

Semi Flammable

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Semi-Flammable

By Derek J. Snow

CHARACTERS:

PHARAOH LINDEN. 17 years old. African-American. Calm and reserved, but hides a strong personality underneath.

SETTING: A Zen Center, anywhere USA

SCENE 1

(PHARAOH sits nervously in a chair facing the audience. He is in a Zen and meditation center, and it should be obvious that it's his first time there. He awkwardly holds a clipboard and writes a few words before looking around. For a second, we watch him struggle with staying put or walking out the front door. Eventually, he settles back into the chair and finishes writing his information down. He speaks to the center director as they enter the room, represented by the audience.)

PHARAOH

(clearing his voice before he speaks.)

Hi. Oh...um. I don't know what it was that got me through the door this time. Honestly, it just felt like somebody else was moving my legs or something, not me. To finally come all the way in here, I mean. Like, all school year I walked past this place and laughed a little to myself when I passed by. I always used to be able to talk myself out of checking this place out, even though I really wanted to see what it was about. I knew that my friends would clown me if I told them I wanted to come here. They always make fun of anything that's like yoga or peaceful. You know, *(he does a sad impersonation of a yoga pose and chant)* like that. And I'll be honest with you, I used to be the same way about it. I never had much peace in my life, so I thought people were straight lying whenever they would tell me how *peaceful* they felt and stuff. It sounded fake. Like, how peaceful would *you* feel when every day of your life is wasted looking over your shoulder for the police and anybody else trying to take you out of here? Still, I know that ain't no excuse to do what I did. I know it now. *(Pause)* Ma'am? Oh yes, it's Pharaoh, like the Egyptian kings. My father wanted me to have a strong name, something powerful. That's what my mother told me anyway. His was just...Marcus. He died, though.

My nickname is Phay, not like the girl's name-like F-A-Y-E. Nah, not like that.*(there's some pain there.)* My mother has just been calling me that since I can remember, so most of the people I grew up around started calling me that too. I like it. It makes me feel like I have people close to me when they call me Phay instead of feeling lonely like I do most of the time. That's kind of why I came in here today. I'm not allowed back in school for the rest of the year. I mean, it's almost summer, so I kind of don't mind, but I still feel like I disrespected myself and my family by acting out like I did. Ok, sorry. I just keep talking when I'm nervous. I'll tell you. *(settles down and takes a much-needed deep breath.)* I was in Mr. Collins class just finishing my test and talking to one of my friends at the desk behind me. Usually, I like Mr. Collins. He's cool. He's actually really funny sometimes. He'll tell us a joke about his wife or something and then ask us to write a short story about something similar or funny that happened to us. Anyway, we're packing up to go home for the day, and-I don't know. He must have heard one of my friends call me Phay, so he called out to me, loud enough for the whole class to hear: *(in an annoying exaggerated voice)* "Hey, Pharaoh! I've been meaning to ask you all school year. Are people calling you Faye like..girl Faye or is it like..Lil' Phay-Phay? What, is that your rap thug name?" There was maybe 3 seconds of total silence and then the whole room just exploded with laughter. I felt hot. Like, he *knew* that it was just short for Pharaoh, but it felt like he was just using that chance to make me feel stupid for no reason, and then try to sneak in the thug thing. Everybody was falling all over the desks and laughing hard. It hurt. It felt unnecessary, what he did. It felt racist. Like, I'm one of the best students in that class. So why are you trying to make fun of my name, the name my father gave me who ain't even alive anymore? My mother told me I was a king, not a thug. The hotness went down my spine and the more that they laughed, the more my temperature went up. And, then it felt like I blacked out. I don't really remember picking anything up at all. And I know it sounds like I'm lying to you, but I swear on my father's grave that *I don't remember throwing that chair at Mr.Collins.* I really don't. I just remember the next moment, I was in the office and they were telling my crying mother that I would be charged with misdemeanor assault unless I wrote a letter of apology and went to all this therapy over the summer. They said that the chair didn't come close to him. Still. I actually feel like I *want* to do the therapy, but I feel like I need something more. I feel a little more at peace now, but I'm scared that something like that could happen again out of nowhere if I don't learn how to get rid of my stress some other way. So, do you think you could teach me how to meditate? I don't want to feel like this anymore. I understand if you don't want to, though.

END

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