IF ONLY MY HANDS COULD SPEAK NICHOLAS IFILL

Disclaimer

If Only My Hands Could Speak is a work of fiction. The author created the names, characters, places, and incidents, or used them fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or deceased, or actual events is purely coincidental.

This story contains emotional themes, including disability, bullying, trauma, racism, grief, and healing. While written with deep respect and sensitivity, some content may be emotionally triggering for certain readers.

The author does not speak for all experiences of deafness or disability. Instead, this work seeks to honor and uplift the voices of those often unseen, unheard, or misunderstood. It is a tribute to resilience, the power of love, and the unspoken language of art.

If you or someone you know has experienced trauma, bullying, or discrimination, please know you are not alone. Every voice matters—spoken or unspoken.

Introduction

Some stories are spoken.

Some are written.

But some... are carved.

If Only My Hands Could Speak is a deeply personal tale inspired by the resilience of those who are often unheard—not because they lack a voice, but because the world refuses to listen.

This is the journey of Malik Marshall, a deaf Black man whose hands became his voice, and whose woodworking became his soul's expression. Born into silence and shaped by hardship, Malik discovers that, through pain, art, and love, it's possible to build not just furniture—but belonging.

At its heart, this story is about what it means to be seen. To be known. To be loved not despite your differences, but because of them. It's a tribute to anyone who has ever felt left out, underestimated, or unseen.

May Malik's journey remind you that healing is possible. That love is louder than words. And that sometimes... the most powerful voices are the ones that speak without sound.

Chapter 1: Born into Silence

The world greeted Malik not with a cry, but with a quiet stillness.

The nurses looked at each other in confusion. The baby's eyes were wide open, taking in the hospital's brightness room, but no sound escaped his lips. His mother, exhausted and barely conscious, reached out for him, unaware that her son had entered the world in silence—a silence that would never leave him.

From the very beginning, Malik's world was different.

As he grew, his parents noticed the signs. He never responded to their voices. He didn't startle at the crash of pans or coo at lullabies. By the time he was ten months old, the doctors confirmed it —Malik was profoundly deaf. His mother cried for days. His father said little. Just stared out the window like something had been taken from him before he even held it.

There was no celebration. No balloons. Just quiet. A deep, uneasy quiet.

Malik's childhood was filled with misunderstandings and missed moments. He would tug at his mother's skirt, trying to show her something, only to be brushed off. He'd sit in front of cartoons, watching the mouths move, guessing at the story. And when he tried to express himself with wild hands and animated eyes, people looked away, confused. Impatient.

By the time he was five, he'd already learned what rejection felt like.

At school, the cruelty sharpened. Kids whispered about him, laughed behind his back—and sometimes, right in front of him, assuming he wouldn't know. They mimicked his sounds, called him "mute," "slow," or "dumb." One day, a boy cornered him by the lockers and spat in his face, yelling, "You can't even talk, freak!"

Another day, he was locked in a supply closet during recess. Alone in the dark, Malik sat with his knees pulled to his chest, the smell of pencils and old paper surrounding him, tears soaking his shirt. He couldn't scream. He couldn't call for help. No one would hear him even if he did.

But the worst wasn't the silence. It was the words.

"Too Black to be smart."

He heard them once, mouthed cruelly by a teacher who didn't think he was paying attention. The words pierced deeper than any slap. He didn't understand the full weight of it then, but he understood it was about more than just his ears.

He was different twice over—deaf and black. And the world had little patience for either.

Malik learned to retreat. He stopped trying to be noticed. He stopped looking for smiles. He withdrew into his own world, a world where he didn't have to explain himself. A world where silence was not punishment—but peace.

And in that silence, he discovered something magical.

It started with a broken toy truck. The wheel had snapped off, and the trash bin waited nearby. But Malik took it instead. Using glue, nails, and clumsy fingers, he pieced it back together. He didn't know why it felt so good—only that it did. Fixing the truck made him feel... capable. Useful. Whole.

The next day, he fixed a wobbly chair in the kitchen. Then a broken picture frame. Then a drawer that always stuck. No one asked him to. No one noticed, not really. But Malik noticed.

And for the first time in a long while, he smiled.

His hands became his voice. Where his mouth could not speak, his fingers did. He didn't just fix things. He gave them life again. Each stroke of the hammer, each cut of the wood, became a way to say what his heart held: "I am still here. I feel. I love. I matter."

People still didn't listen. But he kept building.

He built for his pain. He built for his silence. He built because it made him feel less alone.

Sometimes, at night, he'd lie in bed and look at his hands in the dark. Big, scarred knuckles. Splinters under the skin. Callouses forming like armor. If only they could speak, he thought. If only the world could understand what lived in them.

But they would. One day.

For now, Malik carved quietly into the corners of his world, shaping more than just wood. He was shaping his story. A story no one was ready to hear.

Yet.