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LITERARY CAFE
MAGAZINE
MOTHER'S DAY ISSUE

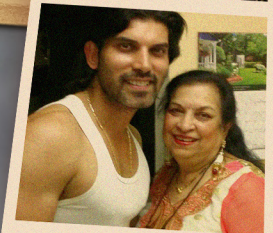
**AUTHORS, REVIEWERS, AND SPONSORS
PAY TRIBUTE TO THEIR MOTHERS**

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RAISED AS ROYALTY
SIERRA KAY

**MOTHERHOOD AND SUBMISSION:
CAN THEY CO-EXIST?**
SHAKIR RASHAAN

MAMA DON'T TAKE NO MESS
SHANNAN HARPER



MAY 2017



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Magazine covers designed by
J. L. Woodson for
Woodson Creative Studio



“I was adopted by my biological mother.”

Yes, you read that right. I was adopted by my biological mother. My mother gave me away at birth because of, from what I learned much later in life, the unfortunate circumstances surrounding my conception. She signed into the hospital as her sister, Rose Morris, then dropped me into her arms right after she left Cook County Hospital. I was raised by that woman for 18 months before another unfortunate incident landed my aunt in prison for a nice little stretch. I ended up back in the home of my biological mother, the one place she never wanted me to be. I swallowed some type of poison and ended up in the hospital for weeks on end. In order to get medical care for me, my biological mother had no choice but to go before a judge, tell the true circumstances surrounding my birth, and he, in turn, made her go through the adoption process to gain unwanted custody of me.

Years ago, I imagined a scene in a book I wrote, where it would be acceptable, in my mind, for my mom to have hated me so much and to physically and emotionally abuse me the way that she had. I wrote a background for one of the characters where the mother in the story had been forced to have the child after a horrific experience. I later published that book and my “other” mother read it. (I had two mothers who were together for 34 years).

Well, my other mother asked, “Who told you?”

“Told me what?” I replied.

“You were never supposed to know.”

That’s when I found out that what I had written as fiction was actually truth. It was then, that I started on the path of forgiving my mother because I realized that she had done the best she could with the circumstances that had been presented to her. Did it erase all of the years of what she had done? No, nothing could do that—the pain of it, the unreasonable reasons for it and the residual effects of worthlessness and being unlovable were firmly implanted in my soul. But what it did was provide a framework of understanding why when so many children don’t have the privilege.

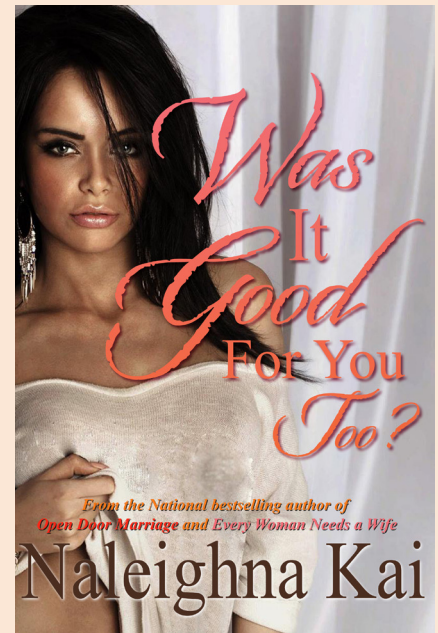
When my nephew posted on my FB page about her passing thirteen years ago; to be honest, I had not remembered until he did. I remember her birthday. I remember her life and the people who adored the church-going, hymn-singing, pie-baking woman. What’s more is that I imagine her pain of having a reminder every day of something that she so wanted to forget. I remember that despite the physical and emotional abuse, that after writing *She Touched My Soul*, I had found a way to love and forgive her.

Writing has given me more than just a platform to tell a story to entertain ... it has given me a method to heal. And that healing is priceless.

This issue of Naleighna Kai’s *Literary Cafe Magazine* is all about the love the authors, editors, contributors, have for their mothers and/or about the joys of being a mother. We wanted the magazine to be something that readers could connect with authors on a more personal level.

Motherhood can be a challenging and rewarding experience and this issue was designed to show exactly how much.

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Cerece Rennie Murphy

Sometimes, I feel bad telling people about my mother. It feels like I'm bragging because, well, I am. My mother is simply the best person I have ever met and there aren't many people who can trace every single good thing in their life back to one person. I can. She is

God's first gift to me. She loved and sheltered me through a difficult home environment, even when I was indifferent and ungrateful for the sacrifices she was making for me. Through the depths of her kindness, she enabled me to have meaningful relationships with each of my five siblings, even though we all have different mothers and grew up in different homes.

She encouraged each of my crazy ambitions, whether it was heading 3,000 miles away from her to go to college or setting off to climb Kilimanjaro by myself. Many of these excursions she didn't like or flat-out disagreed with, but she never withheld her love or support if there was any way she could help make my dreams come true.

When I cried over boys who were not worth my tears, she prayed that God would send me the man that He wanted for me. Now, every time I look at my husband, I remember that he is not the answer to *my* prayers (because I didn't know how to pray for a man like him). He is the fruit of *my mother's* faith in God and love for me.

Because of her prayers, I now have a family, something I never thought I would have, with two beautiful children to raise with all the love that she instilled in me.

Most people get some resistance when they tell someone they want to write a book. My family was the first to encourage my new passion, with my mother right along side me. If you've ever met me at a convention, there's a good chance that my Mom was with me. The more expansive the convention, the longer the days, the more likely that she was there. Wherever she goes, you will not meet my mom without a bookmark or some information about my books. When I am tired and doubtful about my work, she's one of the first people to tell me to keep going.

I could go on and on about her and my gratitude only deepens with age. This legacy of love was passed down to her through the strength and courage of her own mother, my grandmother, Mary. I pray I have this same powerful love within me, so that I can pass it on. If there's just one part of this legacy that I could share with you – one truth – it is that true love is a living thing.

I'll never forget the moment I understood this. My first year of college, my Mom lived in DC and I was across the country in California. Even though we were thousands of miles apart, I could



still hear her voice. I could still feel her love for me expanding from within. As I made decisions, I heard her voice encouraging me down the right path. Even when I felt lonely, I knew that my mother loved me. I knew this because she gave her love so completely that it no longer needed her presence. Her love grew inside me because she cut the ties and gave it to me unconditionally, not for a moment or even a lifetime. She gave it to me forever. I remember the tears in my eyes as I sat alone in my dorm room and realized that I carried her love around with me always. The only thing better than that was God Himself.

My mother taught me the legacy of love, what it truly means to give your love to another person, so that it breathes, grows, and lives outside of you, nourishing those you seek to set free. Like God's love, it is the one gift that lasts forever and I am eternally grateful. I am sure that you, the reader, has had some influence on your life that has made you feel even a semblance of what I've written here. If so, then it should be an honor for you to share that love and pass it on.

Elle Wright



“Against all odds, I made the choice to give You my trust. Now, I rejoice. You answered my prayer not a moment too soon. Your words I embrace, my sin you erased.”

My mother, Regina, had a beautiful voice. The words above are from her favorite song, *That’s When You Blessed Me*. I always thought it was her testimony. It’s been four years since my mother left us. But when I think about her, I always remember that she trusted God. In all

things, no matter how she felt, she trusted Him. In her weakest hours, as her illness made it difficult for her to walk or eat or think, I could hear her praying to God, telling Him that she trusted Him. She always encouraged me to do the same. This is the one piece of advice I carry with me from her always.

During my darkest moments, I can almost hear her whispering, “I trust You, Lord.” There is not an hour that goes by that I don’t think of her. My mother. She taught me the importance of saying what I mean, that laughter is the best medicine, that there is joy in pain, and that one should never leave the house looking like a “tack head”

Although, she’s not here with me physically, I’m thankful that I had a wonderful, beautiful, funny, intelligent, real, sweet, dependable, faithful, God-fearing mother! She meant the world to me. She inspired me to dream. I’m grateful for her, I miss her, and I love her.



Being a mother to three funny, intelligent, persistent children has been my most rewarding experience. Everyday they inspire me to do better, be better.

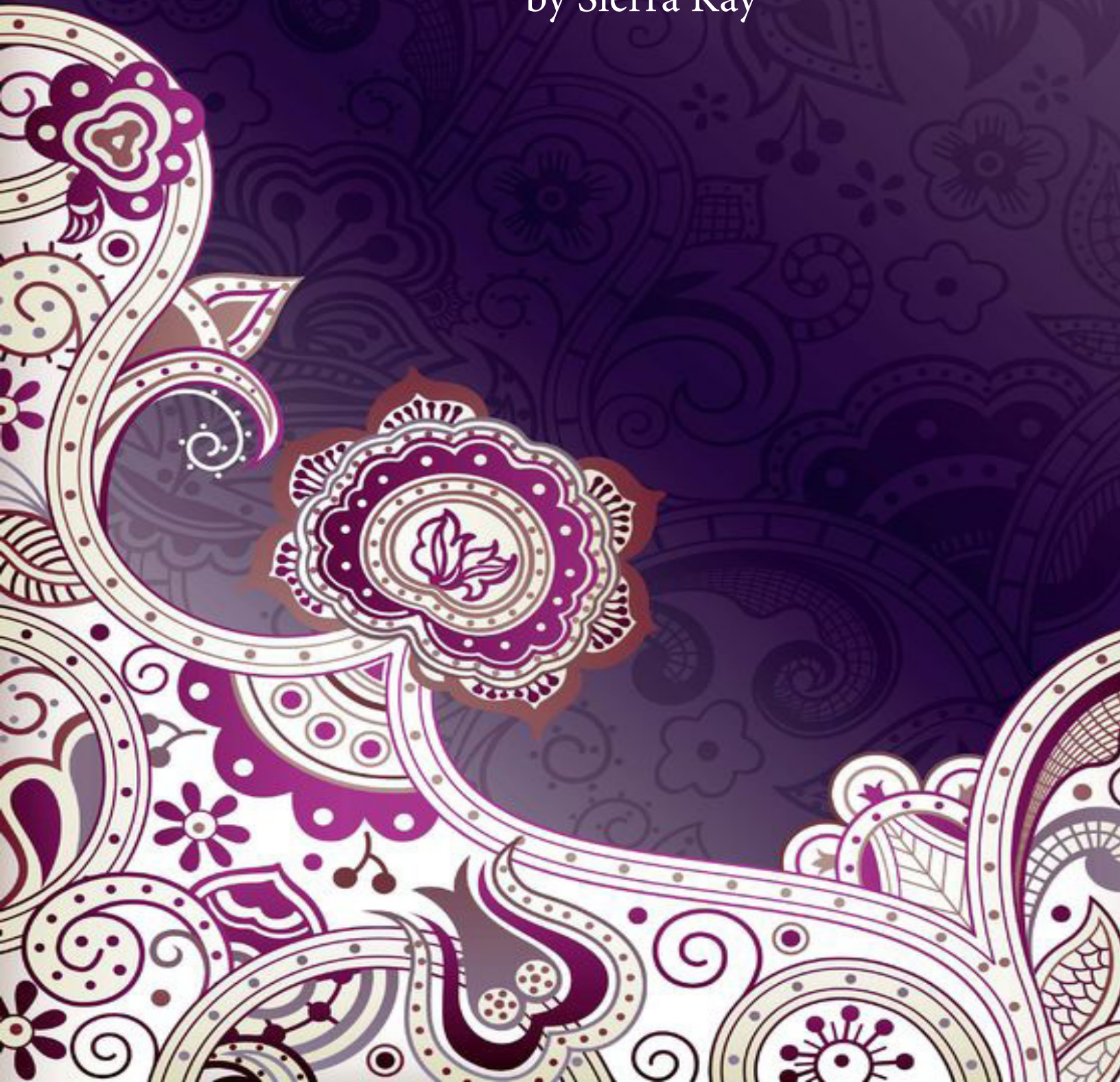
I never thought I'd have children because being a mother seemed daunting. When I found out I was pregnant with my daughter, I was elated. My pregnancy wasn't the best experience but I couldn't wait to meet her. It was a hard labor, but I finally got to hold my "Deuce". Unfortunately, my difficult pregnancy and labor was eclipsed by a traumatic event. Two days after my release from the hospital, I suffered a stroke and lost my sight. I didn't think I would ever see my baby girl again. But God...

It was God's Grace and Mercy that allowed me a second chance at life. Eventually, my sight came back. I'm thankful for every day I can see my children, watch them grow into wonderful members of society and beautiful young adults. They are the reason I keep pushing, the reason I make myself go when I want to stay. My heart smiles when I think of the blessing they are to me. Motherhood is a gift!

Happy Mother's Day to all.

Raised as Royalty

by Sierra Kay



My parents raised us under the steady and proud gaze of the great kings and queens of Africa. That familiar poster series adorned the walls of our family room with a haughty expression.

My young eyes were captivated by these images for a couple of reasons. One, I was unsure of how their prominent place in our home was approved by my stricter than average parents. Let me explain. I was raised in a household that was dry like burnt toast. No smoking. No drinking. Not ever.

The worst whooping I remember one brother receiving was when he tried to smuggle a 40 ounce into the house. Hopefully, his decision-making skills have improved since then. However, the memory seared into my mind and all I did was hide, hoping to avoid whooping transference.

Yes, that's a thing. It's when your parents are so pissed that even a minor infraction by a different sibling can result in the same punishment for the others. I never experienced it, but as a child I felt the possibility. And sometimes, you must listen to your instincts to survive.

So these posters that were sponsored by Budweiser with their logo clearly imprinted in the bottom right corner confused me. Normally, that red logo flashed like a cease and desist beacon. Like, the way my mom used to say the R rating on a movie stood for "Remove Yourself." They weren't supposed to exist



in my house. So, their placement on the wall gave testimony to their relevance in the narrative of my life.

The second reason was that African Americans weren't portrayed as royalty on television. Even though our mother let us watch the Ten Commandments, she side-eyed Elizabeth Taylor the whole time as she tried to pass as Cleopatra. Clearly, Elizabeth Taylor did not look like the kings and queens on my wall.

Our history didn't start at slavery. It didn't matter whether or not the roots of our family tree could be directly traced back to one individual adorning the wall the way the others trace their families back to the Mayflower. My mother descended from greatness and held herself to a certain level. My father worked two jobs to support the family. However, everyone in our neighborhood knew someone selling food stamps to help ends meet. When someone tried to hip my mom to that hustle, she turned up her nose at it. Once a neighbor shared how my

mom could clothe us cheaper if she shopped at a second-hand store. You can imagine “the look”. Her response included, “Someone could have died in those clothes.” We probably would have had one outfit that we would have had to wash by hand in the bathroom sink every night before the potential of a dead person’s clothes being draped over any one of her children. To be clear, she did believe in hand-me-downs. As the youngest, I can attest to that. She did draw the line at the gently used clothing of undisclosed origin, though.

When it came to grades, my parents demanded the best. However, my dad worked; my mom enforced. If my dad had to enforce, well let’s just say thankfully all my brothers made it to adulthood. Yay them. According to Mom, a “C” on a report card meant you “can” do better. So when a “C” in Algebra became part of my experience, my mom found a tutor. Unfortunately, said tutor lived in an area infamously called Terror Town. After school, I hopped on my bike and rode to the tutor’s house, hoping that none of the horrors that had befallen others would fall on me. Of course, if I didn’t want to ride my bike after school through Terror Town to see the tutor, I shouldn’t come home with Cs on a report card, right? Looking

back, that may have been the last time I received a C in Math. Well played, Mom.

As I made my own way into the corporate world, I’ve lived two distinct experiences. I’ve been given the opportunity to excel as well as been stifled and smothered with a smile. In truth, I’ve been thrown under the bus so often I could probably rebuild the engine. However, I’ve also been lauded as an example for others to follow. You’d think there were two different people living in the same body.

The expectations bequeathed by the great kings and queens of Africa and their descendant, my mom, don’t change. They don’t suffer excuses. They neither have the patience nor the tolerance. You didn’t get the throne by politely asking for it. Sometimes you’re given your crown by the nature of your birth and other times you earn it. Either way, you always have to defend it.

I wouldn’t be a writer if I didn’t believe that there are no walls built high, nor strong enough, to limit my potential. Words that people tell me about who I am and what I can do rarely penetrate the shell. If I’m not great today, then that’s on me because I “can” do better. No need for another ride through Terror Town to figure that out.

So when the world tries to dictate who I am, I refuse to internalize their image because the great kings and queens of

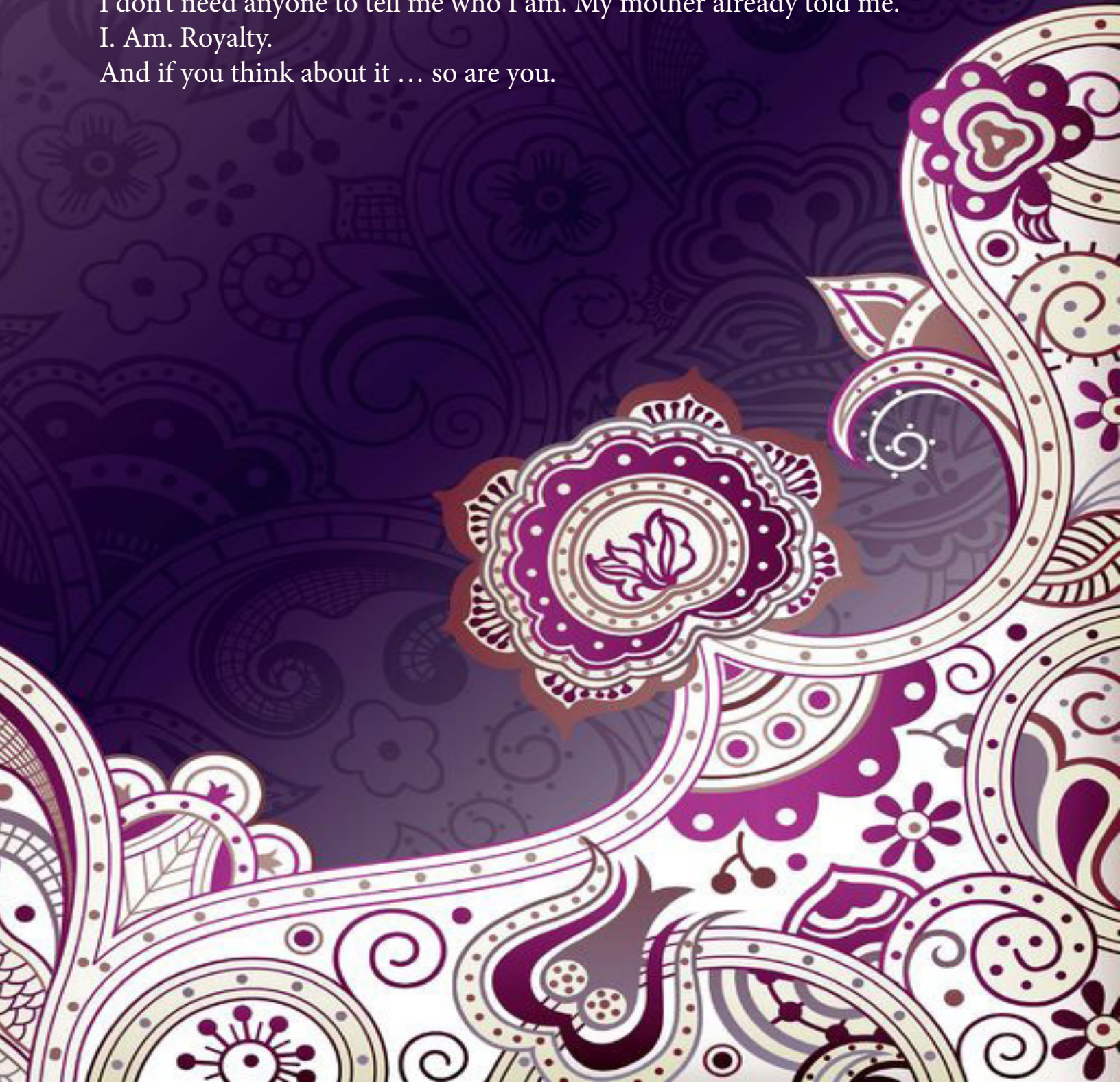
Africa are inscribed in my eyes, filtering my image of myself. Sometimes these lessons get buried in the minutia of everyday and the influences thrown at me constantly by the world in which I live. However, my lessons can't stay submerged. They rise like a river after a hard rain--and they are as formidable as I am.

Obstacles are a part of life. But guess what? So is success. You and I don't need anyone's permission to be great. We just need to continually tap into the heritage that lies deep within. The heritage exemplified by the great kings and queens of Africa and my mom--and quite possibly your mother as well.

I don't need anyone to tell me who I am. My mother already told me.

I. Am. Royalty.

And if you think about it ... so are you.





Janine A. Ingram

When a child is born, a mother is also born.

“The mother is the gateway of all human life. When the mother is honored and respected she becomes the channel of power, creativity, beauty, which means joy reigns on earth...”

In the movie “Malcolm X”, Malcolm told his wife, Betty, “That a nation can rise no higher than its woman.” Why? “Because the woman is the first teacher...”

Years ago, I went to a retreat for woman and we learned to become acquainted with our limitless and immeasurable value so that we can realize our true potential and rise to our proper place as the mother of civilization. The main thing that I took away was the sentiment: when you teach a woman, you teach a nation. The “Womb” is the workshop of God and that the “Mother” is the Divine Self of God.

Those two thoughts left me feeling as though there was something delightful in being a mother or maybe even pleasurable in being a woman when many of my life experiences had not reinforced that truth. I also realized that at that point that I had never embodied the fullness of being a mother.

I remember feeling very different as a woman when my first daughter was born. On the other hand, I also kind of “winged” the whole process. My body transformed and it seemed as though my soul had been turned upside down. This feeling of an all-consuming unconditional love came over me. I felt that was the closest to love I would ever feel. My heart sang, yet, I did not understand my influence and the impact I would make on these lives I had given birth to. All the unhealed spaces in my heart, mind, and soul that I needed to honor and send love into, were the furthest thoughts from my mind. I didn’t understand the magic of the healing presence of a true Divine Mother. As I honor the Divine Mother today and every day, I am so grateful that I now understand and walk in this truth.

There is an unspeakable power in being a mother. There is even more power in being an awakened mother who has done the work to heal her own wounds so they won’t carry to the child within and even further when that child comes into the world. Healing the wounds of my mind, the wounds of my heart, and the wounds of my womb became of the utmost importance. It is something that I encourage in others no matter what stage of motherhood they are in. That Divine Mother energy is our power; it provides the focus, dedication, purpose, determination to

live the kind of life that inspires others and especially the children who are watching and learning from us. When we harness our energy, we are confident, clear, and bring one-hundred percent of ourselves to every aspect of our lives.

This element is what provides our creative flow, unconditional love, pleasure, passion, and wisdom. When we, as women, claim our Divine Mother energy, we live in joyful self-acceptance, self-respect, and listen to our innermost knowing. We become the walking embodiment of love and that heals everything and everyone around us just by being our Divine Self.

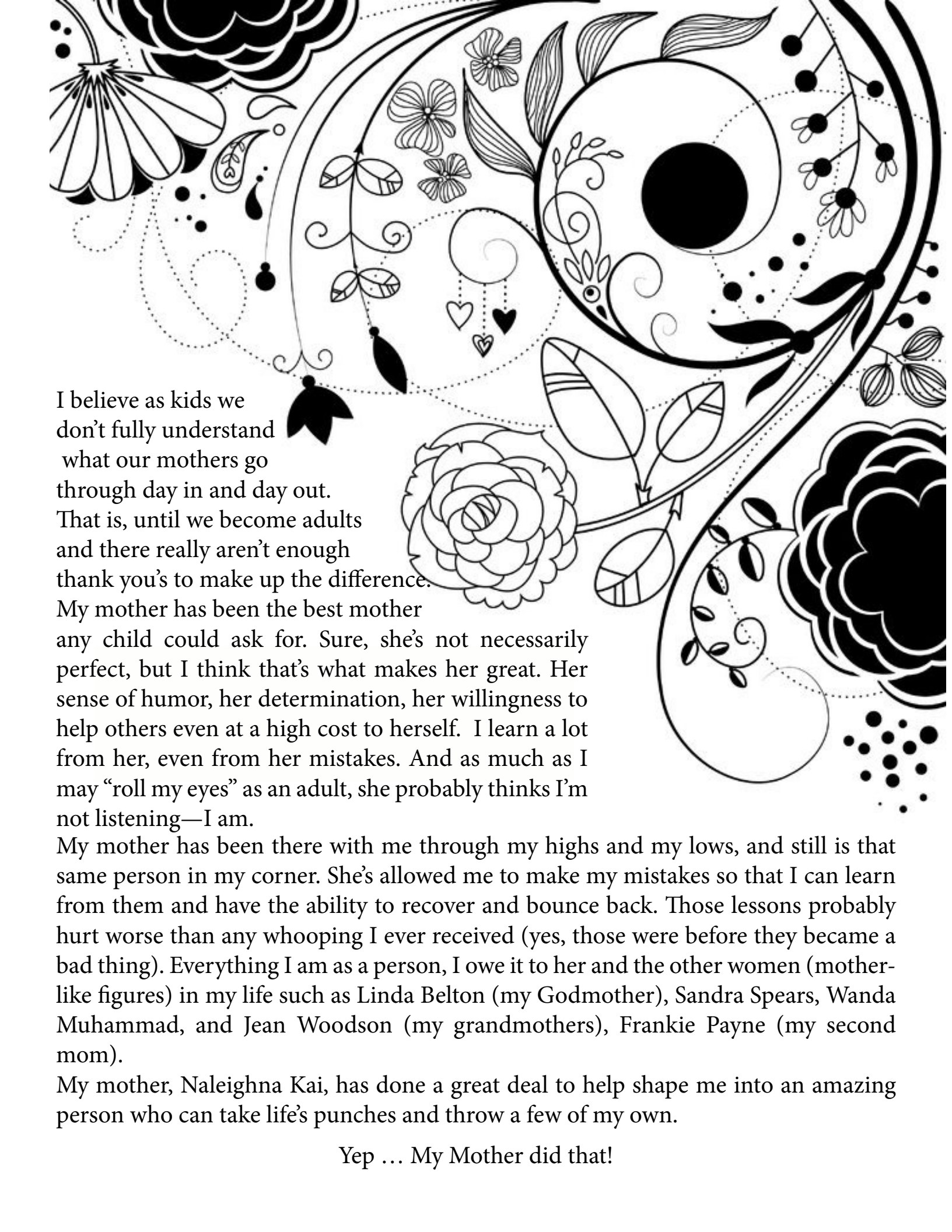
Anastasia McAdoo, I am grateful for you allowing your body to be the vehicle that brought me to the earth; the Divine Spirit who created me; the essence of me that magnifies the energy of love. I am because you were.

Today I dedicate this article to the Divine Mother energy in you. Thank you, mom. I love you.



I. Am. Superwoman's Child.

by J. L. Woodson



I believe as kids we don't fully understand what our mothers go through day in and day out. That is, until we become adults and there really aren't enough thank you's to make up the difference.

My mother has been the best mother any child could ask for. Sure, she's not necessarily perfect, but I think that's what makes her great. Her sense of humor, her determination, her willingness to help others even at a high cost to herself. I learn a lot from her, even from her mistakes. And as much as I may "roll my eyes" as an adult, she probably thinks I'm not listening—I am.

My mother has been there with me through my highs and my lows, and still is that same person in my corner. She's allowed me to make my mistakes so that I can learn from them and have the ability to recover and bounce back. Those lessons probably hurt worse than any whooping I ever received (yes, those were before they became a bad thing). Everything I am as a person, I owe it to her and the other women (mother-like figures) in my life such as Linda Belton (my Godmother), Sandra Spears, Wanda Muhammad, and Jean Woodson (my grandmothers), Frankie Payne (my second mom).

My mother, Naleighna Kai, has done a great deal to help shape me into an amazing person who can take life's punches and throw a few of my own.

Yep ... My Mother did that!

London St. Charles



London St. Charles is pictured with her mother, Marva

Mom, you know you're a rock star in my world, and I celebrate you every day. God makes no mistakes, and I am blessed He chose you to be my mother. Thank you for being the person you are. I tell you that all the time because it's true. Everything I am is because of you. My heart, my spirit, my silliness, my ability to understand people, and to forgive, you instilled those traits in me and the way I live my life is a reflection of the woman you are and the person you raised me to be. You taught me to work hard and to go after what I want. Your infinite support and belief in my dreams have no limits. Our friendship (I'm tearing up right now) is one of a kind.

I remember when you retired and I made the first drive alone to work. A piece of me was missing and the fact that you weren't riding shotgun felt weird. So I filled that void by calling you every morning, and we still journeyed from the south side to the north side together. We talk every day for hours at a time, and the love and laughter is endless and something I look forward to. You are my very best friend and the most trusted confidant a woman could ever have. My whole being loves you--today, tomorrow, always and forever. d forever.



London with Sierra and Carrington

My heart beats outside of my chest when I look at my beautiful daughters. I'm filled with an indescribable emotion when they wrap their arms around me and say, "I love you, mommy" or the easiness of the jokes and laughter. That proud feeling when they accomplish a hard task and realize that they did something that they thought they'd never be able to do. The

"Ah-ha" moment when they realize something I said actually matters when it comes to their friends, teachers, or a choice they made. Sometimes that epiphany comes at a greater cost, and that's when my heart crumbles.

One of the downfalls of being a mother is watching your children make mistakes when they don't listen to reason. As a mom, I know better, but they don't want to hear about my experiences (we've all been there, right? We know better than the grown-up). They don't think mothers can relate to what's going on in their lives. Sometimes they have to crash and burn before the lessons and values instilled in them become real. As a mother, that's one of the hardest things to sit back and watch. We, as parents, can only hope that the the downfalls will help build their character in the long run as they learn from experiences, whether they're good, bad or ugly. One thing is for certain, I'm not the only mother who feels that no matter what, I'll be there to guide them every step of the way.



Mama Don't Take No Mess

It's hard to put into words what my mother means to me. My mother grew up on the south side of Chicago in the Englewood area during the 50's and 60's, so it goes without saying that she didn't take no mess. Imagine my surprise when she told me how they used to put razors in their hair in case of a fight.

It doesn't matter that her children grew up in Kankakee surrounded by cornfields that were so different from the urban upbringing she had, she said what she meant and meant what she said and we'd better take heed.

My siblings and I used to think our mother had psychic powers. How else did she always show up at school when we were acting up or at a place she told us not to go to? I used to be a talkative child, always running off at the mouth. One day I was cutting the fool, giving the teacher a hard time. Guess who walks in? And guess who never gave a teacher a hard time after that.

I had always been a child who was addicted to sweets. So on my way home from school, I would stop at a convenience store before going home and my mom told me to stop it. I thought she would never find out. Until one day I walked in, and guess who was there waiting for me to stroll my happy little sweet-tooth-having behind? My mom with the miracle baby, Matthew, my brother. I almost passed out.

My mom was a phenomenal example of a biblical wife. When she said those vows "For Better or Worse, In Sickness and Health", she meant them.

She took care of our father for 41½ years until he was called home a few months ago. She set the example and the bar extremely high. Truthfully, I know that kind of marriage life is not in my future, because after seeing what she went through, I wouldn't be able to live up to that example, and I'm all right with it.

She was not a do what I say, not as I do kind of parent. She led by example. We were told if we saw her do or say, then we could, too. My mom worked two jobs to make sure that not only did we have everything that we needed, but also to ensure each of us went to college and received a bachelor's degree.

It wasn't all work. I remember her taking us to the library on a weekly basis. Of course that has always been my favorite place, even today. Those visits fostered my love for the written word.

One of my favorite stories she would tell when I was growing up; the one

where she was in labor with me. She was mad at my father, because he wasn't there when labor began. And that's what she reiterates. He wasn't there, and she was mad. She also talked about how her and my grandfather were nervous, because there were slight complications, and a great aunt had died while in labor years before. Thankfully, everything turned out just fine (well, probably not for my father because remember she was mad—but she didn't tell us *that* part of the story).

And don't let her and her mother get together. You want to talk about a hilarious, hot, funny mess? Never rule out some of the shenanigans that our elders can get into. Nobody knows how to cuss someone out without using curse words like my momma (Telemarketers beware).

I am so grateful and blessed to still have her in my life. She will always be my mom, and I will always be her baby girl.

written by

Shannan Harper



Two Mothers

(and I finally love them both the same) . . .

I was raised by two women who were together for over thirty years. In the editor's note I gave a brief history surrounding my birth. My "new" mother raised me for eighteen months, then made an unfortunate mistake that earned her a trip to prison. What a family, right? Then my bio mom had to adopt me when my "new" mother was away.

But here is where things became interesting. She had taken on a female lover at the time. When I first came to the apartment in the Robert Taylor Homes, a project on the South Side of Chicago, I was told that I went directly to my mother's lover, crawled into her lap and went to sleep. That woman became my "true mother".

My biological mother had been through a great deal, and the way I was conceived added insult to life's already plentiful set of injuries. She was bitter, angered at having to raise the very child she wanted nothing to do with. At one time, in writing a novel, titled *She Touched My Soul*, and giving the character a little of my background and her experience with her mother, I told God that if

written by

Naleighna Kai

a certain set of things happened to her which made her hate me so much, then I would be able to forgive her. It was all fiction, right? Unknown to me at the time, some of the scenes I created in the novel actually happened in real life. So I had no choice but to keep my word and work on doing what it took to forgive my mother.

Evidently, there were some life lessons I was supposed to learn from the entire scenario, because as you can imagine the physical and emotional abuse was substantial. The only thing that came between us was my true mother, who stayed in their emotionally abusive relationship far longer than was practical. All because she felt the need to protect me.

Once, she did try to leave, but was immediately compelled to return because I had endured a horrific ordeal at the hands of my father. That was the summer I left and first ran to my aunt, (my “first” mother/aunt who had served her sentence and was back in Chicago). I overheard a conversation taking place between my aunt and her brother making an arrangement for him to come to her house every week to have sex with me; a scene that became something I wrote about in *Was it Good For You Too?* I didn’t stick around to find out the end result, I fled to what I thought was the safety of my father’s home.

Unfortunately, that didn’t go well.

Overall, when I returned to my childhood home, my true mother was there and I didn’t tell what happened at my father’s house. I had the common sense to know that she would’ve ended up in jail. I think she had some idea, but it was nowhere near a normal imagination would take anyone. What my true mother did was to take measures to ensure that I was safe from my biological mother’s anger. What she did was to make sure that I would not shut down as a person, as a female, as a human being. She did things to make sure that I would be able to navigate life’s challenges without being consumed by any of the negative filters that overshadowed my life. There is more, but I chose to put it in fiction because my son told me at 15-years old, “Mom, you can’t put your entire story in one book. It brings the reader down so low they can’t get back up again.” He was so right. Now, there’s a splinter of my soul and the soul of the females of my family line in every novel that I’ve ever written:

She Touched My Soul is my healing story and one of forgiveness.

The Pleasure’s All Mine is about my background, my family drama, and my relationship with my son.

Rich Woman’s Fetish has snippets of my sister’s experience.

Was it Good For You Too? covers that unfortunate night I overheard that conversation between my mother’s sister and brother.

Slaves of Heaven has a great deal of what I experienced by my uncle's hand

Open Door Marriage is a nod to the older woman/younger man relationship with the first man I've ever loved.

My Time in the Sun is a blend of my sister and my niece's experiences (who years apart were both victims of child sex trafficking and became teenage prostitutes). It also details my struggles with believing in God, the recent family drama surrounding a funeral I didn't know anything about, and the tribute to the same man who is written about in *Open Door Marriage*, *Rich Woman's Fetish*, and *Slaves of Heaven*. Same love. Different experiences.

Now let's take stock of things. That woman, who I call my true mother, was already put in place to help me long before I crossed the threshold and crawled in her lap. I am more like her in my thinking, the way I keep house, and the way that I'm always open and receptive to the beauty of what life has to show me. The Creator knew that I had to go through the tough lessons, but also knew that there had to be a softer, nurturing element nearby to balance things out so that I could become the person, the woman that I am; the woman that I am evolving into. The woman that I am learning to love.

Who knew that things could look really bad in the beginning, but are all part of the Master Game Plan? If things came without walking that thin line between pain and pleasure, fire and ice, seeming failure and resounding success—we wouldn't become the spiritual representation of the best The Creator has to offer.

Ask me how I know.



LaShaunda Hoffman

My mom, Brenda Turner, introduced me to the world of books when she read to me as a child. I would later go on to sneak her Sidney Shelton and Jackie Collins books to read in the bathroom.

When I became an adult, we became book buddies attending literary events together having fun meeting our favorite authors. It was such a blessing to share my passion for books with my mom. I miss having conversations about books with her.

I'm thankful that I can pass on my love of books to my children and they enjoy reading as much as I do. My mother's reading legacy lives on in her grandchildren.

LaShaunda C. Hoffman took her love for books and successfully created SORMAG Digital, an award winning online magazine for readers and writers of multi-cultural literature. Her mission in life is to introduce as many books as she can to readers. <http://bit.ly/LCHWRITER>

*If you would like more tips on how to build relationships with readers. Check out her book, *Building Online Relationships – One Reader At A Time* and become the social butterfly you were meant to be.*



Vikkas Bhardwaj

What can I say about my Mumma? (Others might call her Mom, Momma, Mama, Mema, but in my culture, it's Mumma). There aren't enough words to describe her beauty, inner strength, and patience which so many of us lack today.



Bollywood Actor and International Model Vikkas Bhardwaj is pictured with his mother, Devi Bhardwaj

www.vikkaszone.com

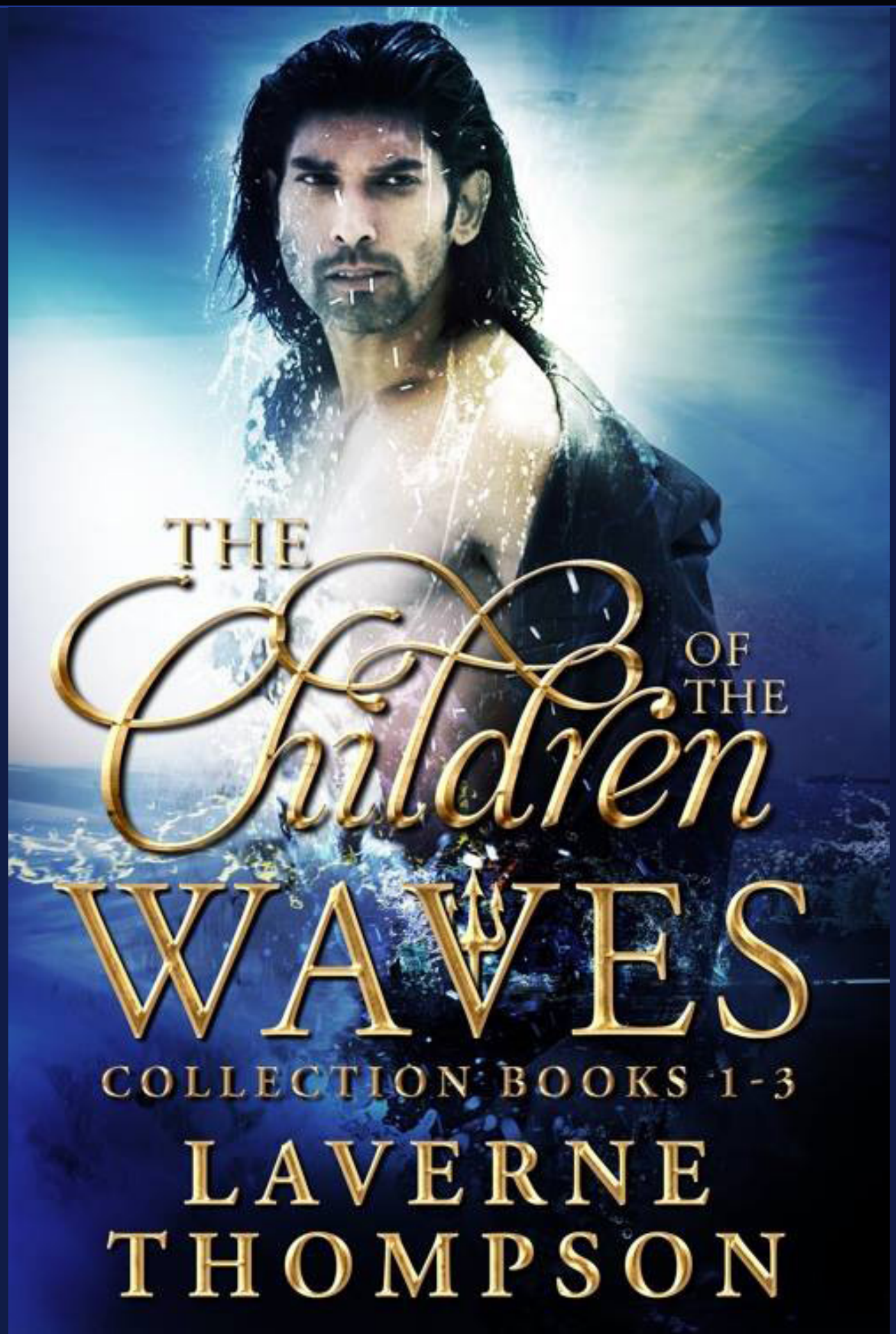
I remember growing up, if someone came to our house from a long distance trip and would arrive around 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, my Mumma would wake up and make them a meal from scratch, all fresh foods—not canned, not leftovers. She says a guest is like god coming to visit. No matter if she was sleepy or exhausted from her day, she would serve them with a smile and pure warmth and embrace them. Nowadays, if someone comes at two in the afternoon (especially without calling), the first thing is “What the heck are you doing here?” And when it comes to feeding them? The reply would be, “Why don't you grab something from a fast food restaurant” That's the difference in what I've seen from my Mumma—extended herself and not resenting a person's presence because there will come a time that the person may not be here on earth.

It is said, even in the scriptures that if you want to see Heaven, to look under a mother's feet.” I have washed my mother's feet as part of my culture and it is a sign of respect and care for one who is so important in my life. A mother's feet is the seat of understanding; those feet have taken her to places and through experiences that have given her wisdom. She has stood her ground on things when it comes to family and friends. Everyone benefits from a mother's love and especially the wisdom that will carry her children and her children's children through a lifetime of pain, joy, and things that happen in between.

Mumma is a warrior and a survivor. There is no one with more kindness that shines from her gentle eyes and the soft timbre of her voice. She will go hungry in order to feed her family first. It is a rare quality that I wish this generation would understand—that giving of one's self is not meant to be seen as losing something. Her generation was giving and I am certain that seeing how today's generation tends to be more into “self”, single pursuits, and don't embrace family and foundation, it makes a mother's heart weep.

Mumma is a rare jewel who tries to ensure that we, her children, know that we are precious gems and that we, even if others do not, should embrace the qualities that she holds dear. Caring, compassion, kindness and doing things for others is what she preaches and practices. Even if someone does something to hurt my parents, my mother understands that Karma will take care of them and the situation. Let them be. Forgive them. Honestly, this is something I still have yet to learn and embrace because I'm from the new school. If someone does the things that I've seen happen to my parents? Well, let's just say, “let them be” and “forgive them” isn't the first thing that comes to my mind. But I am trying.

What can I say except my mother divine and that aspect of her nature is captured in her name, Devi, which in Hindi means a goddess.



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Sea Bride

For 200 some years Xavior, a child of the waves, has searched the seven depths for his bride only to find her on land. How could a landwalker be his Queen, the one destined to stop the wars among the sea tribes? But one touch and he knew he'd defy Poseidon himself to make her his.

Sea Storm

She was lying to him. Zek knew the woman in his house, in his arms was the bride he'd searched for all of his existence. But as a son of Poseidon nothing and no one would stop him from claiming that which was his.

Sea Witch

Aaron is a Child of the Waves and he's searched for his bride for over a hundred years. Always seeking never finding. Then when he finally does, he's got a choice: claim her and risk the destruction of his people, or let her go and risk the destruction of his soul.

Due to the mature subject matter and violent content suitable for 18+

cover design: Fiona Jade

cover model: Vikkas Bhardwaj

Marissa Montielh

Advice: "It's not what you do, it's the way you do it!"



My mother "did it" was with class. I always called her the class-act of the family, especially while I was trying to find my way as a teen, and as a young woman. My God-fearing mother was a strong role-model, liberated before her time.

As an actress and business woman, who owned restaurants, a dress shop, a health club, and several real estate offices, my mother was modeling a role for me as a female, just by being herself. She was the fourth oldest of 13 children, who left home as a teen to join the army as a member of the Women's Army Corp. She was a fearless and independent go-getter, always coming up with creative ideas, both in the household and in the boardroom. I learned to chase my dreams and take chances, while celebrating my strengths and passions.

Thank you Mom, the queen of my heart, for embracing all three of your children, and taking your youngest, sometimes geeky child, your only girl, and holding her hand until your very last breath. I am, because you did! And the way you did it, was phenomenal!

Happy Heavenly Mother's Day!

Marissa

A Tribute to Cynthia Davis- Milroe

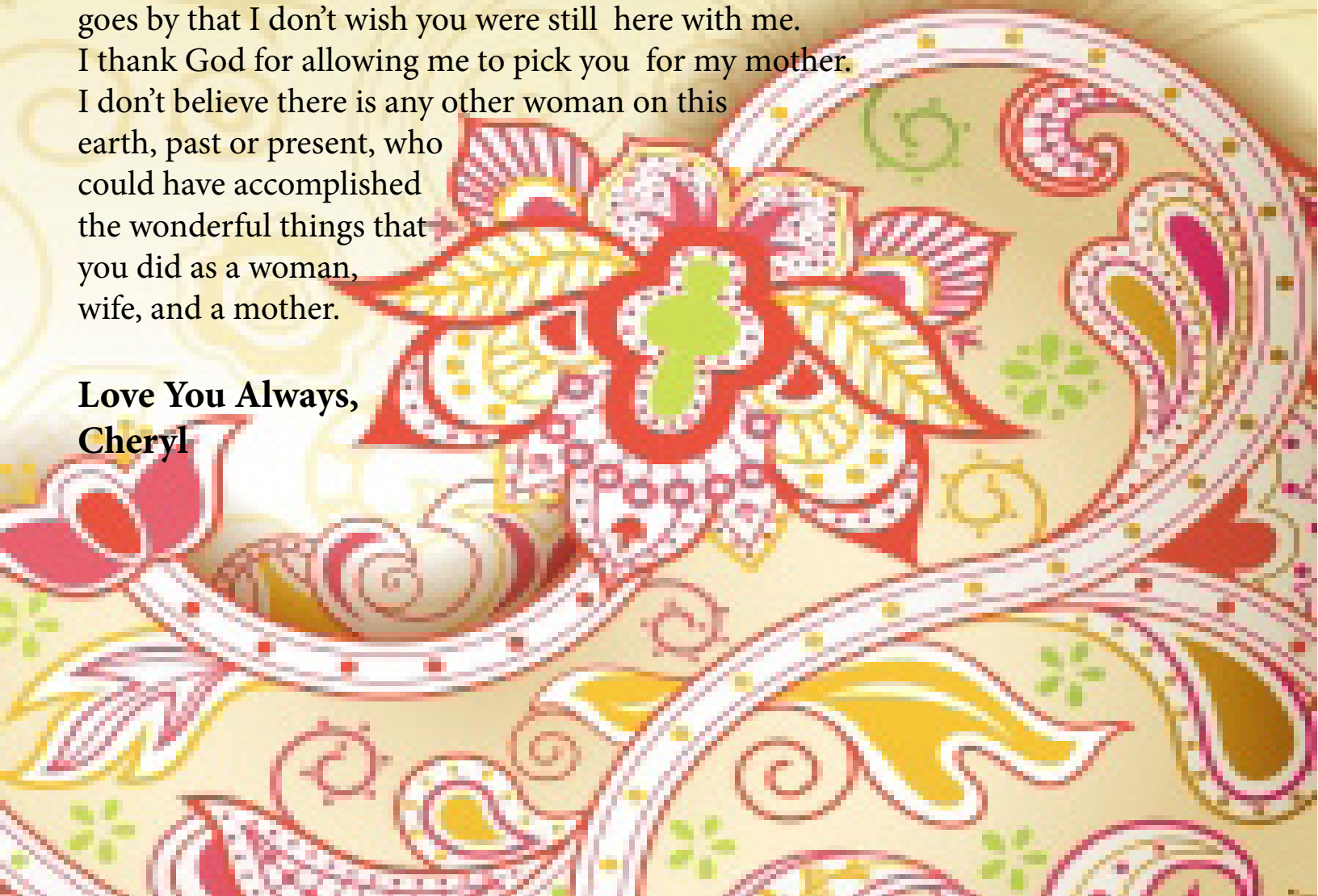
by Cheryl Davis-Kimbrough

Mom, you were my world when I was a little girl. You became that shoulder I leaned on when I reached adulthood. You were the very essence of charm, warmth and determination. Raising two boys and a girl in the heart of Jeffrey Manor was not an easy thing; yet you made it seem effortless. You helped give me a sense of self-worth that has been the foundation of every experience in my life. Without it, I would not have had the sense of balance, esteem, and confidence that has carried me through many trials and tribulations.

You were with me through thick, thin, and everything between. I love and always made everything alright. You were the greatest, strongest, and most intelligent person I know. There is no way I can really thank you for molding me into the woman I am today.

But I want you to know that I miss you like crazy. There's not a day that goes by that I don't wish you were still here with me. I thank God for allowing me to pick you for my mother. I don't believe there is any other woman on this earth, past or present, who could have accomplished the wonderful things that you did as a woman, wife, and a mother.

**Love You Always,
Cheryl**





Their Mother's Wisdom


Cynthia Scott: Learn to read first. That way you will know when a chapter is over.

Author Stacey Barlow: As long as you are bleeding, you can have children.

Michelle King : Always have respect and good manners, it will take you a long way in life. That's what I taught my boys. She also told me when you have kids make sure you get the guy's social security number. If he ever try and bounce you got that number to get him. I never had that problem I've been married twenty years.

Kim NotKimmy Crawford: Celebrate and appreciate yourself; don't wait for others to do it.

Diane Long-Smith: Keep your dress down and your drawers up!



Sidne Kingston: When a guy asks, “When, babe?” You reply, “Feb. 30th” You know guys walked away all giddy then call back a day or three later, oh, that’s some cold sh*t, there!!

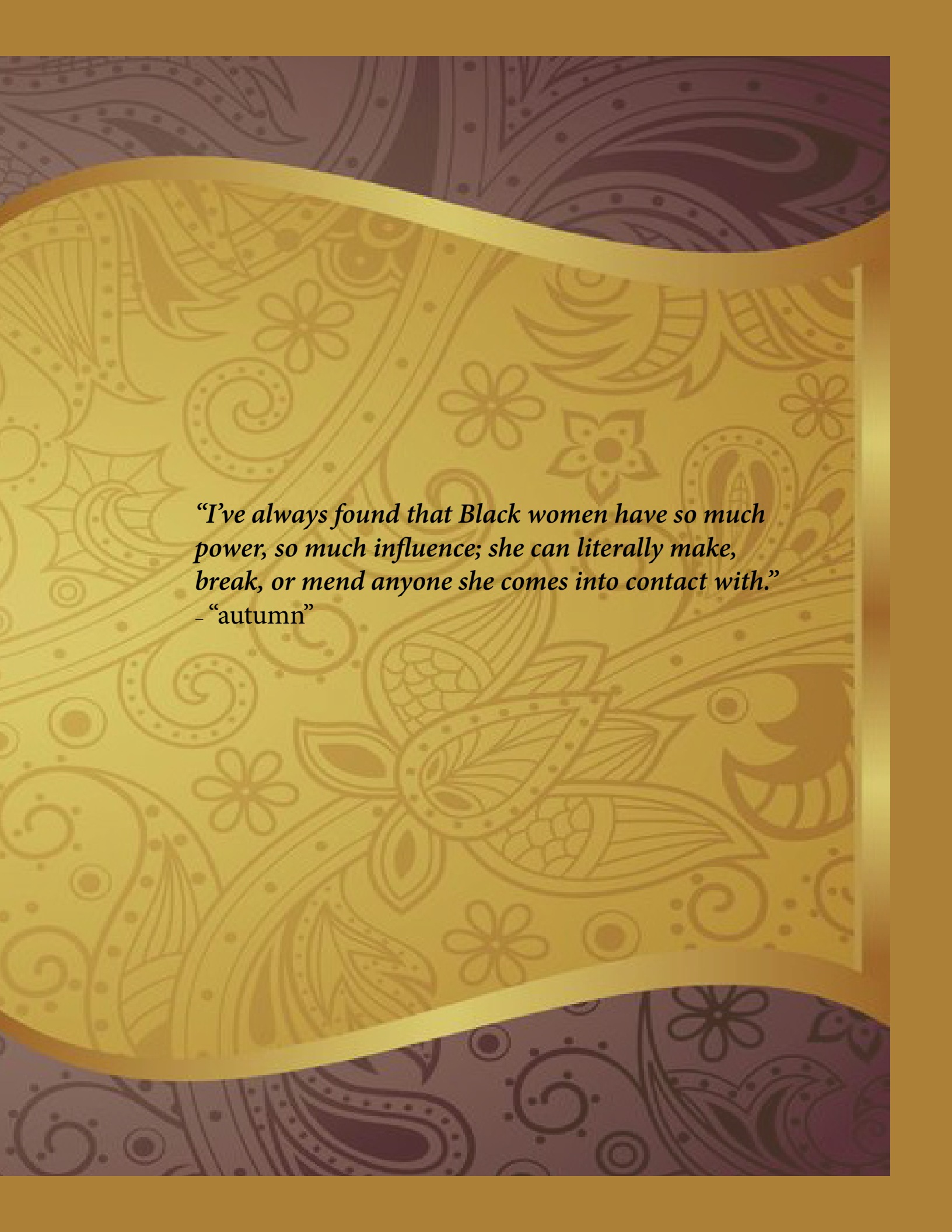
Valarie Prince: I think the two best pieces of advice my mama ever gave me was: ‘Baby you have everything a poor child needs but a rich child desires.’ Once I became an adult I finally understood that comment.

Tanishia Pearson-Jones: The two most valuable pieces of information that my mother ever gave me were: Go to College and always honor God with my tithes and offering. She stressed going to college so her girls could get jobs and take care of ourselves and not have to depend on a man to do it. She told me to give my tithes and I could always depend on God to supply all of my needs. Both have been very beneficial to my life!

Vivian Kay: What you don’t want to eat, don’t sniff. Applies to food and life. :)

Submission &
Motherhood:
Can They Truly Coexist?

by Shakir Rashaan



“I’ve always found that Black women have so much power, so much influence; she can literally make, break, or mend anyone she comes into contact with.”

- “autumn”

In my journeys as an author, with the theme of the majority of the books that I write, whenever I'm at a book event or a book signing, I always get at least one woman in the crowd who will make certain statements that refer to their ability—or inability—to identify with the submissive women in my literary universe.

“I could never be a submissive like that...what example would I be setting for my daughters?”

“I like to be in control too much... we'd be fighting.”

“That's not the biblical version of submission that I'm interested in. That version is too perverse for me.”

I think you get the gist of where I'm going with those statements.

What I try to explain to those women, and in a way in which I'm not trying to convince them as I'm trying to help them understand, is that there are several different ways that submission can take shape, whether the Dominant is within the BDSM lifestyle or not.

As quiet as it is kept (shhhh, don't tell nobody I told you this, LOL), there are a lot of Dominants who adhere to the biblical concept of submission. In fact, there are a lot of them who

incorporate those teachings inside of their alternative relationships—what is termed as “1950s Household” power-exchange relationships. Google it—it's a thing, trust me!

So, while your proverbial heads are exploding over that concept, allow me to get to the crux of what this article is about: submission and motherhood.

I spoke to several women who I am very good friends with, and some I consider extended family. They are all submissives who serve their Dominants, and they are all mothers. I've gotten the gambit of different emotions based on the questions I've asked them with regard to their thoughts on motherhood and submission: humor, introspection, pride, indifference with regard to those who can't (or won't) understand how they can live “that life”. As “lovey” explained, “being a mother and submissive are not mutually exclusive titles...being a submissive woman does not mean sacrificing my wants and needs and responsibilities. Having children simply means a level of discretion is always taken under consideration.”

This is probably the one thing that most women fail to understand when it comes to “What it is that we do”—the discretion is paramount. Very few women I have encountered flaunt their lifestyle choice in the faces of their children; they need to stay in a child's place. Meanwhile, mommy still gets to be a woman, and is entirely

within her rights to be exactly that, in whatever form those womanly desires take shape. In the grand scheme of it all, that is what most of them do.

During the course of a few days before I wrote this article, I had a series of conversations with three women, and for the sake of keeping with protocol, I will refer to them by their submissive names: lovey, autumn, and frost (the lower case is designation is intentional). Although the questions I asked were quite extensive, I will stick to the questions that serve to the baseline of this piece.

Shakir: How would you offer as a rebuttal to those women who say that they could never be submissive? That it would set a bad precedent for their daughters?

frost: That's totally fine, I've not always been submissive throughout my life. It takes a lot of trust for me to surrender all things to One.

As far as being a role model for my daughter, I would say I am showing her a working, loving relationship where he cares enough about us to make the proper choices for our family. I had to observe his ability to not only decide, but for it to be a good choice. I first observed how He made choices about where we would eat based on my finicky palate (LOL), and then I began

to take a step back from protecting myself so much to see if he would protect me in smaller things, like how I interacted with people. As he continued to build that trust, I began to give Him control over my income, my property, etc.

lovey: Everyone has a choice. In relationship structure, be it egalitarian or hierarchical, it all boils down to core beliefs. Unfortunately, mainstream society places a negative connotation on submission, resulting in it being taken as a weakness or oppressed state of living within a relationship. On the contrary, to those who take comfort in a mutual power exchange relationship, submission is a strength; submitting your will to one who can lead, guide, support and nurture while growing together is one of the most beautiful things a person can experience or witness.

autumn: Honestly, I wouldn't. I'd be like, "alright, boo, do you (lol)". But if I absolutely had to, I'd tell them the story of how I was the independent black woman who never needed help or wanted anything from anyone. Never thought of myself as even being a housewife until I met the last vanilla man I dated. He was seventeen years my senior, a true Southern Gentleman. Stern. He taught me so much about myself and what I deserved as a woman. And he had a way of making me listen and understanding the importance of the benefits of trusting a man like

him to lead. That relationship is what started my journey of submission and I didn't even know it.

If I'd had a daughter (I have a son), I would want her to understand the importance of knowing when to follow and when to lead. I've always found that black women have so much power, so much influence; she can literally make, break, or mend anyone she comes into contact with. Power does not always mean dominant; understanding that you have the desire to surrender, to make the choice to submit, it is powerful. I feel we truly have the power to complete a Black King, but we have to humble ourselves in order to do that. There's nothing that speaks "bad role model" in any of that.

Shakir: I know based on my interactions with you and your Sir (upper case is intentional), that you call him Daddy...do you feel that women who do that have the proverbial "Daddy issues", so to speak?

frost: Yes, I call him Daddy, but not because I have any Daddy issues. My father has always been my Superman, that's how I knew I needed a superhero as a mate. My use of the title Daddy is more from Master's Southern roots and my fetish than anything else. Some women may have the need to have that roll filled if they grew up without one, but I really can't speak to that.

loveyy: I grew up in a two-parent structure. I received, and still receive, love and support from my father to this day. He is stern, loving and knows me to a fault. Why wouldn't I call the man I've chosen to surrender to by that same title? My Sir protects me, loves me, and takes his time to truly understand the woman I am. He does not allow complacency, and even disciplines righteously. That's Daddy.

autumn: They may or may not, but it when it all comes down to it, I really think it is a genuine term of endearment. I don't think I'd say that there is a connection between using that title and any issue one who uses it has. It's a preference.

Whether you believe or don't believe that these types of relationships can be "for you", that is not for me to decide, nor am I here to convince you one way or the other. As the women mentioned, in their own words, submission and motherhood can coexist for them. Whether or not you feel you can allow yourself the ability to surrender, and do so while raising children, is purely a personal choice.

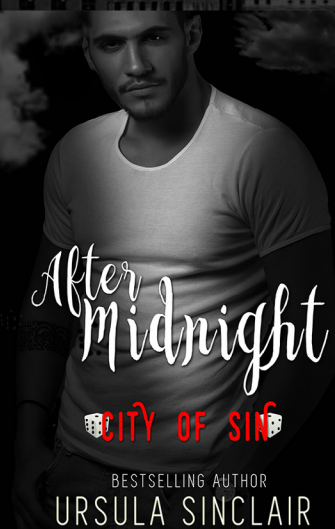
I would, however, implore you to keep an open mind. You'd be amazed at what's out there.



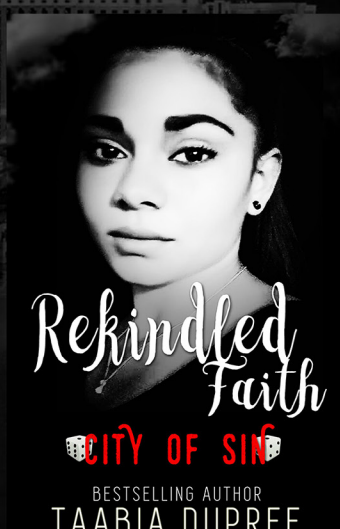


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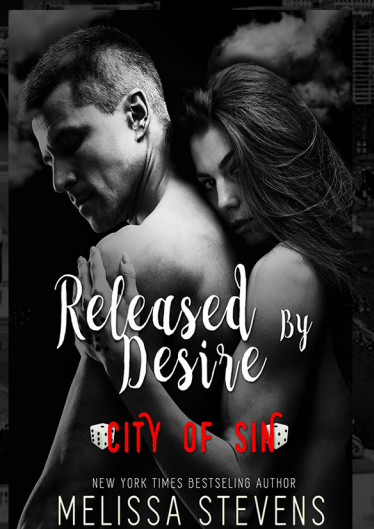
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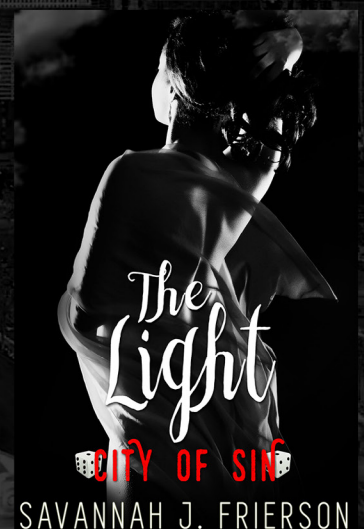
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Their Mother's Wisdom . . .

Lorraine Elzia: "A woman should be a complete package on her own. She should love herself and be able to take care of herself. She shouldn't ever need anyone else to make her feel whole. Having a man should not define her or be a necessity. A man should be an accessory to an already wonderful outfit."

Daphni Cooper: I have my fave. When I turned 18. "When you decide to give it away, don't keep giving it away or else it won't be worth a quarter" #ilaughed #keepyourgoodiesfortherightone

Sheryl Kindle: "No matter how fine you may be, don't ever think a man won't cheat on you with an ugly woman, because most ugly women have good p_ _ _y. Of course my next question was, "How many ugly women have you had???" Suffice it to say, we never had that conversation again!

Naa Koikoi-Aziza Zenzile Kebe: Always have people happy to see you come and sorry to see you go and not the other way around

D.j. McLaurin: Keep your appearance up (hygiene, nails, dress, etc.). People treat you the way you look. If you look like a bum, you'll get treated like a bum. The most successful thieves wear suits, because people trust that (I can hear her voice in my head).

Mary Elizabeth: From my God mother: Learn to say no, because you can't be everything for everyone. And then accept that is okay.

Sandra Beasley: Better to be an old man's sweetheart than a young man's fool.

Rosalyn Livers Owens: Keep your dress down and your knees crossed. LOL

Author Asar: "Never surrender your reason to your passions."

Lutishia Lovely: Can't say one helped more than another but one that kept me grinding toward my career dreams is "Don't depend on a man. Make your own money!"

Veyshon Edmond: Always respect your teachers, they have something you want. Get a good education, no one can't take that from you!

SB Moss: You would rather be sitting inside an apartment with nothing and nobody will ever know. But if your sh*t gets put out on the curb, then everybody knows. What happens in your house stays in your house ..

Rhea Alexis M. Banks: A steady nickel is worth more than a some of the time dime, any day.

Dorenda Clink: A lady don't close down the club, and a lady only gets drunk at home never in the streets. (I wasn't hearing that in my twenties, though. LOL.)

Ruby

by J.D. Mason



“I ain’t going to be here forever.”

Of all the things my mother has ever said to me, this is the one statement that she’s made that has always stood out to me in big, fluorescent, flashing letters. It means, in essence, that I’d better learn how to take care of myself because she wasn’t always going to be here to do it.

My mom hates the Internet. She hates that my sisters and I have ever posted pictures of her on Facebook. She hates for us to mention her name on the Internet. She’s in her seventies, you see, and she doesn’t embrace this technology. So, if she ever gets wind of this article, she’ll probably be mad at me, but it won’t be the first time or the last, and when it’s all said and done, we’ll laugh about it and even though she’ll never admit it, I like to think that maybe she’ll feel a little proud.

I’ve never been as close to her as my other siblings. There have been times when we have just not seen eye to eye on things because I’m more like my dad, her ex-husband, and I think that that’s a testament to why she divorced him. But I also think that’s what makes our relationship so incredible. We challenge each other. She’s a practical woman, responsible and reasonable. I’m the flighty one in the family, careless, whimsical, and impulsive. But despite our differences, it’s her words that have always resonated the most with me.

“I ain’t going to be here forever.”

My mother, like so many black mothers, especially from her generation, has always been strong. Wonder Woman strong, possessing the kind of power and grace and determination that defies logic and gravity and all that. Even as a kid I marveled at her superpowers and held her up as an example as the kind of woman I wanted to be, independent, driven, and focused. But, like I said, I’m more like my dad, so yeah, we’ve bumped head through the years because of she’s oil and I’m water.

Girls study their mothers. I’ve studied mine. Most girls idolize their mothers. I’ve idolized mine; my no-nonsense, direct, do-as-I-say, 5’3” ‘Lil’ Ma”. She’s a goddess to me and because of her, I began the task to finding my independence and self-sufficiency because of this lesson that she taught me. Some folks reading this might find this harsh, but to me, it’s the most unselfish and loving thing a mother can do for her children.

“I ain’t going to be here forever.”

This statement was a testament to her mortality. Children believe that parents are invincible, eternal, and indestructible. She was teaching me that she was none of those things. And it was her way of preparing me for coming to terms with the fact that one day, she would move on from this life, as we all do. It was affirmation to me that while

she was here, she would prepare me for the future, for whatever challenges awaited me as I grew up. It was her way of preparing me to be as strong as she knew that I could be and would have to be.

Ruby is not a coddler. She is an enabler. She shows you her best, and fully expects for you to follow that example and to rise to the occasion of your best. Has she always been there to catch me when I fell? Sometimes. But mostly, she stood back, offered an ear to listen and advice, and waited for me to get up on my own. And I have, most of the time. Those times when I didn't, I remembered her example. There's dignity even in failure, even when things don't work out your way. I watched and admired her keeping her head up in adversity, dusting herself off, and standing even taller when the dust settled.

We've reached a place in our lives where the respect is mutual, and a genuine friendship has evolved between us. She's sly with her humor. If you're not paying attention, it can get passed you, but I've learned to recognize it, and I'm

surprised to see how closely it resembles that of her mother's, my grandmother. Growing up, I wasn't really sure she even had a sense of humor. But I like it. We like each other. That's something I wasn't ever sure would happen. I adore my mother. She is one of the most kind, generous and loving people you'll ever meet. And as I get older, I'm starting to think that maybe I'm starting to change and become more like her than my dad. I certainly look more like her now than I have ever have in my life. She's cute. So, I don't mind.



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

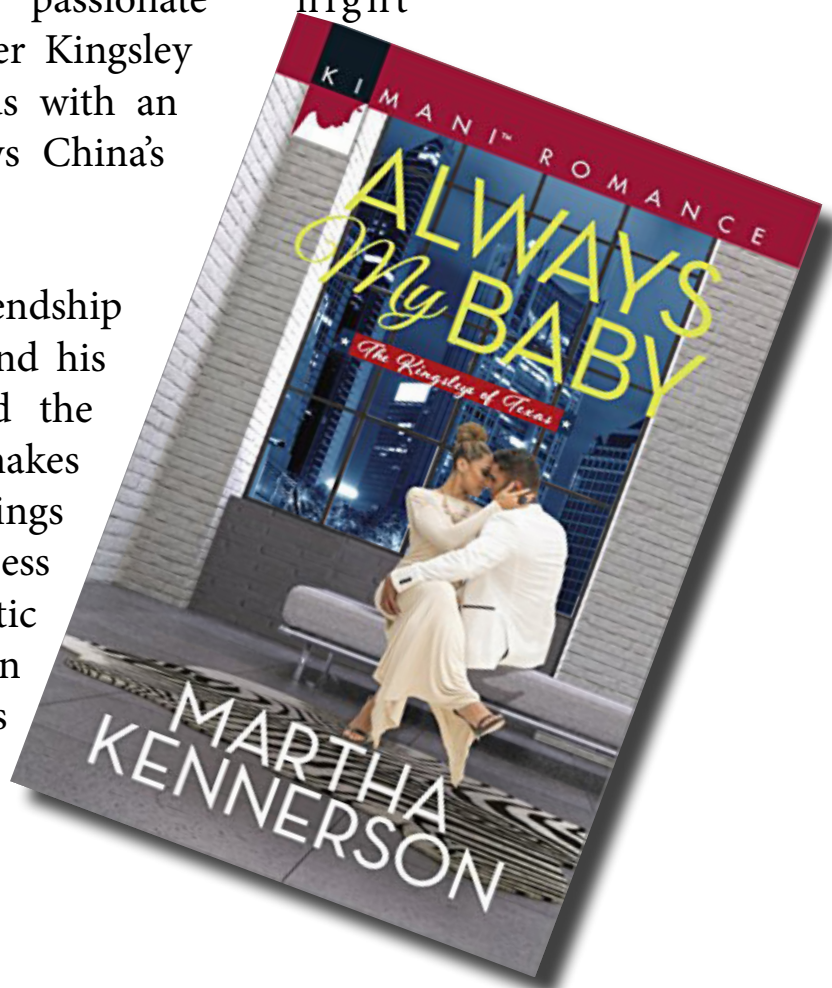
Presents the first in a new series by
national bestselling author

MARTHA KENNERSON

The sweetest surprise...

Ambitious environmental attorney China Edwards pursues every goal with drive and dedication. Having a baby is no different. No husband? No problem—she'll find the perfect donor. Then one spontaneous passionate night with bachelor executive Alexander Kingsley leaves these two longtime friends with an unanticipated benefit, and throws China's future plans into turmoil.

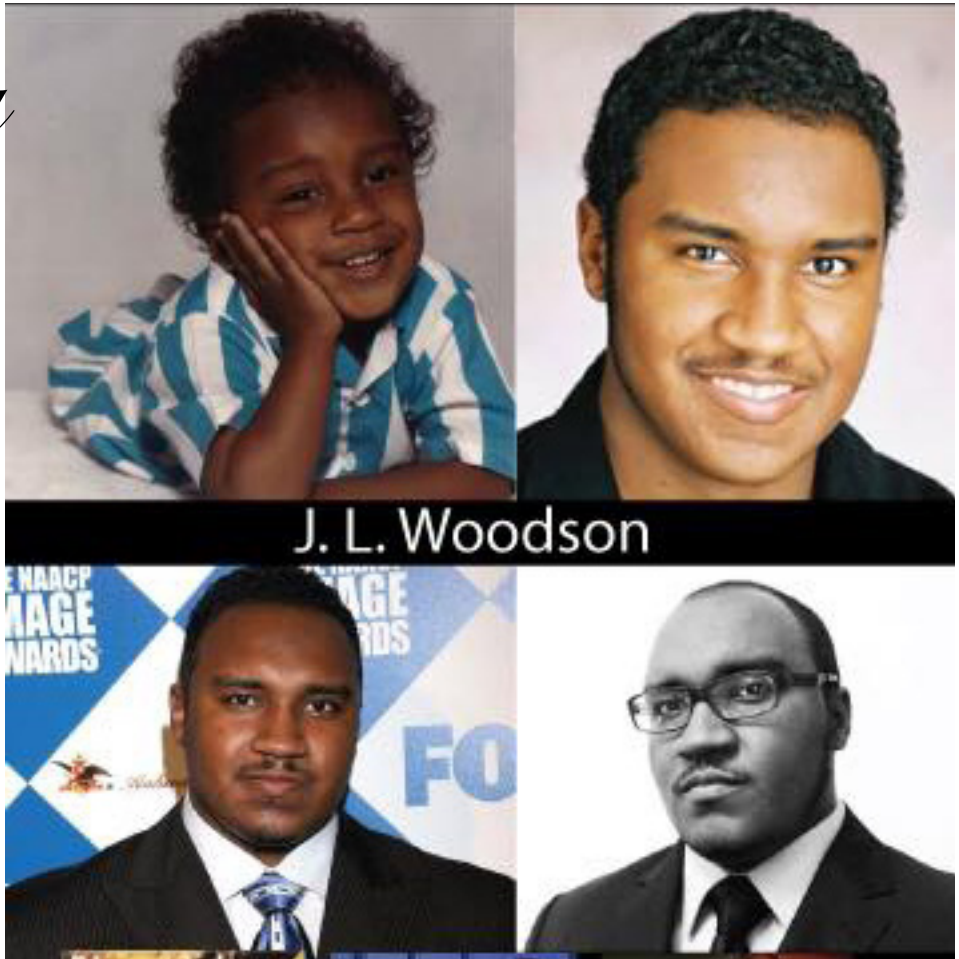
China's brilliant legal mind and friendship are indispensable to Alexander and his multibillion-dollar oil firm. And the possibility of her moving on makes him realize how deep his feelings actually run. Then their all-business relationship takes a wildly erotic detour...until Alexander is drawn into a company scandal that rocks his life. With trust in tatters, can an unplanned bundle of joy lead them to become the family they never expected?



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Blessing in Disguise

by Naleighna Kai



J. L. Woodson

First, I'm going to be honest. I never wanted children. Considering what I had been through early in life, I didn't think there was a maternal bone in my body. So what happened to me at age eighteen? Right at the point I was about to put a "for sale" sign on one thigh and an "open for business" sign on the other and would be serving "it" up like it was on the menu of Mel's Diner? You guessed it, that star in the east floated by; along with Three Wise Men (or was it Three Blind Mice?).

In either case, I was now expecting the one thing I didn't believe I could handle. How was I going to raise a child without infecting it with the aftermath of my traumatic

experiences? Why would The Creator do such a thing? Were they passing the peace pipe up there in Heaven? Maybe someone had three pulls too many. It's supposed to be puff, puff, pass people to keep things in rotation. At least that's what they said on the movie "Friday".

At 18, in college studying to become a computer programmer, I wasn't ready to be a mother. Not that I did everything I could to get pregnant, but me, and the guy I was dating who was nearly eight years older, weren't diligent in doing the things for me not to get pregnant. Why on earth would the Creator put this on me when the violent circumstances surrounding my birth and the things I went through growing up didn't make me

the best candidate for being anyone's mother? Then the Creator hit me with whammy number two: I would have a boy child. Seriously? How could I raise a son, on my own, especially when there were so many issues in my life surrounding men? What could I impart to this little being, when there was so much unhealed in my soul? Well, that answer would come in the form of Jeremy LeMarc Woodson.

Truthfully, he almost didn't make it here. My psychological health was ruling my physical health to the point that I was violently ill during that first few weeks. I couldn't keep water or food down; lost nearly thirty-five pounds, all of my hair and could do nothing more than lay down for long periods of time. I didn't want to be pregnant, and my body was trying to accommodate that fact. Finally, the doctor said, "Ms. Woodson" (that's my gov'ment name) we're going to have to take the baby. The night, before I was supposed to check into the hospital, I had a dream that I consider profound.

In the dream, I was an Asian woman, a courtesan or lesser wife to an Emperor. I had four daughters and one son. When I gave birth to the son, they took him, and evicted me and my four daughters from the palace. Every day, for an entire year, I cried at the gates of the palace, begging for the return of my son. Every single day, with my daughters surrounding me, crying with me. After a year, they brought him out and placed him in my arms. Me and my

daughters were the happiest we could have been as we went on our way and entered into a dark tunnel. Somehow the daughters disappeared in that tunnel and it was just me and my son. As I walked further in, there were people coming towards me that I recognized from *this* lifetime—all members of my current church at the time. Bessie Sims, Dorothy Greene, Aridell Slaughter. Each one had a special gift for me, to help me with my son.

That morning when I was supposed to check into the hospital for the procedure, I decided I wanted my child. I kept down a meal for the first time in nearly two months. Salisbury steak, buttery mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, orange juice. Didn't bother me at all. And didn't make an unwanted return appearance.

On the whole, handling the basics: breastfeeding, diapers, shelter, and all that would be easy. What I worried about was the emotional aspects of his upbringing. Was I mentally and spiritually equipped to navigate him safely through to maturity? Especially since his father—a Latino male who was eight years older than my seventeen years—had decided that being a father was not part of his plans. I should've guessed something was a little off about him when he asked me out on a date while my head was half-covered in hair relaxer. But I digress.

My son arrived and he was absolutely beautiful. Politically incorrect translation: he looked like he'd been

through hell. He had purple lips and slanted eyes, which made me swear up and down they were passing off the wrong child. Maybe they needed to place him back in the oven and put him on broil for a few minutes. Thankfully, he soon fleshed out and became a little bundle of joy. And that's truth.



Motherhood was especially rewarding. Here was someone who depended on me for everything. A little person who seemed to live for my smiles, my hugs, my voice. A person who needed my protection. A person who I would keep safe at all costs. A person who would inspire me to take risks that I would not have dared on my own. That smile, that voice, that face—that sweetness in his soul that was so unlike me and his father.

My son had such a wonderful disposition, so much so, that people wanted to give him everything, because he asked for nothing. He was never materialistic and that made people do more for him than he realized. For his birthday, he wanted friends and family over—it was never about presents. And he is still that way to this day. He graduates from Columbia on Mother's Day (a few days after this magazine releases), and instead of some fancy spot like the Grand Lux Café, this dude wants to hit The Smoke Daddy for his graduation dinner. Seriously?

He did not like to disappoint people. All I had to do was raise my voice and he was immediately contrite for what he'd done wrong. Giving birth to, and raising, a son had more rewards than challenges. And the challenges weren't really about him—it was more about the fact that he'd been perfect up until puberty and I didn't

know how to handle it. Strange thing was, for a woman who didn't want children in the first place, I was taking foster classes so that I could adopt another child because I had this motherhood thing in hand. Well, my son hit puberty and cured me of that notion. The woman from the agency called me at one point and said, "Ms. Woodson, we haven't seen you in the last few classes." With all the chaos I was going through with my son at the time, I replied, "Lady, I don't want the little m-----r I got, and I don't want your little m-----rs, either." She asked, "how old is your son?" I answered, "twelve." She laughed and said, "We'll talk to you in a few years." They're still waiting.

So, to be honest, I became my biological mother for a short period of time during those teen years. I took his actions personally, as if I had failed somehow, instead of understanding the unbalance--chemical, mental, physical, and all that was happening to him at that time. My actions resulted in my doing the grown up thing when he was on the way to college. I apologized. He deserved chastisement, but not to the level that I administered. He forgave me. Bless his little happy heart. He forgave me.

The Creator knew to pair me up with the perfect child to facilitate a series of lessons of loving someone outside of myself. The lesson of realizing that there were more important things in life than the darkness that I'd experienced



growing up. And on another note, the same holds true for my son. He needed to come through his father and me because he had his own series of lessons to learn.

Sometimes the thing that we think we don't want is the very thing that we need for our spiritual development. We'll swear up and down that we'll never do X, Y, or Z. And The Creator says, "Oh, yeah? Let me see what we can do about that." Basically, it's because energy follows thought. When you put emphasis on what you *don't* want, it's taking the focus off the things you *do* want. And trust me, the things you don't want always come with a calling card: Remember that statement you made a kabillion years ago? Well, since you feel so strongly about it, you must really want to tackle it. And then ... BAM! Suddenly you're paddling upstream without a boat, or without a paddle for that matter. You're now tackling a challenge that you swore you never wanted to wade through in the first place.

When I was talking to a friend and he asked about J. L. (as we call my Number

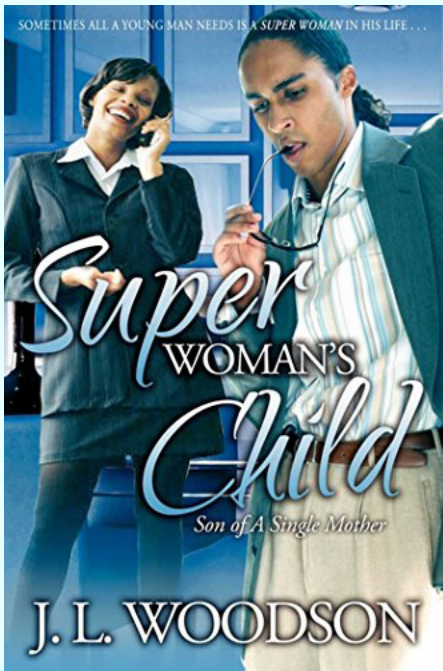
One Son), and I told him of all the recent advances in my son's life, and reflected on how wonderful he was as a person, son, man,--I said to my friend, "I believe I raised the father I should have had." Powerful words. If my father had been 1/100th of the man my son is shaping up to be, there would be no way that I would have carried the kind of pain that I had for years.

I might have questioned the Creator's reason for having this particular child come through me, but as I reflect on our relationship over the years, and the one we enjoy right now, my son has been the answer all along.

When he wishes me Happy Mother's Day, those are the sweetest words next to I Love you, Number One Mom. I can't thank the Creator enough for not only giving me the gift of my son, but also sending that message that I was supposed to have him, and that having him has been the biggest blessing in my life.



Photos taken by
Pete Stenberg Photography
Chicago



*“What a wonderful tribute to single mothers!
You are a true son of Fisk [University].”*
-- Nikki Giovanni, celebrated author and poet

From a young author who has lived through what he writes about, *Superwoman's Child* is an eye-opening novel chronicling one teenage son's struggle with his trouble-filled life.

Growing up the only male in a house full of women is no easy task. Sometimes the women can be “as sweet as pie,” while other days they turn into something he wouldn't dare say out loud.

So is the life of Sean Morris, a teenager with an absent father and troubles many would recognize. Even though his father's been practically missing in action for a while, Sean still wonders if his father will ever be there for him, especially now, when he needs him most. Will Sean be able to handle new challenges without a male role model? Or will he come to terms with the fact that the only people he needs in his life are the ones who actually love him -- the “superwomen” who are already there?

Sure to resonate with parents and teenagers alike, *Superwoman's Child* is by turns humorous and heart wrenching -- a revealing story of the determined perseverance of one son and the unwavering encouragement of his mother.

Nominated



Excerpt from *Superwoman's Child: Son of a Single Mother* by J. L. Woodson
(Perfect for Teens and Parents)

Mrs. Esposita, the principal of the school, was pretty and generally pleasant, but could be strict when the job called for it. "I'm concerned about Sean and his performance in school." She looked at both parents. "Mrs. Morris, I know what you were trying to do. But you need to take Sean back from his father, because he isn't doing a good job raising him."

Sean could see his dad's jaw clench when the principal commented on his parenting skills. She was right, so why was he even thinking about getting mad?

"Sean has been in my office several times so that his dad could have a conference with me and his teachers."

Superwoman's infuriated brown eyes, cut dead at Sean's father's without moving her head. Superwoman wanted to drag Sean and his father outside and teach them a quick lesson of responsibility and following up, but the meeting wasn't over yet.

Mrs. Esposita continued, "We seem to also have another problem, Mrs. Morris. Apparently Sean likes to use profanity."

Sean choked. His father looked at the door like he was ready to bolt.

A wary expression crossed Superwoman's face. "What happened?"

"You don't know?"

"Know what?" Cynthia asked in a whisper, looking at Sean who sunk down in the seat.

Mrs. Esposita leaned back in her chair as she looked from one parent to another. "He called one of his classmates the 'B' word."

Superwoman's eyes grew as big as saucers. "Why would you say that, Sean?" Her voice had gone from alto to high soprano.

"Apparently, she called him a 'Nigger,'" Mrs. Esposita said. "That was three days ago. I sent a notice home for Mr. Maldonado."

Superwoman switched gears, shifting to her burning stare to Roberto.

So did Mrs. Esposita as she continued. "And we called his job and the house."

Roberto sat there frowning. He knew he was going to get it, probably even worse than Sean.

"And he didn't come to the school to see about his son?"

"I couldn't take off work," Roberto said, hoping that would be good enough.

"Well if you thought like a parent, you wouldn't allow anything stop you from going to a meeting that involved your son," Cynthia snapped. "I would have taken off work within a heartbeat."

Sean was relieved that his dad's troubles had taken the spotlight off him. Hopefully it would last a while.

"And you," Cynthia pointed in Sean's face. Hope flew out the window. "There's no reason to call a woman that word; you should not call any woman that." Cynthia's eyes blazed with anger—first at him, then at his father. "Why wasn't I told about any of this?"

“Because I was going to handle it, Cynthia,” Roberto said, looking ashamed and defeated. “I’m going to handle it.”

Cynthia snapped, “I hope you do, because I don’t want my son to grow up disrespecting women. He didn’t curse when he was at Gadson, or any time when he was with me.”

“I can’t watch his every move while he’s in school,” Roberto said, finally defending himself.

“Obviously, you can’t do it outside of school either.” She folded her arms making sure she didn’t go up his head. Though he deserved it. “They had to call me to get your attention. So much for you having things under control,” she said, then directed her attention back to Sean, who was still slumped in his seat. “Now, tell me what happened.”

Sean grunted, not wanting to explain but knowing he had to. “I was in gym class...

* * *

Three days earlier, Sean had stepped outside to a beautiful sunny day, which had a foul swampy smell misting the air. The pavement and grass glistened in the sunshine from melted snow. Dressed in his gym clothes—a white T-shirt and blue jogging pants—Sean ran onto the pass the concrete field with his class across the street to play softball in the Carrasco Center, the bottom half of the building was made of dark brown brick and the top half was like the Georgia Dome. This build took up three blocks. Probably

because it had two basketball courts and a turf training facility for the local high football and baseball teams. Sean had gotten so good at the game, that everyone started calling him Sammy Sosa, though Sammy was Dominican. Some people just didn’t know geography.

Stephanie, one of Sean’s classmates, was one of the shortest girls there, but she was also the prettiest. She wore a butterfly pin in her beautiful, light brown hair. Arched eyebrows accentuated her flashy brown eyes. Her eyebrows could either be drawn in for a mean look or lifted toward the sun. Her devilish smile often caught his eye. She wore gray jogging pants and a white T-shirt on her dangerously attractive shape.

Sean knew instantly that something was wrong. She usually wore tight black volleyball shorts and a navy blue shirt with a knot tied in the back, like some of the others in their grade. She was also very distant. If someone approached her, she was either very brief if they were friends or very mean if they weren’t.

As she stormed onto the field with a scowl on her face, she looked like she was ready to explode. She reminded him of his momma—when it was “oil change” time.

As they began the game, Sean’s friend Joshua was up first. Robert, the pitcher, sailed three soft pitches past Joshua.

Joshua walked back to Sean, forcing a smile, but everyone could tell he was angry. He normally talked a lot of crap about hitting the ball out of the park, but

he sure had his mouth closed now.

When it was Sean's turn at the plate, he picked up the wooden bat and took a deep stance, aiming high as usual. He wanted to hit the ball past the gate this time.

Robert, a Puerto Rican kid with a dark complexion like Sean, stood as though he was Kerry Wood from the Chicago Cubs. Robert's team was on a losing streak. Robert looked like he was going to launch the softball at Sean to cheat so that Sean wouldn't hit a home run, putting Sean on first base but ended up lobbing it toward home plate.

Sean got even deeper, bending his knees as the ball came his way. He swung the bat and made contact. The ball didn't go high but straight up the middle at a pace that could cause someone to lose a body part or two.

He ran to first and stopped; usually the ball would be further in the outfield putting him on third base, but someone had thrown the ball to second base already. Shoot!

"What is your problem, Puta?" Sean heard someone yell from behind him as he squatted for a breather. He knew without a doubt it was Stephanie, and she was definitely red, just seconds from exploding. Why was she mad at him?

"What did I do, Stephanie?" Sean asked.

"You almost hit me with the ball," she yelled at him as she punched him hard in the chest. As if he did it on purpose, it was definitely that time of the month for her.

"I'm sorry," Sean said.

"Watch where you're hitting next time, Dumb-Ass Nigga," Stephanie yelled in his face, then stood there letting her remark sink in, echoing over and over like a bad movie while the other kids laughed.

As much as he wanted to say something back, he knew he couldn't call her a wetback or a spic because he would be talking about himself. Instead, he responded, "Next time learn how to move quicker or duck—B*ch."

The anger he felt was almost instantly replaced by guilt. Just his luck that the gym teacher was standing close by, but only close enough to hear Sean's reply. The teacher grabbed them both and headed to the principal's office.

* * *

"And that's what happened," Sean said, lowering his head to his knees, avoiding Mrs. Esposito's stare and his mother's gaze of shame.

"This is the kind of behavior that my son displays while he's under *your* care?" Cynthia asked Roberto.

"I never heard him talk like that before," he replied, trying to brush it off.

"Sean, where did you get that word? You certainly didn't hear it from me."

Sinking farther down in his seat, Sean made sure he stayed out of the way, just in case Superwoman decided to blast him out of the office. Sean knew women had power, but power that left his dad speechless for long periods of time? Wow!

"Well, Dad sometimes—um—calls

you a, well, you know,” Sean said, trying to shift the spotlight away from himself. He looked quickly to his left and caught his dad’s face with an expression that said “You little devil.”

Superwoman snapped at Roberto, “Oh, so you like to call people a B*tch? Not only that, you’re trying to turn my son against me.”

Sean sat up. *Oh yeah! It’s on now!*

“Mrs. Morris,” Mrs. Esposito said, placing a hand on her desk.

“No, I’m not trying to do that,” Roberto squirmed in his seat, throwing an angry look at Sean.

“Well, obviously you allow him to say that kind of thing whenever you two talk,” she said folding her broad arms across her chest.

“He’s a boy. He should speak his mind. So can I, and sometimes you are...” Roberto let the thought drift.

Sean swallowed, watching his dad struggle to say the word to Cynthia’s face. Wimp!

Superwoman’s eyes sparked with anger, but thank God she kept her hands down. “When he’s with me, he knows not to curse, even if it’s a joke—”

“Mrs. Morris,” the principal said a second time, looking from parent to parent, not knowing whether to wait and see what happened or to call security. Sean’s vote was for—*Security!*

“But Cynthia—” Roberto tried to interject.

“No Roberto! You can’t curse when

you have conversations with Sean. And you can’t allow him to use vulgar language. That is not how you win your son’s respect, trust, and love. You have to set an example. You’re supposed to be the parent and you have to have rules. Am I clear?”

“Yes Cynthia.” Sean’s father let out a sigh of defeat and slumped down in the chair like a little kid.

“Mrs. Morris, please—” Mrs. Esposito started.

“Mrs. Esposito,” Cynthia said turning her gaze away from Roberto. “Is it okay if Sean goes to get the young lady and bring her here? I believe he has something to say.” She glared at Sean.

“Sure,” the principal said with a sigh, then directed Sean out the door. No one had to tell him twice!

Sean walked up the stairs feeling ashamed. He’d allowed his dad’s example to affect his behavior. He had betrayed his upbringing—no matter how bad his grades were—he had always been known for his manners. He walked into his homeroom, where math problems were displayed on the projection screen. “Mrs. Lopez, Mrs. Esposito would like to see Stephanie Cordova.”

“Ooooooh,” echoed in the classroom.

Mrs. Lopez allowed Stephanie to leave.

Sean escorted her down the stairs in silence. But he could tell that she was still mad at him for what he said. She’d started it!

As they walked into the office, Sean wondered what had happened while he was gone.

“First, Roberto, I would like for you to

show your son a good example of an apology,” Superwoman ordered, resting on the arm of the chair.

“Apology,” he snapped, glaring at her. “For what?”

“For disrespecting me. Not only that, but in front of my son,”

“I am not apologizing for speaking what I believe.”

Roberto obviously wanted his head taken off. You never disagree with a woman; you’ll never win.

“I guess you want your child to be as stubborn as you. But I’m not having it. Maybe you can learn something from your son,” she said turning away from Roberto. “Sean, don’t you have something to say?” Superwoman demanded, fixing her eyes on Stephanie.

Sean folded his fingers, twirling his thumbs nervously. “Stephanie, I apologize for calling you out of your name. I shouldn’t have done that. I was raised better than that, and you are a beautiful and respectable young woman,” Sean said, staring directly into her eyes, regret conveyed on his face.

“And I apologize for calling you that name too; I didn’t mean what I said. I was just having a bad day,” she said hugging him as tears slid down her cheeks. Romance may have a chance.

“Stephanie, you can go back to class,” Mrs. Esposito said, handing her some Kleenex from the box on her

desk. “I’ll speak with your parents later.”

Leaving the room, she closed the oak door behind her.

“Good,” Superwoman said, gripping him by the arm. “Now, I want you to apologize to Mrs. Esposito.”

Sean’s eyes shifted in confusion wondering why he was apologizing to her. But Cynthia was mad; there was no time for questions. “I apologize for disrespecting you as a woman.”

“You’ll keep apologizing to your female relatives and to any other woman we see, until I say you can stop. When you disrespect one woman, you disrespect *all* women.”

Mrs. Esposito gave Cynthia a little nod.

Roberto groaned.

Sean thought she was kidding.

By Friday Sean was pulled out of Jayne Adamson, as soon as they were done with the paper work, they went to River Oaks Mall. While they were walking toward Auntie Anne’s Pretzels, buttery, cinnamon aromas filled the air. Sean was happy because he was getting through to the good stuff, even though he was still being punished. Guess again.

Out of nowhere, Superwoman said to the women working behind the counter, “Ladies, will you please come here?”

Wondering what this was all about, they moved to the front.

“My son has something to say to you.” She smiled at Sean.

Sean’s smile quickly faded away. “I apologize for calling you all out of your names and disrespecting you. I shouldn’t have done that because that’s not the way

I was raised, and because you are beautiful and respectable women.”

The women stood confused, looking to one another. “My son called a girl at his school the ‘B’ word, so I’m teaching him how to be respectful to women.”

“All right, Girl,” one of the workers said, giving Superwoman a high-five.

Then Cynthia pulled him into the center of the mall. “Ladies in the mall! I have someone who wants to say something to all of you,” Superwoman yelled so loud Sean wouldn’t have been surprised if the whole mall heard it.

“Momma!” Sean said as he yanked on her yellow shirt trying to convince his mother to stop. “Momma, please.”

He turned to make a fast escape, but she grabbed him by the collar, yanking him back. A large group of women—some big, some petite, some old, some young, some who were probably too young to even understand the word—formed a frightening circle around him.

“My son, Sean Morris, called a girl in his class the ‘B’ word the other day.”

Embarrassed, Sean covered his face.

Some of the women gasped, covering their mouths and shaking their heads. Then, one older woman, who was leaning on a cane, piped up, “Shame on you young man!”

“What makes it worse is that he got it from his father,” Superwoman said with a big smile on her face and

a movie star twinkle in her eye. The crowd gasped as though none of them had ever heard of a father saying that word before. “But he has something to say.”

Sean lowered his head, mumbling, “I’m sorry for calling you—”

“Lift your head up so they can hear you,” Superwoman instructed.

Looking up at all of those women who looked like giants hovering over his little body, Sean painstakingly expressed, “I’m sorry for calling you all...,” he hesitated, “the ‘B’ word. I shouldn’t have done that because I was raised better than that, and because you are beautiful and respectable women.”

The women applauded. “It’s okay, Baby; just don’t do it again,” said a woman with a light complexion, kneeling down to hug him. *Finally a little bit of sympathy from somebody.*

“Now ladies, if you would excuse us, we have to get to the rest of the mall,” his mom said, pulling him away from the clapping crowd.

Sean’s face, lips drooping but eyes wide enough to hold golf balls, reflected his alarm. He was trapped in a horrifying nightmare. Security!!

Dad wasn’t getting it all that bad. He should’ve been right here getting it with me.

Man! That Superwoman—always using her super powers. But one thing was certain the “B” word was out of his vocabulary.

Their Mother's Wisdom

Chevonne Eason Frasier Don't lose the dime! I was told to keep a dime between my knees in high school to make calls if I needed to on the pay phone. If you lost the dime, you were doing something you ain't have no business doing. LOL.

Candy Jackson: Just because I stayed married 50 years, doesn't mean you have too. That co-sign blessed my ENTIRE life.

Phontonia Belin Walter: To make sure I loved my husband because I wasn't always gonna like him

Wonderlyn Parker: Always treat people well as you never know who's hands your children may fall into

Kimberly Perdue-Sims: It was my grandmother. She said always keep your house clean. Your living room so if someone pops over they have someplace to sit; your kitchen because they always want a drink of water; your bathroom because they always want to use it. This is when I got my first place 40 years ago.

Nicole A-me: My mother said: 1) do not be weary in well-doing. 2) have a job that allows you to command your income 3) get your behind off your shoulders 4) always have toilet paper in the bathroom because people are going to wipe with something. (My grandmother told my mother that, my mother told me)

Michelle Newell: "You'll know when you've had enough." Truer words were never spoken.

Lynette Shelton: Every word spoken to you does not warrant a reply.
Hush up sometimes. Silence.

Gayle Jackson Sloan: Manners will get you what money won't.

Catherine Marshall: Only two people can keep a secret
providing one is dead.

Cherlnell Lane: Never be too good to say I'm sorry. Especially to your children. Anyone can make a mistake but it takes a real woman to say and mean I'm sorry.

Sandra Beasley: It don't take all night to do anything and if it does, most of the time somebody ain't doing something right.

Sheryl Lister: Never sacrifice your faith when it comes to relationships. Wisest words ever!!!

Stephanie Michelle: Anderson I think my mothers actions spoke louder than her words. She prays faithfully, she forgives easily and she has standards. Those are her words to me but she lives it everyday.

Nisi Burrell: First Impressions Last A Lifetime.... When you walk In a place like A woman Leave the place like one!!!! My Mother was talking about lounges when a woman drinks....

Wandra Shonetta Franklin Worthy replied: That can apply to more places than a lounge!!!!

Sonia Johnston: My mom used to say to remember the Golden Rule. My Nana would say, "you more with sugar than salt." Papa preaches, to this day, and he's in his nineties, "that if there's a doubt in your mind, don't do it." And lastly, my Mema, God rest her soul, would say, "don't let people piss in your face and call it rain."

Edye Deloch-Hughes: My mom came in as I was nursing my newborn. I felt her standing there for a moment, then she said, "Edye you're a good mother." I was so happy - stunned she said that, because her words meant gold to me. She was an honest, wise, and deliberate woman w

Susan Peters: When in a club never walk away from your drink and come back to it.#streetsense

Ronni Roseman: "If you can type, you can eat."

Donna Beasley's reply: My mother made me take a typing class one summer. Turned out to be one of the best things I did as a teen. Did our moms know the information age was upon us?



Tiffany Tyler

It is no surprise to anyone that personally knows us and/or follows either of us on social media that you are by far my most favorite person in the entire world. I started this letter a number of times but had to stop because I became overwhelmed with emotion. I question and/or doubt many things about God but the one thing I believe He got 100% correct is putting the two of us together!

You are the one constant in my life. The one I can always count on. The one that will be in my corner no matter how ridiculous I am being at that particular moment. Everything you have done since you became pregnant with me in December 1976 has been for me. Every decision, every job, every heartbreak, every tear, every ounce of your hard work has been because you wanted to provide as best as you could for me

and because you did not want to see me hurt. I don't think you have any idea how much confidence this gave me as a girl and young woman to know that it is possible to have someone who loves you unconditionally.

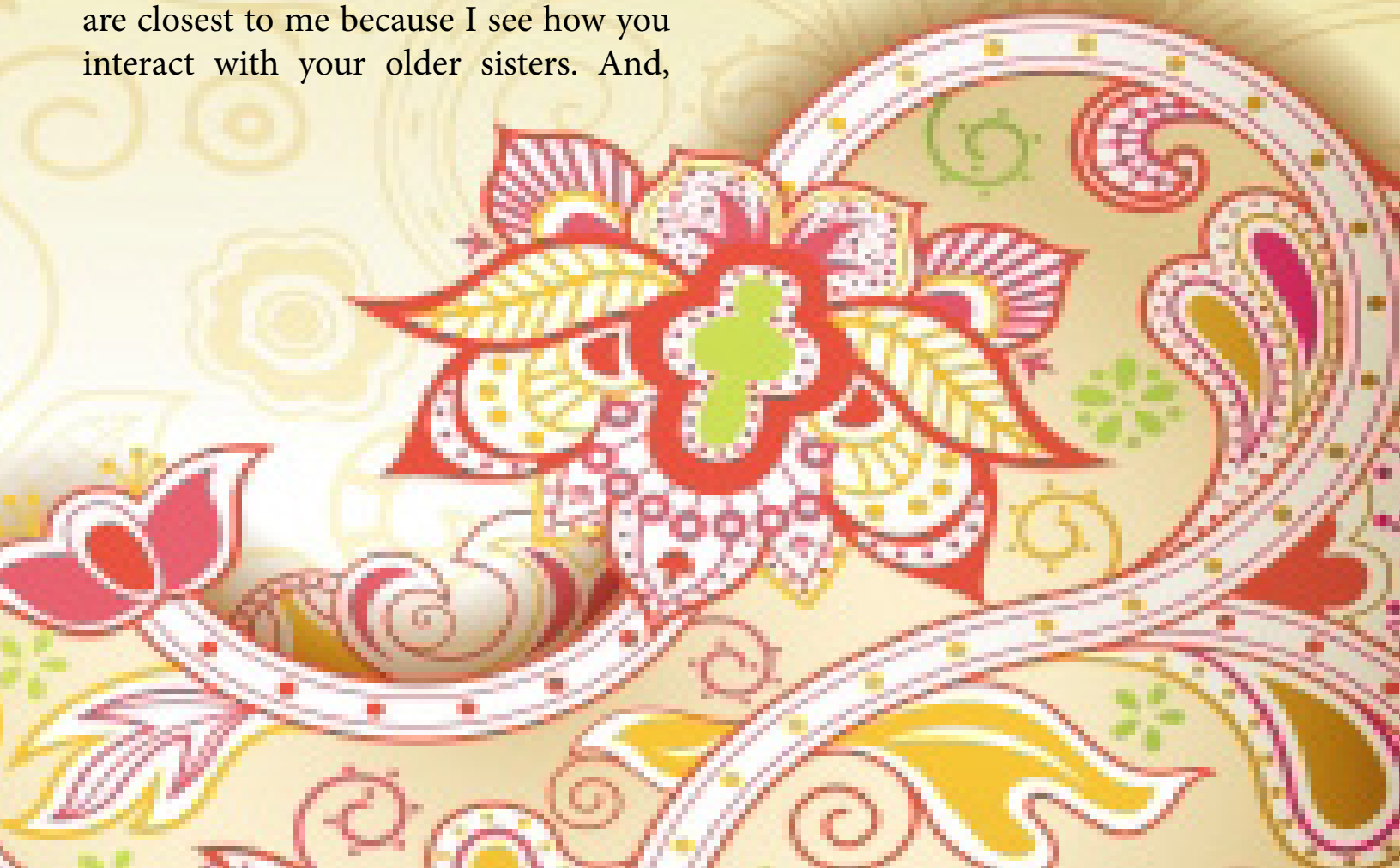
A lot of people assume that I experienced heartbreak due to the end of my marriage, but you knew I felt that way before then. And, you always made me feel better by saying, "you are here because of a love once shared." I don't think you fully know the impact of those simple words strung together have on a child raised in single parent home who often questioned why the other parent was absent. Those nine words were and still are the greatest ones you have ever said to me.

Even though you only attempted to physically discipline (thank goodness!) me once you were a pretty tough parent. You made it clear where the boundaries were and that there was not a grey area in regards to our parent/child relationship until I was well into adulthood. And, because of this I am known to tell men, "My momma didn't hit so you for d*mn sure aren't!" There will not be a cycle of any type of violence going on with me and I have you to thank for that.

I could easily go on and on as to why I think you are special. Everything you have taught me has been by example. You aren't a "talk a good game" type of person. You've shown why I should give back to the community because you've served on the board at the local Boys & Girls Club, the Salvation Army, and countless other organizations. You've shown why I should help those younger than me because you are an official mentor to children at your local middle/high school. You've shown me to respect my elders because now that you are retired you spend part of your days visiting local nursing homes just to make sure they have company and someone to talk to. You've shown me what it means to value sisterhood with the women that are closest to me because I see how you interact with your older sisters. And,

most importantly, you've shown what it means to be the best daughter possible because I see and hear everything that you do for my grandma.

Mom, this letter does not even begin to scratch the surface to express the level of gratitude and love I have for you. You are amazing and loved beyond measure. And, I am so extremely happy that you are the one that has helped to navigate and guide me as I journey through this craziness called my life. I love you much, much, too much!



Family blooded by war.

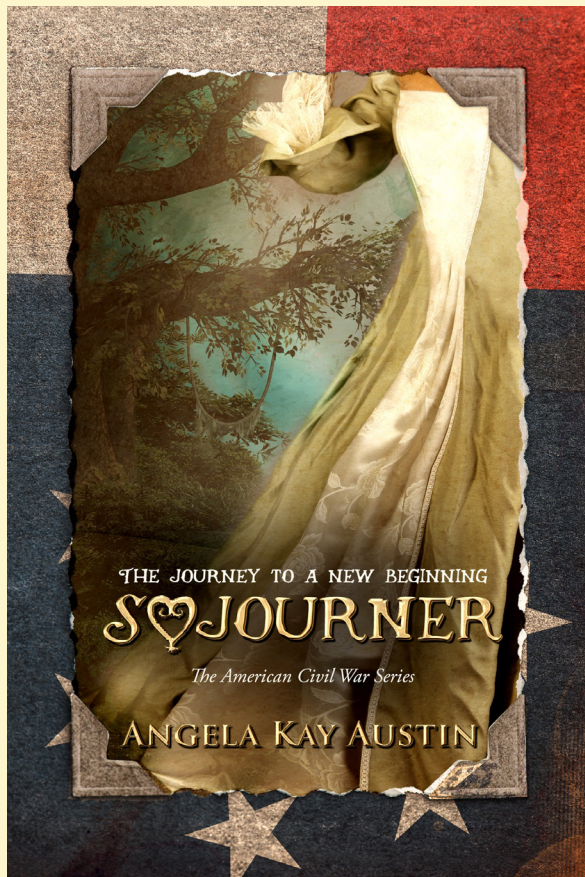
The choice was to run for freedom or die never having been valued as a human -- as a woman. The penalty was the same -- death!

Freedom and her brother, Triumph, would fight for their lives and the lives of the ones whom they loved no matter the cost. Escaping bondage meant they must RUN! Run to Moses. Run to the Promised Land.

Watson Brown knew all too well the struggle to survive. The fight to live. He had been given a second chance to do what he had failed to do in life -- as a human. What he and his father could not do before the Harpers Ferry Raid.

The runaway slave and her brother were a distraction.

He could afford no interferences with his mission. He nor his family could risk exposure.



Nothing could tear them apart.

Sojourner knew how to run, hide and fight. She would find her family and reunite them. Her mother's secrets had become a gift. A gift that would aide her on her journey.

Oliver had been held prisoner by Frederick, his brother, for a year. Escape meant hurting an innocent, a beautiful woman who he could not forget. He would not stop searching the colonies for her, until he found her. Debts owed would be paid.

Will Sojourner and Oliver learn from the past and return to where it began to get the answers they sought? Will they be able to let go of the past to claim their future?

Angela Kay Austin



I am blessed to be the daughter of Clara. Blessed!

Once I called my mother to chat, and in the background I heard rattling. Clanging. It disturbed our conversation, so I asked, “Mom, what’s that noise.” She responded, “I’m counting the change in my bank.” Now, let me interrupt to explain. For as long as I can remember, my mother has had a ceramic piggy bank and each year she loaded it with loose change. During the holidays she would pull out all of her coin

and use it to purchase food for both Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner. But, this wasn’t the holidays and she was counting coins. Counting coins!

My mother had always been frugal. And I guess I’m Clara Frugal II. Instead of calling my brother or me to ask for money, she counted coins. She was always generous and could not imagine ever infringing on anyone for anything. Her grace and kindness are traits I hope to one day possess myself.

I now own that piggy bank, and once in a while I drop in a coin or two. One day, I will buy a turkey or something ... maybe a chicken wing or two and follow in her footsteps!

Their Mother's Wisdom

Laverne Aslam: Don't go outside in raggedy underwear and embarrass me, but now I don't do it because I don't want to be embarrassed on the operating table

Lawanda Metcalfe: Always be lady and to protect your reputation because once it is lost it hard to regain.

Ellen Kiley Goeckler: Be careful. Smarter people than you have been conked on the head!

Yolanda Buick: Never be jealous of what anyone has. You can work to have the same if not better.

Mona Grant-Holmes: If there is something you don't want anyone to know, don't put it in writing.

Priscilla Jackson: Be sure whatever you start off doing/taking in a relationship is something you can keep doing/taking in the relationship.

Cynthia Manson: Start out the way you can hold out. In a relationship, you can't try to be all and do all.

Cynthia SunShine Davis: Never purchase anything with someone/anyone that you can't afford to purchase by yourself . . .

Nivea Nadae Rahming: Save your tears there will be more important/tragic events for you to shed them on when you get older. this was after something some friends did/or said something to upset me I was 15 at the time

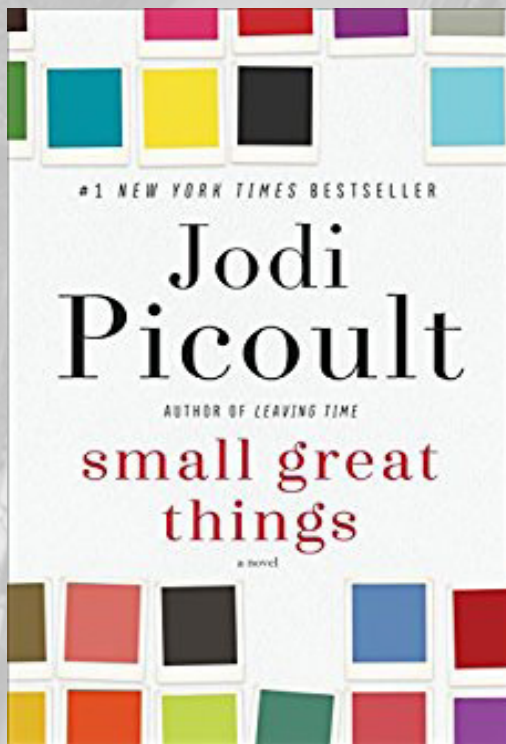
Annette Long: Watch how a man treats his mother because it's a pre-cursor to how he will treat you.

Maxwell Bezear: My mom was a mother stayed home and she was very submissive. I don't remember her giving me too much advice. She was always cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and making sure we always get our homework done. So what I got out of that was family is first

Shelva Echols: Try to find a man that loves you a little more than you love him.

Reading in Black & White

with Tiffany Tyler



I absolutely have no words for this book. The authenticity, the rawness, and the realness are something I've never seen in a fictional book written by a white person on the subject of racism. Heck, maybe by any author. It'll take me awhile to fully process my thoughts on this book (especially because of current events), but I will say that everyone should read this

book if they are really ready to take a look in the mirror and then have an open and honest dialogue on racism.

I could easily write an entire old school book report on this book, but this is one that I truly believe everyone should experience for themselves. It forces you to think. I mean really think on how you feel, what you would do, and examine who you really are at your core. *Small Great Things* is one of the top two books that I read in 2016!

Ever so often you come across a book that is a gem! It is above exceptional. The authors of these gems skillfully craft a story that makes you stop, think, feel, and simply stare into space because it is just that darn good. I am quite delighted to say that *Stand Your Ground* by Victoria Christopher Murray is one of those rare books that fall into the category described above!

As the title states and the synopsis describes, this book centers around the controversial Stand Your Ground law that was made “famous” in Florida.

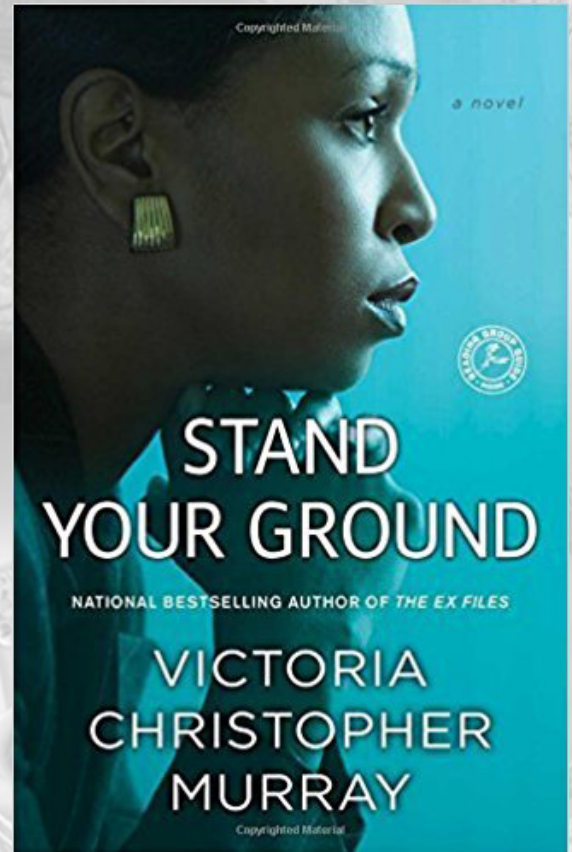
The book is divided into three parts. The first part is narrated from the slain teen mother’s point of view. I don’t know a better word than heartbreaking to describe this part.

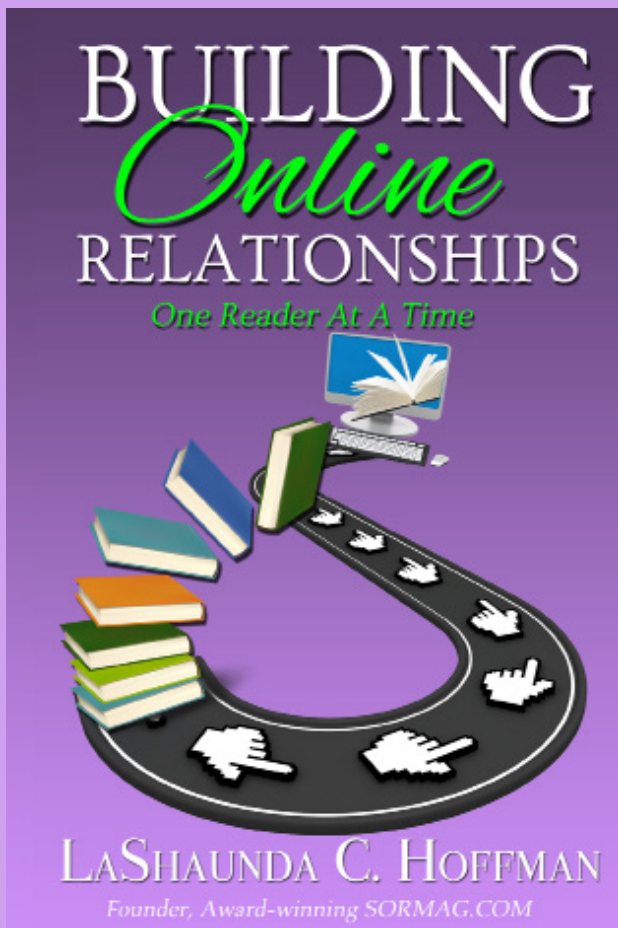
The second part is from the point of view of the shooter’s wife. This was truly a unique perspective and voice to hear in this type of story. Normally we only hear from the side of the victim’s family and we do not receive insight into what the other family might experience.

The third part of the book is the trial. Everything about this section from the preparation of the defense to the ending left me exhausted. I cried. I got upset. I had thoughts (only thoughts, lol) of throwing my kindle. I smiled. I cried a little bit more. I felt relief. And, then I cried a little bit more because this book is the reality that the parents of brown and black boys currently face while living in this country. *Stand Your Ground* is now. *Stand Your Ground* is relevant. And, *Stand Your Ground* is one of the best books I’ve read so far.

Reading in Black & White (RIBW) focuses on what’s written on the pages and not the person who wrote them. RIBW values diversity and it is represented as a wide range of books written by authors of all ethnicities, and genders are highlighted and reviewed. Indie and self-published authors, as well as books that make a personal connection, hold a special place in my heart!

Reach Tiffany directly at readinginblackandwhite@gmail.com
or visit the blog at: <http://readinginblackandwhite.com>





5 Ways to Meet New Readers Online

Meeting readers is your number #1 goal for your promotion. Below I offer five ways you can get in front of readers. Pick one or two and add them to your monthly promotion plan and start introducing your book to new readers.

1. FACEBOOK GROUPS – I love FB Groups. They are one of the best ways to meet readers without leaving the comfort of your home. A lot of writers belong to more

than 10 groups, but aren't actually utilizing them to build relationships. They are drive by promoters hoping their graphic will attract new readers. I don't recommend this method. Take time once a day to pop inside a FB group and interact with the members.

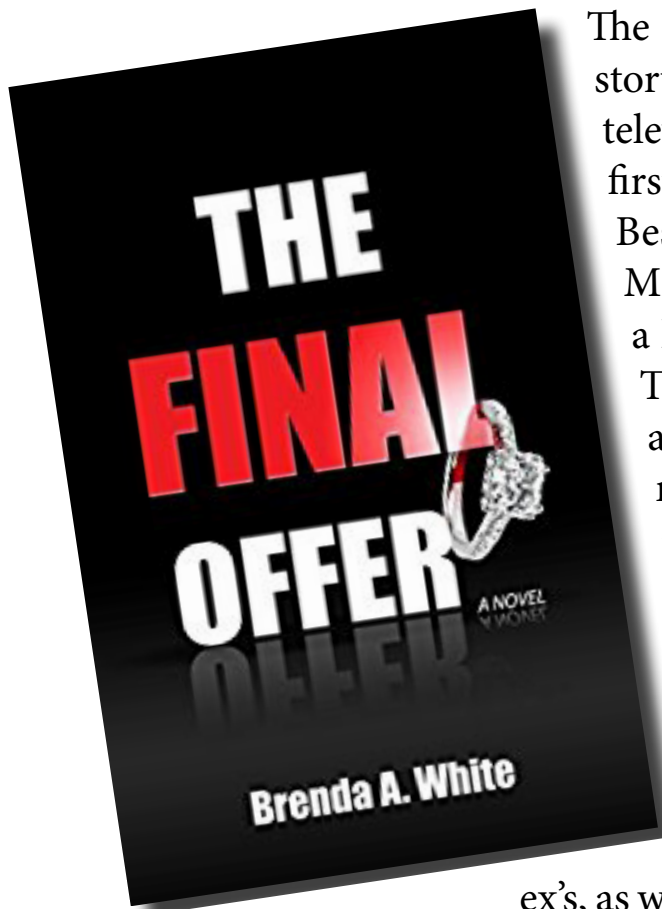
If you have time, I recommend creating a group for your readers. You can pop in daily and chat with your readers. Or you can schedule book chats and discuss your latest book. Beverly Jenkins, one of my favorite authors, hosts a monthly book discussion and the chats a very lively.

Don't sleep on the FB groups; they are great for meeting readers and for networking.

2. ONLINE RADIO – Radio hosts are always looking for new guest to feature, and you can be that featured author they are looking for. Set up interviews with a few online radio shows. Most are live with call in sessions, so you're able to talk with the listeners.

Another suggestion is to create your own online radio show. Invite a fellow author or two and create a show that's all about writing.

Harper's Court



The Final offer is the second book in this storyline and it would make for a wonderful television series. I still have to read the first story, but will mention that in The Best I have to Offer, we meet Gary and Mia, two people who have experienced a lot of drama. In this new installment, The Final Offer, they are living together and engaged, but a secret revealed might tear them apart forever. Karen, Gary's biological mother thinks that the two might actually be cousins. Mia decides to leave and go back home to Arkansas allegedly to sort things out. Gary lets her know that this is the last time she will "run away." Add a lot of drama from her, some of Gary's

ex's, as well as a best friend that has some health challenges, and that makes for a very exciting and suspenseful read. Mia represents most Black women. Not wanting to give up control for fear of an unknown future. Gary represents a great deal of Black men. I love you and will do my best to protect you; I just need you to trust me. I liked the writing style of this particular author, and I was engaged from the beginning. I would like to know more about Karen's background and find out why she acts the way she does as it would provide more "flesh" to the story.

Forensic firearms specialist, Muriel Mabley, is a single mother of a college-aged son. She's forty-nine and is dealing with Hot Flashes, all while trying to put away a man who has been torturing her family for years. More drama unfolds when she ends up helping her younger sister out of some serious experiences. Not only does Muriel have all of those issues working in the background, she's involved with Calvin, and her work partner Laughton is keeping secrets from her. Things have come to the point where she doesn't know who to trust. And in this instance, some secrets are deadly.

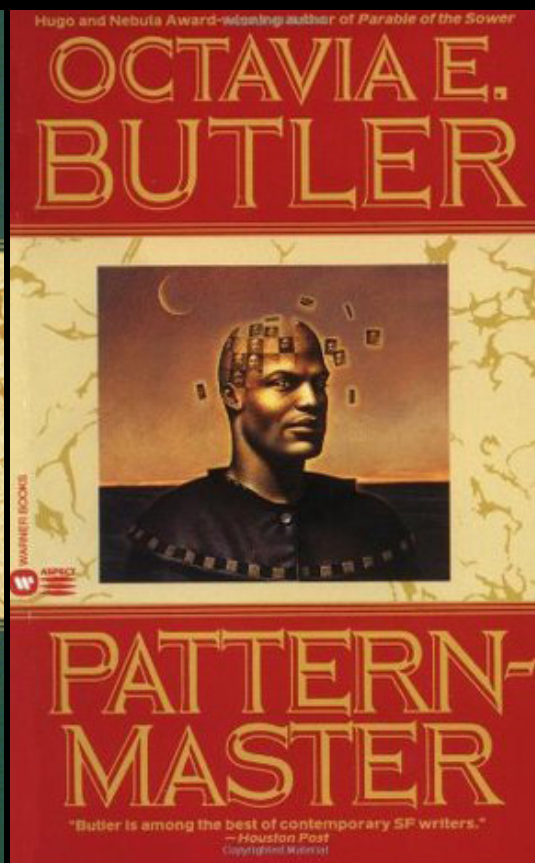
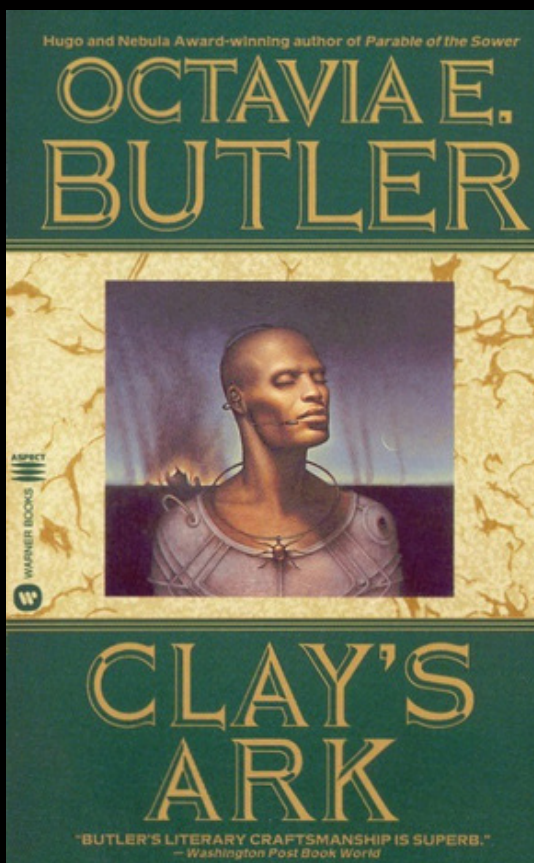
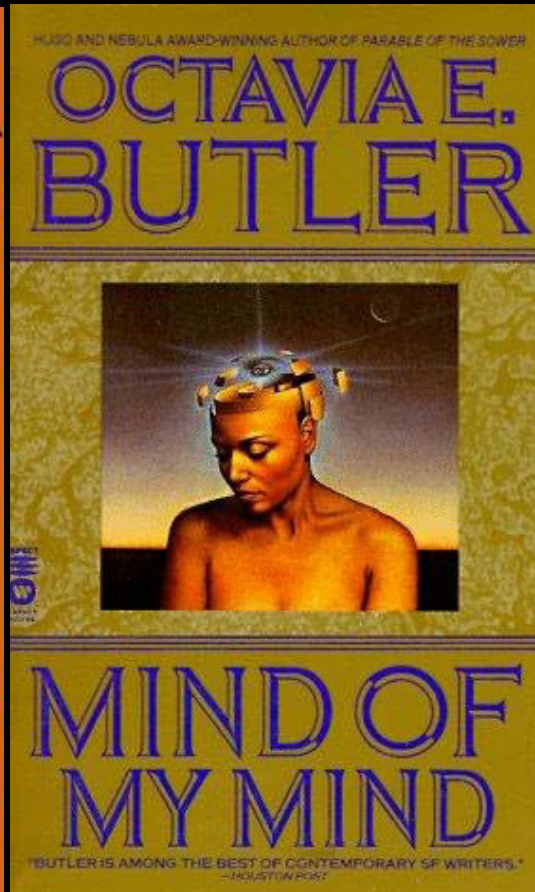
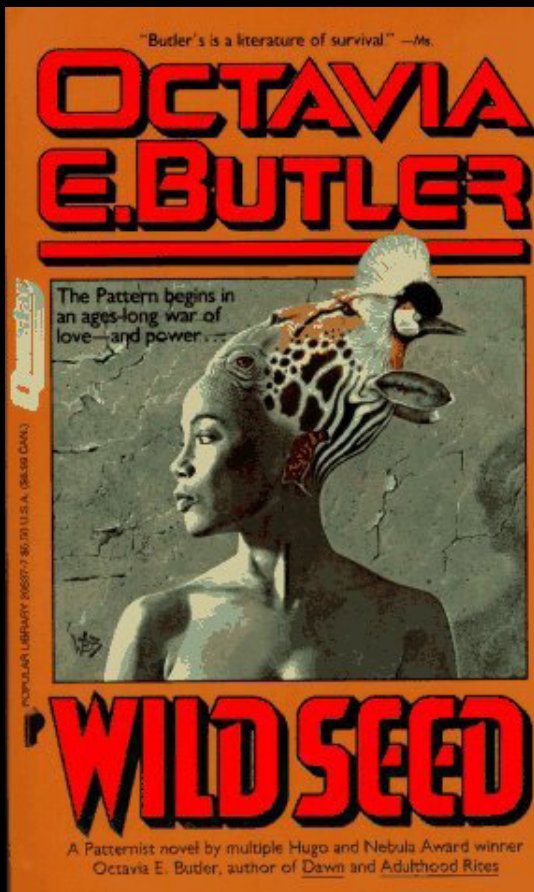


To be honest, I've never been a big mystery fan, but I have become a fan of this author's work. For her debut mystery novel, it was a very well written and fast paced read that will keep the reader on the edge of their seat. There was a lot of action throughout the story, and just when I thought I had the scenarios all figured out, I was thrown for another loop. Muriel is the perfect balance of strength and vulnerability. The author did a marvelous job in this story, and I am eagerly waiting for the next story in the series.

Shannan Harper is an avid reader and book lover turned blogger. She hails from Chicago and when she doesn't have her nose in a book, she's thinking about her next read.



Naleighna Kai's Top Picks



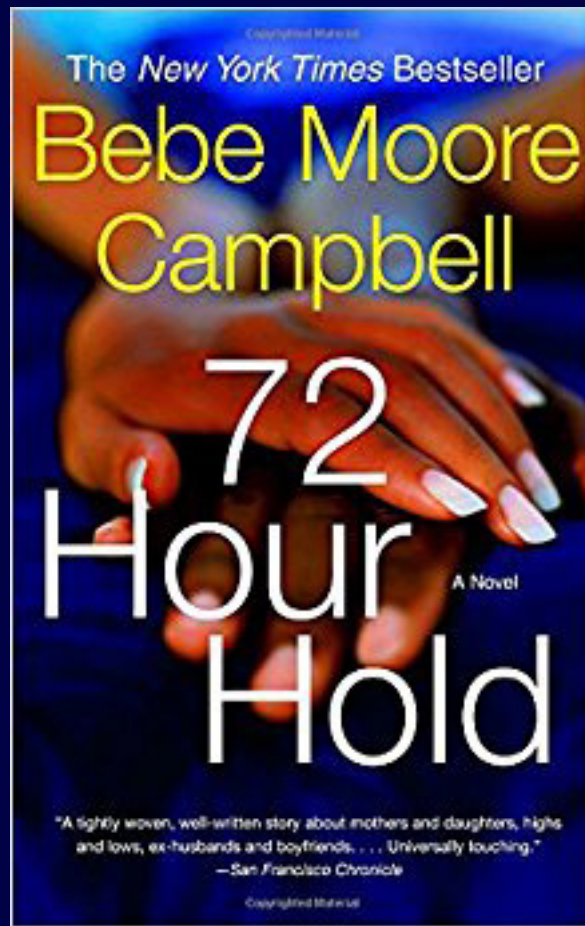
These are the original covers from when I purchased. Covers may have been redesigned.

Octavia Butler



A writer that was long before her time and didn't receive nearly the amount of acclaim she deserved. Octavia wrote about the human condition, race relations, and societal ills in such a way the reader didn't realize that they were being taught a powerful and dynamic lesson until they turned the very last page. Her work is compelling, engaging, and as satisfying as a good meal after a long stretch of starvation.

If you have not read any of her work, please start with *Mind of My Mind*, as it is the one that got me hooked. I was forced to go out and find everything else this prolific writer had created. I have returned to this one novel and have read it at least twenty times over the years. Keep an open and curious mind when you crack it open.



Trina is eighteen and suffers from bi-polar disorder, making her paranoid, wild, and violent. Frightened by her own child, Keri searches for help, quickly learning that the mental health community can only offer her a seventy-two hour hold. After these three days Trina is off on her own again.

Fed up with the bureaucracy and determined to save her daughter by any means necessary, Keri signs on for an illegal intervention known as The Program, a group of radicals who eschew the psychiatric system and model themselves after the Underground Railroad. In the upheaval that follows, she is forced to confront a past that refuses to stay buried, even as she battles to secure a future for her child.

“A tightly woven, well-written story about mothers and daughters, highs and lows, ex-husbands and boyfriends.... Universally touching.”

—San Francisco Chronicle

Hell, being black is hard enough.... Please don't add crazy. So writes Bebe Moore Campbell in her compelling new novel that confronts two taboo subjects in the African American community: mental disorder and homosexuality. The book is named for the three-day maximum period that a mentally ill adult can be legally held in a public health facility if she demonstrates a danger to herself or others. The novel tells the story of Keri Whitmore, a successful black businesswoman struggling to care for a teenage daughter with bipolar disorder, which causes radical mood swings between mania and depression. The fictional prose is not meant to offer an inside look at brain disease. Rather it presents a brutally honest and devastating account of a mother's love and the desperate degree to which she will go to rescue her child from mental illness. In doing so, Campbell exposes the woeful inadequacies of our current public health care system in treating such patients and introduces the novel's greatest value: its insight into the challenges faced by people who must care for such loved ones. Nevertheless, this noble effort is undermined when Campbell invokes slavery to convey the horrors of mental illness.

--Scientific American

Bebe Moore Campbell



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2017 Literary Events

June 2-4, 2017

Go On Girl! Book Club Annual Awards
Loews Chicago O'Hare Hotel,
Chicago, Illinois

June 17

Great Midwest Book Fest
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

Black Pack Party (during BEA)
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
New York, New York

July 15, 2017

Harlem Book Fair
West 135th Street, Harlem, New York
Time: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

July 27, 2017

EDC Creations - Chocolate Social
Atlanta, Georgia

July 28-30, 2017

National Book Club Conference
Atlanta, Georgia

Loews Atlanta Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia

October 5-7, 2017

A Reading Warriors Retreat
Building Relationships Around Books
Arlington, DC 22202

October 13-14, 2017

Black Authors & Readers Rock Weekend
The Comfort Inn of Bowie, Bowie, Maryland

October 13-15, 2017

The Cavalcade of Authors
featuring
New York Times Bestselling Authors:
Brenda Jackson
Mary Monroe
Chicago, Illinois
www.thecavalcadeofauthors.com

October 26-29, 2017

Christian Book Lover's Retreat
Charlotte, North Carolina

Cavalcade 2017



The 13th Annual Cavalcade of Authors Chicago Tour Friday, October 13 to Sunday, October 15, 2017, is the ultimate literary event where readers and book clubs actually tour several areas, restaurants, and special attractions of Chicago with their favorite authors.

The event gives up close and personal time with favorite authors and the opportunity to meet new ones, partner up with them in a game of Spades or Bid Whist, learn some Chicago Style Stepping and line dances, watch performances that are sure to make you laugh, and enjoy late night intimate chats where the authors slip into their pajamas, let their hair down and discuss personal experiences they might not share anywhere else.

New York Times bestselling authors Brenda Jackson and Mary Monroe are joined by national bestselling authors Naleighna Kai, J. L. Woodson, Pat Simmons, along with Cerece Rennie Murphy, Bridgett Renay, Jo McEntee, Meredith Greenwood, Jessica Cage, MarZe' Scott and many others.

See the full line-up and itinerary at:

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