

Preacherman Blues II

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"**W**hen a person places the proper value on freedom, there is nothing under the sun that he will not do to acquire that freedom. Whenever you hear a man saying he wants freedom, but in the next breath he is going to tell you what he won't do to get it, or what he doesn't believe in doing in order to get it, he doesn't believe in freedom. A man who believes in freedom will do anything under the sun to acquire . . . or preserve his freedom."

Malcolm X

PROLOGUE

The biggest trick a black man ever pulled was making white America forget that he was black. And Barack Hussein Obama had pulled the trick off flawlessly. Now, he was relishing his first twenty-four hours as the country's first black president.

For Shemika Money, witnessing this moment was a dream come true and honestly, was the only reason she hadn't killed her husband, TJ Money. Literally. After Shemika found out that TJ was responsible for the murder of Reverend Turner a few months ago, she was ready to take revenge then. But she had to wait on this day. And now that it had come, it was time to put her plan into action.

One. Two. Three. Shemika loaded the bullets into the 9mm. She took her time, counting slowly until all seventeen bullets were in the clip. She lay back on her king-sized bed and smiled. It was almost over.

She glanced over at the sleeping monster that she'd called her husband for the last three years. Bishop Terrell Joseph Money was the epitome of evil. He had raped her sister, made her life a living hell, and was even responsible for the death of her mother and sister almost twenty years ago.

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. Shemika chuckled as she thought of the sermon TJ had preached last Sunday. He had the nerve to say people should leave revenge up to the Lord. After everything he'd done? Oh, no. Shemika was sure the Lord had a special jail cell in hell for TJ and she wanted to speed up his path to getting his just due. She could feel the energy surging through her body as she imagined killing the man she had hated more than Satan himself. She was lost in her vengeful thoughts when the light behind the remote-controlled bedroom blinds cast a moving shadow on the wall. Shemika shot up in her bed as the figure took one step through the double French bedroom doors.

A mask of horror shrouded her face. Her screams came out as a blood-curdling gurgle. The first bullet to her neck did the job. The second one to the chest was insurance.

The killer took a couple steps toward the bed.

Bishop Money got up and walked into his bedroom closet and opened the safe, the killer on his tail. "Are you sure she's dead?" he asked, looking up at the killer from his kneeling position.

"Bishop, I'm a professional."

"That's not what I asked."

“I hit the carotid artery. Trust, she’s dead as a brick,” he said, holding a gym bag open as the Bishop put a couple handfuls of watches, rings, bracelets, and chains inside. “I don’t see why you just can’t give me cash.”

“I can’t insure cash. Besides, you’re walking away with over eighty-thousand dollars worth of jewelry.”

“Okay. You ready?” The killer put the night goggles back over his face and pointed the silenced .22 at the Bishop.

“You see the red mark on my thigh?”

“I told you, I’m a professional.” The killer fired.

Chapter 1

Fired up! Those were the best words to describe the 2011 New Dimensions First Church of God Youth Choir.

“Please be patient with me,” they sang their teenage hearts out. “God is not through, with me yet.

Ain't that the truth, Cheyenne thought as she clapped and sang along.

“When God gets through with me.” She followed as the entire church stood up singing. “I shall come forth.”

So caught up in the rapture, the Junior Senator’s wife didn’t notice that the older lady sitting next to her had disappeared. Cheyenne glanced down at the folded letter-sized manila envelope on top of her copy of the Marcus Garvey book the church had studied two months ago.

“I shall come forth as pure gold.”

Reverend Solomon One-Free looked out at all the different cultures that filled the church. If it weren’t for his close friends, Bill Clinton and President Obama explaining the importance of understanding all history, New Dimension churches all over the country would still be all-black. “In honor of his birth month, back in August, we studied the life of Marcus Mosiah Garvey.”

Cheyenne half-listened as she picked up the envelope. Dr. Jamison-Hayes was neatly printed in red ink on the front. By the shape and weight, Cheyenne knew that there were pictures inside.

“Today, our topic is Moses and Marcus,” the pastor continued. “I want everyone to open up their *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* to page 48.”

Cheyenne loved New Dimensions and Pastor One-Free’s method of comparing biblical figures and stories to great men and women of African descent. But as much as she loved his teachings, she couldn’t put that envelope down. She eased it open as the pastor continued.

“In Genesis, chapter...”

Cheyenne gasped. Her hand shot up to her mouth. Her eyes became blurry with tears as she flipped through the five pictures. She was just as stunned as she read the letter nestled after the last picture.

2347 WINDSOR CROSSING, LITHONIA, GEORGIA, 30058 15 MINUTES. ALONE. NO PHONE CALLS. You’re probably not a bomb expert, but you

don't have to be to know what you are looking at. And you do see the date: September 12, 2010; 11:30 AM.

Cheyenne looked at her watch. 12:22 PM. Not even an hour ago, she thought as she got up and barreled her way down the aisle, stepping on toes and almost falling into someone's lap, before making it out of the second row. How? Why? Who? Those and more thoughts see-sawed through her mind as she knelt down to take off her heels. At least a thousand eyes were on her as she rose from the middle aisle of the 2,500 member church. And more eyes would have glanced in her direction if she hadn't taken off running like a stockinged-foot, dress-wearing Olympic sprinter with two black three-inch Dolce & Gabana heels in her hands.

Before closing the door on her white Lexus SC430 convertible, Cheyenne tried her husband's cell phone. It went straight to voicemail. She tried the house.

"Make another call to anyone, he'll be dead," a strange computer-like voice said, before the phone on the other end went dead.

With no traffic, Windsor Crossing was a ten, twelve minute drive from New Dimensions, but Cheyenne made it in five. Her heart fluttered like she'd drunk a twelve-pack of red bull. Everything was happening so fast that she hadn't had time to think, let alone be afraid of whoever was behind the front door of the older brick house she stood in front of.

Before she could knock, the door swung open. "Come in, Cheyenne, my name is—"

"TJ Money," she said enunciating every syllable.

"*Bishop* TJ Money, and please, come in. Your husband's life depends on it." He smiled.

If looks could kill, Bishop Money would be a statistic. Cheyenne stepped inside and closed the door. Standing face to face, she and Bishop Money were eye-level and she was only five-four. "I will castrate you and let you bleed to death if anything happens to my husband."

"So violent," he sarcastically shivered.

"Violent! You send me these," the pictures flew through the air before crashing on the laminate floor in front of the purple carpeted stairs, "while I'm at church."

"Please come in." He gestured toward the den. "Have a seat, I can explain everything." Bishop Money said as he walked into the den, with a slight limp.

She looked around the room. The house seemed very clean. Too clean. Every bright color in the crayon box seemed to be represented. The walls were painted blood red. The carpet was banana yellow. The couch was ocean blue. And the bed in the middle of the large open room had a Sunkist orange sheet spread across it. The room looked like something out of a fairy tale picture book. And the TV's. There was a flat screen TV hanging on every wall corner of the room. She took a seat on the opposite end of the couch.

"Cheyenne, it is okay that I call you by your first name?"

"My name is Dr. Jamison-Hayes."

"You're calm for someone who just received pictures of a bomb hidden under her husband's home office desk." Bishop Money sat on the edge of the bed, crossed his legs, and rested a palm on his knee.

"I was just thinking about a morbid DVD series I once saw called *Faces of Death*. It was about some of the most gruesome and painful deaths that people have suffered. I was just daydreaming about how many different ways I can cause you pain before I kill you."

Cheyenne was scared, but as a psychiatrist, and having dealt with so many psychopath-sickos in the past, she knew that her safest bet was to stay calm, and don't let on that she was afraid.

Bishop Money rose from the bed. "Cheyenne, I think you know why you're here."

"I hope my husband destroys you. I won't do anything to interfere with his special committee to expose crooked pastors." She shook her head from left to right. "You are that desperate. That scared."

"Scared of what?" The bishop asked.

"Of losing everything. Jordan knows all about you. Samuel Turner. He told Jordan everything. How you used church members tithes to buy property and finance other business ventures, how you lined city leaders pockets to get zoning permits for your precious mall. And," She smiled, "Samuel even told him how you where involved with his fathers murder, and how you were able to steal his church and his father's congregation."

Bishop money let out a loud high pitched laugh. "If I'm so evil, so wrong..." He smiled. "Why am I not in prison." He stuck a finger in the air, "I'll tell you why. A little five letter word. "Proof. Without it you have nothing but empty accusations that can get someone hurt or even killed."

"You don't scare me." She looked the bishop up and down. "Look at yourself. You look like a weasel. Act like a weasel. You're walking proof. It's over for you and now—"

"I'm confused." He interrupted while taking off his pinstripe blue and peach Hugo Boss suit jacket. "Your husband is at home in his office with enough C-4 under his desk to bring that seven-thousand square foot house crashing down like the World Trade center and you're telling me how your drug addict, senator husband is going to brig me down." He pulled back the crisp peach colored sleeve and turned his wrist. "Babycakes, not only are you going to do every single thing I tell you, but you're going to enjoy it or at least act like it." He looked at his diamond bezel Jacob watch. "It's 12:57 PM, at 1:20 PM," he began unbuttoning his shirt, "the ever-popular, former crackhead, professional football player, husband of yours, Senator Jordan Hayes will be on that stairway to heaven, carrying your seven-year-old daughter with him."

"What do you want?" she shouted.

"Ahhh, the sweet sounds of fear and what was that word you used." He snapped his fingers, "Proof, that's right. He licked his lips and unbuttoned his pants. "Prove to me that you love your husband and child enough to do anything." He put his hand under her chin. "Anything in order to save their lives."

"I can't." she cried.

"You can and you will." He raised his wrist. "It is 1:00 PM you have twenty minutes to satisfy me or ..."

"How do I know—?"

"You don't know." He shrugged his shoulders, smiled and let his pants fall to his knees. "Just have faith."

Chapter 2

“**F**aith,” Bishop Wiley said into his cell phone. “Today, my sermon was about faith and putting your problems in God’s hands.” He paused. “I just wonder sometimes if I’m doing God’s work.”

“Faith is the key word. Have faith, Bishop. Sometimes you have to be God’s hands,” Bishop Money said. “Was it wrong for you to take the pictures I had sent you and transpose the image of a bomb and time and date on them? Yes, it was. Is it wrong for you to edit the video I just sent you of me and the Junior Senators wife? Yes, it is. But, if Jordan Hayes goes through with this stupid witch hunt, you and I and others will be ruined. All the lives that we affect. All the lost sheep that we shepherd. We are in a time where hope is the only thing that black folk have. No one is perfect, Bishop. Not even us, but we are men of God, and sometimes we have to do evil in order to preserve the greater good.”

“You’re right, Bishop. I just have a heavy heart sometimes. But you’re right. We have to stop Jordan Hayes. When I get through doctoring the video and implementing sound effects, using the voice sample you sent over of his wife, we will have Hayes in our pocket.”

After hanging up with his protégé, Bishop Money made another call. A moment later, he had the Orville Redenbacher of porno movies on the line. “Ron Fuego, Bishop Money here.”

“Good evening, sir.”

“Son, the church will accept the house.”

“God is good,” Ron shouted.

“Every day, all day,” Bishop Money said. “You’re right, Ronald. I think it will make a great transition house for recovering addicts. With hidden cameras in every room, the addict’s activities can be monitored. But, I just have one question for you, Ron.”

“The loud colors, right?”

“Yes, man. What kind of porno movies were you making?”

“I shot Alice in Wonderland part 1, 2, 3, and 4. They were my biggest porn movies, but those day are over thanks to you. Now that I’m saved, I want to do better and as you have taught me, I have to live better and be *in* the world but not *of* the world. Again, I just wanna reiterate, Bishop, that I have no problem paying whatever it costs to have the house readied for the transition center.”

“I’m proud to know you, son. So many people talk the God talk, but you are truly walking the God walk. Ya know,” he paused, “I spent most of the morning at that house praying. Looking for a sign.”

“I thought you were in your car.”

“I am, now. Son, I was looking in the wrong place. Now that I see what’s in your heart. I see that your redemption is the sign. Your willingness to give back to so many that you have taken from. Together we will rebuild a house of ill repute into a safe haven and help center for the downtrodden.”

“Thank you, Bishop. On another note, I still can’t believe you were outside in this rain today. You have to take better care of yourself, so you can continue taking care of the thousands of people that look up to you. I just pray that you recover from the flu in Godspeed, so you can be back in the pulpit next week,” Ron said.

“I thank you for your prayers and your heartfelt words, but my health is secondary. The congregation is my primary concern. And when my Father sends one of his lost angels to me, I have to do His bidding. You, son, remind me of the apostle Paul. Who, like him, the Father has made you clean, washed you of your sins, made you anew. God has put it on your heart to give back to your community. It’s my job to make sure that God’s work is followed out to the letter. If that means going out into this nasty weather with the flu, then who am I to interfere with the will of the creator? I’ll be fine, son. Oops, I have another call, let’s touch base sometime tomorrow afternoon.” TJ lied to get off the phone. One of his favorite songs was on the radio.

“Drifting on a memory.... There’s no place I’d rather be..... Than with you...” Bishop Money sang along with the Isley Brothers as he drove his Maybach through the sixteen-foot wrought iron double gates of the Money estate.

“Well... Well... Well... Loving you.”

After pulling into one of the bays of his eight-car garage, he cut the engine, put it in park and pulled out his Blackberry.

SENATOR HAYES, I HOPE I DIDN’T DISTURB YOU THIS EVENING. I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I WILL COOPERATE AND I HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE. AS PER YOUR REQUEST, I WILL BE AT YOUR OFFICE AT 9:30 TOMORROW MORNING. I JUST WANNA MAKE SURE THAT THIS PRELIMINARY MEETING IS STILL OFF THE RECORD.

After pressing Send, he got out of the car, went inside, and disarmed his state-of-the-art security system before turning on the kitchen lights.

“I doubt he returns your text.”

“Sweet Jesus.” Bishop Money placed a hand over his heart and looked at the two white men who had made themselves comfortable in his den.

“Not quite, but close. You can call me Franklin.” The Tommy Lee Jones look alike said as he extended his arm toward a much younger man who was reclined all the way back in one of Bishop Money’s twin massage chairs. “And this is my partner, Theodore,” Franklin said.

Bishop Money turned and hit the silent alarm on the keypad by the garage door.

“It’s been disarmed,” Franklin said.

He opened the kitchen door that led to the garage. Bishop Money stared into the huge chest of a light-skinned, Blues brother-suit-wearing black man. The Mack-truck looking man had a coiled wire dangling from his ear. The man’s mouth opened but TJ didn’t give him a chance to get a syllable out before slamming the door. Immediately, he turned to the alarm pad, pressed the four digit code. The alarm pad slid to the left, revealing a hidden compartment.

Bishop Money grabbed the gun and turned toward the two men that were relaxing in the Bishops den. “I want some answers. Now!” Bishop Money waved the gun in both men’s direction.

Ignoring the Bishops threats, Theodore exhaled long and slow, enjoying the mechanical hands as they made their way down his back.

“In time. We’ll tell you what you need to know, but first, put the gun down,” Franklin said with calm.

“Because I’m a man of God you don’t think I’ll blow your head off?”

“Like you did Drake Gardener?”

The bishop’s mouth remained faithful but his eyes betrayed him.

“Oh, we’re very well aware of what you’re capable of, Mr. Money.” Theodore spoke for the first time as he continued to enjoy the massage chair. “What you are capable of and how far you are willing to go is why you were chosen. Now, if you would be so kind as to put the gun down .”

How did they know about Drake? I was the only one in the alley that day, and I was disguised. If they were cops then I’d be... No. “I’m going to ask you two one more time. Who are you and why the hell are you here?”

“I’m going to tell you one more time,” Franklin said. “Put... the... gun... down...”

Bishop Money stepped down into the east wing den where the men were lounging, pointed the gun at Franklin’s left foot and pulled the trigger.

“You might need these.” Theodore threw a handful of bullets in Bishop Money’s face.

Both men simultaneously came up from their reclined position.

Defeat crossed Bishop Money’s face as he took a seat across from the men on the beige Corinthian leather love seat.

“For over twenty-five years, Professor Gardener worked for the same people we represent. As you know, he was much more than a white African-American studies professor at Morehouse College. And not just an ex-military, soldier of fortune hit man. He was a government agent. You are who you are because of *us*. All the mess you’ve been in, haven’t you ever wondered why you haven’t been exposed? Percival Turner, Jebediah Jones, your ex-wife, your son. I must say, you are the craftiest S.O.B. I have ever read about. Let’s not even get into the people you’ve swindled out of their homes. Church members you’ve robbed. Women you’ve abused and taken advantage of. No one man in the history of America, has ever done so much dirt, over a twenty-year span and has remained so clean, and,” Theodore pointed a finger in the air, “has managed to grow in epic proportions as a religious and community leader.”

“At least not a black man,” Franklin corrected.

“What do you want?” TJ asked.

“We want you to be the next president of the United States.”

“Yeah, right. Me, president?” The bishop laughed. “When pigs fly.”

Neither Theodore or Franklin cracked a smile.

TJ looked back and forth between the two of them. “You’re serious?”

The men just stared.

“I don’t know anything about politics.”

“Ronald Reagan didn’t either. And George Jr., he had to use his toes to count past ten. And look what we did for Obama. Do you honestly think he won the election because of a grass roots movement? Speaking out against Special interests, the money and power behind government? No. We allowed Obama to win.”

“I’m a Christian Bishop. I don’t have any experience in politics.”

“Oh, yes you have. Way more experience than Obama. He was a first-term Junior Senator from Chicago. You are a tenured political leader. As you know, the church is as political as government.”

“I can’t believe we’re having this conversation at 11:00 on a Sunday night,” Bishop Money said.

“Believe it,” Franklin said.

“It’ll take a miracle for anyone to beat President Obama in next year’s election,” Bishop Money said.

“The miracle will begin tomorrow morning. We just need to know if you’re our man?” Franklin asked.

“Why me?”

“Unlike Obama, we can control you,” Franklin said. “Your answer?”

“Well—”

“Well is not a yes or a no. It doesn’t matter if you doubt what we say we can do, but after nine-fifty-two tomorrow morning, you will have no doubt. We just need to know if you are our man.”

“What choice do I have?” Bishop Money shrugged his shoulders.

“You always have a choice,” Franklin responded.

“I’m in,” he said, not believing what they were saying, but not taking a chance if they were for serious.

Theodore pulled a metal briefcase from beside the chair he sat in, and opened the silver latches. “This is a much better video than the one Clarence Wiley was editing for you.”

Okay, they know way too much.

“It’s only two minutes, but that is all you’ll need,” he said, standing and handing over a blue folder to the bishop. “There will be no need to try and blackmail the Junior Senator. We have other plans as you will see after committing the script inside the folder to memory. As you read, you will see that everything is time sensitive. You do your job and we will make you rich and famous beyond your wildest dreams.” Both men stood and headed toward the rear double doors.

“How will I get—”

“You won’t. We’ll get in touch with you. Tomorrow is key. Read those five pages and memorize every step. Several lives depend on you,” Theodore said before he and Franklin stepped out on the deck, “including yours.”

The bishop got up and went to the wall-sized picture window that overlooked the three-acre back yard. He watched as the men walked down the deck stairs and faded into the night.

He went and opened the garage door. The huge black man was gone. This was definitely some real-life spy mess, he thought as he went to the bar and poured and downed a shot of Grand Marnier, before heading into his home theatre room with the blue folder in hand.

Chapter 3

“**H**and in hand, Babycakes. It’s all about me and you. Hold on,” the bishop said, putting his Blackberry on mute. “Marcos?”

“Yes, Bee-shop,” the driver said, not taking his eyes off the bumper-to-bumper Atlanta morning rush hour traffic.

“How many times do I have to tell you? This is America. You have to pronounce your words correctly. What if I addressed Mora as Whora?”

The driver turned his head. “Come on Bee-shop, that’s my wife.”

“And I,” he put a hand over his chest, “am your savior. Yet, you call me Bee shop. I don’t sell bees or honey. My name, my title is one of great importance.” He held his hands in the air. “I am God’s hand. Not His right or left. I am His hand. Doesn’t God’s hand deserve the utmost praise and respect?”

“Yes sir, Bee, Uh, Bi-shop,” the overweight driver said, clenching his teeth, while gripping the steering wheel.

“I take care of you, right?”

“Yes, sir.” Reluctant, the Hispanic driver bobbed his head up and down. “Very well, sir. Me and my family are very grateful.”

Bishop Money took off his Gucci shades and leaned forward. “So why in hell,” he un-muted his phone, “am I riding in my custom-made bullet-proof, seven-hundred fifty-seven thousand dollar Bentley stretch listening to a damn buzzing sound. I pay you thirty-six thousand a year for you to drive and keep my cars and my Falcon 900 private Jet cleaned, and maintained, right?”

Lord, just one time. Just a few seconds. Unite my hands with his neck. Marcos smiled, while turning the corner, entering the prestigious downtown Atlanta community of Buckhead.

“In the three years you’ve been with me, have I ever paid you late?”

“No, sir?”

“Have I ever come short or given you a bad check?”

“No, sir?” Marcos shook his head.

“Than why does the privacy window make that much noise closing and opening?”

“I-I don’t know. I didn’t pay any attention, I’m sorry, sir.”

“Hell, Ray Charles is blind and dead, and he knows you didn’t pay attention to my vehicle. Maybe I shouldn’t pay you tomorrow. After all you don’t pay attention to what I pay you to pay attention to. And, please refrain from telling me about your character flaws.”

Marco decided not to bite on the sandwich his boss had just made, but his mouth took off before the message made it from his brain. “I no talk to you about no character flaws.”

Bishop Money pointed to the back of the driver's clean-shaven head. "Now that's where you're wrong. You're always telling me how sorry you are. I know you sorry. Probably come from a long line of sorry folks, but I'm trying to raise you from amongst the dead as Jesus did Lazarus. But you refuse to let my wisdom seek in them holes on the side of your head." Bishop Money went back to his phone call. "Hello, Babycakes, hello."

"I'm here, Lil-daddy. Why you gotta be so mean to your employers?"

"I thought I placed my phone on mute."

"Still, you ain't have to be so mean to your employers."

"Employee, not employer," the bishop corrected.

"Huh?" she grunted.

He took a deep breath. "Babycakes, an employee is the worker. The employer is the boss."

"I ain't stupid."

Coulda fooled me and everyone else who knows you, he thought.

"You knew what I meanted. Jus' cause I ain't got no doctorial degree like your uppity ass, don't mean I'm dumb."

"Babycakes, I didn't mean anything by correcting you. I know you're not dumb. You're doing something with your life. How many twenty-three year olds with five kids are going back to school? I'm proud of you, Babycakes."

"You just sayin' that 'cause you want some more of this, meow, meow. You was just ready-culing me about school a few minutes ago."

"I was what?"

"Ready-culing me about me going to school to be a cashier."

"Don't you mean ridiculing?"

"See, what I'm sayin'. Yo' ass think cause you a bishop, you's God. You can't judge me. Er'body ain't gotta wanna be a brain surgeon. I wanna be a cashier at Publix. Not only will I get a twenty percent discount on groceries, but they close at ten. I can still hit the club before it gets crunk. And I get first crack at all the expired food for me and my babies. So now what you gotta say 'bout that, preacherman?"

Bishop Money was forty-eight, single, with no children. Tequila Mercedes Lewis was only twenty-three, had five kids and had graduated from ignorant, to stupid, to now, doorknob dumb, and since the bishop didn't hold conversations with doorknobs, instead of answering her, he pressed the End button disconnecting the call. He shook his head and pressed the privacy glass remote, thinking that he had to stop picking up women at the Bankhead welfare office bus stop.

"Yes sir, Bishop." Marcos made sure to say the word bishop slowly, before putting the car in park.

"Someone needs to tell black women that we treat them like toilets because more than half of what comes out of their mouths is crap."

Someone should tell him that maybe if he stops putting so much crap in their minds, then maybe so much wouldn't come out of their mouths.

"I think I'll do a sermon on it. I'll call it *From Trash to Treasure*. Yeah, I like that," the bishop said as Marcos opened the rear passenger door.

It was a sunny breezy Autumn Monday morning, but not nearly breezy enough for the peanut butter brown ankle length fur coat the bishop wore. Labor day had passed three weeks ago, but you couldn't tell the Bishop he wasn't making a fashion statement wearing a three-piece white tailored silk suit, white gators, white silk shirt, white silk tie, and white hat, with a long brown peacock feather dancing on top of his head. And there wasn't a rapper in the hip-hop industry that wore a Platinum cross bigger and with more diamonds

embedded in it than the one the bishop sported around his neck. You would've thought he was auditioning for a role in an *I'm Gonna Get You Sucka* ' remake.

Five minutes later, Bishop Money checked his watch. 9:26 AM. The hallway was empty, he noticed after getting off the elevator on the 32nd floor.

"Senator Hayes's office, please hold." The middle-aged motherly-looking receptionist said, adding the caller to the long list of blinking lights on the switchboard.

The bishop looked at the small receptionist-slash-waiting area. Only a small flat panel TV tuned in to CNN decorated the dull brown windowless walls.

Junior Senator Jordan Hayes's eyes were glued to the charity book signing invite he was reading as he burst through his office into the receptionist area. "Pam, please hold my calls, I have an important meeting," he looked at his watch, "in just a few..."

The Junior Senator didn't see Bishop Money. The Bishop placed a hand on the back of the Junior Senator's, white dress shirt. "Senator, how are you?"

Just as the Senator turned to him, Bishop Money grabbed his hand like they were old drinking buddies.

"Mr. Money."

"Bishop Money," the bishop corrected with the fakest, most insincere smile.

The Junior Senator casually but forcefully jerked his hand from the Bishop while turning back toward his receptionist. "Pam, after you take Mr. Money's coat, run out and pawn it. We could feed a third world nation with the proceeds."

The fake smile became clown-like. "I guess if selling political lies doesn't work, you could always embark on a career as an out-of-work comedian."

Moments later, the two men were in the Junior Senator's office. Bishop Money had only planned to use the edited and photoshopped video feed of him and the Senator's wife as leverage to get the Senator to stop his prominent pastor witchhunt. But, that plan had all changed last night when he was handed a script and another feed. Although the feed looked authentic, even the voices of the Senator's wife and niece were perfect matches, he still didn't believe the senator would do what TJ was supposed to tell him to do.

Chapter 4

Bishop Money looked around the small office before placing a large brown and yellow Louis Vuitton briefcase on the Senator's desk. "Good God, man. You have a million dollar address in a hundred million dollar building, and Uncle Sam gives you a broom closet for an office."

"Enough of the pleasantries." Senator Hayes took a seat behind his cluttered desk and reached for a file with Bishop Money's name on it. "If it's okay with you, I'd like to get down to business."

"Let's," Bishop Money said, opening his briefcase.

"Ho-hold on..." Senator Hayes put his hands in the air. "How did you get that past security?"

"If you don't mind, I'd like to ask the questions," Bishop Money said, one hand on the trigger and the other taking a Mac laptop out of his briefcase. "Just stay calm. This," he waved the gun in the air, "is just insurance. Once you see what I have on this," he pressed a key on the laptop, "you may want to do me harm."

The video began playing. The same video that wasn't needed. The same one that Franklin told him not to show the Senator. But this was the Bishop Money show and no one was going to tell him how to run it. Besides, the senator had to suffer for all the sleepless nights he'd caused TJ, worrying about what all the senator knew and how he was going to try and expose him. No. Jordan was going to suffer before the finale.

"What the...?" Jordan leaned forward, his knuckles began turning red from squeezing the wooden arms of his chair, "Good God."

"That's exactly what your wife said. Look at how she—"

Jordan dove forward, sending papers and a three-tier, paper-cluttered credenza to the beige carpeted floor along with the bishop's laptop.

Bishop Money jumped up and barely avoided Jordan's grasp. "Now see, I figured something like this would happen." He pulled the stock back, loading a bullet in the small .380 caliber handgun, while standing over the Senator.

"Just tell me why?"

"Because I could. I felt like I was doing a community service. I mean, the way she begged." He placed a hand on his crotch. "Oh, did that Indian squaw wife of yours beg?"

"You better use that gun." The senator nodded. "'Cause if you don't, I'm goin' to jail for murder."

"Promises, promises." Bishop Money looked at his watch. Nine-forty-six a.m. "There's more, and trust you want to see it. Unfortunately, you won't get the perverted satisfaction of watching me pound your wife in this next scene." The bishop said, holding the gun over the

Senator as his body was still half on the desk and halfway on the floor. “Look ,” the bishop said, pressing down on the F2 key before putting the laptop’s seventeen-inch screen close enough where Jordan could see the next scene clearly, but not close enough for Jordan to grab hold of it or him.

His career, his life. The one he and Cheyenne pieced back together was falling back apart. His wife had killed his twin brother, whom had raped her for years while Jordan sat in prison for a crime his twin committed. But the woman on the video he was watching took the blame for his brother’s murder.

“Cheryl Nutcase Sharell, or as authorities call her, Wild Cherry.” Bishop Money shook his head from left to right. “Shame, Shame, Shame. What tangled webs we weave, when we practice to destroy and deceive Bishop TJ Money.” Bishop Money took a knee.

Jordan had seen enough. Instantly he knew. That shady Bishop C. Wendell Wiley somehow must have... Nah, he couldn’t have had anything to do with it. This had happened twelve years ago in a Motel 6. Jordan didn’t even know there was a video, let alone why it hadn’t surfaced before now? Jordan knew there was no way he could talk his way out of this one. A foursome with his wife’s best friend, who sat at the top of the F.B.I.’s Most Wanted list. Not to mention the fact that the video caught a close-up of him smoking crack in a corner while watching two naked women mercilessly beating and stabbing Cherry, his wife’s best friend. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to drown out the images of that night.

Bishop Money looked at his watch. Nine-fifty a.m. “Get up!” Bishop Money shouted.

He walked over to the wall adjacent to the office window where a forty-two inch flat panel TV hung on the wall. “What channel is CNN?”

Jordan struggled to stand on his own wobbly two feet.

“Never mind,” TJ said, thinking that news this big would be broadcast on every network in the country, the world. “I’m about to show you how far my hand reaches.”

The Bishop looked at his watch again. Nine-fifty-two. So much had happened between last night and this morning that he’d totally forgot that he’d reset his watch fifteen minutes ahead, in order to be sure to be on time.

The Junior Senator just stood slumped over with a defeated expression shrouding his face. If the Bishop didn’t know any better, he would have thought the man was losing it.

“Jordan, I want you to listen very closely.” The Bishop spoke slow and clear. “Your wife’s life depends on these next few minutes.”

At the sound of the words *his wife*, Jordan’s melancholy look changed to one of intense worry. Jordan closed his eyes, and contemplated charging Bishop Money. No longer concerned about his life, he exhaled. “What else have you done to my wife?”

“Nothing.” Bishop Money again pointed at the seventeen-inch laptop computer screen that was now perched on the corner of the Senator’s cleared-off desk.

“You have cameras in my home. How in the...” Much louder, he repeated, “You have cameras in my damn house.” He grabbed the laptop. Held the screen inches from his face. “Oh... my... God...”

“And that is exactly who she will soon be reunited with if you don’t do exactly as I say.”

“What do you want from me?”

“Your life.” Bishop Money pointed to the window behind the Senator’s desk. “But before you open that window, I need you to type a letter, print it out and sign your name to it.”

“You’re serious?”

“As a suicide bomber.”

Jordan shook his head. “I can’t.”

“Really,” the Bishop said.

“You better shoot me now.” Jordan dropped the laptop and stepped forward. Murder in his bloodshot, watery eyes. “I’ll kill you.”

Bishop Money took a couple steps back. “Only thing you are going to kill is your wife, and your dead brother’s daughter, that your wife gave birth to.” The bishop took another step back. Jordan took one forward. “You may get to me before I shoot you, but can you get to me before I press Send on my phone.” TJ pulled out his blackberry.

Jordan paused.

“Send, might as well be End, because it will be for your wife and your bastard seven-year-old niece. Oh, and if you think you can save them, you can’t. Your wife’s cell phone is scrambled and every landline on your block is down. So, this is how the next three minutes is going to play out. You will write instead of typing a short note that I will dictate. You will seal it in an envelope and give it to me. I will leave out of the office and chat with your receptionist for one minute. At that point you will have jumped to your death, or the two people you love the most in this life will be taken, just as abruptly as your twin, Jevon was.”

A few minutes later, Bishop Money stood in the reception area talking to the Senator’s receptionist, when they were interrupted by a loud beeping noise that came from the thirty-two-inch flat panel TV in the small waiting area.

“Breaking news. Twenty-two minutes ago, President Obama collapsed during a closed door meeting with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, and Cuban leader, Raul Castro.” The reporter put something to her ear. “The President’s helicopter has just arrived at Walter Ree... A stream of tears cascaded down her face.

The mask of seriousness she wore disintegrated before America and the world that was watching. Her breakdown lasted all of seven seconds, violating the unwritten code of non-emotional professional journalism etiquette. The world that was tuned in to CNN knew before Chin Li continued. “The 44th president of the United States of America, President Barack Hussein Obama born August 4, 1961 was pronounced dead on arrival at Walter Reed Hospital less than two minutes ago, as a result of a brain aneurysm.

Chapter 5

“**A**neurysm my a—”
“Samuel, you’re in a place of worship,” Reverend Solomon One-Free, reminded his young protégé.

He pointed to the TV in the church office. “Almost three years in office and they killed him. Just like they did Reginald Lewis, Ron Brown, and Johnny Cochran. You knew President Obama personally. The man didn’t drink. He quit smoking a year ago. Worked out regularly. Perfect health. The whole country. The whole world cryin’, sad and shit, holdin’ candle prayer vigils. Bull—”

“Samuel!” The former Illinois governor, the Reverend One-Free shouted. “You know the masses are sheep, led by wolves, disguised as shepherds.” He shook his head. “The people don’t know. For the most part, they think the government is for the people.” The reverend put a comforting hand on Samuel’s shoulder. “It’s been three days since our brother was called home. And, I assure you the matter is being investigated, but as you know it’s hard investigating the invisible hand of government puppeteers.”

“But, how can the world be so naïve? A decade has passed since we fabricated lies to start a war with a Middle Eastern country. We go and kill the sons of that country’s president and plaster their gruesome death photos on the internet and the news, before we hunt that country’s president down, and force that country’s judicial system to kill their own president. For what? Huh, Rev? For what,” the young man cried out. “Oil dominance. We ain’t do shit then, and we ain’t gon’ do shit now.”

Solomon sat next to the young man that he had grown so fond of since the young man’s father, Bishop Percival Turner was shot down three years ago.

“That’s where you’re wrong, son.” He put an arm around his dejected mentee. “We have close to forty-thousand Hispanic and Black Kings and Queens in the One-Free family, and thousands more that follow our truth-teachers around the country. For now we have to act with calm in the midst of the storm. We have to gather more intel, and strategize before we take any action, or make any accusatory public statements.”

Samuel bobbed his head up and down. “I know, you right. I’m just mad. I mean, it’s so clear. Black people were on the verge of finally getting something for the 400 years that our minds and bodies were raped and forced to work like domesticated animals for scraps of food from the white man’s table.”

“Closer to 450 years,” Rev. One-Free said. “The difference then and now is that we don’t realize that we are still slaves. Our minds are being raped every day that our children walk into public schools. Every time we turn on the news, every time our children turn their Xboxes or Playstations on.”

“That’s what I’m sayin’, Rev. If Proposition 400 passed, we would have gotten free health insurance, free education and child care assistance for those who went to school and maintained at least a 2.5 GPA.” He looked up at the man he’d come to love and respect as much as he had his own father. “Can you imagine?”

“No, I cannot.” Reverend One-Free said. “History has shown us that the powers that be were going to do something to block this, but I didn’t think they would do this. I guess I just didn’t think. Although Biden, and Hillary are good people, they won’t push this bill. They know what happened. They know why it happened.”

Samuel’s long dreadlocks looked like black helicopter propellers as he violently shook his head from side to side. His eyes were clenched shut. He didn’t want to accept or deal with the reality of a reparations bill that would never pass.

“But they ... We need more than just knowing.” Reverend One-Free said, looking off at some spot on the church office wall that only he could see.

“You’re right. I’m just so... You don’t understand,” Samuel cried.

You have no idea how much I do understand, Solomon thought. *The president and I had talked about this day often. The day the unseen hand behind the government and the economy figured out that the president was a man. A real black man.*

“I’m just so tired of ignorant cookie-cutter, milk-toast, toilet paper-soft black folk. In times of turmoil, we don’t wanna fight. We wanna either riot in our own communities, or march. I mean explain the logic behind that. We get mad at the system and we set a match to our backyards. We go out and rob and loot our brothers and sisters, who have nothing to do with the system that angered us. It’s like a teacher beats up a child for nothing and the parent brings the kid back to school and beats up his or her child in front of that same teacher, and then says to the teacher, ‘I guess I showed you’.”

Samuel was on a roll. “And marches. Come on. What are we marching for, besides the CSPAN and CNN cameras? They getting paid off of viewers watching thousands of blacks walk down a street and listen to a few good speeches by our media chosen black leaders. These same blacks aren’t leading their thousands of marchers into the courthouses and jail cells and forcefully freeing our wronged and talented men and women. They just give speeches, sing and call for gas boycotts, when you know good and well, black folk will go to the gas stations after the one day boycott and buy twice as much gas as they would’ve bought the day of the boycott.”

“Son, you preaching to the choir. You have to understand that we know better, but we don’t understand better. And that’s because we only read what we’re told or trained to read.” He extended his arm out. “Look at King Jihad. This brother is one of the best and deepest writers of our time. His eighth book, *The Survival Bible: 16 Life Lessons for Young Black men* hasn’t sold 1,000 books in the three years it’s been out, and he’s everywhere trying to get the message out. Yet black violence among young black men dominates the headlines in this country. Our sisters have been crying out that there are no good black men. They are raising young boys in the hopes of them becoming positive black men, but a brother who has come from the same gutters that most young black men come from writes a passionate, moving and inspirational life-changing piece of work that will revolutionize the way we all look at things, and because his name is Jihad, and not Hill Harper or Steve Harvey, the black media, our own people, treat him and his work, like a leper.”

“Goes back to your sermon last Sunday, Rev. *Jesus, The Grass Root, Barefoot Revolutionary*. Sort of like you said then, the masses didn’t receive Jesus or his messages until decades, centuries after his earthly body had returned to the Father, and that was because he never had the backing of any part of the power structure. The message is clear,

so why do the Tupacs, the Obama's, and most likely the Jihad's of this world have to die before their messages are received?"

"In the words of one of the greatest men I've ever had the pleasure of sharing oxygen with, President Obama once said, "Change we can believe in begins with a thought and then, not a *call* to action, but action we the American people can *call* our own." The reverend stood, and helped Samuel to his feet. He couldn't help but smile at the framed article that hung on the wall in front of him. No matter how hard last years, 2010 Forbes magazine 50 most influential men photo was photoshopped to make the reverend look like some dark, menacing demon, he still looked like a forty-year-old, six-foot-tall honorable black man, although he'd just turned sixty-two last month in October.

"Son," he handed Solomon a plane ticket, and looked at his watch, "I need you to be on the one o'clock flight out of Washington-Reagan, to Atlanta. Go to Queen Cheyenne, stay with her until Moses, Rhythm and I arrive tomorrow morning."

Solomon nodded. "I almost forgot about Senator Hayes's passing."

Chapter 6

The Atlanta autumn rain had been falling all morning and didn't seem to be letting up anytime soon. But that didn't stop or slow down the onslaught of traffic entering the massive wrought iron gates leading onto the forty-acre One World Faith Missionary Baptist church grounds.

CNN, FOX, and several other news agencies were busy filming the politicians, actors, hip-hop and R&B artists, Atlanta's movers and shakers. They all smiled and waved for the cameras as they walked down the well-lit and covered electronic moving sidewalk leading to the escalator that would take them in to the massive gothic-like church vestibule dome.

At exactly noon, Bishop Money's five-car motorcade and six motorcycle police escort pulled onto the church grounds.

"I thought President Obama passed away." One onlooker waiting to get in to the already packed church said.

"He did, but the king didn't," another replied.

"That nigga ain't no king. He just got king money, and a slick tongue," another said shivering, while leaning against his umbrella.

"So why you here standing outside in the cold rain waiting under the canopy like all of us to get in?" a young lady asked.

"Nigga put on a damn good show. He shadier than a four dolla' bill, but he sho' knows how to party preach."

"Party preach?"

"Yeah, it be like a club with live music and a big band, a light show, and all in the name of my Jesus. But I tell you this. I swear fo' God and all his prophets, that after I pay this twenty dollars to get in to the memorial service for the president and Senator Hayes, I ain't givin' that rich nigga no mo' of my money. How you gon' charge to get into a damn memor'al service," the man said.

"Why don't you take your evil behind somewhere else?" another lady said. "You're not going to stand here and speak ill of Bishop Money. He is the greatest thing to ever happen to the black community. And he charges to get into special church functions, because he know people like you are going to show up. This is his way of ensuring that the community gets fed, housed, clothed, and receives proper medical attention."

The man turned to the woman. "You act like he God."

"He's the closest thing."

Before he could reply, loud applause rang out. People began shouting, "Bishop Money, Bishop Money." Flashes from a thousand cameras lit up the dreary Wednesday early afternoon.

All of a sudden there was a pause as the Bishop got out of his stretch Bentley. Bishop TJ Money, looked like... like, a normal person. The crowd was taken aback. Gone, were the flamboyant suits, the jewelry. Even the hair. Bishop Money waved and smiled as he walked with a slight limp through the crowd with his entourage of bodyguards and fellow clergy. He wore a black suit. Still tailored, mind you. His shoes were made of black leather, not some exotic animal or reptile, like he usually wore. His hair was no longer permed and hanging off his slender shoulders. It was cut very short and clean. His clothes looked comfortable on him, unlike before when he wore shirts that strangled his midsection and his arms.

An hour later, Bishop Money was on stage.

“On this, week before Thanksgiving, we stand before you Father on weak knees. Our hearts are bleeding. Our souls are crying. This is a trying time for us all, Father.” He shook his head from side to side. “We’re all grief stricken. But why, Father God? Why are we stricken with grief?” From behind the electronic podium, Bishop Money pointed a well-manicured ringless finger in the air. The Word says, “He giveth and...” He pointed out to the congregation.

“He taketh away,” thousands of voices completed the proverb.

“But, did He take what was ours... or what was His? Just because we can’t see our beloved president or the senator, doesn’t mean they’re gone. Can we see Jesus? Is he gone?”

The standing room only, twelve-thousand plus people inside the newly remodeled convention center-like church were in awe of the Bishop’s words. Even the cameramen seemed to be mesmerized.

“Last month, I flew out to Jackson, Mississippi to comfort a brother, John Higgins and his adopted family. If you don’t know who John Higgins is, he is the man; white man, that had a one-night stand with a sister. The sister ended up pregnant. And because she was on crack, John offered to raise the baby. Well,” the Bishop loudly exhaled. “She told John she’d sell him the unborn baby for five grand.”

“That’s a shame. A dog gone shame,” someone voiced from the front row.

“John Higgins’s lack of education tied him to the warehouse job he’d had since dropping out of the tenth grade ten years prior to sleeping with this woman. No wife. No kids. Brother Higgins made twelve dollars an hour. Of course, he didn’t have five-thousand dollars, but he did own a five-year-old Ford pickup truck. Without a thought, he gave his only form of transportation to the woman for his little black baby. Because of what he had done, whom he had done it with, and the color of that precious baby’s skin, his own mother and father had disowned him. He’d lost his job because he couldn’t get to and from work. Thanks to the Jenkins, an elderly couple next door helping with the adorable little girl, he was able to work at a Burger World and at a Smoothie Paradise eighty, to sometimes one hundred hours a week to support him and his special needs, bubbly baby girl.”

The Bishop swallowed hard as if he were composing himself before he continued. “Six years had gone by, no word from the little girl’s mother, and out of nowhere one Saturday morning, with red eyes, a runny nose, and a thick head of hair that looked like it was the home for several different insects, she showed up at the front door of the small house John rented. Of course, John refused to let her see the little girl. He advised the woman to get an attorney and go through the courts. Of course, what he had told her was too much like right.

A couple days later the woman came back, cleaned up, hair half combed. John was working this late summer Monday afternoon. The little girl was playing in her little sandbox inside the Jenkins’ yard. The woman unlatched the metal gate and walked up to the porch. After confirming that the child was hers, before the couple could act, the woman lifted the

child up and ran with the scared baby screaming in her arms.” Bishop Money paused for effect. “Two days later, the police arrested the mother in a flea bag Motel 6. No child. Come to find out the mother had resold her little girl for crack.” Bishop Money took out a handkerchief and wiped his invisible tears. “Days later the little girls remains were found behind a dumpster near the drug infested area where she was sold...”

“Take your time, Bishop,” someone shouted.

“John Higgins was stricken with grief. He asked me...” Bishop Money closed his eyes before repeating. “John Earl Higgins asked me how could I believe in the goodness of a God that let something like that happen to an innocent little girl.”

The church was deathly quiet.

“I smiled and asked him, how could I not believe? After all, isn’t death what we live for? Aren’t we trying to live in His light so when we are called home, we are accepted into His kingdom? Don’t we believe that the greatest place to be is with God? So, yes that little girl suffered briefly in this life to live forever in His light. I told him and I’m telling,” he waved his arm in a half circular motion, “you all, that God’s goodness was in calling that child home so she could be with her Father. So she wouldn’t have to see a tomorrow where murder runs rampant in America’s urban communities like running water. A tomorrow where men and women of color lovingly degrade each other with words, like nigga, dog, cat, fox, bitch and they don’t see anything wrong with that. A world where the mother and father have become dinosaurs, replaced by Playstations, cell phones, and TVs. So,” he paused and held a finger in the air, “I say to you as I said to John Higgins on that day. Honor the memories, and pray that you will follow in her footsteps one day. Honor the memories and the messages of President Obama, and Senator Hayes.”

A reporter standing at the back of the church nudged her cameraman. “Did I miss something?”

The cameraman shrugged his shoulders.

“What does that story have to do with President Obama and Senator Hayes?” she whispered.

“Nothing, but it sure sounded reader worthy.”

The cameras caught thousands that had been moved to tears by the Bishop’s speech. Rick Warren, the author of *The Purpose Driven Life* stood up from behind Bishop Money and began the applause, followed by Bishop Jakes, Bishop Long, and Joel Olsteen, before the entire church was on its’ feet.

The bishop, put his hands up and slowly brought them down, gesturing to the church that he wasn’t finished.

Minutes later he continued. “They say the good die young. I guess this is their reward from God for being good. They are able to come home sooner than most. But if I can borrow a slogan from our departed President. Change we can believe in begins with the head. As I am the head of the One World family,” he stepped away from the podium and held out his arms so all could see, “Gone is the flamboyant dress, gone is the hair, and the jewelry. I only dressed as I had for the past two and a half decades, because I wanted to show our young people that God is cool. God is Hip-Hop. God is anything and everything associated with righteousness and his work and his workers come in all colors,” he waved an arm behind him, “shapes, sizes, and monotheistic religions. Yes, I said it. Monotheistic religions. Belief in the one God. Call him what you choose, in your native tongue, but call Him and only Him, because He is, was, and will always be the only salvation for this world and any world. And in honor of our dearly departed Senator, I am opening up all my books to the IRS, because that is what Senator Hayes wanted. And that is what I want. I want to show you and the world, that I have nothing to hide. This I do in Senator Hayes’s honor.

And in honor of the proposed reparations bill and the Health Care reform bill that President Obama fought for so hard, over the next year I am not going to try, I give you my word that I *will* raise a half billion dollars so everyone, black, white, yellow and brown will not have affordable health care, but have free health care.”

The cameras flashed like mad, as photographers took pictures of the Bishop.

“You might be thinking that a half billion dollars won’t go far with over 310 million Americans. It’s not meant to. That money represents your voices. It will be the catalyst for change. The late President John F. Kennedy said, *‘Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.’* I can show you better than I can tell you and I will bring change that you can believe in, change you can see and feel.”

Everyone was so engrossed in the Bishop’s new look and his words, that not many noticed or paid attention to the woman in the brown suit, with the brown hat covering her face moving to get out of the N section and into the middle aisle.

Bishop Money pulled out a check and began to write on it from the podium. He walked back into the middle of the stage and waved the check in the air. “I am donating most of my savings to this cause. Now we are six million dollars closer to our goal.”

Applause rang out.

The lady was in the aisle walking forward. An usher was quickly approaching her.

“Not only am I giving this. I am putting my ten million dollar estate home, my multi-million dollar exotic car collection, and one of my two private jets up for sale. Every single dollar will go to our half a billion dollar goal.”

She took off her hat and pulled a gun from her purse.

Bishop Money shouted, “Noooo!”

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The sound of gunshots echoed though the church. It was pandemonium, People were screaming and running for the exits. Others were hugging the floor. Every one was doing something except for the woman holding the smoking gun and Bishop Money. She and Bishop Money’s eyes met as his bullet-riddled body collapsed onto the stage.

Chapter 7

“Oh my, God!” Rhythm gasped. Her eyes welled up with tears of rage. “Who did this to you?” she asked, looking at one of her closest friend’s swollen and bruised face as the two female guards took off the handcuffs.

“Is he dead?” Dr. Jamison-Hayes asked a little above a whisper before wincing in pain while holding her side and gently sitting in the metal folding chair behind the stainless steel table.

Through clenched teeth Rhythm addressed the guards, “My client needs medical attention.”

“Is he dead? Please tell me he’s dead.” Cheyenne asked again.

A tall, stocky, female deputy stepped forward. She stood inches from the much smaller caramel-colored attorney. “I ’on’t care who you are. I ’on’t care ’bout this job.” The huge woman looked down at Rhythm. “Psst.” She bobbed her neck. “And I r’ally don’t care ’bout you balling and unballing your fists. All I gotta say is, you just better pray real hard that Bishop Money lives.”

Rhythm wanted to snatch every red and glitter gold braid out of the woman’s head. But instead, she asked, “Is that all?”

“If the bishop dies, it ain’t.”

Rhythm smiled, showing a perfect set of white teeth. Slow and clear, enunciating every word she said, “You have fifteen minutes to get my client medical attention.”

The guard crossed her arms. “Bit—, heifer, shit, you ’bout to make me curse. *Who* you think you are?”

Rhythm looked down at her Movado. “It’s ten-twenty-five a.m. You have until ten-forty a.m. to get her a paramedic or a doctor. If my request isn’t met I’ll show you *who* I am.”

The deputy laughed, before walking to the steel door of the attorney-client visitation room, the other guard behind her. Upon grabbing the doors handle, she said, “You lucky I’m on the job.” She licked her big brown lips. “Let me get outta here ’fore I find better use for them pretty lawyer lips of yours.” She turned her head to Cheyenne. “And as for you, killa’, I get off in twenty minutes, but I’ll see yo’ trigger-happy behind tonight.” The guards locked the two women in the room.

“So, he’s still breathing?” Cheyenne asked. Disappointment resonated in her voice.

“Barely. He’s in the critical care unit at Dekalb Medical. That’s as much as I know.” Rhythm pulled her chair around the table. She grabbed her friend’s hand and looked into her swollen discolored eyes. “Did that guard do this to you?”

She dropped her head, breaking eye contact with Rhythm. Her silence told a better story than her words could have.

“It was my understanding that you were being held in protective custody.”

“I am. But, who’s going to protect me from those who put me there?”

I can. And I will, Rhythm thought. Rhythm One-Free was in her early-fifties, but like her husband, Moses she didn’t look a day over forty, which was surprising considering all the hell she’d gone through in her past. On more than one occasion, she had stared death in the face. And on more than one occasion she sent death to hell. “Sweetie, I’m going to get you out of here.”

Cheyenne lifted her head. “Rhythm, you been a great friend and I love you. My life’s over. I died with Jordan. I don’t care what they do to me. I just want Samuel to raise Ariel. I haven’t spoken to him. But I know he loves her and she loves him. I know it’s selfish, but I’ve been going crazy since TJ killed my husband. The police, my friends, no one believes me. That man is evil. I had to do it. I had to.”

“Listen to me, Cheyenne.” Rhythm grabbed her friend by the shoulders. “I know Jordan didn’t commit suicide. Just like I know you’ll raise your daughter. I’m going to talk to the A.D.A. handling the case at five this afternoon. I know Tiffany Cole, she’s tough, but she’s fair.” Rhythm patted the back of Cheyenne’s palm. “We’ll get you a bond. Worst case, we’ll plead temporary insanity.”

“Rhythm, you’re not listening to me. My life ain’t shit. Don’t waste your time. I tried to murder that bastard, and if I get out I swear I’ll finish the job if God doesn’t beat me to it,” she said doubling over, wincing in pain.

“Cheyenne?” Rhythm said, squeezing her friend’s hand.

Cheyenne made a grunting sound before losing consciousness and falling to the shiny concrete Dekalb County jail floor.

Chapter 8

For the past hour, Rhythm had threatened to sue every department and every person that worked in the Dekalb County Jail. She couldn't believe Cheyenne was taken to the jail infirmary instead of an outside hospital. Now she was sitting behind the wheel of her Range Rover, fuming.

She was startled out of her thoughts by the vibration from her cell phone.

"Bazz, I know you haven't gotten that address for me already," Rhythm asked while turning on her windshield wipers.

"Come on, Queen. This Shabazz. Lifetime MVP in the hustlers hall of fame, although that don't begin to define my game or my name." He paused. "You got a pen?"

"Let me see." She fumbled through her purse as she tried to pull out of the Dekalb County jail complex. "I can't find one. Can you—"

"Come on, Queen. How you gon' win, without a pen, especially when you planning to use my G to sin."

Shabazz was an old school con man, surrogate father, former heroin addict, white-skinned, black man in his early forties. He was now part of the vast One-Free family. He was the man that could get anything on the low. One day he'd be in the hood, shootin' craps with the dope boys, preachin' to them about how they needed to get out the game, and the next day, he'd be advising a senator or congressman over dinner. If he didn't have anything else, Shabazz had game.

"Text me the address, please." She turned the volume up on her hands free phone. "Have you spoken to my niece?"

"Everyday. That American history class is kickin' her tail."

"I don't know why she just didn't stay at home and go to Spelman," Rhythm said.

"You know good and well, why. You graduated from Howard," Shabazz said. "I just got off the line with Babygirl. She's excited about coming home in a couple weeks for winter break. I just hate she's not going back until next Fall. But then again, maybe that's best. Because she at a HBCU learning U.S. Mystery, 'cause I'm explaining way too much history. Had to break down the Navigation Act of 1761 and the real reason the American Revolution begun."

"Bazz, you should go back to school. Get your degree and teach."

"Queen, I teach every day, every way, high and low, 'till they brains is tired and can't think no mo'. Didn't cost me a dime, but it damn sho' wasn't free. Got my Bullshit, my more of the same, and my piled higher and deeper degree from Penitentiary State, and Sidewalk University. Ain't no better ledge to know than the beat of the streets, and the feats of our peeps put down in books, stolen by history crooks to keep us as they coat hooks. So,

as you see, I'm gon' stay free and keep doin' me and everybody else who wanna be free. But without further adieu, I'm gon' send that text to you. Gotta go, gotta date with Destiny and I can't be late, that big-bootie cutie just might not wait."

She'd been patiently waiting in the parking lot of the apartment complex for about two hours, listening to Dr. Mark Naison's new book, *The Boogie Down*. The late November rain was picking up, but not bad enough for Rhythm not to see anyone coming out of the townhouse. She looked at the clock on the dash. Two-thirty. She prayed that the woman left the townhouse before Rhythm had to leave for her five o'clock at the D.A.'s office. She was starting to wonder if the woman had another car, besides the black Honda Accord parked in front of her door.

Her cell phone vibrated.

Rhythm pushed the Talk button. "Greetings."

There was a lot of phone static in the background.

"Hello," Rhythm said.

"I got your message. What can we do?"

Message. Message. Oh yeah, she thought, just now remembering that she had asked her husband, Moses to get Cherry the news of Jordan's death. That was quick, considering Cherry had been on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba ever since she was featured on America's Most Wanted a year ago. "Tamika?"

"Yes," Cherry answered, responding to the code name, her, Cheyenne, and Rhythm set up after Cherry took the blame for killing Cheyenne's husband's twin brother a couple of years ago.

"What do you mean, what can *we* do?"

The woman that Rhythm was waiting for came out of the townhome with a big red umbrella over her head.

"Me and my mom."

Rhythm opened the driver's door of her Range Rover.

"Girl, you still there?" Cherry asked.

"Tamika, if you can, call me tonight. Gotta go." She threw the phone onto the cream colored leather passenger seat and jumped out the car and half walked, half jogged toward the woman standing at her black Honda.

Officer Eadie Calhoun was only a few feet from her car when she spotted Rhythm quickly closing the distance.

"I'm a Christian woman. Don't make me act ugly in this rain."

"Act ugly? If you aren't getting royalties off the use of the word, than you need to sue somebody," Rhythm said.

"You sure you want this," the huge woman asked, as she put the umbrella down next to her ten-year-old car.

"All I want is for you to leave my client alone, and make sure the others do the same."

"Oh, that's all you want?"

Rhythm nodded her head. "That's all."

"How 'bout we get out this rain, and go inside. There, we can talk about what I want," the ox-like woman winked, "cutie pie."

A minute later, Officer Calhoun closed her front door and turned to face Rhythm.

Pop!

Officer Calhoun grabbed her nose. “Bitch, you broke my nose.” She pulled out a foot-long, black metal flashlight. “I’mma’ break your damn face.”

At least David had a slingshot and some room to work before slaying Goliath. The five foot six , hundred and thirty-five pound middle aged attorney was in close quarters and she had nothing but her fists and feet. Officer Calhoun was six-foot-forever and might as well have weighed a ton.

“You try and hit me with that flashlight, I’ll fracture your ribs on the left side, and break your right index finger,” Rhythm calmly explained.

Officer Calhoun charged forward in what seemed like slow motion.

Rhythm sidestepped the behemoth and kicked her in the knee. As she was falling, Rhythm grabbed her right index finger and bent it back until the bone popped.

“Ahhhhh!” Officer Calhoun hollered. She dropped the flashlight and reached around and grabbed a handful of air, barely missing a handful of reddish brown dreadlocks.

Rhythm dropped to the burgundy carpeted floor, grabbed the flashlight, rolled to her right, bumped into the couch, and hit Officer Calhoun in the shin with the butt end of the flashlight. On her way to the ground, Rhythm timed her swing and cracked Officer Calhoun’s ribs.

Seconds later, Rhythm stood over the fallen giant, who was visibly in agonizing pain. “Now that I have shown you who I am, let me introduce myself.” She dropped one of her business cards on Officer Calhoun’s leg. “My name is Rhythm One-Free, Esquire, and attorney at law. I apologize for cracking the right rib. I told you the left. I guess I’m getting’ rusty, but my trigger finger is good and oiled up, and if my client is touched by anyone I’ll be back with a body bag.”

“I can’t go to work like this. I can barely breathe.” The huge woman cried from her prone position on the floor.

“Unlike you did my client, I won’t deny you medical attention. I never said you had to go to work.”

“But, how can I protect her if I’m not at work?”

“I have no idea,” Rhythm said, walking to the front door. “Oh, and I want my client in an outside hospital. Don’t worry, if she’s not transferred tonight, I’ll let you continue sharing my air, but I will break a bone in your body every day until she is.”

“I don’t have any control over who’s sent to an outside hospital,” the officer whimpered.

“Sounds like a personal problem to me.”

Chapter 9

“Good, God.”

The female security officer that had just searched Rhythm looked over at LJ, the mouth almighty, tongue dummy, head of the security detail at the downtown Atlanta State building. “Negro, whachu’ Good Goddin’ about?”

“Lawd, lawd, lawd.” The old man took out a monogrammed handkerchief and wiped his brow. “Looka here, looka here, looka here!” The sixty-seven year old security guard paused. “Whewwwww. Boy, looka here. She can get it. I mean every last cent of it.” He shook his head. “Umph, umph, umph. You ain’t gotta do nothin’ to that. She ’on’t need no hot sauce, no salt, pepper, nothing. She seasoned just right. I ain’t takin’ nothing from that Beyonce, or Rhi-anna, but they ain’t ripe yet. They ain’t seasoned, but ’dat dere.” He nodded in the direction of where Rhythm stood. “I’ll give that fine mamma-jamma my paycheck, my wife’s paycheck, and if that ain’t enough, I’ll hit one of them dope boys over the head and give her that nigga’s money, too,” LJ said as Rhythm stood at the elevator wearing a fitted, but professional beige Donna Karan pantsuit.

“LJ, yo’ old behind can’t do nothin’ with that,” Yaris, the twenty-something year old officer said, looking at Rhythm disappear inside of the elevator. “You be done OD’ed on Viagra tryin’ to keep up with her. Now, a young bull like me. I’d—”

“Dogs. All ya’ll.” Ella looked at the other three security officers who were lusting after the movie star-gorgeous fifty-two-year-old attorney.

“Look!” Ella pointed to one of the forty-two inch TVs that hung from the gray and black speckled granite lobby walls.

“We interrupt your regularly scheduled program to bring you this special report.”

A second later, the broadcast went to the outside of Dekalb Medical, where a sea of people holding candles and praying flooded the hospital grounds in the forty degree clear November Atlanta weather.

“This is Sadequa Frazier reporting live from Dekalb Medical Center where Bishop Terrell Joseph Money, the charismatic leader of One World Faith ministries has succumbed to injuries resulting from four gunshot wounds. I repeat, Bishop Terrell Joseph Money has died as a result of injuries sustained from several gunshot wounds.”

“No deals.” Tiffany Cole stood behind the desk in her small eighteenth-floor office. “Your client will be the first woman to die in a Georgia electric chair.”

“Excuse me?” Rhythm said, as she closed the A.D.A.’s office door. She couldn’t help but notice all the papers, books, and pens. Even the state’s flat panel computer monitor was on the floor. It looked like someone had just swept everything off of the A.D.A.’s desk.

Tiffany made a feeble attempt to straighten her clothes and compose herself. The silver iPhone was about the only electronic device that wasn’t on the floor. *Bishop Money is dead.* She read the headlines as they flashed across the two-inch screen that the red-eyed district attorney held out in front of Rhythm’s face.

“I’m so sorry,” Rhythm said, truly meaning it. Not sorry for TJ. If anyone deserved to be dead, he did. She was sorry for Cheyenne. Her friend had been through pure hell over the last few years. And in Georgia, there was no way she’d get a fair trial. Hell, she wouldn’t get a fair trial anywhere in the south, and even if she did, the game had changed since TJ was now dead.

A few states away, in Quantico, Virginia, at CIA headquarters, five of the most powerful men in America and, quite possibly the world, including a former US President and a current Senator were in a closed door meeting surrounded by fifty inch computer monitors.

“Genius! Rupert you are an absolute genius.” George Bush Senior pointed up at the monitors. “Just look. NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, your network, and even the BBC followed your lead.”

“Senator, how you got your medical team assembled and into Dekalb Medical so fast is nothing short of a miracle,” Bush said.

“It’s time,” Prince Nathan, England’s next King interrupted, looking at the flashing red light on the wall near the heavily guarded six-inch steel door.

“For years, we’ve used fear tactics to scare the American people into furthering our goal to establish a One World Order,” Bush said, picking up the red phone that sat in the middle of the rectangular table facing the twelve monitors that hung from the ceiling in the underground strategy room. “Taking care of Obama was child’s play compared to what we’re about to do gentlemen.”

“Not really,” Rupert Murdoch, the media mogul that owned the FOX network, interrupted from his seat at the end of the table. “Hope follows fear. The people think we are at war against who? Jihadists? Muslims? This is still a Christian country. For the most part, Americans believe in God. Hell, we got that idiot son of yours elected the last time on a Christian platform, GB.”

Phone still in hand, Bush interrupted, “What does that have to with what we’re doing?”

“Everything,” Rupert said. “Osama Bin Laden is a Muslim and the devil in the eyes of the public. The bible prophesizes about a Messiah coming back to save the people.”

GB smiled before imprinting his thumbprint over the phone’s scanner before passing the phone down the line. Every man did the same, before the phone finally reached Rupert. “Do it,” were the only words spoken into the receiver once the computerized voice came onto the line.

Glorious Withers had just read a line from Brandon Massey’s latest sci-fi horror mystery before the elevator noise down the hall scared her into action. She jumped up from

the mop bucket and put the book inside the pocket of her hospital coat, grabbed the mop, and wrung it out in the clean, cold mop water.

She looked up just in time to see that the elevator had stopped on the basement level where she was supposed to be working. A young brother with earphones in his ears sang the lyrics of the latest Bo Jack Jones hit, *Smoke til' ya Choke*, while wheeling a dead body toward the hospital's morgue.

"Ah, it's only you, Man-Man." Glorious rolled her eyes before pulling the book back out of her pocket. "I thought you was somebody."

"I is somebody, shawty. Bet if you knew who I was takin' down to da cold room until the county show up, you'd respect my gangsta shawty," the young orderly said as he pulled his hospital scrubs up on his behind and wheeled the gurney toward Glorious.

"Why I care who you got under that sheet? Hell, they dead, can't do nothin' for me," she said.

Man-Man stopped in the hall next to Glorious. "Bet you ain't never been this close to royalty."

"Psst." She put a hand on one of her twenty-two-year-old hourglass hips. "Negro, you ain't royalty."

"I ain't say I was, but I got Bishop Money under here," Man-Man said.

Her droopy, red eyes lit up. "Swear to God?"

"On er'thing I love, shawty. Let a nigga lay hands on you." His eyes feasted on Glorious's rap video body. "I'll let you touch him."

"Let me touch him?" She looked the tall, skinny, clumsy-looking orderly from toe to head, and from head to toe. "Negro, you must be on crack."

"Nah, but there's a crack I'd like to be up in," he said.

She touched his cheek with one hand and grabbed a piece of the sheet covering Bishop Money with the other. "Playa, I'm like a buffet, all you can eat, but please believe, you can't eat for free," she said pulling the cover from Bishop Money's head.

Both Glorious and Man-Man looked at Bishop Money's face, just before his eyes popped open.

"How much is a plate?" Bishop Money asked.

Man-Man hollered like a ten-year-old girl and ran into the wall behind him, before taking off toward the stairs. Glorious wasn't far behind. "Swear to God, I ain't smokin' no more Cush. I'm gon' stick to regular weed," she said dropping her book as she ran.

Chapter 10

***P**OPULAR AFRICAN-AMERICAN BISHOP DIES IN HOSPITAL AND COMES BACK TO LIFE AN HOUR LATER. MIRACLE, MESSIAH OR MEDICAL MISHAP?*

Newspaper presses all over the world printed the front page story. Television networks scrambled for any new details. It was a media blitz, as big, if not bigger than the one created a week ago after President Obama had passed away.

Less than seventy-two hours after he'd literally come back to life, Bishop Money was granting "60 Minutes" an interview from his private hospital room.

"Bishop Money, you were shot multiple times while memorializing the late President and the late Junior Senator from Georgia. You were pronounced dead less than four days ago, on November 26, 2011. Ironically, you died on Black Friday and rose on Black Friday."

Although he'd just risen from the dead a few days ago, you'd never know it. He sat cross-legged on the beige loveseat, an arm draped over the top of the mini-couch, wearing Perry Cuomo two-tone brown leather and suede loafers, coffee-colored pinstripe slacks, matching vest, and as ordered by Franklin, he wore no jewelry. He'd had his barber, massage therapist, nail technician, and even a stripper disguised as a nurse cater to his every whim over the last twenty-four hours.

"What was going through your mind as you lay on the stage waiting for the paramedics?" Andre' Maurice asked.

"Never have I owed so much to so many."

Andre' Maurice wore a perplexed look on his face.

"While on that stage. I made a promise to America and to the world. I promised that I would rebuild the integrity of this nation one brick at a time. I made a promise that I would fulfill Dr. King's dream. The late great president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy once said," he held a ringless dark finger in the air, "'there are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction'. America votes and expects one man," he waved the finger he held in the air, "one man, to implement change when it takes a village to raise a child. We are all but Children of God. And it will take a village to raise this nation." He finger jabbed himself in the chest. "I'm the big brother that's going to help build up the village."

Andre' Maurice leaned forward in his chair. "Bishop Money, many are calling your fastidious recovery a miracle."

"The miracle is not in one man's awakening, the miracle will be in the reawakening of the spirit for which this great nation was founded on. A nation where the people are

governed by a system that caters to and fully represents the poor, just as it does the rich. That will be the miracle,” the bishop reiterated.

“Three years ago, you and your wife were shot, victims of a home invasion. You lived. She died. Five days ago, you were shot four times. You spent fourteen hours in surgery. Less than twelve hours after surgery, your heart stopped. You were pronounced dead. An hour later, for lack of a better phrase, you rose from the dead.”

Bishop Money nodded his affirmation.

“People are coming from all over the world to see you. I’m going to give you three words. Tell us which best describes you.”

Again, Bishop Money nodded.

“Messiah.... Prophet....Miracle....”

“None of the above.” The bishop smiled. “Andre’,” the bishop closed his eyes. A couple seconds passed before he reopened them. “You see, I’m a man. Simply, a man of God. My resurrection is proof that God not only exists but He is active. The best word that describes me is the word *tool*. That’s what I am. That’s who I am. A *tool*. Now that God has repaired His *tool*, it’s up to His *tool* to repair the hearts, minds, and souls of men, so we can repair this nation and then the world. And as I said at the beginning of our interview, I made a promise. And while I lay bleeding on that stage, I prayed for God to let me live to make good on that promise. That promise is why I say, never have I owed so much to so many.”

“If I ever get my hands on you, I’ll take mine out ya ass.” Shabazz said to the TV that everyone’s eyes were glued to. “Y’all know I hate the word nigga, but,” Shabazz sat on the edge of the couch, “that’s exactly what he is. Enough shit come out that nigga mouth to fertilize the Sahara desert.”

“The worst part is, people not only believe him, they believe in him,” Reverend Solomon One-Free said, standing next to the 55-inch flat panel TV, eating a chicken wing.

“He doin’ too much.” Shabazz shook his head. “Way too much. Ol’ shade-tree jackleg, Jesse Jackson wanna-be, mini-me, tooty-fruity loose booty. Nigga make George Bush look like Ghandi.”

“Samuel, baby, you okay?” Rhythm asked looking at the tears running down his face.

Samuel shook his head from left to right. “I just don’t understand. My dad, my mom, my auntie, and so many have died because of him. How many have to die before he does. I just can’t believe he lived. Sometimes...I don’t know, I just,” he paused like he was trying to find the right words. “Sometimes, I just feel like a coward.”

“Samuel, you are not even close to being a coward,” Solomon said. “You’re a hero to so many inner city kids at Boy’s and Girl’s clubs all over the city. And that little girl. Sister Cheyenne’s daughter, adores you.”

“Rev., all that sounds good, but Dr. Jamison-Hayes is in jail for something I should have done long ago.”

The reverend took a sip from his glass. “Romans 12:19, you know the part about Vengeance is mine, saith the lord. Well, in laymen’s terms what God is saying is,” the reverend turned and looked Samuel in his eyes, “that it is not our place to judge and exact revenge on others in return for wrongs they’ve committed against us. We are to trust that God will bring about His justice in the end; that’s His job and—”

They smile in your face and all the time they wanna take your place; backstabbers. A verse from The O’jays seventies classic hit filled the room.

Shabazz jumped up from the couch. “That’s my new doorbell ringtone.”

Solomon was about to finish, when Moses, Solomon's younger brother and Rhythm's husband, cut in. "That's so true, but if memory serves me right, I think it's in Exodus where God said, if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from My altar and put him to death."

Shabazz opened the door. For maybe the first time in his life, Shabazz was speechless.

"Damn, white boy. I know cat ain't got your tongue. I still got my clothes on," Cherry said, stepping forward and giving Shabazz a big hug.

Everyone was just as speechless as Shabazz had been. They stared in awe at the two women who stepped inside the small condo.

Tears welled up in Shabazz's eyes. He broke the embrace and grabbed the other woman's hand. "Before I went to prison, and read your story, I didn't realize that I had no respect for women. Bitch and whore were just words that I used in casual conversation when referring to sistas I either didn't care for, or ones I wanted to go up in. Your story made me dissect the black male mindset, and in retrospect I went on a cultural reading journey, only to discover the cause and effect of my mindset, and today, years after I read *Assata*, I drop Master G on brothas and sistas who casually disrespect the black queen with their negative dialect. It was your story, Queen, that hipped me to the scene, that Whitey used to keep us all green and with low self-esteem. So," he got on one knee, "it is my honor to kneel to you, my sista, my queen."

"If you don't get up off yo' damn knees, boy." Cherry playfully popped him upside his head.

"I've heard so much about you, Shabazz," the sixty-four-year-old reddish brown and gray speckled dreadheaded woman said, before looking up at the others, who were frozen where they sat and stood. "And all of you, it's like I already know you, and I am proud to be here. I never thought I'd see this country again, and quite honestly, I didn't care if I ever did, but you need my help."

Rhythm got up from the butter-beige chaise. "Ms. Shakur, I think I speak for all of us." Her mind went blank as she became an emotional rollercoaster. Tears streamed down her face.

Samuel didn't take his eyes off of the living legend as he silently walked over and stood in front of her. Assata Shakur took the young man in her arms. A minute later, Moses, Solomon, and Rhythm embraced the distinguished-looking woman.

"Can someone please help me up?" Shabazz asked aloud, still on his knees.

A half hour later, the four men in the apartment left to do some grocery shopping. It was decided that the men would shop and cook for the women.

Rhythm, Assata, and Cherry sat at Shabazz's small, round glass dinner table.

"Cherry, I didn't get word to you. I mean, I didn't send the message of Jordan's death for you to come back and risk your freedom and your life."

"I know you didn't. Cheyenne's my girl. I want to be there for her, and when I found out about her arrest, I knew I had to come."

"But—"

"But nothing." Cherry took Rhythm's hand in hers. "I'm not the same Cherry I was a year ago." She smiled and turned to Assata. "Thanks to Assata, I understand my purpose for being. You see," she turned back to Rhythm, "I am who I am because of my experiences and everyone that has crossed my path. Cheyenne was the only person who cared. I mean really cared for me back when I was her patient in the last nutsville mental institution that I was in. I'd never known the meaning of unconditional love before her. And the senator would've been dead long before now for what he let happen to me back in his crackhead days if Cheyenne hadn't taught me how to forgive."

Cherry turned back to Assata. “And this woman,” she took Assata’s hand in her free hand, “she made me fall in love with being a woman. A black woman.”

“That’s beautiful,” Rhythm said. “But this is your freedom we’re talking about. And yours, Ms. Shakur.”

“Freedom, my child can only be truly achieved when the dome,” she held a finger to her forehead, “is free.” Assata smiled. “And that can’t exist when the minds and souls of the masses of our people are blinded by the machinations of a system that has them subconsciously worshipping the dollar instead of God, and the God in them that they don’t even know exists.”

“But, what can you two do?” Rhythm asked. “You’re risking your life just being here.”

“Life,” Assata began, “Rhythm, we are all living on borrowed time. I don’t know when my time will be up, but as long as the clock continues to tick, I will continue fighting. And I may get killed in battle, but I would rather die with the dignity as the free black queen that I am, than die of old age not knowing that I lived my life as a slave to a system designed for me to push out as many dogs as my body will allow, than to give birth to black kings.”

“Bottom line is,” Cherry squeezed Rhythm’s hand, “we here to get Cheyenne.” Cherry said. “No way we gon’ let her have that baby in jail.”

“Baby?” Rhythm’s eyes became golf balls. Images of that big bull woman and other guards beating Cheyenne played through Rhythm’s mind like a 3D action movie.

“She didn’t tell you she was pregnant?” Cherry remarked.

The words, *she’s pregnant* paused the mental movie.

“I wasn’t the biggest fan of Jordan’s, but he was a good man, and she deserves, at the least to raise his child,” Cherry said.

Rhythm was hurt. She couldn’t believe Cheyenne hadn’t told her. She had no doubt that Cherry was being truthful. “I’m going back to the A.D.A.’s office in the morning.” She thought back to how the A.D.A.’s office looked. She thought back to the emotion in Tiffany Cole’s voice. “I’ll talk to the judge. I should be able to get Cheyenne a bond now that Terrell is alive.”

Cherry and Assata just stared at Rhythm.

“What?”

“You don’t really believe what you’re sayin’, girl.” Cherry said. “That little booty-bandit monster, might as well be Jesus Christ. You know good and damn well, after all this publicity, them Flintstones ain’t ‘bout to give our girl no bond. And if they did, how long would it take?” Cherry shook her head from left to right. “Nah, girl. I know Cheyenne like I know myself, and after all she been through, she gotta be ten seconds from crazy, and one minute from suicide.”

Rhythm thought back to the other day when she went to visit Cheyenne. Her friend was so out of it, she couldn’t even begin to discuss the case. All she cared about was TJ being dead. Now that he was alive, she didn’t want to think about what was going through Cheyenne’s fragile mind.” Rhythm shrugged her shoulders. “Cherry, I don’t know what else to do.”

“That’s why we’re here.” Assata’s brown eyes lit up like headlights in the middle of midnight nowhere.

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