

Passed Around By Man,  
But Not Passed Over By God

My Untold Story

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Passed Around By Man,  
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My Untold Story

*Chontate Brown*



**PASSED AROUND BY MAN,  
BUT NOT PASSED OVER BY GOD**

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# *Introduction*

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I, Chontate Brown, remember my life from as young as two years old. My “perfect” life changed overnight. The morning the family and I were evicted from our apartment marked the beginning of a spiral that tossed my two brothers and me into separate homes, forcing us to suffer physical, sexual, mental, and emotional abuse.

In this book, I uncover the untold story about myself as I express heartfelt details of my mother’s absence after a mental breakdown, my poverty-stricken and fatherless childhood on the South Side of Chicago, and the struggles as a broken woman who suffered emotional hunger and indulged in the streets of destruction. I was challenged by adults and bullied by children.

Before I knew God, I knew no one. In my own words, I will reveal how the light of the Lord lit my path and guided me and my family out of darkness.



# *Chapter 1*

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## **Kool-Aid Ghetto Living on the West Side**



I am Chontate Brown, and the West Side of Chicago holds my best memories. I recall the early parts of my childhood to be as perfect as they could be, both for me and for my brothers, Pierre and Raffael. My family lived in a basement apartment on 1628 South Sawyer Street, and my grandmother lived next door.

My mother, Vivian, worked hard to make ends meet at Rauland Corp., a subsidiary company of Zenith that made color television sets. My Aunt Denise or my grandmother would babysit us. My mother was already the single mother of one child before my birth. The father of my older brother, smart-mouthed and bigheaded Pierre, had already

left the building, and I do not think that my brother even knows what his dad looks like to this day. Well, about a year and a half after he split, my mom met what she called “a fine, sweet-talking, sharp-dressing kind of fellow”; in other words, a slick-ass nigga named David Gant. Yes, indeed—and can you believe, to this day, this fool with pigeon-toes, crusty-knee, a bald spot in the middle of his head surrounded by Shaka Zulu hair, wearing Stacey Adams shoes without socks but with blue jean shorts, has the nerve to think he is fine?

Anyway, back to the story: Vivian and David began to date, and in the process of getting their freak on, I was conceived. I was born on April 24, 1971, at Mount Sinai Hospital. My mother had a Winnie the Pooh crib, passed down from Pierre, all prepared for my sweet arrival. But of course, Pierre, who is always the family comedian, had something funny to say.

When my mother told him to come and look at me, he said, “Mom, I thought you said you were bringing me home a baby sister. You brought home an old man.”

My family began laughing, but my mother didn't think anything was funny.

My dad hung around from time to time, up until I turned two years old. He told my mother that he was going out to get me a birthday gift, but he never returned. None of us saw him again until I was eleven years old.

A few years after David's departure, Vivian met a handsome man who was fifteen years older than she was. Vivian was twenty-seven and he was forty-three. His name was Clarence Lemons. Clarence was six feet and two inches tall, light skinned with grade-A hair, and he was doing very well for himself working for a company named Bally that manufactured casino slot machines. Yes, Vivian, a single mother of two, had finally hit the jackpot.

We were still living in the two-bedroom basement apartment when they met. Clarence was a great handyman, who put some life into that dark-looking basement. He and my mother painted the apartment, and he made a bar he painted with black and white polka dots. Hey, in the 70s, that

was hot! Pierre and I shared a bedroom. I remember when Clarence bought me my first rocking chair in black and white leather. Nobody—and I mean *nobody*—could sit in my rocking chair or there would be hell to pay.

Clarence really loved my mother and us kids too, so he asked my mother for her hand in marriage. He was not only a great husband to my mother but also a great stepfather to Pierre and me. Life was good for my family and me. We were still considered “poor,” but our family never lived according to that standard. My parents believed in providing the best for their children. I guess you can say we were living a champagne life off of Kool-Aid money.

My stepdaddy would hand his paycheck over to my mother, and she would pay all the bills, buy groceries, and take care of whatever else needed to be paid, then give him back whatever was left. My mother was a caramel-brown, sharp-dressed, five-feet-and-four-inch young woman with gorgeous black hair that fell down her back. She had expensive tastes, her favorite stores being Lord and



Taylor, Sears, Carson Pirie Scott, J. C. Penney, and Marshall Fields. For Easter holiday, she bought me a white leather coat, a hat, and a gorgeous yellow dress. Pierre had a two-piece white pantsuit with a burgundy shirt and white tie matched with burgundy platform shoes. He also had a burgundy leather jacket and golf-style hat. We were “casket sharp” even though we didn’t attend church that day.

Both my brother and I were the first on the block to get bikes. I had the red Radio Flyer tricycle, and my brother had a two-wheel bike with the big wide handlebars and banana seat. When my brother went to the store with his friends, he would be the only one with a one-dollar bill, while everyone else just had maybe a quarter to spend. Yes, Pierre was Mr. Popular (though, I must admit, my brother was a little cutie too). My stepdaddy even bought my mother a beautiful, shiny, powder blue Chrysler Imperial car.

We were living the good life with no stress or worries. Raffael, my baby brother, was born in June of 1974. Raffael was one of the most gorgeous

babies you would ever see. He looked like a mixed-breed child with a head full of dark, soft, curly hair. Let's just say that Raffael did not look like he belonged in our family. He was his daddy's child.

## *Chapter 2*

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### **The Browns Is Moving On Up**



**O**ur first Christmas as a family was exciting. My parents bought this huge aluminum Christmas tree that was placed right in the basement living room window. My mother bought one of those changing-color lamps for the tree, so it would turn three different colors: red, green, and yellow. People would stop in front of our apartment just to see the tree change colors. We had all the holiday trimmings with objects moving and singing Christmas songs.

Clarence spent five hundred dollars in cash on the family Christmas gifts. Five hundred dollars! Heck, that's a lot of money to spend on gifts today, let alone back in the day. I remembered our parents waking us up to a living room filled with all kinds of toys and clothes, a kitchen and table set, many different dolls, a doll house, toy cars and trucks,

army men, a wooden playpen for Raffael, and so much more. It was like Toys-R-Us in the hood. We still do not know how they hid all of these gifts from us, but it was an awesome thing for any child to experience.

Since Raffael was an extra head to keep a roof over, we needed to upgrade to something much bigger. Clarence's father owned a two-flat, white apartment building on 1339 South Troy. Clarence's stepsister, Edna, lived upstairs and our family moved into the first floor apartment. This was a beautiful place with four bedrooms, two full bathrooms, and a very large living room with a separate spacious dining area. Starting from the dining area was a long hallway where our bedrooms were located. My room was first, on the left side with a pink and white bedroom set. My brothers' room was diagonal from my room to the right side. Pierre had a queen-size oak bed with a matching dresser. A little further to the left was the first full bathroom with a light blue, antique bathtub right in the center of the room. There would be days when my baby brother was able to get into everything, and he would be

found waiting in that tub with nothing on but his shirt, hoping for someone to come turn on the water for him.

Across from the bathroom was my parents' bedroom. They had a king-size, black and white bedroom set with black beads dangling at their door. Clarence's father lived with us, and he stayed in the fourth bedroom that also had a sitting area. Mr. Lemons was a very tall and bald man who drove a burgundy and black Cadillac. He was quiet but kind (I was afraid of him at first, I guess because he was so tall and skinny).

The kitchen and second full bath were in the far back of the hallway. We had a wide, white, wooden back porch that had a green swing, where my mother would love to polish my toes and fingernails with her multiple colors of nail polish. The porch looked over one of the largest, most beautifully landscaped, fenced backyards in our neighborhood. One side of the apartment building was completely covered with a green vineyard. In addition, a sidewalk trail led from the backyard to the front of the fenced yard where diverse, beautiful flowers and

roses grew. I get excited to this day when I see stunning floral landscapes or arrangements—and of course, I am a spring baby. We also had a basement where we would play on our very own pool table and pinball machine.

Our apartment was walking distance from Douglas Park. The memories are vivid as I recall this neighborhood's recreational park with swings, slides, monkey bars, and a small lagoon surrounded by sand. It seemed like people from everywhere would come to this park. My mother would pack up some sandwiches, chips, and drinks, grab a blanket, and watch her kids enjoy themselves. I don't recall any danger or harm from anyone there, just good old fun. If we were not at the park, we would be at home with our parents, listening to the hits of my mother's favorite musical group Earth, Wind & Fire. In the living room we had a brown floor-model cabinet television and stereo system by Zenith. If you had one of these, you were considered top dog in the hood. Many days, my mother would have Pierre and me sing out loud to her favorite tune called "Reasons." She would even record us on

her tape recorder. My mother sure knew how to move her hips to some music! Moreover, if some stepping music played, it was a done deal: she was a showstopper.

Ms. Brown also used to throw down in the kitchen with the family meals. My mother cooked a full meal every day, unless it was too hot to cook. In our dining area, we had a beautiful, pure wood, antique formal dinette table that sat up to eight people with a matching china buffet cabinet. We always ate as a family at this table. There were no separate eating times or areas; you either ate when dinner was served or you did not eat at all. Our house was always clean and tidy, and peaceful when my brother and I were not at each other's throat. Clarence and Mom would have arguments here and there, but there was never any domestic abuse.

Channel 11, the PBS channel, was one of our favorite ways to watch educational programs such as *The Electric Company*, *Sesame Street*, and *Zoom*. The characters I loved most were Bert and Ernie from Sesame Street. And please do not let me forget about the Mickey Mouse Club. I was so glued

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to the television when this show came on and was positioned ready with my Mickey ears to sing the famous tune: M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E.



## *Chapter 3*

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### **Black Christmas in the Hood**



**T**he Christmas holiday came back around again, and we still had that big aluminum Christmas tree, but this time Mom and Clarence had spray-painted the tree with white snow. My mom placed those color lights in front of it with the tree placed in front of a huge picture window and, again, our house was the center of attraction. Now, it did not have anything on the Marshall Field's Christmas window display, but in the hood, we were the next best thing. Clarence and Vivian were the ultimate Mr. and Mrs. Claus.

This Christmas was off the chain. My brothers and I woke up to another room filled with all kinds of stuff. The majority of our toys came from Toys-R-Us and the FAO Schwarz toy store. I got the first new Barbie who rode her own battery-operated bicycle until one day the destructive baby

boy broke her handlebars off and that was the end of that. I swear, that child was like Godzilla. He demolished everything that was in his path. The family name for him was Bam-Bam. He even destroyed his wood playpen!

I also had the new crawl-away doll that crawled on her own. Sometimes, I would let her crawl to the wall and watch her try to keep going. I even had the whole Sesame Street play set, which was portable, so I was able to carry it around. Then my parents blew me away with an elegant, all-white piano that came with different color keys to help you learn to play, a stool, and a lesson book. It was a piano fit for a princess.

I fell in love with my awesome gifts, but Pierre had gotten something that was bigger and shinier than my piano: a Mickey Mouse drum set. This was not just any kind of drum set; it was of high quality too. It had everything a good drummer would need: three tom-toms, crash and ride cymbals, snare and bass drums, bass drum pedal, throne (or stool), and, of course, some hardcore drumsticks. Man, it was sick and all of that. Pierre was very stingy with his

prized procession, but I was eager to play on those damn drums by any means necessary. I would play on them while he was at school, getting my fake Sheila E. drummer on. I was told on numerous occasions to stop playing with Pierre's drum set, but I did not want to hear that. One day I was getting down on those drums and hitting the bass drum pedal against the bass drum with just a little too much force, and before I knew it, the ball of the drum pedal went through the bass drum.

When I realized what I had done and thought about how my brother was going to kill me and the ass whooping I'd get from my parents, I did the best thing I could do at that time—blame the baby brother, Raffael. Pierre freaked out when he saw what “Raffael” had done to his drum set. But the truth came out eventually: the set was of high quality and my baby brother was only 1½ years old. The drum set was fixed, and I was punished, and forever banned from Pierre's room, at least when he was not present.



## Chapter 4

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### Backyard Wild Wild West Side



Pierre was in second grade at this point, and I was still at home with my mother and baby brother. I used to get excited whenever my mother took me shopping. I remember, one day, she took me downtown on the bus to the Sears store on State Street. It was crazy to drive and park your car downtown when there was public transportation that would drop you off right at your destination. I cannot forget that day because it was the day I tripped down the escalator stairs. Luckily, I was caught by the hands of bystanders before going completely down, though I remained terrified of escalators until I was older.

My mother had my hair in two curly ponytails so I looked like a black Cindy from *The Brady Bunch*. On our way home, we stopped at McDonald's to get something to eat. This was

definitely a day in March, because they had the green shamrock shakes that came in a clear souvenir glass with the McDonald's characters on them. Boy, that shake was good! But, as we were coming back towards the house through Douglas Park, we were walking across the platform of a huge statue, and I tripped, dropped my shamrock shake, and my glass broke. I was really tripping that day. I looked at my mother with my sad face, but she refused to go back to get me another one. She finally did, though, later in the day.

You would think life could not get any better for us and, guess what, it did not. I guess we knew things were changing, because Clarence and our mom began fighting a lot. We never saw her bruised up, but we did see them fight a lot. One day, things kind of took a turn for the worse. Pierre and I were playing outside when some kids we knew came and told us our mother was in our backyard with a gun. We took off running and saw people from the neighborhood watching from outside the fence as if they were looking at a live boxing match. Our mother was standing there with

a 45-caliber gun in her hand and about four feet in front of her was my father, Clarence, who looked like a scared yellow chicken. We could hear my mother telling him to strip down out of his clothes. He was pleading with her, telling her he was sorry for hurting her, and he would never do it again. My mother continued to demand he take off all of his clothes and said, "Motherfucker, I mean now."

All of this seemed so unreal to me. Was this really happening? All the spectators were laughing and poking fun, but Pierre and I were heartbroken and embarrassed. Daddy had taken off his shirt and pants like he was told, but Ms. Brown wanted him buck-naked. He pretended he was about to take off his underwear and tried to take off running, and the next thing we knew we heard a loud sound. She shot at Daddy! Pow! We heard it again and she began to chase after him. We didn't know what to think. Was Daddy dead? Did she kill him? Why did she want to shoot him?

The police came, and next thing we knew, we were over at my aunt's house, still trying to figure out what had happened between our parents. I

remember my mother had a red blister on her bottom lip from when she shot the weapon the first time. The story later told to me by my mother is that she had stayed overnight at a girlfriend's house, but never called to let my father know her whereabouts or what time she would be home. It was eight o'clock in the morning when she got her behind back to the house, and Clarence had been up worrying and drinking (a twelve-pack of beer among other things). I must remind you, he was fifteen years older than my mother, and you can say she was still young minded. He asked where she had been all night, and when she tried to explain, he knocked her down and slapped her. And that was why my mother had planned to shoot him and how she was going to get away with shooting him.



## *Chapter 5*

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### **Back to Drinking Sugar Water**



**T**he happy, good old days were over. My parents separated for the time being, and Vivian was back to being a single mother, caring for three children on her own. I was in kindergarten by then. We moved to an apartment back on Sawyer Street and living in this apartment was no picnic in the park. The place was dark and gloomy. It seemed like the sun went on a long vacation. Our daddy Clarence was not present anymore. When was he coming back? There were no more awesome toys for us to play with and nothing to sing or dance about. Times got hard for our family. We went from eating eight-course meals to just eating a plate of beans. One night, my mother cooked black-eyed peas for dinner with sliced luncheon meat. I got that we were no longer living like the Jefferson's, but I drew the line when it came to eating this meal. The devil was a liar. I

was not eating those beans. They not only looked nasty, but they didn't smell good either. My mother got mad and threatened to beat my ass if I didn't eat my food. I took my ass whooping like a champion.

Sadly, my mother was back on public assistance to make ends meet, but the ends were not meeting, because our family was evicted from that apartment. My mother never told us about her financial situation or gave us notice that we might end up on the streets. The eviction people just came and put the little stuff that we had right out on the sidewalk. I cannot imagine what was going through her mind while watching all of this happen. She didn't show any emotion or concern. She was not screaming or yelling at anyone; she just stood there quietly. She grabbed a few of our things, and we walked up the street to one of her friend's house.

The next thing we knew, we were staying at the Salvation Army. There, we shared one room with two beds and one bathroom, with another family. The place was not as bad as it may sound. Hey, at

least we were not on the streets or staying with anybody else. They fed us three meals a day and even had activities for us children. They donated clothes and shoes to us, and though they were not new or what we were used to, we did not complain since we did not have anything else. Everyone seemed pleasant and welcomed us into the establishment. There, I learned that poor was not only for black folks, because there were some white people living there too.

I cannot say if I ever cried or questioned my mother about what was going on. My brothers and I were considered good children and we didn't complain or throw tantrums. Only we knew that Ms. Brown was not someone on whose bad side you wanted to be.

I would like to note that, regardless of what the circumstances may have been, Clarence and Vivian were outstanding parents.

During our stay at the Salvation Army, we began to go to church. I remember I always sat in the front row because they gave away old-fashion

dolls to the little girls. I believe I collected about three of these dolls. They were so dazzling with big Shirley Temple curls, pretty blue or brown eyes that blinked, and very pretty dresses, too. I would sit them on top of the shelf in our room. Even when we lived at the Salvation Army, I did not have the sense of feeling poor or less fortunate. After a season at the shelter, Vivian was able to obtain public assistance, and our single mother moved us into the Stateway Gardens projects on the South Side of Chicago.

It was at this point in our lives that I remember everything going downhill.

## Chapter 6

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### Chicago's South Side Alcatraz



Small, fragile, six-year-old Chontate laid her eyes on a big, white, raggedy building: the Stateway Gardens projects. Apartment 1306—smelly, congested, and roach-infested—was now home. Though I was reluctant to go inside, my mother and brothers assured me it would be okay. As I walked toward this strange-looking building (it looked as if people were living in cages), I realized that this was a sight I had never seen before: I could see residents walking across the porch ramp and onlookers watching as we approached. I was terrified. I wished we had stayed at the shelter. I might have been young, but I was not stupid.

When we got on the elevator, the smell was horrible, like the stench from hell. It was as if someone took a piss bath seven days ago. Can you

imagine trying to hold your breath all the way up to the thirteenth floor? Not only did these contraptions take all day to come down, going up was not any cool breeze either. We finally made it to our floor and when we got off the elevator, it was like a maze to me, going either to the left side or to the right side of the building. We went to the right and some double doors led us to our so-called home.

There it was—apartment 1306. But something was not right at all. The door to our new home was wide open. With a concerned look on my mother's face, we walked into the place, and a strange man surprised us in our damn bathroom, shaving his face, with all of his things scattered throughout the apartment. Really? Are you freaking serious? The Chicago Housing Authority gave my mother keys to this apartment without a walk-through? That was the first sign telling us to get the hell out of that place.

Vivian, being a brave lioness, stood guard in front of her children. She asked the stranger, "What are you doing in here? This is my place and I am going to need you to leave now." I was thinking he should

stay and we should leave, get back on the train, and ride back to the West Side. It was the first time I saw a black man with reddish-color hair. He had a short Afro with red freckles all over his face—he was just red all over. The man said he didn't want any problems, grabbed his belongings, and left as if nothing had happened. Once he was gone, we settled in and became as comfortable as we could. This was going to be the place we called home for the next seven months.

The apartment had three bedrooms, one full bathroom, a living room, and a small kitchen. Everything from the walls to the cabinets was a dull white. The floors were all black tile. The radiators were attached to the walls and that was where thousands of those nasty cockroaches lived. Roaches were everywhere—in the cabinets, crawling on the walls, just all over the place. I had seen spiders, bees, ants, and lightning bugs. But roaches? Hell, no! These roaches were gangsters too. They didn't have a care in the world. It was as if they were saying, "We were here first, you live here, and we live here too."

We went to the store to get some cleaning supplies and something to eat. My mother bought some Raid and sprayed every room, cabinet, drawer, and especially those nasty infested radiators. Then she made us take a nap while she cleaned and got dinner ready. The house already didn't have a pleasant odor from the beginning and that roach spray definitely did not make it any better. When we woke up from our nap, I walked into that living room and saw all those dead roaches piled up, some still trying to flee for their dear lives, and I almost lost my damn mind. The crying and screaming began. This was just too much for me to bear. I did not want to be there anymore. Where was my daddy? Why, of all places to live, did we have to move into this hellhole?

My mother tried her best to assure my brothers and me that everything was just temporary. I did not care how much that woman sprayed the place; the roaches were still invading our home. Family visits to our house were not frequent anymore, and I didn't blame them, though my favorite aunt, Denise, would visit from time to time. I will never



forget when she bought me a lovely red trench coat for my school trip to see *The Princess Swan*. Even though my mother was receiving public assistance, it still was not enough to provide for all three children. She had to sell half of her food stamps to her sister to provide clothing and shoes for us.

A month after moving into our apartment at Stateway Gardens, one night, someone began banging on the door. We were all sleeping with our mom on the floor in the living room, because we didn't have any beds to sleep in at the time. The banging became louder, and Vivian grabbed us close to her as she yelled, "Who is it?" Men's voices yelled back demanding that she open the door. She yelled back with a strong voice, "Get away from my damn door! Get away! Go away from my damn door!" Whoever the men at the door were, they left. Although we never heard from them again, to this very day, I wonder if it was that man with the red hair and his friends. Was this place a drug house? How was it being managed? I still wonder today.



## *Chapter 7*

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### **There Were No Good Times at Stateway Gardens**



Pierre and I were now attending Corpus Christi, the elementary school right across from the building where we lived. Pierre was in the fifth grade and I was in the first grade. School was kind of fun for me. I don't recall my teacher's name, but I do remember her as a young white woman who had disabilities. She wore one of those metal leg braces that helped her walk, but she was a very nice teacher. However, each day seemed to be a constant challenge for my eldest brother, Pierre. The handsome ten-year-old was constantly teased by his peers, simply because he was the new kid on the block and popular amongst the girls. It seemed that, almost daily, the neighborhood bullies were jumping on him. The torture from the school kids continued as Pierre and I walked home from

school. I remember one winter day, Chicago had a big snow fall and, as we were walking toward the building, I wondered why we just kept falling with our faces in the snow. In actuality, these project-ass kids were tripping us with their feet and causing us to fall. We were too fearful to tell them to stop tormenting us and were just happy we made it home to tell our mom about the altercation.

I can still feel the tears coming to my eyes as I recall the bullying from the other children. The only thing that gave me peace of mind at the time was when I colored in my coloring book. I loved to color and I was great at it too. I was always very neat and took my time when it came to coloring and writing. Pierre, too, was frustrated and the living situation was taking a toll on all of us.

I understood that our mother was also growing weary. The money was running out, family had stopped visiting, and times were hard. Vivian had done all she knew to do to protect her children and to keep them together, but her efforts were not enough. My mom would send my brother Pierre to the store, but he never came back with any of the

items because he always got robbed before he made it home. But she had to send him anyway so that she could stay with my baby brother, Raffael, and me. One day, the weather was bad, but my mom had to send Pierre to the store to get cereal and milk for us to eat. She sent him out that day with the very last of her money, and he came back without the groceries once again. The boy downstairs had taken the milk. This time, our mother was fed up. My mother went downstairs to take back what belonged to us. That boy had the nerve to still be downstairs with the milk in his hands, and I know she fought for it, because the gallon carton was dirty and had grass all over it. Vivian later explained that she tackled the boy to get back the milk.

After that incident Vivian became depressed. It seemed to have been her breaking point, because she began talking to herself and writing on the walls. She began letting strange people come into the house, but my brother and I did not want to say that anything was wrong with our mom—we loved her too much. That is until things got out of hand.



## Chapter 8

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### My Mother Flies into the Coo-Coo's Nest



On August 27, 1978, strangers came into our house and robbed my mother of \$354. Although the robbers did not physically harm my mother, I heard when she screamed and yelled, “Get away from my family and leave us alone!” I saw Pierre crying and fighting with the kids, trying to protect our mother. I was just standing there looking at all the craziness that was going on before my eyes. Next thing I knew, Raffael and I were in some woman’s house. Pierre had gotten a chance to call our mother’s sister, who came with her brother and took us over to the family house on the South Side at 68th and Wood. This is where we would be staying; well, where I *thought* we would be staying.

Meanwhile, the siblings took Vivian to Madden Hospital because it was proven that my mother had a mental breakdown and needed immediate attention. My grandmother stayed across the street from my aunt, and one of my uncles lived on 56th and Seeley (by the way, remember these street addresses—they are going to blow your mind!). No one ever sat us down and explained anything or updated us about our mother's condition. Then again, I wasn't worried, because I thought I was safe and secure with her family. I cannot speak for Pierre, but I couldn't imagine him not worrying about our mother, because he was the oldest child. But I'd bet you a million bucks he never expected that our own family would do the unexpected. Raffael was still too much a baby for him to understand what was going on.

The few days that we stayed at my aunt's were a breath of fresh air (literally). She had a beautiful home that she shared with her husband and two kids. School had not begun yet, so one of my cousins would babysit us while her parents were at work. She was a pretty cool babysitter. She made



sure we ate breakfast and lunch, then let us watch one of my favorite old-school cartoon shows, *Underdog*, before she made us take our afternoon nap. Things were peaceful for a change: no roaches, no stinky elevators, and no more living in the projects.

In the words of Ice Cube, “Those few days was some good days.”



## Chapter 9

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### When Blood Became Thinner than Water



Then, that unexpected whirlwind of a day came: a woman named Ms. Irving, who claimed she was from the Department of Child & Family Services (DCFS), came to my aunt's house and told us we would be living in temporary foster care until our mother got well. Ms. Irving was a tall, thin, black woman with long curly hair and fake eyelashes. I could not believe that this Diana Ross wannabe was standing there with a smile on her face as if everything was fine and dandy, talking about how they found some good people to care for us. Did she have this conversation with my mother? Did she agree to this?

Are you telling me that the woman who taught us not to talk to strangers was going to allow us to live with people she never met or talked

to a day in her life? And the ultimate question: who in the hell called Child Services to come take us away from our family? Who would do such a thing to innocent kids who were already facing circumstances that were out of their control?

With my mind confused with many unanswered questions, my brothers and I left with the woman while the so-called family watched us go. As we were leaving, another unwanted load was dumped on us. We found out we were not going to be together under the same roof. First, we're separated from our parents, then from our family, and now we were going into separate foster homes? Everything was wrong with this situation.

Later on, my mother told me that one of her sisters had signed her into the mental ward due to her nervous breakdown where she stayed for three days, and from there, a bus took her to Tinley Park Mental Hospital. She said it felt like a long ride to Tinley Park. Then, if that was not enough, three days later, she received a mailgram telling her that we were placed into foster care. She started screaming and crying loudly. Two days later, she

was called into a room with a woman and a man from DCFS. They tried to get her to sign papers to have us put up for adoption. She refused and vowed that she was going to fight the system and get her kids back. When they saw she was not willing to give up her parental rights, they left, and she never saw them again.

Even though they were gone, she was still left with the pain in her heart that her children were taken and forced to live with strangers. Not only did Ms. Brown not give consent for us to be taken, but guess who else was out of the loop about our whereabouts? My mother's husband and our daddy, Clarence. He did not even know that Vivian, who was still his wife, was admitted into a mental ward.

Now, my so-called grandmother had given birth to eleven children. *Eleven*. There were five grown women and six grown men. I am going to excuse my Aunt Denise because she was still quite young, but I just did not understand how we had so many aunts and uncles and none of them could take us in. Some of them lived only a couple of blocks from each other, but still, they sent us away to live with

strangers. They allowed us to be separated and, for me, that was the hardest part of the entire ordeal. Raffael and I were placed in a different foster home from Pierre's. It did not seem as if things could get any worse for my brothers and me, but they did...a whole lot worse.

## Chapter 10

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### Sometimes Roses Are Not All That Nice



I had turned seven years old. I know this because on this day we were taken away from our family, I had on one of my favorite shirts that my mother surprised me with from Zayre's, a popular department store—it was a cute green shirt with seven scoops of various flavored ice creams on a waffle cone in honor of her baby girl's upcoming seventh birthday. Oh, how I loved that shirt! My baby brother, who was now four, and I were in the car on our way to a new home. I was sad because I did not know when I would next see my big brother. Who was going to protect his little sister and brother? I was also scared about not knowing who this new person was. We pulled up to a bungalow-style home, and guess where it was located? Remember when I told you to remember

the street names? Well, this house was located on 57th and Honorie. Hell, we could have hopped and skipped to this person's house. Now, this question: did my family already know this critical information?

The caseworker rang the doorbell, and a woman named Rose opened the door. This woman dressed exactly like Aunt Jemima, but she was very dark in spirit and in color. She was a short, thick, and unattractive looking woman. She seemed cold, but I didn't know if that was because I was scared and knew she was not my mother, or if it was because I was so worried about Pierre. Rose did not greet us with any type of love or hug or say that she was happy to have us in her home. There were no damn cupcakes or even other family members of hers there to meet and greet us. Nope, just her Aunt Jemima-on-the-pancake-box-looking self. I stood there in her living room holding my baby brother's hand really tight. I did not trust this person at all and she knew it. As the caseworker explained and gave guidelines, Rose would glance over at us for a



couple of seconds, but if looks could kill, we were dead.

Rose lived in a very nice house, clean and organized, but she allowed her dogs to live inside the home. She owned a big German shepherd and a big, white, hairy dog. But I was more afraid of her than the dogs. The dogs never barked or growled at us, and she kept them in their own room, but they were able to freely roam the home at times. She took Raffael and me upstairs to the room where we would be sleeping, which was right next to her room. As I said, she lived in a bungalow-style home and most of these homes had attic space that you could use for bedrooms. My brother and I each had our own twin-size bed and the room was nice and clean. We did not have any clothes to unpack.

Initially, things seemed as if they would work out with this living arrangement and that gave me second thoughts about Rose. I thought, maybe I was the one not being nice and I had made her feel uneasy in her own home. Here was a woman who was willing to take us in when my own family did not want us, and I was passing judgment. Then

*Passed Around By Man, But Not Passed Over By God*

again, we were children that were too young to know if we were in any danger.

## *Chapter 11*

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### **Black Cinderella: No Glass Slipper, No Prince Charming**



September arrived and it was back to school time for me. Rose had taken me school shopping for some good-looking clothing and shoes, and registered me as a second-grade student at Henderson Elementary School on 56th and Wolcott. This school was quite large, but my classroom was in a trailer next to the school. The only times I remember my class going into the school is when there was an assembly program. My teacher's name was Ms. Johnson. She was a pretty, young-looking, black woman who wore a short, curly Afro. She genuinely cared for her students and loved her job as a teacher. She had a prize poster board that was covered with different kinds of items such as toys, jewelry, candy, and small reading books, which she would reward us with if

we had good conduct and the best penmanship on daily writing assignments. We used the old-school writing paper to do our daily assignments. I was an intelligent student who did not talk or interrupt the class. I sure was not trying to make friends with anyone, but I had good reasons, as you will find out soon. All of my work was done in excellence, and I had pristine penmanship. My goal was to earn a prize off the board every week because that was the only way I was going to get a toy. School was a safe haven for me, and I did not want to miss a day sitting in that classroom. My teacher was great, and my classmates did not bother me at all, but the place that was supposed to be home was not as good as it seemed.

Rose turned out to be a wicked person. Yes, she made sure I looked good on the outside, completely covered when dressed. But if you stripped me of my clothes, you would have found a frail body with many scars and bruises from physical abuse and a soul torn apart from daily emotional abuse. My first instinct about Rose had been right, and the truth about her spirit arose right before my eyes.

Rose had plans for me. I became her little black Cinderella, except there was no glamorous ball, fairy godmother, or prince to come to my rescue. Please do not get me wrong: I am an advocate for children participating with household chores, but that was not the case. It began with washing the dishes, which I felt was not a big thing. I took it as something I needed to learn anyway. Then, it went from cleaning the inside and outside of the refrigerator to wiping down all the kitchen cabinets to sweeping the kitchen floor.

Now, I do not know if the vacuum cleaner was invented at the time but, I kid you not, this crazy woman had wall-to-wall carpet throughout the entire lower level of her home. And she did not have a small kitchen. As if cleaning her entire kitchen was not enough, she decided to invite me into her living room. Believe me when I say that this was not to reward me by letting me sit on her couch to watch some television, but to completely clean that entire area also. I did not know that I could polish that much wood in my life. I was tired and hungry, and the boss was not feeding or paying

me for all this hard work. But I never complained or showed signs of ungratefulness towards her. I was a good child who was being treated terribly and was about to encounter her first day of physical abuse.

## Chapter 12

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### Getting Whipped In the Worst Way



When I completed my chores, I thought I had done a great job considering I was seven years old, but it was not good enough for Rose. She began to yell and scream, telling me that it was not clean or done right. I remember watching her storm off into the kitchen saying, “I am going to teach you,” rummaging through the kitchen drawers to find the beginning of my worst nightmare: an electrical cord, known to us black folks as the extension cord. I didn’t have any idea what she was about to do with this cord wrapped in her hands until she raised her arm and struck me with it. The pain I felt was unexplainable. All I knew was that it hurt and it was something that nobody should have to endure. Now, I had been spanked by my mother with a belt, but I promise you it was never, and I mean never, as painful as getting beat with a cord.

As if a beating with this cord was not enough, Rose thought it would be a better punishment if I took off all my clothes. I was screaming from the agony of this horror while she beat me with delight. I tried to grab the cord, but my hands stung from every strike of the cord. Finally, the moment came when she stopped beating the life out of me, and I was lying on the floor crying, because I could not move at all. I didn't know if my brother understood what was going on with his sister downstairs in the living room, because he was upstairs in our room, but soon he would find out for himself what I had experienced.

Rose told me to get up and get dressed because I had more chores to do. As I was putting on my clothes, I noticed bruising and welts forming on my skin from that terrifying beating. They were all over my skinny body, even my hands were blood red, and some of the welts were oozing blood. She then ordered me to scrub the stairs that led up to our bedrooms. She gave me a pail, a brush, and a rag to use to clean the stairs. It was about ten steps that I had to shine, or else. As I scrubbed these



stairs, I was aching and torn with hurt, but I had to do as I was told because I did not want to face that pain ever again. It was not the last time that I would be a victim of her wrath. Any small thing would set Rose off into a rage, and whenever I did not meet her expectation of cleanliness, she would beat the living daylights out of me. She made me clean every room of that house except her bedroom, and to this day I can remember every inch of that psycho woman's house.

I don't think Rose liked the sight of me because she always made me go into the basement until she told me I could come out. Sometimes, being in that basement was like a great game in a ballpark because I was away from her presence. It was a finished lower level that had a laundry room on one side and a nice-sized sitting area on the other with a couch, lime-green carpet, and an old radio that I enjoyed. I learned how to braid my hair while in captivity. This is also where I learned to use my imagination at its highest level. I remember when I lost my baby tooth from Rose throwing me down the basement stairs in one of her irrational rages.

*Passed Around By Man, But Not Passed Over By God*

But Rose herself got some karma returned to her one day in that basement.

## Chapter 13

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### Rose vs. Pearls



At school, I was to be rewarded for good conduct and penmanship, and Ms. Johnson had just placed more gadgets on the prize board. On that board was a gorgeous gold charm bracelet that I wanted so badly, but on this particular week, I was not the only one to be rewarded. It was another female student and me who the teacher called to the front of the class to choose our prize. As I was reaching for that charm bracelet, this trick had the nerve to snatch it from the board. Before I knew it, I was shouting in that girl's face about my bracelet and how she'd better give it up or else. I was so outraged that I began crying. Ms. Johnson tried to reassure me, and I can still see her giving that girl a look of disappointment. Still, I was pissed.

The teacher asked me to be a good sport and choose another gift. She pointed out a “pearl” necklace that I definitely did not want. I took those pearls and, as I was walking back to my seat, I gave that girl the “I will see you at 3:15” look. When school was over, I went into the basement at home and in a rage broke those pearls from the string and dropped them all on the laundry side of the basement floor. While I was in the sitting area of the other side of the basement, Rose came down to do some laundry and had not yet flicked on the light switch. The next thing I heard was a loud bang and a whole lot of cuss words coming from Rose’s mouth. I got up to see what all the commotion was about and there, laying on the floor, was no other than Rose. She had slipped on those pearls! Before I knew it, I was laughing at her fat behind trying to get off that floor. She looked up at me, declaring she was going to get me for what I had done...and she did. That beating, as I expected, was painful, but well worth it that day.

## *Chapter 14*

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### **Black Devil In a Church Dress**



Everyday, like clockwork, I went from my bedroom to school to chores to the basement and then bed. That was my daily life in her house. Rose had me completely afraid of her. When my mother was able to call us on the phone, Rose would be on another phone, listening in on our conversations to make sure I would not tell my mother about all the horrible things she was doing to Raffael and me. Ms. Irving would stop by for her monthly check-ups and would ask us how everything was going with the living arrangements. I would make sure Raffael didn't get a chance to say anything because he would have told the truth about everything, and I did not want to make matters worse while living under Rose's roof. So I lied with a smile on my face. The beatings that we sustained were not nearly half of the emotional

abuse we tolerated. This woman was more wicked than the Wicked Witch of the West from Oz.

The woman who took joy from beating me was the same woman who went to church on Sundays. Like my pastor says, “The devil goes to church too and his name was Rose.” We never kept attending one church; it was always a different church. She was what you call a “church hopper,” who just bounced from one church to another. I am telling you, that woman would get up there at the altar and get the Holy Ghost, shouting, jumping, and praising God. Or, I think it was God, though there was no telling with her. How can you be a hell raiser through the week and a Christian on Sunday? I would just fall asleep and hope that, when I woke up, church and all her shenanigans would be over.

Then, one day the senseless woman went brand new on us. My brother and I were used to eating at her wooden kitchen table, but things changed when she splurged on a brand new glass dinette set. I must admit this table was stunning, like a clear shining diamond, and Rose made sure we were not

eating at this new table. One night, she called us to dinner (it was the worst thing ever: a plate of damn beans. I am sorry to sound all bougie, but I did not know about this kind of meal until I started living in foster homes because Ms. Brown did not eat or like beans). Anyway, we tried to sit at that new table of hers and got a reality check very fast. She told us with a serious look on her face that we could not eat at her table. My brother and I looked at each other like, what the hell is she talking about?

So we asked, “Where we going to eat then?”

She said, “Over there on the floor.”

Now let me give you a description of this area where she now wanted us to eat. There was a small step down from the kitchen that led either to the right and the back door or to the left and the bathroom. Right in the middle part of this area was the place where her big old dogs would eat their food. It looked like Rose had downgraded us from being humans to being her new puppies. If you think this was bad, matters were made worse when she would deliberately have those dogs eat their

meals at the same time we were eating our food. Many nights, we did not get the chance to eat our food because the dogs would eat it, and there were desperate times when we ate our food while the dogs were eating from our plates. Rose would just watch this madness happening as she sat at her beautiful table.

This abuse was taking such a toll on my baby brother that he began to wake up in the middle of the night to raid the refrigerator. It was heartbreaking when I would wake up and notice my brother not in his bed, only to find him in the refrigerator eating ketchup from the bottle. Sometimes, I would sit there and let him have his way, but there were times I had to stop him, just to keep him from being caught in action by Rose. One day, she did catch him eating from the fridge. I heard running all up and down the stairs, hearing my brother screaming and crying, but all I could do was watch him suffer his beating.

I could not protect my baby brother from this hateful person. He went from being potty-trained to becoming a bed wetter. I remember she would



beat him for wetting the bed and even started putting those blue, old people diapers on my baby brother. She was a true bitch indeed.



## *Chapter 15*

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### **School of Trailer Park Haven**



**T**he great escape from this woman was school—a place of peace for me. I was able to eat breakfast and lunch all by myself without those dogs, I received recognition for all my hard work from my teacher, and nobody at the school was tearing my spirit apart. Yes, I was safe and secure at this place, but my facial expressions must have said something different because my teacher would ask me at times if everything was okay with me. When I would reply that everything was good, she'd get this look of discernment as if she knew that I was lying to her. I did not have any visible show-and-tell signs for her to go any further, because I never gave her any problems. My hair was always combed, I wore nice clothing and shoes, and I maintained excellent grades.

Ms. Johnson really looked out for me at times, like the day my class went on a field trip. Rose made me just a sandwich with apricot preserves and told me to eat that. I left the house, threw that mess in the garbage, and decided I just would not eat lunch that day. Ms. Johnson noticed that I did not have any lunch and asked if I brought a bag lunch for the trip. Filled with shame and trying to keep tears falling from my eyes, I said no. She had that look on her face again and kindly asked the class if they minded sharing their lunches with me. I was so embarrassed, but my classmates shared their food and didn't even tease me for not having any.

I dreaded when school let out and the weekend came because I would have to be at that place with that woman. The craziest part of this whole ordeal was that I would actually see my cousins on my way home from school. I didn't know at first that we were attending the same school. These were my same cousins who used to live next door to my family when we lived in the basement on the West Side. They noticed me first and would stop to talk

with me. I was happy to see them but would hurry to brush them off because Rose did not live far from the school and I had a limited time to get home. Sometimes, knowing my cousins went to the same school that I attended and that my uncle lived not too far from the prison that I was in, left a bitter taste in my mouth. I can imagine them running home and telling their father, my uncle, that they saw me. If he would have just waited for me after school and checked up on his niece, I could have told him everything. I could have told him, but instead, I was left to continue receiving this senseless violence from this person.



## *Chapter 16*

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### **Running Away Back to Prison**



**C**hristmas season came back around, but it was not celebrated in Rose's house. Not because she was a Jehovah's Witness; she was not affiliated with them, but because she was a mean, old, fat, black-assed Grinch. Our Christmas presents came from the community who donated gifts to DCFS. Rose did not buy us a damn thing. Still, Raffael and I were excited to see something we hadn't seen in a while: toys. I was blessed with a doll and a youth cookware set in white that exactly resembled the well-known Conair cookware. The box the dishes came in would become a make-believe stove when you flipped it over on the other side. I would play with my dishes with excitement when I was able to play in my room, until one day Rose told me my cookware set looked real enough for her to really cook with them. She had that evil

look in her eyes that told me to keep a close eye on my gift, because they might just come up missing.

It was about this time when I thought enough was enough and decided I was going to break out from that hellhole. I had my great escape all planned. I was going to be out of that place! I got up one morning, and Chicago, as usual, had another great snowfall. There was no school that day, and I don't even remember what story I gave Rose, but I knew I was leaving. I left the house, but I did not include a destination in my plans. I had no idea where I was going or how to get to my family's house. I just found myself sitting under someone's stairwell thinking about how I could not leave Raffael behind in the care of this woman. After a couple of hours of hanging out in the snow with no place to go, I had no choice but to go back to Rose's house. When I returned to the house, Rose was waiting, but I was caught by surprise when she did not have anything to say to me. I think she suspected what I was going to do and was trying to be cautious about her actions.



## *Chapter 17*

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### **The Fire of No Desire**



**H**er conscience only lasted for a day, and then she was right back at it with her endless rage. Rose was becoming more treacherous and really went off the deep end one day. In her bathroom, Rose had a maroon bathroom rug and dish set. One morning, she comes stomping up the stairs, waking us from our sleep, yelling and asking who had put a crack in the bathroom-drinking cup. I promise you, we never touched anything in that bathroom unless I was cleaning it. We told her we didn't touch that cup, but she kept yelling that we were lying and we were going to learn to keep our hands off her things. Raffael was in tears because he knew what was about to happen to us. She called us downstairs into the kitchen where we got all of our beatings. I noticed there was no cord in Rose's hands and she was standing

by the stove looking like a bat out of hell. She turned on the stove and told us to come over to it.

My heart dropped because I knew that this woman was about to do the unthinkable to us. I was crying and shaking my head from side to side, trying to plead with her, but she demanded I stand in front of that stove, and, without a care in her heart, she grabbed my right hand and placed it over the open flame to burn. I screamed for her to stop and would have done anything she wanted me to do if she would just stop.

I could hear her through the pain asking me, “You gonna keep your hands off my things?” I screamed “Yes” at the top of my lungs.

The torture ended but not for long, because Raffael was next in line. My brother began screaming before she even said his name. I began crying even more because I would have to witness Rose placing my baby brother’s hand over the open flame. In my mind I was crying, “He’s just a baby.” My heart was aching, unable, once again, to protect him from danger.

When it was all over, Raffael and I were lying on the floor trying to comfort each other. Rose just sent us back up to our room as if nothing had happened. She burned us really bad and, to this day, we still have those burn scars to prove it. Both my brother's and my burns developed painful blisters. Raffael had a huge blister on his left thumb that was ready to burst at any minute.

A few days after we were given third-degree burns by the pyromaniac, Rose dropped us off at one of her friend's house while she ran a couple of errands. Her friend's name was Ethel, and her favorite hobby was jigsaw puzzles. Ethel had a wall full of the puzzles that she placed into frames like artwork. I thought it was unique. She seemed nice but, then again, she was friends with Rose. She looked at us with a strange expression when Raffael and I sat on her floor in a corner, but she continued to work on her latest puzzle. She asked us a few questions and then noticed that my brother had a bandage wrapped around his left hand. She curiously asked what happened to his hand as I secretly tried to hide my hand from her. Without a

fear in his heart, he told her that Rose had burned his hand on the stove. Ethel looked troubled by what she heard, and I sat in that corner sweating bullets and ready to faint, because my baby brother just signed us up for our deathbeds.

Rose returned from her errands and was ready to take us back to the plantation when her friend Ethel asked her with the “I know you didn’t” look on her face if she burned my brother’s hand. Rose looked back at Raffael like a dragon ready to burn him up completely and said with a straight face, “No, I didn’t burn that boy.” Ethel replied, “I hope you ain’t burning these kids.” Rose got smart and turned the table on my brother, bullying him into saying he was telling a lie about her. Rose told us to come on, and the trip back to her house was very quiet.

You would think that this woman would consider how she was almost busted and would stop with the beatings. That would be too much like right for Rose. Believe me when I say that this person still beat us when we got home. She beat my brother so bad with the cord that she broke the

blister that had formed on his burned thumb. The next thing I saw was blood gushing from his wound. How long were we going to have to live like this? So many times I wanted to tell the social worker when she came to do the evaluation, but every time I thought I had the courage to tell her, Rose would look at me with a nasty glare. Her white eyes bulged from her dark, black, evil face. She kept me scared, and I never told.



## Chapter 18

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### The Gnashing of the Devil's Teeth



**I**t seems like the physical and emotional abuse became worse by the day. The beatings and lack of nutrition became a way of living for us. One day, Rose was beating me on the kitchen floor with my hands tied behind my back to keep me from grabbing at the cord. While she was beating me, the German shepherd came into the kitchen and started barking and growling at me as if I was doing harm to his master. Then, the dog began biting and tearing at my gown, which eventually ripped. After that, every time Rose beat me, if the dog was around, he would attack me. The white hairy dog never joined in on these vicious attacks, only the German shepherd. I began to think that this dog was going to kill me one day and Rose probably would not have cared if it did.

Eventually, the day came when the German shepherd went for the kill. Rose was once again beating me on the kitchen floor with my hands tied behind my back. Every strike of the cord was so painful that I truly believed my neighbors had to hear my cries for help. Then, I started feeling a pain that was more than the cord. It was unbearable and excruciating, and it was from the sharp fangs of the shepherd's mouth mauling at my leg. I did not know anymore if my cries were from the pain of the cord or from the pain of that damned dog. I remember crying, screaming, and yelling, "Stop it!"

Rose finally stopped, but it was too late because her dog had mauled the middle of my left leg down to the bone. The wound the dog created on my leg was about the size of a golf ball. When Rose realized what he had done, she panicked, but not enough to take me to the hospital. She tried to doctor the wound herself. She placed gauze pads on it, wrapped it up, and told me not to tell anyone what happened. Here I was, a child, with no one to come and rescue me from this mad woman. I did not know at this time anything about the Almighty



God or the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I did not even know how to pray or what a prayer was for that matter, but I knew something had to give.

Two or more days passed until my caseworker, Ms. Irving, came for a visit. She noticed me limping and asked me what was wrong with my leg. I would not say anything, so she checked for herself, noticed the bandage and removed it. She could not believe her eyes as she gasped with disgust. Though I was trembling with fear of Rose, I stood my ground and just told her everything that had happened. Ms. Irving took me and my brother to the emergency room at Wyler Children's Hospital where the doctors and nurses took me into a room where I received multiple needles in my wound. There I was, screaming my life away again. The healthcare workers were saddened by what had happened to my leg. Glory to God that my caseworker's actions saved my brother and me from this horrible creature name Rose, or I would most likely not have my left leg today.

My wound eventually healed over the course of months, but a permanent scar remains. I spent a

few days in the hospital while Raffael was temporarily at the DCFS facility. Although I never saw Rose or her dogs again, our physical and emotional scars were far from healed. We remained with no indication of when our mother was going to get custody of her children again, leaving us to wonder if that meant being placed in another home with another abusive family.

## Chapter 19

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### Round 2: Big Momma's House



**A**t the tender age of seven years old, I had formed my opinion of adults: Do not trust them. I was at the point in my life where I was heartbroken, my mother was locked away like a criminal, and my siblings and I remained separated from each other. My mother had to hear in court about all the horrific trials that Raffael and I had endured while in the custody of Rose. This devastating news set my mother's recovery back, causing her to fall into depression fueled by guilt. The caseworker managed to place my brother and me into another foster home, hoping we would regain a healthy balance of emotional stability.

Our new home was with an older woman who went by the name Big Momma. Big Momma lived in a bluish color one-level house on 58th and LaSalle. You could tell the place was somewhat old, but it

was decent. Our new foster mother was not big in size at all; she was somewhat tall but not big. She had beautiful skin for her age, and beautiful, wavy, long black hair that she always wore in a ponytail. One of her eyelids was lower than the other, which I learned later was left behind by a stroke she had once upon a time. She appeared to be a nice, caring, and thoughtful person. Finally, somebody was happy to see us and welcomed us into their home.

Big Momma's children and grandchildren were also there to greet us. Two of her adult daughters, named Ethel and Esther, lived in the house. Ethel did not have any kids, but Esther had four. Their names were Melanie, Marcus, Sherita, and Pauline. Now, Ethel should have been called Big Momma, because she was fat. Esther was not fat, but if she ate a couple more pork chops, she'd have been well on her way. They gave us a tour of the place, which, I must say, was not something I would declare nice, but it was bearable. I thought it was somewhat strange that Big Momma's bedroom set was in the dining room. Everybody was all smiles, but I had

too many things racing through my mind about this new foster parent, another new school, and something that probably had never crossed my mind: new foster siblings. They all kindly introduced themselves to my brother and me, but deep down inside, I was not buying it.

I already knew in my mind that this living arrangement was about to be very challenging. Melanie was the oldest and seemed a bit strange to me. She did not talk much and was always off to herself. She did not cross my path, and I tried not to cross hers. Marcus was the only boy among the siblings. He was short in height, brown complexioned, and was not cute. Sherita was what you would call a bona fide “tilt drill,” meaning she had a cute shape with a big booty, but an ugly face that only a mother could love. She was a light-skinned eight-year-old girl who looked like she was twelve. Sherita was not just ugly in the face but also in her ways. She was a sneaky, conniving bully. Lastly, the baby girl Pauline was a little bigheaded cutie who was the same age as my baby brother, Raffael.

I shared a room with Melanie and Sherita, and Raffael was in the room with Marcus. Ms. Irving made sure that Big Momma had a clear understanding that the wound on my leg needed daily dressing changes. My new foster mother was on point when it came to taking care of my wound. She did the daily dressing changes as ordered and made sure I kept my doctor's follow-up appointments as scheduled. I hated those dressing changes, because it was still painful to touch, especially when she had to pack the wet gauze into the wound. It took a strong stomach to tolerate the massive hole the dog had left in me, but she did it like a champ. For me, it was too much to handle. There were times when I thought my wound would never heal, but with the help of Big Momma, that once golf-ball-sized hole eventually healed.

## Chapter 20

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### The Foster Seeds of Spawn



**T**hough reluctant to feel comfortable, things seemed to be getting better for my brother and me. I was finishing the second grade at Jesse Sherwood Elementary at 245 West 57th Street, Big Momma was not torturing me, and my mother was allowed more visitation rights. But not everything was what it seemed. After a few months of living in our new foster home, people began to show their true colors. Sherita and Marcus were the troublemakers of the household, and Sherita was the leader. They did bad things then blamed them on Raffael and me, but mostly me. Sherita was a compulsive liar. Everything that came out of her mouth was a lie, and she actually believed she was telling the truth.

The first of her devious acts happened one day when we were all sitting in the living room. It was

Raffeal, Marcus, Pauline, me, and, of course, Sherita. Big Momma or any other adults were not there. Melanie was left in charge, but she was off in her own little world. Sherita and Marcus decided they wanted to play with fire using a lighter they had found around the house. I do not know whose it could have been since nobody in the house was a smoker. They first lit paper and then it was whatever they could set on fire. I can remember this day so well: I was standing in the dining room, which was Big Momma's room too, when they asked Raffeal if they could light the strings hanging from the legs of his cut-off blue jean shorts. I don't think he understood what they were asking him and I couldn't believe they were serious. Before I knew it, they had set fire to one of those strings and in an instant that one thin string combusted into a big flame. My baby brother was screaming and hopping around trying to put the fire out, and they were laughing at him, so I ran over to rescue him. Luckily, he did not suffer any burns.

From that day on I hated every one of them. Sherita made us vow not to say anything about this



day, but she forgot that her four-year-old sister Pauline was present when it happened. A couple weeks later, Sherita, Pauline, and I were sitting in Esther's room. Pauline was chattering like any other four year old and told her mother what happened that day, not knowing she would get her siblings in trouble. When Pauline finished telling the story, Esther got angry, looked at Sherita, and said, "Y'all did what?" Sherita had the nerve to lie with a straight face and said I was the one who did the terrible thing to my own brother. Before I could state my case, Esther had slapped the taste out of my mouth. I could only sit there holding my face in disbelief that this girl had just told a boldfaced lie on me and her mother believed her over me.

Another time, Sherita was again playing with matches. I guess this crazy child just loved playing with fire. She was burning every dead hair she could find in an ashtray. Now if you have ever burned dead hair, you know it leaves behind a strange smell. Again, with no adult supervision in the house, Sherita was having her way like she was

at Burger King. Right after she went on her hair-burning spree, guess who just happened to walk into the house, but the adults. Ethel was the first to come through the door and quickly realized that somebody had burned hair in the house. She asked Sherita and me who burned hair and, again, this ugly girl lied and said I did it. My stupid self just stood there like a stick in the mud and didn't even open my mouth to say anything. Ethel spanked my hand with a hard hairbrush and chastised me about playing with matches while Sherita just stood there smiling because she knew she had just gotten away with her bad deeds.

I know I said Sherita was an ugly girl and that remains true. I am not saying I was all that and a bag of chips, because I was not. I was just a short, thin-framed girl, but I had something that Sherita would never have—long, thick, naturally beautiful, dark brown hair; flawless caramel-brown skin; and a gorgeous smile. Yeah, yeah, she had thighs, legs, and a big butt, but that is all she had going for her, and I believe she already knew that.

Both Sherita's and my birthday came around in April, hers on the 21st and mine on the 24th. She was a year older than I. Esther decided to take me to the doctor to get my ears pierced for my eighth birthday. I was excited that I was going to be able to wear earrings. Big Momma had bought me a cute white dress for me to wear on my special day, but before I could go get my ears pierced and wear my birthday outfit, I had to get my hair washed and pressed. The only thing I did not care for was getting my hair hot combed. Because my hair was long and thick, it seemed to take forever. My hair had to be done this way on a weekly basis because I had "grade N" hair; that is, nappy. After my hair was done and gorgeous, we went to the clinic to get my ears pierced. The nurse put silver studs into both of my ears. You could not tell me anything at this point. After being blessed with my new earrings, Esther took Sherita, Pauline, and me out to dinner and a movie for our birthdays.



## *Chapter 21*

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### **Stranger Danger**



Things were not always bad around the house. But you can bet your last dollar that, if trouble happened, Sherita's name was all over it. One of those bad days came into that house unexpectedly, a day I can never forget and, I know, Sherita cannot either. We were on our way home from school on a warm day, when she and I came across a stranger. Our school was only a block away from the house and there was a vacant lot that many of us would use as a shortcut as we went home. We were walking down the hill of this empty lot, with Sherita ahead of me, when a young man approached Sherita. She stopped, and they began talking to one another. I was looking at this young man, who I definitely knew was not near our age, but something was familiar about him. He started walking, and Sherita began walking behind him as if she was following him. I started speed walking to

catch up with her and asked if she knew him. She said, as clear as day, “Yes, just come on.” I assumed everything was okay.

But everything was far from okay. The next thing I knew, Sherita and I were in a dark garage with this young man. He put a knife up to Sherita’s throat and told me to sit down and cover my eyes. I put my hands over my face, but peeked through my fingers and saw him sexually assault Sherita. He made her take off her pants and underwear and unbutton her blouse, then made her lay on that dirty ground where he raped her. I remember him kissing her and rubbing his hands all over her body. I could see Sherita was scared, because he still had that knife at her throat. Once in a while, he would look over at me to see if my eyes were still covered. I could not believe what was happening and hoped that I was not next to be touched, or worse, be killed. The worst report a neighborhood could hear on the nightly news was that two young girls were sexually assaulted and found dead in a garage directly across the street from their house.

After the stranger finished, he told Sherita to get dressed and for us to wait in the garage for twenty minutes after he left and that we'd better not tell anyone what he had just done. We did as we were told and came out of the garage with both of us looking to make sure he was gone as we ran across the street to the house. Sherita was crying as she told her family the horrible thing that just happened to her on our way home from school. They asked us who it was, where it happened, what happened, and so forth. The police were called to the scene and everybody was still in shock about the news as the police questioned us about the man's description.

I can still recall how he looked as if it was yesterday; he had looked so familiar. He was about 5'7", medium built, light-skinned complexion with red freckles, and a reddish-color Afro. He was just red! I know there are little sayings like all black people look alike or everybody has a twin. Whatever the case may be, he looked just like the uninvited young man who was in our apartment when my family moved into Stateway Gardens. Big Momma's

house was on 58th and LaSalle, and Stateway Gardens was on 39th and State. State is only two streets away from LaSalle. There was the definite possibility that this could have been the same person.

Just when I thought things could not get any worse than they already were, they did. Guess who was in the kitchen being interrogated by the family about what happened to Sherita? Can you believe they were now blaming this rape on me, an eight-year-old? They asked me, “Where were you? Why didn’t you get any help? How did you let this happen?” I was in tears. I could not understand why they were asking me all of this. Hello, I might not have been sexually assaulted but I was a victim too! And it could have been worse—we were both still alive! I could understand their anger and frustration, but blaming it on the foster child was not the answer. What hurt me most was when Sherita told her family that she told me to go and get help. They asked me if what she said was true, and I said the true answer was no, she did not. I kept telling them exactly what happened, but they did not seem to listen to a word I was saying. I looked at them and



wondered why they were not asking Sherita more about this person. What did he tell her that would cause her to follow him in the first place? I mean, he didn't have anything in his hand that was a threat to her, so why? She was the one that was older and should have known better.

Oh, believe me, I was cursing them out real good in my mind. It was not my fault that they had not taught Sherita not to talk to strangers. Ms. Brown taught her baby girl! You can bet that man would not have gotten two words out of me, much less a damn look. But all I could do was sit there crying, wishing all of this would go away.

A couple days later, we went down to the police station to try to identify the young man. They gave Sherita and me some books that were filled with mug shots of different male individuals, but he was not in any of the books.



## Chapter 22

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### Another Move, Another School



Eventually things died down about the situation with Sherita and I. We moved with Big Momma to a courtyard apartment unit on 69th and Cornell. Once again, I had to attend another school for my third grade year. This school was Parkside Elementary at 6938 South East End Avenue. I don't remember the teacher's name or what he or she looked like because I didn't stay long enough to keep memory of it.

After staying on 69th and Cornell for a couple of months, we then moved again to 67th and Blackstone. By this time, my mother and stepfather were allowed to have my brothers and me on the weekends. My oldest brother Pierre was still present at his foster living arrangement. My mother was living back with Clarence at our old house on Troy Street.

I was so excited when I first set my foot back into that house. Everything pretty much looked the same, only it did not feel the same. It seemed like the love, laughter, and peace that once was in that house had disappeared into the stale air. My grandfather, Mr. Lemons, had passed away, the lagoon that had been in Douglas Park was no longer there, and even the neighborhood did not look the same. It seemed like, within the couple of years we were gone from our house, something came through and sucked out every little bit of life that was left until it was dry. The beautiful West Side of Chicago where I was born and where my happiness, my love for music, and my joy began had become just memories that I would try desperately to hold. I hated when DCFS had to take Raffael and I back to our foster home and Pierre returned back to his living arrangements. I could not understand the DCFS concept: if it was okay for our mother to have us for the whole weekend, then it seemed like it should have been okay for her to have full custody of her children. In reality, she could have kidnapped us and taken us to another state. I mean, she was unsupervised while we were in her care.

Anyway, I was a student at Parkside for maybe the first semester of third grade before we moved again like some damn gypsies. Army brats have more stability than this. At least, they got the chance to move from state to state or to another country. Instead, we moved from block to block.



## Chapter 23

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### A Family Reunion



Raffael and I were now living with Big Momma in a two-flat apartment building on 6547 South Ingleside. This one had three bedrooms, one full bath, and an enclosed back porch. Again, everybody and their mommas were living in this apartment. We had nine people living up there: Esther and her four kids, Big Momma, my baby brother, and me. Melanie had a room of her own that was right by the living room, Big Momma's room was in the dining room again, Esther and her daughter Pauline shared the biggest room, Sherita and I shared a room that was in the back by the kitchen, and the boys' room was the enclosed porch. And can you imagine all of us sharing only one bathroom? This was definitely a hot mess. At least the neighborhood was decent and quiet. There were plenty of children that lived

here, and the majority of them were good friends to hang out with.

About this time, great news finally came around: there was a new addition to the family—my big brother, Pierre! Big Momma found it in her heart to allow him to live with her so we could be a family under the same roof. As usual, I was so happy to see Pierre, but also sad to hear that Pierre too had endured emotional and physical abuse from the foster mother he had lived with. Even though I was excited that I could see my big brother again on a daily basis, the fact remained that I no longer wanted to be with this family. I wished that Ms. Irving would burst through those doors and tell my brothers and me that we could live with our mother. Now that would be some true happily ever after right there.

Once again, I was a new student at a different school, this time at Alexander Dumas School located on 6650 South Ellis Avenue. I would be attending this school for the next five years, and I was definitely not excited about school anymore. I could not seem to stay at one long enough to enjoy



it anyway. I was eight years old and, since kindergarten, I had already been to six different schools. When I passed into the fourth grade and was still at the same school, I thought, “What?! Well, I’ll be a biscuit soaked in syrup, this is unbelievable!”

My fourth grade teacher was quite a character. All I can recall is that she was white, short, and stumpy with long blonde hair. She looked as if she was born into a hippie family. I swear, this woman wore the same outfit almost every day, until the day my class went on a field trip and she had on a brand new outfit. She came into the classroom all excited that she had on something new and different, and the next thing I knew my class was up out of our chairs all excited with her, clapping, and giving her praises for her new ensemble.

Other than that, school was just school to me, the same routine every day. In the morning, I got up and went to eat breakfast at school, then the girls would be waiting around in the play areas for someone with a rope to jump Double Dutch while the boys played tag football. The school bell rang

and we lined up outside according to classroom number, recited the Pledge of Allegiance, then began working on the daily class curriculum, waiting impatiently for recess.

When recess time came we went outside on the school playground and did whatever activity we enjoyed. A convenience store was across from the school, and we would sometimes go during recess and lunchtime to buy candy and chips to sneak back into the classroom. When recess was over, it was back to more schoolwork, wishing and hoping that lunchtime would hurry on up. You had a choice to either eat lunch at school or go home to eat lunch. Back during this time there was a school policy called “open campus,” meaning you did not have to stay on the school’s grounds during lunch or recess. If you wanted to leave to go to the neighborhood store, your house, or someone else’s (to do things that you probably shouldn’t be doing), you could as long as you made it back before the bell rang. When lunchtime was over, we definitely could not wait for the 3:15 bell to ring and the time to go home. Some of us would stay around the

school for a little while to chitchat with our classmates and watch a fight or whatever.

The majority of the kids went in different big groups according to the neighborhood where they lived. Dumas was a large elementary school that served many different neighborhoods. Kids came from many different streets such as Maryland, Drexel, Ingleside, Ellis, and University, even as far as Kimbark. But I would just go home and do my homework if I felt like it. It was not as if anybody at the house checked my book bag to see if I had any homework; they just took my word for it. As long as I was passing, that was good enough for me. I am not saying Big Momma was not a good foster parent, I just don't think that homework was her specialty. Now anything that had to do with church was a different story.



## Chapter 24

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### Big Momma: The Church Lady



Big Momma was what you called a spiritual woman. That woman watched church on television or listened to it on the radio all day long. She would have *The 700 Club*, a TV church program, on 24/7. In addition, if we got into trouble, the worst punishment ever was to sit in the room with her and watch that church channel. Living with Big Momma, we had to start going to church on Sundays.

I didn't care for Sundays. The only thing I liked about church was the music and maybe Sunday school class. I did not have any problem taking the opportunity to fall asleep in church. I cannot even remember the name of the church we attended when I was baptized. You see, church was a little too scary for me when I was a little girl. There were people shouting, jumping, speaking this strange

language, and falling out all on the floor. I didn't understand the purpose for going to church. Who were this "God" and this "Jesus" person? And why couldn't we see these people? I didn't know how to read or understand the Bible and really did not want to learn. My mother bought me a copy of *My First Bible* when I was five. The only stories I remembered from that Bible were about Adam and Eve and Noah's ark, because it had colorful pictures and those were easy to remember. I learned about Moses by watching the movie *The Ten Commandments* on TV every year.

As long as the church music was playing or when I was singing in the choir, I was good. But, when the music stopped and the preacher began at the pulpit, it was time for me to go. As if sitting in a hot church was not enough, I had to listen to the pastor with all his whooping and hollering about religious stuff that I could not understand. It was more whooping and hollering than teaching. And it always seemed like the same people would get the Holy Ghost every Sunday. I think the only time that I liked going to church was on Easter because

I got a new Easter outfit and a basket filled with candy and colored eggs. Other than that, church was not my cup of tea.

I am telling you though, Big Momma loved going to church, even during the weekdays. I can never forget when she dragged Sherita and me to a church conference at the Congress Hotel in downtown Chicago. The congregation gathered in a big conference room every night that week, and it seemed like we were there forever—like church would never end. Families had come from all over town to hear this pastor preach the gospel. I met a girl about my age who introduced herself to me and was nice. There was also a boy named Ishmael that many of the young girls were crushing on, including Sherita. Ishmael was light-skinned, well built, and had a nice smile, but he had something that was far more attractive to me—a set of drums that he played for the church band. That was the only reason I liked Ishmael, a good drummer and a little “player” too. He would be flirting and winking his eyes at Sherita, then turn around and do the same thing to the girl who had introduced herself

to me. The other girl was much cuter, and Sherita did not care for that at all.

When the folks finished singing, Sherita, Ishmael, and I would find ways to leave the room so we could run around and play on the elevators and in the hallways of the hotel. Then we would hurry back before anyone missed us. Well, in the middle of the week, Sherita and I were in the kitchen telling the other kids in the house how we didn't like going to the church conference with Big Momma, so we killed the time by playing around doing things like karate up and down the halls until church was over. However, little did we know there was a snitch amongst us in that kitchen and his name was Marcus. His monkey-faced self told his mother, Esther, that we were playing around at the conference. Esther surprised Sherita and me with the butt whooping of our lives, and we were put on punishment. But the great thing was that we did not have to go to the conference anymore. Big Momma was disappointed in us when she found out that we were not fond of going to church with her,



but I definitely didn't care about not going back to the church circus.



## Chapter 25

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### Old School Saturdays



Living in this house was like any other house that had too many kids: nerve wracking. We could never keep the good cereal in the house without Esther's kids eating it all up, using those big country bowls that you would use to mix cornbread. And if you slept in late on a weekend, you were out of luck, because by then, the only cereal left was the generic black and white box of cornflakes and no milk. If you didn't want those nasty dry cornflakes then you ate the next best thing, a grilled cheese sandwich made with the best cheese in the world, the kind that came in a long rectangular cardboard box—government cheese with the government butter. A good old government grilled cheese sandwich with a glass of red Kool-Aid was the best meal in the world.

The one thing everybody in the house had in common was that we loved watching Saturday morning cartoons such as *Fat Albert*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Top Kat*, *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *The Bugs Bunny Show*, *Scooby-Doo*, *The Superheroes*, *Pink Panther*, and many more. Once the cartoons were over, it was time to shake a tail feather and sing our hearts out with our two favorite dance shows, *American Bandstand* and *Soul Train*. With these two shows, there was no need for health clubs—dancing was a workout. Once we finished sweating our hair out from all those funky dance moves and singing as if we were Al Green or Aretha Franklin, we cleaned house. Yes, it was chore time, and they had to be finished before we could go outside. On Sundays, when we didn't have to go to church, it was "samurai karate Sundays," when everybody and their momma thought they were Bruce Lee. All the kids in the neighborhood would be outside trying to do karate moves on each other until somebody used a little too much force; then it went from being Bruce Lee to Bruce Leroy from the hood. Those were my good old days.

At some point, exciting news came: Sherita and her family were moving into their own apartment. The news was as amazing as when Sammy Sosa hit home runs out of the ballpark. But if I knew the darkness that was about to enter the house, I would have begged for them to take me with them.



## *Chapter 26*

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### **The Molester's Mindless Behaviors**



**B**ig Momma became ill, and we were passed down to her other daughter, Ethel, to be the foster mother. Ethel and her husband Larry moved into the house to continue to care for us. I don't know where these two were living in the first place, but I wish they would have stayed there and we had gone into a different foster home. Ethel was never a threat to me; it was the man she was married to that sent chills through my frail body. Ethel and Larry were both overweight and Larry was about 6'1", dark complexioned, and he always stared in a way that made me uncomfortable. His dark, gloomy presence made him seem larger than he already was. As the only girl in the house, I became a target for abuse that was much worse than a child could bear.

Larry and Ethel's bedroom was the room that had been Esther and Pauline's, and I now had Melanie's old room by the living room. One night, I was watching television and fell asleep in my clothes, a blouse and shorts, on the couch in the living room. I don't remember Larry being on the couch with me, but I remember I woke up with him touching me. He actually was rubbing his fingers on my vagina. I was mortified, shocked, and did not understand what he was doing. I tried to sit up but Larry demanded, "Shhh, be quiet." He kept touching me as he masturbated and, afterwards, he said that if I told anyone, I would never get to go back to my mother again. As a nine-year-old, what was I supposed to think? I thought he had enough power to keep me away from my mother. I felt like I was on the worst rollercoaster ride of my life, and I hadn't even been on an actual rollercoaster yet. It seemed like I sat in the wrong seat, riding through all these loops and sharp turns, and when it was finished, I had to watch the other riders get off with excitement and high adrenaline from the rush, while my seat kept going instead. I was left behind to endure this nightmare repeatedly, and there was



nothing exciting about it, no great or awesome story to tell. Instead it was a ride of shame, pain, hurt, and impurity. This man had literally just robbed me of my innocence.

Weeks went by after that horrific nightmare, and I was still confused about why he did that to me. He had a wife, for goodness' sake, who was more than enough for him. I was a little girl and, in my eyes, he was old enough to be my daddy. Another night came when Larry decided he wanted another piece of me. It was on a school night, and I was asleep in my room when I was awakened by him. He told me this would be the last time that he would touch me, but we all know there is never a last time for a pedophile. He told me to take off my underwear, and he climbed on top of me with his huge black body. I was crying and I felt like I could not breathe. He asked me if I liked what he was doing, and I said yes, so he would hurry up and finish. One thing that Larry was smart not to do was to take my virginity. He would get his rocks off my grinding on me. Either way, it was disgusting to the far extreme.

Now, I was stuck in two places that I did not want to be: school and home. How can a child focus on schoolwork when she is trying to figure out how to protect her body from a man this sick? Ethel continued with her day-to-day routines, seeming to have no idea that anything was going on. I was afraid every time Ethel fell asleep. She slept hard and I mean *hard*. There were times when she would use the toilet in the middle of the night and fall asleep on the toilet. If you had to use the toilet you might as well go outside by the tree like a dog or have a bucket ready. But now, I wonder if she fell asleep there because she knew what was going on and escaped to the bathroom to wait for it to be over, or if she was ever asleep at all.

As long as I continued not to say anything to anyone, Larry continued to molest me. I recall a night when I was watching television in the living room. Ethel and my brothers were asleep, and Larry came into the room and watched me as I sat Indian style in my navy blue dress with tights on underneath. I felt him watching me as I kept my eyes glued to the television. He came over to the

couch, sat next to me, and I already knew what he wanted. He told me to open my legs as he lifted the front of my dress, put his hands inside my panties, and fingered me. This time was different though. I do not know why, and I am ashamed to admit it, but this time, it felt good to me. This time, I experienced my first orgasm, and I liked it, but I did not like that I felt good by him. I felt like I was forced to fulfill the duties of a grown woman under Ethel's care. Larry's disgusting mentality enabled his lust for me to heighten, and I was about to become his personal sex slave.

Ethel and Larry used to love going fishing. They would take the family to the lake that was far from the city. They bought us bamboo fishing poles and they had regular ones. This was my brothers' and my first time fishing so it was somewhat fun as long as the fish were biting. It was neat when the white ball from our fishing poles would go into the water to let us know that the fish had taken the bait. Now, putting the bait, like worms and minnow, on the hook was not fun for me at all.

On one of those fishing trips I had a close call. We were on the pier, and I had just put my bait onto the hook. I went to sit down on the pier to begin fishing, but I missed the pier and fell into the lake. I was under the water and couldn't swim at all. While I was under, I felt like I was in a *Friday the 13th* movie and Jason had got me. I felt something grab me and immediately thought it was a shark, and I was about to die. The next thing I knew, I was on the pier coughing up water with everybody standing around me, including bystanders, asking if I was okay. I was happy that I was still alive until I found out who had saved my life. Yes, of all people that were out there, it had to be Larry. I would have rather just drowned than to still be alive around this man. The man, who was already making my life a living hell, was now about to have total control of my life because I would owe him for saving me. I would now become his wife's replacement.

Larry's sexual desires were getting out of hand and, still, I was wondering when all of this sickness was going to end. When would someone catch him

in action? When would I have enough courage to tell my mother what this crazy man was doing to her one and only little girl? It was way out of control by now. One night, I was in the room with Ethel, watching a movie, and Larry was not there. Somehow, I fell asleep in the room and woke up in the bed with both Ethel and Larry. Ethel got up half asleep to go to the bathroom and I heard her start snoring, meaning she fell asleep again on that damn toilet. I knew then what time it was, and I tried to hurry out from that bed and Larry, but it was too late. Larry wanted to touch me again while his wife was just across the hall. He made me take off my pants and underwear and climbed right on top of me to do his thing while the bedroom door was open. I was telling him to stop and saying that his wife is going to catch us. He whispered back in my ears, saying, "No, she won't, because she is in a deep sleep." My brother's room was in the far back on the enclosed porch, but I was hoping that somebody would catch this big ass, black bear that was assaulting me. But no rescue came, and when he was finished, he handed me fifty cents for my trouble and to keep my mouth shut. Another night

he tried to get me to suck his penis. He pushed my head between his legs, but I kept my mouth closed and just kept shaking my head no. I was not going along with that one. Because I was too scared to say anything, the abuse just kept happening.

The more I was sexually abused by Larry, the more controlling he became towards me. I can remember one evening, when Larry's mother called the home and I answered the phone, I spoke with his mother and assumed the call was over so I hung up the receiver. His mother called back and accused me of hanging up the phone on her. That man beat me up down the hallway, screaming at me, "You do not hang up on my mother!" He was very protective of her, I guess, because he was the only child. Maybe, that is the reason he beat me, I told myself. He apologized to me later that night, telling me he was sorry, and he didn't know what had come over him. But we all know what he was apologizing for, right? Yes, this bastard was truly sick in the head. First, you beat the crap out of me as if you are my daddy, but then you come at me as if I am your little woman?

When I was ten years old, my brothers and I were able to get more visitations with our mother. Her medical treatments were helping her get better, and although three years had passed, she maintained a relationship with her children. My mother began to visit frequently on Sundays to take us to church. I still did not care for this church thing, but at least it got me out of that house for some hours away from Larry. Hell, I would have played in mud with the pigs and cleaned horseshit all day on a farm if it would keep me safe from him.

We attended Burnside Community Baptist Church on 91st Place. We would go to Sunday school first and I was still not paying any attention to that class. The church had an awesome choir and band that had everyone up out of their seats, clapping and dancing. They wore these nice baby-blue colored choir robes and had their own rehearsed style when they came marching through the sanctuary to the choir stands to sing their hearts out. The band was amazing too. They would have it cracking in the church, and I would be crunking until the music stopped. Nope, my

feelings about church had not changed yet. I was still playing church; I would sit there and pretend like I knew how to locate the chapters and read the Bible. Then, before you knew it, here came all the whooping and hollering from the pastor, people claiming they caught the Holy Ghost and falling out on the floor. By then I had it fixed in my mind from all my past experiences that all churches were the same: filled with hypocrites.

I can never forget one Easter Sunday, a special day. A couple of weeks prior to Easter Sunday, I had come down with the chicken pox from Raffael after he chased me around the house to give it to me. Everyone else in the house had already had chicken pox and gotten better. Our mother showed up with a big box of clothes for us to wear to church for Easter, but she told me I couldn't go because I was sick. I remember standing in the living room, crying deeply and hurt as I stared into my mother's eyes, telling her that I was okay and the infection was going away. I begged to go to church; I did not want her to leave me alone in the house with Larry.



I looked back and there he was sitting in a recliner, just staring at me. He looked as if he was shitting bricks. I never saw a dark-skinned person turn that pale in my life. He kept staring, worried that I might break down at any moment and tell it all. I felt his fear, but I continued staring into my mother's eyes, crying and holding onto her tight to try to get my message across to her. My brothers were looking at me with strange expressions on their faces too, especially my baby brother Raffael, because if nobody else knew or felt my pain, he did. They couldn't point out what was wrong with me, but I believe they knew something was not right. I had never cried like that before. My mother kept trying to assure me everything was going to be all right and gave me a slice of cake that she baked. She told me she would be back to spend time with me before she went home. My mother and brothers headed out for church, and I remember my mother looking back at me with a concerned look. Still, she left, and I was alone with Larry.

Do you know that this pervert still had the nerve to molest me that day? I just lay there. I

could not even cry anymore, but I was tired of him hurting me. When it was all done he sat back in the Lay-Z-Boy chair, put me on his lap, and gave me my cake.

## *Chapter 27*

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### **Do You Promise To Tell Nothing but the Truth?**



**F**inally, a breaking point came when enough was enough. A couple of weeks after Easter, my mother called Ethel and asked if she could have a mother and daughter day with me since I couldn't go anywhere for Easter. Ethel said it was okay, so my mother came and we caught the bus. We had to change to the #29 State Street bus, and looking out the window, I noticed there were some buildings that were similar to the projects we lived in at Stateway Gardens. My mother pulled on the bus cord to let the driver know we wanted to get off at 53rd and State Street. I noticed there were many of these buildings up and down State Street. Some of the projects were red and some were white. My mother grabbed my hand to walk across the street, and I

stopped to ask her where we were going. In my mind, I was cursing her out, thinking, I know you did not move back into these nasty ass projects! Did you really forget these buildings are the reason why we're in the predicament we are in now? She looked at me and said, "This is where Esther and them live."

Now I was introduced to some different buildings that were well known as the Robert Taylor Projects. Esther lived in the 5320 building on the tenth floor. For some reason, I was not afraid of these projects. Was it because I had suffered so much emotional and physical abuse by then that I became immune to anything that might be harmful or cause danger to me? We got to Esther's apartment, knocked on the door, and Esther opened the door with excitement to see us both. My mother and I walked in, and Sherita and Pauline came out of their rooms. I must admit, I had never been so happy to see them as I was just then. We were hugging each other like long-lost friends.

My mother and Esther sat at the kitchen table, talking, when they called the three of us over to the table. My mother told me to have a seat, and Esther had this look on her face as if something was troubling her. Then, my mother looked at me and told me she was going to need me to tell her and Esther the truth. I was scared and confused because I thought I was in trouble, but didn't know why. Then, she asked me the one question I had been waiting for her to ask: "Has Larry ever touched you in a bad way?" Shamefully, I put my head down thinking about all the threats Larry made if I ever told my mother anything. She and Esther assured me that I was safe with them and nobody would hurt me anymore. I finally told them about everything Larry was doing to me. The most hurtful thing to see was the expression on my mother's face as I explained details of the molestation. I can imagine her wishing she had that gun she used on my daddy. I learned that I was not the only little girl Larry molested. He had also touched Esther's daughters, only once, by feeling their breasts and behinds, but I give them the utmost respect because they had the courage to tell their

mother. If it was not for them, I don't know how long my sexual abuse would have continued.

Esther and my mother called the police and, no, Ethel still did not know what was going on or that her husband was about to be arrested for molestation. Meanwhile, during the investigation, Esther became my legal guardian, and I remained with her. But just when I thought this heavy burden was lifted from me and I would not have to see Larry again, the situation got complicated. Larry pleaded not guilty and told his attorney that everything was a lie. The molestation case would go to trial, and I would have to face this trifling, lying nigga in court. Now, we all had to go downtown to the Daley Center for a pre-trial, so the lawyers who were prosecuting Larry could prepare us with questions and details of this case. I found myself crying every minute, because I had to keep telling and reliving that horrible situation. I don't know why Larry couldn't just tell the truth about the damage he had done. If he was man enough to hurt a child, then he should be man enough to accept his punishment and become somebody's slave bitch in

prison. The prosecutor assured me that Larry was going to prison and all I had to do was to get on the stand and testify about everything he done to me. I was so frightened and terrified that I had to face this man again, but I was also ready to put him away into the hellhole where he belonged.

Unfortunately, there were some things the attorney did not run by me or I missed it completely: there were going to be complete strangers in the courtroom with us. I didn't know there was going to be a jury, people sitting in the courtroom to witness the proceedings, and that the defense attorneys were vicious, and they were going to attack me at every turn to help free Larry. They didn't care that I was a child filled with shame and pain. Those defense attorneys treated me on the stand as if I asked him to have sex with me. That attorney woman literally told me to my face that I agreed to have sex with Larry. I was on the stand crying and telling her no, and she asked me if I had accepted fifty cents in return. I looked over at Larry with disgust because he was trying to make me out to be some kind of hooker. The next thing I knew

my mother ran over to the table where he was sitting and threatened to kill him. She told him his best bet was to stay behind bars because she would kill him if he walked away as a free man. The sheriffs had to escort her out of the courtroom.

Through all my fears and tears, I stood my ground on that stand. After a couple of days of this madness, the jury returned with a verdict of guilty. The judge sentenced Larry to three years in prison, though I wanted him to get life. He might not have committed murder, but he killed, stole, and destroyed my soul just like the devil. I remember Ethel sat me on her lap saying, "That's what he get. He deserves to be in jail for messing with little girls."

I just looked at her and started feeling sad for her, because here she was, a wife who has to watch her husband be sent to prison, not for stealing or selling drugs, but for molesting little girls. It had to be hurtful and embarrassing for her to know that the man she loved was also the man who preferred me over her. The other sad part was that Larry's mother was in the courtroom, but she sat on the other side in a secluded room. She never once



acknowledged me or apologized for what her son did to the three of us. She truly believed that her one and only precious son was telling the truth. She was so wrong, because I was the victim of his hideous lust, and only I can tell my story.



## *Chapter 28*

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### **I Am Still Waiting On My Birthday Gift!**

**A**t age eleven, I had the opportunity to meet my real father, David Gant, along with my half sisters and brothers. It was right after the death of my grandmother. My mother called and told me that she had a surprise for me. Esther had just bought the two-flat building that was directly across the street from the building where Larry molested me and now my brothers and I are under Esther's care because Big Momma became ill again. One day came, there was a knock on the door, and it was my mother. I was always happy to see her. She came in smiling from ear to ear and said to me, "Guess what?"

I asked, "What?"

She said, "I ran into your father."

Now, I am looking at her like what is you talking about? The man who came walking in through the door of the apartment was none other than Mr. David Gant, my father. I must admit, my daddy was one handsome guy. He was about 5'7", slimly built, with a curly Afro, an S-curl. He was nicely dressed with some sharp Stacey Adams shoes. He was driving a dark blue and orange Cougar and he worked at the Steel Mill. For a man who left and never came back, he seemed to be doing well for himself. I wonder if my mother ever asked him where my birthday gift was; still, it was great to see another part of me besides my mother.

My father and I talked for a while and he told me that he would like for me to meet my sisters and brothers. So he came back and picked me up on a Saturday and took me to his home. That day, I met his wife, who was a pretty, light-skinned, petite woman who wore spike heels. Then, he introduced me to my sisters Alisha, Sarina, and Kawana. Alisha, the oldest, spoke to me, but didn't say too much, and of course, she didn't know me. Then came Sarina with these pretty hazel eyes, speaking

with excitement, “Hello, my name is Sarina, and it is nice to meet you!” And guess what? If you meet my sister Sarina today, she is still that excitable! To some people she is loud, but that is how she shows her love for you.

Lastly, my baby sister, Kawana, came walking towards me with those pigeon-toed feet that she was cursed with from my father, saying, “Hey, Sister.” To this day, she still calls me Sister, like from my favorite movie *Sparkle*, and I love it every time she says it. Kawana was the cutest little thing with a head full of curly hair, and being so petite, that little girl has some hips and thighs. She had asthma like me, but hers was a little worse than mine. Sometimes when she talked, you would have thought that she had just finished jogging.

My sisters, Sarina and Kawana, and I clicked well, especially my baby sister and me. We found out that we had the same taste in clothes and that we loved shoes! Then, my father took me to meet my brother David, who is definitely my father’s twin. My daddy couldn’t deny him if he wanted too. I also met my stepbrother Reggie, a child I believe

from another previous marriage. Yep, poppa was a rolling stone; wherever he put his Stacey Adams shoes was his home.

At the end of the day, I was happy that I met my father's side of the family. Everything seemed to be going fine with my father and I, but one day, it just went downhill. I talked to my father on the phone, and he promised me that he was going to come and pick me up for the weekend. I can still remember that day like the back of my hand. I was so excited because for one, I was going to see my sisters, and plus, I was getting away from the foster home. The planned time was to pick me up at 1:00 p.m. I had my outfit picked out: a grey and white striped two-piece skirt outfit that I wore with some white tights, white bobbie socks, and white gym shoes. I was too cute. I remember calling my daddy to see if he was still going to come and pick me up and he said that, yes, he was coming. Well, 1:00 p.m. came around and there was no David. With me being excited and impatient, I called his house again, and I was told he was not there, so I assumed he was on his way. Two o'clock came rolling around

and still no David, but I was determined to sit on the steps of my apartment building so I would be able to see my daddy driving up the street. My friends came to ask if I wanted to play with them and, I said no, because my daddy was coming to get me.

I called numerous times that day and the days after, but he never responded. I even made a collect call to his house when I went to the store, and Sarina answered the phone. The operator asked her if she would accept the collect call and she said, “No! Because her daddy ain’t here!” She hung up the phone, and I didn’t hear from or see my daddy again until I was sixteen years old.

To this day, I am very close to and dearly love my sisters Alisha, Sarina, and Kawana.





## *Chapter 29*

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### **Released from the System, Finally!**



**I**n 1984, DCFS and the family court system finally gave my mother full custody of her children. I was twelve years old by then. We moved into a beautiful white high-rise located on 47th and King Drive. We lived in a two-bedroom apartment located on the 21st floor with the view of Chicago's beautiful skyline, especially at night. This was definitely not the projects. I attended Walter H. Dyett Middle School for my seventh and eighth grade year. I was excited when I heard that I would be going to this school because I previously heard that the school had a swimming pool.

My mother was doing well and taking her medications as prescribed. She attended weekly group counseling for therapy and was working at a newspaper stand for my great-aunt. My brother Pierre was now a senior at Hyde Park High School

and Raffael was in the third grade. I was now a girl with a mouth full of braces, wearing glasses, who was deaf in my right ear due to a tumor that led to an emergency surgery. My family and I did not talk about the challenges we faced in the foster homes. We went on living our lives as if nothing ever happened, and as for me, I was fine with that. Like the saying, "I swept it under the rug," I hoped not to ever talk about it again.

I was happy about how things were going. I was back living with just my family and nobody else's. I was attending a school that I can say that I truly liked and had great memories there. I met new friends and had my first boyfriend, pretty boy Ricky (Ricky was not his real name, but he was pretty though. I had a fight and got my butt whooped by a girl, and there was a time I went swimming with some male classmates, and my swimsuit decided to unravel, leaving my immature chest exposed in a pool full of people, but still, great memories. I was back to getting great grades in school. I graduated from eighth grade with flying colors and I got the chance to wear my

favorite color for both my luncheon and graduation—pink. Hey, I was back to living that Kool-Aid living life.

I went to Martin Luther King for my freshman year. King High School was well known for their National Championship basketball team led by Coach Cox. I joined the school's prep squad and pom-pom team because I loved to have fun and I was a great dancer. I was just your typical teenager who stayed fly and fresh who couldn't wait until the weekend to get my skate on at Screaming Wheels skating rink and my dance on at The Fort on 39th and Drexel. Life went on, and I just reminded myself from time to time that I was a little girl who endured and survived the abuse of evildoers. I just didn't know at the time that it would affect me later on in life.



## Chapter 30

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### Not So Sweet 16



**B**y sixteen, I was sexually active. I gave birth to my first child at seventeen, and when I found out I was pregnant, it was kind of funny. It was in September of 1987, and my mother, who literally would count my maxi pads to make sure I was putting them to use, realized the box was still full after two months. She approached me and asked, “Have you been coming on your menstrual?”

I replied with the first lie: “Yea, I came on, why you ask that?”

My mother said, “Because the box of pads is still full, and I haven’t seen you use them.” Damn, if my heart didn’t just drop all the way down to my big toe.

Then she asked me, “Are you having sex?”

Now, I am sweating like I am sitting in a sauna but trying to keep my cool at the same time.

I replied with the second lie: “No I ain’t having sex!”

By now, my mother has an expression on her face as if she had my life insurance policy in her hands ready to cash it in. She asks, “So you are telling me the truth when you say you ain’t having sex?” Continuing with the lie, “Yes,” but I do think about it. My mother jumps up in my face and says, “I am taking you to the doctor for some birth control pills because ain’t no babies coming in this house!”

Now, I am standing there scared out of my mind thinking about how Ms. Brown is going to kill me when she finds out that I may be pregnant. Well, the day came for me to visit the doctor. The doctor asked my mother, “Why are we here?”

My mother replied, “Birth control pills for my daughter.”

The doctor said, “Okay, well, Ms. Brown, I am going to need for you to sit in the waiting area while I talk to your daughter in private.”

I am sitting on the exam table like, damn, is there about to be two murders in this office, mine and the doctor’s? My mother looked at him and said, “Excuse me, you need to talk to her in private for what? Why I can’t be in the room?”

The doctor was trying to explain to my mother about my rights as a patient. She was not happy, but she eventually took a seat in the waiting area. The doctor asked me similar questions to what my mother asked, but this time I told the truth. When he was done with the questions, he gave me a cup and told me to fill it with urine for a pregnancy test. Well, the moment of truth came—I was pregnant! The doctor asked, “So do you want to tell her or for me to tell her?”

I said, “I ain’t telling her, that woman is crazy!”

He then called the grim reaper in to give her the devastating news. Before the doctor could say

anything, my mother interrupted him by asking, “So what birth control did you put her on?”

He responded, “I did not prescribe her anything but some vitamins.”

My mother said, “Vitamins?” with a confused look on her face.

The doctor said, “Yes, prenatal vitamins. Because your daughter is pregnant, and her expected date is May 21, 1988.

She looked at me with the “how could you?” look. I never saw my mother hurt like that before. From the time we left the office, my mother did not speak or talk to me for three days.



## Chapter 31

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### Teen with Child



**M**y mother broke her silence with me, and the first thing she asked me was, “Who is the father of the baby?” I told her who he was, and she said she wanted to meet him and his mother. I was like, for what? Shoot, I was scared that she might have brought out that gun again. Then she asked, “Where do he stay?”

I replied, “He live in the projects.”

Now, she is looking puzzled because she is trying to figure out how I was hanging out in the projects when I wasn’t supposed to leave the neighborhood. Well, while my mother was working at the job from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, me and my girls would go hang out in the projects on State Street, and I would make it back into my neighborhood before she came home. She

started yelling and asking me, “Did ya’ll have sex in my house?”

I said, “No!”

Then my mother asked, “So where did ya’ll have sex at?”

I replied, “At his house.”

By now, I am having mad attitude and the rolling of the eyes. She began yelling again, talking about how could I do this to her, and I am saying to her, what do you mean? You ain’t the one that is pregnant! The next thing I know, Ms. Brown is in my face, telling me if I keep getting smart at the mouth, she was going to slap the shit out of me! It didn’t take me long to be quiet. We continued to go back and forth until finally my mother came up with the decision for me to keep the baby and that she was going to leave her job to babysit so I could graduate from high school.

School was back in session and I returned to King High School for my sophomore year. I went back to school again as if nothing ever happened

over the summer. Usually when you ask a child what did they did for summer vacation, they will respond with, I went to the beach, I went out of town and stayed with my grandmother for the summer, or I went to summer camp, but no, not me. I got pregnant during the summer break! I was ready to continue being a teenager. I was not having any pregnancy sickness or health issues.

Everything was cool, until that one day in gym class. The physical education teacher had an activity for the class that I clearly could not participate in. I was sitting on the floor by the wall when the teacher asked me why I was not on the gym floor for the activity. I said I wasn't feeling well. She looked at me like, yeah right. She said, "I will talk to you when class is over."

The class bell rang, and the teacher called me over to finish our conversation. She said, "Now, tell me again why you weren't participating in the class activity."

I responded, "I said I wasn't feeling well!"

She said, “Listen here little girl, you can keep that attitude to yourself. Now I am going to ask you one more time, what is really going on with you?”

I finally said, “I am pregnant!”

The teacher rolled her eyes with disgust at what I just told her. She then told me to follow her to the principal’s office. I am yelling whoa, whoa what did I do? Now, I am walking with her to the office feeling confused about the whole situation. I am sitting in the principal’s office, and after listening to her go on about the school’s rules and regulations, I was then told that I could not return back to school without the presence of my mother. Yep, I literally just got suspended from school for being pregnant! The principal told my mother that due to liability, I would need to attend an alternative school for the rest of my sophomore year. No homecoming, no pom-pom, no prep squad, no nothing! I basically got kicked out of high school.

I was transferred to Nikola Tesla, a school for pregnant teens. This was the place where pregnant

teens were sent to continue their education. They even offered what they call “home bound”—another phrase for maternity leave where we were given the opportunity to stay at home for four to six weeks after giving birth. You had to make sure that all of your class assignments were picked up and completed by the due date, with no exceptions.

Because of the timing of my pregnancy, I had to do my entire sophomore year at this school. Some of the girls were able to return to their schools if they had their child before January. In a school with all girls with crazy hormones, there were fights almost every day. Yes, pregnant girls fighting each other. Some of the conversations that I would have with these girls were unbelievable. One time a girl asked me, “So how old is your baby daddy?”

I replied, “He is sixteen. Why?”

She said, “Sixteen? That’s too young for me.”  
(She was also sixteen years old.)

I wanted to respond back by saying, we are in a school full of pregnant teenagers, and some of them

are not even teens yet. We have girls as young as twelve years old who are pregnant; we even have a set of twins in the eighth grade who are about to have babies. This school shouldn't exist, and you are concerned about how old my baby daddy is? Instead, I just looked at her as if she was crazy. I couldn't wait to have my baby and get the hell out of this school!

Well, my anticipated big day came. After being four days overdue and after eight hours of labor and pain, on May 25, 1988, I gave birth to a six-pound-twelve-ounce baby boy that left me sixteen stitches and hemorrhoids. I named him Derrick. He was so handsome with these big beautiful brown eyes that took away the hurt and pain and fear of raising him alone because I was no longer in a relationship with his father. My son's father and his family were in our baby's life, no doubt about that. As long as my child had family that loved him, that's all that mattered.

## Chapter 32

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### Almost Her Last Breath



**A**t age nineteen, I graduated from DuSable High School's Class of 1990. My mother was not able to attend my graduation because of a suicide attempt two days before. If it wasn't for my late great-aunt, who was always there, especially when my mother kept having her setbacks, my mother would have no longer been on this earth; June 13, 1990, would have been the day that the doctors would have pronounced my mother's death, the same day as my baby brother's birthday.

That day, I was downstairs in our townhome, talking to a friend on the phone. I saw my mother come down the stairs and go in the kitchen. With me gossiping on the phone and the TV volume on high, I didn't even know that my mother went back upstairs. My great-aunt called on the other line and

asked for my mother. I yelled out loud for my mother, but I got no answer, so I assumed she went out the back door to go to the store. My great-aunt told me to tell her to call her when she returned. About thirty minutes passed, and I was still on the phone when my great-aunt called again. She asked if my mother was back from the store. Now, with me being a teenager, I got irritated that my conversation kept being interrupted. However, my great-aunt said in a stern voice, "Get up off the phone and go check to see if she is upstairs!"

Rolling my eyes, I hung up the phone with my friend. I went up the stairs and saw my mother in my bed. Why she was sleeping in my bed? She had her own room. I nudged at her shoulder to wake her up, but she didn't respond. I started rocking her a little harder and saying loudly, "Momma, Momma, Auntie on the phone." Still, no answer. I knew something was wrong, and I turned my mother on her back: her eyes were rolling, and the pills that she had swallowed were oozing out of the side of her mouth. I told my aunt on the phone what I had seen, and she told me to call 911.



The ambulance came and transported her to the hospital just in time. The doctor stated that if my aunt wouldn't have called, then by the time I would have gotten off that phone, I would have walked into the death of my mother. While I was relieved, I was also frustrated: I was already a teen mother of a two-year-old son. I was still trying to be a teenager while also being the caretaker for my mother. I felt like I was always left to handle the mess whenever my mother had her breakdowns; meanwhile, I could literally count on my two fingers the people in my family who were there for me.

I went to school the next day because I had finals plus graduation rehearsal. My school gave each graduated student ten tickets to give to our families. I gave the majority to a cousin who was also graduating with me, because what did I need them for? My daddy, Clarence, passed away, my mother was in the hospital, and my baby brother went back to jail on his birthday after spending a year in jail for distribution of drugs charges. He wasn't even out more than a month! The only one left was my older brother Pierre.

I had to have my cousin's family hold my child so I could participate in my own graduation. Hey, I came too far not to graduate now! I had those few hours to be happy, to be filled with joy, and to know I accomplished the one thing that few of my own family didn't think that I would. But when it was all over, it was back to reality. While my other classmates were celebrating, I had to go the hospital to visit my mother; still, it was better than making funeral arrangements.

I did not attend college after graduation; to be honest, I didn't know the importance of going to college. I didn't have anyone to talk to me about school after graduation or even ask me if I applied to any colleges. I mean, my mother did not go to college. She dropped out of high school in her senior year. And no, I did not know anything about taking the ACT or SAT for college. So I didn't get the chance to leave Chicago and experience the good ole college life of college parties, joining a sorority, having a college boyfriend, and getting a degree.

Nope, instead I grew into a woman who was filled with hurt, anger (even towards my own mother), pain, insecurity, and low self-esteem. They say hurt people hurt others, and I am a true believer of this, because I was one of those wounded people whose defense mechanism was to hurt others before they hurt me. I even found myself in relationships with men who I should not have been with in the first place. I wanted to know what this love thing was. I was so emotionally hungry for it that if a young man did a few nice things or said nice words to me, I automatically thought that he was good for me. I did not have anyone in my life to teach me to understand the true meaning of love.



## *Chapter 33*

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### **Becoming a Licensed Nurse**



**B**y the age of twenty-seven, I had given birth to three more kids—Robert, Tracy, and Marcellaus—from different relationships. I was continually allowing myself to be in toxic relationships that were not doing me any good. I became emotionally numb. By this time, I really did not like myself for who I was or how I looked. I needed something to make me feel better and have confidence about myself. So I created an alter ego who was fearless and selfish—a woman who lived life her way and her way only. Someone who took risks and enjoyed life on the edge, and most of all, she was my protector. She was introduced as Ms. Chady (pronounced like Shady) to anyone who may have crossed my path. Believe me when I say, I did some shady things.

Now don't get it twisted. I may have had a lot of chaos and confusion going on in my life, but I was a good mother to my kids, and I had enough sense to get up and obtain a trade to provide for my family. I made sure to love on my kids and provide them with the best. They attended good private schools, were well-mannered and well-behaved, and traveled to places that only a child can dream of. My children also had a nanny to care for them while I did overtime working as a certified nursing assistant for a nursing agency.

After working for five years as a nursing assistant, I decided to go back to school for practical nursing. I always wanted to be a nurse and to help others. I heard that they opened the waiting list for the practical nursing program at William L. Dawson Technical College that was in my neighborhood, so I went and completed an enrollment application. About two months later I received a letter in the mail stating that my application had been accepted and to attend a two-week orientation. I was so excited that I was about

to become a nurse, but that excitement almost went down the drain when I started my orientation.

During this process, the teachers get you prepared for the entrance exam into the program. Now, reading and English were no problem at all for me, but that math, Lord Jesus, take the wheel, because I was terrible in that subject. I took my exam, and the time had come to see if my dream as a nurse would come true. The teacher called each student's name and announced their scores in front of the class. The names he had called so far had been accepted into the program, and they were happy and screaming with joy.

Then my moment came, but he seemed to have a different expression on his face. He proceeded with, Chontate Brown, reading: 12.9 (which was the highest score); math: 7.4. He looked at me with a sad face and said, "I'm sorry." I missed that math by one tenth of a freaking point! One tenth! I needed a 7.5 to pass. I was sitting in the front of the classroom trying not to cry, not just because my dream of getting into the nursing program had been shot down, but because everyone in that class

knew I had just failed. The last thing I wanted to do was fail again. The last time I failed was when I had to repeat the sixth grade, and I promised myself that I would never fail at school again.

The teacher said to me, “I know you are feeling a little down about your score, but please don’t let this stop you from trying again.” He continued on to say that the good part about this situation is since I completed my two-week orientation, I could retake the math test in thirty days and be accepted for the next nursing rotation. He said, “Go home and study and do whatever you need to do to pass the exam.”

Although, I had all of these emotions going on inside of me, I took what he said to heart and began to prepare for my test. I took free tutoring classes at the school, and I studied from the practice guide. Thirty days later, I signed up to retake my math test and my results were . . . 7.9! It may not have been that much of a difference, but I passed, and I became a student in the practical nursing program! I graduated as a practical nurse in July of 1999.



## *Chapter 34*

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### **My First Bible**



It was not until the year 2001, a couple of years after I graduated from William L. Dawson as an LPN, when Ms. Beverly, a supervisor at my first nursing job asked me if I was saved and if Jesus was my Lord and Savior. I said “Yes,” with attitude, because I thought I had been saved when I was baptized at nine years old. She looked at me like I was crazy and asked me if I had a church home. At first I thought this chick was a Jehovah’s Witness because they are bold like that. She began inviting another friend and me to her church, though I only said okay because I felt obligated, and the church was walking distance from my house. Ms. Beverly gave us the address, and I was happy when she walked away.

Sunday came and Sunday went by. Monday, I was back at work, and she asked me, what had

happened, why hadn't I shown up at church? I came up with some lame excuse I cannot even remember, so she invited me again. In the middle of the week, Ms. Beverly walked down the hall and told my friend and me that she had something for us. She handed each of us a box and inside was a King James Version Bible. The Bible was a beautiful purse size in a burgundy red color. It had a flap with a magnetic clasp to open and close it, and at the bottom of the right hand side, our full names were engraved. Then, she told us to open the Bible to read the inspirational message she had written on the front page alongside the date she had given it to us. I'll admit, I was honored because she took the time to be a blessing in my life. I gratefully thanked her for her heartwarming generosity, and in return, attended her church that Sunday.

It was a huge, beautiful church. Ms. Beverly was so excited to see me there, and I was a little excited too. This church was packed, overflowing. The choir was huge too; it had to be more than a hundred members. The choir sang and nobody was falling out or catching the Holy Ghost, so I was

thinking, “So far, so good.” When it was time for the bishop to preach, I was saying to myself, “Let me find out that this man is going to be whooping, hollering, and shouting all over the sanctuary, then I am going to grab my things, get up, and charge out the church doors.” Well, I could not believe it, but finally, here was a pastor who preached from the Bible. I was twenty-eight-years old, sitting in this church with this beautiful book, but I did not know how to read it. The bishop asked the congregation to go to certain books of the Bible. I didn’t understand and had too much pride to ask someone to help me. A voice told me to go to the front of my Bible where there was a table of contents. I found the chosen book and then the pastor said the chapter and verse of the book. I was still a little confused, but again that voice guided me through, and I realized it was not hard at all. That day, I can say I enjoyed church. After a couple more services I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, joined the church, got baptized again, and even began to tithe.

Although I was attending church regularly, I still was not getting clear knowledge and understanding. In addition, I did not remember the bishop telling me the devil was still going to hate and attack my family and me. I continued to face many different circumstances in my life. The streets were trying to take my daughter, the boys in the streets were trying to hurt my son, and I too was involved in the streets. Chicago was becoming a burden to me, and I was ready to leave the state of Illinois. Since 2001 when my best friend and I first visited Atlanta, Georgia, with my older son's class field trip, I always wanted to move to that city. But my mother didn't want to leave Chicago, and I wasn't going to leave her alone.

I began to attend church only off and on, and then, eventually, completely strayed away. By now, I was stressed, growing tired and weary, having to admit my mother into the behavioral health ward from time to time, and trying to keep everything under control on my own. My attitude was bad and all jacked up, and sometimes I just didn't care

about anything in the world. My life needed to change for the better.



## Chapter 35

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### Arrested Development



One Thursday night in September of 2005, I was on my way to work on the West Side, when I was pulled over and put in handcuffs by the police for driving with expired license tags. I had to call my job and let them know that I was not coming to work because I was in jail. The charge nurse asked, “How long is it going to be?”

I was in custody at the Laramie police district, sitting in a room with some arrogant detectives and waiting for them to give me my citations so I could leave and go to work. Yes, I had every intention of getting back in my car with expired tags and all. Then, my attitude went in another direction because I was told that I was going to the Cook County Correctional Jail on 26th and California. By then, I had a mad attitude, and I questioned why

they were holding me hostage. I said, “This ain’t the first time I been to the police station for a traffic violation. Believe me, I’ve been to plenty of them on the South Side.”

The female officer looked in my face and with a smirk said, “Sweetie, we are not sending you to County for a traffic violation. You were driving with a suspended license.”

I thought, “Damn, I messed up now.” I had to give them all my possessions, but right before I was about to give her my Sidekick phone, I asked her if I could make a couple phone calls. I was surprised when she said I could use my phone, so I called a friend who had the extra key to my car and told her to go pick it up, and I also called my mother to let her and the kids know that I was going to jail and I wouldn’t be home until late Friday evening. Then, I had to go sit in a cold holding cell until the county sheriff came to take me to the Cook County jail. It was about four o’clock in the morning when the police paddy wagon came to take me to my destination.



When I got to the county jail, I was placed in another holding cell with about fifteen other females waiting to go through the process of checking into the system. After taking my mug shot, getting fingerprinted, and all that other good stuff, I had to face the judge on a TV monitor. The judge recited my charges and asked me how I pleaded. I said guilty, and she told me my bail was \$2000, of which I would only need to pay \$200. I thought that was nothing; I had that much at home. I was able to call my mother and tell her where to find the money and to call the person who had my car to pick her up so she could pay my bail.

I was all geeked, feeling cocky that I was about to get out of jail. Now, the people who got a bond-to-bail-out went to another holding cell until their name was called. You had until 5:00 p.m. to get bailed out or you were staying the night, so I was sitting and waiting. Still waiting and sitting; I was getting pissed. I called my mother again, and she was still there because she was waiting on the person who had my damn car to pick her up. I'll tell you something: you cannot depend on black folks

for nothing! You have to wait until they come back from the mall, the beauty supply store to buy a hair weave, the nail shop, dropping their momma off at the casino, before they come and get you in your damn car. Now it was 4:00 p.m. and my name had not been called yet, so I was beyond pissed—panicking and about to cry. I called the house again, and my son answered, saying my mother was on her way to bond me out. It was 4:50, and I was still wondering where in the hell they were. Then it was 5:00, and I had missed my deadline.

An inmate said to me, “I thought you were out of here.”

“I thought I was too,” I replied.

Another hour went by and a couple of jail officers came to take the ones like me who did not luck out to the next process to get poked and probed. You had to get your blood drawn, take a urine test, and get a pap smear. I was still sitting there confused, wondering why I was still there. I just could not believe that I was really about to go upstairs to the real deal and I was going to have to

stay the whole weekend. I was then taken to where I was assigned and “fitted” for my lovely blue ensemble. The officers called the females so many at a time to get their clothes, and my group was the last to be called. We had to stand against the wall and wait for our name to be announced. When they called your name, you walked to the middle of the floor where the piles of the jail uniforms were sorted according to size. If you had on a bra that had a wire in it, you had to remove it.

The inmates were getting their uniforms, and when it was my turn, there was only one uniform left: an extra large. I was an extra small! I asked the officer if I could get a smaller size and she told me, “No, it is what it is.” Then, we were ordered to get completely undressed and stand in place. I looked around, wondering who was getting undressed where? After everyone had taken off their clothes, we all had to assume a squatting position to make sure no one was hiding drugs in their vagina or anal cavity. Apparently, I didn’t do it correctly and was told to do it over by myself in front of everyone. I was so angry and embarrassed that

tears started rolling down my face. If that officer could have heard what I was saying in my mind, I would have gone to jail for life without parole. Once everyone in my group was dressed, we were escorted to the pod where we would reside.

As we walked down the hall in a line, they first stopped us at a room where we picked up a stuffed pillowcase. In this pillowcase were one face cloth and towel, one sheet, one blanket, a toothbrush and toothpaste, and the one pillowcase. This was real! The officers told us our cell number and the legendary jail rules, blah, blah, blah. Who cared? I just wanted to get to the damn phone to see why in the hell I was still in this place. We went into the secure unit, and it was nothing that I expected. There was no one screaming “Fresh meat” or saying, “I got that one.” Nope, not at all. The pod I was in only had two levels, and I was on the first level. The cell was a small room with twin bunks, a stainless steel toilet, and a secure door with a small window. When I got to my cell, there were already two inmates in the room. I gave the officer the look of, where I am going to sleep? She knew where my

thoughts were going and told me the jail was overcrowded, so she would find a floor mat and I would have to sleep on the floor. Really, this is how you all do me? First I was not bonded out; second, my jail suit is an extra large; third, my pillowcase did not have a dry towel. And now you are telling me that I have to sleep on the floor?

I stood there feeling like Ricky Ricardo (yep, somebody's got some damn explaining to do!). All I wanted to do was go to sleep and hope this whole thing was just a dream. I slept for only an hour before the officers came yelling out, "Breakfast time!" I asked the inmate in my cell what time it was, and she said it was four in the morning. I asked her if we had to eat breakfast. She said no, so I went right back to sleep. Believe me, I had gone without breakfast for plenty of days, so this one wouldn't affect me at all. I slept for a couple more hours before I had to get up for the day, then went to take a shower. I realized I would need two washcloths, so I walked up to the bulletproof window where the guard was and asked him for another washcloth and also my dry towel. His fat

behind just laughed at me as if something I said was funny. He bluntly told me that I only get one washcloth. Really, you're telling me that I have to use this same one to wash my face, vajayjay, ass, and feet? This was just nasty to the tenth power.

One of the inmates was laughing too, telling me, "Girl, you ain't at home." I looked around the jail, and she was definitely right—I was a long way from home. There were chairs lined up in rows in the middle of the pod for the girls to watch the one and only television. Other females were walking up and down the stairs and around the pod to exercise, probably to keep from going crazy. There were others who were washing their only possessions such as long johns, socks, and that only washcloth and towel, by hand washing and hanging them on the bars to dry. This sight was definitely out of the ordinary.

I just took a deep breath and prepared to take my shower, when I realized something else—I didn't have any soap! I went back to that window again, asking for soap. He gave me a bar of soap that was the size from one of those small motels,

but still no towel. I got in the shower, washed my face with my hands, dried my face with the washcloth, and proceeded to clean my body. I hand washed my underwear, brushed my teeth, and put my uniform back on. Luckily, I had micro braids so I didn't have to worry about my hair.

I finally called my house to talk to my mother about what had happened. She said she came to pay my bond just as I asked, but she was told that I had to wait to see a judge because Kankakee, Illinois, had issued a warrant for my arrest for not showing at a court date for a speeding ticket and no car insurance. My heart sunk. I asked her to let me talk to my kids before I got off the phone, and I told my kids I would be home soon, to listen to their grandmother, and that I was sorry and I loved them very much. I remember sitting in a corner when reality began to set in, and I could not stop crying because I was to blame for all of this. I could try to find reasons to be angry with everybody else, but the truth was, this was all my fault, and I needed to own up to my wrongs. All of this could have been

avoided if I would have just accepted total responsibility for my actions.

I sat there in that place, not knowing when I was going to see a judge or if I was still going to have a job when I got out. Thank God my children were with my mother or it would have been worse. I think I cried for about another hour, not caring who saw me.

After I finished crying me a river, I walked over to the sitting area to watch television. I sat next to a young lady that I became cool with while I was in jail. She asked my name and I told her “Chady.” She said, “Chady?” with a crazy look on her face. I lifted up my sleeve to show her the tattoo on my arm with my nickname. She introduced herself and asked me why I was here at the jail. I told her the reason why I was in there and asked her what was her case, why she was in jail? She stated that her boyfriend is a drug dealer and when the police raided the house that he was selling drugs from, the boyfriend and her got arrested. She took the charges that were against them and told the police that those were her drugs that were found in the



house during the raid so her boyfriend wouldn't go back to prison—he had previous felony charges for an illegal weapon and distribution of drugs already. I just looked at her crazy ass, but I was trying not to judge her.

Now, I never went to jail for a man, but I have done foolish things just to satisfy a man. The young lady proceeded by saying the judge had given her five years, but she would only do two and a half years. Then she smiled and said that her boyfriend was “her Boo.” This crazy girl just blew me away with that one! I truly believe some people are a fool for something or someone, but when you become a goddamn fool, somebody needs to come and smack some sense back into you. I am about to lose my mind after just a day in jail, and she was sentenced for five years, while that Negro boyfriend of hers is walking around singing, “I am free!” All I could say in my mind to that is, “Girl, you are good for that one, because I couldn't do it.” Regardless of her situation, she was good people.

At ten in the morning they started calling lunchtime. Who eats lunch at ten in the morning?

They gave us a brown bag containing two slices of white bread with one thick slice of bologna, no cheese, little packets of mayonnaise and mustard, a tiny juice box, and a snack. The inmates started bargaining for each other's food. One girl came and asked me if I wanted my snack. I told her "Yes," I wanted everything that was in this bag and gave her an "I am hungry right about now" look.

After I finished my brunch, I began to walk around the pod to exercise, wondering how anybody could do this every day, and why in the hell would you come back to jail after being released? Later in the day, we were allowed to go to the recreational hall where the crazy girl and I played some pool. The girl had a great sense of humor and kept me laughing which kept me from going insane.

Sunday and Monday came and left. Then at about three in the morning on Tuesday, the guard came to my cell and told me it was court day for me and to get ready. Yes, I was about to be out of this place. Court was at nine. The guards took me and everyone else who had court that morning to the

courthouse and placed us in a holding room until our cases were called. This was the time when the defendants' lawyers would come in to discuss their case. The courts also provided a free attorney to represent your case if you needed one but couldn't pay.

A white man with white hair came into the room, called my name, and introduced himself as my defense lawyer. I was wondering how much trouble I was really in. He told me the deal the prosecutor had offered was for me to plead guilty and be sentenced to jail for thirty days, which included my time served while awaiting bail. I looked at that man as if he had lost his mind. I straight up told him he needed to go back to the drawing board and come up with something that did not include jail time. I told that fool I had a life with kids waiting at home for me, and I went on telling him that I had a job that I needed to get back to by Wednesday night. Thank God I only worked three twelve-hour nightshifts per week, so after today, my days off were over.

He just stood there looking at me and said that was the best he could do because I had repeated cases in the past of the same offense. My mind was racing and I was getting scared that I would have to spend thirty days in this place. I went back in that holding cell and prayed to God that if He got me out of the mess I had put myself in, I would never be in another court again.

It was my time for my case to be heard. The defense and the prosecutor were going over with the judge the plea deal they both agreed on, and the judge asked me how I pled. I correctly said guilty because I was guilty. The judge asked if I agreed with the plea deal, and I said, "Hell no; I mean, no sir." I repeated the same thing I had told the attorney and the judge set my bail at \$930. He asked if I could pay that, and I said yes. He told me I had three days to pay it or I would have to do the thirty days. He told me he didn't want to see me in his court again, because the next time, I wouldn't be so lucky. I replied, "You won't, sir."

I really had the money, but there was one big problem. The money was in my checking account,

but my check card was with my possessions in lock up, so I had to think quickly. When I walked back into the pod, the crazy girl and the other inmates were smiling and laughing, asking me if I was there to stay with them. By now, I was cool with a lot of them, and they weren't so bad after all. They were just people like me who had made bad decisions and wrong choices in their lives. I looked at them at first with a sad face and then I said, "Psych," while throwing up the peace sign with my fingers and doing the Crip Walk.

I then went over to the corner where another inmate who I also became cool with was sitting. This young woman had given me some tissues that day I was crying my heart out in that corner. She was also the one who introduced me to what is considered the jail's favorite dish, the Ramen noodle salad—noodles mixed with mayonnaise and mustard and eaten with crackers. Inmates used their old peanut butter jars ordered from the commissary and crumbled the noodles into the jar and filled it with hot water to cook the noodles. She had given me some on a cracker to taste, and they

were the best noodles I ever tasted in my life. Either that or I was just super hungry. Anyway, I was grateful she shared her food with me.

When I looked at her, I wondered what she had done because she just looked so young, pretty, and innocent, as if she could have been a preacher's daughter. We began talking and she told me she was in there for check fraud and identity theft. She also was a mother of two kids who were living with her mother. She congratulated me on my freedom from jail and told me how she could not wait until she got out, although she would have a felony on her record. I told her she still had time to get it right and to not let her past choices and decisions keep her from living a great life. If you want to do what is right by you and your kids, just do it. I told her she could go back to school and be whoever she wanted to be, and I knew she could do it and it could be done. She smiled and said she was glad I was giving her something to look forward to.

Then, I realized something: Chontate, you're great when it comes to giving advice. You can motivate people and help them to believe in

themselves, but there is one big problem: you don't practice what you preach when it comes to helping yourself.

I knew right then that I needed to get my act together and do what was right for my family and me. And if that meant I had to travel more than eight hundred miles to do that, then I would. I called my mother to tell her the great news of my release and that I would need to borrow the money until I got out. She told me that she had called my youngest daughter's father, who I thought I was in a relationship with, to let him know I was in jail and needed bail money. But to her surprise, a female answered the phone and was questioning my mother. The girl eventually hung up the phone on her. I was pissed, but I didn't let it get to me. I told her to call two people I knew for sure would have the money— my son's grandmother and a very good friend of mine that I worked with—and asked for them to loan it to me until I got home. They both agreed, and my mother got there Wednesday morning to bail me out.

While I was waiting anxiously on Wednesday morning for my name to be called, the crazy girl came by and said, "I thought you were leaving today." I told her I was, that my mother paid my bail, and I was just waiting to leave. She said, "It takes longer to get out than to get in."

It was about three o'clock when they called my name, and I thought to myself that I would have time to go home and get ready for work. They returned my belongings to me and I was able to change my clothes. I had a pair of jeans and shirt in my purse, because I usually went from my part-time, day-shift job right to my night-shift job that had casual Fridays. It sure came in handy on that Wednesday!

Crazy girl was not lying when she said it takes longer to get out of that joint. I had to leave by going through the same process as when I came in. I had to take another mug shot, get fingerprinted, and sign paper work, but I was glad that I at least did not get poked and probed again. Man, this was unbelievable. After I did all of this, guess where I ended up? Yep, back in the holding cell where I was



when I thought I was being bonded out the first time. I am for real when I tell you that I felt like Sophia from *The Color Purple*. I sat in that jail for hours before they released me. There was a phone in the cell so I called my mother to ask her to call my job, tell them about the situation, and let them know that I wouldn't be there until 11:00 p.m. I continued to sit there until nine o'clock at night.

During the last process, I was again planning in my head, hoping that, if I got out by 10:30 p.m., I could get on the California bus and take it straight to my job that was on 14th and California Street. Well, it looked like my plan was not going to work out as I wanted, because the guard was a complete asshole. He was taking his slow, sweet time, saying ignorant stuff to us. Right before we were to be released, we had to line up in single file, and he told us to hold up this card that had our personal information and the jail I.D. on it in a certain kind of way in our right hand so they could return our other belongings. Now I am truly left handed—I had the card and I.D. in my right hand, but I didn't have them positioned the way he wanted. It was

something so little that he should have overlooked it, but instead he felt the need to come directly in my face and say, “What is wrong with you? Are you stupid? Did you graduate from high school? I see you weren’t the smart one.”

This asshole struck a nerve. The white bastard was not only a short, small-framed, four-eyed, red-haired ass, but he called me stupid! Now his dumb ass had crossed the line! I looked directly into his face and said, “No, I am not stupid.” I was about to go off, but before I could say anything, a woman behind me got close enough for me to hear her say, “Shut your mouth and don’t say another word. He wants you to be rebellious so he can have a reason to keep you here. You are about to be set free any minute now, so just look at that door and ignore him.”

I did as I was told. It was not easy, but I did it. I don’t know how she was able to tell me this without him hearing her, because she could have gotten into trouble. But I realize now that it had to be God talking to me through her to protect me from any weapon that enemy was trying to use against me.

Finally, I made an exit out the door to freedom. When I walked through, the first thing I did was look again at that guard to remember his face, because back then, I was an unforgiving person that held grudges. I got the rest of my things and proceeded to go to work although I was late. I was able to board the last bus to my job. As the bus drove past the correctional center, I promised myself not to see that place again, or any county's jail for that matter.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when I made it to my job, and my coworkers were surprised but happy to see me. I went to my assigned nurses' station and I saw my coworker who we all called Momma Shirley. She was so happy to see me, and I began apologizing for not being at work to help her. She just opened up her arms to hug me, and I went into her arms and started crying. She let me cry on her shoulder as she rubbed my back, telling me everything was going to be all right. After I finished crying, she looked at me and said, "I heard you were in jail and I don't need you to explain to me what happened,

but for whatever reason it was, you'd better get yourself together because you are not getting any younger and you've got kids to take care of."

I didn't get offended by anything she said to me because she was exactly right. She told me to go home to get some rest and had someone give me a ride to the train station. I made it back to home sweet home where my older son and mother were up, waiting for my arrival. They were happy, and I was excited, but tired and ready to go to bed. I called my best friend, Ericka, to let her know that I was out of jail; she was cracking jokes as usual and calling me an official criminal. Even when I'm serious, she always finds a way to make me laugh, but she's also a great listener and never judges me. That is her character, and that is what I love about her.

Before I went to bed, I took a long hot shower with a big bar of good soap. I was in that shower asking myself what had happened to me. This was not me at all. Why was I bringing pain to myself? Was it because pain was all I knew? Was it that I endured more pain than love, resulting in me not

being able to love myself? I also wondered if, when I told someone that I loved them, did I really mean it? Was it from the heart? Or was it because it was what I thought I was supposed to do?

I did not have the answers yet, but I knew I needed to change my ways.



## Chapter 36

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### Time To Make Moves



I got up the morning after I got home from jail and made a phone call to my other friend to bring me my car. I first met with my supervisor and explained what happened, apologized for my actions, and asked if she could find it in her heart to keep me on her staff until the end of December.

She asked, “Why until December?”

I told her with a smile, “I am moving to Atlanta, and I need the money.”

She let me stay aboard, and I was grateful because she could have fired me from my position. I then paid off my loans and straightened out my license and the registration to my car.

When I got home later that evening, I had a meeting with the kids and my mother, and I told

them that they weren't getting anything for Christmas because our new home in Atlanta was going to be their gift. I promised them that I would make it up to them for Christmas the following year. My kids were happy that we were moving away and did not care if they were not getting any gifts. Then, I turned to look at my mother and told her firmly, "I don't know what you going to do, but I am leaving. Either you are coming or you staying, but either way I am out of here." She agreed to move with us.

Every day, I searched the Internet for housing and jobs. I downloaded the application for my Georgia nursing license, completed the form, and mailed it along with the application fee and required documents. Now, I had been traveling to Atlanta every year, but I didn't know one thing about Georgia's counties and not once did I pick up the phone to call my cousins Lynette and Harriet about their whereabouts in Georgia.

I started picking up overtime and my part-time job became a full-time job. I continued to search for four to five bedroom homes and wrote down the



different hospitals and numbers that were located in Atlanta. I finally found a home that was a lease purchase, rent to own, and it was everything I wanted. The lovely home was in Dacula, Georgia, which, at the time, I did not know was nowhere close to Atlanta. I called the man about the home, and he emailed me the application. I planned a date to go and meet him, so we could get the ball rolling. In the meantime, I was hustling and grinding for the money that was needed for this house.

I worked my twelve-hour shift from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., then went to my other job, which was not too far away and worked there from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. When I finished working the day shift, I went home to check on the kids, eat dinner, take a nap, and then it was back in work mode. I am telling you, this was not easy at all, but it had to be done. Between the months of October and December from both jobs, I hustled up \$8,000 to pay for the new home, new furniture, moving truck, deposits on utilities, and whatever else was needed. The agent and I set a date and time to meet and see the home in November. I told my friends

and coworkers that I was leaving Chicago, but I don't think they had taken me seriously. Ericka believed me, but she didn't think it would be so soon.

I took a seven-day vacation from both jobs and headed out on the road to Atlanta. I checked into the Holiday Inn in downtown Atlanta and called my cousin Lynette and homeboy Venny to let them know I was in town. I called the agent to let him know that I was in Georgia and was ready to take care of business and go back home. While I was waiting, I decided to take a tour of Atlanta's downtown. I eventually became pissed and frustrated because the agent was not calling me back, and I felt like these jackasses had bamboozled me. My kids were calling my cell phone to ask about the house, and I didn't have an answer for them. I decided that I was not going back home to Chicago until I found my family a home. Lynette called while I was downtown eating breakfast at the Landmark Café and asked me about the house. I started crying and told her the agents never called me back and how I wasn't leaving without finding a

home. She asked me where the house was located, and I told her it was in Dacula, Georgia.

She asked, “Do you know where Dacula is?”

I said, “I thought it was near you.”

She replied, “Hell no.”

I said, “I didn’t know. I should have thought to ask you in the first place.”

Lynette told me to come to her house in Marietta and she would help me find a home.

Again, we went on the Internet to find a couple of homes in the Marietta area and went from there. We drove around to check out some homes, but my spirit was not feeling them. Although they were nice, they just weren’t for me. We finally came across one that I really fell in love with just from looking at the exterior of the house. There were kids riding their bikes, the sun was shining brightly, and it was just peaceful—something my family and I badly needed. We rang the bell, but no answer. We called the phone number listed in the ad, but got the voicemail, so I left a message saying

I was interested in becoming a tenant in this home. The blinds were wide open so we could see how beautiful the house was. This had to be a good neighborhood if your blinds could be left open for other people to look into your house; not like in Chicago.

We continued to look, but my heart was set on the other house. Later that evening a man returned my call about the house, and I asked to come see it. The owner was a Nigerian man and some of his family were there. He graciously gave me a tour of his gorgeous house, which had four bedrooms, two and a half bathrooms, and a master bedroom suite with two walk-in closets, a Jacuzzi garden tub with a separate shower, and double sinks. In addition, it had a large kitchen with a breakfast bar, a back patio, and hardwood flooring all through the first level. The house was over 2,700 square feet and had everything I needed to start my new life in Marietta, Georgia.

The owner told me that right before I came, he had received two great offers, but when he opened the door and saw me, he said God put it on his

heart and told him to give me this house. He was a Christian man and did what he was told to do for me. This man did not do a credit, reference, or background check on me. I could have been a con artist for all he knew, but he just trusted in the Lord. I completed the application, and he told me to call him before I left to go back home so he could have the lease ready. He said I could pay him the first month's rent and security. I called my cousin, told her that I got the house, and thanked her for helping me in my time of need.

The following morning, the property owner called to tell me the lease was ready and I could come pick it up, along with the keys to my new home. I checked out of my hotel room, met up with him and paid him the first month's rent and security deposit. He asked if I had a job, and I told him that I was looking into a hospital called WellStar Kennestone Hospital. He said that they were always needing nurses. Around the same time, my cousin called and asked if I was on the road yet. I said I was near her house, which was not too far from my new one. She said there was another

WellStar Hospital right up the street and that I should go apply for a position there. I drove over to the hospital and found the human resources office without asking for directions. I went into the office and they had a list of open positions. Bingo: an LPN position for the night shift from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., open and ready! I asked for an application, and the receptionist handed me a three-fold form to fill out. I was already tired and ready to head back to Chicago, so I told her I would come back and complete the form. She looked at me and said, “Girl, go on ahead and fill that out.”

I was trying to find excuses, saying I didn’t have my nursing license, but she told me, “Girl, you don’t need that right now.” I looked at her for a minute then told her I would just come back; I was moving to Marietta in December.

She said, “Okay then and welcome to Georgia.” I thanked her and walked out of the office. I got into my car and was looking at the long application when a voice told me to complete that form right then. I filled out the application in the car and

returned it to the receptionist, who told me with a smile, “I thought you would change your mind.”

I called my family and told them that I was on my way home. I called Ericka to tell her the great news, and she was excited for me. I finally made it home, and the next day my cousin Lynette called to tell me that a recruiter from WellStar was calling her phone, looking for me. I returned the call, introduced myself, and asked how I could help her. She said my application came across her desk for the LPN night shift position and asked if I was still interested in the position. I said I was, but that I wasn’t moving there until the next month, December. She said that that was okay, they would hold the position until I moved and settled in; then she would set up an interview with the manager. I just could not believe what was happening! I called my cousin to tell her what had happened, and we were both blown away.

I went back to my hustle and grind, getting prepared for the big move. Since I was going to be paying \$1,500 a month in rent and found out there was a bus line that could take me to work, I gave

back the black 2005 Pontiac Grand Am for which I was paying \$454 a month on the car note and for \$250 car insurance due to all my past traffic altercations. I did not care at the time about my credit, and it was not going to be the first repossession on my credit report. I turned in my notice to my current housing management and to both of my jobs. Momma Shirley gave me a going away party at a lounge where my friends and family came to dance, eat, drink, and sing karaoke. My friends still could not believe that I was moving to Georgia. There were people who kept asking me with their faces frowned up, “Why are you moving to Atlanta?”

My smart-mouthed self replied, “Because there was no more room in Alaska. If you are not supportive of my decision, please mind your damn business.”

Right before I left, my friends and I were invited to visit a church located at 45th and Princeton. That day, the church was completely filled with members and visitors who had come to listen to this well-known young pastor. When he



began preaching the word, I noticed that I clearly understood what he was teaching. For the first time in my life, I was finally hearing a pastor who had my full attention, and I was eager to hear him preach again. Then, Ericka did the best thing she could ever do in her entire life—she went down to the altar and gave her life over to Christ. I was so happy for her because she also wanted to change her life for the better.



## *Chapter 37*

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### **Georgia Meets the Browns**



**T**he day finally arrived—December 21, 2005—when my family and I left Chicago for good. I remember stopping by Ericka’s job to surprise her and to say good-bye. When I arrived, she was crying. The next thing I knew, I was getting upset and ready to fight somebody because I thought someone was messing with my Ericka. I asked her what was wrong and her coworker told me she was crying because her best friend was leaving her. I looked into my best friend’s face and saw how she was bawling her eyes out. I hugged her and told her to stop crying, because no matter how far away I am, we will always be the best of friends until we die. She said, “I know, but I am going to miss you.”

I told her I would see her the next week when she came down south for New Years and we both

laughed. I love me some Ericka. You see, Ericka and I were the black Thelma and Louise. Shoot, we were Bonnie and Bonnie without Clyde. Ericka is so sweet, funny, always willing to listen, and never judges me; and I did the same in return. We were friends when we both attended DuSable High School, but we became best friends on the night of our prom, and we've been inseparable since then. Yeah, we have some stories we'll both have to take to our grave.

I went to pick up the moving truck and drove it straight to Value City Furniture Store to load bedroom sets and a kitchen table for my family. Then, I went home where my friends and family members helped load the rest of our things onto the truck. My older son Derrick, who was now seventeen, and I drove the truck to Georgia while my mother stayed at the house with the other kids until I came back to get them. It was my first time driving a truck. I prayed in that truck before we took off, asking God to get us there safe and sound, keeping us free from harm, danger, and the police.

We made it to Georgia and it was a warm day. My son and I unloaded the truck ourselves and assembled all the furniture. The moving truck was also our car while we were in Georgia, so I drove to Wal-Mart and spent about \$700 getting household necessities; then, I had the utilities transferred into my name and went to the Aldi store to get food. I set up the Christmas tree in my den and assembled the light reindeer out in the front yard. I still could not believe this was happening! My son loved the house and the neighborhood; he knew that there would be peace here in Georgia.

We celebrated Christmas with Lynette and her family and, though I wished all my family were with us, I couldn't bring them all at once. After I settled into the house, I called the recruiter about the nursing position, told her that I was in town, and asked if the position was still open. She said it was and arranged my interview with the floor manager. I went to my interview and the manager, Chandra, was the coolest, most down-to-earth manager I ever met. She gave me the position, and while I was on my interview, my son, Derrick, applied for a

position at Six Flags and received an appointment date for an interview. By this time, Ericka came to bring in the New Year with me in my new hometown. She was amazed at the new house. We went out with a couple of friends we knew for New Year's Eve and had a ball. When it was time for her to go home, I told her that I would see her when I came to get my family.

A couple days after Ericka left, my son and I took the long, dreadful ride on the Greyhound back to Chicago. We made it back to the family who was waiting for us to give them all the details about the house, so I showed them the pictures that I had taken. I went to another going-away party that my friends had prepared, and they all gave me the best gift that anyone could ask for: gift cards.

The night we left for Georgia was a Sunday, and I decided to attend night service at church with my friends because I wanted to hear the word before I hit the road again. We were at the same church where Ericka was saved and it was, again, filled to the max, so we were in the balcony. The young pastor began to preach as if the word he was

teaching was just for me to hear. I couldn't stop smiling and said to myself, "This pastor is dynamic." I wondered why God finally brought me in contact with a pastor whose teachings I could understand, just when I was moving to a different state. I did not know at the time that God would not have guided me to Georgia, blessed me with a house and a job, and not have in store for me a church home with an awesome teaching pastor. One thing about God: when He said that He will never leave nor forsake you, He meant it. And when He starts something great in your life, He will give you an expected end.

I gave my hugs and goodbyes and headed back to Georgia. I was able to register my kids for school on time and the orientation for my job did not start for another thirty days, so that gave me the chance to spend quality time with my family and to enjoy my new home. I made a few great friends during my first year in Georgia. These great women—Brittany, Chasity, LaKeisha, and Maureen—were my coworkers on the unit. Brittany and LaKeisha were born and raised in Atlanta; Chasity was from

Indiana and Maureen from New York. Chasity and LaKeisha are my best friends, and when I say these two always have my back to the fullest, it is the truth. God knew what He was doing when he brought these two into my life. I love that Chasity is sweet, kind, compassionate, and always sees the good in everybody. I needed that when I was not trying to see the good in anybody. LaKeisha is my headstrong sister: kind, compassionate, and always willing to speak her mind and tell you about yourself in a hot second, but she always means well.

God keeps blessing me even when I'm not paying attention. In 2007, God blessed me with \$10,000 I won from an Atlanta radio station and that money came right on time. In 2009, I wanted to learn to know God. Although I was living in a great home, working at a good job, had grateful kids, and a great mother, I continued to have something I brought with me from Chicago: an unforgiving heart. The hurt, the pain, and the mistrust were burdens to me that I was trying to keep under my control.



## Chapter 38

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### Giving This Church Thing Another Try



**M**y cousin Lynette invited to me her church home in December of 2008. I was reluctant about this one because she had invited me to her former church, and I had left unhappy. Let me sum it up in two words: whooping and hollering! Enough said!

But Lynette kept going on and on about how the pastor at the new church taught the word with clear understanding. I thought to myself, “Yeah, that’s what you said about that last one!” So, I told her I would try this church and see this pastor for myself. Lynette came and picked me up one Sunday morning and drove into the parking lot of an office building. I looked around and asked her where we were. She said, “At church.”

Strike one. Now, you have to understand that, where I came from, a church looked like a church, so this was different for me. When we got to the door, the greeters were all nice and touchy-feely, saying, “Welcome to our church.” I think that, before I made it to the sanctuary, I was hugged about ten times. Soon, I was asking myself what religion my cousin said the church was. Strike two.

I already had it in my mind that I wasn’t going to like the pastor either. The coordinators guided us to our seats, and I noticed something at the pulpit that was different from my experience: there were only six people singing the hymns, though they were admittedly bringing down the house. Where was their choir and musicians? After the praise team sang their songs, the announcements for the church were made. The next thing I know, the praise team leader said, “Now put a smile on your faces and give your neighbors a hug.” For the love of God, I have to hug you all again? Let’s say some of my neighbors were short on hugs, because I wasn’t hugging no more!

Then, the pastor came out. He was this tall, slim, light-skinned man and with him was his beautiful wife. He began teaching and, in my eyes, he felt a little rough around the edges. I was definitely glad he didn't do any whooping and hollering, and the people of the congregation weren't praise dancing and falling out all over the place. I was thankful for that! But, I was still trying to find reasons not to like this church and this pastor.

I was glad when church was over. When I got in the car with my cousin, she asked me the big question: how did you like the service? My response was that it was "okay," and I knew she was not happy with my answer. She dropped me off at home and that was that. Although I did not care for the church service that past Sunday, something kept telling me to give it another chance and to come back for another visit. I remember calling my cousin to ask if she was going to the New Year's Eve service at her church and telling her I wanted to go to church. I could tell she was a little shocked, especially after my reaction to the Sunday service.

Still, she came and picked me up, we drove to church, and this time, it was a different night for me.

I didn't care about where the church was located, why the congregation was so nice, or why they didn't have a choir. All I wanted was the word that I needed to change my ways. The pastor began to teach; this time, I listened without any distractions and his teaching of the word finally became clear to me. That night, I was not willing to walk out that church. I finally found a pastor in my new town that taught the word with clear understanding and revelation knowledge. After three Sunday services, I was reborn again and joined the church, but this time I did not stop or stray away.

My family and I are faithful churchgoers to this day. I know many people who say they grew up in a church all their life, but I did not grow up until I moved to Georgia. This is the place where I became strong, faced my fears, and learned to walk in my power of authority. I am a woman who did not learn the Lord's prayer until I was thirty nine years old.

It was this great pastor of my great church who taught me faith confessions, how to pray effectively, how to apply the word in my life, and the importance of tithing and sowing seeds, but most importantly, he helped me to forgive myself and to forgive those who brought harm and pain into my life. He and his wife showed me my worth and taught me that I am beautiful, fearfully, and wonderfully made. I am created in God's image and am perfect in every way possible, because I am who I am by the grace of God.

Do I still face trials and tribulations? Yes, but I learned to walk through my circumstances by the strength of God with no fear, worries, hurt, pain, or depression. No matter what I have been through in life, I don't regret it, and I would not change it for anything, because the very thing the enemy did, God came in to use it for my good, to fulfill my life purposes. The fact remains that I always had a loving heart and always will, and nothing will ever change that.

You want to hear something funny? Remembered how I didn't too much care for all the hugs? Well,

guess who is now a church greeter on the First Impression Team? Yes, that would be me, waiting at the door to give you a friendly smile and a warm hug.

# *Conclusion*

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## **Reborn, Restored, and Redefined**



**S**ince I moved to Georgia, I have not had to admit my mother into a hospital for psychiatric help—not once. She takes her medications faithfully and attends her doctor’s appointments as scheduled. I have not been arrested by the police or sentenced to jail. I remain as a Licensed Practical Nurse but I am now employed at Piedmont Hospital of Atlanta in the department of Hepatobiliary and Oncology services. I obtained my certification from The Coach Training Academy as a Life Coach in April of 2015. No, I am not married yet, but I am very blessed to say that I have been celibate for almost five years because I am saving myself for my husband.

Both my younger boys attend public schools: Marcellaus is a senior in high school and will be graduating in May of 2016, and Tyler is in the first

grade of the gifted program. My daughter Darrielle is now in the eighth grade. All of them are doing great in school. My family and I attend weekly family counseling to help strengthen our communication with one another and for peace and healing. Prior to counseling, I didn't communicate with my children effectively. I knew how to delegate, train, and command them to do what I said and how I wanted it, but sitting down with my kids to talk and listen without yelling was an area I seriously lacked in. I did not want to continue with this learned behavior. My mother was a great loving mother but lacked in communication skills with her kids. Counseling was the best decision that I ever made in order to improve my family. I am also a Glam-Ma of three beautiful little girls named Autum, Makayla, and Aria. They are the apples of my eye. My oldest son, Derrick (28), works for Xfinity now as a cable installer. My second son, Robert (25), recently graduated from Chicago's Columbia College in May 2014 with a BA in creative writing. My daughter Tracy (23) had some struggles of her own, but with much prayer and



support, she overcame them and is now engaged to a good young man.

I am now a Certified Life Coach that specializes in helping women and teen girls to experience self-love, self-value, and self-worth, and to overcome life's challenges through empowerment, inspiration, and healing. I am known to the social media world as Chontate B Inspires. My goal is to become an International Inspirational Speaker who has a tremendous impact on other women, teen girls, and society, because I myself have a story of trials and tribulations that would inspire others of all ages. There are those who have yet to be delivered, who have yet to have peace, who have yet to be loved, who have yet to forgive and be forgiven, and who have yet to tell their own untold story.

Will this be the last time you hear about Chontate Brown? The answer is no because I will be coming to a stage near you. Just be ready to receive me when I do!

## *About the Author*

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**Chontate Brown** is an Inspirational Speaker, Life Coach, Licensed Practical Nurse, mother of six, a grandmother of three, and woman of faith. Once a Chicago native, she earned her



license in practical nursing at William L. Dawson College.

As a life coach certified by the International Coach Federation, her specialties are in helping women and teen girls to experience self-love, self-value, and self-worth. In addition, she is a member of the International Toastmasters, through which she has received numerous awards in public speaking.

Brown and her family currently reside in Marietta, Georgia, where she is a faithful and active

*Passed Around By Man, But Not Passed Over By God*

member of her church. She now dedicates her life to helping and inspiring others through her work as a nurse, as well as by communicating the Great Gospel through both her actions and her words.

To learn more, visit [www.ChontateBrown.com](http://www.ChontateBrown.com)



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