

**JANUARY 2018**

**NKK**  
LITERARY CAFE  
MAGAZINE

# **New Year New You**

**Confessions of a Peacekeeper**  
by **Marze Scott**

**You Gotta Suffer to be Beautiful &**  
by **Naleighna Kai**

**Mending Fences**  
by **Christine Pauls**

**Wounds in the Way**  
by **Karen D. Bradley**



**W**e're two weeks into the New Year. How are those resolutions holding up? You're doing great? Awesome. Are you procrastinating or have given up? Join the club. Didn't make any? Well, there's honesty for you. What I decided to do this year was simply commit to being a better me. That's going to be a job unto itself.

**T**his issue of the Naleighna Kai Literary Café Magazine explores the ways to embrace a new year, a new mindset, setting realistic goals, letting go, as well as healing from old wounds and putting a bandage on new ones.

**A**ngelia Vernon Menchan wants you to figure out what a living means to you and not judge by someone else's standards. Shakir Rashaan has a public service announcement to all men and newcomer, Michelle Newell, has one for the women. Victoria Kennedy shares the importance of rituals and routines. And this time, our resident

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

# A Note from the Editor

graphic guru, J. L. Woodson, chimes in with two articles: life for me ain't been no crystal stair and a book is judged by its cover. Christine Pauls tells a personal story about mending fences. New authors with debut novels releasing in 2018 have chimed in: Anita L. Roseboro—New Year, New You and MarZe Scott who teaches us the difference between being a Peacemaker and a Peacekeeper. That article right there was an eye-opener. Our arts and entertainment author, Sierra Kay, had a chance to experience Janet (Miss Jackson if you're nasty) and give insight on her book and the concert that is part of a world tour. Shannan Harper, our traveling blogger, has two new book reviews. J. D. Mason has issued a call to arms, while Portia Cosby has a few more of those random thoughts to give you a smile. Susan D. Peters take us "beyond fear" and into stepping into a different light. Karen D. Bradley speaks on wounds that may still be in your way and can keep you from getting better in every way. Nicole Lawson Travis, owner of Body & Soul Naturally, writes for the first time and explains what it takes to protect your skin from the harshness of winter.

The January issue also has a few subjects that are close to my heart. The suffer to be beautiful article is all about my transition from my love affair with "creamy crack" (hair relaxer) and moving into sister locs. A second article, Hairstory, has readers voicing their opinion about the television segment where a husband claimed he was no longer attracted to his wife because she now embraces a natural hairstyle. In a more transparent article, I share

how two professional women that were in my inner circle landed in Club Fed (women's prison), and how a simple mistake almost slid me in there along with them. This lesson is timely as it comes around tax time. By the way, am I the only one who didn't know what "flipping taxes" was all about?

I started off this new year as a spotlight author in EyeCU Reading & Chatting Social network, the book club that is featured in this issue. Their Freestyle Friday challenge brought out a new short story from me that has never been published. The first half of that story, *Love Travels a Gravel Road*, is here for your reading pleasure along with excerpts from Angelia Vernon Menchan's *Choosing to Stay* and Pat G'orge Walker's *Don't Blame the Devil*.

Once again, this year has so many things in store. Don't start it off with regrets, anger, and baggage. None of it will serve any good purpose.

Please share this magazine with your friends, co-workers, family and fellow book club members.

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# Confessions of a Peacekeeper

PAGE 8

# CONTENT



## New Mindset

PAGE 12



## True Janet

PAGE 22

<i>HOW YA LIVIN'?</i>	<b>6</b>	<i>SHANNAN'S REVIEWS</i>	<b>27, 31</b>
<i>YOU HAVE TO SUFFER TO BE BEAUTIFUL</i>	<b>18</b>	<i>ZORA NEALE HURSTON</i>	<b>28</b>
<i>PORTIA</i>	<b>20</b>	<i>CALL TO ARMS</i>	<b>32</b>

Shakir Rashaan / Marze Scott / J. D. Mason / Victoria Kennedy / Anita Rosebor Wade / Portia Cosby / Angelia Vernon Menchen / Shannan Harper / Christine Pauls / Susan D. Peters / Nicole Travis Lawson

Hair Story  
PAGE 50



Mending  
Fences  
PAGE 48



Love Travels a  
Gravel Road

PAGE 62



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2018

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Resorts in  
Paradise  
Island,  
Bahamas

*ROUTINES &  
RITUALS* 36

*NEW YEAR,  
NEW YOU* 38

*I WON'T GO TO  
JAIL FOR YOU* 42

*BEYOND FEAR* 56

*A BOOK IS  
JUDGED BY ITS  
COVER* 58

*EYECU BOOK  
CLUB* 59

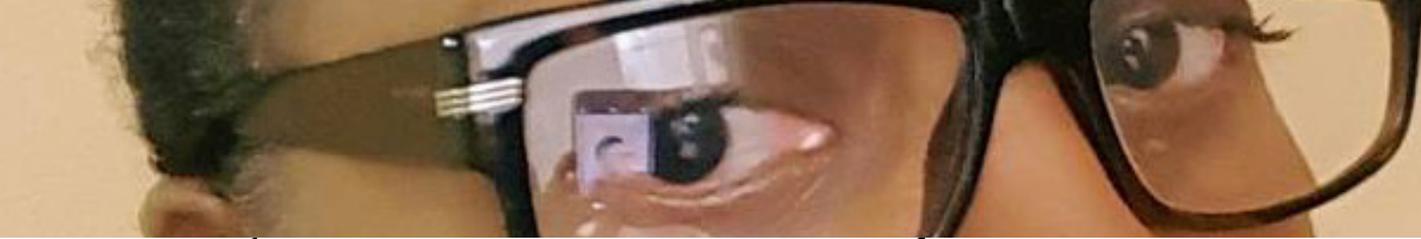
*WOUNDS IN THE  
WAY* 68

*CHOOSING TO  
STAY* 72

*DON'T BLAME  
THE DEVIL* 76

*WINTER SKIN  
CARE* 81

Register



# Angelia Vernon Menchan

Decide what a living is for you, not based on someone else's life or lifestyle.

One of the ongoing conversations I have with some of my writer friends is the proverbial earning a living with their writing proceeds. And the same thing applies to anyone entering the arena of working for themselves.

## How Ya Livin'?

The first thing I tell them is they must know what "a living" means to them. For instance, to some people, *a living* is being able to place a roof over their head, food in their bellies, and shoes on their feet. To others, *a living*—I know some won't agree—might include two weeks in Costa Rica in the winter and another week in Alaska in the summer. How we live is who we are.

I know a young woman who is an entrepreneur and earns about \$1,600 a month as a hairstylist. To her, that is enough to earn a living. However, she also lives in subsidized housing, receives food stamps, and free childcare. Her basics are already met. Thus, *a living* is different than say, the one who gets none of those other things. Also, there is demographics and location to consider. If one decides \$2,000 a month is *a living* in a small town in Mississippi, perhaps it is a darn good one. Whereas, in New York City, you are likely talking renting a dwelling for that amount of money, if that. So, in determining what one needs to earn *a living*, make sure you take all these things into consideration before giving notice. You know, saying "take this job and shove it" or some such. Many allow friends, etc. to convince them they don't need more than that one resource without realizing many who branch out or are giving them that advice are comfortable with a particular income because they are subsidized or might happen to live with a husband, their parents, or roommates.

I give y'all this stuff free cause I love you just like that. #JUSTLOVE

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

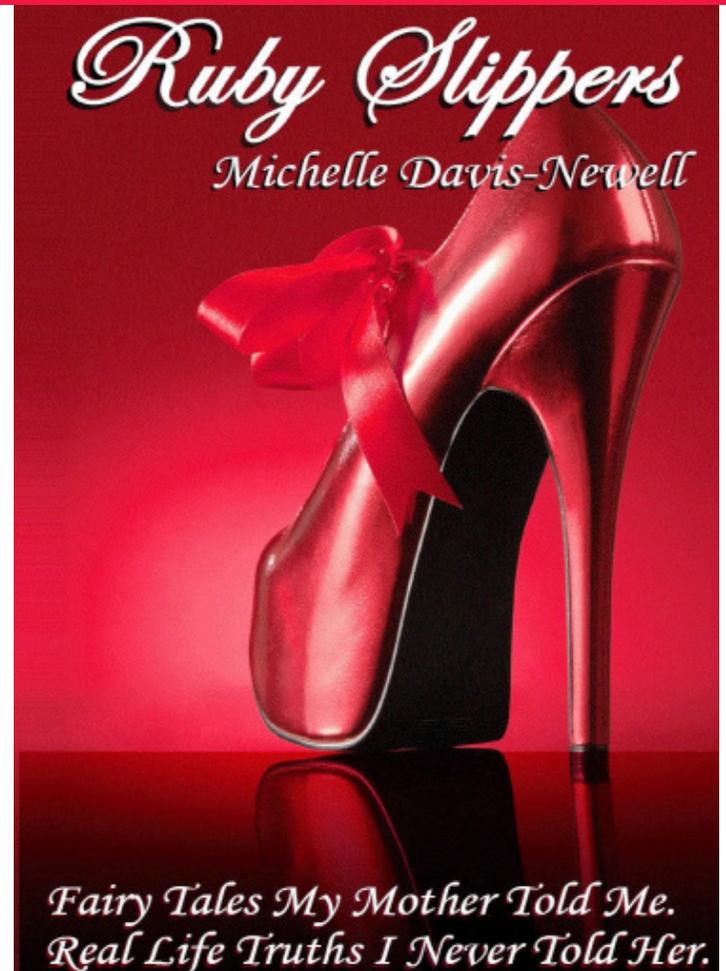
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# Public Service Announcement

”Ladies, you can’t turn a frog into a prince simply because you adore and supply him with kisses. Self-preservation is a mother\*\*\*\*\*, and men have mastered it for centuries. Therefore, he will acknowledge you as a good woman, but he’s not stupid enough to walk away even if he knows he isn’t worthy. So, know and understand your worth.

If your queenly skin is being blemished because you keep getting warts, it’s time to stop kissing these frogs. If the man you need is not available, don’t settle. Keep waiting and learn to satisfy your own needs. The right one will come along.

Get to know and love yourself while you’re waiting, so in case he (or she, ‘cause hell . . . anywho, different subject) never comes along, you’ll still be with someone who loves the hell out of you and will treat you the way you want to be treated – and that is ... YOU



*Ruby Slippers is a personal journey through painful and sometimes embarrassing moments in my life as I sought to uncover the root to all of the drama and dysfunction I once found myself in. I wrote the book to inspire and encourage young ladies and women who find themselves in abusive cycles that they can bring themselves out of any situation, no matter how bad it is. It’s all about determination, and the willingness to take a deep look within and address our own demons. It’s also about taking personal responsibility for our own happiness and removing the stain of shame and guilt that taints our self esteem, leaving us to doubt our own worth. Ruby Slippers encourages, inspires, and challenges you to find out: What’s your happily ever after?*



Michelle Davis-Newell is a Chicago native who wrote and published her first book in 2006 and co-authored an anthology shortly after. She also has a passion for film and screenwriting and is the Vice-President of UrbanScope Productions, LLC. She has written several screenplays, including a short film entitled *Roses Out Of Concrete*. Michelle continues her passion in helping others as the Director of Programs with a not for profit organization in Chicago, Illinois.

*Life for me ain't been no crystal stair . . .*

J. L. Woodson



I used to be the guy that wanted a life that was like the movies. You know, a Big city scene, hanging with friends, going to the bar after work to have a drink with said friends, talking about people that we work with, meeting up on the weekends to watch a game, or play video games, meeting a woman, falling in love, getting married, having children, going through a climactic problem, everything is resolved at the end.

Problem with that is: movies are 1-2 hours long. So everything is sped up, and life has a lot of climatic problems, and living in the big city isn't necessarily all that, hence this effing weather. (Chicago's is under zero as I type this). And when the said friend that you would hang out with is all the way in South Carolina (where a mere one inch of snow can bring the State to its knees), that's another issue. But I'm grateful for some of the things that have happened. I guess I need to be patient because this is a long ass movie. Thankfully, I have some good people walking on and off the screen that is my life.

So, who's bringing the popcorn?  
Oh, and a pop. I love Pepsi.

J. L. Woodson is an award-winning author of *The Things I Could Tell You!* and the critically acclaimed novel: *Super Woman's Child: Son of a Single Mother* which was NAACP Image Award nominated for an NAACP Image Award. Currently, he is a graphic designer, website developer, and brand manager for a host of clients. [www.woodsonstudio.com](http://www.woodsonstudio.com)

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# Confessions OF A PEACEKEEPER



MarZe Scott

*So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservation, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality, nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit.*

-- Christopher McCandless

The beginning of 2017 came in like a lion pouncing on its prey, announcing the first of changes that would begin a new chapter of my life.

The first Thursday of the New Year I woke up excited. After my morning shower ritual, I dressed with intention—close-fitting sweater, a pair of black fashion leggings, and high-heeled boots. Box braids were pulled into a high bun on my head, and makeup was flawless. Before leaving out of the front door, two sprays of Dolce and Gabbana Light Blue on a black and white scarf, finished with a black leather hip-length coat. “Victory Is Mine” was the old church song I hummed all the way to the courthouse.

The wind was crisp enough to make my eyes tear up, as I walked from the place I parked and toward the building. My pace was brisk, but not enough to miss my soon-to-be ex-husband standing by a pillar in the same parking structure. He, too, was looking quite dapper—he always knew how to dress like a million dollars though I never saw one penny of that look. He caught the glance that I threw him and I kept it pushing—there was nothing to be said.

Michael\* had pleaded with my lawyer to talk me into reconciling. One look from me and she understood all too well that I was far beyond interested in reuniting with him. You only get one time to put your hands on me in an effort to control me.

Yes, our marriage ended the moment he wrapped his hands around my neck.

Our twenty-plus year relationship had been on a decline since the beginning, but being young and dumb and full of .... (Well, let's just say the sex was good, and I let certain treatment slide). Michael was a binge alcoholic, but good sex and a seemingly heartfelt apology

about staying out all night and calling me everything but my given name were sufficient for me to remain in the relationship. I mean, every couple has its ups and downs, right? And then the kids came.

Now, to be honest, Michael wasn't the worst kind of man, or so I thought. He went to work and paid the bills (kind of); he was a good father to our children, a great son to his parents, and reliable brother to his siblings. I knew that a man had to figure out how to be a good husband to his wife. So I had patience.

I knew that I didn't do everything right, but should he point out my every error? Did he need to say that I was ignorant, especially in a debate where his points were neither solid nor valid? Should he have questioned my every move to church and back? I became the sole reason for his drinking binges and the sole proprietor of every problem in our marriage. But he could always be worse, right? He wasn't a cheater (I had no proof of it anyway). I could put up with the tantrums and the name-calling. He never called me the B word, but I've been called a Jezebel. I'm a big girl, no big deal; there was no truth to what he said.

Dealing with his eccentric behavior and trying to make sure that he was comfortable enough to not blame me for his insecurities was my attempt at creating a healthy relationship. I built a life of comfort that never seemed comfortable enough for him. Equally, I constructed a wall for myself so that his words and erratic behavior didn't wear me out. At one point in time within our marriage, I didn't cry about anything for seven years. Yes, my wall was fortified with metal and concrete. Nothing moved me, at least not to the point of tears.

One of the Beatitudes in the Bible states, “God bless the peacemakers for they shall be called the Sons of God.” Do

you know how sometimes a certain verse or scripture that you've read a million times means something completely different and more significant than it did all of the other times you read it before? I had a light bulb moment—I wasn't a peacemaker; I was a peacekeeper. My heart sank with the realization that I was the one, more than Michael, that perpetuated the drama in our marriage. I found reasonable ways of managing his madness in hopes that it would ease his conflict, therefore erasing mine.

The more I accommodated, the more I had to adjust to keep the peace. Peacemaking means getting to the real root of the problem and working together to fix it. Peacekeeping, on the other hand, means doing whatever is necessary to keep conflict at bay. Peacemaking isn't always pretty and sometimes uncomfortable, but ultimately a beautiful relationship will develop when all resolutions have been made and met. Peacekeeping hides the truth. Peacekeeping hides the bottles. Peacekeeping hides the arguments. Peacekeeping makes sure any and all conversations with others remain at a minimum when the discussion turns to the one you're "protecting". All because as much as you need to be okay and have someone to unload or vent to, you're worried that if you say the wrong thing, you and your partner will get the side-eye when things get back on the good foot. And the "good foot" happens even in the worst of relationships. So much so that they can become so welcomed that one pushes the "other times" to the background.

Peacekeeping is the blight of any relationship—familial, romantic, and friendship because someone's toxic attitude and behavior are given a full range and total control in exchange for the other person's perception of peace.

However, after one more night of nonsense and name-calling, I prayed for an out. It had been ten years since my heart felt anything for the man that I married. I didn't know how to leave without a profound reason. The Bible states three reasons that are grounds for divorce: 1) If the unbelieving spouse leaves the marriage; 2) If there was any sexual immorality, and 3) If Jesus himself abandoned the church. We were both "believers" in the faith, though often we did not act accordingly. I had never cheated on Michael and I didn't have proof that he had cheated on

me; As far as I know, Jesus has not separated from the church, so I had no basis to divorce according to Christian tradition. These reasons are why I endured the emotional and verbal abuse for so long—no profound reason to end it despite the issues. Name-calling, demands, and interrogations weren't enough for me to leave or divorce Michael.

Less than twenty-four hours after my plea, a very anticlimactic argument over a demand for me to give him the keys to my van ensued. He had spent all night out drinking himself silly, and it wasn't safe for him to be driving.

My statement, "That ain't gonna happen" made him so uncomfortable he became enraged enough to choke me. There was no longer a question of can I, or should I, stay in this marriage. My safety, and my children's safety, became a top priority.

The entire scene could be summed up as surreal, but what was more unbelievable was that I asked God for an out and my husband losing his mind was how it was presented. God moves in mysterious ways.

I'm blessed to say that in building my wall, I managed to heal some parts of my heart while still in that toxic relationship until I could come out of my delusion. After a restraining order, twelve months of court dates negotiating child support and visitation, and finally a divorce, I'm free. You'll never hear me say that my marriage was a nightmare. I learned a great deal about myself while going through trial by fire. I learned that I have a dark side (My thoughts—whew!). I learned to trust and listen to that still, small voice in my head that gives me directions on what path to take for my journey; I learned to trust vibes, good and bad, that a person puts out—they never lie, energy speaks louder than words.

Most importantly, I learned that peacemaking is far more precious and beneficial than peacekeeping. The advice that I would share with anyone is to always be more active in making peace than keeping up a ruse that offers the appearance of peace.

*\*names have been changed to protect the guilty.*



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

# New Year, New Mindset . . . **Shakir Rashaan** Maybe?



Happy New Year! Hopefully, by now, you've had the chance to have your collard greens and black-eyed peas and fish and cornbread and things like that to create blessings upon your household for the rest of the year.

What? You don't do that? Man, listen! Nah, on second thought, sometimes superstitions are what they are, I can't tell you what to do or not to do. Especially when I'm about to say something with regard to another tradition.

So, now that I've gotten one of the many lovely superstitious rituals out of the way (you know them, the whole "the man is supposed to be the first one to cross the threshold of your home on New Year's Day; don't wash clothes on New Year's Day, etc.), I want to have a sit down with you so we can have a chat, okay? Like, can we talk, for real, for real? Okay, good. I'm glad I could count on you to be my sounding board, a bruh really appreciates it.

So, about this new year, new mindset type of situation that I'm sure you've seen on social

media, right? Well, let me throw myself in the mix a bit with it, because I have my own unorthodox methodologies when it comes to dealing with the new year and my resolutions—or lack thereof—that need to be invoked and held up the rest of the year.

Simply put, resolutions are for lazy people. Yes, I said it, it's for lazy people. Even as authors, to sit there and say that we're planning to hold ourselves to something that we didn't do the year prior, it makes it difficult to change a habit in less than a week or a month. Now, what I'm saying is, instead of dropping the grandiose "my New Year's Resolution is" statement, what needs to happen is to hush, look in the mirror, and look at the person in the mirror and commit to that person. The rest of the world doesn't matter.

Case in point, I don't make New Year's Resolutions. I do, however, look at the man in the mirror and ask him one simple question: "What can I do this year to stretch beyond my comfort zone?"

In that vein, I think I've answered that question to the man in the mirror. I'm in the midst of stretching my comfort zone by going into genres that I probably wouldn't have entered into a few years ago. In doing so, I'm going to be honest and say that I'm freaking out because this is truly new territory for me. At the same time, I'm also hopeful that I have done enough to be able to give the genres I'm venturing into the authenticity that they deserve. I'm bucking the time-honored tradition of "writing what you know" and finding out if I can provide a compelling story with the flair that I've always been capable of.

I don't do this at the beginning of every year as a part of a resolution. This is something I try to do every month, every quarter, every opportunity that strikes me when it strikes me. It's a constant check to the system to make sure everything is working and clicking on all cylinders. That can't be done at the beginning of the year; it's too much to take on. Which is why I'm always so against the concept of resolutions. If it's a part of you, if it's what you want to do even when you hate having to do it, then you stay committed to it.

Now, it's time for me to stick to my own commitment and get some writing in tonight. I have to make sure I stick to the process, or I'll fall off the wagon.

Oh, and don't forget to ask the person in the mirror what you can do to stretch beyond your comfort zone. And be honest with that person, the last thing you want to do is lie to the one person who matters the most in life. Enjoy the start of your year, and may it be filled with the prosperity and positivity that you hope for.

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

On another note ...

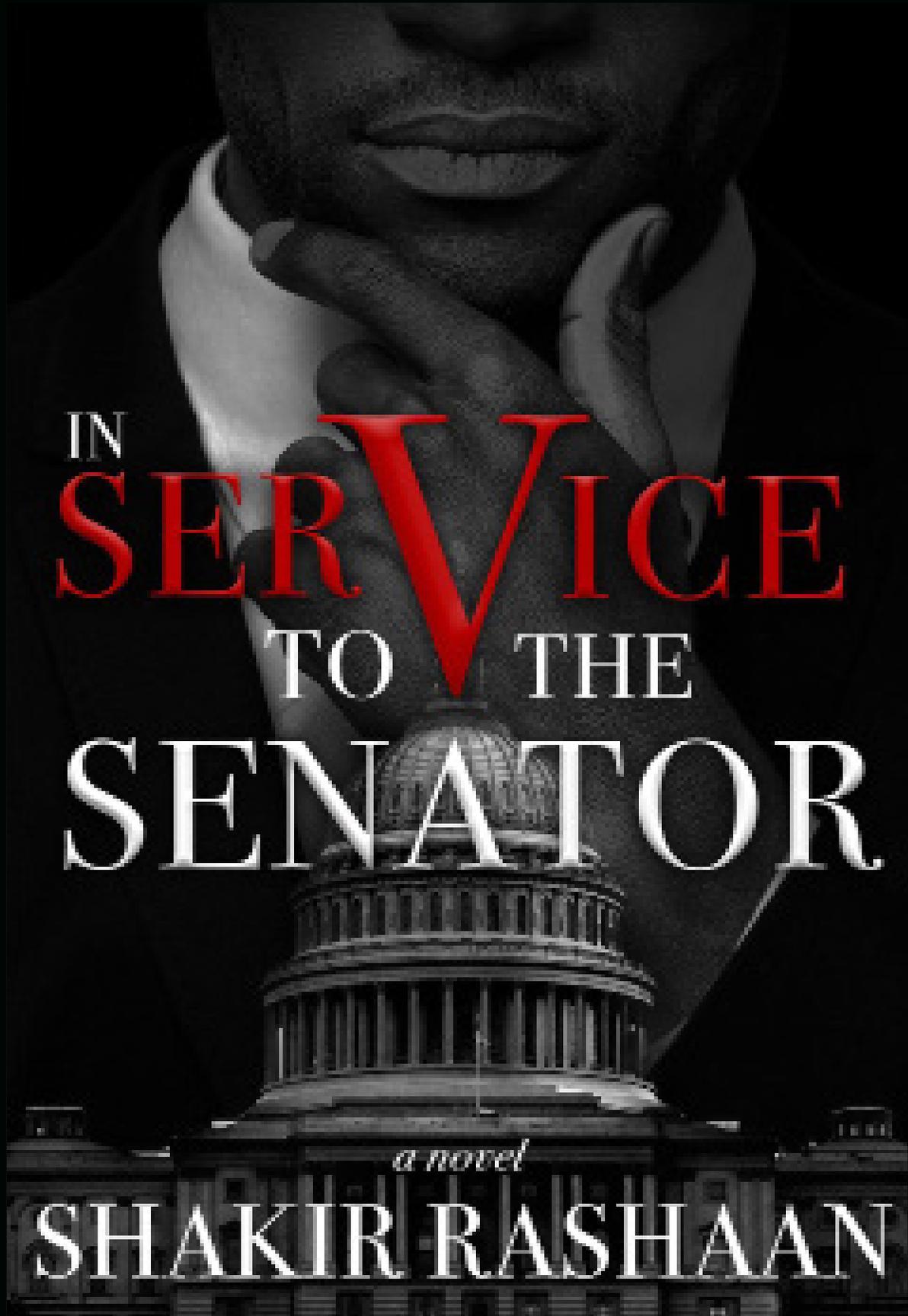
Fellas, can a bruh holla at you for a second or two? Okay, cool.

See, here's the thing: I know we've been on this kick as of lately where we might have been taking for granted the things and people who mean the most to us. We've all been there, believe me, and I'm not immune to it, either, I've stumbled and messed up, too. Let me tell you, it's not worth the trouble of having to rebuild what was once fractured or destroyed, life is too short for all of that. It is much easier to maintain and strengthen, and it doesn't burn as much energy and time.

In the span of two calendar years, two of the most important women in my life, my Beloved and my mom, had undergone illnesses and surgeries that might have taken them from me in an instant. Thankfully, by the grace of God, they are both still with me today, and God willing they will both be on this planet for me to cherish for the foreseeable future. I was lucky in that I'd already had strong and solid relationships with them both to where I didn't have regrets about not saying "I love you" enough, or being the son and husband I was for them.

What I'm trying to say is this: the two most important things about being a man are the lessons he learns and the choices he makes. Make the choice to be the best father, husband, son, brother that you can be. You don't have to be perfect, what matters most that you are present and active. We are the foundation for which our sons will go into the world and emulate. We are the standard for which our daughters will measure when it comes to the men that come into their lives.

*In Service to the Senator is the latest explosive tale from best-selling author Shakir Rashaan, where sometimes, politics make the strangest of bedfellows—and enemies.*



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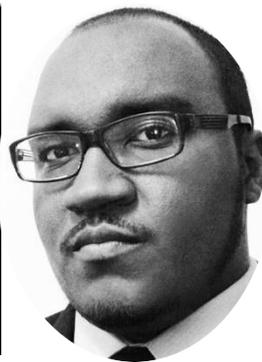
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# Message from *Pastor Karen Williams*



“There are times you have to wait on God for instructions when something new or some new situation comes in your life. You need direction because you’ve never been that way before or you’ve never done a thing before. If you do it the way you’ve always done, it might not work. And this year we’re focusing on how “it’s gonna work”. It’s gonna work because we listen to God, get good directions and guidance. Yes, it’s gonna work.”

# “You gotta suffer to be beautiful, baby”

Naleighna Kai



My mother said those words to me right after she put a small burn on my ear while “pressing” my hair. I was about five or six and had a love-hate relationship to the ritual of sitting in a chair in front of the stove, sizzling metal comb over an open flame, and my mother at the helm wielding both like a weapon. She didn’t burn me often, but when she did, Jean Woodson let loose with those words. I became familiar with the scents of Queen Bergamot and Sir Charles hair grease (which I loved because it smelled like candy).



Later, she would switch the press and comb for what is now called, “Creamy Crack”—that lye-based relaxer (some mistakenly call it perm). Relaxers straighten the natural coil of the hair; perms put in the curl for straight hair. Now, I would experience another type of ritual. Hair parts with a rat tail comb, Vaseline on the scalp and edges, gritting my teeth against that slight burning sensation after a few minutes in order to get the best straightening possible.

She wanted to end the time-consuming process of the original press and curl, and get longer-lasting results for my thick, unruly hair. My sister, on the other hand, whose hair was baby fine and grew so long that she could sit on it, lost all of her hair with this new process. Later, as time went on, and various relaxer products were introduced, so would I. My childhood photos reflect exactly what was going on in my life as defined by my hair.

As a grown woman, I continued relaxing my hair until I became familiar with micro-braids. One time, the braider was nearly three hours late. I was so ticked off, that I tried doing my own hair and kept at it until it felt and looked right. By the time she arrived, I was one-third of the way in and was like, “See ya, chief. I’ve got this.” In between, though, there was the familiar fallback of relaxers to straighten out that new growth. Then I was introduced to the almighty weave. And I’m not talking about hood weave, either. Ehryck, who was a stylist to Oprah before Andre came on the scene, would lay and slay hair for celebrities, entrepreneurs, and professional women alike. That man could do a weave so tight that we’d look like we were born that way. When I wanted to change up my style, I slid on a wig—pixie, bob, page boy, a Janet Jackson, Halle Berry or whatever. I could easily experiment with color, curls, length and have a different look every day.

There came a point that with all the relaxer and weave, my hair thinned. I’m pushing fifty and it wasn’t bouncing back with that full-fledged thickness that had been with me all my life. I wanted to make a drastic change, but I wavered for months before diving in. I loved the look of the tiny sister locs as they resembled micro-braids. I started with a small afro that my locticians first separated into tiny parts, then began locing the tiny strands of hair. I was not used to wearing my natural hair in all that “Ungowa Black power.” The change was startling.

I will be the first to admit, I was not comfortable with the look. No ma’am and no sir. I wore wigs during the embryo stage and only a handful of people knew what lay

underneath. I was afraid. That's right, I'm laying it all on the line here. I WAS AFRAID. I worked at a law firm and could only imagine how wearing my natural hair would be received in a professional setting. I would be ridiculed. I could be fired. I was already a little militant and this might be perceived as me asserting "something" that they couldn't understand. To me, it was merely an attempt at doing what best for hair that years of relaxers, wigs rubbing on the edges, braids pulling out the edges—had damaged.

And then it happened. The day that changed my life forever. I was tired of hiding. Tired of wondering. Tired of being ashamed. And I did the one thing that I did not think I would do. I was like, "To hell with it. This is who I am and I love me. They're going to had to deal with it." I snatched off that wig like it had done me wrong and wore my natural hair to work.

Let me tell you what I didn't expect—I received MORE compliments from Whites and Blacks alike over the state of my new hair. They LOVED it. Absolutely loved it. Truthfully, I never considered myself as vain. Ever. But with every compliment, with every sister asking me about my hair, with "natural" sisters giving me that head nod of approval, my "personal sunshine" meter went up a notch. So much so, that I was beaming into the mirror, beaming when I walked down the street, beaming while I worked, beaming and had a little sway and swagger in my hip movements. When I became comfortable with my hair, "e'rebody" (Yes, I said it that way) e'rebody was alright with it. But it started with me.

Trust me, and this is important, I didn't become one of those "natural hair saints". By that I mean, one of those vigilant people trying to convert everyone into

embracing a natural style. You know, like how some sinners do when they find God, and suddenly forget what it was like before they stepped through the church doors and they were doing all kinds of whatever? Oops, did I say that?

Hair is a personal journey and there is no "right" or "wrong" way when it comes to how someone wants to wear their hair. If you're making that transition, it is important to surround yourself with people who are going to support the effort, and not "talk you out of it" or put down your thoughts about making that move. Some might even go so far as to slide a container of "creamy crack" in front of you the moment there's a smidgen of doubt. They'll act as though you're an addict that can relapse.

But I'll be honest, when I walk past a sister with locs or an Afro, I will give them that subtle head nod to say, "Go on, with ya bad self," and you can bet your bottom dollar that I always get one in return.

*For the next issue, I would love for our readers to showcase their transition to natural hair and share their stories. Email the document and the before and after photos (one each) to [lissawoodson@aol.com](mailto:lissawoodson@aol.com).*



# PORTIA'S RANDOM THOUGHTS

1. These toilet paper commercials will have you thinking you're gonna wipe yourself with a cloud. #lies
2. Be careful who you have praying for you. #everybodydonthavegoodintentions
3. I need to carry a baggie full of cookies for the times when someone wants recognition for doing something they are supposed to do. #hereyougo
4. We all need somebody to lean on. #reallifeisnotasongormovie
5. Some days, I wish life was all cigar bars, smooth grooves, tasty libations, and great sex. #easyliving
6. Loving a writer isn't easy. We can be a handful. Most times, though, we're worth it. #enoughsaid
7. Don't be a waste of space or time. #earnyourkeep
8. It's okay to want more. #dontletnobodytellyoudifferent
9. Give nosey people something to talk about sometimes. #theyneedtogetalife
10. Lauryn Hill had it right. "Miscommunication leads to complication." #isMercurybackinretrograde



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

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

PORTIA A. COSBY



F.I.R.E.

REIGNITED

A NOVELLA

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"Jackson candidly  
opens up to readers."  
—Essence

# True You

A JOURNEY  
TO FINDING  
AND LOVING  
YOURSELF

with DAVID RITZ Afterword by nutritionist David Allen

# THE REAL JANET JACKSON

## Sierra Kay

My sister-in-law said the words that absolutely made my December. Janet Jackson concert tickets. So I packed a bag, told my bank account to stop giving me the side-eye, found plane tickets and flew to Atlanta without a second thought. My aim? Seeing Janet Jackson on December 17, 2017 on the last night of her American concert tour. See, before Beyonce had a Beyhive, before Tamar Braxton had Tamartians, and before Lady Gaga had Monsters, there were a group of people merely labeled as “fans.” I am a Janet Jackson fan.

As a child, the only thing that kept me from standing on a chair and tipping it over like she did in the Pleasure Principle video was the fact that all chairs were considered my mother’s furniture. No child stood on furniture. Not without repercussions and consequences.

Janet Jackson was, is and will always be a phenom. There are husbands today that will leave their wives for the mere possibility of winning Janet Jackson’s affection, and a slew of wives that will shrug and say, “It’s Janet.” No one ever doubted her talent, her beauty or her appeal. Well, one person did for years. Janet herself.

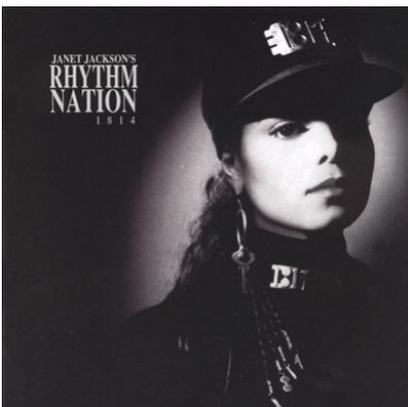
When I read her novel, *True You – A Journey to Finding and Loving Yourself*, I realized what being Janet Jackson cost her. And it wasn’t until I went to her concert that I realized what it gave her.

Her struggle with self-acceptance began with her family. Her beloved brother, Michael, teased her a lot. Now, I have four brothers. In my family, it was the youngest boy that teased the most. Janet knew Michael loved her and they maintained a very close relationship up to his passing. However, she defined herself through his view of her. As a little sister, I know about her brothers and how long it takes for a sister to tell her brother, “I love you, but you can suck it.”

Janet loved food. Having learned at her mother and grandmamma’s knee, she enjoyed cooking. Yet, when she stood in front of an audience, she embodied a character. Someone else determined the character’s visuals. Janet found herself at the mercy of whatever ideal people enjoyed at the time. Every time she stepped in front of an audience, she dealt with dieting, exercise, and the attempt to be good enough, which often translated into thin enough for acceptance. This all started before she had a good grasp on who she was as a person, she was being told who she needed to be.

She launched herself into the limelight playing Penny from Good Times. This character’s biological mother considered an iron as a tool for removing wrinkles from clothes as well as disciplining children. After being cast as Penny and already believing her natural curves didn’t fit in with society’s ideal for a woman, the wardrobe department told her to lose weight and bind her breast. She started her career with the knowledge that her body was wrong; that she needed to change. That she was good, but not quite good enough.

Hence, we’ve watched years of yo-yo dieting, on-tour Janet versus off-tour Janet. She battled herself constantly before realizing she needed discipline. By engaging a nutritionist and sticking with the program, she achieved the type of balance that alluded her previously.



Janet's book reads emotionally guarded. The stories are honest, but it shied away from revealing too many deep emotions even during the telling of turbulent times. I learned more about Janet's evolution with the *Control* album from listening to Jimmy Jam on the QuestLove Supreme podcast than I did from a book supposedly written to tell a side of life previously unexplained.

Watching the DeBarge Unsung episode on TV One, enlightened me on the deeply troubled the DeBarge family. Janet married James DeBarge, an addict, between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. She would look for James DeBarge until 2 a.m., then wake up at 4 a.m. to be on the Fame set at 6 a.m. I can't imagine how much strength it took to do that. How deep she had to dig. The thoughts running through her head. The decisions she had to make during that time. And I should have a clue because I read her book. I expected to shed Lifetime and Hallmark channel worthy tears. Janet shared a lot, but I didn't necessarily feel the emotion along with the stories. The book is still a good read, despite this fact.

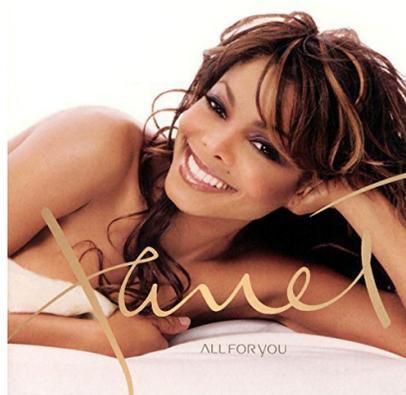
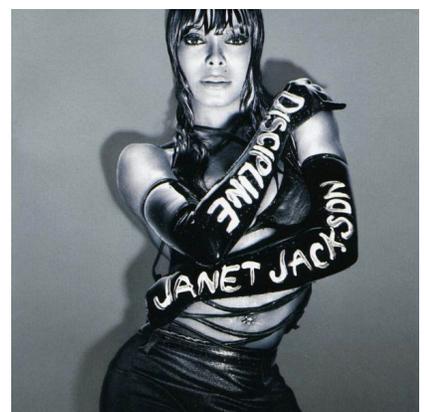
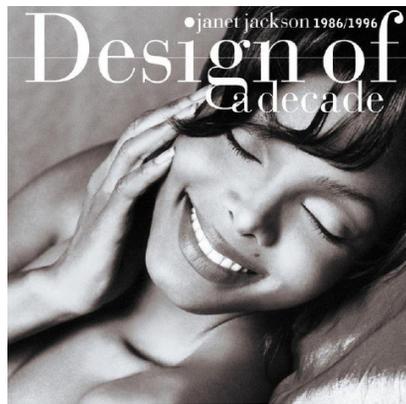
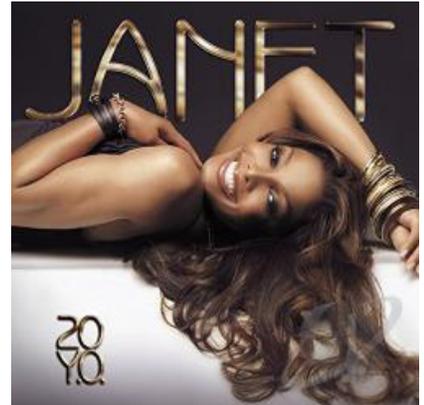
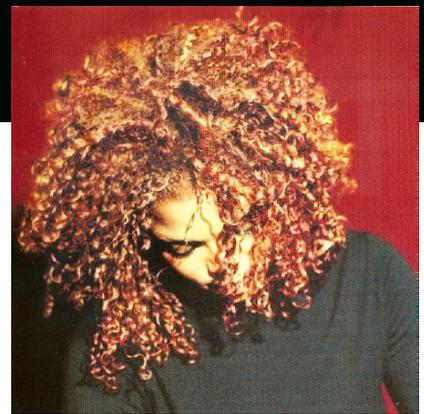
However, go to a Janet Jackson concert and listen, truly listen to her catalog of music. In her songs, she gives her true full range of emotions, the pain, the strength, the resilience and often defiance. She shares her spirit, her belief system, and her love.

During a 90-minute set in Atlanta's Philips Arena, I felt Janet Jackson.

The background of the book was nice. People will connect and be helped by it. I may cook some of the recipes placed on the back pages because I don't know what she sees today when she looks in the mirror, but she is in shape.

However, the Janet that humbly stood in front of an audience while nervously rubbing her hands together, thanking her fans for their support was the real Janet. Even though she's been slaying the game alongside her family for years, she's grateful for the people that support her journey and allow it to continue for years to come. Shy enough to be nervous as she ad-libbed, but strong and determined enough to see it through. That was the true Janet.





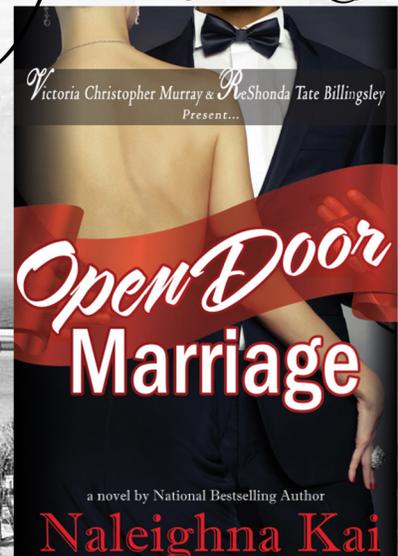
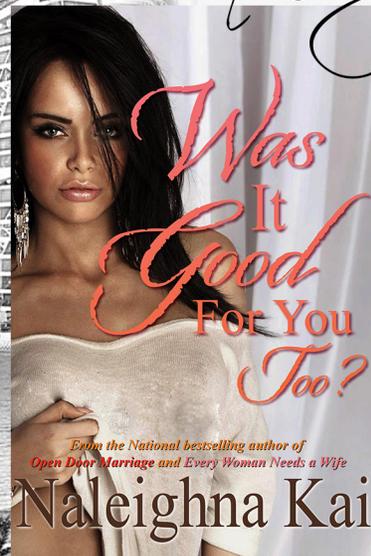
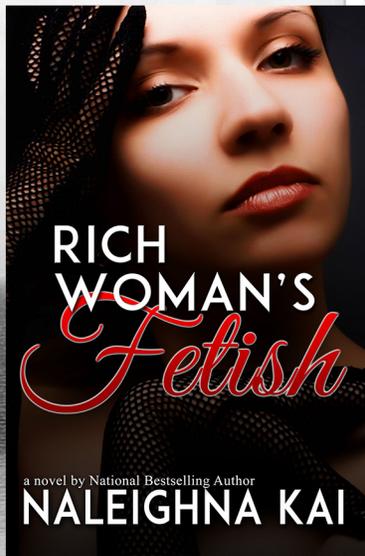
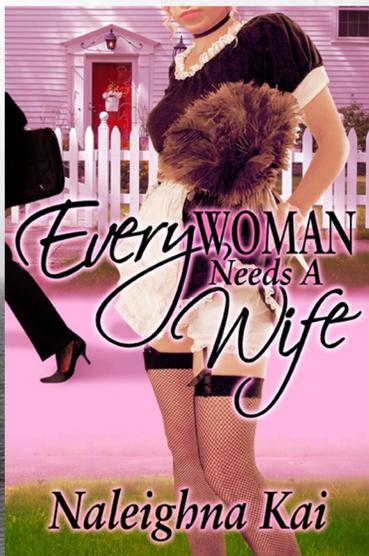
Sierra Kay has an M.A. in Writing from DePaul University, won a Nuyorican Poets Cafe Short Story Slam, participated in comedy fests as a member of the writing teams for Spankx and N20 Comedy. She also writes poetry and suspense novels. Obviously, she'll try anything at least once. Her two novels, *From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

Ladies, you can curl up with a **Good Look ...**



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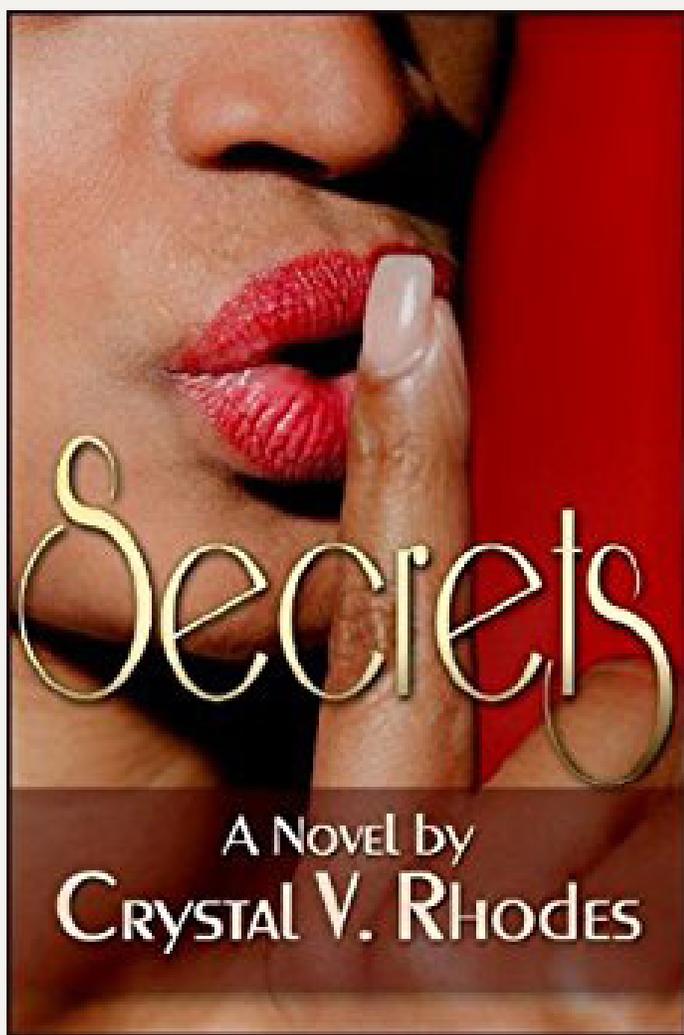


[www.naleighnakai.com](http://www.naleighnakai.com)

# Secrets

Book Review by Shannan Harper

REVIEW



Sinclair and Nedra Reasoner seem like a normal couple, but secrets threaten to cause permanent damage to their relationship. They're raising three precocious children and things are good until Nedra's best friend/co-worker, along with her husband and his parents are killed in a boating accident where they were not the target. Adam Casey, a "Spiritual Guru" comes on the scene as a philanthropist to possibly help Nedra's not for profit organization. The couple's youngest daughter, Gillian takes a dislike to him, but the adults seem to fall for his charm.

Colin, the couple's oldest child, is working with Sinclair's best friend, Brandon, who is a reporter working on an exposé. During his research, Colin uncovers something else that could be totally explosive, if kept a secret.

Sin grew up on the streets, but secrets he's just finding out are threatening to tear his marriage apart. Nedra has a secret of her own, which can cause irreparable harm to their relationship as well.

Adam is a rich and powerful man, and wants Nedra, and will do anything to get her. But Adam also has another deep dark past that threatens to rear its ugly head at times and could cause his plan to fall apart.

Secrets is a surprisingly interesting story filled with murder, mayhem, suspense, and several "what just happened?" moments. Apparently, this book is part of a series, but has an excellent storyline which definitely can be enjoyed as a stand-alone.

# Zora Neale Hurston



In 1917, Hurston was in Maryland, where “colored youths” age 20 and under were eligible for free public school classes. The only problem was that Hurston had been born in 1891, which made her 26. She came up with a solution: Hurston told people that she’d been born in 1901 instead. This allowed her to attend night school, the first step on a path that would take her to Howard University, Barnard College and beyond. From that moment, Hurston’s altered birth date remained a part of her story — even the grave marker that Alice Walker had erected for Hurston in the 1970s incorrectly notes her birth year as 1901.

Hurston worked at a variety of jobs, from manicurist, to Fannie Hurst’s secretary, to writer for Paramount and Warner Brothers Studios, to librarian at the Library of Congress, to drama coach at North Carolina College for Negroes. Hurston began her writing career while at Howard when she wrote her first short story for *Stylus*, a college literary magazine. She continued to write stories, and in 1925 won first prize in the Opportunity literary contest for “Spunk.” In 1939 Morgan College awarded her an honorary doctorate. In 1943 she received the Annisfield Award for the autobiographical *Dust Tracks on the Road*; also in 1943 Howard University bestowed its alumni award upon her.

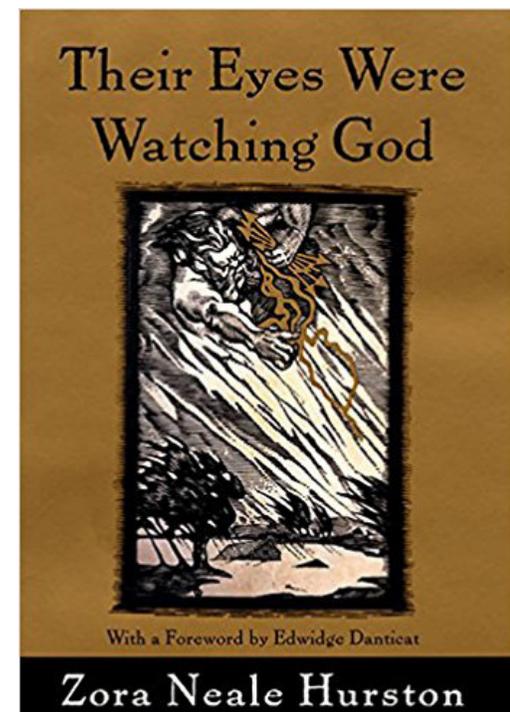
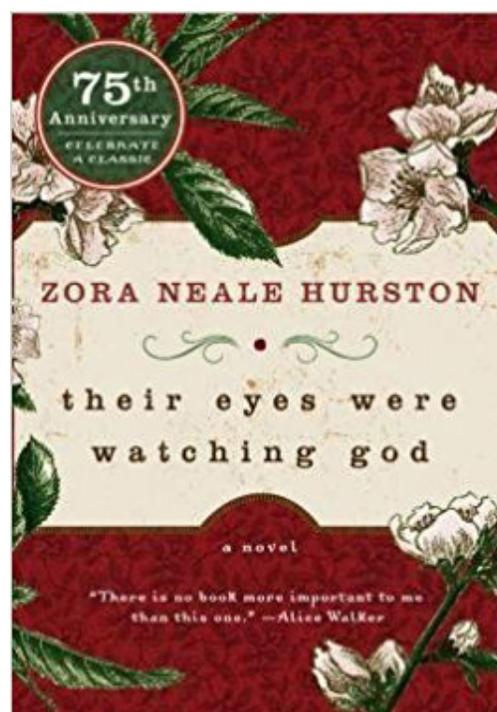
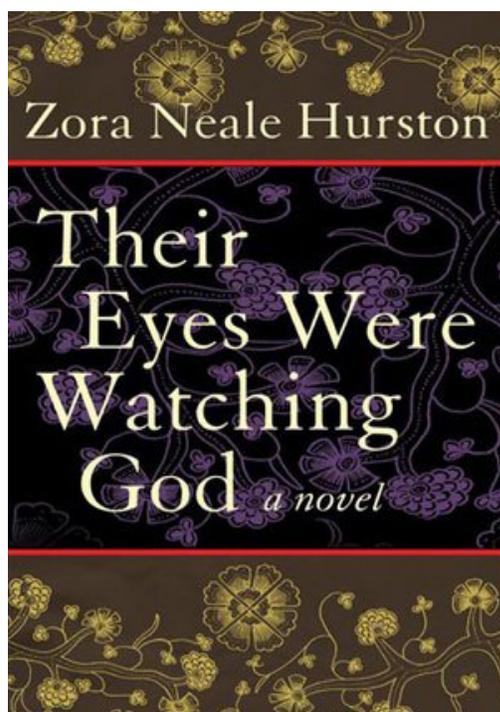
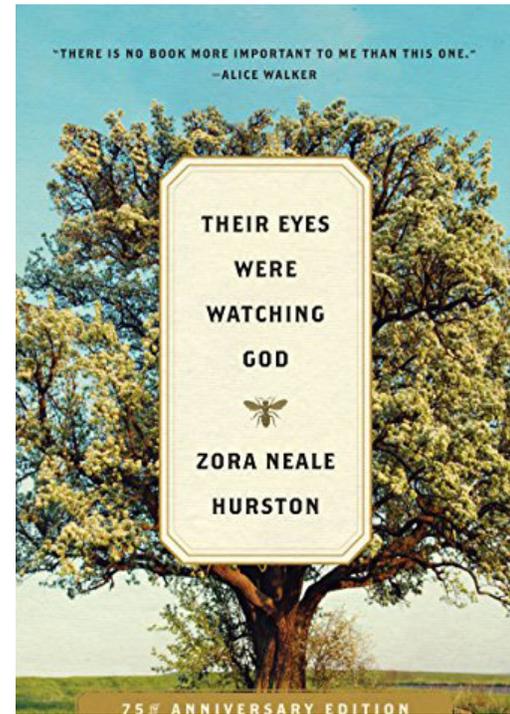
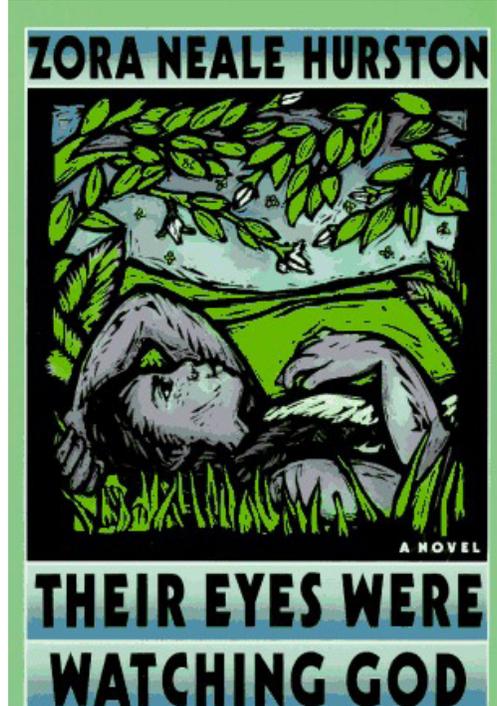
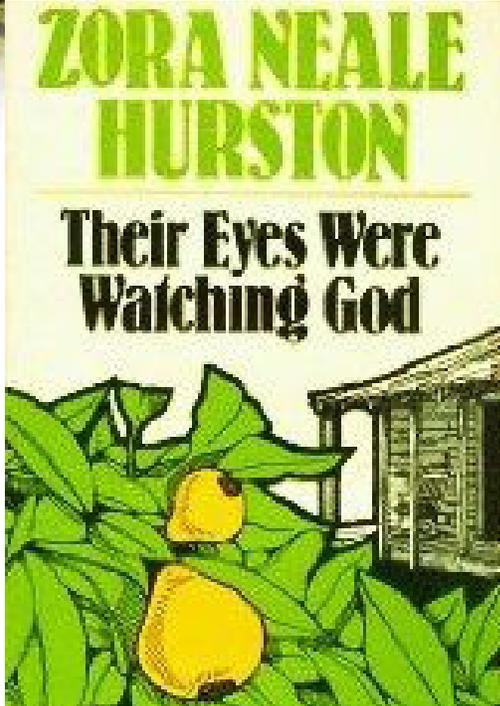
Although Hurston worked all of her life at many jobs and was a prolific writer, money was always a serious problem. In the late 1940s she returned to Florida and worked as a maid in Riva Alto. After several efforts to re-ignite her writing career, she died in poverty in the town of her birth.



OPRAH WINFREY PRESENTS  
HALLE BERRY  
THEIR EYES  
WERE WATCHING GOD



Considered one of the best 100 novels written in the English language since 1923 by Time magazine, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is about the life of Janie Crawford, an African-American woman in Florida during the early part of the 20th century. Wafting and anecdotal, the novel dealt with Janie's struggles with love and disconnect between the restricted role of women were expected to play in society and the increasing opportunities and freedoms available African-American women brave enough to seize them. A sort of coming of age novel, if you will, except the coming of age takes place over her entire difficult life, not just one weekend alone in her parent's house in the suburbs.





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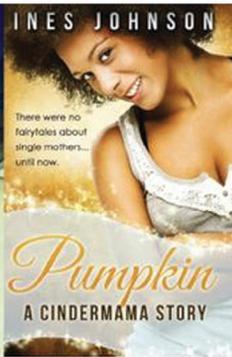
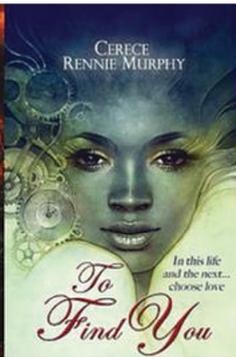
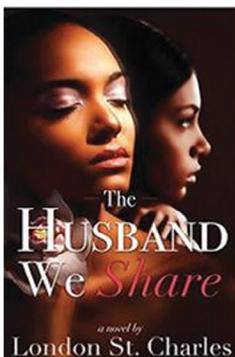
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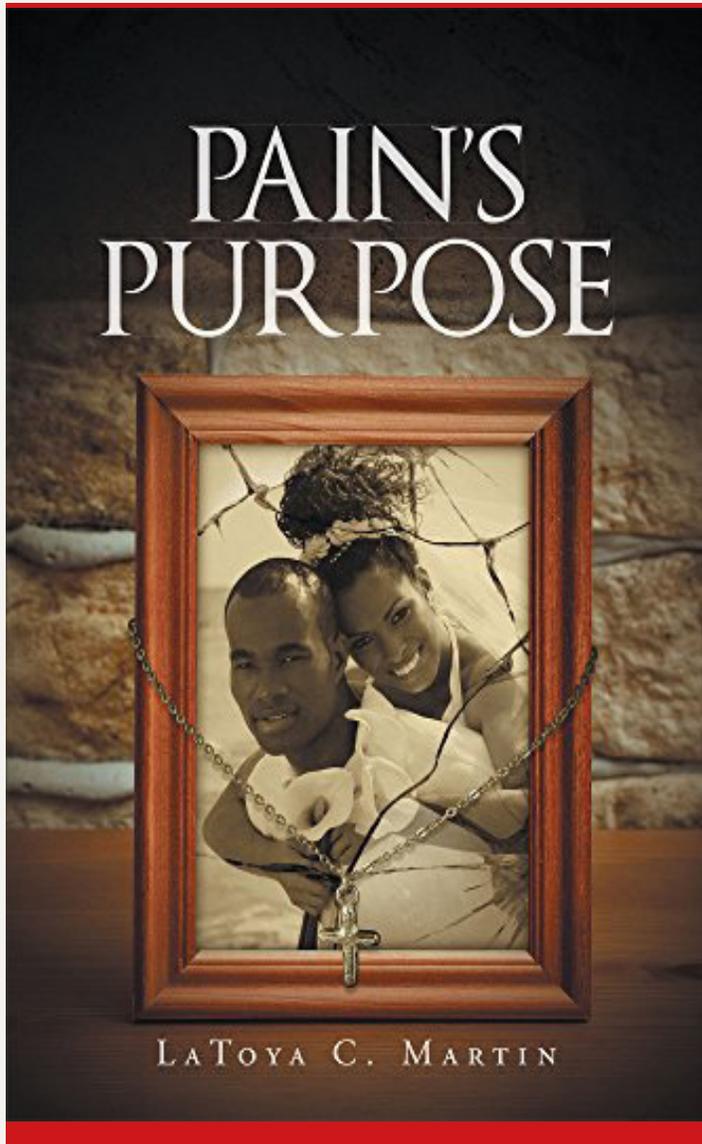
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# Pain's Purpose

Book Review by  
Shannan Harper

REVIEW



Pain. Something that we all have to deal with, but for Talia Williams, her's is in the form of abuse from her husband, Khalil. So she's able to escape and stay with a sorority sister, Alanna Davis in order to keep her baby safe from a possible miscarriage.

After Talia leaves, Khalil decides it's best not to track her down. He finds a job, reconnects with a father who he hasn't seen for over twenty years, and life is on the mend. Until an unfortunate incident happens to shatter every one and their faith.

Talia only issue while living in a safe place is that Alanna is a Christian and is praying for Talia to give her life to the Lord, and Talia feels that God won't help her. Talia's pregnancy is progressing beautifully, she finally does give her life to the Lord, and is close to reconciling with her husband. Then Tragedy strikes.

A phenomenal story of faith, love, and forgiveness that will keep you on the edge of your seat until the very end. You will see growth from the characters as the book was extremely well written and thought-provoking read about facing trials and tribulations in our lives, and how God can help us navigate through them. I am anticipating the sequel and more from this author



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

*You can keep up with Shannan on her blog: [harperscourt77.blogspot.com](http://harperscourt77.blogspot.com)*

# A CALL TO ARMS

*“Stories are like spiders, with all they long legs, and stories are like spiderwebs, which man gets himself all tangled up in but which look so pretty when you see them under a leave in the morning dew, and in the elegant way that they connect to one another, each to each.” – Anansi Boys by Neil Gaiman*

This year, 2017, definitely turned the world upside down and inside out. It’s been a year of WTFs? and of “I can’t believe I’m having to protest the same crap my parents protested back in the day”. Our country had turned her head 180 degrees to marvel at her ass, and so yeah. It’s been challenging, attacking our sense of well-being, culture, and what we “thought” was progress, leaving souls feeling shredded and all of us scratching our heads wondering “How bad is this going to get before it gets better?”.

As a creative person, it’s been tough maintaining a shield around my psyche to keep all of the negativity from infecting my creative flow. My goal as a writer has always been, first and foremost, to entertain readers. All I’ve ever wanted was to provide an avenue of escape from day to day life, into a world that hopefully helped to take your mind off your problems and focus it on someone else’s. My challenge in writing has been to take readers on adventures and to immerse them in a world that was different from their own and to introduce them to fascinating and interesting people that they might not ever meet in real life.

This year has been particularly challenging for me because, like everyone else, it’s been hard not to feel enraged, defensive, and afraid. These obstacles hinder creative flow and make it difficult to focus on seemingly inconsequential things as trivial (in comparison to what’s going

on in the world) as writing made up stories. Images on social media bombarding us with the faces of our sons and daughters being beaten and shot because they made someone else feel—as always comes to light after the fact—“afraid for my life”; news of missing people being trafficked, enslaved, abused and tortured has been unbearable. So many feel helpless to stop these things from happening. They have taken their toll on all of us. It’s in our eyes, this posttraumatic stress resulting from a year that’s truly shown its ass in the worst way, causing us to ponder, “What is humanity, really?”.

And so I questioned, how important is what I do in a world that’s turned on itself and embraced all of this ugliness? Is it worth it to continue? Do people even care anymore? And then, I answered myself. Being an artist, a creator, is more important now than ever. Art is life, an expression of life, and people need it most in the darkest hour. Art heals, and it makes us laugh. If you don’t believe me, check out Alec Baldwin’s impersonation of Trump on Saturday Night Live, and see how much better you feel afterward, when you’ve laughed for ten minutes.

As **artists**, we need to continue creating and working harder than ever to make sure we tell our stories, share our paintings, our movies, and music. People need to be refueled and reinvigorated, enlightened, and uplifted when

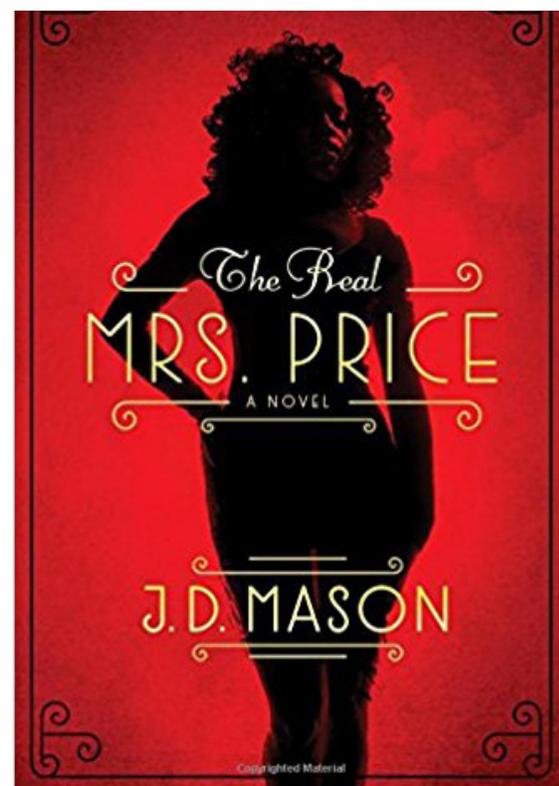
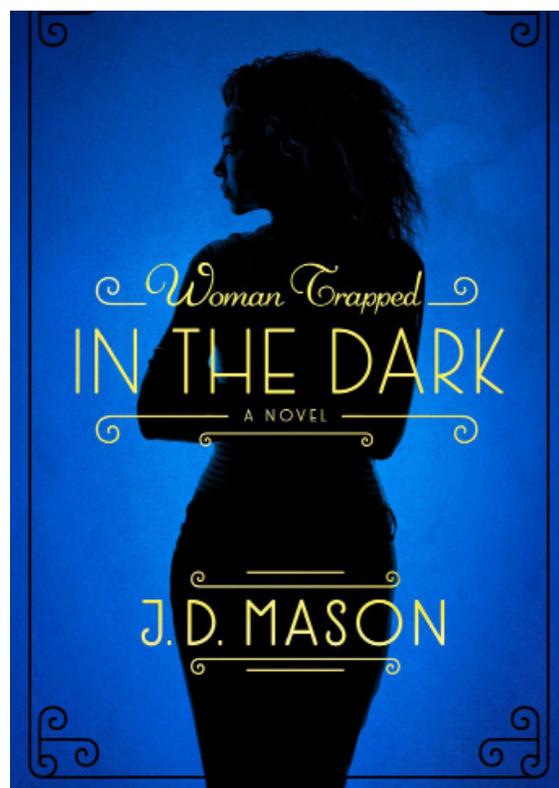
the world seems void of love, light, and empathy. To all my writer friends out there, if I had to give one piece of advice, it would be that you keep doing what you do, and never give up, never give in to negativity, to the despair of what's happening the world. Use it to fuel a new revolution, to teach and uplift through words so that no one ever forgets what these times were like. If only one person ever reads your story, and it makes them smile, then count your effort, successful. Storytelling is a superpower, one that has truly withstood the test of time, and that's never going to change.

**Readers,** never let the world rob you of your gift of imagination, of your appreciation for the whimsical, magical, and make-believe. You're a kid all over again when you read and let those words whisk you away to someplace new and exciting. There's nothing like falling in love with a character and crossing your fingers hoping like hell that there's a happy ending on its way. Every time you read a book, every time you reach out to an author to let them know just how much you loved it, you give us a chance to experience it all over again like it's the first time.

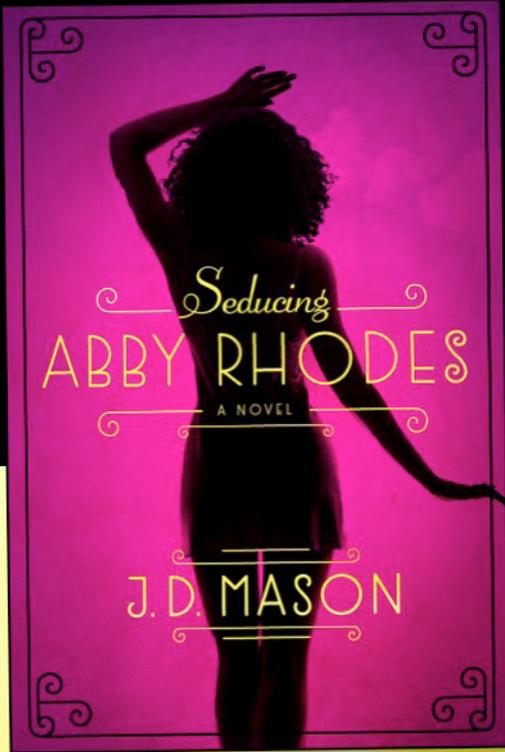
There's hope in art. And love. There's a dance that happens between the artist and the person who views it, listens to it, reads it, and watches it, one that stands strong during the worst of times, and endures long after the artist moves on. Continue this dance into the new year. Understand the passion and love it takes to create magazines like this one, as well as the books and authors featured in it. Know that we all work together in this. I write the words and you read them, bringing them to life in your own way. Celebrate this, knowing that there's light in the darkness, and light always wins.

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

[www.jdmasonauthor.com](http://www.jdmasonauthor.com)



# Welcome to the “colorful” world of Blink (And Miss It), Texas!



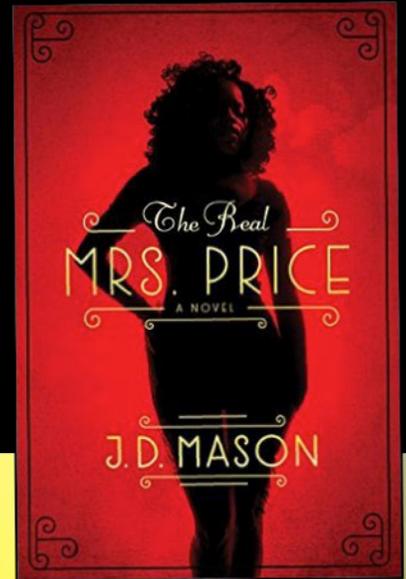
## *Seducing Abby Rhodes*

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

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

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

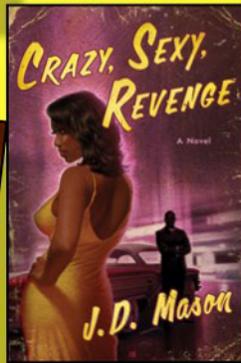
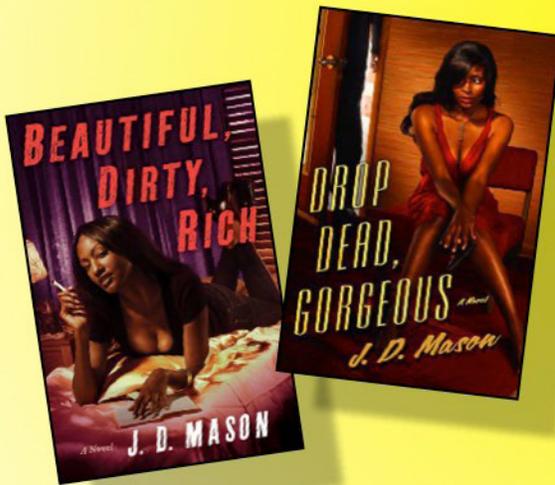
“I have no idea—but the spirits in this house just exhaled, Abby.”



## *The Real Mrs. Price*

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

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



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

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

## *Hart Breaker*

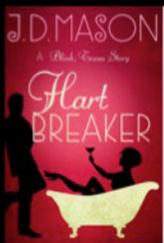
Farrah Hart has made her escape. Running from a violent ex, she finds her way home to Blink, TX. Farrah hopes to lay low at her abandoned childhood home until she can get back on her feet. But when an eviction notice comes in the most dangerously handsome of packages, Farrah might just need someone to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

## *Stone Cole*

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

## *Stormy Knight*

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



**And don't forget to check out the Blink Novellas**

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## Routines and Rituals



**W**riting requires discipline. There are writers who write daily, without fail, and others who can only write late at night. There are writers who stick strictly to a word count or a number of hours per session. But some writers take discipline to a whole other level. They create routines and rituals that seem more like superstitions or idiosyncrasies. Writers can be a bizarre bunch of people.

**F**or example: Start at 6 a.m. with a cup of coffee and a cigarette or SweetTarts and Coca-Cola; write everything down in pencil first (on a pad or Post-It notes), then transcribe in the computer, or play Debussy's Clair de Lune at the start of every session. Sound far-fetched? Well, some writers are that specific about when and how to start their writing practices. Bestselling author, Naleighna Kai is very specific. She writes on a yellow tablet in blue ink and does her revisions with mindless television droning in the background.

**P**erhaps, the success an author achieves with a book or project and the habits used when writing it becomes the foundation of his/her writing routine. Maybe she reads about the peculiar habits of a favorite writer and wants to mimic his/her actions, in hopes of achieving similar results. Take Ernest Hemingway for instance, famous for writing books like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but he likely wrote it while standing. Who knew?

**W**hat do you require to get your writing started or to "free your Muse" as we discussed in the last issue? If, like me, you love to listen to music while writing, your custom may be to create a playlist. That's what I do. As I wrote my debut novel, *Sometimes Love*, I included songs to frame every scene, like a movie soundtrack. On another note, some writers don't like music at all while they write or at least, can only tolerate instrumental.

You might be one of those writers who wears the same shirt turned inside-out and won't wash it until the project is finished. Whatever it takes to get the job done. Just do it. (Be sure to warn visitors though, if you tend to write in the nude or skip showers while writing). However, if you require solitude and there's no one else to consider, you're good.

Writers' routines and rituals are as varied as the writers who adopt them, as well they should be. Writer, AC Arthur, goes to bed early evening and rises around 3 a.m. to begin her writing session. Sometimes we must do something a little differently to yield the best results or as the saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." For a night owl like me, this would never work, but it has worked for her very well. If quirky little behaviors and unusual patterns compliment your writing, by all means, get as crazy and peculiar as your heart desires and your pen requires.

Happy writing from Zora's Den!

*"My main ritual is to write daily unless I'm taking a writing sabbatical. Even on an unmotivated day I can write something. The sabbaticals are usually a week to ten days in which I allow my muses to rest. I also write well to certain musicians, Anthony Hamilton, Leela James and Jaguar Write being three of my faves. I can write most places."* -- Angelia Vernon Menchan



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

*"My rituals involve a specific caffeinated beverage (Coca-Cola to be exact), SweetTarts, and a soundtrack that includes a mix of Dirty South HipHop, Jay-Z, and a West Coast swagger to keep me in the flow. I do my best to write daily, usually at the same time every day, when I'm in my best floetry."* --Shakir Rashaan

*"Post-It Notes along the side of the desktop to remember new ideas or as a reminder to insert/take away something. The computer starts off as a framed cork board and the closer I get to completion, the less Post-Its there are."* -- London St. Charles

*"Pen and paper to start, then I move to the computer. I keep the iPad and phone close by for research. I play random music from gospel, jazz, R&B, dance hall, classical and country while writing. I also keep whatever I'm drinking and snacking on close by, so I don't get distracted."* -- Anita L. Roseboro

*"I always carry a pad and pen. Ideas hit at any time. My characters seem to bug me while I'm at work. Not good. Lol. Evening writing most times consist of wine, going over the notes I've written. Sometimes in quiet or old school R&B playing softly with my headset on. Honestly, there's no clear direction at first. Eventually, it comes together. It's like an outer body experience."* --Christine Pauls

*"I always make a playlist for the book and let it play while I write. The songs are very specific to the storyline or the characters."* -- Portia Cosby

# New You



A new year is beginning, and with that opportunity for us to better ourselves. I'm not talking about a New Year's resolution because face it, we all know those don't work. I'm talking about heart and mindset changes. How many times have you started a resolution on January 1st, and by January 30th, it was over? Well, maybe not that fast, but shortly thereafter. Proverbs 23:7 says "For as he/she thinks in his heart, so is he/she." When you make a resolution, you set yourself up for failure. People use resolutions to self-motivate so they can change bad habits or behaviors. The problem with that is your mind is listening to your heart. If in your heart you are really thinking, I'm not ready to do this, or I'm never going to lose this weight, then you won't. Whatever it is that you are trying to accomplish, you need to believe in your heart first.

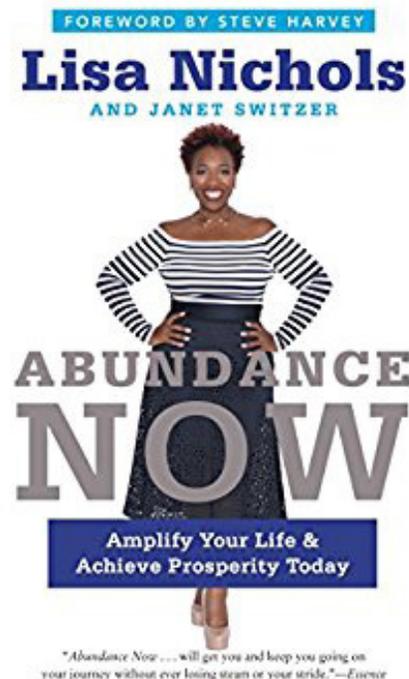
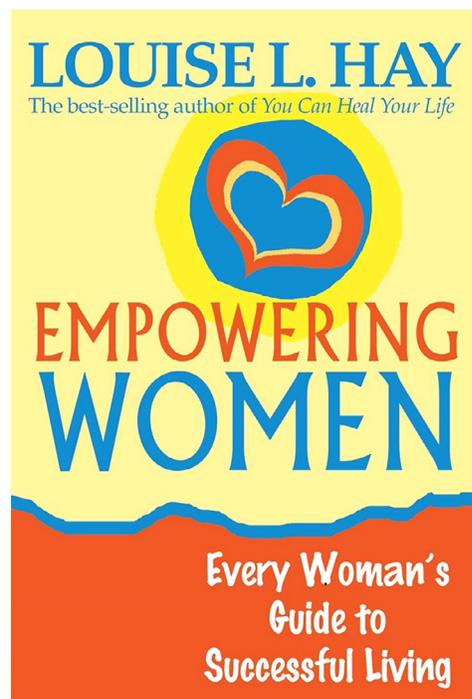
Change requires a new way of thinking, a new outlook. According to Louise Hay in *Empowering Women: Every Woman's Guide to Successful Living*, "The smallest positive change can begin to unravel the biggest problem. When you ask the right question of Life, Life will answer." It doesn't have to be big but should start as small changes where you can quickly see progress. Each success will drive future successes. "As you think in your heart, so you are." Every time you accomplish what you started, your belief in yourself will change, thus changing your mindset. Don't make your resolution just for the new year, make it for life. You need to be ready to apply those new changes daily for the rest of your life. This is how new habits are created. Instead of starting a sentence with "I am not," change to a positive affirmation, "I am rich, I am beautiful, I am healthy, I am all that I was created to be."

In the business world, we use the acronym SMART. It stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-based. This can be applied in everyday life as well. Identify concrete, specific, attainable goals for yourself. Once you have identified those goals and have a plan set, track your progress. Find yourself an accountability partner. Make sure it's not someone who will sabotage your goals but will give you a push when necessary. Celebrate your successes and acknowledge your failures, but don't stay there, move on. Every round will get easier, and before you know it, you will have reached your goal.

As we step into the new year, make smart attainable goals. Whether you want to lose weight, save money, buy a house, start a blog, or write your first novel. Take it one chapter at a time, one pound at a time, one dollar at a time, it all adds up. Invite positivity into your atmosphere. Allow only encouraging vibes to enter your mind. Remember, what we think we are, we manifest. Speak INCREASE in every area of your territory, and you'll definitely enjoy your New Year and your New You.



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





# **THE SECRETS TO HOW NOT TO THROW MAMA FROM THE TRAIN**

*The Relationship Between Adult Daughters and Their Aging Mothers*

**DR JANICE HOOKER FORTMAN**

She's very independent, says anything without thinking of how what she says effects people. She's stubborn, controlling, spiteful, cantankerous, and stressful and wants to be independent but is totally dependent on me. She loves her sons unconditionally, but barely tolerates her daughter. She tells her daughter how to dress, how to wear her hair, how to drive, how to raise her child, how to spend her money, etc., etc., and so forth, and complains that her daughter never listens to her. She is 90 years old and I love her with all of my heart. She is my mama. I hate to admit it, and some people might be shocked. But wow, sometimes I feel like throwing mama from the train. Can I get a witness??!!'

My goal for this book is to explore and offer some advice and techniques that have been shared with me from various women on how to have balance in this extremely complicated relationship, and definitely "How NOT To Throw Mama from the Train". Remember, we can't change our mamas. The secret to a successful relationship is how we respond to them. "The relationship between parents and children but especially between mothers and daughters is extremely powerful, scarcely to be comprehended in any rational way" – Joyce Carole Oates

*Janice Hooker Fortman, Ed.D is an award winning international speaker and author, who specializes in the field of communication as it relates to behaviors. Her workshops offer insight, into the communication patterns that cause difficulties in the adult daughter/aging mother relationship.*



# *I Won't go to Jail for You*

Naleighna Kai

When we think of people serving time, the last thing that comes to mind are people who did a little “creative accounting” with our taxes, or maybe someone gave you the hook up on the paperwork to help a loan application pass through all the hoops that banks send buyers through these days. We don't think of the bootleg man coming through with CDs and Movies that have been pirated and is basically stealing from the artist. No, we think of guns, drugs, assaults and things of that nature.

Recently, it came to my attention that an attorney I once worked with is serving nearly five years in Club Fed for being caught up in a mortgage scam. I did some research to find out what happened in the case. The attorney, I'll call her Wendy for this article's purpose, did the closings for a few questionable real estate deals. Now mind you, when I knew Wendy she was into corporate, labor and employment, and entertainment law. None of what her field of interest encompassed had anything to do with residential deals. So, after reading pages of transcripts, listening to the recordings of the hearings, I found that Tiffany, the woman who handled the paperwork for the banks, underwriters, appraisals and such; brought Wendy in for the closings, then decided to turn the tables on Wendy by testifying against her. From the behind the scenes maneuvering, Tiffany, not Wendy, was the one who ended up with a house that was \$723,000 and change. She also was the only one to benefit in other ways.

When that woman sang to the Federal government, she let loose with the whole opera. Tiffany cut a deal to save her own ass without going about it the proper way. She effectively blindsided Wendy and Wendy's attorney. The bad part is—the judge

completely let it slide. A mortgage broker was a smaller fish to fry than a lawyer who had spent years in college, then law school and who once worked at a major firm. The legal system was sending Wendy a message. Unfortunately, Wendy's attorney pissed off the judge a few times and that certainly didn't bode well. The dissension between the judge and the attorney was one of the major factors in a failed appeal along with that “deal” that Tiffany cut to throw Wendy under the bus, then back up and roll over her a second time.

Now, through it all, Wendy never “snitched” and told Tiffany's part in things and I'm certain she soon became aware at some point that Tiffany wasn't on the up and up. In the beginning, either Wendy didn't know anything, or she was more loyal than she should have been given the fact that it didn't take much for Tiffany to serve her up like day-old bread.

The end result? Wendy, a lawyer who had been introduced to the residential real estate field by Tiffany, found herself disbarred with no way of paying off debts and massive student loans for a profession she dreamed of since a little girl. Then she found herself in a women's prison, away from her sons and her husband. She will miss their formative and teen years. Tiffany, the mastermind of the scheme to defraud four separate homeowners, walked out of the courtroom and back to her family. Wendy, however, received 4.9 years.

In another case, a Chicago woman who owned several businesses, one of which provided tax services is also behind bars. “Raine” is serving about five years in Club Fed. She did a little creative accounting with people's taxes to get them more of a refund than the IRS felt they were entitled. She didn't see a dime of that extra

money that landed in her client's pockets. That "creativity" finally caught the attention of IRS and they snatched her up and tried her for each and every instance where she "doctored" someone's taxes. She was found guilty. The IRS served notice that they were going to take a closer look at all of the taxes she prepared. Several customers who thought they danced away with extra cash free and clear, now might find themselves on the wrong side of the law. Remember that old saying, "gas, grass or ass, nobody rides for free"? Playing with the IRS is not the kind of ride anyone should leave to chance. They are like Rihanna in this instance—they want their money. And you'd better have it.

Two professional Black women behind bars. Both situations hit close to home because I knew them (Raine wasn't my tax person. She owned another business that was literary related and that's how I interacted with her). They were good people that made bad judgments.

Now, let's bring you to my experience and a mistake that could have landed me in the same place as Wendy and Raine. Because I own multiple businesses, getting my taxes done was become fairly expensive. A former friend referred me to a woman who would do taxes at a much lower rate than the guy who'd handling mine for nearly almost two decades. Because I keep an accounting spreadsheet and all of the tax items in a folder all year long, putting everything together to turn over to the tax people is never an issue. The process is pretty painless and I was always applauded by my tax guy for having everything broken down the way he liked. And I trusted him completely. I only wished he didn't cost an arm, a leg, and a couple of toes.

Well, this new tax person, "Elexa" was definitely a different experience. I scanned and sent

everything in so she could start the process with a note that I would make an appointment to come in to sit with her when they were done. Then I didn't hear anything for a minute (red flag). So I followed up. Unfortunately, I had one heck of a time trying to get someone to answer her phone for me to schedule a time to come in. Red flag. Then when I finally reached someone, I found out that my taxes had already been e-filed with the IRS. Seriously? Sent in without me laying eyes on it? Without discussing what was done? Without signing it? Red flag. Red flag. Red flag.

Unlike my former tax guy who lived only a couple of miles away, this new spot was in a West Suburb. Drive-bys weren't as easy and confirming when she'd actually be in the office became a major challenge because no one from her office, once again, was answering the phone or returning my messages.

I tried for a week to get on the horn with IRS and the wait times went way past my lunch time (sometimes on hold for 55 minutes or so). After a truckload of voicemails and emails to Elexa, I finally received a copy of what she sent in and saw that I was getting a refund that was a lot higher than normal. Another red flag. The IRS sent me a letter asking for a piece of documentation that had to do with tuition. No problem. I sent in a copy of my son's tuition statement. I received yet another notice that they needed the same documentation that I believed I had already sent in. This time, I toughed it out and managed to reach someone at IRS who went over the taxes that were sent in. The agent pointed out that there was one piece of documentation missing. They wanted a 1098T that came from Kaplan University. One problem. One major problem. I have never attended Kaplan University.

This time I was on the horn trying to reach Elexa, to

ask what the hell she had done. I did some research and found out Alexa once worked there. And then a call to my former friend showed that she was very much aware that Alexa was “that kind” of tax person. I was livid. When I finally reached Alexa, the conversation did not go well and I recorded it to be sure I was able to make a complete transcript of what was said. The conversation led me to the understanding that Alexa had always been a “Raine” kind tax preparer and wasn’t ashamed of it, either.

My former friend who referred me to Alexa, evidently wasn’t aware that I wasn’t into that kind of “hook up”. I stated that the fee for getting my taxes prepared by my normal guy was becoming too costly, NOT that I was looking to get out of paying the IRS what they were owed; or getting more back than I was entitled to. The one thing I never played with was God and the IRS. They both come for what’s theirs and they ain’t no punks about it either.

I sent in a letter to the IRS explaining that I had not attended Kaplan University and that particular aspect was an error. I would owe them, but that was fine. I’d rather be honest and be on this side of the bars, than send in the form that Alexa emailed to me to send to the IRS and walk away with money that could be considered ill-gotten gains. Anyone who knows me, knows Homie don’t play that. And that’s why my friend is now a former friend. If that’s how you want to roll, then hey, that’s your Karma. But don’t get me wrapped up into that kind of mess. She was perfectly fine with it and then wondered why her life was always on the verge of falling apart.

Eventually, with another call to the IRS to make sure things were square, they asked for further documentation (emails, transcripts, and paperwork) regarding Alexa and my tax preparation experience. What happened to me needed to be on record to

make sure I wasn’t joining Raine and Wendy at any point in time. I’m not going to jail for nobody. They say snitches get stitches, but not if I cut you first.

Why am I sharing this story? Because it’s tax time and this is a lesson that someone might need to learn. We all know someone who gives “the hook up” whether it’s bootleg movies, someone wanting to trade cash for the use of their “card”, the person who can produce paycheck stubs, the knock-off purse guy and all the others. In this day an age, when police are pulling Black folks over for any and everything, I want you to be aware that they can haul you in for having that knock-off or those bootleg CDs and movies in your possession. Don’t give them any ammunition. If the art is something you appreciate, show the artist some love and actually see the movie when it first comes out. Buy the products from a place that will give you a receipt. And when it comes to your taxes, do NOT play with the IRS. Having those extra dollars aren’t going to be any comfort when your ass lands in the pokey.

And another thing, ladies. I just became aware of a practice called “flipping taxes” where dudes hang around or cozy up to a woman who’s about to get a tax refund. Then he asks (or demands) that she turn it over to him so he can “flip” it (put it into drugs) and net three times the amount. Well, what happens is sometimes the guys walk off with the money. But here’s the worse case scenario, he gets busted for drugs and the money trail leads back to you (You know, with refund hitting your account for x-y-z amount and the drugs on said lover is around x-y-z amount. Guess who’s going to pokey right along with old boy? Riiiiiiight.

Play it smart. What’s yours is yours. Don’t make the kind of decisions that could land you in a place you would never want to be.

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**He vowed to love and cherish her . . .**

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

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



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# MENDING FENCES

Christine Pauls



The characters in my latest book, *One Good Thing*, pushed me into this topic and have also caused me to be a bit transparent in the process. These three sisters were in a situation where forgiveness was needed, but their differences have caused dissension between them.

Madelyn, the youngest felt unsupported and unloved by these women, who were supposed to be her family. They left to pursue careers in music, leaving her as the sole caretaker of their mother and grandmother, effectively putting a halt on her life. They left her to sink or swim, not bothering to call regularly or send monetary help her way. When the two return home because their music aspirations didn't pan out as hoped, the emotions and issues surface which will force them to have to face the funk and work through all of it together. Unfortunately, it won't be easy.

I wasn't raised by my biological mother. I was raised by her youngest sister, my aunt and her husband who were childless. Actually, my aunt raised four out of the twelve of us and had legal guardianship. Years went by, and my life was as normal as any child growing up in a middle-class, two-parent household with siblings. That would all change in a blink of an eye.

When I was around seven or eight, the woman

who I called, "Mom," sat me down and said, "Christine, we're not your real parents. We're your aunt and uncle. Your mama is my sister."

You can probably imagine the confusion on my little face. After that announcement, she packed a bag and sent me to my biological mother, a stranger, for a visit. At least I thought it was a visit. I had no idea she was actually giving me back to the woman who gave birth to me. All of a sudden, I was thrust into an environment that I couldn't comprehend.

In this new world, I met my oldest brother, a heroin addict, thanks to the war. A brother who was a juvenile delinquent. I also became acquainted with a teenage sister who drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, partied and stayed out all night. She would take me with her sometimes to one of her best friend's apartment. He was a gay male who dressed in drag. She protected me no matter what was going on, and kept me close to her. Her friends took a liking to me and helped care for me too when I was around. In her own way, I believe she was showing love for me.

My mother was very lenient, plus she had a lot of health issues which is probably why she wasn't strict like my aunt was. I was amazed to see kids do whatever they wanted with no repercussions. My brother didn't like that I had been inserted in

the household, and made sure I knew it by way of bullying me constantly, as well as moments where he'd abuse me in a sexual way. I'd try to steer clear of him by following my mother around the house so that he'd leave me alone. It didn't always work because she'd shoo me away, telling me to go somewhere and sit down.

I more than hated being in my mother's house, and couldn't understand the dynamics of my new situation. I was confused. I felt like the only way I could stop this was to act out in hopes that my mother would send me back to my aunt, who I wasn't even sure wanted me now. My tantrum worked. She sent me back. Why didn't anybody want me?

My mother never attempted to have a close relationship with me. I didn't think she wanted to. We interacted; but not in a mother/daughter way. She would always say that I belonged to my aunt and never gave any other explanation. I was angry and felt abandoned, despite the loving foundation provided by my aunt and uncle. I couldn't understand why I was unwanted. My mother didn't want me. My siblings didn't want me. My biological father didn't want me. I was unable to accept it and became resentful towards everyone. Those feeling stayed with me and carried into my adulthood.

My grandmother, mother, aunts, my father, two brothers and a sister passed on many years ago. So many things were left unsaid, questions unanswered, forgiveness granted or given. My siblings and I have made a pact to work

together to mend the relationship between us. We all realized that it was time for a change after experiencing so many losses. Spending more time together, family functions, sending birthday and holiday cards, calling each other more and being there for support when needed. It's still a process for me as I work towards forgiveness with a few of my brothers.

I forgive my mother because I've come to understand that she loved me enough to let me go. She wanted me to have a "proper upbringing." She knew I'd be better off with my aunt, because at that time in her life when I was born, her circumstances, as well as her health prevented her the ability to provide the care and stability I needed. She believed in her heart that my aunt could give me what she couldn't. She told me this on her death bed in 1999.

My mom, the oldest, and her two sisters were very close. They stuck together and looked out for each other. So it would only be fitting that her sister, who couldn't have children of her own, to step in to raise her nieces and nephews. That's what family does.

Mending fences doesn't always mean you're going to kiss, make-up and become bosom buddies. It doesn't mean that you'll form a relationship with that person. Sometimes it means you'll forgive, squash it and move on with life, closing the chapter of those past events and laying it to rest. The most important thing is that you do it for you, not for others.



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

# Hairstory



Recently, on a national television talk show, a married couple of nine years were on and the topic was all about the fact that the husband was no longer attracted to his wife because she now wore her natural hair. When he married her, she wore weaves which eventually damaged her hair to the point she had to cut it all out. What was left behind was something that sent him running out of the door, then trudging back into the house to say, "If it's a wig, take it off."

I posted the video on my page and my FB Friends had the opportunity to sound off.

**Shareta Caldwell-Rippatoe:** This is what happens when you don't show the person you are with the real You. Could be hair, make-up, or how you talk.



**Naleighna Kai:** so you're saying it's okay for him to now not be attracted to his wife because she has to wear her natural hair since the weave has damaged it? He didn't marry her hair, he married HER for better or worse. He didn't warn her that not wearing weave is a deal breaker the way some men warn that if a woman goes over a certain weight he's leaving her.

**Shareta Caldwell-Rippatoe:** Whether it is right or wrong, I didn't really think about it. He feels how he feels. I was only referring to how he had no idea how his wife looked without a weave. Nine years and she has never shown him her real hair! He was used to seeing her one way all the time and without warning, she switched it up.

So when you don't talk about these things or don't show a person who you really are, you get this very shocked response. He obviously liked her to look a certain way. While he is saying she is beautiful, her new look is not something he

loves. I find it more wrong that they are just now having this conversation.

**Naleighna Kai:** I look at his body language and how his view of her has affected her, too. I don't think they will get past this for something as simple as "hair". And that's truly sad. He said he finds her unattractive and told the whole world this. And that's sad, because she is beautiful. Natural hair and all.

**Shareta Caldwell-Rippatoe:** Naleighna Kai, look at how far apart they are sitting. To him it is more than hair. He has a type and she no longer fits. There was a reason he never saw her in her natural state. Girl, he ran out the house and said if it's a wig, take it off. This man wants no parts of the natural look. Yeah, I don't think they will last after this. He's not attracted to her and she has to be wondering if he ever was.

**Neysa Wilfong:** It almost sounds like he was saying, she's beautiful, but. Like yeah she's beautiful but not my type of beautiful. This man clearly does not like the natural look. He was attracted to her looking a certain way and now she doesn't so he's like who are you and where is my wife. None years and this is how he's acting, good grief! And didn't she say she went natural 2 years ago. So she's being feeling unattractive for that long. Wow!

**Naleighna Kai.** It hurt my heart that she takes the blame and then co-signs on not liking her natural hair. Hair is going to lose them a good marriage. Appearances. Really? If he was more supportive, trust me, she would love it.

**Shareta Caldwell-Rippatoe:** Whew!! So I watched the remaining portion of the video. Still going with my original reaction and will add this...if they don't make it, he will be the one to leave, not her. She's already making concessions by



not wearing her natural hair because she knows he doesn't like it. He also mentioned the length a few times and the style. It sounds like he prefers long hair and if she cut it off a couple of times, it will take a few years for it to grow to the length that he likes. Him not supporting her is unfortunate because dealing with your natural hair on your own can be hard, frustrating, and discouraging at times.

So many black women do not know how to take care of their hair, what products to use, what salons to go to, and what styles will work. All that is hard enough to deal with but add to the mix the person that you want to look good for not feeling you...that's hurtful. I understand how she feels it is her fault because he hasn't said anything different. She taking responsibility for them having this issue between them now, but he hasn't taken responsibility for his reaction and how it makes her feel. She seems to be more understanding of his feelings and while he says he understands, he would prefer that she put that weave back in.

**Mary Crawford:** We wear weave, we're trying to be white. We wear makeup they've a problem. We wear out hair the way God gave it to us and they start longing for the other texture. Women have way too much pressure on us to be everybody else's definition of beauty. Mary Crawford And I know damn well that he knew that mermaid looking hair was not real. GTHOH

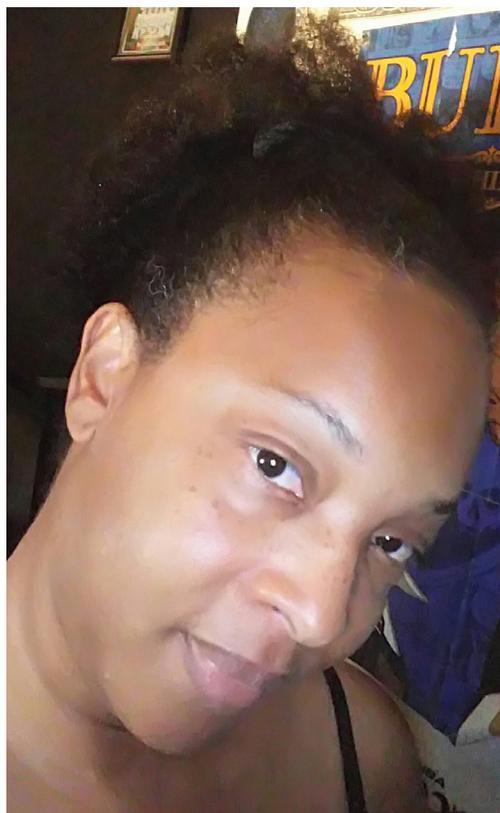
**Keshia RocknRolla Kola:** She needs more friends with natural hair. There are so many beautiful styles she can play with. I'm glad that she's finally embraced it, because she is beautiful. My BF is Mexican and he LOVES and prefers my hair natural. He doesn't like it straight. I don't understand why all the drama over hair. It reminds me of the "Good and bad hair" scene in Spike Lee's "School Daze" and I thought we were pass that?!

**Shareta Caldwell-Rippatoe:** I'm natural and one of the top comments I hear from other naturals is regarding their significant other's reaction. All of them thought, oh it's just hair, he won't trip. Well, they were wrong. It isn't just hair. It never is just 'anything'.

I remember when I decided to stop relaxing my hair, I did talk to my husband. He didn't care, he said it was my hair. He has only ever seen me relaxed so I told him, so you know this hair in its natural state is completely different. Fast forward five years later and he walked in on me putting a deep conditioner on and lost his damn mind. He thought I was putting on a perm. All I heard was, you said you were natural now. How could you do this? It is so unhealthy. Your hair is fine. Wash it out, you didn't say you were doing this. And he was serious!

Remember, this is the man who said, it was my hair and it didn't matter. Turns out, it does matter. I was like, "Dude chill, it's conditioner. Can you not smell the coconut?"

He had the container in his hand like he was about to throw it in the trash! Man, do you know how much deep conditioner costs? Put my jar down!!!



(pictured: Shareta Caldwell-Rippatoe)

# RT BOOKLOVERS CONVENTION

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## A New Beginning

In April 2008, I recall getting out of my car on the west side of DuSable Museum of African American History. My office, on the campus of the University of Chicago Medical Center, was on the third floor of a brownstone at 56th and South Maryland. A warm spring rain, the kind that brings May flowers, splashed my windows, and caressed my face. I grabbed my shoulder bag, hoisted my umbrella and began my walk. Today was different, I no longer braced myself for the grinding bone-on-bone pain that had plagued me for several years, and gone was the slight limp that a friend had respectfully dubbed my “pimp walk”. Reflecting upon that morning, I walked with a sense of awe, the magnitude of my blessing gripped me in waves. As I strolled, I welled up with tears and under the cover of the light rain audibly repeated the mantra Thank you, God! Thank you, God! Without pain, I could refocus my energy.

Shortly after the 2008 presidential inauguration, I pivoted and finally faced my fear of undergoing surgery and had my ravaged right hip joint replaced. The post hip replacement drugs were potent, and I felt no pain. This liberated me to freely rehab my replaced joint, focus on sets of leg raises, leg rotations, balancing exercises and the gait training necessary to recover and learn to retrain my body to bear my weight evenly.

As the film of pain over my life was lifted, I refocused on polishing my memoir, *Sweet Liberia, Lessons from the Coal Pot*, so that it could be published. I had no idea how I would publish my book, but my gut told me it would be published.

I have always been a writer. I began as a little girl, writing stories in my head even before I had the temerity to put pen to paper. I was anxious to resume writing for pleasure and to publish the slew of short stories about my family’s life in Liberia, West Africa, that had morphed into my memoir. My family’s saga was stewing on my laptop, like a well-seasoned pot of gumbo while the pain that had been a barrier to almost

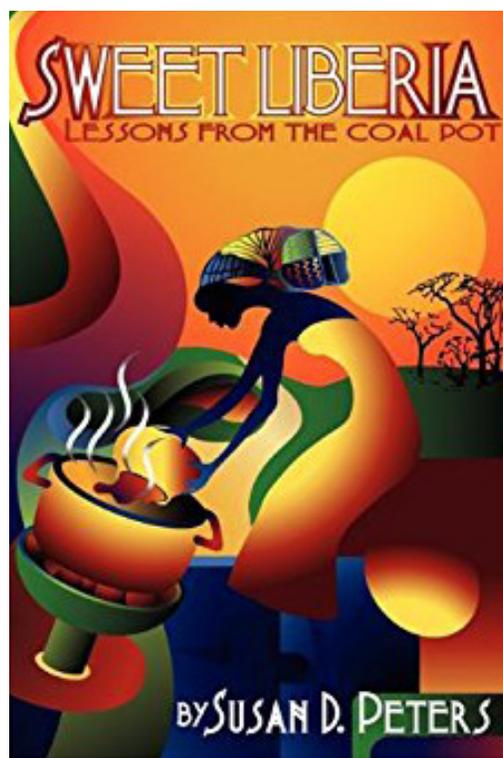
everything other than eating and making a living reigned.

I had tried to find a publisher. I had mailed dozens of proposals to agents and received a folder full of rejection letters. My sister and I had flown to New York in 2007 to attend BookExpo America, and I had almost snagged a New York agent, when, through a cruel twist of fate, that opportunity disappeared. Had her interest been a mirage? When the offer was rescinded, I was discouraged and filled with self-doubt. Maybe my book wasn’t any good.

Having lived in Liberia for 11 years during, I had fed, housed, educated and clothed five children in a country that was, unbeknown to us, spiraling towards a civil war. The faith and optimism that had been battle tested in Liberia reemerged.

In early 2010, I became reacquainted with national bestselling author, editor, and self-publishing Guru Lissa Woodson (Naleighna Kai). Ironically, we had initially met in the African American Author’s area at BookExpo America. But it was her cocky presentation on the merits of self-publishing at the Carter G. Woodson Library that would set me on a rapid-fire course to self-publish.

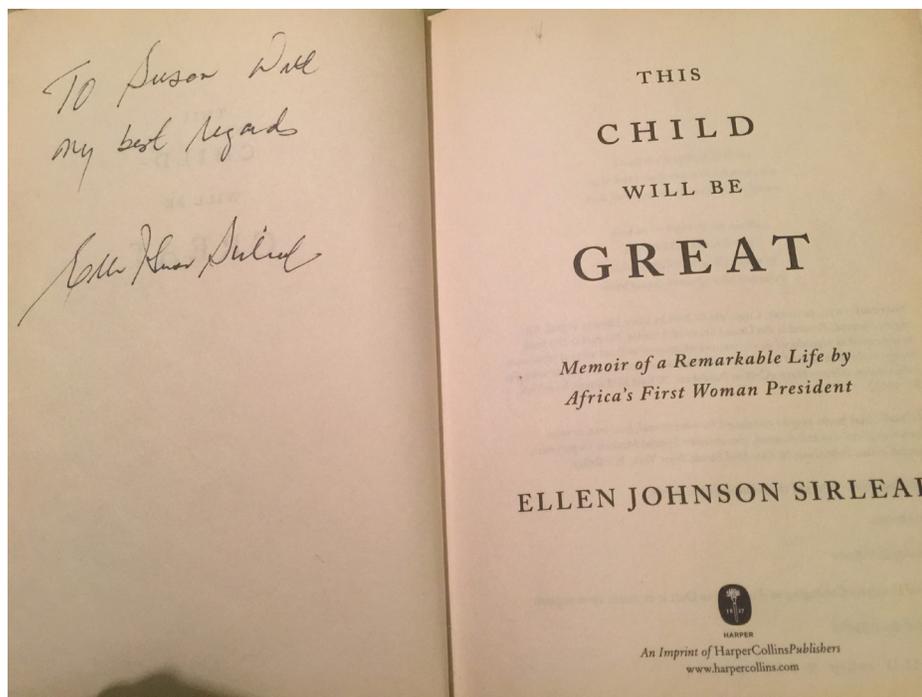
By May of 2010, Lissa had edited my book, led



me to cover artist Baron Steward, and guided me through all aspects of publishing under my own company, Sunrise Consulting. July 21, 2010 my Liberian experiences came full circle when two members of the AKA sorority, responded to my wish to present a copy of Sweet Liberia, Lessons from the Coal Pot to their sorority sister, Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, then President of Liberia. They blessed me with transportation and tickets to the AKA Boule in St. Louis. Once inside, I was able to hustle myself into a private audience between the president and members of a St. Louis Liberian delegation. In those few unforgettable moments I reminded Madame Sirleaf of our initial meeting more than twenty years earlier in Liberia; presented her an autographed copy of my Liberian memoir, and got her to personalize my treasured copy of her 2009 autobiography, This Child Will be Great.



That year, Sweet Liberia, Lessons from the Coal Pot, won the 2009-2010 Black Excellence Award from the African American Arts Alliance of Chicago for Outstanding Achieving in Literature-Non-Fiction and in 2011, received an award in the Illinois Women's Press Association's Mate E. Palmer Non-Fiction Contest.



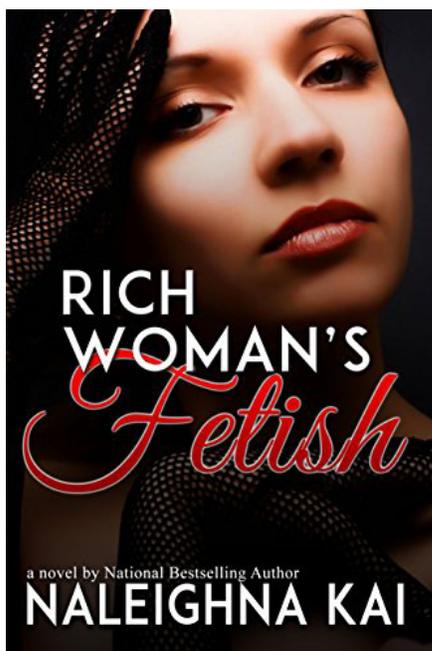
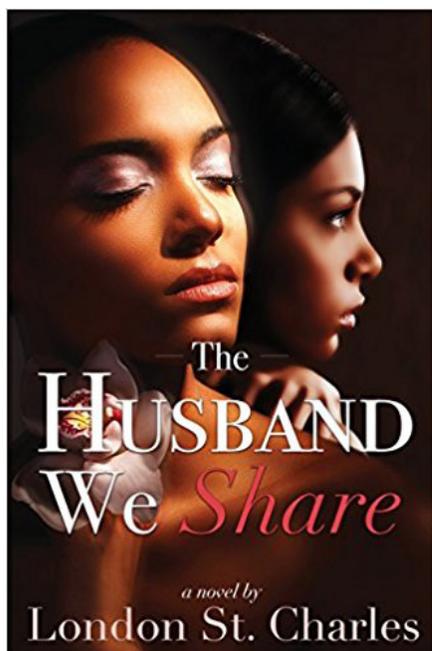
I had been terrified of hip replacement surgery, but even more afraid of allowing pain to limit my life and steal my dream. I've come to realize that fear is often standing squarely in front of a door one needs to pry, or sometimes kick, open. We all fear something. Our work is to acknowledge the fear and find a way to break free.



Susan D. Peters authored Sweet Liberia, Lessons from the Coal Pot, her award winning memoir. Broken Dolls is the first of the Detective Joi Sommers mystery series and her most recent book, Stolen Rainbow centers on a beautiful marine captain's recovery after a devastating combat injury. Susan is a monthly contributor for Garden Spices online magazine and is currently working on her next novel. [www.susandpeters.com](http://www.susandpeters.com)

# A BOOK IS JUDGED BY ITS COVER

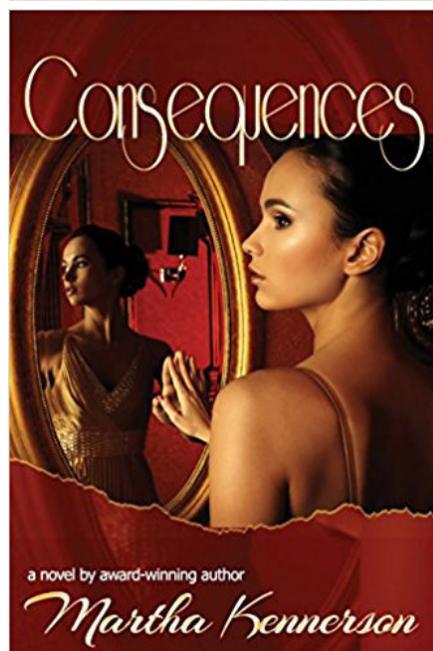
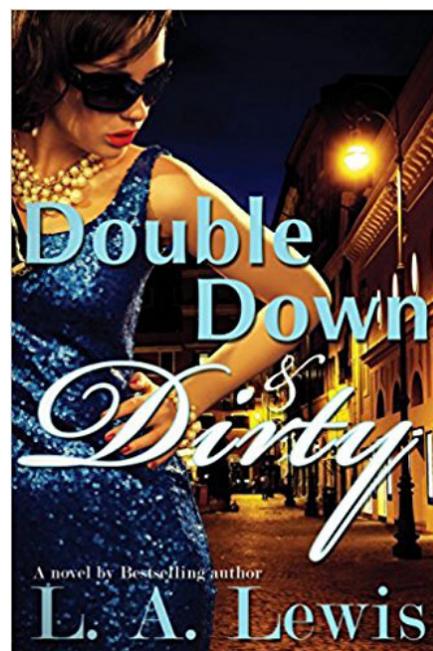
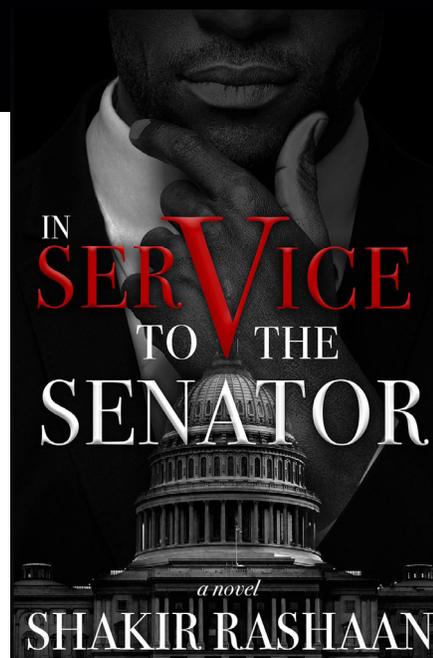
**J. L. Woodson**



The cover of my first book, *The Things I Could Tell You*, was designed by my mentor, Barron Steward. I was amazed at how well it was done. The image was a profile of a young male with a solemn expression over a background of a hallway in a house that was designed in a way to give it a flashback feel. I looked at what message the book cover conveyed to me as a young author. I was proud to call the book mine, not just because of the content, but because of that book cover.

I started learning graphic design not long after I started learning website design in early 2010. However, I didn't start designing book covers until September, 2013, when my mother needed one for a special edition of her novel *Open Door Marriage*. It wasn't necessarily easy to dive into either. There are so many things to focus on as a designer of book covers.

Picture yourself walking through a bookstore. What is the first thing you notice as the reader? The book cover. What is the second thing you'll most likely do? Take in the title. The third thing? Look at the back of the book to read the synopsis. If not designed right or positioned correctly, the reader could be turned off at the first step. A well-



designed book cover can be the difference between, “Eh ...” and “Damn, that’s hot!” Which response would you rather get?

You, as an author, want to stand out, and you should want the same for your books. So here are some tips on how to achieve that.

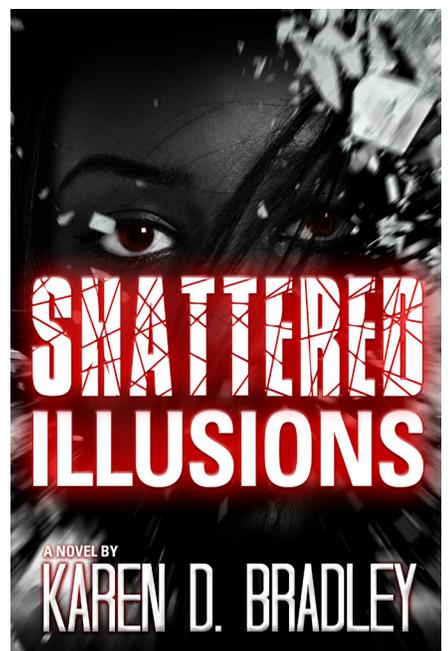
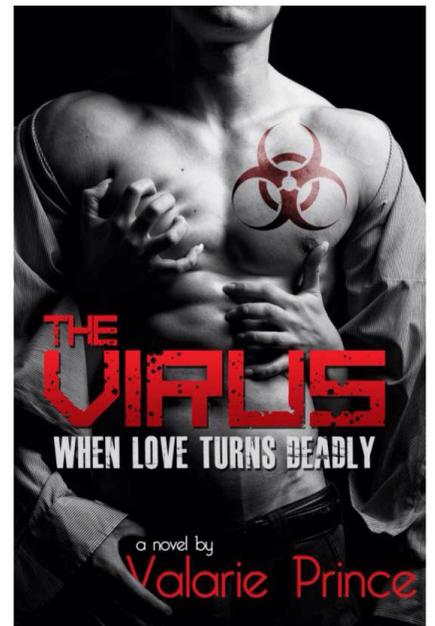
Your book title should be visible from six feet away. When your book is standing or sitting next to others, it should call to the reader in a way that says, “Pick me!” Well, you can’t achieve that if they can’t read the title, or if the image is blurry.

This next tip is for the authors who love script fonts (aka cursive fonts): don’t use them. They are very hard to read from far away. If a reader has to squint to see your title, then you are not necessarily achieving your desired goal. Your book has to “speak” for you when you’re not standing next to it making a sales pitch. So treat your book as if it’s your child when they leave the house. You want them to be a great representation of you when you’re not around.

Though a great deal of readers are going digital, there are still some hardcore trade paperback holdouts. Wouldn’t it be a

wonderful thing to see someone reading your book on the bus? On the train? One of my editors, Katie Walsh, says that if she sees an interesting cover, she’ll make a mental note of the title and look it up later. Don’t you want your book to be that eye-catching?

Next tip: Have a mainstream book cover. What do I mean by mainstream? Your book should catch the eye of any reader—of any ethnic background. It should look like something that comes from a major publishing house, not something you put together in your living room. What appeals to people can vary, but take a look at the covers of books that hit the New York Times bestsellers list. Do you see how most appeal to a wide audience? As an author, you should want everyone to read your book. To achieve that, you’ll need some form of mainstream cover appeal. Now if you’re going for a target market, then by all means, the cover should reflect that. But if you’re writing a story that you know everyone can relate to, then consider having a cover that reflects it. You don’t want the reader to feel that it’s not for them just based on the visuals. Try to view your book as something that everyone can read, and it will definitely improve your sales.



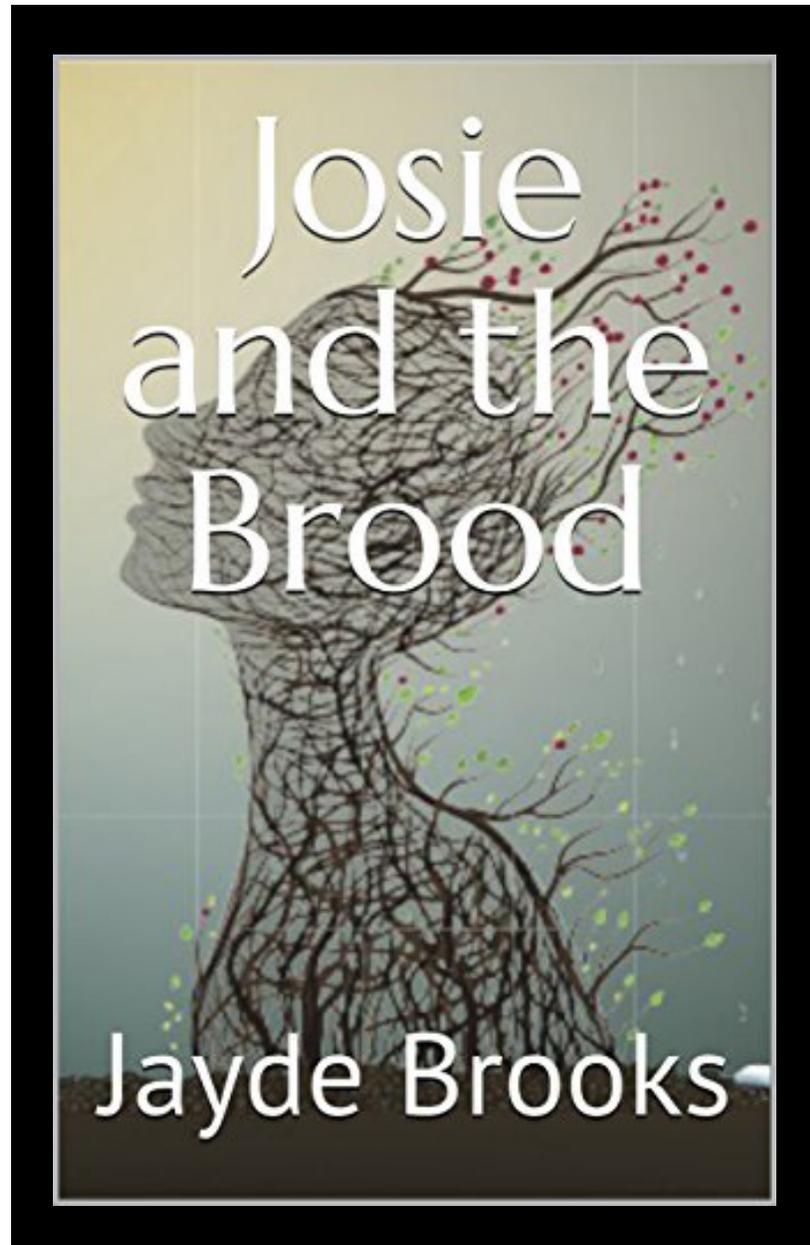
# New Release from J. D. Mason

Time didn't mean anything out here. The only clock that mattered was the change of seasons and Josie had learned to live to nature's rules a long time ago. She preferred it out here by herself because people couldn't be trusted and vamps ruled the world. The biggest lie ever told was that there was safety in numbers. Human Revelers (traffickers) worked for the vamps and preyed on the weak, capturing other humans living in the sanctuaries, and selling them to the highest bidder. Josie had been bought and sold once, back when she was child, back when she was weak, but she had learned the truth after escaping sanctuary a long time ago. The truth that she was stronger than she ever thought she could be, and she was safer on her own.

Human beings had only ever been sustenance for his kind. But that was long time when demons fought to rule everything, the Brood numbered in the millions, and the world still hadn't quite ended yet. He'd been human once. Like so many others, the plague got hold of him, and turned him into what he was an now, brood, a cannibal by nature, a beast by design. But thanks to a death wish, teeth pulling, some good, old fashioned cold-turkey starvation and a stubborn, pain-in-the-ass Djinn with a guilty conscience and who refused to let Chapman die, he was a reformed cannibal. She was pretty and she had no idea of how long he'd been watching her, which was probably for the best. Being stalked by a brood would've more than likely scared the hell out of her, so he figured it was best to keep his distance.

Brood weren't supposed to save lives, they were supposed to take them, but for some reason, this one had saved hers. Still, Josie wasn't stupid and knew

better than to trust his kind. They were supposed to be dead. She was old enough to remember the terror of having to escape to survive an attack against her by her own mother who had caught the sickness and turned to brood. She remembered the world spiraling into chaos, loved ones turning on loved ones, with kids like her, orphaned and forced to try and survive on their own. It was hard enough hiding out from revelers and vamps, now she had to add a brood to that very short list, and knowing that he out there, scared her more than any of them.



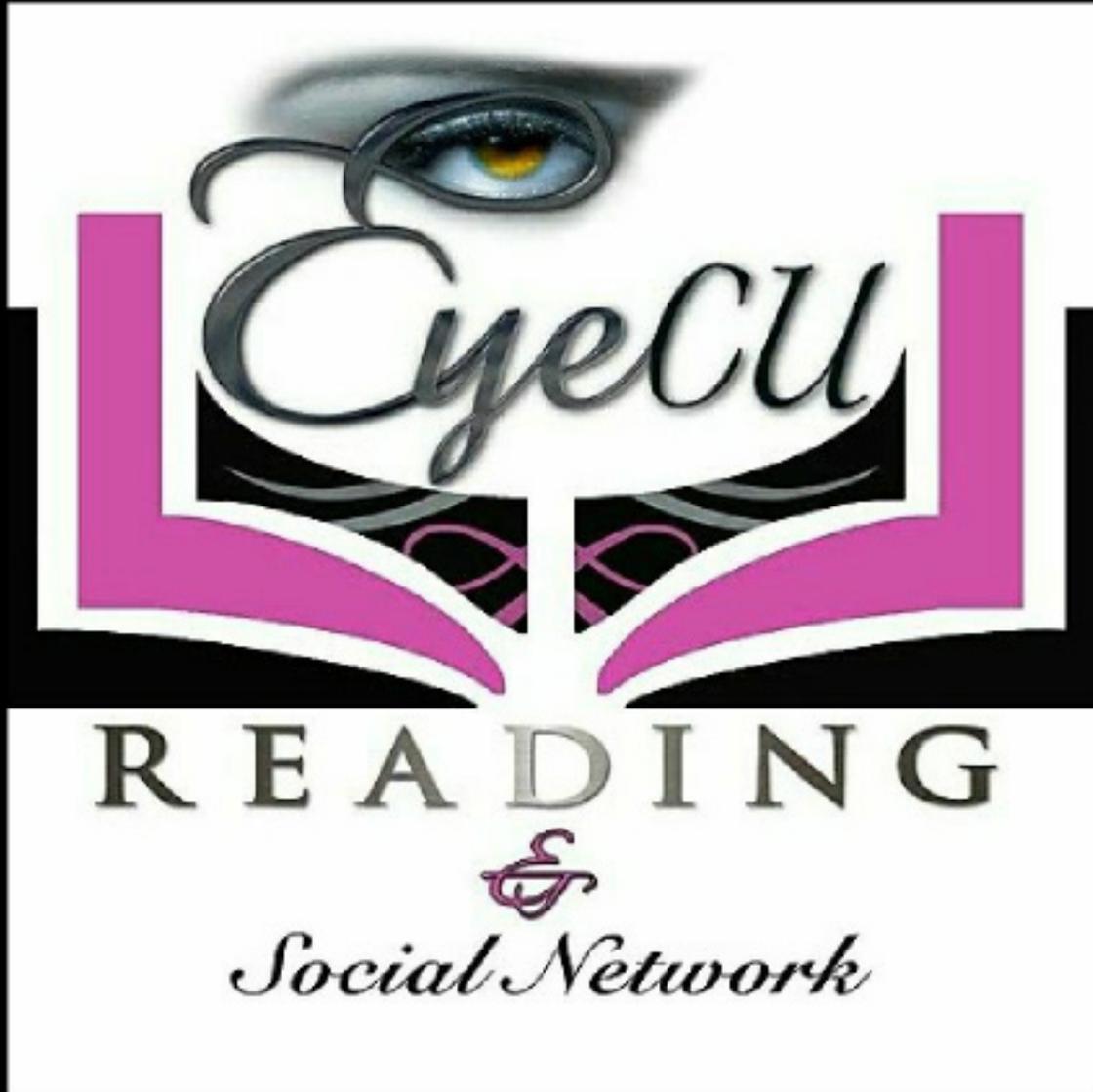
# *Ebony* "EyeCU" *Evans*



A Detroit native, Ebony Evans has always had a knack for creating and implementing exciting out-of-the-box ideas. Quite the event planner, she has embarked upon many different endeavors; be it a shopping trip to the Big Apple, photo shoots of all kinds, pole parties or giving her time to charities near and dear, Ebony was and is doing it! EyeCU Reading & Social Network, is a combination of yet another creative idea, fused with one of her dynamic passions...reading. She and a host of friends together developed this idea into a reality. In addition to reading, being a devoted wife and mother, Ebony enjoys cooking, traveling, karaoke and spending time with family. Life has taught Ebony the value of surrounding herself with a close-knit circle of like-minded supportive friends, with whom she reciprocates compassion and that same support.

Ebony Evans, EyeCU Reading & Social Network book club's founder is an enthusiastic reader and self-proclaimed "book nerd" at heart! Ebony has been married to her soul mate, Michael for sixteen years and together they have one high energy and very talented 11-year-old daughter, Essence. Essence's "bigger than life" personality and sleuth of extracurricular activities keep Ebony and Michael very busy and very proud as they watch her grow!

# Introducing



Meet the ladies of EyeCU Reading  
Ebony, Samara, Bayyinah, Rhena, Satanya,  
Tina, Monique, Tamara and Stacye

Primarily in Michigan with one satellite member in Arizona...EyeCU Reading & Social Network consist of 9 intimate & diverse women with a wide range of professional backgrounds and varied interest. We look forward to seeing each other at our monthly meetings to not only discuss that month's read but to get caught up on each other's lives, offer advice or sometimes just an ear and have some of the absolute best laughs. In our 7 years, we traveled to Bahamas, Jamaica, and National Book Club Conference.

EyeCU Reading & Social Network is made up Founder & President Ebony, Secretary Samara, Treasurer Bayyinah and members Monique, Rhena, Satanya, Stacye, Tamara & Tina.

What makes us different from other bookclubs?

EyeCU Reading & Social Network is not your ordinary bookclub! The purpose of EyeCU Reading & Social Network is to promote literacy in the African American community with an emphasis on African American women. To support primarily, but not exclusively, the works of African American authors. To encourage community involvement through charitable endeavors, support and motivation.

Our club was born from the vision of providing an avenue for women to fellowship with a primary focus on reading thought provoking books, networking with other book clubs, attending literary events and meeting fascinating authors. We also want to show our beauty and boldness in all that we do! One of our mottos is... If we read it, we review it. Knowing that author's exposure and support is heavily based on book reviews.

We want to support the authors in the best way possible. The popularity and constructive honesty of our reviews has gotten us sought out by many authors, whom value the opinions of their readers. When reading our monthly selections, we heavily promote the book through sharing excerpts and link for purchase. We also keep the authors and following readers engaged through social media by sharing free e-reads, reviews, interactive games, Author Freestyle Friday & FB live author chats.

Although fiction...Some of the books that have made a major impact on us would be... "Perfect Peace" by Daniel Black, "A Piece of Cake" by Cupcake Brown and "The Shack" by William P. Young. These novels were very descriptive in their writing styles and the relatability evoked emotions

that made for some of the most in depth and memorable discussions. Most recently we read "Indigo" by Beverly Jenkins; as a group, initially there were mixed reviews but with a very descriptive storyline, well developed characters and plenty of romance "Indigo" turned out to be so much more than your average slave story!

Our top three favorites of 2017 "The EyeCU Reader's Choice Awards" went to "Mascara & Moscato" by Shakela James, "Indigo" by Beverly Jenkins & "Mimi's Heart" by Renee Wallace

Selected by Samara, we are currently reading "She Touched My Soul" by Naleighna Kai. 2 years ago, We met Naleighna Kai at "The National Book Club Conference" in Atlanta. Immediately we were captured by her great energy, permeating passion for her craft and the woman can sell ice to an eskimo :-)) We left there wanting to reading every one of her catchy titles.

Our February selection is "Plug Love" by Detroit Author Danielle Marcus & March "The Peace Maker" by Detroit Author TL Criswell who was also selected for "Author Day" with The Detroit Public Library and a Q & A with Detroit Public Schools.

If anyone would like to get to know EyeCU Reading & Social Network, please join our Facebook Group: EyeCU Reading & Chatting where we share free reads, excerpts, reviews, Author Freestyle Fridays and regularly host FB Live chats with our featured authors and discuss other literary randomness.

We can be followed on Instagram @ EyeCU\_Reading & Facebook at EyeCU Reading & Social Network.



Introducing a never before published short story.  
Part of **EyeCU Reading** & Chatting's Freestyle Fridays



Part I of II

“9-1-1, what’s your emergency,” the silky-voiced woman asked on the other end.

“My mother’s trying to kill my father’s mistress,” came Ebony’s weary reply.

\* \* \*

The funeral, for all of its length and pretentiousness, went off well. Ebony’s father, Darek Mandel, had not been the best of men, but he was a shrewd businessman worth over forty million, give or take, and owned half of the people in the small suburb of Chicago where he’d been born. Darek had left Eyecuville as the teenaged outcast of a dirt-poor family and headed to Texas to make his fortune in oil. He came back years later to clean house, starting with the politicians who were lining their own pockets at the people’s expense and ending with every man and woman who had done him wrong in some way.

That kind of power does something to a man. So much so, that many, including his wife, Samara, rarely stood up to him. Except when it counted ...

\* \* \*

Twenty-seven years ago

“Shut up and sign it,” Darek demanded while the new attorney, Tina Evans, stiffened with anger.

Samara, in her wedding dress, flawless make-up, hair pulled into a love knot with wisps of curls framing her honeyed face, could only stare at the man she had planned to marry and spend the rest of her life in wedded bliss. They were in the near-empty foyer of the Drake Hotel, a space that led into a magnificent ballroom decorated in lavender and silver that made up a fairytale wedding fit for a princess and her prince. Right before the start of the wedding march, he had called Tina to draft a last-minute prenup.

“I’m not signing that,” she replied with a quick glance at the ten-page document. “I need to read it and have my own lawyer look at it first.”

“She’s right,” Tina chimed in, then clamped down on saying anything else the moment Darek gave her a hard glare.

“Then go right inside that ballroom and tell everyone there isn’t going to be a wedding,” he challenged, placing those ice blue eyes on her dark brown ones.

Samara's honey skin turned an angry shade of crimson. Her chest heaved in an effort to breathe at an even pace. She believed she'd made the match of the century—a young Black woman from a hardcore Chicago 'hood, marrying a self-made millionaire who had used her advice on more than one occasion, making him even more millions. In her mind, she saw herself finishing college with a business degree, and getting an MBA. The two of them were set to become the next “power couple” as she fulfilled the dreams that had been lodged in her heart and mind since the moment she was able to imagine them.

A quick glance at the official-looking document on printed bond paper with a few well-placed clauses showed that he only saw her as a breeder and someone he could control. Her new role? To provide him with ten children—at least. And the disappointing part—she must remain home to raise them until they reached majority. Effectively, with those two lines, her life was going to be all about him with no regard for what she desired. He had waited until now to put this on the line, knowing that her family—and his, were in full attendance—thanks to his generosity. The media was also present, thanks to his publicity team.

Samara raised her chin, grasped the ruffles of her dress, lifted it high enough so she wouldn't trip on her way to the ballroom.

“Wait, what are you doing?” he asked when she swept past him. There was a slight bit of alarm in his voice.

“Exactly as you asked,” she replied in the coldest voice she could manage. “Letting everyone know that the wedding's off.”

Darek shrugged and Samara could swear that Tina breathed a sigh of relief. That was enough for Samara to stay the course. She had almost made it to the mahogany doors, when Darek let loose with, “I'll make sure your brothers don't see the inside of a prison for those drug charges ...”

Samara froze. Nothing could have made her want to go through with this wedding. Except her brothers. Darek now had the power, connections, and money to grease the right wheels and secure both of her brothers' release. He'd had it all along and had hinted on more than one occasion. She wasn't going to beg him for his help if he wasn't inclined to offer it outright. That should have been red flag number one. Instead, Samara had done what she could to make sure they had better representation than the public defender's office could provide. But it hadn't been enough.

Part of that “drug money” that filtered into her family's home is what kept them afloat and helped send her to Howard University for those first three years. She wasn't naïve to the source of those ill-gotten gains. The fact that her family had been poor enough to have cardboard up to their windows in wintertime or that the refrigerator held more condiments than content, meant she totally understood that the ends sometimes justified the means. Like now. But at what cost? To do so meant Samara would be

spitting in the face of the underworld sacrifices her brothers made for her, alone, to make it in this world and become successful. And with one stroke of a pen, she'd lose it all to be tethered to a man who was losing his soul on an hourly basis and demanding that she give up hers as well.

She also couldn't have her brothers go to prison and leave her mother, Tamara Pearson, without the two offspring she favored over everyone else, including Samara. People died of a broken heart all the time. Her mother would be no exception. The feisty older woman had been disabled since birth, taken advantage of by her parents, then sold off to a man who did the same before leaving her with three children to raise on her own. Maybe this one sacrifice would be the thing to bring them closer. Maybe. Each time Samara made any strides in life, her mother seemed to take it personally, even going so far as calling her a "white woman with brown skin." Now that Samara had the chance to set Donny and Ricky free, and give them a better start somewhere else, she had to take it.

She didn't turn to face Darek as she asked, "And you'd give them enough money to start a new life somewhere else? Away from Chicago?"

"Sign this, and it's a done deal," he shot back, almost as if he had anticipated her request.

Only then did Samara walk to where the lawyer's crestfallen face awaited her. Evidently, Tina had wanted Samara to show Darek exactly what she was made of by walking away. She could if it only affected her life. But her brothers? They meant the world to her. They taught her how to survive, how to look at school as a way out, how to size people up, how to shoot straight, and how to gamble. They had wanted her to be the one person in the family to be successful since they had already given in to the trappings of a hopeless existence that would leave them dead or behind bars. If she could give them a third option, at least they would have a chance. What they did with it, was up to them. Hopefully, they had witnessed firsthand the bottomless pit of hell that prison could become. She hoped she was risking her happiness for their redemption.

"If you screw me on this, you won't ever get to touch me again. And as quiet as it's kept, ten children will be out of the question." She gestured to Tina. "Let's make this simple and in a way that I can understand."

Darek's sharp intake of breath caused both Tina and Samara to look his way as he stammered, "But—but—"

"I don't want your money," Samara said. "It was never about the money. It was because you were there for me. I thought you saw me for more than a pretty face, a curvy body, and what's between my legs."

She shook her head at how naïve she'd been when it came to him. At least her brothers were honest about their sins; her grandparents had been the same way when

they parceled her mother off to a man looking for a bride who would be loyal to him. This man, who had “courted” her the moment they met in a coffee shop near campus, had hidden behind a cloak of respectability and seemed to have embraced the fact that true love travels on a gravel road. This relationship had hit a pothole, and Chicago was full of them. She knew what it would take to maneuver—a concrete layer of strength in her heart to fill the empty spaces, a steamroller of courage to lay it flat.

“Evidently, I was wrong about you and I won’t forget it.”

She scanned the document, snatched his pen and crossed out ten children, made it six, ignoring his grumble of dissent. Then she instructed Tina to add a clause that she would finish her education on her own time and her own dime.

Yes, she would graduate and have that bachelor’s. He would not take that from her.

Darek grimaced with all the other changes she slid in, but Tina’s smirk and admiration weren’t hard to miss. Samara struck down quite a few more unreasonable demands he had Tina type in at some ungodly hour of the morning.

Only when she was satisfied that what was left on the page meant she wasn’t selling what was left of her soul, did she place her signature on the bottom. Tina’s hands were trembling as Samara did so, a sure sign that she still wasn’t comfortable with this either. Signing a prenup under duress was unethical, and in some cases, might be illegal. But money did more than talk; it was a whole conversation unto itself.

She left the two of them standing in the foyer, gave Darek a last look over her shoulder before opening the doors to the ballroom where she gazed at the guests who were becoming anxious at her disappearance. She took a deep breath and stepped into the beginning of what would only be termed a hellacious marriage. Fortunately for her, it ended with a car crash on the Dan Ryan Expressway twenty-seven years later. Her husband died. His mistress survived. How ironic was that?

\* \* \*

Darek Mandel’s repast was in full swing—food, music, condolences laced with gossip and hints to the fact that Samara was now a wealthy woman, and so were the six wonderful children brought into this world—mostly Irish Twins—children born one right after the other. Ebony, her oldest daughter, stood by her side, watching the people circling like vultures, eyeing the contents of the house as though pricing the artwork, furnishings and everything in between. Rumors had spread that Samara was going to give away everything that her daughters didn’t lay claim to.

Tamika, the mistress whose life had somehow been spared in an accident that took

the lives of six people that day, sidled up to where Ebony and Samara stood near the fireplace, and said, “If it’s all the same to you, I’d like to have his ashes.”

Rhena, the baby of the family, made a beeline from the buffet table and to Tamika’s side, and was soon followed by Stacye, Monique, Biyyinah, and Satanya. All of them beautiful and intelligent like their mother, educated, and working in some faction of their father’s multi-million-dollar corporations. Except Ebony, who turned down Darek’s offer and went her own way. She now owned a string of auto dealerships nationwide and serviced the cars belonging to Darek’s business as well as personally attending to any work done on his car. Suddenly, the temperature in the room rose by a few degrees and their movements were enough to draw the attention of those nearby. Soon, others inched their way closer to put eyes and ears on the situation.

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

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

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

Read Part II in the next issue of  
Naleighna Kai Literary Cafe Magazine  
February 2018 -- the Anniversary Issue

# Wounds in the Way

by Karen D. Bradley



“I went through a period where I was giving people the worst of me before they were allowed near the best of me.”

Not everyone can endure the pains of life and allow their light to continue to shine bright. There are people who've had incidents that have changed them and held them back. The darkness found a way to creep into their hearts and hardened it to the point they've assimilated the negative effects of the wounds as part of who they were. They can't always see how this process has stunted their growth.

Tyler, the main character in *Love Runs Deep*, had wounds which caused her to be guarded to order to survive. Thinking about how Tyler's wounds got in her way in the book, I decided to host a “Wounds in the Way” panel discussion for the book release instead of the common type of launch event. The panel was to explore and discuss the effects of grief and past wounds on relationship, healing from the past, turning wounds into wisdom, learning to love again, and maintaining a good relationship in the mist of drama and chaos.

Everyone wears their wounds differently. My hope was to give the audience a variety of perspectives based on individuals' different life experiences. The panel included authors, Jenetta M. Bradley, Yasmine Brown and Larry Miller as well as Internet Radio host, Dave Maxx. Each person had a topic to discuss. The audience contributed their personal experiences to the mix and made it a great discussion. Every opinion wasn't agreed with, but each fed into a deeper conversation. I can't get into everyone's point of view from that day. Instead, I will share how I dealt with the wounds of being betrayed, their effects on my life, and the lessons I learned.

The longer we allow our wounds to be in our way, the more damage they will do in our lives. I had packed my pain in a box, placed it in the back of the closet, then closed and locked the door. Every day I visited the closet by remembering all the pain and disappointment. I parked my life in front of that locked closet door, dwelling on things I couldn't

change. I had no clue at the time that my wounds had shattered me into pieces like a glass vase hitting concrete. It caused me to encase myself, and my broken pieces, in a bubble. I claimed to be okay. I wasn't. I had fallen prey to my wounds; building walls are around my heart and life; refusing to accept any new people into my life. I became excellent at deflecting and managed to share the bare minimum about myself with others.

Until I acknowledge the wounds, I couldn't honestly assess the damage they had done to my life. They had made me a guarded pessimist with trust issues, but that was only the tip of the iceberg. My wounds had damaged my perception of who I was and altered my life goals. I went through a period where I was giving people the worst of me before they were allowed near the best of me. I wasn't trying to be nice and wasn't trying to be optimistic. Neither had served me well and I was having none of it.

The decision not to give people another opportunity to abuse my kindness was made early on. Uncaring, blunt and not trying to be sensitive to people's feeling anymore became my new way of being which was the opposite of my true personality. I knowingly self-sabotaged career opportunities and relationships. I allowed my wounds to keep me half-stepping around and avoiding experiences that would benefit me. I was perfectly content with staying under the radar and in the role of a loner.

Healing from our wounds cannot exist if we are in denial that they exist. Even when I recognized them and accepted the negative influence they had on my life, I had to actively decide—push myself—to do something different. Initiating change was not easy. Even when the world was falling apart around me, there weren't too many people I would open up to and tell. Attempting to be less guarded brought on a series of missteps and mistakes. The process of changing my ways healed old wounds and opened

my life to new possibilities, but it also created new wounds.

We live in a world that says we need to have a mindset of no regrets. I have plenty of them. It hurt me deeply when someone who betrayed my trust uttered the words “no regrets” as it spoke to that person being oblivious to the pain they had caused. Regrets are only a bad thing when we allow them to hold us back. They can assist in the prevention of repeating mistakes and teach us how to handle certain circumstances better. If we refuse to acknowledge that experience, then we can't turn it into a tool to make our lives better.

When we use those mistakes to improve our lives, we can get to a point where we can't look back on the certain incidents and associate them with the word regret. I regret not being a better communicator with people who were good to me. I took for granted they knew that I appreciated their contribution to my life. Even when they do know, sometimes they still need to hear it every once in a while. I can't say sorry to the people who are no longer in my life. However, I can make a conscience effort to do better with others in the future.

We have all made mistakes. We have to learn to stop kicking ourselves in the behind, forgive ourselves and find the courage to move beyond it. We can't get stuck in the cycle of blame. We definitely can't take the blame for circumstances that were out of our control. Our situation needs to be assessed to figure out what is the next step to get our lives back on track.

Sometimes instead of doing an overhaul, I attempted cosmetic changes. It caused me to sabotage great opportunities and take a new route to the same mistake. I couldn't accept new blessings when my hands were full of old issues I should have let go.

Our wounds can cause us to be a house divided. If we

don't deal with them, we will fall. Our peace of mind suffers. Our relationships suffer. Our lives suffer because our hearts, minds, and souls are divided by the wounds in our way. We put up so many defense mechanisms that restrict the flow of our lives.

A bubble was created around my life to keep out the pain, but it also kept out blessings. My movements were in fear instead of faith and courage. I was consumed with protecting myself. As I crossed paths with others like me, I began to understand when we are not moving in our purpose due to our issues, we are also blocking someone's blessing. We are sitting on someone's inspiration. We are holding our destiny and gifts hostage because our wounds won't let us move forward.

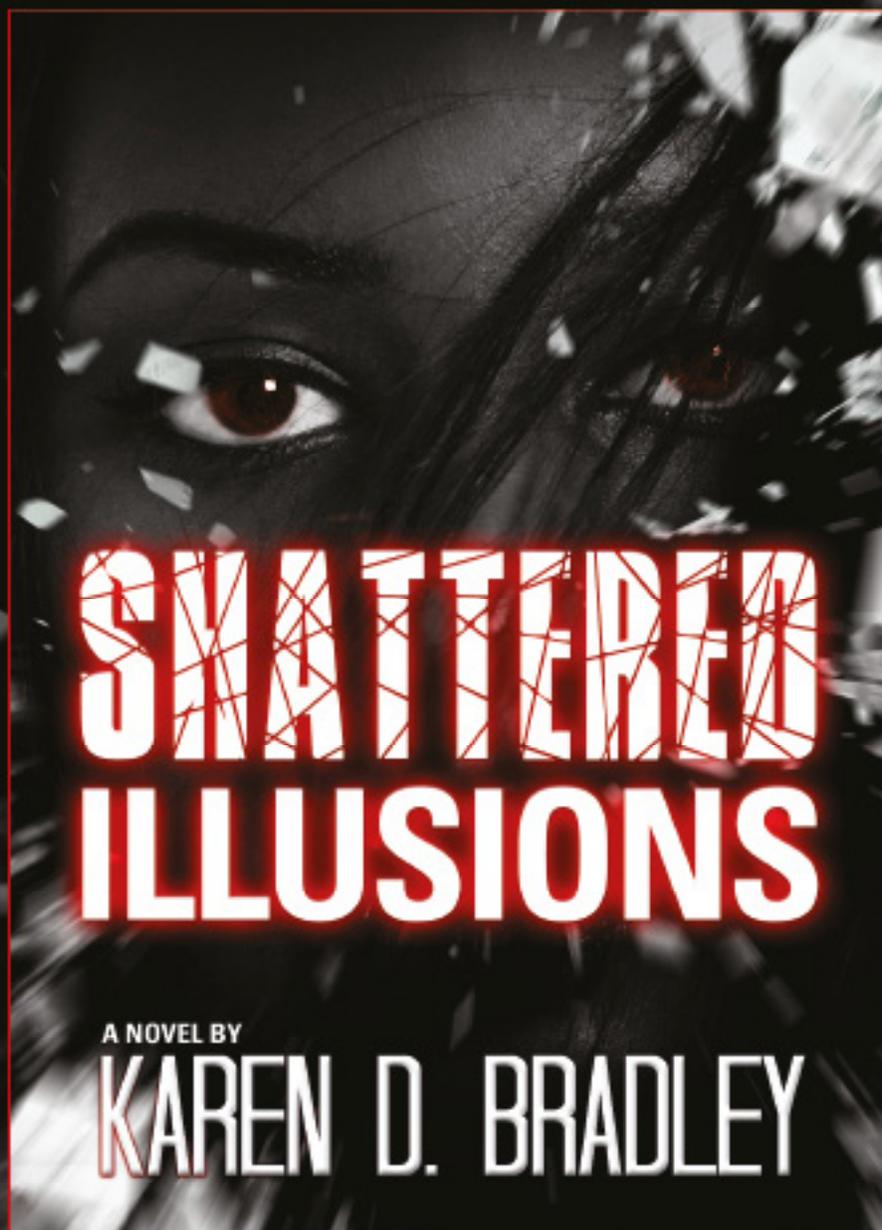
We can't live life without incurring wounds. They will either make us bitter or make us better. They will either grow us up or stall us. They will either weaken or strengthen us. They will either break us down or build us up. We are the deciding factor on how these occurrences past, present, and future will affect us. I am hoping that those who have wounds in their way are granted the strength, courage, and faith to move past them.

The journey to work through the wounds won't be easy but it will be worth it. We have to trust that circumstances that once scarred us will become a testimony that empowers, inspires and strengthens our lives.

*Karen D. Bradley, a Chicago native, is the author, Shattered Illusions, Life on Fire, Love Runs Deep and Tainted Love. She co-authored novel a with her sister, Jenetta M. Bradley, and is working on her next novel. Visit her on the web at [www.ambrosiasands.com](http://www.ambrosiasands.com)*

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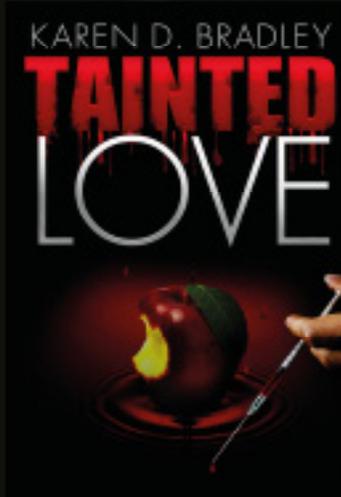
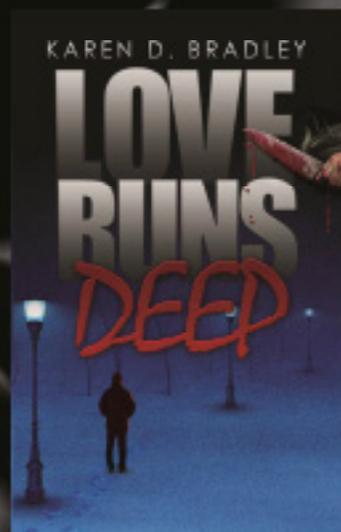
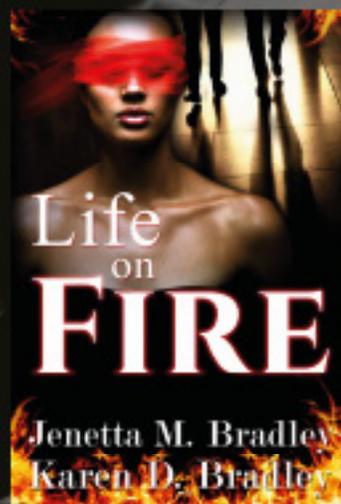
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# THE HONORABLE MENCHAN

**EXCERPT**



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

**Choosing to Stay**  
**A Fictionalized Truth**  
by **Angelia Vernon Menchan**

*Gleena*

**W**e started with an open marriage ...

“I was thirty and Frank almost forty when we got married. I couldn’t have children and his son was nineteen and living with his ex-wife in California. Frank was the most beautiful man. He was tall and lean but muscular with thick hair, brows and lips. His skin was like coffee with a drop of cream and he spoke so damn well. He was deep into civil rights and that appealed to me. I had worked and scrambled and gone to school since I was eighteen. I had no time for civil rights. I was poor, I mean lights off, roaches scattering when the lights come on poor. At thirty, I had been teaching five years and had a small place all my own. People said teachers are poor but baby I was rich. I was frugal and saved my money and always had a roommate but two years after I started teaching I found me a small house through a program designed to assist teachers. My life was damn good. I had a degree, a job I loved, my own house and car and a man or two... and no damn roaches.”

Throaty laughter filled the air. I watched her and she was lovely in a pure, Black Woman way. Her skin glowed with health and cocoa butter. It was the mid-nineties and her hair was cut short and sassy, shaved in the back and her skin was like peanut butter, the smooth kind. Gleena was neither thin nor thick but looked healthy and was curvy. At forty two, she looked years younger.

“How does one broach the conversation of an open marriage?” I asked. Something still filled Gleena and her back straightened.

“The night I met Frank he told me fidelity was a hoax. A hoax he was incapable of. Seeing as I had two men of my own... I wasn’t planning on falling in love and moving to Oklahoma. But I fell for him and hard. When he got a professor position here, he asked me to come with him. It had been more than a year and I told him I didn’t go to Oklahoma with men who weren’t my husband. He proposed and we got married. It was another year before the open marriage thing came up. I balked but finally gave in. We were both discreet. Well, I didn’t have to be, I wasn’t really doing anything at first. But, finally I did too, here and there. We didn’t discuss it but I knew when it started and when it ended. I just stopped...”

Her voice trailed off and I saw her blink and swallow.

*The night I walked into Lester's, Frank was the first person I saw. There was a throng of people around him, mostly women, their eyes filled with adoration. From a distance I found him appealing but when I got closer and he turned to look at me, I felt zinged. I continued to the bar and purposely didn't look his way but I felt his eyes on me.*

*"You're a cool one." I heard in my ear. I paid for and retrieved my rum and pineapple juice before sliding down and from under his reach. I suddenly felt sweaty.*

*"Why is that, because I didn't stop and become part of your fawning entourage?"*

*Surprise flickered across his brow before he chuckled lightly.*

*"Touché. Perhaps. Or maybe you're not interested in intellectually stimulating conversation." Lifting my glass, I sipped from it, staring at him.*

*"To assume I'm less than intellectual or stimulating speaks to your excessive hubris. Excuse me."*

*I walked around him and to my seat. The one Lester the venue owner saved for me. Lester was one of the men I saw occasionally and we were friends more than anything. He was a young widower with no interest in permanent relationships and was very good to me. Aside from good sex we had wonderful conversations and went on a few trips together. He hosted jazz musicians and an elite black crowd. He and I were from the same kind of background and often laughed at the pretentious Negroes. Most were from no better but education had removed them.*

*"I see you met Frank." Lester said. "He's a professor and actually a pretty down brother. He's not like most of these clowns. He's from California and very involved in civil rights. His mom, dad and paternal grandfather were all professors in California. Women love him." Lester said, looking down at me. I raised my glass and watched as New Fusion, a great local jazz group took the stage. Lester chuckled and made his way to mingling with his customers.*

*"At the end of the evening Frank was standing outside near the door, a cigarette dangling from the side of his mouth. There was something so sexy about that." He pushed up off the wall and strolled with me to my car, not saying anything. I watched him snuff out the cigarette under his shiny jumpboot before looking back up at me.*

*"That night over dinner we had very lengthy detailed discussions about education, civil rights, etc. I told him I had never been very political, my focus had been on surviving and then succeeding. He said he understood but me more than anyone should be interested.*

*For several weeks he took me to events with him after meals and conversations and not once did he lay his hands on me. That was unexpected because everything about his was player. Two months later when he finally came home and made love to me, I was already his. He made love like he talked, fought, believed. He treated my body as if were the only one ever created by God for him to make love to. That never changed A. which made it very hard when I knew he was out there. The idea of him making another woman feel as he made me feel was too much but I learned how to channel it, pretend it didn't exist. I loved him, I love him and he never treated me as if he didn't love me. One night we were at an event honoring him and there was this woman and everything about her let me know... she knew my husband, really knew him. The way she*

spoke to him, the way she didn't get too close to him and the way she never quite looked at me. The interesting thing is Frank was attentive to me as he always was, his hands on me, getting me drinks, making sure I was comfortable and introducing me as his wife who was in school to become a principal. But I hurt deep and true.

Later in the car, he took my hand, holding it as I looked out the window...

"Look at me Glee." He said. After making love to me he started calling me Glee. Turning to him, I saw his eyes, his heart. "I only love you, I only married you, you are my wife."

I didn't respond but shortly afterwards I started my own fling... it didn't last long, because it wasn't Frank, I only wanted Frank."

Her words filled me with something I was unable to define. She didn't sound sad or bitter just resigned I guess to what it all was.

"How long before you stopped?" I had to ask.

"After two or three lovers..."

"Did Frank ever stop?"

"Yes, as far as I know... it ended with a conversation in bed."

*"Glee I ran into someone who knew you." He said and my heart stilled. It was something about the way he said it.*

*"He asked me if I were related to Gleena and before I could answer he said you were quite a woman but had obligations... I felt like someone had stuck a poker covered with lye in my heart. I never even knew you were... anyway. He said it had been a long time but he remembered you. It took all I had not to punch him out because I thought he was being slick. I told him you were my wife and he stopped speaking. I knew he had genuinely thought maybe you were my sister or something... funny shit, huh?"*

*I knew exactly who he meant. I had met this guy at an education conference and I was in deep pain over Frank and we had a fling. He tried pursuing me but I told him what happened in Miami stayed in Miami. Who knew he would run into Frank years later and ask based on his name if he knew me. I also suspect he saw Frank with someone and assumed there was no way he could be married. Funny, shit right. Like Frank said. I never responded or admitted anything but I knew that with all Frank had done he couldn't abide the idea of me doing it.*

*I snorted at her words.*

"Of course not, men, especially black men are caught up in the whore=Madonna thing and they separate their hearts from their dicks but don't think women can." I said and Gleena howled with laughter.

"You are so right. After that if he had another fling, I didn't know about it and my instincts usually kicked in. I am not sorry I stayed, A. Frank Gibbons loves me and I love him and this is our marriage. No one else gets a vote."

"You are absolutely right Mrs. Gibbons. We all have our reasons and our seasons for doing myriad things. Your marriage, your business."

The way they figured, even though Reverend Tom authorized only five hundred dollars for the entire affair, they'd make it work and have money to spare. Still delusional, they ended in prayer.

**[Click here to visit Angelia Vernon Menchan's Amazon.com Page](#)**

National Bestselling Author

EXCERPT

Pat G'Orge-Walker

*Don't Blame  
the Devil*

"One of my favorite  
writers of all time."  
—Zane



Don't Blame the Devil  
by Pat G'Orge-Walker

Chapter One - The Beginning before there was a Delilah

Nine months ago she was the darling of the Apollo Theater. A gorgeous R&B chanteuse and often mistaken for a Dorothy Dandridge look-alike. Nine months ago Claudine Dupree-Jewel was someone on the verge of stardom because she'd made it into the downtown Manhattan nightclub scene. Downtown was where the white folks with money and connections migrated and played the queen-making game for some lucky Negress.

Nine months later Claudine was an angry fame chasing and maternally lacking, pregnant and unmarried, nineteen year-old.

It was 1947 and it came to a head during a snow blizzard in Westchester County, New York. She'd never completed high school and barely existing on the little money she'd made and saved before she began to show. Nobody would hire a big belly singer no matter how good the singer was.

In no time she the money dwindled. Claudine didn't have money for the crowded vermin-infested room she'd rented and barely enough to pay for a bus ride. But Claudine had what she called Street Smarts, so she made a plan. She couldn't afford prenatal care so she'd just simply planned to wait until a few days from when Mother Luke; an elderly church mother who rented one of the other cockroach motel rooms, suggested she'd give birth go to a nearby emergency room.

But Mother Luke's old custom of placing a hand on the belly and sizing up the dark line that ran from the navel to the pubic hairline wasn't quite scientific enough. If the pains that racked Claudine's back meant the baby was coming, then the old church mother was off by a couple of weeks.

So armed with just enough bus fare and towels crammed into her underwear to catch the birth water she stood crushed between others who didn't care if she were pregnant or not. Twenty minutes later, a young and alone Claudine Dupree-Jewel barely made it across the street after she'd stepped off the bus. Within fifteen minutes after arriving and some ignorant doctor yelling, "Don't push," while the blizzard howled louder covering her screams, she gave birth in a small hospital labor room in Mount Vernon, New York. Shortly after since she'd registered as a charity case and the bed needed for paying patients, there'd been not too subtle hints tossed her way indicating that her stay would be short.

“We’re sorry we can’t allow you to stay past a day or so until you get your strength,” the Charity ward nurse began in her most uncharitable manner, “but the best we can do is give you a few diapers and a letter that will authorize a few bottles of formula from the hospital pharmacy. Once you leave I suggest you try and eat healthy enough to give that baby some breast milk.”

So that was all the kindness Claudine received. A couple of diapers, a letter for formula and told to eat healthy on money she didn’t have so she could provide breast milk from her tiny yet swollen tits. She got the news after she received a few... hope-this-will-hold-ya stitches. Her five pounds, two ounce pasty-colored baby girl, just hours ago, had almost ripped the petite Claudine apart.

To add further insult as she lay without the benefit of even an aspirin for the bone-crushing cramps that followed someone came over to the bed and urged her to hurry and name her baby. Paperwork needed filing before they kicked Claudine to the curb in another twenty-four hours.

Claudine didn’t give it a second thought. “I’m naming her Delilah,” Her chest heaved as the tears poured, “this little girl’s gonna blind every man with her beauty and steal their very soul just like that Delilah gal did in the Bible story.”

The unsympathetic woman with the pen and paper remained disconnected as she added. “And don’t forget to fill in the father’s name and date of birth.”

“He’s dead.” Claudine let out another groan indicating that was all she would say about the matter.

The woman retrieved the pen and paper from Claudine’s hand and left without any further information. It wasn’t the first time a woman gave birth and didn’t give the father’s name.

The real truth was that Claudine didn’t care what the woman thought. Despite her pain and the wails coming from her hungry newborn baby in the bassinet a few feet away, Claudine turned to face the wall and cursed damnation upon every Y chromosome that walked the earth. Of course, there was one man in particular whom she’d have shot if he were there. She was really angry at a silvery-tongued devil named Sampson, and despite telling the lie that he was dead she was very sure he was still alive.

Sampson, the object of her hatred, was a few years older; a tall, butterscotch complexioned bass player who’d gotten more than a phone number from her, he’d gotten her pregnant. As smart as she thought she was she’d fallen for the old, “We don’t need no piece of paper to show how much we love one another,” jive. The first few months were like magic. Then hocus-pocus. Sampson disappeared off the planet, as soon as she’d mentioned she’d missed her period. She would never forgive herself for not learning more about him so she could’ve ruined his life like he’d done hers. The only way to get back at him was to never tell her daughter who her father was. Claudine never did; not even when

Delilah grew up teased and called a bastard child and cried to know his name.

Like most of Claudine's decisions that weren't well thought out if thought out at all, she also messed up when she named her baby with a less-than noble motive. Claudine hadn't read the entire Biblical story because in the end that particular Delilah didn't make out too well, while in Sampson's case, he brought the house down...and not in a good way.

Only time would tell if Claudine's need for revenge would manifest in little Delilah's life and to what degree if any. Whether it did or not, Claudine never waited to find out. As soon as Delilah, talented and gorgeous turned eighteen, Claudine did to her daughter the same thing she'd always hated Sampson for. Claudine disappeared and left Delilah to fend for herself.

## CHAPTER TWO -The Storm in 2009

Delilah Dupree-Jewel was dog tired of decades of life using her as its human ping-pong ball and toilet. She'd looked for love on her terms every since Claudine abandoned her with nothing but youthful ignorance as a cover. It didn't matter that Delilah had beauty that either made one instantly love her or hate her. She'd lost count of how many times she'd heard, "You may look like Lena Horne but you ain't Lena Horne."

How many times had she fallen for some man's game? All a pair of pants had to say was, "Lena Horne better watch out 'cause you about to snatch her shine. You look like her twin."

Delilah of course wasn't totally blameless, if she found a diamond, Delilah would find a way to turn it into Cubic Zirconium. Self-sabotage, thy name be Delilah Dupree-Jewel.

By the time she turned forty-something, she gave the idea of surrendering a try. I don't have another tear left she told God for the umpteenth time. That time it was when the last of her sugar daddies turned out not to be so sweet. His wife having thought more of the marriage than her husband went after Delilah with a brick in one hand and a fist full of I John the Conqueror snuff. She'd planned to hit Delilah upside the head and then blind her.

"Don't you ever call my house again for my husband", the man's wife threatened.



*The First Lady of Gospel Comedy-Pat G'Orge-Walker is the Essence and National bestselling author of almost a dozen novels, including the Sister Betty gospel comedy series. [www.Sisterbetty.com](http://www.Sisterbetty.com),*

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# 2018 LITERARY EVENTS

# Victoria Kennedy

excerpt from *Sometimes Love*



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I understand."

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

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

[www.victoriaadamskennedy.com](http://www.victoriaadamskennedy.com)

# L. A. Lewis

*national bestselling author*

excerpt from *Double Down & Dirty*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

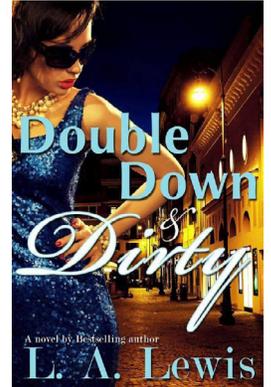
“Okay, then I’ll be honest,” she shot back. “I don’t like the way you do business. I don’t like that money means more to you than people. You’re not the type of person I’m interested in dealing with. Does the truth satisfy you?”

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

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

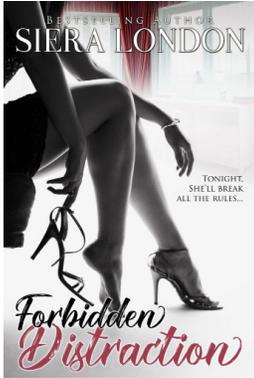
“So that’s it.” He inched closer. “You’re not afraid of doing business with me. What scares you is the fact that we’re very much alike. Isn’t that right? We both know what we want and would risk it all to make it happen. What frightens you the most,” his mouth nearly touched hers, “is knowing what will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

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



# Siera London

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Did you approve this without my input?"

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

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

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

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

In a daze, she came to her feet.

"Carson?" She pleaded.

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

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

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

\* \* \*

[www.sieralondon.com](http://www.sieralondon.com)

# Nicole Hampton

## *Glimmer in the Darkness*

The road to forgiveness is paved with shards of deceit.

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

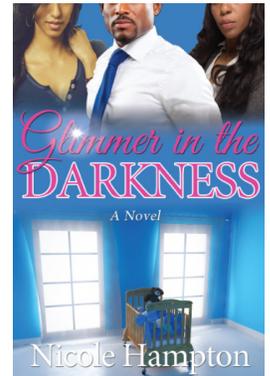
“I am sure you can’t, but I am here anyway.” Vaneetra looked Shannon up and down, smirking at how clueless she was about the fact that her life was about to change. She gave Shannon the once over, noticing her lean legs covered by black leggings, and how her waist did not indicate she had given birth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

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

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

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

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



# Sierra Kay

*Excerpt from In the Midst of Fire*



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

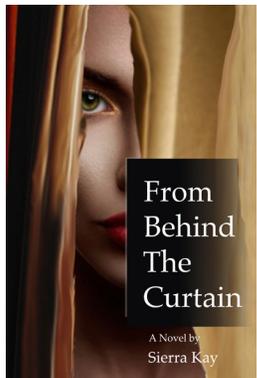
As Giselle rushed from the room as though a burning fire were nipping at her heels, Chase pulled Sera into a hug. "See, that wasn't that bad. Was it?"

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

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

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

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



[www.sierrakay.com](http://www.sierrakay.com)

# Lisa Watson

excerpt from *Interview with Danger*

“Pierce, what’s going on?”

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

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

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

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

“Jacob Toliver.”

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

“Jacob Toliver,” he repeated.

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

“He’s me.”

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

He was right on her heels.

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

“I don’t understand.”

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

Her smile faded. “What?”

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

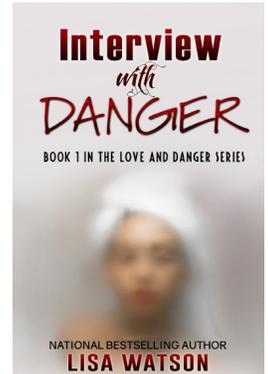
She eyed him from head to toe. “Well, are you?”

His expression turned indignant. “Certainly not.”

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

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

“Wait, what do you mean back?”

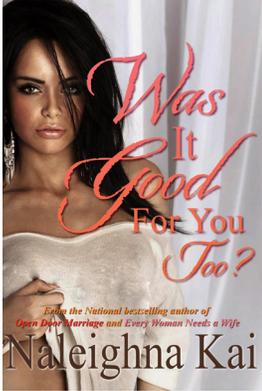


coming  
December  
2017

# Naleighna Kai

*national bestselling author*

excerpt from *Open Door Marriage*



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

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

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

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

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

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

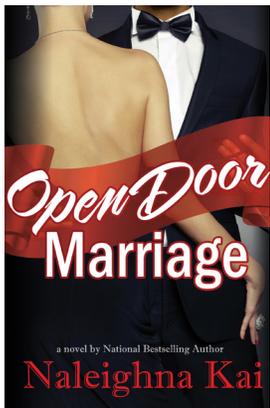
In unison, everyone nodded.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

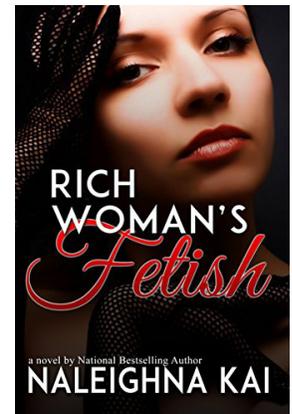
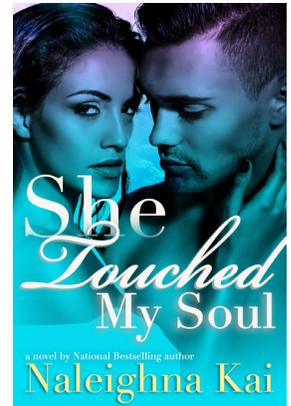
Yoli gave him a lusty once-over. "He's the type of man who can make a woman put a for sale sign on one thigh and an open for business sign on the other. Yes, Lawd!"

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

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

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

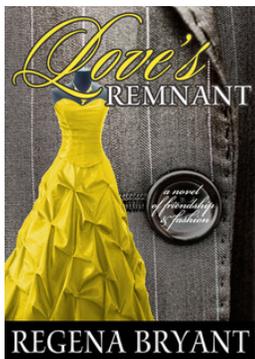
The front door slammed and Tori stood frozen. Bernice's voice snapped her out of a trance. "Girl, I taught you better than that," Bernice yelled, gesturing to the door. "You'd better go get your man."



[www.naleighnakai.com](http://www.naleighnakai.com)

# Regena Bryant

excerpt from *Love's Remnant*



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

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

When the door flew open, she stepped back.

"Hey!" Tyler beamed.

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

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

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

"Can you come in?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Just the driver."

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

[www.regenabryant.com](http://www.regenabryant.com)

# Karen D. Bradley

excerpt from *Shattered Illusions*

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

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

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

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

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

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

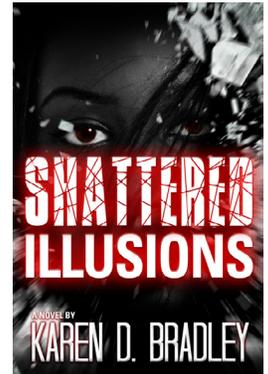
"Miss, we need you to slow down and repeat what you said." The voice was calm and steady.

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

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

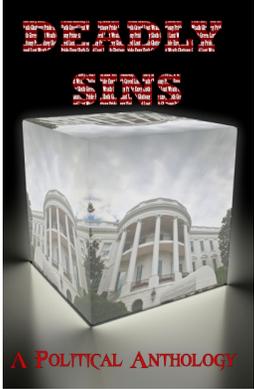
The pain was so severe, Terry struggled to speak. She ignored the dispatcher's questions. She held her head to the side so that her voice wouldn't sound stifled. "I also need the police. The assailant is still in the ..."

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



# T. L. James

*Excerpt from Deadly Sins*



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

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

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

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

[www.tljames.mba](http://www.tljames.mba)