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BFFs

Donavon St.Andre

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BFFs

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all of those who have helped inspire me throughout my life, from friends and family to teachers and strangers. There are too many of you to list and thank personally but know that I am eternally grateful and forever in your corners. It is also for those who are told they are not enough, that their dreams are ridiculous and that they cannot do something. Do not let anyone stop you from becoming better. Anything is possible. I would like to thank the major influences in my life at this moment in time. To my mom, with all your love and grace, no matter how crazy and wild you get at times, I know you only want the best for me. Thank you for those pushes when I was younger. To my father, with all your wisdom and concern, knowing the sacrifices you made for my sister and I is what has kept me on a path to greatness and always wanting more. I will not let you down. To Dominique, my sister, with all your potential and faith, I know I give you hell, but I am truly proud of you and your accomplishments, just keep going. To Ivry, the strongest friend I ever had, thank you for reminding me about warmth and compassion when I was in a very dark place. Miss you girl. To Walter, my brother from another mother, thank you for keeping me under control those six years we were away from home. Cannot wait to call you doctor, Lieutenant Guillory. All of you will never know the amount of impact you had and still have on me, among others that I cannot list. I apologize, just know that I have not taken any of you for granted. The hardest thing to do is to keep playing the game when you feel like you have already won.

Abstract

The purpose of this assignment was to create, perform and evaluate my own show. Over the course of approximately twelve months, many ideas were brought to the table. None of these ideas were censored or frowned upon; each was very genuine and had the potential to become the final product presented. Throughout the process, I dove deeper into my own thoughts, beliefs and feelings as I attempted to decide and design my performance. Once a commitment was made, I applied my fears, troubles and insecurities on paper to ten adolescent students in a classroom setting. Drafting the script took little time and the rehearsal process was quite liberating. Presenting my work was a marvelous feeling; execution was a priority as this was a once in a life time opportunity. After receiving positive feedback from audience members, it became clear that the children were more than just figments of my imagination. The students were pieces of me, or rather extensions of me, but they also represented others who shared their experiences. As cold and unforgiving as this world may seem, we must remember that we all have each other and when all else fails, we are not alone. This show was an original idea as were all scripts that preceded it.

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Introduction

What follows is a detailed explanation of my solo show and the process I took in creating, performing and reflecting on the work I did. None of the characters in my show are true representations of people, they are more closely related to archetypes and stereotypes we would rather deny we believe. There is one character who is nearly an exception due to the stem of her creation, but even she was adjusted to share a different story. Each of these stories hold some truth, but none of them are 100% accurate. Each fear is a fear I have had or have to some magnitude, but none of the fears are as strong as they are presented in the show. With intuition and life experiences, I grew up and grew out of several haunting ideas, but there are things that linger with you forever.

Over the course of my life, I have met many people in very different stages of their lives. I have met dirt, poor people, I have met oil, rich people. I have met people in the 1% and others on the very low end of what I call the rest %. Some are family and friends, others are acquaintances and strangers. Some are alive and well, others are dead and gone. Some have made drastic changes in lifestyle, others have only dived deeper into what they already represented. We come in all shapes and sizes but at the end of the day, we are all people. It usually takes a near-catastrophic event for all of us to come together and trigger a fundamental change, but we must remember that we are ALL people.

These voices are the voices of thousands, possibly millions of our youth who feel that they are alone. Know that you are not alone and that one day, you will be heard.

Chapter 1

Process

Going into the process, I knew that I wanted my solo show to be dope. I wanted my show to not only appeal to whomever would see it, but to teach them as well. Honestly, I think that is the best type of theatre. Spectacle is cool but when you leave a performance with new knowledge, feeling like you need to change something in someway, there is no substitute for that. Entertaining is nice but I do not do this because I want to entertain others; I do it because it is fun and once I get to where I want to be, I can influence change on a grander scale.

I cannot remember the first writing assignment we had, but I know I started writing waaayyyy before. After seeing a close friend's solo show during the Spring of 2017, I knew I wanted to break the fourth wall in some way. I experimented with several ideas in my head before I started typing in my notes for the very first draft-a college seminar, a TED talk, a concessions speech. At last, I settled on a lecture. The piece would be called *The Epitome of Light and Dark* (a title I created in class that stuck with me for a while). I would treat the space as a college classroom with me as the teacher and the audience as my students. The "lecture" was going to be on my top 10 fears, starting with number ten and counting down to the biggest, number one. Initially, the plan was to discuss my top 10 and then tie it up with a positive way to overcome them all. However, it never really came to fruition due to several issues. For starters, I struggled coming up with 10 fears that were fundamentally different from one another and that were true to me. Commitment, social media, the workplace were just a few until I thought of 10, but I never did. Second, I got really caught up in the three characters I created. The first was Donavon who essentially was me, the second was D which was the "dark" side of me and the third was Donnie who was the "light" side of me. In the script, Donavon was the

teacher and D and Donnie were parts of him that interrupted, intervened, whatever you would like to call it as he taught. I enjoyed fleshing them out but as I continued to write, it became clear to me that D was not so much bad as he was dumb and hood-like and Donnie was not light, but more so smart and appropriate. I knew I lost the meaning of what I was trying to do when it became more about the two of them than my actual fears. I added to it every now and again when I thought of something witty, though it was always commentary for the characters.

I wrote when I was in Michigan too, or I tried to. Back in high school, I loved writing. I wrote poems, songs, short stories, everything. All of them about girls; girls that I messed with, girls that became a mess and girls that messed me up. Granted, there were a handful of light-hearted ones in there too, but they were not as juicy. When I got to college, I attempted to transfer all of them to my phone so that I could always have them when I needed them (whether it was to reminisce, edit, or show off sadly), but half-way through my freshmen year, I gave up. When I got to Michigan, I was going to expand on that idea and make a concert dedicated to either one specifically or all of them, but I burned that idea for three reasons. 1) I wanted to perform something fresh that was from current me. 2) I did not know how comfortable I would be singing my own work on stage. 3) I had too many pieces about too many girls and as silly as it sounds, I did not want to narrow it down because that meant picking some pieces over others, which to me was like picking some exs over others. I practically quit two weeks into camp due to time anyway, so no harm, no foul.

When I returned to Columbia to my new home with Libby and Nic, I thought about connecting the show to the solar eclipse somehow. Next, I thought about tying it into staying with roommates after living by myself for the first time and weighing the pros and cons. Once class started, I considered including several events throughout the day, especially with my students because some of them were so needy, yet they were all hilarious. Be that as it may, my native idea did not change, even when we started the solo show class.

The solo show class was interesting; some were for it, some were against it. I wavered in between, but that was before I found out we were about to have just teaching and rehearsals for months straight. I appreciated the prompt writing and free flow of new visions, but I had my design already. I was set, I did not need that class, or that is at least what I thought at the time. I was not a fan of random writing that was not going to be used, but I did it because I had to. Some pieces are more memorable than others, like my very first piece. None of us knew we would be sharing, so when everyone read their texts in under a minute and mine was an eight-minute saga full of reveals, embarrassing moments and funny voices, we knew we were in for something fun. My first piece recounted the story of my best friend and I going through a rough patch in our relationship over a girl. LOONNGG story, I did not even finish it. If you want to read it, you can request it as I still have it, but I will not make it part of this piece as we have all moved on for the better. It did feel good to tell that story because I closed the book on it. There were other pieces too that I enjoyed, like a poem I made about playing football and another piece describing *007 Nightfire* (I still love James Bond) during Hurricane Katrina.

Sometimes we did co-pieces where you and a partner took turns writing. Occasionally, you knew what you were both writing and at times you were in different time zones. Kim G and I wrote a lovely piece during the Halloween season that was adorable, but it was in my notebook and I do not believe I have it anymore. We brainstormed quite a bit that fall semester as Robyn always stressed writing and coming back to a piece. Rarely did I do that because I thought every piece was perfect, not truly but I wipe my hands with things once they are complete. Although, I did make one exception.

I would say my favorite piece of writing was probably *Gone*, because in some strange way, it meant something to me. For the prompt, Robyn brought in a bunch of copies of photos and portraits and asked us to write a story inspired by which ever artwork we chose. I am sure the piece I chose is probably well known somewhere, though I forgot the name. In it, a young woman with brunette hair and a hat slumps against a drawer of some sort in a blue room with a window. It was really provoking to me because as soon as I saw it, I saw a woman with a story, so I chose it over a portrait of men warding off a shark in a boat. We had the pieces over fall break, so there was ample time to brainstorm and come back. I was seeing a girl at the time who is kind of in the show (the character a referenced earlier), and we spent an evening together out in the town during the break. I do not remember how it came up, but we began talking about the assignment and I told her about an idea I had. I thought it would be cool to get her input and she agreed. Actually, she was all for it, and she gave me a reason to “make” the woman “sad”. All she said was, “She’s hurting, what if her lover left her but he didn’t cheat on her or anything? Like, he was a good boyfriend, but he just couldn’t do it,” and I

ran with it. Once I edited and read it to her, she balled. She thought it was beautiful and suggested that I should not change it all, except the dates did not match with the picture (Robyn said that too though I did not listen to either).

When I read it in class, I could feel everyone's weight on me. I normally just write things that are emotional and hand them to others to read, because when I read it I feel like everyone is about to cry. In a twisted way, it feels good to touch people that deeply, not looking for reactions or anything but to know you affect someone or everyone for that matter. There was a moment of silence after I read it aloud in class and I knew everyone was gathering themselves-they said loved it. That was awesome, but that was not my goal. I wanted to tell a story, a story of love, loss, and hope. I think it is the pain that gets people, it almost got me as I read it and I created it. I told everyone I was inspired by *Train to Busan* because Hope and I watched it over the break, but the truth is that was probably just 2% of the piece. Most of it was me and my imagination, the other chunk was Hope.

IT was the start of the rest of my show, a piece made merely for fun. I combined what Kim G and I created with what Nic and I hashed out and gave it steroids. I badly wish I could find the piece Kim and I did, I recall I was a werewolf/vampire and if I am not mistaken, she was a witch. We were in Transylvania, but outside of that, it is all blurry. It was cuter than what I constructed for *IT*. Nic and I's piece was just a normal conversation we had every day, starting with a specific and going off to something broad, quick jabs flying around, pettiness and wittiness. It was a huge shift from what preceded before, but I believed the transition explanation was a gem (the stories we hear before are from the tv that is on). It reads as many different stories that combine into one. The

monster that I had in my mind was loosely based on IT and each of the people in the stories were based from actual people I knew. When I shared with the class, I discovered that I had really gotten into performance mode. Eleven characters in a few minutes was possible, so why stop there? That is when what I wanted to do became clear to me—showcase and challenge myself. The thought of playing more than one part can be very taxing, but what if I did it? What if some of them were girls? What if they were not people at all?

Hundreds of visions flashed through my mind as I planned my show in the back of my head with every scheme I could dream up. Some were impossible because they were too elaborate, others were too risky because they were too loaded. I desired something in between. We did not have set deadlines, but we all knew that we needed to develop the gist of what we might do because we would be meeting with Robyn soon. Even though she said it would be acceptable if we were still generating ideas, none of us was going to go in there empty handed. I thought long and hard and settled on a show with multiple people discussing multiple things. What and who would be determined soon, but for now, I had something tangible.

When I met with Robyn in November, we discussed draft ideas again. This meeting was not meant to solidify anything, but rather to begin pouring the wet concrete. By this time, I knew I wanted to play multiple roles, at least six and have wooden chairs for my classroom setting. I had seen two of my closest friends' solo shows and I will admit, I stole some atmosphere from them. They each performed more than one role, but the subject matter was on different ends of the spectrum. Regardless, I borrowed what I thought would work for my show and applied it in my mind. At the time, I was still

rolling with *The Epitome of Light and Dark* as a title. I explained to Robyn that I wanted six chairs with each chair being a different stage of my life. The show was focused on growing up as a mixed child in a society where you cannot be mixed. Basically, you have to choose a side and how does that choice affect you down the road. At the time, it seemed like a good idea, I convinced myself that this was truly what I always wanted to do, I just could not see it materialize until now. That was bull. It was a thought, more so race in general vs mixed upbringing but it had not reached the development stages yet.

Regardless, we discussed the game plan and Robyn provided suggestions on how the space could be set up, costume ideas, and more. It was a very productive meeting, but I realized I was not as prepared for my show as I thought I was. I left, stating that I would have something solid for her script wise, a draft at least, before we left for winter break. I did, it was rushed. I sent her a draft of what I was thinking-kids who were all afraid of something and somehow, all their fears were connected by the color black. I called it *Black*. I believe I had seven or eight kids at the time, and I was struggling to tie in black without it becoming repetitive or a dead giveaway. I realized that I was trying too hard to make it funny too. We talked about this through email and text, and Robyn approved of the idea but recommended I flesh it out more. I promised her that I would have a draft of the “real” show by the time we returned in January. What a mistake I made.

I flew back home, Christmas rolled by, the holidays continued, New Year’s Eve passed through, my birthday was in a few days and I did not think about that damn script. With each day that passed by, I told myself I would start tomorrow, but tomorrow never came because it’s always a day away. Now it was January 3rd, and all I have done that week is attempted to beat *Batman Arkham Knight* and *The Witcher 3* (both extraordinary

gifts). I do not know what got into me, but I stopped playing my PS4 immediately, grabbed my laptop and went into the living room. I pulled up the draft I had not touched since I was in Columbia, and I typed like the wind, adding, deleting and editing everywhere. It took me approximately seven hours to have something new because I was listening to music for inspiration and distraction, but when I was done, I knew I had the base of something good. I decided I wanted nine chairs instead of six, ten kids instead of seven and fears in general instead of black fears. These children would be pieces of me, and all of these fears would be fears of mine. Of course, I stretched the truth a bit with the frights and exaggerated my attributes for the sake of my children, but it had to be done in order to have a show that would be special. The important thing was that I had something for Robyn, but now I was concerned about time.

Reading the draft I constructed usually took me about ten minutes, and speaking it aloud, allotting time for shifting seats and playing another role took approximately eighteen minutes. That was a problem that I knew I would run into going into the process. I am bad at staying under a limit, word limit, speed limit, all of it. Caps have their benefits, but they stress me out. I rarely have trouble reaching an amount. My issue is not going over it. I knew we would have fifteen minutes to seventeen minutes each and that drove me to no end. This was our solo show, arguably the most significant thing we would do during our time in graduate school. I loathed the fact that we had less than twenty minutes each to make our mark. I cut a lot of material out of my show before I even sent it to Robyn with that knowledge and she worked with me on finding what was meaningful and what was not. Then, there was the rehearsal process which was very up in the air. I should not admit this, but I barely rehearsed my show. Anyone who knows

me knows what I think about practice and rehearsal. I personally feel like I can only do it for so long before it becomes unproductive and I become a cancer. Libby made an excel sheet for us so we could sign up for time slots during the day in the CPE; I applauded the effort, but I never signed up for a slot (to be fair, I never got the email). I loved this new schedule because I had so much free time. It sucked that we still had rehearsals, but at least I was free throughout much of the day.

I went to the CPE after *Crucible* rehearsals and performances because I felt comfortable with my show. It was not difficult to memorize because I wrote it, the roles were not difficult to portray because I made them, and the stage was not difficult to set up because honestly, it could have been performed anywhere. Most nights I went to CPE and kind of lollygagged unless Gabi or Nic was there using the space too. I did not start to seriously rehearse until two days before I had to present to Robyn for the first time. Stan assisted me with mannerisms and voices and Steve gave me feedback on the aesthetics and stage set up. Robyn was our go to and she really helped me with the arcs. She reminded me that each story was a major reveal and should be treated like so and encouraged me to change the order that the students speak in. She said I should drop the backpack idea (before, I had each kid pull their prop out of my backpack and then become themselves) by just having props on each chair which sped up the process. She also helped me with Hope's dance which I will go into more detail later and fought for Ms. T to remain in the show. Days before we opened, I was still a little over time, but she told me not to worry about it because not everyone would use the full seventeen minutes and that everything I had in the show, "has to be in the show." That was the ultimate compliment.

I have attached the final version of the script to this assignment which is titled *BFFs*. Several additional scripts that inspired me follow; all are unedited and will remain so. The order of performance for *BFFs* is as follows: Caroline, Benjamin, Marie Antoinette, Alexis, Jax, Wendy, Tyler, Jedidiah, Hope, Vice, Ms. T.

Chapter 2

Caroline

Caroline was the first girl I created, and I made her up off the top of my head. For starters, I knew I wanted to be someone of the opposite sex for both the challenge and the irony. As for Caroline, I wanted to have a fun character to play with and in a sense mock the traditional “southern belle” idea. I craved a blonde wig, pink dress, umbrella, shawl, the whole nine. I had her pictured in my mind as typical as you can get. I settled for a fan. Caroline is boujee and she knows it. She sits and moves like the beautiful young daughter you see in the movies, speaking as if she is always thirsty or out of breath in a somehow sensual manner. She comes from luxury, born into wealth and she has no issue flaunting it. She thinks very highly of herself as well, which is why she asks to go first.

When it came to Caroline’s biggest fear, I knew I wanted it to be something that I thought was stupid but believable. It started with roaches, hint the palmetto bug joke. I had an entire passage of her going in on why she HATED roaches. She talked about types, sizes, colors, locations, reproduction, everything. I ran into a roadblock when I could not tie it into black without it being about the color of the bugs, so I thought of other things. “What are other people afraid of?” I asked myself, focusing on fear instead of me and that opened the floodgates.

The doll idea came later, after I realized it was even funnier to me. I will never forget a story my mom told me when I was nine years old. She worked with a guy who was extremely afraid of Chucky, the killer doll, so much so that every night, before he went to sleep he checked under his bed with a shotgun to make sure Chucky was there. Mind you, this was a grown man. Maybe the story was exaggerated, or not true at all, but

since that day, I have pictured this man lying on the floor and looking under his bed with a double barrel every time I see a Chucky film.

I had my own run ins with Chucky as a kid, one of which I recall vividly. I was seven at the time and it was on Easter Sunday at my Grandparents house. Back in the day, my entire mom's side of the family would get together for the holidays and at the end of the evening, they would watch a movie. For some reason, they chose to watch *Bride of Chucky*. I was outside playing with dragonflies for most of the film, but at one point, I went inside to get some water and of course when I decided to go in, one of the most violent moments of the film occurred on screen. I saw someone get shot in the head; I felt a little queasy but did not think anything of it at the time. In fact, I tried to play off and said, "Awww, y'all watching that?" as if I were above them. Nope, later that night I had nightmares out the wazoo.

I was a huge fan of the *Goosebumps* series as a kid, reading most of the early classics and watching the TV show on Saturday mornings. I rented several of the episodes/films too from Albertsons, and one of the visuals that always stuck with me was Slappy from *Night of the Living Dummy*. The first time we see (or read about) Slappy, he is a living ventriloquist doll who just wants to have fun. If my memory is correct, I believe he does "murder" another doll out of jealousy, but otherwise he is not very malicious until later in the series. That said, Slappy is not an image one could easily forget, especially if you are a five-year-old kid who is already weary of things that look like you but are not you. There was something distinct about him, his eyes, his bow tie, his voice. Even as I grew older, Slappy remained in the back of my mind when I saw

other dolls, played with my action figures and tried to become a ventriloquist. When I think of *Goosebumps*, I think of Slappy.

Annabelle was just a throw in. I saw *The Conjuring* when it came out and I was more interested in the Warren's and the doll than I was the haunting. After reading about Ed and Lorraine for about a week, I decided to learn a bit more about Annabelle. I was shocked when I discovered that she was a normal looking Raggedy Ann doll; they probably got a porcelain doll for the aesthetic of the film. After researching more, I learned that Annabelle is currently held in a glass box at the Occult Museum. Personally, I am not very superstitious, but I can see why one would be afraid of Annabelle. According to Lorraine, Annabelle is controlled by a demon entity and though locked behind a case, still wreaks havoc. There is a story about a biker who visited the museum years ago and taunted the doll; he never made it home. He died in a bike crash once he left the museum. Coincidence? Possibly, maybe even probably, but who knows?

Chapter 3

Jedidiah

Jedidiah was meant to show the “child” in me. In my heart of hearts, he is who I feel the most respect and pity for because he is being himself with nothing added on and he does not even know it. He likes to color, believes in Santa and knows a roach when he sees one. He is different mentally, notice I did not say wrong. He has no handicaps or mental illness; his mind is unique and distinct. People today would say he has not grown up, but he would reply with “why should I?” Jedidiah fears a fair amount of stuff due to his expanding imagination. He does not get why the other kids do not like him, and he does not care, because his teacher does, his family does and he does. He does not need them anyway since his imaginary friends hang around 24/7. Jedidiah is the kid that everyone craps on because he is not like you, but you do not care enough to get to know why. You see what you believe is abnormal behavior, his eerie physicality’s, his strange hobbies, his unorthodox speech pattern and conclude that at the very least, the kid is borderline bizarre. You make assumptions, and you know what they say about that. It hurts. He clearly does not need their approval, but it would make life easier. As kids growing up, I think subconsciously we all want to be accepted, until we are not any more. At that age, being accepted means new friends. Unfortunately, Jedi is not accepted by his peers, so he gets picked on.

I was picked on a few times at different points of my life, but I would never say bullied. I have seen bullying; pretty sure I played a part in bullying others but I was not bullied. I was too big, too tall, too smart-those were my flaws. From Preschool through early High School, I was always one of the biggest, tallest and smartest at my school. Elementary was not a problem, I was nearly as big as most of the teachers there and in

middle school, Anward and I were the tallest kids as 6th graders. Granted, we have not grown much if it all since then, but the point is how you are perceived helps. Seeing that I was normally one of the big men on campus generated a unwavering confidence in myself that I still carry today.

The closest comparison I went through was no doubt verbal abuse which was natural at my high school. Everyone used profanity and obscene gestures, I was known for calling everyone a bitch and a pussy and I did not even know what a pussy was. I think of the time when a group of upperclassmen called me thick sideburns; that was the roughest social time I had at Carencro and it did not even last. It happened about three weeks into my first year, and I will not lie, one day it really got to me. On this day I was dealing with other stuff, so I got my lunch and ate in the library instead of confronting T'wone and the crew. Two weeks later, they stopped because I asked them why they would call me dick sideburns and they thought that was the most hilarious slip up in the world. That was the lowest point of my social life in high school, not including girls. Obviously, I have no complaints.

I named Jedidiah after Solomon, the King in the bible. His Hebrew name is derived from Yedidyah, meaning "friend of God". God played a substantial role in my life during my time at home. Though I have witnessed and been involved in several shocking and sinful acts, I was pretty much sheltered as a boy. My parents succeeded in keeping me safe around the clock and I was rarely left alone without supervision. I spent most of my baby, toddler and youngster days in the care of others until my parents got off work. I was all about learning when I was small, like ball is life, I had a yearning for learning. The importance of school was instilled in me as soon as I could comprehend

what school was, and my parents always made sure I did my best. My mom was more concerned about grades than my dad; even so, I always brought back a 100% A until I entered the Gifted & Talented program in 4th grade (my first F was a blessing to me, not so much to my mother but separate story for different day). While attending public school, I additionally went to catechism class every week. I was raised Catholic and my mother wanted to make certain I knew who my one and only savior was. Again, I passed every class and went through the process of becoming a Catholic (Baptism, First Communion, etc.) but somewhere along the way, I lost the joy of going to church. To be honest, I question if it was ever there because I despised attending church for quite a while after I made my confirmation. I always told my mom that after I made my confirmation, I was done and she would cackle. I was serious, I may have attended a sermon 10 times since then and that was almost 10 years ago. My theory on that is church bores me and if I fall asleep every time I go, that is disrespectful to God. He does not want me there if I am going to fall asleep and I do not want to be disrespectful to him, so I will not go. Win-win.

I joke, but I believe in God with all of my heart. I still pray every night, talk to him sometimes throughout the day and thank him for everything I have had, have and will have. He has saved my life and improved it countless times over. He has blessed those that I love and helped those who have needed aid. He, along with others give me strength to go out and pursue something more, something better every day. Literally, he gives me life and I am so thankful that I am still breathing after some of the stupid stuff I have pulled. I truly do believe in him, but I consider myself more spiritual than religious for a multitude of reasons. I will never forget a conversation I had with a friend of mine

who was not a Christian. A former grad student at LSU, she is one of the sweetest persons you will ever meet in life. She did not believe in God but it was not because she denied him. Growing up in a different part of the world, she was never exposed to him and I find it grueling to admit that she is going to burn in hell because of something that was out of her control. I know that fair is a place where they judge pigs but that is beyond harsh.

Then, there is the good book. I cannot say there are things in the Bible that I do not agree with because I have not read the Bible entirely, but there are states of mind, an old way of thinking and conforming that I refuse to be a part of. One of my biggest gripes with the Bible is that it was written by man and we all know how men are, I will leave at that. It was also written thousands of years ago, take that how you will. Great pieces of literature have withstood the lengths of time, but a lot of things have changed over the past thousand or so years. I am a Christian, but the definition of that term seems to be changing too. I could go on for an eternity, but all I know for certain is that I believe in Christ and I have a relationship with, the Father and the Holy Spirit. I will not knock anyone for not believing what they believe and I hope that others will afford me the same courtesy. We could all be right to a degree, just different names for different beings but I am in no position to make proclamations. I just know what I believe and though I do not parade it, I believe in him.

Side note: I also assigned Jedidiah this name because when I hear the name Jedidiah, I think of an Amish boy with no connection to the outside world. Weird, right?

Chapter 4

Marie Antoinette

Ms. Antoinette was one of the characters I struggled with the most. As I stated previously, growing up I felt different. Not in the, “We are all special,” way but more so in the “What are you?” way. Back home in Lafayette, people always asked where I was from for a multitude of reasons. Some questioned my race, wondering what I was mixed with. Others asked why I did not have an accent because I did not “sound like” I was from Louisiana. I can blame some of that on the media and ignorance, but I do believe a few times I was asked because the questioner genuinely wanted to know. I thought nothing of it then, but at this age, I have to wonder why. Why was it, or is it so important for people to know these things? Things that I could care less about, that I may not even know about myself? It is easy to say people fear what they do not understand, and I do think some of that is true, but coming from where I came from, I think people also like to be in the know because it makes them feel relevant. 9 times out of 10, if you ask someone about something they do not know, they will either act like they do, act like they did and forgot or admit it and change the subject. That 1 out of 10, they will be honest and that is sad.

Coming to SC, I did not know what to expect. After accepting Steve’s offer the day before St. Patrick’s Day (yes, I remember that moment like I remember my name- he had been calling my agent for days, leaving messages and I had just gotten back from the park with my boy Bert in BR, we went upstairs and sat outside on the patio to chill, etc.), I was mad excited. The recruiting process had been nerve racking and I was almost in tears when it became official. I was going to be a...University of South Carolina Student (sorry, I will always be a tiger). Cool, so I had to find a place to stay. I scheduled a visit

to campus and asked my mother to join so she could experience something new. The drive was gruesome, but we made it. After exploring on our own a bit, Josh showed us around campus. Columbia was not what I expected; it seemed as if nothing eventful was taking place during our stay. Definitely a college town. Still, I knew getting out of Louisiana would be a blessing, a breath of fresh air, a chance to start a new. I could not wait, especially with the “mess” I was dealing with still in the back of my mind. I thought I would miss it a bit, but I underestimated how much. My sister, mother and Aunt helped move me into my new place on August 1st and on the 4th, they left. That morning was difficult, and the two weeks that followed were the two hardest by far I have had in Columbia.

I say all this to describe how rough coming here was; I was alone. I did not know where to go to meet people. I did not know where I was in relation to other places to go somewhere. A childhood friend of mine died the first week. There were roaches EVERYWHERE. I spent a lot of my time calling, texting, daydreaming and hoping that some miracle would occur. Most days were spent in my apartment and driving around aimlessly. I even went to church-that is how badly I needed to be a part of something, do something, interact with other people.

Then, something happened. I was able to enter Strom, and I was fine. I drove to the rec, lifted and balled every day until school began. I met people, made connections, went out before school began. I completed my syllabus, made my lesson plan, settled in before school began. School began and I was ready...for the most part (*Away* was a blindside).

Marie Antoinette embodies that. She fears that no one will “get” her, because she claims is fundamentally different from those around her, but she is also new. Anytime you are the first to something or breaking in to something that is already established by yourself, it can be scary. It does not have to be a massive move or a joining a team, something small like going to a party where you know one person or eating at a restaurant can be intimidating. Being new is a chance to start over yet know that starting over is not always easy. Do not get me wrong, her being new is part of it because she is different. It is not something she brags about or attempts to be, she just is, and she wants people to accept her for who she is. Luckily, they do. She loves them for it. It is not often that people see her for her and take her in. I always hope that people will do the same when I meet them for the first time. Lots of people here have done that, especially outside of the department. That is why I spent a majority of my free time at the rec (Strom); yes, part of it is due to my college athletic background but part of it is I do not get judged out there for who I am. Whether I am on the court, on the track, on the machines or in the pool, I am judged by what I do, and I will take that any day over personal character attacks. Plus, no one cries if I tell them they are playing like shit or they are taking too long on the bench.

Sometimes, I do not feel that way when I am performing on stage. Part of acting is portraying a character. I often feel like I am portraying something that is a character of a character. It is like I am acting the way I think someone else would act a role because I know I do not act the way others do. Again, I am not boasting about it, I just know that I have a very calm, nonchalant demeanor and though I more than capable of being the

opposite, it feels to me sometimes I am just being big for the sake of being big and I do not like that. I frequently ask myself if I have chosen the right profession.

Chapter 5

Benjamin

Ah, Benjamin. What do we want to call him? Dexter, Jimmy Neutron, Screech, Urkle, Lisa, the list goes on. Ben, Benny, Benjie, Ben 10, you get the idea. Benjamin is the nerdy, geeky, dorky side of me that is more prevalent than one may think. On the surface, Benjamin is the boy who was so smart that he naturally became cool, an extremely rare occurrence. His classmates accepted that he was the brightest a while back and though everyone is competing for second place, Benjamin still feels he does not deserve to be at the top. He is the boy that gets questions wrong ON PURPOSE from time to time just to remind people that he can make mistakes.

Benjamin may have been the realest character with the most complex fear that I have. Though he is nothing like him, he claims that he is afraid of becoming his father. Everything that proceeds is about as close to the truth as you can get. That text is a mirror image of the relationship I share with my dad. A great man who was not the smartest, not the richest, but a man who knew what he had and who had worked for everything he owned. Nothing was given to him; he earned everything, from the beatdown trailer I grew up in that no longer stands to the Chevy S-10 that he cuddles with pride. 3PD, that should be his nickname because that is what he did well. Produce, provide and protect.

Like many young boys, I was very close to my dad growing up. We went on tons of adventures together, imaginary and real life. Camping, dinosaur hunting, house touring, space missions, parks and pools, etc. I still remember getting either a Happy Meal or a Kid's Club meal every day after school and going back home to play with my toys. I loved my dad, sometimes even when we whipped me. The man also saved my life on countless occasions, starting months after I was born...with a hole in my heart. When I

needed to have a procedure, my dad donated bags of his blood. Two out of the five times I was drowning, my dad jumped in the water and rescued me. When I got locked inside a car, my dad called the cops and they got me out, but he made the call. Seriously though, he came to my aid many a time, more than I would like to share truthfully. So why would I speak so negatively of him you may ask? Like many young boys, as you become a young man, you begin to gather your own sense of things and question tactics that your parents may have had/still have. You also become rebellious. Those were two baby steps that I took years before I was ready, but it was nothing compared to what happen to me during my freshman year of high school.

On August 29, 2006, my life changed forever. I remember it like yesterday, just got off the bus, not even a full week into my freshman year at Carencro High. It was storming outside, so much so that I was surprisingly scared to be alone in the house, especially when a huge blast of thunder shook the walls and made me fall. I walked to the kitchen (closer to the road, you know, just in case) and watched the end of *Oprah* when the phone rang. It was my mom. “Donavon, listen carefully, Dominique and Daddy were involved in an accident. Aunt Shirley is coming over there to pick you up?” “What?” She repeated herself. “Are they ok?” She said she did not know, she thought so but no to worry, so I thought nothing of it. Aunt Shirley came by, picked me up and brought me to her house. My cousin April and I watched movies and listened to CDs. I was so oblivious, I really thought it was just a fender bender. When it got late, I started to worry. Where was my family?! I felt uncomfortable, more of my relatives showed up at Aunt Shirley’s home and I noticed that this was not normal. Finally, I was brought to the

hospital after midnight and got a chance to see my mom. She explained everything to me, and as overwhelming as it was, I took it in.

An 18-wheeler had hit them, they were both alive, but Dominique had shards of glass impaled in her face and they were not sure if my father would ever walk again, IF he made it through the surgery happening as we spoke. I could not see my father, not that night, but the surgeon said I could see my sister. I ran down there with a young nurse tailing me, and when I walked in, Dominique rose from the table she was lying on, began crying and embraced me. I knew from that point on, no matter what, we would always be close and I was never going to let her down again. My grandma came into the room with another aunt and tried to get me to go home to get some rest. I made it very clear that I was not leaving without my sister, so I sat there for about 30 minutes until they cleared her. Then, we went home, without my dad and without my mom.

They wanted me to go to school in the morning. THE FUCK???? Life was never the same after that. I told no one about the accident, I did not really know anyone at school yet that I could trust besides two friends who I knew from middle school. I dropped out of every club I signed up for, every activity and sport I wanted to do to take care of my sister. My dad was in the hospital for months, although it felt like years. I became the man of the house with two women, so I did what my dad did, provided, produced and protected. I went to school but came back to help Dom with her school work and make meals for her. Sometimes, I just sat with her because she just needed a body with her. I tried to help my mom too, did some things I am not proud of to make some extra cash on the side. Once word got out, I had nothing to worry about protection wise- I knew my boys had me and by that time, I had become one of the most popular

kids in school, so everyone told me they had me if I needed anything. It was a very interesting time-my mom always told me she sacrificed so I would not have to during those times, and she did, but I left lots of stuff on the table too and I am not holding her accountable. What had to be done was done.

Things were not easier when my dad returned. He was depressed because he could not walk and he really could not do anything by himself. My mom was hard on him, she wanted him to get better and I was the nice cop to her bad cop, but some days I could not take it. It was hard to see this man I looked up to, idolized, wanted to be, to be so helpless, so useless, so weak. I mean, I had to take him to the bathroom at times to give him a bath and help him pee and stuff because he could not do anything by himself. I hated it. Sometimes, I stayed at school after school for no apparent reason just to avoid seeing him like that a little longer. In spite of acting sweet, I grew to despise him for a few weeks, and it was not his fault. It was mine, the arrogant, selfish, unaware teenager I was. I had no problem helping my sister because she was a child, but this man? Nigga, you grown! I was so stupid, but when he went back to the hospital for another operation and almost died due to a doctor's error, my entire outlook and perspective changed. I could talk about this for pages and pages, but to wrap it up, let us just say I understood what role I needed to play in my family moving forward.

I say all that to say, I love my dad immensely. He is so much better now, walking and all and I regret not speaking about him more. If you ever heard me talk of my father, consider it a miracle. I am sure if you asked most people, they would assume he is not around or that I maybe do not even know who he is. Neither of those assumptions are correct, but the vibe I give off when speaking of him would lead people to believe so.

This is why-it is almost impossible to describe our relationship now. There will always be love and a connection, but the knowledge of one another is eroding. It is what I wrote, he does not do those things and he does not really know me, but I do not think it is because he does not want to. It is because I am not there anymore and he cannot go most of the places that I go; I also do not call very often and he does not call me (we both avoid “bothering” the other).

It’s funny, I ponder everyday what if, and how he must feel believing that he failed us. A man who was known for being physical, always on the move and on the go restrained to basically the confines of his home and maybe a trip or two a day due to someone else’s fuck up. I know he hates that I do not want to use money we got from the lawsuit when I am in a bind financially, the “blood money” as I refer to it that he suffered for because that seems to be the only way he can still do his duty. Without that, he probably believes that I do not need him. He is wrong. I need him. I want him. I admire him. I love him. What happened to him was not fair, but he is coping the way he knows how. I many not want to be him, but that does not mean I have not learned things from him. Everything he has done to this day has been for my sister and me. There are no words to describe how much I love my dad, and as this tear falls down my cheek, let it be known that I will never stop loving him. He is currently going through another rough period, possibly even tougher than before and he knows that I am here for him now because again, I will NEVER stop loving him.

Chapter 6

Alexus

Alexus was a fun character to portray- I named her after that Kanye line in “All Falls Down- Couldn’t afford a car so she named her daughter Alexis.” Ah, one of my faves. That line is the embodiment of a sophisticated hood rat if you ask me, and that is what Alexis is. Sassy, Classy and Flashy. Everyone knows her, and everyone knows what she is doing because she tells the whole world when she speaks. Yep, Alexis is that side of me, the “ghetto” side. She does not come out very often because I have not been in the environment where she is needed in quite some time, but she is there. Loud, strong, and self-absorbed. The girl who does not care about a thing but herself, or maybe that is just a front? Everyone is under the impression that she is a fool, but in actuality, she is very clever, resourceful and woke. She just acts that way because she can and because she is a little insecure.

It is a very small thing, but Alexis mentions her mom. My mom, similar to my dad, has played a very significant role in my life. She would probably be the colossal if it were not for her instilling God in my life. My mom was just, unexplainable. She still is- she has that joyous, jubilant presence where everyone loves her and she is always looking for an adventure. She has always loved me and I am certain she will never stop. I could talk about her for eons. No matter what happens to her, Alexis will always cherish and respect her mom, hints why she recalls all her mother has ever told her. She states that when she was young, her mom claimed that what she had was a privilege. This information was easier to accept as truth at a time of innocence, but as she has aged and become more aware, it is difficult not to question what her mother told her years ago. Yet, the only reason why she has not succumbed is because of her mother’s words and

the pedestal she is on. In my mind, Alexis has challenged this thinking before and has been punished in various ways including time outs, whippings, and embarrassment. She has learned her lesson and knows that her mom wants the best for her. Her mom has emphasized this again and again, so it must hold some type of value. I hope all moms do this because sometimes you need that tough love. Like clay, you need to be molded, to be coddled by someone you love and/or someone who loves you; otherwise, change will not happen unless something else gets to you.

The thing I wanted people to take away from Alexis is that there is a deeper meaning in what she is saying. If you read the text or watched my performance, what she is talking about can be either one of two things. Number one is her phone, but number two is her virginity. She feels pressure, everyone one is doing it. People are coming up to her and asking for her assistance. Her mother told her to wait because what she has is special, a gift, a blessing of sorts. In a society where it is all about the next, the new, the now, some would argue it is all neurotic, negative and needy. On one hand, she is trying to hold on. She has not given up what is dear to her and she acknowledges that it is significant. On the other, she states that she is “the only one left” as all her friends have done it already. Sex, an upgrade, the two are interchangeable for this conversation because at the end of the day, she is worried about what society may think of her based on her decision. Think of it as a science experiment; there is a controlled variable, an independent variable and a dependent variable. The controlled variable is Alexis, always consistent in her stance. The independent variable is choice, as she controls herself and all choices made. The dependent variable is in fact society in the grand scheme of things as those around her will be affected by her choices.

Why is this important? Alexis is influenced by the outside as we all are but remains loyal in what she believes. This is the part of Alexis that resembles me-beliefs. The old trick question, what is more important, knowledge or belief? You will find people who vote on both sides, however I believe it is belief by a landslide. For something to become knowledge, it is generally accepted as a truth, which means it must be believed first. You cannot be smart if you do not trust what you know. Society, especially ours, tries its best at times to dictate what we know and persuade us to believe things. The media is an obvious example. It is not all the time, or most of society either, but with us being more connected than we have ever been, what is truth can be hard to decipher. There is just loads of information roaming around by the millisecond and the fact that almost anyone can access it now at any time with a phone, computer, library, etc. is great, but we must remember what is true and what is important. No need to rant, just commenting. If a young girl knows that she does not have to rush into something she does not really need, I would think that others are capable of doing the same, whether it be sex or an upgrade.

My beliefs have not wavered much even at 26 years old. I still believe in God, ghosts, monsters, a bunch of stuff that people would more than likely chastise and pick apart. Still believe in myself too.

Chapter 7

Jax

Ah, Jax. A man's man or the typical jock. Named after a *Mortal Kombat* character, Jax excels at sports, girls, and of course, being adored. Even when down, his rep is untouchable, and seldom does he have to prove himself outside of a game. Really, he wins at life. I had to put this part of me in the show because it played a tremendous role in my late teens. Most people know that though very short lived, I was a collegiate athlete at LSU, but not many know that I was a walk on. That is right- walk on. I tried out for the basketball team as a freshman in high school- my friend and I were told by the coach that we had the talent to start varsity but he did not like our attitude. I tried out for the football team twice and made the team, but never finished or started a season. The first time I was cut for missing two-a-days; did not even know what the hell that was at the time, plus I told the coaches weeks before I was going on vacation. The second time, I quit; I did not play in our season opener against Barbe and after being down 42-7 in the first, why did I quit you may ask? I did not even get a jersey because I missed practice the day before (due to a doctor's appointment I TOLD them about) and they wanted the team to run one hundred 100s for losing. After I sat that game? I SCORED ON THE FOUR PLAYS I DID PLAY IN TWO SCRIMAGE PLAYS. Fuq outta here, no thank you. Track and field, you get the idea. I was kicked off or quit every sports team in high school, so I always held that preverbal chip on my shoulder. It was petty, but it helped me get to where I wanted to be and provided other options.

Jax also has everything a guy could want-again, the popularity, the awards and accolades, the sports, the girls, the adoration. Stuff he did not ask for, stuff he does not need, yet somehow, he is missing the thing he wants. That happens to be Marie

Antoinette, the girl who is not impressed by what he can do physically, so he has got to connect with her on some other level.

That is beyond frustrating. If you have the gift you want to use it. Fine, so he asks Ms. T for help, which she provides. Now the ball is in his court, and he is sick with the rock, but what happens when the hoop begins to move? What if he misses? What if it is for the game? Or the high score? Or bragging rights? According to the great Wayne Gretzky, you miss 100% of the shots you do not take, but what if he cannot shoot because he does not know for sure what is going to happen next?

This is also a deeper-rooted struggle for Jax as it comes from his fear of commitment. For quite a while, this was my largest fear, especially during my college years. I always wondered if there was something else, the bigger, better deal as they say. I was terrified of committing to things, anything that did not apply to my studies or that I believed would not benefit me immediately. I joined several organizations in college and dropped off the face of the earth as time went on, things like Habitat for Humanity, Chess Club, URTA and more. I did it with sports too. Obviously, I quit basketball due to a multitude of reasons. I later made the Rugby team and quit. I was going to try out for the football team after getting in shape and never did. Outside circumstances were a factor in some of these decisions, but I frequently wasted time in my first two years. Poor time management was hella heavy until I had no free time to manage. Once I had school, work and rehearsals/performances, I got my shit together. It was necessary in order to function. What was not necessary was having a happy, stable relationship.

“I struggle with commitment.” That was my thing, I stated this constantly. So many times, so many memories, so many girls. Scared of settling? Yes. Scared of getting hurt? A little. Scared of losing someone? Maybe. Honestly, I don’t know why it was such a giant flaw in me and to me now that I look back. My parents were always together and even though I think the potential to split grows more and more each day, I never saw that growing up. Their relationship did not influence me in a negative way. I saw things on tv like *Flavor of Love* and *Next* that emphasized finding the one, but also experimenting with as many ladies as possible. I played games where I could have a girlfriend or wife, or multiple girlfriends and/or wives, idolizing the playboy mentality. I read stories about males who had females flaunting over them, the opposite sex practically begging them for a taste even at a young age. Maybe that stuff did creep into my mind, but it never altered what I believed was right and wrong. That rarely changes, and I believe on a fundamental level, seeing, dating, kissing, sleeping, etc. with more than one woman at the time is wrong, which is why I never did it. The key word is “same time”....or key words, whatever. The point is, I have made mistakes as we all have, not going into details.

I used to wish I could take some of those actions back, but now I relish in them. None of them make me feel good about myself; nevertheless, I know that without those things happening, I would not be who I am today. I have a theory on why I did those things: 1) I got my heart broken, which happens to everyone unless you are really lucky or you do not have a heart, 2) I tried to cope while at the same time realized that I was attractive and 3) I went to LSU as a staple on a team and in a department full of women. Herm Edwards said it best, you play to win the game. Even when he gets advice from Ms. T, Jax is not contempt. Athlete mentality.

Chapter 8

Wendy

My baby Wendy. Similar status to my boy Jax, a girl who has everything in the world given to her due solely to her looks. This girl is gorgeous, she has a natural Aphrodite essence. Even without her “add ons”, she is irresistible, and she knows it. Wendy is your typical Cali or Miami girl-beach bod, long hair, beautiful eyes, perfect smile, warm laugh, etc. Think surfer girl mixed with valley girl-her one knock is her voice (its glottal). She is also highly intelligent and shockingly strong, but when you look that good, no one cares so why flaunt that, right? Play dumb blonde, brunette, whatever you truly are and go with the flow. That is why she is known in circles as the party girl, the hot chick, the one. Not the girl who gets wasted and takes her bra off, that is tacky, but definitely the girl who will go all the way in truth or dare. What I am trying to say is she is pretty, but she is also somewhat scattered brained because she wants to experience things. She tries her best to be careful, yet sometimes she has to be reckless in order to obtain a new experience. Some experiences should never come about.

Here is the thing about Wendy, she was raped. Straight up. Wendy was raped. It was not dramatic with her crying, attempting to get away from her abuser, but it happened. She unknowingly had a drink or two that took her back, but she remembers. It was not her fault, but she feels responsible. Every day, she blames herself knowing that she is not guilty but telling herself she was culpable to a degree. “If only I didn’t do this,” she says, “or that,” she sighs going over every detail in her head. Then she realizes that the details do not matter because from what she can recall, she will never be the same again. He took her temple. Until she dies, Wendy will live knowing that someone took advantage of her and she could do absolutely nothing about it.

Now, she fears every man who looks at her. Being assaulted, molested or abused in any shape or fashion can do something like that to you, especially if you blame yourself. If she blames him, then she is a victim and it is just that one person. Sure, it can happen again, but the likelihood is slim. By blaming herself, it means that it can happen again with anyone, possibly everyone because she is the common denominator. That is just one side effect of dozens. By losing trust in herself, she begins to lose trust in others, hence losing trust in herself. It is a catch 22, but it is counterintuitive as well and that was the biggest thing for me. Sometimes you can meet your destiny on the very path you chose to avoid and that is a reality for Wendy.

Wendy was the hardest character for me to write a passage for because of what she represents during the times we are in. In fact, I considered scratching her early on because of how dark she is along with the subject matter she speaks about. Not unlike Alexis, I wanted to play on the light-heartedness before reaching the dark. It is a touchy subject, one that has to be approached with care. I knew the audience would react to her; of all the characters, all the parts of me, I knew she was the one that could not be ignored. Not even Vice could get the attention and response that she received. She was the spark I needed to ignite my message. Whether you have had that type of encounter or not, you know what it is. We all know it cannot be justified under any circumstances, but no one ever wants to talk about it.

Fortunately, some of that has changed recently with the #MeToo movement which continues to expand. I am not surprised by any of the stories I have read or heard, but I am tremendously disappointed and sickened. It goes without saying that writing from a female's perspective was difficult too, for each of my young ladies but definitely

for Wendy. Speaking about something that has happened to me through a young girl was an extraordinary challenge, and I based Wendy loosely on many of my friends from LSU who shared their stories with me. I am certain it took a lot to get that off their chests; it is uncomfortable and terrifying. It takes heaps of trust and strength to do that, and I dedicate Wendy to them and to all who feel they lack a voice.

As a man, I have been taken advantage of on more than one occasion, once with a close friend. Never thought it would happen. Speaking on the other side of things, it took me a while to become comfortable with it. It is difficult for a guy to be taken seriously if he claims he was raped by a female and it should not be that way, but it is. To most, it is logically impossible. I have revealed this to a few of my close friends, people I consider my brothers and two or three of their mindsets have not wavered a bit. As a male, you either wanted it or you are a bitch or a pussy. I could go into that much deeper, but I think I will move on for now. That's what she said!...jokes are another way of coping. I am fine now, I was good then. It is just one of those things that happen and you either learn from it, or you dwell in it.

I will not pretend to know what women of all ages go through on the day to day. I have had these conversations with many of my close girlfriends before, and it is shocking to hear how they live everyday life. It is almost as if they are on high alert anytime they are in public near men. Some have told me they have to be this way because they are always "prepared," and we have joked about it, but there is some candor in their comments. Every man they do not trust is a potential rapist and every woman is a potential victim. Blame our culture, blame the media, blame the past, they are all one in the same. Blame the real perpetrator, ourselves. Not in the traditional sense, but we do

hold the keys to the future. I am not saying all men are beasts, nor am I saying that women are perfect. I am only one heterosexual man and I will not speak for all men, but in my opinion, we must do better.

Chapter 9

Hope

Hope started off as a lost cause and developed into one of my favs. Initially, Hope was a mirror image of a girl I was messing with months before, but we could never get it quite right because of her insecurities. I had issues too, but I was willing to work it out with her, she was not. She had legitimate excuses, though excuses only satisfy those who make them. Regardless, we ended it. I hated her for like a day. My friends and I have this running joke about getting with girls, we call it “perfect circumstances”. They can range from anything like “if she wasn’t my best friend,” to “if I weren’t in a happy relationship.” Hope was one of those I tried to capitalize on and it fell apart. I kept her name, but this Hope is separate from that other one. This Hope is a treasure, and I gave her what I believe are the best parts of me. In a word, Hope is hope.

Hope is the embodiment of a happiness free of expectations. A sweet, pure, warm girl, she is conscious of who she is and where she stands in relation to all. Due to her intuition, she processes everything and questions the few things she does not understand to gain more insight. A joy to have around, she appreciates every moment of every second, spending it on her passions and those that are passionate about her. She has an abundance of fears, minor and major, that stem from her imaginative, creative mind. For example, she knows that vegetables can cause no physical harm to her, but she avoids them because they are green and nasty. That is unquestionably a me trait I had to give her-dodging the ball even though you can catch it. It is cooler to just move simply because you can.

Youthful Hope has a quality that lingers within me, and that is the fear of being desensitized. What does that mean exactly? For me, it means not feeling anything, fear, joy, disgust, surprise, all gone. I really do worry that one day I will not feel anything, especially because I am already mellow most of the time, but I remember things I felt as a kid that I no longer do. Naturally, things change as we grow, we adapt, but how much is too much? I detest using this example, but movies and tv have changed massively since I was born. There was a time when I saw something was rated Tv-14, Tv-MA or R and I would either change the channel or turn the volume down low. Now, the things I viewed with extreme paranoia are on tv all the time and some of them are rated PG.

I recall reading about when *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Gremlins* were released in the 80s, a little before my time; there was no PG-13 rating to that point and the content in those films were not R worthy, so they were rated as PG. Once audiences watched the film, countless complained about the violence on screen which did not seem appropriate for the rating and a new rating formed. These days, good luck. Now there is so much nudity, vulgarity and violence that even I ought to admit it is disappointing. Plus, it is easy to access; no more waiting until after dark or ordering special programs to fulfill your desires. With TVs, computers, and smartphones, you can watch what you want, when you want, where you want. I say all that to say, I have seen many things on screen, including video games and the hypocritical media. There is some merit in what has been said by many, I do think constant exposure to negative images can subject and influence young minds, but that is not the only factor, nor the main.

Speaking for myself, I was robbed of my feelings by my environment and experiences. After seeing someone being shot in front of you, having to kill a dog with your bare hands, losing so many people you held close to you and more, you build up a tolerance, a resistance. You cannot be weak. I remember reading an interview with Hov about his rise to fame, impact on the youth and cheating on Beyoncé. One of the things I took from that article was Jay-Z discussing survival mode. He talked about how multiple men, in particular minorities growing up in tough places cannot connect because they have to survive (more times than not, women are the recipients of that cut off, but that is a different debate). They cannot afford to feel, so they shut their emotions off. In his words, “‘What you looking at?’- that comes from oh, you think I see you? You think I see through that you’re hurting, so to prove that you’re tough or that you’re not weak you want to fight me.” I relate to this so much. I do always feel I have to be strong and that crying is a weakness.

I will say opening up has always been somewhat easy for me once trust is earned and I have made strides in the vulnerable department, but I do get that Li Shang vibe every now and again. That is why I dance. Yes, I dance, in my room, in the shower, in my car and I sing. I play basketball, I run, I lift. I go out, I stay in, I eat. I act the fool because I need to stay positive for myself and others. My bad, macho energy rarely helps so why bring it to the table when I can bring productivity and a good time? Dancing is a metaphor for the activities I enjoy that others will say are mundane, and that is ok with me. Like Hope said, it is a way of life and it is how she escapes.

Hope does not have a chair; she is a dancer. In my mind, I pictured her prancing around the classroom with a ribbon, the length of it flowing behind her as she leaped

from location to location. I cut the ribbon after drafts, but I still wanted her to be a bit wild-child. Not in the sense of loose, but just not restricted or confined. All that said, Hope was one of the most irritating characters for me to rehearse because of the feedback I received from my professor. I love Robyn to death, but I did not think she understood that I wanted Hope to be new every time. Every rehearsal, she gave me a suggestion here and there, but she ALWAYS had something to say about Hope. Every. Single. Time. It never failed, and I believe she started to see that I was becoming annoyed with the feedback. She kept telling me that I was doing Hope a misjustice, that she was not real like the others, that I did not give her the respect I should have. She adored the character, but really thought that my presentation had no worth. At times, it felt like she was saying I was making fun of women because Hope came off as a ditzy, uninformed, floozy and that was not my intent.

Robyn had never been so stern with me, not that she was harsh, but her position did not budge one bit. To be fair, every time I showed her my show, I usually skipped over Hope or did her half-heartedly with some excuse (my leg was hurting, I was working on the dance, etc). I was not frustrated with her, I was frustrated with myself, but I needed someone to blame, so I blamed the person helping me of course. Also, I told her to be real with me when she asked permission to be truthful, so I should not have been in my feelings, but I was. Nonetheless, I took her advice, and we choreographed a piece for Hope as she glided through the space. Robyn never tried to alter my piece, she only wanted the best for me and asked me to commit to Hope as I did with everyone else. It took me some time to realize that and in hindsight, I needed it. It all worked out in the end.

Chapter 10

Tyler

Occam's razor personified, Tyler is the most laid-back boy you will ever meet. The ultimate smoothie king, he walks around with jazz playing out of his ass and he always has a joke prepared that can make even Ms. T laugh. He possesses an unpretentious swagger with a laissez faire attitude. Tyler is what I believe people see when they see me, a cool, calm, nonchalant cat who gets the job done, but leaves you wondering how. In the script, I exaggerated his profile, which is why he leans in his nonuniform chair, speaks slowly and smokes. At first, smoking was Tyler's top priority and number one quality, but as I continued to draft him, I realized that was too shallow and he had to be more than a stoner.

All that said, fire is one of the neatest chemical reactions to me and I convinced myself to have it in my show (I can be very persuasive). I really wanted Tyler to be smoking the blunt as he spoke but with the whole "no fire in the theatre" thing, I cut that and had him attempt to light a Black & Mild. I really wanted fire in my show; so much so that I did not confide in any of my professors as I knew they would trip. In the end, I decided against it. The passing off at the end of his excerpt was improvised and did not make sense to me when I did it, but the audience loved it so I kept it. Tyler was also Jamaican, a trait I threw in to give him a little pizzazz.

Black Friday. So, true story, I have only worked one Black Friday in my life and I mirror what Tyler stated, it was awful. I was working at Best Buy in 2015 and I was beyond pissed when I saw the schedule. I knew I would have to work, but those hours did not seem humane. I worked from 2 AM until 5 PM, some of the longest hours of my life. It really was not that bad from a task perspective, there were just so many people on the

floor and they kept asking me questions. Literally, question after question. “Where is Fallout 4? Do you think he will like this?” “Do you sell Mac chargers here? Thanks, and what about iPhone 7 cases?” “What sound system would you suggest between Bose and Beats?” I recall answering multiple questions that day I was not qualified to answer, and once even bringing a group of twenty-two people to the same department they just exited because they could not find the item they were looking for. I did try, I helped when I could, but sometimes I had to direct customers to someone else or another department because I could not assist them.

Then, there were the sales. Like Tyler, I was an inventory and merchandising specialist, a fancy term for a stocker. I spent much of my time in the warehouse with the crew. When I was on the floor, I was usually restocking and repricing shelves of iPhone cases, TVs, computers, toys or headphones. Admission-I stole a pair of headphones one night. Technically, the package was damaged, but it was damaged on purpose by a warehouse member who taught me the ropes (will remain nameless) and then he gave it to me, so there is that. Anyway, on Black Friday, I was required to be “on site” as they say and available unless it was absolutely necessary to be in the warehouse. Making sales was vexing since I depended on selling myself more so than the actual product, but I prefer that over checking buyers out any day. I smiled a lot, spoke in a soft, sweet tone when talking to women and a clear, firm tone when talking to men. Pitching a sale can be stressful, but if you have little invested in it, it is effortless. The company’s bottom line would not affect mine, plus we all got time and a half for the entire day. I did my best, but I did not hurt myself trying to pull off a miracle.

Once we hit 10 AM, the countdown to freedom began as I took my lunch break. I considered leaving and not going back, but I returned and got the day over with. By the time 2 rolled around, there was less rush and panic and nothing for us to really do, so I roamed the store and talked to a few of the pretty customers (I was bored). They did not need me, almost everyone was gone by 1 anyway, customers and workers. I was sure the place would not get busy again until after 5, but by that time I was long gone and sharing thanksgiving dinner with my family.

Obviously, I am not afraid of Black Friday but after being on the other side of the table, I do not want to sit there again. It was intense. I get why companies and marketers do it, but I would much rather spend my day doing something else than assisting hundreds of customers. The space was crowded, the customers were anxious, and the pay was not exceptional. Furthermore, it cut into my limited family time, so you will not see me on a sales floor again during that period. I rarely make promises or guarantees, this is a special case. If I can, I will continue to avoid being in the vicinity of all stores during Black Friday as it is undoubtedly not worth it.

Chapter 11

Vice

I do not even know where to begin with Vice. Deplorable, asinine, blasphemous, none of those attributes apply to this young man, but that is the impression people get when they see him. Possibly the most thought out character next to Wendy, Vice was difficult to create because of how in the moment he is. I wanted to make a statement with each piece, but none more than with Vice because he is me. Always holding back, constantly playing the game, habitually suppressing himself because he feels it is an obligation. Letting others shine so you can walk freely in the dark, that is what Vice has done his entire life. He has to, because if he excels, then a bigger problem will arise. He has become captive to the easy way out. If I could have, I would have given Vice a grill, gun, tats and a do-rag just so he could pull out a MCAT book. I detest stereotyping others but for this character, it was near mandatory to get my point across.

Vice grew up as a mixed boy, in all aspects of life. He is mulatto, back home they call him Creole because he is periodontally white and black with dashes of Native American and Hispanic, but he is viewed as black. At least by his white friends. On the other hand, some of his black friends see him as white. His skin color is clearly brown. His family is several shades brighter than him, so much so that when he is in public with his mother and/or sister, people believe he is adopted. He is not poor nor is he rich, but he has extended family and friends who are both. Vice knows who he is, yet everyone continues to tell him what he is. Somehow, that defines him. Somehow, that determines his future. Somehow, that will never change, no matter how far he gets in life. He has dreams, he wants to be a doctor, a superhero, a basketball player, so many things and people continue to tell him no, that those things are not obtainable. He is outstanding at

school, though some classmates shout he is a sellout. His best friend has similar goals and he is called an Uncle Tom. After years of denying, one day, he submits to the pressure and alters his lifestyle, appearance and bond to others.

Vice becomes a nigga. “But Donavon, what is a nigga?” you may ask. Put plain and PC, a nigga is an ignorant man that does stupid stuff and is expected to do little more. Niggas come in many shapes and sizes, and even a well-put together, respectable man can have what we call a “nigga moment” (i.e. The Boondocks). There is a great piece of stand up that I believe should be enshrined in the history books by standup comedian Chris Rock. The bit is entitled “Black People vs. Niggas.” In it, Chris states that black people are more racist because, “Everything white people don’t like about black people, black people really don’t like about black people.” He claims there is a war going on right now between black people and niggas. As comedic as it is, it is kind of on point. In his jokes, he talks about how black people cannot go to the movies because niggas are shooting at the screen, how owners cannot keep a disco open for more than two weeks and how he has to move his tv in at two in the morning because niggas will rob him, come over the next day and say “I heard you got robbed.” There are several more jokes, one about book being kryptonite but the point is a nigga is dumb. This is not the friendly term of endearment that some use or the hard -er, this is the sad excuse for a man you see projected constantly in the media.

Vice imitated that because it is what people expected of him, but even when he did that, he was still chastised and criticized! He dumbed himself down, listened to rap music and never spoke up or participated in and outside of class because that is what he was SUPPOSED to do, and now he cannot even do that. Therefore, his outburst is so

critical because for a split second, the dynamic in the classroom changes. He becomes the teacher.

No matter how you dice it, people still fear black

And there's nothing we can do about that

Even though I've got a little bit of white

Being black is a permanent stamp on my life

Truer words have never been spoken. Regardless of what this young man does, he will always be viewed as a black man first. Not a student, not a father, not a CEO, a black man. It should not be like that, but it is. I do not want to get into the logistics of what it means to be black or anything like that, because it is different for everyone. Plus, being light-skinned and mixed could be different from being dark-skinned and African-American or something else and I still do not feel totally comfortable speaking as a quote on quote "black man." What I will say is that these are unfortunate times for people of color in this country. Rock has another joke that I will paraphrase, "People say that we've come a long way from slavery-WHITE PEOPLE have come a long way from slavery."

I am not racist or against the white man or anything like that, let me be clear. Vice was a blatant commentary on the country we are living in now, my Kaepernick moment. I am not into the dynamics of the movements, I am into the targets, I am looking for a result. I will hold out hope like I always do, but D. L. Hughley once said that the two things in America that no one will ever feel sorry for are a great white shark and a young black man.

Chapter 12

Ms. T

I went back and forth with inserting and deleting Ms. T from the script. Originally, I thought she would be a nice tie up to an overwhelming 16 minutes of dialogue, but then I struggled to see what purpose she served outside of that. She provided another challenge as an additional female role, but how would she respond to all this information? She just heard very personal stories from everyone in her care, stories they probably have not told to anyone else. Someone once told me that listen and silent are spelled with the same words, but she has to react somehow. Then I solved it- she did not have to react! She could just take it in, start to share and then BAM, bell rings for dismissal. Game. Set. Match!

Ms. T was heavily inspired by my Kindergarten teacher Ms. Dupry with sprinkles of other teachers thrown in. A kind-hearted young lady, Ms. Dupry will always hold a special place in my heart because she was my first “official” teacher. She did all she could to accommodate her students, even letting me eat boxes of Rice Krispies treats during a pizza party because I did not eat pizza at the time (I was going through a phase). If I were any of the teens above, I would want someone like Ms. Dupry to confide in. She was the type of instructor that made you feel like you were capable of anything, the quintessential early education teacher, a model of consistency. I always attached this Ben Franklin quote to her, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I will learn.”

After taking in each individual story, Ms. T is flustered. What could anyone say after that? She openly states that she does not know how to proceed but thanks her students for opening up. It appears to be small, but an act like that goes a long way when

building trust and vice versa. I did not indicate what the reason for this sharing was in the script, but I realized the faith they held in this woman had to be evident.

Ms. T asks her class, “If everyone is special, then are we really all different?” On the surface, this can seem like a silly question and maybe it is. That said, I wanted the audience to really think about it, to go three-deep. A vast amount of us Americans are told we are special throughout life, especially as we grown into the adults we choose to be, so how can we all be special if we are all different? What I was trying to get at is we are more alike than we want to acknowledge. We should let that bring us closer together in lieu of splitting us farther apart. A quick Easter egg to this is when Ms. T answers Jedidiah’s question with a smile as everyone else is leaving. Once her students have left, she calls out to them, “Have a good weekend,” and stands alone in the room as the lights fade on her and the vacant seats.

The overarching question is what does the T stand for. The answer is nothing. I toyed with the idea of trust, terrific, thankful, etc. but that was all tacky. As I concluded the show, I determined it would be better to let the audience ponder that and name her to their desire. I am certain we all have a Ms.T in our lives.

Chapter 13

Statement

Surprisingly, I struggled quite a bit with what to put into the program. I settled on the title BFFs for multiple reasons, but the main one was it is a common acronym for best friends forever which these students are not, but in a way become after their session (like *The Breakfast Club*...I guess). It also kept potential alive for other things (Big Black Fears-the original idea, Best Foot Forward-the progress through digress, etc.). That said, I needed a statement in the pamphlet for our shows. I was aware that I had the freedom to say anything, that my comment could reveal as much about my piece as I wanted or absolutely nothing. I was not ready to let the ELD idea go. I tried to make it work, writing, “Witness the epitome of light and dark through vessels of innocence.” Sounded cool, mentioned the viewers and the kids, but I knew I was stretching it. Scratched.

Next, I tried, “Enter a familiar space with an unfamiliar face, where we are all witnesses to something great.” That was corny as hell; for some reason, I was caught up on the witness idea. Rhyming is an act I often include in my work, but the act of observing, of spectating. The audience had to know that what they were going to see from my show was special and no disrespect to the other shows but it was not to be compared or grouped in with those either. Still, that line was terrible. It was cut. Then I tried, “Someone once told me the only times in life we’re honest are when we’re drunk, mad or young.” Didn’t fully apply to my piece because no one was drunk, I’m pretty sure I just heard that somewhere and liked it. Nada. I needed something though because I told Kaleb I would have something for him the next night. During a tech rehearsal with Gabi, I discovered my stamp.

Earlier in the day, I was looking up quotes on my phone. Quotes on love, life, despair, happiness, fear, you name it I aimed it (code for search, but I wanted it to rhyme). I found several nice quotes, but the more I read, the more I realized I wanted something original, something by me, something I could paten if I wanted to. I started to think about lines in books I read and songs I heard that always stuck out to me, and then I stumbled upon it. After doing a very rough run through one night in CPE after *The Crucible*, Gabi and I were talking about things while J Cole came up on my Pandora station. J Cole, one of my favorite artist of today, has lots of clever messages in his lyrics, so I listened to some Cole and made notes on a couple of lines I really liked. Then I thought, “What if I took a line from a song I haven’t heard so there is no preconceived bias on what that means?” I was inspired by his song *Never Told*. In it, he raps, “But the truth is we’re all the same, on different teams but it’s all a game.” That was as close to ideal as I could have asked for, but it was too short. I needed to make it weighty and impactful, but also keep it short, simple and sweet. I thought and thought and finally, I came up with what was in the program.

“We got different names and different frames

Different aims and different pains

The truth is, we’re all the same

On different teams but still in the game”

Everything my show is about in one, clever statement. I was satisfied. I think J would be proud. The message was clear as day if you knew the show like my friends and cohorts, but there was enough ambiguity where you could come in and not know what

you were about to watch if you had never seen the show. Like my show, it is work that I am proud of because in that short piece of text, all is encompassed.

Chapter 14

After

I never understood why my cohorts were so nervous about their shows. Each of them was beyond amazing and I wish we could have done them again. That was my biggest gripe-only doing three performances was cheap to me. Personally, I loved sharing my story every night because last school year felt like a huge waste of my time. Some of that was due to the small roles I got which I understand I am not going to always be the lead, but I do not like my time being wasted. To me, my time could have been spent much more wisely on other things than standing/sitting in rehearsal for hours to barely be utilized. I am a team player though, so what evs. It was also a blast to create something that not only showcased my skills but spoke volumes to people while meaning something to me. I could not tell you how many audience members gave me positive feedback after the show and I heard from others that people outside of the department were talking about it. It felt good to do something for me, to make my own art and not fit into somebody else's project. I look forward to doing that again.

I did rediscover my passion for writing throughout this process. When we were given our first writing prompt by Robyn, I was not a fan. At the time, I knew for certain what my show was going to be, and I thought all that free writing was unnecessary. Needless to say, I was wrong. The prompts did not change my mind; rather, they influenced me to open my show to other possibilities outside of the one I was going to focus on. As mentioned before, that led to the idea of race issues, then fear and so on and so forth. I will confess, I wrote my show in one day, practically one sitting because I told Robyn I would have something for her when I returned from Christmas break. I made a tweak here and there, but there was no shift in the foundation.

Now that the show has been done for months, I thought about expanding it and performing it in other venues, but honestly, I am kind of done with it. Every now and again I have an awesome idea that involves the 11 of them, but more times than not, it stays an idea and never reaches a pad, paper, phone or pc. I like to finish things and move on to the next which can be detrimental sometimes, but as of now, I have no intention of performing it again anytime soon. I would like to use some of that footage in the future, maybe even for my reel, but the show itself will be on a backburner for the foreseeable future. It was as close to perfect as it could have been in my mind; I refuse to taint it by expanding or condensing it. I want it to be a legend, the first show I ever wrote, directed and performed. I have not edited it either. For the purposes of my thesis, I cleaned it up a bit format wise but the original will always remain on my google docs and Microsoft word, on top, unblemished and undefeated. It is an original and nothing beats a first.

Chapter 15

BFF's

Black Familiar Fears of Black Future Fears

Blackfest Club

9 chairs

1) Caroline (southern belle-slow and soft, fluttering)-fanning herself (cross legged for real, right over left)

May I go first? Contrary to popular belief, my greatest fear is not failure. In fact, my greatest fear is dolls. (To Jedediah) Before you ask, I despise Slappy, Annabelle and Chucky-I repeat, despise. I hold utter disdain for puppet masters and even more contempt for those who capitalize on their success, making mannequins and such. There is something “off” about all dolls in general, but the life like models are the absolute worse. Why mimic something so dear as life? Take the reborn dolls; there have been instances where cops have broken into cars because they believed a baby was locked inside, and other occasions where mothers have contacted law enforcement to put out APB’s for their lost petites. Furthermore, demons appear to take pride in possessing these objects; how easily can you recall a film or novel where a doll was controlled by a fiend? (To Jedediah) It was rhetorical baby.

2) Jedediah- Drawing with paper then draw a hole (freak that gets picked on-fast and brash, worried)

(Hunched over, knees together)

Umm, nothing. (To Caroline) I'm not scared of palmetto bugs, and they're called ROACHES. (To teacher) Huh? Yes mam. I don't like getting coal for Christmas. I never got it before but if I woke up one day and had coal in my stocking, I would cry. (To Tyler) SANTA IS REAL! (To teacher) Yes mam. (Takes breath) Holes scare me. I saw this movie once where these boys had to dig holes all day. And this one time, I read a book about this magician dude who locked a dementor thingy in a hole. And I played this game once where I was this girl running from these guys who were shooting at me and I had to jump into this hole. And holes that are black...I was born with a hole in my heart, so holes reminded me that something was wrong with me. Really? Thank you. It's silly but sometimes I wonder if I cheated death, like Final Destination. (To Tyler) What? YOU SHUT UP!!! (To teacher) Yes mam.

3) Marie Antionette- looking straight into crowd (french-sweet, different pronunciation, lovely)

(Either crosses for real, left over right with hands on knees or both legs together slanted at an angle with hands together on side)

The biggest fear I had coming here was that no one would understand me. I speak different, think different, dress different. I thought they would hate me Madame T. Luckily, I was incorrect. (looking at class) I love the people I know now, they have made me feel at home. That is no longer my peur. Now, it is closing my eyes. Oui, I shutter almost every time I blink. My culture psychiatrist calls it Somniphobia. She says that the fear comes from not wanting to sleep, but I believe it is a fear of not wanting to be alone. A fear of bareness. A fear of... (chokes up; maybe starts to cry, but not forced)

4) Benjamin (nerd-nasal, unsure, innocent)/calculator

(Left leg over-man way)

My dad. I'm not afraid of him, I'm afraid of becoming him. See, my father is an excellent man. He made sure I stayed in school, never cheated on my mother, all that good stuff but that's what he's supposed to do. I'm not in the business of rewarding people for things they should do. He doesn't smoke anymore, but he still drinks. I haven't seen him function much without it. He doesn't go to church anymore, but I don't go either. Honestly, he doesn't really go anywhere. (Pause) He doesn't talk to many people, a few neighbors and family. We don't talk much, don't see much...he doesn't really know me. I don't want to be that. I want to know my children, my friends, my world. I also dread that he's going to be forgotten, and he deserves better than that. Flaws don't warrant fade.

5) Alexis-Phone in pocket-chewing gum (hood-lots of attitude, loud and annoyed)

Girl, my mom would kill me if I lost it. She told me at a precious age it was a privilege. More like a burden! Plus all these broke niggas come up to me with their bull and I have to tell them to back up off of me. Ugh! No lie, this one boy came up to me last night and asked me if I had a plug? No nigga! I don't, can't you see I'm struggling over here, trying to keep it together. Cut ass. (Addressing Wendy behind her.) Cut it. (Singing together). (To teacher) Sorry mam. It's just, all my other friends already did it. I'm the only one left. (Takes out phone) I hate it, but I can't let go.

6) Jax-Playing with baseball (probably)- chewing gum (jock-chill, cool guy, smooth)

(Legs wide open, leaning back)

So there's this chick I like Ms T, baaadddd, I'm thinking about popping the question. (looks at Marie Antoinette) Yeah, but I talk to a lot of girls. I talk to a lot of guys too. That can get confusing. (Stop playing with ball) I struggle with commitment Ms T, always have. I'm never sure about anything. I can't make guarantees on relationships, job applications, dinner. Uhhh... I'm like a rainbow Ms. T...nah, I'm not gay. I have all these things I want to do with my life and I wanna shine, you know? You're right, thanks Ms T. It is just a dance. That dress code though...

7) Wendy (valley girl-glottal, superficial but tough, real)/purse and make up (knees up to chest, drop at some point)

My turn? Ok, I wish I could be a role model, but the ignorant, podunk, incompetent men have decided I'm like the Ken to their Barbie- I'm an accessory, not a necessity. Fun to play with, but replaceable. I craaavveee attention and need validation. I dress like a slut, so obviously, I want some. And apparently, "no" means "yes" and "stop" means "try harder". Sometimes you know more than you understand, like how I'll always be a female before I'm a human being. Or how even someone you care about can destroy you. It's been three days since..it happened. The hookup culture- it's my fault, right? Of course, I was practically begging for it. He left yesterday-said HE needed to clear his head. I thought he was different, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe he is just like

every man, and that's my real fear, every man. Everyman who's ever looked at me and cat called, or smiled at me then told their friends what they would do to me, or went out of their way to "accidentally" bump into me or slide their hand across my ass or...Everyman that sees a pretty, ditzy, defenseless little thing instead of a strong, beautiful, educated young woman. Every man that feels I owe them something and the only thing stopping them is the sun. Every man waiting... for the sun to go down. For night to arrive. For dark.

8) Hope-ribbon/ either dancing around chairs or sitting on ground doing interpretive (mover-optimistic, viola, playful) (cross legged)

Me? So many things, divorce (strikes pose), pathological liars (strikes pose), vegetables (strikes pose), ghosts (strikes pose), catching the flu (strikes pose), being desensitized (strikes pose). Yes, I worry that I won't feel one day. That's why I dance. Dancing to me is what teaching is to you, a way of life. I escape myself through dance. (To Marie Antoinette) Sauf le cygne noir.

9) Tyler-Lighter in pocket with Black & Mild (class clown- stoner or surfer vibe, tepid, steady)

(Chair facing Vice, leaning lazily, one leg forward, one leg on the side)

The ocean. HAHAHA (class laughs too). I worked at this store once and maaaaannnn, it was awful. Hour after hour, product after product, sale after sale. Customers kept asking me questions and I was like "Yo, I'm just an inventory and merchandising specialist sir." Technically, I'm just a stocker. That was the longest shift

of my life man. (Shivers/ starts to light Black) Black Friday. Black Friday my ass, they can have that-(To teacher) oh, my bad Miss. Smoking scares me too, your lungs. Here man (passes smoke to Vice).

10) Vice- Headphones on- J Cole playing De Ja Vu

(Chair backwards, legs wide)

Shheeee, you ain't gotta ask me twice. Dey useta come up to my mom and say things like "Oh, it's so good what you're doing for that poor child. I'm planning to adopt soon." Bitch! You don't see race or hate as a kid. Terms like "mixed, mulatto, creole" become "nigga." I'm not a nigga. Never was and never will be, but I play the game. I bubble in African-American, listen to rap music, dumb myself down and act like I don't care. I remain quiet because I know if I speak elegantly and express myself in a manner too familiar to theirs, a problem will ensue. Yet somehow, they still look at me Misses T. I like it when the girls look at me, they can get it but when the dudes look at me I be like, bitch what? Fuck you looking at? (Stands up) Nigga fuck you, I know I don't know you but fuck you!

No matter how you dice it, people still fear black

And there's nothing we can do about that

Even though I've got a little bit of white

Being black is a permanent stamp on my life

(Sits down) Anomaly, maybe, but not fake. Being black is not a noun, it's an adjective.

All these racist mutha fuckas stuck in their ways, stuck in the past. Making jokes and shit

and don't know a damn thing about me. I gotta joke for you- what's black and white and red all over? Me. Your future. Red, White AND Black.

11) Ms. T

I'm...I'm not sure what to say. Thank you...each of you...for your stories. I...one of you asked me last week "If everyone is special, then are we all really different?" I believe (bell rings) WAIT! On Monday (groan), your interviews are due. Yes, Jedidiah, more than one is fine. (Noise) Have a good weekend.

Chapter 16

GONE

Dear James,

It has been a while since we spoke but I thought it would be fitting today. After all, today makes three years. Three years since we have seen each other. Three years since we last shared the same bed. Three years since you have said, "I love you."

As I sit in this blue, barren room, thinking, I ponder the future. What is to come scares me because I now know nothing in this world is certain. In fact, the only guarantee is uncertainty, though you know that all too well. The one person I thought I could count on has left me for something better. I hold no animosity. I hope you are happy.

I met someone new last year. Todd, he works for a law firm in the states. He's a bit odd, but very sweet. He calls me his "V Apple." Initially I thought he was commenting on my vagania which I was not fond of, until he explained that the v stood for voluptuous. His little voluptuous apple. Isn't that funny? That said, I believe he is much more invested in us than I am. I have a lot on my plate right now and I am in no hurry to eat. I just....I need time to process what happened still. I deserve that much, if nothing else. He has been extremely patient with me, although I trust that he will not stick around as he has come to realize the hold you have on me. He will take to exception to it; all men do. Fragments of your love remain attached to me, as if one of your grenades implanted rubber and metal into my skin. I doubt I'll move on, even with you gone.

I read a poem that made me think about you. Would you like to hear it? Of course you would, forgive me.

Whenever I am in your warm embrace
I cannot help but to stare at your face
And wonder how a gal like me
Could possibly be so lucky
You read my mind and say with love
“Thank you God from up above
For gifting me with this precious girl
Who I would not trade for the world.”

Remember that day we met? That gorgeous, fall day of October 20th, 1983. The sun was confident, holding as bright as the star it is and the breeze was as gentle as a baby’s smile. The autumn leaves were full of variety, ranging from raging reds to golden browns and luxurious yellows. My friends and I were lying on my favorite quilt, the one my mother crafted for me when I was six. Square patterns of pink and blue filled the cloth, reminding me of those younger days. Ha, I still recall her stating to be “extra careful” with it at the park because it was not made for “outside conditions”, and then you happened.

Out of nowhere, you and your clumsy, unaware behind managed to lose your footing and fall across my lap. The initial pain would have been intense if it were not for

the shock that went through my body when I saw your face. I didn't have to say it, you were handsome and you knew it. I blushed viciously when we made eye contact, so much so that I had to turn away. You giggled, rose to your feet, grabbed your frisby, assessed the situation, said, "Excuse me miss," and departed.

"What!?" I muttered under my breath, still taken aback. You said, "Excuse me miss," smiled, and walked off as if you had done nothing wrong. And I thought, "This guy. The nerve of this man. Who the hell do he think he is? Telling me what I should and ought to do." So, before Cathy and the girls could calm me down, I rose and approached you. I don't know what came over me, but on the way towards you, I became angry, maybe embarrassed and picked up a stone. I halted a good 10 feet away from you before shouting "Hey jackass!" You turned, as did everyone else within earshot range to see what was going on. The look on your face was all I really needed, but I wanted more. I lifted my hand to eject and launched the stone at your body. You held your position. Now, we both knew that I could not throw for shit but the fact that you did not move, not even flinch, told me something about you. Attracted and impressed I was, but foolish, I was not.

The rock went maybe three feet in your direction. We shared a laugh as everyone else turned away. I looked behind me and saw the girls cackling excitedly; they knew there was potential here. You walked up to me, introduced yourself, and apologized bounteously, after which you then hinted at taking me out.

“Uhh..I’m flattered, but no thanks,” I said, knowing in fact that I was yearning for you.

“Oh, come on. Just one Jackie, please.”

“I’ll think about it,” I said, before returning to Cathy and the girls. The following weeks that proceeded were very, how should I say, annoying. Phone calls, love letters, flowers-my parents were not the least happy, especially my father. However, you continued to ask, you persisted, you insisted. After a while, I caved out of mere pity and if I had known then what I know now, I would have made the same decision day one. That night was the 3rd best night of my life.

Your mother still calls me from time to time to check on Jesse and I. She despises you for what you did to us, for leaving. I have tried to explain to her that it was not your fault, I vouch for you every time, but she will have none of it. She believes a man has responsibilities to maintain and what you did was self-centered. She is delusional; yet sometimes, I wonder if she is right.

Jesse’s doing well. She started fourth grade a few weeks ago; her teachers say that she is way beyond her peers in reading and processing. Growing fast too, she is nearly my height haha. So curious about life and herself she is. She asks me every night when Papa is coming home and I don’t have the heart to tell her. One day, one day she’ll be told, and she’ll hate me but I hope she will understand why her mother protected her. One day, she’ll leave me, but it can’t be today. I know that’s selfish, but I have already lost you; I can’t lose you both. At any rate, she wrote this poem for you.

I know you only came because you have your fears

I know you only ache because I cause those tears

I know you only hate because I grind your gears

I cannot go a day without having you here

Daddy, why did you go away

I promise I'll be good, I promise I'll be gay

Promise you'll come back, promise me you'll stay

Promise me that you and mommy will be ok

Poor girl, she's a beautiful person James. You know, she has written you a letter every day since that day. 1,095 letters and not one response. At times, she thinks you left because of her; that's why she dedicated this poem to you. Jesse, she's quite the poet. Our baby girl. She misses you. I miss you.

Even as I lean here against this drawer, contemplating what is next, I want you to remember that no matter what, I will always love you. We will always love you, and you will not be forgotten. I promise. As you told me the night we became one, "I knew I fell for you when I fell on you." I wish you were here to hold me, to hold Jesse, to tell us that this is some cruel military trick you and the boys played on us for selfish, immature reasons. But I know you will not, because you are gone.

I still cry. It's been three years and I am still crying.

Everyday it hurts less and less, and at the same time more and more. The closer you get to nothingness, the closer you are to my core.

With all the love in the world,

-Jackie

Draw or describe three set locations that I could play on (set, props, etc.)

Real vs Fake (maybe coming on with a fake lantern and talking about fake)

Chapter 17

IT

“I saw it”

“No you didn’t”

“Yes, I did. I swear.”

“What did it look like.”

“It was big, Black and brisk.”

“Are you sure you’re not talking about...”

“Shut up!” (Pause) “Listen”

“Do you even know what brisk means”

“Quiet”

(Pause) “I don’t hear anything Kelly”

“Shhhhh”

“You’re losing it girl”

“Wait, wait, just listen” (Pause)

“I’m going home.” (Karen turns and walks away)

“Karen!”

(Shriek)

(Karen turns around) “Oh my God!” (Shriek)

“I heard it”

“Whatever Ricky”

“No, seriously bro. I heard it right here.”

“Dude, you dragged me all the out here to...to I don’t know for I don’t care.”

“I didn’t drag you, you came willingly.”

“You said we were going by Stacy.”

(Pause) “After this.”

“Bro!”

“Look, we’ll go after this. Seriously. I just need you to see something.”

“See what your heard, right?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, alright. What is it?”

“You’ll see.”

(Pause-they walk to the back)

“See.”

“Dude, what the fuck is that?”

“Beats me, but I’m pretty sure it’s not human.”

“Sooo...what do we do with it?”

“Do with it?”

“Yeah, we can’t just leave it here.”

“This isn’t some hurt dog Johnny, it’s a fucking monster.”

“You don’t know that. A minute ago you didn’t even know what it was.”

“I know it’s not a dog.”

“No one said it was a dog.” (Pause-they share a look) “We can’t tell anyone about this.”

“About what?”

“I smell it mommy!”

“Smell what, honey!”

“The creeper! The creeper”

“The creature sha?”

“Yeaahhhh.”

“Baby, there’s no creature in here. It’s just you and me.”

“And Barney?”

“And Barney.”

“Butttt...but what if it comes back.”

“Do you want mommy to sleep with you?”

“Un-hun”

“Ok. Let me go get some water and I’ll be right back.”

“You promise?”

“I promise. Just hold on to Barney and I’ll be right back.”

“Okay.”

(Walks downstairs)

“What’s the problem?”

“He thought he smelled it again.”

“Something wrong with that boy.”

“Larry, don’t talk like that.”

“May, I’m just saying Mary. He’s been smelling this thing for two weeks now. The creeper.”

“It isn’t funny Larry.”

“It is. When you think about it. Oh come on, you know you want to laugh.”

“I don’t. He’s old enough now. He should be told.”

“I felt it”

“What do you mean cadet?”

“I felt it sir, crawling across my chest last night.”

“You mean to tell me that at 1000 hours last night, you felt a beast crawl across your chest and no one else saw or felt a thing?”

“Yes sir.”

“That’s the dumbest load of shit I’ve ever heard.”

“I didn’t know you could hear dumb shit.”

“Drop and give me 50 private. And the rest of you, 100. Whether or not there was a so called beast, you have all wasted valuable training time.”

(Walks off to the fort)

“General, there was another sighting last night. They know.”

“Good. It’s time to brief them on what they will be up against. What’s the ETA on the package?”

“We lost contact with Alpha, sir. The last feed showed some sort of...attack.”

“Terrorist.”

“No sir. It appeared to be one of ours.”

“May God have mercy on our souls.”

“Isn’t it cute?”

“I think he’s kind of ugly.”

“How do you know it’s a he?”

“I don’t. I just thought, you know. Like, almost all animals are he’s, right?”

“Lady bugs aren’t. What should we name her?”

“How about Diamond? I’ve always liked that name.”

“Do you know any Diamonds?”

“No”

“There’s probably a reason for that. How about Marigold?”

“Eww. That sounds like the name of my third Grandma.”

(Together) “Kally!!!”

“So let me get this straight, you want to take it home with you?”

“Why not. It follow me around anyway. I mean, at first I was scared but look at it; it’s harmless. I can’t just leave it here.”

“Hell yeah you can. A’int nobody out here but us.”

“Naw dawg, we’ve got to take it.”

“You’re acting like it’s ours. We stumbled upon this thing and now you want to take care of it?!” (Pause) “You’re tripping J”

“I’m not. I just need you to trust me.”

“I do....fine.”

“Cool. I’ll bring the truck around.”

“You want me to stay with it?”

“Who else is going to keep it company?”(Leaves)

“Stacy better say yes”

“He’s six years old, Larry. There’s nothing wrong with being afraid.”

“True. But still, the boy needs to grow up.”

“The boy is your son.”

“I know that Mary.”

“Then spend time with him!”

(Pause)

“Mommy!”

“I’ve got to go.”

“Mommy!”

“I’m coming sweetie”

“Mommmyyyy!!”

(Running up the stairs)

“Ben!”

(Arrives-Ben is gone)

“Ben?! Ben baby?! Benjamin!!!”

“Privates, tonight you will embark on a- what the hell was that!”

“Sir, the base is under attack.”

“Damn it. I knew we should have prepped for this during PT.”

“What should we do sir?”

“Pray.”

“Kally...Kally...”

“She couldn’t have gone far.”

“I know, right? Kally...”

“These trees are sooo creepy.”

“I know, right? Kally...KALLY!”

“There you are! Come here girl.”

“Wait, what’s that thing in her mouth?”

“Oh. My. God.”

“What do you mean you don’t know where it went.”

“I was standing right here, taking a piss and when I turned around it was gone.”

“You are unbelievable Ricky.”

“What do you want me to do. I’m not going to pee on the thing. It might have ripped my dick off.”

“Whatever man. Besides, it had something in its mouth already, I don’t think it was hungry.”

“You fed it?”

“No, but I heard it eating something earlier. Whatever it was, it cried like a baby. It was so Erie, almost sounded human.”

“How do you know it wasn’t?”

“I don’t.”

“Slow down, slow down. Where did you last see him?”

“I’m here Larry! I’m telling you, he was here, and then he wasn’t.”

“That’s ridiculous honey. Ben! Ben! He’s probably hiding from this creeper he sees.

Ben!”

“Or maybe there really was something?”

“Really Mary?”

“I’m just saying. Maybe there’s something here, like a presence. Kids don’t lie about things they don’t understand.”

“They lie if they need to get out of something, like trouble, school or going to sleep. Ben!

I’m going to look downstairs again.”

“Im going to call the cops.”

“Easy Boy. Easy. What do want. You want more meat? I’ll get you some, just hold on a sec... (growl) okay, okay. No meat. That’s fine. (Whisper) Smith, lock the gate.”

“But sir.”

“Just lock the damn gate. I uhhh...you know those experiments were done to make you better right? More evolved, an apex predator. A killing machine. What did you say? No, no, stop...please. Stop. Smith!”

“There you are. Had us worried sick.”

“Yeah, I found her playing with my baby brother.”

“Thanks Stacy.”

“You hear about that kid that went missing last week?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m not certain, but our “thing” may have had something to do with that.”

“The police are on their way.”

“There’s blood Larry.”

“What?”

“There’s blood.”

“Sir, Sir. Luteniet.”

“Jesus, it’s got to stop soon. I feel cramped.”

“Yeah, I know. I do too.”

“I just wish it didn’t rain on our only off day, you know?”

“Yeah, I know. I do too.”

“Can you say anything besides that? God, you’re like a child.”

“Yeah, I know. I do too”

“That doesn’t even make sense.”

“Yeah, I know. I do too.”

“What the f...oh, you’re listening to music. And hear I thought you were making fun of me.”

“Oww. What’d you do that for?”

“I want to go outside.”

“Then go outside.”

“Maybe I will.”

“Maybe you should. Now can I be left alone? Thanks.”

“I’m hungry.”

“You’re always hungry.”

“Yeah, I know. Hey, you know what we should do?”

“Go to church.”

“Yes, but besides that.”

“Look man, I already told you, it’s nothing personal. I just don’t go because I fall asleep and I feel like that’s disrespectful to the man. He doesn’t want me to be there if I’m just going to sleep, I don’t want to be there, it all works...”

“I said BESIDES THAT”

“Oh...my bad. Naw, what’s up?”

“We should play Black Ops 3.”

“I guess.”

“You don’t wanna play?”

“It’s not that. I just, I’d rather play something else.”

“I mean, I’ve got other games.”

“Nah, it’s cool. Let’s play it.”

“Alright. You coming?”

“What?”

“To my room?”

“Oh, I thought we were playing in my room.”

“Why would we play in your room? I suggested we play dawg.”

“Yeah, but I got a copy too.”

“Your room is small.”

“Your room is big.”

“What’s your point.”

“I don’t know.”

“You know what, fuck it. I don’t want to play anymore.”

“Whatever bitch. I didn’t want to play anyway.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

“I’m soooo borreddd.”

“Ahhhhh, I hate thiiiiissss.”

“Want to go to the movies?”

“Boooooooooo”

“You want to smoke a blunt?”

“What?”

“I’m just trying to think of things bruh.”

“I didn’t say no.”

“Word? Cool, you got some paper?”

“Yeah, hold on.”

“You serious?”

“What?”

“This is looseleaf.”

“Yeah.”

“You tripping.”

“I don’t see what the problem is. You asked for paper, I provided paper.”

“Negro, this is writing paper, like paper plane paper.”

“They don’t make planes out of paper son.”

“You’re so asinine.”

“Yeah, well, you’re asa-ten. What?”

“Sometimes, I don’t even know how to respond to you.”

“Then don’t.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

“This blunt though....”

“We shouldn’t. We’ve got rehearsal tomorrow. Plus, neither of us smoke anymore.”

“True that. True that. Remember the last time though?”

“Peek a boo. I see yooouuu.”

“Knick knack patty wack.”

“Yo, you remember Lacy?”

“Bye dummy.”

“Yeah. Man, that bitch was crazy.”

“Booty was spooky thick though.”

“SPOOKY THICK!”

“You trying to lift later?”

“I’ve got to do lines.”

“You can do them at Strom.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Alright.”

“Wait, where you going?”

“The rec.”

“I want to come.”

“Come on then.”

“I need to eat though.”

“Ugh. Is it still raining?”

“Yeah.”

“Man, I’m going to bed.”

Chapter 18

Black

Cool Kid/Thug

1) Shheeee, you ain't gotta ask me twice. I know nigga, that's why I said you aint gotta. Yeah my cudin, evrybody be lookin at me and I be like whats good money? We gotta prolem? Shit, that's what I thought. Nah, feel me out. When I was a youngin I thot dey was just looking at me cuz I was cute, know what I'm sayin? I know betta now tho, dey was lookin at me cuz they was annalyzin, tryna figga out what I was. Nah, for real, no lie. Check, I remember when I was bout five or six in the store. Dey useta come up to my mom when my dad wasn't round and say things like "Oh, he's so cute. I'm planning to adopt soon," and "It's so good what you're doing for that poor child." Bitch! Yeah my momma bright but she ain't white. I just thought they were ignorant cuz those who knew me never made me feel like that. My best friends were white and asian as they would say, and a close friend of mine who I had a huge crush on, she was Hispanic. None of that mattered to me, you don't see race as a kid, or hate. It is a learned trait, but that's neither there nor here. Then my boy made a comment one day, asked me why I was "pretending to be something I wasn't." Uncle Tom, Sell Out, Wanna Be-I've heard it all but coming from him? I was hurt homie, I couldn't even register. It never hit me till that day that even my boys that I now hung out with didn't know what I was, and it bothered them. I always knew-I was they're friend. I always know-I'm me, but they don't care. People fear what they don't understand and sometimes, instead of ignoring it, they put it in terms that they understand. Terms like "mix, mulatto, creole" become "nigga." I'm guilty too, I rolled with it because it kept me comfortable, but that's not what I am. I'm not a nigga. Never was and never will be, but it feels like that's what they be striving to make us. It's

sad, but I play the game. I bubble in African-American now and I listen to rap music. I dumb myself down, I give a lil effort here and there and I act like I don't care, but I do. I stay quiet because I know if i speak elegantly and express myself in a manner too familiar to theirs, a problem will ensue. It scares me because even with all those changes, dey still look at me, it's whatever. I like it when the girls look at me, they can get it but when the dudes look at me I be like, bitch what? Fuck you looking at? Nigga fuck you, I know I don't know you but fuck you! Man, where the hos at? Call me an anomaly, maybe I am, but what you will not call me is fake. I know what I am, and I know who I am. No matter the hue, season or lighting, I am black, but I am also something more and that frightens the general public. Being black is not a noun, it's an adjective. All these racist mutha fuckas making jokes and shit, I've got a joke for you, what's black and white and red all over? Me. Your future. Red, White and Black.

2:30

Valley Girl

2) OMG, I thought boys were full of it. Was I in love? Duh! OH MY GOD, there was that one guy, he told me "Come on babe, I'd never do that to you." And I believed him. We were the perfect match, both popular, both liked by everyone, both hot. I really thought we were going to work out, had all my eggs in the basket, but the basket was weaved improperly. REALLY Y'ALL, I should be like a writer or something, this is sooo clever. I hope someone is writing this down....we broke up though. I saw it on TV, but I never thought someone would do that to me. Heard it in songs, but never thought it would happen to me. Hahaha I'm such a poet. He just wanted my body. What a waste of time,

yet I didn't know it then. I cried, yeah, I wept like a baby. Luckily, my girls were always there to support me and even my boys came through for me. Ewww, not like that, I mean my brothers, the few that didn't want to sleep with me. I wish my parents could have understood but they were "busy" at the moment. That was 4 years ago...Now I am 21, hehe, go me! And now, OH MY GOD-He is so fine. He is my everything. We met two years ago in church and I believe to this day I was blessed with him. He's perfect-smart, funny, caring, working. My mother loves him, and my father hates him, tell-tell sign. Like, if he left, I don't know what I would do without him. I would probably die. Hahahaha! I wish I could say that and mean it. I do love him, but he doesn't even know I exist, at least romantically. In his world, I'm like the Ken to his Barbie- I'm an accessory, not a necessity. Fun to play with, but replaceable. Sure, we've been together, as besties for the past two years. We have lived together, for the past year and a half. And we have not spoken about this unspoken thing, in the past three days since....it happened. He left yesterday-said HE needed to clear his head but when I got back, his things were gone. I thought he was different, I still do, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe he isn't different. Maybe he is just like every man, and that's my real fear, every man. Everyman who's ever looked at me and cat called or smiled at me then told their friends what they would do to me, or went out of their way to "accidentally" bump into me or slide their hand across my ass or...Everyman that looks at me and sees this pretty, ditzy, defenseless thing. Every man that feels I owe them something. Everyman that wants me, and the only thing stopping them is the sun. Everyman waiting... for the sun to go down. For night to arrive. For black.

2:20

Ghetto Girl

3) Girl, I don't know what I would do if I lost it. Really, my mom would probably kill me. She told me at a young age to never give it up and basically scared me into holding onto it until I can't anymore. I get it, it is special, but sometimes it's such a burden. And all these broke niggas come up to me with their bull and I have to tell them to back up off of me. Ugh! No lie, this one boy came up to me last night and asked me if I had a plug? No nigga! I don't, can't you see I'm struggling over here, trying to keep it together. Cut ass. Sorry, I try not to curse, they just make me so mad. Sometimes it reaches the point when I start to question "Should I give this up?" Once it's gone, I'll never get it back." Yeaahhhh gurl, like Lyfe Jennings. It's time though. Are you kidding me-I'm like a curse now, a frickin hex waiting to happen. I've tried sha, but they won't take it. Guess I'm too old-if anyone invests in me at this point, they know they are in it for the long hall. And tbt, no one wants old news, no matter how good it looks. Everybody wants an upgrade. This stupid phone. It looks brand new, but all these updates are killing it. Ugh! And now it's black.

1:30

4) Artsy/Band Geek

Myself. That is my biggest fear Ms. T, it's me. I fear what I am capable of, what I am liable to do to another person if they piss me off. Do you know how many times I have to hold myself back Ms. T? How often I take a deep breath and just walk away, knowing that I could demolish everyone and everything around me. No, I won't do that,

because I was raised right, but these other...ugh, they just don't know. They keep barking up the wrong tree. Where is this coming from? I get picked on every day. Not from students, my friends know better-I'm too big for them. No, it's your peers Ms. T, the faculty at this school. They encourage me to do all these things and then laugh at me when I try. They give me little to no credit for my work. They contact my parents stating that I have been misbehaving in class when all I'm doing is trying to have a discussion. They don't want me in their group, and I don't know why. It's not race or politics or anything like that, this is a grudge from something I didn't do, but I'm being punished for. I've been quiet, but one day, I'll expose them for what they are. These ignorant, podonk, incompetent people telling me what I should do, what I could do! You know what I would do! I would kill them all if I could! Every single one of them! Some of the faculty at this school would rather control me than exploit me and see me grow, and it just works my nerves. But I'll play their game until I'm out of here, strategy vs tactics. My Queen and Rook are about to end this, it's your move black.

1:30

5) Child/Freak

Umm, I'm not afraid of anything. No I'm not, Shut up! I'm not afraid of the dark. Stop! *smacks lips* Stooopppppp! Huh? Yes mam. Ok. Well, I don't like getting coal for Christmas. I never got it before, but I know that if I woke up one day and had coal in my stocking, I would cry. What? Because I would be scared. What if I never get anything again?! Yeah-huh. Ok, well...I hate getting bad candy for Halloween. No-uh, like Licorice. It's all twisty and nasty. That is scary! It's....yes mam. Black Jelly beans too!

They're so...yes mam. (Takes breath) Holes scare me. Not the little ones, the big ones. You never know how deep it is or what's on the other side or if something is in there you know? And what if you jump in and then you can't get out? I saw this movie where these boys had to dig holes all day and then they fell into a hole all night. And this one time, I read a book about magic and this magician dude locked a dementor thingy in a hole. And this guy somewhere at a museum told me that black holes suck up everything, even time and stuff. And I played this game once where I was this girl and I was running from these guys who were shooting at me and I had to jump into this waterfall, but then I fell into a hole. And there were cobras and spiders in the hole-no, it wasn't Tomb Raider...it was Tomb Raider. What?! No, I'm not afraid of creatures, I'm afraid of holes. I was born with a hole in my heart, so I always feared holes because it reminded me that something was wrong with me. I came into the world broken and it was supposed to close, but it didn't and then I had to have surgery. It's silly but sometimes I wonder if I cheated death. Like I should've died, like in Final Destination! I betcha when they make 6, it'll be in space, like Jason X or something and somebody is gonna get sucked into a hole that's black. What? I KNOW IT'S A BLACK HOLE BUT I LIKE SAYING HOLE THAT IS BLACK. IT SOUNDS SMARTER. YOU SHUT UP!!!

shivers a hole that is black.

2:20

6) Nerd

Everyone believes that my biggest fear is failure. Contrary to popular belief, it is not. In fact, my greatest fear is ventriloquist dummies and porcelain dolls. Before you

ask, I despise Slappy, Annabelle and Chucky-I repeat, despise. I hold utter disdain for puppet masters and even more contempt for those who capitalize on their success and take it up a notch, making mannequins and such. There is something “off” about all dolls in general, but the life like models are the absolute worse. Why would you want to mimic something so precious as life? Take the reborn dolls; these are manufactured skin dolls that have been altered by professional artist to resemble infants as closely as possible. There have been instances, reported cases where cops have broken into cars because they believed a baby was locked in a vehicle, and other occasions where mothers have contacted law enforcement to put out APB’s for their lost doll. This society, I wonder how far it will dwindle in my lifetime. Department stores have refused to stock these products because of the controversial/ negative attention it garnered upon release, imagine that. For \$89.99, you could buy your perfect baby boy or girl with his or her own birth certificate, batteries not included. It would give me pleasure to call it a toy, but I cannot; it is not something you play with. Nor are dummies; there is nothing more frightening to me than a useless ventriloquist prop resting in an area. Sitting in a rocking chair, lying on a living room carpet, locked in a trunk in the attic, I cannot. Their features do not fit their idea-it should be dumb, it’s a dummy. Obviously, when no one is utilizing it, it becomes a limp, useless object yet for some reason, I have always gotten a sense that this was not true. That when I turned me back or left the room, it somehow moved. Barney once spoke to me during the middle of the night, at the end of my bed when I was five years old and it left me with a permanent scar, I refuse to get another. I am not a huge fan of roaches either, just thought I would add that as a quick sidebar. Not afraid, but do not like. Did you know that roaches can run up to 3 miles an hour-what a

coincidence, the average walking pace for a human? A roach can also survive approximately one week without its head, one month without food and hold its breath for nearly 40 minutes. As we all know, roaches are on the extremely limited list of things that would exist after a nuclear blast as well. Sometimes with the way they stare at me, I question if they are aware of how dominant they could be with one false step, which is not all that improbable now. You cannot tell me with a straight face that those things are not from hell. The locals have titled them “palmetto bugs”, I suppose to hold them in a “prettier” light-no, they are roaches. That is all I have to add, fade to black.

2:45

7) Jock/Stoner

So, there’s this girl I like Ms. T and we’ve been dating for two weeks now and I really love her. I’m thinking about popping the question, but I don’t know, it seems a little fast right? I mean, I only just met her three weeks ago. She’s super sweet though Ms. T, not as nice as you though. Oh no, we don’t talk anymore; she.....never mind. How does this apply to your question? Uhhh...what was the question? Oh yeah, see, I really like her Ms. T and I want to ask her but what if she says no? That would be so embarrassing. We have been dating...well I don’t say “talking” because I talk to a lot of girls, you know? I talk to a lot of guys too. That can get confusing. You’re right, it’s just a dance. I’ll ask her tomorrow. Any who, I struggle with commitment Ms. T, always have, especially now. For example, all I’ve wanted to do for the past few years is play ball somewhere and get paid for it. I’ve put in the work and I’ve gotten the recognition, but what if I don’t make it to the league Ms. T? Or what if I get hurt. I put all my marbles

into this bag. I can feel myself questioning how much I want to do this now, I wasn't always this good you know. I didn't play ball growing up or lift weights or anything like that. My dad didn't, doesn't like sports-I spent my free time coloring, drawing and reading. When I was outside, if I wasn't running around, I was climbing or breaking something. It's not pressure, I just...I know there's more to me than meets the eye Ms. T, and you know it too. You're one of the few people who told me I can do anything and be anything, I want to change the world and I want to be a leader. I know I can do it, I will do it, I just don't know how and that's why I can't decide yet. I can't commit because I don't want to fail, but if I fail, I will blame it on not committing. It's killing me Ms. T. I am never certain about anything because I see both sides of an argument or various points of view. I can't make guarantees on job applications, relationships, or events. I can't even promise I'll eat tomorrow Ms. T. I am the embodiment of indifference because commitment petrifies me, yet I sit here in this classroom knowing that I am meant for something great. The best way to describe me is like a rainbow Ms. T; nah, I'm not gay or nothing. I'm like a rainbow because I've got all these skills, these talents and these dreams but besides a few bright spots here and there, all that's around me absorbs my light. Absorbs my life, like black.

2:40

8) Foreign Guy/Girl

This is, how do you say, easy? The biggest fear I had coming here was that no one would understand me. I am not from here, I am from another place and it shows. I stick out like a sore thumb, people know that. I speak differently, think differently, dress

differently. I even walk differently. Being scattered brained or daydreaming constantly does not help my case either. I thought they would hate me. Luckily, I was incorrect and have made many friends since coming to this place. I love the people I know now, they have made me feel like I belong. This is my new home. Now, that is no longer my biggest fear. My new biggest fear is closing my eyes. Yes, I shudder every time I blink. I don't know what happened, I woke up one morning and suddenly, my eyes had to remain open. I cried. The darkness, I could not...cannot take it. My culture psychiatrist calls it Somniphobia. She says that the fear comes about from not wanting to sleep, but I believe it is rooted in a deeper fear. A fear of not wanting to be alone. A fear of being left with nothing. A fear of black.

1:20

9) Professor/Teacher

Thank you all for sharing your biggest fears today. The second half of you will share with the class tomorrow. What's that? Why of course, it is only fair that I answer as well. My biggest fear is a common theme we all seem to share. It is becoming black.

Chapter 19

The Epitome of Light and Dark

The epitome of light and dark.

AUTHENTIC, DRUG DEALER, SELL OUT

Note: Maybe do the thing that Robyn was talking about. It could be fantastic, but I don't know, we'll see.

Donavon: Good evening all, and welcome to How to Succeed in Life 301 or as it's known around the community, how to get rich quick. If you're wondering why there is only one section of this course and why it is a 3000 level class, I'll explain. You see, 101 was everything in your life up until you walked through that door (indicate door). So birth, walking, crawling, your first kiss, oatmeal, grandma-all part of 101. Now 201 began with your walk to the seat you are in now and ended when the lights went down. That said, section 301 is all about...

D: Man, fuck this shit, where the hos at?

Donavon: Oh my god... (puts hands on his face)

D: Yes?

Donavon: (smirk) Man, chill, chillllll....

Donnie: Yes, please calm down sir. I would be very upset if I were forced to restrain you.

Donavon: Fellas....

D: Who said that?

Donnie: It was I who spoke.

D: What? Come say it to my face!

Donnie: I am your face.

Donavon: Boys! Thank you. Sorry about that, I told them I didn't need them for tonight's presentation, but I guess you can't really leave pieces of yourself behind.

Donnie: Your guess would be correct, which would make it a fact. Unless of course, you literally left physical pieces of yourself behind. For example, if you were to detach a limb or somehow decapitated your...

D: Maaann, Shut. Up...Damn. Always got something slick to say.

Donnie: It was not my intention to be slick. I was simply stating that....

D: Dawg, we don't care!

Donnie: Well, that explains your

Donavon: Guys!! (Breath in-idea). Would you like to help?

Donnie: Absolutely. It would be my pleasure.

D: Sheee, you ain't gotta ask me twice.

Donnie: But he didn't ask you twice.

D: I know nigga, that's why I said you ain't "gotta"

Donnie: Excuse me sir, but I prefer that you do not use that word?

D: What word?(thinks...) Oh, you mean nigga?

Donnie: (distraught) Yes,

D: That's what you are. Why you act like you not?

Donnie: I believe firmly that the color of my skin does not determine who I am.

Donavon: That's a conversation for a different day.

D: Naw, naw, let this nigga talk.

Donnie: Sir.

D: Sir?

Donnie: Yes, you ignorant, podonk, incompetent...

D: Woah, woah, you throwing too many big words at me. I don't know what all that mean, so I'm a take it as disrespect. Watch ya mouth bitch.

Donnie: Perhaps you would like me to clarify?

D: I'll clarify your ass if you keep...

Donavon: Guys! PLEASE! I only have 17 minutes and you both just ate about 3!

D: Hahaha, you know I luuvvv to eat. I be divin DEEP in that pu...

Donnie: (looks at him furiously)

D: You know, like Trey Songz? (Sings) Oooo, I'm about to diiiivveeee in it.

Donavon: (looks at him furiously)

D: (puts his head down) I'm sorry.

Donavon: As I was saying, this class is all about fear and how one may overcome said fear. Today, we will discuss different scenarios and possible outcomes for different types of fear. As I am the instructor, I will begin by using my biggest fears as of now.

Unfortunately, here to help me are my two friends, Donnie, who represents the light part of me and D, who represents the dark. My biggest fear is commitment.

D: Commitment? Like, marriage and shit?

Donavon: Naw, commitment in general.

Donnie: Like dedication and grit.

Donavon: Yeah. And it's hard to admit. That said, I will give all of you the 10 fears that scare me to death. We'll get back to number one much later.

Donnie: Still stuck on 6 I see.

D: 666 Baby, we ain't scared. We oucha here!

Donnie: Why do you stated those values as if they were your area code?

Donavon: Yeah, it's my favorite number. Born on the 6th day....Epiphany....12th day of Christmas...moving on.

D: Damn, ain't nobody laughed.

Donnie: He's struggling out there.

D: Mardi Gras ass

Donavon: MOVING ON. 10 Social Media. I'm not into all

9. Forgetting my phone. That shit is scary y'all. Like, you ever been walking around and then you feel for your phone in your pocket, because that's where you always keep it, but it's not there? And then that frantic "oh my god"

Donavon: It's not just the color of my skin or the shape of my body.

Donavon: 5, Work.

Bosses: (either talking over each other or a recording of several speaking over one another) Excellent job Donavon. We need more people like you. Picking up fast I see. How do you feel about Pat? A new position just opened up if you're interested. Would you mind staying late this weekend? We need someone to cover her shift? Remember, the customer is always right.

W: Good morning Donavon, how are you?

Donavon: Good, good (shaking hands). I'm sorry about the two-week notice, I just need a change.

W: We understand. Believe me when I say you will be missed.

Donavon: I know, I'll miss you all too. It was a pleasure to be a part of...

D: But you don't even work anymore.

Donnie: I would not say that. I would say that your occupation has shifted dramatically over the years.

Donavon: Yeah, now I'm a student.

Donnie: I prefer the term Master's Candidate.

Donavon: I know, which brings me to my next example, 4, school.

Donnie: Are not school and work similar? Could you not combine the two into one instead of separating them into two categories?

Donavon: I mean, I could, but it's not the same.

D: Yeah, plus you spend most of your time at school now anyway.

Donavon: (smacks lips) you right. Number 3, family.

Family: Donavon!!! Baby boy. Little man!

Donavon: 2, Relationships.

Girls: (either talking over each other or a recording of several speaking over one another)

OMG Donavon. Why would you do that? I just, I can't. But I love you. I'll always want more, so I can't be your friend. I hate you. I'm sorry. Leave me alone! You can come with me. I'll always be with you, no matter what. F U! Please, just stay! No you don't.

(Flip around, maybe a wig or something feminine of a sort)-valley girl

G: So, like, I know it's crazy, but I've never had a real relationship that lasted longer than 3 months. Like, officially. Not "talking", or "seeing", or "messing" or-

D: Hold up. What?!

G: Uhh, yeah. Never.

Donnie: That is true. However, there were those three instances where...

G: Never. (Waits a second). Thank you (flips hair). Anyway, I sort of gave up on you.

Donavon: (sarcastically) I'm shook.

G: You shouldn't be, because you haven't given up on me and that's why I stick around. That's a very attractive quality to have, hope. Sometimes I think you're in love with the idea of me, but you don't want to go through all the bull...but I still hope that you will because I'm waiting.

Donavon: You may be waiting for a while.

G: I know.

Donavon: Like, a long ass time.

G: I know, but it'll be worth it if I'm right.

Donavon: A dead clock is right twice a day.

G: I only need to be right once. (Pause) I know we haven't always seen eye to eye...

D: Yo, I say we kill this ho right now.

G: but I want you to know that you don't need to be afraid of me. I'm not here to scare you, I'm here to share you.

Donnie: That was clever. To be fair, it's a two-way streak. You should give her another shot.

Donavon: (Thinks dramatically, smiles) Naaahhh. Moving on.

Donnie: Wait a second, that is not how you conduct yourself among a guest. You should ask for forgiveness immediately.

Donavon: Wait for it.... (Puts hand up)

G: Fine, I don't want you anyway. You're a player, a flirt, a tease, a womanizer, a-

Donnie: (Quietly) I apologize for my outburst.

Donavon: And last but not least, myself.

D: Wait a second, you? Like, me?

Donavon: Yes.

Donnie: What the fuq?!

Donavon: I know, I know. It seems stupid, but it's true.

D: Explain.

Donnie: Yes, please.

Donavon: Well, from the day I was born, something was wrong with me. I was born with a hole in my heart and I had surgery as a baby to close it. From that day on growing up, I was always the stand out kid. Principals List, Perfect Attendance, Gifted and Talented Program, Accelerated Reader Competitor, Spelling Bee Champ, 4H Member, the list goes on. My parents expected the best of me in school, in part because I was a devil at home. Same for my sister. Then, things began happening, and it all changed. I changed. I became the man in short order. And things changed again. The I went from being the man to being one of the men.

Donnie: I do not mean to interrupt, but could you shorten this.

Donavon: Of course.

That's why I rarely give 100% to anything anymore. Part of me is afraid that I'll be too good, but the other half is afraid of failing, which is why I always have the excuse in my back pocket of "Eh, I didn't really try." My minimal or lack luster effort at times seems to match with the best of others, and I am ashamed of that.

Well, long story short, early on in life, I was usually the man. The tallest, the brightest, the funniest, the quickest, etc. Then, incidents forced me to become a man earlier than I

would have liked. I grew up fast because I had to take care of my own and because of that, things that I thought had so much value.

D: Aww girl, didn't really have any value at all.

Donnie: That I was a lonely maaannn haha.

Donavon: hahah yeah

It's like that famous quote, you know, in Coach Carter? "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

D: Commitment can be a good thing to though folk. Hear me out.

You know NATO Jenkins?

1st world problems-not enough likes, losing my phone, condom breaking, forgot my belt