

## Malcolm

When I walked down that aisle and saw all of those familiar faces staring at me as I took the long stroll towards matrimony, I finally realized what life was all about. It was more than the petty riffs and silly grudges many of us are guilty of.

I smiled when I saw my mother. I knew the waterworks were going to happen any time now. I nodded at many of my friends and family as I stepped up to the altar.

I greeted Pastor Taylor with a smile. Just last week I was getting baptized in this very place. Now here I stand in my tuxedo about to reconnect with my missing rib. The nervousness within me brought flashbacks of my grade school years, when I hated to speak before a crowd.

I looked over my shoulder and glanced at the men who have been there for me the majority of my life. When I looked at my dad and he nodded at me, calmness came over my body like it was a supernatural experience.

The music began to play. I glanced over in the direction of my beautiful wife-to-be's parents. I wanted to assure them that I would provide a life for their daughter just as a queen like her would expect. I turned my head towards the front of the aisle and saw the bridesmaids take that long walk. All of them were smiling in their pink dresses. The maid of honor followed suit. She looked stunning, just like the bridesmaids. All of them were queens in my eyes.

I didn't get teary-eyed until I saw my beautiful daughter, Destiny, walk down the aisle. Her smile was the size of a half block of government cheese. I felt my eyes water, but I manned up. She tossed flowers, took a step, tossed more flowers and took more steps.

Then I exhaled when I saw my beautiful bride. I couldn't believe the journey, but I was pleased with the destination.

Pastor Taylor yelled, "All stand for the bride."

With each step she took, I felt our bond getting stronger and stronger. It's a feeling I can't explain. It felt as if I was whole again, almost like the last piece of the puzzle was finally in place. When she stepped up on the altar opposite me, we smiled. Our eyes spoke the words our mouths couldn't. At that very moment I knew the decision I made was the right one.

The opening remarks began, followed by the opening prayer.

In unison the entire church said, “Amen.” With my eyes still closed, I said a small prayer myself. Not too long ago, if someone would have told me I would be praying to a higher power, I would have called them a liar to their face.

The congregation was now seated. My wife-to-be’s father gave away his princess as she was about to become my queen. I admit, she held up in regards to the tears. I guess she didn’t want to mess up her make-up. It’s funny how, when a woman is determined to do something, nothing in the world can stop her. For example, a woman could get her hair done and sleep in the most awkward position for hours, trying to avoid messing up her new hair-do.

When her father was seated, we all listened to a worship song. After the song, Pastor Taylor reminded us of the individual duties and roles that we would have to uphold for the rest of our lives. By the time we got to our vows, I began to think about Marvin Gaye’s Hear My Dear album. I was determined not to have to go through that. After all, I’ve had so much bullshit to put up with over the years; there is no way in hell I’m going back to that.

I sighed. I couldn’t help but look back out to the crowd. In the midst of my glance, I saw her. I saw the woman who I once thought would be standing across from me at this moment. A feeling of awkwardness came over me. I didn’t know what to expect. The last time I had seen her, I thought we had closure. I was the reason our relationship ended abruptly. I have a permanent scar on my face that expressed the pain our relationship caused. We made subtle eye contact. I then focused my attention back on my bride. I was 100% sure that she was the right choice when I first touched the altar. Am I wrong to admit that I’m only 99% sure now? That small fraction of a decimal still tugged at my heart. If I was going to move forward, I needed to look my bride in the eyes and say honestly that she was my 100%. Only time would eventually tell.

I have a story that needs to be told. Maybe if my story is told, I’ll be able to move on. You will be taken on a journey. You will hopefully share my joy and pain. Many people talk about the destination, but it’s the journey that makes or breaks you. These last four years have been like no other in my life. I’m not even sniffing 40 yet and I feel like an old man. Many older people talk about having midlife crises and all other types of life ills. Well, I’ve had my fair share of crises in my short years of life. That’s enough talking from me. Enjoy my journey—the journey I call—“The Crisis before Midlife.”



## **Part I**

## Chapter 1

November 4, 2008

Malcolm sat back, in his black desk chair with a Newport positioned between his fingers, deep in thought. Yes, he was elated that a black man was finally in a position of power that many felt was taboo. At the same time, he knew that this brother would be one of the most—if not the most—scrutinized presidents there had ever been. He began to think about all of the brothers and sisters who gave their lives so that the black community would be able to celebrate a progressive event such as this. He stared at his olive-colored wall, which was full of pictures of inspirational African Americans who had done a great deal for the black community. The wall, as he called it, was like a who's who in regards to African American leaders. The wall was perfectly designed by Malcolm's vivid imagination. As he began to exhale the thick cloud of tobacco-filled smoke from his mouth, the phone rang.

“Are you coming out tonight? Give me a call back...One!” That was the message Chris left on Malcolm's voice mail. Malcolm deleted the message from his phone. He tapped his pen repeatedly on his note pad and mumbled to himself, Maybe I need to shut it down for the night. I can't think of anything else to write anyway.

Malcolm glanced at his silver-plated watch.

It was a little past 11:00 p.m. He turned on the shower and thought; I need to be back here by at least 1:30.

After the shower, he stepped into his small walk-in closet to finalize his wardrobe. The mothball scent still lingered from the previous renter. Malcolm began to toggle through his perfectly arranged attire. He searched for some wrinkle free gear to expedite the process. He decided to wear some dark blue jeans, a long-sleeved polo shirt, and his camel-colored blazer.

Looking over his 5'10" frame in the mirror, he thought, well, maybe tonight will turn out to be a good one after all!

THE SMALL VENUE WAS FULL of brothers and sisters overjoyed about Obama's winning of the election. There were people wearing all types of Obama attire, including; shirts, buttons, hats, etc. The night seemed like the dawning of a new beginning—almost like the birth of a new nation. After all, this may be the hope that the city of Memphis needed to help change the mentality and negativity that drained the city at times.

The crowd was diverse. The ladies were astonishing from head to toe. It was the same for the men too.

"I bet all these folk pretending to be pro-black and righteous gone go back to their everyday bullshit in the next couple days. How come every time we get a so-called victory we act like we been so close and together as a culture and community—then we get back to bringing down one another like a crab in a barrel," BJ said.

With a slight roll of his eyes, Chris replied, "Chill out with all that. I'm trying to have a good time."

With his Public Enemy t-shirt and green beret, BJ continued to look around the venue. His dark chocolate facial features resembled that of a boxer before entering the ring. His face solid—nose flared.

Malcolm arrived at the club a little before midnight. He didn't have to wait in line too long. Chris had already paid for Malcolm's spot and had alerted security accordingly.

Malcolm walked into the dimly lit venue as Snoop Dogg's "Sensual Seduction", had the crowd in a nice groove. He glanced to his left to see a group of young ladies looking in his direction. He smiled and gave them a nod. He ventured towards the back of the club near the bar. Finding a spot to order a drink was almost as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack.

"Let me get a crown and coke, please," Malcolm said to the beautiful bartender. The sister was gorgeous. She was wearing an Obama T-shirt and had it tied in a knot in the front, showcasing her gold-plated belly button ring surrounded by a rose tattoo with the thorns circling her belly button. Malcolm was definitely enjoying the view from where he stood. There was no better way to start a night for Malcolm than to be in the vicinity of a beautiful woman. The pure

essences of the female anatomy made Malcolm second guess his thoughts of there not being a God in the sky.

“It’s about time, bro.” Chris said. He then proceeded to let the world know. “Yo—listen up. My guy Mac is in the building!” A group of on-lookers stared in their direction.

“You must be the man around here?” a short ebony sister asked.

With his hazel eyes and nicely trimmed Cesar haircut, Chris replied, “Indeed, I am!” Chris reached for her hand. “My name is Chris, and who might you be?”

The woman smiled. She extended her hand as she batted her eyelashes.

“My name is Alex.” Leaning back a little and squinting her eyes, she said, “Has anyone told you, you look like—”

Clearing his throat and poking his chest out, Chris said, “Let me guess, a light skinned Denzel?”

She smiled and replied, “No—I was going to say Terrance Howard before I was interrupted.”

The bartender gave Alex her drink. She winked at Chris and said, “Nice to meet you, Terrance.”

As she was leaving, Chris grinned and replied, “The name is Chris.”

Malcolm sipped on his crown and coke as he looked for familiar faces in the crowd. The sound of “My President Is Black” was blasting through the speakers.

“Is that Keisha over there?” Chris asked.

Malcolm squinted as he replied, “It look like her, but I can’t really tell.”

“I can tell from them curves that’s her. I bet you miss that too.” Chris said.

Keisha and Malcolm were once what some people would call “friends with benefits.”

Malcolm patted his pants pockets in search of his cell phone. He wanted to be sure he hadn’t left it sitting in the cup holder in his Maxima as he usually did. He took another sip of his drink as he began to think about the old times he and Keisha had. His mind went back to their broke days, when the two of them had to share 2-piece meals from Jack Pertle’s at times.

With tight eyes and a slight drawl in his tone, Chris said, “Look, Mac, if you don’t go say something to her—I will!”

Malcolm looked at Chris and gave him the ‘what you talking about Willis’ look. “And what you gone say? You know she don’t like you, bro.” Malcolm said with a chuckle.

Chris rolled his eyes with a smirk on his face when he replied, “Ok...believe what ya want. But enough of the chit-chatting; there’s too many other ladies in here tonight to be talking about Keisha. I’ll catch y’all a little later.”

“You just keep your eyes open for Vanessa,” Malcolm said as Chris walked away. Malcolm leaned back on the bar and placed his empty glass on the table to his right.

As BJ mocked Chris behind his back, BJ replied with narrow eyes, “I swear he thinks he’s just God’s gift to women.”

“Come on BJ, you know he’s been like that for years.” Malcolm flagged for the pretty bartender to fix him another drink as he continued, “He is who he is...Can’t change it, so don’t even try.”

“You right about that.”

BJ took a seat. He placed his stocky legs on the bottom of the stool. “Anyway, how’s life treating you, bro? You’ve been so busy in that book I haven’t really had a chance to hear what’s been good with you.”

Malcolm leaned a little closer. They were about two feet from the speakers, and Malcolm was having a hard time hearing what BJ had to say.

“It is what it is. I’m surviving. I wish teachers’ pay would increase, but that’s another subject on its own.” Malcolm said.

Still standing against the wall near the bar, Malcolm started to sway slightly from side to side.

“BJ, watch my drink for a sec. I need to go drain the main vein.”

As Malcolm journeyed to the restroom, he socialized with some of the familiar faces he spotted along the way. He saw Chris had worked his magic as he spotted him exchanging numbers with Alex, the young lady he met at the bar. Chris saw Malcolm as well and gave him his signature wink of the eye, meaning that he had accomplished his nightly goal.

Malcolm checked his watch as he entered the restroom. It was 15 minutes past midnight. There were only two stalls in the small restroom. Next to Malcolm stood an elderly man collecting tips as he provided soap and paper towels for his visitors. Malcolm’s cell phone rang. He looked at the number and it immediately caused a scowl to form on his face. With piercing eyes and slightly inflamed nostrils, he let out a deep exhale. His cinnamon colored skin flared red



when angered or agitated. While washing his hands, he decided to buy two loose cigarettes from the old man as he exited the restroom.

“God bless you!” the old man said.

Malcolm shook his head. “I wish I could say the same to you. But I hope peace be upon you.”

Malcolm felt a soft tap on his right shoulder as someone whispered seductively, “Hey, you.” Malcolm immediately recognized the voice and the scowl he had been wearing disappeared.

“Long time no see. How have you been?” Malcolm said.

“I’m good...I know you saw me earlier. Why didn’t you come to say hi?”

“I didn’t really know if it was you or not.”

“You knew it was me. I could tell the way Chris—‘ole dog ass—was staring.”

Malcolm laughed for a second and replied, “So who are you here with?”

“It’s just me and some girlfriends. I thought getting out would do me some good.”

Malcolm grabbed her hand and leaned a little closer, “Same here—you still looking good.”

Keisha smiled as she replied, “Some things don’t ever change.” She continued, “You still looking good yourself.” Not being one to hold her tongue or beat around the bush, she asked, “So—who are you with these days?”

Malcolm licked his lips, which was a habit of his, as he replied, “I’m cooling right now—and you?”

“You can say the same for me.” While digging in her purse, she continued, “Maybe we can get together and get some lunch or something sometime?”

Without any hesitation, Malcolm replied, “I think that can be arranged.” Malcolm took her cell phone and proceeded to enter his contact information.

Keisha looked behind her and noticed the twins, Trina and Tina, standing with their arms folded. Keisha said, “Well, it was good seeing you again, Malcolm. Don’t be a stranger!”

“Same to you,” he replied.

Chris was right; Malcolm would have loved to get back in the mix with Keisha. She was looking extra-enticing that night. She had on tight jeans that enhanced the size of her buttocks, and to compliment her attire, she wore some 80’s style bamboo earrings with slight extensions in her hair. She was definitely a “round the way girl.”

After his brief conversation with Keisha, Malcolm walked back to the bar. “I see you finally made your way to Keisha,” BJ said. Not looking at BJ, Malcolm replied, “Didn’t plan on it. It just happened.”

With a smirk on his face, BJ replied, “Yeah—it just happened!”

Malcolm and Keisha kept making eye contact throughout the night. When the DJ played Ginuwine’s “So Anxious,” they both looked at each other. That was their song when they were at the peak of their so-called relationship. Almost simultaneously, Malcolm and Keisha began to move towards one another. Keisha turned around so Malcolm could get a glimpse and good feel for what he once had. Malcolm grabbed her by the waist and they both began to dance rhythmically in sequence with the hard drum kicks in the song. That’s the only dance they shared that night. As soon as the song ended, it felt as if their once blissful relationship could possibly be rekindled.

With her head tilted to one side, Keisha said, “I’ll be waiting on that lunch date, Mr. Turner.”

“No doubt!” Malcolm replied.

It was now 2:00 a.m., and the crowd was still in good spirits. Malcolm had stayed longer than he expected. Everyone was still socializing and enjoying themselves as the DJ began to unwind for the night. All the lights were now on in the club as that was the signature “you ain’t gotta go home, but you got to get the hell out of here”, sign.

“Yo everybody, it’s been a joy! Remember, let’s keep this momentum going, OBAMMMMMMAAAAAA!” yelled the overjoyed DJ. The night ended with Seal’s remake of Sam Cooke’s “A change gone come.”

## CHAPTER 2

**Riiiiinnng, riiinnng, riiinnng!** The sound of the bell before lunch always excited the students as well as the teachers. The students got to socialize and flirt with one another while the teachers got to talk about work or current events, or they held cafeteria duty. Malcolm had been teaching going on six years now. When he completed his grad studies, he only planned on teaching for a couple more years until he was able to go into business for himself. Malcolm's overall goal was to become a nationally known writer as well as a staple in the community. He definitely had his eye on one day obtaining the Pulitzer Prize by like peers such as Toni Morrison. He chose to be a teacher because he felt he would be in a position to have a positive impact on the lives of young African Americans in the urban community. He respected the brothers and sisters who had made great leaps to try to improve upon the well-being of their community.

In Memphis, there was a lack of positive male role models for some kids in the inner city. It got difficult because the kids that he cared so much about and tried to help were the same ones who seemed as if they really didn't care about their existence on this earth. To make matters worse, if there were some young brothers who tried to step outside the box, they were usually scrutinized and labeled a nerd, soft, or any other derogatory self-hating statement. Again, that was the "crab in the barrel" mentality.

Malcolm sat in the teachers' lounge with his legs propped up on a blue milk crate. He sat in peace as he jotted down some notes in his journal.

"Malcolm, how you doing this morning, or should I say this afternoon?" a beautiful dark-skinned sister asked.

Malcolm removed his feet from the crate and put down his pen as he replied, "I'm wonderful. What about you?"

With a slight sigh, she replied, “Could be better, but who am I to complain? I’m just trying to reach these knuckleheads.”

The dark-skinned sister’s name was Navil, which meant “to be blessed.” And blessed she was. Navil was a beautiful young woman. She was very knowledgeable and demanded respect. Navil was not a Memphis native, so she relied on Malcolm from time to time for general advice in regards to the city of Memphis. When Navil and Malcolm first met, there was a mutual attraction. Navil was attracted to his humble nature. In her words he was so “cool.”

As Malcolm opened his bag of chips, he asked, “Navil, what did you do to celebrate last night?”

Tilting her head down and raising a brow, Navil replied, “What was there to celebrate? I mean, am I happy Obama is our president? Yes. But let’s be real, Malcolm—we are not going to see any changes any time soon. I believe that once we can get together as a community and fix our problems internally...then and only then...there will be a reason for me to celebrate! We are so fixated on the fact that we have a black president; I just hope that this doesn’t cause a mental block among us and we forget about the real issues at hand!”

Malcolm took a sip of his water and sat back and began to shake his head. That was your typical Navil. You ask a simple question and you would not get just a simple answer. Instead, you got a long lecture about the world according to Navil. Despite it all, Malcolm was indeed attracted to her mind, body, and soul.

THE EARLY EVENING TRAFFIC on Shelby Drive was backed up more than usual for a Wednesday afternoon. Malcolm looked out the passenger-side window and glanced over the boarded up establishments that were once staple venues in his youthful years. Obama ads were plastered all over the buildings. Malcolm turned down the volume on his radio as he heard the sound of sirens race by in the opposite lane. Following three police cars was an ambulance with the paramedic blowing his horn frantically at the elderly woman who wouldn’t veer her vehicle, which was too large for her to control, to the side. The on-going traffic to Malcolm’s left was rubber necking trying to see what was causing the traffic jam.

Malcolm cracked his window open. The weather was unseasonably warm for an early November evening. Malcolm took off his blue blazer and draped it over the passenger-side head rest. He placed his car in park. Opening his arm rest, he took out a small black journal. Biting on

the end of his black ball point pen, Malcolm tried to think of new scenes for the novel he was working on.

Noticing that the traffic was now moving at a snail-like pace, Malcolm eased his car closer to the brown station wagon that had a John McClain sticker on its bumper. He turned up the radio and overheard the DJ say that the Dow Jones Industrial Average had reached its lowest level since 1997. Malcolm shook his head. Forget about Dow Jones; Malcolm Turner has been at his lowest level since inception, he thought to himself.

Malcolm saw a short Caucasian police woman directing the traffic. He was able to see the three car collision that caused the traffic jam. Some drivers were honking their horn trying to hurry the “rubber-necking” drivers along.

MALCOLM FINALLY ARRIVED at the small ranch brick home that belonged to his parents. Jumping up and down, a brown-skinned little girl shouted, “DADDY’S HERE...DADDY’S HERE!”

With a huge smile on his face, Malcolm walked over to Destiny to give her a hug. As he lifted Destiny up off her feet, he asked, “How you doing, baby doll?”

With the giggles she replied, “Gooood!” Then she continued, “Daddy, I want to tell you all about what we did at school today.”

“Okay, baby doll, but let me rest for a second and talk to your grandma.” Destiny’s little lips curled downward, but she knew that she would have all of his attention soon enough.

“You want me to fix you a plate?” yelled a very distinctive voice from the other room.

“No, ma’am, I’ll fix it on the way out. You heard from pop lately?”

“Chile, please. After the separation, we really haven’t been in touch lately. I’m sure he’s alright though.”

Malcolm loved his mother very much. He had a deep appreciation for the way she raised him and provided the nurturing and love he needed as a child. He was kind of a “momma’s boy.”

“Mama, y’all need to quit acting like that. How can you be with someone for over thirty years and just let it all go? That’s why I don’t see myself getting married,” Malcolm said as he sat down at the round kitchen table.

As she grabbed some Tupperware from the pantry, Mama Turner replied, “Malcolm, me and your father enjoyed some great times together, but over time we just simply grew apart from

each other. Things happen; I don't regret anything that has happened between me and your father."

Mama Turner was a heavy-set little woman. She had long, flowing black hair which was streaked of gray and the biggest and brightest smile you've ever seen. Malcolm's father, on the other hand, was a stern brother. He was a very renowned business man in the Memphis area. He just seemed a little aloof at times.

When Malcolm was growing up, he heard all of the conversations about infidelity and the financial issues his parents were going through. After awhile, he just figured it was the norm.

As he looked over his elementary school picture on the old, stained white refrigerator, Malcolm asked, "Hey Ma, you remember when I was little and I said that I would never leave this house?"

Laughing as she held her stomach, Mama Turner replied, "Chile, I knew you were gone leave. Is there something else on your mind, boy? You've been a little off—like your father these past couple of weeks."

Shrugging his shoulders and not looking at her, Malcolm replied, "Not really, Ma. I've just been a little tired; that's all. I do want to say thank you again for looking after Destiny for me. I really do appreciate it."

While placing a hand on Malcolm's shoulder, she replied, "You ain't gotta thank me. We all need help at times. You've been doing this on your own too long."

Malcolm nodded.

Mama Turner continued, "You need to find you a young lady and make an honest woman out of her. The good book says, for this cause... shall a man leave his father and mother...and shall be joined unto his wife—"

Rolling his eyes Malcolm quickly interrupted. "Ma, I have to go. I have to get some rest. I have to get to school early tomorrow. Principal Leslie wants to meet with me about something before the teachers meeting."

Malcolm grabbed his Tupperware full of goodies as he left the kitchen.

"Destiny, please make sure you grab your things and kiss Grandma goodnight." Showing his pearly whites and dimples, he continued, "Ma, can you keep Destiny this weekend? I need to get a little work done. That's if you don't have any plans of course."

With her hands on her hips and a slight tilt of her head, she replied, "I got myself a date."

Malcolm smiled and shook his head.

Mama Turner returned a grin and replied, “Okay, you got me! I don’t have a date. Destiny can stay over. Just make sure you put me somewhere in that book of yours. And find yourself a church to go to. I know you ain’t been going. Destiny tells me these things.”

Malcolm continued to smile as he replied, “Yes ma’am... I told you, Ma—I do it all for you.” Malcolm kissed his mom on the cheek and headed for the door.

## CHAPTER 3

Malcolm sat back in his blue recliner chair and reached for the remote control.

“Alright, baby doll, tell me all about your day.”

Destiny’s little eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. “Well, let me see—first we learned all about primary and secondary colors. Since I’m in the first grade now, I must know that.”

Malcolm reached for her book bag. “Hey, gone ahead and wash up so we can go over your home-work before dinner.”

While unpacking Destiny’s things from her book bag, he came across something that caught his attention. It was a picture she had drawn while at school. The picture included her and two other figures that were standing a-part from each other. There was a figure on the paper that looked very strange. As Destiny came back down stairs, Malcolm called her in the living room.

Looking under his reading glasses, he asked, “Hey, baby doll, what is this supposed to be?”

With her head down she mumbled, “We had to draw a picture of our family, and I put you, me, and mommy in there.”

Rubbing his chin, Malcolm replied, “But why does everyone have a face except for your mom?”

Malcolm knew that not having her mother around was starting to bother Destiny tremendously. Now that she was older, she had begun to ask questions about her mom.

With her head still down, she continued to mumble, “Well, I don’t know what she looks like—so I left her face blank.”

Malcolm took off his glasses and proceeded to clean the lenses while he replied, “Hold your head up when you’re talking to someone. Stop mumbling. I can barely understand what you’re saying.”



Lifting her head up, Destiny said, “I just wish I had one—that’s all. All the other kids were drawing pictures of their mom’s, so I didn’t want to be the only one without one.”

Malcolm sighed. He placed his index finger on his temple as the rest of his hand rested on his chin. He sat in silence for a good five seconds before he replied, “Baby doll, can we discuss this another time? My stomach is growling like a pack of wolves.”

Pulling on the bottom of her shirt, Destiny replied, “Yes, sir.”

That night Malcolm couldn’t get any sleep. The thought of him continuing to lie to his daughter was eating him from within.

“GOOD MORNING, Dr. Leslie. You wanted to see me.”

“Yes, Malcolm, please have a seat.”

Dr. Leslie stood at a tall 5’9”, almost eye to eye with Malcolm. She had on a dark blue business suit with white pearls to match. Her cocoa brown skin was smooth without any blemishes. Dr. Leslie was an attractive woman. However, she would rather people respect her business savvy as opposed to her ASS...ets!!!

Malcolm glanced at all the credentials that Dr. Leslie had throughout her small office. She was one successful sister. Malcolm always admired a woman who knew what she wanted. It didn’t intimidate him one bit. He stared at the picture of Dr. Leslie and Mayor Herenton when Dr. Leslie was awarded the “key” to the city. He then looked over Dr. Leslie’s PhD from Stanford University, which was the centerpiece on her office’s off-white colored wall.

Dr. Leslie placed her hands on her cherry oak office desk. “Malcolm, you know that we have had to cut back on some costs lately, and as a result, we’ve had to let go of some of our seasoned teachers.”

Malcolm slouched a little in the small black chair and tilted his body to the left. This better not be that bull...I don’t need this early in the morning, he thought. “Yes I’ve noticed some changes,” Malcolm said.

Looking away and then staring into Malcolm’s eyes, Dr. Leslie continued, “Well Malcolm, because of that—I wanted to let you know that I really appreciate your work. You have done an extraordinary job. Your work with these kids is having a great impact on some of their lives. Don’t you agree?”

Malcolm leaned forward and replied, “Yes, Dr. Leslie. I feel that we all have made contributions for the betterment of these kids. Not being rude, Dr. Leslie, but what exactly are you trying to tell me?”

Dr. Leslie sat back and crossed her legs.

She took off her tortoise frame glasses.

“Malcolm, I just wanted you to know that I notice your work. It’s great to see that we have people in this world who are virtuous.” She paused and continued, “I hate to be the bearer of bad news, Malcolm, but we will have to let you go at the end of the year. With the current budget cuts, we simply can’t afford to keep you.”

Malcolm hung his head down and instantly remembered how he advised Destiny to always hold her head up. Malcolm glanced out the window for a brief second before he locked eyes with Dr. Leslie. He professionally replied, “Dr. Leslie, thank you. I understand. I know it’s not your personal decision. I respect you making me aware.”

Uncrossing her legs and leaning forward, she replied, “This is never an easy thing for me. If you need anything, I’m always here for you. We simply just don’t have the funds to keep everyone here. With your credentials, I’m sure you will have no problem finding something.”

Malcolm walked through the empty hallway and looked at the broken clock on the wall. He noticed the dented lockers with a variety of unread books sitting on top of them. The only use they had was collecting dust. He stopped and just stood there for a second. He placed both hands on a nearby locker and dropped his head as he let out a deep exhale. As he exhaled, the bell rang. The once empty hallway began to fill with the sounds of middle school kids and their rowdy behavior.

Navil grabbed Malcolm by the hand and pulled him to the side. “How did your meeting go this morning?”

Malcolm ran his hand over his head and replied, “I’m out at the end of the year.”

Crossing her arms Navil said, “I’m sorry Malcolm. That’s some B.S!”

## CHAPTER 4

**I**t was 4:00 p.m. and Malcolm was still grading papers. Sitting alone in the classroom, Malcolm got up and began pacing the floor. He stared at the bulletin board that measured the progress his students were making. He began to smile. Then he shook his head as he looked out the window and saw Mrs. Johnson and Mr. Stockwell get into their vehicles. Both Johnson and Stockwell were the eldest teachers at the school. Some teachers complained that the two didn't have the passion to teach anymore and their methods were now outdated. Walking back to his desk, he noticed Navil waving in the doorway. He motioned for her to come in.

“Why are you still here on a Friday?” Navil asked. “You should be out doing something besides burying yourself in work.”

“Hey, I'm trying to get work done so I won't spend all weekend thinking about it.”

“I understand, brother.” Batting her eyes, she continued, “Do you want some company around? I don't have any significant plans.”

Shrugging his shoulders, Malcolm replied, “Your choice.”

With her almond-shaped eyes looking directly at Malcolm, she said, “Brother, for the record, I think that you're the best teacher at this school. I really feel bad. How are they letting quality teachers go when there are some teachers here just collecting a paycheck?”

Not looking up at Navil as he was reading over some paperwork, Malcolm replied, “I'm cool; really I am. I'm not messed up about it. I appreciate the concern.”

There was indeed a lot on Malcolm's mind. He very seldom let anybody know what he was thinking. He was one of those brothers who could keep everything to himself without showing any signs of stress. From his writers' block, Destiny's mother, the piercing questions from his mom, and now losing his job, Malcolm was at his wits end.

Sitting back in his chair, Malcolm placed both hands behind his head as he swiveled back and forth in his chair. “Navil, I know you have something better to do than sit here with me and watch me grade papers while I drown in my sorrow.”

“Brother, I’m looking out for you. I got plenty of things I could be doing. I’m trying to make sure that you don’t sit up here all night on a Friday burying yourself in work.”

Navil then walked behind the desk and proceeded to pull on Malcolm’s arm. “Okay, Negro, I didn’t want to do this, but we gotta go.”

Malcolm tugged his arm away and groaned, “Navil, what are you doing? I have to get this stuff done.”

Hooking her arms under his, she tried to lift Malcolm up. “Come on—let’s go grab a bite to eat, and I have something that will help you clear your mind.”

Malcolm cracked a smile and shook his head. “You are a persistent little thing, aren’t you?”

Navil just stood there with her arms crossed as she smiled.

Malcolm let out a long and deep sigh. He swiveled his chair in the direction Navil was standing. He folded his arms and replied, “Okay—okay—you win. I give up.”

Malcolm began to pack his things and followed Navil out the door.

“YOU GOT TO ADMIT THAT WAS the best meal you’ve ever had.”

Malcolm pulled out a Newport and replied, “It was alright! Well, I guess I should head on to the crib.”

Navil replied, “You don’t want to come up for a sec?”

“I really shouldn’t, Navil.”

“Brother, I won’t bite. You don’t have to pick up your daughter, so don’t try and pull that. However, you will have to put that cigarette out.” Navil grabbed the cigarette from Malcolm and put it out with her size 5 pumps.

Navil pulled on the sleeve of Malcolm’s charcoal Kenneth Cole coat. Malcolm frowned a little and dragged his feet. However, he let her lead the way to her condo.

Still dragging his feet, Malcolm slowly entered Navil’s home. He was immediately impressed by the contemporary décor and the rooms’ color schemes. “This is a nice pad you got here.”

“Thanks, I try,” Navil replied.

Malcolm continued to look on in astonishment at the perfectly coordinated condo. The walls in the living room were a plum color with white crown molding throughout. The white bordering on the fire place illuminated the light and gave the room a welcoming vibe. Like Malcolm, Navil had her own wall of great African American leaders. But her wall was mostly African American women. Navil's wall consisted of great sisters such as Shirley Chisolm, Marian Edelman, Maya Angelou, Coretta Scott King, and many more.

"You thirsty?" Navil asked.

Malcolm gave her a wink. "Since you don't drink, I'm afraid to ask what you got," Malcolm replied in a joking tone.

"Negro, just because I don't drink that doesn't mean I don't know how to entertain my guest."

Malcolm laughed. "Navil, please—I'm probably the only guest who's ever been over here."

"You keep on with them jokes. Anyway, if that was the case, you should feel honored. You should want to take a picture with me. Anyway, I have wine and non-alcoholic beverages if you prefer that."

Malcolm replied in a sarcastic manner, "Non-alcoholic!" He smiled and continued, "I'll take a glass of wine, please."

Navil showed Malcolm around her place.

They began to venture towards the hallway that connected the living room to her master bedroom, which was one door to the left of the guest restroom. The wall vibe switched from plum to an earthy color.

"I really like the vibe you got going on with your crib!" Malcolm said again.

"Hey you know what they say—your home should reflect the image of yourself in a non-human form. So if you have a messy home, more often than not—you will have a messy life," Navil replied.

Malcolm nodded and said, "I can dig that."

AS HALF OF THE WINE WAS NOW GONE, Malcolm was getting a little buzzed and began to relax a little more.

"Hey, Navil, can I ask you a question?" Malcolm asked as he began to clump down on the plush, burgundy colored couch.

“Sure, go ahead,” Navil replied as she pressed mute on her stereo.

“Why don’t you have a man?” Malcolm paused for a second then continued, “You’ve been in Memphis almost four years, and I haven’t seen or heard you talk about any dudes. What’s up with that? You don’t play for the other team—do you?”

“Malcolm, there are only a few brothers that are worth talking to. I’m really not looking for anybody. Most of the dudes I do meet are so immature. The bad part is they are in their thirties. Another thing I don’t understand is why brothers get intimidated by a woman who has confidence in herself and is aware of what’s going on in the world.”

“Navil, I mean you are indeed a nice girl, but you can jump down a brother’s throat sometimes. Your expectations may be too high.”

“And...yo point! What am I supposed to do, dumb it down and settle?”

Malcolm nodded and replied, “I know—I know. But women are as much to blame as we are. For example, y’all complain about how y’all want a brother who’s gonna do this and do that and when you get a brother who is actually trying, y’all dismiss him like yesterday’s trash. It goes both ways you know.”

Malcolm and Navil continued to have a back and forth conversation about relationships. Usually, when two friends of the opposite sex who happened to be single come together, this is what they talk about.

“Hey, I admit—I do feel better than I did earlier today,” Malcolm said, slurring his words a bit. “I can’t believe I got fired today. It seems like for every two steps a brother takes, I take ten steps back.”

Grabbing Malcolm’s hand, Navil replied, “Brother, I know it’s f’d up right now. It will get better. I believe in you. It may be a blessing in disguise—Allah is with you!”

“What a blessing,” Malcolm said, his words dripping with sarcasm.

Malcolm’s eyes began to tighten a little.

“Let’s see what type of person you truly are. My mother use to always say you could always judge a woman by the movies she watches and music she listens to. It’s kind of like the old saying, ‘you are what you eat’.”

Shaking her head with a smile on her face Navil replied, “What sense do that make boy?”

Malcolm walked over to the entertainment center and began to explore her movie collection.

“Let’s see...Booty Call, Love and Basketball, Love Jones, and Hitch... Now we got... Raw, Harlem Nights, and The Hand That Rocks the Cradle.” Still looking, Malcolm read, “Lady Sings the Blues, Titanic, and...The Mack?” In mid-laughter, Malcolm said, “I would have never figured you to be a person who would even consider looking at The Mack!”

Hiding her face with a pillow, Navil replied, “Well, surprise, surprise.” She lifted her head and continued with a raised brow, “Well, prove your point. What type of woman am I?”

“Based upon your selection of viewing pleasure, it looks like you are a crazy, under cover freak with a vulnerable side, looking for love in all the wrong places.”

Navil stared at him with a smirk on her face and replied, “Negro please, you full of cow manure.”

With his tight eyes, Malcolm turned to her and said, “Seriously, it shows that you are not as uptight as I thought. It shows that you have a keen eye and ear for great pleasantries. It shows that you are a strong woman. It shows that you are stern, yet willing to open up, if the terms are right. It also shows that you have an old soul and value the days of yesterday’s past. You have a different side that you need to show more often. It’s a side that I would like to get to know a little better.”

Being unable to control her laughter, Navil replied, “You need to stop with the Billy Dee act. I think someone has had too much wine. You just lost about five cool points.”

With a smirk on his face, Malcolm replied, “Call it what you want.” Malcolm’s smirk disappeared and his face turned serious. “The words may have been Billy Dee-ish, and I may have been trying too hard, but I meant what I said about getting to know you better.”

Feeling somewhat shocked and vulnerable and not knowing how to reply, Navil said, “Uhm...let’s do it...Uhm...watch a movie that is!”

In that exact moment, there was a feeling of bliss and lust in the air. Their eyes were locked on each other. They both felt it; it was undeniable at that particular moment. Navil wasn’t sure if that was really how he felt, or if it was because of the bottle of wine that was now empty.

Malcolm leaned against the entertainment system and replied, “We may need to do a rain check on that one. No disrespect or nothing. I dig you and all, but—”

By the time he finished his sentence; Navil had walked up to him and placed her finger over his lips. She looked into his eyes and replied, “You ain’t got to say another word. I know you respect me enough to not do something that we both don’t know if we’re ready to handle.”

Malcolm grabbed her hands and stated, “How do you do that? How do you always know what I’m thinking?”

Navil leaned on the entertainment system with Malcolm and replied, “Some things should just remain unknown. Sometimes you just gotta go with the flow—you know.”

Malcolm looked at the clock. It was a little past midnight. Since Destiny was going to spend the weekend with his mom, he wanted to take full advantage of his writing time.

“Hey, it’s getting late; I think I’m gone go ahead and head to the crib.”

“Alright, do I need to call a cab?”

“I’m good. A couple glasses of wine ain’t gone do nothing to me”

As he headed for the exit, he stood face to face with Navil and said, “Thank you for a wonderful evening. I can’t remember the last time I’ve actually had some fun. I’ve had a lot on my mind, and this was a great release. You were a special hostess. That mental block I had is now gone.”

He then leaned forward kissed her right below her ear lobe. “Good Night, Navil.”

“Good Night, Malcolm. I’m glad I could free your mental block.”



## CHAPTER 5

**K**nock...Knock...Knock

Ahhhhh, my head is banging, Malcolm groaned as he squinted from being blinded by the sunlight that beamed through his bedroom blinds.

Knock...Knock...Knock

Malcolm pulled back his black satin sheets and grabbed a t-shirt that was draped over the foot of his bed. As he walked past Destiny's room, he closed her bedroom door.

Who is this, this early in the morning? Malcolm groaned.

Knock...Knock...Knock... "I'm coming!" Malcolm yelled.

"Dang, brother, it's damn near one o'clock. You still sleep?" William asked.

Rubbing his eyes, Malcolm replied, "Long night. It feels like it is still morning."

William walked in and immediately headed towards the television.

"Are you watching the Tigers today?"

Yawning, Malcolm replied, "Man, I forgot they were playing today. What brings you my way?"

"I came to see how you doing. I saw your mom at church last week, and she said it looked like something was bothering you. Besides—I can't even front—she promised me some of that meatloaf of hers if I would be a little nosy," William said with a grin on his face.

Malcolm cracked a smile.

"How's the family?"

"They cool. I just dropped the boys off at the YMCA. Natalie is out doing what she usually does."

"What's that? Shopping?"

“You got it. To her, a trip to the mall is like a bottle to a drunk.”

William was a couple of years older than Malcolm and was widely known in the city. He was one of the nation’s best athletes coming out of high school. He had scholarship offers from every top Division 1 college. He accepted a scholarship to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. At UNC, he was excelling on and off the basketball court. NBA scouts was even beginning to recognize his talent. In the summer of his junior year at UNC, he had a freak accident that ended his basketball career. With the help of his family and friends and his deep personal relationship with GOD, he finished school and completed his studies. Not feeling sorry for himself, he found a new passion, and now he was one of the best dentists and mentors in the Memphis area. Malcolm had a lot of respect and admiration for William.

“Are you going to the Grizzlies game tonight?” Malcolm asked.

“The boys want to go. I may take them. I don’t know yet. You want to roll?”

Massaging his temples, Malcolm replied, “I think I’m gone chill. I got things I need to sort out.”

“That’s what’s up. How’s work been going?” William asked.

Malcolm popped open a bottle of Aspirin. He turned on the faucet and cupped his hands for some water. After swallowing the pills he replied, “I don’t even want to talk about that, bro.”

“What’s going on with that?” William asked.

Malcolm took a seat on a stool in the eating area. He exhaled a little. “I had a meeting with the principal on Friday. To make a long story short, she said that she was gone have to let me go at the end of the year. Mane, Will, it’s just been a rough year for me, that’s all.”

“I feel you, bro. A lot of people have been going through it lately. What’s your next move going to be?”

“I haven’t really thought it out to be honest.”

William jumped up as Memphis scored the first basket of the game. Noticing Malcolm wasn’t returning the same exuberant behavior, he pressed mute on the television and glanced back at Malcolm. “Well you know I’m here for you, little bro. Let me know if I can help in any way.”

Malcolm heard his cell phone ringing from the bedroom. Thinking it was Navil, he tried to catch it before the voicemail picked up.

“Hello?”

“Hey, long time no hear.”

A scowl appeared on Malcolm’s face, and he groaned. “Let me call you back. I got company.”

William’s 6’2” frame stood up with a look of concern, noticing Malcolm’s scowl and the dismissive tone in his voice. “Dang, bro, who got you riled up like that?”

“That was Toya!”

William rotated his broad shoulders and began to stretch his damaged right shoulder.

“How’s she doing?”

Malcolm shrugged his shoulders.

“Malcolm, you know I don’t like preaching to you, but my brother, everybody makes mistakes!”

Malcolm let out a sigh and walked back to the kitchen as he threw his hands in the air. He sat back down on the bar stool and crossed his arms. “Why does she keep calling me? She already knows how I feel. Why can’t she just leave us alone? She made her decisions—now she should just stick with it.”

William sat back down and dropped his head for a second before he responded. “I understand. Like I said, I’m here, bro!”

Malcolm glanced at the microwave clock. He began to fiddle with his phone. William noticed the silence and walked towards the kitchen table. He pulled up a chair and proceeded to pour himself a glass of juice.

“Let me ask you a question.”

Malcolm glanced at William.

“If the roles were reversed, do you think you would deserve a second chance?” William asked.

Malcolm unfolded his arms and stood up from the stool. He paced around the kitchen for a second. He stopped in front of the sink and placed his hands down on the fake marble countertop. With his head down, he replied, “I don’t know man—I don’t know!”

William placed his empty glass in the sink and patted Malcolm on the back. Leaning on the sink with his arms folded, William said, “You have to look at the situation through the eyes of Destiny. I know this may sound very cliché, but two wrongs don’t make a right.”

Malcolm knew that William and his mother were right. He had to reach out to Toya for Destiny's sake. He knew he was being stubborn and not necessarily doing what was best for Destiny. He'd tried swallowing his pride before, but it was just too much for him. Now, for some reason, he knew it was time.

When William left, Malcolm paced back and forth from the front of the apartment to the back. He decided to return Toya's call.

With lowered eyebrows forming wrinkles in his skin, Malcolm said, "Hey, I'm just returning your phone call."

"I didn't believe that you were gone call me back." She hesitated and continued, "Malcolm, I know that you don't want me calling. I know that you don't care for me too much either. I'm not asking for any forgiveness from you. I was just checking in—that's all."

Malcolm almost dropped the phone. Biting his bottom lip and shaking his head, he snapped, "'Checking In'? That's the shit I'm talking about. Destiny ain't a fucking hotel."

"Malcolm, you don't have to be so damn nasty. You know what? I'm tired of kissing your ass. Fuck you, Malcolm—FUCK YOU!"---'Click'

Malcolm threw his phone across the room. Malcolm was on an emotional roller coaster. His usual calm demeanor had had a dark cast over it lately. He was reaching a breaking point. He turned off the television and walked into his bedroom. Malcolm closed the blinds and curtains. In the dark, he sat down on his unmade bed and laid back, resting his head on a nearby throw pillow. Staring at the ceiling, he closed his eyes to try and gather himself. In a state of comfort, he fell asleep.

It was 5:48 p.m. when Malcolm woke back up. The aspirin had subdued his headache while the nap subdued his emotions. He yawned and had a deep stretch before he got out the bed. Walking in the hallway, he noticed his cell phone lying on the tan-colored carpet and missing its battery. I'm glad it didn't break, Malcolm thought. He re-positioned a picture that must have been the recipient of the violent toss of his cell phone. Malcolm turned on his stereo. He played CD #5. He bobbed his head as he sang...Let me tell you 'bout this girl/ maybe I shouldn't/ I met her in Philly and her name was Brown Sugar. In mid-song, he saw the battery for his cell phone hiding under the couch.

He noticed he had eight missed calls. One of the missed calls was from Navil. Brown Sugar babe/ I gets high off your love/ I don't know how to behave...Malcolm sang. He placed his phone on the charger that was sitting on the glass end table.

He picked up his house phone.

“Hello?”

“Hey—you know who this is?” Malcolm asked.

“Jake?”

With a perplexed look, Malcolm replied, “Naw! Who is Jake?”

“I know who this is. I was just joking. What's up?” Navil replied with a chuckle.

“Nothing much. I was just calling you back. I didn't interrupt you or anything—did I?”

“Not really. I'm just sitting up here reading.”

“What you reading?”

“The auto-bio of Angela Davis”

“That's that sista who's a professor in Cali somewhere right?”

“Yep, and it's a good read.”

“You stay on that revolutionary tip...huh?” Malcolm asked.

“Can't help it; guess it's just in me.”

“No doubt—so, I just want to say thanks again for the other night. I really needed that.”

“No problem. I needed it probably as much as you. It was nice to take a break from my norm and just relax, you know?”

“Yeah, I hear ya.”

“What you doing at home on a Saturday night?” she asked.

“Nothing much. I'm trying to get some things done and clear my mind a little bit.”

“I understand that! Ain't nothing like a clear mind,” Navil replied.

“So, what about you?”

“What about me?” she replied.

“Why are you home on a Saturday night? Oh, let me guess—you over there watching The Mack...right?”

“You think you so funny. That just so happen to be a classic movie. I can't help it if I like classics.”

“It's blaxpotation at its finest,” he replied.

Navil laughed and replied, “You probably right about that. I guess it’s just a guilty pleasure of mine.”

They continued to talk like high school kids. Navil wasn’t an easy read—you had to take the time to decipher what she was about. That was the challenge that was beginning to intrigue Malcolm.

## CHAPTER 6

**M**alcolm, I was expecting you at church today?”

“I know Ma, I apologize. I over-slept.”

“Sure you did. How’s it going?”

“I’m broke—damn near poor!”

Mama Turner placed her hands on her hips. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. If you would have come to church, you might have received a good word today.”

Malcolm playfully mimicked his mother and placed his hands on his hips. “I’m gone surprise you one day and pop up unannounced. And the church said ‘Aaaaamen’!”

She laughed. “When that day comes, the Lord will have to resuscitate me because I shall just have a heart attack.”

Malcolm hugged his mother and kissed her on the cheek. “Very funny, Ma. Where’s Destiny?”

“She’s upstairs taking a nap. She doesn’t feel too well. I think the drop in temperature has something to do with it. You know how crazy this Memphis weather is.”

“I guess it is around that time. I better start preparing myself for it.”

Malcolm sat down in the Roslyn recliner and turned on the football game. He kicked up the recliner. Mama Turner sat across from him on her beige sectional.

“Ma, how have you been doing since Pops been gone?”

Letting out a sigh, she replied, “I’m doing. Half the time he was here it was like I was alone anyway.”

“Why did y’all stay together so long then?”

“I guess it just became a routine, and I kind of got use to it. However, I still love that man.”

“Still no word from him, huh?”

“Well, I spoke to a couple people who have seen him round the way. At least I know he’s still alive. Sometimes the phone will ring, and I’ll pick up, and it will just hang up. I know it’s him, just checking on me.

Malcolm mumbled, “That nigga trifling.”

“Malcolm—don’t speak about your father that way. No matter the situation. Just let it be.”

“Ma, I understand what you saying and all, but sometimes you have to call it like it is. Don’t no man just up and leave without saying a word. Hell, he could have at least reached out to me. I don’t mean to get you all upset. You know me; sometimes I just speak my mind. That’s how you raised me—right?”

Mama Turner smiled and replied, “Boy, you are something else.”

“THREE OF A KIND—READ’EM AND WEEP!” Chris said as he spread his cards across the table.

Still hiding his hand, William sat up and placed his cards on the table one by one. “Nine—eight—seven—six and five. Straight flush!” William said with a grin.

Malcolm sighed and threw his hands in. BJ followed suit.

Chris threw his hands in the air as he replied, “Got-damn!”

“Deal’em again.” William replied.

“Yo Malcolm, what’s up with you and the lil’ teacher chick? All I know is—if that was me, I would have been drilled that by now! Back in the day, you would have too,” Chris said.

“Yea Malcolm, you must really dig this sista. You get all uptight when we talk about her. Who is she anyway?” BJ asked.

“I told y’all we just cool, that’s all.”

Chris looked across the table at William. “How does it feel being married? I fear that day. That shit is like Kryptonite for a nigga.”

William grinned. “It is what it is. To each his own!”

“I mean—don’t get me wrong—I respect the whole religious part of it, but I just feel as if the whole thing—is so oooverrated,” Chris replied.

Looking over his hand, Malcolm replied, “I feel you on that one, Chris.”



“Not to change the subject, but did y’all hear about Matt?” BJ asked.

They all looked inquisitively at BJ.

Malcolm finally spoke up.

“Matt who?”

“You know Matt. We teased him all the time about his ears back in the day!”

Both Malcolm and Chris nodded.

BJ laid his cards face-down on the table before he proceeded. “Rock told me that some young brothers ran up on him in North Memphis and shot him three times point blank.”

With a look of shock, Malcolm replied, “Damn!” He leaned back in his chair and continued, “I don’t understand what’s up with these young brothers these days.”

“What you mean, these days? This shit been happening—it’s just getting worse. I mean, look at all the shit that already goes on in the city. Now combine that with the current economic state. What you expect?” Chris replied.

With a stern face, BJ stated, “We need to get it together.”

“Who is we?” Chris asked.

“Black folk, that’s who. It has to be a disconnect somewhere. It’s getting to a point now that it’s damn near embarrassing.”

“It’s gone take a huge wake up call for some of these brothers,” William replied.

BJ asked, “What happened to the brothers from back in the day? What happened to the brothers from the sixties?”

“Nigga, you weren’t even born then. You don’t know them niggas,” Chris replied.

“I read, and I’m just saying we were so organized back then. We fought for things that were worth dying for. Now niggas die over bullshit, like stepping on a nigga shoes!”

“There’s a whole lot of blame that can be spread around, if you ask me. The first step is to stop calling each other niggas.” William said.

“Mane, ‘nigga’ is just a figure of speech. It’s no malice, as long as white people don’t say it,” BJ replied.

“I was reading this book called Ready for Revolution, and it spoke on some of this backward thinking our generation is on. I’m with you BJ—we are far from where we used to be as a people,” Malcolm replied.

“That’s because we always looking for the answers from someone else. We should be taking care of our own personal business. Black folks are always looking for somebody to save us. Let’s try and save ourselves for a change,” Chris replied.

William looked at his Rolex and said, “Whoa, fellas, its damn near eleven thirty. We need to finish this hand. I got to head home to the wife.”

Chris shook his head. Pointing at William he said, “And that’s why I’m not getting married.”

Malcolm laughed. He pointed to Chris and said, “I concur!”

William grinned and pointed to them both. “You two need to get your affairs in order. Ain’t no shame in my game, young’uns. Ya’ll go learn one day!”

William knew, deep down inside, every last one of them would love to have someone to go home to at night. When all the partying was over and fantasy-land came to an end, home was where the heart was. Being a righteous man, he knew that. He prayed that some of his friends could experience the joy and feeling he and his wife shared. After all, everybody should have the pleasure of enjoying that type of love one day.

## CHAPTER 7

With Thanksgiving just a couple of days away, Malcolm wanted to get all the grocery shopping done with his mom. This holiday would be different because this was the first time his father would not be home with the family.

“Ma, don’t forget the stuff for the red velvet cake. You know I gotta have me some of that.”

“It’s on the list. Make sure I didn’t leave anything else off.”

“Are you bringing anybody special over for Thanksgiving?”

With a raised brow Malcolm, replied, “Someone like who? Ma, I told you I’m just chilling right now.”

“Alright, Alright—I was just asking.”

Destiny was skipping down the aisle, running her hands across the racks.

“Daddy—Can I get something?”

“Destiny, what did I say before we got out the car?”

Destiny looked down at her feet and replied, “No treats.”

“Malcolm, I forgot the bread. Can you run and get some?” Mama Turner asked.

When Malcolm raced to the bread aisle, Mama Turner snuck some candy in the basket for Destiny. She winked and Destiny smiled.

Walking down the bread aisle, Malcolm thought about how he and Chris used to work at that grocery store as teens. He laughed because the same broken rack was still hanging on and the scent, walls, flooring, and baskets were just the same as he remembered.

After shopping with his mom, Malcolm decided to stay the night. Since it was the weekend, and Destiny was fast asleep, he didn’t feel like disturbing her by driving home.

Malcolm took Destiny up to his old room to put her to bed. As he was walking up the stairs, the phone started to ring. After tucking Destiny in bed, he headed back down-stairs to get some rest himself. As he passed the kitchen, he noticed his mom sitting at the table sobbing.

“What’s wrong, Ma?”

“It’s your father!”

Malcolm’s heart began to race frantically. Not today! he thought to himself.

Mama Turner wiped her eyes and walked over to Malcolm.

“It’s not what you think it is, Malcolm.”

With a perplexed look, Malcolm replied, “What do you mean?”

“He just wanted to know if it was ok for him to come here for Thanksgiving. He said it was urgent and sort of an emergency.”

A feeling of relief flowed over Malcolm. His heart slowed back to its normal beat. “Ma, I swear I thought it was something bad. Well—why are you crying then?”

Mama Turner exhaled and sniffed. Then she grinned. “I was just caught off guard, that’s all. They are just tears of joy.”

“That sounds good and all, but how can he just pop up out of nowhere and expect to be welcomed?” Malcolm asked.

“Malcolm, I don’t want you to carry that type of attitude. We didn’t raise you that way.”

Malcolm looked off and replied, “You also didn’t raise me to be no fool.”

Mama Turner grabbed Malcolm, and turned him around. “What is that supposed to mean, Malcolm?”

Malcolm tugged away. “Ya know what—never mind, Ma. If you like it, I love it.”

“Malcolm...Malcolm.....MALCOLM!” she yelled as Malcolm was headed down to the basement.

IT WAS A DAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING, and Malcolm decided he and Destiny would visit some friends and family. He suddenly realized that he was in Navil’s neighborhood. He hadn’t spoken to her in a couple of days, so he decided that maybe he should drop by to see how she was doing. He didn’t bother calling because he felt he would just surprise her.

“Whose house are we visiting now, daddy?”

“One my friends from work,” he replied.

He knocked on the door. Nobody came. He decided to ring the door-bell. Still, there was no answer. Malcolm mumbled, maybe she went home for the holidays.

Navil was looking out her blinds when she saw Malcolm heading up to her condo. She was just laying around in her bra and panties enjoying the heat from her fireplace. She immediately jumped off the couch and ran to her bedroom. She almost knocked over her Grandmother's vase she was in such a hurry. She threw on her pink hoodie to match her sweatpants. She jetted to the restroom, hurdling over a pile of laundry, to run her fingers through her hair. She was natural, so she didn't have to do much. She sprayed on a little DKNY perfume and darted to the door, leaping over some pillows that were lying on her hardwood floor.

As Malcolm was turning around to leave, the door cracked open.

Trying to control her breathing, Navil said, "Hi!"

"Hey...I was just about to leave." Malcolm smiled and continued, "Were you working out or something?"

Standing in the doorway with one hand on her hip and the other on the door, Navil replied, "You don't know how to call before knocking?"

"I was just in the neighborhood and decided I would drop by. I'm not disturbing you, am I?"

"You cool. I was just about to go somewhere. Come on in." she said.

Navil kneeled down. "Aww—you must be Destiny. You are a doll. I've heard so much about you. You look just like your dad—only better," she said as she winked at Destiny.

Destiny smiled and blushed.

Malcolm was really careful who he brought around his daughter. He didn't like introducing her to all of his female companions. But for some reason, he thought Navil was "cool."

"So, what have y'all been up to all day?" Navil asked Destiny.

"Oh, nothing! We just were going over people house all day. We like to do that before holidays."

"That's so sweet. You want something to drink, little sista?"

"Yes, please," Destiny replied.

"She is so adorable. Would you like something to drink, Mr. Turner?"

Following Navil to the kitchen, Malcolm replied, "Yes, please, and thank you. Not being nosy, but uhm—where are you headed to?"

Pouring a couple glasses of water, Navil replied, “Aw, nowhere special. I was just gone go out with a friend for some drinks.”

With a raised brow, Malcolm said, “Wait a minute, you don’t drink.”

Navil laughed and rolled her neck. “And—I can still go out for drinks. They do have virgin drinks, you know.”

Taking a sip of water, Malcolm replied, “You so lame. Anyway, who you going out with?”

“I told you already—a friend.”

“Some dude, huh?”

“Boy, I told you already—I don’t do dates.”

Navil had been thinking about Malcolm ever since they spent that one evening together. She had been yearning for an opportunity to spend some time with him again.

They continued to talk for 30 minutes.

Now sitting next to Malcolm at the table, Navil asked, “How is the book coming?”

“If I received a dollar for every time someone asked me that, I’d be a rich man. But to answer your question—it’s coming. You know you the reason I got my mojo back.”

She smiled. “Yeah, right! You told me already.”

Malcolm looked at the kitchen clock.

“I forgot about you saying you had somewhere to go. My bad! We can leave so you can do what you was about to do. I don’t want to keep you from that date of yours.”

Grabbing a butter knife, Navil playfully pointed it at Malcolm. “Don’t make me cut you! It’s not a date.”

Malcolm laughed. “Whatever. Come on, Destiny, tell Ms. Navil goodbye.”

Destiny was busy watching the Disney Channel. Malcolm and Navil headed back to the living room.

Navil pinched Destiny’s cheek. “It was so nice to meet you, lil sista. You have a happy Thanksgiving, okay!”

Blushing, Destiny replied, “Nice to meet you, too.”

“I’ll see you later, Navil. Don’t eat too much,” Malcolm said.

“You do the same,” she replied.

While standing in the door way, Destiny turned around abruptly.

“Wait! I have an idea. Why don’t you come have Thanksgiving dinner with us?”

Malcolm's eyes widened like those of a deer caught in headlights. Navil was just as surprised.

Grabbing Destiny by the arm, Malcolm said, "Destiny! She probably already has plans."

"Well, maybe she doesn't. Do you have plans, Ms. Navil?" Destiny asked.

Holding herself as the breeze from the open doorway was giving her the chills, Navil replied, "You know what? That's a question your Dad has to ask."

Pulling on her daddy's coat, Destiny said, "Daddy, can she come over? I told you she didn't have any plans."

Malcolm grinned. "I didn't put her up to this, I swear. If I wanted to invite you, I would have just asked you myself."

Navil leaned back on the doorway with her arms crossed. "So—you don't want to invite me?"

Malcolm laughed. "I didn't mean it like that." He stepped up to Navil. "Look—the invitation is open. If you would like to have Thanksgiving dinner with me and my family, you're welcome to."

Navil smiled. "Ok, well, on that note. I'll let you know."

When Malcolm got back in the car, he spoke to Destiny about what she had done.

"You know that wasn't cool, right?"

"What you talking about, daddy?"

"You shouldn't have asked Navil to come over for Thanksgiving like that."

"I was just trying to be nice. She seems fun."

"I understand, but still—there are some things you just don't do."

Dropping her head, she mumbled, "Yes, sir."

Noticing she was a little sad, Malcolm tried to lighten up the mood.

"So, where do you want to go next before we head to your grandma's?"

"Uhm...I don't know. Wanna go to the movies?"

"Let's pick something else. We didn't check the times for the movies."

"OK, well, let me see. Ooh, I got it."

"What you got?"

"Can we go over Uncle Will's house, so I can play with little Will?"

“Let me give them a call and see what they got going on.”

When Malcolm returned to his mother’s home, he went to the basement as he did when he was a teenager. He began to think about all that had happened to him in such a short period of time. From getting the ax at work to figuring out when to tell Destiny the truth about her mom to working on his novel to worrying about the mindset of the city and wondering what this so called emergency visit from his dad was about. He pulled out a nice cigar. He lit it up and watched the smoke float in the air like a ghost in the dark room of the basement.



## CHAPTER 8

HAPPY THANKSGIVING! A middle aged woman exclaimed as people passed by.

Thanksgiving at the Turners' was always the best. The house was always packed with family and friends on this special day. The food was unbelievable. You name it—they had it. The décor made you feel the holiday spirit. From the moment you stepped on the porch, you could see the over-sized picture of a turkey hanging on the front door.

“Hey, precious! Look at those chunky cheeks,” a heavy set woman said.

“Hey, Auntie J,” Destiny responded.

“Wooo-weeee! What’s that I smell in heah?” a man in his early 60’s blurted.

“Malcolm, get yo ass on ova heah and give yo Uncle Ju-Ju some love.”

Malcolm got up and walked over to give his eldest uncle a hug and pound.

“Where yo crazy ass daddy at? I tell ya, I can’t even get in contact with my own little brother.”

“He said he was stopping by later on. Who do you got for the game today?” Malcolm asked.

“Not dem damn Cowboys!” Uncle JuJu replied.

They both burst into laughter. JuJu was the family clown. When he was present, he was the life of the party.

The doorbell rang. Mama Turner hurried to the door.

“Happy Thanksgiving, Mama Turner,” William said.

“Hey, baby. Happy Thanksgiving!”

Mama Turner gave him a hug and continued, “Gone on in and get you a seat. Malcolm and the guys are in the den watching the game. Where are Natalie and the boys?”

“She’s on the way in. The boys ran upstairs with Destiny.”

Natalie was a beautiful brown sister. She was tall with long gorgeous legs. She was a successful athlete in her own right. She worked as a chemist with a prestigious pharmaceutical

company in Memphis. She and William had been married for nearly a decade. They had two handsome boys, William Jr. (11) and Trenton (10). Mama Turner loved her some Natalie. She prayed that Malcolm would one day be blessed to have a woman like her.

“Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!” Natalie yelled.

“There’s my baby. You bring the yams?” Mama Turner asked.

“Yes, ma’am. You know I did,” she replied.

Everyone was talking and having a good time. Everyone told jokes and talked about embarrassing moments of their past. It was like a place of heaven. If only it could be like that every day.

William walked downstairs to head to the den. He passed by and glanced at the family pictures on the wall after each step he took.

“What’s up, big dog? Happy Thanksgiving, everybody,” William said as he entered the den.

Everyone acknowledged his existence.

“Game started yet?”

“Not yet. Detroit and Green Bay are heading into OT.” Malcolm replied.

Everybody was anticipating the kick off of the football game. All the men were talking their regular sports jargon.

“Speaking of the kick off, when we kicking off that food?” Uncle JuJu shouted.

The door bell rang.

“I got it!” Malcolm yelled.

As Malcolm was approaching the door, the aroma from the food went straight to his stomach, causing it to growl. He smelled the delectable combination of ham, turkey, chicken, yams, greens, green bean Casserole, dressing, mac and cheese, et cetera.

He reached to open the door.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” his father said.

Malcolm hesitated a little and replied, “Happy Thanksgiving.”

“Well, you just go stand there? Give your pop some love,” Malcolm’s father said.

Malcolm held an awkward look on his face that turned into a slight scowl. Is this the reason he’s been acting so aloof? Is this the reason he’s been away so long? Malcolm continued to think, He actually has the audacity to bring in another woman to my mother’s house? The

mystery woman looked as if she was Malcolm's age or younger. Just when Malcolm was about to tell his father off, Mama Turner arrived.

"Malcolm, who was at—"

Mama Turner's eyes said it all. Her skin, like Malcolm's, turned red when agitated. Is this the urgent matter? To disrespect me in my home in front of everybody? She thought to herself. However she was a righteous woman and not one to cause a scene, so she welcomed them both into the home.

"Hello, Dexter. Happy Thanksgiving," Mama Turner said.

"Hello, Maxine. Happy Thanksgiving," Dexter replied.

"Maxine—I want you to meet Stacie. She's my—"

Before he could even finish his statement, Mama Turner acknowledged the young lady and showed her where everyone was.

Malcolm was still standing in the doorway in disbelief. This is the man I have been looking up to all my life. This is the man who I've always strived to be like. Malcolm clinched his teeth as he closed the door behind him.

Dexter took off his and his lady friend's coats and placed them on the corner coat hanger. Dexter was dressed to impress as usual. He had on some black slacks, a Coggi sweater, black dress shoes, and his gold jewelry to match. The brim he wore set the outfit off just right. His lady friend wasn't too bad herself. She was definitely a pretty young woman. She kind of put you in the mind of Keisha Knight Pulliam. She was dressed in a long black tunic with black leggings to match.

"Where is all the boys, son?" Dexter asked.

Standing in the foyer, Malcolm sighed as he replied, "In the den."

"Look, son, I know you're upset with me, and I have a lot of explaining to do, but—"

Interrupting his father, Malcolm replied, "Don't even worry about it. It's all good."

Malcolm headed back to the den to make sure he didn't miss any of the game. His dad went to say hello to everyone else. As Malcolm headed into the den, William noticed the look on Malcolm's face. He didn't ask any questions as he knew Malcolm didn't like to talk about issues bothering him when there were too many people around.

"Who was that at the door?" a middle aged man asked.

Malcolm answered with a simple and short, "Ya brother!"

“Dex is here?” the middle aged man replied.

The middle aged man was Darrell, Malcolm’s youngest uncle. He was about 10 years older than Malcolm. They were more like brothers than uncle and nephew. JuJu, Timothy (Malcolm’s other uncle), and Darrell all got up to go see their brother. After all, they hadn’t seen him in a while either.

“Aye y’all come and eat,” a voice yelled.

Everyone headed to the dining area as it was time to bless the food and eat. The aroma of the food was making everyone anxious to satisfy their taste buds. Mama Turner’s hood famous pecan pie was the center piece on the table.

You could sense a little tension in the air. Dexter decided that he would go ahead and alleviate some of the tension that was in the house. As he headed to the middle of the room, he raised his hand in the air.

Navil stood next to Malcolm and held his hand.

Knowing how to work a crowd, Dexter said, “Hey everybody, listen up!” He wasn’t a stranger to public speaking. He was reserved and quiet, but when he talked— people listened. He had been the rock of the family for years. You don’t just lose those tendencies overnight.

“Before we bless the food, I have something I need say to everyone.”

His voice was now starting to crack, but he continued, “As all of you know, I’ve been absent for a while. The reason for my departure is due to the fact that I’ve been dealing with a lot of things from an emotional stand point. My intentions were never to worry or cause any type of confusion. To make a long story short, about 3 years ago I learned something about myself.”

The small gathering of family and friends listened with curious ears. The atmosphere was like that of a soap opera. Starting to put the pieces of the puzzle together, Navil held Malcolm’s hand a little tighter. She could feel the tension in his grip as his palms were beginning to sweat.

Dexter continued with his announcement, “I learned that—I learned that I had another child.”

As soon as he said that, Malcolm let go of Navil’s hand and walked into the foyer as he thought, First he disappears! Then he brings in another woman to my mother’s home! Then he announces that he has another child?

Navil rushed behind Malcolm.

“When I first learned of this, I didn’t know how to accept it. I was dealing with deep depression. Not only did I not know how to tell my family, but I also didn’t know how to respond to my unknown child.”

The look of hurt was all over Mama Turner’s face. She knew he was unfaithful a time or two in their marriage, but the thought of him being responsible for the birth of another offspring was too much. She always believed that having a child by him was something no other woman would ever have on her. However, now that feeling was gone. Her heart was broken all in one day.

“This has caused a great burden on my marriage. I couldn’t wake up and face the mirror anymore as I was in total shame, which resulted in my departure from this house. During my absence, I have been trying to get to know my other child. I wanted her to know who I was and where she came from. We’ve become somewhat close, even though all those years will never be regained. I brought her here today so that you all can meet her.”

The house was soundless. It was so quiet you could probably hear the thoughts in someone’s head if you tried hard enough. Mama Turner had a feeling of embarrassment, but at the same time a feeling of peace. She was a strong woman. She knew that she had to take the first step in accepting Dexter’s newly found daughter.

“Well, where is she?” Mama Turner asked, trying to mask the pain she was feeling on the inside.

“She’s right over there. Come on, Stacie—it’s okay,” Dexter said.

Stacie slowly began to make her way towards Dexter. Her palms were sweating. If you looked hard enough, you could see some small beads of sweat beginning to form on her forehead. She knew that all eyes had been on her since she walked through the door.

Mama Turner walked up to her and reached out her hand and acknowledged her. She didn’t indulge in any conversation. After acknowledging, Mama Turner just walked away. Following her lead, the majority of the household did the same.

Dexter’s brothers were a little more courteous. They were eager to meet and get to know their niece. They didn’t want her to feel excluded as she was now a part of the Turner family. Uncle JuJu took Stacie by the hand and took her to introduce her to other family members.

The feeling in the air was still a little tense. Even at the dinner table, there wasn’t as much conversation going on as there usually was. Nobody knew what to say. Mama Turner was still

trying to register what had just happened. Feeling a little uncomfortable, some people left after dinner.

“Where’s Malcolm?” Dexter asked.

Everyone looked around as Malcolm was nowhere in sight.

The house was beginning to empty as everyone said their goodbyes and goodnights.

“Mama Turner, dinner was excellent. Tell Malcolm I’ll give him a call when you see him. You have a good night,” William said.

“I thank y’all for coming. I hope we didn’t ruin y’all Thanksgiving,” Mama Turner replied.

“No, Mama Turner, it was just fine. If you need to talk, just give me a call,” Natalie said.

The house was nearly empty. Dexter was still there. He was waiting for Malcolm as he wanted to speak with him before he left. He tried to wait, but it was starting to get too late. He and Stacie were two of the last to leave.

Looking for a sign of forgiveness, Dexter said, “Maxine, I know this is difficult for you, but I’m just trying to do the right thing. You have to understand.”

Raising her voice slightly, she replied, “Not now, Dexter.” Then she repeated in a lower tone, “Not now!”

Dexter sucked his lips in and slowly nodded. “Well, when the time is right, we do need to talk.”

Stacie was downstairs in the basement with Navil. She didn’t want to cause any trouble. She just wanted to look for a place of solitude. The feeling was mutual for Navil. As Stacie heard her father saying his goodbyes, she gathered her things.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, Mrs. Turner,” Stacie muttered.

“Under unusual circumstances it was a pleasure to meet you as well. I hope we didn’t make you feel uncomfortable. Nothing you did is your fault. If we did, I want to apologize to you,” Mama Turner said.

“Thank you,” Stacie replied.

With a cold shoulder, Mama Turner said, “Good night, Dexter, I’ll tell Malcolm you were looking for him.”

MALCOLM HAD DECIDED to take a drive. He needed to get some fresh air and clear his mind. He began to think about his own situation with Destiny's mom. Darrell ended up riding with Malcolm.

"Mac, you know how yo pops is. He only did what he felt was right," Darrell said.

"Dee, but still—that doesn't make it right," Malcolm replied.

Darrell let the window down in the Maxima as he lit up a Newport. He looked over at Malcolm and leaned over to give him a cigarette as well. As he flicked some ashes out the window, Darrell continued, "I gotta fess up on something."

"What's that?"

"I knew." Darrell paused as he took another puff from his cigarette and continued, "I knew about Stacie."

At the corner of Shelby Drive and Third Street, Malcolm made a right turn heading towards the Westwood area.

"Damn, didn't anybody bother telling me or my mom for that matter?"

"Some things ain't that simple, Mac."

Malcolm was burning with animosity towards the whole situation. He changed the channel on the radio as he wasn't in the mood for Christmas music.

"The whole situation is just messed up, Dee. Why can't things be simple? Why does the rain cloud have to always be over us?"

Darrell took his last puff off his Newport before he flicked it out the window into traffic.

"Are you okay, Mac? I don't want you to do nothing outside yo character."

Malcolm exhaled. "I'm good, Dee. I got my own situation to deal with. I guess I can't be throwing stones and hiding my hand."

They drove past Southwest Twins drive-in theater. Malcolm smirked as it brought back some memories.

Malcolm shook his head and replied, "I can't lie; this is going to be a hard one to get over."

"Well, wheneva ya wanna talk about it, Mac, just let me know!"

IT WAS NEARLY 10:00 p.m. and Mama Turner's sisters stayed as they wanted to help her clean up and make sure that everything was alright with her. Navil was assisting as well.

“Baby, I hope this whole ordeal don’t leave a negative image in your mind about this family?”

Navil looked into Mama Turner’s eyes and replied, “No ma’am, not at all.”

“I’m sholl gonna give Malcolm a piece of my mind for going off and leaving you like this.”

“It’s ok. You know men—they just have to let off their steam in their own way. It’s no problem at all.”

Mama Turner cracked a smile, impressed by her answer.

As the women finished up the cleaning, they heard the door open.

“Well, your baby is home, Maxine. I guess we’ll leave now,” one of her sisters said.

They began to gather their things and headed for the door.

“Malcolm, Where you been, boy?” Mama Turner asked.

“I had to leave, Ma. I just took a drive, that’s all.”

“Why did you leave this girl sitting her all by herself? Also, your father wants to talk to you when you find some time.”

With a scowl on his face, Malcolm replied, “There’s nothing to talk about. Ma, he embarrassed you in here today. I don’t think I can ever forgive him for that.”

Trying to make light of the situation, Mama Turner replied, “Well, Malcolm I can’t say that it didn’t hurt, but despite the outcome, he did do the right thing. Besides, it could have been worse. I thought she was his lady at first. I guess I should feel better about that...huh?”

Malcolm shook his head, not understanding why his mother wasn’t as angry as he was. He didn’t want to indulge in the conversation any longer.

“Where’s Destiny?” Malcolm asked.

“She fell asleep. That poor child exhausted herself. I’m going to go get some rest as well. You should do the same. Sleep things over. Lord knows I need to,” Mama Turner said.

She ventured into the kitchen, where Navil was sitting. “Baby, be sure to come back again so we can have a better first meeting. I’ll be sure Malcolm brings you by. I’m heading off to bed. It was a pleasure meeting you. Good night.”

Navil gave Mama Turner a hug. “Good night.”

“Malcolm, be sure to lock up if you leave,” Mama Turner said.



“Good night, Ma. I’m going to drop Navil off and come stay the night. I don’t feel like taking that ride home. Besides, I don’t want to disturb Destiny’s sleep. You go get some rest,” Malcolm replied.

Malcolm entered the kitchen.

“Hey, you ready?”

Navil put on her coat and grabbed her purse. She walked in the foyer with Malcolm.

“You know you have to be strong for your mother.”

Malcolm nodded.

Malcolm knew deep inside that what his mom said was correct. His dad was just doing his fatherly duties. He knew there were so many brothers who would let their responsibilities fall to the side if they learned of something like this. Dexter was assuming responsibility. Malcolm was more disappointed in his dad than he was angry at him. However, sometimes it’s hard to differentiate the two emotions.

What a day, Malcolm said to himself as he locked the front door.

## CHAPTER 9

After the Thanksgiving debacle, Malcolm spent some time away from the family. He needed to ease his mind and reflect on some things. Malcolm and his boys decided to have a little get together and catch up on things that had been going on.

“I heard about your pops,” BJ said.

“Yeah, man, that was messed up,” Chris replied.

Malcolm shrugged off the questions. Sitting at the bar, he shook his head. “Let’s drop that conversation for a while.”

BJ and Chris respected his wishes and changed the subject.

“What’s up with you and that teacher? We keep asking, but you don’t give answers!” Chris asked.

Malcolm shook his drink. “It’s good. Nothing is official. We’re just kicking it right now.”

“Damn, brother, you moving at turtle speed. I thought you would have knocked that off by now,” Chris said.

Malcolm shot Chris a look of annoyance. “Get outta here. My mind ain’t been on that. Unlike you, I got other things to worry about.”

BJ replied, “Damn right.”

“Ya’ll niggas worry too much. As long as I got money in my pocket and something warm and moist to tend to, what else is there to worry about?” Chris asked with his hands in the air.

“It’s impossible for you to be that shallow. I know you’re just bullshitting. At least I hope you are,” Malcolm said.

“He ain’t playing. He is that shallow.” BJ said.

Chris looked at BJ with a scowl then flashed his eyes towards Malcolm. “Ya’ll know I’m just having a good time. Stop taking shit so serious. And, BJ, you be the first to throw stones but be the first to say nigga this and nigga that. You ain’t shit but a fucking hypocrite.”

Malcolm sipped his drink and checked the scoreboard on one of the multiple TVs across from the bar as BJ and Chris continued to argue.

“Do y’all ever think about why things happen the way it do?” Malcolm asked.

BJ grabbed a hand full of peanuts. “Sometimes I do. I’ve just come to the realization that everything happens for a reason.”

“Is there something particular on your mind?” Chris asked.

“I’m just saying. When you young—you have this image of what you envision yourself to be when you get older. You have these expectations for yourself. From what your parents tell you to what they teach you in school. I’ve always thought that if I did this and did that—then I would be better off than I am. I mean, I’ve stayed out of trouble for the most part—went to college and tried to have some type of spiritual background—but it seems like I’m still lost,” Malcolm said.

“I feel you, bro. I think about that all the time. We’ve just been mis-educated, that’s all,” BJ replied.

“What you mean ‘mis-educated’? I don’t feel that way. I’m doing great as far as I’m concerned,” Chris replied.

“I bet you are.” Rolling his eyes, BJ continued, “Anyway, I’ve been reading this book called *The mis-education of the negro*. It talks about how we as black people have been brainwashed from an educational standpoint.”

“BJ—why do you always have to turn every discussion into a black discussion? I mean got-damn, everything ain’t gotta be about race. That’s what’s wrong with niggas—y’all think that the man has prevented you from doing the things you want to do when in actuality y’all just lazy—physically and mentally. Don’t talk about it—be about it!” Chris replied. He continued, “Anyway—if you look at most of those so called revolutionary folk who swore up and down they were down for the cause and about the so called revolution—most of them niggas did a entire 360 and turned republican or got hooked on drugs and shit.”

BJ’s nostrils flared a little. “There is always some broke links in a chain. Some people are not as strong. Don’t get it twisted—the government most definitely had something to do with the

down fall of the revolution movement in the U.S. Using the old divide and conquer method. Have you heard of COINTELPRO? Look it up sometime.”

“I’m just saying stop complaining, and it will stop raining,” Chris replied.

Still with flared nostrils and a scowl, BJ said, “Let’s keep it one hundred. If it wasn’t for your daddy, you wouldn’t be shit.”

Chris rolled his eyes and replied, “Here we go. Yada—yada—yada. I assure you, even if my dad didn’t exist, I would still be doing me—believe that.”

Near by patrons began to look on as the discussion was getting heated.

Getting tired of the bickering, Malcolm interjected, “Y’all be beefing too much. Let me ask y’all a question? If y’all so-called don’t like each other, why the hell y’all kick it with each other so much?”

BJ and Chris didn’t have an answer. They just let it be. Chris mumbled something under his breath, and they went at it again. Malcolm threw his hands in the air and pulled out his wallet.

BJ and Chris continued to have their heated debate. As time passed, Malcolm decided to call it a night. Chris and BJ were so into their heated conversation that they didn’t even see or hear Malcolm leave. After some minutes passed, Chris stated, “Where Malcolm go?”

Looking around the bar, BJ replied, “Don’t know.”

“Well, you want to roll out?”

BJ replied, “Cool.”

THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL after a holiday was always a little frantic. The kids were excited to be back with their peers but at the same time dreading to be back at school. This time wasn’t any different. Malcolm approached it a little differently though. He decided that he would let the students know about his departure from the school. He felt he owed it to them. He also thought about what BJ spoke about being mis-educated. Malcolm decided that he was going to teach what he believed. He didn’t want those kids to be susceptible to the rank and file direction of modern urban institutional education.

“Did everyone enjoy their holiday?” Malcolm asked the class.

Everyone responded with enthusiasm, as always. The students loved Malcolm. They really looked up to him. They felt as if he really understood where they were coming from.

“I wanted to let you all know of some things that have been going on in my world.”

The class was very alert and ready for his announcement.

“Well, as many of you know, there has been some changes in the school. Some that has caused many of the faculty to leave the school. Because of those changes, I just wanted to let you all know that I won’t be teaching here next year.”

The students got all riled up and were displaying their displeasure at his announcement.

“How could they do that to you?” a chubby student yelled.

“Are you going to another school?” an energized student shouted.

“Calm down y’all. I felt the same way at first, but that doesn’t change anything as far as you guys go. Even if I’m not here, I still expect you guys to continue to excel. You will still be held to those same standards I’ve set for you. Whoever is your teacher, I still want you to seek self-knowledge and be the very best you can be.

“Let me ask you all a question.”

All eyes were focused on Malcolm.

“What do you all see yourself doing 10 years from now?”

A variety of answers were blurted out.

“I’m gonna be a baseball player.”

“I’m go be a NFL player.”

“Not me...I’m go be on BET.”

“I’m gonna own me a beauty shop.”

“I wanna work in New York.”

“I’m go be like Dave Chappell.”

“I just wanna do what my momma does.”

“Why do you want to be a rapper?” Malcolm asked one of the kids.

“Because, I wanna ride clean, have fat stacks, and have all the girls,” the kid replied to the laughter of the other students.

“Don’t believe the hype. Trust me 99% of the rappers you see are lying. They are not living the life you think they are,” Malcolm replied.

But, of course, no matter how many times you tell a kid that, some still can’t differentiate between real life and fantasy-land. Truth is they see more rappers in their neighborhood than these so-called professional brothers and sisters. Not to mention the overbearing media that

romanticizes the baller lifestyle. So it's no wonder that young brothers and sisters aspire to imitate what they see.

Malcolm continued to lecture the kids about what was and wasn't real. He knew that he wouldn't reach everyone with what he was saying, but if he just reached one student, then he felt he had done his job.

After class was dismissed, Malcolm gathered his pen and pad, and he began to jot down notes in his journal. He was at peace when he was able to reflect on the situations that he was concerned about. He hoped that one day he would be able to share his gift with the world.

## CHAPTER 10

The cold rainfall felt like small bits of hail. It was the last day of school before Christmas break. Malcolm had on his black triple fat goose coat. His NY Giants hat fit snugly on his head and helped him avoid the small bits of rain falling onto his face. Navil met him in the North Wing. Malcolm was unloading some empty milk crates from her car.

Navil laughed. “Look at you. You wouldn’t last one day up North. You dressed like it’s a blizzard outside.”

Malcolm blew into his hands and then removed the blue and white scarf from around his neck. “You got that right. I’m more of a sunshine type of guy.” He shook some leftover rain from his hat as he continued, “That’s why y’all emotions so cold and cut throat up North. It’s because it’s so damn cold all the time.” He blew into his hands again. “Ya see, down here in the dirty, dirty—we show that southern hospitality,” Malcolm said with a smile on his face.

Navil unzipped her jacket and ran her fingers through her hair. “Well, all of us don’t act that way.” She batted her eyes and continued, “Maybe I can take you my way some time to prove you wrong.”

Malcolm placed his hand on the small of her back and replied, “Maybe, you, should do that.”

Malcolm’s touch sent a tingle down her spine that she’d never experienced before. The feeling was almost in parallel to taking that first sip of coffee on a cold day—the feeling that heats and soothes the body just right in the morning.

Navil leaned a little closer to Malcolm.

“How’s that pretty daughter of yours doing?”

“She’s fine. She’s just so thrilled that Christmas is coming.”

“Hey, you want to hook up and catch a movie or something? That’s if you don’t have anything going on, of course.”

“Not this evening. Maybe we can hook up sometime tomorrow. I have some things I really need to take care of. Is tomorrow cool with you?” Malcolm asked.

“Cool beans. Just give me a call.” She stopped and turned towards Malcolm. “Thanks for the help. I guess I’ll see ya later on?”

“Ok, meet me in the lounge at lunch. There is something else I need to talk to you about.”

With curiosity lurking in her eyes, she replied, “Will do.”

IT HAD BEEN A COUPLE OF WEEKS since Thanksgiving, and Malcolm had a cooling down period. He decided that he owed his father enough respect to at least have a conversation with him man to man. He also felt he should at least try to have a one on one with Stacie. Later that evening, he called his mom to get the number where his dad could be reached. Malcolm and his father spoke and agreed to have dinner that evening.

They decided to meet at one of Malcolm’s favorite restaurants as a child. Dexter used to take Malcolm there every Saturday morning when Malcolm was finished playing ball at one of his basketball or football games. Malcolm was already there, and he noticed his father as he entered the restaurant.

As usual, Dexter was smooth in his appearance. He had on some dark blue jeans and a pink button down with a blue sweater vest over it. Instead of his usual gold jewelry attire, he was wearing red gold.

“How are you doing, son?” Dexter asked.

“I’m good—and you?” Malcolm asked.

“I’m good as well.”

Dexter sat down and removed his scarf. He placed his brim on the table near the napkin holder.

Malcolm checked his cell phone to be sure he had turned off the volume. He then grabbed a menu and slid the other menu to Dexter.

Dexter opened the menu and took a quick glance before placing it back on the table.

Dexter rubbed his chin that was no longer a salt and pepper color. It was more gray than black. He took off his Malcolm X glasses and placed them next to his brim.



“Son, I wanted to talk with you, because I know that I owe you an explanation and an apology.”

Malcolm nodded as he took a sip of his draft beer.

“I know that I’ve disappointed both you and your mom. Words can’t express the shame and sorrow I’ve felt, but at the same time I should feel no shame for doing the right thing...Right?”

Malcolm glanced outside the window and noticed a young man and what he perceived to be the young man’s father walking hand in hand to the restaurant. He leaned back as he proceeded to respond.

“The past couple of weeks I’ve had time to think about the whole situation. You have always been one to do what is right. I’ve never judged your actions—until now.”

Dexter dropped his head and nodded repeatedly.

He looked back up at Malcolm and replied, “I know you’ve looked up to me your entire life. And I know you know that I’m not the perfect man you thought I was.”

A man interrupted, “Dexter Turner, is that you?”

Dexter smiled and gave the man a firm handshake and engaged in some brief small talk.

He then continued, “Like I was saying, I’m not a perfect man, but I always told you that I would be totally honest with you no matter what.”

Malcolm flagged the waitress. He put a piece of ice into his mouth.

“I just had an issue not with what you did, but how you did it. I mean we haven’t heard from you in what—a year?—Year and a half?”

Placing his hands on the table and flashing his red gold jewelry, Dexter replied, “You right. I could have used better judgment. I give you that.”

A waitress appeared. She looked like she could have been in her early 40s. She was a light skinned sister with small freckles. She smiled, showcasing her gold tooth.

“Well, well—I must be a lucky gal to have the pleasure of serving two handsome men such as you.”

Both Malcolm and Dexter smiled simultaneously.

“You know what you want to order, honey?”

Malcolm nodded.

“Let me get the Big Daddy combo, light on the sauce please.”

Malcolm handed the menu to the waitress.

“And for you Mr. Handsome?” She said in the direction of Dexter.

Dexter replied, “Let me get the brisket plate.”

“And for your sides?” she asked as she smacked on her gum.

“Uhm, let me get some mac and cheese and greens, please.”

Dexter handed her his menu.

“You shall is a good looking man.”

She then glanced at Malcolm. “And you ain’t nothing but the splitting image of him. Are y’all brothers?”

Malcolm laughed.

“No, he’s my dad.”

She winked and replied, “Good genes. Your orders will be out in a sec, guys.”

Dexter smiled as he shook his head.

“I don’t know if I’ve ever been in a place with you and some lady ain’t try to flirt with you,” Malcolm said.

Dexter just grinned at the comment.

“So I haven’t spoken much to Maxine since Thanksgiving. How is she?”

“I really haven’t been talking much with her either. You know how she is. She’s strong. She’ll be alright,” Malcolm replied.

“True that.”

Dexter took a sip of his drink and took in the scenery of the restaurant.

“You remember when you all won the championship and you and Chris was just running round this place all happy and all?” Dexter began to shake his head and laugh.

“Yeah I remember. We were the tandem—me at QB, and Chris at receiver. We thought we were the second coming of Montana and Rice.”

“Y’all boys was too much. Time goes by so fast.”

“No doubt,” Malcolm replied.

“So, how’s your writing going? You still pursuing that—right?” Dexter asked.

“It’s going. It’s a process, ya know.”

“So you never told me what it’s about. Is it a book of poetry or something?”

“Nah, I was going to do that at first, but I decided to venture into writing a novel.”

“A novel, huh?” With a sense of pride, Dexter continued, “Malcolm Turner, national bestselling author.”

“That sounds like a plan,” Malcolm replied.

“You might be like the next Langston Hughes or Alex Haley.”

“Nah, I’d rather just be Malcolm Turner.”

“That’s my boy. Carve your own lane.”

The waitress arrived with their food.

“Big Daddy Combo for you and the brisket plate for you.” She looked at Malcolm, “Are you go need a box? I ain’t seen too many people put that down.”

Malcolm pretended to loosen his belt. “No, Ma’am, I’m going to take this out in less than 10 minutes.”

She winked and walked away.

Dexter snuck a peek at the curvaceous waitress as she walked away.

Malcolm looked at Dexter and replied, “She is something else.”

They both shared a laugh and proceeded to finish up their dinner.

The rest of the evening was pleasant. They spent the rest of the time playing catch up. Malcolm even initiated reaching out to Stacie. That made Dexter proud.