

NKK
LITERARY CAFE
MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2018

THE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



Happy One Year Anniversary

Last year, during the weekend of Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday, an epic idea hit me. Instead of resting and reflecting, suddenly I was at my computer flipping off inboxes and emails to a few key people. "I'd like to do a digital magazine that has a focus on authors, books, current issues and literary events. What are your thoughts?" Every single answer was a form of "Count me in."

So much for getting any naps or a restful night's sleep as planned. I sat at my Mac for 18 hours with only a little food and bathroom breaks in between. The first prototype for Naleighna Kai's Literary Café Magazine was born. A few strokes on the keyboard and a FB Group (NK LCM) was on board and the draft of the magazine was in play. See, it's different to "talk" about doing something and then seeing the physical evidence—yaaaassss. That right there hit home for me and everyone involved.

Now, the task of learning "magazine" software was on tap and thanks to the fact that the one I chose had twenty-four hour customer service, meant that the trial and terror of the process wasn't too bad. The articles the writers for the magazine turned in were nothing short of phenomenal. The cover, designed by my Number One Son (J. L. Woodson), was engaging. Over a few weeks, I edited, tested, reformatted, tested some more, and kept at it until I was satisfied with the result.

*Photo by
Peter Stenberg Photography
Make Up by:
LaTasha Benn MUA*

A Note from the Editor

A month later, on my birthday, the first issue of NK Literary Café Magazine hit the internet. The response by readers, publishers, and authors alike was reassuring and heart-warming. The late nights, the doubts, the missed hours of sleep, the nudges for rewrites or revisions, were all worth it. The magazine has had 7,091 viewers in the year since it launched, and the numbers continue to climb. What's more, is readers compare its quality to upscale magazines they've read for years. A compliment? Sho' Nuff!

On a personal level, I have learned a great deal from the process, but more importantly from my fellow authors as I read each piece before it goes between the covers. Also, learning to keep an open mind has been paramount. One time, I threw out the theme of transformation and received an article that curled my hair. That article (you know the one—by Janine A. Ingram), almost didn't make it into the magazine. I thought it was too controversial. So, I took a step back and thought, "Well, I did ask for an article on transformation, right? This is HER experience, who am I to say different. The people who read this magazine are grown ass folk. They can handle it." And you did. That article has been the most talked about since the magazine's inception, and also brought forth a memory of a tragic experience that had been buried deep in my subconscious. More healing work to be done.

NK LCM has provided a platform to *New York Times*, National Bestselling, Debut, and aspiring authors alike. Every writer, reviewer, graphic artist, gives freely of their time to make this work—it is not a paid gig, this is a labor of love. This magazine serves as a way to connect authors with readers in a way that lets them "hear" the author's voice in something other than a sales pitch of "buy my book." The writers share personal experiences that have impacted their lives and their writing. They share instances that have caused exponential growth in hopes that it will help the reader, too.

The cover of this Anniversary issue which is about love and Black History, is a blend of past and present griots who lit the storytelling torch and those who are keeping the fires burning bright. In the footsteps of successful magazines founded by John H. Johnson and Susan Taylor, I can only hope that NK LCM continues to shine in its own right.

Naleighna Kai

Editor-in-Chief

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J. L. Woodson

Woodson Creative Studios

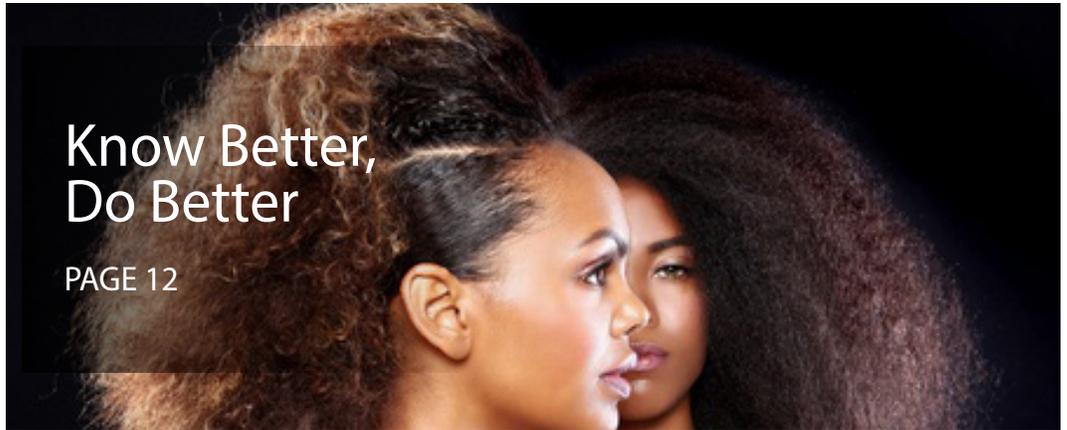
Art Director



Loving yourself is the
greatest revolution

PAGE 8

CONTENT



Know Better,
Do Better

PAGE 12



Love
is Love
PAGE 26

<i>LOVE YOURSELF BEFORE YOUR NEIGHBORS</i>	14
<i>PORTIA'S RANDOM THOUGHTS / CARDI B</i>	18
<i>AMIRI BARAKA</i>	20

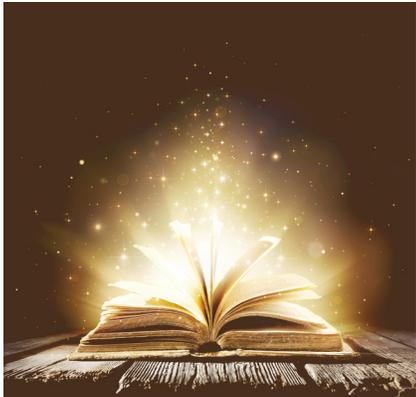
<i>LORRAINE HANSBERRY</i>	22
<i>SHANNAN'S REVIEWS</i>	29, 33
<i>ZORA'S DEN</i>	38

Shakir Rashaan / Marze Scott / J. D. Mason / Victoria Kennedy / Sierra Kay / Anita L. Roseboro / Portia Cosby / Janine Ingram / Angelia Vernon Menchen / Shannan Harper / Christine Pauls / London St. Charles / Kisha Green/ Rhonda M. Lawson / Johanna Sparrow

Choice
PAGE 30



Intimate
Chat with
Beverly
Jenkins
PAGE 32



Honoring Our
Past to Shape
Our Future
PAGE 40



The O'Jays
My Mother's
Music
PAGE 48

*I DID NOT LOSE
MY BROTHER*

44

*TO COURT OR
NOT TO COURT*

58

*LOVING
THROUGH THE
PAIN*

46

MAYA ANGELOU

62

*EXCERPT FROM
IF ONLY FOR ONE
NIGHT*

64

HAIRSTORY

52

*PART 2: LOVE
TRAVELS A
GRAVEL ROAD*

70

*WHY I'M NOT A
FAN OF BLACK
HISTORY MONTH*

54

NEW RESOURCES

84

One lonely wife...one frustrated husband...one online connection.
Is it forever or only for one night?

New from literary powerhouses

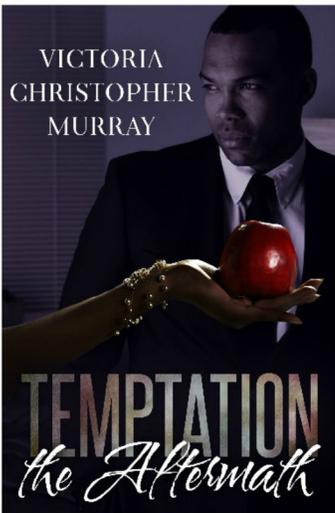
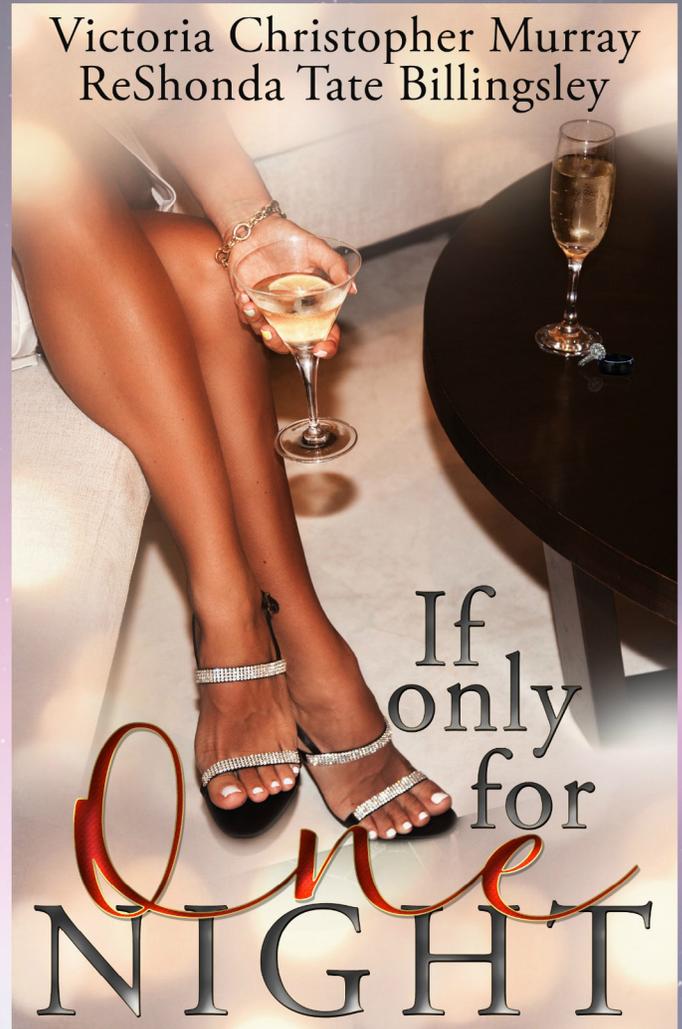
**Victoria
Christopher Murray
& ReShonda
Tate Billingsley...**

Check out the book that has
everyone talkng...

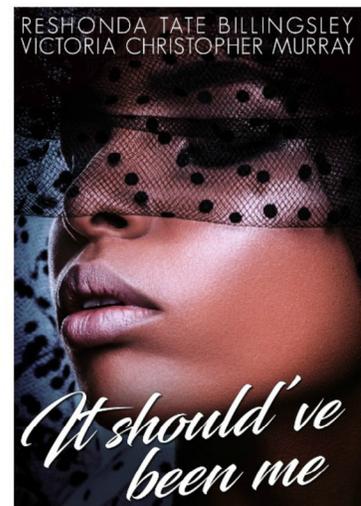
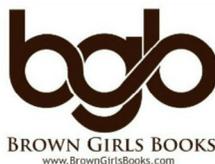
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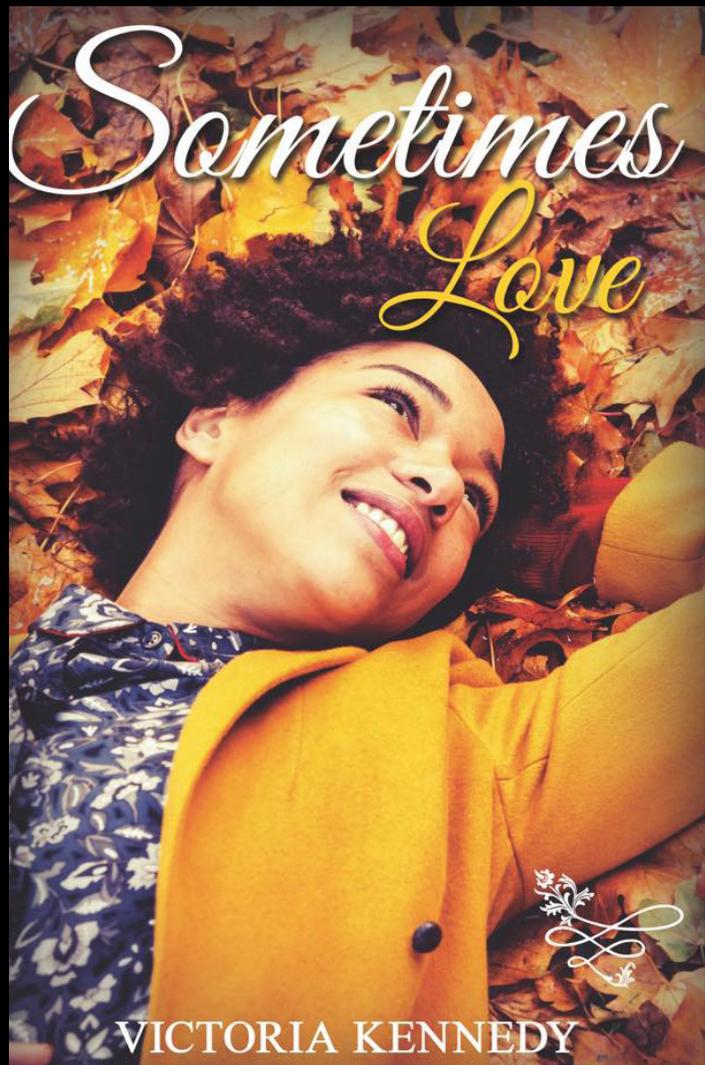
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OPEN DOOR MARRIAGE ...

Everyone will get a little of what they want. . . and maybe a whole lot of what they don't. Be careful what you ask for ...

Read an excerpt on page 92



SOMETIMES LOVE

"Love isn't always meant to save the day; Sometimes love is meant to change your life."

Read an excerpt on page 86

Loving Yourself is the Greatest Revolution



Janine A. Ingram

My grandmother always said, “Life is an inside job. Fix your mind; you fix your life.” These thoughts still carry in my mind.

Has life experiences smacked you into reality? Have you ever gotten a “reality smack” from someone you liked and respected a lot?

We don’t always “enjoy” these little wake-up jolts. Sometimes, the truth can be painful. But from time to time, we all need a reality smack. We need people to hold us to a higher standard of behavior, or else we tend to fall short of our potential.

It was in my pain where I learned to fix my mind. I heard this a long time ago that PAIN is an acronym for Pay Attention Inward Now. Whew! Why is it that we must be pushed around by PAIN before we learn? Because we, as spiritual beings, learn from those painful experience more so than the joyous ones. Part of that pain gets us to reflect, recommit, and sometimes focus on loving the most important person in the equations—ourselves.

Loving myself healed the very essence of my being. Love awakened the Goddess in me. Love taught me how to ask empowering questions as opposed to the traditional “Why Me?” Instead, I ask, “What is the Universe trying to express through me?” or “What is the lesson?” Love taught me how to trust in the process of the unknown. Love that taught me how to see myself as a Divine Gift to the planet.

So you ask, “How do you fix your mind?” First, by changing your thoughts.

Transform your life simply by looking into a mirror. Mirror work—looking deeply into your eyes and repeating positive affirmations—is the most effective method I’ve found for learning to love yourself and see the world as a safe and loving place. Simply put, whatever we say or think is an affirmation, so making certain that those words are positive is important. All your self-talk, the dialogue in your head, is a stream of affirmations. These affirmations are messages to your subconscious that establish habitual ways of thinking and behaving. Positive affirmations plant healing thoughts and ideas that support you in developing self-confidence and self-esteem and creating peace of mind and inner joy. The most powerful affirmations are those you say out loud when standing in front of a mirror.

The moment when I made the decision to embrace my grandmother’s words that love is an inside job is the moment I began to own my voice. A voice that awakened my inner lover. When I began to love and honor me, it created a shift in how the world, people, and experience started loving me as well.

I invite you to make loving yourself a daily ritual. I invite you to wake each morning and ask yourself, “How can I attract more love and joy into my life?” Then watch things change as others begin to show you exactly what you’ve requested.

Loving yourself is the greatest revolution and it will not be televised. That wonderful movement will happen right in front of your mirror

*Janine A. Ingram is the author of bestselling inspiration book, *Born to be Rich*, wife to a wonderful husband for twenty years, and mother to three uniquely beautiful and talented daughters. She is also the founder and facilitator of *The Love Journey, Inc.*, a yearly event in Chicago and weekly prayer line for those who focus on healing, love and forgiveness. ingram_janine@yahoo.com*



"ACT LIKE AN AUTHOR, THINK LIKE A *BUSINESS*"

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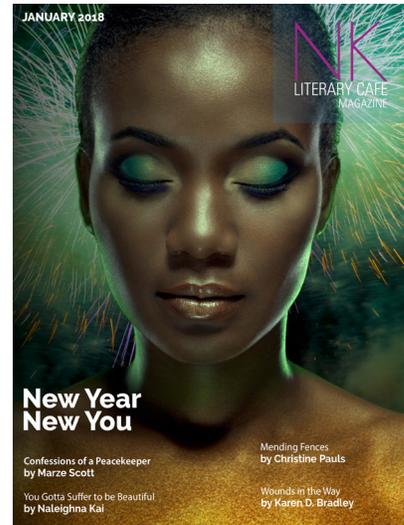
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Know Better, Do Better



I had to grow out of being a mad woman. I started being mad young and for years and years and years, that anger sustained me. I actually equated mad with strength. If someone had told me something different in my twenties and thirties, I would have told them they were lying. At that time, my anger was my strength.

How could I be mad? I was a good person who would do anything for anyone. Often before they even asked—mad, shoot, I tell people off. I don't hold mad, it comes out. Ha!

It did come out, but in no way did it alleviate the anger that had been brewing inside me and festering most of my life. I couldn't admit why I was angry, and as a result, I couldn't deal with the anger living inside me. I didn't see it all at once, but signs of it began to reveal itself over the years.

I recall an incident while living in Germany when a good friend of mine was accused of rape. We were all aghast and wanted to do whatever we could in his defense. He was the third soldier the woman accused and we didn't want to see another career ruined. However, when they were collecting witnesses, no one ever asked me. I was surprised because he had visited my home and I felt we were close. I asked our supervisor for the day off and he told me I wasn't a witness.

"Huh?"

"He didn't add you to the witness list, Angelia. No one thought it was a good idea."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Because you are a bit of a wild card and no one knows what you might say or do if you are angry."

My head snapped back at his words. I could not and did not see myself in that way. However, I was raging inside at the idea they had discussed me and thought of me in that manner. I pretended not to care. Strangely enough, they still called me as the last witness of the day.

Afterwards, my friend and I were at lunch and I asked him about what I had been told. He didn't really look into my eyes but he was honest.

"Sis, you know I love you, but you go off on people and I didn't need you going off on the witness stand and you went off when I told you."

"I never thought I did that," I snapped.

"Yes you did," he responded. "You believed me, but you went off because I was a married man and should not have been messing with that girl. You let me know in the harshest terms. Sis, I love you and you are a good woman but you go in."

Angelia Vernon Menchan

I shrugged off his words but they pierced my bones. I felt it deep inside and it was something my husband, sister, and others hadn't already said to me in different ways. His eyes searched mine and instead of actually saying, "You hurt my feelings", I dealt with it by putting on a smile, burying it deep down and allowing it to meld with the other anger that was ever-present.

* * *

By the time I was in my mid-thirties, my imbedded anger had started to surface. I was working at the time in a rather high-energy job, and there were myriad management issues concerning employees and I was the buffer for them. I wasn't feeling well, made myself an appointment, and was shocked when my blood pressure registered 148/99. Before that, I had been proud of my low blood pressure and somehow it had become extremely elevated. Of course, I went through a series of tests and appointments; and at thirty-six ended up on medication. I started doing all the physical things that would help, but to no avail.

One night, I unleashed on my then preteen eldest son, and almost collapsed from the exertion. He was in that 'I am going to drive my mom insane,' age and it was working. I sent him and his younger brother to their rooms, and was lying on the sofa when my husband arrived. I must have looked really awful because he sat down beside me, touching me to see if I were feverish. I told him what happened and his words rained down on me.

"Baby, you let them, all of us make you too mad. You try to be everything to everyone and you can't. You are also on a rapid career track and it's taking a toll on you. They have you working on holidays and they call you at midnight when the machines go down. Something has to give."

I burst into tears because there was that angry thing again and he was right. For most of my twenties and early thirties my life was devoted to him and our sons and instead of careers I had jobs for the most part. The few ladders I climbed, I had to climb down from when it was time to

go. Though I pretended it didn't bother me, it really did. I felt I was being cheated and didn't know how to articulate that without sounding 'unwife-like' or 'bad-motherish.' That was at the root of my issues. I was mired down in perfectionism and not admitting what truly bothered me but blowing up at infractions which weren't that big a deal. I recall getting off the sofa and making my way upstairs to pray. I prayed very perfunctorily at best during that time of my life and church wasn't in the equation. But that day, I talked to God asking for guidance.

The guidance didn't come immediately but it started to trickle in. We were a few months from leaving Germany and I gave my notice at a job I actually hated. Then, I started focusing on my health by riding my bike and walking. I also began to consciously think about what I was going to say and how I was going to say it; realizing everything didn't need a response. I literally woke up speaking those words to myself. It was amazing how well it works when it becomes part of a routine. Most times, I was literally able to talk myself out of an argument or a response.

When we moved, I immediately enrolled in college to get an advanced degree —something I had put off doing for years. I had saved enough and could still contribute.

I must be honest and say initially, my folks didn't respond well to my changes. They saw my not going off or commenting on everything they did as not caring. My husband once said he was going to do something that would have previously angered me, and I responded with "Okay, but count me out."

They didn't have to agree with the changes, but they got used to them. I needed to release the anger for myself, because it put my health, my emotional and mental state in jeopardy. I learned that I had to be important to me. After all, I had put everyone else first for years. Now I know better, so I do better.



Angelia Vernon Menchan is an avid serial writer. Her goal is to engage readers in ongoing stories filled with people like them, who they can grow to know. Some will inspire love and devotion, others rage and ridicule, perhaps. They will all inspire feelings and generate conversation.

<http://honorablenmenchenmedia.blogspot.com>

Love Yourself

BEFORE YOUR NEIGHBORS

MarZe Scott



“I have an everyday religion that works for me. Love yourself first, and everything else falls into line.” —Lucille Ball

Every Sunday morning, somewhere in the great USA, men dress as though they stepped off of the pages of GQ; women drape their bodies in awards ceremony sparkling dresses trailed by well-dressed little boys and fancy little girls in lacy dresses and frilly socks as they file into somebody’s church to learn how to be a better Christian. Hopefully, an even a better human in the process.

One of the church tenets is “Love thy neighbor as thy self.” This is a clear directive given by Jesus. I know a few people who have told me that they have difficulty understanding most bible prose let alone the language of the popular King James Version that most church leaders hold dear. However, this is the one scripture that doesn’t need any further interpretation. I’m a hardcore Jesus freak, but not a bible scholar (gasp!) This scripture is one that I practice—to love my neighbor as I love myself. The interesting thing about this scripture is that I know just as many nonbelievers that practice this, as I know believers that don’t. I used to wonder why the very people who were told to show the world how loving their neighbors works seemed to struggle with demonstrating it.

Generally speaking, before we are old enough to understand what it means, we are taught to put other people’s needs and feelings before our own. The first voices that we consider “voices of love and acceptance” come from our parents. Then other voices enter—family members, friends, etc.. We hear things like, “Mama likes it when you keep your room clean” or “You make Dad proud when you do well in school.” But what if your mama treated you like Dough Boy from *Boyz In The Hood*? What if your daddy wasn’t around? What if your siblings told you that you were stupid? As we get older, not only do we adopt the words spoken to us as truth, we use those words and experiences to define who we are and how to love ourselves. We compare ourselves to the imaginations of our mentors. We repeat whatever

narratives were blessed upon us in our childhood into our adult lives. And then we’re told to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

How do I love my neighbor if I don’t know if I love myself? How do I love myself when I don’t know what that kind of love looks like?

In my childhood, my father was absent even when he was physically in the home. When he wasn’t at work, he was in the streets, or emotionally detached from his family. His actions seemed common for most men of that time, maybe even now. I knew I did something good when he smiled; at least, when he was around to smile. I loved to sing in the church choir as a child and was the lead soloist for several songs. Somehow I never thought I did it “right”.

“You should’ve sung your song like Aretha Franklin,” he said once. Who? I guess my dad forgot that we listened to The Ohio Players and The O’Jays at home, not Aretha Franklin. I knew I didn’t sing like any of the O’Jays nor did I sound like Aretha or any other proclaimed anointed voice that I was told to emulate to improve my technique.

My mother struggled with showing her emotions. She often said that I was vain and a natural-born flirt, so I suppose telling me that I was pretty was unnecessary. My mother would say that she was proud of me for doing something good, but I always knew her true love was a hot grill, ready to prepare T-bone steaks for dinner every Friday night. Fried catfish, scallops, clams, and a house salad accompanied the sizzling steak. Now that was love, but I can’t recall hearing the words “I love you” often. I had elder relatives that would openly ridicule my too-plump-for-my-age frame who would then offer me a plate of food that was no more appetizing than their mean words.

From about the age of eight to eleven, crying and telling myself that nobody loved me happened to many times to count. How on earth was I being taught to love myself?

The voices that told me that I wasn't good enough overwhelmed any thoughts I may have come up with on my own. Then adolescence happened.

Adolescence is the battleground for identity and the war can be brutal if one isn't well equipped. The only thing that kept me from following the crowd was a healthy fear of disappointing my mother. All of this and I was supposed to be well-adjusted enough as an adult to love somebody else? Life has a sense of humor, but some jokes aren't funny. I needed validation from somewhere, so I started wookin' puh nub in all da wong pwaces—meeting the needs of others so that I could get those familiar smiles that let me know I did a good job. This kind of “loving” allowed me to think that I had to tire myself in order to receive love and this caused some resentment when I felt overextended. I wanted to be loved without having to work like a slave to get it. But I'm supposed to be growing to be like Jesus, right? I had to change my perspective because being “like Jesus” wasn't working out with the way I was doing things. Jesus knew who He was as much as He understood His purpose. That's what I needed to do; I had learn about myself.

In order to develop a deep love for myself, I've had to learn a number of things. The process has been as exciting as it's been unnerving.

The first thing I had to learn was to silence “negative” voices. Iyanla VanZant always says that a person can only love you as much as is within himself or herself. This was, by far, the hardest thing to begin with. Some of those voices were “gifted” to me by the ones I loved or at least the ones I wanted to love me the way I needed to be loved. Some of those voices spoke from the fears or lack or love they had for themselves. Some spoke from monstrous experiences that had happened to them. All of them well-meaning, albeit fearful and criticizing. The challenge was in not taking what was being said personally. Limiting the time I spent with those who speak negatively was crucial.

Once I stopped keeping company with those voices, I had to learn to be okay with being by myself. For me, that wasn't a bad thing. Peace of mind is priceless and

I could finally explore some things that I hadn't before because there was always someone lovingly discouraging me from doing what I wanted to do.

My mother knew her child. I've always thought I was cute. I found that standing in the mirror and telling myself the things I wanted to hear was good for my esteem. I looked at the body in the mirror and admired it—big, dark hair, full lips, a nicely placed birthmark at the corner of my right eye, and curves for days—“God made no mistakes on me,” I'd tell myself. I discovered my voice and I exercised it often, especially when it came to loving my appearance.

This means I became a student of myself. Once I surveyed the outside, I took an inventory of what was inside. What did I like about myself? What do I feel like I want to improve about myself? What were my strengths and abilities? What was my unfiltered opinion about current events? What was I interested in doing for myself? What motivates me? What inspires me? If there was something that I didn't want to do, I had to decide if this was my voice or one of the records playing from my childhood. The more I researched myself, the more I appreciated myself, the more that I loved myself. The love that I'd give to my neighbor wasn't such a struggle anymore because I wasn't trying to give from a place of lack. I also understood when I needed to say “no” so that my love and energy wouldn't be depleted.

This process hasn't been easy since research of any kind is time-consuming, but it's the best thing I did for myself. I deserve the spa days and movie nights I treat myself to and don't complain about the cost. I love myself unconditionally and my neighbors reap the benefit of the love I have for myself.



MarZé Scott, a lifelong resident of Ypsilanti, Michigan, is a lover of all things creative. While taking care of her family, she indulges Her passions of reading, writing, drawing, and makeup artistry. She has been writing short stories and poems since elementary school and developed a taste for writing about provocative topics like the consequences of casual sex in high school. Her debut novel, *Gemini Rising is due for release 2018.*

Message from *Pastor Karen Williams*



“God knows all about you--all your dirt, all your sins. And guess what? He hasn’t told anyone. He won’t tell anyone. He throws your sins into the Sea of Forgiveness, never to be brought up again. Not like some people who bring up old stuff only to throw it back in your face: “Remember when you used to ...?” “Everyones know you ...”
God doesn’t do that.”

PORTIA'S RANDOM THOUGHTS

1. I miss the old Scandal.
2. I can forgive you. That doesn't mean I still fool with you.
3. It's okay to wonder why.
4. I'm convinced I'd be one hell of a producer for an awards show.
5. Sometimes I don't feel like talking. Read my email, text, or social media posts.
6. Nail shops should sell real flip flops.
7. I can't take a man seriously if he uses emojis in every text.
8. All single women aren't lonely, thirsty, or desperate. Some are just...single.
9. Once you insult my intelligence or my professionalism, it's a wrap.
10. There's an art to knowing when it's time to shut up



Portia A. Cosby is the author of four novels, including The Disgruntled Wives Club and It's Complicated. The Indianapolis native lives in the metro Atlanta area and holds a spot on Terry McMillan's Writers Worth Reading list. Her new novella, F.I.R.E. Reignited is available now. www.portiacosby.com

CARDI B: FROM DANCE MOVES TO MONEY MOVES



written by **Portia A. Cosby**

In 2015, I tuned in to *Love & Hip Hop* (New York) to see who the latest cast was and determine whether I would commit to viewing their shenanigans for Season 6. No, I didn't watch the entire season, but one "previously unknown" cast member stood out. Her name was Cardi B. She was loud, rambunctious, and obnoxious at times. I could only take her in doses, but I liked that she was usually in the studio actively trying to work on music (unlike many other "rappers" and "singers" on the show). I wasn't sure whether she was actually talented. Most of her studio scenes that aired were of her flirting with the producer. So that remained to be seen. What I also liked was that Cardi seemed honest, was funny as hell, and had no problem speaking her mind—even if she was making up words or using them incorrectly.

I peeked in on Season 7 to find that Cardi was still hilarious, still trying to find her way in the world, and still speaking facts. But there was something different. Cardi spoke about her crooked teeth in the previous season. When she returned, Miss Cardi had used some of those checks from the show to get her teeth fixed and she gave a shout-out to the dentist in her song. Kudos to her for seeing the big picture of how image can affect success whether we like it or not.

Fast-forward to 2017. Cardi B did not renew her contract with *Love & Hip Hop* because she wanted to focus on making music. She released a single titled "Bodak Yellow," and before the world knew it, Cardi was making history. With that song along, she:

-became the first Dominican artist to reach the number one spot on Billboard's Hot 100 chart.

-held the number one spot for three weeks, tying Taylor Swift as the longest running female in the top spot for 2017.

-became the first female rapper whose first three singles entered the Hot 100 chart in the top 10 after being featured on two other songs.

-went triple platinum with "Bodak Yellow."

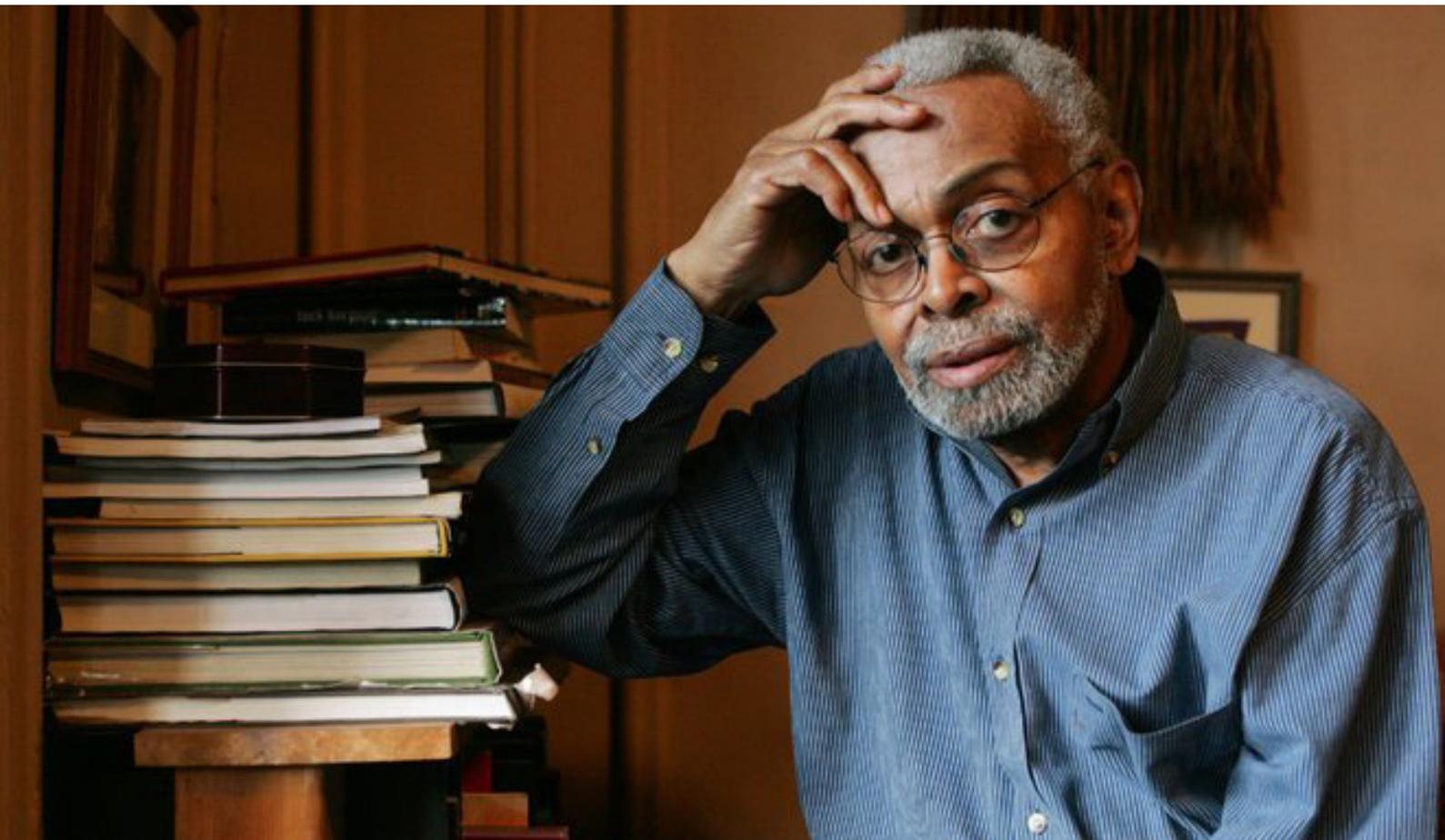
The gang member turned supermarket cashier turned stripper and student turned Instagram star turned reality TV star turned chart-topping rapper is living proof that one can beat the odds and reinvent themselves if they are motivated and believe in themselves.

She owns properties. She's headlining concerts. She's taking care of her family. She's now engaged. She's featured on another hit single with Bruno Mars, and the woman who was once ridiculed for having a thick accent and her sometimes incorrect use of the English language is now featured in a commercial for Amazon's Alexa. Even her clothing has become a slight bit more modest and upscale. Her cosmetics are more refined. When no one else believed that she would make it, SHE believed it with all of her heart. Other young women on *LHH New York* are still struggling to make it to just one-hundredth of the success this young woman has attained. Cardi B has even surpassed the success of some of the seasoned artists on the show. That, right there, speaks volumes. I hope to see Cardi B continuing to evolve, because I'm ready for her to drop a book. Cardi B is the prime example of not letting one's past define how far one can rise.

AMIRI BARAKA

Kisha Green

Poet, writer, teacher, and political activist ...



Amiri Baraka was well known for his strident social criticism, often writing in an incendiary style that made it difficult for some audiences and critics to respond with objectivity to his works. Throughout most of his career, his method in poetry, drama, fiction, and essays were confrontational, calculated to shock and awaken audiences to the political concerns of Black Americans. For decades, Baraka was one of the most prominent voices in the world of American literature.

Baraka incited controversy throughout his career. He was praised for speaking out against oppression as well as accused of inciting hate. In the American Book Review, Arnold Rampersad counted Baraka with Phyllis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison “as one of the eight figures . . . who have significantly affected the course of African-American literary culture.”

Pretty dope huh?

Barak’s story has always fascinated me because he was outspoken but not some “ignorant man with a voice” ranting about issues that affected so many who couldn’t put speak out, but an educated man who could articulate the struggles and challenges quite well. He had the education and life experience to back up his words and platform. Barak attended Rutgers University and Howard University, spent three years in the U.S. Air Force, and returned to New York City to attend Columbia University and the New School for Social Research. With all of the above, he was the perfect person to speak and work on behalf of those who were so downtrodden they never realized there could be something better.

In his prime, he embodied the words the late James Brown sang when telling the world that we are Young, Gifted, and Black. The admiration that I have for him turned to love

because I truly embraced how passionate this man was. He fought for what he believed in, and I can't lie, being a fellow New Jersey native, on added to his appeal. If he was alive today, he would still have the fight in him that commanded respect. Today, if I had a moment to catch him up on the Black experience, it would go a little something like this:

Dear Amiri,

So much has changed since you left, yet remains the same. There is now some heightened awareness of the severe attack on many Black men and women in the United States and we are now embracing the term of #staywoke, but some are still asleep.

Would you be proud of the progress? Would you be disappointed that more is not being done? I am not sure, but I do hope you would have to see the genuine effort that is taken place, right?

Knowing that you did not back down, but in some instances do you think many could or would do more? We watched this football season go from America's favorite sport to something that was divided by color and money. One man stood alone, Colin Kapernick and I know this would have raised your eyebrow on how he acted in the best interest of everyone, reignited a movement that would make you proud. The unfortunate thing is that you would also see the responses and actions of everyone and wonder if anyone still cares?

See, that last part will make you wonder if your efforts and those before you, have been in vain. Nonetheless, in closing, you are greatly missed.

*Sincerely,
A jersey girl*



Kisha Green is a literary consultant, promoter, blogger and social media enthusiast who loves everything about literary. This mother of four resides in New Jersey who enjoys fine champagne and sushi in between reading and writing.

www.kishagreen.com and <http://www.myliteraryjewels.com>



AMERICAN MASTERS

Lorraine Hansberry Sighted Eyes | Feeling Heart

a new documentary

**Thurs, January 11 | 6pm
at DuSable Museum**

**LORRAINE HANSBERRY
SIGHTED EYES/FEELING HEART**
Written and Directed by TRACY HEATHER STRAIN
Produced by TRACY HEATHER STRAIN & RANDALL MACLOWRY
Executive Producer GREG SCHLEZ
Narrator SABINA RICHARDSON JACKSON
Lorraine Hansberry's Voiceover ANIKA NORA ROSE
Editors RANDALL MACLOWRY & CHAD ERVIN
Music Composer DON BYRON

AMERICAN MASTERS
Executive Producer MICHAEL KANTOR
Series Producer JULIE SACKS
Supervising Producer JONAS THUNASIRMA
Narrative Producer JOE SHARINE
Production Coordinator CRISTINA LIMBARDO

Major support for Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional support provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Ford Foundation, Just Films, National Endowment for the Arts, ICF Foundation, Peter G. Peterson & Joan Henne Peterson Fund.

Major support for American Masters by **AARP**

Additional support for American Masters is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Rowland P. Workin, The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation, Judith and Arthur Rosnick, Edna and James S. Blumberg, West Program, Lifeline Goodman Programming, Esther and Paul, The Blanche & Irving Lerner Foundation, Cheryl and Philip Minkin Family, The Anne and Edward Herlihy Foundation, Michael & Helen Scheller Foundation and public television viewers.

Major support for the Inspiring Women campaign provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.



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Is there a woman who has inspired you? Share her story:
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LORRAINE HANSBERRY

SIGHTED EYES | FEELING HEART

Sierra Kay

I always thought Lorraine Hansberry was a fantastic writer. And she was. No one argues that point, but her personal story stretches broader and deeper than my minute understanding, and it was wonderfully displayed in the documentary *Lorraine Hansberry: Sighted Eyes | Feeling Heart*.

One day, a little notice popped in my Facebook feed because someone I know, might have known, a friend of a friend, was interested in attending a viewing of *Lorraine Hansberry: Sighted Eyes | Feeling Heart* at the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago.

I thought, why not? And I am so glad I did. To say Lorraine Hansberry was a great writer is like saying Nina Simone was a great singer. It focuses solely on their talent while missing their drive, their impact, their fire.

Now, while the documentary would have been more than enough, the evening began with a question and answer session with Tracy Heather Strain. The ability to listen to Tracy, the writer, director, and producer, share the struggles she had finding funding to get the project completed is inspiring to say the least.

Initially, she was turned down for grants. She and her husband rolled up their sleeves and began the painstaking process of fundraising. She conducted a Kickstarter campaign and kept grinding and grinding until someone said yes. Once she received two grants, other monies followed.

Her struggle didn't take a day, a month or a year. It took fourteen years from inception to completion to the tune of \$1.5 million. Motivation.

So the showing at the DuSable Museum in January 2018 that is entrenched in displaying and amplifying the African American experience; highlighted how an African American woman was able to clear obstacles to write, direct and produce a documentary about an African American woman whose voice gave rise to the challenges of her people in this country. If I had a mic in my pocket, I would have dropped it.

The ability to mine through tons and tons of information and produce a string that ties through the pieces is an amazing feat. The Lorraine Hansberry story alone has several stories embedded in it. However, Strain focused her documentary on Hansberry's impact on the civil rights movement.

Lorraine Hansberry learned about activism at the knee of her father, a real estate broker. He bought houses and chopped them up into kitchenettes to rent to African Americans migrating to Chicago.

Eventually, Lorraine's father moved the family to the Washington Park neighborhood in Chicago, which was predominately white at the time. Not surprising, their arrival was met with significant resistance from the neighbors. The experience included a brick through the window, which seemed to be a consistent signal for residential discontent during the 50s and 60s.

Law enforcement tried to force the family to move, but Hansberry's father went to court. The landmark case *Hansberry vs Lee* (1940) went all the way to the Supreme Court. Lorraine's father was eventually forced to move out of the neighborhood. However, five hundred new properties opened to new residents of color. Her father fought the good fight and continued fighting different injustices for years.

Do any parts of that story sound familiar? If not, you have not read nor seen *A Raisin in the Sun*. Do it now. We'll wait.

A Raisin in the Sun wasn't simply a well-written play, but contextually relevant to the African American experience with segregation which was/is strong in Chicago. Before running on Broadway, the play ran in Philadelphia and eventually played to sold-out crowds.

Sidney Portier, who played the character Walter



Lee, starred in a movie at the exact same time. When one theater-goer was asked about why she would pay so much more to see Sidney Portier in a play versus a movie, the response was she was told the play was about her experience.

Lorraine Hansberry: Sighted Eyes | Feeling Heart aired on PBS on January 19. However, I'm sure there will be other opportunities to enjoy the film. And I encourage you to take advantage of any viewing opportunity.

These types of projects are so important to understanding the historical relevance of work of national treasures like Lorraine Hansberry and future treasures like Tracy Heather Strain who deliberately and fearlessly tell stories and magnify the experience of African Americans. This documentary was a double scoop of Black Girl Magic.



Sierra Kay has an M.A. in Writing from DePaul University, won a Nuyorican Poets Cafe Short Story Slam, participated in comedy fests as a member of the writing teams for Spankx and N20 Comedy. She also writes poetry and suspense novels. Obviously, she'll try anything at least once. Her two novels *From Behind the Curtain* and *In the Midst of Fire* are available online. Learn more at sierrakay.com



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Love is Love.

Shakir Rashaan

Managing it is the Challenge



As we celebrate the lover's holiday this month known as Valentine's Day, I wanted to take a minute to get the usual Public Service Announcement out of the way. For those of you who follow me on social media, you already know what I'm about to say, but I'm speaking to the ones who have yet to follow me, okay? Here's my usual PSA: Don't take one day to plan over-the-top grandiose gestures to profess your undying love for your significant other, only to do little-to-nothing the rest of the year. You're feeding into the commercialism of the holiday instead of using it for its intended purpose—celebrating love.

And by celebrating love, that means celebrating love in all of its forms, and not just the ones that you have been socially conditioned to accept and promote. Whether you see same-sex couples, polyamorous couples, alternative couples (meaning those into Domination and submission and the like) or monogamous couples, the reaction should be enjoying the fact that they have found someone—or someones—to share their lives with. Let them celebrate their love and acknowledge that they have the same right to be as affectionate and into each other in public as you do. Now, if they're overdoing it on the PDA with exposing skin and the like, then yes, that's a whole different thing, but then again, we're all adults, right?

Sorry, didn't mean to get too pragmatic, but it falls into my theme for this month: love is love.

If you've yet to have the chance to read through my literary catalog, then let me clue you in on a little secret: rarely will you find a lot of the mainstream norms when it comes to relationships. I cover the gamut of the romantic spectrum: same-sex couples, polyamorous triads and groupings, D/s couples, and yes, I do have a few conventional heterosexual couples in the mix also. As much as I promote the sexier side of life, I believe in love in all its forms, and that love should be available to be read, viewed, and heard as well.

There's a time-honored cliché that goes, "Love is a many splendored thing". As an author, I have tried to write by that cliché the best way I can. As a reader, I've attempted to read about all types of couplings and groupings. For the most part, I can say that I've done my best to adhere to my own rantings about being as diverse as possible in my literary work, as opposed to just "staying

in my own lane" because it's comfortable and I can relate to the culture. After all, life itself is supposed to be about exploration, isn't it?

Even in my day-to-day life, I do my best to ensure the women in my life are happy with me as the man in theirs. I have my moments where I can do better, and as a Southern Gentleman, I don't take disappointing them lightly. In fact, they can tell you, I take it harder than they do at times. So, you can imagine what this month is like for me—and it is no laughing matter. Being able to handle them in one capacity or another with their unique needs and wants is not supposed to be easy, but hell, I don't do easy. If things were easy, everyone would be doing it.

Love is never without its challenges, regardless of the relational dynamic. Whether fictional or real, we love to be the fly on the wall of a good romantic story laced with comedy, suspense, and drama. Managing all of that, in fiction or in real life, takes the commitment of everyone involved to get through the storms and sunny skies alike. Because at the end of the day, the one(s) you love is/are the one(s) that matter the most. The rest of the world can go to hell.

There are few things in this world that make life worth living. The daily struggles of life, the ups, the downs, the failures, the victories, they all combine to encapsulate the human experience. The one thing that makes it worth the daily suffering and grind worth the trouble, is knowing that at the end of each day, there's that one person who you know will do whatever it takes to help make it all better. In my case, there are three, and I am grateful that they do for me what I hope I have been able to do for them—help make things a little better every day.

That's the beauty of love, after all.

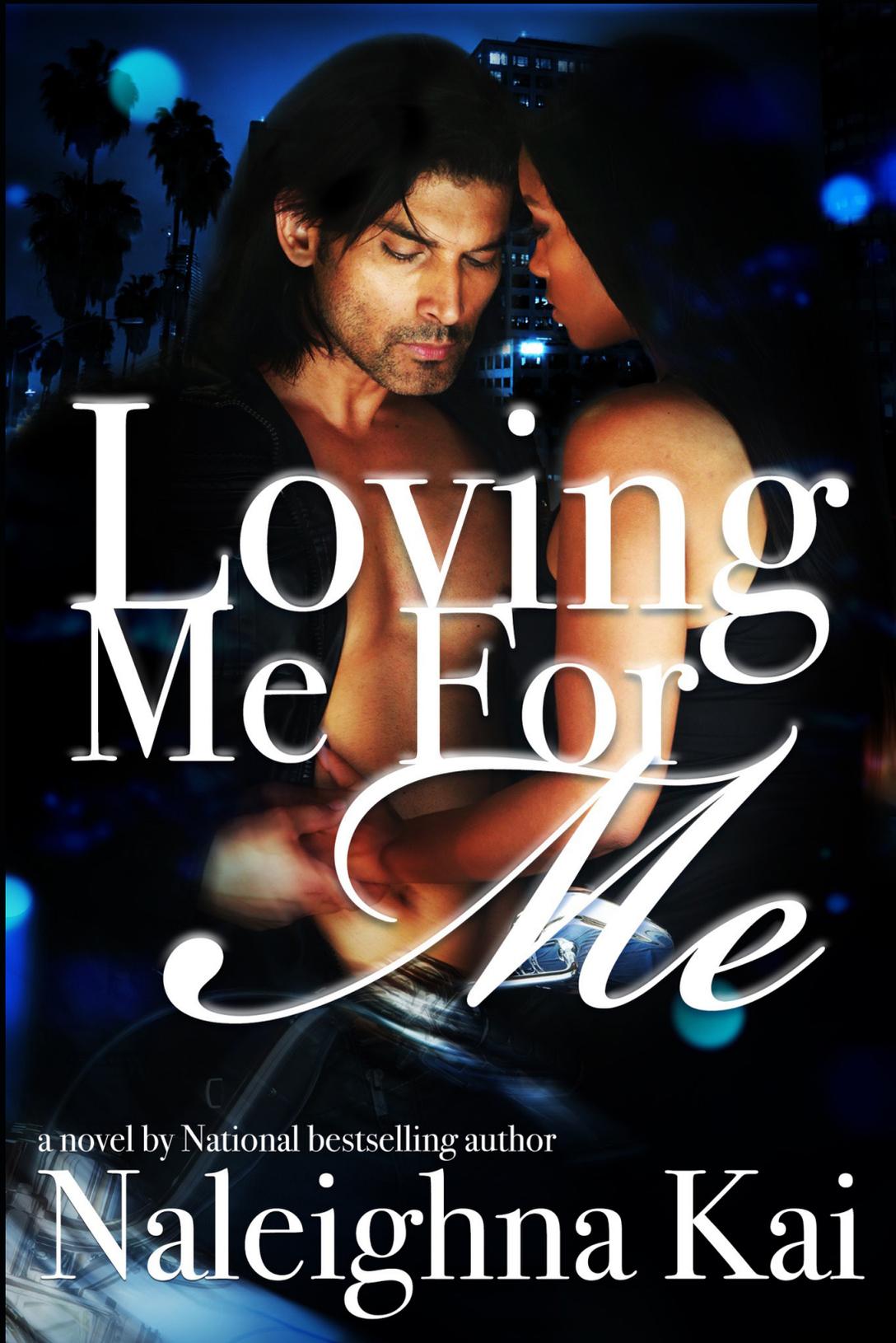
*Shakir Rashaan is the author of *In Service to the Senator* and the national bestselling *Nubian Underworld and Kink, P.I. Series*. He is also developing projects under the pen name *PK Rashaan*. You can find out more about Rashaan at www.ShakirRashaan.com.*

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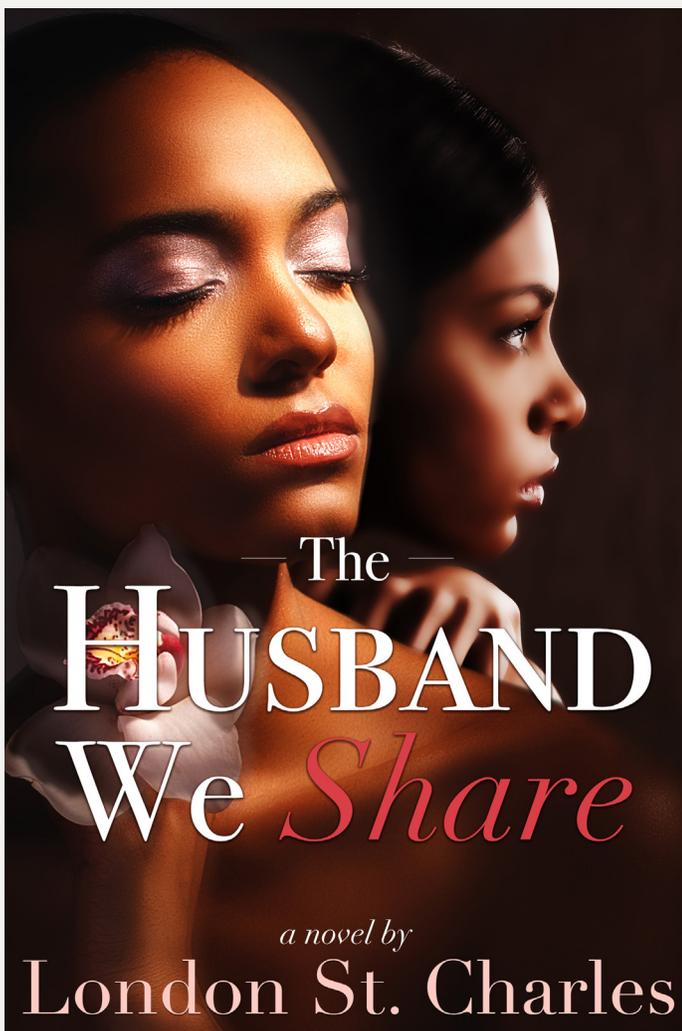
Can this May-December romance survive her secrets, his family, their reckless ex's, and two cultures who would rather see them dead, than in love?



The Husband We Share

Book Review by Shannan Harper

REVIEW



Patricia and Lauren Carter share someone in common. Unbeknownst to them, they both share the same husband, Xavier, a detective on the Chicago Police force. Patricia, the first Mrs. Carter met Xavier in college and married him despite the fact that she was warned of his playboy ways. Patricia also carries a secret from her past that indirectly affects their marriage.

Lauren, the second Mrs. Carter, is a successful business owner, but has nightmares from a tragic incident that severely altered the life of a child within her care. She is also a mentor, but an unfortunate act of violence threatens everything she holds dear. Xavier has been able to juggle both wives and lives with his partner, Jason's help. Unfortunately, a few unlikely experience makes everything start to unravel.

Shawn, a young woman who grew up in foster care along with her best friend Candace, knows both "wives". She ends up figuring out Xavier's deception is and now has been caught in the middle of destroying one or both women's lives. There were multiple surprises throughout the story and I could barely catch my breath by the end of the book. That ending was a total shocker.

This was the author's debut story, and London St. Charles did a phenomenal job. Not too many authors are this amazing with a first book. The characters were totally relatable, and it was hard for me to put the book down because she managed to have that classic hook at the beginning and kept the story on pace.

By the end of the story, what has happened in the dark will surely come to light. I am expecting the next amazing read by this new author.



Sounds absurd, doesn't it? I used to think so, too. Love is that gooey feeling that infiltrates our hearts and makes us nervous, unsure, and elated at the same time. Let's talk about parental love, for instance. The first time a mother holds her newborn baby, she feels all of those things (most of the time). The love is instant and overwhelming, foreshadowing the grueling hours of labor that took place moments before. That's how I felt after giving birth to both of my daughters.

The early stages of falling in love with a significant other are equally intense. It starts with a physical attraction that makes the heart skip several beats. It's the rush of adrenaline that slams into the heart and bursts into fireworks whenever that special someone is near. Or that gut-wrenching pull

whenever that person leaves. It makes us feel good on another level. Phone calls that drift into the early morning hours exploring each other's minds, aligning the stars to ensure the next time you'll see each other again, reciting lyrics to a song that seem to be written specifically about you, and the inevitable swoon at the slightest touch Oh, what a feeling.

But love, at its mature stage, is so much more. Going through the early stages of love leads to the meaningful love that comes with longevity. And it is not always easy. For those who haven't been there, this may sound foreign, and that's okay. I didn't truly understand until it became my life.

Love is a choice. It's a verb. Once again, parental love—those little people aren't so little anymore, and with

age, especially the teenage years, begin some trying times. My daughter, who I love dearly, had an outer body experience two years ago and forgot that “I” was her mother. I went through several phases of not liking her very much, but because I loved her with every fiber of my being, I had to dish out tough love that she won’t thank me for until she hits thirty. Washing my hands of the situation would’ve been easier, but when you love someone, that means choosing to do what’s best for them, even when it breaks your heart.

Spousal love. “I take you, for my lawful wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part.” These wedding vows say nothing about loving you on the days you’re being stubborn and I don’t like you. Marriage is work; even the most solid marriages have bumps. How we handle these bumps shows the depths of our love.

Nine years ago, my husband’s employer went under. As a result, we lost our home. I was just returning to work from maternity leave. A new baby brings new expenses, and the biggest expense was child care. On paper, we didn’t qualify for any assistance, but we were drowning. Mortgage, car notes, household bills, credit card bills, our oldest daughter’s extracurricular activities, along with the new baby’s needs. My husband had the foresight to enroll in real estate school when the possibility of the company folding was mentioned a few months prior. During this time, he was stressed beyond anything I’d ever seen before. His attitude was funky—yes, I said funky. And he tried to drag our marriage down a raggedy path.

He felt I was going to leave because he couldn’t provide. He threw the job, the kids, and the marriage in one pile of manure and stirred it up. I

was hurt. How could he think so little of me? I wasn’t materialistic. I wanted us to be okay. Blow the house to smithereens. I wasn’t married to the house; I was married to him. We could live in a one-bedroom apartment until things got better. But I put my feelings aside, looked past his attitude, and was able to see things from his point of view.

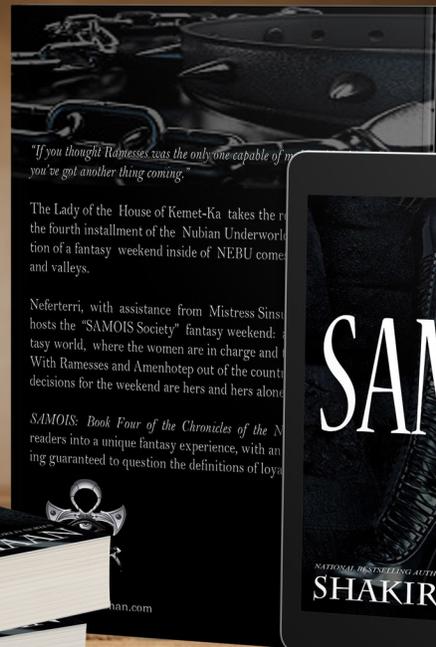
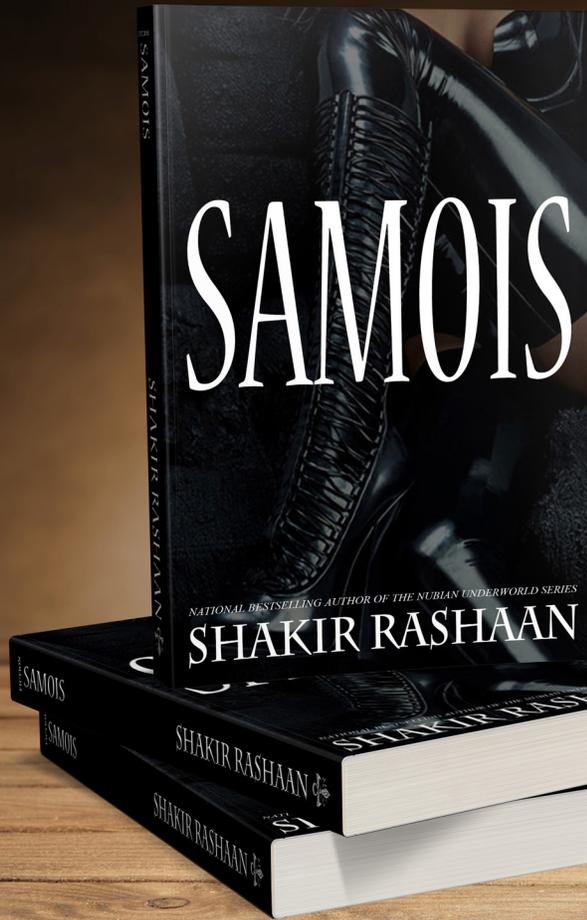
My hubby operates in black and white. I operate on the full spectrum, including that gray fuzzy mess in the middle. It was my job to let him know that I love all of him; that I support him. That I love the man he is, and not what he can do for me. I had to teach him to laugh again and to enjoy the little everyday things. He had to understand that this hardship would pass and I wasn’t going anywhere. We were in it together no matter what. I had to stroke his ego. He didn’t always make it easy, but I had to look past what I wanted, to give him what he needed. Ultimately, I received what I needed when he became whole.

Everyday love choices aren’t that extreme. Most times, it’s choosing to walk away from an argument to keep from saying something hurtful. It’s sacrificing your warmth while sitting in the car in subzero temperatures letting it run, so your wife doesn’t have to. Love is serving your man dinner while he’s working on his laptop; it’s removing his glasses after he’s fallen asleep so they won’t break. It’s checking in to let the other person know you’re safe. Right now, it’s my hubby de-icing the freezer while I write this article.

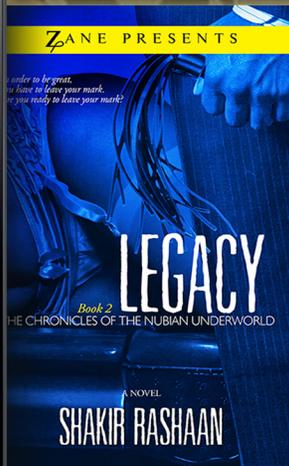
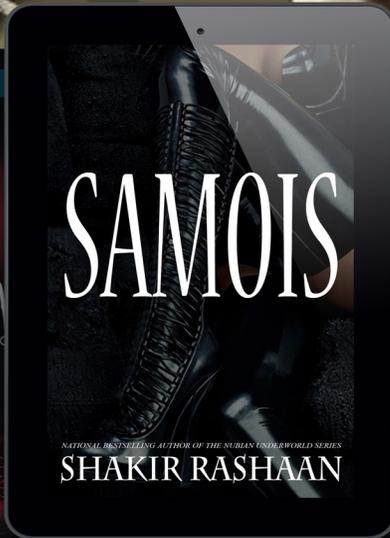
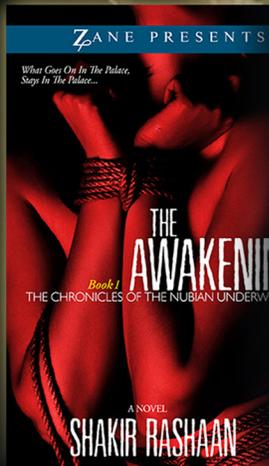
Married for twelve years and together for fifteen, we choose love daily. I believe it’s mutual respect and kindness for the other’s well-being that has made it more effortless over the years.

Love is a choice.

Coming March 7, 2018



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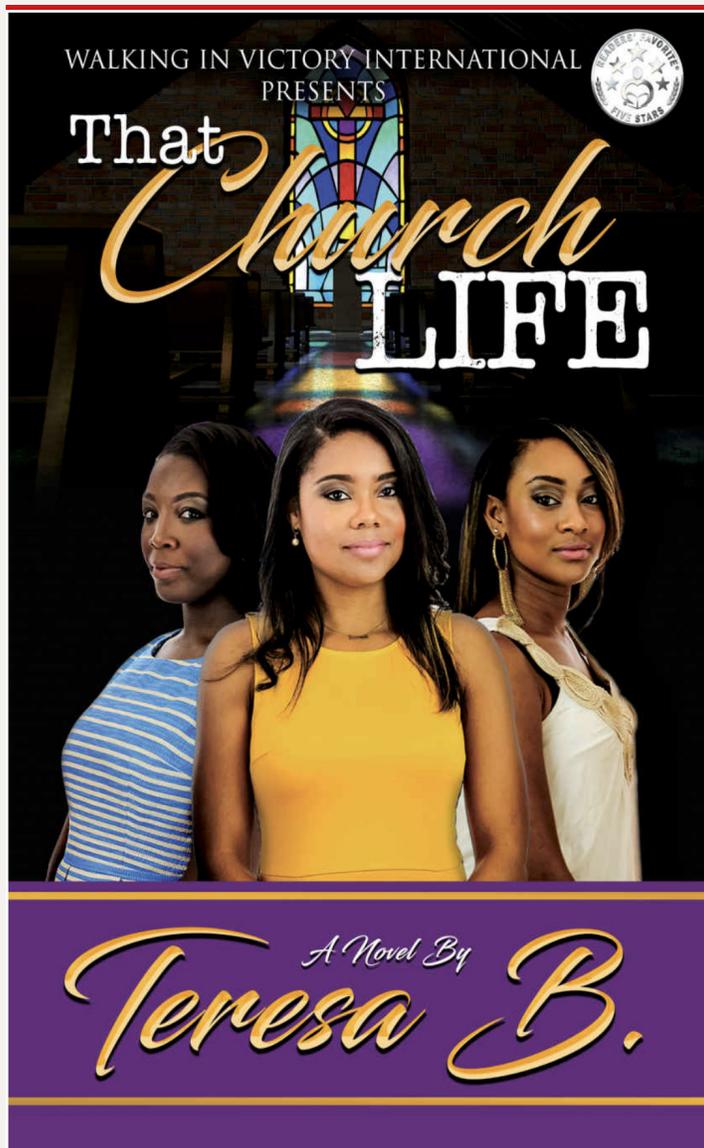


If you have yet to enter my Nubian Underworld...
Take the "red pill" and begin your descent into my dark Paradise

That Church Life

Book Review by
Shannan Harper

REVIEW



Flight Attendant Natalia Freeman, Musician Michelle Hanks, and preacher Missy Jones are three childhood friends known as the Church Gal Crew from Mt. Zion Holiness Church.

Natalia is the leader and the loudest of the crew and hasn't yet learned how not to say everything that comes to mind. Her faith has been shaken because of her past, so she's leery around certain church folks. Michelle, is the soft-spoken peacemaker of the group but is hiding a tragic event from her past that has kept her bound mentally and emotionally. Missy, the pastor's daughter, is involved with a lot of drama involving her philandering and abusive boyfriend, Tommy, until she goes to Jamaica, and is swept off her feet by a native Christian man.

Missy's father, Pastor Jones, has several skeletons in his closet, especially one involving his daughter, but him retiring will not keep them hidden. All three friends strive to support one another, all the while dealing with drama, lies, and even murder.

A great story full of secrets, "what is going to happen next," with a little romance mixed in. This was an enjoyable storyline that isn't the normal Christian fiction. The characters were extremely flawed and made mistakes, but do make an attempt to do right. The author also tackled issues not often talked about in regards to Christians being put out for doing wrong. The author sets the stage where the story ends in Book 2. I can't wait!



Shannan Harper is a simple person who takes pleasure in the simple things in life. She highly enjoys four things in particular: Jesus, books, traveling, and coffee.

You can keep up with Shannan on her blog: harperscourt77.blogspot.com

INTIMATE CHAT WITH *Beverly Jenkins*

J. D. Mason

Beverly Jenkins: I'm here! Hi everyone. Thanks for the invite

J. D. Mason: We're slated to discuss *Destiny's Embrace* for this chat, but you have so many books that people love, we'll have to work hard to stay on task.

Beverly Jenkins: Glad you're in charge not me. Going to be like herding balloons. :)

LaCeasha Banks Turner: I am a recent fan and you can thank Naleighna Kai for that. I love your writing.

Beverly Jenkins: Why thank you. Welcome to the BJ family.

Shannan Harper: Welcome. The way these two characters are acting towards each other is hilarious. I just love all the history we glean from reading your books. Especially about *our* history

Beverly Jenkins: Great way to learn African American history.

J. D. Mason: Who actually inspired this story? Mariah Cooper or Alanza Yates? Because they both were fabulous female leads with incredible stories.

Beverly Jenkins: Actually Queen Latifah. Maria Cooper followed. Had no idea the state was named for a mythical Black Amazon queen.

Sam Cherry Erkard: Wow, that's interesting. I must say that I've been hooked on your novels every since I read the first one which was, "Indigo"

Beverly Jenkins: That's a favorite of everyone's, including mine.

J. D. Mason: I loved the fact that you included such a strong Latina character. Was she modeled after anyone or a particular event in history? Or was she just made

up (Alanza)?

Beverly Jenkins: She was made up. Los Angeles was founded by mixed African American and Latins so I wanted to bring that history forward.

Christine Pauls: Was writing always your desire? What other professions, if any did you have?

Beverly Jenkins: Had no intentions of being a writer. All I ever wanted was to work in a library. :)

Sam Cherry Erkard: For someone just getting into Historical Romance which of your books would you recommend to start with?

Beverly Jenkins: I always go with publication order - that way you get everything in the right time frame and don't miss anything. So *Night Song* is first.

Venise Jacobs: Was it your intention to connect the characters of your historical fiction novels to those of the Blessings series in present day Henry Adams?

Beverly Jenkins: After we decided to do the series, yes, but the question became: would it be Henry Adams or Grayson Grove where *Vivid* was set.

Anita Roseboro-Wade: What is your favorite novel that you have written?

Beverly Jenkins: Hard to choose. It's like asking a mama to name her favorite child.

J. D. Mason: Did it ever occur to you to make that momma do a 180 and regret the error of her ways?

Beverly Jenkins: No. That would have been the conventional/easy way out. I try to avoid what readers might expect. :)

LaCeasha Banks Turner: What was your inspiration for this story?

Beverly Jenkins: The Black and Latin history of Cali. Characters were secondary.

Jennifer Copeland: When did you know you wanted to write historicals?

Beverly Jenkins: Only after I sold *Night Song* - my first. :)

J. D. Mason: My new favorite word as it relates to nipples is “berried” thanks to you

Beverly Jenkins: LOL

Anita Roseboro-Wade: What do you feel your biggest accomplishment is as an author?

Beverly Jenkins: Still standing after 22 years in the business and making the path wider for those romance writers coming up in my wake.

Sheryl Lister: Beverly, if an author wanted to write a historical romance, what advice would you give her/him as far as how to incorporate the history without making it sound like a narrative?

Beverly Jenkins: Only keep the pertinent parts. Skip the parts the readers are going to skip. You’re writing a story - not a history book.

Venise Jacobs: Would you be open to turning one of your novels into a movie?

Beverly Jenkins: I would. Just waiting on the stars to align properly.

J. D. Mason: How hard was it to keep Mariah a virgin for so long with Logan being so damned hot and all, because if I were her, he’d have found me spread-eagle on his bed pretty quickly.

Sheryl Lister: You are killing me, **J. D. Mason!** LOL

Beverly Jenkins: LOL. Wasn’t hard. Morals were different back then. Your virginity was a prize to be offered to the right man.

J. D. Mason: **Beverly Jenkins** Touché.

Cordenia Paige: Hahaa at **J. D. Mason** spread eagle!! Gone gurl, and get your eagle on!

Karen Bradley: What advice would you give to your younger self about becoming an author?

Beverly Jenkins: Keep reading everything I could get my hands on—in all genres. I’m a big Sci-fi fantasy reader.

J. D. Mason: I’m such a FAN GIRL. Seriously.

Beverly Jenkins: You’re a great sister to me, too.

LaCeasha Banks Turner: The sponge, was that something you found out about during your research as a common practiced method of birth control during that time?

Beverly Jenkins: Yes. I’ve used sponges in many books. It was a very common form of birth control.

J. D. Mason: **Beverly Jenkins** They bought them back for awhile. I used to use them back in my fertile days, and then they took them off the market for some dumb reason :(

I’m trying to find that name of the other man in the book who was pursuing Mariah. Can anybody remember? Anyway, I kind of think he gave in too easily. Or am I being too hard on the brotha? Then again, as nice as he was, he didn’t have the fire that Logan had.

Beverly Jenkins: The Rev. He knew he couldn’t compete with Logan.

Antionette Gates: Do you have a favorite character(s) from any of your romances? How do you pick the settings/cities for your stories?

Beverly Jenkins: I love all my characters - faves are Max and JT, Loreli, Grace, Sarita I could go on all day. :)

J. D. Mason: I absolutely *loved* Alanza, her strength and elegance. She stepped up where Mariah’s mother left off and that was *everything*.

Beverly Jenkins: Alanza was all that. Billie in book 2 changed her life, though.

Anita Roseboro-Wade: How do you approach your research and how extensive is it?

Beverly Jenkins: If it’s a subject I’m unfamiliar with I’ll do the research up front and add to it as the story unfolds. I use about 10% of what I find. Save the rest for other projects.

Karen Bradley: How has writing changed your life?

Beverly Jenkins: LOL I get to spend all day in my PJs. And travel all over the country (not in my PJs, though).

Cordenia Paige: The main thing that frustrates me reading Historicals (overall) is the low sexual command of women generally. I'm glad to be born in this time 'cause I know I woulda been considered a harlot. (I may be considered one now, but I don't care).

Off topic Question: will you ever write a historical that acknowledges the sexual experiments imposed on Black People?

Beverly Jenkins: No. Nothing romantic in that - at all.

Cordenia Paige: True, but sometimes your novels hint at the harshness, Ms. Beverly. Initially, Noah's story was hard to read. Now, it's one of my faves!

Shannan Harper: What are the other books in this series?

Beverly Jenkins: Destiny's Surrender - my fave, and Destiny's Captive. Surrender is 2 and Captive is 3.

Venise Jacobs: Did you have a day job/another before you became an author or were you always a writer?

Beverly Jenkins: Worked in libraries most of my adult life.

Cordenia Paige: And Wife/Mother... Not to be forgotten. :-)

Shannan Harper: Do you have any input into your covers? They are always eye-catching.

Beverly Jenkins: I do. It helps to have one of the best art departments in publishing too.

LaToya Hopkins-Kimbrough: I love how all of your male characters have sweet little nicknames for their ladies, especially in the historical novels. That's so sweet. What made you decide to do that?

Beverly Jenkins: The characters dictate that a lot of the time. I let them tell the story and I just try and keep up. :)

J. D. Mason: For a man like Logan, who made it clear that he was not interested in settling down with any woman, how difficult was it for you to come up with this woman to make him change his mind? Did you have any idea of what qualities that woman would need in order to change him? It couldn't have just been that she was pretty. That wouldn't have been enough for him.

Beverly Jenkins: I think that kick in the knee sorta got him thinking. He needed a woman who challenged him and his perception of women. Mariah was all that.

LaToya Hopkins-Kimbrough: Of all your books in all genres you write in, which was your least favorite and why?

Beverly Jenkins: I love all the genres I write in. Would hate to be stuck/forced to write the same thing all the time.

LaToya Hopkins-Kimbrough: I meant which was your least favorite book, if there is one. I love your versatility as an author.

Beverly Jenkins: Hm. I thought it was Black Lace until we read it again in book club. Decided it was pretty good. I don't have anything I regret writing.

Victoria Adams-Kennedy: So many writers, like me, look up to you. We love and respect both you and your work. I want to thank you for setting a standard that gives us something to aspire to, while never acting like it's out of reach. You share so well.

Beverly Jenkins: Aww. That's sweet. Thanks for those kind words.

J. D. Mason: I am always so happy with what I come away with after reading your books. You set a stage that makes readers believe that you were actually there. You even manage to write dialogue and scenes in tones that I would think were more in keeping with those times instead of ours. How? I mean, movies? You just making it up? Very authentic and I come away smarter.

Beverly Jenkins: You immerse yourself in the period by the vocabulary, events of the times, what was expected of both gender and race. I think the vocab is the most important. Words had different meanings back then in some cases. The dialogue rhythms were different as well. Letters from the era help a lot.

J. D. Mason: Rhythms. That's what I keyed in on. It wasn't just what they said but *how* they said it, and it is very different.

Beverly Jenkins: J. D. Mason, it is. Makes a big difference when you're writing dialogue.

Sam Cherry Er kard: How many books have you written?

Beverly Jenkins: I think - 35 counting the 8 or 9 novellas.

J. D. Mason: Was I the only person who stood up and applauded when they saw that the Latina woman had a white maid? I'm just saying. For that time period, it seemed so odd, but fascinating. Certainly unexpected.

Sheryl Lister: J.D., no you weren't. I did a fist pump and a YES!

Joyce M. Hudson Right there with you JD.

Beverly Jenkins: Some Black folks had white maids - was a status thing for some wealthy African Americans.

J. D. Mason: Do you prefer writing historical or non-historical fiction?

Beverly Jenkins: I like both. Keeps the writing palate cleansed.

LaCeasha Banks Turner: Who are some of your favorite authors?

Beverly Jenkins: I read mostly fantasy so N.K. Jemisin, Patricia Biggs, Ilona Andrews, Jim Butcher. Also like the JD Robb In Death series by Nora Roberts.

Cordenia Paige: Ms. Beverly is Octavia Butler among your Sci-fi authors? I. LOVE. Her work!

Beverly Jenkins: Yes.

J. D. Mason: The community in *Destiny's Embrace* was marvelously diverse. I know I keep harping on that, but for those times, it surprised me. Spanish, Black, White, Native American. Was that true for how progressive California was back then?

Beverly Jenkins: It was. Back then many communities were that way. Detroit was that way when I grew up. We had Italian neighbors and Polish neighbors.

LaToya Hopkins-Kimbrough: Are there any more contemporary novels on the horizon? I know the Blessings series are a big hit, and I enjoy them. I must admit, I miss the contemporary novels.

Cordenia Paige: I hope my man, Sweetness will still get his story.

Beverly Jenkins: Working on Sweetness on the weekends. Hoping to finish by summer. Hope!

J. D. Mason: Ok, I don't know about you **Beverly Jenkins**, but I'm getting tired. LOL. I am so happy that I got to go on their sweet journey with them. Thank you.

Beverly Jenkins: You're welcome. You herded us well. :)

J. D. Mason: Which book continued the story about the brother who was the sailor? I think I might need to read that one because I was in the Navy, too. LOL

J. D. Mason is the national bestselling author of several contemporary fiction novels. She writes science fiction and paranormal under Jaydee Brooks. www.jdmasonauthor.com

Beverly Jenkins: No. Read Surrender next then Captive. You have to meet Billie. One of the baddest female characters I've ever written. Pilar in Captive ain't no slouch either. Can you say: swordfight? LOL

LaToya Hopkins-Kimbrough: I love how you don't write about women as poor damsels, in distress.

Naleighna Kai: Aunt Bev, on Saturday at a signing in Chicago, you mentioned your love for libraries. Please tell us more about that and how they helped you writing career.

Beverly Jenkins: Grew up reading and reading and reading. The writer who reads the most wins - and reading everything helped me develop my voice. When I run into young authors who say they don't read - I sorta know they won't be successful.

Karen Bradley: If you could only select one novel to become a movie which one would it be and why?

Beverly Jenkins: *Topaz*. Because it has all the elements - as does *Edge of Dawn*.

Christine Pauls: Miss Bev, you've been doing this for a long time, but when it comes to the deadlines, do you make it with time to spare or cut it real close? :-)

Beverly Jenkins: Frankly, I'm usually late.

Naleighna Kai: Aunt Bev, please let the readers know how they can keep connected with you and find out about any new work you have coming or any events where you'll be appearing.

Beverly Jenkins: Join the Fans of **Beverly Jenkins** FB page or my Author Page, or check me out at www.beverlyjenkins.net.

J. D. Mason: I have enjoyed this. **Beverly Jenkins**, keep doing what you do until you can't and we will be forever grateful and blessed by you. Next time I see you I'm going to try and not be star struck and actually try and hold a discernible conversation.

Beverly Jenkins: Thanks ladies! Have a great evening.

J. D. Mason: My Pleasure.

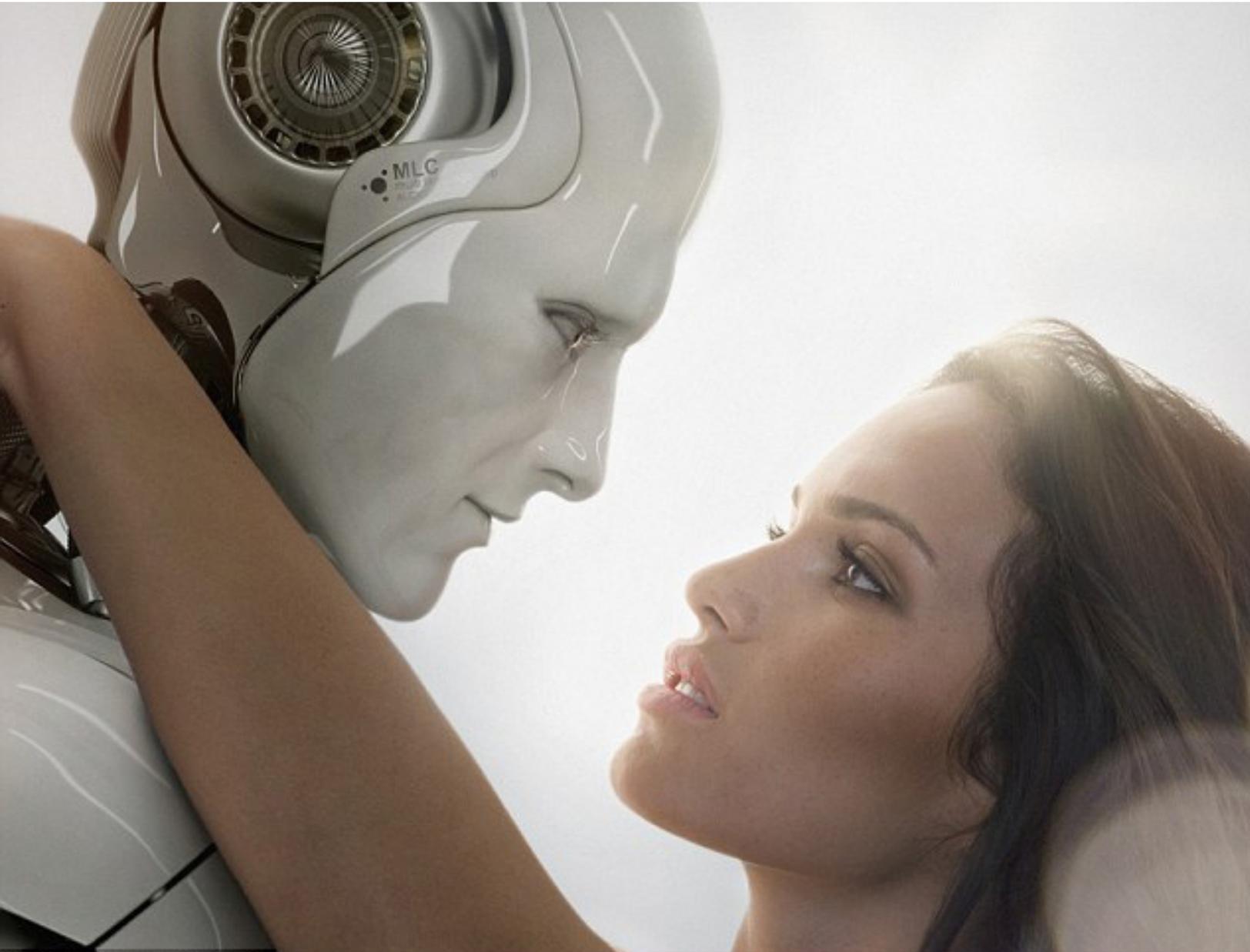


Zora's Den

Victoria Kennedy

Love Knows No Bounds

Transcending Genre with Love Stories



The Hunger Games is a science fiction trilogy of Young Adult novels set in a dystopian world. Love is the central theme. Nora Roberts, writing as J.D. Robb, launched her In Death Series with *Naked in Death* in July 1995—a detective story with crime, suspense, and mystery. And it creates the perfect conditions for intrigue and love. In *Committed (A Love Story)*, Elizabeth Gilbert gives us the continuation of the relationship she found in the New York Times Bestseller-turned movie, *Eat, Pray, Love* and covers the path to overcome her vow never to remarry. She ends up finding love and marriage. See the pattern? When it comes to love, the plethora of possibilities in literature is many and varied. Without trying very hard, one can find love at the core of many stories, no matter the genre.

In fiction and all its divisions, non-fiction (whether memoir or self-help), or even poetry, love proves to be the most universal language. It's the biggest common denominator across categories and in terms of writing. Love transcends genre.

Most stories are relationship-driven. Romantic entanglements are at the heart of literary fiction, contemporary fiction, romantic suspense, science fiction, paranormal, erotica, and sometimes non-fiction. For example, books have been written about artificial intelligence and how it makes relationships between robots and humans possible. *Love + Sex with Robots* by David Levy is one representation of this aspect. The range of supporting subject matter is so diverse, it wouldn't be far-fetched to assume love drives just about all stories. Of course, there are different kinds of love. In my collection of short

stories titled, *Where Love Goes*, I included stories that demonstrated cultural love, family love, love of class/status, and heritage. Indeed, love covers a huge spectrum.

Now that it's been established that love can be applied to every kind of scenario, can we posit that nothing beats an old-fashioned love story? No matter what the backdrop, one would be hard-pressed to find a substitute for the right mixture of sexual chemistry, conflict, and the love that combination creates. Historically, authors have taken big chances to deviate from a predictable path to love. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a prime example. It's sometimes hard to find the perfect mate, but not all writers determine to create humans in a lab to ensure they find love.

Regardless of the method, we find we can't put a limit on love. One way of telling a love story has no more merit than another. What is more relatable to one reader, could alienate another. What may be entertaining to a large readership, like romance novels, might be too predictable to mystery lovers. But love always finds a way, in both books and life. Even though it is cliché, love knows no bounds and in literature, we have a variety of genres to prove that point.

See you next time in Zora's Den.



Victoria Kennedy writes fiction. She contributed to The Dating Game anthology and wrote a short story collection titled, Where Love Goes. She is also the founder of Zora's Den, an online writers' group. Her latest book is a novel, Sometimes Love, published by Brown Girls Books. www.victoriaadamskennedy.com

Black History Month

Honoring Our Past to Shape Our Future

Rhonda M. Lawson



We cannot just depend on our teachers to teach our children our history. We also cannot wait until February to celebrate our history.

Around this time of year, we often hear the question, “Is Black History Month even relevant anymore?”

I usually tell them to imagine the slaves who belted out Negro spirituals as they moved through the plantation fields. Humming them as they nursed cuts suffered from the pricks of cotton plants. Moaning them as they bore the sting of the master’s whip. Singing about a freedom that many of them would never see, even after President Lincoln’s release of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

How could they sing that, knowing that for many, death would be the only way they would be done with the troubles of this world?

That song didn’t end with slavery. More than 100 years later, Mahalia Jackson traveled throughout the country with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph D. Abernathy, crooning the spiritual to encourage the thousands of Negroes—as we were called at that time—who marched for equality. For many of them, equality was just a wild dream. For some, it was a ridiculous notion. Yet, for others, it was a reality that they were willing to die for.

Why would they want to die, knowing they would never taste the one thing they savored?

Today, in 2018, as we celebrate the achievements of people like Oprah Winfrey, Maxine Waters, Barack Obama, and Colin Powell, I am convinced that our ancestors weren’t only thinking of themselves when they sang those spirituals. They weren’t even thinking of their friends, and possibly not even their immediate children. Perhaps as they sang *Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*, *Hold On*, and *Oh Freedom*, they reminded themselves to keep the faith because one day, a young black man would die trying to register men to vote so one day his widow could attend the first black president’s second inauguration.

Maybe they envisioned a man like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who didn’t live to see Barack Obama become the first African American president or a young John Lewis who was attacked on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama go on to become Congressman John Lewis, the gentleman from Georgia. Dr. King’s life ended April 4, 1968 by a sniper’s bullet, less than a year after Thurgood Marshall was appointed to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. In his less than 40 years on this earth, despite his many shortcomings, his efforts played a pivotal role in ending segregation in the United States and helped create the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

As my heart swells with pride at the strides we have made as a people, I often stop and ask myself that if our ancestors came back today, would they be happy with what they see? I mean, sure, many of us are living the dreams of our forefathers, but how many of us even know it? In a day and age when black history is only being taught in neat little chunks during the month of February, when our children groan and moan when given a book written by an African American author, when adults proudly proclaim that not that they don’t have time to read, but that they *don’t* read, are we doing our ancestors any justice?

I can’t help but think back on W.E.B. DuBois’s co-called Talented Tenth, the group of exceptional men who would save the Negro race. DuBois believed that the community needed to work to send only the best and brightest to college because education teaches life and character, and only our best and brightest would uplift our race. Today, nearly every African American child and many adults have the option of going to college with or without a scholarship if they so choose. African American

women have led the country in possessing the highest number of advanced degrees. In 2017, African American women made powerful strides in politics, entertainment, literature, and education, and are poised to accomplish even more in 2018 as we prepare for mid-term elections. However, the danger lies in the fact that as we continue to make strides, if we do not honor our history—the beautiful as well as the ugly—we may forget.

We cannot just depend on our teachers to teach our children our history. We also cannot wait until February to celebrate our history. When we honor our history throughout the year, we better understand what it means to keep moving forward when we get weary and discouraged. We better understand the plight of people like Ursula Burns, Malcolm X, Bayard Rustin, Rosalind Brewer, or DeRay McKesson.

It is for this reason, I am committed to honoring our history. For the last five years, I have spoken at events in five different countries on keeping Black History relevant. This month, my company, Meet the World Image Solutions, is hosting our Second Annual Black History Month New Orleans Literary Weekend. We will host eight local and national authors in a free writers'

workshop, a literary jazz brunch, and an original stage play based on my first novel, *Cheatin' in the Next Room*. The event will also include an essay contest and a visit to a local high school.

As an author, it is important to me to incorporate literacy and history in all my events so we can make reading popular again. By promoting stronger literacy programs and requiring our young people to read for both entertainment and information, we empower our communities while honoring the dreams of those who came before us. Does this stop at Black History Month? No, it doesn't, but using the month of February to remind us of how far we've come is a start. By honoring our past and continuing to shape our future, we can keep Black History relevant.



*Dr. Rhonda M. Lawson is a 23-year Army veteran, 14-time published author, and founder of Meet the World Image Solutions, LLC. She hosts a literary online talk show each Wednesday at 7 pm CST, highlighting authors and other literary professionals. Her fiction novels include *Cheatin' in the Next Room*, *A Dead Rose*, and *Twylite*. She currently resides in New Orleans, Louisiana*

Writers' WORKSHOP



FELICIA YOUNG
founder of
Higher Minds
of Education



WIL CASON
Motivational
Speaker

FEB 23

Time: 11 AM

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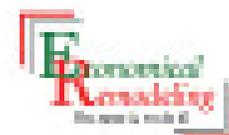
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Panel discussion featuring:



www.mtwimagesolutions.com/BHM



Sharing My Truth

Naleighna Kai

I did not lose my brother



Over the Christmas holiday, my brother came over to my house to help organize the multitude of books that are being given away for NK Recommends and the Cavalcade of Authors this year. He's been dancing around a subject for a while now. "Why didn't you come to Uncle Lynn's funeral?" It's been the elephant in the room for so long that said elephant is part of the furniture.

One thing anyone knows about me is that I don't have a problem speaking my mind. Except in this instance. My brother loved my uncle, who for all appearances, had been a hard-working family man, with a housewife of nearly 30+ years, and two successful children. That was the side that everyone knew.

He passed. I felt absolutely nothing. I didn't attend the funeral (this was my mother's biological brother) and I'm certain that it raised quite a few eyebrows, but I wasn't there to see them. It wouldn't matter anyhow. I had kept that secret of what my uncle had done to me way past the time I was a grown ass woman. A woman strong enough to rip the bandages off and let the wounds have some open air and heal the right way. Even though I had sought counseling for what my father had done, I still couldn't tell what my uncle's sins because everyone loved that man so much. No one loved him more than my brother. I had no plans to tell him--ever. I did not want to lose my brother as I feared that the love he had for an uncle—that he'd known far longer than he'd known a sister who had been dropped

*Photos from the Stepping & Spades April 2009
DJ Don (Donny Woodson) Celebrates his birthday with
Naleighna Kai*

*I had kept that secret of what my uncle had done to me way past the time
I was a grown ass woman.*

unexpectedly into his life when she was 18 months old—would carry more weight. I did not want to lose my brother.

Same way I didn't want to lose my "other mother" when I returned home from my father's house and he had done all manner of wickedness to me. Then, keeping the secret was because I needed her more than the government needed to put her in prison for killing him. And she would've killed him, too. Make no bones about it. And wouldn't feel an ounce of remorse as she served her time. My brother was a different story. He'd worked side by side with the man, day in and day out. There was a greater possibility that he would not believe me. The fear of rejection far outweighed the need to unburden this truth.

Until a few days before Christmas.

By not attending the funeral, I've been seen as cold and uncaring. Not so. How can I pay any "last respects" to a man who never had respect for me and my need to have a safe place away from the abuse I was already suffering at home? No, I'm not that woman. I couldn't pretend. Nothing makes a statement like absence. And my absence at that man's funeral was duly noted. And here's the thing--no one, not my aunt, his daughter, his son, other relatives--no one called to ask why. They didn't want to know, and I truly believe it's because in the small shadows of their minds--they KNEW.

When I let my brother know, not in any sordid detail, he went strangely still. Then quiet. He didn't move for a long time. His facial expression was blank--nothing registered, not anger, not shock, just blank. Then his eyes moved in that rapid succession that happens when someone is thinking, musing, or

analyzing. "There was a time when he had to go to court because they said he did something to a fourteen-year-old ..." my brother admitted.

Evidently, that case wasn't enough to deter my uncle from doing it again. But that means my aunt knew he had that issue with improperly touching, molesting, raping young girls. She KNEW, and yet she encouraged all of the nieces--HIS nieces, not hers, to come to the house and learn to cook, sew, keep house, and other things we weren't learning at home. No, auntie, I see you. I understand you. You were providing your husband with ample opportunity to keep his prurient desires satisfied--and your ability to remain simply a housewife, intact.

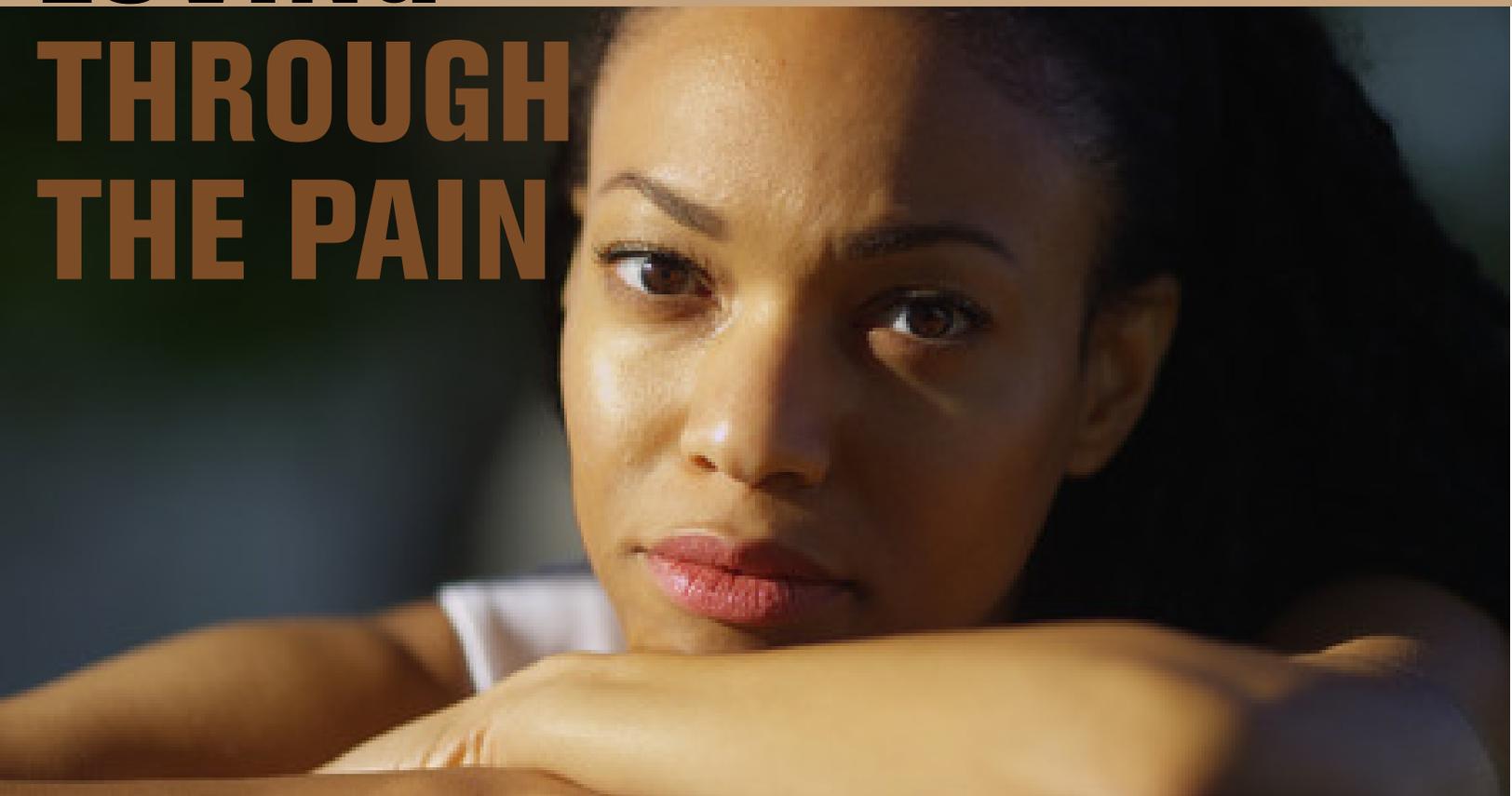
My brother has been calling a lot more often since that conversation. Just to "check on me." I know he feels something that he can't express about what I shared with him, and I'm certain he's now putting together other scenarios where he might have missed the signs.

So when people say "Why did you wait so long to tell?" I'll say this, "there's a fear that we have a lot more to lose by unburdening our souls, than just keeping it inside and keeping the peace--and the relatives that we want to remain in our lives." I'm glad, that with my brother, I was ... wrong. I did not lose my brother. I gained more strength.

LOVING

Christine Pauls

THROUGH THE PAIN



“How could I love a child that was conceived during my husband’s affair?”

We met in 1987; married in 1989, and divorced in 1998. Even before the vows were shared between us, a toxic relationship existed and continued that way for the majority of our years after we said, “I do.” That’s a whole other story. However, love bloomed between a woman and a child.

My then husband and I couldn’t have children together which he knew going into the relationship. Some years before meeting him, I’d personally made that choice after giving birth to two children, eighteen months apart, by one man. I was adamant about not bringing any more children into this world. Because I was so young, the doctor asked me if I was certain this was the route I wanted to take. What if I met someone I wanted to have another child or children with? What I was choosing to do was permanent. Trust

me, I was more than sure and was willing to take the risk.

Fast forward. He wanted a child; I knew it. I noticed the changes and a hint of jealousy when my ex-husband’s brother started building a family with his significant other. We’d argue when I brought up his mood swings.

Into our fourth year of marriage, my husband confessed to an affair which resulted in the conception and birth of a child. I’d been through so much with this man, and in spite of it all, I stayed with him. It wasn’t a shocker to anyone that I remained after another punch in the gut. My self-esteem, confidence, and love for myself were non-existent during that time. That saying, but I love him was in full effect. I even believed that I was responsible, that my inability to give him a child was the reason

“I found love. When I looked into your eyes, there it was...”

-- Phyllis Hyman

he went out and impregnated another woman. Of course, I was not to blame, but back then, my state of mind wouldn't allow me to see things clearly.

I came in from work, exhausted. My husband was sitting on the sofa with a small bundle in his arms. After putting my bags down, I sat on the couch next to him. My husband was ecstatic to show off his first child, a son. On the other hand, I was staggered because I hadn't been informed about the child coming this particular day, and had no preparation time to gather myself, my thoughts or anything.

He plopped the ultimate betrayal in my lap without warning. I breathed in deeply and exhaled slowly as he pushed apart the blanket covering the infant so that I could see his face. The baby squirmed and whimpered. The mother in me kicked in. I stood, and rock him gently as I walked around our small apartment. I looked down into the cute face of a baby boy whose eyes were fixed on me. He quieted. That was how our love started.

My daughters were teenagers, and trust me, they were angry that I was putting up with this mess, but the girls couldn't speak on it. They were old enough to understand the dynamics swirling around them. They had witnessed the deterioration of the marital relationship although I thought I was hiding it from them. But what they didn't know was that I was broken on so many levels. They didn't know of any of the trauma that I'd been through before I even met

this man.

Through the resulting chaos, I found myself caring for this child as if he were my own. When I viewed the award-winning movie *Fences* with Denzel Washington and Viola Davis, it touched a chord with me as the elements were so similar to my life. My approach to this outside child was that I no longer viewed him as the wrong that my husband did. My daughters and I bonded with the baby because we accepted him as a part of our family. Nothing that had happened was his fault anyway. We formed a close relationship from infancy into grade school.

Eventually, the marriage dissolved which was the best thing that could happen for my life. My relationship with my stepson became a bit distant for a time as I was working on myself. But he loved me and he always knew I loved him. Now, at twenty-four, he has grown into a man who makes me extremely proud. When he says he loves me, I know it's genuine and coming straight from his heart. We will always be connected by love.

As Whitney Houston's song says, I didn't know my own strength. I don't regret one day of loving my stepson. He definitely came into my life at the most inopportune time. Some people will never understand why I stayed in the marriage and helped to raise a child that was conceived as a result of my husband's infidelity. I'm a witness that only God can give one the ability to love through the pain.



Christine Pauls a native of Wilmington, Delaware is the author of *To Begin Again*, *Belinda's Song* and *One Good Thing*, her newest release. She penned her first novel in 2012. The mother of two and grandmother of three is an accountant by day in the banking industry.



The O'Jays

current trio:
Eddie Levert
Walter Williams
Eric Nolan



Recently, I came to the realization that my mother's music is my music. I went to the O'Jays concert last night and was genuinely surprised. Not because that they were awesome and that the performance was amazing, but I thought I knew only a few of their songs. Wrong. I knew and could sing almost every single one—except Ship Ahoy, which was new to me. Another revelation came last year when I learned that Now That We Found Love made famous by the Reggae group, Third World, was originally performed by the O'Jays. Eddie Levert shared with the audience that “We did it first and Third World landed a gold record for the song. I felt some kind of way about that.”

On February 4, I turned 51. For some reason I kind of considered their music and all music from that time, my mother's music. Old folks music. Well, I must be getting old because I appreciated the words. I enjoyed the musicality as there was a full live band and horn section that accompanied them. They didn't lip sync. They sat their asses down when they got tired and owned up to ailments that many in the audience were familiar with.

The O'JAYS sang to us, they talked and taught us, and honored us by taking us on a musical journey that has been their lives for 48 years. They were well dressed—open casket sharp, as some would say. Even the opening scene and song were so powerful, I had to do a separate article in this magazine to express the impact.

The trio was gracious in accepting gifts from the audience, such as business cards from aggressive women who wanted more than just a song from the stage. Even in that instance, there was humor when one of the O'JAYS looked at the card, raised an eyebrow, smiled at the woman, then slid the card in his pocket. His actions brought on laughter from

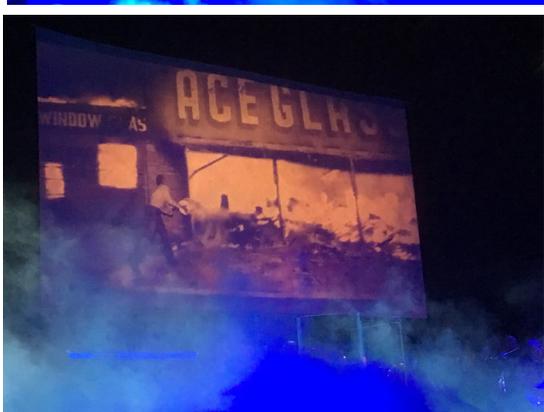
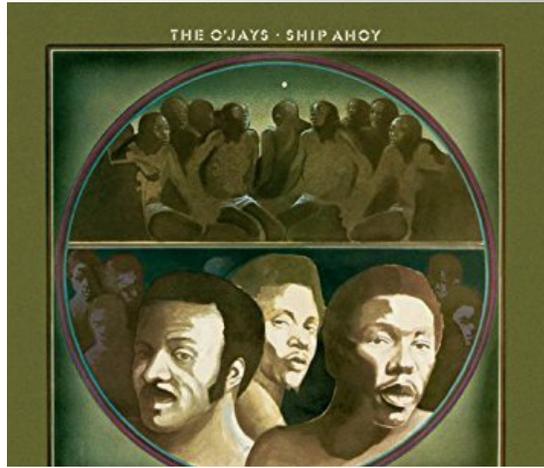
the audience, all the while he didn't miss a verse or beat of the song. My intuition told me that he's not going to make use of that card, but was kind enough not to embarrass that woman in front of the audience.

I had an awesome time and I'm glad I decided to go. Now I'm going to make an effort to attend more concerts by our musical legends. Gladys Knight comes to mind. Mostly because I love her voice, her journey and that she embodies elegance, class, and soul. Once, when I was about seven, I remember that a song of hers played on my brother's stereo all night long. Overnight Success. He was a DJ and had more equipment and albums in his upstairs bedroom, than furniture. Meaning, he didn't have a bed and slept on a pallet stretched out in the middle of the floor surrounded by subwoofers and strobe lights. I tipped up the stairs after the song had replayed for like the tenth time, to find my brother stretched out on his back, his eyes focused on the ceiling, and tears flowing from his eyes. I had never witnessed a time when my big strong brother cried. The impact of that moment was so stirring, I wrote it into a scene in one of my novels. Gladys' *The Makings of You* is calling to me, so at some point real soon, I need to lay eyes and ears on that woman. I've been missing out on the good stuff and I'd love for you all to write in and let me know who you deem worthy of a first and repeated visit to a performance.

The O'Jays concert made me realize that I want to be serenaded. I want to be entertained. I want to leave the concert feeling as though I just experienced my life through song.

Yes, I can do that with music by artists and groups that my mother loved. Her music is now my music because I'm old enough to understand the words, the meaning, and the experiences that we've both had and lived to tell.

Ship Ahoy



The opening scene from the O'Jays Venue concert in Indiana was the visual depiction of a song from the album of the same name, *Ship Ahoy*. Actually, they had two openings. First, smoke/fog floated upward and around the stage, and this haunting music echoed setting the stage for the images that were displayed on the screen. Stark and unsettling images of the Negro, Colored, African American-Black experience as African captives, the Middle Passage, and brutal effects of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

The song ushered in a crescendo of waves crashing against the hull of a ship and the cracking sounds of a whip flaying open the flesh of our ancestors. The entire scene before the trio swept onto the stage, was nothing short of disturbing. It brought to mind *The Coming* by Daniel Black in its intense interpretation of The Middle Passage—a part of history that rarely is told or understood. Professor Black stated in a reading at a Chicago gallery, that the reenactment of *The Coming* sent patrons running from the theatre because the pain, agony, and reality portrayed by the actors was too much for them to absorb and process.

images from the Civil Rights Portion of the Ship Ahoy Performance

Here too, as I watched the opening to the O'Jays performance unfold, brought about feelings of sorrow and hopelessness. The reminder of what my ancestors experienced then and is also a direct correlation to today's experiences with injustices against Black, Brown and all People of Color being met with indifference and apathy. The song, Ship Ahoy, does not give the listener false hope that "everything's going to be alright." The work is chilling and profound, and is something that everyone should listen to, then take a visit to an O'Jays performance to witness it firsthand.

The New York Times reviewed the album and called the song "dark and occasionally spine-chilling." The Miami Herald said it was "a dark, atmospheric, frightening masterpiece that'll send a shiver up your spine." Truth! The album cover shows the band in a ship's slave hold with a powerful image of slaves cramped together in a tight formation. The imagery already warns that this isn't usual O'Jay's musical fare. The love songs, the lighter themes of family and togetherness.

Equally, I later learned that one other song from the album, Don't Call Me Brother was something The Los Angeles Times considered "the cream of the vocal trio's angry music—a nearly nine-minute long album track that protests hypocritical claims of racial unity from backstabbers. Hmmmm. Brings to mind a few Black politicians and Black leaders, eh? A year before, their song, Backstabbers was inspired by Smiling Faces, The Undisputed Truth. All of this brings to mind, the times during slavery where the drums, music, and dance were secretly used to convey messages without the master's knowledge, tell history that some didn't want to be forgotten, and express emotions that could not be voiced in the presence of those who enslaved them.

Marvin Gaye's socially aware, Trouble Man, which followed an even more socially conscious album, What's Going on? was monumental, not only, in the fact that he had fought with Berry Gordy, the head of Motown, for the

freedom to produce songs of his choice; but also that what he preferred to focus on at that time was a deep, chilling, and sometimes inspiring message in the face of war and injustice. Though, unsure of the reception, songs from Gaye's album not only shared the Black experience through music and words, but became his most controversial and successful work to date.

Using melodies and messages, Gaye, Undisputed Truth, and The O'Jays, were trying to tell our grandparents, parents, and now us, something. The album has been reissued by several records labels: Philadelphia International, Epic Records, Legacy Records, Columbia Records, Sis Records, Sony Records with a bonus track, a live version of "Put Your Hands Together" recorded in London in 1974.

That album also brings to mind their most famous song, "For the Love of Money" which has meanings and truth that are as relevant today as it was in 1973, when the album first released. New Jack City brought the song to the forefront as Eddie Levert's sons, Gerald (with is fine self!) and Sean along with Marc to sing a remixed version of the song that blended with vocal group, Troop, crooning, Living Just Enough for the City—a Stevie Wonder classic. The song, which tells that money would make people do bad things, is not too far off the mark, as our witnessed by the current political regime, the rampant use of drugs and the addicted in America, and the underbelly class who preys on the average working man and woman. Queen Latifah puts some dynamic prose that shares insight to the drug world, then encourages the singers to "Kick the ballistics." What all of them were kicking was absolute truth.

We would do well to give these songs a good listen and figure out what has or has not happened in the over forty years since its initial release. Progress toward equality, justice, and humanity has been slow or stagnant indeed. I love music, any kind of music. Especially, when it provokes emotions and experiences we should not forget.

Hairstory



Debra J. Mitchell,
president of
Black Women with Opinions & Attitudes Book Club
made the transition to Sister Locs ...
and she's loving it!!!

In the January 2018 issue of Naleighna Kai's Literary Cafe Magazine, the article, You Gotta Suffer to be Beautiful touched on women who are embracing their natural hair over "creamy crack" , weaves and wigs. I encouraged readers to send in before and after photos and mentioned they might end up in the magazine. Be sure to check out the article.





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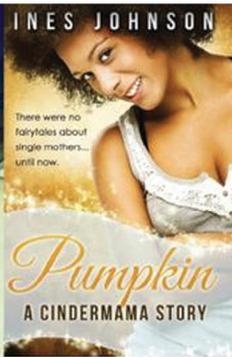
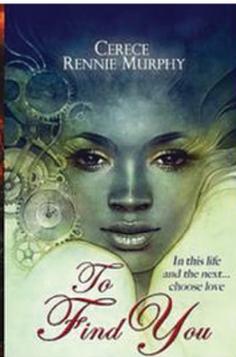
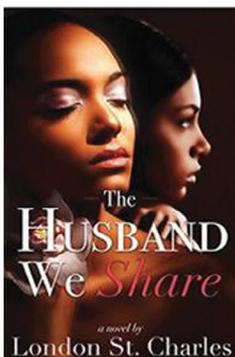
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NOT A FAN OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Now that I have your attention, let me start off by saying there's a problem in the Black community when someone, no matter who he or she is, has to tell us to research our history. Since designating a month for us has been the only way for many Black people to crack open a book and dive into history, I guess it works for some. As a woman of color, I should know my history, which is the history of melanated people, and the fact that this isn't a daily study for most is alarming.

February seems to be the only month that many of my brothers and sisters take an interest in learning something about their history. Why is that? What the hell is going on? A people who take pride in themselves will always seek knowledge and truth. Black history shouldn't be something discussed for only one month; it should be a part of everyday life.

Too often, I'm confronted with questions from people who are unsure of who they are. They don't know if they're African or not, and my answer to those questions is simple: since the inception of time on this planet, Black people have been here. We are the original people. Study the history of melanated people throughout history. Stop narrowing the time you seek knowledge of your history to one month given to you by someone else, even if it was given to you by a person of color. It should not be looked at for a month.

In my home, I make a concerted effort to constantly research the many melanated cultures throughout the world by reminding my family to not only know their U.S. history, but learn their world history as

well. If you're the parents of small children or teens, you should be doing everything in your power to educate them and yourself about your history. Know your culture and don't depend on the school system to teach your children their true pre-slavery history.

I never cared for Black History Month even when I was a teenager. I felt it was our responsibility to know our past cultures and achievements. Also, learn from past mistakes so they can be prevented in the future. *If the majority of Black homes can buy game systems and excessive clothing, they should at least have a small library of books on black culture, inventions, and history.*

Therefore, no, I'm not a fan of Black History Month because after that month has passed, many of our people never pick up a history book on black culture and history again until they're forced to. Start educating your children and yourself on black achievements of the past, and not just from the 2000s. We have a lot of work to do, especially in our homes, if we're going to get our young people in the mindset of seeking knowledge, wisdom, and truth. Make learning Black history a part of your everyday lives so you and your children can make a difference and spark change for the rest of the world.

Is this too much to ask for from every Black home? The answer is no. So get up and teach your children the history of melanated people beyond that of slavery in America. Our history didn't start there as the media and school system has brainwashed most of us to believe. What were our people before slavery? What did they achieve pre-slavery? What things do you use in your daily life and take for granted that

Since the inception of time on this planet, Black people have been here.



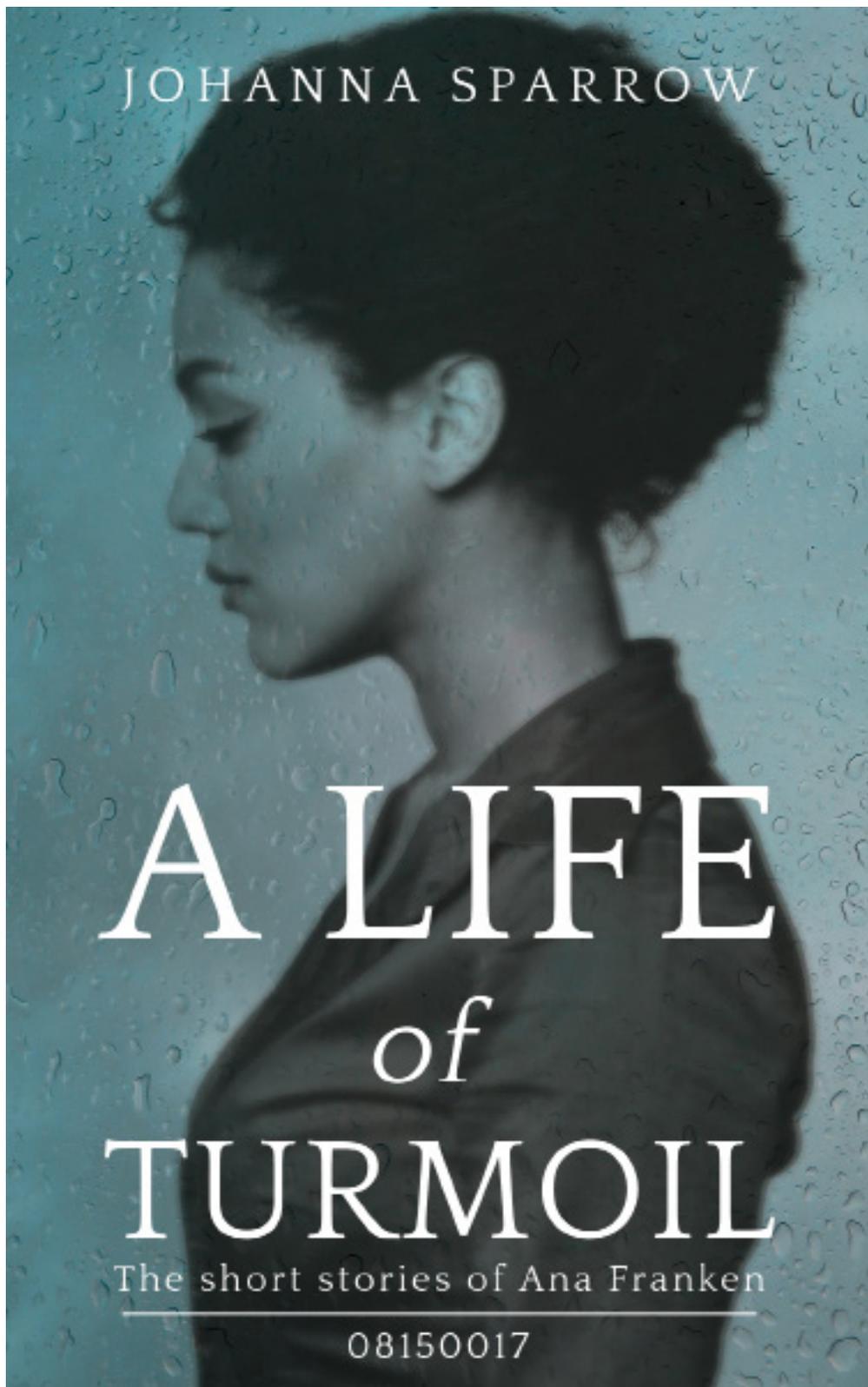
were invented by black people? Today, when someone is kidnapped, the word slave is never attributed to that person. Find out where the word slavery comes from and how a stolen people was given the name, slave.

The truth is that many Black people are comfortable with knowing their history as it relates to slavery, but they remain ignorant about their history as original people before slavery. Melanated people weren't the first slaves, and shouldn't be looked at in such a way. I prefer saying kidnapped or stolen because that's the truth of what happened due to the greed and power-mongering of white men. It's long overdue for black people to learn their true history. Knowledge is power, and one of the only ways to prevent repeating of the past is to know your history. I am a fan of being Black and learning one's history ... daily.



*Johanna Sparrow is a life coach and author, publishing children's books, novellas, and self-help books about relationships, personal growth, and conflict resolution. She was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, but now resides in San Antonio, Texas. Her current books include *Helen's Scars*, *A Life of Turmoil*, and *Breakthrough*. She also hosts *Common Sense Talk with Johanna Sparrow*, which airs every Thursday at 12 p.m. EST/11 a.m. CST on www.AMFM247.com.
<https://johannasparrow.com>*

“A riveting story that will shake you to the core.”



It doesn't matter how fast or strong I get, I'll never outrun her or be stronger than her. Mother is strong and has many lives. She keeps me as her servant and her bitch. I'm a mistake that she desperately tries to cover up. Mother would probably be ecstatic if I was a whore and a liar, but since I'm neither, she despises me. In time, you'll come to know why I've decided to tell the world my tumultuous story.

I wouldn't recommend reliving an abusive past, but for the last forty-plus years, I've been living a lie. Daily, I'm finding broken pieces of myself scattered around because of how Mother and her sons shattered the real me. Now, I must put myself back together. I've beat myself up for staying in their lives far too long; hoping they'd eventually welcome, accept, and love me. But instead, I've continued to be used and abused. I'm often left with anger, rage, and thoughts of having their heads on a platter.

Too much time has been wasted. I just want the world to know the true story of Ana Franken.

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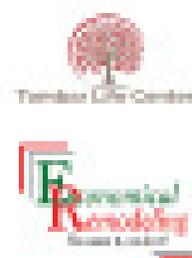
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TO COURT

Anita L. Roseboro

OR NOT TO COURT



Over the last few weeks, I have researched how many women have been “courted.” Various age groups were asked the question “What does courting mean?” and “Have you been courted?” Once upon a time, men took the time to “court” a woman. Most of the middle-aged to older women had been courted at least once. I was pleasantly surprised that the younger girls knew what courting was; I was equally shocked that not one of them had been courted.

Courting is the experience of developing a deep relationship with someone without the complication of sex; while seeing if it will lead to marriage. In this microwave society where everything is expected to be fast, no one wants to wait for anything. Young girls believe if a guy is not actively trying to get in their pants there is something wrong with them. Young boys are so eager to lose their virginity and

break in a girl that they don’t even check to find out her last name. Taking the slow road is essential to the health of both women and men, in this day. When did we stop teaching our children to respect themselves and others? Mothers were diligent about their daughters having respect for themselves. While it was okay for young boys to sow their wild oats, most did so with girls they never intended to marry. Courting allowed the men to invest in the relationship and the woman.

I’m reminded of a story of a boy coming to take one of my aunts on a date. He just happened to mention what he had planned for her. While I was not privy to his exact statement, my grandfathers’ reaction was enough to let me know it wasn’t good or smart. Being the giant of a man that he was, picked this kid up and tossed him into a lit fireplace. Needless to say, no date took place. With

four daughters it's safe to say my grandfather didn't play when it came to their safety.

Back in the day, courting wasn't an option for boys. Young men would walk up to the doors so nervous that their Sunday-go-to-meeting suit was already drenched in sweat by the time they arrived. The uncles and fathers would drill the young men with questions such as: "What are your intentions with my daughter? Do you work? You plan to have her home by this time, right? Parents took the time to get to know the boys and their families. They had to know who their parents are, who their grandparents were. If the boy was scared but still brave enough to date the girl, the older men assumed you were worthy. Most of these questions were just a way to rankle the youngsters. More than likely the older men already knew the answers.

Before the young men came around, members of the family would have conducted their own investigation, probably guided by "answers" the women had extracted from the young girls in question. The "grilling" or "interrogation" was simply to gauge the young men for themselves and "shore him up" with what others had said about him. Sometimes those interactions took place with a shotgun, rifle, or pistol in plain sight serving as a warning for any youngsters thinking of getting out of line. Unfortunately, sometimes hormones overruled fear and common sense as many young men who ended up on the wrong side of the casket can attest to (or not since they are no longer breathing).

Gone are the years of courtships where not only did the couple take time to find out how compatible they were, but the entire family took part in "guiding" it

to a conclusion that was not all about wet ass and a slick dick. Years later, courting is almost extinct and replaced with hook-ups, set-ups, speed dating, and even speedy marriages that end in costly and painful divorces, and children growing up way to fast.

Recently a video clip hit social media for an upcoming movie. A rapper-turned-actor plays a father who brings a dating prospect into a garage full of muscled men who are glaring at the young man as if he's about to commit a crime. The message the father gives the youngster is, "I've been the one who's protecting my daughter all this time. Now, I guess I have to put it in your hands." The young man scans the room and sees about fifteen men-Black, Latino, and White-all with their game faces on to make a point. The father claps a hand on the young man's back and ushers him out of the garage. When the father returns to the garage, they all break out in rowdy laughter. Trust me the youngster taking the daughter to the prom got the message. And if he didn't, the father and his friends will show him that his actions are no laughing matter.

We need more of this and it will mean less domestic violence cases. Fewer calls to the emergency room for our young girls who have been raped and beaten. And fewer calls to come and identify a loved one who has been murdered because no one took the time for a background check. Women take your time in allowing a man to know you intimately or before bringing them into your lives and your children's lives. First and foremost, learn to love and respect yourself.



Anita L. Roseboro, a native of North Carolina has a BS in Management Information Systems and a Master's Degree in Business Administration. She is a passionate advocate for children and the cultivation of their minds in that they become productive members of society. Currently, she is pursuing her life-long dream of writing.

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Maya Angelou

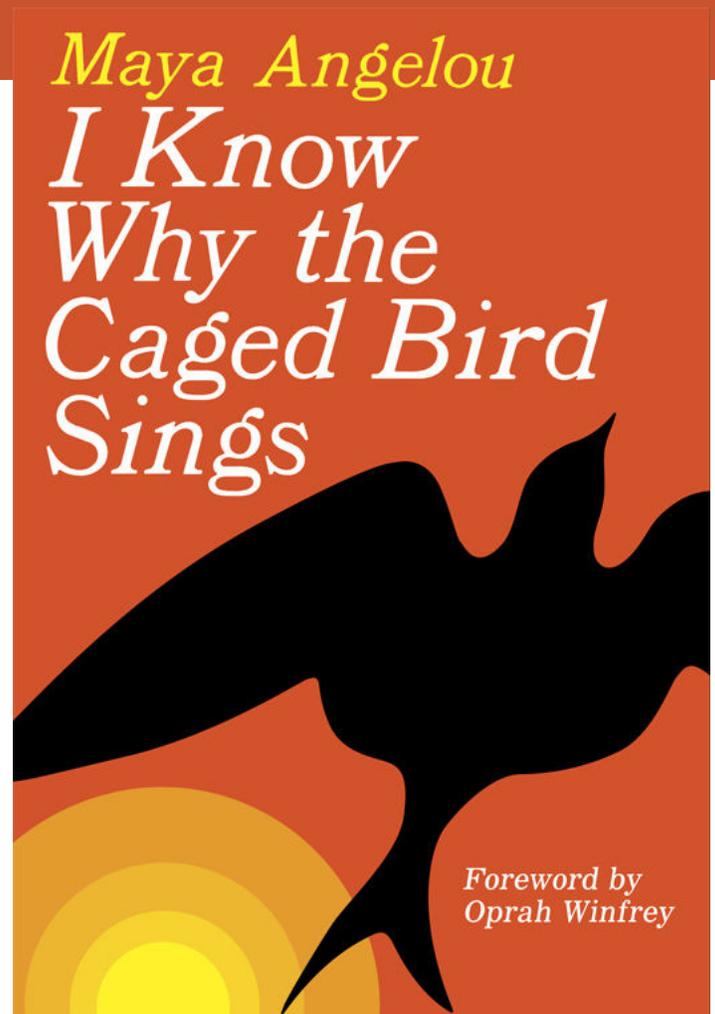
A Literary Legend

Here is a book as joyous and painful, as mysterious and memorable, as childhood itself. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings captures the longing of lonely children, the brute insult of bigotry, and the wonder of words that can make the world right. Maya Angelou's debut memoir is a modern American classic beloved worldwide.

Though I had been aware of the name and knew that Maya Angelou was a special woman, it wasn't until I read, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in high school that I fell in love with her writing and understood why she was exceptionally special.

The story, told so honestly from a child's perspective, drew me into her world. The journey of a young black girl who felt abandoned after being sent on a train along with her brother, Bailey, to live with their paternal grandmother in Stamps Arkansas. During this time, bigotry and prejudice against black folk was the normal way of life. Four years later, at the age of eight, Maya's father disrupted her world again, this time sending them to live with their mother in St. Louis.

Maya was sexually abused and raped at the hands of her mother's boyfriend. The life-altering injustice had consequences that plagued Maya for years. She suffered from selective mutism following the murder of the man who assaulted her. Maya thought her voice killed him because she told his name and she believed her voice was powerful enough to kill anyone. During her five-year silence, Maya's impressive memory and love for books and literature developed, ultimately transforming her the woman we knew and loved to this very day.



The beauty of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is in the way Maya tells the story. Her words, descriptive and raw, flow freely. Uncensored. Unapologetic. Passionate. My heart raced as I read. I experienced the hurt and sadness through her eyes and developed empathy for little Maya. I also broke through barriers with Maya as she discovered herself once again. She was strong, inspiring, and proof that great things can be accomplished through overcoming pain and a having positive outlook on life.

My shelf is filled with hundreds of books that I have, and will, only read once. Except *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Every so often, I'll pick it up and sink into the prose and experience that fall and rise all over again.

Three Favorite Quotes by Maya Angelou and How They've Impacted My Life.

“When someone shows you who they are, believe them.”

I've knocked myself over the head with this one many times in the past, especially with family members. I had to learn when it was time to let someone go. People are who they are and just because we share the same bloodline, doesn't make it any different. I've learned to take care of me first. You only get one chance to show your true colors. I'm still a forgiving soul, (I can't let anyone change the person I am inside), but I can love you from a distance and keep my inner peace intact.



“I've learned that making a living is not the same thing as making a life.”

In the January issues, Angelia Vernon Menchan wrote about Making a Living. Six years ago, I left my steady paycheck as a pharmacy tech to open my own business. Spending more time with my family was the driving force behind the decision. My employer cut part-time workers and expected the four full-timers to do double the work which entailed working nights and weekends. I'm an active and involved mother, and the thought of not being at my daughter's basketball games and gymnastics practices were unacceptable. The change of employment couldn't have come at a better time. Now I'm available for the everyday things that I would miss out on if I had a traditional nine-to-five (or nine in the morning to midnight as they were aiming for). I'm present, and that's priceless.

“We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated.”

Anything in life worth having doesn't come easy. We have many fails before we have successes.

This is pertinent in writing. I had to remember through the editing process and now the writing of a new book that defeat is not permanent. It comes in spells. I have moments when I can't get my thoughts together or writing hiatuses that seem to go on longer than they should. The important thing is never to give up and keep working hard.



London St. Charles is a Chicago native who has always had a passion for the pen, paper, and books. She wrote and published her debut novel, *The Husband We Share* in 2017 and is currently working on her next novel. www.londonstcharles.com

EXCERPT

Victoria Christopher Murray
ReShonda Tate Billingsley

If
only
for

Women
NIGHT

Can they be soulmates if they're married to other people?

From the outside, Angelique has the perfect life - a rich husband who adores her and gives her the world, except for what she craves most - his attention. A workaholic, more concerned with his family's financial situation than emotional stability, Preston doesn't understand why his wife is so unhappy. Not one to stray, Angelique seeks comfort in the online game, Words With Friends.

Blu has been living a life of loneliness since his wife settled into a depression she has no desire to shake. Frustrated and fed up, he loses himself in his favorite game - and the woman that has proven to be a formidable opponent.

It's not long before their online connection turns flirtatious and troubles at home lead them to a face-to-face meeting. And eventually an addictive connection that will have them questioning if they're truly soulmates or if they were destined for only one night.

Excerpt from *If Only For One Night*

by Victoria Christopher Murray and ReShonda Tate Billingsley

Blu Logan

There were three reasons why I couldn't jump up and give myself a high-five the way I wanted to over those one-hundred-and-forty points I just scored. First, I was already in bed, second, I was lying butt-naked in the dark, and third...

"Ugh! Will you get off that game?"

And reason number three: I was in my bed, butt-naked...next to my wife.

"Please," Monica whined.

The end of my lips turned down just a little, but I wasn't going to let Monica steal my joy. Because Lord knows, she wasn't the one who'd given it to me. All of this joy that filled me right now was because of DivineDiva. Damn, she was a challenge.

"That light is too much."

And then, there was the woman next to me who didn't challenge me at all. Although, Monica had once — six years ago.

I turned my attention back to the game, so wanting to stay in this place. It wasn't often that I got a chance to one-up DivineDiva. Two weeks, and I hadn't beaten her once. But this move right here, it had been calculated, it had been strategic, and there wasn't anything that she could do.

"Did you hear what I said?" Monica said.

Monica was that thief in the night. Because all of my joy — stolen! "How is the light from my phone bothering you?"

She pushed herself up in the bed, and leaned back on her elbows. The light from the television was what made the room so bright and I easily saw her glare.

She said, "You have a six-plus. That thing is dang-near the size of an iPad. And I'm trying to sleep." Then, she sat up and adjusted the pink hair roller that was falling into her face.

I sighed, remembering the days when she would have never worn those things to bed. Remembering the days when she told me that she wanted to be sexy

twenty-four-seven just for me.

It was those memories that made me snap, “You’re always trying to sleep, Monica. Five o’clock in the morning, you’re sleep. Five o’clock in the evening, you’re sleep.”

“You know I can’t help it.” She folded her arms and her bottom lip trembled. “You know what I’m suffering from. You know how it’s affected me.”

This was where I was supposed to have empathy. Maybe pull Monica into my arms, give her a hug, assure her that everything was going to be okay. But even though I wanted to, sometimes I couldn’t. Because I felt like I didn’t have any more understanding inside of me.

It had started years ago, right after our daughter, Raven, had been born. As soon as I brought Monica and Raven home, I’d noticed the change in my wife: she was moody, had trouble sleeping, couldn’t eat. In the beginning, we’d just thought she was just suffering from baby blues because she hadn’t gone through that with our son who was ten when Raven was born. But after a few weeks, she’d been diagnosed with postpartum depression.

Of course, I wanted my wife to have the best care and her ob-gyn was on it. Her doctor gave her medication, taught her relaxation methods, and suggested a support group. Well, Monica never attended a single meeting and only took about two deep breaths to relax herself. But the medication — Monica rode that one for as long as the doctor gave her prescriptions.

When Raven was a year old, Monica’s gynecologist had referred her to a psychologist...and even though she’d been seeing Dr. Nichols ever since, it felt like we were in the same place.

“I don’t care what you say,” she broke through my memories of when this all began. “I’m still suffering from PPD.”

She’d become so familiar with the term that she only spoke of it through its acronym. But postpartum depression wasn’t her problem at all.

“Raven is six, so it’s not postpartum depression,” I said, refusing to call such a serious disorder by a nickname. “You’re suffering from a lot of things, but that’s not one of them.”

Her glare became harsher. “Whatever,” she said, snatching the covers away from me. She turned her back and snuggled deep under the duvet.

I shook my head. Maybe I should have tried one of my old approaches. But then the chime of my phone turned my attention away from my wife.

A message:

I can show u better than I can tell u.

Okay, so why did that make me smile?

My response: That's what most ppl who lose say.

Then, I waited. The seconds ticked by, time passing so slowly. But the digital numbers on my cell only changed from 9:32 to 9:33 before DivineDiva responded:

Payback isn't going to be pretty.

I couldn't get my fingers to move fast enough.

Bring it.

I paused. Because I was just talking about the game, wasn't I? I'd been playing this chick for the past two weeks. That was it. And tonight was the first time that I'd ever messaged...well, that I'd ever messaged her. I mean, I did chat with women, though I kept it friendly and not too flirty.

But this connection with DivineDiva...it was instant and it felt real.

If Only for One Night is available wherever books are sold.

K I M A N I TM R O M A N C E

Presents a holiday themed romance
by national bestselling author

He vowed to love and cherish her . . .

It was like something out of a fairy tale: being swept off her feet, then eloping with her one true love, Houston oil tycoon Brice Kingsley. Then a devastating diagnosis and a threat from her past forced Brooke Smith Kingsley to leave the man she loved. Now she has a chance to make things right, but only if she can keep her secret—and her distance—from her irresistible husband.

Though he couldn't accept Brooke's reasons for running away, Brice never gave up on her or their marriage. And with the beautiful tax attorney back in his life, reigniting passion stronger than before, he can't bear to let her go ever again. Even as a revenge-seeking blackmailer schemes to bring down the Kingsley empire, Brice will fight for their future—a love that's for now and forever.



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Part II of II

Samara leveled a stony gaze at Tamika, taking in the Sienna complexion, expensive weave, even more expensive clothes, and the polished air she tried to affect. Unfortunately, the woman was more hood than Samara could remember when she first ran into her at Darek's office a week ago. Ran into her might be a stretch, since the woman was under the desk giving Darek ... lip service. He didn't bother to halt the woman's actions until he had reached his climax. Samara yawned, took a seat on one of the leather wingback chairs across from his smoke glass desk, crossed one leg over the other, waiting with bored resignation. Darek always did have a fascination with dark meat, and the more reminiscent they were of a street upbringing, the better.

Tamika finished, wiped her mouth the back of her hand.

"At least she swallows," Samara quipped, with a low, throaty chuckle. "You're moving up in the world."

"I'll see you after the meeting tonight," Darek said to Tamika as she hurried from the room, but not without giving Samara a pointed look first. A "knowing look" that spoke to the fact that she was someone that the wife should become used to dealing with. No worries on Samara's end. As long as Darek was dipping his spoon in someone else's bowl, the less likely he would be trying to grace the inner sanctuary of her bedroom. She'd done her time on her back. Kept her end of the bargain. Six children, even though Darek tried to demand one more. He surely wanted a boy child. Pity. Unfortunately, no amount of millions he slid into her account would make her spread them for him again. Girls ruled the world, right?

"Rhena's on a plane to Washington. Let's talk about that divorce," Samara said, and Darek's face darkened an ugly shade of red.

"Let's not. She isn't eighteen, hasn't reached the age of majority," he said with an ear-splitting grin. "You know what the agreement was."

Samara's smile was as wide as a kid getting that first glass of Kool-Aid. "Yes, I certainly remember that infamous agreement." Samara reached into her tote and pulled out a copy of the prenup and slammed it on his desk. "I wrote that in myself. All of my daughters are aware of this agreement. Why do you think Rhena took accelerated classes? She's the one pushing for me to end things ever since I gave all of them the truth about us."

Darek dropped down in the executive chair behind his desk.

"Our marriage affected the children. You'd know that if you weren't so pissed that none of them were boys." Then she grinned. "Well, five girls and

another one who can strap one on and give your mistress something to scream about. But I digress.”

Darek was on his feet, wagging a finger in her direction. “Now you look here. You end this before I’m ready and you will pay.”

“How? That wasn’t our deal, remember.” She uncrossed her legs, stood and walked the length of the office until she came to the cathedral windows with a view of Lake Michigan. “You can’t hold my brothers over me any longer. One’s a lawyer who could run rings around you. The other’s a community activist with a non-profit that outranks your own. And he’s about to run on an opposite platform which you’re gearing up for. He’s for the people. You’re for the people with money.” She turned to face him, placed her back against the cool glass, and folded her well-toned arms over an ample bosom. “So how, exactly, do you plan to make me pay any more than the twenty-seven years that I’ve put into this marriage.”

The angry silence that ensued was telling. For the first time in their marriage, Samara had the upper hand. Darek had put recent efforts into running for elected office. More power; more connections. He put this strategy into play a few months ago, two years before Rhena’s eighteenth birthday, possibly gambling on the fact that his political campaign would be well under way, and it would be nearly impossible for Samara to leave him.

One of those little revisions she had made on the prenup that day, was the children “going off to college” instead of his words of “reaching majority”. He was under the belief that majority and off to college were one and the same, not giving any credit to the fact that Samara had entered Howard at sixteen.

Yes, her presence was required on his part, but certainly not hers and there were no terms he could lay down to make that happen. She wanted no parts of it—none whatsoever.

“The money, the prestige, the connections you enjoy,” he said between his teeth. “Are all because of me. I made you,”

“God made me,” she shot back. “And he didn’t make me stupid, either. The moment Rhena accepted Harvard’s invitation to become a student and all the paperwork was in to make it so, my time in this marriage was a wrap. Nothing you have done over the years have made up for how you treated me on our wedding day.”

Darek gripped the edge of the desk so hard he nearly broke off the glass. “Why are you so upset about the prenup if wasn’t about the money.”

“It’s about respect,” she snapped. “You could’ve had that paperwork completed

and in front of me months, if not weeks before then. You waited until you thought you had me painted into a corner. Then, when that didn't work, you threw my brothers into the mix. I might have had some love for you after that, but it certainly wasn't the love I had for you before." She laughed, and the sound was bitter and slicing. "And there's certainly not enough left for me to play the part of the dutiful wife to help your political career." She lowered her gaze to the place where his mistress had vacated moments earlier. "Tamika would add a nice touch. I'm sure she's down for whatever."

Three hours later, Samara was in the morgue identifying her husband's mangled body. Five minutes later, she was fielding questions from the press as her brother, Donny, ushered her toward the limousine that awaited them. "Did you know about your husband's mistress?"

"No comment," her brother replied, raising an arm to ward off the microphones thrusting their way.

Inwardly, she answered, "Yes, I knew and didn't care. Tamika wasn't the first."

"Is it true the firefighter had to extract his mistress from your husband's genitals?"

Even the other journalists frowned at that question. Someone pushed the guy to the back of the line.

"No comment," Donny said and his eagle-eyed gaze narrowed on the insensitive reporter who asked the question. The man finally shrank down as though to hide behind his colleagues.

Thank God for big brothers.

* * *

Thank God for daughters, Samara mused a week later as all six of her young women surrounded Tamika, whose bold request for Darek's ashes had silenced all conversations within a two-room radius.

"You have lost your cotton-picking, chicken-plucking, motherfuckin' mind," Ebony said in a voice barely above a whisper.

"Want me to take her out back and tune her up," Stacye, the middle child said, flexing her hands into a ready-made fist. Those martial arts classes had paid off on many levels turning a woman who had struggled with her weight in high school into a lean, mean, fighting machine.

“No, I don’t have bail money for you today,” Samara with a patient smile.

“You won’t need it,” Monique replied, running a manicured hand through her bouncy curls. “There are ways of getting the message across without seeing the inside of a jail. Right, Rheena?”

“She said it best,” Rheena answered, without taking a hazel-eyed gaze from Tamika.

“The fact that you’re even here is classless,” Satanya said, her olive skin flushing with color. “But to come at my mother like that—that’s some next level, low level right there.”

Bayyinah, the quiet one of her daughters, nodded. “Indeed. But you don’t know how low we can go. We’ll meet you in the darkness and you’ll never find your way out.”

Samara tried to hold back a laugh. Nothing like being pissed off to bring out that inner hood from one generation back. And her daughters had it in spades.

“He wanted his ashes sprinkled at sea,” Tamika whined, her red lips trembling with emotion. “I promised him that I would.”

Samara swept a gaze across all six of her daughters, shifted to a space right past them and snatched the silver urn from the mantel. She was scaling up one side of winding stairs in a flash. Her daughters, Tamika, and several others right behind her.

She made it to the master bathroom, flung open the door, and dumped the contents of the urn directly into the waiting arms of the porcelain god. Tamika’s screams rent the air, overshadowing the gasps that came from her daughters and the onlookers peering in. A loud flush signaled the second part of the process; followed by another and then another to make sure none of her husband’s remains were circling the bowl. When all was clear, Samara turned toward all of the shocked faces staring back at her and said, “The sewer leads out to Lake Michigan eventually. He’ll just have to go through a lot of shit to get there.”

Tamika screeched and lunged forward, wrapping her hands around Samara’s neck. The movements carried them into the master bedroom and landed them on the bed.

Samara struggled within the woman’s death grip as Ebony and Rheena rushed in to assist. The rest of the sisters kept everyone at bay.

No one saw the hand that slid beneath the fluffy pillows.

Everyone witness the glint of steel reflecting off the last remnants of daylight peering through the windows.

The deafening noise from the first shot caused everyone to freeze.

Then chaos ensued.

* * *

“9-1-1. What’s your emergency?”

“My mother took a shot my father’s mistress.”

There was a pause, then, “You said shot, not killed. Is she still alive?”

“Oh, yes,” Ebony replied calmly with a quick glance at the trembling woman who was struggling to extract herself from Samara’s hold. “She’s still breathing. My mother missed.”

“I’ll send the police,” the dispatcher said and there no mistaking the relief in her voice.

“No, send the coroner instead,” Ebony countered.

“But I thought you said she’s still alive.”

“I said that my mother missed. I won’t.” Then she smiled as she added, “Again.”

After almost ten years apart, Paris, Shai, KiKi, and Reign come together to decide whether F.I.R.E. should remain extinguished or be reignited one last time for their fans. Secrets, lies, addiction, and egos tore them apart. Can their love for music bring them back together?

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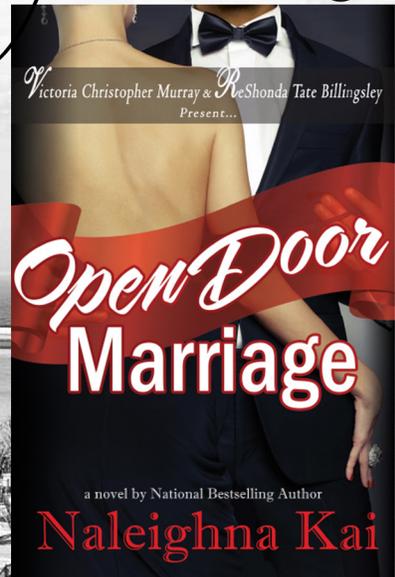
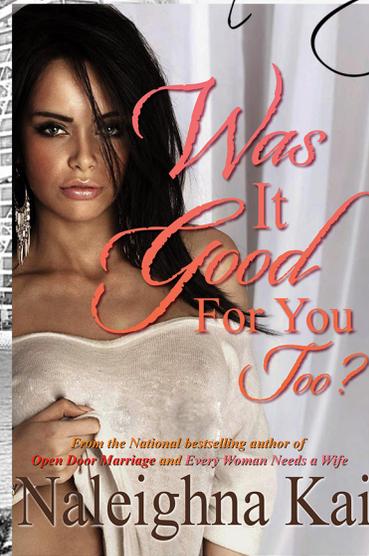
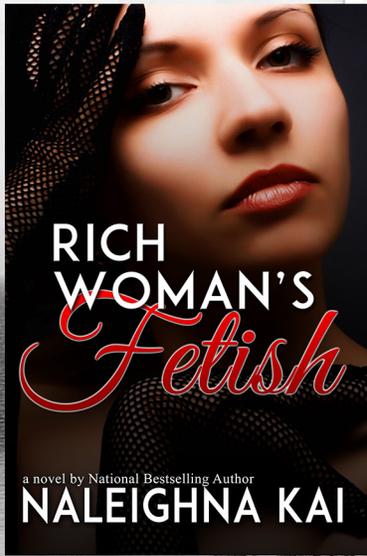
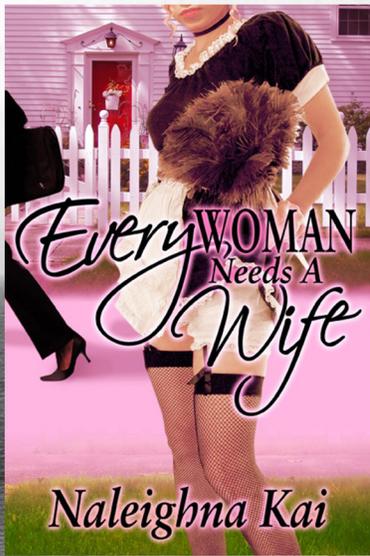
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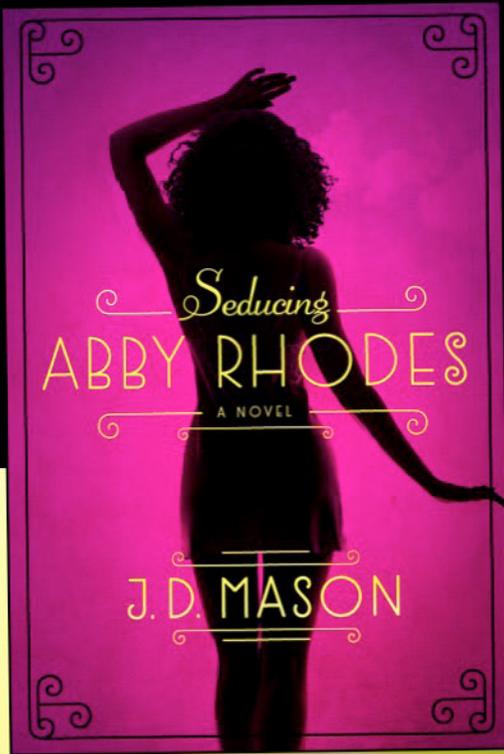
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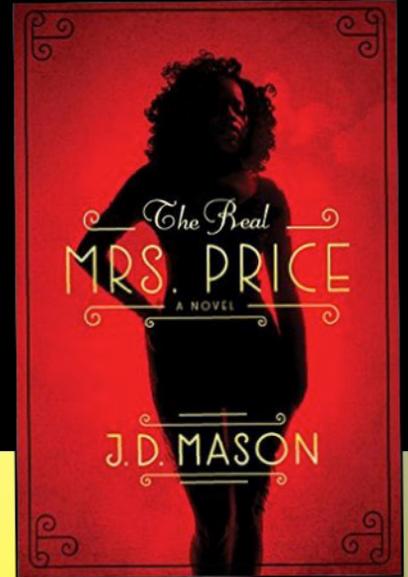
Seducing Abby Rhodes

A man like Jordan has too many secrets, secrets that, if found out, could not only destroy his relationship with this other woman, but that could also cost him the biggest business deal of his life, and possibly, his freedom. Robin is the last person he wants to go up against, and she will stop at nothing to get him back or to make him pay for his betrayal, even if that means unleashing those secrets. The question is, will Jordan let her? Or will his all-consuming obsession with Abby win out.

"Chock full of unexpected twists, turns, secrets, and spirits plus a healthy dose of redemptive love." - Kirkus

“Who’s that?” Abby asked, mesmerized. Her heart pounded like a sledgehammer in her chest.

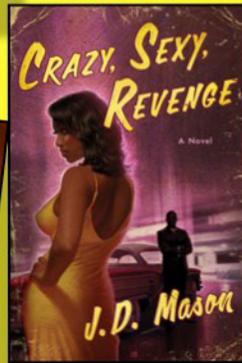
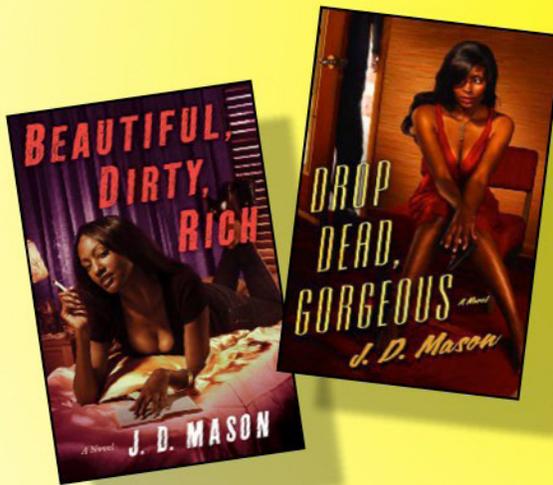
“I have no idea—but the spirits in this house just exhaled, Abby.”



The Real Mrs. Price

Marlowe is no stranger to trouble. An outcast in her own community for being one of those “hoodoo women,” who can curse you or cast you under her beguiling spell, Marlowe is shunned at every turn. Six months ago, a whirlwind romance in Mexico led Marlowe to marry the man she thought she’d spend the rest of her life with. For Marlowe and Eddie, there is no such thing as trouble in paradise. But late one night, when Marlowe witnesses her husband putting the body of a dead man in the trunk of his car, the illusion comes crashing down around her and she knows she has to move fast before the devil comes calling once again.

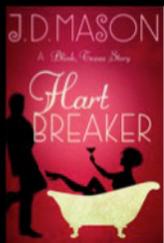
"A heart-pounding and terrifyingly awesome story!" - RT Book Reviews Top Pick



The series where it all began...Beautiful, Dirty, Rich; Drop Dead, Gorgeous, and Crazy, Sexy, Revenge

Desdimona Green has been the name on everyone’s lips in Blink, Texas. Twenty-five years ago, at the age of eighteen, she shot and killed one of the wealthiest men and pillars of the community, oil baron Julian Gatewood. The Gatewood family was considered untouchable, so the whole state of Texas was rocked to its core over Julian’s murder. They were even more shocked to discover that Desi is Julian’s daughter and her mother had been his lover for years. But when Desi gets out of jail and promptly inherits millions from Julian’s estate, everyone knows that there is much more to the story—and Desi Green is the keeper of the Gatewood secrets, including what happened the night Julian died.

And don’t forget to check out the Blink Novellas



Hart Breaker

Farah Hart has made her escape. Running from a violent ex, she finds her way home to Blink, TX. Farrah hopes to lay low at her abandoned childhood home until she can get back on her feet. But when an eviction notice comes in the most dangerously handsome of packages, Farrah might just need someone to lean on after all.

Stone Cole

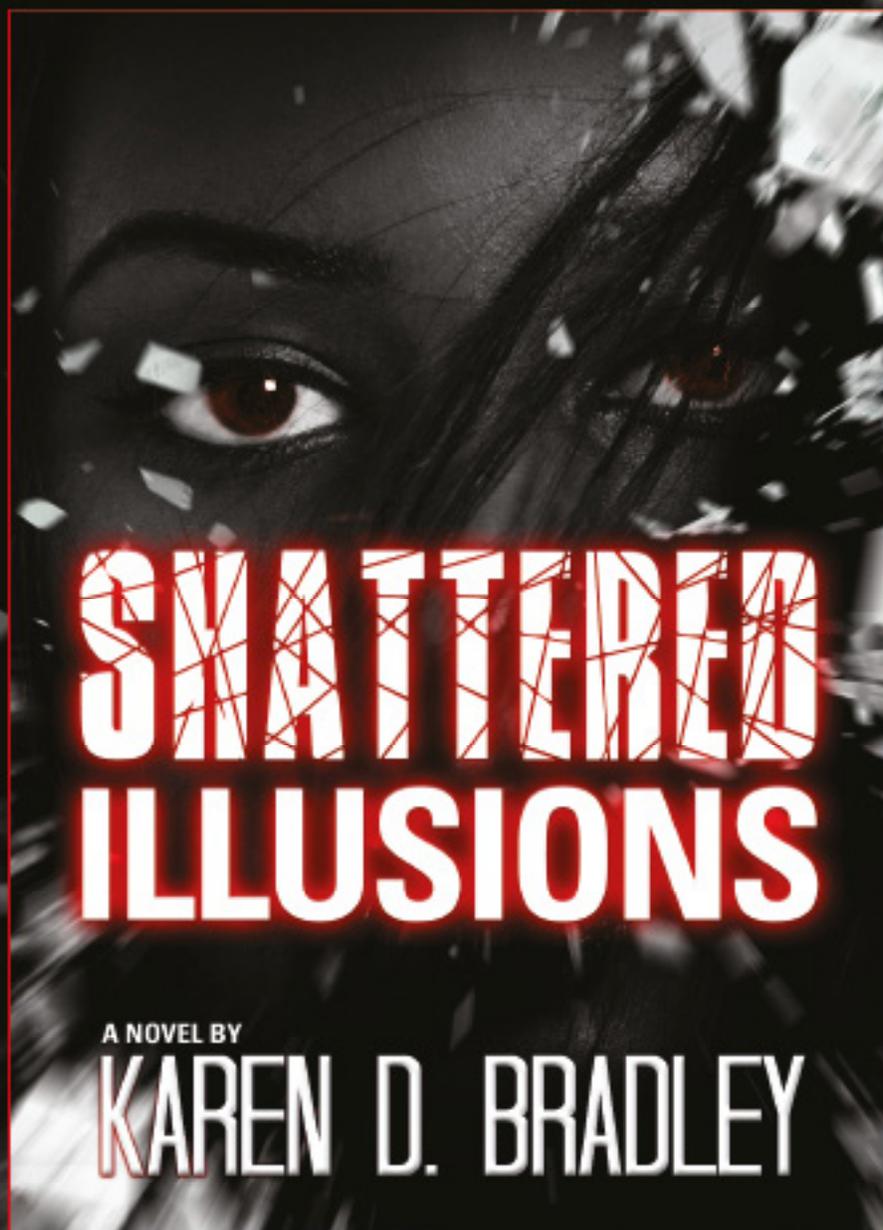
Christina Cole prides herself on her insightful and thorough reporting skills. When she gets an opportunity to interview the recluse and rising star Ellis Brewer—devastatingly good-looking and charming down to every last one of his ex-con fingertips—she soon realizes that she’s getting way more than she bargained for.

Stormy Knight

Omar and Lola both know that, despite being opposites, their attraction is off the charts. But some key players are determined to see a business deal fall apart, and will stop at nothing to keep the wheels in motion, leaving Omar and Lola to fight for what’s right and fight for each other.

IGNORANCE ISN'T ALWAYS BLISS

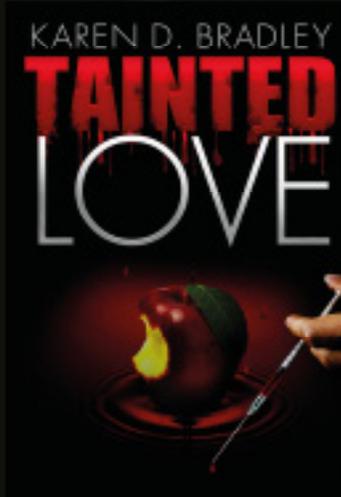
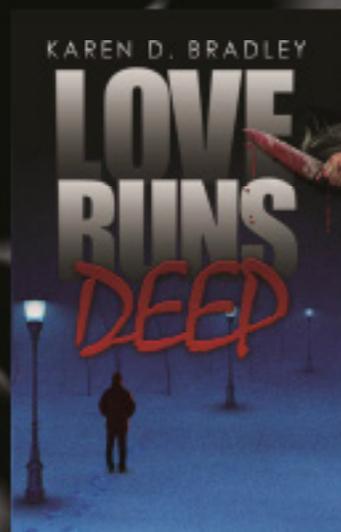
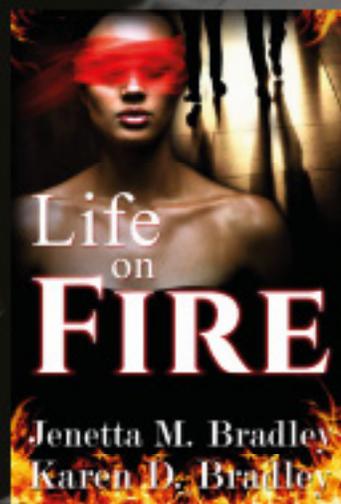
WHAT SHE DOESN'T KNOW JUST MIGHT GET HER KILLED.



Danya Holmes relives her worst nightmare when the man who destroyed her life gets out of prison. The truth as she knows it begins to unravel before her eyes. Every illusion she had about her past and her life will be shattered. She finds herself once again in a fight to save her life. But will she be the one that lives to tell the story?

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2018 LITERARY EVENTS

Victoria Kennedy

excerpt from *Sometimes Love*



He showed up with more flowers and the unwelcome news that he wouldn't be staying long. He had to meet with the dean of the art college who'd recommended him for the board position at the gallery. She hadn't been available for their earlier scheduled meeting and so, our time together would be the casualty.

"I'm sorry, Babe. It really can't be avoided."

I said I understood even though I didn't. And I didn't know how to be that girlfriend who could be spontaneous when needed. I didn't know how to be a girlfriend at all... but I had given my word. I trusted all would be well.

"Something smells great," he said, handing me his jacket while loosening his tie. My disappointment was no match for the joy rising up within me at the sight of him, the nearness, and the smell of him. He had my senses crackling with stimulation.

We spent the next hour sharing dinner, wine and hot stares across the table. The food on my plate could never satisfy the hunger created by his very presence.

"Come closer to me," he asked, beckoning me with the crook of his finger.

He pushed his chair back from the table and turned it around, guiding me onto his lap.

"The meal was delicious. And your home is warm and lovely. But none of that comes anywhere near the feel of you in my hands and the taste of you on my lips."

He cupped my face and held me in the perfect position to ply me with the most thorough kisses, his skilled tongue and knowing lips. Every move of his mouth over mine made me hot in levels of heat I'd never experienced.

And then, I kissed him back. I returned the moves he'd melted me with and took delight in the moans escaping the mouth that started the seduction. He pulled away with a groan.

"If we keep this up, I'll never leave."

That pleased me. "Then don't leave."

"I wish I could stay but this meeting cannot be missed."

The demand for the understanding girlfriend had returned and I was no more pleased about it than before, even less so. Before, I didn't know he would have my nerve endings in an upheaval and desire flowing from every pore. I didn't know his touch could command so much of my emotions. I fought back tears, at the thought of his leaving, knowing he was returning to New York the next day. I pushed myself to respond.

"I understand."

"Be patient. I'm making it easier for us to be together."

If it were possible to smile and sulk, simultaneously, that's probably how I looked. When he left, I felt foolish for falling so hard, so fast. He had me and I didn't want him to let me go.

www.victoriaadamskennedy.com

L. A. Lewis

national bestselling author

excerpt from *Double Down & Dirty*

An electric kind of energy flashed throughout her body. That was certainly a concern. She had learned when and how to play it safe. And Sean was as dangerous as they came. Having been an employee of an upscale escort service, she knew the hard fact that those at the top of the food chain were equally as slimy as those who were willing to do whatever it took to get there.

Jade had shielded herself from unwanted advances—of which there were many. But years of going without a human touch had built up something inside of her that needed to be extinguished. A man like Sean Wright would be a perfect choice, but there was no way she would go there. Being with a man like him came with too many problems.

She steadied her breathing and her voice. “Go ahead.”

“You care to tell me the real reason you don’t want to work with me?”

“Is that why we’re here?” Jade questioned, trying to keep her voice level. “I hope not because my time is valuable, and I don’t need to waste it by entertaining that question.”

“I believe in making the most of an opportunity. If I have a question, I ask. So, do you plan on providing an answer or should I just assume that you don’t have a reason at all?”

Her eyes met his. “I didn’t make it clear the first, second, and third time?”

“You don’t feel it’s the right job for you,” he smirked. “But we both know that’s not it at all.”

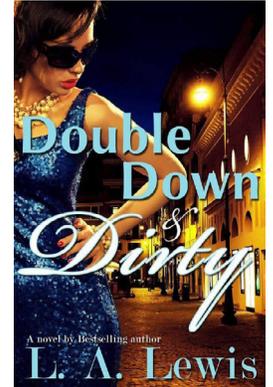
“Okay, then I’ll be honest,” she shot back. “I don’t like the way you do business. I don’t like that money means more to you than people. You’re not the type of person I’m interested in dealing with. Does the truth satisfy you?”

Sean was silent for a few spells, then, “And you came to this conclusion based on what? Because if I recall, you’ve never done business with me.” He closed the distance between them. “So cut the bull and tell me what is it about me that frightens you,” he snapped.

“Nothing frightens me,” she countered. “But I am wise, and wisdom tells me to steer clear of you.” She stepped back and didn’t realize how close she was to the wall.

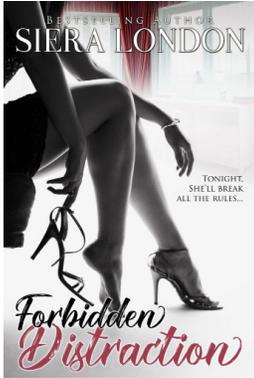
“So that’s it.” He inched closer. “You’re not afraid of doing business with me. What scares you is the fact that we’re very much alike. Isn’t that right? We both know what we want and would risk it all to make it happen. What frightens you the most,” his mouth nearly touched hers, “is knowing what will happen if you let your guard down.” His lips lightly brushed against hers and she trembled with an anticipation so strong she almost reached up and pulled him to her.

Then he abruptly moved away, walked toward the circular staircase, but tossed over his shoulder, “I believe you said there was more for me to see.”



Siera London

excerpt from *Forbidden Distraction*
part of the *Sultry Nights* digital box set



Carson's lips parted, but then he stalled. His open mouth abruptly slammed closed, his eyes focused above Vivianne's head. Heat, intense and stirring, sizzled all over her skin. She knew who had entered the room before he spoke.

"Dr. Sloan, it's come to my attention that we have a problem."

Jared Pierce's gravelly tone washed over her, lapping at every cell in her body, awakening the desire she couldn't suppress when he was around. The sound of his heavy footfalls bounced off every inanimate object in the room before hitting her between the eyeballs.

"Jared," Carson said, his tone infused with professional competency,

"Vivianne and I were discussing her future with the practice."

The hands that were semi-relaxed in her lap, gripped the armrests of her chair. Her eyes flew to Carson's begging him not to mention their conversation. Jared came to stand beside her. His thigh brushed her shoulder, and she shivered. Between her legs, her panties grew damp. He was too close.

Before she could formulate a response, Jared reached across the desk and swiped her transfer request into his large hand. As he processed what she'd initiated, a scowl formed on his face. Slowly, he turned hard eyes on her, the color deep as the chasm she felt open in her gut at his angry stare.

"Did you approve this without my input?"

Though the question was directed at Carson, Vivianne had his rapt attention. She could feel his eyes boring into her.

"No," Carson stated, purposefully avoiding eye contact with her.

"Understood," came Jared's response. Vivianne looked on in horror as he dropped her neatly typed request in the trash.

"Vivianne, I want to see you in my office." When she didn't move, he said. "Now, Dr. Sloan."

In a daze, she came to her feet.

"Carson?" She pleaded.

"Vivianne." The sharp crack of Jared's voice struck her eardrum in time with the thunder clamoring beyond the glass windows. Both shook the foundation, one the building, the other—hers.

Carson looked at her then. "Come back when he's done with you."

"She won't be back," Jared snapped, turning on his heel. The memory of the last time she'd been alone with him in his office surfaced. Oh gosh, she should have worn a padded bra.

* * *

www.sieralondon.com

Nicole Hampton

Glimmer in the Darkness

The road to forgiveness is paved with shards of deceit.

“May I help you?” Shannon’s eyes grazed over the beautiful woman standing in front of her. She took note of the annoyed look on her face, and her defensive posture.

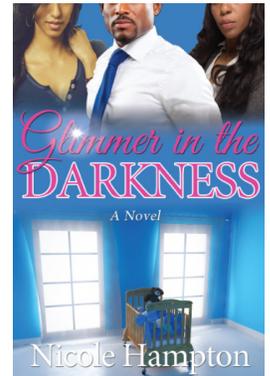
“I am sure you can’t, but I am here anyway.” Vaneetra looked Shannon up and down, smirking at how clueless she was about the fact that her life was about to change. She gave Shannon the once over, noticing her lean legs covered by black leggings, and how her waist did not indicate she had given birth to children. Nevertheless, Vaneetra knew this pathetic version of a housewife could not hold a candle to her, not even under the current circumstances.

Vaneetra turned as if looking around, and set her focus back on Shannon. “You have a nice house. Daniel has good taste...in homes, that is.”

“Do you work for my husband? An uneasiness about this woman rose from the pit of Shannon’s stomach. She sensed she was trouble and would suggest that Daniel fire her.

Vaneetra laughed. “I guess you can call me an assistant. For the past several months, I have been assisting Daniel with some pretty important issues—helping him to stay hard and on his game is a better way to put it.”

“Look, I don’t have time to play word or guessing games with you.” Shannon turned to close the door, but Vaneetra’s next words stopped her dead in her tracks.



www.thenicolehampton.com

Sierra Kay

Excerpt from In the Midst of Fire



They say there is no place like home. Unless your home is in a place so volatile that the devil himself would give it a wide berth and the only direction you're trying to move ... is out.

Hawk's dark brown eyes opened wider than the shades covering the matching lamps on the end tables. "Dad? Really? That's more than fifteen years?"

Giselle's hands curled into fists. "Well, did you know each other before Vegas?" she inquired, her gaze falling to that wedding ring again. "Dad just left on Thursday. I mean, were you drunk? What happened? How can you get married in four days? She doesn't even know—"

Sera looked between the Glens. She shifted her gaze so that it took in each one of the Glens. "What? What don't I know?"

Chase relaxed again and rubbed his hand down Sera's arm. "You know when you're in love."

The twins whipped their heads to stare at their dad as if he had grown another head. "Love!?!"

Chase grimaced and then stood, pulling Sera up beside him. "Yes, love," he confirmed; but there was something in his tone that brought Sera up short. "It was instant and liberating."

Hawk shrugged, extracted his cell from the shirt pocket and looked at the caller ID. "I have to take this."

"Yeah, welcome to the asylum, Sera." Hawk raced out of the room, but yelled back over his shoulder, "I hope you enjoy your stay."

Chase watched his son's retreating back for a moment before shifting his gaze to Giselle, whose solemn expression signaled that something wasn't quite right in the world of everything Glen. "Why don't you whip up something for dinner?" he suggested. "We can get to know each other better."

Giselle nodded. "No problem, Dad. You could do steaks on the grill, and I'll handle the sides. We have some asparagus, maybe a bit of risotto."

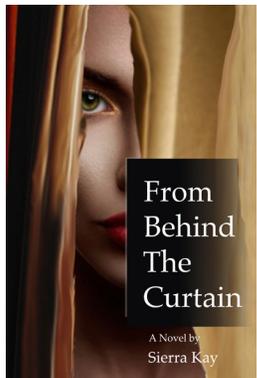
As Giselle rushed from the room as though a burning fire were nipping at her heels, Chase pulled Sera into a hug. "See, that wasn't that bad. Was it?"

Uneasiness settled into the seat of her soul. She angled her head toward the back of the house.

Hawk had the phone to his ear, but he was watching them intently from the upper level of the steps. Giselle peered out from the edge of the dining room.

If she had to sum up their countenance and expressions, it would be—sad.

Sera didn't know anything about the three wives that came in between his first love and the "love" he claimed he felt for her.



www.sierrakay.com

Lisa Watson

excerpt from *Interview with Danger*

“Pierce, what’s going on?”

“That’s exactly what I’d like to know,” he growled. “Have you lost your mind, Sasha? Do you know what you’ve done?”

She stared at him blankly. “I don’t understand. Will you stop beating around the bush and tell me the problem?”

“You are the problem,” he threw back. “You and your stupid book have ruined my life, Sasha...and you’d better believe you’re going to fix it.”

Her mouth dropped open. “I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about.”

“Jacob Toliver.”

Sasha waited, but Pierce didn’t say anything else. Instead, he moved closer until he was crowding her. He folded his arms across his chest and stared at her. Finally, she threw her hands up. “What, are we playing twenty questions?”

“Jacob Toliver,” he repeated.

Sasha pinched the bridge of her nose. “I know who he is. I wrote the book, remember? I’m just wondering what my character has to do with this.”

“He’s me.”

Sasha’s eyebrows rose. “You...you think Jacob...is you?” She started to laugh, then pushed past him to go in to the lounge. “He isn’t you, Pierce.”

He was right on her heels.

“Well, there are some people that disagree with you. In fact, the executives at the sporting goods store that just dropped me as an endorser would beg to differ...and the men’s apparel ad I was going to do and—”

“I don’t understand.”

“Apparently, a few of them read your book and thought your midnight Casanova was me. You just cost me three quarters of a million dollars,” Pierce said between clenched teeth.

Her smile faded. “What?”

“Yeah, that’s what I said. Apparently, they didn’t want a womanizing, strung-out playboy representing their brands. Considering these are family businesses, I can understand why,” he snapped.

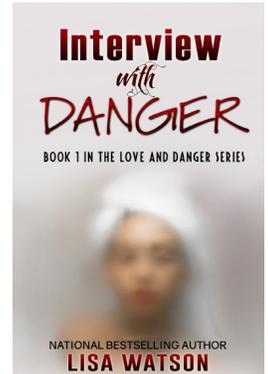
She eyed him from head to toe. “Well, are you?”

His expression turned indignant. “Certainly not.”

“Then there you go.” Sasha threw up her hands in frustration. “Pierce, this is absurd. You could throw a stick and hit thousands of men that fit that same description.”

“You know, your sister tried to say that, too. Obviously, the list is a lot smaller than either of you think,” he said dryly. My image has been damaged, and it’s your fault, Sasha. Do you know how hard I’ve worked to get back to where I was and just like that—”

“Wait, what do you mean back?”

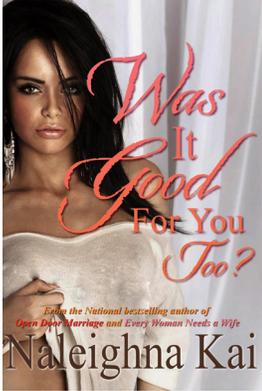


coming
December
2017

Naleighna Kai

national bestselling author

excerpt from *Open Door Marriage*



“You slept with my aunt?” She glared at her fiancé, still desperately trying to come to terms with the information her mother had blasted to everyone at the packed Thanksgiving dinner table. “Seriously? How is that even humanly possible when you didn’t know the woman four hours ago?” Tori shouted.

“It’s not what you think,” Dallas said.

Twelve pairs of eyes were now focused on the not-quite-blissful couple standing at the bottom of the stairs just off from the dining room.

“What did you do?” Tori snapped, glaring up at him. “Trip over the sheets, and your penis somehow landed in a woman nearly twice my age?”

The drumstick in Uncle Bill’s hand paused in midair on its journey to his wide mouth. Cousin Tiny’s fleshy hand flew to her overexposed bosom and came to rest somewhere above her heart. Even Tori’s father’s frozen expression of alarm would have been Three Stooges comical if the situation weren’t so tragic.

Aunt Yoli was the first to recover. “Did they just say what I think they said?”

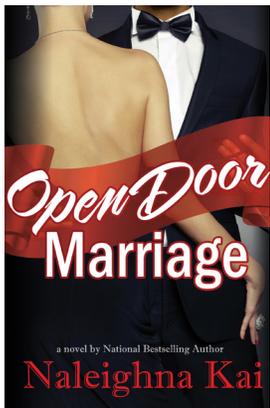
In unison, everyone nodded.

“Girl, shut the front door and run out the back!”

A few bursts of nervous laughter sprang up around the table, but they were not nearly enough to chase away the unease that had flooded the room when Tori stepped into the house. Bernice blurted out that she’d caught Alicia and Dallas together. Alone. In bed. In the nude.

“I didn’t sleep with her,” Dallas said, his voice shaky.

“Hell naw. I know what I saw,” Bernice snapped. She had moved from the dining room table to the end of the staircase, right next to her daughter, poised as if she was ready to go to battle. “She was butt-naked. And he was nut-naked.”



Tori closed her eyes and took deep breaths to calm the emotions that warred within her.

Dallas Avery was the NBA's most valuable player, and a man most women would give their right and left ovary to call their own. Even with his chiseled, handsome face, towering muscular frame and million dollar bank accounts, he was now worth next to nothing in her eyes. Too bad her aching heart didn't get that memo.

"Bernice is lying," Martha said. "That young stud wouldn't pick her over Tori." She shot an appreciative glance toward Dallas, then leaned to her right and whispered loudly in Yoli's direction, "But, girl, he is finer than frog's hair."

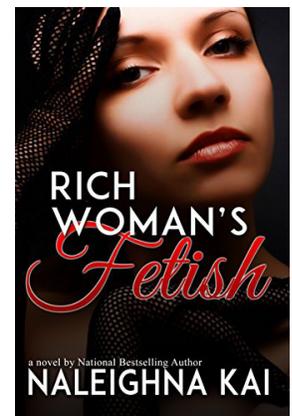
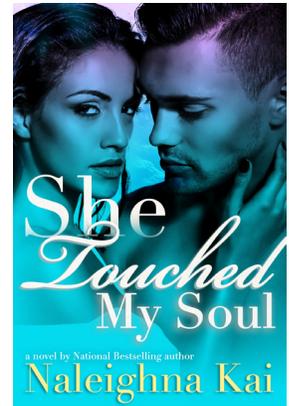
Yoli gave him a lusty once-over. "He's the type of man who can make a woman put a for sale sign on one thigh and an open for business sign on the other. Yes, Lawd!"

Alicia brushed past Dallas and ran out of the front door, oblivious to the fact that she didn't have on enough clothing to protect her from the sub-zero temps of a Chicago winter.

The whole crowd gasped in disbelief as Dallas grabbed his leather coat from the foyer closet. "I'll be right back," he said as he stepped into his Timberlands.

"Are you kidding me?" Tori screamed as he quickly laced up his shoes, then darted toward the door. "My heart is bleeding all over the carpet and you're going after her!"

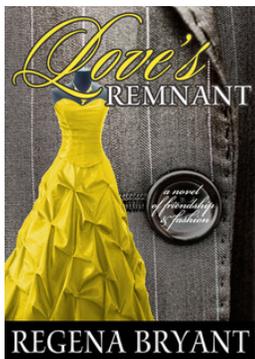
The front door slammed and Tori stood frozen. Bernice's voice snapped her out of a trance. "Girl, I taught you better than that," Bernice yelled, gesturing to the door. "You'd better go get your man."



www.naleighnakai.com

Regena Bryant

excerpt from *Love's Remnant*



Avery Thomas switched the glass statue from hand to hand and waited for Tyler Anderson to answer his door. The thing was heavy. She glanced back at the waiting car. She'd tipped the driver handsomely to make this little detour, but the driver wouldn't wait for long. She pressed the bell again.

Tyler had called several times this week. Their conversations had been very promising. Maybe she should have called. Derrard always said you should never just drop by a man's house unless you are prepared to handle what you might find.

When the door flew open, she stepped back.

"Hey!" Tyler beamed.

She pushed the award toward him so quickly he almost missed it. "I just wanted to show you this. I thought you'd appreciate it."

Tyler grabbed the solid statue just in time. "I appreciate how you look in that dress. D Allen?"

"Of course." She twirled. "Couture. One of the few pieces he designed just for me." She swallowed hard.

"Can you come in?"

Avery smiled. Good to know Tyler wasn't doing anything she couldn't see. Behind him in the dark house smooth jazz floated to the front door. "No, I just stopped by to show you the award. I hope you don't mind. I didn't interrupt anything, did I?"

"No, no, I was just researching details for an investment project." He switched on a hallway light and held the award high to read the inscriptions. "For commitment to education and the Chicago fashion industry." Tyler nodded in agreement. "Well deserved."

Tonight, the Chicago Fashion Foundation had honored Derrard's work and she'd presented the first Derrard Allen Memorial Scholarship. He left money to grant one scholarship to a deserving student, but she'd determined there would be a yearly award in his honor. How she was going to fund the scholarship was a question for another time. She reached out for Tyler to pass back the award. "Sorry to interrupt."

"No," he balanced the award in one hand and reached for her with his other, "please stay. Come in. I'll make you a cup of tea."

Why hadn't she realized sooner what a good brother Tyler was? "I can't. I have a car waiting. As I said, I just stopped by because I wanted to show you Derrard's award."

He looked past her at the waiting limo and his smile dimmed. "Is there anyone waiting for you in that car?"

"Just the driver."

Tyler's grin broadened. "Good. Come in out of the night air. I'll drive you home. I'll just go and tell the driver." Tyler grabbed his wallet from a jacket and shot out of the house in his bare feet.

www.regenabryant.com

Karen D. Bradley

excerpt from *Shattered Illusions*

Gena was getting up when Terry ran by, grabbed her hand, and headed for the stairs. Terry pulled Gena slightly to get her to move her butt. They were not far from the top stair when Gena tripped. Terry turned and caught Gena before she hit the ground, steadying her. The assailant, right on their heels, lunged at them. The force of his body connecting with theirs sent them tumbling down the stairs.

Terry woke up in a daze. Where am I? She remembered. Gena's. Oh no. She tried to sit up too swiftly and got light-headed and had to lie back down. She sat up again, slowly this time. Her head throbbing. She was slightly dizzy. It didn't feel like anything was broken.

Once she looked around, she found the assailant knocked out next to her with Gena face down over part of his chest. Terry felt faint as she stood but she walked over to Gena anyway. She knelt next to Gena then leaned over. Terry shook her ever so slightly and whispered in her ear.

"Gena! Wake up! We need to get out of here before he wakes up. Oh lord, Gena, get up."

Terry was scared to move her. She rested her hand on the floor next to Gena as she checked the pulse in her neck. She exhaled, relieved she was still alive. Terry tried to use the hand on the floor to push up to stand. Her hand slipped a bit. Glancing down, she saw liquid was on the floor, a small pool of blood. "Oh, no! God, no."

Her heart beat wildly against her chest as she ran to the kitchen. She picked up the phone and dialed 9-1-1. The dispatcher answered the phone and Terry started speaking rapidly.

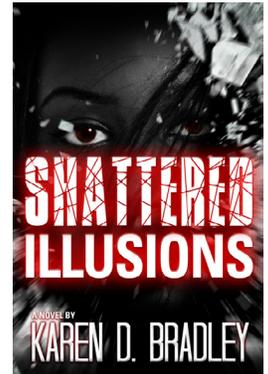
"Miss, we need you to slow down and repeat what you said." The voice was calm and steady.

Terry took a deep breath and clearly stated. "My sister has been stabbed. I need an ambulance at 212 Bell Oak. Oh!" Terry cried out in pain then hit the floor, landing on her knees. With the phone muffled against her, her head fell forward onto her lap as she wrapped one arm around her stomach trying to stop the pain.

"Miss! What's wrong? What's happening?" The dispatcher's voice rose slightly to indicate her concern but not enough to sound alarmed.

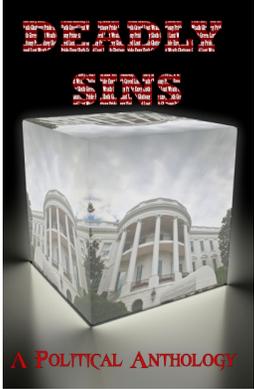
The pain was so severe, Terry struggled to speak. She ignored the dispatcher's questions. She held her head to the side so that her voice wouldn't sound stifled. "I also need the police. The assailant is still in the ..."

Terry looked up and saw the assailant standing above her with his finger on the hook, cutting her off



T. L. James

Excerpt from Deadly Sins



Matthew tapped his fingers in a rhythmic motion as he watched the polls for the upcoming 2012 election. With each uptick in the opponent's ratings, Matthew stomach soured more. He started thinking back to the last election. Heaven had been victorious that time. Although it presented a non-bias stance, its influence proved powerful and the rightful 44th president was elected. It was very important for humanity at large, not just the United States, for President 44 to be in office. Heaven and its influential party were ready to change the world and send a global message that Humanity Cares and Saves.

However, it turned bad when Heaven switched its focus onto Matthew. As he wandered further into the world, he was getting beyond the angels' reach. It was to the point that God would have been the only one to save him. Heaven pulled together to get Matthew back to Heaven, alive and in one piece. It was good for humanity that The General of Heaven's Army was home. However, it left President 44 to fend for himself against the political wolves.

Unfortunately, Matthew didn't want to be saved nor did he want Heaven's attention on him. Heaven worked really hard to beg, persuade and even threatened him to get him back to his rightful position. But he didn't care. He wanted to be with his greatest love – Mallory Haulm. Everything was going fine until Mallory learned of his true identity. Mallory was Death, the Final Fourth Horseman. He was the one that Matthew was supposed to battle in the event Armageddon should start this century. They were lovers and didn't mind the truth until his family got in the way and skewered Mallory's thinking. Then when Hell got involved, his life plans changed. Unfortunately, Mallory's plans didn't include Matthew anymore. Finally, all hell broke loose and Mallory was killed.

His greatest love was dead and Matthew was heartbroken. He wandered around until he found himself in the arms of none other than – Silas Xavier Luxapher or Satan, the ruler of Hell for the 21st century. That was a new low, but it didn't motivate Matthew back to Heaven. In fact, he started to get comfortable when he made himself at home at Silas' residence. Silas vehemently obliged. To make matters worse, he thought he rekindled with his greatest love's soul in a series of female bodies. However, that left a series of murdered bodies. Matthew was digging himself further into a hole that was getting beyond Heaven's reach.

www.tljames.mba