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Chapter 1

“**G**irl, I’m tired of waiting for you to give me an answer,” said Todd in a firm tone as he tried to convince Cynthia, the naïve young girl on the other end of the phone line, to have sex with him. “You know I’ve been patient. I don’t understand why you trippin’. I told you I’m gonna be gentle – I know you’re a virgin...damn!”

Todd first noticed Cynthia during a pep rally as he and a few of his friends stood posing against a wall. Cynthia was sitting amongst a pack of rowdy girls that appeared to be doing everything imaginable to attract as much attention to their group as possible. Cynthia stood out amongst the wild teeny boppers because she was the cutest and more importantly, the calmest.

Todd spent nearly an hour trying to make eye contact with her. When he finally got the opportunity to lock gazes with her, he made the best of it. He hit her with a wink, a kiss, and then a head gesture signaling her to meet him in the hallway. Cynthia, surprised that an upper classmen would even acknowledge her existence, pointed at herself just to make sure his flirtations weren’t misdirected.

Todd flashed his charming smile and nodded. Cynthia blushed so hard that her caramel complexioned cheeks turned as red as a rose. With the grace of a model, the slender framed girl smiled and stood up. She carefully slid pass her cohorts as she made her way towards the hallway. Todd, feeling like a true ‘playa’, gave his friend dap and then proceeded to the meeting place.

After successfully getting Cynthia’s phone number, Todd met up with his friends and proceeded to embellish the details of his discussion with her. The moment one of his buddies questioned the details of his soliloquy, Todd did what all teenage boys do when their “mack” skills are questioned, he started bragging about how quickly he could get the booty to prove how much of a mack he was.

Todd stood in front of his crew and boldly predicted he’d get inside of Cynthia’s panties within one month. Once the one month deadline passed and his dick was still as dry as the Sahara Desert, Todd pulled another typical teenage boy move in an effort to avoid being teased; he lied and told his friends he’d actually had sex with Cynthia. The truth of the matter was; three months had passed since he and Cynthia first met and he was still working on his goal.

If you really love me Todd, you wouldn’t pressure me.

“I ain’t been pressurin’ you. We’ve been kickin’ it for three months, and I’ve only asked you for the ass two or three times. If you love me like you say you do, you’d be tryin’ to give me what I need.”

How do I know you ain’t gonna tell your friends?

“Girl, I ain’t gonna tell dem niggas nothin’!” Todd barked. He could sense that his badgering was starting to wear the gullible little girl down. Since his initial request she’d gone from an emphatic ‘no’ to ‘I’ll think about it’ to ‘if I do this are you gonna tell your friends?’

Todd was in full *playa* mode as he lay stretched across the living room sofa with his hand buried in his pants. He massaged his throbbing pubescent penis as if he was the only person in the house; totally oblivious to his surroundings.

Standing a few feet away in the kitchen eavesdropping on his phone call was his 18 year old sister Kim. Todd didn’t care; he had a case of the blue balls like never before. He knew this was his best chance

to close the deal with Cynthia, and he wasn't about to lose sight of his objective. The boy was as focused as a hooker at a condom convention.

With each stutter and pause offered by the young girl, Todd could feel his virgin status getting closer and closer to coming to an end. His goal was to lose his virginity before his 17th birthday. Only three weeks remained before he reached his self-imposed deadline; therefore, he pulled out every trick in his raging hormone filled trick bag.

I'ma let you know tomorrow.

"Tomorrow?" he asked indignantly. "Why can't you let a nigga know sumthin' right now!"

You see Todd, there you go again. Why can't you wait til tomorrow? When you act like this you make me think that sex is all you want from me.

Forgive her lord, for the girl – and so many others who have fallen for the okie doke - had no idea how immature she really was. Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder could have seen that the only thing Todd wanted from this child was sex.

"You promise?" asked Todd in a tone that suddenly bordered on begging. "Are you really gonna let me know what you're gonna do tomorrow?"

Yes. Do you really love me Todd?

"Of course," Todd said as he celebrated silently. He had no problem lying to her. He was so horny and desperate, he would have agreed to stand on the corner and sell tampons while wearing a pair of spandex pants, a football helmet, and a cape if he thought it would get him his first piece of coochie. "Hell yeah, I love you girl!"

Well tell me.

"I just did."

Say it like you mean it Todd. I'm not just gonna lose my virginity to some boy who doesn't really love me.

Todd repositioned himself on the sofa and started to pour the bullshit on thick. "Baby girl, I can't even lie. This shit I feel for you is on a whole other level...for real. I love you like a ma'fucka."

"If she falls for that tired ass line she needs to get played," said Kim in a tone that was loud enough for her brother to hear.

Todd looked at his sister and placed his finger over his mouth signaling for her to be quiet. Fearful that his potential victim may have heard Kim's snide remark, he laid the bullshit on even thicker.

"Girl, I'ma tell you the truth, but you'd better not tell your friends this."

I'm not gonna tell them what we discuss.

Todd glanced at Kim again and winked his eye as he tried to contain his laughter. Kim rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Girl I had to go and talk to my mama about you. I told her I didn't understand how I was feelin'."

Todd are you serious? What did she say?

"I'm almost ashamed to admit it, but she told me that this feelin' I've been having is love. Cynthia, this ain't no bullshit! My mama don't be lying. My mama used to be counseling teens about this type of stuff."

For real? My mother was a teen counselor. Where did your mother counsel teens at? Was she a teen counselor at the YMCA?

"Uhhh yeah," Todd replied as his lie was starting to get him off track. "Yeah, she used to be counseling at the YMCA and for the PTA and she even was working at the SPCA doin' some counseling."

What? Why would she counsel at the SPCA?

"Uhhh," Todd uttered as he dug into his trick bag again. "She used to be counseling teenagers who were gettin' rid of their dogs and stuff. You know that shit be emotional for some people."

Cynthia was quiet. Todd started cringing as he bit his bottom lip. Her silence could only mean one thing – she was no longer buying his bullshit.

I ain't never heard of counselors at the SPCA, but I could see how they would be needed. I cried when we had to get rid of our dog PeeWee.

Todd let out a sigh of relief as he listened to Cynthia's gullible response flow through the phone line. It was music to his ears. Now all he needed to do was get her back on track before she started a thirty minute conversation about pets.

"Yeah, like I was sayin' – my mama is on her shit when it comes to relationships. That's how I know I'm in love with you. My mama told me."

"Oh lawd," Kim blurted out as she shook her head harder. "If I ever meet that chick I'm gonna slap the hell out of her for being so stupid!"

I love you too Todd. I'ma do it – I promise. I'ma call you tomorrow and we can talk about when we're gonna get together.

"Okay boo. I'ma be waitin' on that call," Todd replied as he pumped his fist in the air like a boxer who'd just won a championship bout. "Tell me what I wanna hear."

I love you Todd.

"Say it again."

I love you Todd.

"I love you too boo," he replied in the most sensual voice he could muster up. "I'ma holla at you tomorrow."

Todd quickly hung up the phone before the girl could change her mind. He was also anxious to end the phone conversation so that he could run into the bathroom and take one of his *extended* lather filled showers. The kind of *extended* shower that is a hallmark of all teenaged boys between the ages of 15 and 18.

With the agility rivaled by only an Olympic gymnast, he leaped off the sofa effortlessly.

"I don't know why you're all happy," said Kim.

"Mind your business girl! You a child – stay in a child's place."

"What!" Kim shouted. "Fool I'm older than you. You think she's gonna give you some cat, but you're gonna still be a virgin this time next month."

Kim and Todd's relationship was not unlike a lot of siblings. They often bantered back and forth, seizing every chance to take a cheap shot or get a laugh at the other person's expense. They shared the same mother, Linda Dean Carter, but they had different fathers. This half sibling factor always seemed to be the source of tension in their relationship because Todd always bragged about his father, Kennedy. Todd's dad was physically present and Kim's father had been missing in action since she was three years old.

The fact that Kennedy lived with them may have given Todd the upper hand in that area, but it's not like Kennedy was worth bragging on. It was a known fact throughout their extended family that Kennedy had fathered at least four other kids during his ten year marriage to Linda. When Kennedy wasn't spending time in the household with Todd and his family during the weekend, they all knew where he was...including Linda. Kennedy could be found across town with one of his "baby mama's" as he tried to play daddy to one of the four kids he had out of wedlock. Four little boys called him daddy; all of them younger than Todd.

Kennedy's presence wasn't missed much when he did stay away for two and three days at a time. When he did decide to grace them with his menacing presence, the mood in their house was usually uncomfortable and bleak. Everyone ate in separate rooms and no one communicated. Todd and Kim even avoided talking on the phone out of fear that he would pick up another phone and embarrass them while they were talking to classmates.

Kennedy was an unhappy man. He had too many mouths to feed and not enough cash to do it. A self inflicted wound, but no less stressful. Although he brought home the bulk of his paycheck to Linda and the kids, he also brought home all of his built up anger and hostility.

As with all simmering brews, an occasional explosion is inevitable. Kennedy's explosions usually came weekly. Sometimes they would come in the form of yelling at the kids. Sometimes it would come in

the form of yelling at the neighbors. But, his main method of releasing his frustration was via Linda's face; he used it as the canvas to express his displeasure with his own life.

As a result of the weekly beat downs Kennedy inflicted on Linda, Kim hated him with a passion. There were times when she actually contemplated killing him in his sleep. *'I wish he would die'* was her only thought when he walked through the front door. On more than one occasion she stood next to him holding a steak knife as he lay in bed snoring.

As you might expect, Todd had a different opinion of his father. His opinion was rooted in a genetic bond that was unbreakable - even in the midst of domestic violence.

Todd and Kim would sit in Kim's room and listen to Kennedy's rants through the paper thin walls, and flinch as the haunting sounds of smacks upside their mother's head penetrated their eardrums. Todd would usually find himself trying to console Kim as tears of fear and anger streamed down her face.

'I hate your daddy. I wish he would drop dead and die.' Kim would mumble on cue. Her words were filled with contempt.

As much as Todd wanted to acknowledge his sister's pain, he often found himself trying to defend his out of control father. *'At least my daddy didn't run away like your daddy did. Your daddy doesn't even give mama any child support money to take care of you. My daddy has done more for you than your own daddy.'*

The conflicting sentiments caused these siblings to have somewhat of a love / hate relationship.

"Todd I know you're probably about to go in that bathroom and play with yourself," said Kim. "But, you'd better not forget to come and do these dishes before mama and your daddy get back from the movies."

"I'll give you two dollars if you do the dishes for me."

"Nope. Tonight is your night to do the dishes. You need to start bustin' those suds because it's almost ten o'clock. They're gonna be home soon so you'd better start doing the dishes right now."

"What movie did they go to see?" asked Todd as he tried to gauge how much time he had left before his parents came home.

"They went to see *The Color Purple*," Kim replied as she plopped down on the sofa her brother had just vacated. She turned on the television and got ready to watch a rerun of *Sanford and Son*.

"Man I got time," Todd reasoned. "I heard that's a long movie."

"It is a long movie dummy. But, they went to the six o'clock show. It's damn near ten o'clock now; they're gonna be home before you know it."

Todd looked at the clock as he thought about his sister's remarks. His father promised he'd punish him if he failed to wash the dishes again. He'd already failed the task twice that month and a third failure would all but guarantee he'd be grounded for the weekend. Todd was not about to lose the chance to join the ranks of the *laid* over a few dishes. He immediately marched into the kitchen and went to work.

As Todd washed off the grease soaked skillet sitting in the sink and prepared to put it and other dishes inside the dishwasher, his parents came through the door. They were both laughing and discussing the movie.

"How was the movie mama?" asked Kim.

"It was real good baby. Long, but real good," Linda replied.

Kennedy walked past Kim without acknowledging her. She wasn't offended by his slight, the feeling was mutual. He glanced at Todd and gave him a head nod. Todd nodded back - thankful that he listened to his sister's suggestion.

Kennedy and Linda went straight into the bedroom and closed the door behind them. Kim looked back at Todd and rolled her eyes.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Todd.

"I swear I hate your daddy. I really do wish he'd die."

"Girl, you need to..."

“Todd, come here,” Linda requested from the bedroom.

Todd abandoned the dishes and put his flippant retort to Kim on hold as he went to see what his mother wanted. As he walked out of the kitchen he heard a thump. It was the stomach churning, vomit inducing, goose pimple harvesting thump that kids living with domestic violence become far too familiar with.

Todd paused for a second. He was frozen with fear. He looked at the door and then at his sister. Kim heard the thump too. She leaped off of the sofa with the same amount of agility Todd had displayed earlier.

“Go and see what’s going on Todd,” Kim urged.

Todd heard his sister’s demand, but he didn’t move. His fear rendered him immobile; that is until he heard his mother call out again in a muffled tone.

“Todd; baby please come here.”

“Go see about mama you little punk,” Kim yelled and then pushed Todd in the back.

Todd gathered up the courage to go check on his mother. He walked gingerly towards the door. The bedroom door was only a few feet way from the kitchen, but the intensity of the moment made the hall seem as long as the hallways at the high school he attended.

He finally arrived at the bedroom door and pushed it open just as his mother was calling his name for a third time. When he opened the door his worst fears came to life.

Kennedy was a tall slender man, but he was very strong for his size. He used his strength to pick Linda’s puny 110 lb. frame up by her neck. The thump that Todd and Kim heard came from Linda’s back slamming against the closet door.

“What the fuck you mean, I can’t have none?” Kennedy questioned as his huge hand wrapped around Linda’s scrawny neck.

“Let her go!” Todd shouted.

“Boy, you’d better get the hell outta here and close that damn door!” Kennedy barked as he turned and glared at his son.

Kennedy turned his back to Todd. He assumed that his order would be followed without any questions, but he was wrong. The sight of his mother being suspended in midair moved Todd to action.

Not knowing what to do, Todd did what his instincts told him to do...he jumped on Kennedy’s back. Todd was rather tall for his age; therefore, his limbs were quite long. He wrapped his arms around Kennedy’s neck – sort of like the *sleeper* move that wrestlers on television do.

Kennedy had no choice but to address his new adversary. He released the grip he had on Linda’s neck and allowed her to fall to the floor. His attention and anger was now directed at his eldest son. Trying to counter Todd’s surprise attack was difficult at first, but eventually Kennedy was able to reach around and grab Todd’s shirt. He bit Todd’s forearm in an effort to make him release his grip. Veins protruded from Todd’s neck as he screamed from the immense pain. Kennedy bit him so hard that he drew blood from the brave teens forearm.

When Todd’s grip loosened, Kennedy flung him off of his back like the boy was a flimsy rag doll. The scene looked like a low budget wrestling show. Todd fell on the bed, but he didn’t stay there for long. As trickles of blood begin to seep from his arm, Todd struggled to stand up. The tables had suddenly turned; Kennedy was now stalking him like a lion preparing to pounce on his prey.

Linda was slouched against the closet door with her hands on her own throat as she gasped for air. Without taking his eyes of his father, Todd backed out of the bedroom and into the living room area.

“Go call the neighbors!” Todd shouted at Kim. “Hurry up! Run across the street and get some help Kim!”

Kim didn’t move. She was so afraid of what Kennedy might do if she attempted to leave that she just stood as stiff as a statue....