ALTER Q

VOL. 1



DEEPER AND DARKER

By Quran Rich

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By

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You made a villain outta someone who adored you.
I hope he ghosts you too.

I won't forget...
I won't forgive you...

— TOXIC —

Look what you turned me into.

Say something deeper and darker...

— Quwan

Chapter 1

T0XIC

The first song that named the wound

I wrote it before Alter Q had a name.

Back then it was just me, a phone mic, and the kind of quiet that makes you hear your own thoughts like footsteps in an empty hallway. No plan. No brand. No "artist." Just a man trying to drain poison out of his chest without spilling it on somebody who didn't deserve it.

The room was small and too clean for how messy my head was. A chair with a hoodie thrown over it. A half-empty bottle of water on the nightstand. Curtains that didn't fully close, letting a thin strip of streetlight cut across the floor like a blade. My phone sat face-up on the bed, screen dark, heavy with the last thing it had shown me: delivered.

That word looked different when it meant nothing was coming back.

She said forever like it was a place we could live. Then she vanished like smoke. Not a clean goodbye. Not an honest ending. Just the slow disappearance that turns a relationship into a question you keep rereading. One day the replies were normal. The next day they were spaced out, vague, polite. Then nothing. Silence with a pulse.

Absence is a strategy.

At first I tried to be mature about it. I told myself it was timing. Stress. Life. I told myself not to overreact, because overreacting would mean I cared more than she did. I told myself not to become the type of man who measures love by response time. I tried to be the "secure" version of myself.

Then I realized secure men still deserve clarity.

The first night she didn't answer, I stayed up too late looking for a rational explanation. The second night, I caught myself drafting messages that started with "Hey" like nothing happened. The third night, I started bargaining with my pride. I told myself I could send one calm check-in, one simple line, just to make sure she was okay.

I didn't want to admit the truth: I wasn't checking on her. I was checking on me. I was trying to confirm I still mattered in a story that was being rewritten without my consent.

Then I saw her online and understood the difference between absence and abandonment.

Not in an "I'm spiraling" way. In a simple, accidental way. A story. A smile. A caption that sounded like freedom. Like relief. Like she had been released from something heavy. She looked like a person who had already decided the ending was over, even if I hadn't gotten the memo.

She looked untouched.

That's what got me. Not that she moved on. People move on. Not that she found somebody else. People replace. It was the way she rewrote the narrative while I was still living in it. Like we never happened. Like I was a draft she never saved. Like whatever we were was just a phase she outgrew and didn't need to mention.

The air in the room felt thinner after that. Like oxygen got rationed. My chest tightened the way it tightens right before

you say something you know you'll regret. I stared at her face on my screen and felt the insult settle in before the heartbreak could even stand up.

I didn't feel sadness first. I felt played.

I wanted to call. I wanted a reason that made it make sense. I wanted her to say one true sentence that matched what we were. I wanted her to be the person she pretended to be when she was close. I wanted her to look me in the eyes and not edit the past.

Instead, I sat on the edge of my bed and stared at the hoodie on the chair, the one she used to steal and wear like it meant something. Her scent was still there, faint but undeniable, like proof with no witness. Like a receipt with no return policy. It was the kind of smell that makes memory feel physical. It made me angry that chemistry could linger longer than intention.

The hoodie was heavy in my hands, not because of the fabric, but because of what it represented. The casual intimacy. The way she used to pull it over her head and smile like she belonged there. The way she'd say my name in a quiet voice when she wanted something from me. The way she'd ask for reassurance with her eyes and then punish me for needing any.

I held the hoodie like I was waiting for it to explain her.

It didn't.

My phone buzzed. A notification from a random app. Not her. My thumb hovered over her contact like muscle memory. I almost typed, "You good?" I almost pretended I wasn't bleeding.

Then I didn't.

I hadn't suddenly become strong. Something inside me had simply gone still.

That stillness wasn't calm.

It was a switch.

I opened my notes app and typed without thinking. Not inspiration. Irritation. The kind that sits behind your teeth when you realize you've been polite to someone who's been playing chess with your feelings.

I wrote the first line like I was spitting out a splinter.

{MUSIC}

You said forever, then vanished like smoke
Left me with ghosts and a half-written note
I gave you my truth, you gave me a show
Camera-ready love, all filters - no soul

When I read it back, my stomach tightened because it was accurate, not dramatic. It named the part that hurt the most: she didn't just leave, she performed leaving. She curated the ending. She cleaned her image while I was still staring at the mess.

I tried to soften it. I tried to make it more "fair." I tried to add nuance, like nuance would make betrayal less sharp.

But my hands kept writing what my pride was trying to hide.

I tried to rewrite it for her benefit. I tried to pretend it was a misunderstanding. But the details would not cooperate. The truth has a specific weight. You can't carry it with one hand and still pretend your balance is fine.

She called it timing. I called it a lie. Not because she left, but because she left while keeping the door open just enough to keep me waiting. That's the part people don't describe out loud. They romanticize the distance. They call it "space." They tell you to be patient.

Space is neutral.

This wasn't neutral.

This was control.

{MUSIC}

You called it timing, I called it a lie
Told your new man you never made me cry
But I kept receipts in the back of my chest
You wore your halo while I cleaned the mess

I didn't know about the new man the way you know things for sure. I knew the way you know when the room temperature shifts. When somebody starts answering with less detail. When the affection comes in shorter bursts. When your "good morning" starts getting read hours later, like you're a chore, not a person.

And then she posted. Tagged. Smiled. Laughed.

The universe doesn't always send lightning. Sometimes it just shows you a picture and waits to see if you're brave enough to accept it.

I walked to the sink like I needed water. I didn't. I turned the faucet on anyway. The sound filled the room. A fake noise to cover real thoughts. I watched the stream run and thought about how easily people wash their hands of what they caused.

I kept hearing the same sentence in my head: She's going to tell this story like you didn't matter.

That's what made my throat tighten. Not missing her. Not losing her. Losing my place in the narrative. Being reduced to an anecdote, a mistake, a "phase." Watching someone take your sincerity and file it under "temporary."

I didn't want to be the man who begs for a spot in someone else's memory.

I went back to the bed and opened the voice recorder. The room felt like a booth. The strip of light across the floor looked like a line I shouldn't cross. I crossed it anyway.

The hook came before I decided to sing it. It showed up in my mouth like it had been waiting.

{MUSIC}

Heaven ain't an option for this angel... not no more
I used to bleed love, now I'm cold at the core
You made a villain outta someone who adored you
I hope he ghosts you too

When I sang it, I felt a coldness that wasn't sadness. It was clarity with teeth. I heard myself say cold at the core and realized it wasn't a metaphor. It was a measurement. I could feel the temperature changing inside my chest, like the part of me that used to soften was learning to lock.

The line about being a villain landed heavy. I didn't think of myself that way. I had always been the one who tried. The one who apologized first. The one who cared even when it wasn't convenient. The one who stayed honest even when honesty made me look weak.

But I also remembered the way she reacted when I loved her cleanly. How she got comfortable. How she stopped trying. How she treated loyalty like a permanent resource she could spend without restocking.

That's when it hit me: some people only respect you after they've seen you walk away.

The hook wasn't just about her. It was about what she triggered in me. How quickly affection can rot when it's mixed with disrespect.

{MUSIC}

I won't forget... but I won't forgive you
Toxic - look what you turned me into

I sat there with my phone in my hand, listening to the playback like it belonged to someone else. My own voice sounded unfamiliar. Not louder. Just colder. Controlled. Like the emotion had been filtered through something sharper than my heart.

That's the first time I noticed the split. Quwan still wanted to understand her. Quwan still wanted a clean ending. Quwan still wanted to believe she had a good reason. Quwan wanted to be soft and still be respected.

But the voice writing this song did not want closure.

It wanted protection.

It did not ask permission from my feelings. It simply started telling the truth faster than I could deny it.

I kept writing and the song turned into scenes. It wasn't just about a text left on read anymore. It was about the whole pattern, stretched across cities that were supposed to be romantic. Because that's the thing about toxic love: it doesn't stop being toxic just because the background is pretty.

{MUSIC}

Took you to Greece, to Paris, to Spain
But you brought your venom with every plane
Kissed me in Prague just to feed your fame
Smiled in Berlin, but played a cruel game

Those places were supposed to mean something. Greece was supposed to feel like a reset. Paris was supposed to feel like romance. Spain was supposed to feel like laughter that lasted. Prague was supposed to be private. Berlin was supposed to be honest.

But every city became the same room with a different view. The pattern traveled with us. The beautiful parts became backdrops. The cruelty stayed consistent.

In Greece she held my hand like she was grateful, then checked her phone when I spoke. In Paris she wanted pictures more than presence. In Spain she laughed loud, then went quiet when I asked simple questions. Prague felt like a kiss meant for an audience that wasn't there. Berlin felt like the final reveal: she could smile at you while playing a cruel game behind it.

It wasn't that she was always mean. That would've been easier. She was selective with her warmth. Strategic. She gave affection the way someone gives discounts: enough to keep you coming back, never enough to make you feel settled.

I used to defend her. "She's just independent." "She's been through a lot." "She has walls." I treated her wounds like excuses and my patience like proof of love.

Then the song wrote what I didn't want to say.

{MUSIC}

You were the snake in my garden of peace
I watered your roots while you poisoned my seeds
Now I don't dream - I plot and rehearse
Every good man you touch, you just curse

That line about plotting and rehearsing wasn't a flex. It was a warning. It was me realizing I was learning to anticipate pain instead of believing in love. I could feel my imagination changing shape. The future wasn't a daydream anymore. It was a contingency plan.

I used to dream. I used to assume people meant what they said. I used to walk into love like it was safe.

After this, I started scanning. I started measuring. I started collecting evidence in silence instead of giving someone the benefit of the doubt out loud.

It wasn't maturity.

It was adaptation.

The hook returned like a bruise you keep pressing just to prove it's real.

{MUSIC}

Heaven ain't an option for this angel... not no more
I used to bleed love, now I'm cold at the core
You made a villain outta someone who adored you
I hope he ghosts you too
I won't forget... but I won't forgive you
Toxic - look what you turned me into

The repetition did something to me. It made the thought permanent. Like saying it twice meant I couldn't pretend it was temporary rage. Like the words were welding a new posture into my spine.

People think heartbreak makes you louder. Mine made me quieter.

It made me stop explaining. It made me stop chasing clarity from someone who benefited from keeping me confused. It made me stop treating mixed signals like puzzles I was supposed to solve.

I didn't feel proud of that. I just noticed it happening like a weather change.

The night got later. The room got colder. Rain started tapping the window like a metronome. I kept writing and the words got uglier. More cinematic. Less polite.

Because once you accept the truth, you stop protecting the liar's image.

{MUSIC}

You left your scent on my hoodie and sheets
But not your heart - just your ego's receipt
You said I was crazy, said I was too deep
But real love ain't shallow, and yours was cheap

That accusation, crazy, is the easiest way to dodge accountability. If I'm "too deep," then she never has to admit she was shallow. If I'm the problem, then she gets to keep the halo. She gets to leave clean. She gets to rewrite. She gets to be the angel in her own story.

I thought about the moments where I had been gentle. Where I asked for clarity without raising my voice. Where I said, "Just tell me what you want." Where I tried to be fair even when I felt disrespected.

She called those moments pressure.

She called those moments insecurity.

She called those moments me being "too much."

It took me too long to realize "too much" is what people say when they want you to shrink so they don't have to grow.

{MUSIC}

Now I walk with a smile they can't decode
But deep down I'm dancing with shadows alone
Revenge in my veins, your name in my throat
I hope every "I love you" comes with a choke

I didn't like how that last line tasted. It was violent. Ugly. Honest. It wasn't who I wanted to be. But it was who I was becoming in response to being handled carelessly.

That's the part nobody wants to admit: pain changes the mouth. It changes the thoughts. It changes the vocabulary.

I wasn't proud. I wasn't even satisfied.

I was aware.

And awareness is cold.

That's when I understood why Alter Q would exist. Not as a costume. Not as branding. As a function. As the part of me willing to say what Quwan would keep swallowing. As the part of me that could turn emotional damage into something structured, something useful, something that didn't ask for permission.

I layered the final hook quieter, darker, like thunder far away. Like something on the horizon you can't talk your way out of.

{MUSIC}

Heaven ain't an option for this angel... not no more
No prayers, no grace, just blood on the floor
You made a villain outta someone who adored you
I hope he ghosts you too
I won't forget... but I won't forgive you
Toxic - look what you turned me into

That final hook was different. The first hook still had grief inside it. This one had consequence. No prayers. No grace. Just the acceptance that some versions of you don't survive betrayal without becoming something else.

I saved the session and stared at the waveform like it was a diagnosis. The peaks looked like heartbeat spikes. The silence between lines looked like restraint. The whole track looked like a person trying not to explode.

The next day I moved different. I stopped reaching for closure. I stopped asking for explanations from people who had already decided to be unclear. I stopped trying to be the "good man" in a story where goodness was treated like leverage.

I did not know his name yet.

I only knew the song sounded like the version of me that would not beg again.

I pressed save, and the part of me that believed "forever" stopped answering.

THE STORY CONTINUES

TOXIC was only the beginning.

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When love breaks you…
what's left doesn't always heal.

Sometimes it hardens.
Sometimes it performs.
Sometimes... it speaks back.

Quwan was the quiet one.
The soft one.
Until betrayal cracked something deeper.

ALTER Q

Not louder. Just colder.
Not to help Quwan move on, but to make sure
he never breaks that way again.
But when the world starts listening
to that voice instead…

Quwan faces a choice:
Take back control or let the voice created
to protect him decide who he becomes.

A dark psychological story
about heartbreak, self-protection,
and the cost of trying to become unbreakable.

DEEPER AND DARKER isn't about being strong.

It's about what you become...
after the softness is cut out.

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