

## Book Excerpt I - Taylea's Velvet Girl Salon

...“All I’m saying is that I’m not so certain that your man isn’t a black hater,” Synthia ventured.

“So you’re saying that he hates himself?” Chanixè responded.

Synthia continued, “Don’t look at me funny like he would be the first one to do so. Sometimes people so brainwashed and messed up that they do find themselves dissatisfied with themselves.”

“But that’s not what Journey’s trying to get across,” Selena interjected.

“Don’t get mad, Selena.”

“No Synthia, It’s not about getting mad, which I am not.” “These are the very conversations that Journey wanted people to have, in places just like this. We have to discuss and become more mindful of how we are viewed.”

“Wait, Selena,” said Taylea, “is he saying that as a *slightly* talkative colored beauty shop owner, I’m a clown? Is he saying that I’m a stereotype or something?” She put her hands on her ample hips and playfully demanded, “Am I in his book?”

“No, Miss Thang, Journey enjoys the colorfulness of black folks. It’s the fundamental issues that concern him.”

Taylea was again on her stage. “No, I think that people like me are just what he’s talking about. Like I’m entertainment for white folks. You think that I’m here for your entertainment, do I amuse you?”

“Er, excuse us Mrs. Joe Pesci; and by the way that was a pitiful, simply pitiful imitation. Good try anyway.”

Taylea feigned hurt.

“But seriously,” continued Selena. “How we’re perceived matters because it effects how we’re treated and I don’t mean just on Family and Friend’s Day at church. Political decisions that affect community jobs, education, healthcare, and business are actually built around peoples’ perceptions. You see, when someone holds the power, how they see you is how *they* determine what *you* need.”

Selena's voice and breathing pattern changed as she became a bit more passionate. Taylea, sensing the change, silenced a ringing phone.

"You see, Katrina didn't happen just when it started to rain. The Katrina disaster began when those in power neglected to rebuild those levees years ago with the modern day technology that was readily available. Period. "Those truly in authority had proclaimed: 'Oh sure, black folks, please be around for our touristy New Orleans so you can cook, clean, and entertain, but don't think that we actually acknowledge that your value is the same as ours. Don't believe us black folk? See who's left when all hell breaks loose.'"

Selena's eyes were misty as those post hurricane days were brought to everyone's recollection. "Many people don't remember that even while others were fleeing and thousands were stranded, the only footage we saw the first day was of those 'damn black looters - see how they act?'"

"Looting was the news because that was a perceptual expectation. You cannot tell me that the reporters who filmed the 'looters' didn't pass by homes that had rising waters and distressed occupants. Those anguished people weren't on the news - because they simply weren't news. Unfortunately, the so-called looters weren't on television for the sake of information, but for America's entertainment."

As minds drifted into somber remembrance of those troubled days, even the music's volume appeared to lower on its own. It was as if the powerfully poignant Curtis Mayfield understood the moment in his rendition of the introspective, *We People Who Are Darker Than Blue*.

Synthia still harbored issues with Journey's book, so she continued her comments.

"My personal problem with your man's book is, doesn't he mean that we're always trying to live up to the expectations of people, white people, who mostly don't care for us anyway? We all know that it's not the opinion of every white person, but I still ain't trying to live my life so I can get other folks daily approval. That's like a dog needing a pat on the head, and I ain't no dog."

"Amen from the deaconess' pew," said Nikki.

Selena smiled at Synthia. "No, that's a very good point. No one should have to live their lives needing a 'good

boy' from anyone else. What Journey's trying to get across is that because the perception of us as a people is so intricately imbedded in the fabric of world society, even we have to lift ourselves out of the mentality. We have to recognize and then raise our standard banner for *our* own good.

“Why is it that black people applaud or smile when we acknowledge *not* that a young man has gone on to higher learning but that he has not been to jail? You telling me that it's now culturally acceptable that our terminology of a 'good thing' is the pseudo-prefix, 'at least he's not'?”

Chanixè and Nikki looked at each other, momentarily confused.

Selena continued. “Somewhere, there are other ladies sitting in a salon just like this one and they might be discussing their family members. 'Johnny's doing this or I have Sally enrolled in that.' But in salons like *this one*, why too often are we back to the 'at least' she's not pregnant as a marker of success?

“What Journey's angry about is that our daughters have all the personal tools and attributes to be, say... an excellent lawyer, but we puff out our chest because she's conscientious with her birth control?”