

# UASKD

By Brian Jolles

## Arrival...

The sun danced across I-90's pavement, in the end of summer air. The air for Ed in his 91 Honda Accord though was not nearly as buoyant. It was congested instead with the fog of cigarettes and the haze of things to come. His mind was a cesspool of thoughts, churning away in the late summer breeze, as he cruised down the highway. He was on his way to school.

Behind him, driving a crimson Ford Explorer were his parents. Ed had left before them to create enough space for him to smoke in freedom and not wonder of their wandering eyes. But when the few drops of THC from the primer at the end of his first cigarette kicked in, the velocity at which he traveled plummeted and Ed could see now the familiar vanity plate and crimson glow of his parents in the rear view mirror catching up to him.

He depressed the gas pedal even harder and sped off in front of them.

He was attending any college, USA. He was a freshman, and the long winding road of I-90 was enough of an obvious metaphor to cause him to smoke even more cigarettes.

He was ready to go to school; all of his other friends had left for their freshman orientation at least a week prior. But his friends were all attending rich private schools; he was going into an overcrowded university, that didn't have things like weeklong orientations.

His orientation was one long weekend in a hot hell. Not a glowing precursor, in fact Ed was loathing the thought of college. He was more contented to stay at his well paying job and live life. But at eighteen, and especially from Edwards upper-middle class upbringing, some decisions are simply forgone conclusions. And Ed was on the road for a new life.

As he came into the asshole of America, as he would later say with fondness, Ed inhaled the last drag off his tenth cigarette. *Half a pack in a two-hour drive, that's some nice work their boys.* His lungs hurt from the excess of smoke, and his throat told him a story about how he was not going to smoke for the rest of the day, and his brain got a good laugh out of that.

He tossed the cigarette out the window and look about at the campus that sprawled before him. UASKD was a dirty place, with mysterious smoke stacks coming out of the ground, pluming white fog into the atmosphere. Ed sighed and drove up to the dorm that he had weaseled himself into only two months prior.

Loafer had said, you want to live in central. Central is the only place for sinners like us to have a good time. It was about time to see how much Loafer had really known about Ed and the University. The rest was up for grabs.

Moving day at any university is one giant free for all; cars were everywhere. Once green grass covered in a blanket of steel. Ed parked in a loading zone spot because he wasn't sure how the system worked, his father though apparently was on to something more because he parked the crimson explorer smack dab in the front of the building.

The family met.

“Nice drive?” Said his father. He was blatantly cheerful; he always was, just his way of dealing with the world.

“I guess.” Ed said blatantly standoffish as he always was to his father, just his way of dealing with his father’s way of dealing with the world.

“That’s nice, so are you ready to move into you new home?”

“I guess.”

“That’s nice, Should we unpack?”\

“I guess.”

Suddenly his mother spoke in a shrill voice. “It’s not his new home, he always has his old home, at home, with us, you always have your old home, at home, with us.”

“Thanks mom.” Ed and his father exchanged a glance; she was on the verge of collapse.

“Well, shall we get this underway.”

“I guess.”

They entered the building. Ed was met with the same false smiles that greeted him at orientation. They were all being paid to be their as part of what it meant to be a community leader.

“Hi.” A snide voice, met by a frail freckled faced individual. Weenie is an adjective Ed might have used in describing him. “I’m Jamie, first floor R.A. and you would be?”

Ed deliberately paused as a means of summing up this guy, and giving him an awkward moment in the process. He looked back at his father who was standing beside him, doing what father’s feel they should do out of obligation to the child. “Well.” Said his father, “Aren’t you going to tell him?”

“No, I thought I would at least make him suffer a little first. Everything comes at a price, including a name.”

Jamie was beginning to fidget and Ed knew that he had gotten what he wanted. “Ed Knowles”

“Edward Knowles,” began Jamie, “why that name sounds familiar.” He leafed through the room assignment sheets to the letter K. “I wonder why that sounds so familiar,” an obvious set-up, until his finger slid down the page to Ed’s name. “Ah, well, duh, Jamie, it’s because he’s a part of your flock, room 121, what a funny coincidence.

*What a jackass.*

Sarcastically, “Ha-Ha.”

Jamie had him fill out two forms, and than handed him a room inventory, “Fill this out and give it back to me. We are having a floor meeting at five tonight, so you can give it to me then.”

Flat, “Great.”

“Until tonight than.”

Flat, “Super-Duper.”

They walked in silence at first down the long sterile hallway. Their were large signs made out of poster board saying ‘welcome freshman’ and cheesy quotes like, ‘today is the first day of the rest of your life.’ Ed was not amused by them. In fact the only thing Ed had a grasp on being real was the soreness in his throat. *I really shouldn’t have smoked all those cigarettes.*

After a moment his father broke the silence. “Well, he seemed very nice.”

Ed shot his father a sarcastic look, “Are you kidding me, he was a tool.”

“Ed’s right dear, that man was a bit strange.”

“Alright, what do I know?”

“Apparently not much about today’s standard of coolness.”

A moment later they were standing in front of room 121, Ed’s new home.

The heavy wooden door swung open and they crossed the threshold into shoebox style college

normalcy. The air was dingy hovering above the radiator below the only window in the square of the back wall. The beds were cheap metal, and the furniture was made of slowly rotting wood. *Livin in the lap of luxury alright.*

“Well this is nice, certainly bigger than Stacy’s first dorm room.” Stacy was Ed’s older sister who was attending the same university 2000 miles away.

“I guess.” Moral, which was already slumping for Ed, dropped a little more with the dorm room. He was over six feet tall and the length of this room could be no more than double his height. *I get to be the left foot.*

“Well, Ed.” Said his father, “Which are you going to be?”

“I get to be the left foot.” Ed’s parents looked at each other and shrugged, they were used to Ed’s slightly unexplained comments, but to them all they needed was a keyword.

Ed’s mother who was trying to conceal her sadness for watching her last child go away peeped, “That’s nice, I would have chosen the left bed also.”

“It’s not just the left bed mom.”

“Yes dear, it’s the whole left half of the room.”

“Oh ridiculous, this is not *I Love Lucy*.”

“It’s not the *Real World* either, mom.”

“Yes, it’ll be more like the odd couple.” Ed’s father laughed to himself, and now it was Ed and his mother’s chance to catch a glance with each other. No matter how hard he tried, Ed’s father could never graduate from cheese ball to funny, though it is a common parental syndrome. One only *thinks* it won’t happen to them.

They helped him unpack his stuff, and his mother made his bed. “Wow, it’s not that I ever do it anymore as it is, but this is the last time that I am going to get to make your bed.”

“You haven’t made my bed, in probably ten years mom.”

“I know, but I always could go make your bed if I wanted to. I just never wanted to, unless I was curious.”

“Your such a snoop.”

“Well don’t worry dear, I’m told it’s hereditary.”

Ed gave up trying; he was going to just have to ride the wave until it rode his folks out of town and out of his life for at least the next month. He let out a small sigh and continued to put away the last of his stuff.

They stood on the concrete stoop of Baker hall, Ed could see the glass turn to gloss in his mother’s eyes. “Thank god I came prepared.” She said, holding up her box of tissues. “I love you, have fun, but be safe.” She hugged and kissed him one last time.

Ed’s father put out his hand for Ed. Looking into his father’s eye’s Ed could see something new; it was a mix of pride and relief, with a pinch of regret. Ed took his hand but immediately brought his father into him for a hug. “Thanks for everything dad.” Even beyond his topical resentment for his father lay a deeper appreciation. One cannot fully resent, that which a biological part of oneself. Throughout his whole life, Ed would be plagued by Leoism’s a word he coined for when he caught himself acting like his father.

“Hey, pal, just have fun, and be safe.” It was there only words of advice they ever gave him. Do what ever you want, just don’t get caught. When they looked at him they couldn’t be hypocritical of what they were like in the early seventies when they attended college.

“You know I will.”

And with that they got in and pulled their crimson Explorer off the green and away from the campus. Ed let out a sigh of relief and sat down on the concrete stoop.

In front of him a similar scene was played out that only moments earlier Ed had with his family. She was a tall pretty girl with straight black hair. Like the interaction Ed had, it was short, choppy and unfamiliar water. When they said their last good byes, Ed noticed that it was the father this time that was glossy eyed. *I guess that figures.*

The parents walked off and Ed and the stranger made eye contact.

“Finally gone?” Ed asked.

“Yeah, you?”

“Yeah, you want a cigarette.”

“You read my mind.”

In the beginning the conversation is always it’s worse. People don’t know where to begin so they develop a bio about themselves that they give to this new person and than have strange moments of dead space before the conversation ball can actually roll.

Her name was Sandra, she was from Maine, she was going into psychology, than dead space, than a realization that you can talk about real things, she smoked for the past three years, she is nervous about school. The conversation on the other side sounds like a recording.

But than thoughts form and opinions about the person form and than suddenly some of the awkward tension relieves. However, in Ed their became this building and constant desire to escape, not that the grass was greener over there but that he wasn’t ready for this new playing field. He had only just gotten happy with the playing field he was previously on.

They talked though until their cigarettes were done and Ed held out his hand. “Pleasure to make your acquaintance Sandra, I have some things I have to sort out with my room, so I’m going to go.”

“Yeah, I have some stuff I gotta do too.”

They entered the building and started walking. They both made the turn for the north wing, and they both walked past the stairwell.

“We live on the same floor.”

“Then we’ll definatly meet again.”

They walked to the end of the hall, and on a dime they addressed their doors. Then they started laughing and turned back to each other. In an eerie unison they both said, “Hey, neighbor.” They made another moment of eye contact, which was strangely intense and then broke like chopsticks, they laughed and over their laughter said see ya and went in their rooms.

*That was cool Ed, she seemed nice. Good lookin too and she smokes. Always a plus. I shouldn’t have smoked that cigarette though, my throats killing me.*

The rest of his day was pretty mundane. He set up his computer, put *Daft Punk* on the radio, and played *Civilization*.

His civilization was in the year 1150 and he was starting to really capitalize on the Mongolians when the hands of time landed on five. He looked down at the unfilled inventory on his bed and shrugged his shoulders, *might as well see what’s up.*

The scratch in his throat and become a full-blown irritation and he stopped at the fountain for a drink of water. The water fountain was a stumpy pimple on the hallway wall that let out a drool of water. Even with the hardest spin on the little wheelie, nothing more that a measly arc would become of the fountain. *Nothing but the finest.* Ed drank and the stale water did little to ease his ailing throat.

“Okay, okay everybody, I’m Jamie, you might remember me from this afternoon, I was at the door, and I think I met all of you.” Jamie had a whiny voice and a frail little body; he was the kind of person that became an R.A. because he wanted a sense of power, because his peers never respected him. He might have been an intelligent person but he was a sad failure when it came to social skills.

In the back of the room, stood Ed, next to Ed was a twitchy little man, the type that looked like he could never sit still. He had dark hair and glasses. He was probably a little below average in size but he was not frail like Jamie.

Under his breath he was booing Jamie's speech.

"Okay, now I'd like to go around the room and have everybody introduce yourself." The upperclassman hadn't returned from break yet and there were only ten freshmen on both the north wing of the first floor and the basement. "Could everybody, say their name, where they are from and what room they are in."

The first girl to speak was a short little Jewish girl with long curly hair. "Um, my name is Dana, I'm from Maryland, and I'm not going to tell you what room I am in, you can talk to me and I will tell you but I don't just announce information like that."

Ed shot a glance over at Sandra; they made contact with their eyes and exchanged a glance that seemed to say, 'what's this girl's problem?'

"Hi, I'm Alyssa, I'm from Revere, and I live in the basement, room B-6, I'm roommates with Dana."

Dana put up her finger to protest but realized it was totally in vain, she lowered it and, closed her mouth.

"Hi, I'm Sandra, I'm from Maine, and I live down the hall in room 120."

"Hi, I'm Meghan, and I'm from Holyoke, and I live with Sandra."

"I'm Faz, I'm from Cambridge. I live in B-8."

That brought the circle around to Ed, "I..." He tried speaking but found his mouth to be a barren wasteland, not qualified for even the slightest of speech. He managed to pull back a little saliva and crust throat the words, "I'm Ed, ahem, errm, I'm also from Cambridge, errm, I live in, hah, 121."

Next spoke a girl that looked like she had been living in a closet for her whole life, she had a certain linty quality, smart and painfully disturbed, "I'm Laura," she squealed, "I live right down the hall."

"Wo," said Faz in a look of total shock, "what was that?" He spoke under his breath and only Ed could hear him, and he had to stifle a laugh.

The next person that introduced himself was a fairly well built guy with terrible acne and glasses. "I'm Adam, though people call me Jonesy, I live in 112."

A small orcha of a girl was next, she was dark-skinned though she reminded Ed more of Violet from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory than of any girl of an ethnic background, she was almost painful to look at. "I'm Vahishna Varishnu, I am on transfer, and I'm living with Laura."

*The gruesome twosome*, Ed thought to himself.

Again Faz spoke under his breath, "May god have mercy on that room."

The last person to speak was a country looking girl with freckles and a tremendously warm smile.

"Hi," She spoke very bright and cheerfully, "I'm Teresa, I'm from Vermont, and I live in B-6." *Not bad.*

"Great, great, great," said Jamie, too much. "Well does anybody want to play a game to maybe allow us to get to know each other better?" People looked around the room in dead silence. Faz, the twitchy man, started turning to leave and Jamie was realizing this was starting to be a failure.

"Well, at least why don't we all go to dinner." Ed looked at his watch. *It's 5:15 has he mistaken us for the elderly.* Ed really didn't want to eat his dinner at five o'clock but he really wanted to get a drink for his throat, and there was nothing else going for him. He subsided, as did most everybody else in the group that this was a good idea and about seven of them strolled down to dinner.

Jamie didn't shut up for the next hour and a half.

It was becoming clear to Ed that this man had no life outside that which puts him by obligation, by other people's side. He was bustling with the chance to speak and share his side, because for the

remaining twenty-two and a half hours in the day, he was silent, keeping everything he noticed to himself.

*He wouldn't be so bad if his voice didn't sound like nails creeping down a chalkboard.*

In the beginning the amoeba swirls around in space like a net, catching anything that will float into its path. And on some primal level, there is magnetism that draws the amoebas together, but in divided clicks.

As the maiden voyage to dining hall began, the ten amoebas began their magnetic flocking. It clearly became divided, people that could stand the awful pitch and content of Jamie, to those who couldn't.

In the beginning assumptions are general and very base.

Pretty soon Sandra, Faz and Ed were walking a little slower than the rest of the group and speech was found again, in the forced talk of the start with no pretenses and little to speak about.

“So.”

“So.”

“So.”

In the beginning you can only talk about what you know, and thus shared experiences are few.

“So,” began Ed, “That's are R.A.”

“What's his deal?”

“The only deal I know about Jamie?” began Faz, “Is that the brain can only take so much of that frequency before it starts going mad.”

“Hear, hear.”

“What was that stuff about that girl from Maryland?”

“I don't know but I'd say that she is pretty hot.” Faz made it very clear from the very beginning that he had it on for women in a big way.

In the past you thought you knew it all, but in the beginning you realize that what you knew was 2 dimensions of the species at best, you need all three to become a real person. Most people arrive with hardly one.

Ed let out a quiet and unserious, “Yeah.” But he didn't want to offend Sandra at all, he was starting to think of all he knew at this point of time, and about the most predominate thing he got so far was that this girl was the most interesting one he had met so far.

D.C. dining Ed soon learned is one of the ten worst parts of the American system of conditioning. After surviving at least one year of that mystery non-toxic food, one can survive anything.

The meal consisted of hockey pucks of chicken; Jamie continued to talk his subject now changed from what the University was like to the public news of the day. Princess Diana had been recently killed in a car accident and he was talking about that to two British students that were sitting at the end of the table, by this point in time Teresa, was thoroughly infected by the bug of Jamie's voice and sat down at the end of the table with Ed, Sandra, and Faz.

She was a pretty girl with a very country look, her hair was long and her breasts were large, she had a big smile on what was a curing post freckled face. She was bubbling with a warm vibe and Ed

found picking up conversation with her the easiest so far.

“So your from Cambridge? I used to live in Belmont before my family moved to Vermont. My father had an incident at work where he staged a revolution against the cubicle and sold everything to buy a farm up in Vermont. We sell cheese, now.”

“That’s cool.” Said, Ed, but Teresa was more contented to talk and Ed to listen, so perhaps that was why it was so easy to communicate.

She told him about her family, her history, and her future. Ed was impressed that this girl could go on like this, and he had trouble even remembering to ask people if they’d yet to decide a major.

As for himself, he was still thoroughly undecided though, he thought psychology and the concept of social dynamics was interesting.

In the beginning everything is interesting.

“Yo, where in Cambridge are you from?” Asked Faz.

“Well, to be honest? I am not from Cambridge I just went to school their and learned to associate myself with a more Cambridge, than suburbia attitude, that’s why I tell people I’m from their.”

“That’s cool, where in Suburbia are you from?”

“I’m from Swellsley.”

“Yeah, well don’t sweat it, I was from Newton. Where did you go to school in Cambridge?”

“Bucky high.”

“No, shit. I went to Rindge.”

“That makes sense.” They both said this at the same time.

*Dinner sucked.*

At the concrete base of the D.C. Sandra and Ed lit up a cigarette.

“Dinner sucked, huh?”

“Yah, I think I ate a small, very sour salad, with two stale rolls.”

What they would learn later would be the two most disturbing truths of the D.C.; one the meat comes in a box stamped for use in universities and prison. Two; that night, being the first night, the school was providing it’s best and most popular meal for the incoming freshman. Yikes.

That night was slow and dark. When Ed finally returned to his room, it would be for the last time that night. He wasn’t in a place to be social, he had tried being so with Sandra and Faz but he was not feeling free spirited and wild, instead he was feeling like a long cold shadow was passing over his head. Storm clouds were building out of the corners of his horizon and he realized it wasn’t just the impending sickness that was taking him, but also the impending sense of isolation.

Most people come to college with every strand of them ready to start anew. They are ready to shed the humiliating nicknames of high school, they are no longer Raison or Woody, but the actual person they were born to be.

Ed however had felt like he’d found himself in the waning year of high school, and instead of being given a rich new opportunity. He felt like he’d been stripped clean and was now being told to find himself in a place far from where he already felt he’d found himself. How wrong he was, and yet here in the first few hours and what would become the first few weeks, nobody, no matter how clairvoyant was going to prove his closed mind likewise.

At 6:30 Ed entered his shoebox, waved to Sandra, and closed the door, he was not to be seen

again by the outside world until tomorrow.

That night the storm clouds that loomed in the corners of Ed's eyes started to break into a living nightmare.

He tried to write he best friend Art but the phone lines wouldn't give his computer a dial tone, the university's first step in the true cutting of the umbilical cord, cut off all outside access. Instead Ed reached into his backpack that lay waiting for the coming year.

From it he withdrew a cloth backed blue notebook. He propped up his window letting the warm end of summer breeze flow through his hair and lit up his last cigarette of the night.

As the smoke fluttered around his eyes and made its dance out the window, Ed began writing. Ed had always had a fascination with writing in the past though he never thought of himself as a writer. A writer he had always felt, had to have written something of consequence before being being dubbed such a title.

Good-bye home, blasted home that I no longer seek. Be you gone by your hands unto tomorrow. Tomorrow that come holly go lightly in the morning. I'm not mourning, I'm just cause.

Well, there gone, and I feel like shit, that sitch that got caught in my throat has deteriorated, and the air in here is not quite right, it's dusty. Neglect, ah what a beautiful word, neglect.

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life." I'd like to believe that, bullshit, I am who I am and I know enough about me, so piss off, don't look at me. I don't need your parentally advice, I don't need anyone right now. I am me, and I am on my own.

Smoke that drifts on cool air  
Above the work that I do here  
Rises up around my face  
Seemingly seperating my dear space  
But of the things that I hold dear  
This smokes journey I will not fear

Ed closed the book, and rubbed weary hands over tired eyes. He was sick. He always got sick before big events. To date this was probably the biggest event of his short life.

That night sleep came eventually, but like all first nights, there was that cosmic disconnection between Ed and the room, there was no organic connection. The sickness that night carried Edward into a dense dreamscape.

The world sprawled out before him was a parched landscape. It was like a desert; only there was no color to it, no form, just the arid dryness of a desert.

In the beginning he could feel himself swirling in this dry void, as objects would approach him he would slow down and scenes would form.

There was a girl, of no distinguishable features reaching out to him, pulling at him with each curling finger. As Edward reached out to her the ground around him became covered in jackets on a base of wool blankets. Their fingers met, though Ed's eyesight was blurred and he could not distinguish her face.

They started to dance and found themselves in a lavishly decorated house; the music had swing



to it, the type that makes one move their hips uncontrollably.

When suddenly the music stops abruptly. There is another presence in the room this time over his left shoulder. At first Edward can only feel the other presence and is afraid to turn. A faint voice in the pit of his stomach tells him, it's all right to turn.

When he does he is astonished to find a short little man, debunking the fear that he was having. As he approaches the short figure, his vision cleared. Edward, then let out a shrill yell as he looked at his reflection in the face of the midget.

At which point in time, Edward sat up in bed sweating like an athlete, his throat the only part of him that was dry as a bone.

He got up and looked at the clock on his desk, in red it said, 4:18 a.m. *What time did I go to bed, what, ah I feel like shit.*

He dragged his groggy ass up out of bed and wandered down the hall. The lighting was foreign, he felt detached from the world around him, like he had woken in up in some insane asylum, the air swirled around his confused head. *It feels like I'm still dreaming.*

Ed took his sore throat to the pimple on the side of the wall. He drank from its sour dribble of water and then continued his way into the bathroom.

*This place is disgusting.*

An army of forty-year-old sinks fell in line before him. Behind a frail cinderblock wall stood a similar army of toilets.

He went into the first stall and let the urine drop from his body with no sense of control. Gravity doing its dance on the recently cleaned toilet bowl that still had tell tale traces of its history carved into it.

On the wall across from him scrawled out in pen wrote, 'may the new year begin' underneath it said, 'leave your wisdom at the door.'

Ed made no attempt to read into these words; they were just what his sensory reality was picking up. The air seemed to have a hum in it, and Ed felt so far gone from reality that he made no stalling in getting back to his room.

He lay silent in bed for a little while; rubbing his throat hoping it may relieve something. It didn't, Ed scoffed and then before he knew it the storm clouds that loomed and rained, blocked off his brain from his body, with the power out, Ed's brain had no where to go but asleep. In a few moments, the new day would begin.