

Liberation

by Dashawn Patrick

Two Chapter Sample

Completed Manuscript / 270 pages / 61,400 words

## SETTING

Charlie set the National Geographic magazine on his lap, removed his bifocals, tipping his cap as Tavin exited the train. Tavin smiled at Charlie, wondering which passenger boarding the train would occupy his vacant seat. How had good karma finally found Tavin? How had a chance seating assignment, 29D, shifted his destiny? Or was it by chance? Steadfastly, Tavin sifted through the seas of passersby, making his way through the Seattle train station. Fixated on the possibility of finding Nora, Tavin reflected on Charlie's final instructions. "Don't let anyone or anything deter you from finding love! Love is paramount, Tavin! There is nothing greater!" Tavin knew he was on the right journey.

## Chapter 1

TAVIN

12 Hours Earlier

Morning of Release

Wilsonville Juvenile Prison, Wilsonville, Idaho

After three hundred sixty-five days, Tavin had not grown accustomed to the barking commands and harsh tones from officers at Wilsonville Correctional Facility. After day twenty-one he understood civility and proper salutations would come as short-lived surprises. He'd been educated by Sax, the first of twenty-three cellmates, about the lack of etiquette between inmates. Professor Sax explained on day twenty-one, "disrespect must be challenged with a quick and equal response, lest you be considered weak." Sax warned Tavin to expect altercations with garden variety, orange jumpsuit wearing thugs but the regularity of disrespect by correction officers was unpredicted and allowed zero retort.

"Inmate W10436, step up to claim your property," the sergeant hollered, his voice echoing off the chalky, concrete walls. Tavin memorized his inmate number eleven days into his year-long sentence. He knew his number had not been called but subconsciously glanced at the wristband fixed firmly to his left wrist. He pinched the inside of his right wrist, the sharp pain confirming he was not dreaming. September 6, 2016, his release date had arrived.

"Inmate W19762, step up to claim your property!" Still not Tavin's number. Outwardly, his face revealed the same hard-hearted stare he'd perfected since the first day he'd walked through the cell block doors. Inwardly he could not contain his joy. In less than thirty minutes he would be free.

He thought about Nora's letters. He wondered about her sobriety. In her last letter, she'd be clean for eighty-nine days. Was she still on her journey to be free from the chains of addiction, or had she relapsed again? He noticed the scent of patchouli oil on the envelope of her first letter so he imagined what she may look like. He envisioned her a hip-chick, with piercings through her nose, bottom lip, and eyebrow. She would have dark eye-shadow and tattoos on her shoulders, neck, and back. He wondered if she had short, spiked hair shaved on one side, or long dreadlocks with beads and feathers woven through. For five months, they'd written each other. In his last letter, he explained he would be transferred to a different facility to prepare for his transition back into society. He told Nora how excited he was to start his life over back home in Arizona. He anticipated her return letter but was transferred before receiving it. He wondered if she'd written back, or if she'd even received his last letter.

Tavin thought about how Nora's first three letters were inadvertently delivered to him. They were intended for an inmate who'd been transferred to a maximum-security facility. When he received her first letter, he told the correction's officer on duty that the letter was meant for a different inmate. "Well, if he didn't bother to tell her he was being transferred, then why should I care," the guard snapped. "Flush it," he instructed.

Tavin placed the letter in the small storage bin beneath his bunk where he'd kept his court documents. Two weeks passed since he received the letter. Like most nights, he lay in bed, eyes wide open, dwelling on mistakes from his past. When he reached under his bunk, into the storage bin, to dig for a book he'd been reading, he found Nora's letter wedged between the pages. He contemplated for a moment, then opened her letter.

\*\*\*

*Jake,*

*I know this is going to sound crazy, but as of 6:00 pm tomorrow, I will be 18-days sober. It's the hardest thing I've ever done. I'm hoping I can stay 'clean', but each day brings a different struggle. I hate the word clean because it reminds me of how dirty I've felt about my life. 'Get clean', 'clean myself up'... Every time I say those words it makes me nauseous. After the accident, I just let go. I lost myself, but I am ashamed that I have fallen so far. I want my life back. I am planning on enrolling in the Seattle School of Art. I know it's only been 18 days, but for the first time in years, I see my life being so much different than it was. I just want to make it to day 19.*

*I know it's been too long since I've written you, but I needed time to get my life together. Since the accident, it seems like happiness has been beyond my reach. But I am learning I can't reach for happiness, that it starts from inside. That is the same for you, Jake. I know you're in a place where*

*there isn't much happiness, but I hope you are trying to find peace. Our four years together was filled with more passion than either of us knew what to do with. At times, it was earth-shattering but ended by shattering both of our lives. I had to stop blaming you for my decisions and accept my truth. I am an addict, but I was more addicted to you than I was the drugs. Every time I took you back, you lost respect for me and I lost respect for myself. I compromised who I was but you were okay with that. I couldn't take it anymore. I was watching you kill yourself, and each day a piece of me was dying with you. I am not healthy, but I am getting there. I miss so many things about you, but I don't miss us. We were right for each other, for that moment, but love isn't supposed to feel that lonely. I hope you find peace. I will always care about you.*

*I'll write again soon.*

Nora

\*\*\*

Nearly a year passed since Tavin received Nora's first letter. As he waited for his number to be called, his decision was clear. He needed to find her.

"Inmate W10436, step up to claim your property!" Tavin didn't look at his wristband this time. Before standing, he pinched the inside of his right wrist. "Inmate W10436, step up to claim your property," the sergeant repeated. Tavin took a

deep breath and exhaled three hundred sixty-five days of angst. He turned, facing the empty module, staring into the camera. He held up the middle finger of his right hand, for a count of 10. He turned and walked toward the sergeant. "Hey," the officer howled. "It's not too late to add thirty days to your sentence. Until you walk through these doors, you belong to Wilsonville! Do you understand me, inmate?" he growled. The sergeant stood behind an open window, waiting for Tavin's, yes sir, response, customary from inmates when speaking to officers. Tavin offered no response.

He handed Tavin an air-tight, transparent bag, stuffed with his phone and street clothes he'd worn one year earlier. Hurriedly, he tore open the bag. He stripped out of the musty jumpsuit worn by dozens of inmates before him. He slid into his jeans, plain white tee-shirt, and black hooded-sweatshirt. He'd turned on his phone, hoping it retained some battery life, but now it died as soon as it powered up. The officer handed him a stack of papers. "Sign on the dotted line to make sure all of your personal items are accounted for," he said. Tavin scribbled out a signature. "Okay, here is your voucher for a one-way train ticket from Wilsonville Correctional Facility. Take this voucher to the train station and they will issue a ticket to any city on the West coast. Here is a check for one hundred dollars. You can cash it at the Wilsonville Bank kiosk at the train station. You give them the inmate bracelet on your wrist and they will give you one hundred

dollars. Please sign to receive your voucher and check." Again, Tavin signed, making no eye-contact with the sergeant. "Good luck to you. Hope we don't see you inside here again!"

Tavin walked to the door on the far side of the module. A release-officer stood on the outside. He popped the lock on the large metal door. "We'll keep a cell light on for you," the guard whispered as Tavin walked to freedom.

## II

Dr. Charlie Matheson

September 2016 - Passenger 29C  
Train from Wilsonville, Idaho to Seattle

On Sundays over Labor Day weekend, seventy-eight-year-old doctor, Charlie Matheson road the 5:00 am train from Wilsonville to Seattle; a tradition not broken in forty years. There was no need for him to purchase a ticket, for seat 29C was always reserved for Charlie. On Sunday, September 6, 2016, Charlie sat quietly in seat 29C, waiting for the train to depart. He flipped through the pages of a National Geographic magazine, reading an article about the thirty-nine legendary birds found in New Guinea. His favorite was the Ribbon Tailed Astrapia because its tail feathers measured more than three times the length of its body, the longest of any bird species in the world. Charlie's life had been filled with a love for animals, particularly birds.

Raised on a wheat and barley farm in Wilsonville, Charlie was taught to work hard, respect his elders and look a man in the eye while shaking hands. He'd led a good and fruitful life, so keeping a secret from his family for sixty years had been no simple task. For the first eighteen years of his life, his father, Charlie Sr., taught him the business of farming. By age ten, Charlie knew planting dates, harvesting periods and had a strong working knowledge of mechanics, to keep their farming equipment in optimal condition. By age fifteen, Charlie oversaw the cultivation, fertilization, planting, and spraying of the crops, which had grown to include canola, oats, rye, flax, and peas. At eighteen, he was well-versed on the limitations and

regulations of the Food and Drug Administration. It was his responsibility to make sure the farm was operating within regulations placed on the agricultural industry. Charlie was groomed to take over the family business. Upon graduating first in his class from Wilsonville High School, Charlie accepting an academic scholarship to study veterinary medicine at Cornell University, a decision that did not sit well with Charlie's Sr.

Charlie's younger brother, Paul, was capable of running the farm but it was the dream of his father for his first-born son to take over the family business. Charlie's mother, Mary, had a different perspective. Helping Charlie with his homework, year after year, she witnessed his dedication to academics and aptitude for learning. She'd noticed how jubilant he'd become, at nine years old, when he found the injured gosling limping around the pond on the backside of their farm. Mary drove Charlie to the Wilsonville library, where he checked out books on birds and human anatomy, to learn about healing broken bones. She watched for weeks how Charlie woke up before his farm duties, to nurse it back to health. He made a small splint for its broken leg and three times a day fed it tender-grass, wheat, and sprouts. After reading the book on human anatomy, which included a complete glossary of Latin, Charlie named the Gosling 'Sanus' because it translated to the word 'healthy'.

"We've got no time to be concerned with an injured bird. Crop season is at hand. Set the bird free and get back to work!" Charlie Sr. demanded. After weeks, Charlie removed the splint, releasing Sanus into the wild as instructed but the Gosling returned to the pond later that evening. Mary tried reasoning with her husband, explaining Charlie had interests and abilities beyond farm life, that he loved animals; but her husband would hear none of it. "The boy needs to learn to work with his hands, Mary. We've got mouths to feed! His running

around helping maimed animals is taking food from the table," her husband stated firmly. "He can keep the bird, but it if interferes with his farm-work, it's gone!" For the next five years, Charlie watched Sanus grow into a handsome gander, with goslings of his own. Charlie Sr. didn't approve, but young Charlie never missed a day of work on the farm, so his father grew to accept his passion for healing animals.

Before leaving to Ithaca, New York to begin his education at Cornell University, Mary wanted Charlie to be exposed to life beyond the small town of Wilsonville, Idaho. "Charlie and Paul," she called her sons into the living room after a hearty supper of Guinness Irish stew. "My brother Mark purchased property in the south. He needs you boys to spend the summer there helping restore it, so he can sell it. He's going to pay each of you handsomely for your work. You'll be in Louisiana all summer." Mary knew her boys were no strangers to hard work, she'd watched them work on the farm during scorching summers and sub-zero winters. She knew New York would be a culture shock for her son. "Charlie," she said that evening. "Life here on the farm is much different than around the country. There's a lot going on in the world these days, with the Civil Rights Movement, and Women's Rights, too. It's much different from here in Wilsonville. You will see a whole new world in New York. You need to understand who you are, Charlie, and always remember how you were raised. Being respectful pertains to all folks who earn it, not just folks who look like you!"

Two weeks later, Charlie and Paul boarded a train to Louisiana, a memory Charlie kept locked away for sixty years.