



# The Untitled Story

## By Michelle Stimpson

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1 DeMarcus Polk turned over onto his stomach and buried his face in a pillow to block out the sunlight spilling through the slats. Maybe he should get one of those eye-mask things he'd seen people on TV wearing when they went to bed. No, on second thought, he'd better not. He'd only seen women wearing those things. If his older brother, Ronald, came in and saw DeMarcus wearing a satin mask, he'd never be able to live it down.

2 It was bad enough that Ronald teased him about college. "You ain't gon' get no good job when you finish, not in this economy. And you ain't goin' to college, so what's the point?" Ronald always added a nasty shove to DeMarcus's head when he gave such sound advice.

3 DeMarcus pushed his brother's hand away. "I am going - community college first, then a university."

4 "Whatever. I'll be glad when you finish school 'cause I'm tired of raising you." Ronald made yet another excuse for why he hadn't done much with his life since finishing high school.

5 More and more, DeMarcus found himself avoiding Ronald. Ever since Ronald came back from his trip to California to see their mother, Ronald had changed. He was angrier, meaner. Not that Ronald had ever been accused of being nice before California, but he was definitely mad about something more than the, "Momma ain't the same," he would admit to.

6 As he continued lying in bed, DeMarcus tried to block out the hurtful memories coursing through his mind with fonder ones. Before his parents' divorce,

things were better. He and Ronald used to go to karate classes, have birthday parties, and take trips with the church. His mother would make cupcakes for his class's Christmas celebration and ask to see his report card the very day it was issued.

7 His father worked two jobs – full-time at the brewery and part-time at a nursing home – so that his mom could stay home with DeMarcus and Ronald. It was only after DeMarcus entered kindergarten that his father allowed his mother to work a few hours during the day. “I want the best for my boys,” he would say. “That means at least one parent available to them at all times.”

8 DeMarcus believed his father still wanted the best for them, but the best was far beyond his father's reach now. Survival was the only thing he could provide for them after his mother's leaving and the lay-off.

9 Dad had to make some tough choices. DeMarcus could never forget the day he sat them down, at ages ten and twelve, to inform them that life as they knew it would never be the same. “Boys, you know I've always tried to do right by you and your momma.”

10 DeMarcus's father paused and bit his lower lip to stop the trembling. DeMarcus had never seen his father so anguished. He wondered what was wrong. Was his father sick? Was his mother dead? Were they moving to California, where his mother was taking a class on film?

11 “What is it, Dad?” Ronald had asked.

12 “Your mother...has decided not to come back home.”

13 DeMarcus's young mind couldn't make sense of this news. “Did somebody kidnap her?”

14 “Oh no, DeMarcus, your mother is okay. She has...found someone else who is her...friend...and she would like to...stay in California with...that person.”

15 Their father cleared his throat. "So, here's the plan. If I can't find another full-time job that pays what I was making at the brewery, I'll have to find two part-time jobs to make up for it."

16 He pointed at Ronald first. "You're in charge. You'll clean the bathrooms, take care of the laundry, and make hot dogs on Tuesday and Friday nights."

17 "I gotta do laundry and cook!" Ronald protested.

18 "Yes, you do," Mr. Polk confirmed with an authoritative edge in his voice.

19 Ronald folded his arms and pressed his back into the sofa. "That's girl stuff."

20 "Well, there are no girls around here anymore. It's just us men from now on."

21 DeMarcus's father focused on his younger son now. "You do the vacuuming, get the mail every day, and make sandwiches on Mondays and Thursdays. I'll take care of cooking on Wednesdays and weekends if I can – and we all have to clean up after ourselves. No more leaving your socks and shoes everywhere.

22 "I won't be here to make sure you boys follow all the rules, but you do know what's expected of you."

23 And just like that, their family changed.

24 DeMarcus and Ronald spoke to their mother once in a while, but she never answered their questions, never said she was coming back. All she ever talked about was movies. "DeMarcus, a major producer is looking at my screenplay, honey!" On and on she went, trying to persuade him that this *next* screenplay would be the one to make her famous, make the grief worth it. "I'll fly you out to California for the red carpet screening!"

25 In all her seven years in California, none of her big "projects" ever amounted to anything. Seven years of nothing but Ronald's bullying, his father's constant working, and what DeMarcus now believed was his mother's selfish dream-chasing.

26 The smell of bacon wafted through the apartment. Saturday. As promised, DeMarcus's father took care of food on the weekends when he wasn't working. Try as he might, DeMarcus couldn't resist fresh, crispy bacon which would probably be served with Belgian waffles and hot syrup.

27 He pushed the comforter off his body and headed toward the kitchen where his brother and father were just sitting down to eat. It was the first time in five days the three of them could relax together.

28 "Morning."

29 "Hey, Pop."

30 DeMarcus nodded at Ronald just as the doorbell rang. "I'll get it."

31 DeMarcus opened the door but didn't see anyone. He looked down and saw a large UPS Express envelope lying at his feet. Perhaps it was a letter from a college - something he wouldn't share with Ronald.

32 He tore through the packaging and pulled out a flyer. A movie flyer. *Dangerous Divas*, starring Jamie Foxx and Sanaa Lathan, coming to theaters June. And there, circled in a black marker, was the big news - *Screenplay by Donna Polk* - with a note scribble in the margin: *I finally made it! -Mom*

33 DeMarcus tore the flyer to pieces and threw the scraps into the wind.

34 He rejoined his father and brother at the table, grabbed a fork, and slid a waffle onto his plate.

35 When his father asked who was at the door, DeMarcus replied, "It was nothin'. Somebody tryin' to sell us on somethin'."