

# **INTO LIVES**

Passages of thought...

Man....where do I begin? So many thoughts are rushing into my head- into my mind- as I sit here- so many things that I want and need to say. First and foremost- if you're reading this page, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to buy my book if you bought one or thank you for taking your valuable time to read my book- if you just got it from someone you know. It was a trial you know...my completing this project to my standards. I offer an unedited, ungraded expression- it comes from my head and goes straight to the page. Since I can remember, painting my face with words has always brought me joy. Poems were my delight. I relish the fact that one can express so much with so little. The written word speaks more than the mouth can utter. Do you hear me?

The soothing sounds of Mary J. encourage my fingers to continue to move and talk to you. My eyes want to shut so badly...I'm so tired. Yet I have so much that I want to say. I'd like to express to all to those who doubted me- Yes- I CAN focus on something long enough to complete it. I'll admit that I am a person who has said a lot and started a lot of things, half completing them. I've said one thing and done another. Inconsistency and uncertainty haunt me everyday. I vowed that I wanted to complete this project- that I wanted to get my words out there- let the world hear me. That is what I'm doing.

What is the definition of success? I could easily look in the Webster's sitting on my bookshelf but I think I'll take a shot at this one myself. Success, to me, is doing what it takes to accomplish your dreams and aspiration. Success is stopping at nothing and not settling for just anything to do whatever it is that YOU want to do- NOT what others want for you to do. Success, for me, is being able to support my family, live comfortably, be able to pay my bills- man...these bills are killing me. S- staying on top your game, U- utilizing what little you have to get what you want, C- calling on God for strength to get there, C- calling on your family and friends for support, E- expecting the best and not the worst, S- sharing your blessings with the ones you love, S- smiling everyday even when you're sad.

I owe all of my success and achievements to many: To God for giving me this gift and many, many other blessings; to my loving mother who has had to be my mother and father for many years- she is my light and still makes sure that her son is alright; to my brothers, Willis and Bryan- they are the reason I strive to achieve my goals- I want them to follow their dreams and dream BIG; to my sister Britney- she's full of hope and love; to my Granny and Bigmama- they both have helped raise me and taught me the value of wisdom; to my loving nephews and niece- our new generations that I must help bring up; to my many other family members and friends- you know who

you are- you have definitely impacted my life in a way that I can't describe;  
and lastly to my father- dad...although you have not been here for most of my  
life you have given me so much hope, so much faith, encouragement, and so  
much love- you have truly expressed your regrets and pains for not being  
here- it's okay...momma did good....- I love you all. Thank you.

## CHAPTER I:

Susie was the last one standing at her father's casket. She just needed more time, time to allow the reality of her father's death to really set in. She looked in his face, wrinkled and lifeless. She wanted to kiss him but the thought of her lips against his dead, hard skin was unbearable. She admired the decision to put him on his favorite pair of overalls, although it wasn't her own. She grabbed his hand rubbing it gently. A tear began to trickle down the side of her face. She already missed him dearly. "I'll miss you daddy," she managed to whisper.

As she returned to her seat, beside her weeping mother, Ann, and sister, Rose, she could hear the many, many others mourning. The room was stuffed. Hundreds had come out to wish her father goodbye; many family, friends, associates, and such. The funeral was short and to the point; no comments or remarks made by anyone. And especially not the always popular sad song, "amazing grace, how sweet the sound," that would be sang by his granddaughter, Eve - you know the one song that makes everyone break down into death defining sobs and cries. No, Ann was not having that, all that ruckus at her husband's funeral. Her religion wouldn't allow it.

The drive to the burial site seemed to take forever to Susie. She was practically crammed into the family car with six other big-boned, wide-hipped individuals. Her mother, Ann, sat in the middle with a blank stare on her face, shaking her head still in awe. "Oh Ed," she yelled out. The sudden burst startled everyone in the car. Her sister-in-law, Claire, sat next to Ann, clutching her purse as she always did. Her mind drifted back twenty years ago when she thought she had something with Ed, when he made that move on her.

She remembered it so vividly, so crisp and ripe. She was at the far end to the cotton field they were picking that day. Ed had managed to make his way down to her end like he always seemed to do everyday.

"Girl you sho' movin' it down there," he yelled out. "Can't nobody catch up with you." "I'm movin' just as fast as everybody else is ain't I," she replied trying to blow him off. She knew how Ed was, always trying to court somebody. She also knew that Ed was with Ann, for many years now.

"Naw girl. You pushin' it," he said smiling, teeth showing. "Come here. Come on over here."

"What it is fool? You always botherin' somebody."

"You sho' lookin' good today."

"I look the same everyday Ed. You know that."

"Naw, naw. It's somethin' different today," he said easing beside her. He grazed her hand as he reached for a piece of cotton right next to her- as if the one cotton stalk that she happened to be picking was the only stalk standing in the field. They looked into each other's eyes- saw something- at least that's what Clair thought.

Clair's daze was so deep that it caused her eyes to cross. "You alright?" her husband, John, asked, sitting directly across from her. John was one of Ann's many sons. He had taken a liking to Clair the very day his dad touched her hand in the cotton field. He'd noticed his pa courting Clair and decided to intervene. *I don't know why pa always courtin' somebody else on top a ma*, he thought. John was a vibrant young man. Always steadfast and hard-working, eager to please his ma and pa. Later that evening he'd asked Clair to accompany him to Faye's Juke Joint, a local hot spot, and from then on they would never be apart. Clair would give birth to three children for her loving husband and they would live comfortably-ever-after.

Marie could not shake the sorrow that had enveloped her this day. She glared out the window, past John, into the serenity of the ocean-blue sky. Marie was Ann's 13<sup>th</sup> child- just two years older than Susie. Her mind drifted from past to present and vice versa as the memories of her beloved father flooded in. She remembered how she had just started to visit more often, going home to prepare breakfast and lunch for her mama and daddy. She'd walk in, seeing her mama first in the living room reading scriptures from "The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived," her bible.

"How you doin' mama?" she'd ask.

"Alright Marie. How you?" Ann would reply.

"Alright," she'd reply. "Hey daddy, how you doin' this mornin'?" she'd say, stopping and greeting her dad on her way to the kitchen.

"Oh, hey Marie. How you?" he'd reply, seemingly surprised and startled. His voice had become raspy and dry as he aged and became more acquainted with death.

"Oh, I'm fine daddy. Jes fine," Marie would reply. As she made her way to the kitchen she'd yell out to Susie, who would still be asleep, "Don't you s'pose to be up?" she'd ask. And in that just-woke-up voice Susie would reply, "Oh, I'm up. I'm jes still laying here."

She remembered how her mama would routinely come into the kitchen to coach her on the breakfast menu. And how she'd murmur the exact same words that her mama would tell. "Marie, I guess you can make him two scrambled eggs- you know- leave em' a lil runny- wit a piece of toast and some grits," Ann would say. "Dat dun man so picky."

"Yes sum," Marie would reply.

Marie placed the tissue just below her right eye before the tear trickled down. Her flow of delightful memories was interrupted by the awful panting sounds coming from her older sister Myrtle.

The stresses of disruptive past marriages and the wrenches of alcoholism revealed themselves in the creases of Myrtle's rigid skin. Myrtle was the first born to endure the vast hardships of human life outside the womb. She lie slumped over on the hearse door drenched and drained moaning, "My daddy dead ya'll, my daddy is dead." She had already drunk a bottle of E & J Brandy with Coke and 8 Budweisers and was demanding a beer. "I need a beer. My daddy dead ya'll. You hear me. My daddy dead I say!"

"Gul, we know your daddy is dead," Ann replied. Myrtle had already reiterated this fact to the funeral home director, a store clerk, and the hearse driver.

"My daddy is dead mama. Marie, my daddy is dead," she said facing Marie. Marie shook her head in agreement with Myrtle not giving her eye contact. Myrtle slumped back over to the door and began to sob. She couldn't help but remember when her pa saved her from that raging wild hog when she was six. She'd fallen and hurt her leg running from the boar and screamed for help. Her pa had heard her wailing and took on a serious battle with the boar coming out victorious. Ed had a mean shot with his rifle. "You alright baby," he'd said picking his daughter up into his arms. He carried her back home where he and Ann made her well.

The water from developing tears had settled in the lashes of Susie's closed eyes. She opened her eyes and looked into the once clear, blue sky to find a familiar image in the clouds. It was the beautiful, gold castle she had built, just for her, when she wanted to escape from any bad experiences in her life. She couldn't help but remember when and why she first built the castle.

"Susie baby. Come here," Ed called. Susie was frightened by his tone. She was familiar with it. "Susie baby. Come here. Don't you hear me calling you?"

"Yessa papa. I'm coming," she yelled from the back porch. She had just finished putting the windows and doors on her beautiful castle. She had a feeling that she would have to escape there soon. Susie was a darling little girl. She carried her one-eyed black doll every where she went. She'd combed the hair in an eccentric and ethnic style that matched her own.

"Yes papa," she said walking into her father's room. She noticed the empty bottle of Brandy on the nightstand.

"Look what papa has for you," he said holding up her Betty doll that she'd lost months ago.

"Oh papa, my Betty doll," she said with glee. Ed tapped on his thigh signaling for her to sit on his lap. Susie obeyed without hesitation. She'd sat on her father's lap many times before which is why she became sick at the stomach (rampant butterflies tore at its walls).

"You know daddy love you, don't you?" he said while he rubbed his rigid and aged hand up her small thigh.

"Yessa," she replied holding her head low. Susie had gotten used to her father's touching.

She didn't understand the kind of love that he referred to when he said "you know daddy loves you"- the love that would allow a father to violate his daughter; his little princess he'd say. He'd taint her insides for hours, sometimes even passing out from over-intoxication. Ann would always seem to be absent; in presence and in mind.

Looking out the window, Susie noticed the door to her golden palace opening, inviting her to go inside. She escaped, floating in serenity- away from her world and away from her life.

## CHAPTER TWO:

Rob anxiously looked out the window to make sure that Ed and Ann had driven off. They had left him in charge of seeing after his brother, Reginald, sisters- Susie and Marie, and nephew and nieces- Ray, Charlene, and Donna, while they went to town. All the children were very close in age with Rob being the eldest at ten years old. He had always enjoyed the position of superiority bestowed upon him by his ma and pa. His counterparts, on the other hand, did not. They felt that Rob often took his role as "the Boss" or "head pa" too far.

"They gone now. Ya'll bet not move or say nothin'," he demanded looking each of them in the eyes. "I'm the boss now. I'm the boss."

"No you aint," Reginald disagreed. "Momma just said for you to watch us. You aint the boss." Reginald was never afraid to stand up to Rob. He began to think about the last fist fight he and Rob experienced in the backyard. He'd beaten Rob fair and square in a bare foot race (it couldn't have been more than five yards). As Reginald jumped and cheered in his conquest, Rob had managed to pick up a rock and launch it at him- hitting him in the head, breaking skin. Reginald instinctively engaged Rob defending himself. The boys had to be broken up by their father. Reginald feared the worst today.

Rob did not respond to Reginald's outburst. He shot a blazing glance at him that said more than words. Suddenly, an evil grin fell upon his face.

"Come on ya'll. We gone play a game," he said smiling.

"What kind a game?" Reginald asked. He didn't trust his brother. Reginald and Rob were like Cain and Abel.

"You gone see," he said leaving the room.

As Rob walked out Reginald whispered to the others reassuring them that he'd tell ma and pa about the way Rob was acting. It was the only sign of hope he could muster. All the children were genuinely afraid of Rob.

Rob returned, still smiling, holding his pa's double-barreled shotgun in one hand and an empty beer bottle in the other. The children became extremely frightened- there eyes widened and mouths dropped.

"Oooh Rob! Where you get pa gun from? Why you got pa gun?" Reginald quizzed.

"Ya'll get in a circle," Rob said. "We gone play spin-the-bottle." The children were too terrified to refuse his demands. They did as they were told.

"Rob, I'ma tell m..." Reginald began to say before Rob raged out at him.

"Shut up!" he said. "You always tellin'! You make me sick!" Rob yelled pointing the shotgun into Reginald's face.

Rob opened his eyes- beads of sweat dribbled down his forehead. The death of his pa had opened the tomb of his dreadful past. Horrid memories of things that he'd done flooded his mind. Rob eased his way out of bed to go wash his face. For the past few nights sleep didn't come easy to him. He let the water run in the basin until it was scorching hot. A gust of the raging wind and rain collided against the bathroom window startling him. He looked out the window and saw one of his past horrors.

"Hey Rob. Man. I thought I was going to have that ten dollars for you today but I just ain't got it," Quinton said looking into the back seat of the car where Rob sat. Quinton was a distant relative. He'd borrowed the money from Rob the previous week. Child support had eaten him alive this week.

"It wasn't no problem when I gave it to you," Rob replied. "Now when I come to get it. You ain't got it." Rob looked at him fiercely. He held a Bud Light in his left hand and his right hand lay in his lap.

"Man, you know I'm gone give you yo money," he said. "It ain't nothin' but ten dollars."

"I don't care how much it is," Rob said. "I want my money." Rob had now pulled the gun he had in his pants out onto his lap- making it visible to Quinton.

"Rob, man, I'm gone get you your money," Quinton said noticing the gun. His voice began to tremble. He slowly backed away from the car. Rob pointed the gun and shot Quinton two times in the stomach. "I wanted it today," he said. Quinton fell to ground on his back. He could hear the faint screams and the clouded sights of people over him.

"Rob...Rob. I'm getting cold Rob," he said. "I'm getting cold." Quinton died before he could be taken to the nearby hospital.

Rob slumped to the floor- the hot water still running in the basin. He could not shake this spell.



### CHAPTER III

Jobe peaked out of there bedroom door to make sure that everyone else in the house was sound asleep or at least getting there. He tiptoed to his aunt's room door- placed his left ear on it- he could hear her coughing and the soft roar of the box fan she kept near her bed. He followed the same procedures at his mother's door- it was silent. He tiptoed back to his room and eased the door closed hoping not to create any squeaking sounds that it sometimes made. He pulled off his shorts and underwear- folded them- then placed them on his bed.

Jobe noticed that tonight, Cain lie asleep with his head at the foot of his bed- which was adjacent to his. Cain slept with the covers over his head- something he'd done since he was a small child. Jobe softly sat at the corner of the bed- leaning over- pretending to do something to his right foot. He knew that this might tempt and entice Cain- arouse him- even though Cain vowed to stop doing what they were doing. Yet, so many years had passed and they still couldn't break it. It became second nature- a lust and drive that, when urged, had to be fulfilled.

Cain pulled the covers from over his head and noticed Jobe naked at the corner of his bed leaning over. Deep sleep hadn't yet captured him so the light movement Jobe made woke him. Now he was suddenly aroused. *I said I didn't wanna do dis no more.* Yet, the temptation was too much and the urge was there. He lifted his head slightly to survey his surroundings- to make sure the others were asleep- his younger brother, Abel, and Jobe's two younger brothers- it was safe. He slowly moved his right hand closer to Jobe's backside, slightly touching him. Jobe felt the touch. It was all he needed- a sign of interest- a sign of acceptance. Jobe moved back further onto the bed and more onto Cain's hand. He moved his bottom more as if whatever he pretended to do with his foot was more difficult to do now. Cain began to rub Jobe's backside with his forefinger. He pulled his left hand from his side and began to do the same with it. They both let out sighs of relief and release- the anxiety of never being with each other again overcome.

Jobe pulled back Cain's covers easing his backside against Cain's manhood. They moved back and forth- touching each other- embracing each other- satisfying one another. They tried to remain alert and attentive to the fact that, at any moment, either of their mothers could walk through their door- to check and make sure that their sons were asleep. Yet, their sons were with each other and had been for many, many years- escaping the realities of life late in the night.

Jobe lie across his bed listening to the sounds of Tai Chi relaxation music on his nifty mp3 player as his mind played images of his past. He was 23 now and the engagements still persisted between Cain and him. He had enlisted Cain's brother, Abel, in his slow and grudging demise not too long after that night.

Jobe brushed his hands under the water to make sure it wasn't too hot. He searched around the base of the tub for a bar of soap- there wasn't any. He peeked underneath the basin- there wasn't any there. He knew that his Aunt Susie kept extra bars in the top, right dresser drawer in her room so he wrapped his white bath towel around his waist- peeked out the bathroom door for clearance- and tiptoed directly across the hall to his aunt's room shutting the door behind him. He noticed Abel lying across her bed on his back staring at the rapidly spinning blades of the ceiling fan trying to keep focus on one individual blade.

"Whatchu doin'?" Jobe asked walking over to the dresser drawer that contained the soap. "You scared me."

"Nothin," he replied. He said little most of the time. He was a quiet soul.

As Jobe picked up the soap out of the drawer, he thought about how, days earlier, he had enticed Abel to interact with him- he reminded him of the things they used to do when they were younger and how it would be fun for them to do them again. He placed the soap on top of the dresser and pretended to scramble for some unknown item in the drawer. He intentionally dropped his towel exposing his buttocks to Abel then hastily picked it back up and wrapped it back around his waste. "Dang man," he said. "These dang towels don't stay on you." He continued to scramble more in the drawer.

After a minute of silence Jobe began to think that his actions were worthless- not drawing the attention and reaction from Abel that he'd wanted. Just as Jobe decided to forfeit his attempts and head back to his bath, he felt someone softly grab his waist. It was Abel- he had used the silence to plan his approach. He pulled Jobe slightly indicating that they go to the bed- Jobe submitted. With Abel in front and his hands around Jobe's waist, they slowly stepped backwards to the bed. Jobe lie down on his back opening his towel as

Abel climbed on top of him. Abel remained fully clothed. They caressed and grabbed each other- touching each other- embracing each other- satisfying one another.

Jobe remembered that he hadn't locked the door to his aunt's room when he entered and that his mother was either out in the backyard hanging laundry on the line or in the kitchen cooking. Just as he thought about how his mother could walk in at any moment, the door opened. Abel jumped back as Jobe grabbed his towel closing it.

"Whatchall doin'?" Marie said to them. Jobe saw the shock and grief on her face.

"I was just gettin' some soap," Jobe replied jumping up with the soap. His heart sank and a deepening grief came over him.

Jobe took as long as he could with his bathing. He didn't know what to expect when he stepped out. He contemplated the horror he felt when his mother opened the door on his cousin and him. He'd heard the saying many times, "what you do in the dark will come to the light," but he didn't expect to be a living witness to it. He dried himself off slowly after stepping out of the tub- put his gym shorts and t-shirt on- and eased out of the bathroom heading towards his room. "Come here Jobe," his mother said. She was sitting on her bed waiting for him to come out of the bathroom. His heart sank again. He did not know what was going to happen or what was going to be said. He and his mother did not communicate often- verbally. When something really important needed to be said they wrote- wrote long letters to each other expressing their feelings, thoughts, angers, and pains. He thought about how they had exchanged numerous letters the week after she found his private journal under his mattress and reading his most secretive thoughts and doings- of how he enjoyed his sexuality and sexual acts with other boys and of how he had been spying on her current boyfriend, from outside through the bathroom window, while he took showers and baths. His soul dragged behind his body as he walked into her room. She indicated for him to sit directly beside her on the bed. He sat down with his head hanging low- so low that she could not see his eyes. On that day they had not the chance to write a letter to each other- the long thoughtful letters where they expressed their inner-most thoughts and feelings- the letters where they were able to connect with each other. Marie started out slowly... "Jobe..." she paused for moment- she fought hard for words- "I know you said that this is the way you want to be. And...I don't know why and I sho don't know where you got it from but... you just can't spread it around through the family." She spoke of his choice as if it were a disease or sickness. He began to cry- each painful tear streaming slowly down his cheeks. Her eyes began to water as well- this was so difficult for her. "Now you know I love you. And I'm gone have yo back whenever. But

I don't wanna see you doin that no more. I don't wanna see you doin THAT no more..." and with one more final pause, "Okay," she ended.  
"Yes...ma'am," he said. And he hugged his mother.

Since that day Jobe and his mother would have a completely open relationship. They'd talk about all types of subjects and discuss their feelings and emotions. Yet- he'd continue to struggle with his problem involving Cain and Abel. He'd struggle with it up into his later years- he getting older- and the urge getting harder to suppress. He vowed to overcome this gripping temptation- this recreation of Eve accepting that deadly fruit from the serpent.

## CHAPTER IV:

Amber looked both ways before she got onto the bus- the coast was clear. Her heart raced with excitement. She was finally meeting up with Jerome, the guy she'd had a crush on since the first grade (now in the sixth he finally thought her worthy). She walked slowly down the aisle crouched over hoping to go undetected and slid low into her favorite seat (two from the back on her right-hand side). She didn't think about how much trouble she'd be in if Jerome and she were caught on the bus. All she could think about was how wanted she felt- how liked she felt. Jerome expressed a genuine interest in her- writing her letters at lunch- passing her "do you like me? Yes or No" notes in class- and even smiling at her from across the playground as he shot his famous behind-the-back lay up. He'd whispered to her before the bell rang, "hey meet me on the # 7 bus after school." And there she sat waiting on bus # 7. She heard foot steps parting the graveled rocks leading to the bus so she ducked into her seat. She ducked her head under the seat to see if she could make out the shoes of the intruder...the new Jordan's...it was Jerome. She sat up straight smiling, looking out the window, timid and warm.

"Didn't nobody see you come on here did they?" Jerome asked.

"No," she replied. He sat next to her, smiling at her. She smiled back with a giggle. She thought he was so cute. Her girlfriends had applauded and congratulated her for taking the risk to meet him on the bus (stepping out on the ledge for the pack).

"So...whatchu wanna do?" he asked- his intentions already made up in his mind. She answered with a quiet shrug of the shoulders- her I don't know.

"Well," he began to whisper as if someone else was on the bus. "Pull your pants down and lay on the floor."

Amber unbuttoned her jeans- pulled them down- and lie on her back with her hands directly by her side. He began to unbuckle his jeans. Amber didn't know what to expect.

Amber sat hunched in the corner of her room for hours- her skin bruised and sore from the many blows contributed. She over heard her mother on the phone with her grandmother...

"Yeah I wuped her. Broke two belts on her. I don't know. I don't know what she was thinkin' bout getting' on some bus wit some lil' boy." "Yeah, uh huh," her mother continued. "I told her if she don't straighten up she gone go live wit her daddy. She ain't the only child I got."

The idea of going to live with her dad didn't seem so bad. She thought about hanging out with her friends- carefree- at her dad's place- a freedom that she hadn't experienced at home. Being the oldest of four Amber was bestowed the responsibilities of seeing after her younger siblings, cleaning the kitchen after dinner- washing the dishes and such, changing her little sister's pampers, washing the laundry and folded it too. She thought about how she probably would be relieved of these duties.

"AMBER!" her mother yelled.

"Ma'am," she replied softly.

"GET in here and EAT! Then WASH them dishes when you through!"

"Yes ma'am." But for now, she was under her mother's wings.

Amber enjoyed the new environment at the alternative school. She was sentenced to thirty days at an off-campus location after being caught on the bus by the female janitor, Ortensia. Still she was able to pass notes to her cohort, Jerome, and make some new friends. Little had changed at home besides her mother continuously threatening to send her to her dad's place. She still yearned for something or someone. Her body, mind, and/or soul needed watering- the food all flowers need to flourish.

"Granny, you ain't gotta pick me up today," Amber told her grandmother truck. "My auntie is coming to get me." Her mother instructed her to have her daddy's momma, Ms. Scott, pick her up from alternative school because she just would not be able. She was to stay with her grandmother until her mother came to get her.

"Oh. Alright baby. Bye," her grandmother replied. Amber hurriedly raced to the door entrance her grandmother had to honk the horn to get her attention.

"Come get ya bag baby. You left ya bag."

"Thank you." Amber said.

After getting her book bag Amber slowed her pace walking back to the door entrance. Her mind began to settle on what she had just told her grandmother and on what Jerome had in store for her today.

Ms. Scott rushed to see who was keeping up such a fuss outside her house honking their horn. She opened her door to see her young grandson...

"Granny, momma said to tell Amber to come on," he said. His mother and other siblings were waiting in the car. Ms. Scott was taken by surprise. "Surely this baby's mother didn't forget that she had her sister to pick Amber up," she thought. She paced out to the running car, as fast as her age would allow.

"How you doin, baby," she said.

"Alright," Rose replied.

"Rose...Amber told me that one of her auntie's was gone pick her up school today."

"Ms. Scott...I didn't tell her nothing like that. I don't know where she got that from," Rose said.

"Oh lawd have mercy," Ms. Scott proclaimed. "Now I don't know what to do." She was genuinely concerned.

"Well...Ms. Scott," Rose said looking out her window. "Let me get on to this house so I can try to find out where the hell my daughter is."

Rose sped off causing the small pebbles of graveled road to fly back near Ms. Scott. As the car vanished into the night and the dust settled, Ms. Scott managed her way back into her home. Rose drove furiously to their apartment. She didn't understand why her daughter would do such a thing. She began to think about how she had beat her just weeks earlier and of how her daughter had been acting out lately- how she had been calling out for something or someone- some attention or love or care. Yet, she was still infuriated with her daughter's actions and audacity. She swirled into their apartment complex throwing her other children from side to side. She noticed a young girl sitting on the steps that led to their apartment as she pulled into the complex- she brushed her off as a forlorn teenager out past her bedtime. It was approaching 10pm.

As Rose closely approached their apartment she began to recognize the face of the girl sitting on the steps. The girl had an oval-shaped head with lots of hair. She had a caramel-colored skin tone that was a keen resemblance to hers. Rose pulled the car into their assigned parking space shining her high-beamed lights into the young girl's face. It was her daughter, Amber. Her hair was thrown and spun in every which way, her clothing was torn, pulled, and shredded, her nose bleeding, lips busted, and her left eye and right cheek displayed a bluish-purplish coloration.

Rose gasped as the sight of her daughter in shreds and all beaten up captured her. Tears began to nestle in the corners of her eyes. Amber's siblings sat motionless in the car- too young to know what was going on but still realizing that the occurrence was intense. Rose got out of her car and

rushed to her daughter's side. Both of them sobbed in distress- Amber realizing the consequences of looking for love in all of the wrong places and Rose realizing the consequence of not giving it.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

*Sup. whatchu been doin. nuttin much here. jus chillin. Ya know da deal. Anyway. I saw you lookin at me in tha lunch room. I cudnt do nuttin but smile. You so crazy. Ol'girl saw you lookin 2. oh well aint nuttin. So are you gone call me tonite. We talked on tha fone last nite for 4 hours. Dang. Wat we gone do. Eric be trippin and shit. Always askin me who I'm talkin 2. I be like shut the fuck up shit. He jus be sittin dere lookin ugly. Din I be like ooohhh home. He do it 2. beta buy me dem new timbalands I saw at the mall Friday too. Are you cumin to da game. U betta go. If I don't see you in tha stands im gone kick yo ass when we get back too. Lol. j/k. but anyway I gotta bounce. See you at break. Luv  
Shorty*

Shorty proofread the note more than four times before folding it in half, and then again, and then again- until it was small enough to fit in her back pocket and then into Lil Dawg's locker. Their spark had just recently turned into flames that she could not control- one of those niggling wild fires that just could not be contained.

"Dang girl. What are you so focused on? I know it ain't no homework," Jewel said. Jewel and Shorty had been running buddies since their freshman year. Shorty referred to Jewel as her white home girl- a title well warranted in their day. She also won more cool points by dating Shorty's first cousin, Jamal. They'd experienced the trials and tribulations of high school athletics finally advancing to the playoffs on their volleyball team and being defeated. "Shut up," Shorty replied with her head low hovering the note. She had begun to read it again.

"Who you writin' anyway?" Jewel asked.

"Nunya!" Shorty replied. "Nunya."

"Nunya? What the hell is nunya?" Jewel asked laughing hysterically.

"None of yo business. Dats what it is."

"Uh...o.kay." Jewel sniggled. She was fascinated by Shorty's ability to make up words.

"You ready for the game tonight?" Jewel asked.

"Man I don't know. I don't even wanna play."

"Girl...you never wanna play. Man I wish we woulda beat those Gator bitches the other night. They were talkin some cash shit too."

"I know. I elbowed that one trick. Din she gone say "you beta watch yo back." I was like girl back up foe you get yo ass wuped." The bell rang for third

period. Shorty felt that it would be the perfect time to slip her note into Lil Dawg's locker since most grades would be heading off to athletics and gym. "Ima go to the bathroom right quick," she told Jewel. "Aight. See ya in class," Jewel replied.

Shorty paced towards the girls potty looking back to make sure everyone else was minding their own. Joey, a sophomore, was sticking his right leg out to trip Mandy, his classmate, saying "remember this." Amber, a senior, was blushing and batting her eyes at Mark, her totally hot classmate whom she had a huge crush on. And Principal Long was doing his usual, storming the halls harassing the students yelling "GET TO CLASS. GET TO CLASS." Shorty stopped at Lil Dawg's locker and stooped over pretending to tie her shoe- she slid the note from her pocket and slipped it into the locker. She looked around to make sure that her actions went undetected. She was clear.

The Texas winter felt like mid-spring which made Friday night a perfect night for double dating. Asia had planned it all- an event that would work in her favor. She had let Eric know, earlier that day, that they would be participating in a movie date with Jewel and Jamal. She followed her normal routine when getting ready for a date; first she needed music- she pushed play on her "mixed jamz" playlist in iTunes to blast the first and her favorite song "Pussy don't fail me now" by Missy Elliot, she then laid out what she'd wear- tonight she chose a white "wife-beater" tank top, below-the-knee length black gym shorts, her brand new Jordan's she had just gotten, and lastly her school letterman jacket with a "P" for Plunkerville High patched on the front and "Shorty" patched on the back. She jumped in the shower- freshened up- and was ready to go. She heard Eric's loud F150 pulling up in the yard.

"Asia, you ready. The movie starts a 8," Eric yelled walking into the house without knocking. It was usual for him so her mother consented from cussing him out. "How ya'll doin'?" he said giving everyone eye contact. Everyone answered: "Fine." "Aight" "Hey Eric, how you doin'?" "Sup." He walked back towards her room. She was on the phone...

"You beta be dere...WHAT?...Quit playin' foe you get slapped....I ain't playin' wit you....Yeah....It start at 8....Yeah the village of the damned....at 8 dang...."

"Hey...you ready," he asked. His tone was lower.

"Aight, aight. Bye." She hung up the phone. "Oh, hey. I ain't even hear you come in. Yeah I'm ready," she said.

"You call Jamal and Jewel?" he asked.

"Yeah. Dey said dey wuz gone meet us up dere."

"You tell em what time the movie start?"

"YEAH BOI DANG! C'mon let's go." The two said their goodbyes to the household and loaded up in the truck. The movie started at 8.



Jewel jumped in an exaggerated excitement when she spotted Asia and Eric walking up towards them. She and Jamal had been waiting at the ticket booth for some ten minutes- talking and laughing about what others were wearing, how they looked and acted, and the likes. They had already purchased four tickets and just needed to be reimbursed so they could buy snacks. "We already got ya'll tickets," Jewel yelled. " Ten dollars please." Students got in for \$5 on Fridays. Eric handed Jewel a \$10 dollar bill.

"Thanks," he said.

"Why you lookin so ugly?" Jamal asked Asia. "You need to quit."

"Shut up," she replied. He noticed her looking around as if she was expecting someone. She looked to her right for a few seconds and then to her left for a few more.

"Let's gone in," Jamal said. "I want some popcorn." Jewel smiled at her boo.

"You always hungry," she whispered to him.

"Will you go get me some popcorn?" he asked her. "Ima go over here a play this ice hockey game. Hey, Asia. Come play this ice hockey game wit me. Eric will you get her some popcorn too."

Eric and Jewel headed towards the end of the long line for refreshments. Jewel looked at her watch. They had 18 minutes until the movie started- give about 5 for previews- that was 23 total she calculated. Jamal grabbed Asia and led her near the ice hockey table. She was still spaced out- looking around- beginning to become nervous.

"Hey cuddy. I got somethin' to tell you," he said putting his face in front of hers to get her undivided attention.

"WHAT!" she yelled.

"Sammy stopped me in the hall yesterday and was like 'man...wuz up wit yo cousin and whassa name?' and you know who he was talkin about."

"And what?" she replied. "Man, it's my senior year and I'm gone do what I wanna do."

"Well hey...I was just tellin' ya. Just thought you wanted to know that everybody is starting to see." He noticed her glaring across the way and the smile that came across her face. It was Lil Dawg and an entourage of other freshmen.

"I be back. Naw...Ima meet ya'll in da movie," Asia said to him and made her way towards Lil Dawg. Jamal noticed them walk off towards the restroom area. He headed over to Jewel and Eric who were just now ordering their popcorn and drinks.

"Hey. Asia said she was gone meet us in the movie," Jamal told them.

"Where did she go?" Eric asked.

"Cuddy...I think she went to the bathroom or something," he replied. "You know how she is. Always lookin' in the mirror."

"I know it," Eric said.

"Hey. Did you want butter on your popcorn?" Jewel asked Jamal. "Oh and I got you a Dr. Pepper."

"Yeah...dats cool," he replied.

"Boy this shit is high" she whispered to him presenting the thirty six cents change in her hand.

"I know," he said.

"Alright. Let's go. Six minutes," Eric told them.

They all made their way to the young black girl taking the tickets. Jamal noticed her posture- right hand on her hip with her left hand twirling the left ponytail on her head. She had just popped a huge pink bubble before they walked up- working hard on the next one. They handed her their tickets. Her hoarse voice, "Down dat way on da left. You gone see it." They all chuckled at her as they walked away.

"Oh man. I have to go pee," Jewel exclaimed loudly. "I'll be on in. Dang maybe Asia is almost done too. Goodness."

"Aight," Jamal replied.

"Girls man," Eric said. "They live in the restroom."

"Right," Jamal added.

Jewel scurried to the restroom which was near the entrance of the theatre. She smiled as she walked past the girl concentrating on her bubbles and still twirling her hair. She walked in the restroom, *Gees I have to go bad*. She stopped- she couldn't move- her feet were frozen. In the corner of the restroom Asia and the freshmen, Kesha, engaged with each other- kissing, hugging, and rubbing. She slowly walked back out of the restroom because after that she no longer had the urge to pee. Her olive-colored skin was now turning a grapefruit pink. She didn't know what to do or think. She walked back into the theatre. Jamal and Eric had reserved their seats- dead center about ten rows up. Jamal noticed her pink complexion and sullen expression as she walked up slowly. She sat down next to Jamal.

"Wuz wrong wit you? Why you lookin' like that?" he asked.

"Jewel did you see Asia?" Eric whispered across Jamal.

"Naw...didn't see her," Jewel said. "I...don't know where she at."

Jamal looked at Jewel. He knew that something was up. She leaned over to him and whispered... "yeah I saw her alright...in the restroom kissin' and huggin' Lil Dawg."

It was 8. The movie was just about to start.

## CHAPTER VI:

Susie felt the emersion of life inside her as she bent over to pick the bean from the stalk. It was a strange feeling- her insides reconstructing, preparing a warm home for her new baby boy. She paused briefly placing one hand on her hip and wiping her forehead with the other. "Gul, is you alright?" her mother asked. They had been picking in the garden nearly all day. "We still got plenty more rows to pick. I told Minnie Lee she could come down here and get some of these snap beans later on." Minnie Lee was Ann's sister-in-law and good friend. She lived less than half-a-mile down the road. "I'm alright," Susie replied. "Jus hot that's all. HOT." She continued to pick beans- hot, exhausted- and ready to be done. She began to think about the life that awaited her in the months ahead. And of how she and the child's father would try to live their double lives.

Lola noticed R.L. coming down the road so she began to grab her things- her purse, over night bag, and such. She heard the chuckle of his engine shutting off- as it had always struggled to do- and his truck door slam. She knew he'd be walking through the door at any moment..."How yall doin?" he spoke to everyone: Ann, Susie, Ed, other children, and grandchildren. Everyone responded almost in unison "oh alright" "fine" "how you?" He somehow managed a wink at Susie. She pretended to not see him. Lola picked up their 3 year old daughter, Kay, and kissed her on the lips.

"Mama see you tomorrow baby. Mama love you," she said to her. "Say love you for mama. Say it," she continued.

"Luh you," Kay managed.

"Oh my baby," Lola said giving her child long kiss on the forehead.

Eight years later Lola would have another lovely daughter by R.L. and name her Asia. The two daughters, Kay and Asia, would both battle the woes of uncertainty with their sexual orientations.

"I sho 'preciate you watchin' her for me sista," she told Susie walking out of the door. "I'll see yall." Everyone said goodbye. R.L. followed behind Lola saying his goodbyes as well. He shot another glance at Susie. She acknowledged this time throwing a nod of her head at him.

Later that night R.L. would slither from under the covers of which he lay with Lola and ease through Susie's opened window- she didn't lock it for this sole purpose. She had already told him that she was expecting. He just needed to tell her to conceal the truth about her pregnancy- the truth about their adultery- the truth about the child's real father. That's all that he needed to tell, then he left- back through the window- a shadow in the night.

"I had a dream last night Susie," Ann said steadfast at work picking beans. "I dreamed of fish baby- fried catfish seasoned with good ole cayenne pepper, collard greens with Louisiana hot sauce, and some hot water corn bread. Now, my mama always said that if you dream of a hot, heavy meal like that somebody gone have a child or you just plain ole hungry." Susie laughed at

the old adage. "Mama, where did Bigmama get that from?" Nervousness had begun to settle into Susie's stomach. She knew that something uneasy was slowly approaching. "Gul, dat old saying been around for many, many years. And every time she had dat dream, somebody was havin' a child. So baby, tell mama, what you gone name your lil' boy?" Susie stopped picking and slowly turned to face her mother. The beginning waters of flowing tears began to fill her eyes. The first tear slowly streamed down her right cheek. "Come here child." Ann said waving her to come. She went to her mother and they embraced. "I knew you was expecting baby all along. Is jus a woman's intuition. You been actin' all tired and sickly. Dats only da first part. Da second part gone be a lot worse."

The second part was indeed worse- Susie thought- as she screamed in agony trying to push her new baby boy out into existence. Ann scurried back and forth to the water pump to get more hot water. She dipped the bloodied red rag in and out of the water- squeezing it- then placing it on Susie's head to sooth her. Susie had already thought of a name for her child. She would name him Cain after her great-great grandfather- a hard-working slave who chopped and picked diligently to provide for his family. She envisioned that her son would resemble her grandfather's will and work ethic. "Push child. Push," Ann yelled. The wind and rain howled and fought against the windows and shutters- swinging them wildly. "I am pushin," she yelled back. "Chile I see his head. Keep pushin baby. I see his head." A round, oval-shaped head it was. And Cain came to be.

Four years later Susie would give birth to another son and name him Abel. He would know who his real father was and build a somewhat mediocre relationship with him- his father would at least acknowledge that he was his son and lend some financial support. Cain and Abel would come to struggle with the wretchedness and uncertainties of their sexual orientations. They'd struggle- struggle with vision and self- dependence- with drugs and money- with life.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

Jenetra had everything she needed spread across her coffee table: the old cigar box that she kept the weed in, three strawberry flavored blunts, one black lighter and a blue one too. It was almost like surgery- the way she approached the task of rolling up her blunts- this substance that allowed her to disappear from the realities of her life and float on the clouds. Her son, Ashton, was still asleep- she was grateful of this fact. Ashton was a vibrant

child- always moving, frisky, hyperactive and very knowledgeable for 5 years of age. Her brother, Jobe, had just told her weeks earlier that she should get him evaluated- she just might be able to get a check for him. Her daughter, Ashley- at eight months, sat up beside her on the sofa, laughing and playing with her Elmo doll. With a sharp-bladed knife, Jenetra carefully dissected the Swisher Sweet blunt to remove the tobacco inside- she'd replace it with the pot she had reserved. She licked the edges extra this time- to make sure that it would stay together. After lighting it up and taking a long, relieving puff, she lie back on the sofa- her body was being soothed. The crackle of the phone on the table startled her, *Damn that scared me*. She let it ring until the answering machine picked up... "This call is from a federal prison. You will not be charged for this call. This call is from..." she hurriedly picked up the phone- it was her dad.

"Oh hey daddy," she said. "I was in the restroom."

"Hey baby. What's goin on?" he replied. "Girl you like a ghost. I called you the other day. Couldn't get nobody."

"Yeah. We was gone. Ashton and Ashley had appointments. You doin alright?"

"Yeah...daddy alright. Just tryin to make it. You know."

"Yes sir. I understand that. I gotta come up with this one hundred thirty dollars for this rent."

"If daddy had some money I would send it to you."

"Yeah I know daddy. I'll get it from somewhere."

"You talk to your grandmama?" he asked.

"Naw. Not today. I talked to her a couple of days ago. She say she was doing alright. Jobe was taking her to the doctor."

"Yeah. I want yall to take care of her for me. I want you to bring them kids up here to see me too. You know...I'm just up the street. Oh and call your brother to see when they gone come up here too."

"I am daddy. And I'll call him too. You know Jobe is always so busy with school and work and all. I'll prolly try to come tomorrow or Wednesday."

"Alright. Well daddy love yall. Kiss them kids for me."

"We love you too daddy."

"Bye, baby."

Jenetra hung up the phone - a wrenching hurt began to pull at her heart. She yearned for her father to be home. He'd been incarcerated for more than 15 years. So many that she'd stop counting. He'd say all the time "you know your daddy gone be home soon." Yet that phrase had become numb to her soul. "He ain't ever coming home," she'd say. She hurt remembering how she had struggle to raise herself these past 15 years- how her unstable mother was practically a fugitive always moving and running- how she had to practically raise her little sisters and brothers by herself- she hurt. She picked herself up

and went back to the coffee table. Lifting the burning blunt she puffed long and hard- she was relieved again- the pain was numbed.

Jenetra spotted Arnetta walking while driving home from dropping the kids off at her aunt's house. She asked her aunt to watch them on the first of every month so that she could go pay bills and such. She pulled to the side to pick her up.

"Girl, girl let me tell ya," Arnetta said getting in the car. "I got somethin fo yo ass girl."

"What bitch?" Jenetra replied. "Cause you sure sound excited." Jenetra met Arnetta at a public housing meeting weeks earlier. She had given her a ride home once and they'd been talking since.

"You know how you be tryin to get blasted and high and shit. Well...my home girl thew me des pills. She say dey will get you dere."

"Pills girl. What kind of pills are they?"

"I don't know. Dey (real little and shiny white). I think dey call em meth or ice or somethin."

"Naw girl I don't know about all that. That shit will probably kill you."

"It ain't nothin like dat. My home girl say dey jus make you feel like you floatin and shit."

Jenetra thought about the notion- of floating- of escaping her world.

"I don't know girl," Jenetra said.

"RIGHT HERE GIRL. TURN HERE," Arnetta yelled. "Girl you almost past my damn turn." She started to laugh. "Well look Ima put foe of em in yo purse. Ima take me some tonight. Call me girl if YOU do," and she got out of the car.

As Jenetra drove away she glanced down at the pills in her purse. Something in her was telling her to throw them out of the window. Yet something in her urged for this ultimate high. She drove home.

Jenetra hurriedly unlocked her apartment door- she heard her answering machine going "This call is from a federal prison. You will not be charge for this call..." After dropping her keys on the ground then fumbling for the right key again, the answering machine had stop playing. The call from her dad was lost. *Oh well. He'll call back later.* She walked into the apartment and tossed her purse on the coffee table causing it to tilt releasing some of the contents: her lip gloss, change purse, the pills. She glared at the pills long and hard. "Man. What if I take this damn pills and don't wake up?" she asked herself. She got up- eyes still on the pills- walked to the kitchen and pulled her a glass from the cabinet. She poured her a full glass of Tropicana orange juice- took it and sat back on the sofa directly across from her purse. "Fuck it," she said picking up three of the pills- tossing them to back of her throat- then taking a big gulp of orange juice to wash them back. She sat still for about ten minutes to see if these wonder pills Arnetta raved so much about

would take effect. She stood swiftly to go to the restroom when suddenly a blinding ray of white light halted her. Her heart began to pound rapidly so she slowly eased back down on the sofa. She lie flat on her back looking up at the ceiling. Her eyes were wide open but all she could see was white- bright white light- she was there...

After picking up her keys that she clumsily dropped, Jenetra fumble to open her door. She heard her answering machine going "This call is from a federal prison. You will not be charged for this call. This call is from..."

"Excuse me, ma'am," the lady said walking up to her. Jenetra jumped startled.

"Damn you scared me," she replied.

"Oh I'm sorry ma'am. Are you Mrs. Jenetra Scott?" the lady asked.

"Uh. Depends," she responded. "Who wants to know?"

"My name is Mrs. Eileen Holder with the Federal Parole Board. Is John Scott your father?" she said.

"Oh yes. Yes ma'am. Is everything alright. He's not hurt is he? Oh my god. Is he dead?" Jenetra began to panic.

"No. No. No ma'am. He is fine. I have some documents that I need you to complete and sign for me concerning his release," the lady said.

"Oh my god. Is my daddy coming home. Is he coming home," Jenetra said.

"Soon. Soon," the lady replied. "It is just pertinent that we complete the signing and filing of these documents to ensure that everything is covered."

"Oh yes ma'am. Yes ma'am," Jenetra finally had her door opened. "Ma'am please come in so I can sign this shit. My daddy is coming home. Coming home."

Jenetra led the lady to her dining room table- they sat and completed the signing of the documents....

"WHO IS IT!" Jenetra yelled rising to go answer the knocking at her front door. The person had been knocking for quite sometime. She put on her braw and the t-shirt and shorts lying next to her bed. She walked slowly to the door. "WHO IS IT!" she tried again. She didn't get a response the first time she'd said it. She looked through the peep hole to see if she could recognize a face- the hole was dark- the person outside the door had their hand over the hole. "IT'S TOO FUCKING EARLY TO BE PLAYIN AT MY DAMN DOOR! WHO IS IT!" she tried again. She was pissed now. She opened the door ready to swing on the person playing with her this morning- she gasped- placed her hands over her mouth. It was her father- standing at her front door- smiling at her. She began to back away from the door slowly.

"It's daddy baby," he said. She still couldn't speak. She shook her head in disbelief. "It's alright baby. It's your daddy. I'm home."

"Daddy," she managed in a whisper. "Daddy." She stood there a few seconds then launched at him throwing her arms around him.

"It's alright," he confirmed again.

"Daddy," she cried. "You home. You home. Oh god you are home."

"Yes baby daddy is home now. I love you baby"

Jenetra tried to open her eyes but she just didn't have the strength. She felt an overwhelming pain in her stomach- her head pounded with a migraine- she felt tubes in her wrists- she heard a constant beeping sound close to her- she heard voices.

"Everything looks okay," she heard someone saying. "She was very lucky. Most individuals that come in, in the condition that she was in, don't make it. We were able to extract the harmful substances from her body before they were able to destroy any vital organs. She may not have survived."

She heard the sniffing results from someone crying. She heard another moaning. She heard an "Oh thank ya lawd. Oh thank ya. Thank ya Jesus for saving my grandbaby." She fought with all her might to open her eyes see what all this ruckus was about- she was in a hospital room- there were machines everywhere- her aunt and children, her grandmother, and her brothers and sisters all stood with tears and sullen expressions pasted on their faces.

"Wh...whe...where," she managed. Her voice was low and cracked.

"Jenetra. Baby," her grandmother raced to her side.

"Granny. Is my daddy here. Where is my daddy?" she whispered.

"Baby. Yo daddy is in tha prison down tha street," she replied talking to her like a child. "You know we go see him all tha time. We gone go see him when you get well."

## CHAPTER VIII:

Ann tussled with the dough for her peach cobbler. She worked diligently on this task- making sure that she added the correct amount of flour, salt, and water. The sweat on her forehead displayed as if she had stepped out into the rain- she dabbed her head with her washcloth. She had asked Marie and Susie to help her in the kitchen- there was still plenty to be done. The peaches still needed to be cut- into perfect halves- the green beans needed to be snapped- the corn-on-the-cob shucked- the brisket tenderized and seasoned- and the potatoes peeled.

Ann had decided, not too long after Ed's death, that she would still celebrate their anniversary- it would serve as a memorial of sort. She had enjoyed the anniversary parties they threw in the past- how she and Ed would rent out the local fire station in town because there wouldn't be enough room at their home. They'd prepare all the family favorites; collard greens, cabbage, potato salad, brisket, and pork-n-beans. She had invited all the family and many of Ed's old friends. She concealed the tears from Marie as she stood at her



kitchen countertop handling the dough. Vivid and discomfoting memories began to flood her mind of the long and hard marriage she endured with Ed. She thought about the hurt she had felt when she walked in on Clair and he having sex. She almost could not contain the hurt she felt then. Clair had been married to John for years and had just given birth to their first child, Edward. Ann wiped a tear for that with her washcloth. As another tear formed she recalled the pain of catching her husband shamelessly molest her youngest baby girl- she stood there looking at him in awe and disbelief while he blazed a glare at her that said she had dare not contest. But she did contest later that night- and Ed smacked her down in fury, threatened her life, and threw her outside to sleep in the car. She wiped several tears for this.

"Mama, you alright over there?" Marie asked. She heard her mother sniffing. And when Ann answered, "yeah baby...I'm alright." Marie could hear it in her voice- that her mother had been crying- the memories of her dead husband overwhelming her.

"Susie, will you finish that dough for mama?" Marie asked. "Let her sit down a bit. It's too hot in here anyway."

"Naw baby, naw. I'm alright," Ann persisted.

"I can get that mama," Susie replied walking over to where her mother stood. She placed one hand gently on Ann's back "mama...let me."

"Susie, I want you to listen to me," Ann said tears beginning to flow down her face. "I know ya thank mama wasn't there when..." she paused constructing a way to let it out, "when dat damn man was puttin' his filthy hands on ya like he was...oh lawd." She put both her hands on Susie's shoulders, looking straight through her- straight through to each occurrence- to each hurt and pain- into Susie's secrete castle in the clouds where she retreated when she was violated. Susie had begun to cry- to release the pain with each tear that trickled down her face.

"Baby, mama was there. And I tried to stop him. I tried, I tried, and I tried. But he threatened to kill me. Take my life away from ya'll. And mama didn't want to leave ya'll."

Marie had stopped cutting the peaches for the cobbler and had made her way over to her mother and sister. They created a circle of love and forgiveness- hugging and crying- ensuring one another that everything would be okay.

"Alright, alright," Marie said wiping her eyes then looking at both ladies. "We need to get to work. Ya'll know them hungry folks gone come runnin' up in here soon enough."

"I know it," Ann replied. "Well...let me finish this dough. Susie, will you snap those green beans for mama?"

"Yessum, I will," Susie replied.

Jobe felt the immense hurt and pain as he and his grandmother, Georgia, walked away from the court house. He had been so strong up to now- after

actually seeing for himself that his half-sister, Jenetra, was so gone. She had asked their grandmother and he to come support her at the court hearing that day- she said she really wanted her kids back. They had been in the care of the Child Protective Service ever since Jenetra was pulled over by the cops and arrested for drugs. Since then she had been in and out of the hospital- the mental health ward- for some type of help, aid, or cure. Yet- she was only given more pills, more medications that, when taken with other illegal substances as she did, only contributed to the deterioration of her sane mental state.

Jobe and Georgia were on time for the hearing and it was Jenetra who didn't show. Georgia found out some information about her grand-daughter's case by asking a nice young black lady passing by, Ms. Angie Lewis. She just happened to be the case worker handling the case and informed the two that the hearing had been rescheduled due to no contact from the fathers of the children nor the mother. As Jobe and Georgia were leaving the court house they spotted Jenetra coming in.

"Hey wassup where da kids?" she began.

They were taken aback by Jenetra's appearance. She wore blue socks (no shoes), red and white, plaid pajama pants, and a long-sleeved blue shirt. Her hair was pulled back in a muddled ponytail- stranded and confused hairs hung from both sides of her head.

"Wha...baby what...why...what do you have on?" Georgia managed.

"Man I know where my daddy at. I know dat," Jenetra said. "I parked over dere ya'll wanna go back to my car les go back to my car?" Jenetra turned and walked out of the building. Jobe and Georgia followed.

"Jenetra, your case worker said that they had to reset the court date because they have to contact the kid's fathers," Jobe said.

"Why you didn't go pick up dat cake like I told you to GEORGIA SCOTT?" Jenetra asked her grandmother vehemently, beginning to raise her voice. She had bought a cake for one of her 5 year old cousins. "I TOLD YOU WERE IT WAS AT H.E.B. UNDER THOMAS T H O M A S," she continued.

"Jenetra, granny did pick up the cake," Jobe said to her trying to divert her attention to him. Jenetra stopped talking and held out a yellow ticket of some sort- she knew what it was- Jobe and Georgia hadn't the slightest idea. They looked at it, confused and unsure of its significance at the present time.

"Jenetra, baby, what is wrong with you? You okay?" Georgia asked.

"Man ya'll always trippin don't nobody feel me don't nobody understand me," Jenetra said beginning to cry.

"Gone on up there and see about your kids sister," Jobe said to her- nothing else seemed to get through to her. Jenetra turned and went into the building.

"Should we go in there with her?" Georgia asked Jobe.

"Naw granny, let's go home," Jobe replied. "That was scary. The court needs to see that she is not well." And they turned and walked away. A gripping

fear came over Jobe as they walked- he saw himself walking up to his sister's casket as this circumstance had formed into a dark and clouded tragedy.