

## **THE UNDERACHIEVER**

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*Blake Cure is conflicted in his first year dental simulation clinic when Dr. Harris doesn't seem to be providing him with the same treatment and guidance as his peers. Initially, Blake thought he caught Dr. Harris on a bad day, but as the mistreatment continued throughout the semester, matters became very uncomfortable. He finally gained the courage to do something about it, and immediately realized that he had made a big mistake.*

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### **BLAKE CURE**

Blake Cure, a second-year African American dental student at a large public university, fell into the field of dentistry by mistake. He grew up on a cattle ranch in a small town of 296 people. Blake had 12 people in his graduating high school class and was the star quarterback of his school's 6-man football team. His family always assumed he would finish high school and start taking over the family business on the ranch. It hit them by surprise when he said he wanted to go to college and do something else. Blake ended up attending a 4-year state university where he spent his first two years as a finance major. He didn't really know what he wanted to do in life; he just knew he didn't want to work on the farm.

Early his third year of college he was at a dental visit and was inspired by his dentist's gentleness and eagerness to teach. His dentist offered to let Blake shadow a few times to see if dentistry is something he might like to pursue. Blake immediately took him up on the opportunity and shadowed 4 times that month. He fell in love with the field and changed to a biology major.

Since an early age, Blake was very strong academically; however he didn't know what dental school entailed or what would be required of him to get accepted. He persevered through his biology curriculum, graduating in the top 8% of his class. During his 4<sup>th</sup> year as an undergraduate student he took the DAT, applied to seven dental schools, and was accepted to all seven. Wanting to stay close to his family, choosing a dental school in the state he grew up in was an easy choice for him.

### **DR. HARRIS**

Dr. Harris was born and raised in the same state as Blake to two Caucasian parents. He served in the United States Army at a young age and was admitted to his dental school's second graduating class as active military. Upon his graduation from dental school, he continued to serve time as an Army dentist for eight years. When his service was completed he decided to return to the university as a full-time restorative dentistry instructor.

Dr. Harris thoroughly enjoyed the start of his teaching career. It was a much slower and more enjoyable pace for him than the military life. He was able to bring to the students techniques that weren't necessarily taught in the textbooks, but worked. His stories and experiences as an Army dentist were intriguing to many. It's fair to say that the majority of the students really enjoyed working with him and listening to him teach.

By the time Blake was admitted to the dental school, Dr. Harris had been a full-time faculty member for 27 years. His enthusiasm about dentistry and teaching had seemed to fade over the years. Although he still had his favorite students, he made it clear that Blake was not one of them.

### **THE SIMULATION CLINIC**

It was finally time! First semester of dental school was over, anatomy class and cadaver lab were over, and it was time to enter the simulation clinic and start learning how to cut on plastic teeth. Blake couldn't have been more excited. This is what he worked so hard to achieve. It was finally time to learn how to master this new skill that was foreign to him and all 79 of his classmates.

Blake, coming from such a small town and high school was somewhat used to being the only "colored" student in his class. However, this came as a shock to him when it was also the case in his dental school class. His race has never affected him in the past; his outgoing personality has always made him well liked among his peers.

Blake always prepared for "sim clinic" by reading the lesson before class. Whether it was a class II preparation, or a crown prep for a gold or all-ceramic crown, he knew the dimensions of reduction. What he didn't know were the things that weren't taught on paper such as how to position his body, where to place his mirror, how to angle the patients' head, or which burs were indicated in different scenarios. For these questions, he turned to Dr. Harris whom he'd heard such great things about from his predecessors.

The first time Blake approached Dr. Harris in sim clinic for advice he was shocked when Dr. Harris snapped at him with, "go back to your seat and practice it on your

own, you should have come to clinic prepared today.” It upset Blake because he felt as though he was prepared. He knew what the assignment was and he knew dimensions of the exercise, he just needed a professional that’s now been doing it for over 28 years to demonstrate it to him. Blake tried to quickly look past this as he assumed Dr. Harris was having a bad day.

To Blake’s surprise, his encounters with Dr. Harris the following weeks either remained the same or got worse. His most vivid memory of sim clinic was when he asked Dr. Harris a question, was blown off, then witness his best friend Daniel ask the same question and receive hands on instruction on how to complete the task. This began to anger Blake; he didn’t know what to do. He felt as though he was being mistreated but didn’t want to get Dr. Harris in trouble because of how much his friends enjoyed working with him. He just wanted an explanation.

### **THE SOLUTION**

As the weeks went on, Blake felt as though he was falling more and more behind in the simulation clinic. He wasn’t being treated the same as his classmates and every question he approached Dr. Harris with was reprimanded as poor underachieving performance. Dr. Harris was the first person to ever refer to Blake as an underachiever. He always strove to do his best, but now that the semester was nearing its end he feared that Dr. Harris would give him a poor grade in the course purely out of resentment. Blake finally thought of a solution and was hopeful that it would make things better.

Dr. Franz was the department chair of restorative dentistry and before the semester came to an end was paid a visit from Blake. Blake explained the events of the semester to him. Dr. Franz questioned why Blake didn’t come to him earlier and was afraid that there was little to nothing he could do about it at this point. He suggested setting up a meeting with the three of them to possibly discuss what has been going on.

One week later Drs. Harris and Franz met with Blake to discuss the events of the semester. The meeting was tense and seemed to be going nowhere. It was one man’s word against the other. As Dr. Harris was a tenured and well-respected faculty member Blake felt as though Dr. Franz was taking his side. The meeting seemed to make things worse, especially that now Dr. Harris knew that Blake involving people of higher authority.

The meeting came to a close and as Dr. Harris and Blake left Dr. Franz’s office Dr. Harris turned to Blake in the hallway, grinned at him and said. “Looking forward to working with you in the real clinic next semester, Blake.” And he walked away.

Blake was more upset and afraid than ever. Not only was he worried about his simulation clinic grade, but he was concerned what his friends would now think of him, and especially what the future holds with Dr. Harris as his attending faculty.