MIRRORS OF LIFE – CHAPTER ONE

AS THE CIRCLE OF EARTH TURNS – opening and closing windows into the lives of people – locking and unlocking doors in their path – a 14-year-old girl named Yvonne Baker has fallen in love and becomes euphoric in the news of her pregnancy – believing her 17-year-old boyfriend will love her more as the mother of his child.

But like rain without substance, her melodic joy becomes lugubrious when she learns her boyfriend has abandon. She prays in the whimpering of a lost child and tears that fall from a broken-heart brings wisdom to an undeveloped mind and strength to a feeble child as eyes once closed are opened to her situation – one of six siblings in a two-bedroom apartment and her bed the sullied carpet.

 Surroundings she once saw as comfortable has become bothersome and raised a consciousness that ignited her motivation to escape the clutches of poverty. Five months later in a newfound maturity given by the cry of faith, Yvonne gave birth in the hope that her son named Mister will break the family cycle of generational welfare.

Protecting him from the unscrupulous role models that plague communities decimated by poverty and violence, she instilled from his infancy the values that guided him to avoid the waywardness of the streets and the personal leadership to resist peer pressure. Under strict guidance, Mister grew with education as the priority and became an honor roll student every quarter.

In a place where children control their parents and the elderly are often disrespected by youth, Mister isn’t one of them, neither hangs around them. His life is schoolwork and basketball.

At 9-years-old, Mister joined a 10 & under AAU basketball team, and his height and skills to play every position attracted college scouts fascinated by his Phenom talent. The future stood bright for Mister and his mother worked everything in her power to keep his future bright.

 One evening when Yvonne was home alone in her apartment provided by the welfare system – rapid knocks on her door interrupted a phone conversation with her son who is staying the weekend with his great-grandmother. Wondering whose knocking so vigorously, she abruptly ended the call and asked in her pleasant nature, “Who is it?”

“It’s me baby. How are you? I missed you.”

The sound of Justin’s voice, Mister’s father, hadn’t been heard in years and isn’t a pleasant sound to her ears – but Yvonne opened the door with the safety latch attached and asked precariously, “What do you want Justin?”

“Wow! You’ve gotten prettier. A real chocolate beauty. I missed you baby. Open up…I wanna see my son.” he said heartfelt.

“Why?” she asked dispassionately.

 “Why you frontin (slang for pretending). You know you miss me. Let me in baby.”

“Nah…ain’t nothing here for you.”

“What! My son’s here. Bitch – let me in so I can see my son.”

“I ain’t your bitch. You better go before I call the police.”

“Wait baby…I’m sorry. I’ve been locked up for seven years and I miss you. I just want to talk to you and see my son. Don’t let me stand out here in the hall talking to you. Let me in so I can see my son…then I’ll go.”

“He’s not here…and why is he so important to you now? When I told you I was pregnant, you dogged me. You remember what you said? I haven’t forgot. You said that baby ain’t mine. Then you called me, young and dumb and full of cum – laughing at me in front of your boys. You remember that?”

“I’m sorry baby. I was high and shit. I was young and stupid...but I’ve changed. I matured in the joint. I stopped smoking trees (slang for marijuana). I’m out of the game now. I’m looking for an honest job. I love you Yvonne. I’ve always loved you baby. I want us to start over. I know you remember the good times we had.”

“I’m sorry Justin, but you’re not my type.”

“Your type. What the fuck you mean I’m not your type!”

“You not my type. The girl you knew is a woman now…and you’re not the man she wants in her life.”

“Bitch, you the same freak (slang for promiscuous) that like to roll with big dicks. Stop frontin. Let me in.”

Yvonne smirked at his words, resenting the foolishness of her youth and said, “You’re still a big boy in a man’s body. Bye Justin. I will pray for you.”

“I don’t need your prayers. Tell me where I can find my son before I kick this fucking door-in!”

Expecting Justin might attempt to force his way inside – before she opened the door, Yvonne grabbed a sharp chef knife from out of a silverware collection given to her as a housewarming gift – and when he threatened to barge-in, she showed the knife, saying, “If you force your way into my house, I’m gonna kill you.”

Seeing the seriousness in her eyes, he tried to pretend he wasn’t afraid and said, “So you gonna stab me now? You think I’m scared? Bitch, I’ve faced men with shanks. You don’t scare me. Open the fucking the door before I kick this motherfucker in.”

Yvonne shut the door and turned the deadbolt as Justin stood startled – stun by the ease in-which she turned him away. He paused for three seconds staring at the door – thinking about his next move, before yelling in his obstinate mentality, “Bitch, I’m gonna see my son.”

Yvonne stood quiet behind the door with her ears listening intently for the comfort of hearing Justin leave. As she stayed quiet with the knife clutched tightly in her hand, she could feel Justin waiting outside her door as if she will open. Seconds later, he yelled, “I’m gonna kick your ass when I catch you on the street. You fuckin ho (slang for whore).”

Yvonne stayed silent. Her mind pondering on how to keep Justin away from Mister. A new stress was added to her life. Another problem to solve among the many already.

When Yvonne heard the sauntering footsteps of Justin exiting the building, she ran to the phone in a fear kept hidden and informed her grandmother to keep Mister inside.

“What’s wrong?” her grandmother asked feeling the edginess in her granddaughter’s voice.

“Justin’s looking for him.”

“Justin’s out? Why he looking for Mister. He told everyone that Mister ain’t his son.”

“Yeah but I think he heard about the college scouts.”

“OH. Okay. I’ll keep him in the house.”

The next morning when Yvonne picked-up her son, she didn’t tell Mister that his father came looking for him and she didn’t see Justin again – because after he left her building, he was killed later that night when he was caught cheating in a dice game.

When she heard the news of his death, she felt the sting of sadness – because under all of his thuggish mentality she saw a good person lost in translation and cried for him. But she didn’t tell Mister that Justin is his father.

 As the days of Yvonne’s life continued in the hope of her dreams, she attended a nightclub with Cynthia, her best friend since the age of 6, to celebrate Cynthia’s 24th birthday.

Sitting at a four person table in a nightclub well-known as a singles meeting ground, they are scouring the place discreetly as women do, looking for a single man that attracts their selective eye – when the beat of “Billie Jean” by Michael Jackson impulses their movement to the dance floor with each other as the partner.

They are happily bouncing in the latest dance moves when a tall-dark and mysterious man in a military uniform smoothly steps in-between to dance with Yvonne.

Her private thoughts become – “Where did he come from? I didn’t notice him when I was scanning the room.” But as out of the shadows of others he appeared gazing at her with his magnetic eyes in the silkiness of his movements that heightened the attraction of a man in uniform. Yvonne responded to his handsomeness with the brightness of her eyes to confirm a mutual attraction as smiles brightened both faces.

Cynthia became a forgotten dance partner, but continued while Yvonne and this enigmatic man flirted in thoughts reflecting on their faces. When the song ended in the beat of another, the man of mystery introduced himself as Cedric Williams and escorted Yvonne back to her table, while Cynthia having found a new dance partner remained on the floor.

As Yvonne and Cedric sat the table poignant in attraction, surrounded by loud music and indistinct conversations, he asked, “Are you single?”

“Yes…but I have a 9-year-old son.”

“What’s his name?”

“Mister.”

“Mister. That’s a cool name. I have a 4-year-old daughter back home in Mississippi. Her name is Erin.”

“Erin is a pretty name.”

Curious to learn the status of his relationship with the mother, she asked with an inquiring mind, “Are you involved with the mother of your daughter?”

Knowing the reason for the question, he answered –

“I love the mother of my daughter…we’re very good friends…but I’m not in love with her and she isn’t in love with me. No matter what happens between us, I will always be a part of my daughter’s life. I believe a father’s role is to support his child emotionally and financially regardless of his relationship with the mother.”

Feeling good about his answer, she continued to pick his brain and asked, “Why did you join the military?”

In a look of regret he said –

“I joined to escape the slums of Mississippi...a state where slavery still exists in the backwoods. I joined to support my daughter, because the only jobs in Mississippi for a black man without a degree is washing dishes and cleaning toilets. I thought the military was my escape from poverty, but I quickly learned the only way for a non-athlete black man to escape poverty is with a good education or entrepreneurship. I’m dreaming of starting my own business one day.”

“What business would you open?” she asked inquisitively – looking into the dreaminess of his eyes that sparkled brown satin.

“A distributor of gold. I believe I can convince the Nigerians to enter into a partnership to sell their gold below market price. Then I’ll sell it to the Europeans at market price.”

“Why would the Nigerians sell their gold to you below market price?” she asked to learn.

“The white man is raping Africa for materials to make his planes and ships…maybe I can be the liaison to help Africa reap resources from this country.

That is one of my dreams. Everything that anyone has created or accomplished started with a dream. Dreams come true with potential and the will to succeed, but you must have the potential.

If your dream is to be a professional basketball player and you don’t have the potential which is the talent, you need to follow another dream.

If your dream is to become a lawyer and you don’t take the educational steps necessary to become a lawyer, then you’re just daydreaming and fooling yourself.”

Yvonne looked at Cedric with high interest – imagining the possibility of his dream and said, “My son is my dream. I might not escape poverty, but I’m determined for him to escape and never return.”

“That’s good. You should live for what will be, remembering what has been, and knowing what is.”

Struck by those profound words, she asked the meaning and he answered philosophically –

“Reality surpasses actuality. Your current situation isn’t your reality, but your actuality. Actuality is yesterday and today – but reality is yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We might not live to see tomorrow, but tomorrow will come, so we need to prepare today for tomorrow.”

Yvonne looked at Cedric and saw a very intelligent and charismatic man. Cedric saw a strong and very insightful woman.

As they continued in a conversation without allowing anything current to interrupt, they discovered lots in common, from the things they like to do in their leisure to their views on religion and politics. Strangers no more, they began dating regularly and their relationship grew quickly as Cedric became a fixture in the life of Mister and filled the void of a father-figure.

Yvonne has fallen in love for the first time as a woman, but kept her feelings secret. Although the signs are clear that Cedric feels the same, like a wise woman, she waited for him to share his feelings. Five months from the day they first met – Cedric proposes and Yvonne gleefully accepts – they make plans to wed when Cedric returns from a six-month deployment in Lebanon.

What begins for most as a slow process came rapidly for them, as they quickly fell in love by seizing the moments that mirrored love when they talked, when they looked at each-other, and when they thought about one-another. Not only did they love each other, but most importantly, they liked each other.

Six weeks after his deployment, Yvonne learns she’s pregnant and eagerly tries to contact Cedric to share the good news, but is unable to reach him.

She writes letters without reply as the weeks pass in silence. Her worry turns to fear – then to grieving when she learns from one of his comrades that Cedric has died in a gun battle with extremists.

A life that had turned into the stages of fulfilling a dream was crushed by the reality of death. Sobbing with choking tears at the rancid news, Yvonne laid straddled on her bed in fond memories of Cedric that brought an abundance of more tears.

Mister, hearing the loud and unyielding cries from his mother, ran into her room with his eyes flooded in a face befuddled. Laying his tall thin body on top of his mother, his baffled face becomes waterworks. He doesn’t know the reason for his mother’s tears – he’s crying because she’s crying. The harder she cried, the tighter he held her, before saying words that Cedric had told him to remember when bad things happen – “There is a positive side to every negative thing.”

Yvonne found a comfort when the words were spoken from the mouth of her 10-year-old son. She felt an inspiration like none before – and in her sweltering eyes, turned to hug her son in this moment of sadness.

Hearing the whispers of memories from the emptied space in her heart, she tells her son that Cedric has died and his tears becomes personal.

With his mouth gasping from an overflow of tears, he struggles to ask, “Why my father die mommy?”

She holds her son tighter – kissing the top of his head as he lays his weeping eyes on her breast in a slumped body looking to escape the feeling at hand.

Realizing her son needs to be comforted, she holds back her tears and speaks the same words he had spoken to comfort her – before saying, “I’m pregnant.”

When Mister heard pregnant, his slumped body quickly lifted up and his tears of sadness turned to tears of joy, as he felt the impact of understanding the positive side of a negative thing.

Excited about a brother or sister, he gently laid his well-groomed head on the unnoticeable bulge in his mother’s stomach and fell asleep in that position, as Yvonne contemplated on how to solve the new challenge in her life.

But she welcomed the challenge of raising another child alone – because in her womb is the last life of the first man she truly loved.

END OF CHAPTER ONE