

Chapter 1

School, What School?

Ray was woken up by the sound of his parents shouting at each other downstairs. He pulled the duvet over his head so that he could not hear them, but after five minutes his alarm clock rang anyway and he was forced to face the day. He dragged himself out of bed, went to the top of the stairs and shouted, 'Give it a rest, will you.' His parents heard him, but carried on.

Back in his room Ray searched through his massive collection of CDs until he found his favourite Tupac Shakur album, 'Me Against the World'. Dressed only in his boxer shorts, he strutted around the room rapping along with Tupac, imagining that he was on stage and the CD player was his audience. Tupac was Ray's hero. Ray knew every word of the track and rapping along with him made Ray feel as if Tupac were in the same room as him. When his music was on he could no longer hear his parents arguing, but before the first track was over he could hear the sound of his sister Kori singing along to the R'n'B singer Beyoncé in the other room. Ray turned his volume up. Kori turned her volume up. Ray turned his volume up even more. Kori turned *her* volume up even more. Ray turned his volume up until the room began to shake. Kori turned her volume up until the house began to shake.

'What the hell do you two think you are doing?' shouted their father from the landing. He was a short stocky man who had shaved his head the moment his hair had started to go grey, and had obviously spent a lot

of time pumping iron in his youth. He stood in a position from where he could shout into both bedrooms.

‘This is no rave, this is not a discothèque business you know. What are you trying to do, shake the house down?’

Both CD players went silent.

‘She started it,’ Ray said, opening his bedroom door wide to see his angry father standing there.

Kori stormed out of her room. ‘He started it with that hip-hop rubbish,’ she said as she locked herself in the bathroom.

‘What hip-hop rubbish?’ Ray shouted in the direction of the bathroom. ‘It’s better than that stuff you play, that stuff doesn’t say a thing, that stuff sounds like babies crying. And hurry up and get out of the bathroom, other people want to use it too.’

‘If the music I play sounds like babies crying, yours sounds like dogs barking,’ Kori shouted at the door.

‘Oh yeah,’ replied Ray. ‘You wait until I get my rap band together, we’ll teach you about good music. All that stuff that you listen to does is brainwash you.’

‘You and your so-called band. It will never happen Ray, and if it does you’ll be rubbish.’

Their father stamped his foot down hard. The house shook. ‘Both of you shut up, and you, Ray, you should know better. I told you to start being an example to your sister, didn’t I? And put some clothes on.’

‘You should know better,’ Ray said, turning his back on his father. ‘Every morning this week you and Mum wake me up with your arguing.’

Ray could see that his father wanted to lash out. He had hit Ray before but this time he managed to control himself.

‘Who do you think you are talking to, boy? Don’t you talk to me like that. You are only a boy, do you understand? A boy, so don’t come giving me your backchat.’