

Chapter 1 Excerpt

The Uniform Was Never You — Identity beneath the role

“The Uniform Was Never You” opens with a direct message to people whose identities have been reduced by institutions, labels, or survival roles: the role assigned to you is not the whole of who you are. It argues that systems often turn a person’s name, history, needs, and complexity into classifications that make them manageable—but adapting to those roles is not the same as becoming them.

The chapter frames masks developed for safety—whether on the street, in incarceration, or at home—not as weakness, but as intelligence and protection. Its central invitation is to look beneath those masks for the part of oneself that remained intact: the inner voice that recognizes, “This is not who I am. This is not where I end.”

It then describes the uniform as an institutional costume: something designed for identification and control, not a portrait of character or a forecast of the future. The chapter stresses that incarceration may be an important chapter in a person’s story, but it is not the title.

The excerpt ends with a practical written exercise: identify three deeply held labels assigned by systems, family, community, or one’s own internal voice; write where each label came from; and draw a line through it—not to erase history, but to reject others’ assessments as the final definition of self.

Source: *From Role to Identity: A Journey of Becoming*, Chapter 1, by Hameem Abdul Qadeer.