asking you to buy”. Linda responds with the same refrain, “Me no buy, too much.”

Wedgeable now knows he is in trouble; his method of explaining is to talk louder. “No, No, No, we are not asking you to buy the damn shoes”. Linda understands exactly what he is saying but plays it out.



“Me no want; he buy from me, \$75.00”.

*Pachuco* now is flailing about the stage, chains swinging, shoes tapping, arms waving. The crowd is chanting, Me no want! Me no want! Me no want!

Before the camera cuts away, Linda is seen selling Wedgeable a pair of Stacy’s and sharing her homemade egg rolls with him. Wedgeable refuses to share with the other contestants, “get your asses away from here”!

Those nights he and Wedgeable did rifts on *Jeopardy (A Children’s Version: “Mamma, he is cheating, he is giving the answer!)*, *Wheel Fortune* (concept: you pay a third party to stop the Wheel for you abruptly; although its technically cheating, 50% of the money goes to your favorite non-profit) and *Can You Do Better than a Third Grader (the answer is hell no, I’m not doing his homework for him; boy get your butt back in there!)*.

## JOKE ON THEE, BUT NOT ON ME

Larry's sadness and anger is because Wedgeable's conduct contradicted all which they had discussed. Wedgeable's held his head down, appearing to totally ignore Larry. The others who stood around no longer pretended not be listening; they were fully engaged.

Wedgeable is now sweating profusely. He has had only a sip of his beer, the bottle sat lonely on the edge the bar. His tears begin to mingle with his sweat. He repeated over and over and over again he couldn't do it. Wedgeable then launches into a story about being at his pastor's house the other day; there was a card game going. He said the pastor looked up at the sky and said, "Forgive me Father" and then slammed the card on the table with some choice words, "Get y'all asses up"! Everybody laughed. Wedgeable called his Pastor a punk ass preacher that day. "Man I can't put that on T.V."

Wedgeable bent over the bar and appeared to be talking to the bar; he was fully engaged and practically screaming at his inanimate friend:

"We integrated and we lost Black shops, motels and teachers. We put Black dance on television and now everybody can dance. I heard this White boy on cable the other day and I thought I was listening to Prince. What else do y'all want from us! When I was a young man, they used to say White girls had no butts, so much for that. Fuck you man, my mother is still living. I can't do it. Have you ever heard Diane Schuur sing? *Ain't*, no secrets anymore. And sure, you can call me a hypocrite. Maybe I am. Sure, I tell our inside jokes to others Larry, but this is different. I can't clean up, *get your ass up!* My mother would stuff a dry neck bone down my throat the next time I stayed overnight. So she's ninety, I guarantee you I am a dead man".

Wedgeable smiled at his last line. He now wiped his eyes, stood erect and grabbed the napkins which graced the bar, all now full with thoughts, concepts, words, and unreadable scribblings. "I gotta use that, I gotta use that," he repeated it over and over again. The sweat repeated its path on the bridge of his nose; his eyebrows were now soaked.

The music is now silent; the musicians now are standing to Wedgeable's right. Larry has not moved from his seat. Sam's is now more intimate than Wedgeable ever knew. All the monitors are now muted. The lights from outside now gently interplayed against the aged walnut, no one noticed this interplay; no one cared.

Even though Wedgeable didn't come to Cleveland to work, he has now worked Larry's last nerve. Larry still didn't know whether Wedgeable was joking or whether he was working on a new routine. He knew his legal fees for his work would

pay off the mortgage on his home and give Elaine the summer vacation in Paris they had long planned. Larry had spent months pitching the project and had heard Wedgeable speak of the uniqueness of how Blacks played games. He thought it would be good to do a show looking at the difference in how games are played in the different cultures. He pitched it as fun. He pitched it as unique. It would be different than what those other Black comedians offered as host of game shows.

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*I can't do it because of secrets. I can't do it because my mother is still living. I can't tell those secrets to America. If I can't write it, I can't host it. If I can't host it, I can't write it. What kind of shit is this!*

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Wedgeable is now totally oblivious of Larry's presence. After wiping his forehead, with one of the napkins, a bit of

the paper remained in his now heavy brows. Through his sweat however, he could see the look on his friend's face.

“Man I’m not joking. I’m deadly serious. I’m fucking serious (it was if the use of the word fucking was a better descriptive word than deadly). We put on a show reflecting how a real game of spades (this is a reference to the card game “spades”, not a tool, not a reference to a *jiggaboo*, or the use of spade as a racism idiom) is played, and the talking heads will be on CNN and PBS talking about self-hate. Our reaction to the talking heads will be neutered game of dominoes, spades, poker, Monopoly. I don’t want that to happen. We won’t spend the entire night lying, laughing and loving each other’s company. Everything would change”.

Larry thought his thoughts but had no chance to respond. Wedgeable acted as if Larry’s silence was the much awaited invitation to continue: “I must admit there

are some words we don’t use. I never heard anyone ever use the word bitch; unless the bitch is in the game”. Wedgeable chuckled at his profane play on words. Larry did not.

“You don’t talk about anybody’s mother; well, unless she happens to be sitting across the table”. His *double entendre* brought another smile to *his* face. It was if he was tangoing with himself.

“I ain’t revealing our secrets on a national show. I can’t do it. Pitch another concept, but not that”! He began to hit on the bar and complain louder, “When Richard Pryor played in the movie *The Toy*, I was through with him. A black toy for a fucking White kid! When I was a kid, we all ran home because the Temptations and the Supremes had a special on T.V. It was a big deal for Black entertainers to be on T.V. then. The songs they song were all a tribute to Broadway! What the shit is this! We wanted to hear them sing, *Stop in the Name of Love*. We wanted to hear *My Girl!* A

tribute to Broadway!? I didn't know who Cole Porter was then and I don't too much give a damn now! I was through with them".

Larry thought *this fool is crazy!* Wedgeable heard his thoughts and responded, "I *ain't* going down like that – I can hear them now, 'That's the man who destroyed spades – the man who made it a crime to curse and play cards at the same time'. There are enough Black men in prison! Fuck you Larry, and I *ain't* crazy. I heard your thoughts"!

The crowd was no longer mute, laughter surrounded their last exchange. They really didn't understand why they were laughing. Larry remained confused and pissed. *What is wrong with this man?*

Larry could bear no more. "Are you kidding me; you get on stages all over this country and you talk about the most intimate, controversial topics, but you can't talk about games as played in the Black

community. You reference the female anatomy in as many languages as you can and wait for the audiences to catch up. You insult. You prod. Sometimes you are vulgar, other times you are not. You make people mad and you are afraid to write and host a show about the games we play. You ass! You hypocrite"!

None of this mattered to Wedgeable now. He knew there were limits to his humor. He is good at making fun at others' expense, but this is a line he felt he couldn't cross. Wedgeable knew what Larry's, mostly silent, passive aggressive, participation meant. "I know what you're thinking; my mother didn't raise no damn fool". They have been friends for that long; they think each other thoughts.

Wedgeable's words and sweat are now intermingled with his tears. His now captive audience saw his tears as tears of humor, but they are not. Wedgeable knew his friend knew now he could laugh at

others, but not laugh at himself. Wedgeable has always struggled with the implications of words but could never fully admit his own struggle. He knew most curse words were female based (where females were the brunt of the negative reference), but apparently the “raw and unvarnished experience” has its limits. After decades of plying his trade as a wordsmith, Wedgeable’s humor is no different than others he often criticized, poked fun of through his craft. Even though others, and he, were all part of his running social commentary, he was good at excluding himself from the joke.

The lights continued to bounce against the wall. The music has now resumed. The audience is captive no more; they did clap prior to resuming their respective chases. The bartender refreshed Wedgeable’s beer and told him to “*sit your ass down*”!

They, he and Larry, laughed; he, the bartender, did likewise. They all wiped their eyes. Larry one-armed hugged his friend and changed the subject. “Like I said man, it is nice seeing you”.

Larry then noticed his phone contained a couple of texts from Elaine. The first text reminded Larry to be careful with “Jamaal” and not to push him too much. Elaine had texted Larry prior to his making it to Sam’s; he simply did not have time to check his phone. Her text went on to tell him Wedgeable was “no different than the rest of us”. She reminded Larry to explain to him the sharing of cultural secrets was not a sin. A second text was more than a reminder, “My dear, handle his ego, and your own, carefully – if you want me to come down I will. And don’t drink too much – you become the opposite of Jamaal – you rant internally while he rants externally”.

Wedgeable returned Larry's manly hug, and in their moment of brief physical interaction, Wedgeable unknowingly asked the most appropriate question of the night, "How is Elaine"?