

Chapter 1

Family Matters

A paroxysm consumed my hometown of Baltimore in early 1968 as the city's Negroes reacted to the segregation, unfair police treatment and racial divides of the prior year. It was a time when us Negroes were prohibited from enjoying the same swimming pools, skating rinks, bathrooms and other facilities as white residents.

At 13, I considered myself a typical teenager and not as a Negro teenager. I loved competing Double Dutch, I loved hanging with my friends and I carried an 'A' average in a challenging school for Negroes. To the world I was the happiest kid on Earth and had earned the respect of all who knew me. The racial tensions so many Negro adults complained about did not matter to me; heck life had been that way for as long as I was alive. Though all who knew me enjoyed the large smile I always wore, many never knew the pain hiding behind it. Triggered by the life I lived in the Preston Street row home I shared with my mother, 2 brothers and 3 sisters the pain was exasperated every time I stepped into the Hell-hole I called home.

I loved leaving that dark house in the mornings and hated returning to it in the evenings. There were days I'd rather make my way to the Detention Center just blocks away as I felt that the barbaric treatment of the prisoners was an improvement over what I had to deal with.

The actions of the woman who born me seem contradictory to a mother who cared. While she imagined herself as mother of the year her disrespect of those that are force to call her mom demonstrated a strong candidate for Satan of the century. I'll never forget the day my mother, The Queen, gave birth to my baby sister.

It was the coldest day of the year. Very few people were on the streets as I made my way home from school. Those that braved the elements were wrapped in Eskimo clothing, making it difficult to determine the gender of the host carrier. It was so cold that every time I breathe a mouth full of frozen breath filled the air on exhale.

As I approached the three marble steps that led to the old wooden black door of the house I stopped, shivering in fear. Ignoring the impending frost-bite I stood hesitating as I knew that the moment I touched that worn door knob I was committing myself to entering the home of Satan. Realizing my life span shortened exponentially with every second in the cold I had no choice but to touch the door knob to Hell. Slowly turning the iron oval shape knob, I tried to enter the house unnoticed. Opening the door, I carefully peeked in to find an empty house. Happy to notice the absence of The Queen my heart rate literally dropped from 150 to a normal 67. How did I know that, I didn't know, I was just making that up. Anyway, to my dismay a voice was heard from upstairs before I could even lay my books on the old living room side table.

"Kimberly, get up here." A voice yelled.

Not sure of the person attached to the voice I just stood there.

"Kimberly, did you hear me girl" The voice said as I finally realized that it was the voice of our neighbor Mrs. Wilson.

"Yes mame." I said quickly dropping the books on the floor then running to The Queen's room.

"Come on, push, push" Mrs. Wilson, a neighbor, yelled repeatedly to my laboring mother as I looked on in fear as she gave birth to her 7th child.

I was 13 at the time and my 43-year old mother was giving birth to yet another bastard child. Though it was the 7th child she had given birth to without haven' takin' the vowels of Holy matrimony it didn't bother her that yet again she would be raising another child without the help of its father.

"Kim, Kim get some clean towels", Mrs. Wilson yelled as I stared in amazement while my mother struggled to push.

"Kim did you hear me girl!" Mrs. Wilson yelled even louder.

"Yes Ma'am!" I said as I turned around and practically fell over a nearby chair to hurry to a hall closet where we kept the clean towels.

When I returned from fetching several clean white towels, I suddenly noticed a small fuzzy circular thing appearing from my mother's worn body. The site absorbed my attention leaving me oblivious to everything around me, including the fact that I was carrying 6 towels. As the site drew me closer to the foot of the bed I unknowingly dropped the towels on the dirty hardwood floor. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was the tiny head of a baby, and it was covered in liquid goop and had a head full of black hair.

"Kim, look at you, why in the hell did you drop those towels?" Mrs. Wilson angrily yelled as I just stood there watching.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I’ll go get some more.” I nervously said before running to retrieve a new stack of towels. It didn’t make sense to me as to why I needed to fetch those stupid towels. I guess Mrs. Wilson had watched too many of those old movies because she sure didn’t know what to do with the things when I finally got her some.

Moments after returning to the bedroom, the first cries of mother’s fifth daughter were heard. It was a tiny little brown skinned baby with a head full of dark black hair. Her skin was covered with all sorts of pinkish goop that had the consistency of a bowl of cooled over tomato soup. Her head was a bit on the flat side as was her nose. Her eyes had me wondering whether her father was of Oriental decent, but the more I thought about it the more I realized that there was no way in hell an Oriental would have been caught dead in that neighborhood. Heck, I didn’t want to be caught dead in that neighborhood.

Fixating on the tiny face for several minutes I was still unable to determine which of my mother’s last three boyfriends was the father of my new born sister. But later, as I helped Mrs. Wilson clean the baby, I realized she had the nose of Melvin.

Melvin was the neighborhood con-artist and sex addict. On the day my little sister was born it had been months since anybody had seen him. Some say he had been arrested for murder while others thought he had been drafted and sent to Vietnam. Me personally, I believed he had been drafted, after all he was only 20.

Soon after my new born sister, Maddie Jamie Carter, fell asleep next to my exhausted mother Mrs. Wilson grabbed my right arm and dragged me in the hall toward a nearby bedroom. That was the bedroom I shared with my three older sisters, Naomi, Kathy and Beatrice.

My oldest sister Naomi, was and to this day the religious freak. Her love for God had separated her from the rest of the world as most of her time was spent servicing the wills of her savior. She attended church four times a week, spending at least 4 hours there each time. She taught Bible Study, sang on the choir and ran several ministries. Each time she spoke, religious connotations were implied giving me the feeling that my whole life was made up of a basket of sins. Oh, it drove me crazy.

Next was Kathy, the black sheep of the girls. Lamar is Kathy’s son by some Jon she slept with when she first started selling her thin dark body for a little bit of pocket change. He looked to be half-white, which didn’t surprise me since most of her customers seem to be white. Most of her teenage years were spent skipping school, running with her prostitute girlfriends and hating the world.

Finally, there was the sneaky yet quiet Beatrice. You could say that she talked out of both sides of her mouth. She would tell you one thing but do just the opposite. She felt that if a situation didn’t benefit her she didn’t want any part of it. I think she

had been around those rich white folks at her preppy rich white school too much. You see, Beatrice was very smart for her 15 years. So much so that by the age of 10 the public-school system had awarded her a full scholarship to a private school in Northern Baltimore city. The school was very exclusive and very few black folks in Baltimore could afford the high tuition. And absolutely no one living on the West side, where we lived, could even afford the uniforms. The City had started this program a few years earlier in an effort to claim desegregation in the schools.

And then there was me, the youngest occupant of this two-bed room. Surrounded by three sisters with three totally different personalities I sort of picked up a little from each of them. Thanks to my three sisters I learned how to live in the city of Baltimore and thanks to my three sisters I learn how not to live in the city of Baltimore. Many days I felt lost and confused but looking to my sisters for guidance was the worst thing I could have done as none of them had any real common sense.

After opening the door to the bedroom, we noticed a sight not meant for young eyes. Laying in one of the twin beds was my sister Kathy with some strange white man laying on top of her. Unaware of our presence Kathy and her stranger continued to have sex before noticing us. Scared he then quickly leaped off Kathy, grabbed a nearby shirt and covered his leaking dick.

“What in the hell are you doin’?” Mrs. Wilson screamed.

“Nothin’, nothin’”, Kathy said panicking as she quickly reached for a nearby pair of pants and began putting them on.

“Kathy you need to take your il-gotten-ways and that nigger lovin’ white man the hell out of your mother’s house.”

“Oh get out of here you old bat.” Kathy replied sarcastically while she continued to get dressed.

“Excuse me you little tramp.” Mrs. Wilson said as she rolled her right hand into a tight fist while staring angrily into Kathy’s eyes.

“You get on my damn nerves, I’m tired of you mindin’ other people’s business. So why don’t you take your fat ass out of my house and keep it out.” Kathy replied as she took a handful of money from the frightened man.

“One-day God will punish you for your sins, you tramp.” Mrs. Wilson said as Kathy slammed the door shut after she and her customer left the room.

Mrs. Wilson looked angrily at the door and then began shaking her frail head. After a few minutes of pacing and mumbling to herself she slowly made her way to the chair in which I was now sitting and swinging my long skinny legs.

“Now look young lady, I’m going to tell you this just once. Don’t you dare end up like that dam Kathy or that sorry excuse of a mother. You think before you do anything. And you better not go around sleepin’ with any and everything that has a

dick between its legs. You understand?” She said in a caring yet angry voice.

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Dear Diary,

The date, December 10, 1967, the time 4:33 p.m. Today was the most awful day. I hated every moment of it. Diary please don't get mad with me for not telling you that The Queen was knocked up. I couldn't believe that she had the nerve to bring another child in this world when she already had six kids that she couldn't raise. Early this morning she gave birth to her seventh child. It was a girl. I can only guess the baby's father. I don't even think The Queen knows. And why should she, to this day most of us have no idea who our fathers are. And Diary, for the life of me I have no idea why she wears that stupid blue scarf every freakin' day.

Douglass, my oldest brother and Kevin my youngest brother are the only ones that know their fathers. Douglass' father, if that's what you want to call him, Freddie shows up every blue moon or so begging for money. Diary you should see the man, begging and pleading and giving these sob stories about losing his job. It always amazed me, just how can you lose a job if you never had one in the first place. Well, at least we haven't heard from that dumb-ass in a while and I hope we never hear from him again.

Kevin's father really isn't all that bad Diary. He does come to see him a few times a week and even takes him shopping allowing me to tag alone. He's really a great father but what he saw in The Queen at one time I have no idea.

As far as us girls are concerned, none of us know our fathers. I've asked The Queen several times about him, but she just tells me to leave her alone. One day I will find out, but for now I've adopted Kevin's father, Bryant, as mine. Well Diary, I have to go. The baby's crying, I have to feed her and make sure she's okay. You know Diary, even though my mother gave birth to that baby I have a feeling that I'm the one who will be raising her.

Love

Kim till next time

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Two months after my bastard sister was born things couldn't have changed more. My sister Kathy was in the women's detention center for selling herself and carrying 1/2 ounce of cocaine. Douglass had become an active member of a gang called the Black Panthers and I spent most of my time taking care of my little sister. I don't know how I managed to keep an "A" average in school, I guess it was all those late-

night homework and study sessions. Man, it's funny how The Queen gave birth to that baby, yet I was the one who got the silver dollar sized bags under my eyes.

To our surprise, Freddie showed up one cold February morning. Drunk and full of spirit he made his way into our Humble abode to cause a years' worth of confusion in just a few hours. But it was enough time to con Douglass out of \$100 and make a few passes at me and Naomi. You know, it always amazed me how Douglass had lots of money yet never had a job.

I assumed Freddie, sorry, "Uncle Freddie" knew how Douglass was acquiring his funds but Freddie being the great father that he was just used it to his advantage and didn't give a damn. He was great using any situation to his benefit. Though The Queen was such a hard nose to me she was just as gullible as Douglass because Freddie had no problem using her to satisfy his biological needs. What really irritated me was that Freddie believed that if he couldn't get any on the streets he could always come here and get some. Well, I guess to some point, as long as The Queen lived here he was right. But, despite his other thoughts, us girls were not here for the taking.

Well anyway, that last visit left my mother pregnant once again. She insisted that she wasn't going to have the baby but she had no choice. We were poor so she had no money for an abortion. And anyway, abortions were illegal at the time.

Despite all the normal ghetto drama a couple of good things happened. Because of my grades I was among fifty Negro public school kids chosen to take the Baltimore transition private school scholarship test. That's the same test that got Beatrice into private school. I was so happy when I heard the news, that cold winter day, that I decided to treat me and Kevin to a Cheese steak sub, that was after going home and making The Queen's dinner.

"Well,,look who we have here, my two favorite kids." Mr. Parkinston said as we entered his store.

"Hi Mr. Parkinston" I said happily.

"Hi Mr. Parkinston." Kevin, my 6-year old brother, said as he walked toward the enormous candy stand.

"So, what brings you kids in today?" Mr. Parkinston asked.

"I just wanted to celebrate." I answered as I sat on a stool in the middle of the long serving bar.

"Oh, a celebration." Mr. Parkinston said smiling.

"Yeah, I was selected to take the Scholarship test."

"You mean the same Scholarship test Beatrice took to get into Friends Mar Academy?" He said with even a bigger smile.

"Yes Sir." I replied nervously.

"I'm so proud of you. You deserve the opportunity to go to such a fine school." He said.

"Thanks Mr. Parkinston." I replied even more nervous.

"And you know you have a good chance of passing the examination, right. You just need to buckle down and study as hard as you can. (Pause) And if you want I will help you study." Mr. Parkinston continued.

"You know all that stuff?" I asked.

"Well of course I do. I graduated valedictorian from Douglass High School and then later received a Master's from Morgan State College. "

"Wow" I said in amazement.

"I tell you what" Mr. Parkinston said sensing my nervousness.

"To help you celebrate I will cook you one of my famous Cheese steak subs, add a bag of chips and include a bottle of Pop and all for free." He said calming my nerves.

"Do I get some too, I got the lead role in the school play." Kevin asked as he climbed on the stool next to me.

"Well of course my young man." Mr. Parkinston said.

"Yay!!!!!!" Kevin yelled happily.

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"Hey I'm home" I yelled after returning home from Mr. Parkinson's store.

"Where the hell have you been?" The Queen barked as she sat at the kitchen table stirring a cup of bad smelling coffee.

"We went to Mr. Parkinston's 5 and dime. " I said as I began removing Kevin's coat.

"That's no excuse for you to leave me with a cold ass dinner. I expect my dinner to be hot when I walk into this house and I don't give a damn if you have to watch over this stove for 10 hours until I get home because I want my fuckin' dinner hot." The Queen barked in a high-pitched tone that would win any contest against an adolescent Beagle.

"But it wasn't cold when I left." I said after removing Kevin's coat and walking slowing toward The Queen.

"You're such a stupid child." The Queen said staring me in my eyes as she pushed the plate of food toward me.

"I'm sorry, but what was I supposed to do?" I asked.

“I don’t care, next time I expect a hot dinner when I walk in this house. Is that clear you little Bastard?” She so kindly said.

“Yes Ma’am. But Mom I was selected to take the Scholarship test so I went to celebrate.” I said hopping for some sympathy.

Silence rang loudly in the small dark room when suddenly the clicks of a nearby clock filled the air. There was no movement from The Queen as she sat staring at the old wooden floors. Minutes went by and not a word from anybody. Then suddenly The Queen began shaking her oversized head which was sporting her awful blue scarf, closed her eyes, then looked toward the ceiling. After several minutes, she stood up, walked toward me and stood towering over my tiny body.

“I don’t give a damn about that sorry ass test.” She said staring me straight in my watery eyes.