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WordsUncaged Submission

### An Open Letter to my Young Ladies

Dear Young Lady,

I hope this letter finds you in the best of health and highest of spirits.

My name is Lashawn. I've been incarcerated for 28 years. I'm 47 years old and I've lived the greater portion of my life behind bars. I've lived very few of my precious days on this earth as a free man. So few and so long ago, I can sense them, I can feel them, but I can't remember them. This is where poor decisions, violence, crime, and disobedience to my mom has led me; this is prison! Young lady, if you're in a place that your mind and heart will allow you to not only hear but listen and consider, I would very much like to offer you the benefit of my observations and experiences.

Over the course of my life, I've made poor decision after poor decision and I never knew why. Over the last several years, I've come to understand that most of my poor decisions later in life are directly related to my childhood, and some of the things I was exposed to, like belittling and verbal abuse, led to low self-esteem and ultimately to me becoming a follower. There was also abandonment by the father I never knew, which created a void in my life that I filled with a series of very negative people. These people became my role models. This became my perfect storm of stupidity and waste of a life: my life! I had low self-esteem, I was a follower and I patterned myself after criminals and thugs. As a direct result, I'm in my 28<sup>th</sup> year of a life sentence. I share this with you so that you can see how the decisions we make as kids can impact our lives as adults. Depending on the decisions, that impact can be positive or negative. The great part about this is you're in control of your own destiny. Life is so beautiful, if you make it so! Life can also be very ugly, if you make it so! Either way, the power is yours.

My advice to you, in claiming your future and directing it toward prosperity is be your own person, find the strength to make decisions that are best for you. Don't worry about what other people think, have the strength of character to plot your own course. When you need help, don't be afraid to ask for it, just make sure you ask the right person, somebody with integrity and a track record of being a good person and a citizen. Develop personal and professional goals; educate yourself. Most importantly, respect yourself and demand that same level of respect from others, especially the boys you date. When you arrive at a point in your life that you begin to consider children, make sure you have two things: a degree and a husband. While on your journey of life, don't settle for being a female; aspire to be a woman and a lady!

Finally, I wish you well on your journey. Be sure to avoid shortcuts; they are trouble. Do the work, be patient, develop goals and maintain the strength to overcome the setbacks and challenges that life will surely throw at you. You'll be fine. You got this!