

# Call Me Justice

## Chapter 1 - Punished

Being numb to the pain is such a stupid phrase. The pain is still there, but we *choose* to ignore it. The odd thing about pain is if we ignore it for too long, it intensifies to a point where it tears us apart from the inside out. Then, things get funny, but not funny in a good way. Once our pain is exposed, often those around us have an issue with how we decide to handle it.

My pain isn't physical, and opinionated outliers have no right to tell me how I should feel. Everyone thinks they understand my condition: being Black in America.

Another video of abuse, another hopeless protest, another week of nightmares result in the same damn quotes as before...

*"No justice! No peace!"*

*"Hands up! Don't shoot!"*

*"I can't breathe!"*

Mr. Cooper, my American History teacher, will probably make us do some silly project about this drama. "We must dissect our history so we are not doomed to repeat it," he says. The goof can't even recall a popular saying. What has history done for me? I'm not doing it. I don't care anymore.

"Justice!" my mom yells from the living room.

"What?" I respond, dropping my phone on my pillow. She has been on my case all day.

"Don't 'what' me, boy!" she screams. "Get in here!"

I throw a small tantrum, messing up my sheets. After settling down, my eyes rest on my dad, who is staring at me from my doorway.

“Hurry up,” he says sternly, his eyes silently lecturing me about my attitude.

I nod.

He buckles his belt as he walks to his room, his boots thumping loudly. I hear the door close as I reach the hallway.

“JUSTICE!”

“I’m coming!” I yell back, still unable to contain my frustration. “Damn. Gimme a chance,” I whisper.

Once I reach the living room, I find her and my sister sitting on the sofa watching the news about the latest police scandal. *What’s the rush if they’re lounging?*

“Yes?” My attitude continues to linger in my voice.

She looks at me for a moment before saying, “You’re not going to that game tomorrow.”

*Bruh, what?*

“Seriously, Mom? Why not? I already bought a ticket!”

“Well, you better find someone to buy it from you because you’re NOT going,” she says, then returns her attention to the TV.

“Is it because of that shit?” I angrily point at the news playing clips of protests.

“Oh,” my sister mumbles, catching my mistake before I do.

The realization of what slipped out hits me, and I know I’m in deep. Should I stand strong? *Nope*. Mom’s scowl says it would be a frivolous fight.

“Come here,” she says through her teeth.

I slowly inch toward her, afraid of her reaction.

“Sit down,” she tells me in the same terrifying tone.

As I sit, my sister rises.

“Good luck,” she says silently as I read her lips.

Carmen chuckles as she disappears into the kitchen.

*SWAT!*

A solid slap lands on the back of my head. It is such a clean hit. That explains why she doesn't want me growing out my hair. Her discipline will be less effective if I have hair padding my skull. I caress the tingling sensation as she continues to glare at me.

“Who do you think you are, using that language in this house?”

“Sorry,” I reply, trying to apologize.

“Sorry ain't gon' cut it!” Her law school education flies out the window when she's mad.

“Gimme that phone!”

My eyes buck as I realize what my punishment may be.

“Momma! C'mon! I didn't mean to—”

“Hand it over, Justice!” she shouts over my plea. “Don't make me tell you again.”

Her glare is so intense that I fear for my life.

“It's in my room.”

I slowly stand up from the sofa and drag my feet as I make my way to the back of the house. Angrily, I snatch my phone from my pillow and walk back to her. Her hand is waiting as I flop back onto the sofa and pass it to her.

“Open it.”

I comply and unlock it. She turns her angry eyes to the screen. The silence between us lasts about a minute as she flicks at my screen. I was on social sites looking at the reactions to the protests just like they were doing. My sources aren't biased media, though.

“Do you understand the weight of the content you're watching?” she asks, apparently regaining her composure. “These people who are dying—”

“Are innocent black men like me. I know, Mom,” I say as I rest my head in my hand and slouch on the sofa's armrest. “I just don't understand why I can't go to a high school football game because a policeman killed another black man.”

“Because some students are planning a protest during the game,” Carmen says as she returns with an ice cream sandwich.

“How do you know?” I ask, not believing her. “You're not cool enough to be informed about something like that.”

Knowing her, it was probably some scare tactic she came up with to ruin my day.

“One of my friends is the organizer of it,” she replies before taking a bite. “They're going to walk onto the field and kneel. It shouldn't be a big mess, but I'm not going or getting involved.”

“That girl has always been strong-willed, but to try to pull something like this...” Mom says as she drops my phone into my lap. “Say another curse word around me, and I'm tearing all those silly cartoon posters off your wall,” she threatens with a disturbing grin.

Mom knows what anime is, but she always calls them cartoons.

“What am I supposed to tell Shawn and Moe?” I ask.

“Tell them whatever you want, as long as they know you're not going.”

I sigh loudly as I stand up. “Can I go back to my room now?”

“Yeah, but you better not get on that game. You didn’t feel like going to church this morning, so you must not feel like playing either,” Mom says.

Dad walks into the room, now fully dressed in his uniform.

“I’m heading out,” he says as he strolls past me. He rubs my head as he goes to hug and kiss Mom and Carmen. “These late shifts may be more common for a while until this situation calms down a bit.”

“Be safe, Daddy,” Carmen says.

“I’ll try, sugar,” he responds with a smile. “It’s a crazy world out there, but I can handle it.”

I attempt to leave the room.

“Justice,” Dad says suddenly.

I stop and turn to him.

“C’mere, son.”

I walk over to him and wait for him to affirm what my mom just burned into my head.

“If you feel you need to talk to me about these things, I’m here for you. We clear?”

“I’m good, Dad,” I say. “See you tomorrow.”

“God willing,” he responds as usual.

I turn to walk to my room, but his bulky arm wraps around my chest as he hugs me.

“Remember!” he says after releasing me. “No church, no game!”

I don’t turn to acknowledge the grin that I’m one hundred percent sure is on his face.

“Love y’all.” He leaves, and I finally escape to my room.

After diving into my bed, I use my phone to hop onto our server’s chat with my friends to tell them the bad news. *They’re gonna love this...*