

Confronted with the turmoil in his family, dismissal of his employees, and dismantling of his values, Alexander, a Black executive, must forsake his traditional existence to learn his ancestor's mystical truth and rediscover his powers to combat the demonic disturbances.

De Facto Adjournment

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DE FACTO

ADJOURNMENT

SYLVESTER BERRY JR.

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Opening Correlation

In the early fifties there was devised a lamp with a light that glowed at a greater intensity as one turned its spring loaded dial clockwise. It was a sensation, as hippies to ultra conservatives alike flooded the hardware stores to purchase the item. Rival companies investigated the accomplishment and naturally attempted to better it by enhancing the basic two power settings to more. The competition grew fierce, where each inserted more positions until soon there were lamps that had ten or more lighting choices to get the wattage that an off-and-on apparatus would provide in a flick of a toggle switch.

I mention these variable intensity lamps because they remind me of the selections used in relating a human to their phenomenal capabilities. I am convinced that every person is endowed with that type of device inside their ever being. Although some push their light to greater heights than others, the opportunity to intensify and notches to rest it at different locations does exist in us all.

Turn the dial clockwise to the first setting and you possess a dull nightlight that you would dare not read by. It is barely enough illumination to comprehend the surroundings and justify one's being. Twist to the right a few clicks and you are in what is considered the safe zone, where like most everyone else, you trudge through the day providing sufficient brightness to ensure there will be a tomorrow. More turns and you have a person that shines a bit more impressive than the norm. Additional twists takes you to a rambunctious idol status, admired by the many.

To ninety-nine percent of us, that is to the extent that we dare dream to experience in a lifetime. It is also where society posts its boundaries of acceptance. Nevertheless, there are some that persist past that 100-watts danger zone and dials further, where they venture into primping a cape, leaping tall obstructions, and soaring above certainty. If one has the fortitude to push their destiny by dialing higher, where indentations to rest are non-existent, they have a beam that is so bright that the human element exists only as much as they determine it should.

On the other hand, have you ever wondered what energy exists between those grooves and settings that are humanely diverse? Efforts to discover those gray areas are mostly futile due to the tension on the

spring, somewhat like society, attempting to yank one back to a preconceived niche. It is places that are very difficult to experience and trickier to maintain as you maneuver brighter. It is between those zones that generate thrill seekers in the lower non-settings of, let's say, the 17-watts luminous area. In the 32.6-watts, maybe the daredevils have explored for a short period until doubt disrobed them of further probabilities. Inventors would have had a brief residence at the 53-watts region to devise our future. Successful entrepreneurs discovered ways to vacation at the 72-watts domain. And the prophets established themselves well beyond the 107-watts, which obliterate what we conceive as actuality.

Now! If you are intrigued by what I have just slapped inside your rational perimeters, yet skeptical of its notion, then you can recognize that what I am about to suggest is ludicrous—I once believed the same. To discover a human reared to thrive between those life's settings with no limits on their wattage is preposterous.

However, I found such a person—in a Black executive named Alexander Bryre—and this is his story:

Chapter 1

The Whomp!

It was a late Thursday night on the 21st of November 1996, where Thanksgiving loomed on the horizon at the million-dollar estate of the forty-two year old executive, Alexander Bryre, and his wife of fifteen years, Cynthia. The moderate holiday exterior decor added a comfort sense to the two-story, forty-four hundred square feet, red brick home with spacious wooded acreage. It was situated just within West Los Angeles. Fresh carved pumpkin displays by their two children, thirteen-year-old son, Isaiah, and ten-year-old daughter, Cyrene, added a seasonal fragrance, and complemented the elaborate interior furnishings.

Alexander, which most referred to as Alex, was in his upstairs entertainment room with his daughter at his side. They were watching their first viewing of a recording of the past Sunday's football game of his favorite pro team, the Dallas Cowboys, who were playing their archrival Green Bay Packers.

In a short robe, Cynthia joined them at the half after Alex's disturbed words had softened from the insults directed at the television for his team settling on field goals instead of touchdowns. She sat on the open side of him on the sofa and gently caressed his thigh as to request some attention. "Let's go downstairs and re-consummate some vows," she whispered tenderly in his ear while she stroked her freshly manicured hand further up.

"Are you serious?" Alex inquired, feeling the four months of denial she had put him through due to an argument.

"Are you sure you are ready for this," Cynthia continued her sexual stimulation of his ear. "You can have me any way you want...if you take me now."

"What does re-consummate mean?" Cyrene the child genius interrupted to make them aware that she had taken notice of the flirting.

"We'll let you know in a few years," her mother answered. She seductively led Alex out the room, down the foyer stairs, and a left toward their master bedroom.

Once there, Alex rediscovered one of the many reasons he had fallen in love, as Cynthia placed him on the bed, locked the door, and shed her robe, exposing her tantalizing 5'7" majestic figure in a pink, Peek-

a-Boo Cups, Babydoll. She had retained that soft look and appeal that Alex had admired at first site. Her light paper-sack skin tone glistened from the six small candles she had lit and situated throughout the room for the mood.

Alex had little chance to reflect on a room he had not slept in since the dispute. He had been restricted to sleeping in the entertainment room with the hide-away bed that failed to fit his two inches above six feet athletic frame. He questioned himself briefly of the possible reasons of his reprieve. *Maybe my wife could resist my loving no longer, or maybe she had reconsidered her stance and the problem had gone away.* He did however know the feeling he experienced as she strutted towards him and straddled his lap. That sensation preceded any more of his deliberations. He directed attention to his weakness, her voluptuous middle-sized breast with erected centerpieces. He called them his Babies, and his wife placed one directly in his face. He quickly disrobed it from her negligee and began suckling while she heaved sighs of delight.

“Take what you want of me, my love. We can relieve ourselves of all of our lost activity in one night—if you simply tell me who was there,” Cynthia whimpered.

Alex could hear her speak the words that had caused so much grief between them. *Maybe if she’s stimulated more, the words will go away.*

“Come on Alex. You can’t tell me you don’t want me. I can feel your swell,” she antagonized as she swayed slowly her hips, allowing her concealed labium to brush softly across his bulge that matured and firmed more with each majestic pass. “Tell me the truth and we can continue until you beg me to stop,” his Cynthia advocated, then gently pushed him away from the nipple and stared into his eyes for the white flag of surrender.

“Honey, I’ve told you the truth. Let’s forget this and go on,” he asked. As he attempted to resume his dish, he was once again peeled away.

It was then that Cynthia’s medium brown pupils turned a cold black and began to shrink until they were a minute speck. The whites of her eyes changed to a repugnant gray, accompanied by an abrupt shudder, as if some enigmatic force was infiltrating her body. Then came the creepy grunt Alex had heard on many occasions from her in their tribulations, prior to her showing her wicked side. Alex could not

understand what was happening. *Possibly a woman thing when they reach thirty-eight.* Nevertheless, he had found that whatever it was could not be reasoned with. He had learned to absent himself and allow it to run its course, which varied from a few minutes to hours.

“Cynthia, I don’t know what you are digging for, I’ve told you the truth,” Alex tried to reason anyway in his excitement to continue what she had started.

“You lie!” voiced a harsher and more deepened voice from the lips of his wife. She lifted herself from him, picked up one of the candles from its holder, and tossed it at his feet. “You can fuck that, then!” she insisted, and then went to her closet to cover herself in a full-length Granny housecoat.

Alex stomped at the fire to extinguish its flames. “What is wrong with—” he attempted to ask before there was heard a screeching sound of car brakes from his driveway.

Cyrene, from up in the entertainment room, peeked through the blinds and saw that it was the white and blue security car with the lights on top that she recognized. “It’s Uncle Jesse!” she shouted with excitement as she ran down to greet him.

Although Jesse Taylor was of no kin, he and Alex were as tight as brothers, and Alex’s kids called him uncle due to it. Cyrene enjoyed the exhilaration he brought with his many visits. She usually needed to make use of a tissue after hearing his crackling laugh. Yet, without permission, she knew not to answer the door. Therefore, she curtailed her excitement while she waited on the bottom step for someone to allow him in.

“It’s your ace-boon-coon!” Cynthia accused sarcastically, as she had made her way to the kitchen window where she could get a good glimpse at the car. “And he’s drunk as usual,” she continued in showing her disapproval of the huge body that slowly exited the vehicle with a stumble.

Alex’s attention was on making sure the house would not burn down. He dashed the dime size burnt area in the plush rug with water from the bathroom and went about blowing out the other five candles.

“Damn he can’t even stay on the walkway. He’s staggering all over our damn grass,” his wife insulted as she conveyed her condemnation where she was very visible to Jesse through the shades.

Cynthia had been very accepting of Jesse until of late. At that point, she resented him as dragging her husband down with his ghetto jokes and mentality.

Jesse was half bent over and ignored her menacing stare as he stumbled his way to the door, disregarded the doorbell, and banged at the entrance with his usual obnoxious police-raid knock.

“Well, open the door!” Alex called out to Cynthia while he ground the water into the scorched spot.

“It’s your damn partner in crime. You let him in!” Cynthia replied and headed back toward the bedroom in defiance.

When Alex started toward the front door, their paths crossed, and he glanced at his woman as if to figure what her problem was. However, the cold bitter gaze she returned showed she could care less of his perception of her.

The harsh knock sounded again, along with a horrifying rasping voice from Jesse. “Let me in or I’ll break this damn thang down!”

As soon as Alex turned the knob, the massiveness of his 6’5” two hundred and eighty pound cohort leaning against it caused the door to fly open. By quickly stepping back, Alex was barely able to dodge the brunt of the swinging pine, and Jesse fell into his arms. Jesse had his uniformed clothes torn and blood covered his face and hands.

“What the hell happened to you?” Alex asked.

“Isaiah—go get your son!” Jesse commanded.

“Calm down,” Alex responded, then steered Jesse to a recliner in the spacious living room.

Cynthia heard the commotion and rushed from the bedroom to hear about her child.

“Your son; Go get your son!” Jesse shouted. “He’s at the Centerline Mall on Manchester Drive—the west side parking lot.”

Alex displayed his usual rational self. He was more concerned with comforting Jesse, to get more details from him, while Cynthia pushed Jesse to tell her about her child.

"I'll go with you," Jesse directed his words to Alex and commenced coughing up a mixture that included some of his vital fluids.

"No," replied Alex. He rushed toward the kitchen to retrieve a warm soaked towel, bowl, and a cup of water to tend to Jesse. "It appears as if you have been through hell already."

Cyrene closed the front door and headed to assist her Uncle Jesse, but Cynthia furiously tossed her out of the way and ordered her to go to bed. Cyrene ran up the stairs, yet stopped at the top rung to observe the happenings.

Cynthia next turned her rage on Jesse. "Where is my son? What have you done to my baby, you son-of-a-bitch?"

Jesse did not respond to her interrogations. He looked away with the same you-don't-matter stance that she had reflected toward him. He felt Cynthia had no right to believe he would cause harm to either of her children that he had self-ordained himself to as their Godfather.

"What's this all about, Jesse?" Alex asked when he returned and began administering aid.

"Go get your son, Damn-it!" Jesse insisted. "Forget about me. At the mall—Isaiah—on the side—get him out of there!" the words staggered from Jesse's mouth between spits into the bowl.

Alex grabbed his jacket from the front room closet and headed toward the door.

"I'm going with you," Cynthia insisted.

"No!" Alex stipulated. "You'll only make matters worse."

Jesse summoned Alex back by rising to his feet and gesturing for him to come closer. "Take this, you'll need it," he whispered as he motioned toward his concealed .38 special in his jacket pocket.

Alex knew instantly what Jesse was referring to and shook his head no. "I don't need that. You know I disapprove of guns. I'll get through this with reasoning."

"Fuck—I mean—screw reasoning!" Jesse replied as he excused his cursing for Cyrene, who was peeking around a corner from upstairs in tears. "I promise you Alex, you will need it."

As they continued to dispute about the pistol Jesse was licensed to carry, the door opened slowly and everything went quiet. Isaiah entered the room with bloodstains on his clothing.

"What happened in here?" Isaiah quizzed in a callous voice. "Am I missing something?"

They all stared at him in stupefaction for a second. Cyrene broke the abounding spell by running down the stairs and hugging her brother, relieved that he had safely made it home. Cynthia joined them.

“Are you okay?” his mother asked while she searched for wounds.

“I’m alright,” Isaiah replied.

Alex interrupted their greeting by questioning Isaiah about where he had been.

“Busy!” Isaiah retorted with a stare at Jesse that could melt diamonds.

Alex witnessed in Isaiah’s eyes a son that he did not recognize. He blinked his own for a moment and shook his head in disbelief at what he was seeing. Isaiah’s eyes were the same eerie gray as his mother’s. Alex let out a “what the hell” murmur. “Do you know that it’s after your curfew?”

Isaiah turned his belligerent gawk at his father.

“Let’s not make more out of this than we need to,” Cynthia recommended in an effort to defuse the situation. The transformation in her eyes and manner had returned close to their norm.

Cynthia was aware that Alex had the woodshed mentality in him, yet had not demonstrated it on his children. His correction of them had always ended with a pointed expression of disapproval. However, never before had either of the two challenged him in such a way. She remembered that attribute of I’m-going-to-kick-some-butt fix of his eyes from his Air Force days and her college ones. That was when they first met, and she witnessed firsthand what Alex could do with his anger unconstrained.

Two airmen harassing her and her girlfriend at the Non-Commissioned Officer’s Club had gone into the grabbing mode until Alex intervened. As soon as the two womanizers invited Alex outside for butting in, he accepted. When Cynthia and her companion were going outside to witness what would happen, Alex was coming back in unscathed, while the two guys lay half-conscious on the front lawn. Afterwards, Alex and Cynthia partied the night away together and fell in love. All the same, she remembered that fury in his eyes that night and had not seen it in him since, until that moment when his son was testing his authority.

“Let’s get you upstairs and into a hot shower,” Cynthia told Isaiah in an effort to whisk him away from the moment of annoyance.

Isaiah obeyed his mother’s wishes and allowed her to escort him to the stairs. He walked up a few steps, stopped, turned around to face Jesse defiantly, and said, “The business you mind old man—should be your own.” Then he continued his controlled strides up the flight of stairs with his mother and Cyrene.

Alex was astonished that his son was whatever he was. He took a seat by Jesse and asked him to start from the beginning of what had occurred.

Jesse, between coughs and gags, explained:

“Mary was getting worried about Robert, who was out longer than we anticipated. So she pushed me out of the house to find him. Hell! I didn’t know where to go, except Robert and Isaiah’s favorite hangout spot, the Centerline Mall. They were there all right, though not in the mall. I observed a large gang gathered on the edge of the parking lot, surrounded by many cars. The group was upper teenagers and young adults, except for two of them. It was dark indeed; still I recognized right off that the two younger ones were your Isaiah and my Robert with their baseball gear. As I approached, I noticed the heavy smoke as though marijuana was being done.”

“I called out their names and they walked toward me. Once they were close enough to hear, I asked them what were they doing there and wasn’t it time they be getting home, in hopes of luring them away from the gang bangers. A few of the older teens approached my car and questioned who I was. Isaiah told them that I was just his Uncle Jesse checking up on them. Right after, Isaiah came to my window and whispered for me to leave before it was too late. I told him, ‘Not without you and Robert in my car.’ Then they were led away by one hoodlum into the crowd. I exited and took chase after my sons, knowing that it would be stupid to grab my gun from the glove compartment. Damn Alex, they had more weapons than the LAPD.”

“Once I caught up to them, I let the punk know that those two were minors and told him that they could be locked up for giving that junk to kids. I ordered Isaiah and Robert to the car. Robert obeyed and headed back, while Isaiah took a step backwards and stared at me. The punk handed him a lit joint, and Isaiah took a couple of hits. I swear to you Alex, I wouldn’t have believed that was Isaiah in a million years.”

“The guy placed his arm around Isaiah and told me, ‘Too late old man, he’s ours now.’ The look Isaiah gave me after that was bone chilling. He called me a few curse words, raised his bat, and took a swing at me. I ducked it, but I didn’t evade the other ten or so assholes that tackled and beat me with all they had.”

“Somehow between the kicks and blows, I whipped enough of them to make it back to the car where Robert was sitting in some type of a stupor. I got the hell out-a-there. I dropped off Robert at home, and then came here.”

“Why didn’t you call the police?” Alex inquired.

“And get Isaiah and Robert thrown in jail for drug use? You know how much I trust our regulators,” Jesse responded. He leaned toward Alex. “Look man! I have seen some shit here tonight that I cannot begin to explain. The craziness in his eyes—his hateful attitude—that is not Isaiah in that body. Anyway, I’m going home and tend to Robert. If you need my help for anything—you know I’ve got your back.”

“Thanks for the save, Jesse. I owe you.”

“Not in this lifetime,” Jesse replied while displaying his pain as he attempted to rise.

“Are you going to be alright?” Alex asked. He helped Jesse up and to the door.

“I’m as tough as they come,” said Jesse. “On the other hand, you my friend need to tend to your business. I have always admired your children, and you know that. That’s why I’m advising you that you need to do what has to be done, before it is too late.”

“Yeah,” Alex responded in a whisper before he watched his long time partner wobble to his car and leave. *Tend to my business...right.* He shut the door and walked up the stairs to Isaiah’s room. Stepping into the doorway, Alex considered nothing except beating the reasoning from his son. Thank goodness that Isaiah was taking a shower or he would have instantly felt the rage that Alex had built up.

Alex had believed himself as a nurturing family man. He wore his Good Husband and Good Father name as a badge of honor. Yet, the last four months had been trying, to say the least. With his wife, he had bent over backwards to avoid her constant onslaughts, which were enough to make any strong man pathetic. Up until that night, Alex had handled her with the patience of a saint. Besides, she was an adult and had the

right to be what she wanted. In contrast, his loving son's transformation into a thug from the streets was not an option. It sent him well past the socially approved version of correcting a child. Alex's approach clicked him back to his upbringing. His urges were to whip the shit out of him until the devil himself came out and apologized.

After the shower, Cynthia and Cyrene escorted Isaiah to his room. They walked past Alex as if he was not there and set Isaiah on the side of his bed. Cynthia comforted him with such expressions as "Things will be better in the morning," and "We know you had nothing to do with what happened."

Alex gazed at his son and wondered how such a well-mannered child could have been in such an altercation with his cherished Uncle Jesse, who treated him as his own. Jesse's son, Robert, who was the same age as Isaiah, was his best friend. Isaiah spent many a day at his second home, his Uncle Jesse's house. Alex never doubted that Isaiah was safe with them. He questioned how Isaiah could intentionally attempt to hurt the man whom he had so much admiration and respect for. Things just did not add up. Alex had previously believed his son had not a destructive bone in his body, and he fought to change his punishment-demeanor controls inside himself to a find-out-what-had-happened-first one. Despite the attempts, the whipping mode was prevailing.

Cynthia knew her husband was fuming, so she went to his side. "He is sick. Let's allow him some sleep tonight and we can filter through this in the morning, when he is better," she spoke softly.

Alex focused at his son, and his son stared back daringly with his tiny pupils sliding from side to side feverishly in unison.

"We've done a great job in raising our son," Cynthia reasoned. "Let's not blow this out of proportion behind your friend's accusations and ruin everything that we have done so far with him."

Alex's eyes did not veer from Isaiah. "Do you see his eyes?"

"All I see is a scared little boy that needs some sleep," Cynthia replied.

It hit Alex that he solely could see that particular change in his son. Cyrene would have been scared out of her wits had she noticed them. Yet, she was talking to him as if nothing outside of stubbornness was wrong with him.

“We have some business to take care of ourselves, in the bedroom,” Cynthia suggested in a passionate voice. “No inquiry or anything else this time. I promise, if you will just let this wait until the morning.”

Alex’s mind was fixed on one thing, so he ignored her advances. He felt that he had the responsibility to find out, at a minimum, to what had happened. Thus, he explored deeper into his son’s eyes in bewilderment and disbelief.

Cyrene was busy attempting to divert her brother’s attention away from her father and toward her. She was finally successful when she placed her hands on his cheeks, got into his face and asked, “But—did you stilled loved me?”

Isaiah and Cyrene were like most siblings who quarreled from time to time. Alex’s ways of resolving their conflicts were usually to have them look into each other’s eyes and each solicits, “But—did you stilled loved me?” Forever, would be the correct response. Afterwards, they would reply, “Then smile.” They were not allowed to leave until they made the process complete with smiles at each other. Alex made them go through those motions so they would realize that no matter what, their bonds were permanent. Those gestures on occasions took a moment, yet it always resolved their differences.

The gray of Isaiah’s eyes began turning lighter.

“But—did you stilled loved me?” Cyrene questioned again.

“Of course I love you, Cyrene,” Isaiah replied.

Cyrene turned her head to the side, placed her hand on her hips, and stared at Isaiah impatiently, as to request the correct response.

“Forever,” Isaiah finally told his little sister.

“Then smile!” Cyrene insisted. Afterwards, she turned her head to the other side, intensely awaiting the question from Isaiah.

Isaiah, in a less possessed state, responded with an okay, as if to go along with the game. “But—did you stilled loved me?”

“Probably,” his sister said with a childish giggle.

Alex turned his head in aping her and waited for the correct response.

Tears trickled down Cyrene’s face as she said, “Forever.”

Isaiah felt her sorrows and mustered a smile as he said in a scraggly voice, “Then smile.” Isaiah wiped away his little sister’s tears and she

let out a weeping smile. Isaiah hugged and reassured her that everything would be all right. After a brief cheer-up conversation, he advised Cyrene that it was past her bedtime, and he walked her to her room.

Alex waited for his son's return. He was determined to find the underlying reasons for what had transpired earlier. Cynthia was curious also, although her main objective was to get Alex back downstairs so he could cool down, hence she continued to entice him.

Alex was about to give in until he noticed something in the jeans that Isaiah had shed. They were on the floor of his partially opened closet. A piece of metal protruded from one of its pockets. Alex walked inquisitively across the room, reached down and pulled the object from the pouch. It was a double action revolver. He held it in disbelief, while his wife looked on.

Alex had never permitted firearms in his home. Yet, in less than an hour, he was exposed to two. He pondered the reasoning, and could figure that Jesse was always packing, unless he entered his abode. That one incidence could be forgiven for Jesse, due to the circumstance. In contrast, he could not come to grips with his son in possession of one.

Isaiah entered the room in his almost normal state and noticed his father holding the weapon.

Alex and Cynthia instantly fixed their eyes on Isaiah.

"What the hell is this?" Alex grilled.

"I guess my new friends gave it to me. It must be a pellet gun."

Alex pushed in the ejector rod of the pistol, and with the swing out cylinder exposed, saw that the chambers were fully loaded with live ammunition. "If you had shot someone with these B-Bees they wouldn't have survived to tell you how much it hurts. This is a real gun, son!" Alex enlightened. "Why would you want something like this anyway? And to bring it into this house!"

Isaiah was shocked that the pistol was real, and strained to gather his thoughts. Events of the night were unclear to him.

"Answer me!" Alex insisted.

"I don't know," Isaiah replied as he rigorously tried to recollect the day. "Robert and I were in the mall searching for baseball cards when these older guys approached and told us that they had some cards we could have for free—"

“And!” Alex interjected impatiently when Isaiah paused in his brain digging.

Isaiah, slowly remembering, replied, “And, we went to their car and, and—”

“And after that?” Alex drilled trying to rush his son.

“The next thing I remember is Cyrene in my face a few minutes ago,” Isaiah responded, then furiously searched his mind for reasons.

“Then, you did have something to do with your Uncle Jesse’s beating, didn’t you?”

Isaiah stared at his father in a confused sincerity and asked, “Uncle Jesse got beat—how? By who?”

Alex was dumbfounded that Isaiah had just witnessed his Uncle Jesse down stairs in a bloody mess and yet could not remember anything about his condition.

Isaiah searched the floor harder for the answers. The harder he searched, the more his body tensed up. Then Alex noticed his son tremble as if having an epileptic fit. Isaiah’s eyes, upon lifting, were once again of the repugnant gray, and his body went still.

“What do you want, old man?” Isaiah asked in the gruesome voice.

“Why did you bring this thing into our home?”

Isaiah fixed his ghastly eyes at his father and retorted, “Protection from your stupid ass!”

Alex requested Cynthia to leave the room. She questioned what he was going to do. Alex replied, “Whatever needs to be done.”

Cynthia, seeing the defiance in her son’s eyes, knew that a standoff was inevitable. She refused to leave, and demanded that Alex cease his assault on her son. “I’ll call the police,” she warned in a last ditch effort to stop Alex, “I’ll send you to jail alongside your barbaric ways.”

“Get Out!” Alex shouted with such thunder that Cynthia impulsively scampered out of fear. She had not heard that tone from Alex in the many years she had known him. She dashed down the stairs to her bedroom, picked up the phone, and dialed 91—. She stopped short of the emergency number when she reflected on her career and the media attention they would surely receive.

Alex slammed shut Isaiah’s bedroom door. Without hesitancy and in one motion, he placed the gun on the dresser, grabbed Isaiah by his pajama shirt, slung him across a chair, pulled his leather belt from his

pants, and unleashed a punishment he supposed he would never have to administer. Never before had he placed a hand on his son in anger.

Alex had struck his child on his behind no more than five licks with the leather before he worked up a sweat. Isaiah's struggling attempts to free himself were futile; his father's grip was too strong. Isaiah could only sustain his ground of rebelliousness by not making a sound, to let it be known that the licks were not fazing him.

"I'll beat that shit from you if it's the last thing I do!" Alex barked as he continued the assault of the thrashing. After directing a few more licks, Alex began to tire, and his anger turned to concern for his son. He knew he had to exorcise whatever was in him before it consumed his spirit. He understood that no one else could or would do it, except him. Thus, he continued the whipping in a mode that carried no concern for fatigue, or the law.

The next few strokes of the belt to his son triggered Alex's mind to the whipping his father gave him at about Isaiah's age. It was an excruciatingly painful beating Alex's father administered. Alex did not know what had gotten into him. He must have delivered a hundred direct hits, yet it was that one "Whomp!" lick that pierced his soul of understanding and headed him in the right direction. He remembered the talk his dad gave before he left the room. Alex understood his father after that, and labeled that one lick as being the strike that shocked his life back on the path it needed to be, or the Back-on-Track lick. Alex realized what his father had gone through that day, and the recollection of it reinforced his reasoning of what his duty to accomplish with Isaiah was.

The hurting from the licks began to penetrate the hard butt of Isaiah, and he let out a scream for mercy. "Mamma!" Isaiah called out in a child being tortured tone.

Alex witnessed what resembled a lucent fly exit Isaiah's mouth with the cry, and felt more weakness as it flew into his own.

Cynthia was a nervous wreck in hearing the sound of the licks. Nonetheless, when she heard her child call out for her, her eyes reconverted to the hideous, and the shudder occurred to her body. She walked quickly in a trance like state back up to Isaiah's room.

By that point, Isaiah had forced his way up from his exhausted father's grasp. He stood in defiance, staring at his father with the ghoulish eyeballs. "What the hell do you think you are doing?" his deep voice taunted, "That's why I brought protection."

As Isaiah turned to go for the gun, Alex mustered all the energy he had remaining, took a quick long step to the side, and delivered one hell of a strike. "Whomp!" the leather sounded upon the flush connection to Isaiah's behind so firm it knocked him to his knees. At least twenty more of the fly like creatures were catapulted from his mouth and into Alex's. Once again, Isaiah's eyes transformed back to their normal soft brown.

Cynthia, witnessing the last lick when she ripped the door open, snatched the pistol from the top of the dresser and pointed it with both hands at Alex. The last infiltration of the lucent creatures had zapped Alex's energy such that he could barely stand. He gagged, then spat out the semi-transparent flying pest, and they burst in mid air.

"Stop—or I swear I'll blow your guts into the next galaxy!" Cynthia declared before she cocked the hammer.

Cyrene had covered her tear drenched face under her pillow until she heard her mother's shrilling threat. She jumped from her bed and ran down the hall to Isaiah's room.

Alex turned toward his wife, saw the hideousness in her eyes, and calmly pled with her to put the weapon down. Instead, Cynthia slowly squeezed the trigger. Cyrene plunged herself into her father's arms and in the path aimed at. Alex had no time or strength to push her from harms way before he heard the Click, Click, Click of Cynthia pulling the trigger three times and the gun not firing.

Alex, with his daughter in his arms, reached out and snatched the pistol from his wife's hands.

Cynthia gave no resistance in giving up the handgun, nor did she show any remorse at what she had tried to accomplish. "I'm sick of this shit!" she attested, then ran down the stairs and back into her bedroom.

Fatigued from administering the licks and the ramifications afterwards, Alex sat on the side of Isaiah's bed to catch his breath.

Cyrene went to the comfort of her brother, who was sitting on the floor wondering what had happened.

“Daddy, what’s wrong with me?” Isaiah inquired after a few moments of silence.

“You’re going to be fine, son,” Alex said as he slowly stood and placed the gun in his pants pocket. “Both of you need to get some sleep. We have had enough excitement for one night. We’ll sift through this in the morning.”

Isaiah and Cyrene did what they were asked, and went to bed.

Alex went downstairs, exited through the patio door, and walked outside to the exterior wall of the garage. He had to get the firearm out of the house. As he reached the trashcan, he wondered what was wrong with the gun. He could not resist pointing it into the sky and pulling the trigger. “Bang!” the gun sounded off loudly as it fired with no problem. Alex was astonished, and imagined the possibilities of harm that could have occurred to him and his daughter. He did not much concern himself with why it had not fired before, merely grateful that it had not.

Alex’s nearest neighbor was a city block away; nevertheless, he noticed their lights come on as they searched for the source of the noise. Alex unloaded the rest of the bullets from its chamber by tilting the opened cylinder. He placed the bullets in his pocket, the gun amongst the trash at the bottom of the garbage can, and then hastened into the house through the patio door. During his closing of the sliding glass, he heard his wife starting her vehicle. He rushed to the garage and stood defiantly behind her silver 96 Toyota Camry, to stop her from backing up and leaving. She repulsively stared at him through the rear view mirror.

“This is not the way to settle anything,” Alex told her while he was making his way to the driver’s side of the car. “You can’t keep running away like this.”

Cynthia remoted the garage door open and placed the car in reverse. “I’m not running away—I’m running to,” she countered, then sped backwards out of the garage, barely missing Alex, who had leaped against the wall. Cynthia continued down the long driveway and into the street, where she quickly drove out of sight.

“I guess you can,” Alex said as he rose and slowly walked back into the house, fatigued, as if he had played four straight sets against Arthur Ashe. His concern for his Cynthia leaving was nonchalant. He had

become accustomed to her departures at night and returning home the next morning after he had gone to work. Her disappearances had also started following his return from his father's funeral, four months earlier.

His wife's transitions had become more horrific as days went by, and Alex wondered if his son's would be the same. He checked on his kids, and only after he was satisfied that they were at peace, did he retire to his hideaway bed in the entertainment room, speculating what adventures he had been enthralled in.

After Alex finally relaxed, he heard the voice of his late father in his head repeatedly requesting him to remember, until it faded away with his drifting off to sleep. A dream shortly followed of a huge man's face. The sequence had occurred every night since he had returned home on that day in July.

The dream was of a Black man that he had never seen. The man's face was very strong. He wore a thick beard and had curly black hair. He did not say anything, just gawked as his piercing eyes threatened. The dream would last for only a short period; still it would cause Alex to wake with his sheets soaked from his sweat. Alex never told anyone about the sequence, and dismissed it as his remorse for not reconciling with his father before he passed. He had no idea if and when the guilt feeling would leave, though he hoped it would soon go away, along with the other problems he had encountered in the past few months.

Alex had handled many difficulties in his life with the stick-it-out-stance; the do what you can and keep turning the page to the next day approach. Through experience, he understood that the sunshine would return and the bad situations would be overtaken by the good. The technique had not failed him yet. However, the predicament he was in at that stage of his life was not a "Dorothy of OZ" fantasy that would leave in time with the clicking of some magic loafers. He had not yet come to grips with what he would soon face: that his passage for survival would launch him through some of those modes on his dial into transformations where few had ventured and returned. It was merely the beginning of an adverse rest of his life, which would force him to lie down and die, or journey straight through the un-sanctimonious trenches of hell.

Chapter 2

Breakfast of Hope

Alex awoke early the next morning, well before his alarm clock sounded. His arm, out of habit, explored next to him, wanting to feel the softness of his spouse lying next to him. Contrary to his hopes, the morning spooning he had become accustomed to before the misunderstanding was not an option. Reality set in, that once again he was on the sofa bed unaccompanied. He figured that he would not be able to see her until after work. He considered that fresh roses later that day were in order and could possibly bring about a change in her disposition.

Believing himself geared up for whatever challenges headed his way after such a catastrophic night before, Alex went downstairs to the master bathroom to prepare for work. He shaved his face and took care to go over the area again, once he left the shower. Alex was exceedingly hairy, and what some called a five o'clock shadow of a beard would come upon him at noon if he did not shave close enough. He combed his short wavy hair and thick mustache to a well groom. While adorned with a towel around his hips, Alex's firm structure exuded power. His muscular frame had not abandoned him since his football playing days in college. He was not a workout enthusiast, and had not seen the inside of a gym since leaving the service many years before. Still, he had the build that most men could only dream of by working out many hours a day. He attributed his physique to inheritance. Even though he was seven inches shorter at 5'7", Alex's father had the same brawny structure.

In his spacious walk-in closet, Alex had five tailored business suits that he rarely wore. Four were conservatively colored blue and black. For that day, he needed more than his ordinary working casual pants and slacks, and past his ordinary suits. He selected his one Gucci dark navy pinstripe wool 2-button suit that he labeled his "Lucky Suit." He saved it for days following a hectic one and usually had great experiences accompany its wear.

Things must get better, Alex reasoned to himself after he had finished dressing and was walking into the kitchen to start breakfast for him and his kids. He was not about to allow yesterday to deprive him

of his today. Forgive and forget as quickly as possible was his key to making it through each day of the week. He opened the shades to allow a radiant sunshine to engulf the dining area. Then he went about preparing a breakfast fit for kings and queens, consisting of bacon, eggs, hash browns, oatmeal, fresh mixed-fruit, toast, and orange juice.

“Ahhhh! There is no aroma like the cooking of bacon on a fantastic morning,” Alex expressed when he turned them over in the large skillet. The smell of a hot delicious breakfast had always made him feel alive. He remembered a saying by his mother as a young lad; Good food and bad days just don’t mix. That day he needed that magic that his mother convinced him of.

Alexander Bryre was raised a half penny short of dirt poor, nevertheless his mother always had a hot breakfast prepared for him and his cousin, Carl, before they left for school. Most were government handouts, or commodities, as they were coined back then. The breakfasts were usually of hot cereals, toast, powdered milk, and powdered eggs. The weekday dinners mostly consisted of doctored-up commodities. Alex did not know how she did it, but he swore his mother could cook up a leather boot to where a steak could not compare. Once a week, they enjoyed a meal called slum-galleon, where the leftovers from the past two days were incorporated in a soup. On payday Fridays, they enjoyed hotdogs with chili and potato chips. Sunday mornings, a country breakfast was prepared with bacon, sausage, and/or ham; medium-well cooked fresh scrambled eggs, hash browns with sautéed onions, large homemade, buttermilk biscuits, and fresh store bought milk. The Sunday dinners were complete down to earth experiences that slowed ones metabolism down to a crawl. Only during weekday mornings and Saturday lunches were his father and mother not present alongside Alex and his cousin at the kitchen table. To Alex, those meals and the occasions spent at the kitchen table talking were the better part of his life. If his family was beneath anyone on that social ladder, you could not prove it by their vitality and contented stomachs.

Alex had incorporated the same joy in the meals at his home. He and his loving spouse would swap turns cooking. Directly after the July occurrence, things changed. All of a sudden, Cynthia did not have the time to prepare meals, so Alex seized the honors. She stopped eating at

home with them due to the “insignificance of it all,” as she put it, but Alex continued the trend without her.

Alex heard both of his children’s alarm go off simultaneously, then he heard the flowing of water in their showers. Both were adept at dressing themselves for school, and raced in their preparations. Isaiah had helped his little sister while she was younger. On her tenth birthday, she advised him, “I am capable of dressing myself appropriately, thank you.”

Cyrene, that morning, was dressed before Isaiah, and knocked on his door for their customary walk downstairs for breakfast together.

“Come on in Siren,” Isaiah responded.

Isaiah had nicknamed his sister Siren, considering she mimicked a warning device when she cried as an infant. It was also the pronunciation of her name he heard as a four year old. As for their given names, Cynthia had named Isaiah after a deceased uncle she admired. Alex named his daughter after his wife, Cynthia, and his mother, Renee. He combined parts of their first name and arrived with Cyrene.

“The name is Se-REEN-a, not Siren!” Cyrene corrected Isaiah once she entered his room.

“OK, Siren,” Isaiah commented as he finished the final touches of combing his hair.

“When are you going to stop calling me that?” she asked. “You make me sound like an alarm or something.”

“When you are a hundred and two, but I’d better not hear anyone else call my baby sister that.”

Cyrene smiled. She really did not mind Isaiah calling her Siren. She viewed it as a pet name from her older protective brother, and an honor that she had become accustomed to. She gently hugged him.

“Hey! Hey! Hey!” Isaiah expressed. “You’re messing up the Fro.”

As Cyrene pulled away, they both heard the garage door opening, and they eyed each other in speculation of another argument. They had heard most of the commotions as of late. Their mother made sure of that. Cyrene, believing she could curtail the quarrel, headed toward the door. Isaiah intercepted her and advised her to wait and let their parents

have a minute or two to themselves. He turned on the television to an animated cartoon show with the volume set to low, so as to not disturb their discussion. Believing in her big brother's wisdom, she took a seat in front of the TV.

Alex also heard the garage door open after he laid the last pieces of toast on a plate to complete their meal. A gloomy feeling engulfed him, as if he perceived his wife's wicked mood. Cynthia entered the house and stared at Alex from the kitchen door. Her eyes and demeanor had not changed from the night before. Alex noticed her presence, yet elected to ignore her, as he had many times before, in the hope that she would go to her room while he and his kids go about their inspired day. However, nothing could have been further from her intended agenda that morning.

Cynthia continued to stand contemptuously. She eagle eyed Alex's every move while he placed the cooking utensils in the dishwasher, poured the bacon grease in a can, cleaned up around the stove area, and when he could find no other excuse for seeming busy, he went for his place at the table. With a quick move, Cynthia's face became instantaneously six inches in front of his, as she cut him off.

If I can somehow resist making eye contact, maybe she will go away, Alex figured. He lowered his head in submission. Cynthia grabbed a handful of eggs from his plate and positioned it in his hair, then resumed her stance facing him, as if to dare him to say a word.

"What the hell have you brought into our house?" Alex murmured.

"Did you say something to me, Faggot?" Cynthia inquired in a loud steadfast voice.

Alex's head rose slowly, and once his eyes reached the level of hers, they were a pissed off red. He then repeated himself with much more authority.

"Au contraire my dearest," Cynthia replied as she eerily dropped her head to the side and then down a notch. Her voice dropped a few tones and her speech became repulsively scratchy. "You can't be that stupid. It was your have-to-bury-my-dad crusade that caused this mess."

"Stop insinuating and talk to me," Alex insisted.

"You know what I'm talking about. Who else was there?"

"I've told you over and over again that my family was all that I cared to see in Tulseh."

"No Alex," Cynthia said. "Think, Who—Else—Was—There!"

Alex had no idea of what she was referring to. He wondered if maybe she had heard something from her friends, caught the scent of another woman on him on his return, or maybe she was provoking a scenario in her mind to cover her late night rendezvous. Whatever the reason, Alex was getting frustrated at her accusations. “Spell it out! Just tell me what you want to hear!”

“What happened there—or should I say—who?”

“I say again, there was no one there I saw out of the ordinary. I went to the funeral, back to the hotel directly afterwards, and flew home on the earliest flight possible. You know that! There would be no doubt if you had come with me. No, you had too much work to do.”

“You didn’t want me there.”

“I plead for you to come. Don’t you remember?”

“All that I remember is that you left us alone and unprotected while you went to see your bitch in Tulseh.”

“Unprotected, did something happen to you and the kids that night?”

Cynthia did not wish to discuss the matter any further, so she grew more deplorable. “I hope she laid it on you right—righteous enough for a lifetime—since you’ll never feel the inside of me or any other woman again,” she said with her gory eyes gazed solemnly at Alex.

“So that is why you have been leaving and going to God knows who, then returning with the smell of sex and booze all over you, not having the decency to clean up first. You believe I was there with another woman? Who would fill your head with such notions?”

“That night, my eyes were opened to many things, especially your manipulation that has been holding me back from what life owes me. As far as I’m concerned, you don’t exist anymore.”

“What exactly happened that night?”

“Anyway, how do you know what sexual aroma smells like?” Cynthia ripped back in ignoring his question. “I truly doubt your sex senses, considering your lack of experience here recently.”

Alex, believing things were getting out of control, did not fire back. Instead, he attempted to defuse the altercation by reaching out in comfort to his companion.

“In your dreams,” Cynthia retorted as she knocked his hands down. “Do you want to try and whip my son again, or maybe this time you want to try and lay your filthy hands on me?”

“I have never laid a hand—”

“And you never will.” Cynthia intervened, then went to the nine-piece butcher’s knife rack and gripped the largest of the set. “Because I failed once, don’t think I won’t put you under the same dirt as your precious daddy.”

Alex was confused, and stood in disbelief at what he was facing. *Maybe it’s time to get away from her sadistic attacks. This is definitely not a conversation of reasoning. She is out to destroy.*

“You want to talk? Fine! Let’s talk,” Cynthia continued with her blitz. “Who the hell do you think you are—questioning me? Question your own damn values and that way we lived in the hood mentality. That beastly mindset that you were raised on has screwed up your brain. This is today, and if you want to keep this family together, then you’d better join us in this world of reality.”

“I’ve never pushed anything on you, and what do my values have to do with this, anyway?”

“That shit that happened last night. I be damned if it happens again.”

“I did what I had to do for my son. You want to see him messed up in the head for the rest of his life? He is not a kid anymore. There are things he has to learn. Moreover, what is happening to you? For the umpteenth time, you have slept with whomever, and then returned home questioning my morality. What about yours?” Alex inquired. He snapped his arms half way up with open hands. It was his usual gesture to plead his case, but on that occasion, it was perceived as threatening by his wife.

Cynthia pulled the butcher knife from the rack and raised it up so that Alex could clearly see it pointing at him. “So now, do you want to try and whip me into shape? Fuck with me and my son again and I’ll show you exactly what I’ve become!” she shouted loud enough to be heard a block away in what Alex called the “lock-n-load-fire” disposition.

To understand Alex’s definition of one ignorant way to have an argument around children, one would have to go back to when Alex was in basic camp for the United States Air Force. It was his squadron’s first day at the firing range with M-16 semi-automatic assault rifles and human silhouetted targets fifty feet in front of them.

“I am going to give some simple instructions to you dick-heads, and the first to disobey I will shoot between the eyes,” the huge pistol strapped, darker-than-blue Sergeant screamed out to Alex and his

regiment. “Make no mistake; I will be justified, since you hold a weapon and I have a weapon. Am I understood!”

“Yes, Drill Sergeant!” each member shouted back loudly in unison as they lay in their prone firing position.

“My first command will be for you to lock-n-load. That means, to you dense fuckers, to prepare your weapons for fire. Take the damn safety off and make sure you have ammunition in the chamber. And that damn weapon better not be pointing at me, or—I again—will take you out of your misery...Am I clear!”

“Yes, Drill Sergeant!”

“My second command will be for you to aim—and—if any one of you fuck for brains ask me what that means, you will feel my metal splattering that piece of shit of a brain of yours across the range. I will do it for you—simply to take you out of everyone else’s misery. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Drill Sergeant!”

“My third command will be to fire. You will discharge your weapon once at the target in front of you, not the one on either side, but the one directly in front of you. And—if any of you thumb sucking maggots discharge your weapon before I give the command, I will assume you are firing at me, and I will fill you so full of lead that your mother will believe you her daughter when she claims your body, considering that—I—am—paranoid. DO...YOU...COMPREHEND!”

“Yes, Drill Sergeant!”

“Then—lock-n-load—aim—fire!”

The squadron fired their weapons.

“Place your weapons down in front of you,” the Sergeant ordered before he pulled out his binoculars and searched out each of the targets. “Well, it seems as if we have some marksmen in this group, some real sharp shooters. I count twenty-four hits out of twenty-five. The last sons-of-bitches group didn’t score five.”

Alex and his squadron smiled at each other.

“Let’s see if you pussies can get lucky again. Grab your weapons,” the Sergeant commanded. “Lock-n-load-fire! Lock-n-load-fire! Lock-n-load-fire! Lock-n-load-fire! LOCK-N-LOAD-FIRE!” the Sergeant yelled repetitively in less than three seconds in his trained military manner. “Put your weapons down! PUT YOUR FUCKIN WEAPONS DOWN! You fuck’n fuck-ups!”

Most had not got off more than two rounds. Hardly any hit their targets, and most of those shots ended below, in, or above the hill that was sixty feet behind their intended mark.

The instructor angered as he surveyed the undamaged silhouettes. “Just as I figured, you fuck’n mama’s boys couldn’t hit a damn airplane if you were in it.”

Alex, the unelected leader of his squadron, due to his leadership abilities, raised his hand as high as he could without compromising his prone position. The Sergeant came rushing from behind him and positioned his feet between Alex’s spread legs.

“WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU WANT, AIRMAN BRYRE!”

“What happened to aim, Drill Sergeant?”

The husky man in charge took a second to check Alex’s target and saw that he had scored four more hits. He talked quietly so that Alex solely could hear. “Missing that fifth shot could have gotten you killed, son.”

Afterwards, the obnoxious Sergeant returned to his loud boisterous self. “Airman Bryre wants to know what happened to aim. Do any of you maggots have his answer?” After no one answered, he drove his boot into Alex’s balls, which brought about an excruciating grunt of pain. “FUCK AIM! Aim is what you do with your dick when you attempt to place it dead center of your girlfriend’s legs. Scan both sides of you Airman Bryre. By the time you aim, the enemy would have shot your incompetent testicles off, and made widows of the wives of the men next to you. Is that what the fuck you want, Airman Bryre?”

“No, Drill Sergeant,” Alex grunted. “What about innocent bystanders?” he pressed.

The Sergeant drove his foot much harder into Alex’s private parts. “Are you pushing your opinions at me, Airman?”

“No—Drill Sergeant. In the service we do not have opinions—only directives.”

“But you must be the one smart ass-hole that has all the answers and that stands in the way of us that are still searching. You are insignificant. Is that what you want to be Airman Bryre?”

“No—uh—Drill Sergeant!”

“In war there are no bystanders. Like smart asses, they are considered the insignificant ingredients of war. AM I UNDERSTOOD!”

“Yes, Drill Sergeant,” The squadron said in unison.

“WHAT ARE THEY?”

“Insignificant ingredients of war, Drill Sergeant!”

“Good, let’s try this shit again. This time without you tit-suckers destroying my hill!” the Sergeant shouted as he removed his foot and backed away from Alex.

Needless to say, the Drill Sergeant got his point across, as Alex never forgot that experience. He relates the incident to people that rapidly spew their anger through their single barreled mouths, without a second consideration of damage that is sustained to the innocent bystanders: their youngsters. They just lock the words in and fire at random.

Cynthia had not been that way until after his return from his father’s funeral. Before then, he could not remember a curse word from her stronger than the damn when she accidentally cut her finger.

Cyrene, hearing the conversation heating up, broke and ran down the stairs before Isaiah could stop her. Isaiah followed. Cynthia’s demeanor turned to a more normal state when she heard her children’s footsteps. She placed the knife back in its rack before they could see her with it. Both kids innocently raced to welcome her back. She brushed Cyrene aside and hugged her son.

“Everything is going to be alright,” she whispered in his ear as Isaiah held his breath to negate the stale sexual stench and alcohol she radiated.

“Are you going to eat with us mom?” Cyrene asked after she took her place at the breakfast table.

Cynthia smirked at Cyrene, then placed her attention back at her son. “I mean it. Things are going to get a lot better. Now, eat your breakfast.” She then guided Isaiah to his chair.

Isaiah shrugged his shoulders to indicate he had no idea of what was meant by her pampering him.

“I’m going to get cleaned up,” Cynthia stated as she headed for the hall leading to the bedroom. “Henry Edwards,” she said to Alex as she passed him.

“What?” Alex challenged.

“The whomever is Senator Edwards, and damn, he makes me feel more of a woman than you ever have. Mmmmm!” Cynthia

administered her venom with a sarcastic smile, went into the bedroom, and closed the door.

Alex was appalled. He knew that Cynthia had worked under the Senator's regime for years. However, in his wildest imagination, he could not have believed that they were doing each other—until then!

Cynthia had successfully interrupted Alex's day with her appearance that morning, and had devastated it with that bombshell. Alex picked up his plate, laid it on the deck by the sink and began cleaning the eggs off his head with a towel. He purposely kept his back to his children in hopes of hiding his misery.

Cyrene, saying her blessings, felt Isaiah staring at her. "What?" She asserted.

"That was stupid," Isaiah replied, referring to her running down the stairs and interrupting the argument.

"No! Stupid is what you caused last night."

"Let's not start this again," Alex interrupted. "You two eat your breakfast and we'll get you toward school."

There was silence in the room while they both ate. Cyrene licked out her tongue at Isaiah and they both chuckled. Cyrene then motioned her head toward her father, as though she wanted Isaiah to go to him. It was not until the second signal that her brother understood her.

Isaiah left the table and went to his father's side. "Dad," Isaiah spoke to get his attention. "I don't know what has been happening to me lately. This morning I recalled some of what happened with the guys and Uncle Jesse. What I cannot figure is why. I can't understand why I turned into such a jerk?"

Alex turned toward his son and examined his eyes while clutching his shoulders gently and searching for the vulgar gray. After he observed his innocent browns and the squares of light floating around Isaiah, he relaxed.

"I promise you Dad, you and Uncle Jesse will have no more troubles from me."

"I believe you son," Alex responded as he hugged Isaiah and diverted his considerations to his son, instead of his wife's words and actions. "I believe you."

"What am I becoming?" Isaiah asked. "And why am I doing these things to the ones I love?"

“We’ll get through this together. For starters, there are three things that you must promise me you will do,” Alex said in recalling the talk his dad had with him after he administered the Back-on-Track lick.

“What, Dad? Anything you say to make up for what I’ve caused.”

“First, you must keep your promise to stay away from characters like you were with last night. They are poisonous. I swear you do not want to be like them. In picking your friends, you must ask yourself if they are the ones you want to emulate in life. If they are, then welcome them as the reflection of what you will become. If they are not, then you must distance yourself from them. Believe me son; you do not want to indulge in a tormentor’s misery. You must be truthful to yourself and find the miracles that are destined to you.”

“OK, I promise,” Isaiah replied in a half understanding of what his father had finished with.

“Second, you must assure your friend, Robert, that you will never again place his life in danger. Go to him and guarantee him, that as his friend, you will never again lead him into hazardous situations.

“I will tell him that today in school,” Isaiah replied.

“And third, you must make amends to your Uncle Jesse. You must win back his faith in you.”

“How do I do that?”

“You must run errands, cut his yard, or do whatever is right by him to get back into his good graces.”

Isaiah’s expression was as if puzzled.

“Your Godfather took an awful beating to try and help you. You put him in a pathetic situation, and he responded by laying down his life for you. You owe him for that. You owe him big time.”

“I promise I’ll do whatever it takes to get Uncle Jesse to forgive me.”

“Good,” Alex responded. “Now go finish your breakfast, you’ll be late for school.”

Isaiah walked to his sister, gave her a hug and a kiss on the jaw, then teased her. “What do you think you are, a bullet proof vest?” Isaiah joked. “All kidding aside Sis, I’m sorry for putting you in harms way last night. I couldn’t have lived with myself if anything had happened to you.”

“That’s alright,” Cyrene responded as she patted his behind to tease him about his whipping.

Isaiah jestingly gave a slight shrug of pain from his father’s licks.

“You need to watch out for yourself, Isaiah,” Cyrene joked, and they both laughed heartily.

“Hey Dad, do you mind if I stand up and eat?” Isaiah asked.

“His father turned and gave Isaiah a don’t-push-it look.

“I’m serious,” Isaiah continued. “It still hurts.”

They all three expressed their amusement of the moment. Alex carried his plate back to the table to finish his remains, and to chat with his brood, as he had done many occasions before. After they were finished eating, they cheerfully piled into the car for the kid’s trip to school and Alex’s to work.

Once again, the delight of his children had successfully overshadowed his personal problems. Except and unknown to him, his family woes were only in the first round.

Confronted with the turmoil in his family, dismissal of his employees, and dismantling of his values, Alexander, a Black executive, must forsake his traditional existence to learn his ancestor's mystical truth and rediscover his powers to combat the demonic disturbances.

De Facto Adjournment

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