

CHAPTER 1

Bad

I wasn't born mean. I hated the word "mean." But being bad was great. It got Mom and Dad to at least look at me. And that's all I wanted.

I started being bad when I was little. Real little, like five. I couldn't figure out why Mom and Dad didn't play with me or touch me anymore. I remember that there had been times before when they did. I thought I had done something to make them stop. So I cried. When that didn't work, I would go up to them and hit. I was reaching for anything.

Mom and Dad didn't do much when I hit them. I wanted them to do something. Even hit me back. They just sat on the couch in a fog of smoke. The smoke made my head spin. I didn't get it then. I get it now. They were so high that they didn't know I was there.

It wasn't always bad with both of them. One time I remember opening the fridge. I wanted something to eat. Anything. There were three things in the fridge. Milk, old cheese that looked green, and one can of soda. I couldn't open the soda, so I started to drink the milk. I put my lips on the jug and tried to drink it. Lumps filled my mouth. I choked a little. Then I spit out a sour mess all over my shirt and the floor. I screamed.

Dad walked in the kitchen. Standing in his boxers he looked at me and cursed. He looked at me. Actually looked at me. "TJ, you clean up that mess!" He threw me a

towel, and I cried while I wiped the mess off of me and the floor.

Then I took the towel and threw it at his legs. The white lumps smeared his black legs like paint. I yelled, “I’m hungry!” I stood up and faced the man. “I hate you!” My little hands balled up in fists. I had pulled my shirt off, and I could see my stomach. Spots of white milk stuck to my own dark skin. I didn’t care. I was mad. I was hungry.

Dad stared at for me a minute. Then he started to laugh. “Thomas Jahmal Young! You think you can take me?” He ran after me as I took off into the living room, if you could call it that. It had barely enough room for a small couch and TV. He tackled me in front of Mom. She was on the couch and woke up out of a deep sleep. She watched him pin me down. He was laughing. He took his nasty legs and wiped the curds all over my belly. I almost looked white. Then we both started laughing.

“What’s going on?” Mom wasn’t sure if she should get mad or not.

Dad held me for a moment longer. His grip loosened. I could feel something I hadn’t felt in a long time. He rubbed my head and looked at Mom. “Baby, it looks like we need some food.” He rubbed my skin. “Our milk has turned into paint.”

I giggled. I hadn’t giggled much lately.

Mom didn’t smile. She turned over on the couch and said, “You go get some. Just leave me alone.” Without looking at me she went back to sleep.