



CONCRETE
ROSE

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CONCRETE ROSE



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Walker Books.

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PART 1

GERMINATION

CHAPTER 1

When it comes to the streets, there's rules.

They ain't written down, and you won't find them in a book. It's natural stuff you know the moment your momma let you out the house. Kinda like how you know how to breathe without somebody telling you.

If there was a book though, there would be a whole section on streetball, and the most important rule would be at the top, in big bold letters:

Don't get your ass beat in front of a fine girl, especially if she *your* girl.

But that's exactly what I'm doing. Getting my ass beat in front of Lisa.

"It's okay, Maverick," she calls out from a picnic table. "You've got this!"

Straight up? I ain't got nothing. Me and King got zero points to Dre and Shawn's eleven. One more point and they win. Big as King is you'd think he'd block Shawn's lanky ass or something. Shawn getting by him like he don't exist. Posting him up, shooting jumpers in his face, all that. Got the homies going wild on the sidelines, and got King looking like a fool.

I can't be mad at King. Not with what's going down today. My head not in the game much either.

It's one of them perfect August days where the sun real bright yet it's not too hot to play ball. Rose Park full of King Lords in gray and black – seem like all the homies came to get a game in. Not that King Lords need an excuse to come to Rose. This our territory. We handle business here, chill out here, get our butts kicked on the court here.

I check the ball to Dre.

He grin extra wide. “C'mon, Mav. You going out like this in front of your girl? Lisa should've played instead of you.”

“Ooohs” echo along the sidelines. Dre never go easy on me 'cause I'm his younger cousin. He been dunking on me since I was big enough to hold a ball.

“Worry 'bout this whooping you gon' take in front of *your* girls,” I say. “Keisha and Andreanna won't wanna claim you after this one.”

There go more “Ooohs.” Dre's fiancée, Keisha, is over at the picnic table with Lisa, laughing. Keisha and Dre's daughter, Andreanna, is in her lap.

“Look at li'l homie, trash-talking,” Shawn says, grinning with his gold grill.

“We should call him Martin Luther King 'cause he got a dream if he think he winning,” Dre says.

“I have a dream,” Shawn try to sound like MLK, “that one day, you may step on this court and get a goddamn point!”

The homies laugh. Truth is, Shawn's joke could've been whack and they'd laugh. That's how it is when you the crown of the King Lords, the Caesar of Rome. People do what they supposed to in order to stay on your good side.

One of them yell out, “Don’t let them punk you, Li’l Don and Li’l Zeke!”

It don’t matter that my pops been locked up for nine years or that King’s pops been dead almost as long. They still Big Don, the former crown, and Big Zeke, his right-hand man. That make me Li’l Don and King Li’l Zeke. Guess we not old enough to go by our own names yet.

Dre bounce the ball. “What you got, cuz?”

He start right. I follow and run straight into Shawn’s chest. They running a pick-and-roll. Dre get away from me, and King go after him, leaving Shawn open. Shawn gun for the hoop. Dre toss the ball up and—

Goddamn! Shawn dunk on King.

“What!” Shawn yell as he hang from the rim. He jump down, and him and Dre do the handshake they’ve done since they were kids.

“They can’t mess with us!” Shawn says.

“Hell nah!” Dre says.

I won’t *ever* hear the end of this one. Thirty years from now, Dre gon’ be like, “Remember that time me and Shawn didn’t let y’all score?”

King slam the ball against the concrete. “Shit!”

He take losing to heart for real.

“Ay, chill,” I say. “We’ll get them next—”

“Y’all got beat *down!*” one of the homies, P-Nut, laughs. He this short dude with a thick beard, and he known to have a big mouth. There’s scars on his face and neck ’cause of it.

“We should’ve stopped calling you Li’l Don a long time ago. You an embarrassment to the OG, balling like that.”

The homies on the sidelines laugh.

I clench my jaw. I oughta be used to them kinda jabs. Let a lot of fools in the set tell it, I ain't as hard as my pops, ain't as street as my pops, ain't as good at anything as him.

They got no clue what I'm doing on the low. "I'm more like my pops than you think," I tell P-Nut.

"Could'a fooled me. Next time, big boy there oughta put as much effort into the game as he do into eating."

King step toward P-Nut. "Or I could whoop your ass instead."

P-Nut step toward him, too. "What it is, then, fool?"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" I say, pulling King back. He real quick to fight. "Chill!"

"Yeah, calm down," says Shawn. "It's only ball."

"You right, you right. My bad, Shawn," P-Nut says with his hands up. "I can be a bit temperish."

Temper-what? I swear, P-Nut be making up words to sound smart.

The way King nostrils flare, I got a feeling this 'bout more than ball for him. He shake me off and march across the park. Shawn, Dre, and everybody look at me.

"He got a lot going on, that's all," I mumble.

"Yeah," Dre add in, and lower his voice to Shawn. "You remember that situation with him, Mav, and ol' girl that I told you about? They find out today."

"No excuses, Dre. He always popping off," Shawn says. "He either get that temper in check or get checked."

In other words, a beatdown. That's how the big homies keep us li'l homies in line. See, there's levels to King Lords. You got youngins, badass middle schoolers who swear they got next. They do whatever the rest of us tell them to do.

Then you got li'l homies like me, King, and our boys Rico and Junie. We handle initiations, recruitment, and sell weed. Next is the big homies, like Dre and Shawn. They sell the harder stuff, make sure the rest of us have what we need, make alliances, and discipline anybody who step outta line. When we have beef with the Garden Disciples, the gang from the east side, they usually take care of it. Then there's the OGs, original gangstas. Grown dudes who been in this a long time. They advise Shawn. Problem is, there ain't a lot of OGs left in the streets. Most of them locked up like my pops, or dead.

A beatdown by the big homies is no joke. I can't let King go out like that.

"I'll talk to him," I tell Shawn.

"Somebody better," he says, and turns to the others. "Now who wanna get whooped on this court next?"

King nearly out the park. I run to catch up with him. "Dawg, you can't be going off on folks. You tryna cause us some problems?"

"I ain't gon' let nobody diss me, Mav," King growls. "I don't give a damn if he a big homie."

I glance back at the courts. We far enough that Shawn and them won't hear me. "We gotta keep our cool, remember?"

For the past six months, me and King been slinging behind the big homies' backs. Like I said, li'l homies can only sell weed, but there ain't nearly as much money in that as there is in the other stuff. On top of that, we gotta give most of our dough to Shawn and them 'cause they supply the product. One day King decided to do his own thing on the side and get his own supplier. He brought me on real quick. Our pockets stay fat.

We gon' be in deep shit if Shawn and them ever find out. This almost as bad as taking their turf. But ay, my momma work two jobs. She shouldn't have to get me kicks and clothes when she struggling to keep a roof over our heads. Real talk.

"Let P-Nut or anybody else say whatever the hell they want," I tell King. "We doing our thing, and that's all we need to focus on. A'ight?"

I hold my hand out to King. At first he stare at it, and I don't know if that's 'cause of Shawn and P-Nut or that other situation we got going on.

He finally slap my palm. "Yeah, a'ight."

I pull him into me and hit his back with my fist. "Don't worry 'bout that other thing. It's gon' work out like it's supposed to."

"I ain't tripping either way. It is what it is."

That's the same thing he say 'bout his parents getting murdered when he was eleven and 'bout everything he went through with his foster families. I guess if he wanna leave it at that so can I.

He head out the park, and I head over to Lisa. She looking finer than a mug. Got on a shirt that show her belly button and some shorts that got my mind wandering.

I stand between her legs. "We garbage, huh?"

Lisa wrap her arms around my neck. "Y'all could use work."

"Like I said, we garbage."

She laughs. "Maybe, but you're *my* garbage."

She kiss me, and that make me forget everything else.

It's always been this way with Lisa. I spotted her at a basketball game freshman year. Her team was whooping the Garden High girls' asses. Honestly, she do play better than me. I was

there to watch Junie play afterward when Lisa caught my eye. She could ball, and she was fine as hell. Plus she had a ass. Can't lie, I noticed that thang from jump.

She did a layup, and I hollered, "Hell yeah, shorty!" She looked my way with them pretty brown eyes and smiled. That was it; I had to talk to her. Once she gave me a shot, it's been on ever since.

I messed up big-time. Knowing what I know make me stop kissing her.

"What's wrong?" she ask.

I play with her braids. "Nothing. Mad that I lost in front of you."

"Daddy beat you!" Andreanna says.

Nothing like a three-year-old calling you out. Andreanna look like Dre, which mean she look like me. Everybody say me and Dre practically twins. Our mommas are sisters and our dads are cousins, so it make sense that we got the same wide eyes, thick eyebrows, and dark brown complexions.

"You should've cheered for me." I tickle Andreanna. She squirm and giggle in Keisha's lap. "You shouldn't have cheered for your daddy."

"Heck yeah she should've cheered for her daddy," Dre says as he come over. He scoop Andreanna up and fly her around like an airplane. Can't nobody make her laugh the way he do.

"Y'all going to the party tonight?" Lisa ask.

Shawn throwing a house party like he always do at the end of summer.

"You already know Dre not going to no party," Keisha says.

"Heck nah. We gon' have all the fun. Ain't that right, baby girl?" He kiss Andreanna's cheek.

“Dag, man. It’s Friday night,” I say. “You can’t stay at home.”

Never mind, this Dre. He don’t go nowhere anymore. Having Andreanna changed him big-time. He stopped partying and hanging out. I think he’d stop being a King Lord if he could.

Ain’t no getting outta King Lords. Unless you wanna end up dead or damn near dead.

“I’m where I wanna be,” he says, smiling at Andreanna. He look at me. “You sure you going to the party?”

Dre know what’s going down today, the thing that might change my life. Problem is, Lisa don’t know. He bet’ not say nothing either.

“I’m sure,” I say.

Dre stare me down the way a big brother do a little brother who up to no good. It get on my nerves and make me feel like shit all at once.

I look at Lisa instead. “Nothing stopping us from going to the party. Gotta get one in before school start soon.”

Lisa drape her arms around my neck. “That’s right. Just think, a year from now we’ll be at college and going to all the parties.”

“Fa’sho.” The parties the main reason I’d go to college. If I go. I ain’t sure yet. “At tonight’s party? Everybody gon’ notice you when you walk in rocking this.”

I take the necklace outta my pocket. The pendant spell out “Maverick” in cursive. It’s made outta real gold with li’l diamonds along it. I got a dude in the mall to make it the other week.

“Oh my God!” Lisa gasp as she take it. “It’s beautiful.”

“Okay, Mav,” Keisha says. “I see you spending dough on your girl.”

“Hell yeah. You know how I do.”

“Them necklaces cost big money,” Dre says. “Where you get dough for that?”

Dre don’t know I sell more than weed with King, and I wanna keep it that way. It took a lot to convince him to let me sell weed in the first place. Even though Dre sling himself, he was on some “do as I say, not as I do” crap for the longest. I told him I wanted to help Ma out, and eventually he gave in. He only let me sell enough weed to pay a bill or two. If he find out what I got with King, he’ll have my ass.

“I did odd jobs around the hood like I always do,” I lie. “Saved up enough to get it.”

“Well, I love it,” Lisa says. She know what I do. She a real one for changing the subject. “Thank you.”

“Anything for you, baby girl.” I kiss her again.

“*Eww!* Don’t be doing that in front of my baby.” Dre cover Andreanna’s eyes, making Keisha crack up. “Gon’ scar her for life.”

“If she ain’t scarred from looking at your face, she a’ight,” I say as a horn blare in the parking lot from a rusty Datsun.

One of the windows roll down, and this muscular, light-skinned dude call out, “Lisa! Let’s go!”

She roll her eyes with a groan. “Seriously?”

That’s her older brother, Carlos. He never liked me. First time I called Lisa, he interrogated me like he was the police. “How old are you? What school do you go to? What kinda grades do you get? Are you in a gang?” All kinds of stuff that wasn’t his business. When he met me, I was wearing gray and

black, which proved I'm Kinging. Fool turned his nose up at me like I was a bug under his shoe. He home from college this summer, and I can't wait for his ass to go back to school.

"What he doing here?" I ask.

"Momma asked him to take me school shopping," Lisa says. "I have to get more of those ugly Saint Mary's uniforms."

"Ay, you be looking fine as hell in them plaid skirts."

Lisa fight a smile, and that make me smile.

"Whatever, those skirts are still ugly." She hop off the table. "I better go before Captain Nosy causes a scene."

I laugh and take her hand. "C'mon. I'll walk you over."

She say bye to Keisha and Dre and cross the park with me. Carlos give me an evil eye the whole way over. Hater.

Me and Lisa stop beside the car. "I'll come scoop you up at eight," I say.

"See you at eight-fifteen, then." She smirks. "You're never on time."

"Nah, I'm gon' be early tonight. I love you."

First time I said that word to her, it tripped me out. I'd never told a girl I love her before, but I'd never had a Lisa before either.

"I love you, too," she says. "Stay safe, okay?"

"I ain't going nowhere. You can't get rid of me that easy."

She smile and give me a quick peck. "I'm holding you to it."

I open the passenger door for her. Carlos glare at me so damn hard. I flip him off when Lisa not looking.

"Why are you tripping?" Lisa asks, and I hear Carlos say something 'bout a "gangbanger park" as he pull off.

They only gone around a minute when an old Camry

with a sunroof turn into the parking lot. Ma used to drive a Lexus. The Feds took it when they took Pops.

“Uh-oh!” P-Nut call out. “Li’l Don in trooooooble. Got his momma rolling through on a disciplitarianship.”

A discipli-what?

Forget P-Nut. I open Ma’s passenger’s door. “Hey, Ma.”

“Hey, ba—” She cover her nose. “Damn, boy! You ripe! What you doing so musty?”

I sniff myself. I ain’t *that* bad. “I played ball.”

“Did you wrestle with pigs, too? Good Lord! You gon’ clear the clinic out.”

“If we run by the house real quick, I can shower—”

“We don’t have time for that, Maverick. We told Iesha and her momma that we’d meet them at two. It’s already one-forty-five.”

“Oh.” I ain’t realize my life might be changing so soon. “My bad.”

Ma must catch the dip in my voice. “We need to know the truth. You get that, right?”

“Ma, what I’m gon’ do if—”

“Hey,” she says, and I look at her. “No matter what, I’ve got you.”

She hold her fist out to me.

I smirk. “You too old to be dapping folks up.”

“Old? Boy, please! I’ll have you know I got carded when me and Moe went out last Saturday. Bam! Who too old now?”

I laugh as she crank up the car. “You. You too old.”

“Ay, hold up!” Shawn call out. He dash across the parking lot and run around to Ma’s side. “I gotta say whaddup to the queen. How you doing, Mrs. Carter?”

“Hey, Shawn,” Ma says. “You making it?”

“Yes, ma’am. Looking out for your boy.”

“Good,” Ma says, and this time her voice dip.

No mother want their son in a gang, but no mother want their son dead either. Pops made so many enemies in the streets that I need somebody to have my back. He told Ma I had to join. Kinging run in my blood anyway. Ma’s brothers claimed it, then Pops and his cousins. It’s like a fraternity for us.

Ma think I’m an “associate” though, aka somebody who only claim it and don’t sling or put in work. She say this whole King Lord thing is temporary. She drill it into my head all the time – get my high school diploma and go away to college so I can get the hell away from all of this.

“We’ve got an appointment to get to,” she tells Shawn. “Be safe out here, baby.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Shawn look at me and nod. “Good luck, li’l homie.”

I nod back.

Ma pull outta the parking lot, and I watch the homies in the rearview mirror. They ball on the courts without a care in the world. I wish that could be me again.

Instead, I’m headed to the clinic to find out if King’s son is actually mine.

CHAPTER 2

The free clinic real busy for a Friday afternoon. Everybody in the Garden would rather come here than go to County 'cause folks who go to County rarely go home. Some man on crutches talk loud as hell on the pay phone like he want all of us to hear that he need a ride. Somehow, he ain't woke up the lady in the wheelchair beside us. A girl around my age chase after this snot-nosed kid and call after him in Spanish.

Wild to think that could be me in a couple years.

This whole situation kinda complicated. King got this homegirl Iesha. She not his girlfriend, nah. They mess around a lot, if you know what I mean. Iesha known to mess around with a lot of dudes though. No disrespect, but it's fact.

Around a year ago, Lisa broke up with me after Carlos claimed he saw me talking to another girl. A bald-faced lie but Lisa believed that fool for whatever reason. I went to King's crib, stressed out 'bout it. He asked Iesha to get my mind off things. I wasn't sure at first, 'cause it seemed wrong, like I was cheating almost. Once me and Iesha got into it, I forgot right and wrong.

At some point, the condom broke.

Now I'm at the free clinic waiting for DNA test results on Iesha's three-month-old baby.

Ma's leg won't stay still, like she wanna run out this waiting room. She glance at her watch. "They should've been here by now. Maverick, have you talked to Iesha lately?"

"Not since the other week."

"Lord. We gon' have our hands full with this girl."

Ma always talk to God. Usually it's "Lord, keep me from hurting this boy." Guess it's nice she talking to him 'bout somebody else for once.

She claim I got her aging early from stress. She keep her hair in finger waves and got a couple of grays she shouldn't have at thirty-eight. That ain't my fault. It's from them long hours she work. Ma check people into a hotel during the day and clean offices at night. I always tell her "I'm gon' take care of you."

She smile and says, "Take care of yourself, Maverick."

For weeks it's been "Take care of your son." She convinced I'm his daddy.

I'm not. "Don't know why we doing this," I mumble. "He ain't mine."

"Why? Because you were only with that girl one time?" Ma asks. "That's all it takes, Maverick."

"She swear he King's baby. They even named him after King."

"Yeah, and who does he look like?" Ma says.

Maaan ... a'ight, she got me there. When King Jr. was first born, he didn't look like anybody. All newborns resemble aliens to me. After a couple of weeks, he got eyes, nose, and lips similar to mine. King was nowhere to be found. Baby boy don't resemble Iesha either.

That's why King stopped dealing with Iesha altogether. She wanna prove to him that I ain't the father and asked me to take a DNA test. So, here we are. Unless I got the worst luck in the world, ain't no way that baby mine.

My beeper go off on my waist, and Mr. Wyatt's number appear. That's our next-door neighbor. I cut his front yard every week. He probably want me to do it today. I'll have to hit him up later.

Ma watch me with a smile. "You think you something 'cause you got a pager, huh?"

I laugh. I bought this joint two months ago. Got it in that blue ice you can see through. Flyer than a mug. "Nah, Ma. Never."

"How's business going?" she asks. "How many yards are you doing now?"

Ma think I make money by cutting grass around the neighborhood. I do, but I make even more by selling drugs. The whole yard-cutting thing help to keep her in the dark. When she see me rocking new kicks or clothes, I act like I got them for cheap at the swap meet instead of the mall. I hate that I can lie to her so good.

"It's fine," I say. "I'm at around ten yards right now. Tryna get as many as I can before it gets cold."

"Don't worry, you'll find something else to do. Lord knows babies aren't cheap. You'll figure out how to make it work."

I won't have to. That baby ain't mine.

The clinic door open, and Ms. Robinson come in. She hold the door open for somebody else. "Bring your fast behind in here!"

Iesha walk in, rolling her eyes. She got a baby bag on

her shoulder and hold a car seat in her hand. Li'l man asleep inside it. His fist rest against his head, and his eyebrows all wrinkled, like he thinking something deep in his dreams.

“Hey, Faye,” Ms. Robinson says to Ma. “Sorry we late.”

Ma goes, “Mmm-hmm.” It ain't approval or judgment. Then she look at me, like she expect me to do something. I stare back, all confused.

“Boy, give Iesha your seat,” Ma says.

“Oh! My bad.” I hop up. Ma stay on me 'bout being a gentleman.

Iesha take my chair and set the car seat at her feet. Ma suddenly starstruck.

“Aww, look at that little man,” she says in a voice she only use on babies. “He knocked out, huh?”

“Finally,” says Iesha. “Kept me up all night.”

“Ain't like you had nowhere to go,” Ms. Robinson snips. “Miss I-Skip-Summer-School-to-Chase-Some-Boy.”

“Oh my God,” Iesha groans.

“He'll sleep through the night soon,” Ma says. “Maverick didn't sleep through the night until he was five months old. It was like he needed to know what was going on all the time.”

“He the exact same way,” Ms. Robinson says, eyeing me.

She can look at me all she want. That don't make him mine.

Li'l man whine in the car seat.

Iesha sighs. “What now?”

“He probably wants his pacifier, baby,” Ma says.

Iesha put it in his mouth, and he suddenly good.

I study Iesha real hard. She got bags under her eyes she

didn't have before. "Anybody helping you with him?"

"*Help?*" her momma says, like I cussed. "Who supposed to help her? *Me?*"

"C'mon now, Yolanda," says Ma. "This is a lot for anyone to handle, let alone a seventeen-year-old."

"T'uh! She wanna act grown, she can deal with this like she grown. By. Her. Self."

Iesha blink real fast.

I'm feeling real bad for her all of a sudden. "If he is mine, you won't be doing this alone no more, a'ight? I'll come over and help as much as I can."

Five seconds ago, she looked ready to cry. Now she smirk at me. "Oh, word? Your girlfriend gon' be cool with that?"

I don't know how Lisa gon' react. I figured if the baby wasn't mine, she didn't need to know 'bout any of this. If he is mine... "Don't worry 'bout her," I tell Iesha.

"Oh, I ain't worried. *You* should be. Her stuck-up ass gon' drop you quick."

"Ay, don't talk 'bout her like that!"

"Whatever. All them girls at Garden High who drool over you, and you go for the bougie Catholic-school girl. It's all good. My baby ain't yours. Soon as these results come back, I'm taking him to his real daddy, and we gon' be a family. Watch."

"Iesha Robinson!" the nurse calls.

We all look that way.

This is it.

"Go on," Ms. Robinson tells Iesha.

Iesha get up, sighing outta her nose. "This so stupid."

"What's stupid is that two boys could be the daddy!" her

momma calls after her. “That’s what’s stupid!”

Well, damn. Do me and Ma get into it? Hell yeah, all the time. But not in public like this.

Iesha come back and shove the envelope into her momma’s hand. “Bet I’m right. Bet!”

Ms. Robinson take the papers out and read over them. By that smug look she get, I know what they say.

“Congratulations, Maverick,” she says, staring at her daughter. “You’re a father.”

Shit.

“Jesus.” Ma hold her forehead. Saying he mine and knowing it two different things.

Iesha snatch the papers. She look them over, and her face fall. “Shit!”

“Damn, why you mad?”

“This should be King’s baby! I don’t wanna deal with your ass!”

“I don’t wanna deal with your ass either!”

“Maverick!” Ma snaps.

My son cry in the car seat.

Ma cut me a hard glare and pick him up. “What’s wrong, Man-Man? Huh?” She don’t have to know you long to give you a nickname. Ma sniff near his butt, and her nose wrinkle. “Oh, I know what’s wrong. Where are his diapers?”

“In the baby bag,” Iesha mumbles.

“Grab the bag, Maverick,” Ma says. “We’ll handle this.”

Suddenly, I got a son and he got a dirty diaper. “I don’t know how to change a diaper.”

“Then it’s time for you to learn. C’mom.”

Ma go into the women’s restroom and act like I should

follow her in there. Hell nah. She come back to the door.

“Boy, c’mon.”

“I can’t go in there!”

“Nobody’s in here. Until they put changing tables in the men’s room, c’mon.”

Damn, this ain’t cool. I follow her in. Li’l man cry his head off. I get why. That diaper stank. Ma hand him to me so she can search his bag, and I hold him away from me. I ain’t tryna get diaper doo on me.

“They sure got a lot of clothes in here,” Ma says. “Let’s see if she’s got some changing pads. If she doesn’t – never mind, she does.” Ma put one on the table. “All right, lay him down.”

“What if he fall off?”

“He won’t. There you go,” she says as I lay him down. “Now unbutton his—”

I miss the rest for staring at him.

Before when I’d look at him, I was in awe that something so little existed. Now I look at him and he mine, no question.

Worst part? I’m his.

I’m scared. I messed up. I only been seventeen for a month, and now I gotta take care of another person.

He need me.

He depending on me.

He gon’ call me Daddy.

“Maverick?”

Ma touch my shoulder.

“You’ve got this,” she says. “I got you.”

She don’t just mean the diaper.

“A’ight.”

I change my first diaper with her help. This nurse come in and see us struggling – it’s been a while since Ma did this – and give us some tips. Li’l man still fuss even though he clean. Ma hold him against her shoulder and rub his back.

“It’s okay, Man-Man,” she coos. “It’s all right.”

He soon calm down. Guess that’s all he needed to know.

I grab his bag, and we go to the waiting room. My son’s car seat on the floor with the DNA papers lying inside it. Ms. Robinson is gone.

So is Iesha.



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ANGIE THOMAS is the number one *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning author of *The Hate U Give*, *On the Come Up* and *Find Your Voice*. A former teen rapper who holds a BFA in creative writing, Angie was born, raised, and still lives in Jackson, Mississippi.

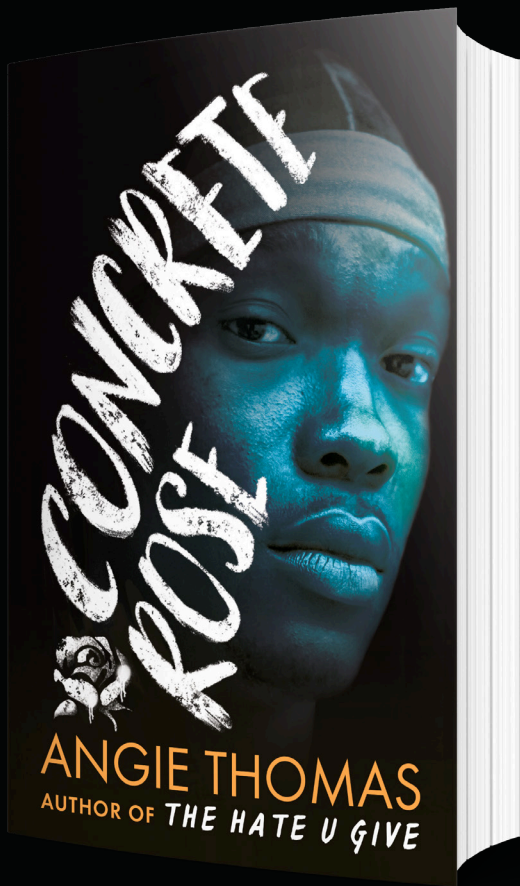
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