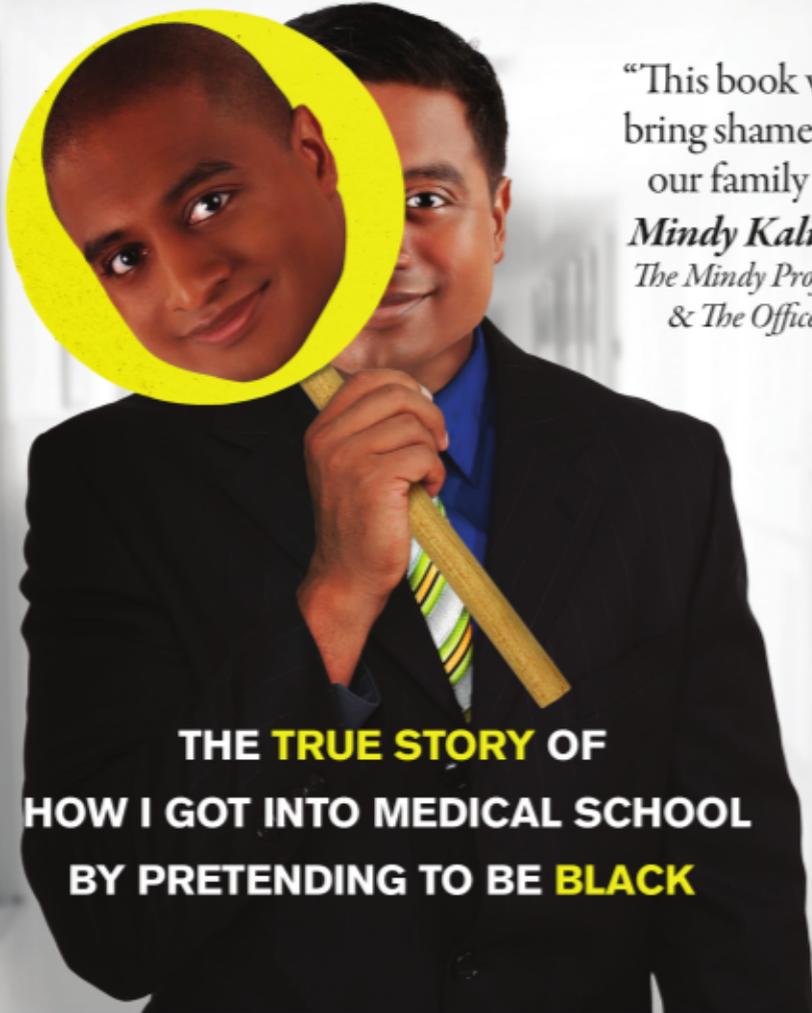


Sample Chapter 3

ALMOST BLACK



“This book will
bring shame on
our family!”

Mindy Kaling
The Mindy Project
& *The Office*

THE **TRUE STORY** OF
HOW I GOT INTO MEDICAL SCHOOL
BY PRETENDING TO BE **BLACK**

VIJAY JOJO CHOKAL-INGAM
with **MATTHEW SCOTT HANSEN**

Almost Black is available on Amazon, Barnes & Nobles, and other booksellers

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I got into medical school by saying I was black. I lied.

Honestly, I am about as black as Gandhi.

Once upon a time, I was an ethically challenged, hard-partying Indian American frat boy enjoying my third year of college. That is until I realized I didn't have the grades or test scores to get into medical school.

Legitimately.

Having discovered a loophole in admissions standards, I shaved my head, trimmed my Indian eyelashes...and BSed my way into med school as Jojo the African American affirmative action applicant.

It worked, but not everything went as planned. Not by a long shot.

THE CRITICS RESPOND TO ALMOST BLACK

"Mindy Kaling's brother is a cool prankster upsetting the status quo."

Brendan O'Connor, *Gawker*

"This sounds like it's straight out of a sitcom!"

Perez Hilton

"Chokalingam's story is only surprising because of how shameless he is."

Max Ehrenfreund, *Washington Post*

"Mindy Kaling's older brother took the phrase 'fake it til you make it' to a whole other level."

Jackie Willis, *Entertainment Tonight / CBS News*

"Unsurprisingly, Chokal-Ingam has been at the end of a huge backlash following his contentious claims."

Kelly McLaughlin, *Dailymail.com*

"This book will bring shame on our family."

Mindy Kaling (*The Mindy Project / The Office / Why Not Me?* (Crown Archetype) / *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?* (Three Rivers Press))

"Seems a sibling spat is sizzling between TV's Mindy Kaling (*The Office, The Mindy Project*) and her brother."

Joe Holleman, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

FROM THE AUTHOR

"Instead of drinking and partying hard in college, I should have studied hard, like my friend and classmate future 'dick lit' author Tucker Max (*I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell*). Then I might have been able to apply to med school without the big lie."

Vijay Jojo Chokal-Ingam (Chokalingam) @vijayingam

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CHAPTER 3

HIP-HOP-CRACY

“I say to you quite frankly that the time for racial discrimination is over.”

President Jimmy Carter, 1976

From my flustering encounter with Dr. Pamies, flash back a year earlier, 1998, and enter a rapidly escalating debauch at the Psi Upsilon fraternity at the University of Chicago. Founded in 1833, Psi U currently has around fifty active chapters in the U.S. The fraternity has a pretty impressive history and boasts a disparate membership, including presidents, William Howard Taft and Chester A. Arthur, Vice President, Nelson Rockefeller, Supreme Court Justice, John Paul Stevens, suds maven, Peter Coors, Dan *Da Vinci Code* Brown, and head Transformer, Michael Bay.

No, Optimus Prime was not a Psi U brother. However, Megatron might be.

The fraternity’s mission statement publicly states it “aspires to moral, intellectual, and social excellence in themselves as they seek to inspire these values in society.”

High-minded boilerplate? Done. That’s pretty much what all fraternities say in support of their wonderfully altruistic face that they show to the world. The *Real* Mission Statement was “drink to excess while trying to have sex with as many women as possible. Oh yeah, and study, too.”

Slightly shallower than the former but far more accurate.

That night the legendary annual Superheroes Party was taking all the energy the frat could muster. This was Psi U’s Oscar Party, the Superbowl of alcoholism, at least as authored by Psi U. It was a big fucking deal and

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it sent ripples not just through U Chicago, but throughout the entire city. Everyone of a certain age HAD to go. You got to dress up as your favorite superhero and troll for the opposite sex in a booze-soaked, target-rich environment. However, it did have some logistical limitations, unlike Woodstock, so the brothers resolved to only letting certain people in. Those limitations restricted the party exclusively to UC students and smokin' hot babes.



Debauch Central, a.k.a., the Psi Upsilon fraternity house, with a banner announcing the legendary Superheroes party.

Everyone else could suck it.

Manning the door was the frat's social chairman, a twenty-one-year-old fun loving, glib, wise-ass, who was *Animal House's* Bluto and Eric Stratton rolled into one. His sacred duty was to allow in only those who might be assets to the bacchanal. His mandate: *extremely unequal balance*. Far more women than men and far less men who might be competitors for the women.

The social chairman was a nice kid but he was also kinda spoiled. From an upper income family, he had a certain world view, which accommodated those exactly like him and those who were almost exactly like him. Coming from money gave him a bit of the entitlement issue that many with plumbless pockets have. He was also as smug as many college kids are

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when they know who Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant and Herodotus are and can actually cite their work.

This social chairman liked Nietzsche. Dark he liked.

This party was a big deal for the social chairman because it handed him a leash to a dog in a fight. The presidency of the fraternity house was up for grabs in a few weeks and the social chairman was considered a front runner. Since the social chairman was more or less responsible for the party, its success would go a long way to convincing the brothers to make him president. On the other hand, if the party tanked it could kill his candidacy. Thus motivated, the social chairman was determined to make sure the party went smoothly from that mid-afternoon when it informally started, to the moment it petered out a day or two later when the hardest of the hardcore suffered liver failure and either gave up or passed away.

If you haven't guessed, the social chairman is someone you're just getting to know. Yeah, me again.

Okay, this is probably the last time I'll use the flashback and this hokey third person device. Just so you know. Thanks.

And BTW, the story pretty much starts *now*.

Anyway, unless the party exploded in flames or was crushed to molecules by Godzilla, I was seen as a shoe-in for the presidency of Psi U. I really, really wanted that. Fuck Lord Acton, at that age there was no such thing as too much power. To make sure nothing was left to chance I was also serving as the doorman to filter any riff raff. Up to that point, I'd allowed people in left and right while happily collecting the cover charge. The door charge helped defray the cost of the sea of brew and towers of little red Solo cups necessary to drive this besotted Ship of Fools, filled with hundreds of young people, who could absorb Budweiser like a Hummer H1 with the Vortec V8 metabolizes gasoline.

When the brothers first elected me as social chair a year earlier, I reveled in the huge honor. But when the dust settled I realized I was supposed to be "the responsible one." That meant remaining *sober* at parties

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and collecting money at the door. Call me Mr. Buzzkill. That's when I knew I'd been royally fucked. It was like being a eunuch in a harem. While this appeared to inflict an intolerable hardship on me, ultimately I was fine with it because once the party had reached cruising speed and required only a light hand on the wheel, I would get relieved, usually by a junior frat member, at which time I was free to exceed the legal alcohol limit and hit on girls at will, all while basking in the glory of success.

I was meticulous in planning publicity and logistics for events. I always made sure there was kickass ear bleed music, plenty of beverage, and a little marketing extra--lots of hype about our fraternity's upcoming social events. As the social chair, I was our first, best, and last line of defense between our parties rocking or sucking donkey schlongs.

And yet, like a young commodities trader prior to October 1987's Black Monday, I had known only success. Over the course of my one-year term, attendance at Psi U parties roughly doubled. The UC student newspaper, *The Maroon*, kvelled that we threw the best parties on campus. While that wasn't saying a whole helluva lot since it was the University of Chicago, it was an honor I happily claimed credit for. The brothers respected me for having done so much to improve the finances and reputation of the house, a seeming contradiction for a frat.

Greek organizations, at least to outsiders, had an *Animal House* reputation for profligacy, framed by bottomless beer kegs and bottomless female accomplices. But those gross characterizations weren't entirely accurate. Though lusted after, women were still treated with respect, and invariably performed said sex acts with full consent, cooperation and, surprisingly, with much of their clothing still in place.

Kinky? Sure.

Furthermore, there was actually a prudent limit to the beer, albeit generally set by how many kegs the local tavern or distributor had on hand. We wanted partygoers drunk, not deceased. With the election of the new fraternity president approaching, many brothers considered me the best

candidate...because I fucking rocked! A whisper campaign had materialized to elect me the next president of the Omega of Psi Upsilon. I came to *love* whisper campaigns. The party that night, if it went well, would be my crowning achievement and cement my succession to power. I wasn't going to let anything stand in my way of the presidency.

OMG...was I Nixon?

The simplest way to insure success at a fraternity party is to limit fatalities and make sure trouble never gets past the front door. That being said, for “security” reasons, only University of Chicago students were ostensibly allowed into our parties. But that restriction was flexible. If the Swedish Lingerie Football team showed up I would have personally escorted them in. However, if you were a townie from the South Side of Chicago, you were out of luck. Fortunately, it was easy to distinguish between townies and University of Chicago students.

The townies were all black.

Jim Crow lived on and I was the Woodrow Wilson of Psi U.

I looked over the long line of white and Asian students winding down the walk and onto the sidewalk in front of the Psi Upsilon fraternity house. Each cheerful face made my brain *ka-ching* like a cash register. I was an economics major so my mental computer was making constant updates to our position, just like a NASDAQ ticker.

Knowing the precise average consumption of alcohol of each entrant (2.5 beers), based on the price and capacity of each keg, I knew our fixed hard costs per person were \$2.57. With the entry fee of five bucks and an estimated total attendance of seventeen hundred imbibers, and additional fees factored in, I calculated our gross take would be forty-four-hundred dollars, give or take two percent. That was some sweet bank, baby. I just knew my parents would have been proud my education was finally giving me their money's worth.

Call me Mister President.

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At the front of the line was Jaime, a pretty blonde and an ex-girlfriend of mine. Jaime was accompanied by Anne, another pretty white girl. Both had fake eyelashes and Courtney Love-level eyeliner. I stopped to chat up the girls but saw trouble behind them:

Three well-dressed, college age black men.

They were the first African Americans looking to get in that night and I knew the second I saw them I wasn't letting that happen. Why? I honestly don't know now. Prejudice, and its handmaiden, Ignorance? Social programming? Call it the inchoate fear of The Black Myth.

"They'll get our womenfolk, fellas!"

It was any and all of those half-formed, mindless fears that have been reinforced over the years by popular culture, lazy thinking, and just flat out racism. Of the three men, two were taller than me and one was several inches shorter. I would come to identify him as Napoleon for various reasons. I kept my eye on them as I hugged Jaime.

"Vijay, can you let us in the party for free?"

"Jaime, you know that only brother's girlfriends get in free. Since we're not dating anymore I just can't do it. Rules. Sorry."

I held out my palm and smiled. Jaime pretended to be miffed then laughed slightly, forked over the cash, and dragged Anne into the party.

That's the moment the policy of letting everyone through the door who had measurable brain activity--along with their cover charge--came to an end. Admittedly, I was a little intimidated by the black guys, but I put on my game face and held up my hand like an East German Communist guard at the Brandenburg Gate in 1966, stopping them cold.

"IDs please." Then I added, crisply, "*Student ID.*"

The young men didn't hesitate or argue, they just pulled out wallets as if expecting this kind of treatment. I was right, their IDs were two Illinois ID cards and one driver's license.

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“Like I said, you’ve gotta have a UC ID. This party is for students only.”

Their leader, probably six-three with intense eyes but a calm demeanor sought to reason with me.

“We don’t go to UC but we’re not thugs. We’re just looking for a good time. Your party looks like fun. That’s all we want. Fun.”

The social chairman of Psi Upsilon was unmoved by his entreaty.

“No ID, no entrance. That’s it.”

I didn’t even add “sorry.” Maybe I was afraid it would make me look weak. And I hadn’t won the game just yet.

“C’mon, man,” said Calm Guy, appealing to my humanity. “We’re not trouble. A couple of my friends go to UC. We just want to have a good time. Please.”

I shook my head and made damn sure I didn’t smile. “No UC ID, no party. That’s it. Now please leave. There are other people in line and you’re holding them up.”

That’s when Napoleon stepped up within a foot of me. I could see he was hot under the collar.

“This is bullshit, man. You lettin’ in everybody and his brother. Why us? Why stop us? Huh? This is whiteass bullshit, man.”

This had officially become *a situation*. Keeping one eye on Napoleon, I scanned the area for any frat brothers to back me up if things got out of hand. The only frat brothers around me were shitfaced and useless. I was alone.

“I knew them, that’s why.”

“That’s a fuckin’ lie. You darker’n me, motherfucker, yet you’s whiter than them,” pointing out Little Bo Peep and Goldilocks, whom I had just let in. “You couldn’t know everybody in the fuckin’ line unless you the fuckin’ mayor of Chicago, motherfucker. You the mayor?”

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“No. I’m not the fuckin’ mayor, as if Chicago would ever have an Indian mayor, *motherfucker*. Them, I know. You, I don’t know from dick.”

Napoleon got right in my face. He had on a very nice cologne. His eyes bugged with rage. I was scared he was gonna throw down. He was short, but it occurred to me that Mike Tyson was barely five-ten and had beaten the shit out of pro boxers who were half a foot taller. This guy was built a little like Tyson. I’m a lover, not a fighter. If it came down to a fight, I was betting on the short, muscular, righteously enraged black man, not the hollowly blustering Indian econ major.

“I’m not leavin’ bitch,” he spit. “I have a right to be here. I have a right to go to your party.”

“No, you don’t. You have no right to go to a private party. That’s it, so get lost.”

Now he was so close I could feel his heated breath. “Fuck you. You not lettin’ us in ‘cause we’re black, pure and simple, you racist *motherfucker*.”

I looked into his furious eyes and wanted to scream at him, “*Damn right!*”

Instead, I shook my head and dismissed his theory. “That’s bullshit. You can’t come in because this is for UC students only.”

“You a *motherfuckin’ racist!*”

I flashed on the paper bag test used by Southerners to exclude black voters in the days of Mr. Crow. Only problem, I’d fail it too, as he pointed out, yet I went for it anyway.

“That’s a fuckin’ lie. My skin’s darker than yours,” I snapped.

He angrily mock laughed. “Darker? Fuck that, whitewash. You just a sand nigger, *motherfucker*.”

“Fuck you,” I said from my high horse. “I know what racism is,” I countered, no doubt exaggerating by magnitudes his experiences with racism and mine.

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Napoleon's face actually got visibly red. His friends just laughed at me, shaking their heads. The dark skinned, white dude expressing his "understanding" of being scorched by the furnace of racism. They gently grabbed Napoleon and pulled him back.

"C'mon man," said Calm Guy, "let's go. We'll find another party."

Napoleon seemed on the verge of taking a swing at me, but then he let out a big sigh and just turned away. No eye contact, no taunt, just tired capitulation.

I too let out a deep breath.

Later, the police came and politely told us to STFU, so we officially ended the Superheroes Party. The abrupt police intervention was a blessing. We managed to collect a ton of cover charges from people who never got a chance to guzzle our beer. We cleared five grand, enough to finance our social calendar for the rest of the year. On top of the windfall, having the party "shut down by the cops" strongly reinforced Psi U's bad boy mystique. Win-win.

The presidency was mine.



No, not the beer aisle at the grocery; leftovers, after the police shut down the Superbowl of alcoholism, our Superheroes party

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A few nights after the wreckage of the party had been cleared by the Hazmat team, the bodies toe-tagged and carted away by the coroner, I was studying--at that time not an occupation I was as familiar with as I should have been.

I was reading George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. I found it a real allegory stew, chock-full of animals-as-people, and how class stratification occurs among the best laid utopian schemes of pigs, invariably degenerating into a clusterfuck of class struggle. The one inconvenient little theme that kicked my ass was "*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.*"

So, here I was, a student of free market economics, with a low tolerance for candy-assed, socialist zealots, reading this screed-as-parable about the Russian Revolution and the perils of abandoning one's ideals, and goddamn it...I saw myself. A little.

My thoughts went to my confrontation with Napoleon.

I was bothered it had shaken me, but I just couldn't leave it in my wake. Now that the adrenaline had subsided, I could be a little more objective about the situation. My first thoughts were directed at what an asshole he'd been.

Yeah, fuckin' Napoleon. He was a total asshole...that asshole.

Why did he make such a big deal about it? It pissed me off to think that he'd created such a scene and nearly upset my campaign applecart for the Psi U presidency. Our party had been a *private* party, so I had been well within my rights to exclude him. His anger had been so untoward. So ungentlemanly.

I felt I'd been patient and above reproach. There must have been ten other parties going on that night they could have gone to. Why ours? Okay, it was a totally bitchin' party, but if you're not wanted, why push it?

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I stewed over that seeming inconsistency for a few moments, convinced that Napoleon was a real mallet head. And, by the way, I'd arrived at his nickname Napoleon *before* I'd read *Animal Farm*.

I thought of Groucho's famous line about not wanting to be a member of a club that would have him as a member. Wasn't the opposite *more* true? Why would you want to be a member of a club that didn't want you? I just didn't get it.

Then a couple of nasty words from my past popped into my head outta nowhere:

Roxbury Latin.

My thoughts came to a screeching halt. *Whoa, hold that pony, pardner. That's not an accurate comparison.* I wanted to get into that school but they didn't want me...so that was different...from Napoleon...because...it...was...different, uh...

Hmmm.

But why the hell did he want in so badly? Why get so mad over something stupid like that? Why didn't I want to let him in? Why did I want so desperately to get into Roxbury Latin? How could those fuckers have booted me? I would have been an *asset* to that stupid school.

Stupid school. It was just a school. Cool, sure, but just a school. Yet the rejection from Roxbury Latin burned even now.

Fuck Roxbury Latin.

But it was just a *party*. BFD, right? Who cares?

I considered this for a few minutes then lapsed into rationalizing.

Okay, he's black. I'll be honest. Black guys have that *reputation*.

For what?

Well, for being, uh, troublemakers. Troublemakers like Nelson Mandela? Stephen Biko? Malcolm X?

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A few months earlier I let a couple of Indian guys into a Psi U party. They weren't UC students. They started a fight. So maybe I shouldn't let Indians into our parties? Okay, okay, that perception about black men was bullshit, but they *could* have made trouble. They seemed to be sort of menacing and Napoleon carried a lot of anger. Shit, that dude was nuts.

Nuts? Really? Or did he have a reason to be angry?

No.

Well, okay, maybe. I guess so. Yeah, I guess I was eleven when Roxbury dumped me but I was still angry years later. Angry. *Years* later.

So why was Napoleon angry?

I thought about that for a few minutes. I was afraid to answer.

Maybe because people like me treat him like that.

Was I now Headmaster Jarvis? Was I the oppressor? Was I like the fucking animals in Orwell's stupid metaphor salad? Was I a...*hypocrite*? The word choked my brain to think it.

I knew from philosophy classes of the conundrum of the self-fulfilling prophecy. It took me a few more minutes of soul searching to reach the next two conclusions:

I would quit reading books by socialists. *And I was the asshole.*