

# THE HATE U GIVE

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## TEN

We spend the night at Uncle Carlos's house because the riots started again as soon as the sun went down. Somehow the store got spared. We should go to church and thank God for that, but Momma and I are too tired to sit through less than an hour of anything. Sekani wants to spend another day at Uncle Carlos's, so Sunday morning we return to Garden Heights without him.

Right as we get off the freeway, we're met by a police road-block. Only one lane of traffic isn't blocked by a patrol car, and officers talk to drivers before letting them pass through.

Suddenly it's as if someone grabbed my heart and twisted it. "Can we—" I swallow. "Can we get around them?"

"Doubt it. They probably got these all around the neighborhood." Momma glances over at me and frowns. "Munch? You okay?"

I grab my door handle. They can easily grab their guns and leave us like Khalil. All the blood in our bodies pooling on the street for everybody to see. Our mouths wide open. Our eyes staring at the sky, searching for God.

"Hey." Momma cups my cheek. "Hey, look at me."

I try to, but my eyes are filled with tears. I'm so sick of being this damn weak. Khalil may have lost his life, but I lost something too, and it pisses me off.

"It's okay," Momma says. "We got this, all right? Close your eyes if you have to."

I do.

*Keep your hands visible.*

*No sudden moves.*

*Only speak when spoken to.*

The seconds drag by like hours. The officer asks Momma for her ID and proof of insurance, and I beg Black Jesus to get us home, hoping there won't be a gunshot as she searches through her purse.

We finally drive off. "See, baby," she says. "Everything's fine."

Her words used to have power. If she said it was fine, it was fine. But after you've held two people as they took their last breaths, words like that don't mean shit anymore.

I haven't let go of the car door handle when we pull into our driveway.

Daddy comes out and knocks on my window. Momma rolls it down for me. “There go my girls.” He smiles, but it fades into a frown. “What’s wrong?”

“You about to go somewhere, baby?” Momma asks, meaning they’ll talk later.

“Yeah, gotta run to the warehouse and stock up.” He taps my shoulder. “Ay, wanna hang out with your daddy? I’ll get you some ice cream. One of them big fat tubs that’ll last ‘bout a month.”

I laugh even though I don’t feel like it. Daddy’s talented like that. “I don’t need all that ice cream.”

“I ain’t say you needed it. When we get back, we can watch that Harry Potter shit you like so much.”

“Nooooooooo.”

“What?” he asks.

“Daddy, you’re the worst person to watch Harry Potter with. The whole time you’re talking about”—I deepen my voice—“Why don’t they shoot that nigga Voldemort?”

“Ay, it don’t make sense that in all them movies and books, nobody thought to shoot him.”

“If it’s not that,” Momma says, “you’re giving your ‘Harry Potter is about gangs’ theory.”

“It is!” he says.

Okay, so it *is* a good theory. Daddy claims the Hogwarts houses are really gangs. They have their own colors, their own hideouts, and they are always riding for each other, like gangs.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione never snitch on one another, just like gangbangers. Death Eaters even have matching tattoos. And look at Voldemort. They’re scared to say his name. Really, that “He Who Must Not Be Named” stuff is like giving him a street name. That’s some gangbangng shit right there.

“Y’all know that make a lot of sense,” Daddy says. “Just ’cause they was in England don’t mean they wasn’t gangbangng.” He looks at me. “So you down to hang out with your old man today or what?”

I’m always down to hang out with him.

We roll through the streets, Tupac blasting through the subwoofers. He’s rapping about keeping your head up, and Daddy glances at me as he raps along, like he’s telling me the same thing Tupac is.

“I know you’re fed up, baby”—he nudges my chin—“but keep your head up.”

He sings with the chorus about how things will get easier, and I don’t know if I wanna cry ’cause that’s really speaking to me right now, or crack up ’cause Daddy’s singing is so horrible.

Daddy says, “That was a deep dude right there. Real deep. They don’t make rappers like that no more.”

“You’re showing your age, Daddy.”

“Whatever. It’s the truth. Rappers nowadays only care ‘bout money, hoes, and clothes.”

“Showing your age,” I whisper.

“Pac rapped ‘bout that stuff too, yeah, but he also cared

'bout uplifting black people," says Daddy. "Like he took the word 'nigga' and gave it a whole new meaning—Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished. And he said Thug Life meant—"

"The Hate U Give Little Infants F---s Everybody," I censor myself. This is my daddy I'm talking to, you know?

"You know 'bout that?"

"Yeah. Khalil told me what he thought it means. We were listening to Tupac right before . . . you know."

"A'ight, so what do you think it means?"

"You don't know?" I ask.

"I know. I wanna hear what *you* think."

Here he goes. Picking my brain. "Khalil said it's about what society feeds us as youth and how it comes back and bites them later," I say. "I think it's about more than youth though. I think it's about us, period."

"Us who?" he asks.

"Black people, minorities, poor people. Everybody at the bottom in society."

"The oppressed," says Daddy.

"Yeah. We're the ones who get the short end of the stick, but we're the ones they fear the most. That's why the government targeted the Black Panthers, right? Because they were scared of the Panthers?"

"Uh-huh," Daddy says. "The Panthers educated and empowered the people. That tactic of empowering the oppressed goes even further back than the Panthers though. Name one."

Is he serious? He always makes me think. This one takes me a second. "The slave rebellion of 1831," I say. "Nat Turner empowered and educated other slaves, and it led to one of the biggest slave revolts in history."

"A'ight, a'ight. You on it." He gives me dap. "So, what's the hate they're giving the 'little infants' in today's society?"

"Racism?"

"You gotta get a li'l more detailed than that. Think 'bout Khalil and his whole situation. Before he died."

"He was a drug dealer." It hurts to say that. "And possibly a gang member."

"Why was he a drug dealer? Why are so many people in our neighborhood drug dealers?"

I remember what Khalil said—he got tired of choosing between lights and food. "They need money," I say. "And they don't have a lot of other ways to get it."

"Right. Lack of opportunities," Daddy says. "Corporate America don't bring jobs to our communities, and they damn sure ain't quick to hire us. Then, shit, even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighborhoods don't prepare us well enough. That's why when your momma talked about sending you and your brothers to Williamson, I agreed. Our schools don't get the resources to equip you like Williamson does. It's easier to find some crack than it is to find a good school around here."

"Now, think 'bout this," he says. "How did the drugs even

get in our neighborhood? This is a multibillion-dollar industry we talking 'bout, baby. That shit is flown into our communities, but I don't know anybody with a private jet. Do you?"

"No."

"Exactly. Drugs come from somewhere, and they're destroying our community," he says. "You got folks like Brenda, who think they need them to survive, and then you got the Khalils, who think they need to sell them to survive. The Brendas can't get jobs unless they're clean, and they can't pay for rehab unless they got jobs. When the Khalils get arrested for selling drugs, they either spend most of their life in prison, another billion-dollar industry, or they have a hard time getting a real job and probably start selling drugs again. That's the hate they're giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That's Thug Life."

"I hear you, but Khalil didn't *have* to sell drugs," I say. "You stopped doing it."

"True, but unless you're in his shoes, don't judge him. It's easier to fall into that life than it is to stay outta it, especially in a situation like his. Now, one more question."

"Really?" Damn, he's messed with my head enough.

"Yeah, really," he mocks in a high voice. I don't even sound like that. "After everything I've said, how does Thug Life apply to the protests and the riots?"

I have to think about that one for a minute. "Everybody's pissed 'cause One-Fifteen hasn't been charged," I say, "but also because he's not the first one to do something like this and get away with it. It's been happening, and people will keep rioting

until it changes. So I guess the system's still giving hate, and everybody's still getting fucked?"

Daddy laughs and gives me dap. "My girl. Watch your mouth, but yeah, that's about right. And we won't stop getting fucked till it changes. That's the key. It's gotta change."

A lump forms in my throat as the truth hits me. Hard. "That's why people are speaking out, huh? Because it won't change if we don't say something."

"Exactly. We can't be silent."

"So I can't be silent."

Daddy stills. He looks at me.

I see the fight in his eyes. I matter more to him than a movement. I'm his baby, and I'll always be his baby, and if being silent means I'm safe, he's all for it.

This is bigger than me and Khalil though. This is about Us, with a capital U; everybody who looks like us, feels like us, and is experiencing this pain with us despite not knowing me or Khalil. My silence isn't helping Us.

Daddy fixes his gaze on the road again. He nods. "Yeah. Can't be silent."

The trip to the warehouse is hell.

You got all these people pushing big flatbeds around, and them things are hard to push as it is, and you gotta maneuver it while it's stacked with stuff. By the time we leave, I feel like Black Jesus snatched me from the depths of hell. Daddy does get me ice cream though.

Buying the stuff is only the first step. We unload it at the store, put it on the shelves, and we (scratch that, *I*) put price stickers on all those bags of chips, cookies, and candies. I should've thought about that before I agreed to hang out with Daddy. While I do the hard work, he pays bills in his office.

I'm putting stickers on the Hot Fries when somebody knocks on the front door.

"We're closed," I yell without looking. We have a sign, can't they read?

Obviously not. They knock again.

Daddy appears in the doorway of his office. "We closed!"

Another knock.

Daddy disappears into his office and returns with his Glock. He's not supposed to carry it since he's a felon, but he says that technically he doesn't carry it. He keeps it in his office.

He looks out at the person on the other side of the door. "What you want?"

"I'm hungry," a guy says. "Can I buy something?"

Daddy unlocks the door and holds it open. "You got five minutes."

"Thanks," DeVante says as he comes in. His Afro puff has become a full-blown Afro. He has this wild look about him, and I don't mean 'cause of his hair, but like in his eyes. They're puffy and red and darting around. He barely gives me a nod when he passes.

Daddy waits at the cash register with his piece.

DeVante glances outside. He looks at the chips. "Fritos, Cheetos, or Dori—" His voice trails off as he glances again. He notices me watching him and looks at the chips. "Doritos."

"Your five minutes getting shorter," Daddy says.

"Damn, man. A'ight!" DeVante grabs a bag of Fritos. "Can I get something to drink?"

"Hurry up."

DeVante goes to the refrigerators. I join Daddy at the cash register. It's so obvious something is up. DeVante keeps stretching his neck to look outside. His five minutes pass at least three times. It doesn't take anybody that long to choose between Coke, Pepsi, or Faygo. I'm sorry but it doesn't.

"A'ight, Vante." Daddy motions him to the cash register. "You trying to get the nerve to stick me up or you running from somebody?"

"Hell nah, I ain't trying to stick you up." He takes out a wad of money and sets it on the counter. "I'm paid. And I'm a King. I don't run from no-damn-body."

"No, you hide in stores," I say.

He glares at me, but Daddy tells him, "She right. You hiding from somebody. Kings or GDs?"

"It's not those GDs from the park, is it?" I ask.

"Why don't you mind your business?" he snaps.

"You came in my daddy's business, so I am minding my business."

"Ay!" Daddy says. "But for real, who you hiding from?"

DeVante stares at his scuffed-up Chucks that are beyond the help of my cleaning kit. "King," he mumbles.

"Kings or King?" Daddy asks.

"King," DeVante repeats louder. "He wants me to handle the dudes that killed my brother. I'm not trying to have that on me though."

"Yeah, I heard 'bout Dalvin," Daddy says. "I'm sorry. What happened?"

"We were at Big D's party, and some GDs stepped to him. They got into it, and one of them cowards shot him in the back."

Oh, damn. That was the same party Khalil and I were at. Those were the gunshots that made us leave.

"Big Mav, how'd you get out the game?" DeVante asks.

Daddy strokes his goatee, studying DeVante. "The hard way," he eventually says. "My daddy was a King Lord. Adonis Carter. A straight up OG."

"Yo!" DeVante says. "That's your pops? Big Don?"

"Yep. Biggest drug dealer this city ever seen."

"Yo! Man, that's crazy." DeVante's seriously fangirling right now. "I heard he had cops working for him and everything. He pulled in big money."

I heard my granddaddy was so busy pulling in big money that he didn't have time for Daddy. There are lots of pictures of Daddy when he was younger wearing mink coats, playing with expensive toys, flashing jewelry, and Grandpa Don isn't in any of the pictures.

"Probably so," Daddy says. "I wouldn't know too much 'bout that. He went to prison when I was eight. Been there ever since. I'm his only child, his son. Everybody expected me to pick up where he left off."

"I became a King Lord when I was twelve. Shit, that was the only way to survive. Somebody was always coming at me 'cause of my pops, but if I was a King Lord I had folks to watch my back. Kinging became my life. I was down to die for it, say the word."

He glances at me. "Then I became a daddy, and I realized that King Lord shit wasn't worth dying for. I wanted out. But you know how the game work, it ain't as easy as saying you done. King was the crown and he was my boy, but he couldn't let me out like that. I was making good money too, and it was honestly hard to consider walking away from it."

"Yeah, King says you one of the best d-boys he ever knew," DeVante says.

Daddy shrugs. "I got it from my pops. But really I was only good 'cause I never got caught. One day, me and King took a trip to do a pickup, and we got busted. Cops wanted to know who the weapons belonged to. King had two strikes, and that charge would've meant life. I didn't have a record, so I took the charge and got a few years and probation. Loyal like a mothra."

"Those were the hardest three years of my life. Growing up I was pissed at my daddy for going to prison and leaving me."

And there I was, in the same prison as him, missing out on my babies' lives."

DeVante's eyebrows meet. "You were in prison with your pops?"

Daddy nods. "All my life, people made him sound like a real king, you know what I'm saying? A legend. But he was a weak old man, regretting the time he missed with me. Realest thing he ever told me was, 'Don't repeat my mistakes.'" Daddy looks at me again. "And I was doing that. I missed first days of school, all that. Had my baby wanting to call somebody else daddy 'cause I wasn't there."

I look away. He knows how close Uncle Carlos and I became.

"I was officially done with the King Lord shit, drug shit, all of it," Daddy says. "And since I took that charge, King agreed to let me out. It made those three years worth it."

DeVante's eyes dim like they do when he talks about his brother. "You had to go to prison to get out?"

"I'm the exception, not the rule," Daddy says. "When people say it's for life, it's for life. You gotta be willing to die in it or die for it. You want out?"

"I don't wanna go to prison."

"He didn't ask you that," I say. "He asked if you wanted out."

DeVante is quiet for a long time. He looks up at Daddy and says, "I just wanna be alive, man."

Daddy strokes his goatee. He sighs. "Aight. I'll help you. But I promise, you go back to slinging or banging, you'll wish King would've got you when I'm done. You go to school?"

"Yeah."

"What your grades look like?" Daddy asks.

He shrugs.

"What the hell is this?" Daddy imitates DeVante's shrug. "You know what grades you get, so what kind?"

"I mean, I get As and Bs and shit," DeVante says. "I ain't dumb."

"Aight, good. We gon' make sure you stay in school too."

"Man, I can't go back to Garden High," DeVante says. "All them King Lords up in there. You know that's a death wish, right?"

"I ain't say you was going there. We'll figure something out. In the meantime you can work here in the store. You been staying home at night?"

"Nah. King got his boys watching for me over there."

"Of course he do," Daddy mumbles. "We'll figure something out with that too. Starr, show him how to do the price stickers."

"You're really hiring him, just like that?" I ask.

"Whose store is this, Starr?"

"Yours, but—"

"Nuff said. Show him how to do the price stickers."

DeVante snickers. I wanna punch him in his throat.

“C’mom,” I mumble.

We sit crossed-legged in the chip aisle. Daddy locks the front door and goes back in his office. I grab a jumbo bag of Hot Cheetos and slap a ninety-nine-cent sticker on them.

“You supposed to show me how to do it,” DeVante says.

“I am showing you. Watch.”

I grab another bag. He leans real close over my shoulder. Too close. Breathing in my ear and shit. I move my head and look at him. “Do you mind?”

“What’s your problem with me?” he asks. “You caught an attitude yesterday, soon as I walked up. I ain’t did nothing to you.”

I put a sticker on some Doritos. “No, but you did it to Denasia. And Kenya. And who knows how many other girls in Garden Heights.”

“Hold up, I ain’t do nothing to Kenya.”

“You asked for her number, didn’t you? Even though you’re with Denasia.”

“I’m not with Denasia. I just danced with her at that party,” he says. “She the one who wanted to act like she was my girl-friend and got mad ’cause I was talking to Kenya. If I wouldn’t have been dealing with them, I could’ve—” He swallows. “I could’ve helped Dalvin. By the time I got to him, he was on the floor, bleeding. All I could do was hold him.”

I see myself sitting in a pool of blood too. “And try to tell him it would be okay, even though you knew—”

“There was no chance in hell it would be.”

We go quiet.

I get one of those weird *déjà-vu* moments though. I see myself sitting cross-legged like I am now, but I’m showing Khalil how to do the price stickers.

We couldn’t help Khalil with his situation before he died. Maybe we can help DeVante.

I hand him a bag of Hot Fries. “I’m only gonna explain how to use this price gun one time, and you better pay attention.”

He grins. “My attention’s all yours, li’l momma.”

Later, when I’m supposed to be asleep, my mom tells my dad in the hallway, “So he’s hiding from King, and you think he should hide here?”

DeVante. Apparently, Daddy couldn’t “figure it out” and decided that DeVante should stay with us. Daddy dropped the two of us off a couple of hours ago before heading back to the store to protect it from the rioters. He just got back. He said our house is the one place King won’t look for DeVante.

“I had to do something,” Daddy says.

“I understand that, and I know you think this is your do-over with Khalil—”

“It ain’t like that.”

“Yeah, it is,” she says softly. “I get it, baby. I have a ton of regrets regarding Khalil myself. But this? This is dangerous for our family.”

"It's just for now. DeVante can't stay in Garden Heights. This neighborhood ain't good for him."

"Wait. It's not good for him, but it's fine for our kids?"

"C'mon, Lisa. It's late. I'm not trying to hear this right now. I been at that store all night."

"And I've been up all night, worried about you! Worried about my babies being in this neighborhood."

"They fine! They ain't involved in none of that banging shit."

Momma scoffs. "Yeah, so fine that I have to drive almost an hour to get them to a decent school. And God forbid Sekani wants to play outside. I gotta drive to my brother's house, where I don't have to worry about him getting shot like his sister's best friend did."

It's messed up that she could mean either Khalil or Natasha.

"A'ight, let's say we move," Daddy said. "Then what? We just like all the other sellouts who leave and turn their backs on the neighborhood. We can change stuff around here, but instead we run? That's what you wanna teach our kids?"

"I want my kids to enjoy life! I get it, Maverick, you wanna help your people out. I do too. That's why I bust my butt every day at that clinic. But moving out of the neighborhood won't mean you're not real and it won't mean you can't help this community. You need to figure out what's more important, your family or Garden Heights. I've already made my choice."

"What you saying?"

"I'm saying I'll do what I gotta do for my babies."

There are footsteps, then a door closes.

I stay up most of the night, wondering what that means for them. Us. Okay, yeah, they've talked about moving before, but they weren't arguing about it like this until after Khalil died.

If they break up, it'll be one more thing One-Fifteen takes from me.