

TYRA BANKS



Model/And

CHAPTER EXCERPT

Thousands of girls stampeded to the square all at once. Heels clacked. Dresses swished. Hairdos wobbled. The T-DOD theme song boomed a pulsating beat.

There was one rule and one rule only: a girl must be walking in order to be chosen.

Other than that, there was no prearranged runway on which the girls could walk, so everyone created invisible ones wherever they were standing. Violence was not encouraged nor was it condemned, and some girls' parents insisted on adding martial arts training to their walking lessons in preparation for the big day. T-DOD Square was an every-man-for-himself—or, more precisely, an every-girl-for-herself—event.

Scores of girls marched down their own stretches of the square, paused, posed for the cameras (real and imaginary), and then turned around. Trains of walking girls intersected with others. One area behind Tookie was so crammed with street vendors, it bottlenecked into a slow, shuffling line. Some walkers had only enough space to take a few steps before they had to stop and turn. Tookie's heart went out to a young girl in a ruffled pink dress who seemed way below the unofficial thirteen-year-old age requirement. She marched in place as if she were on a drill team.

Riiiiip. A girl stepped on the train of a walker a few feet from Tookie and tore the fabric right off the dress. Both girls fell forward into a heap. The walkers behind them stepped over their bodies and continued.

Crash. The De La Crème white and cream blow-up tent went down as two brawling girls entered it. *Oof.* A girl who looked as if she had never walked in heels before stumbled, breaking the tips of both stilettos. Two girls got into a fight at the end of their

makeshift catwalk, rolling to the ground. “Kenya, use the Gyaku Zuki move!” her mother screamed. “Reverse-punch the hairy hag! But watch *your* hair, sweetie!”

Tookie wheeled around. The hairy hag was Abigail Goode, sideburns in full glory, faint mustache above her upper lip, unshaven leg hair coating her calves, underarm hair swaying in the wind, and a DOWN WITH RAZORS! picket sign still in her hands. The girl she was fighting with tried out a karate move on her, but Abigail expertly evaded her blow.

Tookie’s jealousy meter skyrocketed. Even *Abigail* was competing?

She looked around some more. Actually, not only were eligible girls walking, but lots of other people were too. An elderly man on a power scooter shot a gap-toothed smile to the crowd as he steered his vehicle with his hands on his hips. Two down-on-their-luck women dressed in trash-bag dresses and beat-up sweat suits walked while pushing everything they owned in shopping carts, heckling every girl who passed. “Honey, you *wish* you had it like I do.” “Get back, spring chickens—age before beauty, ladies!” Tookie chuckled when she noticed that even some of the protesters ditched their RUN AWAY, DON’T WALK signs and sashayed energetically while chanting, “*Women, let’s walk! Smile for the cams! T-DOD, it rocks. Crank the music, let’s jam!*”

A few drunken boys from outside the gates got into the action, strutting next to the girls in exaggerated, long-legged lopes. One guy snaked an arm around a girl’s waist, but she swatted him away. The photographers and cameramen scrambled to catch every moment, projecting various images onto the screens next to the stage.

Thump, thump, thump. The music beat on. The largest screen

showed the remaining time left for walking. Twelve minutes, twenty seconds.

“Go, Myrracle, go!” Mrs. De La Crème shouted. Myrracle had staggered a few feet away from the fallen tent and was standing there staring at the melee, eyes bugged, frozen in place. “Don’t freeze up! Wake up, baby. You *have* to do this!”

“Yeah, Myrracle. You can do this. Come on!” Tookie urged, holding her sister by her arms and staring into her eyes, trying to spark a connection. “Dance in your spirit, but not with your body,” she repeated over and over. Then she turned Myrracle around, placed Myrracle’s hands on her hips, and whispered in her ear: “Left, then right, then left, then right . . .”

Myrracle suddenly broke out of her trance and began to follow Tookie’s instructions. Tookie jumped out of the way to watch her sister. Halfway down her imaginary runway, Myrracle began to wiggle her hips and shake her shoulders to the infectious music that swelled over the sounds of the crowd.

“Don’t dance!” Mrs. De La Crème bellowed, giving Myrracle a pinch. “If you sway one more time, you’ll get way worse than a little pinch! If I have to beat the last pas de bourrée out of you, I will! Now walk, walk, walk like an Intoxibella!”

Myrracle snapped back to focus. Her arms swung gently. She thrust her hips forward, as she’d learned to do in hours upon hours of walking class. She reached the end of her catwalk and came face to face with Abigail Goode. Both girls vied for the same spot to pose. Myrracle stuck out her pointy elbows, bumped her hip, and shoved Abigail hard out of the space. Abigail teetered over in her high shoes, hit her head on the footrest of the old man’s motorized scooter, and passed out cold.

Almost immediately a siren sounded and Tookie heard someone yell, “Girl down! Girl down!”

Myrracle posed for a long three seconds, then raised a shoulder and swirled back around. There was a *don't mess with me girl unless you want to get hurt* expression on her face as she strutted back toward Tookie and her family.

“That’s my Myrracle!” Mrs. De La Crème jumped up and down and clapped. “Claim what is ours, baby!”

“Uh, I know you, right?”

Tookie turned and nearly jumped out of her skin. Standing next to her was Theophilus Lovelaces. His eyes glistened in the LaDorno sun. He was seeing her, actually seeing her. His eyes focused right on hers. His words were meant for her. Tookie tried to smile, but she had a feeling her mouth made more of a grimace.

“You’re not participating?” Theophilus asked, gesturing to the crowd.

Tookie opened her mouth but couldn’t speak. She was dying to say, *Really? Me? Have you lost your mind?* But instead a cross between a yelp, a sneeze, and a burp came out.

“Good for you.” Theophilus indicated the candidates in the square. “This is a little crazy.”

They both turned to Zarpessa Zarionneaux, who strutted confidently right over an open manhole that three girls had just fallen into. Her long, straight auburn hair streamed behind her. Her skin glistened in the sun. She wore a bright yellow dress that seemed electrified, with matching yellow shoes. Tookie assumed it was the ensemble Lizzie had mentioned the other day, the one she and Zarpessa had fought over at the clothing dump.

“She even makes trash look beautiful,” Tookie murmured.

“Hmm?” Theophilus glanced at her in surprise.

“Oh, nothing.” It pained her that her very first conversation with Theophilus was about Zarpessa. She considered telling Theophilus about Zarpessa’s Dumpster digging, but then she clamped her mouth shut. No matter how much she envied Zarpessa, exposing something that awful was just too mean.

“What’s your name, anyway?” Theophilus asked, looking at Tookie again.

Tookie gaped at him. He wanted to know her *name*? Her mouth tried to form the words. She felt Theophilus’s T O O K E button in her hip pocket.

Suddenly a piercing voice rose above the din. “Theophilus!”
Zarpessa’s voice.

“I’d better go.” Theophilus tipped an imaginary hat to Tookie. Then he whirled around and marched toward his beloved.

“Seven minutes left!” Mayor Rump bellowed.

A blinding neon-yellow flash filled the sky. The clouds vanished. The sun disappeared. Someone screamed. Everyone shaded their eyes or ducked their heads. Even the walkers paused for a moment and squinted upward. Another whoosh boomed through the air. “The Scouts!” a voice bellowed. “They’re here!”

Scouts? Where? Tookie stood on her tiptoes, her heart beating like mad. People stepped back from a nearby lamppost that had started to vibrate, staring at it with a mix of wonder and terror. The lamppost began to lengthen, like a long telescoping pole. *Snap!* It broke apart and reassembled as a slender, mysterious-looking woman in a black metallic jumpsuit. Her head glowed as if it contained a lightbulb.

“A Scout!” Tookie whispered. She’d never seen one in person before.

The Scout’s head began to blink, as if warning people that

something amazing was about to happen. Then the woman marched to a thin girl with cheekbones so sharp they could slice a melon in half, and tapped her arm. The girl clutched her chest in disbelief. The Scout took her hand, and the bright light of her cranium flashed like lightning. And then . . . *poof!* They were gone, and the lamppost was back where it had always been.

“Oh, my baby!” the girl’s mother cried, running up to the lamppost, hugging it tightly and covering it with kisses. “My baby, my baby, my baby! First-draft pick!”

More gasps and screams rose in the crowd as the huge clock in the square ticked past the six-minute mark. Suddenly, Scouts from Modelland were everywhere. An asteroid rocketed to earth, throwing up chunks of marble all around the square and causing nearby runway walkers to flee in hysterics. A stunning Scout emerged from the rubble, with skin that seemed to be made of rough stone. She wore a bathing suit ensemble that appeared to be made of rocks. She tapped a tall, long-haired girl in a plain, dingy cotton dress. The dress wasn’t nearly as fancy as most of the outfits the other girls were wearing, and its front was wet with tears. When the girl looked up and saw the Scout, her jaw dropped.

“Are you sure you have to pick me?” the girl whimpered incredulously.

A pointy-chinned competitor in a poufy-sleeved dress and studded boots pushed to the front. “Pick me, she doesn’t want it!”

The plainly dressed girl’s mother tugged the Scout’s arm. “No, my Desperada does want it! Please take her! I don’t have the money to feed her anymore.”

The Scout nodded and grabbed the sobbing girl’s hand, and they both disappeared into a hole in the ground. Immediately, all the broken marble flew into the sky, reassembled, and then

dropped right back to exactly where it'd been before the disruption.

The clock edged past the five-minutes-left mark. The shopping cart of one of the homeless women flew from her hands and rolled wildly around the square. Girls near the cart ran away screaming. The cart flipped forward, and old food and tattered clothes spilled to the ground. A Scout in a dress with rips in all the right places materialized from beneath the decrepit belongings. She strutted to the middle of the square and stopped in front of a raven-haired girl who was wearing a dress with an enormous bustle. The girl's mother, who was clad in a muumuu, held out her own arm. "You want . . . *me*?"

With a slight, tired, *oh how the old ones always do this* roll of her eyes, the Scout touched the daughter's shoulder instead. "Oh!" the mother squealed. "Well, of course, of course!" She enveloped her daughter in her arms and cooed how proud she was of her and then let go. But as the Scout and the daughter descended into the worn clothes and rotten food within the cart, there was the tiniest look of disappointment on the mother's face.

"Three minutes, fifty seconds!" Mayor Rump announced from his VIP perch. Myrracle strutted on, posing and turning. Mrs. De La Crème bit her nails. Mr. De La Crème paced back and forth.

Eruptions occurred all over the square. The reporters swiveled their cameras and microphones, trying to keep up with the mayhem. Walkers to the left, right, front, and back bumped into Myrracle. She walked two steps, posed, turned, and walked again. Even Zarpessa was losing space, walking in a tight circle near the strange obelisks.

"Tookie, climb up here so your sister has more room to walk!" Mr. De La Crème commanded behind her. Tookie turned and saw

her parents and Brian standing on the roof of the wildest car she had ever seen: a blinged-out golden low-rider with a pavé roof and hubcaps that spun in place, even when the car wasn't moving. The gaudy and glam automobile was parked on a piece of marble that had a huge crack down the middle that looked, strangely, like a question mark.

Tookie dutifully climbed onto the shiny bumper. Mrs. De La Crème anxiously compared the time on her watch to the time on the huge clock in the center of the square. Worry marred her wrinkled face. "We still have time," she murmured. "A miracle will happen for The Myrracle. I just know it."

More flashes filled the sky. More Scouts appeared. The candidates walked hungrily. Dozens of fights broke out, and at least six girls lay on the marble ground, nursing their wounds. As Tookie made her way up the trunk of the car, a strange vibrating sensation tickled her feet. *Bzzz.*

What was that?

"One minute left!" Mayor Rump called. Hundreds of people began to count down. *Fifty-nine, fifty-eight . . .*

Bzzz. Bzzz. Tookie looked down and gasped. A strip of the diamond-encrusted roof of the car had transformed into a thick layer of brilliant fabric. As she watched, even more of the roof disappeared and reappeared as cloth. The fabric looked as if it were being spontaneously woven by a giant loom. "Whoa," she whispered.

Mrs. De La Crème noticed the fabric too. She kneeled down to within an inch of the strange material and then bounced back up. "*It's a Scout!*" She jumped off the roof. "*Myrracle, it's a Scout!*"

Brian was right behind her. He shook Myrracle by the shoulders. "It's a Scout, doofus!"

"Where?" Myrracle halted midpose.

"On the roof of the car!"

Myrracle pushed past girls in her way and scuttled over to the vehicle.

Thousands of crowd members were now counting down the seconds.

Forty-five, forty-four . . .

Another row of fabric emerged. Then another, then another. Myrracle shrieked. "A Scout, Creamy! A Scout!"

Mr. De La Crème grabbed Myrracle from the square and pulled her toward the car. "Everything we've strived for. It's all coming true, baby!"

Thirty-nine, thirty-eight . . .

Tons of girls ran for the gaudy car, clamoring for the attention of the soon-to-appear Scout. Tookie surveyed the crowd, noticing how many people were watching the De La Crème family on the roof. Jealous girls, rabid mothers . . . even Theophilus was in the back of the crowd, looking amused. But strangely, he wasn't staring at Myrracle, as most of the mob was. His eyes were locked on Tookie. Her stomach flipped over.

"Tookie!" Mrs. De La Crème grabbed Tookie's ankle. "Get down from the hood! Myrracle needs her space! This is her moment!"

"Uh . . ." Tookie stared at the ground. The area around the car teemed with so many girls now, she was kind of trapped. Furthermore, Myrracle wasn't able to climb atop the roof to greet the Scout properly. *This is Myrracle's moment*, Tookie thought. She had to help her.

“Come on, Myrracle!” Tookie called. She reached out her hand for Myrracle to grab. It took all of Tookie’s strength to pull Myrracle and her twenty-pound dress onto the hood. Once she was up, Myrracle pushed Tookie out of the way, nearly knocking her to the ground.

“I’m here!” Myrracle cried. She stood in the center of the hood, hands in the air, her chin thrust high. “Da-tahhhh!”

“Tookie, for the love of God, get off the roof!” Mrs. De La Crème screeched. “Give Myrracle room!”

But Tookie didn’t want to move. She wanted to see this happen to Myrracle firsthand. The roof had finished its diamond-to-fabric transformation. There was a slight pause, and Tookie felt the world around her go silent. And then the whole roof began to tremble.

Suddenly, the fabric split violently in the very center, knocking Myrracle off the roof. She fell to the ground almost as if in slow motion.

“Nooooooooo!” Mrs. De La Crème wailed. Tookie’s father pushed Brian out of the way to catch his daughter. Tiers of tulle billowed into his face. Myrracle’s legs kicked into the air.

“*Get back up there, Myrracle!*” Mr. De La Crème screamed, shoving a shoe back onto Myrracle’s bare foot. He pushed her up on the hood.

Fifteen, fourteen, thirteen . . .

The tear in the fabric grew wider, until a human-sized hole appeared. And then a nearly naked woman emerged from the center of the tear and rose into the sky. She had long limbs and golden skin and wore shiny necklaces strategically placed over her chest and lower half. A gem-encrusted veil covered her face.

Tookie gasped.

The Scout's hair blew in its own wind. Her arms stretched wide. Her fingers gripped the very ends of the piece of fabric that had materialized on the roof of the car. It seemed as though the fabric had grown from her fingers, an extension of her body itself.

"Wow," Myrracle whispered. Tookie couldn't agree more.

Fireworks began to explode in the air, the sparkles showing the numbers as they counted down.

Six, five, four . . .

The Scout looked at the De La Crèmes and nodded majestically, looking both strong and feminine at the same time.

"Please take her!" Mrs. De La Crème gushed.

"We would be honored!" Mr. De La Crème cried.

Three, two . . .

And then the Scout reached out her long, slender, radiantly decorated hand and beckoned.

To *Tookie*.

Modeland

ON SALE: SEPTEMBER 13!

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Jacket art and design by Perry Harovas and James Schmitt/Tribeca Flashpoint Media Arts Academy. Endpaper art by Hebru Brantley.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN 978-0-385-74059-3 (trade)

ISBN 978-0-375-98956-8 (lib. bdg.)

ISBN 978-0-375-89944-7 (ebook)

The text of this book is set in 11-point Berkeley Oldstyle Book.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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