

# ONLY GOD CAN CHANGE ME

*An Exclusive Novel Preview from The Ministry of Creativity*

## CHAPTER ONE

The heavy brass key felt cold in Charlene's hand, a sharp contrast to the humid Houston afternoon pressing against her back. She pushed the front door open, the familiar creak of the hinge announcing her arrival to the house—a house that felt less like a home these days and more like a reservoir for things unsaid.

She dropped her purse on the entryway table and let out a long, weary sigh. The house was quiet, but it was the kind of quiet that made her skin prickle. It wasn't the peace of solitude; it was the heavy, expectant silence of a storm waiting for a reason to break.

Lee was sitting at the kitchen island, his back to her, his shoulders hunched in a way that signaled trouble. He had his feet kicked up on the island—the very surface where Charlene spent her mornings praying and reading scripture—and he was watching a video, the audio blaring in the quiet kitchen. A chaotic, aggressive track. Charlene reached over and tapped the screen to pause it.

The silence that rushed back in was deafening.

Lee's reaction was instantaneous. He bolted upright, his chair clattering backward and slamming into the cabinets with a violent thud. He looked like a cornered animal.

"Don't touch my stuff," he spat.

"Lee, you are in my house, at my table, playing that—that poison," Charlene said. "I am trying to keep a home where there is peace, but you walk through that door and bring a war with you every single day."

Lee let out a scoff, a sound dripping with jagged sarcasm. "Maybe that's the problem, Ma. Maybe I don't want your peace. Maybe I'm sick of all this—this 'holier-than-thou' act, this praying, this waiting for a miracle that never happens. You want to know where your son is? He's gone." He snatched his phone and slammed his shoulder into the doorframe as he exited.

The house seemed to hold its breath until the front door swung open again. Frank walked in, his presence immediately shrinking the room. He walked straight to the refrigerator, grabbing a bottle of water with a forceful tug.

"What's wrong with him?" Frank asked, his voice rough.

"He's hurting, Frank," Charlene wiped her eyes. "He's lost, and he's lashing out."

"He's not lost, Charlene," Frank shot back, his face a mask of hardened cynicism. "He's spoiled. If he's lashing out, it's because you let him get away with it."

The kitchen was still ringing with the tension when the back door opened again. Lisa strode in, her movements jagged. She stopped short when she saw the dent in the drywall.

"Seems like Lee's finally catching up to the rest of this family's standard of communication," she sneered, tossing her jacket on the floor.

"Lisa, please," Charlene pleaded. "Not tonight."

"You want to talk about reality, Mama?" Lisa leaned over the island, her voice a low, stinging whisper. "You're so busy trying to 'pray' this family into being perfect that you haven't noticed we're all falling apart. Some things can't be fixed with a hymn." She grabbed a bag of chips and headed toward the stairs, leaving behind a trail of crumbs and bitterness.

Finally, the back door opened again. Felicia stepped inside, holding the hand of her four-year-old daughter, Chantel. The little girl skipped in, her bright yellow shoes making a cheerful, rhythmic pitter-patter.

"Hi, Nana," Chantel chirped, pulling out a handful of crayons to color under the island.

Felicia walked over and wrapped her arms around her mother's waist. "You don't have to carry the weight of this whole house on your shoulders, Mama," she said, her voice soft.

"I don't know how to reach them anymore," Charlene whispered, gesturing toward the stairs.

"Look at her, Mama," Felicia said, nodding toward Chantel. "You're giving her a sanctuary. And we can keep the light on."

Chantel looked up, her face bright with a crayon-smear smile. "Nana, look! I drew you a rainbow!" She held up a messy, colorful sheet of paper.

"It's for the rain," Chantel said, matter-of-factly.

Charlene took a deep breath, clutching the child's drawing to her chest, and for the first time all day, her heart rate began to slow.

 *Scripture Reflection*

*"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

— **Galatians 6:9**

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