

Prelude
Lynette's Diary
August 15, 2008

Today is the worst day of my life, yet it is also my 17th birthday. It is ironic because last year my 16th birthday was arguably the best day of my life. My mother was the life of the party as usual. She was getting so much better, but then her cancer came back. Seriously why couldn't it have stayed gone God!

I knew she was going to beat it again, but she thought different. Hmm, you were always right Momma. I just wish you weren't. They did a pretty good job at the funeral hall, but I couldn't stand looking at you. I wanted to jump in that casket too. Have them bury me six feet under with the woman that brought me in this world. I would rather suffocate with you than to breathe without you.

Momma, you know I can't live without you. Daddy neither, he is trying to be strong, but I know life without you is worse than death to him. What do I do to fill your shoes? I wonder if you could talk God into sending you back. I know, I know, I'm being irrational again well I think it is worth a shot. I'll dig you up myself need be. Just joking, Daddy would though (lol).

Seriously this has been the worst day in my life. The worst part had to be everyone coming up and asking me if I'm alright. What do they think? People, especially our fake family, none of your sisters came to see you when you were in the hospital. You should have seen them Momma falling out cutting the fool in the funeral then eating up all the food dried eyed at the reception.

I will never go to another funeral for the rest of my life. I wouldn't even go to my own if I had a choice. (lol) Oh Mom, who do I

talk to now? Janelle's my best friend, but she is not you Mom. Did you ask God yet? Just kidding...

Well I guess I'll go check on Daddy. I don't think I can write in this journal anymore. It is becoming too painful. The world is unfair and God's wrath has no sense of direction. You weren't supposed to take her!

The preacher today went on and on about letting go and letting God. I can't let go of my heart and still live. My mother is my everything, letting go of her leaves me with nothing. I am lost in a smoke cloud trapped in the worst days of my life...

Chapter 1: For a Reason

Marcus stares at the ceiling as his alarm clock buzzer sounds. He looked to the right side of his bed and mumbled, “Tracie”. He then took a deep breath and sat up with the buzzer still sounding. Finally he rose and without stretching he marched to the bathroom.

In the bathroom mirror he practiced his later introduction, “Hello class my name is Mr. Randall. Nah I sound too old school. What’s up teeny boppers I’m Mr. Randall. Naw that’s too unprofessional. Man how did I get in this mess?”

How Marcus got into his current predicament was a long story. According to his prior plan that Marcus had developed a year ago he was supposed to be in the metro Atlanta area with his family searching for a home. His plan had been destructed by the same person that created it. Marcus was in a constant state of mind of wanting to rewind time.

After graduating from Hampton University with a Masters degree, Marcus was supposed to be on top of the world. He had just married his high school sweetheart, and they were preparing to have a son. The American dream was getting ready for him, but temptation set Marcus back and sidetracked all of his plans.

In Atlanta, Marcus had a six figure salary waiting for him through the company he had interned with. Yet he had to reside in the Hampton Roads area to win his family back. He wasn’t the type of man that could just pay child support and be free to date multiple women. He adored the captivity of responsibility. He was among the low percentage of men that loved the duty list that came with being a man.

In search for an occupation in his field Marcus applied for a Marketing teacher position at Heritage High School. The principal, Mrs. Peterson, hired Marcus after one interview. She believed that Marcus was the perfect role model that the young teens needed in their classrooms. Marcus wasn't as enthused as Mrs. Peterson was, but he accepted the position.

Tightening his tie in the mirror, Marcus mentally prepared himself for today. Picking up his keys he noticed a money order receipt. He could hear his father's voice, 'always keep your receipts just in case they cheat'. He picked up the receipt and placed it in the appropriate folder.

When exiting the apartment the name slipped his lips again, "Tracie, man I messed up this time." His mind wandered to his future students; after many years of being out of high school he was wondering how he would be perceived by teenagers again. That being said he looked over his attire, and he smiled as he anticipated a few Kanye West jokes.

The dress code changed dramatically since Marcus was in high school. Teenagers were now wearing Mohawks, and their pants were sagging to their kneecaps yet their shirts were long enough to conceal their underwear. He was a little anxious to see how the youth of today would respond to him.

Marcus decided to stop by Hardees for some breakfast since he was early. The Hardees's lobby was completely filled with Caucasians this made Marcus think about many negative comments made about his race. He was tired of his people being called lazy, but he was even more tired of the black people that prove them right.

As Marcus got into the line he spoke to an elderly lady in front of him. She looked at him and rolled her old eyes; this forced Marcus to laugh. As the lady approached the counter the cashier had to restock the cups.

"I have a doctor's appointment in fifteen minutes. Can you move a little faster missy?" the old woman ranted.

“Just hold on for one second ma’am... Okay I can take your order now, just calm down it is not that serious,” the cashier calmly stated.

“How dare you!? Where is your manager?” the old lady demanded.

Marcus felt the need to intervene as he saw the young pregnant cashier go retrieve her manager. “Hold up what did she say that would make you want to speak to her manager?”

The lady didn’t even bother to turn around to look at Marcus. It was as if she was saying, ‘you have no control in this matter’. Marcus pondered why she didn’t look him in the eyes; he figured she was intimidated by people she couldn’t control.

The cashier returned in seconds with her manager. “Ma’am, I’m the manager how can I assist you?” the manger politely asked.

“This girl here just told me that my doctor appointment wasn’t serious. She should be fired!” the old woman pointed.

Marcus observed the scene for a complete second. He noticed the cashier fighting the temptation to rip the old lady’s finger off. After noticing the manager contemplating he spoke up promptly. “This lady must be going to a mental clinic because the cashier clearly just asked for the customer’s patience.”

The manager quickly scanned the room after reading the body language of other customers he reacted. “Okay well I can just take your order and get you on your way to your important appointment,” the manager stated as he stepped towards the register.

After the rude customer was out of the way Marcus approached the counter and placed his order. “Can I get a number one large; please don’t pay these people any mind. Don’t let them take your smile,” Marcus stated.

The cashier immediately turned her frown into a grin. Marcus smiled at her and tried to envision her story. She looked to be in her teens, but she wasn’t on her way to school. Instead, she was working for minimum wage to provide for her future child.

When Marcus' order was up, the cashier gladly handed him his food. "Thank you," she bashfully said.

"No, thank you. Remember what I said don't let them take your smile," Marcus said with a serious demeanor.

The young cashier showed all of her thirty-two teeth. Marcus smiled back while he exited Hardees. He felt a hundred times better; there was a new found feeling of hope in his heart. Finally he was seeing what Mrs. Peterson saw; he saw he was a teacher for a reason. A new sense of pride took over him as he went off to school.

Chapter 2

Senior Year

“Devanté! Wake your tail up boy!” A petite woman yelled through a scarred up wooden door.

“Dang mom, why you waking me up all early for?” Devanté asked his mother.

“‘Cause it’s your senior year. And you heard what the judge said. Your freedom is going to be determined by your grades. That’s what you get. Told you ‘bout hangin’ wit those hoods,” his mother preached as she walked back into her room.

Devanté rose to his feet and dramatically stretched and yawned. He then looked for his cellular phone and phoned Rell, his right hand man. “Yo Rell, what up homey?” Devanté greeted.

“Nothing much, what’s good with you?” Rell returned the greeting.

“Man why my mom still trippin’ ‘bout that case. For real I’m not foolin’ with your boy Chad no more,” Devanté stated.

“You funny, come open the door though,” Rell requested. He stayed in Newsome Park the neighboring neighborhood to Devanté’s complex, Brookridge. Rell and Devanté were best friends since grade school, better yet, since day care. They had a history, but their past would be no comparison to their future.

“Alright I’m coming down now,” Devanté stated as he hung up his phone. Devanté came downstairs in his boxers and a white tee. He wiped the cold out of his eyes then opened the door.

“Dang dude, you just now waking up?” Rell asked.

“I took a shower last night though; I’ll be ready in ‘bout five minutes kid. You killin’ ‘em with them Red Monkey jeans, how you afford them janks,” Devanté replied as they headed back upstairs.

“Oh you know I ain’t got the grip to pay for these. My brother got them for me from N-Y when we went. I told you, you should have came.”

“I’m sorry Rell but your brother is a hot box, I can’t take a trafficking fall with him.”

Rell’s brother was named, Flake. He hustled any and everything: guns, marijuana, crack, and etcetera if someone was going to buy it he was going to sell it. There were no morals in his life just self-satisfaction. Money was what he desired and nothing else; he was an empty soul.

Devanté brushed his teeth; he washed his face then looked in the mirror to check himself out. Last week, he picked out his first outfit he was going to wear for the school year. Still he was indecisive on what pair of Timberlands he was going to wear with it. Devanté always knew he could count on Rell for a second opinion, especially when it came to gear.

“Yo, should I wear the two-tone cream and browns or should I just go with the butter beige?” Devanté asked like he was a doctor with x-rays in his hand questioning his colleague.

Rell examined the boots closely glancing back at Devanté’s outfit then he spoke with confidence, “two-tone fa sho.”

After receiving confirmation Devanté put on the two-tone Timberlands, grabbed his cell phone then headed downstairs with Rell at his rear. As they reached the door, his mom came to the top of the stairs. “Devanté this is your senior year. Please take it serious,” she stated.

Devanté glanced at her then exited without a reply. The words ricocheted in his head. He knew she was telling him this was his last year as a child; in nine months he would be a man. The rate he was going the only way he would be going to school next year would be to

repeat the twelfth grade. Serious would have to be his demeanor this year if he wanted to make a change.

“Yo man this year is goin’ to be lovely. I mean, we goin’ have all the girls this year,” Rell attempted to spark a conversation as they walked to school.

“Man I can’t be out here chasing with you this year. I got to hit the books this year,” Devanté replied seriously.

“C’mon man, you know they graduate nearly everybody. All you got to do Dee is pass Government and English,” Rell stated.

“So what if I just graduate what I’m going do then, get a job I can get now. I be better off getting my G.E.D. A brother needs a college degree to make any descent kind of pay.”

“Well, when you taken the G.E.D. test?”

“I didn’t say I was taken the G.E.D. test,” Devanté responded.

“Oh I know you ain’t sayin’ you goin’ go to college,” Rell chuckled as he discovered what his friend was saying.

“I don’t see why not, for real, I got a whole year,” Devanté immediately became agitated.

“No offense Dee, you also got a 1.4 GPA. If it was even your junior year I would be like yeah it’s possible, but dude this your last year you goin’ take only five classes a semester. You basically tellin’ me you goin’ get straight A’s.”

“Yup and not only that I’m goin’ take seven classes.”

“You goin’ take a full load on your senior year, you crazy.”

“No are you crazy? Look around Rell we live at the bottom. Bums, hoes, and hustlers is all we see. This ain’t gonna be me man. I’m not dogging you or your brother, but I can’t hustle. When I was in the holding cell all I thought about was my father. My pops got life. What I look like standing beside him in a matchin’ outfit?” Devanté vented.

“I feel you, but I still think you should’ve thought about that like two years ago,” Rell replied with a grin.

“You ain’t never lied,” Devanté replied then started to laugh.

The boys walked in the midst of hopelessness, passing by crackheads and bums on their way to school. Ironically, their school was newly built and was a beautiful sight in the middle of a sour site. Even though they both despised school, being the first day, they were both excited to be off to school.

Chapter 3

Needful Guidance

As the sun shined on the horizon, a glimmer of light crept into a crack in the blinds. As this light met Lynette's eyes, her tears shined and made crystal rainbows. She awakened to another dreary day; her spirits were sinking more each day. Life seemed like a repetition of hopelessness.

"Lynette, baby you up?" her father asked through the door.

"I'm up daddy."

"Are you descent?"

"Yes you can come in," Lynette invited.

"I wanted to see...baby you are still in your pajamas? School starts in about thirty minutes! I'm sure Janelle will be here in a few."

"I know daddy I just couldn't get up. I know this sounds stupid, but I just thought Momma would be here this morning," Lynette stated sitting up in her bed.

"Oh Lynette I would kill for that to be true and to truly believe that there would be a day it could be possible; but the truth is the truth. No matter how sad or unfair the truth is. Your mother, my wife is now our guardian angel," her father explained then sat by his daughter's feet.

Lynette scooted towards her father and hugged him. "And you're still my hero daddy," Lynette affectionately told her father.

Her father kissed her on her forehead then replied, "Thanks baby, now get up and be my hero. This is your senior year, and I don't want to see no senioritis."

Lynette jumped out of bed quickly as her father exited the room. She looked in her closet, which was full of clothes, and picked out a new outfit. She would mix and match some of her outfits from last year, but today she had to be completely new.

Lynette heard her father speaking to someone. She figured it was her friend, Janelle, who was also her ride to school. “Hey Lynette,” Janelle greeted before entering Lynette’s bedroom.

Janelle would have normally joked on her friend for making them late on their first day. She showed little empathy in her life, but she had to show it here. Her best friend had just lost her mother; although Janelle didn’t have to put herself in Lynette’s shoes to feel pain because she had lost too. Lynette’s mother treated all of Lynette’s friends as her own children, so everyone personally mourned the loss.

“Hey girl, I’m sorry for making us late. I had stayed up late last night. I was tired,” Lynette stated with an embarrass grin.

“Oh it’s okay girl, it’s the first day I don’t think anyone is going to be on time,” Janelle lied. She knew everybody would be there on time to show off their new outfits and electronics.

The girls were extremely quiet; usually they would be full of life filling the air with laughter. Yet the world had spun too fast and knocked the carefree aura out of their relationship. Janelle was guarding her words to the point she remained silent. She watched Lynette mope from the bathroom back to her room without any words spoken.

Lynette’s father wasn’t use to this soundless house that he would normally be praying for. He felt his wife’s spirit urging him to do something, so he arose from the kitchen table and made his way to Lynette’s room.

“So Janelle this is your last year. Are you excited?” he asked trying his hardest to spark a conversation his daughter would want to entertain.

“Yes Mr. Wallace I can’t wait to see what college is going to accept me,” Janelle answered.

Lynette sprayed on her perfume then casually grabbed her purse. “Bye Daddy, love you,” she kissed her father on the cheek then exited her bedroom.

Her father watched her head to the door then he caught Janelle before she completely got out of the room. “Janelle, look after her for me,” he said with a low hoarse voice. She responded with a silent nod.

As the girls got into the car they noticed a garbage truck across the street. “Oh we must be real late,” Lynette stated.

“I can get us there in a few. We probably only be a few minutes late,” Janelle replied.

The girls rode in silence until Lynette pulled out her schedule. “What you got first period, I got Marketing?”

“I have Physics. I can’t stand science; I’m definitely going to have to get to school on time. I can’t miss anything in that class.”

“I’m sorry girl about making us late today. I was just...you know,” Lynette choked on her words.

“I do Lynette and don’t worry about it. I’m sure there are going to be days you are going to be calling me wondering where I’m at,” Janelle managed to get a laugh out of Lynette.

Janelle pulled into the parking lot and placed the car in park. She looked at Lynette with worry written on her face as she read the nervousness on Lynette’s. “Lynette, are you alright?”

“I’m more scared than I was when I walked through them doors as a freshman.”

“Well just like when we were freshmen I’m here by your side,” Janelle comforted.

“Thanks Janelle you have always been there,” Lynette thanked her best friend.

The girls exited the car then exhaled. Lynette was scared of what people would say, and believe it or not Janelle was even more scared. She felt obligated to protect her friend’s feelings, especially, after Mr. Wallace asked her to. Both of the girls felt the world leaning on their shoulders as they went off to school.

Chapter 4

My Class... My Rules

Once beyond the double doors entrance, Lynette and Janelle parted ways. The hallways were near bare, so Lynette figured the bell already rung. Her hypothesis was a second too early; the bell sounded and caught her off-guard making her jump reflexively.

Mrs. Peterson, the principal, came out of the main office and spotted Lynette, “Lynette, good morning, can you come in my office real quick?”

“Yes ma’am,” Lynette responded politely secretly wondering if she was already in trouble.

At the exact same time as Mrs. Peterson called out to Lynette, Marcus called out to two students wandering the halls. “Excuse me do either one of you have Marketing first period?”

“Damn Dee look like your class found you,” Rell laughed.

Devanté was embarrassed, so everything positive he spoke earlier was forgotten. His emotions overtook him like they always did. He was always ultra sensitive like a fragile time bomb. Devanté walked pass Marcus without a word. He entered the classroom and walked straight to the back.

Marcus knew he was being tested, and he felt destined to pass the test. He entered the classroom and gently closed the door. “Devanté Williams wouldn’t happen to have a pass, would he?” Marcus asked.

“How you know I’m Devanté?”

“Because everybody else is here but Devanté and Lynette; the guy out there called you Dee. I just figured, well, I’m sorry for assuming. Are you Lynette?”

The class erupted in laughter, but the laughter died fast when the class felt the heat from Devanté’s eyes. “Yeah I’m Devanté,” Devanté spoke up.

“Okay well Devanté I’m going to give you a pass, matter of fact, the whole class gets one tardy pass, but when it’s gone it’s gone,” Marcus paused for a moment then began his spill, “This is Marketing 101 you are not my students you are my employees. I don’t fail you, I fire you. You don’t get out my class, you quit. I have two week notice slips...” Marcus was cut off by Devanté.

“Yo, can I get one of those?” Devanté asked rudely.

“You sure can, and anyone else that wants one can have one too,” Marcus replied. Devanté grabbed one and started to walk out of the class. “You got to take it to the principal and get it signed.” While Marcus talked to Devanté’s back six other students stood.

When Marcus saw them walking towards him, he felt failure in the worst way. He handed out the slips one by one, but he stopped the six teens for a second. “Hold up for one second...if you continue to quit fast and follow then life will pass fast and lead you to a life of sorrow.”

The students left and there were only six students left in the classroom. In five minutes Marcus had lost more than half of his class. He wondered how long this teaching thing was going to last. Out of frustration he asked the class, “Does anyone else want to quit?”

Before Devanté rudely entered his Marketing class, Lynette and Mrs. Peterson sat in the principal’s office. Lynette looked nervous, and she was for various reasons. She was most nervous about her emotions. She hated to cry in public, in her mind, people made matters worse. Their pity made her pitiful; some times when people try to help, they hurt.

“Lynette I wanted you to know that I’m here for you like always. I always thought of you as a daughter and I only hope you can look at me like someone you can confide in,” Mrs. Peterson compassionately expressed.

“I can Mrs. Peterson,” Lynette uncomfortably replied.

“Alright, Lynette can I share something with you that I rarely tell people?”

“Yes,” Lynette’s edginess vanished; she was now on the edge of her seat.

“When I was a few years younger than you my mom passed away. That’s the real reason why I called you in here. Right after my mother’s passing was the hardest on me. My anger towards her grew, and I grew distant. I cut off the entire world because in my mind the world didn’t understand.

“That’s what I wanted to say to you if you feel like the world is misunderstanding you, come to me. Cancer took my mother just like it took yours, I understand,” Mrs. Peterson exclaimed nearly in tears as she sat on the edge of her desk near Lynette.

“Thanks Mrs. Peterson,” Lynette replied then hugged her principal and surrogate mother in tears. She felt a hundred times better, yet she was still on-guard with her peers. Lynette was glad Mrs. Peterson opened up to her. Everyone knew Lynette needed someone to talk to; she was ecstatic to know who that person was.

“You got me boohooing smearing my makeup. Go ahead and get to class. Here’s my card call me anytime on my cell,” Mrs. Peterson instructed.

“Thanks again Mrs. Peterson; I’ll call you when I need to,” Lynette replied.

Mrs. Peterson walked Lynette out of the main office. On her way back to class her nervousness kicked back in. Almost trembling she began to ponder if her classmates knew of her loss. ‘Of course they would know,’ she thought as she unconsciously walked. When she got to a corner she was knocked to the ground.

“Oh...oh, my bad...I just went around the corner...I’m sorry Lynette,” Devanté apologized.

“Why don’t you watch where you’re going?!” Lynette asked as she helped herself up avoiding Devanté’s hands.

“Dang I said sorry. I mean we both was walking close to the wall; we just hit the corner at the same time,” Devanté explained.

“Yeah right just like you threw that dirt in my hair on accident,” Lynette regained her stride to her class.

“Man, that was eight years ago. When you going to forgive me?” Devanté curiously asked.

“Never!” Lynette yelled to ensure that he heard her.

“Forget you then, you too stuck up anyway.” When he got around the corner he mumbled profanity. Every year he plotted how he was going to make Lynette his girlfriend for the past decade, and once again he failed. This year he struck out in record breaking time.

Lynette figured that Devanté hadn’t heard about her loss due to his last remark. As she hit the other corner she almost ran into someone else. Lynette let out a loud sigh.

“I’m sorry Lynette, what class you got?” the teen asked.

“Marketing, why?” Lynette answered then questioned.

“You might not want to go there,” a girl in the group stated.

“Why not Donya?” Lynette questioned her associate.

“Because the teacher is Sgt. Slaughter I don’t know about you, but this is my senior year I’m not having that.”

“Well I’m going to have to see this for myself,” Lynette stated then regained stride to her destination.

“Good luck girl,” Donya said.

Lynette entered her classroom to only see six other pupils there. “Is this Marketing class?” she asked confident that it was.

“Yes, you must be Lynette. I’m sorry to tell you Lynette half of the class has quit already,” Marcus answered then informed.

“Well that’s their loss, I guess,” Lynette replied.

Marcus wondered if she was being sarcastic, yet he felt too inspired by the statement to ponder any further. Since the others had left he really hadn't did anything. Now he decided to pull out his lesson plan; he was ready to start teaching.

"Okay for the first day let's have an open panel discussion, team. What do you all think Marketing really is?" Hands shot up. Marcus pointed at one.

"I think Marketing is buying and selling things," a student hypothesized out loud.

"Good," Marcus replied then pointed out another hand, "Lynette."

"I think Marketing is everything. From cost production to advertising to distribution; Marketing is everything regarding business rolled up in one."

"Wow, I couldn't have put it better. Alright why do you want to know Marketing?" Marcus asked. Hands shot up again, this forced a smile on Marcus face. Now he was a teacher.

While the Marketing class interacted with their teacher, Devanté and his entourage sat quietly in the main office. They were told to wait on Mrs. Peterson. When she walked out of her office everyone stood at attention including staff. She browsed the row of teenagers in the main office.

"So, you all want out of Marketing..." Mrs. Peterson was interrupted by their excuses. They all spoke at the same time besides Devanté. "Quiet! I know it's a new school year, but the rules haven't changed. Now who was the first to leave?"

Everyone looked at Devanté, letting him know how many friends he really had. Devanté raised his hand. He had a gut feeling that he made a hasty bad decision.

"Devanté come into my office," Mrs. Peterson emitted.

He didn't know how many times he was given that invite, but it was given a lot. Devanté entered Mrs. Peterson's office a little shook.

She saw right through him, and he knew he was about to be transparent.

“I got to give it to you Mr. Williams, you are a leader. Your peers take to you without you even asking. The Lord gives us all gifts, but it is up to us how we decide to use them. You lead but you lead blindly. You understand what I’m saying?”

“Yes ma’am,” Devanté replied. He didn’t dare to argue his case, he had none. Halfway down the hall he knew he wasn’t getting out of Marketing, yet his pride wouldn’t let him turn back. Now he realized he was going back anyway.

“Now I want you to go back to Mr. Randall’s class and throw that slip in the garbage. You don’t have to say nothing just do as I say. If you do this for me I’ll keep it in mind,” Mrs. Peterson instructed.

“Yes ma’am,” Devanté replied then exited her office. He felt two inches high.

Mrs. Peterson followed him out, “since you all followed Devanté here you can all follow him back.” Mrs. Peterson went back into her office without waiting for a response.

The other six teens felt yea high as they trotted once again behind Devanté. He had led them nowhere; he had done nothing to their benefit. He had given his peers a round trip they could have lived without.

As they approached their class they were surprised to hear laughter. Sure enough, it was coming from their class. Devanté entered the classroom first and threw away the two week notice slip.

“So I see the other half of the class has decided to come back and join us. For taking an unauthorized break from the jobsite you all will be given a zero for today, but don’t worry you all don’t have to do any work,” Marcus informed.

“Alright class so what is supply and demand?” Devanté raised his hand. “Oh Devanté you are not on the schedule today, and I can’t allow you to work off the clock just so you know,” Marcus stated.

Devanté put his hand down and then put his head on the table. He had totally embarrassed himself that whole morning. Enviously he

listened to their class discussion wanting to add valid points, but he chose to be ostracized. Disgust was his feeling as he remembered everything he told Rell on the way to school. He realized there and then; it's a thousand times tougher to live your words than to speak them.

