

House of Songhay ☐ The Malcolm Generation
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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May the spirits of Uncle Tyron Scott and Kendall Pullen
live throughout eternity

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INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a psychology intern at a federal penitentiary, I met an inmate who handwrote 22 novels that satirized his life growing up in a violence-ridden, poverty-stricken, crime family. His writings were raw and vivid. I told him about my own 'novel' idea and he encouraged me to pursue. The next weekend I started writing, but scrapped it after 3 pages. At the time, I was writing my dissertation and became acclimated to the bland prose favored in the academic community – a style of writing I learned but never revered.

About a year later, I finished my dissertation and started teaching psychology at Southern University. On several occasions, I'd start writing again, only to scrap it again. At the time, the process of writing a novel was like watching the ocean from the shore – it looks beautiful, until you jump in and realize you can't swim. Ironically, all babies can swim, yet many adults cannot. Just like the uneducated inmate could write fiction, yet I, a college professor, could not.

Like swimming, creating fiction is a gift from God that most adults lose when we learn how to reason. As children, we tell tall tales, talk to imaginary friends and fear the boogie man in the closet. We have faith in the unseen until adults convince us that "seeing is believing." So we stop believing in the *Demons, Ghosts and Zombies* that I describe in this book, yet we remain haunted and mystified by uncanny experiences.

Most would consider this book a work of fiction, yet I consider it mythology. The esteemed psychologist, Carl Jung, advocated using mythology to study fundamental structures of the personality, called *archetypes*. An archetype is an inherited disposition derived from ancestors and retained in the conscious of their descendants.

The Holy Bible is replete with African archetypes that compel Black America today. As I suggests in *Pipedreams*, "We are the lost tribe of Shabazz – The Hebrew descendants fighting tyranny and confusion, with false prophets molding golden hoofs for us to worship, while we ward-off temptation from Lucifer, and endure the wrath of God."

Many people believe that God was more omnipotent and omnipresent during biblical times and somehow, in modern days he lost his ability to move mountains, part seas, or help blind people see. To the contrary, I believe that it is not God who lost the ability to perform miracles; it is humans who lost the ability to see miracles.

At this time, I gratefully acknowledge all who have helped me along this spiritual journey. First, I thank all political, social and psychological writers, documentary producers, activist, musicians and poets for helping me to reprogram my mind. Big ups to all the brothas and sistas representing *real* Hip-Hop – the underground prophets that radio stations neglect.

Thank you to all my family and friends who gave me early support and encouragement for this project. Your faith and esteem kept my wheels

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Thank you to the legendary scholar and activist, Dr. Imari Abubakari Obadele, for having enough faith in me to publish my work with the historic *House of Songhay* and *Malcolm Generation*. Thank you for allowing me to chisel my name into the pillar that you cemented during the Black Power Movement. *Free the land!*

Thank you to the Southern University community, especially to the Psychology Department faculty and all students who have displayed abiding enthusiasm for this novel. Further thanks to the best chair in the world, Dr. Murelle Harrison, for giving me the support and flexibility I needed to complete this novel. Thank you to the staff and adolescent scholars of the Manhood Training Village. I appreciate all of you for your curiosity, enthusiasm and for giving me feedback on the cover.

Most of all, thank you, the reader, for sharing this very personal journey with me. I am accessible to all who want to discuss the content or concepts in this book. Visit me online at www.toldson.com. I will personally respond to all inquiries.

PROLOGUE: COUNTING BLACK SHEEP



Yet for your sake, we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered (Psalm 44:22).

The night after I first met my probation officer, I found myself internalizing society's perverse image of me. I asked myself, *Am I a black man or a nigga?*

I loafed on a musty couch in my uncle's basement in Jersey. And as I gazed into the casement, I began to fear my own dark reflection. I thought about the man I used to be – bold, introspective and inspired. And the man I am now? – I don't know. Maybe I'm the common thug the feds tried to enlist to snitch, or maybe I'm the lowlife the judge sent to rehab. Maybe I'm a criminal or a junkie, or both. I'm like the Deuce of Spade – I can tower above kings or grovel beneath peasants, depending on which dealer has my number.

That night I couldn't sleep, so I counted sheep, and eventually found myself at the purgatory between my life and my nightmaes. By the time I counted the 15th sheep, my voice faded into a dream, and I heard this gangsta named Dempsey echoing my numbers, "16, 17, 18..."

The echo was the coda of Dempsey's death wish. Eighteen seconds ago, he warned me, "you got 20 seconds to hand ova' my stash, before my dawg, Lucifer, peals a cap insida ya... 19!!!"

I knew that '19' was the pretext of death, but I didn't stop counting – I was so disenchanting with life that death began to intrigue me.

So I closed my eyes and totted up to '20'. And like Bloody Mary in a dark mirror, Lucifer, the agent of death, emerged from the dust.

“See you in Hell,” Lucifer whispered, as he fired a hollow point into my hollowed heart. I became comatose, as my cold blood spilled onto a bed of iniquity. My flesh relented to rigor mortis, and my soul awakened on a blighted block in Bed-Stuy.

The block was hot like Hell, with fire and brimstone blazing from tin barrels. However, there were no red devils with horns; just three demons from my past with faces like my own. The first demon pistol whipped me, and ordered, “Lay yo bitch-azz face down on the ground and start countin’ to 1,000!!!” Then the second Demon jacked my wallet and shoes, leaving me downtrodden, aimlessly searching for my identity. After the first two demons drove off in my car, the most sinister demon of all forewarned, “Ya azz betta’ not stop counting ‘til you make it to 1,000... I know who you are.”

So I continued counting sheep, wondering if I could make it to 1,000. But by the time I reached 100, the blood from my busted jaw engulfed my throat, the sharp crown from my chipped tooth gagged me, and then I realized that my vision was in the trunk of the car they jacked. I became blind, and started stammering on numbers. And after missing three lost lambs, I lost count. I no longer had the strength or the will to go on. I protested, “Why, in Heaven’s name, am I still counting sheep, if they’re already in Hell?!”

That’s when I realized that counting sheep was useless. So I stopped counting and tried to escape Hell by the sores of my cold, bare feet. I became the black sheep that I once counted, leaping fences, to avoid a sacrilegious sacrifice. “Where’s my shepherd?!” I brooded. “There’s no one to guide me! I’m all alone!”


Then Lucifer ambushed, “Gotcha!!!!”

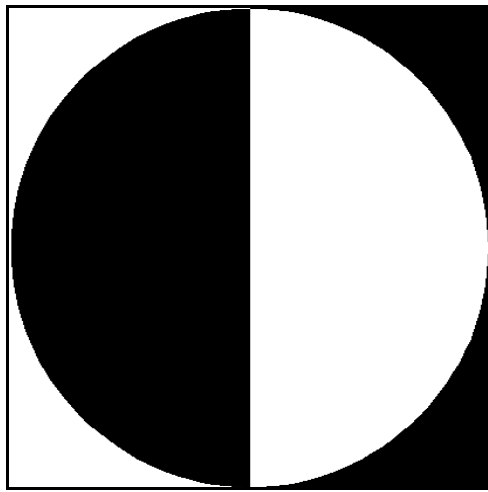
He grabbed my neck and placed his dry lips to my ear. He whispered, “I told you not to stop counting. I told you that I knew who you were, but you didn’t believe... you wouldn’t heed.” He dug a wedge into my neck with his thumbnail and said, “Now you must remain with me in Hell forever... Now you must become *me*.”

“ARRRRGHHHH!!! I screamed, as Lucifer’s thumbnail incised my cords so deeply that I eventually lost my voice. I hyperventilated and convulsed, until my Uncle Tye rescued my third-eye for the third time.

“Duce???” Uncle Tye called, “Duce!!! Wake up man, you’re having a nightmare!”

But it was more serious than a nightmare. It was a trance that I couldn’t wake up from – a dream that had become more real and eternal to me than my illusion of life. The demons that haunted were like toxins to my soul, *the antiThesis* of my life, and my soul wouldn’t rest until my mortal eyes could see them all *dead*.

Part I **THE THESIS** 



CHAPTER I: THE I AND THOU

Burgundy fingernail polish and burgundy lipstick,

Duce was awestruck at the sight of his beautiful and exotic date. 'Date' might have been an overstatement. Duce imagined it *might* be a date, but honestly, he didn't know what to make of their situation. It was after midnight, but his mental clock read noon, and he was sitting in a rural town diner talking to Havana about the 'I-Thou.'

"The I-Thou, according to the philosophy of Buber is the deepest level of human relatedness – a spiritual relationship," Duce explained.

Havana, the burgundy-adorned wonder, listened intently, smiled seductively and effortlessly dissolved Duce's sense of reality. Duce put on a mask of composure, but he was eternally perplexed. *How did I end up at this diner with Havana, and what does this mean?* he thought.

In Duce's eyes, Havana shone like a cluster of diamonds, rubies and sapphires against a grayscale backdrop. She moved like a swan in a lake – smooth and graceful.

"Your lipstick and fingernail polish match perfectly," Duce remarked.

Havana blushed and fancied, "You're silly. You make the simplest things sound so groundbreaking."

"But I've never seen anything like it," Duce explained, "Every color against your skin appears vivid and rich, yet the world around you looks dull.

"At this moment, it's like you're the foreground of life, and the world is just your shadow."

Havana dreamily gazed into the space between her and Duce, and lightheartedly replied, “Thanks, I guess. That was a complement, right?”

Duce narrowed his eyes, lifted his shoulders and clarified, “I was just being honest. I guess honesty can be a complement or an insult, depending on how it makes you feel. So, you tell me. Was it a complement?”

Havana paused to digest Duce’s comment and admitted, “Well, I guess I’d have to understand what I’m feeling right now to answer that. But I really don’t know.

“This is all so weird.”

“I know,” Duce agreed, “Something strange is happening between us.

“Do you sense it?” Duce asked.

Havana narrowed her eyes, leaned forward, and nodded her head ‘yes.’ Then they both stopped talking, started reflecting, and eventually, their silence became intense and analytical like a classroom during finals.

Duce worked over his experiences with Havana in his mind like a brainteaser, again asking himself, *How did I end up at this diner with Havana???*

He remembered his first time hearing about Havana from a guy who claimed, “Havana’s cooler than a fan when you’re friendly, but colder than ice when you try to holla’.”

Duce brushed off the tip-off, and never thought twice. But when he finally met Havana face-to-face, he had to admit, *She’s a dime! Nah, bump that, she’s a dub!!*

Havana was breathtaking – even-tone and honeyed, like a princess from Somalia, with high cheekbones and dark analytical eyes. Her lips were full as the moon from top to bottom, with a short width, giving them a naturally seductive perch. *Kissable* was an understatement, in fact *Kissina* was her last name.

Havana Kissina, the name just seemed to roll off Duce’s tongue like strawberry wine candy. Her last name was outlandish and her first name was revolutionary. Duce could see Josephine in her hips, Assata in her smile, and a White boy in her arms!?! What tha hell!?! Duce abhorred.

Havana was a senior at Big State during Duce’s first year in grad school. Big State was a very large flagship university in a rural midatlantic college town – a modest drive to Philly and NYC, but virtually in the middle of nowhere. Duce was midway through his second semester of grad school at Big State when he met Havana. Having recently graduated from Southern University, a historically black university in the south, Duce had trouble conforming to the middle-American, white-bred dynamics at Big State.

“It’s just *waay* too many crazy white people here,” Duce often complained.

Duce’s first interactions with Havana were somewhat awkward. Duce was wildly attracted to Havana, but initially treated her obnoxiously to

protect his ego. Havana detested Duce's sarcasm; especially when he took subtle jabs at her boyfriend, who was of the 'Caucasian persuasion,' as Duce would say.

Havana never fully forgave Duce for the time he embarrassed her in front of her sorority sisters in the student union.

"My *Prince*'ll be here to pick me up soon," Havana proclaimed.

Duce sharply replied, "Your *Nubian Prince*?" Havana's friends snickered, but Havana was hardly amused.

After an extended scathing look at Duce, Havana coolly walked away from the table. Duce was smug about the situation. He was deeply enmeshed in his black identity and couldn't understand how Havana could hang in a black circle but commit to a white man.

But as time went on, Duce and Havana began to remove their defenses and speak honestly to one another. Duce apologized for his crassness. He explained his life growing up in the South and his experiences working with young black males in the juvenile justice system. A few tensed interactions with white people left him bitter.

When Duce found out that Havana had a white boyfriend, he assumed she was from an uppity suburban, 'buppie' home – "another black American princess who thinks she's too good for brothas."

He was later surprised to find out that Havana grew up among working blacks and Puerto Ricans in Brooklyn, NY and had an aunt who was a member of the Black Panther Party in the 70's. Havana also had difficulty resolving the fact that her boyfriend was white, but couldn't deny that he treated her like a queen.

Then there was the party. Two days before Duce and Havana's impromptu diner date, Duce went to a party at a frat house. There, he saw a different side of Havana – not the usual innocent pretty college girl, but the hot saucy diva with a seductive dance.

At the party, Havana approached Duce quite pertly and pressed her pear-shaped buttocks against his crotch area. She swayed her hips rhythmically as Duce placed his hands around her tiny waste. Duce adjusted his step to Havana's tune as she faced him, grabbing his hand, pulling him to the center of the dance floor.

As the up-tempo hip-hop blasted through the speakers, Havana and Duce worked up a sweat. They pressed their bodies together and gyrated their hips in a blended rhythm. Mystery, lust and caution overcame Duce.

When the tempo dialed down to a slow groove, Havana gently placed her soft thigh between Duce's legs and began a sensual grind. Duce's heart began to flutter and his passion controls weakened. His organ started to stiffen as he heard Havana whisper sweetly into his ear, "*behave*."

That was when the clouds of reality overcastted the sun of Eros and ended Duce's blissful trip. This was still the little angel, not the proverbial hot girl... Right?

Duce returned to his modest graduate student dwellings with a devious smile on his lips, thinking of his enchanting dance with Havana. He fantasized about the possibilities – like, inviting Havana to his apartment, kissing those full, burgundy lips, tasting the sweet pulp of her tongue, peeling away her clothes, laying her on the bed and making hot, passionate... “Behave.” Havana's last word incessantly interrupted Duce's erotic fantasies.

That night Duce's mind was in rapture. He scribbled musings onto his notepad that read:

Red room of roses and passion, my heart endures no greater pleasure than the lust of a dance. Warm as an autumn bayou, your hips move to the rhythm of time. Like a pendulum swaying back and forth, as my eyes roam, up and down. Anticipating each touch of your fingertips to the base of my neck, the communiqué down my spine lingers like sugarcane to the tongue. Honey-glazed wonder on an oval floor, you decorate my space with constellations and my mind with rapture. Your body remains transfixed in a scarlet aura, you touch with the passion of jasmine and wine. Locked in your embrace, relishing the gentle storm between your thighs, winding against my natural sensations, rising like heat, you obscure the distance between dancing and Eros. I realize you in dreams, compromise with time, wondering if I will ever dance again, with anyone other than your shadow.

I'm really trippin,' Duce sneered and slowly drifted off to sleep.

The diner discoursed developed, as Havana and Duce tried to unravel the meaning of life, love and relationships.

“I don't know if I have an *I-Thou* relationship with Ted... How would I know if I did?” Havana inquired,

“Do you have an *I-Thou* relationship with your girlfriend?”

“I don't know, the more I learn about myself, the harder it is to understand my relationship with Dana,” Duce replied.

They each started to develop a new understanding of each other. Havana started to see Duce as insightful and charming. Duce started to hear poetry in Havana's statements and parody in her relationship – a parody that mirrored his own relationship.

“You really make me think,” Havana stated.

Duce started to feel passion stirring within him. He began to emotionally thank God for letting him experience this soul-connection; at the same time begging God not to let him fall in love. He thought, Falling in love with Havana is wrong on so many levels.

To Duce, Havana seemed to have paranormal senses. At the diner, he wondered if she could read his thoughts. Ironically, Duce also felt greater than his normal self when he spoke to Havana. For some reason, the words Duce spoke to Havana had a quality of wisdom and breath that amazed even he.

Is this me naturally speaking, or is this goddess enhancing my brainwaves, Duce wondered.

As Havana nursed a bowl of French Vanilla ice cream with chocolate fudge, she mentioned, "It's late, but for some reason, I'm wide awake."

Duce pondered her comment, "I'm wide awake," wondering, What door is she opening for me?

The time was about 1 a.m. Duce inquired, "So what do you want to do after we leave the diner?"

"We can go to your apartment," Havana suggested.

Duce was becoming more bemused as the twilight hours progressed. He continued to gather mental clues to explain how he arrived at this juncture with Havana.

Earlier that afternoon he returned from classes, thanking God it was Friday. He pressed 'play' on his answering machine and heard, "[beep] Duce, this is Havana, I was just calling to tell you *I love you* [pause] and I wanted to know if you'd give me a ride to my sorority meeting."

To Duce, it seemed as though a decade passed during the *pause*. *I love you?* Duce thought in wonderment. Rationally, he was certain that the statement was benign and meaningless, or at least meaning-little, but subconsciously his life changed. He alighted at the thought of Havana and him actually being in love. Again, this was wrong on so many levels.

After landing from his mental trip, he returned Havana's call and agreed to drive her to the meeting. Duce met Havana in the lobby of her apartment. She was casually dressed in an ice blue sweater, hip-hugging jeans and sandals displaying a perfect pedicure.

The sorority meeting was long, but Duce waited patiently, plucking the firm keys of his laptop, making passive strides on his thesis.

After the meeting, they decided to take a drive through the rural college town. During the ride, they looked for constellations in the skies, surveyed the ice-capped mountains in the horizon, and talked candidly about their relationships.

Duce explained, "I met Dana during my freshman year at Southern University, but we didn't start dating until about 9 months ago."

"Is it hard being in a long distance relationship?" Havana asked.

"I think distance is the only thing preserving our relationship," Duce replied. Oddly, Havana understood this position.

Duce had just finished writing a paper on building therapeutic relationships for his Counseling Theories course. He was intrigued with the concept of the 'I-Thou.' He shared his research with Havana.

"Here, I have a copy of my report on the back seat," Duce revealed. Havana was instantly enthralled. She flipped past the cover page and read:

The I-Thou is the sublime, God-like level of a relationship. There is complete continuity between the logical state of the mind and the dreamlike state of the heart. The spiritual mind is lucid and inspirational, producing unconditional love, harmony, and altruism. With spiritual communication, even during times of physical separation, souls of individuals are spiritually bound, using vivid imagination, reflection and nostalgic memories to supersede the boundaries of time and space.

Havana looked up at Duce after reading this passage. Suddenly, for the first time in her life she felt that "continuity between the logical state of the mind and the dreamlike state of the heart."

Her existence felt surreal and almost hypnotically, she began to see Duce in her future. The more Duce spoke, the more she listened and the more Duce listened, the more she spoke. She began to share aspects of her life that she had never discussed with anyone.

"Why am I so open right now? What are you doing to me?" she mulled, but never resisted.

Duce suggested they go to the diner to finish the conversation. Havana willingly accepted. She was developing an inner awareness and didn't want to end the mental trip.

When they reached the diner, Havana threw caution to the wind and revealed, "The more I talk to you about your research, the more spineless and boring my boyfriend seems. I never have conversations like this with *my man*."

Similarly, Duce felt as though his dialogue with Havana was ethereal and magical, and his girlfriend just didn't move him the same way.

Alas, Duce remained befuddled. Here was one of the most beautiful women he ever experienced, dismembering his mind. His thoughts raced, *She claimed she loved me only 10 hours ago, and now she's asking to come back to my apartment at 1 a.m.*

"Sure, we can go back to my apartment," Duce agreed.

The short ride to the apartment was quiet and calm. Duce continued to grapple with the possibilities in his mind. Suddenly, whether or not to attempt a kiss seemed like a life or death decision.

They arrived at the apartment intoxicated from their exchange of thoughts. The apartment was black as they entered. Duce turned on a lamp and Havana sat on the couch, maneuvering through the living area as though she was familiar with the setting. Duce shared his pictures with Havana.

Havana seemed very interested in Duce's undergraduate experiences at the large historically black university.

Duce and Havana talked about music. Duce was proud of his mixed CD that featured vocal jazz ballads. He played Dizzy and Louie, and asked Havana to dance. She accepted, gently wrapping her arms around Duce's neck and placing her head on his shoulder. It was a divergence from the red-passion seductress at the party, but Duce continued to feel the lava stirring in his heart.

They danced until they were both weary and return to the couch in a drunken trance. The CD continued to play almost imperceptibly in the backdrop. Havana and Duce continued to talk about the 'I-Thou' until they both became drowsy. As their eyelids sank, the content of their speech transformed into a cryptic blunder.

"Do you think we have an I-Thou relationship?" Havana asked.

Duce warily kissed the edge of Havana's eye. Havana inhaled deeply, placed her head on Duce's shoulder and closed her eyes.

Duce tilted his head toward Havana, and stroked the back of her neck. He closed his eyes and whispered, "Where are we?"

Havana replied, "Mars."