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*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched  
refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp  
beside the golden door!*

- Emma Lazarus

As the ocean blows the rain clouds closer and closer to the tops of the Manhattan skyscrapers, and as the night spills its black ink on the azure surface of the sky, my father seems less and less likely to bring home the news everyone has been hoping to hear for many months. Trying not to get carried away by the crowd of people who are so different but still look so similar to each other in the way they dress, talk, and even walk, he rushes to a sidewalk and stuffs another useless business card into his wallet. Another day passed away. Another sun made its circle around the globe and took a header into the foaming waves of the Atlantic Ocean without resting its rays on his shoulders for even a second. "It is never easy to find a spot under the sun," he says to himself as he walks hurriedly towards the subway station, "Especially for somebody like me."

An immigrant with a thick black moustache, an Ivy Cap, and an old "Communist" belt tied around his waist, my father struggles through his 8th month in the USA, still unemployed and still in desperate search of a job. Any job. Every day, he leaves his apartment in Brooklyn and rings the door bells of the offices in all the five boroughs to hand in his resume and repeat the mini-speech he now knows by heart: "Hi, my name is Azar, I have a fire guard certificate, two security guard training certificates, a security guard's license, driver's license, and a first aid certificate. I am looking for a job, and I am ready to work at any shift any day of the week

including weekends for eight dollars per hour." "Do you have any experience in the US?" an employer would ask, frowning at his accent, coldly scrutinizing his neat, clean, but obviously not American image, and barely glancing at his resume. "No, sir," - my father would answer after hesitating for a quarter of a second. "Then - sorry, we cannot have you right now. Come when you have some experience."

But where can a newcomer get his experience from if every employer denies him a job opportunity due to the lack of experience? And what kind of experience does a security guard need in order to stand in front of the door? What does it even mean to have experience in the US? Is it all about work? The answer to this question came from one of the employers on whose door my father happened to knock. "You know, my friend," the employer said with a friendly smile, "you are a nice guy and your paperwork is perfect, but I doubt you will ever find a good job in America unless you shave your moustache. Also, you know, this accent and stuff like that... Not good. Not good, my friend. You have to go home, take your time, and do something about all this... all this strange stuff." And this repeated over and over again. Wherever he went, everybody told him to come back without "the strange stuff," to come back with experience, to come back 100% American.

The US constantly boasts about the countless rights it gives its people. One of them, proudly following the freedom of speech under the first bullet of the Bill of Rights, is freedom of expression. Freedom to be yourself, to look, act, and talk like yourself is something that is protected by the Constitution and something that allures people when they buy their tickets to the US. But does the US really accept us the way we are, or do we become eligible for the rights all Americans have only after we pass through the process of Americanization and totally get rid of the "strange stuff" that we bring from our own cultures? The USA is built on the shoulders of the

immigrants. The crops that ripen here are watered by their sweat and their tears. They all keep waiting for their chance, but are they ever given one until they conform? Are they really encouraged to be who they are and express themselves in ways they are used to express themselves, or do they actually become valued only when they totally blend into the uniform crowd that rushes on the busy streets of New York City? The US accepts Muslims, but only if they uncover their heads, start eating pork, and avoid going to Mosques and talking about Allah. The US accepts Asians, but only if they give their kids American names and get rid of all the habits that may seem Communist. The US accepts West Indians, but only if they cut their dreads and speak pure English with no Patois or Pidgin words entwined in their expressive speeches.

Today, my father does not wear an Ivy Cap and a tight "Communist" belt anymore, and he has a low-paid part-time job in a crowded mall in Queens. Maybe, tomorrow, after his moustache and accent are gone as well, he will get a full-time, better paid job in Brooklyn, closer to his house. Who knows how much an immigrant has to lose on his way to the American Dream? Who knows, how much of himself there will be in my father to express after he reaches the American Dream he came for? Freedom of expression is guaranteed to everyone in this country, but fair treatment doesn't always come with this right. Freedom of expression is a luxury, and immigrants are allowed no luxuries as they struggle for paychecks on the long way towards their American Dreams.

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