

Chapter 1

Introduction

Come. Take a trip with me down memory lane and step into the experience of Micah, a first-generation African American college student who attended and graduated from a high school in the Richmond City School District. Currently, Micah is a 24-year-old sophomore at a local university where she is studying to become a teacher. Listening to her younger niece talk about college plans, Micah reminisces about the time she visited her high school counselor, Mrs. Jackson, and how the counselor's advice broke her spirit and altered her college dreams.

Micah recalls sitting outside Mrs. Jackson's office, waiting to share her dreams and aspirations. Shaking her foot and biting her lip, she envisioned attending a four-year college with the goal of becoming a Neonatal Surgeon. Micah switched positions often, her nervous energy begging for a release. She rocked backward and forward in the chair, arms hugging her math book as though it were a protective shield. Again, she drifted off into a reflection of her high school experience. She relived the thrill of becoming a "SENIOR," the upper classman, and the envy of all other students. Her mind filled with vivid memories of herself enthusiastically waiting to attend the senior trip, to participate in senior skip day, and to order her cap and gown, class ring, and senior pictures. Micah thought to herself, "It is finally my time to be the center of attention! My time to become a young adult! I am on track to become a high school graduate and the first child in my family to attend college!" With this thought, her eyes filled with enthusiasm. She wanted nothing more than a hopeful future.

"Micah," someone called.

Jarred back to the present, Micah looked up at the counselor. Gathering her college brochures, financial aid papers, and ACT schedule, she stood and slowly entered the counselor's office. The office was cluttered with college preparation books, financial aid information, and piles and piles of paperwork. The walls were covered with college banners and inspirational quotes. In amazement, Micah's attention immediately gravitated to Andrew Carnegie's quote posted on the wall above the counselor's desk: "The best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise."

Micah naively equated the words of the quote with the helpfulness of the school counselor. For that reason, Micah's excitement grew. Finally she could share her passion with someone who would give her sound advice.

"You have fifteen minutes," Mrs. Jackson said. "Make it fast."

With intense emotion, Micah shared her dreams and aspirations of attending college and becoming a Neonatal Surgeon.

The counselor raised her left eyebrow, twisted her mouth, smirked, and said, "Don't waste your time trying to become a surgeon. You don't have the grades or the money to pay for college for that career. Umm ... maybe you should consider becoming a cosmetologist. You know ... you always keep your hair so nice."

Defeated, a lump formed in Micah's throat as she swallowed her pain and forced the tears to stay buried behind her eyes. After wrapping up the meeting, Micah retreated to the restroom, avoiding eye contact with others as she scurried through the hall. Then, when she finally burst through the restroom door, she locked herself in a stall and sobbed until she couldn't breathe.

Why would the school counselor speak so negatively about her capability to become a doctor?

So, what is going through Micah's mind? What do you think about the counselor's statements and behavior? What are some questions you would like to ask Micah?