**Angie Thomas: Concrete Rose (excerpt), 2021.**

***Angie Thomas****(1988) is an African-American young adult author from Mississippi. As a young girl, Thomas witnessed many instances of gun violence, and she uses these experiences in her writing.*

*Thomas' most famous work is the novel The Hate U Give (2017), which has also been made into a movie with the same title. The novel follows the young girl Starr Carter who experiences and deals with police brutality. This excerpt is from the novel Concrete Rose (2021), a prequel to The Hate U Give. Concrete Rose tells the story of Starr's father Maverick Carter. It takes place in Garden Heights and revolves around themes such as drug dealing and gang environments.*

*Through her writing, Thomas wishes to give a voice to people who have been victims of police brutality and structural racism and whose stories have not yet been told.*

**Angie Thomas: Concrete Rose (2021)**

Evergreen Prison's in a small town that's only got a general store and a diner. Me and Ma went in that diner once. It was nothing but white people in there, and they gave us dirty looks soon as we walked in. We walked right back out.

It's *that*kinda town. Don't help that it feel like we driving up to a plantation. The prison is surrounded by miles of fields. Sometimes they have the inmates out working in them. When I was a kid, I thought the prison was like a castle - a mountain of concrete surrounded by a tall, razor-wire fence. I came up with this whole story in my head, that it had been taken over by bad guys who kidnapped Pops, and he'd find a way out. He can't find a way outta forty to life.

They not doing car searches today, so Ma park and we go right in. Holidays popular for prison visits, and that mean the lines longer. We go through metal detectors and pat-downs before we ever get to the visiting area. I could only bring in one pacifier, one bottle, one diaper, one toy, and one change of clothes for Seven. I carry him through the metal detector, and they pat him down to make sure we not hiding something in his diaper.

I hate this shit.

The visiting area look like a school cafeteria but with guards standing around it, They got these dull yellow tables and chairs that's bolted to the floor. The walls light yellow cinder block, and the floors are white and yellow. Guess they tryna make up for the sunlight since no windows in here.

We get a table and wait. Ma brought some money for the vending machine. That's all she could bring besides her car key. She buy every snack they got and lay them out on the table. Our own version of a family Thanksgiving.

It probably look like I'm bouncing Seven on my knee, but I can't keep my legs still. I don't know why I'm nervous, this my pops. He never come down on me.

A loud buzz go off, a door open, and one by one inmates in orange jumpsuits come in and reunite with their folks. Seem like every visitor here get their inmate, and I start to wonder if Pops gon' come out.

At the very end, there he is.

This man got my whole face. I mean, I got his. Ma say we identical. She'll bring it up at the most random times. I could be staring at my homework to the point my eyebrows almost touch, and Ma will go, "You look so much like your father."

She say we walk alike, too. Pops walk like the world was made for him. He bald now - back in the day, he had a Jheri curl like Eazy-E. He used to be skinny, but ain't much to do in prison besides lift weights. They got him jacked up.

He catch sight of us, and his smile take over his face.

Ma hurry into his arms. This hug the only time they can touch during the visit. Prison rules. They kiss, and I glance away like a Ii'I kid.

Pops look at me. These days we eye to eye, but I feel like a ant standing in front of a mountain - he always seem bigger than life to me. Don't know if that's 'cause folks in the Garden act like he a god or if it's just 'cause he my pops.

Ma take Seven, and Pops wrap his arms around me. It's one of them big, tight hugs that seem to get all of me.

"I missed you, boy," he says, all rough. "I missed you."

"I missed you, too, Pops."

He hold me in front of him. "Damn, man. You... " He clear his throat. "You keep growing, huh? What you been eating?"

"Everything," Ma says.

Pops chuckle. "I can tell." He clasp the back of my head. "My main man."

That feel like a hug, too.

Pops turn to Ma, and Seven all he see. His eyes light up. "There go that baby."

He hold his hands out for Seven. Li'l Man grip Ma's shirt and whimper.

"It's okay, Man-Man," Ma coos. "That's your grandpa."

I brush his hair to tell him the same. Long as we good, he good - he let Pops take him without much of a fuss. As chubby as he is, he super tiny in Pops's gigantic hands.

"Seven Maverick Carter," Pops says it like he testing it out. "Can you say 'Grandpa'? Say 'Grandpa."'

Ma chuckles. "Adonis, that baby's too young to talk."

"I don't know. Smart as you say he is, he'll be talking soon. I'm ready to hear whatever he gotta say." Pops kiss his cheek.

Me and Ma sit on one side of the table, and Pops sit on the other with Seven in his lap. He allowed to hold Li'l Man the entire visit, but he can't touch us again until the end. The guards watch to make sure he don't.

Seven babble, and Pops go, "Yeah. Yeah, I know," like they having a conversation.

"How was the drive?" he asks us.

"Fine," Ma says. "Traffic was a little heavy because of the holiday, but that's expected. You're doing okay?"

Pops pretend to eat Seven's hand. Seven squeal and laugh. Pops smile wide. "I'm surviving. Finally got that job in the kitchen that I wanted. Y'all looking at the newest prep cook at Evergreen Prison."

"Yo, word?" I say.

"Adonis, that's wonderful!" Ma adds.

"Oh yeah. I ain't a field nigga no more. Massa moved me into the big house."

He and Ma crack up. I get why, but this not cool.

"Hopefully I'll be able to use some of my recipes instead of that mess they got us cooking," Pops says. "I convinced Chef to order some seasonings. Food need more than salt and pepper."

"Hopefully he'll listen. I'm making your yams tomorrow," Ma says. "They won't taste the same though."

"Hear that, Mav Man? You cook right, a woman got no choice but to miss you." He wink.

I can't crack a smile. He should be home, cooking for us.

Seven babble real loud, and Pops go, "I know, buddy. I'm right there with you. How everything at home, y'all?"

Ma turn all the way toward me, and the mood change. Mommas, boy. They can murder you with a look.

"Your son has something to tell you, Adonis," she says.

*His* son. Ma act like I lose her DNA when I screw up.

Pops look up from Seven. "What he got to tell me?"

My legs shaking real bad now. Man, I'm tripping. Pops gon' have my back.

I look at the table anyway. "Umm ... my umm..."

"My eyes not down there, and my name not 'Um,"' Pops says. "Fix that shit. And straighten up."

Pops never let me talk to anybody without looking them in the eye, and he never let me stumble on my words. I better say what I mean, no hesitation.

I sit up like he taught me, shoulders straight, chest up, my eyes locked with his. "Lisa, she pregnant."

"What the hell?" Pops sit back in a daze. He look at Ma. "Ain't you taught him 'bout condoms?"

"Hold on one damn minute. Don't you dare blame me, Adonis."

"I'm just tryna figure out why this boy making babies like this?"

"I'm sure if his father was home to teach him better, he'd do better.''

"Here you go," Pops groan. "I don't wanna hear this today, Faye.''

"Then don't blame me," Ma says. "I'm doing the best I can.''

"Are you? Maybe if you wasn't with *Moe* all the damn time – "

"Excuse you?" Ma says. "Keep her out of this."

"I didn't bring her in it. I call home to talk to my wife, and you running around with her. No wonder our son out there impregnating these girls."

"I'm sorry for finding time to live my life!"

Pops suck his teeth. "Living your life, that's what you call it?"

"You're damn right. Living my life however l wanna live it. The world hasn't stopped because you're in here.''

I wanna disappear, man. I hate when they argue. I don't get why Pops got such a problem with Moe. Ma oughta be able to hang out with her friend without worrying 'bout me.

"Pops, this ain't on Ma. This my fault, a'ight?"

"You got some nerve, coming at me," Ma says, like I didn't say a word. "When was the last time you actually parented our son, Adonis?"

"What you want me to do, Faye? Huh?" Pops ask. "What the hell you expect me to do?"

"I don't know, but you better figure it out. Fast.''

Ma hop up. She take Seven from Pops and go to the other side of the room.

Pops rub his face. "Maverick, what the hell, man?"

"Pops, it was an accident. I didn't mean- "

"It don't matter what you 'meant.' This some irresponsible shit, man."

"I know. I'm sorry, okay?"

"That ain't enough!" he barks. "This not a bad report card or a fight at school. You making babies, Mav. Where the hell was your head at, huh?"

Why he acting like this? "I wasn't thinking, that's all."

"Wasn't thinking," he says with a mean laugh. "Wow, you wasn't thinking. What do your name mean, Maverick?"

"Pops, c'mon."

"Answer me. What do your name mean?"

I feel like I'm in first grade again. My teacher, Mrs. Stanley, was this middle-aged white lady who wore red lipstick. First day of class, she called roll and when she got to me she went, "Maverick? Huh. That's an odd name."

The other kids snickered. It felt like Mrs. Stanley punched me. I went home and told Pops what happened.

"You know what your name mean," he said. "Bet her name don't mean shit. Tomorrow ask her what it is and what it mean."

I did. She said her name was Ann and she didn't think it had meaning. It was "just a normal name."

I told her exactly what Pops told me to say next. "Maverick means 'independent thinker.' Your momma and daddy wasn't mavericks, naming you that."

She sent me home with a note. Pops balled it up and threw it away. After that, he'd make me tell him what my name meant every day, so I'd know who I'm supposed to be.

I look at Pops now and tell him what my name mean like I used to do.

"So why the hell you wasn't thinking?" he ask.

"That was the day of Dre's funeral."

Pops go quiet, the way people do when they remember I lost my brother. He let out a slow sigh. "Grief a hell of a burden, Mav Man. A hell of a burden. However, it ain't an excuse.''

I look up. "What?"

"Dre wasn't on your mind when you was with that girl," he says. "We both know what was. You let that thing in your pants make decisions for you. Don't use Dre as a cover-up."

"I'm not using him as a cover-up!"

Pops slap the table. "Take that bass out your goddamn voice!"

"Pops, chill."

"Chill? You expect me to be cool with the fact my son doing stupid shit?"

Hold up. He in the orange jumpsuit. "That's not as stupid as hiding cocaine in the house where your wife and son live."

He may seem like a mountain, but I'm starting to feel like one myself.

"Oh, okay," Pops says, stroking his chin. "This is Attack Adonis Day, huh? Say what you want, but I was being a man and taking care of my family."

"You damn sure ain't being one now."

Pops's nostrils flare. "Watch it."

"Or what?" I'm feeling bold as hell, and things I've been scared to say suddenly not so scary. "You left us. Got Ma busting her ass to take care of me and put money on your books. I had to join a gang 'cause of you. You can't come at either of us."

"What I did ain't got *shit* to do with the fact you keep knocking girls up.''

"Yeah, a'ight, I made some bad decisions," I admit. "I'm gon' be there for my kids. Unlike you.''

He can't say nothing, like I thought.

I push away from the table. "Man, I'm outta here.''

"Maverick, we not done talking – ''

"Yeah, we are. First you wanna blame Ma, and now you wanna come at me? What you doing besides bumping your gums? I'm more of a man than you. I'm taking care of mine.

"Son – "

"'Son,' nothing. I ain't had a father since I was eight."

The way Pops shrink, I hit him hard. Good. I grab Ma's key and head for the door. Ma call after me, but I don't stop till I'm at the car.

Angie Thomas: Concrete Rose. Walker Books, 2021

**Study Questions:**

1. Comment on the narrator of the story
2. Find one or two quotes that illustrate the setting of the story
3. The story uses *sociolects*. Give examples and comment on the effects
4. What theme(s) do the text have? Try to include the term structural racism