

The image features three spheres of different colors: a green one on the left, a yellow one in the center, and a red one on the right. They are set against a white background with several thick, dark blue hand-drawn lines that form an abstract, sketchy frame around the spheres. The text is overlaid on the lower portion of the spheres.

ali is a jaywalker

hazim haemoglobin

## ALI IS A JAYWALKER

By Hazim Haemoglobin

### CHAPTER ONE

A single dandruff flake drifted down and landed on Ahmad's small bulbous nose, a scout for a barrage of more flakes to come. The 4 year old boy felt dizzy trying to focus his eyes on the flake, so he crinkled his nose and watched as it slid off, and floated down to the bathroom floor. More and more flakes drifted down elegantly and Ahmad flailed his pudgy arms and giggled in glee.

There was nothing elegant about the scalp where the flakes were taking off from. Ahmad looked up eagerly at his 15 year old brother, Ali, scratching his head furiously in front of the cracked bathroom mirror. Ali's face twisted into a disgusted frown at his own reflection, made even more unpleasant by the long gash running along the middle of the mirror. He only paused his scratching to run several fingers down the bridge of his nose.

"Fuck!" he remarked, "a new pimple...great."

He dug his nail into the nasty red bump and groaned as he felt the pus and blood oozing out. Revolted, he quickly washed his hands and wiped his pimple addled face with a tissue. Ali was exasperated. The hoard of pimples made his face look like the surface of Mars. It was a badge that said "I'm a teenager."

He hated it. He hated those pimples. He hated the dandruff. He hated his coarse dark skin. Everything. He was the antonym to the word attractive and Ali spent many hours contemplating on it and digging into the love/hate relationship he had with the bathroom mirror.

Ahmad didn't mind the dandruff flakes though. He was busy collecting them in his toddler palm and as Ali looked down at his brother, a sense of jealousy jabbed at his thoughts. How he wish he could start over on a clean slate. He'd do everything those magazines he bought frequently advised to prevent an acne assault. Too late bugger, he thought to himself.

He bent his knees to scoop little Ahmad in his arms. The little boy giggled, oblivious to Ali's scowling, as he tugged at his big brother's right earlobe.

"Cut it out, Ahmad," he scolded the toddler in his arms. He gave his best 'mean eye' look but Ahmad just continued giggling. Sighing in frustration, Ali stomped out of the bathroom only to be met with his mother's yelling.

"Ali! You goin' ta be late fo' school!"

There was a commotion in the small apartment's kitchen and the sound of China chattering to each other as Ibu shuffled about. She turned around, greased up frying pan in left hand, to shoot a 'get ready NOW' glare at her oldest son. Ali grumbled before setting Ahmad in his high chair. He proceeded to get himself showered and in his school uniform.

"You did not whiten yo' shoes. You did not iron yo' clothes. You did not get yo' bag ready," Ibu said pointedly.

"I didn't want to," Ali blurted before he could catch his tongue.

"You did not want to?" Ibu raised her eyebrow in disapproval, "You want to set a good example fo' yo' brother, no?"

Ali groaned. He did forget. Not on purpose though. He didn't even remember what he was doing last night. He didn't complete that 4 page essay Ms. Tan would be expecting. An essay about traffic safety, the most mundane topic his English teacher could have coughed up.

"What a' you goin' to be? I am guessin' yo' homework is not complete either," Ibu went on, voice unwavering, "I already ironed yo' shirt. I did not do the pants though. That, you can do yo'self. I do

not see the point in refusin' to do somethin' just to get a reaction. Is this some sort of trend at school now?"

Ali wasn't sure of what to reply but Ibu was shooin' him off to the bathroom with her hands, with Ahmad's constant giggling in the background. He quickly shut the bathroom door, more of an attempt to block Ibu's nagging than to get washed up in privacy. He could still hear Ibu's shrill voice from the kitchen though.

Peeling off his pajamas, Ali stole a glance at the mirror again and fought the urge to punch at the horrendous looking creature sneering back at him. Instead, he covered two thirds of the mirror by hanging his pajamas on it. There, he thought, all better...

## CHAPTER TWO

Ali stood at the door, hair still messy, face still scrunched up unpleasantly. He stood in his wrinkled school pants and ironed uniform. His schoolbag was stuffed with little notebooks and foolscap paper and a couple of writing utensils jammed into the little compartments. Ibu was hurrying over to hand him a plastic bag.

"Here is yo' lunch. I did not have time to make anythin' else. I have to be at work early today and I need to drop off Ahmad at Auntie Rokiah's," she explained as he looked inside to see a red Tupperware, "Fish curry and rice fo' today. Now, off you go. Remember to look both ways befo' crossin' the street. Only cross at red lights please. I don't know what I'd do without two. You're the only ones I have I-

"I get it. I get it," Ali interrupted, opened the front door, and kicked the grill softly and watched as it swung to make way.

"You used to be so obedient, you know. You knew all the traffic rules by heart. You would wear that hat he gave you and parade around the house in his v-

"I said I get it!" Ali interjected and turned, "Bye Ibu."

"Have a good day at school! Look both ways! Do not come back late!"

He hated walking to school. It wasn't far. It wasn't near. He just knew that school bus fees were too expensive and Ibu figured they could save money if he just walked. Ali shoved the Tupperware in his bag and let the plastic bag fly free. He then crammed his hands in his school school trouser pockets and with each big step, was on his way to the dreary brick buildings they called school.

## CHAPTER THREE

Ms. Tan liked to enter from the back. It felt more dramatic and intimidating to slowly clap her heels against the floor while her students frantically rushed to their seats. She could hear them whisper profanities in their native Malay as she made her way to the disheveled looking wooden desk placed by the iron windows. A wilted flower in a Teacher's Day mug was Ceria's token of appreciation for their teachers.

Allowing herself a panoramic scan of the small classroom of the classroom, that mug and wilted flower was the best she could hope for from a class the other teachers referred to as 'where you really earn your pay raise'. The government hadn't raised the salary enough, Ms. Tan thought, placing her binder and imitation Luis Vuitton bag on the table. She faced the class.

"Please sit down! I will count to 5! 4!"

Wooden chairs screeched to the cement and uniformed students hurled themselves into their seating positions.

"3! 2!"

Two of the tallest boys in the class quickly hid their unfinished cigarettes behind the trash basket before prancing back to their seats.

"ONE!!!" the English teacher ejaculated.

The class wasn't silent. It would never be, but it was good enough for her tired expectations.

"Today is the day you are supposed to pass up your essays on the importance of traffic safety. Remember, I will submit them to the contest the local paper is running to promote traffic safety. Remember that it is also homework, which means you get the ruler if I don't get an essay."

Several boys grumbled. Some dug into their schoolbags, while two boys in the back row took out a sheet of Foolscap paper and tried to squeeze out a four page essay right there and then. Ms. Tan pretended not to notice and withdrew a slender metal 12 centimeter ruler from her bag. All eyes were on it.

"Now then," she marched over to the first row of flustered schoolboys, "Essay or ruler? Which is it?"

The first row of 7 boys yielded one complete essay and six smacks on outstretched palms, and six gritted teeth as the boys pretended it didn't hurt. Ms. Tan shook her head. There were still 3 more rows to go. A full decade of teaching the dastardly boys school had worn out her smiles and sharpened her scowls. Along with her salary that came in monthly, Ms. Tan was awarded new stress lines and wrinkles.

The second and third rows had given her 4 more essays, one with a 'sambal belacan' stain on it no less. Less grading for me, I guess, Ms. Tan thought to herself wearily. She hated to admit it but she was a slightly jealous whenever she saw another teacher with stacks of essays and homework on their desks.

After extracting another essay and five winces, she reached the final student. It was one of the three Alis in the class. One was tall and thought of himself as the handsome one. One was fat and spectacled. He had given her an essay, at least. The cowering Ali in front of her was rubbing his sweaty palms profusely against his wrinkled green pants, to complement his messy unkempt hair, she presumed.

"Ali," she spoke. The boy looked up to reveal his pimple addled face, strewn with a mixture of defiance and fright.

"Have you completed your essay?"

He shook his head slowly.

"Then hold out your hand," Ms. Tan simply responded.

"No."

The classroom lapsed into silence as even the other boys found it hard to grasp a student would defy Ms. Tan.

"What did you say?"

Alif stammered his response without looking directly into Ms. Tan's chalky face.

"N-n-no."

Ms. Tan shook off her bewildered expression and swiftly walked to the front of the classroom to dig out her cellular phone. She jabbed in some numbers and waited, glaring at a terrified Alif.

"*Wei! Kau bodoh ke ape?*" The boys were hissing at him. Whatever, Ali thought to himself. He just stared at his filthy school shoes. He should have whitened them the night before. They looked atrocious.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Ali rubbed his sore behind. Encik Hassan had just dealt him another whip of the most feared disciplinarian in the school, his rotan. Ali despised the look of delight Encik Hassan always had as he relished the fact the government paid him to whip boys. Encik Hassan stood upright, adjusting the charcoal colored belt under his rotund belly.

"Alright, boy, you know what you did wrong," his hoarse sandpaper voice induced a cringe from Ali as he too, stood up and gritted his teeth.

"Now, Ms. Tan informed me you're supposed to go to the hall. Some talk, Traffic police or something. Ms. Tan really wants you to be there. Whatever it is, you're supposed to be there, and if I see you anywhere else, your butt can say hi to my rotan again. Now GO!!!! Shoo!"

Ali bounded out of Encik Hassan's malodorous sorry excuse of a disciplinarian's office. His head felt light as he walked slowly past a group of 5<sup>th</sup> formers snickering at him. Jostling past a horde of students outside the *dewan*, the school hall, Ali spotted his classmates in the sea of students. Ms. Tan was standing behind them, unflinching, like a Buddhist statue. She swiveled her round head and locked her eyes with his. Startled, Ali tucked his head in and pushed through the students, all lined up in their respective classes, two by two.

"You're just in time," Ms. Tan greeted him, chagrin setting in her jaw.

"Whatever," he whispered to himself as he joined the other students in looking to the stage.

A burly goatee'd man with a bulbous nose in a police uniform walked in front of the podium and adjusted the microphone. Ali sneered. After some tweaking and some moan inducing screeches, he finally managed to set the microphone up while the headmaster, a square headed bald man in his late 40s by the name of Encik Izzuddin, scrambled in the background, ushering several students inside to help with the sound system.

"I thought, in conjunction with the essays you were supposed to have completed, a talk on traffic safety would drive the point home, so I arranged this talk with the help of Encik Izzuddin," Ms. Tan informed whoever was listening. Ali tapped his feet impatiently. Everybody in the hall was on their feet, anxious for whatever was supposed to take place...to take place.

Finally, there was a cough echoing off the walls and out of the speakers. The policeman was smiling at an army of frowns and eye rolls.

"Good afternoon students. My name is Encik Razal. I'm a policeman."

He paused and did his best to ignore the groans and eye rolls that followed. Ali hung his head.

"I've been asked here by your gracious headmaster, Encik Izzuddin and Ms. Tan, who is, if I've been informed correctly, one of the English teachers here."

It was hard not to notice Ms. Tan squealing like a piglet in response.

"I'd like to talk to you about traffic safety and regulations. I want you to remember one important thing by the end of this talk. DON'T BE A JAYWALKER."

Nobody in the audience was giving the reaction Encik Razal had hoped for. They were just tired of standing.

"Err. You can sit down," he said after a minute of thought. The hall collapsed into a collective sigh of release as they seated themselves on the dusty floor. Encik Razali scanned the crowd, eyes falling onto Ms. Tan who, like other teachers, remained standing. Not here, he thought to himself.

"Do you know what a jaywalker is?" he asked the crowd. Several heads shook. Some nodded. Not a voice spoke out so he continued, "I'll tell you. A jaywalker is somebody who crosses the street recklessly, without thinking. A jaywalker doesn't pay attention to the signs and doesn't obey the law. A JAYWALKER,"

He paused, noticing several more attentive eyes on him, "A jaywalker crosses lines he should not cross or he crosses them at times he should not be crossing. He is a criminal. I'm sure all of you don't

want to be criminals, am I right?"

Several boys yelled `I do!' and their teachers were quick to hobble over to tug at their ears. The rest of the speech droned on with bits about `STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!' and `LOOK BOTH WAYS!' which failed to hold even the Ms. Tan's attention who was fiddling with her phone. Ali sat through the hour drawing shapes in the accumulated dust on the floor. Traffic safety is for delusional people, he thought to himself as he blew dust off his fingers.



## CHAPTER FIVE

Ali hopped onto the curb. Schoolboys ran past him to their waiting cars. The sound of whistling, angry honking, and children's laughter filled the air, which smelled of exhaust pipes and cigarettes. His butt didn't hurt so much anymore and neither did his palm. He wondered if Ms. Tan did it to her husband every time he stepped out of line. He was sure she did. Wait...she didn't have a husband. With a face like that, she might just have to pray for a miracle. Then again, Ali, thought, I've got shitloads of pimples all over my own face. Who am I to judge?

The road was crowded with vehicles and motorcycles whizzed and weaved in between them dangerously, their noises blaring into the air like warning for the people on the sidewalk. It was hot. The sun seemed relentless with its assault of rays and Ali felt it grounding itself into every inch of his exposed skin. Ali kept walking though. This was something he was used to.

It was either harsh hot sun or cats and dogs rainfall. He preferred walking in the rain. Either way, he had to tolerate it for 25 minutes every afternoon. He reached a junction. There weren't as many cars on the road he had turned into. Ali decided he had some time to stop by the store and get a new brand of pimple cream. He didn't have time really. He didn't have time really. HHhu Ibu wouldn't want him home late, but she'd nag even if he was 100 minutes early. The one he was using wasn't doing anything and Ibu refused to buy another until the tube was finished.

There was a pharmacy in the row of shops on the other side of the big road that lay before him. Once every few minutes, a Proton or Honda would prance by. The crossing was all the way at the end of the road. It seemed far. Under the glare of the sun, it seemed a million miles away.

A jaywalker crosses lines he should not cross or he crosses them at times he should not be crossing... the words bounded around in his head. Ali yelled to the sky. He hated it when people's voices chose to make home in his thoughts. It was a stupid talk anyways and he, like so many others, had not bothered to pay much attention. What an annoying man. Who was he to tell people not to cross lines or when to cross them?

"Whatever!" he shouted, half laughingly, to the heat.

Ali felt his legs moving, slowly at first. Soon, he was sprinting across the vast road, schoolbag rapping against his sweat soaked back, loose shoelaces defying gravity. Ali started to laugh. There was a thrill to this. He reached the middle but didn't pause. His laughter rolled on, even as he arrived in front of the pharmacy, slightly out of breath, but swollen with happiness from the thrill of the sprint.

Pushing the glass door open, Ali squeezed through the narrow aisles of beauty products and hair creams. He found the section he was looking for and after deliberating on which new facial product to try, he decided to try one with a before and after picture of a girl who had worse pimples than his in the before picture. After displaying 12 crumpled ringgit notes to the disgruntled spectacled cashier, he grabbed the tube of acne cream and stepped back out into the polluted hot air. There, before him once more, lay the vast road.

He had to do it again. It was fun.

Tube in hand, Ali lunged forwards and broke into a sprint, tangled mess of hair flying behind, school tie flapping against his neck. It felt just as good as the first time and he began to let the laughter creep back into him as he ran and ran. The heat was nothing to Ali. That stupid man giving that stupid t-

**ssssccccCRRREEEEeeeEEEcccCCCHHHHHH!!!!!!**

Ali landed on his thigh, heartbeat thumping violently at the sudden intrusion. The vehicle that had swerved just in time was an old gray Toyota. Several shopkeepers had rushed out. The disgruntled spectacled cashier was hurrying over to him. Ali felt the heat pour over him once more like volcanic lava, his hands pressing into the scalding tar in a miserable attempt to hoist himself up. Ali shot a murderous glance at the Toyota. The door opened and he saw a pair of black boots thud against the road. Sweat streamed down Ali's face as he batted his eyelids furiously to keep them out. His thigh wasn't badly injured or anything. He was sure of it. It must be shock, he decided. It's just shock. Then the black booted man crouched and held out a hand. Ali looked up and felt the urge to spit boil in his conscience.

“What do you want?”

It was the policeman who had given the talk, goatee and all, still in uniform. Encik Razi's face was furrowed with wrinkles and a genuine look of concern which Ali chose to ignore.

“Ali, are you hurt? Let me take a look,” Encik Razi gently lifted Ali's leg, but the schoolboy whisked it away in refusal.

“I'm fine,” Ali responded swiftly, and he really didn't feel hurt. He sat upright on the road and then let out an angry moan when he saw the squashed tube of acne cream he had just spent two week's worth of allowance on. Its contents had been forced out by the Toyota's stupid old tires. The man stood up and held out a hand. Ali continued staring at the squashed tube.

“Ali,” the man spoke, softer than his tone before, “Are you hurt? Ibu will be so worried if you go home hurt. How is she by the way? Let me see your leg if you don't want to talk. Please?”

Ali gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. He had no right to tell him or anybody to not cross the line or when. He had no right...

## CHAPTER SIX

Ali sat, hunched over on his mattress. He stared at the new tube of acne cream in his hands. Then he directed his eyes to the new comic books on his writing desk. There was a knock and Ibu entered the room.

"How was school?"

Ali shrugged and studied his mother's face. She must have had a rough day at work. Her voice was frail. Ibu moved further inside the room and Ali instinctively shifted to make room beside him on the bed. Ibu wrapped her arms around his hunched back.

"Work wasn't easy either. I haven't had to work in a long time. Since y-

Her voice trembled slightly and she stood back up. Wiping her watery eyes with the sleeve of her robes, she then bent down to plant an affectionate kiss on Ali's forehead.

"Ahmad is already asleep. You should be as well," she said to a still hunched Ali, "Goodnight Ali. I love you. Please switch off the lights before you sleep ok? Bills are high enough"

Ibu noticed the comic books on the desk, "Which means you should stop wastin' money on comic books, Ali."

She then stepped out gently and proceeded to close the door to the dimly lit room.

"I don't hate him," Ali called out suddenly. Ibu paused, sadness swallowing her in, and looked into her son's eyes, as if trying to bore into his thoughts. Ali turned his head away, placed the tube on the carpet, and pulled his blanket around him. Ibu flicked the switch, throwing the bedroom into a world of darkness, save for the little moonlight filtering through the windows. With a final 'good night', she shut the door.

Ali stared at the ceiling and reached out. His fingers encountered the familiar slightly tattered fabric of the traffic cop vest that had been hanging above him for almost 365 nights now. Fidgeting with the material with both of his hands, he recounted the day from Ms. Tan to the talk to the almost accident. After a while, the sound of rain pounding the windows startled him. Ali quickly jumped out of bed and shut the dusty glass windows before sliding back under the covers..

"Whatever," he whispered, and closed his eyes.

Ali Is A Jaywalker  
is a short story by Hazim Haemoglobin

copyright Hazim Haemoglobin 2011

You may not alter the contents or distribute for profit without the  
owners written permission

All rights reserved.