

**Scenes**  
by Tucker Wilson

*The Beginning*

Sometime in the year 2003, DeAndre begins his fight in the world. He was planned, sort of, and is the fourth child of his 22 year-old mother. It was not a ceremonial birth. No bright stars, no balloons, no bubble gum cigars, no father. Although experienced, DeAndre's mother was not overly responsible with DeAndre throughout the pregnancy. She ate frequently, appeasing the appendage in her abdomen with Ramen Noodles, KFC, and Zebra Cakes. She washed it down with whatever alcohol she could find and the occasional hint of nicotine to aid digestion. Nevertheless, DeAndre is born, and his mother does love him. She loves him as much as a single mother, food stamps, and hand-me-downs can.

*Elementary School*

DeAndre loves school. He loves taking the bus and thinking of his favorite song, "The Wheels on the Bus." He sings it over and over under his breath the entire ride to and from school. Sometimes he doesn't want to leave the bus. He likes the mustache of the red-cheeked bus driver, the green seats with funny letters, and the way his body bounces up and down when they hit a bump.

He's a quiet kid in class. He listens, head perched up and eyes wide, when his teachers talk. In the first weeks-years of school, when he is called on by one of his teachers, DeAndre simply smiles at them and agrees with whatever they are saying.

"DeAndre, can you tell me what you are drawing there?"

"Yes."

“Is it a dinosaur?”

“Dinosaur. Yes.”

“Or is it a dog?”

“Dog. Yes.”

Only two weeks into his education he is labeled as remedial. He is placed into a one-on-one reading program. He loves hearing the way someone older than him reads. He listens intently to the way his clear, white-skinned and red-haired tutor reads with such emotion, slowing down and then racing and raising her voice when something important or exciting is about to happen. She helps him learn the alphabet and he reads the word “mop,” but then she is gone. Meanwhile, his classmates shoot up their hands to read aloud and bring books home. DeAndre takes home a book from the library every week too. He likes ones with animals on the covers, and he likes the way the librarian smiles about every book he checks out.

When DeAndre goes home, he comes home to his mother on the couch. He is engrossed with Wiley the Coyote and Roadrunner; he wishes Wiley would catch him, just one time. Later in the evening, when he hears his mother shouting vulgarity or crying because of the many men that visit his home, he reaches for the plastic bag with a library book enclosed. He lies on his bed, stares at the pages, and imagines he is reading with his teacher or tutor, laughing or gasping depending on what he determines is going on.

### *Middle School*

Now DeAndre walks to school. They are three blocks of head-down, hood up, and quick-footed travel. Some of the neighborhood guys already have tattoos declaring their

induction to the local gang. DeAndre doesn't fit in with this crowd, but they follow him like a dark shadow.

Ever since "remedial" was labeled next to his name, teachers have treated DeAndre different. He can hear them slow down and enunciate their language when asking him a question; he can feel them squinting over his shoulder as he reads aloud at a fourth grade level, now in eighth. DeAndre doesn't take home books from the library anymore. Instead, when the class is brought to the library, he walks aimlessly through the adolescent literature aisles and scans the titles. When he is feeling brave he checks out a book he can read, and says to the librarian, "I hope my little sister likes this one," or, "My little brother likes mysteries, just like I do."

### *High School*

This is where there is supposed to be a lucky break. There is supposed to be a cool teacher with black-rimmed glasses and nonchalant fashion, who inspires DeAndre. They study Shakespeare, examine metaphors, and talk about what it really means to be a "man." This teacher then helps DeAndre apply for college, and a student, who once didn't believe he would graduate high school, is going to college on a fully paid scholarship. Either that, or DeAndre is supposed to develop a talent for writing raps, or impress wide-eyed scouts with his slam dunks and quarterback sacks, or somehow strike it rich, like his mother wins the lottery.

Instead, DeAndre realizes he is not smart enough to go to college a few weeks into his freshman year. He doesn't have a computer to apply, he has never been able to form a strong thesis statement, and he starts hanging out with the kids from the

neighborhood. Most days he ends up meeting his friends at the playground or an abandoned warehouse, not school. They smoke and steal. Because of his size, his friends use him to intimidate others. He relishes the role. Books slam to the ground, bodies against lockers, and his elbows against eye sockets. His heart develops a deep hate for his mother, his bastard father. His two younger siblings are the only things that keep him going home.

One night he makes time for his younger sister to read to him. She is much smarter than him. He thinks she has a real chance to make it to college, but when she corrects him on the word, “responsibility,” a word he didn’t know and skipped, he silently stands up, tells his sister he has to go, and heads to the playground. He thinks of his mother, stoned and drooling on the couch, all the men at his house that he never could call dad, and how the darn coyote could never catch the stupid roadrunner. It’s a cold night, and his tears feel warm falling down his face as he walks toward his future.