

“There’s no such thing as homicide; only suicide,” my friend, Roger, said just after taking a big gulp of his Rum and Coke.

It had been a long night. My band and I had just done two shows at Club Rock. Not to mention we had been in the studio for 24 straight hours before doing those shows. After our third encore, we made a mad dash for the back door heading towards Mike’s Bar and Grill for a bite to eat. We were all exhausted. But it appeared Roger was a bit more tired than the rest of us because the statement he had just made was simply asinine to put it mildly.

“Alright, Rog, you’ve had enough. Let’s get you home and into your jammies so you can go to bed.”

“No, I’m serious,” Roger continued. “Think about it. At the end of the day, it’s about choice.

“At the end of the day, it’s about you being delusional,” Band mate, Quent, jested. “Further, where the hell is this coming from? Are you trying to tell us something? Are you reaching out for help? Do we need to call someone? Perhaps have the nice doctors come and get you into one of those ‘hug myself’ jackets?”

“In life, we make decisions,” Roger explained. “Sometimes we make good decisions. Sometimes we make not so good decisions. The tragedy in this is that we often make decisions based on our emotions. But what we fell to understand is that emotions have the tendency to change.”

“Sleep deprivation is real,” Quent stated as he shook his head in disbelief of what Roger was sharing.

“Alright. Check this out. It’s Saturday night and you want to go to the club,” Roger hypothesized. “You’ve had a few drinks and now you want to hang out with your crew. But there is something inside of you saying ‘don’t do it. Don’t go out. Stay home.’ Yet you defy that ‘something’ and go anyway. You get to the club and grab a table in the back. You order some snacks and a few more drinks. You’re laughing and having a good time. Suddenly, there is commotion. People are hollering, screaming and running. And then you hear it. Gunfire. A lone Gunman is shooting everyone in sight. You try to run but there is no place to go. What’s more, you’re in the direct line of fire; pinned in a corner with no way out. The Gunman is coming straight towards you. At this point in the game of life, there is not a prayer, prophecy or witchcraft incantation that can help you. In just a few short seconds, you’re going to die. Who’s to blame?”

“Uh, the Gunman. Come on, Man. You can’t just go around shooting folks.”

“Happens every day,” Roger countered. “Sometimes there’s a conviction. Sometime there’s not.”

“Are you saying that the Gunman is not at fault?”

“Let me answer that question with a question,” Roger responded. “Are you a Believer?”

“You know I am.”

“Then if you’re a Believer, you have to believe that God knows all and knew that Gunman was going to be in the club; the same club that the ‘something’ you opted to ignore tried to get you not to go too. But you went anyway. Now I ask you again. Who is to blame?”

I had been in church my entire life. Yet never had I ever heard anyone break down a simple thought as this man had just done. Was it the Rum and Coke he was drinking or was he being divinely inspired? Regardless of what *it* was, he had my attention. At this point, he had all our attention.

“I must say you make a valid point. However, I don’t know if this can be a blanket statement. An innocent baby being choked out by a deranged parent can’t be considered a suicide.”

“Depends on how you look at it,” Roger retorted.

“What?” Quent yelled.

“If God is all knowing, He knew that situation was going to happen,” Roger stated. “And if the scripture ‘before I formed you, I knew you’ is true, then that suggests that child knew what was coming.”

“You have lost your damn mind,” Quent chimed in lightening the heavy mood. “So where are you going with this Confucius Jones? What is the point of this unfounded revelation?”

“Death,” Roger stated as he relaxed in his seat. “The bible states that the wages of sin is death. When we sin or miss the mark, we set death in motion. It doesn’t stop. It just keeps coming. I heard a lyric once that stayed with me. ‘Reaching for life but I feel my feet are sliding fast in the grave. Wanna live my life but I’ll be damned if I will live as a slave.’ It’s like no matter what you do, it does not stop the momentum of death that is in pursuit. It’s coming. It will fulfill itself.”

“So I guess you forgot all about a little thing called repentance.”

“Not at all,” Roger confidently responded. “The problem with repentance is that most people don’t know what it truly entails. Not true. People know what it entails. They just choose not to do it. Repentance goes beyond the trip to the altar to ask for forgiveness. It goes beyond reading your bible and going to church. True repentance will require sacrifice. It’s going to hurt. It will be uncomfortable and inconvenient. But it’s doable. Generally, we fall short of God’s will and plan for our lives because we are

reaching for something; trying to get somewhere. Little do we know that the things we want and desire are attainable if we're willing to let go of the twins."

"Twins?"

"Hurt and pain," Roger continued. "Those sisters are often what drives our thought processes; our responses to situations in life and the way we react when we find ourselves in tough situations. Yes, hurt and pain have caused a many of people to drive off the cliff of life."

"Suicide."

"You got it," Roger responded. "Tragically, many don't deal with their issues. They just push it to the back of their minds or to the bottom of their hearts. And because it's always there, it is generally the source of decision-making; bad decision-making. You know like, going to the club when everything in you is telling you to stay home."

"What does hurt and pain have to do with going to the club?" Quent asked. "You go to the club because you want to have a good time. You want to chill; hang out with your friends. Truthfully, you go to the club to get over hurt and pain or at least forget about it for a while."

"The issue is not going to the club," Roger responded. "The issue is ignoring that something inside of you; that still small voice; the voice of God. What could have been so tragic, so traumatic, so hurtful that we would ignore and discount the voice of God that resonates from within; thus adhering to the words of those outside voices that are, in some cases, leading us to a premature grave? Now, I'll ask you again. In the case of the club, should death befall you at the hands of that Gunman, who is to blame?"

I didn't want to answer Roger. But I'm sure that my silence was answer enough. As much as I didn't want to admit it, he was right.

"I gotta go," Roger stated as he stood finishing up his drink. "One last question. What's the first thing people look for when they discover a person has committed suicide?"

"A suicide note," Quent answered.

"People want to know why? Why did they do it? Why did they kill themselves? But the interesting aspect of it all is that people are writing their suicide notes every day," Roger shared. "They aren't necessarily writing their notes with pen and paper but with their actions; their life's choices. Every day we are adding another sentence, another paragraph, another page that the people will want to see and read so they can gain some kind of insight as to why the person did it. So what does your say?"

“My what?”

“Your suicide note,” Roger answered as he walked away.

CHAPTER TWO

The first time I heard the word was from my cousin, Chanel Adams. My parents, my brothers and I were at her family's house one Saturday afternoon. While everyone else was in the house talking and visiting, Chanel and I went outside to play.

"My brother said you're a faggot," Chanel revealed as she pushed me on their old rusted swing. To be honest, I had never heard the word and didn't know what it meant. But the way she said it, made me feel like it was something bad; really bad.

"He said you act like a girl," Chanel continued. "He said you sing like a girl and even walk like a girl. My brother said he saw you in the bathroom staring at another boys' 'thing.' He said only faggots do that."

Chanel kept pushing me on the swing. She pushed harder and harder and I went higher and higher. I was up so high, I could almost see the top of the trees in the backyard. That was a good thing. This way Chanel wouldn't see the tears that were falling from my eyes. I didn't know what the word meant but it hurt. It hurt my feelings that someone could think of me being this thing that I didn't even know what it was.

When I got home that night, I wanted to ask my mom what the word faggot meant but I was too afraid. I wanted to ask my brothers but they picked on me enough. I didn't want to give them any more ammunition to use against me. Finally, I found an old dictionary and looked up the word. It was defined as 'a male homosexual.' Great. Now I was confused all the more because I didn't know what the word homosexual meant either. I tried to forget about that day and the things Chanel had said to me, but I couldn't. The comment about me staring at another boys' penis bothered me. It bothered me because I didn't remember doing it. And if I did, it wasn't intentional. Besides, if her brother saw me staring at someone else's penis, did that mean he was staring at mine?

I was a product of a musical family. My father, Edward Roberts, played in various jazz bands throughout the area and my mother, Vivian, was an accomplished singer. She had recorded several albums but none of them ever got the attention they deserved. They were good; very good. My mom could scat and yodel with the best of them. And my dad could play anything. He could play by ear as well as read music. All of my brothers sang. The four of them called themselves the *Roberts Revue*; Gerard,

Henry, Kevin and Brian. They did gigs around town and was always a fan favorite at the local talent shows. When I was around seven years old, I asked them if I could join. They emphatically told me no. They then told me to go look up the definition of the word quartet as this is what they were.

So, I started doing my own thing. When I came in from school and when I had free time on the weekends, I'd go downstairs, pull out different albums and listen to them for hours. Once I had listened to my final album of the night, I would pull out an old 45 (record) of Pattie Labelle and the Bluebelles. I could not end my listening party without hearing *You'll Never Walk Alone*. Pattie Labelle was everything to me. Yes, she could sing any and everything. But that's not necessarily what I liked about her. I liked the fact that she painted a portrait whenever she sang. It was this incredible masterpiece that told a story; a story that had never been told but needed to be. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to always make sure that my audience could see what I saw and feel what I was feeling when I sang. I wanted them to see the story.

I think it was a Saturday night in March. My family and I had been out riding around. By the time we got home, it was my bedtime because we had church the next morning. But I had a tradition; a tradition I didn't want to break. I had to listen to *You'll Never Walk Alone* before going to bed. I begged my mom to let me go downstairs for a quick listen, but she refused. Angry, I went into my bedroom and slammed the door.

"When you walk, through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark," I sang out.

By the time I had finished the first verse, both my parents were standing in my doorway in tears; with my mother holding a belt.

"Boy, I was getting ready to wear your butt out," my mother revealed. "I thought you had gone downstairs and gotten the record player. But when I opened the door and saw that it was you singing..."

My mom couldn't finish her sentence as she became overwhelmed with tears.

The next day, Sunday, I sang my first solo in church. Dad played the organ as Mom stood next to me because I was nervous. I was afraid to stand alone in front of all of those people. But when I heard that first chord from the organ, all the nervousness went away. I closed my eyes and painted a portrait with my song just as I had imagined Pattie Labelle did when she was singing. When I opened my eyes, every person in the church was standing and clapping. What was supposed to have been a three-minute song turned into a ten-minute praise break as people started praising God. They were running, shouting, hollering and singing. It was a madhouse in that church. I looked back at my dad who was still on the

organ. He gave me a nod of approval. I knew he was proud. There was no question as to whether my mom was proud or not. She was one of the ones running around the church praising God. It was kind of funny watching her run around like the others because I had just sang the very same song the night before at home and she didn't run. Nonetheless, it was a beautiful moment. Seeing all the people feeling this kind of happiness and joy after hearing me sing made me feel happy and joyful as well. They saw the story I was trying to tell through my song. As I walked back to my seat, Mother Callie grabbed me and rocked me in her arms. I'll never forget that hug. Sister Doris gave me a high-five as I walked passed her. Elder Perkins came down out of the pulpit and rested his bible on the top of my head.

“Blessed!” Elder Perkins shouted as he gently tapped my head with his bible.

From that point on, I became a part of every choir the church had and was the featured soloist on many of the songs. The best part of it all was that I no longer had to beg to be a part of my brother's group. In fact, they were begging to be a part of mine. I gave them just a little taste of their own medicine.

“No! Go look up the word soloist!”

My life was never the same after that Sunday. The next day, Dad got me enrolled in music lessons and Mom gave me vocal lessons just about every day. Whereas most kids would have hated it, I enjoyed the lessons. In fact, it wasn't long before I was sitting with my dad at the organ in church playing alongside him. Music was everything to me. It was my life. I sang on the way to school and on the way home from school. I sang while I was in school. In fact, one day, because I was busy giving an impromptu concert on the playground, I missed my school bus. I had no money to take the city bus home or call for someone to come and get me; so I started walking. I was walking by Taylor Street when I saw some guys singing on the corner. They had the tightest harmony I had ever heard. But they were missing one integral piece. Me! I headed over and listened to them for a bit then chimed in. Before you knew it, the crowd increased and so did the money in the hat that was perched on the sidewalk in front of us. I sang with them for about two hours straight. By the time we were done, we had made over \$40. Now, I know that's not a lot of money but we weren't in a crowded area. Probably would have done better on a Friday when people had just gotten paid or a Saturday when people were looking to spend money. At any rate, Leroy the Tenor gave me \$5 and a ride home. I guess that would be considered my first paying gig. I ran into the house to tell my mother what had happened. Thinking she'd be happy for me, I was unpleasantly surprised when she spanked me in front of Leroy the Tenor. What's more, she made me give the money back. The pangs of stardom...

“So, you grew up in the church?” Doctor Raquel Tomlison asked.

“Yes.”

“Are you in church now?” Doctor Tomlison further inquired.

“No.”

“Why not?” Doctor Tomlison probed.

“Because they kicked me out.”

“What do you mean?” Doctor Tomlison asked. “Did they ask you to leave?”

“They didn’t ask me to leave. But I knew I was no longer welcomed in the fold.”

“Why were you no longer welcomed?” Doctor Tomlison questioned.

“Because.”

“Because what?” Doctor Tomlison interrogated. “Did they not want you around because you’re a faggot?”

“What did you just say to me?”

I hadn’t heard that word in a while. Well, that’s not true. I had heard it, but I had not heard it directed towards me. Doctor Raquel Tomlison was the Psychiatrist the judge had ordered me to see after the incident. What incident? Allow me to explain.

It had been a long night; but a good night. I had just done two shows at Club Rock; two hours of singing and bringing the people to their feet. And that’s not including the third encores. I hit notes that I never thought I could hit. I’m talking those glass-shattering soprano notes. I don’t know what came over me. I just decided to go for it and it was insane. The crowd was screaming for more.

After the show, a few of us headed over to Mike’s Bar and Grill to hang out. We were laughing and having a good time; not bothering anybody. We had just finished up an intense conversation and were getting ready to go when we were approached.

“Hey, aren’t you that church boy?” A Patron asked.

I didn’t respond. Even though I knew he was talking to me, I just ignored him and continued to try to walk past him and his friends.

“Yeah, that’s him,” the Patron continued as he nudged his friend. “You’re the one who got kicked out of church for giving the entire Tenor section blow jobs after choir rehearsal.”

I’ve heard of blind fury but never understood what it fully meant until I was knee deep in it. Without notice, I dove towards this idiot and began to beat him mercilessly. I punched him. I choked him. I punched him again. I choked him again. I punched him some more. By the time they pulled me off of him, his face was bloodied and he was unconscious. He was taken to a nearby hospital and I was taken to the police station.

“Justin Gregory Roberts,” Judge Anthony stated from the bench. “You almost killed a man. Is that true?”

“So they say.”

After two days in police custody, I finally had my day in court. Up until that point I had never been to jail; not even to visit anyone. It was a daunting experience; one that I hope to never undertake again. I appeared in front of Judge Anthony dressed in the garb I had worn to the club two nights prior - brown leather pants, a black muscle shirt with a brown leather vest. I accented my get up with a faux Burberry print boa, a red Mohawk and a big ass chip on my shoulder. I had attitude for days. I didn’t care about anyone or anything.

“Any remorse?” Judge Anthony asked.

“No, not really.”

“It says here that you are a singer, actor and music producer,” Judge Anthony read. “Is that true?”

“Yep.”

“Any good?” Judge Anthony continued to question.

“I’m one of the best. Not too many people can touch me vocally.”

“Justin, what are you doing in my courtroom?”

“Some friends and I were hanging out when I was verbally assaulted by some random dude. I guess I had had enough of his insults and I lost it.”

“You lost it?” Judge Anthony clarified.

“Yes, I lost it. I jumped on him and I hit him a couple of times.”

“You didn’t just hit him a couple of times,” Judge Anthony corrected. “You nearly killed him. He’s in the I.C.U. at Baxter Memorial.”

“Tragic.”

“I guess it would be safe to deduce that you’ve never been insulted before,” Judge Anthony insinuated.

I didn’t respond. At this point, I just wanted all of this to be over so that I could go home, take a shower and go to bed. In other words, tell me what I owe so that I can go.

“I knew your father,” Judge Anthony revealed. “He was an incredible musician. Never got his just due; him nor your mother. They were good people. I remember your four brothers; the Roberts Revue. They’d have all the girls going crazy when they would croon Billy Stewarts ‘*I Do Love You.*’ And I remember you. The boy wonder; the child prodigy. Some say you were probably one of the few musicians on the earth that could sing a song that would make Jesus, Himself, weep. You’ve been through a lot. Losing both your parents within a few months of each other couldn’t have been easy. How are your brothers?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you not in touch with them?” Judge Anthony pressed.

“Nope.”

“May I ask why?” Judge Anthony continued.

“You may but I don’t have an answer for you. I haven’t seen nor heard from them since my mother’s funeral.”

“You’re not in touch with anyone in your family?” Judge Anthony asked.

“Nope. I’m all alone in the world and I’m okay with that. I’m doing just fine.”

“I beg to differ,” Judge Anthony deduced. “I want you to talk to someone. Doctor Raquel Tomlison is a good friend of mine. I think she may be able to help you. She’s a psychiatrist.”

“With all due respect, your Honor, I don’t need to talk to anyone. I’m fine. I was minding my own business and this guy started with me. I had to protect myself.”

“Justin, he made a comment,” Judge Anthony shared. “He insulted you. And you responded by nearly killing him. Now, I’m no Shrink but my instincts are telling me that you weren’t just hitting him,

but you were hitting everyone who has hurt and or crossed you in your life. It took five people to pull you off that man. That scares me because the next person may not be so lucky. I could throw you in jail but that won't solve the problem but rather exacerbate it. The truth is you're already in jail – in your mind. Doctor Tomlison may just have the key to help you get out. You are to report to her office tomorrow morning at 11 am. After her initial assessment, she will determine how long you will need to be in treatment. Doctor Tomlison will alert me of your progress; should there be any. If you miss so much as one appointment with her, I will remand you to jail. You will be harmonizing with the brothers on Cell Block C as you were with the fellows on Taylor Street back in the day. Surprised I remember that, huh? I also remember the butt whipping you got when I took you home.”

“Leroy the Tenor?”

“In the flesh,” Judge Anthony confirmed.

“Do I have a choice in this? I mean, can't I just do my time and go home?”

“If this case goes to trial, you're probably looking at attempted murder; depending on how the Prosecutors are feeling on that particular day. Not to mention, they'd probably recommend you stay in custody until your trial date. And of course that trial date would be dependent upon the Defendant. Since you nearly killed him, he'll probably be in the hospital for a while which would mean you'd have to be in custody for a quite some time. To date, no one has come forward to press charges. So I'd say you're getting off pretty easily. But to answer your question, yes, you do have a choice in this. Pardon me for not offering you that choice. Which do you prefer?”

“Counseling.”

“Figured as much,” Judge Anthony remarked. “Court is adjourned.”

CHAPTER THREE

“Shall we continue?” Doctor Tomlison asked.

“I really don’t have anything else to say.”

“Are you angry because I called you a faggot?” Doctor Tomlison probed.

“Why do you keep using that word?”

“Why do you hate it?” Doctor Tomlison asked.

“It is because of the negative connotation that is attached to it. How would you like it if I called you a bitch or a cunt?”

“It wouldn’t bother me at all because I know that’s not who I am. I would understand that you were just saying it to get under my skin; to annoy me; to provoke some kind of reaction. I would be wise enough not to give you what it was that you were seeking. Unlike you.”

“I can assure you this. You are not going to keep insulting me.”

“How old are you, Justin?”

“Old enough to fuck without getting stuck!”

“I assume when you speak of fucking, you’re speaking of fucking a man,” Doctor Tomlison inquired. “That is what you do, correct?”

I won’t lie. This lady was really pissing me off. It was as if she knew what my hot buttons were and she was pressing each and every one of them. I had to do something different. Had to switch this up so that I could make this therapy thing as painless as possible.

After my initial assessment, Dr. Tomlison said that I would need to see her once per week for six weeks. I countered and asked if we could meet daily. This way I could get this junk over and get on with my life. I knew the game. I knew what they wanted to hear. I would just play along; say what they wanted me to say; act the way they wanted me to act so I could get the hell out of there. She agreed but added four additional days. Fine by me. I just wanted to get it over and done with.

“Okay, can we start over?”

“Sure,” Doctor Tomlison agreed.

“I don’t like the word faggot and would be grateful if you did not use it when referring to me.”

“Okay,” Doctor Tomlison further agreed. “How would you like me to address you?”

“You can call me by my government name; Justin Roberts. Yep, calling me Justin will suffice.”

“Okay, Justin, are you a homosexual?” Doctor Tomlison asked.

“May I ask what this has to do with anything?”

“I am simply trying to understand the root of your anger,” Doctor Tomlison explained. “It seems to be a touchy subject for you. You mentioned crying when you were called that name as a child by your cousin Chanel. You also nearly killed a man when he spoke of your alleged homosexual exploits.”

“Yes. I am gay. I am a homosexual. I indulge in sexual intercourse with men.”

“And when did you make this discovery; the discovery that you were gay?” Doctor Tomlison asked.

“I’ve always been gay. I was born gay.”

“You were born gay yet according to your answers on this questionnaire, it says you were married to a woman for five years,” Doctor Tomlison questioned. “Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Seems a little dishonest,” Doctor Tomlison deduced. “Knowing that you were attracted to men, yet you still married a woman.”

“I didn’t know I was gay. I mean, I knew. It’s hard to explain. I was attracted to my wife. I loved my wife. We had great sex. Truthfully, I thought I was bisexual.”

“When did you realize you preferred men over women?”

After that solo, it was like I became this overnight sensation. Everywhere I went, people knew me and always wanted me to stop and sing for them. I didn’t mind. I loved singing. I loved music. But most of all, I loved church. I loved singing and doing music in church. That’s where I felt at home. There would be times when my mom and dad would drop me off at church and I would just hang out there for hours. Dad had taught me how to turn on the sound system. This way I could play the organ and sing. One evening, Dad dropped me at the church after picking me up from school for a dentist appointment.

We were having bible study later that evening. At any rate, I rushed in, turned on the sound system then went to the organ and started to play.

“I like that,” the Deacon said as he walked towards me at the organ. “I’ve never heard this song before. Did you write it yourself?”

“Yes Sir. I’ve written a lot of songs.”

“How many?” the Deacon asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe 50.”

“That’s a lot of songs,” the Deacon remarked as he came and sat next to me on the organ bench.

“Yeah, I told my dad I have enough songs to do my own album; maybe even two or three albums. But he said I have to...”

The Deacon put his...I could feel his hands on my leg. It didn’t feel right. I knew it wasn’t right. His hands shouldn’t have been on my leg, but it was. I just kept playing the song hoping that he would move his hand. He did. He moved it to the zipper of my pants. He was touching me there. He kept touching me there. I wanted him to stop but I didn’t know how to tell him to stop. I should have just told him to stop but I didn’t know how. I didn’t know how to stop him from touching me. I heard the doors of the church open and I ran. I was hoping it was my dad, but it wasn’t. I guess it was the wind. Maybe my dad didn’t close the door tightly when he left. Maybe the wind had opened it. I don’t know. I closed the door but I didn’t know what to do after then. I wanted to go back to the organ and finish playing my song, but I was scared. I was afraid the Deacon was still there waiting for me. So I hid. I went into the bathroom and stood on the toilet seat. I stayed in there for two hours. When I heard people coming in for bible study, I climbed down off the toilet seat and headed out of the stall. When I walked passed the mirror, I saw my pants were still unzipped. I zipped them, washed my hands then went into service.

I never said anything; not even to my parents. I just carried on like normal. I continued to sing, write and play music. But it was different now. It wasn’t the same. When I would sing before, I was painting a portrait of a story; an untold story that needed to be told. But now I no longer wanted to paint that portrait. I no longer wanted to tell that story. I wanted to hide it. I wanted to hide inside of it. Music became my sanctuary; my refuge; my hiding place. It was the one place I could go and be safe – inside of a song.

I was seven; seven years old.

“What was his name?” Doctor Tomlison asked.

“Who?”

“The Deacon; the deacon who sexually assaulted you,” Doctor Tomlison clarified. “What was his name?”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember.”

“Are you sure it was a Deacon who did this to you,” Doctor Tomlison asked.

“Yes.”

“How do you know?” Doctor Tomlison continued.

“Because I knew him, he was my father’s right-hand man at the church. I knew exactly who he was. He came to our house all the time. He and my dad would have jam sessions down in the basement and my mom would sing. People from the neighborhood would stop by. It got to be so popular that they had to move it to the garage because Mom said she didn’t want a bunch of people walking through our house. You never know if they were coming for the music or if they were scoping out the place to later rob it! The third Saturday night of each month, Mom and Dad would open up the garage for a live concert of sorts. Sometimes they would let my brothers be their opening act. Mom asked me if I wanted to do a song or two. I declined.”

“Why?” Doctor Tomlison asked.

“I just didn’t want too.”

“So, what was his name?” Doctor Tomlison probed.

“Who?”

“The Deacon.”

“I don’t know.”

“But you said you knew him,” Doctor Tomlison reminded. “You said he was your father’s right-hand man and that he came to your house every month. So, what was his name?”

“Why do you do this? Why do you keep asking me these questions? I said I didn’t know his name. Why can’t you be good with that? Okay, you want a name? Walter! His name is Walter!

I could feel my temperature rising and my blood was beginning to boil. She was doing it again. She was getting under my skin. I had to figure this thing out. I couldn't allow her to keep doing this. I had to play the game.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for yelling."

"Why are you apologizing?" Doctor Tomlison asked.

"Because I yelled at you and I should not have yelled. It was wrong. And it was rude."

"But it is your right?" Doctor Tomlison explained. "If someone does or says something to you that you don't like, you have the right to let them know that they have violated your space by their words and or actions. You do understand that don't you, Justin?"

"I guess."

Now I remember. Chanel's brother said he caught me looking at another boys' penis in the bathroom. I remember it. I remember that day. He was right. I was looking. It was Terry Rangers. We went to the same school. We were in the bathroom that night after bible study. I was standing at a urinal and Terry was next to me. I looked over at him and then down at his penis. I wasn't looking at him in a sexual way. I was looking at him and was wondering if anyone had done to him what the Deacon had done to me earlier. I wondered if he had gone through it. I wondered if anyone else in the church had gone through it; if anybody else in the world had gone through it. Surely, I couldn't be the only one. I wondered how it made them feel. Were they mad, sad, happy, and or confused?

At any rate, I put it all behind me and stayed focused on my music. By the time I was 10, I had made my first album. I didn't go to a real studio. I did it in my bedroom and recorded it on a cassette player. By the time I was 14, Mom and Dad surprised me with an early birthday gift. Studio time. This had to have been the best gift ever. Joe Bradly, the engineer at Trax Studio and a good friend of my dad's, let me sit at the control board while he worked on a track. I asked him if I could go in the booth then asked him to playback the track he had been working on. Within 10 minutes, we had recorded a song from top to bottom. By the time my parents came back to pick me up, I had secured an after-school job. Well, it was what they called an internship which translates to free labor. But that was okay with me. Just being able to come to the studio daily was pay enough for me. When I wasn't doing stuff for Mr. Bradly, I worked on my own projects. It was a win-win. Besides, had I not been there, I would have never met the one who would become my wife; Shayla Christenson.

I was 17 and Shayla was 15. She was a singer too. I met her when a group from her church stopped by the studio to do some recording. Shayla sang lead on one of the songs. I was blown away. I had never heard a voice like hers before. She didn't just sing; she *sang*! She had one of those powerhouse voices; like Whitney Houston (but not as good). We became friends and eventually lovers. No, we didn't have sex before she turned 16 but we did have sex before we were married. A few months after my 25th birthday, Shayla and I got married. It was great. I guess the best part about it was being able to have sex and not have to hide it. We could legally 'do it' so to speak.

By now my music career was beginning to take off. Apart from ministering at church on a regular basis, I had gigs set up around town as well as in neighboring areas. Periodically, I'd travel out of the state to do a concert. After a lot of negotiations, I signed my first recording contract. I pulled together a group of young people that I had worked with over the years to do my first official album. *Finally* was the name of the album and it was a huge success. The track *At Last* was a runaway hit and blazed up the gospel music charts. I think it peaked at number two and stayed there for six consecutive weeks. We graced the stage of some of gospel music's biggest venues. My name, Justin Roberts, was becoming a household name. I was that guy who could give Mariah Carey a run for her money in terms of octaves. It was first class accommodations everywhere we went. As my grandmother would say, we were making money hand over fist. In those days, people still actually went out and bought music and didn't download everything. So, between music sales, concerts and tours, Shayla and I were sitting pretty (financially). We bought a home out in Island Park and I purchased brand new cars for each of us. All our hard work had paid off and we had made it. There was only one problem. I didn't love her.

Though my body was with her, my heart was with him.