



STUDY DRUGS

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“It’s not only illegal drugs we need to be worried about.
Hell no!”

John P. Walters, U.S. Director of National
Drug Control Policy (2007)
“The Drug Czar”

“Hey Edo, you’re in my will Dude!”

“An A Edo... I got an A on my paper!”

Flattery fills the air.

“You de-man Edo!”

From the many student-body Peers I need to race by. “Excuse me.” Twisting and turning as piles of leaves crunch under my feet. “Pardon me.” Navigating Princeton’s Ivy League tradition of academic excellence... I look down at my watch for a split second. “Shit”, I’m now really late for economics class. “See you after class Mr. Singer”, Professor Marcus demands. Locking eyes with him after being startled... he winks... before I fly by in another hurry. “I need to see you after class Mr. Singer, to go over your assignment”, the tweed and patches Professor again demands in a tone that masquerades as serious. “Sounds great Professor... gotta run though.” I need to keep moving or it’ll be too late to get in... dodging crowded walkways. Even Educators are hooked on my product... sprinting through an open lawn because I can finally see my destination. And why wouldn’t they?

It’s the best damn stuff around!

Climbing two steps at a time because I can’t afford to get locked out... my adrenaline pulls open the heavy oak door to Cameron College easily. I then burst through. My shoes squeak from the many sharp turns in this maze of Protestant nostalgia... antique frames lining the dark oak panelling... that seem to go on and on... literally forever. “Hey Edo?” “Gotta keep moving Phil.” I’m popular on Campus for very different reasons than one might expect. “I need to talk to you Edo.” “Later Lisa... text me later.”

People need help getting through their ‘higher learning’ years... and as strange as that sounds, I’m the best friend they have for doing just that; stopping on a dime when I finally get there. Looking up at room #315... I quickly compose myself before opening that door. I wipe away the perspiration from the twenty minute obstacle course I just had to conquer to get here... and forget the ‘other’ Edo that thrives on this Campus. Glancing at the time - I’m only fifteen minutes late. Only. I take a deep breath, and then move forward... opening the door as quietly as I can. I try my best to be invisible while moving towards the first available seat I can find at the back of this cavernous band-shell. “MR. EDO SINGER.” Shit! Four hundred students and he had to spot me. “Nice of you to join us”, bellows from below. I cower as everyone turns in unison. “Glad you could find the Morris Singer Convocation Hall”, Dr. Pitkanen announces with major sarcasm to a hushed class. A public flogging meant to throw off the scent; I smile back with a humbling admission of, “Sorry.” “I am sure you are Mr. Singer.”

Prolific Author and Essayist, ubiquitous Media Pundit from FOX to CNN and everything in-between, renowned Speaker on public policy and a highly sought-after Advisor to Fed Chairman’s going back to Volcker; Economics Professor Jonathan Pitkanen is not unlike the slew of Professors in my thick black book of human weakness that I must make happy.

He's just my most arrogant.

Whether I show up or not I still get an A; this is just theatre... his theatre.

"Ok class... back to supply curves."

So I play along.

Consistency in any product or service is the key to success... and leverage.

Put that in your Economics 101 pipe and smoke it!

Dead to the world after another night of Carnal heaven, or more like the Porn-Olympics... sprawled out in a coma-like slumber with the sheets off their corners and the blankets pushed and pulled everywhere - suddenly a phone interrupts the beautiful post-coitus silence. *Vibrate Vibrate Vibrate.*

My ears open, barely, the rest of my body can't move... not a damn muscle. Elisha groans. *Vibrate Vibrate Vibrate.*

My Long Island nymphet lets out disapproval to the disturbance... then she promptly rolls over for more shut-eye. She earned it. Slowly I negotiate my body closer to the dancing cell on the bedside table because normal isn't in me yet... she takes everything and then some. "Hello."

"RISE AND SHINE RITCHIE RICH."

I fall listlessly back because I need to.

"Edo my man, push that piece of tail away and get vertical, would ya?"

My eyes stay glued shut, "I'm up." "I bet you are. Now do me a favor and get a move on..."

I'm staring at a brand new shipment of your favourite little diamonds."

Sliding to the end of the bed with a wave of excitement, "It's about friggin' time", I carefully sit up while trying to process my friend's very powerful words. "Knew that would do it... now get your ass over here so we can settle up with this treasure." "Yup... ok... I'll be there in twenty." *Click.*

I take a deep breath... and will my body to get moving; everyone on Campus loves those amazing diamonds. Turning and reaching over to kiss a motionless Elisha on the behind... *mwa...* and what a perfect behind it is. In a very zombie-like state, I try and make my way over to the direction of the bathroom... to let the powers of a steaming shower do its magic on my very depleted body.

Closing the door behind me.

Then turning on the water.

Truly amazing is my first and only thought... as this hot water feels miraculous on my skin. Making love to Elisha is an endurance sport I must say... every minute of this steaming shower is pure joy. Last night is a blur... the best kind of blur though... every muscle being pushed and pulled to the max to please my blonde Goddess. Hit the right button or swallow the right pill and she's ravenous.... and very flexible - the entire night. I always feel her primal power the next morning.

“OK sexy I’ll see you.”

Ten minutes later the steaming bathroom sends out a new man. “You were amazing”, planting one on her heart-shaped ass, “amazing”, and another. Elisha starts to giggle. I could kiss that ass all morning if I didn’t have to check out those diamonds. “You have time for breakfast?”, in her deep-sleep voice. “I can meet you at Joeys in an hour.”

“OK Joeys in an hour”, with the cutest face covered in sleep, “I’ve got to get up”, rubbing her eyes after lifting up slowly. “Yes you do pretty lady”, putting on my jacket because I have to go. “What time is it?” “Almost ten.” “Shit I’ve got a noon class”, pushing the blankets off to reveal a blessed body that always makes me willing & able. My Lord. My very benevolent Lord. If only I had a bit more time - my mind drifts - I’d dive in and do unspeakable things... no questions asked! Fixed on that wiggle... and how splendid she tastes... and how soft her skin is. “I’m out of here”, shifting my gaze away from her perfectness, “I’ll see you at Joeys in an hour.” That woman has a spell on me. “I’ll order you the special.” “With extra bacon.” “I know I know”, standing at the bathroom modelling a perfect silhouette of nakedness.

I really do have to get out of here.

“My man”, enthusiastic fist bumps walking through the front door, “it is a rapturous day my rich white friend.” Within seconds my eyes see it... that open box is impossible-to-miss. Resting peacefully on the small kitchen table of Cecil’s cosy one-room apartment, “So these are them?” “They are”, Cecil answers with the widest grin. Putting my hand in to feel thousands... tens of thousands of pink blue and bright yellow pills... “Jesus fuckin’ Christ!” “Christ’s got nothing to do with it... nothing at all”, Cecil moves closer, he reaches inside the box too. “The smoothness of Adderall... the power of Vyvanse... and the rock-bottom price of Ritalin... these are the world’s most perfect hybrids my friend.” “How the hell did you get so many?” Both of us hover over this teeming box like it’s a cure for cancer or something. “The less you know the better.”

“But...”

“Trust me Edo... I mean it”, in the most profound directness I’ve ever heard leave Cecil’s mouth. Calculating the profits in my head from such a haul... I’m putting my hands through the entire box like they really are diamonds.

“Amazing isn’t it”, Cecil states the obvious.

I need to sit down.

Confidant.

Funny.

Handsome with a killer smile.

My eyes catch him entering the popular Diner like a Rock Star.

Oh and I can't forget as sexy as any Hollywood hunk.

Conveniently located just across the street from the main Campus, the second Edo enters the Diner, the second he always enters this bustling Diner, Edo is swarmed by his fellow students. You'd think he had the secret password for hacking into the schools' final grade database? Which, in a place like this, with so much brains and entitlement... don't think for a minute People aren't trying to do that, some of the Geeks have already told me that they're so close to getting in. This Place is full of our future leaders in every category... especially cyber-crime.

Edo keeps trying his best to navigate the crowd... he's even smiled at me a few times... raising a finger that he's going to be quick. His eyes freeze me... can feel that man all over from head to toe. With so many testosterone-fuelled pats on the back you'd think these guys were in love with my Edo?

I smile back... telling him that his woman will wait for as long as it takes. Edo Singer is the man I want to be with - if it was up to me of course; but nothing is up to me when you choose a man like Edo. The charisma of a Politician; my heart dances whenever I look at him. The way he touches me in all the right places, ignites me in ways I never thought possible. Like always I wait patiently in our favourite booth drinking my morning cup of wake-up.

My Lover.

I need it after what he did to me last night.

My Protector.

Seeing him cut-through the gauntlet.

My Mentor.

His eyes are aimed at me as he moves with experience; he doesn't want to leave anybody out.

"Hello Beautiful"... *mwa*.

I am a Slave to my Edo.

"Your eggs are on the way."

"Thanks", sliding in across from me looking exhausted from all that work. I only give him happy... since I gave him my Dirty Girl side last night.

"Coffee?"

"Please Joanie."

"Nice sweater Edo", pouring with a big grin.

"Thanks."

We can't help it; every woman is taken-in by my Edo. Never do I ever take any of our time together for granted. How can I? Staring right at me with his undivided attention... that dirty girl knows what Edo likes.

"Do you have a busy day?"

"Crazy busy... I have four classes and an essay I have to finish for Friday."

"On what?"

"Building a sustainable economy from the ground up... with proper environmental regulations."

“Interesting?”

“Franklin says he can get me one for a hundred bucks.”

“You going to do it?”

Edo’s face changes fast. “Never... I’m here to get my degree, not a lesson in fraud.”

Edo has an interesting gauge of morality; I know what he does.

“Here we are, scrambled with extra bacon.”

He’s never said it, probably because I’ve never asked... but I can put two and two together.

He eats his breakfast like he hasn’t eaten in days.

I watch because I need to.

Because I never know when our time will be stolen.

“Ok beautiful”, stuffing the final bits of toast in his mouth.

I try not to be obsessive... that never works with a guy like Edo.

“I gotta keep moving.”

Our meals lately seem to only have a time limit of twenty minutes; I don’t have the courage to ask for more.

“My man Edo.”

Getting out of this place can present the same battle as getting in.

“Party at Sigma Kai Saturday.”

“You got it!”

Every woman dreams about being with a man that’s so magnetic.

“Edo!”

“Bobby G!”

We need to stop every few steps.

“We’re watching the hockey game tonight.”

“I’ll be there.”

It can take forever to leave this place.

“Football weekend!”

Or any other place on Campus.

“I’ll bring the beer.”

I really could have stayed in bed all morning with Edo.

“Johnny... I’m going to need two touchdowns from you this weekend.”

Princeton New Jersey is a postcard town of 10,000 students.

“Two... I need two.”

But to Edo it’s merely a cozy Piazza.

“You got it Edo”, Princeton’s speedy wide receiver Johnny Newsome, A.K.A. Johnny Flash, returns with a big smile. I wait proudly by his side with a fixed look of support, any woman that can’t admit they feel ten feet tall would be an outright liar. Two steps out of the Diner and Edo’s eyes suddenly grow large, “Ricardo.” “Edo.” There is no expression on either of them?? “The specials are great today”, Edo says strangely-seriously? “I’ll have to remember that”, the massive black man moves closer with eyes that really stare at my Edo, “til next time”, he replies while leading his posse of four large men past.

Edo grabs my hand tighter as we move forward. Every student knows who that was; big man on campus Ricardo Blackmon is a broad-shouldered, thick-armed, six foot-seven power forward from one of those new-fangled Charter Schools that have been popping up in every housing project of the northeast. Queen's I heard. A 3.6 GPA that averages 22 points per game, and whose likeness is on every poster hanging in the rafters of Jadwin Gymnasium; being an accomplished Academic is not the first thing anybody thinks when they see this Man-Child. This is color-obsessed America after all... and it's in every nook and cranny I'm ashamed to say.

"I've gotta go", with a look I've never seen on Edo's face before.

Racism is a topic I hear plenty from many of my Sorority Sisters... most think nothing about spewing out ignorant generalizations whenever the media gets us all riled up. Fake news or irresponsible Journalism... it all ends up stirring the same 'Us against Them' crap. After Ricardo's strange encounter Edo has definitely changed... even his kiss feels different?? "I'll see you later beautiful." I can't say I ever know when I'm going to see Edo next. "Call me." So I just show desire in my eyes.

It was at one of those really early tryouts when meeting Cecil and Rico, as he's affectionately known around Campus, happened for the first time. Rico put on an absolute clinic of spin moves and awesome dunks, hard not to be awed by his physical capabilities... Rico plays mean on the court, real mean. He's our main weapon and Coach Dugood knows it; me and Cecil were merely trying out for back-up spots to King Rico. Running, jumping, chasing every loose ball; I knew effort was the only way Coach would even notice me. Smart and shifty with a lethal first step, Cecil was proving to be a decent back-up point guard. Me... well I sat further down the bench for sure; a serving of humble pie was what these tryouts were showing me because I barely kept up.

In the change room after two hours of torture, I watched Rico closely... he was like nothing I thought he'd be. This was a smart dude in a grown man's body, an absolute beast on the court; thanks to some very hypocritical NCAA rules for college athletics Rico Blackmon has never had two cents to rub together - but that's a whole other discussion. To the outside world he's a hero only, a Princeton Tiger, a venerated example of a true Student-Athlete; but I know far more, because in the pill business he's my biggest Competitor.

"Sixty milligrams is the best size for a nice six hour jolt", packing a duffel with packets of twenty-four, "some like to crush it and snort it", Cecil shakes his head. "Idiots", he assures. Five million prescriptions written by Psychiatrists only looking to do good; today's top-ranked schools grinding standards can cloud anyone's sound judgement. For any Student who needs to fight back against this smothering competition - Study Drugs are the foundation. "My kid is an honor student", reverberates every dorm on every Ivy League Campus in this Country. The DEA has no clue, none at all - Thank God for that.

“I’m giving you a hundred packs to start so you can load up your Dealers”, Cecil rhythmically loads while counting.

They’d rather focus on grow-ops and street corner heroin.

“That should last me three days”, I sarcastically return because it’s the truth.

“OK two hundred packs then... that should last you the week.”

Sitting in his recliner waiting, “And make my Dealers happy, they’ve been bone dry for almost two weeks.”

Forty-eight hundred pills might sound like a lot, but really it just primes the pump; at least half the Students and pretty much the same amount of Staff use. Four to five thousand pills per week times forty-two weeks of the year, summers are slow, puts my little cottage business at close to 200,000 pills. For many this drug is a daily necessity - and is why the first pill is always free – always!

At twenty bucks per this revenue stream is north of four million... of which I owe everything to Cecil, my stocky Machiavellian Pal with the smooth jump-shot who knows how to leverage his resourceful African-American world with my very entitled Caucasian Planet. A 3.7 GPA from a Charter School in Harlem put him here, smack on my lap... or should I say next to me on those five mile runs after practise. Bloody torture those things were... thought I was going to die, yet I still thank God for every one of them - especially on settle-up day with Cecil.

“Oppressed People focus way too much emotion on their Oppressors... keeps them down, trapped in their mother-fuckin’ bullshit. There’s a lot we can learn from the White Man”, Cecil often quotes his Grandpa Josh’s very serious words when we’re alone. “Pragmatism is a daily goal”, he continues to load, “not a damn destination.”

Cecil was influenced heavily by his close relationship with his Grandfather... who unfortunately took an errant bullet from a trigger-happy Cop who’d mistaken him for a Perp. Not only did Cecil have a savant-like ability to grasp the addictive depths of human-nature... but he was also prescribed Adderal himself, which lit the light bulb of opportunity the day he landed at ‘price-is-of-no-concern Princeton’. Before Cecil the price of a pill was five bucks and was a hit-or-miss proposition, today it’s twenty and people love the quality and consistency; it’s why I’m one of the most popular Students on campus, and my pockets are always full. Only I know Cecil is the biggest supplier on six campuses.

“I saw Rico at Joeys.”

Cecil stops... then re-starts. “Did he talk to you?”

“He said ‘til next time.”

Rattled by the sound of our Competitor’s name, my Partner continues to pack my bag, only faster. We have nothing to worry about I know... hands down our stuff is the best, but even shitty drugs have a way of selling fine. It’s not like People walk up to a Walgreen’s shelf and see all the ‘speed brands’ laid out clearly to compare. These are illegal drugs were talking about... at least in these volumes.

“You know we could put him out of business if we undercut his price.”

Cecil stops as if he's just been prodded with something sharp. "When you have a superior product you DO NOT lower your price... EVER! This is not a race to the bottom. I spent a lot of time and money making sure we get these formulas right." He drops a full bag in front of me. "I have no desire to be mother-fucking Walmart", and takes a seat next to me.

"OK, but I'm just saying."

"Don't be so eager to adopt the American model of Capitalism... the Germans, now there's a nation where quality still matters." I take a humble sip of my coke. "Porsche is the model my friend", grabbing the remote and turning on his big screen, "or the Yankees... now there's a brand associated with quality."

The two of us start watching the Bronx Bombers battle the Indians in a rare matinee game. I look at Cecil a few times... then back at the game. Cecil Brody's got the strength of someone hooked on a vision... someone bred to really understand - someone from my world, which is amazing considering his roots. The American Dream is alive and well in this tiny apartment, as we quietly watch the game. Raining down close to \$100,000 a month of profit onto my head, I follow Cecil's lead and put up with Rico - but I'll never stop imagining the piles of cash if we had the entire market all to ourselves.

When seeing it from the road I always get excited... when I'm about to turn into that awesome driveway with all the memories something always happens... those ten foot high wrought-iron gates with stone columns on either side does something to my Soul. I lower my window so I can reach out to press the button.

"Singer residence", exits the tiny speaker built into the column.

"Lewis it's me."

"Master Edo, come in come in", the gate immediately opens.

Beginning my trek up the never-ending driveway of a sprawling 260 acre Estate in New Canaan Connecticut - a red white & blue Yankee enclave overflowing with vaults of old money. My wide open window allows me to enjoy the clean-air. Edo Aaron Singer is my name... ninth generation heir of the needle and thread Singer Sewing Machine Empire. I am always excited to be here... my Soul knows exactly when I have arrived; I never sleep well the night before I'm going to visit Grandma.

Pulling into the circular driveway... I park in front of the huge main house. My heart is beating really fast when I stop the engine and open my door. Like usual those first few steps out of the car have me standing in place for a deep inhale of fresh country air... everything my eyes take-in ignites vivid memories of an amazing playground. Every one of them is stored under 'the most-fun-ever' file in my brain... snowball fights... long walks in the woods seeing deer, moose, and the odd red fox... even though I always did want to see a bear; what kid doesn't? Horse-back rides I never wanted to end... clearly I can remember

the unforgettable aroma of steaming piles while staring at those snow-white stables in the distance. I remember this place well... this vastness has been in the Singer family for more than a century... absorbing it all from an accommodating 360 degree perch. Grandma made this place the most fun ever for a boy who's Parents were seldom around because they were off flying to some corner of the globe running their manufacturing plants... and hosting their very large cocktail parties. Suddenly I see him standing on the porch with a warm smile. "Hello Lewis", closing the car door and jogging towards him.

"Master Edo."

Leaning in for a heartfelt embrace to a man I've known since birth, a genial man of normal height and slight build who has served the Singer family well; lord knows it wasn't easy... especially after Karen.

"Come in Master Edo."

"Thank you Lewis... it's great to see again."

"And you to Master Edo... you are looking vigorous as usual."

"I try."

"You are trying very well I must say."

A few steps into the massive foyer, which is always a trip back in time... the traditional decor and far eastern art hits me in the face. "EDO", echoes from the top stair.

Tilting up... "Grandma", and racing towards her as she makes her way down the impressive 'Gone with the Wind' staircase. "It's so wonderful to see my Edo", kisses to both cheeks... plus a long look after a tight embrace. Hands on both my arms... "You are as handsome as ever... a real man's man you've become", grabbing my hand and leading me into the massive sitting area of big windows and even bigger vistas.

"Anything to drink Master Edo?"

"A cold beer would be nice."

"Two Lewis", Grandma smiles.

Breaking the mold as far back as I can remember; Grandma Eleanor Singer... Ely to her friends, and everyone was her friend... is an optimistic open-minded gregarious Soul, which is quite some feat considering the stuffy world that raised her. Old money equates very much with old values... except with Grandma. "You need everyone in this world in order to make up the whole pie", she'd repeat when it was just us, which thankfully was often back when I was young and wide-eyed. Lord knows my own Parents never saw the joys of taking a day-off to play hooky... those were the best.

"So tell me what's new at school?"

"The girls."

"I bet Valentino... they probably can't get enough of my grandson."

"Thanks Lewis."

"You're not going to join us?", Grandma asks.

"Sorry but I prefer Scotch."

"Well of course you do."

“And I don’t start until four”, Lewis walks away with a sarcastic smirk I’ve seen a million times. For over forty years Lewis and Grandma have been finishing each other’s sentences. Grandma’s never seen color, and she raised me the same way; which wasn’t easy at the very pale private school I attended.

Time moves effortlessly when we are together. Smiling as we catch-up; her charm knows no bounds.

“Come, I want to show you my new painting”, standing with excitement after catching up for a good while, three beers worth.

She reaches to grab my hand. And then leads me towards a quieter part of the house overlooking the pond, where her Studio’s located. Up-beat and so excited, being with Grandma has me forgetting there’s a world out there. She has us both navigating the twists and turns of this Castle with purpose. Even my name came from Grandma; it was something she absolutely insisted on. “It was the one time I had to put my foot down”, she said after I’d been teased at school for the umpteenth time. “Edo is a very special name, and you’re a very special boy”, looking seriously into my eyes, “and what do those stupid blue-bloods know anyways?” Referring to the blue-blood Colony of my very parochial Logan Academy of Leadership for Boys. “What do they know about the Land of the Rising Sun anyways?”, she asked sternly as I stood there so vulnerable. My thick-skin had not yet started to develop I guess.

A lover of Japanese culture... Grandma spent her most formative years there with her own terminally-distracted Parents. Luckily she had a Governess named Carol she’s never stopped talking about. Carol took her everywhere and taught her everything. “Edo is the former name of the great city of Tokyo... the seat of power for the Tokugawa Shogunate which ruled Japan from 1603 to 1868, eventually turning it into one of the most amazing Cities of the world... Floating World it was called”, Grandma explained, “and what a world it was”, her eyes sparkled on the topic.

I’ve seen it twice, once for an entire summer when I was eight - the place was nothing I’d ever experienced. Next was when I was fifteen, older but still awed like a newborn; both times Grandma was my tour guide... spending all day learning and laughing. “One that doesn’t travel far away sees only one chapter from the book of life”, she constantly reminded. Without Grandma Ely I’d be just another spoiled trust-fund kid; now I make money off them.

“Come on in”, Grandma’s studio has a large collection of paintings, sculptures, and scattered supplies... which is how this place has always been to me. Grandma moves us into the far corner by the window with purpose... where an easel that stands out from the rest is now the focus. Grandma places her hand on my shoulder, and starts to position me just so in front of it. “Where one stands is very important when admiring art”, she says whenever her newest piece gets unveiled. Focusing on a charcoal of a massive building on the shores of some unknown body of water, a giant crack is running down the walls of a building deep into the earth, continuing through each human she’s drawn on the one side.

“Well what do you think?”

“It looks dark.”

Only the truth works with her.

“Good eye Edo, it’s supposed to be, it’s the whole nuclear nightmare thing that’s going on in Japan. Let this be a warning to the world.”

So much of Grandma’s art is about reflection... about absolute truths... about harbingers in the future. A real dynamo who is always curious about why things are the way they are; now if only I can find a woman from my own generation that can teach me as much.

“I love you a lot my Edo”... *mwa*... “thanks for coming to visit your crazy old Grandma, it means everything to me.”

“I love you too Grandma”, turning, “goodbye Lewis”, waving at him up on the porch.

“Happy trails Master Edo.”

“Thanks.”

“Drive carefully”, Grandma waves with a lit up face.

Seeing them both in the rear-view as I pull away... gigantic smiles from the two of them in their comedic simpatico that’s lasted forever. It’s only been a day but I feel rejuvenated heading back into my crazy world, and that’s a good thing because next week is exam season.

“Just got the new Grand Theft, we’re all checking it out tonight!”

Exam season is the craziest time of year.

“Call of Duty... 7 o’clock at Steinberg’s place.”

I’m criss-crossing campus in a rainstorm to get to Cecil’s place.

“Party at Altro’s place.”

No matter the weather I still get stopped in whatever direction I’m headed; at this time in the calendar everyone needs to try and stay awake long enough to cram as much useless information into their brains so Mom and Dad will lay-off for another semester. “Big card game at Morelli’s.” This world only comes down to a simple letter written on the top of a page from answering an arbitrary set of questions. “Monday night football.” If four pills a week was the norm, then eight is now the new norm; especially since being caught without any will almost certainly cause stomach-churning anxiety. School today is a \$50,000 per year investment... which is hardly chump change.

Students know it. Parents know it. The only problem is that most Parents never let us forget it.

That’s why I instruct my dealers to double the amount they walk around with to ten packs total, not the five that requires too many re-fills. At two hundred and forty pills at \$20 - having them walk around with close to \$5,000 in cash does make me nervous.

“Edo my man”, fist bump.

“How was your visit with your Grandma?”

“Great... really great”, entering Cecil’s place.

“Grandparents are aces with me my brother from a different mother.”

Sitting down in my usual spot, putting my feet up on the table... “God bless exam season”, locking my hands behind my head. What twenty-year old wouldn’t be ecstatic about making a hundred grand in under a month... in CASH.

“I’m getting a thousand more packs prepared for the end of the week.”

“Sounds good.”

“That should cover us for the next three weeks.”

“Nicccce.”

Cecil works on opening his safe that’s hidden in a lower kitchen cabinet.

CLICK.

“Here’s a hundred packs for tonight”, tossing them onto the kitchen table, “I’ll get you a knapsack.”

Man must have two dozen knapsacks scattered around this place, his preferred mode of transport; Cecil’s aren’t used for books.

“I saw Rico hanging outside Langdon Dorms.”

Cecil finishes packing my knapsack... and zips it up. He then leaves it on the table while heading for the fridge. He pulls out two cokes... and moves towards me, handing me one.

“Thanks.” “You saw him outside the dorms?”, sitting with a pondering face.

“He was with Lester, they were hanging out, just sitting on a park bench.”

Cecil hates Rico, not because he’s a better basketball player... geez he’s better than almost everybody in the entire Ivy League. Cecil hates Rico because he’s seen as a threat to his territory, his livelihood. Cecil’s plan you see is to not only graduate... which he most certainly will with a 3.8 GPA Dean’s List thank-you very much. Cecil’s plan is also to make sure he leaves these privileged pickings with five million in cash. “I’m no drug dealer Edo, hell fuckin’ no!” That’s five million and not a penny less. “The plan’s to leave this Princeton Planet with enough cash to invest in some primo real estate and never look back.”

I remember that sober expression like it was yesterday... that look of determination in his eyes. After resting his can of coke on the table, “This is the only place I’ve ever been where a black man has a god-damn chance”, he confesses with an honest voice. Considering he started in this cutthroat game with nothing except some fast talk and dark skin - not the criteria for success in this here U.S. of A. - in my book this man is nothing short of a genius. “I’m no dime-bag snake”, he repeats with conviction.

Moving ‘Study Drugs’... even these massive amounts, can definitely seem benign... even I don’t see the harm - but that’s probably the money talking, along with the incredible ease of doing it in such an incubated society. “Be careful Edo, it’s odorless and tasteless... but deadly”, Grandma’s constant heeding on the insidious clutches of human denial.

There’s no DEA here Grandma, just rolls of cash - and all I hear is the Sweet Siren call for more; nobody knows this secret side of me.

“You going to the Godiva fraternity party tonight?”

“Ya... what?”, clearly rattled by the sound of his name, I’m getting the feeling this thing with Rico is personal. “You with me?... CECIL?”, seeing him recalibrate, “I asked if you’re going to the Godiva bash?”

“The fraternity of hot white chicks.”

“That one.”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world... I’ve got my eye on a little peach”, Cecil sparks up a joint. “A nice white peach whose CEO Daddy would shit if he found out what I’m going to do to his little sweetheart tonight.”

Puff Puff.

Then he passes it.

“You’re a Dad’s worst nightmare.”

Puff Puff.

I pass it back quickly because those are the rules.

“I am that.”

Puff Puff.

“I am a terrible black man with almost four million dollars is what I am”, a spiteful tone as he brings the joint to his lips for a congratulatory haul.

I’ll never know what it’s like to be a black man... a really smart one in this Caucasian Pleasantville named ‘Princeton’.

“Yes sir that girl is all mine tonight”, a final haul of a near-dusted spliff.

Sounds like Cecil’s got a lot to prove.

BOOM BOOM BOOM.

The music is blaring in this fraternity house full of horny college students... the dancing and grinding is in every corner.

BOOM BOOM BOOM.

The groping is everywhere in this grand old Victorian.

BOOM BOOM.

Usually this house is one of the most respected female fraternities on campus.

BOOM BOOM.

But not tonight... not when all these pheromones keep bouncing-off every wall... tonight it’s the Playboy Mansion... and the upstairs bedrooms have quickly become the grotto. “EDO EDO”, the group in the corner begins to chant, “EDO EDO”, over the music. Seeing my posse of Dealers... strategically chosen from both the cool kids and the geeks for obvious reasons... in great spirits all of them. This is the last big blowout before the entire campus shuts down tighter than an Amish village for exam season... or should I say pill season... smiling back at all of them. These are ‘Geeks with Pills’... that are definitely not Geeks to these Girls. “EDO EDO EDO.”

I love that my Posse are popular.

Struggling for a few seconds... clued-out as to who-the-hell is lying next to me?

Vibrate Vibrate Vibrate.

Over my shoulder I hear groaning.

Vibrate Vibrate Vibrate.

I try to move my left hand... but it has limited mobility thanks to being trapped in such an awkward position.

Vibrate Vibrate Vibrate.

My other arm's completely numb, and I haven't got the strength to do anything about it. My damn cell continues to bounce; what the fuck happened last night? I feel an ass from my good hand... and another??... and more than two tits?? What if that's Oscar phoning to tell me Elisha's on her way up? "Hello", answering in a panic.

Those two tanned blondes have not moved an inch.

Five hundred bucks means Oscar knows exactly what to do; a bottle of Lagavulin every Christmas means he must absolutely warn me if she's in the building. Dizzy from lifting my head too quickly. Daughter of a Long Island Cosmetic Surgeon who bought her a candy-apple red BMW convertible for her 18th birthday - Elisha Bernstein is not the type that likes surprises when they're not for her. She's beautiful and entitled, and that's all I'm going to say about that; on another note though she loves to give out-of-this-world blowjobs anytime anywhere. Thank the Lord for that.

"Hello Edo?"

I like the dirty girl with the good girl coating.

"Who's this?"

Turning around to two naked and intertwined snoring babes... apparently from where their hands are positioned it was an intimate party last night; the hair on my neck stands straight with anticipation.

"It's me Justin."

"Ya Justin hi", rubbing my forehead in the hopes of clearing the cobwebs.

"Did I wake you?"

My body releases a deep exhale from realizing it's not Oscar. "No... what's up?"

"Edo we have a big problem, you need to get over here right now!"

With sleep barely out of my eyes, and the stench of crazy university sex still caked on my skin thanks to those two co-eds; blondes really can be a lot more fun. That voice has me up and out in seconds.

After running as fast as I can I'm now sitting on a flimsy beach chair in a cramped dorm-room just two buildings over - with eight sets of anxious eyes staring back. It's impossible to get settled. I need to pee, but I'm glued to this piece of shit chair. "We've all been robbed over the last twenty-four hours", Justin Carter suddenly blurts out in a crackling voice.

"WHAT??", shoots out of mine.

"Malcolm was robbed off-campus leaving a bar. Peter was nabbed outside the library. Khalil was coming out of the gym. Howard was walking Robert's Path. Cosmo was..."

“Robbed? You mean at GUNPOINT?”

“Yes I mean at gunpoint.”

Justin’s declaration pierces my alcohol-soaked stomach... there is a war going on in there and someone is losing badly.

“Big Guys in ski masks cornered every one of us. One kept saying, Cecil’s not worth dying for, Cecil’s not worth dying for.”

The gawking faces immediately turn pale; my first instinct is to join them.

Keep it together... just hold it together... I remind over and over. These are your dealers, your foot soldiers... you need to show strength and concern, strength and concern. “So you’re telling me that everybody’s been robbed here?”

“Yes.” “Yes.” “Aha.” “I’m bone dry Edo.” “I’ve got deliveries to make this afternoon.” “I need stock.” “My phone’s been ringing off the hook.”

A unanimous chorus returns.

“We all need stock Edo... and fast. You know this is exam season. If we don’t get some inventory soon we’re going to lose our customers.”

My mind searches for an answer regardless of what my stomach is doing. “OK everybody, new rules”, thinking fast, “nobody walks around alone... buddy-up like we’re on a field trip. Watch each other’s back... and from now on only five packs at a time.”

“That’s going to make a lot of unnecessary trips.”

“I know but I need some time to deal with this... just give me some time”, trying to sound tough as I plead, making sure to lock eyes with every one of my traumatized team in order to project strength. Guns?? Ski masks?? This is Princeton god-damn it! What the fuck is going on here?? Standing as sweat pours out of my armpits, “Everybody wait for my text... and remember PAIR UP.”

I then hastily turn and leave the room, there’s only one place I need to go. Keeping one foot in front of the other in a complete haze, “Solvitur Ambulando Edo”, rings loudly in my head with each step, “nothing can’t be solved from a long vigorous walk”, Grandma emphasized during so many of our country adventures together. Both of us navigating the many challenging paths that snaked her property and beyond... even in winter; I’m lucky that where I need to go is at the other end of campus, a good forty-five minutes away. Grandma’s words may have started this walk... *step step*... but for the life of me I haven’t the faintest idea... *step step*... what possesses me to head straight over??

“Hey Edo.”

Maybe Grandma’s philosophy is exactly what I need now.

“Ya... er... oh hi”, passing the usual slew of Admirers. I smile through the fog. My Customers are hardly meth-heads, far from it... offering another forced smile. These are the Best of the Best... and a nod. Yet despite the massive volume I’m moving it’s amazing how they all seem to hold that addictive tiger by the tail??

“Edo my man.”

Everyone here is just chasing the American ideal of unlimited potential.

“Hey Johnny.”

By denying any biological limitations.

“Kathy.”

“Edo!”

And always will regardless of where they come from... these high-achieving Customers of mine are future Senators and Scholars... Creators of all types. And since Addies - a class-two controlled substance that mentally lubricates it all so well, no dilated pupils, no anxious ticks... damn thing's undetectable really. It links up every chain in the brain - memory, context, and understanding... so that it can perform better. Approaching my target... “A Man's true character is released when he's in crisis”, sweat starts to pour out of my brow, “know thyself Edo, one must always know thyself to accomplish anything in this life”, Grandma's words echo. I see the building getting closer... and bigger; what the hell am I going to do?? “Old Isaac Merritt Singer had a tough ride let me tell you, nothing is easy in this life my little Edo, remember that.” Coming up to a quorum of large beefy men gathered outside the Athlete's residence, their eyes are fixed on my every move... I need to find a way out of this mess... I am a Singer after all. “Never forget Edo... never forget the world needs the whole pie.”

Walking past with a confident stride, “Gentlemen”, I'm certain they're following me. I keep my trembling legs moving and open the front door... and then disappear through it. There's no need to look back... I head straight for the stairs, up to the fifth floor of this low-rise. I'm not taking the elevator. “Greed is everything Edo... understand it... make friends with it.” I'm racking my brain thinking of a way out of this. “Human motivation is led by greed and clear-thinking.” Grandma was no fool; but what am I?

I open the hall door to the fifth floor... and pass another large grouping of expression-less faces that say nothing but deep stares. I nod my head and pull up my shirt to show I'm clean, not a threat to their Boss. One of the Giants moves closer... and pads me down from head to toe; scared would be an understatement. “Ok you're good.” He must have felt the sweat.

Knock Knock.

“Come in”, shouts back.

I hesitate for a few seconds, and try my best to gain control of my emotions. I concentrate on grabbing the knob and turning... opening cautiously into a decked-out-open-concept-over-the-top Bachelor Pad. Two massive plasmas are on the wall playing different sports, a sectional sofa & four leather chairs, all reclining... are pointed in just the right way for watching those screens. Two giant speakers are cranking out a deep bass that vibrates beneath my feet. “Jamaican funk is what is... give it all up to you...”, travelling through my body.

After carefully closing the door behind me... I move a few timid steps more into a group fixated on those hanging screens only. Suddenly from one of the back rooms Rico walks out briskly, the minute he sees me he stops. He quickly turns, and gives a long look into the sofa area. One of his Posse gets up quickly to lower the stereo. A swift shake of his head, and all seven immediately rise, and begin to file out.

They all pass slowly... with intimidating scowls. I stand there frozen. These are seven massive men, six foot seven and up and they could block-out-the-sun.

“Sometimes we can debate what’s in our head forever.”

The door shuts behind them.

“Eventually Edo... everything comes down to a negotiation.”

Sweat fleeing my body; I turn to confront Rico knowing they’re still outside that door. I appear calm and collected despite a million thoughts crashing in my head; I move towards him. It’s Showtime.

“So now I understand ‘til next time.”

Rico breaks an unsettling grin to my breaking-of-the-tension, and then turns away. “Can I offer you a drink? I’ve got a fabulous bottle of Canadian Club”, he starts to fiddle under the bar. My heart starts to beat even faster because I’ve lost sight of him. “It’s somewhere here.”

Is he getting a gun?? Immediately this feels like a bad idea... a really bad idea.

“Here it is”, rising with a pleased face, “I only have a taste if we win... which is usually when I score over thirty.”

Placing two tumblers out.

“Ice?”

My voice has been hijacked.

“I forgot, that’s not a question in your world.”

In spite of the unmistakable sarcasm released by this very intimidating man, I’m still able to smile. But what kind of smile is another story.

“Blue Bloods don’t use ice, not manly enough”, he mocks, “a fine Scotch should never be watered down... SACRILEGE”, with even more mockery.

After pouring, Rico grabs the two glasses and makes his way over to the comfy chairs.

“Come on, I’m not going to bite... come, sit with me”, handing me one as I approach.

“Personally I’ve never met a manly Blue Blood, but who knows maybe you’ll be the first?”

We sit on opposite sides of the sectional. “Take everything and leave nothing for the colored man... absolutely nothing”, his tone rises. So this is a clash of color, my mind notes. “To Princeton”, Rico lifts his glass.

CLANK.

We both drink on cue.

Grandma said negotiations are a dance.

It’s Showtime Part two.

“Rico, I’d like to ask you something, with the greatest of respect of course. What would you do if your dealers were being robbed at gunpoint?”

He immediately takes another slow sip... then sits back into his extremely gushy chocolate brown sofa. For courage I down another. And wait. Here’s to hoping this athlete understands the pragmatic benefits of a good offense over a passive defense.

“I see your predicament, I do. A man must always be prepared to protect his livelihood.”

“And his employees?”

“They’re part of his livelihood.”

“That’s good to hear, because I’ve got a group of scared employees who don’t know what the hell is going on. I’m sure you would agree these robberies can’t be good for business... either of our businesses??”

Rico leans forward, “I tried to arrange a meeting with Cecil so many times”, shaking his head, “but he just ignores me.”

I suddenly realize Rico’s problem is with his ego... his very sensitive ego.

“Black men should not be so willing to ignore each other.”

And his African-American culture too.

“And be so willing to work with the man.”

What the hell is he talking about??

A Ritalin generic, and a weak one at that... giving at best a four hour jolt; Rico’s product doesn’t hold a candle to ours. My rough estimate is he’s moving 100,000 pills a year, which puts him well in my rear-view when it comes to volume and infrastructure; but this cultural fixation he seems to have puts an entirely different spin on things?? I know Cecil’s position on any sit-down with Rico, these two are speaking two different languages and I’m the only one that can do anything about it.

I take another drink because my nerves feel like they want to run and hide.

Then I exhale.

“What can I do to help?”, my mind tries to keep the questions short.

There will be no hiding.

Rico stands... and stretches a bit. Then he strolls over to the massive windows that frame the entire east wall of his super-sized unit. When he’s positioned just right... he stops and stares.

Minutes pass without a word.

I take another sip; my nerves are getting the workout of a lifetime here. Does he know the type of volume we move? Does he know about Cecil’s business on six other campuses?

The wait is excruciating... absolutely excruciating... it’s why I’ve almost finished my drink... and I hate Canadian Club.

“I want to be a partner with you Edo... and with Cecil of course. I want to move more product... lots more product.”

This I wasn’t prepared for? Besides the six-foot seven thing, and the guns; why the fuck would Cecil want to be a partner with Rico? “Come on Edo think”, pressing myself, “find a road out of this mess!”

I stand, and with a patient gait, head towards the window. “Never let them see you sweat”, Grandma lectured after enduring my classmate’s endless teasing, “people respond to your expressions.”

I arrive next to Rico with confidence... and quietly stare with him... so we can both absorb the sun-filled autumn day beaming through. “So you think a Partnership is the best way to do this?” Rico faces me. “Listen Edo, I’m going to be honest with you. My scholarship is for three more years, then the plan is to be in the Pros with an eight-figure contract. But I can’t

bank on that right now, anything can happen between now and then, an injury or whatever?? And I've got lots of mouths to feed before that'll happen." Rico sounds surprisingly pragmatic. "So you need to make more money?" "Who doesn't? Especially with those damn NCAA rules. I also need to find a way to clean my money." Finally I've found a detour. "Now that I can help you with." Rico's face lights up.

I met Peter Frieberg in first-year economics, a man bred to understand the finer nuances of money, or should I say 'orphaned cash'. His acumen caught my curiosity; his father is one of the largest diamond wholesalers in the country... with a direct line to Antwerp - the holy Mecca of beautiful stones. We've been close friends ever since. Every year Peter cleans close to two million in cash for me... bingo bango all that paper turns into a few sparkling gems I can hold in my hand while walking down the street.

"I can definitely wash as much as you need."

"What's the vig?"

"Twelve percent."

Rico's face relaxes for the first time. "That sounds good." He takes another sip, slower this time, he looks like he's trying to hold back a grin, "I think we can work with that."

You think? I'm hardly surprised by Rico's swift acceptance, in fact I know for certain that the standard vig for washing can go as high as thirty, and that someone like Peter would never work with a man like Rico... NEVER! Of course he's smiling... I've just given him my Insider's rate.

"I definitely think I can work with that", he muses.

I'm beginning to feel confident that I've got him in a far more sensible place; but my face lets on to nothing. "So you want to move more product... that's a fair request. What's stopping you?" I'll worry about Cecil later. "It's my supply, some months I get enough but others it's like pulling teeth. I'm telling you Edo if I had fifty thousand more pills they'd be gone", snapping his fingers, "just like that." "I can get you more pills."

"And the quality, what about the quality? Because that's another problem I'm always having to deal with." "I can definitely guarantee the quality. Whatever doesn't work for you I'll take back... no questions asked. You have my word."

I see my words are having an effect... although he is taking his sweet time.

"I like you Edo, you're a straight shooter. If you mean what you say then I think we have a deal." Rico raises his glass. "To our new Partnership."

CLANK.

"What about territory?", Rico asks the second he finishes drinking.

"We don't need to start carving up the streets... there's plenty here for everybody, just let our dealers work it out. Don't forget our retail prices are all going to be the same, this doesn't need to be adversarial, just let the market flow."

Lifting my glass to leave such silly talk behind, “To Study Drugs.”

CLANK.

“You’re right.” I can tell Rico has a hard time with trust. “I know I’m right, this is going to work out fine. We’re all going to get what we want here”, burying any doubt with an optimistic tone. What am I going to tell Cecil?

“Edo my man you are alright”, shaking my hand vigorously while holding it tight. He engulfs it while chaperoning me to the door.

“No more robberies”, looking seriously into his eyes, “just business”, I keep looking, “that’s all we’re going to worry about from now on.” “Yes.” “And if you have any problems with anything you’re going to call me directly and we’re going to talk it out.” My tone is aggressive. “Absolutely.” “I have your word on that?” It needs to be. “Yes.” “And everything we’ve just discussed stays between you and me.” “Man you are a very pushy white guy. Yes. OK.” My new partner cracks a smile. He won’t risk losing my laundromat. “You need to call me a few weeks before you need stock”, stopping at Rico’s door, leaning in to open it, “the more notice the better.” “Sure.” “Great.” Rico’s Posse turns in unison when they see us exit. “Call me anytime”, wanting them to hear my words. Seeing their startled faces as I move past, as I slither through this beefy mass, I give them all a very different glare than the one from only an hour ago.

I wait with confidence for the elevator to arrive.

BING.

“Have a good day Gentlemen”, announcing smugly before stepping in.

BING.

BING.

BING.

BING... the doors open into another set of startled eyes.

“Gentlemen.”

I exit the building to fresh gusts on my face... gusts that make me feel more alive with every step... can feel the optimism returning... although I do have another long walk ahead of me... and I’ve got no clue what I’m going to say to Cecil??

“You need everyone in this world in order to make up the whole pie.”

But I trust I’ll figure it out.