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ANDREAN BROWN-JACOBS

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Some names, places and dates have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals connected to this story.

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Acknowledgements

Life is but a vapor, no time to waste.

Thank you Lord for giving me these two beautiful girls; Ashley & Dakota, They have become my reason to live my life according to your will and have brought me a happiness I never knew before. Part of my purpose here is to share your gospel and complete the mission you've ordained for me.

Thank you for saving me and ordering my steps.

Special Thanks to:

My knight in shining armor; you are many wonderful things, a husband, father and my road dog! Monica Brown-Coleman; what can I say...we been though the storm together but the sunshine is never far away. Thanks for being a sister and a friend. I love you with my whole heart. Beatrice Blaylock my sweet granny, Gloria Holdrege I love

you, Brian Coleman; the best brother-in-law in this entire world. My Love and Unity family, my Pastor and First Lady, Angelo Barrera, what would I do without you? You are the true definition of FRIEND. Christian Brown, Nathan Coleman, Ruth Hill thank you for all you do, Sister Michelle, Chris Brown, Maurice White, Matt Holdrege, Ashley Spidel, Marie Guzman, Anna & Ryan Tacadana, Shaun Hicks thanks sis, Torrie Baker, Diana Murillo you are an inspiration and I love your family, Aunt Ethel I miss you, Chow Kom I adore you, Irene Rodriguez, Carol Gonzalez, Serey Hong, Mario Woolfolk, Chistopher Haywood, Cina Tea, Leticia Yniguez, Maria Gutierrez, Troy Denton, Rita Flowers, Carl, Johanna Zuniga, Marisol Duran, Kevin Piamany, Etnangte Roeung, my WRAP familia! Stephany Brown you are my best friend although you're far away, Dora (Squeek) Brown,

Gladys Kaiser, Andrew Gekas, Chandra Stovall, Crystal Proud, Karen Geib, Tamela Ford, Joy Warren thank you, Anthony McKay, Toni Ford, Ronnie Clare, Kristy Miller, Audrell Thompson I love you always lil bro, Jenetta Sanders, Jerome & Vernell Washington, Vince Green, Yuliana Montano, Araceli and Daveth Yoak, I love you guys! Debresha Adams (sis), Anthony McRuffin I miss you, Mauve Milstead and pretty Alaya, Jerel Stringfellow and family, Shaquana Smith, Aina Smith, Yvette Obilefule, Darik Simpson and last but defiantly not least the Clarks, Anthony & Melanie you inspired me and didn't even know it. Each of you have taught me something or have allowed me to discover something about myself that I didn't know before. Thanks from the bottom of my soul for helping me to grow into the person I am today.

A.J

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I never knew such rage existed-that a brewing pot of **hatred, perverseness and cynicism** could occupy the dwelling chambers of a single human being's mind. *It didn't exist*, that is until I met the devil. He had shape-shifted into human form. He was a dead give away with those beady red eyes, red skin, smoke blazing from his nostrils and filthy mouth. By age five most kids were introduced to God. I knew God ever since I was born; it wasn't until I was twelve that I came face to face with evil, I met the devil, and his name was Elfonse.

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Preface

He look like a raging lunatic, **fiery red eyes**, veins popping out of his neck, and fire shooting from his mouth while yelling *blood clot this* and *blood clot that*. He chased us around the yard swinging the belt at any kid in our yard. He figured if he hit us all, he would eventually hit the right one. I've become accustomed to living in fear. If ever a day I wasn't scared that worried me even more. As I ran trying to dodge a whoopin,' the fear over came me like a giant title wave. I went into my shiny place, a place my mind goes when I'm afraid, to only be brought back by a sharp sting on my bare back. He hit me so hard across my back that I fell flat on the ground. That's when I saw Camey lay across the yard crying too.

Oh my gosh! I thought as I began to smile through my tears, *he whooped her too and she ain't even his kid!* As the tears rolled down my face I was laughing inside. As soon as Elfonse went back into the house Camey jumped up and darted out of our yard. She ran down the street as fast as she could to her house. I could hear Aunt Ofelia yelling at him telling him he can't be whoopin' other folk kids. Camey stopped speaking to me for almost a month after that. Later that day her big ole mama came and cussed Elfonse out, then she told Camey to stay out of our yard. Before Camey and I became friends she and some of the other neighborhood kids would tease us. They would point and shout "They live in that haunted house!" One time a few kids rode their bikes by our yard talking loudly about the crazy lady that lived in the basement; I wondered why everyone thought the house was haunted. *Was it?*

After about two days of Camey riding by the fence just staring at me she finally asked me what my name was. We talked about where I was from, what the middle schools were like around the neighborhood and then she told me about the rumors she heard about the house. Camey and I have been friends ever since. We laugh, cry and get in trouble together. This was Camey's second beating from Elfonse. We later found out we got that beating because someone moved his toe-nail clipper and he couldn't find it. This type of stuff happened all the time at this house we were forced to now call our home. Whenever he went on a whoopin' spree anyone in his path was getting it. His name was Elfonse Morris Valienté, but I called him the devil. To me he was everything I'd heard the devil to be and worse. We were introduced to

the wrath of his whip a week after entering the house.

He was from Belize, somewhere in Central America. I always thought he came from the fiery pits of hell 'cause he was mean and evil. Whenever he got mad his eyes turned red and he'd start screaming *bloody kids this and bloody kids that*, then everything after that sounded like another language because his accent was so thick. All of the grown ups including her own sister talked about Aunt Ofelia behind her back. They'd talk about how desperate she was to marry a man who doesn't love her. Elfonse and Aunt Ofelia had an unusual marriage. Their marriage was the epitome of dysfunction. A blind man could clearly see that he resented her. He never showed her affection except for the nights he was drinking. That's the only time he showed anyone any affection, family night. At

the end of the night one of two things would happen; he'd leave and stay out all night or we'd hear their sexual rough housing.

Her family all knew he only used her to get into the country, and it showed in the way he treated her. The bad thing was she knew it too. But everybody was in the dark about the way they both treated us. We were probably better off dead.

The year was **1983 and it was a cold February day**. My name is Annette Taylor Brown and here's what happened in the longest nightmare I lived to tell about...

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Chapter One

We knew the day mom dropped us off in this boring, lifeless city called Schaumburg that there was something strange about it. It was hard to believe that this place existed and only a few hours from Chicago. This place was in slow motion and Chicago was hip and happening. When my mom made a right turn onto Aunt Ofelia's street it all got worse. The street was gloomy, the grass was off grey and the people seemed to be ten years behind the times. The houses were all dull in color. The cars looked bigger and clunky and the kids on the block looked like they all needed fashion

makeovers. Soon as we parked the car and saw the house we knew there was something deceitful and evil about 552 Hades Street. As we unloaded our many bags and suitcases from the car we all felt as if the house was watching us. The windows were old, the paint around them was chipped and run-down like sad eyes with a story to tell. As bad as we wanted to turn around and get back into the car we knew we had to stay while mom went back to school. She really wanted to finish school and leaving us here for what she called a little while gave her that opportunity. She was the type of woman that strived for the best and she wanted to be the best. She had dreams and goals and even with kids she was hell bent on achieving them. We hardly knew Aunt Ofelia. We knew of her but we hadn't visited her in over seven years, too long ago for us to remember. The last time we saw her I was

only 5 years old. I'm 12 now, and I'm the middle child of three. My brother Andrew is the oldest he's thirteen and my little sister Brooke is ten. My mom was a single mom. She raised us with the help of our very stern grandmother. Grandma was Aunt Ofelia's older sister. They had four other sisters and brothers. We didn't know any of them except for Aunt Ofelia. The others all lived in different states. They went through some type of sibling rivalry over the funeral arrangements of my great grandmother and haven't been on speaking terms since she died. Mom made an agreement with Aunt Ofelia-she agreed to pay her monthly payments to care for us for one year. We'd later find out a year turned into what seemed like forever. The three of us knew that we had to do our part and suck it up. Aunt Ofelia's way of living was much different than ours and we had yet to find that out.

Aunt Ofelia loved her house. It was weird the way she and the house had a symbolic relationship.

Aunt Ofelia's house was a big two-story, three bedroom cave. The outside gave the illusion that it was much larger on the inside than it really was, like one of those fun houses at the carnival, only not so fun. The house appeared to be a beige and white color in serious need of a paint job. She had a hideous yard of ugly, coarse, very light lime colored grass that looked fried. Far from the tiny hedges and manicured lawns I was accustomed to seeing. In the middle of the yard sat a **12ft x 36" inch** over the ground pool. The entire yard was fenced to keep people out. The inside of the house was not my definition of clean at all. Coming from a place that looked like it was stolen right out of the Sears magazine to this place was a humbling experience. We were greeted by the stale stench as soon as we

walked through the door. There were brown speckles and empty brown roach sacks in the corners of the walls, behind the kitchen facet and on the cabinet shelves of her kitchen. The floor plan of the house was odd because the only bathroom was located right off of the kitchen. The worse thing was to smell someone's dookie while you're trying to eat. There was one bedroom on the main floor and two bedrooms on the second floor, One of the upstairs bedrooms, and the bedroom on the main floor were occupied by boarders. Aunt Ofelia rented the two rooms out to help pay her mortgage. And all of us get to sleep in the basement. *Yippy! I can't wait to see how lavish it is.* Aunt Ofelia turned the living room into her bedroom because she got tired of climbing up the stairs to get to her and Elfonses' room. It was weird that she'd sleep downstairs and he'd always sleep upstairs. She constantly made

excuses about her health but the truth was she was lazy and extremely over weight. She had sentenced herself life with no parole in an egg shaped cell of obesity.

The dining room area consisted of two old couches and piles of junk everywhere. The entire house was junky. She was a major packrat. The dining room was next to the living room, which has been Aunt Ofelia's room for almost a year now. She had a wall and a door put up to separate the rooms. In her room there was a large hospital bed, a coffee table next to the bed holding bottles and bottles of different medication and a portable potty on wheels. She had a mini refrigerator in her room because she had to have her snacks nearby. The T.V was in her room so if we wanted to watch T.V we would have to sit on the floor next to her bed. I hated going into her room, the thought of her using the bathroom in her

room grossed me out. She barely left her room. It wasn't like she couldn't she just didn't want to. She would be planted on her bed with her entire face masked by the smoke from her Virginia Slim's, coughing and complaining. On a good day she'd go into the kitchen to make whatchamacallits if she felt we deserved a treat, swim in the pool like a large beach whale or she'd sit on the porch to get some air. We all loved whenever she made whatchamacallits, they were a step up from traditional brownies they were made with chocolate and peanut butter.

When I first tasted them I asked her what they were and she said, "uh... what cha may call it." So the name stuck and that's what we all called them. Aunt Ofelia couldn't have children of her own so she adopted four foster kids named Janisa, Jonathan, Katrina and Mae. At one point she had seven foster

kids all together but the responsibility was more than she wanted to deal with and the house was too small. She also had a husband that the rest of the family didn't know about for almost a year. We think she went off and married Elfonse out of desperation to have a man. The first time I met Elfonse he gave me a bad feeling in my stomach. Everything about him seemed phony; the way he smiled, those shifty eyes and his entire vibe was disturbing. I couldn't stand the way he'd secretly check out my mom. She hated it too but she never let him know he repulsed her.

So, let's recap; Aunt Ofelia, the devil, four foster kids, the three of us, the boarders, two dogs and a cat named Smudge.