



The
Beauty
In Love
That DON'T
Love Me
LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY
MAYA J.

The Beauty In Love, That Don't Love Me:

Letter to My Daughter

By Maya J.

Copyright © 2015 by Maya J.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN-13: 978-1517183424 ISBN-10: 1517183421

Cover design by Aija Butler

Thanks to you all,

*I now know who I am. Thank you for my heartaches, thank you for my happiness, and thank you for my
humility.*

CONTENTS

A Note From The Author

Letter to My Daughter 6

- 1 *Childhood Curiosity* 9
- 2 *Hush* 15
- 3 *Unexpected Womanhood* 23
- 4 *Forbidden Kiss* 29
- 5 *From Sarah's Mountaintops* 35
- 6 *Our Bronx Tale* 41
- 7 *Rochelle's Hair* 52
- 8 *Two Can Play* 58
- 9 *Fighting Temptation* 67
- 10 *Video Girl* 73
- 11 *Sixteen* 79
- 12 *Yoni* 85
- 13 *Beauty & The Beast* 94
- 14 *Spiritual Guidance* 101 15 *Bad Girl, Good Girl* 106
- 16 *Bites & Bruises* 114
- 17 *My Soul Mate* 120
- 18 *Black Butterfly* 159

A Note From The Author:

All of the names in the text have been changed and/or omitted except the following: Miss. Jackson, Lamont, Sarah, Rochelle, Donna and Levar. This book is a true account of my personal experiences. Please be cautious of my vulgarity, and sexual content.

A Letter to My Daughter

Dear Daughter,

I was hoping that one day I would meet you face to face. I was hoping that I would be able to wrap you up in my arms and hold you close, just to marvel at the resemblances you would have inherited from my dominant genes. I wanted to see you take your first baby steps, and I wanted to admire your beautiful cocoa brown skin that I imagined would sparkle in the gentle sun's rays. I wanted you to be the main force behind my powerhouse to fulfill my God given purpose in life, but as time went on my hopes and dreams became shattered.

As I sit here questioning the idea of your existence loathing inside of my stomach, I'm starting to realize that as much as I would want to keep you here with me, I cannot have you. As much as I would want to give you all of my devoted attention and unconditional love, God will not let me do so. You would be a living symbol of one of my biggest faults in life, which is not knowing how to fully love and honor myself as a woman.

I wouldn't want my guilty consciousness of having you selfishly weigh you down from living to your utmost full potential in life. I wouldn't want you to grow up knowing that I had you out of spite, just so that I could still be attached to your father. Sometimes our greatest fruits come from our toughest situations. One of my toughest situations in life was expecting someone to love me, knowing that I had completely forgotten how to love myself first. I hope that my letter reaches you on days where you feel like giving up, not only on yourself, but on love.

Chapter 1

Childhood Curiosity

I grew up oblivious of love. I grew up not knowing how much pain it caused, and how much it intervenes with your everyday life. I grew up oblivious to the pain of not knowing when you would get over a heartbreak; and the pain of wanting to know how I could have changed what the universe had already had set out for me.

I expected so much more from love. I was unprepared for the rude awakening that it had brought to me. When I was about 6-years old, I would stay up late to play with my toys in my bedroom. I deemed "Pocahontas" the hooker out of my large doll collection I kept stored under my bed. She was having an affair on "Quasimoto" with "Batman." I remember placing her inside my yellow *Barbie Volkswagen Beetle*, and throwing her legs over the back seat. Batman would enter from the sunroof and make love to her; at least I thought it was love.

I would do this every other night or so while my parents slept in their bedroom. I found it quite productive at times because it would help me go to sleep. It was a secret love affair that I had created; and no one else could take that away from me. I was enticed by the idea of falling in love.

One night in my Long Island home, I went to the basement in search of a new book to read. My mother had just resigned from her position as a teaching assistant in Queens. We had a huge collection of books that sat in a big red crate in the middle of the basement floor. When I reached the bottom of the steps, I saw something unusual that grabbed my attention. It was a gift basket. It was a pretty big yellow basket that was assorted with all sorts of trinkets wrapped in plastic, and it was complimented with a huge red bow. I walked over to the basket in the corner and of course being the *nosey* little kid that I was, I unwrapped it. I looked inside the basket and picked out what I thought was assorted candy. One box in particular was green and pink. It had a pink character on the cover of the box with a silly face wearing a thin long pink glove. I thought to myself, that this had to be some top secret candy on the market for my parents to hide it far away from me and my brothers.

I opened the box and a bright pink rubber fell to my feet. I picked it up and felt the texture. It was bumpy. I ran my fingers over the rubber playing with its tip as I stretched it out from front to back. I was fond of the sounds it made as it snapped and retracted in between my fingers. It was mine now. I took the rubber and ran upstairs to show my mother my new favorite toy.

When I approached her I asked, "What is this?"

She looked at me sternly and questioned where I had gotten it from. I couldn't lie. I told her I got it from the candy basket in the basement. She snatched the rubber out of my hand and told me it was candy for grown-ups, but that never stopped me from wanting a taste.

Even though we lived on Long Island, my parents still commuted here and there to Queens. We lived in Queens Village for a little while, but we relocated out east for a better nourishing environment. While my mother worked within the School District, my father was a full-time Police Officer. I would only get to see him once or twice a week in the evenings because his schedule was so vigorous. My mother and father would drop me off to various

locations.

On the weekdays I would go to Miss. Jackson's house in Southeast Queens. She was an elderly woman who ran a daycare business in her home along with her husband. I got along with all of the kids there, particularly a young boy named Lamont. His grandmother worked alongside my mother back in the day, so we would always accompany one another if there was an event or gathering taking place at the center. We never kissed or did anything in a sexual nature, but I would often write about him in my diary and how I wanted to.

One evening my mother found a stack of love notes that I had written about him in my bedroom drawer. She knew that I had grown very fond of Lamont and his company. I don't quite recall what happened to us down the line. I just know that I was eventually taken out of daycare, and left Queens. He was my childhood sweetheart and I still catch myself thinking about him sometimes. I would love to see how much he has' matured. He was always so quiet and shy around others, but found comfort in me. I became infatuated with light skinned men as I grew up solely because of him. Whether we were holding hands as we escorted each other to the bathroom or playing hide and seek in between the raggedy book shelves at the daycare center, he was not only my first childhood love, but my best friend.

Chapter 2

Hush

My parents pulled me out of daycare a few years later, and it was mainly because they started having financial issues. My aunt and uncle lived slightly off of Linden Boulevard in Queens, so it was an easy commute for my parents to drop me off, and pick me up on their way to, and from work.

My aunt Beverly lived on the first floor of a joint house she shared with a middle-aged lady named Myrtle. I adored her. She was a very petite woman who had recently gotten a divorce from her husband. She wore a hefty pair of square thick-rimmed glasses, that often hung on a silver chain around her neck. I had never witnessed a day where she hadn't smiled or gave thanks to the Lord for her existence. Myrtle had two small Yorkie's who would always bark when she opened the front door of the joint home to greet me. She always made sure to engage in conversation every time she saw me. Most of the time I sat outside in the front yard perched up on her red cobblestone steps, hoping a few kids would pass by to talk to me and play at the park. It's not like I could have gone anywhere with them though. I was under "supervision."

If I was inside the house, I was sitting up underneath my aunt and uncle watching another prime-time game show that I absolutely hated. It would just put me to sleep. There was really no place for me to seek shelter inside the house. There was a small kitchen, one locked bedroom, a small living room where they would watch TV, and the basement, where my cousin stayed.

I remember the first time I took a trip down those stairs. It was about twenty plus steps to the bottom of the basement, but there was no lighting from the moment I took the first step down. I held on to the steel rail on the right side of me and closed the wooden door behind me. I used the small glaring light from my cousin's television to guide me down the steps. There wasn't much downstairs in the basement. It was big and acquired a lot of space that was occupied by boxes and junk. My cousin had set up his own area in the corner of the room, where his bedpost sat slightly above a small escape window that led to the backyard. There was an old wooden TV box that sat on the floor against the opposite wall. I awkwardly stood there for the first time not knowing where I should sit, or if it was even appropriate for me to be down there while he lay in his bed. He assured me that everything was okay. Since his bed was positioned horizontally against the wall, I sat on the left side so that I could get

a good view of the TV as he laid parallel behind me.

I felt uncomfortable sitting in a dark basement alone with a grown man at 8-years old and he could tell. He told me to take off my shoes so that I was more comfortable and then to lie down. I took off my sneakers and got into his bed. I lifted up the covers so that I could feel the heat of his breath on my back. It comforted me often in the chilly basement. "The Power-puff Girls" was my favorite TV show at the time, and he would often turn to Cartoon

Network to distract me from what he was about to do to my body. The first time he touched me it didn't bother me that much. I thought it was normal. I thought cousins do things like this to each other all the time. He unbuttoned my pants and slipped his hand into my panties. I was so into my TV show that I didn't care to tell him to stop, or ask why he was doing this to me.

Mother would always warn me of men like him. She told me if anyone were to touch me inappropriately that I tell her, even if it were people close in the family that I loved. I didn't say a word though. It's not like he didn't tell me not to say anything to anyone, but he trusted that I wouldn't. He saw how naive I was, and how it was so easy to control me with something simple like cartoons. He never tried to kiss me or engage in sex. He just wanted to play with my privates, and at 8-years old I was okay with that.

I would go down to my Aunt Beverley's basement every time my parents would drop me off, which had to be two to three days a week. After a while, he didn't even have to tell me to unbutton my pants or remove them. I would just do it and lay there in the bed with him. One time he almost got caught. It was late around 8pm and I was laying there in his bed letting him touch me. I didn't hear my mother call for me to come upstairs like she usually does. He was too busy doing his thing and I was busy watching cartoons, so neither of us heard her open the door to the basement. She must have taken about two or three steps down before she stopped and hollered for me to come up the stairs. I'm not sure what made her stop, but I know now that it was nothing but the devil himself. That startled my cousin, and he pushed me off the bed. I rolled on the floor and laid there quietly until I heard her footsteps disappear up the stairs. I rushed to put my clothes back on and ran upstairs after her. She looked at me funny and asked what I was doing down there.

"Just watching TV," I said.

I don't know what possessed me not to tell her. It brings me back to one of the incidents we had before I started going to my Aunt Beverly's house.

One day I came home from daycare and my mother noticed that my panties were ripped. I had left them on my bedroom floor before I had gone into the bathroom to take a shower. When I got out of the shower, she cornered me in my bedroom and asked why my panties had a huge ripped gash in the middle. I just shook my head and shrugged my shoulders. How was I supposed to know? Maybe I slid down the tunnel of a slide too hard and caught a big wedgie during recess, or snagged myself on the fence, either way I really had no excuse as to why they ripped, they had just ripped.

She didn't believe me, so she beat me with my father's leather belt as any black mother would do so that their child would give in and tell the truth. She struck me with mercy and compassion for the next five minutes. I kept telling her that I didn't know as snot and tears dripped down from my face. She would pause and stand there waiting for a confession after every hit she lashed out on me. Eventually she stopped striking me and started to believe my word. She stroked my wet face and told me she loved me.

"I'm sorry, Mommy loves you, okay?"

She held me close as I cried in her arms. She kissed me on my forehead and tucked me into bed. This was a little over a year and half before I started being sexually abused by my cousin, and yet I did not have the courage to tell her what he was doing to me. It's not like it got me off, or whether I liked what he was doing to me. It just never bothered me.

When my aunt and uncle eventually passed away, I didn't hold them accountable for my cousin's actions. They loved me entirely. It wasn't their fault. They had trusted my cousin to watch over me. Maybe one day he will bring it up, or maybe he just forgot. Although he's never apologized to me, today I forgive him. I should have told him to stop if he had truly cared about how messed up I was going to be in the future. I had no idea that this situation would change my life forever.

Chapter 3

Unexpected Womanhood

I was 9-years old when I first started my menstrual cycle. I was sitting in the cafeteria and I had just finished eating my homemade lunch. I hated Hot Pockets but my parents always seemed to pack them in my lunch box. On certain days I would force myself to eat them, and today was one of those days. Other day's, I would trade it in with someone else at the table for "Lunchables," or I would throw it in the trash and starve until dinner time.

When I got up from the bench to throw away my garbage, I noticed my dark blue denim shorts had a huge red spot sunken into the crotch area. I panicked and ran straight to the nurses' office. I told her that I was dying. She looked at me and smiled.

"Congratulations, you're a woman now!" she said to me.

I looked at her with a puzzled face.

"So this happens to girls? I'm not dying?!"

"No," she said. "You just started your period!"

I had no idea what "periods" were, so she explained to me that this would start to happen to me once every month. She gave me a change of clothes and handed me a sanitary napkin. She showed me how to pull off the liner, and I went into the bathroom to put it on.

When I came out she told me to call my mother and have her come pick me up from school. My mother was far more excited than I was. In my head I still thought I was dying. Let's be real here, what child at 9-years old starts their period in the 5th grade? When I got home I sat in the dining room and watched my mother chat on the phone. She called her sister and my grandmother to tell them about my first big steps into womanhood. I didn't feel like a woman at the time. I didn't even have a boyfriend. I never even had my first real kiss. I was really frustrated about that, but when I got my period for the first time I was sort of like a celebrity at school. The nurse had told my 5th grade teacher that I had started my menstrual cycle. It was a part of my elementary school's protocol. The next day in class she came over to me privately to congratulate me. I felt like I was a part of some secret society. It wasn't a monumental moment for me at all, but it seemed to be for everyone else. My mother and I had decided that because I was a declared "woman" now, it was time for me to start dressing like one. I wore a dark

purple halter dress that sat just above my knees with black lighting stripes on them.

Growing up I was a big fan of cowboy boots, so I decided to accompany my dress with my favorite low heel black leather boots. My hair was permed at the time, and it was straightened from the root down to my brittle ends. I felt really pretty for the first time. I'm not sure who I told in my class about me starting my cycle, but as soon as I entered the room, everyone got quiet. They just stared at me while I walked to my seat like I was the main subject of some lab rat experiment.

During recess, I sat on the benches across from the baseball field far away from everyone else at the playground. A few of the popular girls came over to me to talk.

“Is it true?!” they asked.

“Is what true?”

“About you getting your period,” one of them said, eagerly moving in closer to me.

I said, “Yeah, it's cool.”

They formed a circle around me and observed my body language. They were patiently waiting for my next move. Me being the unpopular girl that I was, I played with them.

“It's happening!” I started to pant heavily like I was in labor and about to give birth to a ten pound baby with a head the size of a watermelon. They moved in closer to study me. I played along and acted like I was in pain as I gripped the rail of the bench beside me and held on to my stomach.

“OH MY GOD, SHE'S GETTING HER PERIOD!” one of the girls screamed.

After a minute of fake excruciating fart faces, I stopped and told everyone that the pain had gone away. I did this for about two days until the attention shifted from me to another classmate. She had also started her cycle within that same week. The following month when my cycle came, I walked over to my teacher to let her know that it had started again. She just looked at me unamused.

“You know you don't have to tell me this every time, right?” she said.

I nodded my head in response and walked quietly to my seat in the back of the classroom.

Chapter 4

Forbidden Kiss

Elementary school was a really awkward phase for me. There was a girl that had a mutual crush on me in my class, and I had also liked a very strange boy who was a year older than me. I don't really remember when Zuri and I agreed to start hooking up, but it happened. We were always cool with each other, and I could tell that she was just as promiscuous as I was.

My curiosity with the human anatomy was at an all-time high. There were two factors that contributed to my curiosity. One of them obviously was me being exposed to my cousin at such an early age, and two, I hit my first stages of puberty very quickly. I was developing breasts, and my thighs were getting super thick. Growing up I was a very sexual child. I was always curious to see if other girl's looked like how I looked.

Zuri was the complete opposite of me. She was tall and thin, and she didn't really have that much of a shape. Zuri had a great personality and that's what made me so attracted to her. Zuri didn't judge me because of my appearance like the other girls in my class. She was fun to hang around, and she was one of the most popular girls not only in my grade, but in the school. I gravitated towards her quickly, but I always wondered what made her gravitate towards me. I was fat and plump like an "oompa- loompa" from *The Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory*.

At the time my generation found dark skin women to be less appealing than light skin women. I got picked on constantly because of these things. I was "too dark," and I was too overweight. One Latino boy in my class liked me, but he told me that he would never date me because my skin was too dark for his mother's liking. He said that his mother would disown him as her son if he were to ever bring me home. On top of all this, I wasn't into the latest stylish trends, and my clique of friends included a kleptomaniac and a transfer student.

Zuri and I had planned a day to make out in the bathroom. I had never kissed anyone before, let alone, another female. I was so nervous going into the women's bathroom that afternoon. We only had a little bit of time because we were supposed to be in class with everyone else. We didn't want to get caught by the hall monitor, or by any of our fellow classmates, so we had to act fast. We stood in the middle of the empty bathroom and faced one another. She pulled me in close and kissed me

immediately. I didn't know what the hell I was doing so I let her take control. Zuri pushed me into the stall as she continued to kiss me. She slid the lock close and told me to pick her up, so I did. She was holding the ceiling rail off the stall for support, and I held her up in my arms as she gyrated on me. Everything happened so fast, and in a matter of seconds, it was over. She gave me a peck on the lips and walked out of the stall.

“Next week?” she said panting, trying to regain her breathing pattern.

Apprehensively I responded, “Uhhhh..sure?” She fixed her hair and exited the bathroom. I came out of the stall and walked over to the bathroom mirror to see if I had looked like even more of a “woman.” I was still in awe that I just had my first kiss, and it was from another female. We ended up having a class together in high school later on down the line. We would talk and converse like nothing ever happened, until one day we were leaving class and she told me that I was the reason she was now bi-sexual. Being straight, I took pride in knowing that I had the power to seduce a beautiful woman like her. Truthfully, I was just happy that I was finally getting some attention. I really do admire beautiful, natural, black women. Just not in a sexual nature. It's always been very refreshing to see black queens of all different shades and unique styles being present, and fully conscious of who they are.

Boys weren't really into me in elementary school because I was such a tomboy. I got down and dirty with the guys during soccer at recess, and the conversations I did have with the girls during recess weren't really appealing to me. I got teased a lot because of my weight or my hairy arms & legs. I did kiss a strange guy in my class before I went off to middle school. I call him strange because he was that one kid in class who would do each and every wacky dare we had persuaded him to do. One, in particular, included him licking the lunchroom table from front to back as we cheered him on in the background. One day he got hit by a car after school, and he pretty much calmed down a lot after that.

Because of my estranged sexual behavior, my parents found a huge collection of porn on my laptop in middle school. I had downloaded just about everything I could find on *Limewire*. I kept comparing my body to other women. I didn't like the fact that I wasn't busty. I had a small chest, wide hips and according to all the boys, I had no buttock to match. I kept questioning how these women were

able to attract all these men to sleep with them, and I couldn't even find one that loved me. I favored men who were much older than me. I was intrigued by bad boys and their nature, and I had finally found one. His name was Vladimir.

Chapter 5

From Sarah's Mountaintops

In early March of 2000, my grandmother died. I miss my grandmother Sarah dearly. This is the one person that I wish you could have been here to meet, Daughter. She would have spoiled you with all her love entirely because she did it with me. My grandmother on my father's side was my primary caretaker for a while, after my aunt and uncle became too old to take care of me.

She bent over backwards to support me and your grandfather over the years, and I would give the world and back just to embrace her in my arms one more time. I would love to just see her for a few minutes sitting there in her favorite reclining chair in our living room. She liked to lay the recliner all the way back with her two flat feet perched up on the footrest. That was the best way that she could enjoy the evening sunset from the living room window.

I sat next to Sarah in her last few moments. She was in her hospice bed in the sun room of her Springfield home in Queens. Sarah was originally born and raised in Shuford, Mississippi, but before she lived in Queens, she owned a nice small little cottage in Hazelton, Pennsylvania. My cousins and I would take our bikes and race down the steep hills of her block on the weekends. I would always come in last place because I was too busy admiring the scenery from the top of the hill. Her home was about an hour and a half drive from New York City, and it was a short distance from the Pocono Mountains. I loved the smell of her home because it was earthy and soothed my soul. I could smell the wet dirt from the mountaintops as it trailed into her kitchen windows. At times when it rained, I would spot furry creatures scavenging for shelter in her backyard oak tree. It was a very peaceful cottage.

One time when I was a little girl, my parents left me at my great-grandmother's house in Springtown, South Carolina for the night. I never closed my eyes to sleep in that house, not even for one second. I just cried all through the night. I couldn't, and now I know why. It wasn't Sarah's home. We had to sell her cottage because she had gotten too sick and needed to be looked after, so she moved in with my cousins and extended family in Queens.

At first I was afraid to walk into the sun-room to see her looking so very ill, but I knew it was something that a "woman" would have to do. I pulled up a chair and sat next to her hospice bed. I can still see her face in my head today, continuously mouthing words to me with no apparent sounds or

words coming out. She did this for about three minutes as tears rolled off her swollen cheeks. As she held my hand, I kept praying that God would instantly give me the ability to read her mind. I wanted to yell, "Speak Grandma! Speak to me!"

I knew that's what she was trying her hardest to do, but she was suffering so badly in that bed. I heard nothing. I always catch myself wondering what she was trying to say to me.

Sarah was a single mother of seven, who raised five of her children and my cousins, all in one household. Two of her children passed away before I was born. My grandmother was everything to my father. As she stared into my eyes and gripped my hand tight all I could tell her was that I loved her, and that everything would be okay. Obviously we both knew that it wasn't but I promised her that I would shine in my father's footsteps. He was the only son she had.

When my father was promoted to a Detective in the NYPD, Sarah came all the way out to his ceremony at One Police Plaza in Manhattan; just to see him walk across that stage for 30 seconds. We knew she was extremely ill, but she refused to miss out on the opportunity. My father is my biggest role model. Who knew that a poor kid from Hollis, Queens would later go on to shake hands with the 44th President of the United States?

Sarah passed a year after my father's promotion. She died from ovarian cancer. When I received my diploma at York College, I cringed knowing that she wasn't sitting in the audience cheering me across the stage, because she was one of the main forces who had gotten me thus far. I visit her gravesite once every other month or so, which is a few minutes from my soul mate's old house in Suffolk County, New York. I let her know that she is constantly on my mind, and I will make her and my father proud for as long as I am here on this earth to do so. No one else's death

really stuck out to me the way Sarah's did, except Vladimir & Rochelle's.

Chapter 6

Our Bronx Tale

During middle school, I was in a long distance relationship with Vladimir. He was a very interesting individual. Vladimir was Muslim, but he never seemed to fully claim his Islamic faith. He was way too involved with the “fast life” and the overflow of money that it put in his pockets. He and his cousin, who I had also dated later on in life, were three years older than me. Even though Vladimir lived in the Bronx, I say long distance because we had never really met in person over the course of us “dating.” We had never gotten the chance to.

I met him through my cousin one day on a three-way chatroom call, and we hit things off from there. We would video chat and talk on the phone about issues in our lives, and often found ourselves in four way conversations with my cousin, and his. In middle school I was still finding out who I was and what I wanted to be, and Vladimir would advise me through it all.

In 7th grade I got into my first fist fight. There was a girl in my grade who I was very close with. No one paid attention to Roxie because she was often rejected by the rest of my peers. She came to class smelling like her pet cat almost every day, and she was brutally overweight. Roxie often wore the same clothes to school twice a week, but none of that seemed to bother me because she was a real sweetheart. I always look for the better in people despite their outward appearance. I was probably one of the very few people in my grade who actually took the time to get to know her. We had a few classes together and even shared the same lunch period. One day during lunch time, she told me to accompany her to the bathroom. Once we entered the room, she checked all of the stalls to see if they were occupied. We were the only two people in there.

“What's up? Is everything okay?” I asked.

She took a deep breath and looked at me.

“Promise me you won't say anything?” she said reaching out for me to lock her pinky.

“I promise.” I locked her in.

She slowly lifted up the right sleeve of her long t-shirt to reveal a series of cuts that had stained her pale white skin. They started from her wrists and traveled all the way up to her forearm. I could tell that the cuts at the top of her forearm were fresh, because they had barely turned into scabs. I always

wondered why she wore long sleeves to school every day, and now it made sense as to why she would do so. She was a devoted cutter.

“Roxie..why are you doing this to yourself!?”

Her eyes started to swell up, and the tears came rolling down her face. She was so tired of being bullied. Cutting was the only way she knew how to cope with her stress. She was going through some personal issues at home as well, but she didn't want to disclose all of the details with me just yet. I didn't know what to say to comfort her, so I just held her in the bathroom until she was stable enough to exit.

“Where are you guys coming from?” said one of my friends sitting at the lunch table.

“We were in the bathroom,” I said.

A few of the girls at the table were staring at us when we got back to the cafeteria. They knew something was up. Roxie & I went and sat in our usual seats at the table. There was one girl in particular I did not like, because my best friend Stephanie had fought her previously for running her mouth. Unfortunately, she sat within the same vicinity as me and Roxie at the table. She was one of those girls who nobody liked because of her bad attitude, and no one would tell her about her bad attitude because they were too afraid to confront her.

“Yeah right,” she said sucking her teeth. “They were probably in the bathroom making out like lesbians.” She thought she had whispered those words to my friend who sat next to her, but because she was literally one seat away from me at the table, I heard her comments. I never told anyone about my past with Zuri so it really angered me that she would say something like that out of the blue. I got up from my seat and tapped her on the shoulder.

“Excuse me?! Whatever you have to say about me you can say it to my face!”

I stood there with my arms folded behind her, waiting for an apology. She got up from her seat and waved her fingers in my face with every word.

“I.. SAID.. YOU.. AND-” I zoned out before she could even finish her sentence.

I was so livid, not only because she tried to start a rumor about me, but because she thought she could get away with it by bullying both Roxie and I in-front of all our peers. People treated Roxie like she had a contagious disease all throughout middle school. Nobody wanted to sit near her in class, and

she had no friends. I was the only one who truly cared about her. No one knew that she was cutting herself habitually, and I was the only one who she fully trusted to tell. She was fighting a lot of battles, just like me. I didn't want anyone adding more fuel to the pain by starting up a stupid rumor.

I grabbed my open Capri Sun juice pack from off the table and squirted all of its contents in the girl's face, down to the very last drop. If only you could've seen the look on her face. She was shocked as she stood there in the middle of the cafeteria; her mouth was wide open as the sugary substance drenched from her face into her hair, eyes, ears and nose.

Everyone in the cafeteria grew quiet because no one knew what would happen next. I even shocked myself because I didn't know that I was that bold to do anything of that caliber. She immediately sprung at me and I fell to the floor. We scrambled around on the cafeteria floor for a few seconds until I was able to get a good choke-hold around her neck.

I could hear people chanting around me, "HIT THAT BITCH MAYA! HIT THAT BITCH!"

I managed to flip her over and began beating on her face. My girlfriends cheered me on as I clawed at her eyes and pulled her curly hair. A security guard eventually came over and pulled me off her. Although I got suspended for two days, my bragging rights lasted me the rest of the school year. I was proud of what I did, and so was Roxie. I had finally persuaded her to seek some help about what she was going through. After I graduated from middle school, Roxie pretty much disappeared. I still find myself praying that she is in good spirits.

Even though Vladimir wasn't physically there for me, we talked almost every day from sunrise to sunset. He was my soldier and I was holding down the forefront in my mind. Judging by his appearance, you would think that his personality would be more raw and violent, but Vladimir was the opposite. He was very gentle and soft-hearted. He would sing to me at night time, and even though he wasn't the best singer, I still looked forward to hearing his voice creeping through my house phone after midnight. My favorite song at the time was "*Differences*" by Ginuwine, and every night before we went to sleep he would sing it to me. He couldn't grasp the concept of why I made him feel so tender and fuzzy on the inside, but he continued to open up to me.

Since my parents were very strict with my whereabouts, I wasn't allowed to travel too far, especially to places like the Bronx. The furthest I was allowed to go was Jamaica Avenue, and that was only because my extended family lived within the area.

Vladimir would always tease me about living out on Long Island. For some reason, people who've never been out to Long Island always picture it to be some high-end version of Beverly Hills. They think we have horses running around in our backyards, and we shower with champagne. It's true, those towns do exist, but I wasn't from that area. I lived in small, melting pot suburban town in Nassau County named, Baldwin.

One day Vladimir said that he would finally take the three hour transit ride out to Long Island to see me. I was so excited to meet him up close and personal for the first time. We were friends for years. I talked to him all throughout middle school, and reconnected with him in high school. I loved him as my companion. He kept it real with me when no one else would. Vladimir was the only person who really understood me as a whole. I spoke to him in the beginning of the week about our plans. We were going to see a movie and follow up with dinner shortly after. He told me that his phone would probably be off in between now and Friday, because he was going through a lot of personal issues. He refused to tell me what was going on, no matter how much I had questioned and begged for him to tell me. I guess he was concerned about my safety.

When Friday finally came around, I did not hear from him. I called his number and realized his cell phone was still off. I sent him a message on MySpace thinking that would be the second best way to get in contact with him, but he never responded back to me. It was like he fell off the face of the earth. I had no way of contacting him, and neither did his cousin.

A few days later, I was logged in on Myspace when I noticed his name was tagged in a photo. The caption read, "*R.I.P. Vladimir.*" He was murdered. I immediately called his cousin to confirm. Someone shot him in the head over the weekend, and he died in the middle of the street. The ambulance came and tried to save him, but it was too late. I panicked.

"Did he say where he was going?!"

His cousin couldn't give me a full answer. He didn't know all of the details about Vladimir's

whereabouts. I instantly felt guilt take over my heart. It was horrible. I never even got the chance to tell him goodbye. I didn't even go to his funeral. What would've been my purpose of showing up? His family didn't know me, but I felt partially responsible because I knew that he was going through something serious. I should have tried to stop him. He could have stayed home and video chatted with me like he always did in the past, but instead he chose to go out & engage

in gang related activities. Vladimir took a chance that had cost him his life.

Chapter 7

Rochelle's Hair

Rochelle was my cousin that I had met for the first time, and went to her funeral within the same week. I literally met her for 24 hours, and within two days she was struck by a vehicle that had instantly killed her. Once a year, my family and I drive down to South Carolina to visit all of my mother's extended family. I believe that God called for us to leave in between this exact time frame of her death. It wasn't just a coincidence to me.

My grandmother lives in Denmark, South Carolina. Denmark is a very small quaint town with the basic necessities. It has a McDonald's, a few gas stations, a "Piggly Wiggly" and a few supermarkets. For the most part, my grandmother's neighborhood was pretty quiet. I was sitting on the porch with my mother and my grandmother when Rochelle pulled up in her jeep. As soon as she walked up the steps and entered the porch I was captivated by her glowing spirit.

She had a bright smile that complimented her gorgeous dark brown skin. When she spoke, her voice was warm and mellow to my heart.

"You must be Donna's daughter!" she said to me, reaching out for a hug.

I smiled and greeted her back. She went around the porch giving hugs and kisses to the rest of my family. To be quite honest, I didn't know Rochelle too much. It was just something about her aura that captivated me. Rochelle had just gotten off work and I could tell that she was very tired.

"Maya, can you do me a favor and take out my braids?" she asked, looking at me from across the room.

"Sure!" I said enthusiastically.

I went upstairs to my grandmother's room and brought down a black rat tail comb. I sat in my grandmother's burgundy plush leather chair and ushered Rochelle to sit down in between my legs. After twenty minutes and a few braids, she fell asleep. I let her lay there for a while as I took out the rest of her braids, because I knew she was exhausted. She had left sometime a little before midnight that evening.

Two days later we got the news about her death. I was so heartbroken, but no one could tell. Rochelle was just here taking a nap on my leg after a long day of work the other night, and today we're

here on the porch making her funeral arrangements. I still question why God took her away from us. On the way to Rochelle's funeral I was listening to "*Songs In A Minor*," which was a new album Alicia Keys had just released at the time. I've never cried and reminisced on the past so much to one album like I did with "*Songs In A Minor*." That album really changed my life. Whatever I was going through, whether it was an unwanted change, or someone in school bullying me, Alicia's music spoke to my heart like no other artist. I even wrote a fan letter to her street team because I was so obsessed by the power of her music.

Looking out the back seat window of our minivan, I soaked in the melody of "*Piano & I*," a track that featured Beethoven's "*Moonlight Sonata*." It inspired me to acknowledge my growth as a woman. Her death stuck out to me so much because it was unexpected. I had to reprogram my heart to accept the fact that there will be numerous losses in my life.

After the funeral we all went back to my grandmother's house to have supper. I went upstairs to wash my hands in the bathroom sink. I washed my hands with a small bar of soap, and wiped them dry on a nearby towel. I took a deep breath in and inhaled a familiar scent. It was Rochelle's hair. Her scent was still lingering on my hands from the other night. I broke down and wept in silence on the bathroom floor. I loved someone I barely even knew.

This was the second time I had lost a cousin from an unnatural death. My cousin Levar was murdered in Queens by someone in his high school in the mid 90's. The police never found his killer. I did meet him when I was a little girl, but obviously my memory doesn't go back that far to talk about our interactions. My father likes to bring up old memories of us once in a while. He always says Levar would drag me along with his friends, and we would often bicker with each other about foolish things. Most of the family on my father's side says that we look alike, but I can't recall his face or persona because I was too young to remember him. The only photo we did have of him got lost in transition from my grandmother's house in Pennsylvania, to Queens. Everything else was lost in a house fire.

Chapter 8

Two Can Play

High school brought out the worst in me. I made some really dumb decisions. They say “*you're only as good as the people you surround yourself with,*” and for me I was learning that the hard way.

I had a friend who had lost her virginity to an upperclassman in a stairway, I had a friend who slept with a guy that I liked behind my back, and I also had a friend who dragged me along to a random guy's house, just so she could give him fellatio in exchange for some popularity points.

Me, I just went and got a secret belly button piercing for my sixteenth birthday. I didn't enjoy smoking weed, although I did try it a few times, and I wasn't ready to start having sex like everyone else in high school. I did hangout with a few upperclassmen, but they each had a different ulterior motive every time we would agree to meet up. Our friendships never lasted long.

There were so many different poisons that I could have picked up to steer me away from graduation, but I still managed to get through it all. I put myself in a lot of dangerous situations. One in particular included a day time outing with my best friend Heather. Heather and I would often sneak out of our houses late at night to meet up with all sorts of people.

I remember one night specifically. I snuck Heather and one of my male best friends into my house, just so we could act foolish like we always did in my basement. It was his first time sneaking out of the house, so we had a mini celebration for him by watching “*Cathouse: The Series*” on HBO. When it was time for them to leave, they made it out of my house successfully. The next morning, my best friend's mother showed up at my front door. He had confessed to his mother that he was in my home last night along with Heather. As soon as him & his mother stepped foot out of my kitchen door, my father immediately ran over to me & wrapped his hands around my neck. He choked and yanked me around the kitchen until my mother intervened and pulled him off of me. I remember going to school the next day with my neck as stiff as a rock. I couldn't even bend down to tie my shoes. That was the only time they had caught me, and it was the last time I did it because I didn't want to cause my parents anymore pain because of my bad behavior.

One of the guys Heather and I were about to hang out with went to our high school. He told her that he wanted to meet up later on in the afternoon, and that she should bring a friend along, which was

obviously me. We all met up outside of the gates of Coes Neck Park. Heather and I had noticed Robert was standing there by himself. That should have been the first red flag in my head. Why would Robert tell my best friend to bring a friend along when he's standing there by himself? I kept quiet and ignored the thoughts in my head.

He greeted us both and smiled.

“Follow me.”

We followed Robert across the street to a taxi cab warehouse. The cabs were there, but no patrons were visible. My best friend shot me “the eye,” which meant she felt hesitant and was confused about where he was taking us. I was skeptical as well but I still followed him. We walked onto the grass and watched him squeeze in between a rustic metal gate and a wooden fence.

“Come on,” he said.

Heather went first, and I went second. Once we got past the gate I really had to wipe my eyes to make sure I wasn't hallucinating. We were greeted by five men, two of whom were sitting with their pants off on a random deteriorated couch in front of the open cab garage door.

“No, we're leaving right now!” I shouted.

I quickly grabbed my friend's arm and pulled her closer to me.

“You can't leave.. you guys just got here,” Robert said, walking towards us.

I don't know what type of females he thought we were but we were definitely not porn stars. We were both virgins and we weren't into guys, especially on that level. I was so disgusted by Robert's behavior because he was someone everyone respected in high school, and on top of that he had a girlfriend. That was the first time I figured out looks can be very deceiving, Daughter.

Even the most innocent looking guy in class was secretly a huge pervert. I made it to the other side of the gate and turned around to see if Heather was behind me. I looked back and noticed that he was holding her arm, still trying to persuade her to stay. I squeezed my right arm into the wedge and yanked her off him. We started a tug of war. I managed to win and pulled Heather out. Clearly that situation never really affected Heather the way it did to me, because she lost her virginity to Robert the following year.

Me, I wasn't ready for sex just yet although half of the girls in my grade already had their legs spread wide open for everyone to see. I had a big crush on this guy in my grade, and it was mainly because I hung out with him and his friends every other afternoon. I knew Gerald had a girlfriend, but I couldn't control my passion for him.

On New Year's Eve after church service, I snuck out of my house to go meet up with him. I walked to his house around 2 A.M. and I wasn't dressed up for anything special. I wore sweatpants, sneakers, and I had my hair tied up in a scarf. I wasn't interested in looking pretty. His house was only a short distance from where I lived. It took me roughly ten minutes to get there. When I entered his house I was greeted by him and his cousin, which surprised me. I thought it was just going to be us two, alone.

I walked down the stairs and entered his room in the basement. His cousin closed the door behind me. A part of me knew what I was getting myself into, and I really didn't seem to care. I just wanted Gerald to like me. I wanted him to crave me. I had entertained them both that night, and I didn't feel guilty about what I was doing. I didn't feel disgusted with myself knowing that these 2 completely took advantage of me. The way I carried myself as woman was a serious problem. I actually felt very comfortable with the two of them. I knew Gerald didn't want to be the one to take my virginity, although I had often fantasized that he would. Obviously, he didn't see me as someone special. He didn't respect me, but I never expected him to because I had no respect for my damn self. When it was time for me to leave, Gerald walked me home and gave me kiss on the forehead and that was the end.

The next afternoon I showed up at his house again with a group of our mutual friends. Accompanied by his girlfriend, we were all standing outside in front of his house. I don't remember what we were talking about, I just remember his little sister putting me on the spotlight.

“Hey Maya, I heard you were here last night,” she said glaring up at me.

There was an awkward moment of silence. His girlfriend gave me fiery set of dagger eyes, and all I could do was laugh it off.

“Yeah..I had to pick up something..” I said hesitatingly.

I quickly removed myself from that situation, but it came back to haunt me. The word got back to

school grounds and I flipped out on a guy who had brought it up in front of everybody after school.

I always found myself going back to that house and being a victim of everybody's curiosity. I wouldn't say victim too harshly because I let them all do it to me, and by "all" I mean people who I thought were my friends look and probe at my vulnerable teenage body. It was sort of like a game to them. I was shaming myself. My body had no value. I was just skin and bones, especially to them. I started to become aware of this when a group of them would hold me down and lift up my shirt to expose me, or disrobe me in the backyard or in the living room of Gerald's home.

"Womanhood."

I still kept going back, the same way I would find myself lying in my cousin's bed in the past, and not uttering a single word.

Chapter 9

Fighting Temptation

I hated myself. I was so mentally frustrated with my actions that I was ready to give up on my life. I didn't respect myself as a woman, yet alone a black woman. You see, us black women are taught to be super strong. We are God's soldiers here on earth. Nothing that exists on this planet can dismantle our strength, but here I was being a pussy. Years later, when I finally looked back on a few of my diary entries from high school, I realized that I actually fell into a very deep depression. Here's what I was writing:

“What's becoming of me? Don't know what to do or say to get my mind right. Not enough time or energy to stand for this fight. Calling out for you to come and take me away, no longer do I want to stay. A crime scene going on in my head, one word and this girl is soon to be dead.”

Looking back, I must have written over ten entries of me either wanting to be a victim of a murderer, serial killer or rapist. I contemplated taking my own life. No one had ever asked what I was going through, or how I truly felt inside because I had played it off well. I was crying out to be loved, and I wasn't being heard. I never asked for help during my depression because I enjoyed punishing myself for my previous actions. I thought I deserved to die.

Although my parents were very present in my life, I felt like I was still missing something from them. It might have been that they weren't as accepting of me maturing at such a fast rate. My father was very strict on me as a teenager. I thank him for that, but I would have been a little easier on you, Daughter. I felt trapped, similar to a caged bird inside the walls of a loud zoo. The way my parents dealt with me as a teenager was a little overbearing, and my father being a police officer really made the situation worse. They didn't trust me. I was constantly being punished and accused of acting in a certain manner. I just kept my personal life private. I guess they could sense that. It's not like I had a boyfriend, or anyone to talk to. I just wanted to have a little more fun. They sheltered me from reality, and because of that I was a junkie for taking risks.

I got pretty fed up with all of the daily accusations that flew at me, and I just molded myself into who they were afraid I would become. I really hate to sound like a spoiled brat. It's not like my mother or father weren't present in my life, but we lost the relationship that we once had. I used to feel

comfortable talking to my father about boys that I liked or whatever it was that troubled my mind, but as I matured and his schedule became sporadic, those conversations fell through. With our schedules clashing, there really wasn't enough leeway for us to talk because I would be sleeping by the time he had gotten off from work.

I found myself forcing out "I love you." I resented my family because while they were too busy trying to protect me from reality, they were unaware that they had already failed me by placing me in the hands of my abuser. I was suffocating because they weren't allowing me to mature. I felt that they were trying to patch up the cracks in our relationship with grand family trips out of state twice a year. I never asked for that. I just wanted my voice to be heard. It was hard for them to see that at times.

They always had their hands full. Raising a family, let alone a child with a disability is tough work. My little brother Michael has a disability called "Prader-Willi-Syndrome." It's a very complex disease that most people who haven't been exposed to anyone with this disease will not understand. I'll put it this way, coming home to a trashed house after a fifteen hour shift, just to be greeted by an aggressive teenager who you have to restrain in order to calm him down, wasn't something they had signed up for. It would happen often, at least once or twice a week at home, or in public. We had rough times as a family.

I knew why they were hard on me, Daughter. My parents wanted me to be an overachiever. They saw nothing but success for me. Michael often expresses that he has dreams of following in my father's footsteps and becoming a police officer. I see that it still hurts my father, knowing that Michael will never be able to have this opportunity. I don't regret my parents' tough love because it made me a very angry and rebellious young lady.

Sooner than later Daughter, you really need to fall hard on your butt a few times, just to simply learn from your mistakes. In order to process the beneficial trial and error of tough love, it's best this way. It played a major role in my growth over the years.

Chapter 10

Video Girl

“As women, we are told from a young age that our value rests in our appearance. Our media inundates us with the sexualization of female bodies, youth, and the corruption of purity; there’s business in doing so and normalizing it. The sex industry is the largest functioning mechanism of patriarchy; where it will make a woman believe herself to be empowered because “she’s in control,” when in reality she is reinforcing every twisted concept society has taught our men to act upon”- (KiNG, Op-Ed: The Slippery Slope of Selling Yourself- How I Almost Landed In The Sex Industry)

I needed to release all of the buildup and tension my mind created, so I started a YouTube channel. I used to dance professionally when I was younger so it felt good to be behind a camera again. Even in high school, I appeared in a local artist’s music video. I would post videos of myself, sometimes of me and my best friend Heather, and we would dance sensually to the latest rap music or pop song. I was so simple minded at the time that my only dreams and aspirations in life were to become a video model. I wanted to become a video model because I was so angered to see every other type of women in these rap music videos overshadowing black women.

In the early 2000's, rappers made it seem like being darkskin was almost a crime. If you didn't have a European/Latin “exotic” look, you weren't considered beautiful within the media. A black artist who doesn't find beauty in their own race will never get my support. Although I was still getting picked on because of my dark complexion, it never made me want to lighten or bleach my skin. Not even once.

I admire dark skin so much, even skin tones that are so dark it favors the color purple. A lot of us are corrupted into thinking that our melanin has no worth. People will pay well over \$353 a gram for melanin pigmentation, and yet here we are soaking in all of its abundance for free. Are you looking in the mirror? Are you appreciating your wealth?

We're just mentally trained by silly music videos and commercials to ignore our strong presence. We are a valuable tribe of people. I started to fully appreciate my body and complexion, but for all the wrong

reasons. I was seeking attention and advertising my body.

One day I got a message from some random guy. He expressed to me that he really enjoyed watching my videos online daily, and that he would pay me \$50,000 in cash in exchange for my virginity. He said that he would fly me out to his country whenever I was ready, and that I could stay in a fancy hotel of my choice. I was still very smart enough to know that sleeping with him would be one of the worst decisions I would ever choose to make as a woman, Daughter. My virginity didn't have a price. If I was going to lose it, it wouldn't be auctioned off on some human sex-trafficking market. It would be with someone who I truly cared for & loved.

I started meeting up with people I met online through chat-rooms and social media, and I would bring my girlfriends along with me. I was addicted to the thrill of knowing that anything could happen to me, and no one would know about it. I'm blessed to say that a few of the guys we did meet in person were actually pretty normal people. By God's grace I was never kidnapped or physically assaulted by anyone. We had simple interactions. One of them I had actually grown very fond of. I had asked him to accompany me to prom because he was also in high school, but things fell through when I realized he was dating other women.

Halfway through the school year, my “angel” contacted me. I call him my angel because I can't recall his user name on YouTube, but he sent me a link and told me to watch it. It was one of my videos, and I was watching it being downloaded on some pervert's computer. My angel told me that I was way too young and beautiful to the things that I was doing. Deep down inside I knew he was right. I wasn't thinking long term about my actions, and how they would affect me in the future.

My family had found out that I was posting videos online, because my cousin had discovered one of my videos highlighted on Myspace. She immediately informed my parents about what I was doing. When they asked me why I was doing it, I didn't have a good explanation.

As a woman, we are often pressured to keep up with society's ideal image of beauty. Beauty to me meant sexualization, which consisted of me exposing my full figured body to an online exhibition. I didn't understand my worth as a young woman. In my mind, I was a very private person, but when I

hopped online I became someone else. I was someone who lacked self-value, Daughter. My parents told me the same things that my angel had said to me. They said that I could end up in serious danger one day and, that I needed to remove everything I had posted online. I got rid of my YouTube account and all my social media accounts that made me a target to perverts, and never looked back.

Chapter 11

Sixteen

At sixteen, I thought I was in love. I dated Darius for roughly a year and half. He was a few years older than me at the time, which made me really attracted to him. I didn't like to be entertained by boys my age because I felt that they were too immature to take me on. We had met through a mutual friend and started chatting online. He lived in St. Albans, which was about a five minute drive from my college campus. Whenever I had a break or a huge gap in between classes, I would go see him.

Now here was the first strike in our relationship. From the moment he told me one of his family members (I still presume) had murdered his father back in Jamaica, I should have been more skeptical about pursuing to date him. Awkwardly enough, I still stayed in his presence and somehow seemed to push it far out of my mind. I never met his mother in person, but he would talk to her about me often and she didn't mind me dating him.

Occasionally we would go out to eat, or go shopping if we weren't shackled up in his room. He lived upstairs in the attic of his aunt and uncle's home. They were okay people, I guess. I only talked to his cousin who I tried to put on with Heather, but that's a different story. A few things stuck out to me looking back on the course of our relationship. I'll start by explaining the day I lost my virginity, Daughter. That was strike two.

Like every other teenage girl I wanted the day I lost my virginity to be magical. Not so much glamorous, but I wanted the mood to be set just right. I wanted savory aroma filled candles, soft R&B music playing in the background, that sort of thing.

When I told him I was a virgin he really didn't believe me at first. I was straight forward about my past encounters in high school, and that made him question the validity of my purity. He started pressuring me about sex two months into our relationship. I didn't know what to do with myself, nor did I know what to do with him. I told him that I would be ready in six months. My virginity was sacred to me. It was really the only thing I had left to call my own, and I wasn't ready to give that up to just anybody.

At seventeen, Darius had developed this stupid nickname for me; he called me "Pookie." What a terrible nickname to give to another human being, Daughter. I told Darius that I was finally ready to have sex after making him wait a whole year, instead of the six months I wanted him to wait for my

yonis. In reality I wasn't ready, but I could see that he was slipping away from me because I wasn't putting anything out. Besides, I figured he was getting pleased elsewhere because it didn't bother him that we weren't having sex or messing around for a whole year. We would just kiss, maybe dry hump one another, go out to eat, and call it a night.

I was slick about my plan of action. Darius met my parents after our first year because I had kept him a secret. They didn't really care for him too much, but they were happy that I was happy. Of course I made him lie about his age face to face so that they could rest assured that I was in good hands. My mother noticed that things were starting to get serious between us, and she began to question me about my relationship with Darius.

“Are you having sex?” she asked.

When she first asked me I was taken off guard because I was literally in the process of planning the night I would lose my virginity to him. The true reason behind her asking me was because she found an *NYC Lifestyle* condom in my bedroom drawer. My cousin Cassie had given it to me and told me to use it when the timing would be appropriate. I held on to it. Occasionally I would go into my drawer just to hold it, sniff it, and get a feel of what I was about to get myself into.

My mother had found it one morning while she was searching for something in my room. She told my father, and the both of them came to me separately to question me about it. My father just came out and asked. “Your mom said she found a condom in your drawer. Why are you having sex Maya? What's that about?” he pulled me aside in the hallway.

“I promise you, I'm not.” I looked him straight in the eye.

“Cassie gave it to me. I'm not having sex. Nothing to worry about Dad.”

He stared at me for a moment before he replied.

“Okay.”

I knew that he trusted my choice of words, and as a father

I commended him for that.

Chapter 12

Yoni

Once I told my mother I was still a virgin, she wanted proof. I told Darius that we would have to postpone the “big day” because my mother was taking me to the gynecologist for the first time. I told him that the following day I would be “ready, ready.”

Going to the gynecologist with my mother wasn't as bad as I had pictured it to be. I put on my examination robe and went into the room. The nurse did my clinical intake; and I met with an African-American female gynecologist. As I sat there I realized that I wasn't a big fan of female gynecologists. In my head I thought she was judging me. She was much older than I was, in her late 50's I presume. It was just the way she looked at me. It was like my vagina symbolized a nostalgic past of hers. I placed my feet in the stirrups as I slid down and tried to center my focus elsewhere. The whole time she was examining me I kept pondering on the notion of sex. I imagined how sex was going to feel for the first time.

“All done,” she smiled up at me and tossed her gloves in the garbage nearby.

I took my legs off the stirrups and waited until she exited the room to put my clothes back on. I could hear her in the hallway assuring my mother that my hymen was still intact. That night I called Darius to let him know that I was officially ready to have sex. I “loved” Darius because he was a rebel just like me. He was very feisty; and 90% of the time he was a pain in the ass, but I loved that. I thought loved him to the point where I felt comfortable enough to take this next step with him. I had never felt that way about anyone before, so the attraction that I was developing for him was weird to me. I was concerned about his motives, and I didn't want him to hurt my feelings after I made this big decision to sleep with him.

I would hear stories every other week or so about the girls in my High School who lost their virginity' to their douche bag boyfriends, or upperclassman, who ended up leaving them the next day or following week. I didn't want that to be me. I was a very prideful virgin. I wore my virginity like a crown in high school. There were only a handful of us left, and if I was going to do this with Darius he would have to prove to me that I wasn't making a big mistake. He finally told me he loved me, and at seventeen that sealed the deal.

The big day finally came in the second week of January. I attended school for half the day. I told Darius that I would pick him up from the train station around noon, because my father would leave home from work around 11:30am every morning. We had an ample amount of time to create and bask in our romantic rendezvous. I had set up my room real nice. I didn't have Egyptian cotton sheets, but there was fresh linen on my bed and they were deep purple, my favorite color.

I didn't tell my friends that I was going to lose my virginity that day. I'll be honest, most of my friends were a lot more experienced than me, so I didn't think it would be that special for me to tell them anyway.

I had made a pact with my best friend Stephanie. The pact was that if one of us were to lose our virginities before graduating high school we would have to pay the other \$100. Obviously, I didn't tell her what was going on. I did tell Heather at the time, because she was also in a relationship with this middle-aged Caucasian man who she had met online. I figured we could all hang out at my house. As much as I would have liked to be alone in my room with Darius, I was still very afraid of what I was getting myself into.

Heather's boyfriend came to pick us up from school that afternoon. From there we headed to the train station to pick up Darius. When we arrived to my house, we all got settled downstairs in my basement. I made some iced tea, offered some snacks and made sure everyone felt comfortable. Darius and I were sitting on the couch next to each other while Heather and her boyfriend sat adjacent from us.

"We'll be back soon," she said.

She got up from the couch, grabbed her boyfriend's arm, and led him to my bathroom. As soon as I heard the door lock, I knew it was time.

This is my moment, I thought to myself.

It's finally going to happen right now. I sat there on the couch with my hands folded, fiddling with my fingers. My heart was racing. It was still day time and I could see Darius staring at me out of the corner of my eye.

"Are you ready to do this?" he asked, placing his hand on my left thigh.

I smiled shyly and nodded my head. I had the NYC Lifestyle condom that my cousin had given me in my back pocket. I placed it in his hand.

“Go lay down over there,” he said. I got up from the couch and walked over to the other side. A small section of my leather couch reclined like a pullout bed so he figured that would be the perfect spot for us to do the deed.

I took a deep breath, sat back and rested my head on the cold leather couch. I stared at the white ceiling above me. He took off his shoes and got on top of me. He then proceeded to unzip and unbutton my denim blue jeans. He slid them off my legs, first the right and then the left. He then stood up, unbuttoned his belt and pulled down his pants. He walked over to the corner of the room to see if Heather was still occupied in the bathroom and he came back to me. I knew red was his favorite color, so I wore red lingerie to make this a special moment for the both of us.

“Take your panties off,” he said.

He didn't even bother to acknowledge the fact that they were his favorite color, but I still hustled them down my legs.

“Why don't we go upstairs?” I asked, leaning in for a kiss.

He turned his head and sucked his teeth. “We're good down here, let's just do this, relax.”

I took in another deep breath and laid back down. He took off his boxers and pulled me to the edge of the couch. He lifted up my legs and put them on his shoulders. I couldn't look at him. I didn't want to. I didn't want him to see how nervous I was, so I turned my head and stared at the blank canvas of the white wall next to me. I could feel him staring down at me.

“I want you to look at me,” he said with an aggressive tone.

I forced myself to turn my head so that I was looking up at him before he slowly applied pressure to my thighs and inserted himself inside of me.

“Just relax,” he said, hovering over me.

He didn't kiss me or hold me to make me feel comfortable, so I had to adjust on my own. As he continued to force his way inside of me little by little, I kept praying to myself that he would just hurry up and be done with me already. I was hurting so bad. It wasn't that I was in too much physical pain, I was in mental pain. My mind was somewhere else. I wasn't turned on at all, and on top of that I did not feel spiritually connected to him; even though he had claimed to love me.

I closed my eyes and bit the bottom of my lip as hard as I could. I was trying so hard to resist screaming “get the fuck off me.”

A few seconds before my mouth was about to explode, he pulled out. In my head I was screaming thank you God. He could tell that I wasn't enjoying myself so he stopped.

“I think I'm ready to go home,” he said slipping on his boxers.

“Okay,” I responded sheepishly.

I had mixed emotions about what had just happened. A part of me was happy because I realized that I was no longer a virgin, and a part of me was sad because I had expected sex to feel like something greater than what people said it would be, Daughter. I wanted sex with more substance. I wanted him to appreciate my body instead of snatching away my innocence, like my cousin, and just about every other male I had exposed my body to.

“Where's the condom?” I sat up in search of the empty wrapper because the last thing I needed was my mother or father finding the remnants of my short and dissatisfying escapade.

“I didn't use it.” He grabbed his pants off the couch, picked up his shoes and left the basement.

Chapter 13

Beauty & The Beast

I thought I was pregnant after my first time having sex. Every woman gets that scare after they have unprotected sex. My father would wring my neck if I were to ever walk in my house with a pregnant belly, especially at that age. I thank God that I wasn't. I kept expressing to Darius how paranoid I was about what just happened. He didn't care, and that never comforted my thoughts, so I chose to channel my paranoia by telling Heather.

When I told her we had unprotected sex, she refused to be my friend for any longer. She was upset that I let him manipulate me, and not only that; she noticed that I was getting too wrapped up in him. "Wrapped up" meant I had no social life. Darius became my everything, and Heather didn't like that he had all of my attention.

When Prom time came around I was set on bringing

Darius as my date. While I was still in high school, he was in his second to last semester of college. Truthfully, I only wanted to bring him along so I could show him off to all the girls who picked on me; or made me feel inferior to them in High School. I was originally supposed to accompany Heather, but since we weren't talking I made the sacrifice of taking him to prom instead of taking her. Heather chose to be spiteful and told a few people that I wasn't close to that I was no longer a virgin. That situation ended our friendship.

The day Darius and I went shopping for his tuxedo mirrored an episode of VH1's "*Love and Hip Hop*." I sat there with him and the tailor. I was watching him try on lavender suits that would match my purple sequin dress. He was very quiet, not giving too much feedback during the two hour long process. When we both had agreed on a suit, he put a down payment on it. We left the store and headed towards the mall across the street. I noticed he was walking ahead of me at a very fast pace. He didn't want to be near me.

"What's your problem?" I asked when I finally caught up to him.

"I don't want to pay for this shit, I don't even wanna go," he said.

Here's one of the biggest nights of any teenager's life, and my significant other, who I loved, refused to be supportive of that. I wasn't taking no for an answer, and I doubt my parents would have

either because we had already paid for his ticket. He had to come. At that moment I just wanted to get away from him, because I could see that he was getting ready to have another meltdown. Throughout our relationship I noticed that Darius had very irregular behavioral issues. One day he would tell me he loved me, and the next day I was a bitch. I was prepared for whatever he was going to dish out today; I just wasn't prepared for an audience. At the time I didn't drive and neither did he, so I called my mom to come and rescue me from the mall. As I was texting her on my phone, he snatched it out of my hand and refused to give it back to me. This had to be one of the most embarrassing moments of my life.

He made a big altercation in front of *Green Acres Mall*, it was so big that a security guard had to come over me and ask me if I was a victim of domestic abuse. We were fighting over my phone. I yelled, screamed, and cried for it back as we pushed each other around in circles until a small crowd had formed around us. People were watching him yell and scream like a maniac while I wrestled with him to get my phone back. When I finally managed to get the device back in my hands, I ran off. I ran far away from him. I hid in the parking lot behind a vehicle to call my mother. I called her just to see how far away she was from the mall. Luckily enough, she was down the block.

When she pulled up to the main entrance of the mall I started to walk casually towards her. Darius spotted me in the distance and began walking towards me.

“I'll see you some other time,” I said quickly while hopping into the back seat.

I slid the door shut and rolled up my window.

“How did everything go?” my mother asked me.

I really wanted to bolt out of there but I didn't want to make things too obvious to my mother about what had just happened.

“I just wanna get outta here Mom, can we please?”

As she drove off, I watched him standing there in front of the main entrance with a stupid little smirk on his face. I didn't seem to understand what I was getting myself into by staying with him.

My prom pictures would have been perfect if Darius wasn't in any of them. He never smiled, not even for one picture. It didn't just aggravate me, it aggravated my family. I was so tired of dealing with his behavior. Relationships shouldn't have been this stressful, especially knowing the fact that he was

four years older than me. The night of prom he somehow managed to snag my phone yet again. This time he decided to do a little snooping. He opened up my “AIM” account and saw that I was logged in as someone else.

I was logged in under “Melissa's” user-name. “Melissa” was a fake user I had created. I'm not ashamed to say I did this often in relationships I was insecure about. I baited him under her user-name, just to see if he would flirt back and entertain her, which he did for a little while. Melissa was the same “woman” he had told he was single. He was even planning to hang out with her the following week for “coffee.”

Stephanie was the only one who knew about the fake account I had created on “AIM.” She also used it to bait her exboyfriend away from the woman he had left her for.

After going through Melissa's messages, Darius put the pieces of the puzzle together. He was very infuriated sitting at our banquet table, especially knowing that I had pretended to be this woman. I on the other hand found it very amusing. He said we needed to talk so we went downstairs to the lobby. I didn't do too much talking, it was mostly him begging and saying that it was nothing more than a regular friendship he had developed with “Melissa,” and how deep down inside he knew it was me. I just smiled and played along with his games because I knew this would be a good reason for me to finally leave him alone.

After Prom I closed that chapter with him, but I wouldn't be honest with myself Daughter if I told you that I didn't end up going back to him.

Chapter 14

Spiritual Guidance

A year before I met Darius, me and Heather went to see a psychic in our neighborhood just to get some clarity on our foggy lives. The psychic told me that I would meet my soul-mate in two years, and that I would live somewhere in the tropics like Florida or the Carolina's, where I am currently relocating. I'm not sure how other people feel about psychics, premonitions, horoscopes and ghosts, but me? I believe in it all.

In 2014 on New Year's Eve, I had gotten into a bad car accident in South Carolina. I told myself that I wasn't going to church for the first time ever in my life. Instead, I was going to party and drink with my cousin and a few of her friends. An hour later we all got pretty hungry and decided to make a quick run to McDonald's. When we finally got to the main road, we were about 20 feet away from the restaurant when a vehicle from the opposite lane crashed into us head on. I was on the passenger's side of the truck so I wasn't bruised too badly. My neck was in pain for a few minutes. The driver, my cousin's friend, later went on to have intensive therapy.

Long story short, as soon as our car came to a complete halt in the middle of the roadway I hopped out of the vehicle and started to laugh hysterically. I knew God was testing me and I had failed him. I didn't even wait to file a claim against the driver who was guilty of texting behind the wheel. I called my family to come and pick me up and I took my behind to church.

At one point, Heather and I believed that we had made contact with the dead in my basement. There was this myth spreading around high school that if you take six unsharpened pencils, and each person holds three in a rectangular box with each pencil touching from end to end, you're able to contact dead spirits. If you Google "Charlie, Charlie" you'll see exactly what I'm talking about.

I don't advise anyone to do it though, because it actually works. I asked Charlie if my grandmother was in the room and the pencils moved inward. The pencils move slightly inward for yes and slightly outward for no. You're supposed to ask "Charlie" a question, and he will respond in that manner. I know some of you might think I'm delusional about what happened to me, but if you do this correctly, (which I'm hoping you don't do at all, Daughter,) your fingertips will feel very cold. I went on to ask him if my

grandmother was sitting in the room with us. The pencils moved inward, initiating yes. The thing with this “game” is that you really don't know who Charlie is. Charlie could be the devil for all I know, but whoever Charlie was, he frightened us both.

Till this day, I still believe that there was a presence in my basement, because when I asked my last question we knew that it was time to stop fooling around. I asked “Charlie” if my grandmother was sitting in the rocking chair that was stationed in front of my television in the basement. The pencils didn't move. I paused and asked him again. Midway through my question, my rocking chair started to rock itself. It wasn't a demonic rock like you see in those twisted horror movies, it was a gentle sway that lasted a few seconds. I'm still not sure if that was Sarah trying to send me a message, but Heather & I both agreed to leave any, and all dead spirits alone after that.

Chapter 15

Bad Girl, Good Girl

I was super excited about the news I heard from the psychic, and I was very happy knowing that I would finally get to meet my one true love in college. During my freshman year of college I was slowly coming into my own. I was a cheerleader and I had three dominant cliques of friends. I hung out with a few of the artsy people because my best friend Kim was one of them. I would go hang out with her and a few music majors I had met in the music club room at random times throughout the day.

I was going through a major K-pop phase. I couldn't stop listening to *Girls Generation*, and *f(x)*, which are two of my favorite girl groups in South Korea. I was so obsessed with “Taeyang” and “G-Dragon” from “Big Bang,” and I wanted my own little Korean man to come and sweep me off my feet. I had a crush on two of them at my school, and since my college was so diverse, they both really didn't mind talking to me.

Peter was in my sociology class. He had to be no taller than 5'5, and Kyle was a part of the music club so I would always see him every time I went to go hang out with Kim. I was so attracted to the both of them because they looked like they belonged in a teenage heartthrob boy band. Peter would sweep his dark black hair to the right side with gel, and he always wore trendy outfits to class. He sat

next to me every day in class. I think this other African American woman in my class had a crush on him too, but he only spoke and worked with me in class.

Kyle, on the other hand, thought it was very awkward for me to like him because of my race. He didn't see our relationship taking off anywhere because he was a traditional man. Traditional meaning, you marry and keep to your own race, especially for procreation purposes. I stopped seeing Peter on campus after class ended that semester, so our friendship really didn't go anywhere. I wasn't really attracted to any guys in college except those two.

One day while I was in the music room I met someone new. Appearance wise, Marcus wasn't the type of guy I usually found myself going after. Yeah, sure he had nice dark skin and pearly white teeth, but after dating Darius, who I considered a pretty boy, Marcus wasn't anywhere on that level. He was more of a punk rocker. Marcus was a Converse, graphic tees, and skinny jeans type of guy. What I really admired about him was his personality, and taste in music, which are two of my favorite qualities in a man. I felt really bad at first because Kim liked him, and I wasn't going to lose my best friend over a man again.

Even though we both had kissed Marcus on separate occasions, and agreed that he was a terrible kisser, we hashed it out and stayed friends. She supported my relationship with Marcus, and I continued to support her as a friend. Marcus was a man of God, and that's something I was new to looking back at my track record. I wasn't used to my significant other motivating me through Christ in a relationship. Eighty-five percent of his life revolved around his church. His family was amazing. They always welcomed me into their home with open arms and truly cared about my health and wellness. For the most part any normal person would have enjoyed being in this relationship, but for me I was forcing myself to be committed. I knew he wasn't my soul mate, but at the same time I knew God had sent him to me for a reason.

It's not that he wasn't caring or supportive because he did a lot for me. He always went out of his way to accommodate me, whether it was picking me up from school or taking me home after a long basketball game, at one point he had even paid my traffic violation tickets knowing his was way overdue. I could see that he was falling head over heels for me, and I wasn't accepting of that. I knew

that I was going to walk all over him.

If you're in a relationship with me, I need you to be just as wild and free as my spirit. I needed a man who wouldn't be afraid to do crazy things like play striptease soccer in a trespassing area or go streaking through a neighbor's sprinkler system at night. Not to say that he wasn't like this, but I didn't give him a chance to be my wholesome companion. I was so accustomed to men treating me like crap I didn't appreciate the high pedestal Marcus had placed me on. I had convinced myself that he wasn't for me in the very beginning of our relationship. I stuck with him for a little less than a year because I was trying to make myself realize that I had finally found a good man and there was no reason for me to walk away from our relationship. My family adored him. Marcus was very respectful, and he had all the qualities of what a potential husband should have, but I still ended up cheating on him with Darius. It really kills me to explain what happened next during our relationship because I still feel guilty about the way I handled our relationship, Daughter.

On Valentine's Day I left class early so that I could see Darius. That morning I went to visit Marcus at his house to collect my cute commercial holiday card and heart shaped box filled with candy. I told him that I would see him later in the evening for dinner, and I left for class. Later on that afternoon, I left class early to head over to Darius's house. I spent a few months away from him after Prom and I figured maybe he had learned his lesson.

He made me aware that he was off and on with some girl he had met a few months ago, but he didn't seem to care about her because he claimed to miss me so much. While we were messing around in his room, Marcus kept calling and leaving me text messages on my phone. He wondered why I wasn't in school. I ignored them and proceeded to focus all of my attention on Darius. This was the first time I had ever cheated on someone, and I absolutely loved it. I was addicted to the thrill of having two men in the realm of my hands. I felt like a royal queen, having my cake and eating it too.

My infidelity really didn't start to mess with my brain until that night on Valentine's Day when I saw Marcus. Marcus had set things up for me so perfectly. He was going to surprise me in my class with roses and a life size teddy bear that I always wanted. I felt my heart sink to my stomach. I was hurting him by holding on to my past relationship with Darius. I had a man who was treating me right and going

out of his way to care for me unconditionally, but I neglected him completely. One day it got so bad that I couldn't even sit next to him in his room because I smelled like Darius' cologne. Darius told me that if I didn't chose him over Marcus he was going to tell him everything.

I started to confide in Marcus' best friend. I told him that I was eventually going to hurt him if we didn't go our separate ways. I was doing way too much damage to him by holding on to my previous relationship secretly. It's true when people say nice guys finish last. When I had finally confessed that I was cheating on him, he somehow figured out that was the case. It could have been that we were rarely intimate, or that he noticed that I had become distant and didn't want to be around him too much. Although he accepted my apology, I never came to terms with my actions. I asked God to make me a better woman for my soul mate.

Chapter 16

Bites and Bruises

I still kept in contact with Darius, but only for sexual purposes. My heart wasn't attached to him, my *yoni* was. I was so “*dickmatized*” to the point that I was too afraid to branch off and meet someone new, which was clearly shown in the relationship I had with Marcus. Two months after my bad break-up with Marcus, I met my soul mate and I wanted Darius to know that he would have to let me go now.

My feelings for my soul mate were insatiable. It was a feeling that my mind, heart and body craved for. I was pursuing him hard, so I knew the closure conversation with Darius was surely going to come. I just wasn't aware that my life would be threatened in the process. I kept pondering on different ways to tell Darius that this would be the last time we would see each other. I came up with a stupid plan. I told him that I needed him to fix my computer before the semester started. I told him that I would be too focused on my studies to see him anymore. Yes, I did. I really told him that. It was a terrible exit strategy, but I went for it. I brought my laptop upstairs to his room, he looked at it for a few minutes and I thought that this would be the end. I packed up my stuff and got up from his bed. When he leaned in to kiss me, I pushed him away. I knew this would be the moment for me to finally be honest and straight forward with him.

“Look, I really like this guy I'm talking to so we can't do this anymore, okay..?” I said to him.

He looked at me and smiled. “Okay, but you're not leaving until I get what I want.” He walked over to his bedroom door and slammed it shut. He turned the knob and locked me in his room.

“What are you doing?!” I pushed him out of the way and darted towards the door.

He grabbed me by my waist and threw me on his bed.

“Like I said, you're not leaving until I get what I want.”

I started to cry hysterically as I laid there on my back. “Let me go Darius!” I screamed, struggling to push him off of me.

He covered my mouth and told me he loved me. I had two options. One, I was going to let him rape me and somehow convince myself that he was doing this out of love or two, fight my way out his room and never look back for the sake of my own well-being. So, I fought him. I managed to get to the door, but as I was trying to turn the lock, he pinned himself against me. We were both pressed against the

door hoping that one of us would finally give in to the other. I started to laugh because I knew that I

was going to use every little bit of force inside of me to break down this door.

“SOMEBODY HELP ME, SOMEBODY HELP ME!” I

kept screaming repeatedly so that someone would hear me, even though we were the only two people in the house.

He tried to cover my mouth again, but this time in the process I bit his hand. I unlocked the door, quickly grabbed my computer off the floor and fumbled down the steps as fast as I could. I ran out the side door and headed straight for my car. He was fifteen seconds behind me.

As soon as I started up my car I looked up and saw him banging on my passenger window.

“Open up, I need a ride to the train station,” he said calmly. Everything finally became clear to me. I was in a relationship with someone who suffered from a severe case of bipolar disorder.

I rolled down my window as I was trying to collect my train of thought. “Are you fucking serious?! You just tried to hold me captive in your room and now you’re asking me for a fucking ride?!” I stared at him with a puzzled look on my face.

He wasn't too fond of my reaction. I guess he thought that I was going to unlock my passenger door and everything would go back to normal as if he didn't just try to rape me in his room. I was tired of it all.

“Goodbye Darius.”

As I started to roll up my window, he put his hand inside to stop me. “You know what I got something for you.”

He took the cap off of a water bottle he had in his back pocket, and threw the contents in my face. My face, clothes, and steering wheel were drenched with cold water.

As he walked away I sat there in front of his house trying to calm myself down. I wanted to run him over in my vehicle and have his brains splatter into pieces across my windshield. Instead, I composed myself and prayed. I deserved what he had done to me. I prayed that God would change me. I prayed that he would never let me fall into situations like this anymore. I not only wanted to do better for myself, but I wanted to change for the sake of your future,

Daughter.

No young woman should have gone through half of the things I had experienced in all of my relationships and encounters. I prayed that if I were to find true love, it would be genuine. I prayed that I would do everything the right way. I made a promise to myself that I deserved better, and that I would realize my self-worth. Most importantly, I prayed that God would give me strength to move forward in my life. I wanted to make the very best out of myself for you, Daughter.

Chapter 17

My Soul mate

“You don't understand what a soul mate is. You think it's all roses and happiness. A soul mate is somebody who changes you. And then, sometimes they have to leave because the intensity of the relationship is so much that you can't actually have stability.”

- (Elizabeth Gilbert, “Eat, Pray, Love.”)

Since this as an unconventional story, I will start from the very last time that I saw my soul mate. I had spent the night at his house. We were lying in his bed after having a few drinks and love making sessions when he told me that he was getting ready to start taking things serious with another woman, and by serious he meant marriage. He told me that he was going to marry a woman he had only known for less than a year. I saw all of this coming ahead of time so it really didn't surprise me. Although we both had no intentions of getting back together, we both knew that by him pursuing to be with this woman exclusively, it would signify the closing chapter in our “relationship.” It really didn't hit me that hard at first until I realized that my soul mate had played a very significant role in my spiritual journey to womanhood. My soul mate taught me many life lessons, Daughter. For one thing he' taught me that it's okay to express my emotions. I had a lot of trouble doing so when I first met him.

One night we went out to eat at the Chinese buffet in his neighborhood. As I was sitting across from him he asked me why I loved him, and I could not say why. I just sat there, very confused on what words should come out of my mouth next. All I could do was cry. After everything that I had been through in the past eighteen years of my life, I couldn't explain why my heart felt the way it did when he kissed me or why I had valued his love so much. I felt secure for the first time. I wasn't used to someone loving me simply because I was just being me. He accepted me for who I was in the flesh despite my past. I didn't need makeup, I was in the process of transitioning to natural hair, I always wore jackets to cover up my body, but none of that mattered with him.

He just loved me for me, and most importantly he respected me as a woman. I had turned my emotions off, and it was very hard for my soul mate to flick that switch back on. I had built a fortress around my heart because I was so afraid to fall in love again. I think that's why I came off so shy and

quiet to our peers in college. They didn't understand me, nor the struggle I overcame to fully love and accept myself as a woman. I know that my love is genuine. My brain, on the other hand, translates love into a care taking process. I had a really bad habit of making other people's feelings my responsibility, especially when it came down to my soul mate. It's also a fault of mine that has kept me mentally trapped in relationships, even though God had constantly fought to relieve me of their grips. I fell in love with my soul mate because he was able to tear down that barrier.

He was the only man outside of Christ and my birth father to fully enter my heart and take complete control of it. To see him with another woman just made no sense to me at the time, because I felt that we were the missing pieces to each other's hearts.

After every significant moment that I have stated to you above in this letter about my previous relationships and encounters Daughter, I told my soul mate. He managed to love me through it all. I even had high hopes that he would soon become your father. My soul mate saw the depths of me, and through him I learned how to love myself all over again, flaws and all. Most importantly, he loved the potential in where I was going in life and I was satisfied knowing that one day he would be my husband.

He was the first to say I love you, and for me it took a while to even say those words back. I rarely said it to anyone else, and here I was now in a relationship with someone I did truly love, but yet could not find the words to say it. I struggled trying to grasp my emotions for a whole two years until I felt comfortable enough to let him enter my life completely. He promised me that he would never break my heart. Darius had even reached out and apologized to me about his actions because he saw that for the first time I was truly happy.

Deep down inside, a part of me always felt that I was inadequate. My soul mate was a sweet talker, and I was the complete opposite. I was very guarded and shy when it came to meeting new people. While he enjoyed being the center of attention around women and large social gatherings of our peers, I ran away from it all. When you're bound in a relationship, that selfish persona has to cool down so that your partner feels comfortable. He struggled with that notion. I knew that he loved me, but he still walked around with a "single" mentality. Our peers in college never understood why or even how we ended up being together because our personalities were completely different. Even when we would all hang out on campus together, I barely engaged in

conversations with everyone else because I was a very reserved person. He had even nicknamed me “Grandma.”

Falling in love so quickly, I became very needy and demanding of his presence. I would pull him away from his friends and find shelter somewhere in a private corner or on the campus’ top floor. We christened a few places on campus, and we had a secret area on the very top floor where we could walk out onto the roof and take in the beautiful scenery of the bright industrial lights that lit up the sky across from us.

Our close friends and families thought we weren't the perfect match, and I could tell that he was starting to think that they were right about us. Love poems and love notes are extremely sappy to me, but my soul mate on the other hand adored them. I didn't even bother writing any for him because I knew that I would only be able to whip up something exceedingly generic. He would complain to me about it, but I didn't care. He started to feel that the love he had for me was only one sided. I had love for him but it wasn't as strong in the beginning of our relationship because I was still very guarded for various reasons.

For one thing, he had a very bad temper, and number two, he was very secretive. Half a year into our relationship, my soul mate expressed to me that he was living off of his expired visa. He was very skeptical on telling me about it at first because he had never opened up to anyone else outside of his family about his situation. He figured I would judge him or belittle his spirit, but I did none of that. I wanted to help in any and every way that I could. Everything started to make sense at the time, especially his behavior.

At times I was being punished for his situation. Although he had no control over it, I understood his frustrations. He wasn't working and he wasn't driving. If it wasn't for me, school, and his friends on campus, he really would have fallen into a deeper depression. He was consumed by his negative thoughts every day. I got a bitter taste of that at times, but I still encouraged him to have faith in his situation. I knew that it would soon pass through prayer. I was reaching out to community organizations to see if they had any “off-the books” jobs for him, and I was doing my best to keep him standing on his two feet. It was very rough for my soul mate to watch all of his peers, some even underclassman,

advance above his level, but I still stood faithfully by his side. I knew that his time was nearing and it would be fruitful. Knowing that he had fully trusted me with his secrets, and looked up to me for support as his future wife, I knew that I had truly found my soul mate.

Our relationship became very stressful. I didn't expect to balance my life, my soul mate's life, and everyone else that had come in between us. My soul mate looked up to me as a distraction from all his life problems, but that concept started to shift because I wasn't capable of juggling it all. I was a full-time student and I worked part-time. In addition to that, I was interning at *The Amsterdam News*; which is one of the oldest black owned newspaper companies in the country, and I was on the radio every week broadcasting a new episode of my show.

I don't know how I managed to do all of those things at one time but my relationship wasn't that much of a priority. I was starting to feel that I was the main cause of a majority of our relationship issues, because I couldn't dedicate all of love to my soul mate. I was too invested in my career, and bettering myself as a woman. I guess you can say he noticed that, because after a while I forgot who I was dating. I was walking on eggshells every time we would interact with one another. We would argue over monotonous things, well things I had saw to be monotonous at the time.

One day we got into a really bad argument because he thought my love was insufficient. I wasn't doing the "small things" like posting pictures of us on social media platforms and sending long heart-felt texts in the mornings or in the midnight hour. I just wasn't that type of person. I had a very sheltered view of what "love" was supposed to be and I was still afraid that he would eventually exit my life. I knew he had "nay-sayers" in his ears making him aware that I wasn't the right woman for him. He was constantly hounded by our peers for validation. He even hung around other women who were his type, and that made me feel even more inadequate as a partner. I had no more feelings than a robot, and I relied on sex to fill all the empty holes in our relationship. I didn't know how to make him feel loved, and he confided in me that the love I was giving him was too "conventional."

He started to avoid my phone calls and video chat invites. My soul mate was constantly

comparing me to his ex- girlfriend because of her avid spontaneity. It got so bad between us that he eventually became jealous of our peers who were couples. It was mainly because of their constant display of public affection. I told myself that I had to step it up because I thought I was slacker. I became a slave to his love, despite all of the hard work I was doing just to keep him sane from depression. I didn't realize how bad of an idea that was. It's okay to be in love, but once that person takes over your life to the point where you have no control over your own obligations, it becomes a very detrimental love. Detrimental love will suck you dry. I caught myself a few times bowing down to a man who manipulated me into thinking that I was always in the wrong for everything I did. My backbone was deteriorating.

Apology after apology, I became lesser of a woman than God had created me to be. Love had failed me, and I guess that's why he cheated on me.

My soul mate would tell me that I reminded him of his mother. He would always say that he had a rough time trusting me because of her infidelity. He told me that he could never trust women, period. I found myself trying my hardest just to prove to him that I was loyal despite my past, and that I would never disobey his trust. I gave him the passwords to all my social network accounts, and I even let him browse through my phone at random once in a while. I thought that because he was so emotionally distraught by his mother's infidelity, and how it caused great destruction in his family, that he wouldn't repeat the same mistakes. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case, Daughter.

He was always flirtatious and that's something I had grown to ignore throughout our relationship because I realized it came along with his outgoing personality. Every other week there was a new woman on campus from his clique of friends that either had a crush on him, or confided in him about something sexually inappropriate. Those women didn't respect me or the relationship that we had. They wanted him to cheat, and he liked to be tempted by them. I would often see text messages in his phone about sex, and hear him engage in sexual stories; I just never thought that he would actually step out and pursue something with them.

Every other month or so after a bad argument with his mother or father, he would open up his heart about why he couldn't trust me and how it correlates to his childhood.

Meanwhile, he had penetrated a fellow colleague of ours behind my back. I use that phrase loosely, because this was a woman my soul mate brought around me often. Being that they were both African and shared similarities in their culture, he connected with her in many ways that I could not give him. At times I would link up with him on campus and there she was strolling not too far behind.

She was a pretty woman, and I knew she had her eyes on him for all the wrong reasons, despite her being in a relationship with another man. I even expressed to my soul mate that I did not approve of him being around her without me in their presence, but he still chose to hang out with her privately. They had even shown up to one of our campus parties together. I thought that because I had put my full heart into this relationship that karma wouldn't bite me on the ass but it did, and it left a huge mark.

I didn't find out about my soul mate's infidelity until years later from someone else's mouth. Apparently everyone else in our circle knew what was going on except me. I was so blindsided by everything that I was doing just to prove to him that I was loyal. Not only that but I was blindsided by his situation and trusted that he would never abuse my love. I didn't realize that she was his "safe woman" all along. I say 'safe woman' because anytime we would argue over petty things and I angered him, he would run to her. They were best friends.

After one big argument that we had had over me posting a bikini picture on social media with a flirty caption, he had secretly asked this safe woman for an album's worth of nude photos, and then bluntly rubbed it back in my face while I was out on vacation with my family. I was never the type of person to wish the devil on anybody's back, but I made an exception for him. I should have recognized the correlation of his mother's actions and how they reflected on his behavior, but yet I gave him more chances than I should have.

It is very true when people say love blinds you. My mother and father were the first to notice this. I kept putting my family second. I found a text one day in my phone, and it was me begging to see my soul mate instead of being with my brother on his birthday. I treated my soul mate like he was a God, and I found myself shutting the "real" God out because I had replaced him.

That was one of my biggest mistakes as a woman, Daughter. I was slipping away from my purpose. The self-barriers that I created were no longer present. I had devoted all of my life to this one

man. The biggest lesson you should take from a relationship is knowing that you cannot change your significant other into who you want them to be, Daughter. In other words, they're not a clump of clay and you are not the potter who molds them. I've always been someone who is immensely family orientated.

Despite our dysfunctionality, I truly love my family and extended family. They are my biggest supporters in life. I often dreamed of having you and your twin sister caught up in the abundance of their love. I would drag my soul mate along to my family events every year because I thought that he would change into someone who was family orientated as well, but it would only aggravate him. I was self-imposing my needs onto him, and I knew deep down inside that he wasn't going to change.

His family was quite the opposite of mine. He had a broken family. There was an awkward presence in his home when I came around because I knew I wasn't wanted. Unlike the strong bond that I had with Marcus' family, my soul mate's family was the complete opposite towards me. They never got to know me as an individual. His mother never cared to develop a relationship with me. She didn't want me to marry him, even though she knew we were planning to do so. Most mothers get a little jealous because their sons start to slip out of their hands and refocus a majority of their attention to their significant other, but it seemed like it was more than that which bothered her. I knew she felt that her son was settling by being with me.

I loved her son unconditionally, and I tried my hardest to engage in conversation and activities with her, but it never went anywhere. We developed a series of awkward encounters. I even asked her out to dinner a few times. I also remember asking her if she could teach me how to make one of his favorite Ghanaian dishes, which was peanut butter soup, but we did none of that. I'm pretty sure she didn't even remember my last name. There was no connection between us, and out of the four years that my soul mate and I dated, not once did his mother bother to engage in seeing my family.

When we threw events at my house we would always extend an invitation to her, but she would never come. After a while, my family and I got pretty fed up with her declined presence and just settled with knowing that she was never going to come around. I would just go over to his house, awkwardly say hello to his mother and brothers, have loud sex out of spite, argue in his room and then leave.

Coming from a big family, being ostracized was new to me. No one really gave me a chance to prove myself, except his father and his sister. I felt close to my soul mate's sister because she was very ambitious, just like me. She was the closest in my age group, but lived in a different state with his father.

His father was a pastor. I would only speak to him briefly on the phone just to wish him a happy birthday or send my holiday greetings. He was probably the only one in the family besides my soul mate's sister who fully supported our relationship. He would stick up for me when my soul mate's aunt would try to put me down with her negative comments. He prayed a lot for the both of us, and told me to stay strong for my soul mate. Our connection obviously diminished after me and my soul mate split, and after pondering about what could've been I realized that his father barely encouraged me to come and visit him and his wife in North Carolina as well. It was never meant for me to be a part of this family.

Attending my soul mate's grandfather's funeral was a pivotal moment in our relationship. In his culture, a woman was supposed to arrive early to help the family setup. I wasn't aware of this; instead I was out shopping with my mother for a prior engagement that was taking place the following weekend. Technically, I was late to the function. During the celebration, I remember sitting there playing on my phone because no one had bothered to engage in any conversations with me, and it was interesting because his mother had personally requested me to be there. I was introduced to his aunts and cousins at the funeral when I arrived. When he introduced me to one aunt in particular, she told me that my namesake mother Maya Angelou had too fallen in love with a Ghanaian man. I know Mrs. Angelou's story, and I know that it didn't end well with her husband. I guess she was trying to infer that the stars had also aligned the same fate for me and me and my soul mate.

I never fit in with his family, and that really bothered me because I always yearned to have a strong relationship with my mother-in-law and extended family. A few days later after the funeral, he told me that his aunt did not like me. Number one, I was technically late. Number two; she viewed me as an "Akata," which I've grown to realize is a derogatory term used to describe "Black Americans." She wanted him to be with a traditional woman, just like his mother.

I didn't let her comments bother me because I knew deep down inside that she was jealous of my potential, especially with me being a young and educated black woman. I've always took pride in being a "Black American." I didn't understand why they tried to make me feel so inferior. I value my history and purpose. My main focus in life is to continue to lead a legacy that my forefathers and mothers have set out for my people. Forefathers and mothers like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr., who my soul mate often liked to discredit. Who could say such a hurtful thing?

I noticed that a lot of African people get very upset if you call them, or group them, with us "Black Americans." I know my people, and I know that they may not be fresh from African soils, but that doesn't make them any less of human beings. They are more than worthy of being honored in my "Akata" culture.

Dealing with a mother who took no part in wanting to get to know her son's future wife, and an aunt who said that I would never amount to anything as a journalist in my career, should've been my wake up call to leave him alone. As women, we're supposed to have three main traits that we hold dear to our hearts that we look for in a partner and/or husband, Daughter. Hold on to those traits and never let them go for any man. If a man does not possess these traits that you acquire to enter your heart, you have to let him go or God will intentionally do so for you.

I was in a relationship with a man who lacked faith in God and that was strike one. I was in a relationship with a man who did not value his family and that was, strike two. I was in a relationship with a man who did not trust me, which is the groundbreaking foundation that holds a relationship together and that was, strike three. I started to realize this after we split. I kept entering relationships with broken families, and those minor issues within their families spilled over and became major issues in our relationship. On top pf that, I never allowed myself to heal. I jumped from relationship to relationship without figuring out who I was first.

When you're in love with someone who doesn't trust you, you're automatically bound to do things for your partner as reassurance to their pain. I didn't know what else he wanted me to do. When there was no heat in his house, sometimes even for days, I was there in his cold room during the winter with

an electrical blanket trying to keep him warm. At times when there was no cable, I would cut class to go lay up in his room to watch old DVD's, just to keep him distracted from his negative thoughts. I would even pop up at his job occasionally just to surprise him with a hot lunch, knowing he hadn't eaten a good meal in days.

Some day's I drove him home although he lived five minutes from his job. When it was time for him to buy his first car he fell \$100 short from financing it. I gave him my very last dollar because I loved him.

I wanted nothing but the best for him, and I continued to push him. Whether it was accompanying him to job interviews, teaching him how to drive, or helping him enroll back in school, I fell in love with my soul mate's potential. Although he didn't have a job when I first met him, that never stopped him from splurging on me every other weekend until his account had an overdraft. He used up all his Christmas savings one year on my birthday to buy me a nice handbag and treated me all of my friends to dinner. When he was finally able to get his license, he would take his mother's car and drive out to see me in Nassau County. When he did have it he'd show up, and I was surprised by small monumental gifts and swanky dinners. I could tell that he was trying to rebuild our relationship.

The following weekend after he decided not to buy his car, he had brought me a token of his appreciation and returned the \$100 as a sincere thank you. One time my soul mate literally spent the night in my basement closet because I hadn't seen him in two weeks. My family disapproved of me spending the night at his house, so I secretly made him camp out in my basement just so I could be closer to him. One of my favorite moments was when he made me choose our date from two secret envelopes. We drove to a popular aquarium out east and spent the day taking photos with pirate statues and admiring sea coral. At one point he was teaching me how to speak "Twi," which is his country's native tongue in Ghana. I started to become very comfortable in our relationship and that was a big mistake.

Towards the end of our relationship I remember him specifically saying to me that sex with me wasn't as fun as it was with other women. It made perfect sense as to why he would feel that way because he could not please me. We both tried different methods to make things more fun for me, but after a while he gave up, and so did I. That never stopped me from going out of my way to please him,

and I was doing things that most women aren't accepting of. I was doing things that if I were to include them in this letter our families would turn their backs in shame, Daughter. Not to say that it wasn't fun in the beginning, but some days we wouldn't do anything except have sex. Sex became a chore in our relationship. It was repetitive and lacked pleasure for us both. I was willing to do anything to save our relationship. I didn't hold back on him. I was giving my companion husband privileges because I expected to have a ring on my finger somewhere down the line, but why would he propose to me? What value would I still hold to him if I gave him everything that I had?

Being forced out of my comfort zone was an irritating process because I knew that I wasn't being myself. I was pretending to be someone else for my partner to stay with me. We broke up several times during the course of our relationship because mentally we were both somewhere else. We both knew that we were settling for each other despite all the fun we had as best friends. We just didn't want to let go. We were getting way too comfortable being with one another and that's when I started to see that God was pulling me in a different direction, Daughter.

One night I had a dream that a man was suffocating me in my sleep. I could see his dark figure sitting on the edge of my bed with his hands wrapped around my neck. I could feel him choking the very last breathe out of my lungs. I couldn't breath, I couldn't move, I could not speak. Not to say that this man was my soul mate, but this was how I was feeling inside. I was neglecting my family because I was too busy trying to save my relationship with my soul mate and adhere to his situation. My family and friends were noticing that about me. I was changing to better myself for him, but who was I to be in the position to say that he was perfect for me?

I would leave school early and/or late at night in Queens just to take him home in Suffolk County, some days I would go back and forth from class to his house. At times we wouldn't even speak to one another in the car because we had just gotten into another petty argument, or we had just grown emotionally frustrated and didn't want to be around each other anymore. We did have beautiful moments, some very stupid looking back now, but I did all of these things out of "love." We learned how to mature from each other's mistakes over the years, for example, his birthdays were one. I seemed

to have ruined all of them.

One in particular was at *Ciao Baby's*, an Italian restaurant in Massapequa, New York. I told him that I had planned out his birthday the week ahead, and I was very excited to do something new that I figured he would enjoy. I saved up all my money to buy us V.I.P tickets to see a Muay Thai fight in the city. He was always obsessed with Thai food and was a true fan of action packed movies, so I knew this would be the perfect combination.

The morning of his birthday he turned down the tickets. He wanted to go out to a restaurant of his choice instead, which was *Ciao Baby's*. I had less than \$50 in my account, but I still agreed because it was his birthday. The bill came and I couldn't even pay it because I had used all of my money to buy these expensive tickets. I was so embarrassed sitting there eating dinner with him, so the majority of the time I was sitting in the bathroom stall crying and texting my best friend about my stupidity. It was moments like this when I realized that love had different perceptions to different people.

I stole my father's Italian gold link bracelet right out of his drawer. My soul mate had no money at the time to buy his mother a gift for her birthday, so I wanted to help even though she disapproved of me. I pawned the bracelet and collected the cash. I felt no guilt in my spirit when I traded in my father's gold link bracelet to the clerk. There was no guilt knowing that I had physically stolen from the main hand that was feeding me and paying all of my college tuition. Those were more signs of detrimental love. He didn't even end up buying his mother a gift, instead we used the money to buy him an iPod touch because he was jealous that his older brother had one, and he didn't.

Whether it was lying to my family about my whereabouts, or driving from Queens to Suffolk County and back three to four days a week, I was doing it out of "love." I could never see myself doing what I had done for my soul mate for anyone else. I let go of everything, and when I say everything I mean everything. There was nothing that I kept to myself. As a woman you must know that you're allowed to be selfish. Never sacrifice your goals and what makes you internally happy for any man. I truly cared for my soul mate to the point where it ate me away inside. It ate me away to the point where I started to lose sight of my own ambitions. I was way too caught up in his life.

The only time I truly felt like I abandoned him was when he had gotten into a car accident. I kept

in contact with him throughout the day to see if he was okay after it happened. I may have been at school or at work, but I didn't visit him right away because he said he was okay. Later that evening, I was on babysitting duty. I took my brothers and a few of my girlfriends out to the ice cream parlor. My soul mate called me in the midst of the commotion and flipped out on me. It was because everyone else, including his close friends and family, had panicked and stopped what they were doing to visit him throughout the day.

Instead, I chose to go completely M.I.A as his companion.

Unfortunately seeing him wasn't a priority of mine. It's not that I didn't care; my day just consisted of a different agenda. He told me that if I didn't reach him by midnight we were through. He had sent me that text at 11:40pm. I scrambled to drop my friend's home and drove thirty minutes out to Suffolk County. I didn't understand why at the time he had made it such a big deal and neither did my friends, because they thought he was an asshole. I still went though.

I dragged my brothers with me and they watched as we got into a big argument in front of his house. He despised me for a little while after this, but we still somehow got back together because we were far too comfortable staying with one another. The day we had finally broken up for good was on my behalf. I couldn't take it anymore. I just wasn't happy being with him. We both knew that it was unhealthy for us to be together. We kept falling into the breakup and makeup pattern. I truly loved my soul mate, but I couldn't keep sacrificing myself, my family and my career for him.

That's when I realized that we could never get married. Although he had inadvertently asked for my hand in marriage, I declined. Marriage was the only thing besides the thought of you Daughter, that I had left go call my own in our relationship. I wasn't ready to give that up to him because every other day I was distracted by a factor in his life. I became so distracted that my goals became stagnant and I could not propel them into action.

Sometimes it was the little things that really annoyed me.

There was a really bad storm headed out east one evening.

I hung out with him for a little while until it was time to go home. I was on a mission to beat the storm, but the rain started to pour as soon as I drove off from his curb. I was one exit away from home when

we both realized that he had left his cell phone in my car. He insisted that I turned around in the middle of the pouring rain to return his phone, knowing that I worked across the street from his new job. He didn't seem to care about my safety on the flooded highway, or if I would even make it back home in the height of the storm. It was obvious that I wasn't a priority anymore.

God was pushing me in another direction. He was trying to make me see that the new journey I was about to embark on did not include my soul mate. I just wasn't accepting of God's calling. I told him that we needed six months to get our lives in order. I was getting ready to graduate from college, and my soul mate was advancing in his new job. That was the first time I had actually saw him break down in tears. I think we were both at a point where we had realized that we were far too comfortable being with one another, and it started to stagger our growth.

Change has never been an easy process, but I knew it was what we both needed. We were complimenting each other's weakness rather than complimenting each other's strengths. Although we had broken up, I was still very present in my soul mate's life because I loved and cared for him only. I didn't see myself being with anyone else but him. Even when his car broke down at the parking lot, I didn't feel awkward coming to his rescue or calling my father for jumper cables to help him out of the rut. I thought he still saw me as his superwoman, but how could I have expected him to see my worth if he wasn't even able to see Christ through me?

When I love someone I will literally go beyond the earth and back for them. Love doesn't come easy for me because I am a person who has experienced more heartache than happiness. We were still messing around despite our split, and we had both agreed to be monogamous. Our monogamous friendship started to die down after a while. He stopped texting me every morning, and eventually we stopped being intimate completely. In my mind I thought there was another woman involved, but he rest assured me that everything was okay. He was just focused on the next phase in his life because doors were starting to open up in his career. I believed him. I relied on my faith instead of being needy. I prayed to God that if this relationship wasn't meant to be, to please stray me away from my soul mate. I prayed that God would show me what I wasn't seeing, and he did. A few days later I told him to stop by my house in the afternoon when he got off work, because I hadn't seen him in a long time. I invited him

inside my house and he declined the gesture.

“I'm tired, I think I'm gonna go home and rest up,” he said, so I let him go. A co-worker at my college radio station who was a popular DJ was throwing a party that night in Brooklyn. I convinced my best friend Stephanie to tag along with me because my family was out of town and I wanted to be around happy people, good music, and good vibes. As we sat near the side walls inside the club, we saw a man who looked just like my soul mate, but after an awkward stare down we realized this man was just his doppelganger. It had to be no longer than an hour later when I spotted my soul mate entering the club. I knew it was really him this time because I knew the way he walked, and I saw him say hello to a few of our mutual friends. Stephanie and I had also noticed that he was with another woman. This was the moment I had prayed for. As me and Stephanie started to walk towards him on the opposite side of the club, he spotted me and began walking in another direction as he pulled the mystery woman along with him.

When I had finally caught up to him he was surprised to see me. The woman, on the other hand, removed herself from the situation and walked away. I guess she had heard about me. Although we had broken up, I knew this wasn't the same man who I thought loved me. I fell in love with the fantasy he was not only feeding me, but also the fantasy I had created in my mind over the years. My soul was still connected to his touch, his smell, and the sound of his chuckling laughter. I was holding on to this one man for four years and he had let me go in less than a week after our breakup. I was holding on to hope. I was holding on to him thinking that he would change for me the same way I had changed for him throughout the years of us being together. I was holding on to my soul mate, thinking that we would actually settle down together after six months of being apart, knowing we would end up getting divorced somewhere down the line Daughter.

I was holding on to him thinking that my soul mate had the same life goals and ambitions as me, but he did not. He gave all of that up. I held Stephanie back from punching him in the face that night. I told her that the drama inside the club wasn't worth it. We tried to enjoy the rest of the night, but we couldn't. I was patiently waiting for him to approach me with an explanation, but I realized that it wasn't his place to. We weren't together.

Trying to channel my emotions at this party was one of the hardest things that I ever had to do in my life. I'll admit it; I am a very emotional woman. I refused to let any of my peers see me physically attack anybody, so I took my frustration out on his car. I keyed it. I keyed his brand new Nissan Altima. I was with him when he first purchased it. It was midnight black and the scratches' that I left were very apparent. It started from the driver's seat all the way to the back rear passenger door. People were watching me from across the street as I lashed out my anger on the exterior of his car but they did not stop me. Although I did apologize to my soul mate, I can't really say I regret doing what I did. I regret letting him take me to my boiling point. I regret not realizing that he didn't appreciate me as a woman nor his companion. I regret opening up my heart to someone who devoured my trust, kindness, and respect, just to spit it back in my face. I was so upset with myself. I was embarrassed that I let another man take me to such a negative place.

During this time, I was at the height of my career as a young journalist. I was interning at *Vibe Magazine* when my soul mate sent me a text the following morning. He let me know that I was not only immature and ratchet, but that I was a psycho. He expressed to me that he never wanted to hear, speak or even breathe in my presence ever again. He said my true nature was the same as the people I had surrounded myself with.

I lost friendships and potential partners because all I wanted to do was lay up under him. He had also posted the photo of his damaged car online with the following caption so that all of our peers could see what I had done: *And this is why exes should stay exes. She keyed my car last night.*

A few of his friends left comments, one even called me a crazy bitch, some of them even threatened to beat me up, but I was proud of what I had done. I wasn't ashamed because I knew I could have done a lot worse. I would have loved for each and every one of them to be in my position in our relationship. I was lying and stealing from my family, I was trying my hardest to keep him sane from immigration issues he had no control over, and I was dealing with the anger and resentment he had developed from not only his situation, but his mother, father and me, a person who he "loved" but could never trust. Even stating these things are small to me because I went through so much more within those four years of being with my soul mate. I just kept all the sorrow to myself. I would have loved to

see how they would've reacted in such a setting.

I wasn't jealous, I was disappointed in myself for believing in him, believing that he wasn't self-seeking and wouldn't dishonor my undeniable love. I gave up my entire self for someone else. He had turned his back on me, and that was the only way I knew of coping with the matter. Causing collateral damage was the only way I could make him feel like how I was suffering inside. I was so hurt with what love had done to me. I reached out to his sister and thanked her for being so awesome towards me throughout our relationship. I wished her nothing but the best in her future endeavors. I had also sent out a text to his father for the very last time, because I had no hate in my heart. *“Although we never got the chance to meet in person, I just wanted to say thank you from the bottom of my heart for being so supportive of me over the time I spent getting to know you and your family. I know at times it can be very hard to trust people and their intentions, and that is why I am forever grateful of our relationship. Unfortunately, it is very unhealthy for me and your son to remain acquaintances at this time. I know that while he perseveres through this road to success, his blessings will be fruitful. I pray that the strength and will you’ve instilled inside of him will only continue to push him forward in life. May God protect you and your family. You will remain in my prayers.”*

My friends and co-workers constantly tried to make me aware that this love tragedy was in preparation of my greater. I was fighting to become conscious of that theory. I wasn't just fighting; I was struggling to part away from my soul mate. I didn't understand how he could be my soul mate, and not my future spouse. Please be aware Daughter that not every blessing God gives us comes to stay. God gives us what we need for that season. The relationship between me and my soul mate, that season had come and gone. Nature took its course on us, and I was in fear that I couldn't survive another season without him in my life. I wasn't holding God accountable for what I had continuously cried and prayed for every night. I prayed for clarity, I prayed for success, I even found myself still praying for him. I was praying that he would get his life together for me, and possibly you after we broke up. I was so filled with rage and resentment that I lost focus on where I was going in my life. I was in search to fill the void in my heart. I was looking for others ways to fill myself up instead of filling up my heart with God's love for me.

My core values were weakening and that reflected on my actions. Sex with no emotion was never my cup of tea, and after only being in three serious relationships I had forced myself to engage with men I had no business talking to in the first place because I thought they could fill that void for me. Emotionally, I hit rock bottom. I was at an all-time low. I was going on dates and entertaining people who actually liked me, but I ultimately found myself pushing them away because I still felt unworthy. Me, a woman who's overcame so much, felt unworthy.

Around Christmas time, things had finally started to cool down in my life. I had gone a few weeks without thinking about what could've been with my soul mate, and I had stopped crying in my sleep or on my peer's shoulders for reassurance. My soul mate contacted me a few months later. He expressed to me that we needed to have a closure conversation. We both found ourselves on the verge of repeating the same mistakes.

Chapter 18

Black Butterfly

Being a stubborn Capricorn, I'm not a huge fan of making amends with anybody. I only agreed to meet up with my soul mate because I still had love for him in my heart, and he had expressed to me the same. I went to hear what he had to say and he apologized to me. His apology lifted a lot of weight off of my heart because I was still carrying around heavy bags of our past relationship in my everyday life. It followed me everywhere, and even appeared in my dreams. I was excited, yet cautious, of having him re-enter my life again. I only told people close to me that we had reconnected as friends.

It was my last semester in college and I was acting out a scene from the play *Fences* by August Wilson. I had portrayed the character Rose, and I instantly felt connected to her role in the play. *"I done tried to be everything a wife should be. Everything a wife could be."*(17-18)

These lines brought out the anguish and hostility I kept inside my heart for my soul mate after we split. I was Rose in the flesh, and he was Troy. I tried to be everything for him in a wife, a lover, and a best friend. I was praying that we could be forever. *"All of a sudden it's "we." Where was "we" at when you were down there rolling around with that godforsaken woman?"*
(243-245)

I had fully ingested Rose's persona. I was familiar with the pain she felt knowing that the one and only man she had gave her all to, not only abused her love, but betrayed her family. I was familiar with the discomfort Rose felt knowing that she had made all of these sacrifices for her husband, just so that he could step out on their relationship and run back into her arms once more to saturate in her love. My peers were so moved by me and my partner's performance in class that we had brought one of them to tears.

The point of me telling you all of this, Daughter is because God is still showing me that everything that what taste good, isn't necessarily always good for you. I loved a man so much that I forgot how to love myself first. I never gave myself a chance to. If I had truly loved myself I wouldn't have ended up in any of the situations I've endured as a young woman. I say all of these things because there isn't a day where you don't cross my mind.

During my graduation dinner, my parents surprised me with a celebration cake. We were all

expecting it to say “Congratulations Graduate,” instead when we opened the box it read, “*Congrats! Is it a boy or a girl?*” Although the gesture was comical, and truly a rare coincidence, it still saddened me because I knew I wasn't prepared to have you.

What would I be teaching you by the way I lived my life? Fear is always more intense when you feel that you're alone, but I was never in this by myself. God, and the thought of you have stuck by my side way longer than anyone else has. He forged me into my mother's womb to speak knowledge into your life, and to lead as an example so that you wouldn't fall into the same traps and misfortunes that misled me from my divine purpose. I know that in order for me to fully move forward in my life, I have to say goodbye to all of my faults that have kept me mentally shackled. I've been holding on to these things for quite some time now, and it's been keeping me from embracing my evolution. Moving forward in my life, I plan to be a woman who is so mighty and gallant that everyone on this earth will feel the tremble of my creative roots springing out from the harboring grounds of my humility. I was born to do something great on this earth, I'm still not sure what that may be as I hold my degree in my hand, but I know that it's coming. I'm reminded every day when I look into my bedroom mirror and see your reflection staring back at me. Look how far God has brought me? I didn't think I was going to make it.

Loving you in the flesh isn't a part of my destiny right now, Daughter. When I am finally able to meet you later on life, I will thank you for making me a fighter. It's because of you that my heart is still pure, and yearning of a trustful & passionate love. If God decides to cradle you in his arms forever, I'll still look for you Daughter once he takes my soul and carries it up into the stars at night, and we shall meet in heaven.

Until then, just know that I love you and I always have. My daughter may not have my wide hips, she may not even have my pretentious spirit, but she will have self-value and everlasting faith. All my life I've been going back. All my life I've been repeating patterns instead of evaluating the true meaning behind my afflictions. That has to stop here with you, Daughter. I didn't want to bring you into a world of great bitterness because of my pain. There shall be no more of it. You are the start of my blessing daughter, and like my namesake mother Maya Angelou once said:

“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.”(1928)

My mess became my message. This is the story of my life, and I am fully aware of my changes. I am becoming who God has in mind through my revelations. I am that black butterfly who will overcome love's agonizing torments with my mind, body and soul. I am that black butterfly evolving from the dark solitude of every hand & voice that has dismayed me of my confidence. I am that black butterfly who's strong when I'm quiet through the loudest nights of a thunderstorm; for you my dear have shown me the true beauty in love, that don't love me.

Love always,

Mom

