

WINTER EDITION

NK
LITERARY CAFE
MAGAZINE

Our Tribute to Tanishia Pearson-Jones

Woman First
by **Angelia Vernon Menchan**

Getting Back to the Grind
by **Shakir Rashaan**

How Much Are You Worth?
by **Anita Roseboro**

No Excuses
by **Karen D. Bradley**



This issue of Naleighna Kai Literary Cafe Magazine was, by far, the hardest for me to put together. The experiences covered within these pages are heartfelt, informative, and some of them will tug at your heartstrings. First, **Angelia Vernon Menchan** imparts life-long wisdom in showing women that whatever status they have embraced in life, always remember that they are Women First. **Anita Roseboro** speaks on worthiness and that you, no matter what your lot in life, are deserving.

Victoria Kennedy speaks on finding your muse, whether in writing or any of your endeavors. Our resident bad boy, **Shakir Rashaan**, is getting back on his grind (with NaNo WriMo) after having to put down the pen because the health of his beloved took a front seat to everything. **Sierra Kay**, fresh off the plane from a trip to the um ... how do I put this ... “interesting” place called Amsterdam, takes you inside a museum you’re not likely to forget.

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

A Note from the Editor

In addition to several reviews, including one by **Portia Cosby** on *Sick Life* by Tionne Watkins, I also introduce NK Recommends, a new book service that caters to readers who love to hold a book in their hands rather than read it on a screen. So much attention has been paid to moving folks into the “digital age” when it comes to books, that those who prefer trade paperback and hard covers are being left out. Not anymore! NK Recommends will bring readers the best in multi-cultural fiction in a range of favorite genres.

Shannan Harper, our traveling blogger and reviewer, shares her wonderful and uplifting experience at the Christian Book Lovers Retreat. **MarZe Scott** speaks on a subject that many families are experiencing right now—the “D” Word. **J. D. Mason** interviews character Abby Rhodes, who has been dodging our attempts to get an exclusive on her relationship with Jordan Gatewood. **Priscilla C. Johnson** steps in to welcome you to the world of Book Maniacs and tells how their inaugural event is going to be something readers should not miss.

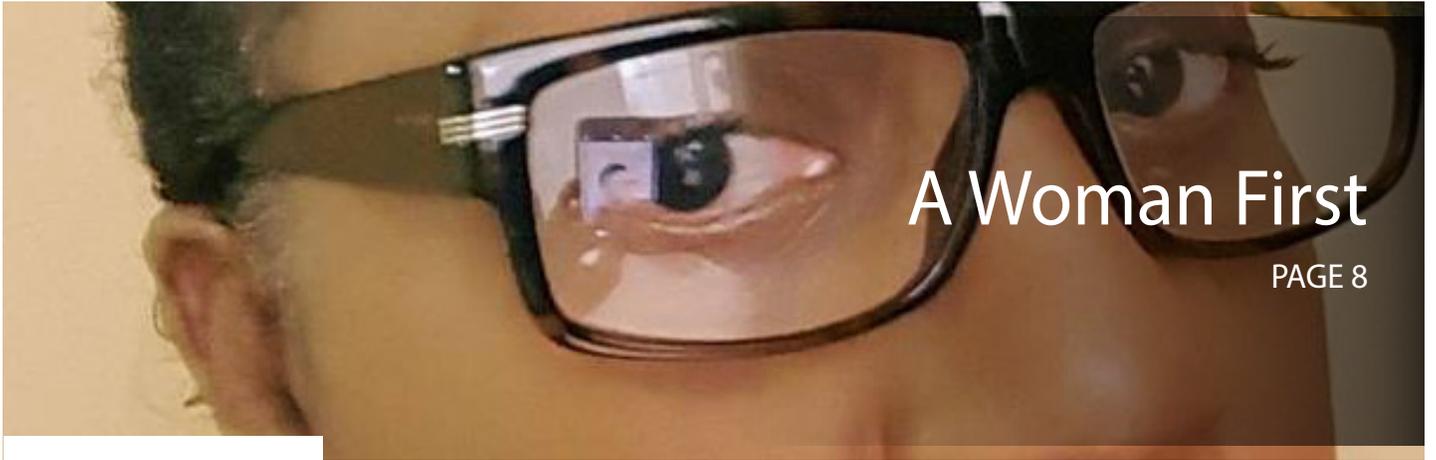
One of the most profound articles to date has been written by our newest featured writer, **Karen D. Bradley**. For the first time, she shares in brutal honesty, how coming to terms with the new life she leads alongside a disease that has taken out so many. Her words, “Lying to myself and others in an attempt to be positive, does me no good. If I wasn’t careful, it would land me six feet under, sooner rather than later.”

The tribute to our beloved **Tanishia Pearson-Jones** took me the longest time to write. I stalled. I procrastinated. I did everything for this magazine, leaving that page for dead last. Why? Because there has been no greater example of God’s love in action, than that woman right there. Pulling from my soul to put it in print was going to take so much out of me. She touched many people and the authors, friends, and her young son cherished this opportunity to share their love and her life with the world. **Brenda Hampton, Elle Wright, Joyce A. Brown, Sheryl Lister, Jay Jay Jones, Jr., and Kenneth May** all give you a glimpse into the amazing woman that was Tanishia Pearson-Jones.

I hope that something within these pages provides you with insight, something to think about, and inspiration.

Naleighna Kai
Editor-in-Chief

J. L. Woodson
Woodson Creative Studios
Art Director



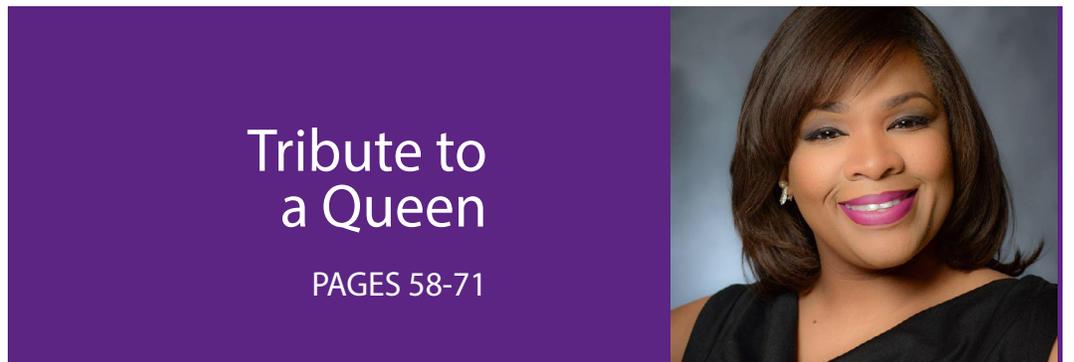
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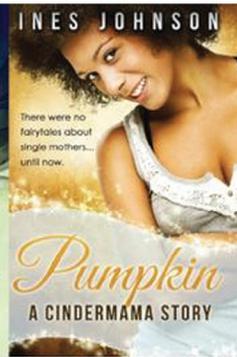
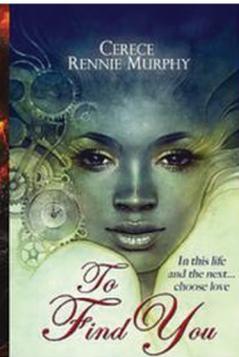
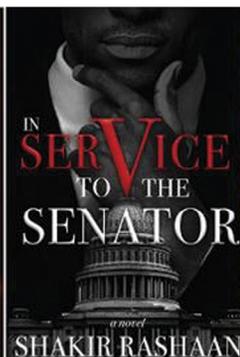
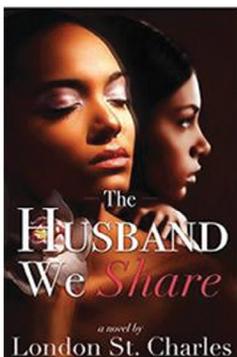
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Angelia Vernon Menchan

A Woman First

If we start allowing ourselves to be manipulated or 'caged' that is often our life.

One of the hardest things in my marriage was getting my husband to see me as me, not just his wife or his son's mother but me. I realized it the first time when I moved to Kansas after we got married and he refused to add my maiden name as the middle name on my military ID card. He was in the Army and how he filled it in was what stood. It wasn't a huge deal, but how adamant he was, became one. We went back and forth for several days, and I lost that skirmish.

"Baby, this is a small thing that means a big thing to me," he said when he slid into the bedroom. I went to bed earlier than him which was unusual. We had only been married a month, and sex was twice a day.

"You're my wife and just like that ring, having my name means ... you're my wife."

I had already made the argument that it would be Angelia Vernon Menchan but that didn't cut it.

"Okay, you win." He started kissing me and let me tell you, "Baby" was name enough.

Perhaps that wouldn't work as well for every woman. Maybe the name thing is so important the marriage isn't viable. If for any reason, that is

so, those things must be ironed out and addressed before marriage or any broom jumping. I will add that in every marriage there is compromise and we learn to live harmoniously with those compromises.

The next battleground in our marriage was my mom sending me things. About once a month she would send a care package. Usually vintage clothing she found at a thrift shop because I loved those types of things. Also, it wasn't beyond her to slip in a couple of twenties.

The clothing was spread out on our single bed when he arrived home, and he did that nose flare thing he does when he's annoyed. Leaning over, he kissed my neck before asking what else mom sent.

"She sent four shirts for you also."

That was my mom. She never sent me anything without including something for my husband. Ever.

"Did she send money?" he asked.

"Yes, two twenties. Why does that bother you?" I asked, dropping down on the bed.

"It's like she doesn't think I can take care of you..."

"That's not even my mom, at all," I replied. "Mama knows I can take care of me and I wouldn't be in an uncared for situation."

"That's just the thing. All of you Vernon women are so independent." It was time for my nose to flare then. That pissed me off. He knew I was about earning money long before we married.

"We had to be," I responded. "My mom and aunts are either widowed, divorced, or never married."

"You came out here with all the money I sent you. It's like you didn't trust me to provide for you."

Truthfully, I was stunned. Literally. That never crossed my mind, but to be honest, neither had anyone taking care of me. Summer had set in, and I planned to take graduate courses in the fall and work part-time. Playing house for a couple of months would be nice.

"That's in your mind," I said. "I never thought that and neither did my mom. My family is like that. We look out for each other. I'm not going to offend mom, and just for the record, I didn't ask her. It's who she is! But you wouldn't know that would you? Your people call and talk to you. They also sent that big ass box for

your birthday last month filled with clothes, snacks only you eat, all without a "how do you do' to me."

Something flickered on his face, and I knew part of him was embarrassed by that observation, and perhaps my mom's generosity showed that up. Grabbing me, he pulled me down on the bed, covering me with his body.

"I'm sad huh," he admitted. "Jealous of your mama..."

"Pitiful," I said before biting his bottom lip, hard.

* * *

When we moved to Germany in 1980, we had an infant and Mister was in training a great deal of the time. I was chomping at the bit to get my career in gear, but he decided we wouldn't live in government quarters because there was more money to be made living on the economy because the rate of exchange was so low. That was true, but I felt it was a micro aggressive way to get me not to work because we had a small child. I didn't have an international driver's license, and we were twenty kilometers from the Army post. Everything on post was a ten-minute walk but again, his military career, his choice.

After a few months of not working, I started catching the train into the Army post with my baby bundled up. Volunteering as a community drug and alcohol counselor filled my days. They provided childcare and I loved it. Mister didn't seem bothered by that, but when they offered employment full-time at the medical facility, he felt some kind of way. The initial argument was the baby was too young, then the transportation thing, but I was determined to work. Having (my own money and something else that was useful to do) was important to me and my kid. I was a better mom when employed rather than sitting at home, and I knew that. Being at home all day wasn't natural to me and as much as I loved mothering, having an outlet other than my child benefited both of us.

During that two-year time span, things became tense between us at times. Mister's jealousy was on "full" because most of the clients were male soldiers and he had an attractive wife that made men sit up and take notice. The two guys who worked closely

with me were very intimidated by the intense man with huge hands who often showed up at the center. I was cool because I knew what I had and wasn't trying to lose it.

"You love that job, don't you?" he asked one Friday night while we were drinking Southern Comfort and listening to Janis Joplin's greatest hits. I was huge into Janis Joplin music at the time.

"I do love it," I told him. "I'm making a difference."

"You love the attention too, don't you?"

"What attention?"

"Baby please," he shot back. "Don't act like you don't notice the male attention. The other day one of my soldiers, a white boy, was talking about the pretty black lady with the sexy voice at the clinic. I know if the white boys are talking, what brothers are saying?"

"I have no control over any of that," I replied, unfazed by his unwarranted insecurity. "All I can do is carry myself like your wife and a professional. And I do. You spend time with friends, you go clubbing and all that, and I'm not grieving you. Or maybe you're doing something and accusing me by default."

"Don't turn this around, you're not slick," he countered.

"Not trying to be, but you're not going to tuck me away while you're out living a full life," I warned, watching him closely.

He lifted his glass to me and changed the subject. He knew I was going to give as well as I got every single time. I knew he loved me, but I couldn't allow him to cage what made me, "me and free." To this day he denies that's what was going on, but I knew. I heard from too many women who threw away dreams and careers only to regret it years later. That

would not be me. He would never doubt my love or support, but I needed to be as free to flourish as he did. That was equal marriage to me. I decided at the gate that I needed things to be as even and equal as possible.

As women who want to be married or long-term coupled, we must realize that what we start with is how we end. If we start allowing ourselves to be manipulated or 'caged' that is often our life. Before any long-term engagements occur, we must be clear on who we are and our expectations as well as what we will and will not live with or through. We must also remember, he has his own identity and is more than just our husband. Things he enjoyed will not change simply because he married you. The thing is for both partners to honor vows, and each other with honesty and truth. I am a testimony that it works.

Ironically, when I started writing twenty-eight years after we married, he was the one who suggested I use Angelia Vernon Menchan as my writing name. By then I could care less. Besides, my youngest had my maiden name as his middle name as a way to honor my mom.

Nowadays, we laugh about those experience. Well, I laugh, and Mister chuckles. Slightly.

Be PEACE! #JustLOVE

Angelia Vernon Menchan

#JustLOVE

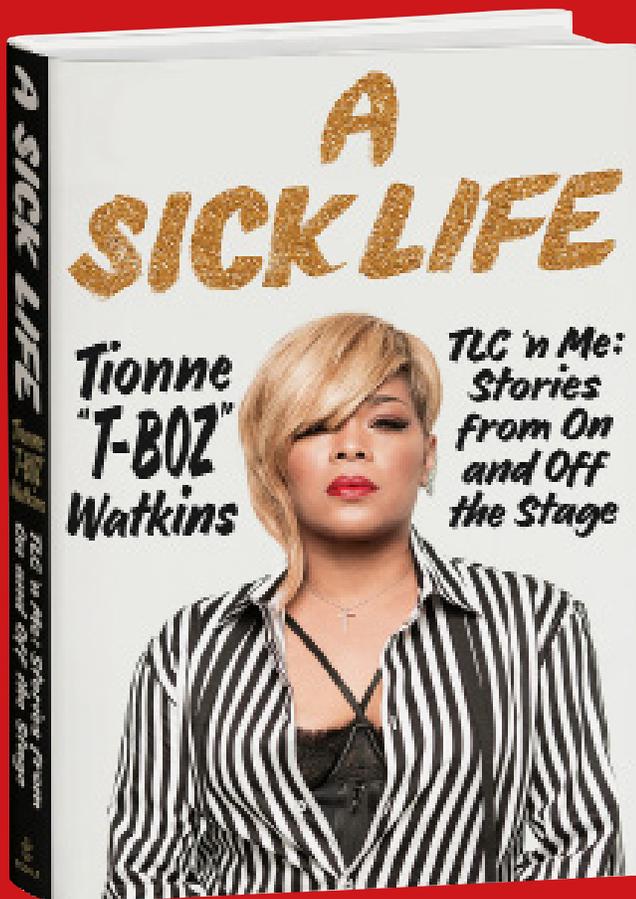
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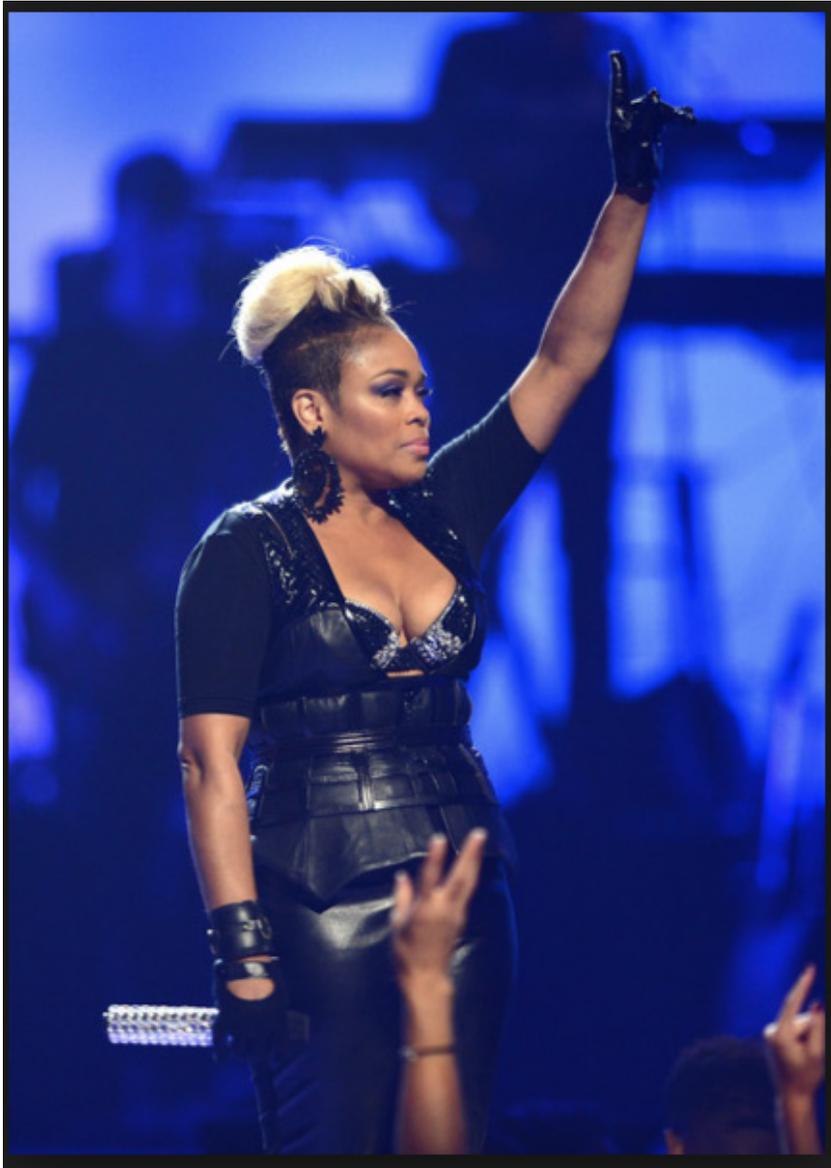
REVIEW



Anyone who knows me, whether in real life or only through social media, can tell you I'm probably the biggest TLC fan they know. They can also tell you that Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins is my favorite member, hands down. So, it was no surprise to anyone when I purchased her memoir.

A Sick Life is an account of Tionne's life story, chronicling her battle with sickle cell, her family dynamic, and of course, her career as one-third of the supergroup, TLC. For someone like me, many of the stories are familiar. I've heard them in interviews or during her live appearances. But there are a few stories Tionne shares that are raw and candid ... and make you say, "Whaaat?" Most of them involved her violent past.

When I saw her speak in October, she told the audience how thankful she was that social media didn't exist back in her heyday and admitted that she was "a mess." She went as far as to say her relationship with Dalvin (of Jodeci) was similar to Chris Brown and Rihanna's. Did she go around swinging at people for no reason? Doesn't seem like it. But if someone hit that one nerve, Tionne would set it off.



Her most harrowing, but triumphant, story involves her brain surgery and recovery thereafter. Other accounts are endearing, empowering, and downright hilarious. I actually laughed out loud when she admitted she'd planned on having a c-section to keep from damaging her lady part. She made that decision after looking at the ultrasound and seeing that her daughter Chase had a head like her father, rapper, Mack 10. On another note, I shook my head reading about Whitney and Bobby at Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes' funeral.

Though some of the stories were randomly placed throughout the book instead of organized fluidly, *A Sick Life* is a satisfying read for super fans and an eye-opening read for those who know of Tionne but have been in the dark about her story. The words are a testament to defying the odds and how strength in spite of unfortunate circumstances can still lead to success. Everyone has a purpose, and I'm glad Tionne is walking in hers.



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 releases in December. www.portiacosby.com

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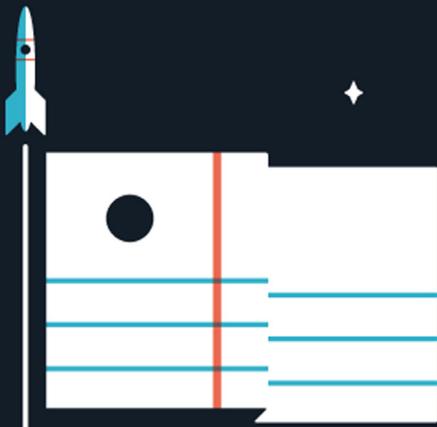
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NaNo
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Running the Gauntlet Getting Back to the Lab

Shakir RaShaan

If you've been keeping up with me on social media (and let's face it, you need to be keeping up with me on social media LOL), then you know what I've been up to this month. For those of you who haven't been, let me get you up to speed quickly.

I'm in the midst of the yearly gauntlet that is affectionately known as NaNoWriMo—National Novel Writing Month. If you're not aware of what NaNoWriMo is, then I will attempt to give you the gist of it. National Novel Writing Month is the yearly grind that authors voluntarily engage in where they commit to composing a novel from scratch and writing fifty thousand words during the month of November.

For those of you who love the mathematics of things, that means an author must commit to approximately 1,700 words per day, every day, until November 30th. Sounds like an easy walk in the park, right? I mean,

surely if you've been writing novels for any length of time, then you can certainly understand how easily that can be accomplished, right?

Not so fast, my friends.

What happens if you have life stuff that happens?

What happens if writing isn't your primary occupation? You still have to work, and that work schedule picks up in unexpected ways.

Family? Thanksgiving is coming up, and you still might have to work on helping with the dinner menu and all the trimmings, yes? What about the kids and all the things they need to do for school?

What about the motivation to actually write, especially if your energy might be sapped from all of the above-referenced instances? It takes energy to write, and the proper headspace to do so. I mean, come

not in the right mood, or you don't have the capacity, words are not going to flow properly.

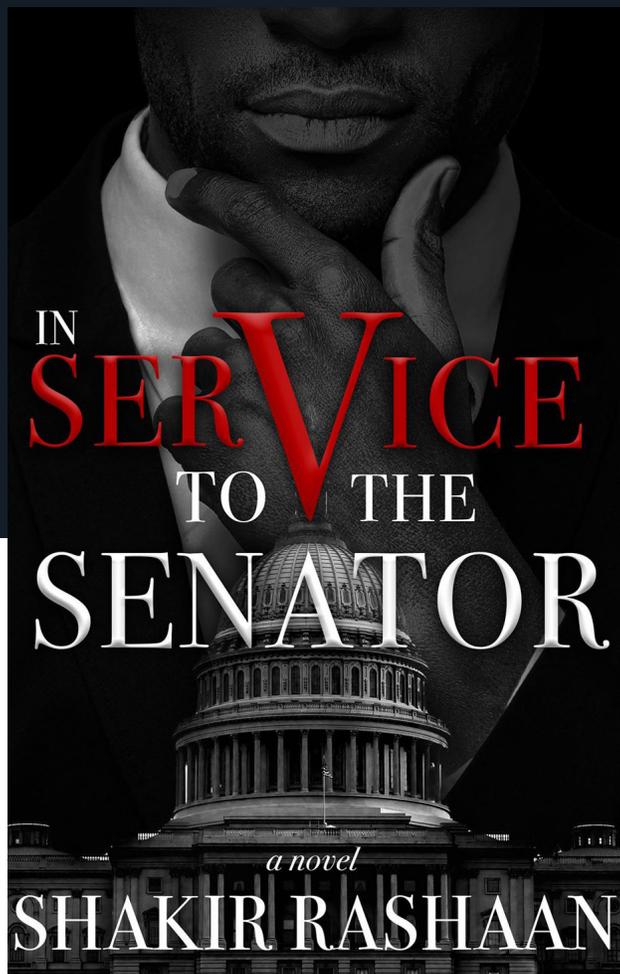
What am I doing for NaNoWriMo? Well, let me tell you!

I'm trying to use this gauntlet for a lot of reasons this year. I have been dealing with getting my Beloved's health back on track, which has had me put all writing projects on pause and reset my release schedule. I am still in graduate school, earning my Master's degree, so that has had me split time between that and trying to get my writing mojo back. Most importantly, I need to get back into the day-to-day discipline that it takes to write.

Look, there are no two ways about it. In order to do what it takes to do what we do, and to get better at doing it, you have to write daily. Even on days when you don't want to write. Even on days when the cursor on the screen is flashing with such an incessant frequency that it drives you mad when you can't get anything to flow. Just WRITE! Otherwise, how else will you eventually master your craft?

So now that I've gotten that off my chest and I can exhale a little bit and get back to the projects I need to finish for NaNoWriMo; I'd like to end this in the proper fashion. Happy Thanksgiving to you, happy writing, and pretty soon we will all be singing the time-honored lyrics, "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas ... everywhere we go!"

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.



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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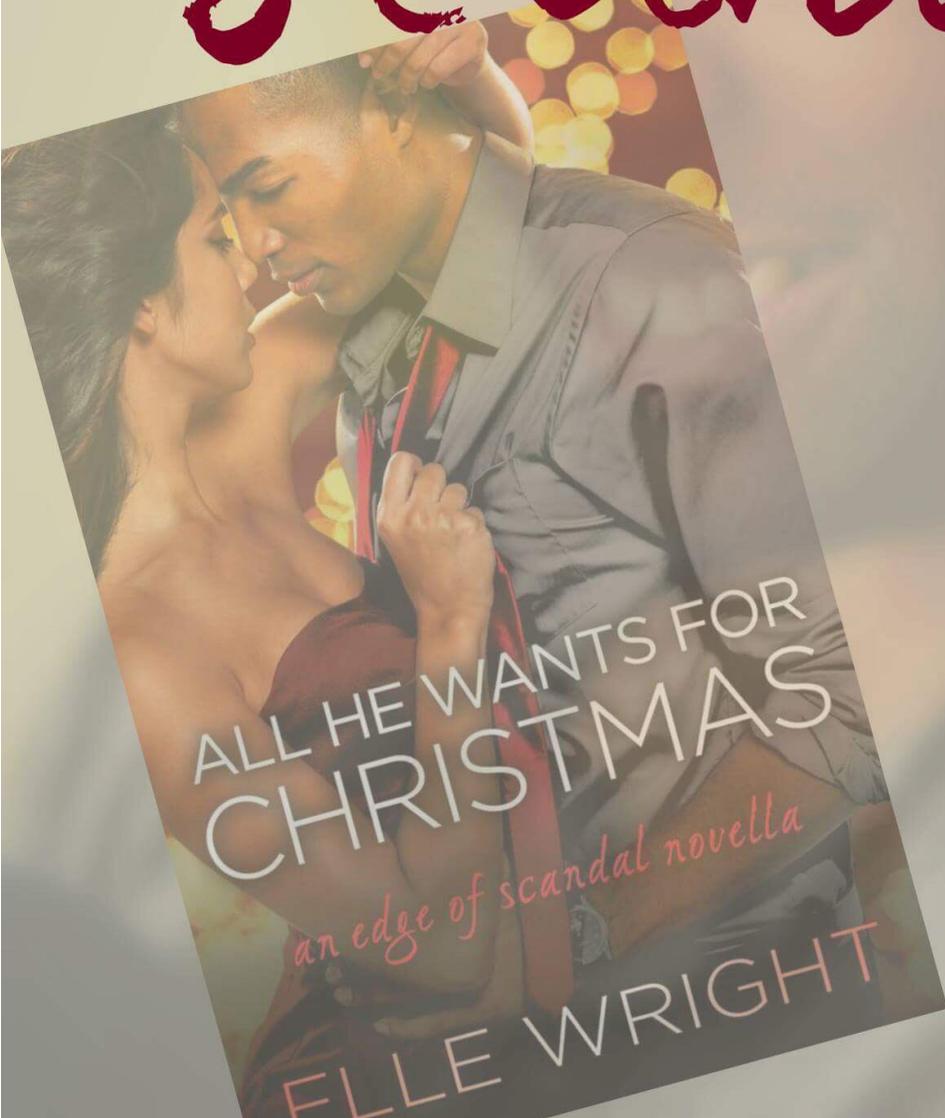
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and nothing but him ...*

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PORTIA'S RANDOM THOUGHTS

1. I am NOT calling Diddy "Brother Love."
2. You don't know my story (so stop making stuff up).
3. You're about to get a taste of my characters' (Paris, Shai, KiKi, and Reign) stories, though.
4. There are few things worse than waking up to a pitch black room unable to locate your glasses, and being scared to move for fear you'll roll onto them and *CRACK*!
5. Fellas, grown-ass, respectable women aren't gonna let you lay up in a house you don't pay one bill in, just because you can put it down in bed. Get over yourself or go over ol' girl's house where that sh*t flies.
6. They tried to put me on BP meds yesterday. Time to hit this gym (-12 lbs) and cut some salt. Because: nope.
7. Really, people need to get off my nerves, and I'll be okay.
8. My daughter's so sweet. She stole most of my fries and then told me I can have the last one. #hustler

SUCCESS



LONDON ST. CHARLES AT THE
2017 CAVALCADE OF AUTHORS
OUT OF THIS WORLD BALL

Writing as a child gave me the ability to get lost in the process of making up strange stories, visiting new worlds, meeting new people, all of which came to life when I put them on paper. My friends and teachers knew that I wanted to become a writer even before I graduated from grammar school.

During the teenage years, writing made me feel empowered in the sense that I was free to express myself, uninterrupted and unscripted, especially in times of anger or being in love. I was able to pour out every emotion with the stroke of a pen, and felt refreshed and heard, even though I was the only person listening to my most inner thoughts. Well, me and, The Man Above.

Somewhere along the line, that drive to become a professional writer diminished. Life got in the way—college, work, relationships, more work, and a baby. I still wanted it, but writing was no longer a priority.

Fast-forward fifteen years when I stumbled upon that spark once again while reading *Cheaters*, a novel by Eric Jerome Dickey. The way he crafted the story was intriguing and had me hooked from the first page. The further I went into the book, the more I visualized the characters in my mind. Not the characters from his story, but my own group of four people for a story that did not exist. One that I was creating with each page of his book that I turned.

By the time I finished *Cheaters*, the overwhelming feeling to write took over. My characters were banging the inside of my skull, begging to be released. I ran to the computer and began pecking away for thirteen hours nonstop. I hadn't written like that ever, and the feeling was nothing short of exhilarating. The characters had so much to say, and I couldn't hit the keys fast enough for all the words to escape my thoughts and make it through the keyboard and onto the screen.

At this juncture, the writing was as fun as it had been when I was eight years old. I wrote as the story came to

me, connected with the characters, all the while enjoying the twists and turns as the plot unfolded. I connected with the characters, and everything was peaches and cream and a whole lot of other things that make a writer feel good.

Halfway to the finish point, it dawned on me that I didn't know what to do next. How was I going to get this thing published? I googled and searched, and everything I saw looked like gibberish. Now, what do I do?

The Man Above dropped a literary angel into my life. And I had no idea that she would be my warrior to all things literary, but specifically developmental editing and giving me the tools to publish my first novel.

My youngest daughter and I were grocery shopping at Walmart when we ran into this woman and her son J.L. discussing whether it was important to have milk with French toast and syrup. I agreed that the two definitely go together. She asked me, "Do you read?" I was insulted (not really). That was like asking a fish if it needed water to survive. I love to read and proudly showed her my Kindle library. Then she showed me hers, which was much larger than mine. I mentioned I was writing a book. What made me do that? I don't know. Maybe it was fate.

Naleighna Kai invited me to a Writers Workshop that she taught at Calumet City Public Library. I made sure I was sitting in the seat of that class the following evening.

The workshop was only the beginning. I didn't know that a story had to be a certain amount of words to be considered a novel. I didn't know the true meaning of having an editor or that there were different types of editors. I thought the spelling and grammar check in Microsoft Word would suffice. (Don't y'all laugh at me. I mean it, stop laughing.)

I completed the manuscript four months later and hand-delivered it to my new developmental editor. I was elated, and she was happy for and with me. Then a couple of weeks passed, and the editor calls to inform me that the

manuscript either needs to be scrapped entirely or some serious reworking. Huh???

Those words are hard to hear. Imagine the realization the work I poured months into, neglecting my hunger because I was in a groove and couldn't fathom leaving the computer for two minutes to fix a sandwich, isn't good enough.

Now the real work began.

Once I got out of my head and over that literary stab in the heart, I chose to rewrite the story. That act had to be the best decision I ever made.

One year later, after hours of writing in solitude, skipping out on family fun, minimal television, and many sleepless nights, I submitted the manuscript, again. This time, the story had legs to stand on, but it still needed work. Editing is a beast, but I had to be the bigger beast. It requires inputs, rereading, reading out loud, resubmitting, more red marks when you get it back, and the cycle continues.

Discouragement was riding me during the editing process, particularly as a new author. Writing became a chore instead of a labor of love. But I couldn't give up even when I felt like I didn't have anything left in me to give. I put so much time into this story, and I was determined to see it to fruition.

Having a support system helps when the literary world and achieving that goal of published author seemed bleak. Sometimes I had to step away, vent with my peoples, get my bearings, then attack the editing with a fresh attitude and a sharper eye.

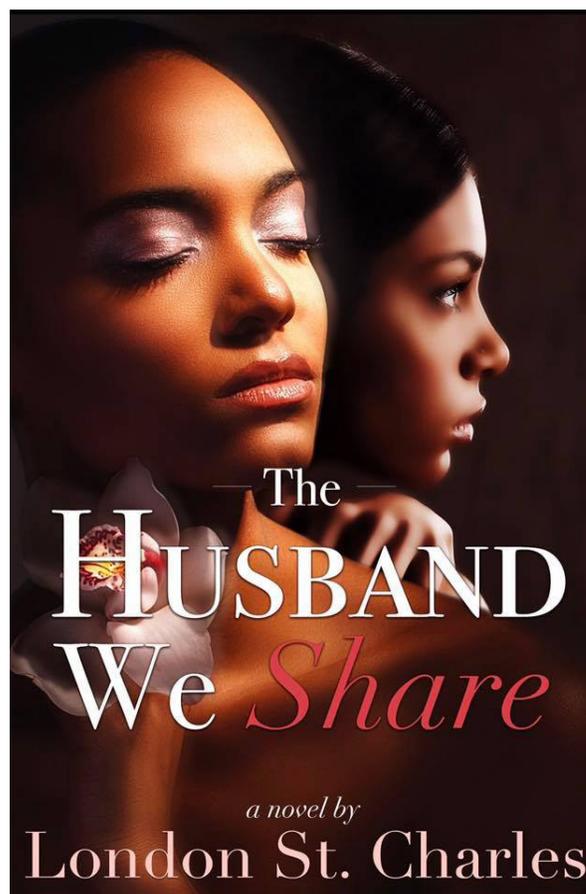
Although my editor was tough, she nurtured my writing soul. She explained what I was doing wrong and didn't give up on me when it took me longer than most to figure some things out. I appreciate that, every time I gaze at my freshly published novel.

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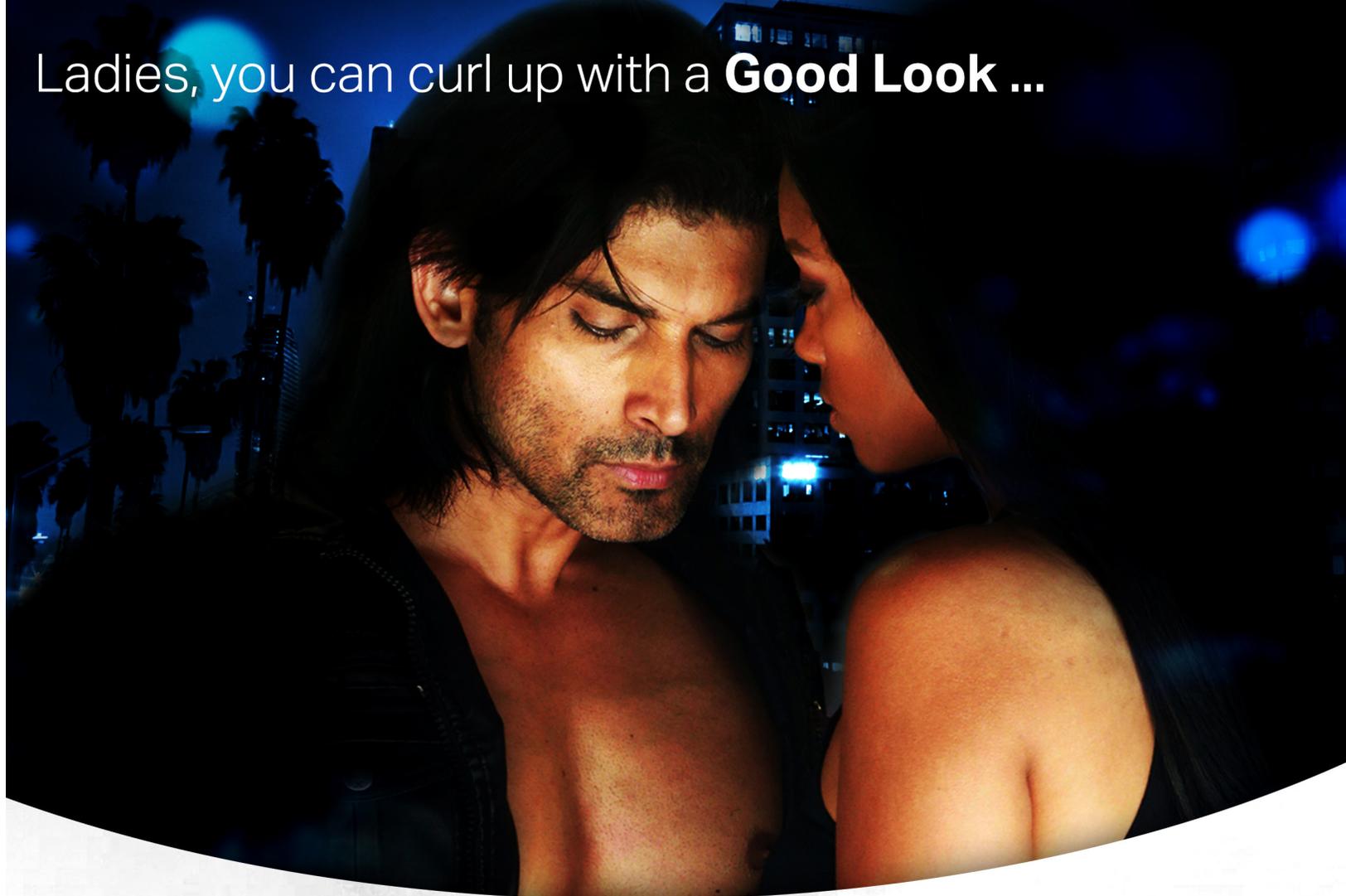
The release of *The Husband We Share* is literally a dream come true. My words are in print. The love and warmth felt from those who've been on this writing journey with me are appreciated on a level I could not believe. I've done something that makes my heart smile and makes my children proud.

My oldest daughter, Sierra, attended the 13th Annual Cavalcade of Authors Out of This World Ball. This was my debut, and I was honored she was there to share that experience with me. She saw me in action, interacting with readers and signing books for the very first time. Midway through the evening, she sent a text that said, "Mommy I am so proud of you." The overwhelming feeling of pride and accomplishment I felt at that moment, I will cherish forever. Sierra witnessed the hard work first hand, and she had the opportunity to see how diligence, perseverance, and staying on task, even when things aren't easy, paid off.

No matter what your dreams are, realize that everything happens when it's supposed to happen, not when we believe they should. Keep pressing forward and get yours. And when you have a moment, be sure to ... get mine.

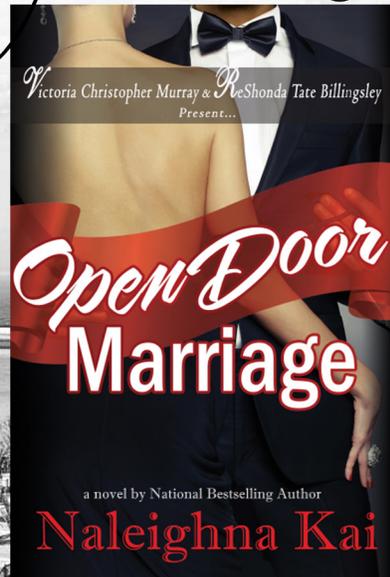
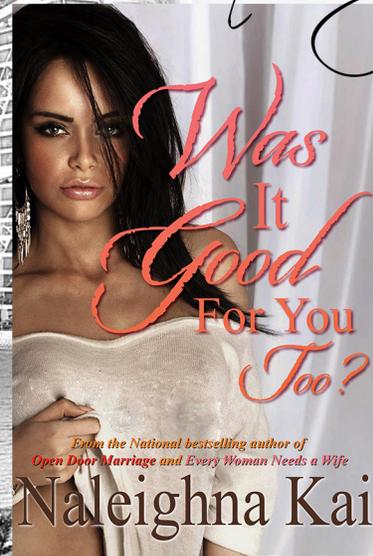
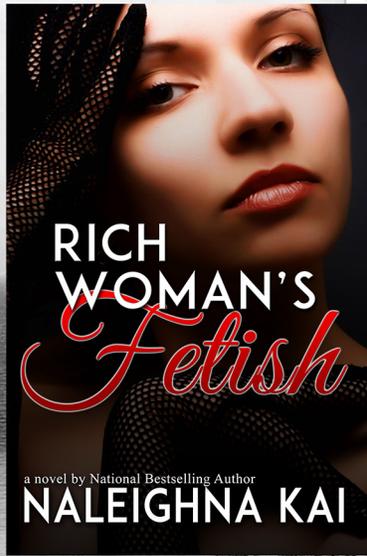
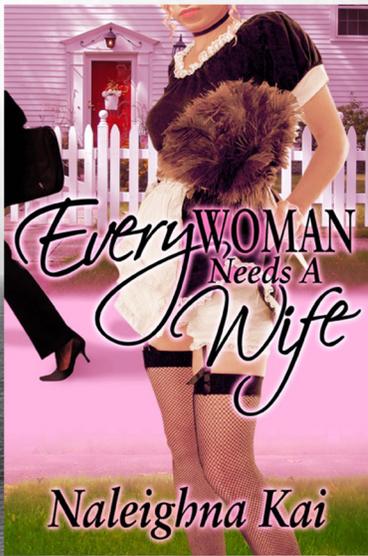


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Sierra Kay

Every fiction writer writes about sex. Even the absence of sex is writing about sex. Whether someone has sex on the first date, after 30, 60, 90 days, or after they get married, it's about sex. Whether the hero or heroine copulates on the kitchen counter or hasn't seen, heard or touched another person since their loves went to rest in heaven, a character's attitude about sex tells us so much of who they are.

On a trip to Amsterdam, a city known for its windows lining the Red Light District providing entree into the world of prostitution, where would an author go, but to the Sex Museum? Yes, it's a thing. Its full name is Sex Museum -- "The

Temple of Venus," and if you remember Greek mythology, you'll certainly know that she is the goddess of love.

Trekking through the streets of Amsterdam—in the rain, I might add—I arrived on a typical Amsterdam rowhome on Damrak Street. It's an unassuming brick building unless you count the neon Sex Museum sign visible through the window. Touted to be the oldest sex museum in the world, entry is open to anyone from ages sixteen years and up.

While some of you are clutching your pearls at the thought of a high school-aged child visiting such a place, please note Amsterdam is not America and feelings about sex are different. Their attitude is that it is a natural occurrence, and that translates into teenagers learning about it being equally as natural. Think of it more as sex education on steroids.

Now, when you enter, the first display is a 6-foot pimp complete with a fat gold chain. So it made me wonder a couple of things. One: From where does one order a six-foot pimp statue? Two: Was this visit going to be a homage to prostitution given the





popularity of Amsterdam's Red Light District?

I left still unaware of the origins of the pimp. However, I did learn quite a bit about the history of sex overall and not just prostitution. Which, in itself, was well worth the 5 pounds entry fee.

Amsterdam's Sex Museum was a combination of quirky rooms on multiple levels that provided educational and sometimes graphically disturbing images of the impact of sex and societal rules associated with the act. In addition to sights, including graphic texts (don't be surprised, I know some of you have a well-worn copy of The Karma Sutra under the mattress), exhibits included freaky pottery from Pompeii and often robust sounds of lovemaking.

Walking through one room, I learned of the existence of brothel coins – both as a financial exchange and a marketing tactic. The funniest coin read, "10 old but ambitious beautiful ladies to serve you." Nothing like truth in advertising, eh?



The Sex Museum does a good job of covering topics ranging from masturbation to conventional sex to bestiality. In short, if you are offended by a variety of images of breasts and penises from humans and animals and sometimes humans with animals, this is not the place to visit in Amsterdam. Go to the Weed Museum instead. Yes, that's also a thing. Snoop Dog would be proud.

However, if you want to learn about how Ancient Romans coined the word "sex," and Parisians provided the word "condom," or if you're interested in both the impact of the Japanese geishas as well as Marilyn Monroe and Josephine Baker on the global conversation around sex, this is a good opportunity to delve deeper into this wonderfully salacious world. For educational purposes only, of course.



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.

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No
Ordinary
Noel

From the creator of
Sister Betty

NO ORDINARY NOEL

by Pat G'Orge-Walker

Prologue

Old man Crazy wasn't supposed to visit the Crossing Over Sanctuary church during Christmas time. Crazy had eleven other months it could've dragged the church into chaos.

But not in the winter of 2010, that year Old man Crazy showed up gift-wrapped, tied with a bow of sincerity around a box of hope. Like any surprise epidemic Crazy's, message spread quickly, from the pulpit to the back pew and all around the town.

Moreover, plenty of church folk should've seen its signs. Those church Mothers with their so-called visions and the old Deacons' that claimed third-eye discernments. The Reverend and the Church Board that boasted all sorts of spiritual gifts, yet none saw Crazy coming. They didn't even know the sign on the church lawn read, "When you come into the House of the Lord, just pay and leave your worries behind."

But Lee Ester, the unpaid former head of the church's custodial board knew about the sign, especially since he'd hung before he filed for bankruptcy.

There were other signs all over Pelzer, South Carolina: Going out of Business, Liquidation, and A Two Days Only B4 Honest Eddie Goes 2 Prison Sale. Big and little signs declared one thing or another.

And God decided Christmas or not, He would send Sister Betty to thwart old man Crazy; of course, she didn't want to do it.

CHAPTER 2 - Fall 2010

A few days after the Halloween madness crept off the radar, there was a new holiday buzz all over the Pelzer. Like most of the country, Pelzer town folk were broke. They faced probable turkey-free dinners and severe Christmas giving challenges.

However, from the schoolyard to the junkyard, with the jailhouse and churches in between, they still held hope for the upcoming holiday.

They snatched down their pumpkin front door decorations and got ready for the Thanksgiving and Christmas madness. Some folk were brazen and heathen enough to have a Tom Turkey figure in a manger with a huge Santa on the front porch. The Santa even had a sack of toys thrown over its back, and a Bible in its hand.

Pelzer folk never allowed reality to derail their delusions. And the Mothers Board determined that the tradition should continue. So when it came time for the Mothers Board Quarterly meeting, the first Saturday in November, craziness and chaos tore down the Welcome sign and moved in.

Extraordinary times called for extreme measures. And no one more extreme than the Mothers board fit the bill. It was time for the bickering fundraising heads of the Mothers Board to rumble. They shared the war-mongering crown, cantankerous Mother Sasha Pray Onn and incontinence plagued, Mother Bea Blister. But with Thanksgiving and Christmas coming soon, it was time to put into play one of the fundraising schemes they'd hatched.

Their plots seldom worked, but like most old hens, they just kept on hatching them.

Early on in the month, Bea and Sasha asked for volunteers to aid in their latest sure-to-be fiasco. But only three out of hundreds of members came aboard. Those three forced labor workers, all either over or in their sixties were Elder Bartholomew "Batty" Brick, Brother Leon Casanova and Trustee Freddie Noel. They came aboard because Sasha and Bea had threatened to spread untruths, beat the crap out of them or stuff laxative-laced meals down their throats.

Elder Brick had already served time and didn't need the rumors. Brother Casanova was scared of Bea's violent nature and Sasha's entire Hellraiser family. And malnourished-looking trustee Noel just needed a hot home-cooked meal with or without a laxative from anywhere.

The weather held out that Saturday morning of the meeting. There was just enough of a chill in the air to chill out the old folk. The five seniors arrived at Crossing Over Sanctuary church with a combined five hundred years of senility, irregularity and illusions of Holiness.

The head of the Finance Committee, elder Bartholomew “Batty” Brick entered first. Fellow committee members, Brother Leon Casanova and Trustee Freddie Noel entered next. The men then escorted mothers Sasha and Bea into the Fellowship Hall. They went to the rear of the hall and sat at one of the large tables.

The five already knew why they were there. Months ago, Bea and Sasha, referred to as BS, had suggested to Reverend Tom about having a Senior Prom as a fundraiser. More recently, when Elder Brick slipped up and told Sasha that the churches intake had slipped dramatically, she’d suggested they come up with more ideas beyond just selling tickets to the prom.

“Okay,” Sasha announced, “Batty, you lead us in a word or two of prayer so we can get started.”

Elder Batty Brick jumped up quicker than his arthritis normally allowed. The overweight, tall, olive-complexioned man with snow-white hair winced. He dropped his head, clasped his hands and blurted as if he were preaching, “You know our hearts Lord.” He let one hand sweep over their heads. “We come asking that You Lord take our few fishes and stale crusty bread ideas and help us to make some money with them.”

All raised their eyes and palms toward the ceiling and added, “Amen.”

“We don’t hafta read the minutes. We can just move on.” The suggestion came from Mother Bea Blister.

Bea had been the Vice President of the Mothers Board for more years than she could remember. She’d also been Sasha’s rival for anything that she figured Sasha wanted. She was in her late sixties, so she said. Bea was also a statuesque woman; she had a severely arched back, an extra hundred pounds, as dark as a sun-ripened raisin and just as wrinkled.

Bea made her wishes known on her way out the hall to the bathroom. She’d felt an urge to go since she’d left home. Since there were men at the meeting, and she wasn’t too sure if she could depend on the Depend diaper, she’d worn then was as good a time to take care of business. The last thing she wanted was to be embarrassed, and definitely not with blabbermouth Sasha present.

By the time Bea returned, she found the other four seated just as she’d left them. “What did I miss?”

“When did you leave?” Sasha asked. She’d never tell Bea that she’d held up the meeting until she returned. There was no fun in that.

So that set the tone for the rest of the meeting.

“I think we should sell tee shirts,” Sasha suggested, “We’ll have ones printed for the men, Got an Xtra Blue Pill? For the women, Me & My breasts R Southern Gals. Sasha’s suggestion caught Brother Leon’s attention. Up till that time he’d been dozing. He leaned forward. His brow furrowed and his seventy-year old cinnamon-colored cheeks appeared full as if he’d stowed away a few nuts instead of sitting among them. “Ahem,”

he said as he pulled on his handle bar gray moustache to give his coming words more weight.

“As I see it,” he looked around to make sure all eyes were upon him, “this hall holds about five hundred people comfortably. Since we’re having a throwback to the fifties, sixties and seventies dress theme for the prom, I’m sure most won’t need to do anything but look in the closets and grab something to wear. Afros, conks, platform shoes, we all got some old clothes somewhere...”

“Bea can wear what she wore last Sunday,” Sasha chuckled. Her tiny parenthesis-shaped legs spread and of course, she’d forgotten her underwear again.

“And Sasha can just wear what she’s wearing now.” Bea shot back, except she can add drawers.”

One moment Sasha’s knees were open and the next the springs to Sasha’s knees sprang shut hard enough to crack a bone. She grabbed her cane and was about go Darth Vader on Bea.

Brother Casanova jumped between them, “Ladies, please. Don’t let me hafta use my Taser!” He’d heard that line used on television and was glad it worked. He shook his head and sighed at their pettiness as they retreated, “Anyway, we’re supposed to come up with ways to make money without going over the five-hundred dollar budget. Won’t it cost much of that if the shirts are printed?”

Sasha didn’t like her idea challenged, and she could almost feel her tight gray bun tighten. It’d threaten to cut off the oxygen to her brain, but she remained cool. “Of course, I already thought about that,” she lied, “Bea is gonna hand-write every word on every tee-shirt.”

“What tha ham and cheese!” Bea’s spine almost straightened as she shot forward, she’d just balled her fists to strike. “Oh forget a Taser!”

Sasha quickly cut her off when she added sweetly, “Bea has such lovely penmanship. Why should we pay for something with less quality?”

Bea’s fist stopped in mid-air. She hadn’t gone to college, but when Sasha put it that way, how could she refuse? “I do have good penmanship,” Bea said with as much sincerity as an old con artist could muster. “How many tee-shirts would we need?”

Elder Batty started counting on his fingers and when he added both knees to the count, he said. “Bea, I think we’ve sold about one hundred and fifty tickets with about two hundred more promised.”

From the end of the table, someone spoke up and offered a semblance of commonsense. “We do remember that the Seniors Prom is that Saturday after Thanksgiving, don’t we? That’s less than a month away. It won’t leave us with much time.”

Everyone turned to face trustee Freddie Noel. Until that moment, they’d not heard a peep from the tall, lemon yellow, skinny man with squinty brown eyes, and a sharp nose that looked like a carrot stick. Not only was he very tall, but extremely unattractive and in his mid-sixties. He was so thin, he’d almost had to pin his pants to his skin to keep them up.

“It’ll be enough time if we’re not distracted.” Elder Batty Brick replied. “So you can pencil that in your notes as a done deal.”

The trustee shuttered a bit. He knew that Elder Batty Brick had only mentioned the word pencil because behind his back, folk called him “number two” saying he resembled a number two pencil with a chewed eraser.

“That reminds me,” Brother Casanova added, as he turned to trustee Noel, “we haven’t assigned a job to you for that night.”

“Let him take the coats,” Bea snapped.

Bea always dismissed brother Noel because he didn’t fit what she looked for in a man, congregation member or a potential helpmate. He was too thin, too poor and she didn’t think he could stand up to the job of giving her what she’d need. “Unless you’re bringing a date or plan on having any fun, I don’t think you’d mind taking the coats, would you?”

Before the trustee could respond Sasha added fuel to the fire, “He’s celibate. Everyone knows he ain’t never been married either. I’ve never seen him dance and if he could, I’m certain he would. He ain’t trying to have fun.”

“Well, I’m certain he’ll celebrate when he’s no longer a cel-i-bate.” Somehow Elder Batty Brick thought he’d helped the reclusive trustee especially when he added, “I’m sure he’s just waiting on a woman who’d have him.”

As usual, the trustee’s manhood always fed the gossip fire and if he wasn’t weird enough for their chatter, he had a bad habit. The trustee had a sprig of silver hair that resembled a half moon that peeked out from the crown of his head. Whenever he was nervous, which was most of the time he’d twirl that sprig. When they’d finished berating him, the top of his head look like silver twigs.

So they decided that Elder Batty Brick would collect the monies despite he’d once served time for embezzlement. Brother Casanova would DJ even though he’d warned them about his hearing loss in one ear and that he’d supervise the hall decorations. Sasha would oversee the food and a possible senior date auction. Bea would print by hand all the tee shirts and secure the adult entertainment.

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.



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,

What

SHE REMEMBERS

MarZe Scott



The only thing in life that is consistent is change. Some changes hit you from the blind side and lays on you like a ton of bricks. March 14, 2017 marked the day that those very bricks hit me on top of my head and the aftermath is still something that I deal with on a daily basis.

That cold day in March, her daughter, my mother, passed away with no warning whatsoever. My mother wasn't sick, hadn't been in the hospital for long stretches or had even been given a diagnosis of any disease or ailment that would check her out of here. She simply fell asleep and didn't wake up.

My mother had been caring for my grandmother who was, and on some days still is, completely unaware that her daughter has passed away.

My grandmother lives with the dastardly “D” word—Dementia. The Mayo Clinic qualifies Dementia as a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking and social abilities severely enough to interfere with daily functioning. While that might be the clinical definition, what it means to the family who has to experience the highs and lows of what it means for a loved one to forget the most important things that have happened in their lives.

On the day that my mother died, my grandmother had the presence of mind to open the door for my sister who had come by to take my mother to an appointment. She didn't know the person who was on the other side of that door. I got called from work to come to my mother's house. When I arrived, my grandmother was present in body, but oblivious to what the commotion was all about. She was unaware that her only child and caregiver was no longer alive. To this day she believes that her daughter is out partying with friends.

Growing up, my grandmother lived a very independent life in Nashville, Tennessee. She worked for Vanderbilt University and saved every penny of her hard-earned money after bills were paid. However, it was about seven years ago that my mother noticed that my grandmother wasn't “remembering”; not remembering what she had said just five minutes prior when having a conversation with someone; not remembering making appointments; not remembering people she saw often. I became witness to these occurrences only three years ago when my mother moved my grandmother from Tennessee to Michigan.

God bless her soul, my mother could have never prepared for the constant repetition of conversations that she had encountered with my grandmother. My mother never cared to repeat herself nor did she like to hear the same information over and over again. So to hear her mother retell the story of how her own mother died when she was only a toddler was nerve-wrecking and heart wrenching every time she told the story. Unfortunate for my mother, communication of this sort would happen literally ten times in a day. Now it's my turn.

Life has been quite the rollercoaster since taking over as caretaker for my grandmother. People, in their kindness, warned me of how taxing it would be living with a loved one who is coping with memory loss. I could expect my grandmother to be aggressive and defensive, that it would be a good idea to prepare myself to hear every manner of mean and abrasive thing that she could think of. I was told to look forward to my feelings getting hurt constantly. I also needed to make sure that she doesn't wander off from the house. Knock on wood; life with my grandmother has been fairly atypical from what I was told to anticipate.

My seventy-nine year old grandmother has a routine that is as close to clockwork as the minute and second hands work on a clock itself. Up by seven, she cleans and feeds herself without help or a struggle. She combs her almost waist-length silver hair and plaits it all by herself. She prepares her favorite meal of bologna and onions a few times a day, cutting her onion with a sharp paring knife without assistance. She takes great pride in washing the dishes for the family (Thank God because it's not my favorite thing to do). We have a great time talking about whatever is on the television and her snappy remarks about the people who she feels need to fix their ugly faces keep me tickled. But ...

She doesn't know who I am or who my kids are. She doesn't recognize my sister, her namesake, or her children. She doesn't remember ever knowing her grandchildren or great grandchildren. We're just nice people, who according to her, should be getting paid to watch her since her daughter wants to gallivant around the city all willy-nilly. We've become used to reintroducing ourselves. Well, at least I have. She feels shame when I tell her that we're all kinfolk and we're here to take care of her. She can't stand that she can't remember us and calls herself a "dumb ass". It's always too funny to me that she cusses, but I assure her that she is far from being an ass or dumb.

She attributes her lack of memory to being "as old as the hills", a consequence of not dying when she still had her faculties fully intact. She longs to go back to "good ol' Nashville, Tennessee", back to the family that she knows, the family that has long since passed away. Sometimes her sleep patterns are "off"; her normal bedtime is around ten o'clock in the evening, but there are days, especially around the fourteenth of the month, where she paces the floor until three in the morning, worried, awaiting her daughter's return. The only thing more frustrating than staying up all night when I'm already exhausted is the look of heartbreak when I look into her warm, gray eyes and tell her that her daughter won't be coming home. These are the times I cry. I'm so glad that it doesn't happen everyday.

Many of the people that I know who are caring for a loved one with memory loss are struggling to understand the disconnect between the person that they once knew and the person that now inhabits their lives. The person they love looks every bit like the person they have always known, but spending just a moment in their presence becomes a stark reminder that he or she no longer exists as the one they knew. Somehow in the stretch of time, that person slipped away, unaware even to themselves, that it was happening. And even with all of modern science's advances, there is no way to stop the journey that this path takes. Even in the times it seems when the person you recognize "returns", the moment is fleeting. One simply has to learn to appreciate the moment for what it was; a beautiful mind reaching back for the traces of its former existence.

So, I choose to focus on the rainbow in an overcast sky. My grandmother feeds me ear loads of compliments about how beautiful she thinks I am, how she likes my style, and to only let a man "have his way" with me if he has enough money to support me. The look of pure joy on her face at a sunshiny day makes my whole world smile. I tell her she is beautiful every chance I get (even though she doesn't believe me); and how happy my heart is that I get to hang out with her (she still says I need to get paid for dealing with a kook like her... LOL). I sit quietly while she talks to herself about what she does remember about her childhood and thank God that I have the opportunity to love on her the way I know she's never been loved on before.

I'm not looking forward to the day that the good Lord calls my grandmother home, though I know with each passing day she's closer to the dream of meeting her mother again. I'm selfish that way. There's not one day that I regret having this time with her. Even if given the all the money in the world, I still wouldn't trade it in. Not for anything in this world.

#ILoveMyGrandma

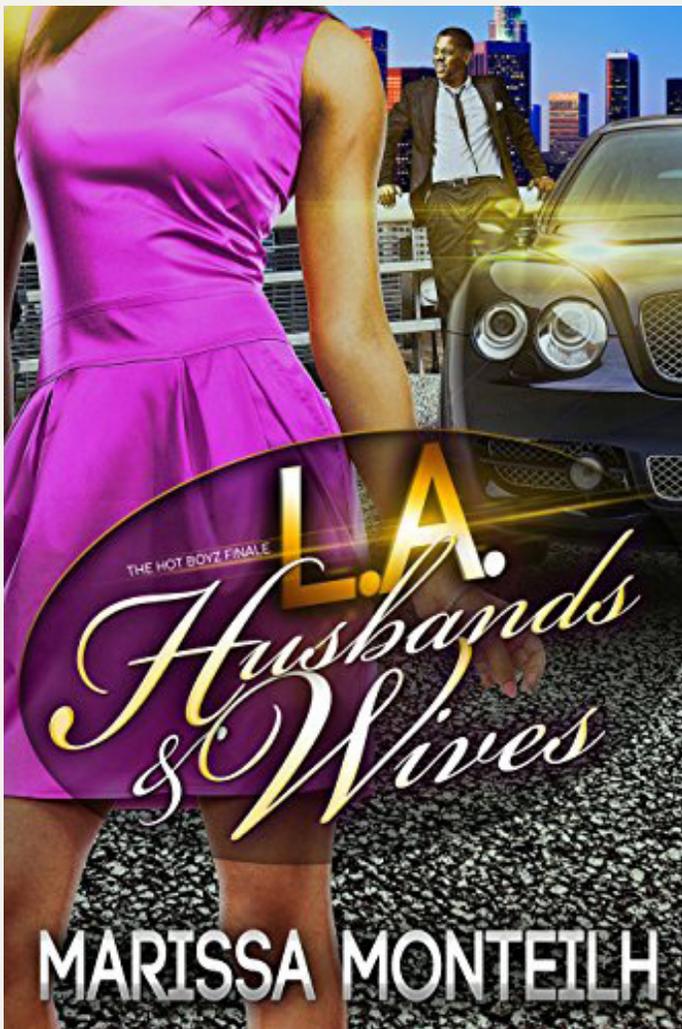


MarZé Scott, a lifelong resident of Ypsilanti, Michigan, is a lover of all things creative. While taking care of her family, she indulges Her passions of reading, writing, drawing, and makeup artistry. She has been writing short stories and poems since elementary school and developed a taste for writing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

L.A. Husbands & Wives

Book Review by Shannan Harper

REVIEW



The Wilson Brothers, Mason, Claude, and Tarino are back with their wives Mercedes, Venus and Sequoia, and of course, they brought the drama. Mason is running for his second term as mayor and still dealing with trust issues from Mercedes' "almost affair". Health issues, as well as secrets, will truly put their marriage to the test. Claude and Venus are still separated, but when tragedy strikes, readers are able to witness whether Claude has finally learned his lesson. A medical mistake happened when Sequoia gave birth caused a series of challenges, but secrets from Tarino's past is what will possibly break or make them as a couple. All three families will have to learn a lesson, hopefully before it's too late.

Although this is the third book in the series, the author does an amazing job giving you back story so that unless you want to, you don't really have to read the first books in the series. I spent the majority of this book talking back to the characters and calling them just about every name but child of God. And who doesn't like a book filled with sex, power and drama, which this family has an overflow of. Although this is Marissa's last book, as well as the end of the series (I'm still a little miffed about both of those points, but I understand), She did a wonderful job making the characters so relatable and personable. And if you take nothing else from this book, take away the fact that tomorrow isn't promised to anyone, and if you love people, be sure to tell them before it's too late.

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No EXCUSES

a journey into
overcoming physical
challenges to create a new me

Karen D. Bradley

Lying to myself and others in an attempt to be positive does me no good. If I wasn't careful, it would land me six feet under sooner than later.



Each day is a gift and an equal opportunity for me to live life to the fullest, and it doesn't matter what challenges there are to my health. That was what I had to remind myself when I was diagnosed with Lupus. The reality is no one, healthy or sick, knows whether or not another day will be granted.

People have told me that there should only be a plan A. In my world there is a plan A, B and C. Having an illness with no cure changed a lot in my life, but it was no excuse for not pursuing opportunities. I didn't want a life that consisted of trying to maintain employment to afford to pay that 2% of an ever-increasing pile of medical bills from the cycle of doctor appointments, lab work, and treatments. I realized early on, that if I want a life where I explore my possibilities, then I have to fight for it. No existing as if the disease had already taken me out. My focus has to be on creating new memories, achieving goals, and continuously working towards improving my life. The journey of adjusting wasn't simple. Wanting it and actively doing it are two totally different things.

Months before I was officially diagnosed, my mom asked if I was okay. I said, "Yes." I was trying to be positive and not worry her despite feeling weak enough that I had to use the wall to assist me in walking. She insisted I go to the urgent care. I'm glad she did because I was far from okay. Blood was pooling on the inside of one of my thighs, which could have led to my death. My concept of "being positive" had to be redesigned to mean being honest, but hopeful about the future. Lying to myself and others in an attempt to be positive did me no good. If I wasn't careful, it would land me six feet under sooner than later. I had to accept that being honest didn't necessarily equate to not being positive.

The loss of my independence, the death of my confidence and negative triggers were a few of the issues I had to work through to be able to function in my new norm. Friends and family had to understand that while I appreciated their help, they couldn't "baby me". They had to allow my attempts

to do tasks as I figured out my new limits. I didn't want to create habits that would have me leaning into the role of being sick even when I was feeling better. The process was frustrating.

Having my independence snatched away may have been the hardest for me. Early in life, I'd learned that if I waited on people to do activities with me, I risked missing out on experiencing life. I went where I wanted regardless of if I had someone to go with me. Lupus forced me into the opposite position of being dependent on people. The mix of medicines and my physical condition determined whether or not I could drive. If I couldn't, I required someone to attend certain events with me. During those moments when I couldn't get up and go, I'd get caught in a comparison matrix of my old life versus the new one. I had to stay away from social media; because seeing people, living life in a way that I couldn't was difficult.

The first few months after being diagnosed, I was in a physical and mental struggle. My mind required a project to focus on, one that didn't center around my health or recovery. Publishing a second book became that something I could focus on instead of being sick. The effort led to me planning a book and panel titled *The Good, Bad, and Ugly of Love*, which created a special kind of energy that was good for my soul.

Somewhere between the first and fourth visit to the hospital, Lupus became a confidence killer. I literally didn't trust my legs to hold me up. My hair texture was constantly changing and falling out in sections. I would swell from head to toe. Lips looked dry like the Sahara Desert. My skin appeared as if it had been dipped in white powder after I put on lotion. My mom used to say, "If you don't feel good at least look good." Unfortunately, some of the time, describing me as "hot mess" would have been an understatement.

The one thing I couldn't do is hide my sickness. The little energy I had was used to get my body out of bed and to work. It didn't matter that I looked like something the cat had dragged in with every intention of dragging it back out. Many times, I was pushing the envelope to show up and be present in my life. Walking into a room with confidence when I was praying that I wouldn't fade away was difficult. At one point, one of my doctors put me on a restriction that kept me from walking anywhere except

the bathroom. I had to remind myself I was alive and tell myself to stop creating stories behind the looks I received from others. And also realized that some people who are in perfect health also struggle with confidence. My attention had to be on keeping one foot moving in front of the other. Those physical issues could bother me, but they couldn't stop me from honoring my commitments.

Even today, I have to avoid triggers that put me in a negative state of mind when my condition is getting the best of me. Normally, I avoid looking at photos taken of me. Not that I don't have physical issues to remind me, but something about seeing it in a photo throws me off my game. I also steer clear of people who repeatedly tell me to stay positive and want me to have this "happy go lucky" persona.

Interestingly enough, conversations with certain doctors had to be kept to a minimum. One of my doctors was determined to diagnose me as clinically depressed. I could not allow anyone to feed depression into my spirit. I had enough issues without adding that to the list. To say that visiting up to five doctors at any given time, getting needles stuck in my arm on a regular basis, and dealing with some type of physical ailment that sprang up every single day, didn't on occasion get a little sad and depressing, would be a lie. But I truly believe it had, and has not, gotten to the point where it matched the doctor's definition. I didn't need anyone treating me for something I don't have, especially when some of the drugs used to treat depression makes people suicidal.

The process of not allowing my illness to be an excuse has been a rocky road. Pushing myself too hard can be detrimental to my productivity. Strategy became key. I needed to be strategic in how I tackled my projects in order to not to cause problems with my health. Doing too much could have me in bed sick for days, or worse could send me to the hospital. One thing I did was assign days to do minimum work and to rest in order to have maximum productivity on other days. No waiting to the last minute to meet a deadline, starting earlier is always better. My issues are unpredictable. If my body shuts me down and I don't get it done, I still have time to get it completed before the due date

When I was shooting my first short film, I scheduled some rest time in, but lupus still reared its ugly head. After filming, my schedule was filled with more lab work and doctors' appointments. By the time I hit the editing stage of the project, the doctors were talking biopsy and chemo. Once I knew there was a chance that I may not be in a condition to personally follow through on the film post-production, I contacted my plan B and put them on notice that their services may be required.

Flexibility and creativity play a big part in my being able to tackle big tasks. I work like I will be there and plan as if I won't. I normally host a panel discussion for my book releases not only because I'm not a big talker, but also because it allows for someone to step in, if needed, and keep the event going. It takes some of the stress off if I'm in a push-through mode. I feel confident knowing that if I'm unable to host an event, it will go on without me.

Since stress can set off my Lupus, it's important to keep it to a minimum. There is no committing to anything that I don't feel I can complete. In a circumstance that doesn't allow for someone to replace me, the best I can do is inform the event planner. The first Cavalcade of Authors I participated in, I had to skip eating breakfast and show up only to read an excerpt. It took me awhile to shake off that feeling as though I was encased in a concrete suit and get moving. When I arrived, the food looked absolutely deliciously, but if I had indulged, it would have put me out of commission for hours. While I dread speaking, it is also the area where I'm stretching myself. Which means I had to alter the other elements within my control

to be able to execute the task. In this scenario, I had to skip breakfast and grab food later to make sure I could get through that three-minute read.

Live beyond your self-imposed limits was the instruction I received from someone I admired long before I was diagnosed with Lupus. If I wasn't supposed to allow my fears to be an excuse for not executing tasks and stretching myself further, then I cannot allow my condition to be one. When the voice inside quiets and no longer screams "fight", I'm grateful to be blessed with people who encourage me to keep going another day. I know I will stumble, falter, and fall on this journey. Yet, I have to get up and dust myself off. I think of the instances when I've slipped on ice, fell and hurt myself. I didn't stay stretched out where I fell wallowing in the pain. I got up, wiped the snow off and limped to my destination. It's the same thing I do now with Lupus. Stand up and dust myself off. I'm hurt and barely shuffling my feet some days, but I'm still moving forward. I acknowledge the reality of my situation without being bound and gagged by it.

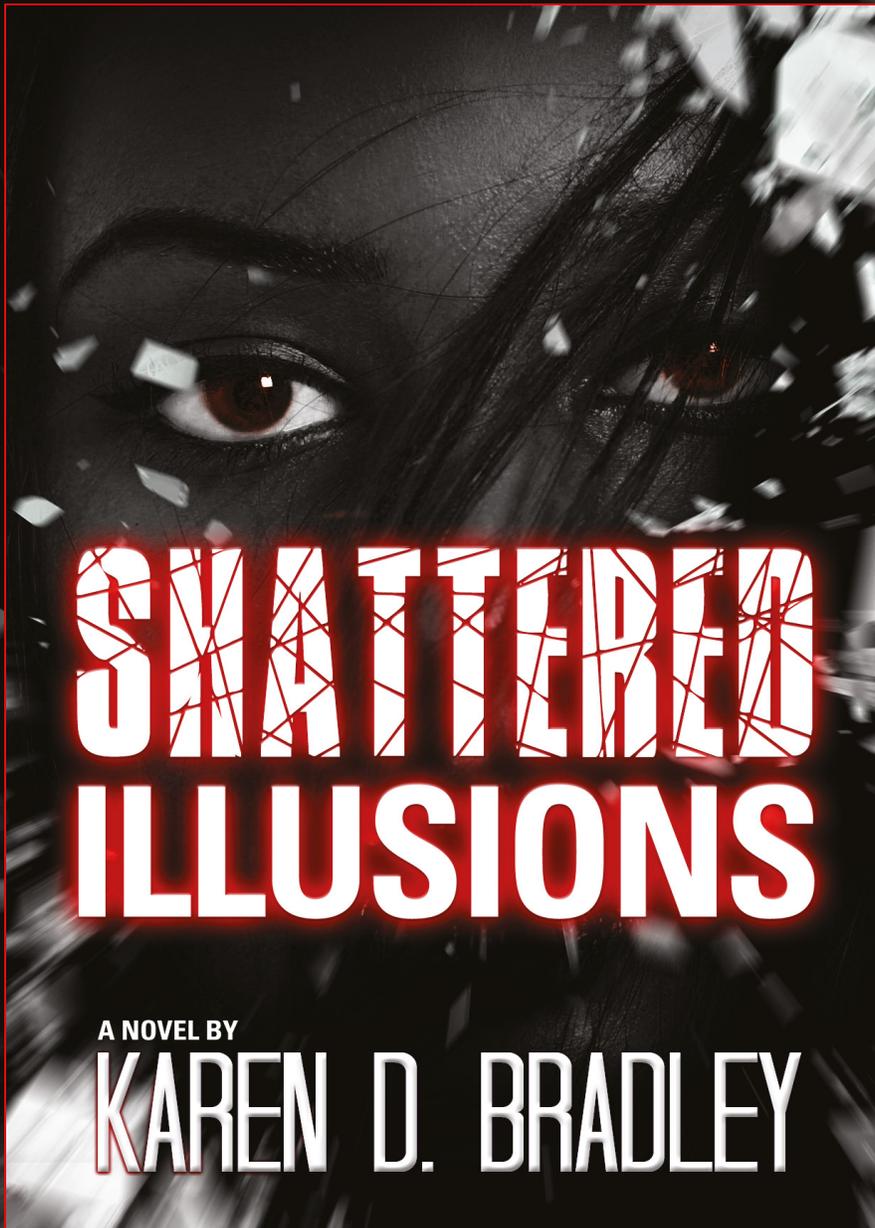
One of my doctors once told me while I was lying in a hospital bed, "You should have died. This should have killed you." It didn't, and I continue to fight for my life like it didn't. To explore the opportunities life presents. To try and fail miserably, then try again. To cross more items off my "anything is possible" list and empty out my treasure chest. Lupus may have flung me into darkness, and it may have taken a while for my eyes to adjust, but they now see the stars clearly. My possibilities are as endless as they were when I felt like I was standing under the rays of the sun.

Karen D. Bradley, a Chicago native, is the author of *Shattered Illusions*, *Life on Fire*, *Love Runs Deep* and *Tained Love*. She has co-authored novels with her sister, **Janetta M. Bradley**, and is working on her next novel.

Visit her on the web at www.ambrosiasands.com

IGNORANCE ISN'T ALWAYS BLISS

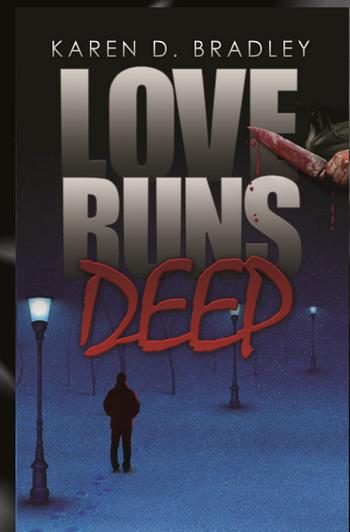
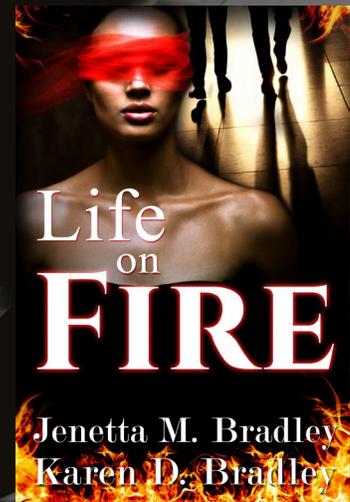
WHAT SHE DOESN'T KNOW JUST MIGHT GET HER KILLED.



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

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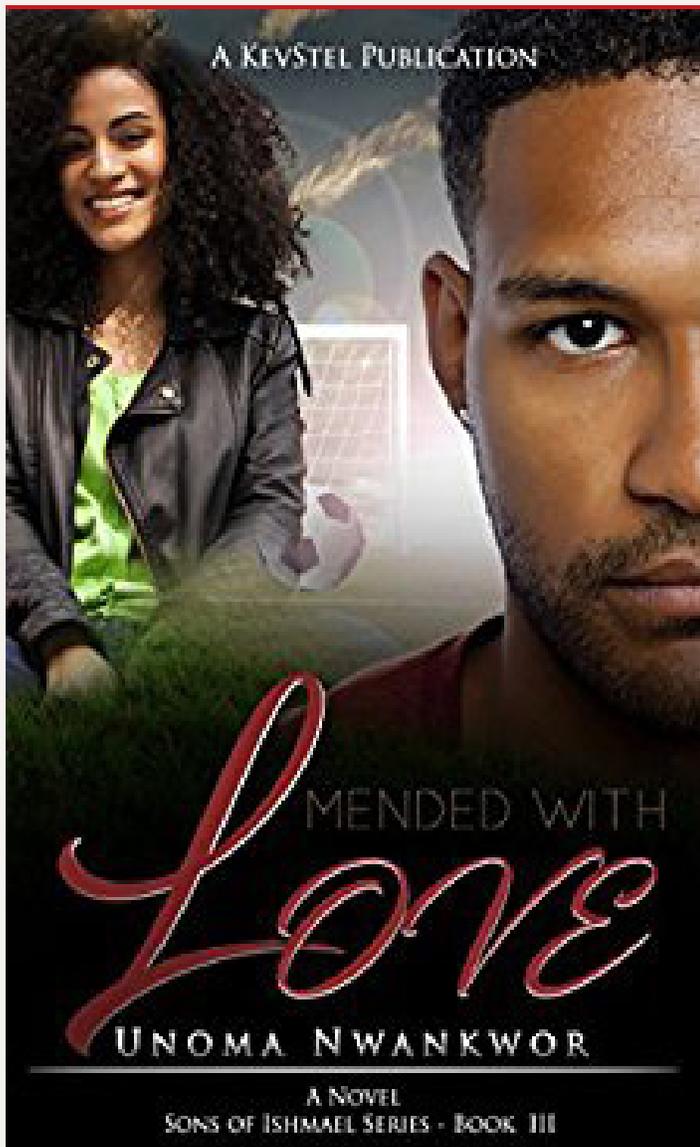


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Mended with Love

Book Review by
Shannan Harper

REVIEW



How can two people with Daddy issues fall in love with each other and make the relationship work? You will find out in this third and final installment of the Ishmael Series. The brothers are still dealing with their father leaving them and starting another family.

Kamal Danjuma, from Nigeria, baby boy of the family meets Ebele Ashdieu on a flight back to East London in the United Kingdom. Kamal, a professional Soccer player, has been moved overseas to hopefully repair his damaged reputation with no help from his so-called girlfriend, and meddlesome mother, who is determined to see all of her sons married. Ebele, an older college student who was once part of a famous dance troupe, is trying to finish the work needed to get a college degree. Not only was she late starting her upper education because caring for her mother took a front seat to everything else; she is also dealing with an estranged father, and with issues surrounding the fact that she just found out that her mother was totally unaware that she had been "the mistress".

What I really loved about this story, was the inspirational theme, humor, as well as twists and turns that I did not see coming. I enjoyed the banter between Kamal and Ebele, and the significant difference in height added yet another layer to the story. Readers will learn a lot about true forgiveness and unconditional love in the scriptures that were sprinkled here and there. Several scenes made me cry and I believe the brothers will be healed from the trauma from their past and from their father's mistakes.

INTERVIEW WITH A CHARACTER

J. D. Mason

As if it were even possible, **Abby Rhodes** has been even more elusive to media interviews than her beau, billionaire and oil man Jordan Gatewood. We were beyond excited when she agreed to sit down with NK Literary Café Magazine and open up some small part of her life, sharing it with readers who are perhaps more curious about this very private woman who's seemingly captured the hearts of one of the world's most sought-after bachelors.

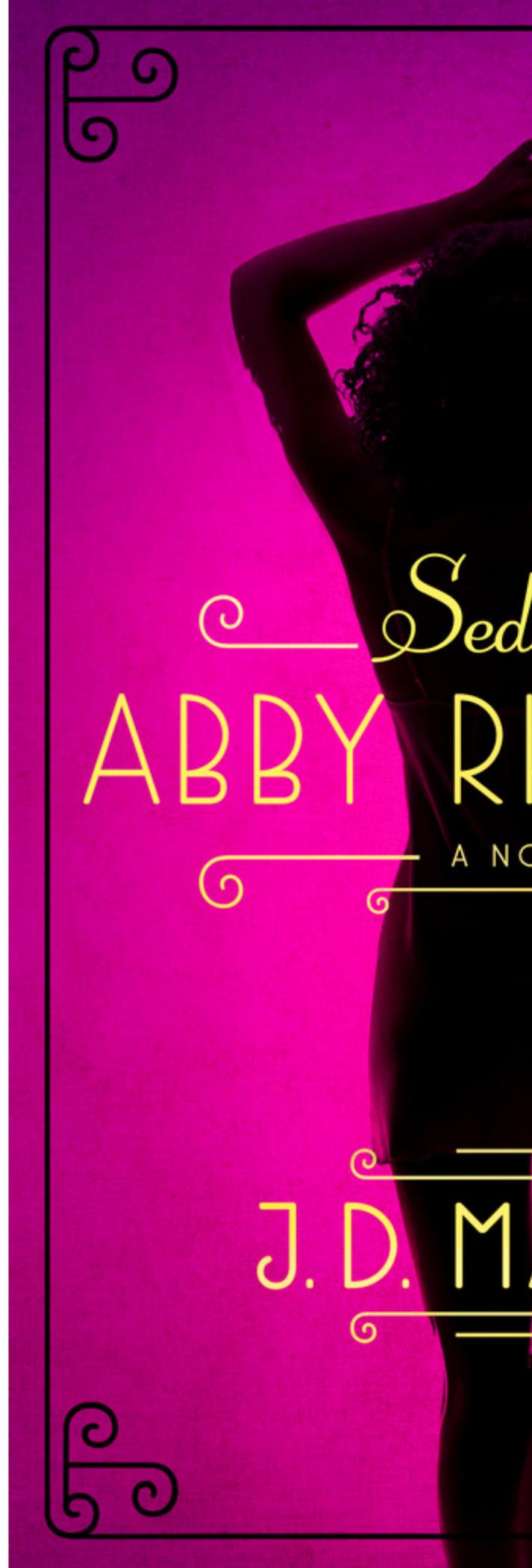
JDM: A lot of women envy you and your relationship with Jordan Gatewood.

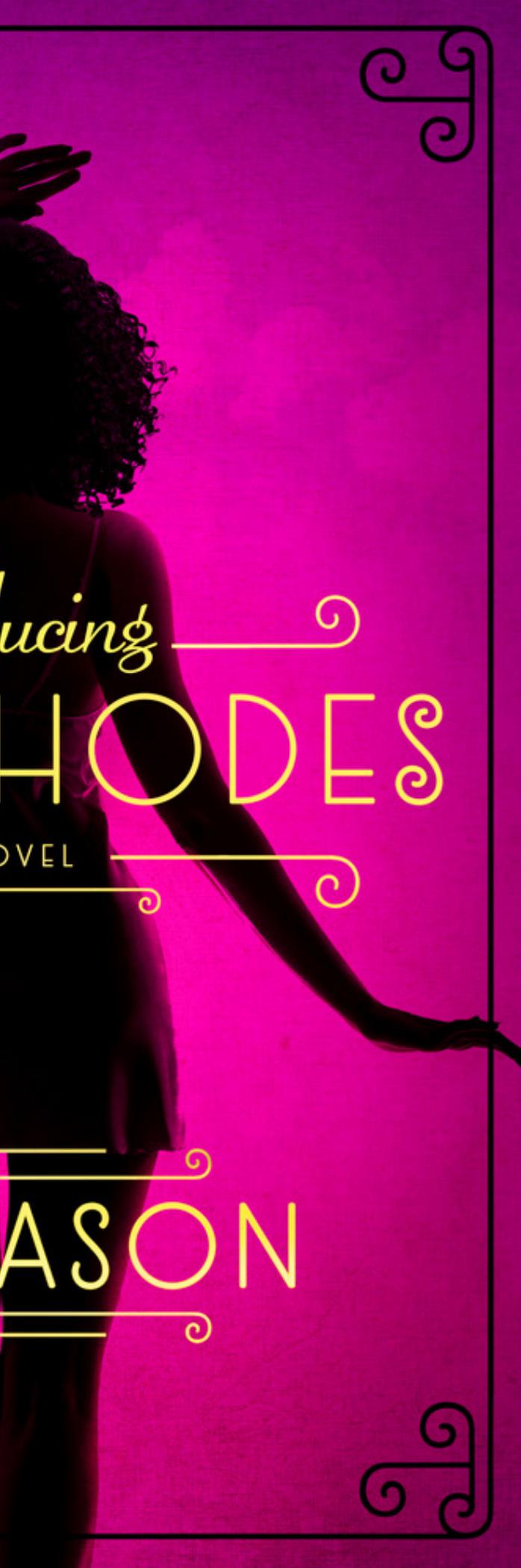
Abby: (Laughing) Yeah, he's pretty cute.

JDM: He's a whole lot more than cute, Abby. The man is gorgeous, powerful, rich, and—guarded. He's very careful about how much he shares about you and the relationship between the two of you.

Abby: Well, it is understandable. I mean, after all, the most tragic moments of his life are splayed all over the Internet for anybody to read. That's how I found out who he was.

JDM: What'd you think about what you found out?





Abby: I thought it was sad that people, especially strangers, should know the most intimate moments of a person's life like that.

JDM: Now that people know about you, I've read that Internet searches for Abby Rhodes have skyrocketed.

Abby: I know. And there's a porn star named Abby Rhodes. She wrote me a real nice letter thanking me for helping to boost her career, which I thought was a nice bonus.

JDM: Coming from a small town and living most of your life in relative obscurity, does all of this sudden attention bother you?

Abby: I don't know about being obscure. I've always sort of been a big deal in Blink, mainly because of my business.

JDM: You build houses. Right?

Abby: I can, and I have. Most of what me and my guys do is renovations and things of that nature, and I flip houses. I also host an annual STEM event in the county encouraging girls to explore science, engineering, and math, especially girls of color because our representation in those areas in this country is sorely lacking.

JDM: And people are starting to recognize you outside of Blink. How does that make you feel?

Abby: Like I always need to be sure that I look cute. Everybody's got a camera phone, and because of that they feel like they have the right to just snap my picture whenever they feel like it. I personally, think it's rude, but I can't stop it. They take pictures, post them on social media, inviting the opportunity for other people to say whatever they want about me, which pisses me off because they don't even know me. But I've

INTERVIEW WITH A CHARACTER

CONTINUED

taken down my website and social media sites, hell, I don't even hardly go on the Internet at all anymore.

JDM: Are you still living in Blink?

Abby: I still have my house there, but I don't spend as much time there as I used to.

JDM: You spend most of your time in Dallas now, with Jordan?

Abby: Yes.

JDM: The two of you seem so different from each other. I think that people are fascinated by you because you're not what they expected for him.

Abby: Should I be offended?

JDM: Absolutely not. I think that people love that you're not the Dallas socialite that we all assumed he'd end up in a relationship with. You're beautiful, down to earth, relatable, funny, and people love your accent.

Abby: Well, in all fairness, I don't think I'm what he expected either, but I think that's why it works. We're on opposite ends of the spectrum in every way, and have somehow figured out how to meet in the middle. Sometimes we bump heads, but mine is as hard as his, so, we're learning how to compromise.

JDM: I can't imagine a man like him having to compromise with anything or anybody.

Abby: He compromises with me.

JDM: When you researched him, you obviously found out about his deceased wife, Claire.

Abby: Yes.

JDM: Did discovering that part of his past cause you to pause in moving forward with this relationship?

Abby: Reading everything about his past gave me reason to pause about having anything to do with Jordan. Her death was, and still, is a raw and heartbreaking subject for him, as it should be. The incident with his mother, her condition, and the shooting, is something that still haunts him. Even losing his father all those years ago still plays a big role in the man he's become and is becoming. In spite of, or maybe because of all those things, Jordan's very strong, emotionally, and spiritually. He's very impressive.

JDM: He thinks you're impressive.

Abby: He respects me, and that's everything.

JDM: What does your family think about you and Jordan?

Abby: I'm the only girl in a family full of men, and I'm a daddy's girl. I've got two big brothers who picked on me mercilessly growing up, but they're also extremely protective. Gatewood or no Gatewood, they've put him through the ringer on my behalf, and I love them all the more for it.

JDM: You lost your mother at a young age in a car accident. She was Hispanic?

Abby: Si.

JDM: Do you think she'd have approved of him?

Abby: Mucho!

JDM: Would you like to have children someday?

Abby: I had made up my mind that I probably never would. I'm 37 and my biological clock is going off like an alarm, warning me to that if I'm ever going to do it, I'd better hurry the hell up.

JDM: You already know what I want to ask, but we'll leave that right there for now.

Abby: Thank you.

JDM: If I were to ask you about the possibility of marriage between you and Jordan, would you tell me?

Abby: No.

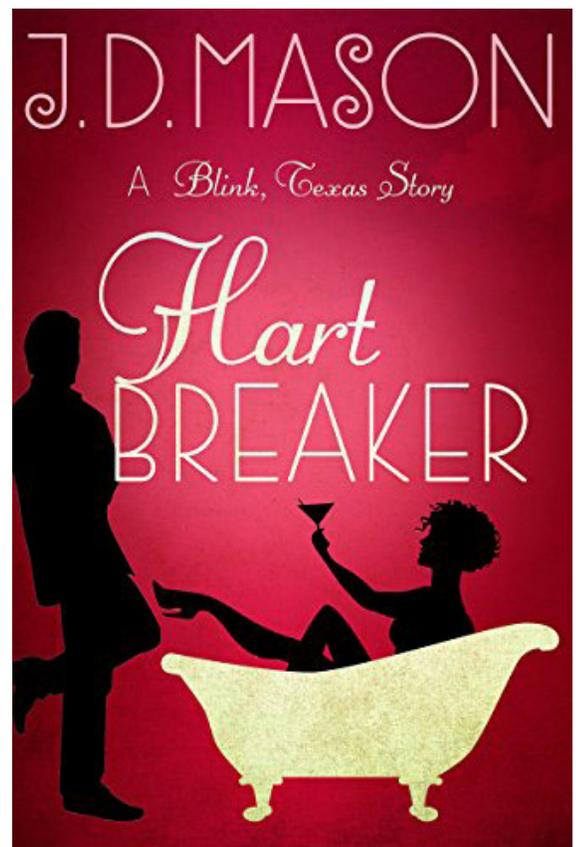
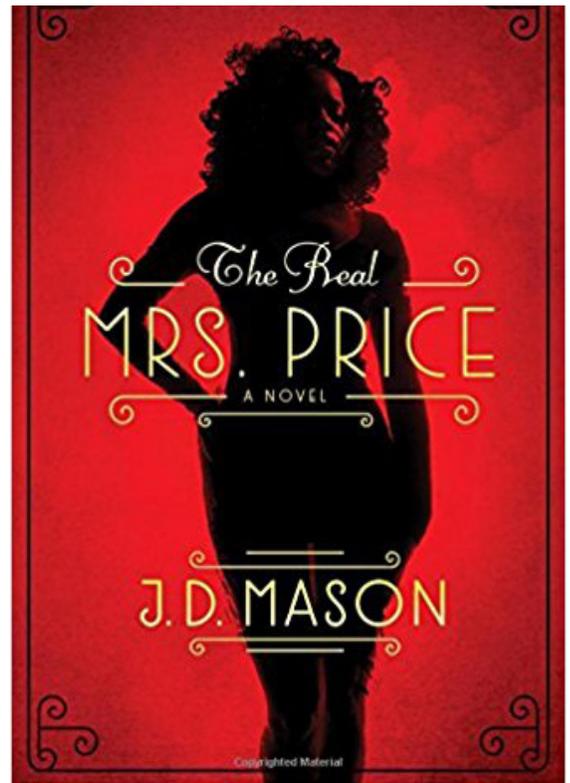
JDM: Why not?

Abby: Because there are things that he and I need to figure out between us before we can share news like that with anybody. I like the idea of marriage, but the idea of it and the reality of it can be vastly different. And marrying someone like Jordan would mean that my life would turn upside down and inside out in ways I'm not necessarily sure I'm ready for, or will ever be ready for.



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

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Zora's Den

Victoria Kennedy

Finding Your Muse



The Muses by Kid at Heart Dolls

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

—ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Through trial and error, writers find routines that work for them. They adopt habits and adapt practices that yield favorable results, including reading good literature that inspires and teaches them. On occasion, they attend writing workshops to share works in progress and to participate in the critiquing process. They establish regular writing regimens and hopefully, collect a set of trusty tools to help hone their craft. (*Elements of Style* by Strunk and White and Stephen King’s *On Writing* are standard references in most writers’ libraries). But after all these boxes are checked, and the elements are tried and tested many times over, writers can still come up short. Despite following all the steps to ensure success, they get stuck. Sometimes a gentle nudge is needed from a writer’s muse.

In Greek mythology, the Muses are goddesses; each ascribed an inspirational role in the arts and sciences. They are credited with inspiring epic poems, songs, and history recounted as stories. In society, it doesn’t have to be an ethereal sista who serves as a writer’s inspiration, even though that’s pretty cool. A muse doesn’t have to be a person at all but rather a source. When writers’ creative energies become stagnant, they can turn to other outlets to rekindle the spark of imagination they seek by clearing away obstacles handed to them by life. They need to plug into a source. They need to find a muse.

Writers are known to have more than one gift, and these gifts play a valuable role in freeing the inspiration needed to jumpstart their writing

practices. Spiritual enlightenment through praying, meditation, yoga, even running has been known to clear the mind, creating a lucid environment for problem-solving, uninhibited thoughts, and ideas for stories. There are writers who also knit or crochet. Some writers are musicians and turn to music to feed their muses. Some are visual artists and utilize painting or drawing to unleash creativity. Guess what the root word is in music and museum? muse

Now, back to the writers’ toolkit:

1. *Read to get your creative juices flowing.*
2. *Attend workshops to facilitate the camaraderie of other writers. (a place where you all “muse” upon ideas together. Catch that)?*
3. *Gather your tools: reference books, writing software, etc.*
4. *Write regularly (even if it’s one sentence a day) because a writing practice is everything.*
5. *Tap into your muse. Without inspiration, none of the above matters.*

Writing is one of the most effective ways of expression and communication. Freeing up sources of inspiration must be one of the most important ways to accomplish this. Meditating on good story ideas, running them by a select group of peers, honing them, perfecting them, all have roles in the process and the never-ending search for, and connection with, your muse.



*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*



How Much Are You Worth?

Anita L. Robeson-Wade

Merriam-Webster defines worth as “the value of something measured by its qualities or by the esteem in which it is held.” Mostly, people have been assigning a value to our lives since the day we were born. Speaking negatives in the atmosphere have attached to our spirits and hearts. Words like worthless, never amount to anything, trashy, useless, and nothing. We take these negative words, acts, and deeds and allow them to penetrate and permeate us until we become damaged and wounded souls. Then to counteract the things that become an unfortunate part of our identity, we sit around waiting for someone to come and validate us. We become beings that spend our lives needing someone outside of ourselves to make us feel valuable.

The truth of the matter is, we were valuable at birth. Our innate DNA given to us by the Creator made our worthiness predestined; a certainty. People are tangible things, so it is easy to believe those things which we can see, feel, and smell versus a God that we can't see. Because they are spoken by people who are “tangible”, we allow those negative words that were spoken about us to reside in our heads and hearts and fester. Then we need a full-blown deliverance session at somebody's altar. What about He that is intangible? When will we believe Him? Yes, we say, “but I can't see Him or touch Him. Still, the Father in all His love and wisdom still says, worthy. Whatever your belief system, God knew your path before you were even born, and yet He says “worthy.”

Speaking as an author to other scribes, sometimes we may struggle with our worth. Are we worthy enough to tell the stories that have been divinely dropped in our spirit? Will we do them justice? As parents, we struggle with whether we are a good parent? Are we doing what is best for our children? Are we doing better jobs than our parents? As readers, our worthiness is tested at work and home. Why didn't I receive that promotion? Why doesn't he or she want me?



The conclusions I have reached are: First, if we had not been meant to write the stories, they would not have been dropped in our spirits. If we were not meant to have an experience that involved children, they would not have been brought into this world. Nor would we hold the positions in life that currently have, they were not supposed to be part of our experience. What we do with what He has given, is on us. Second, we are worthy because we are our Heavenly Fathers' children.

Someone else will come along and try to make us feel unworthy. Some days we all struggle and turn to our friends and family for words of encouragement. We have a purpose, and destiny will continue to call our names until we answer. To meet perfection merely on a human level is almost near impossible because there will always be another standard set for us to obtain. Yet, God is right there saying, "You are my child. That makes you worthy."



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.

CHRISTIAN BOOK LOVERS RETREAT

Shannan Harper



Shannan is pictures with Pat Simmons, Kim Cash Tate and Unoma Nwankwor

One of the best experiences in my life happened in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Christian Book Lover's Retreat combines two of my loves, Jesus and books. I have been to several conventions over the past several years, and even though I've enjoyed the others because I was around like-minded people, the atmosphere at CBLR is pleasantly different.

This event is in its second year and spearheaded by the fabulous Vanessa Miller Pierce, a Christian Fiction author who started out self-published before received book deals with both an imprint of Kensington as well as Kimani/Harlequin. CBLR started off Thursday Evening with a reception featuring the amazing Jacqueline Thomas, who was one of the first authors to write in the Christian Fiction genre and one of the first ones I've read. I also ran into my other book friends, The Sweet Soul Sisters who also attended The Cavalcade of Authors, another fantastic literary event held in Chicago.

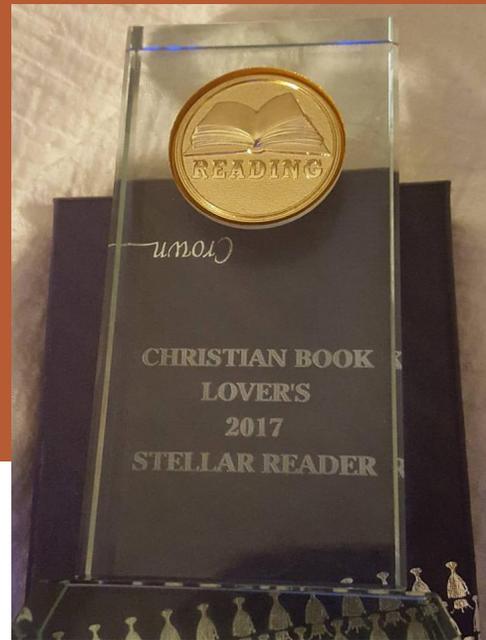
After Breakfast on Friday Morning, I was able to meet several authors that I've known on Facebook for years and have been reading their work even longer. Among them are Kim Cash Tate, Unoma Nwankwor, Michelle Lindo Rice (I just love her West Indies accent), Michelle Stimpson, and Cassandra McLaughlin. Not only was I able to have lunch with these lovely ladies, Kim was our luncheon speaker and admonished us on how to Cling to God, which is also the title of her nonfiction bible study book.

Vanessa Riley who writes Regency romance with women of color, held several sessions of her own. We participated

in a contest where we made “wedding gowns” and I was also able to hang out with my friends, The Victorious Ladies Reading Club. With members, Michelle Chavis and Shavonna Futrell, we came in second place. In another session, we made scripture bracelets that were so wonderful I kept the instructions so I can make others. Then we had a cake decorating session where participants were able to sample the most delicious, moist carrot cake. Now tell me, who doesn’t like cake? Renee Spivey’s Woman of Worth Workshop encouraged us to experience the freedom of letting go of the to become the women God intended for us to be). Next, the classic hat party where the most interesting wide brims were showcased, followed by a pajama party where none other than Grandma BB (A Pat Simmons Character) showed up in a onesie. What a sight. These were just some of the sessions offered.

After Praise and Worship on Saturday morning, we were treated with a word and ministry in dance by none other than Blessed-Selling Author, EN Joy. Now I know she is a woman of many talents, but that praise dance blew me away, and I saw her in another light. We then came up to another event I always enjoy, though I’m usually horrible at paint parties, but they are so much fun, I can’t resist them. The Book Fair—one of the best parts of a conference on this level, is a book lover’s dream. Books as far as the eye can see. So those who know me are already aware that I travel with any empty rolling suitcase. Trust me, by the time I was finished, it was almost overflowing. Not only did I greet other authors I have known for years, like Tyora Moody, Kendra Norman Holmes, Vanessa Davis Griggs, Rhonda McKnight and several others, but I was able to meet several new authors like Andre Ray, Erica Cureton, Nicole Smith and Pastor Michael Holmes.

After we rested for a bit, it was time for The Saturday night main event, the Reader’s Appreciation Dinner. The keynote speaker was none other than Kimberla Lawson Roby, and she talked about how even when God had her change some things in her writing, she lost a few readers, but she didn’t lack for anything. Then everyone who was part of a book club was asked to come up and briefly speak about their club. I’m not a person who likes to talk



in public, but Rhonda McKnight kept encouraging me to go up and speak. So I relented and nervously but quickly gave a spiel about my book club and headed back to my seat.

As I left the podium, the speech shifted to the Stellar Awards they were about to present. As they were listing the qualities that used to select the person for the award, my tablemate and friend Ceisha, said they were talking about me. I looked at her like she was crazy and said, “No they’re not.” Color me surprised when Rhonda said, “They just called your name. You need to go up there.” I looked up, and all the authors were standing, clapping and looking at me. While walking up to the front, I heard from several of the authors who said, “I voted for you.” As I grabbed the mic, I could only say “I was spent from my spiel earlier, so I thank you”. Apparently, that was not enough because the next thing I heard was “Oh, no, Oh, no” from somewhere in the audience. E.N. Joy came to the front, and did a “Kanye” by taking the mic from me, and tells the audience how much I mean to authors and I was given the Stellar Reader Award. Then Shavonna Futrell was called up and she received the Stellar Reviewer Award.



Pat Simmons
as
Grandma
BB



The night ended with a Christian Comedian named Nuff Ced. Now usually when you mention a Christian comedian, either they're a Christian but not funny, or funny but not a Christian. This guy happened to be both. Even though tragedy struck for one of the ladies by the ending of the event, after surrounding her with prayer, we still ended the CBLR on a spiritual high.

Sunday morning closed out the weekend of Praise and Worship after breakfast and an encouraging word by Cheryl Polote Williams.

Such an amazing event, an already it's put me in the frame of mind where I wait for the Cavalcade of Authors at the Atlantis Resorts in the Bahamas and the Christian Book Lover's Retreat which takes place in Myrtle Beach for next year.



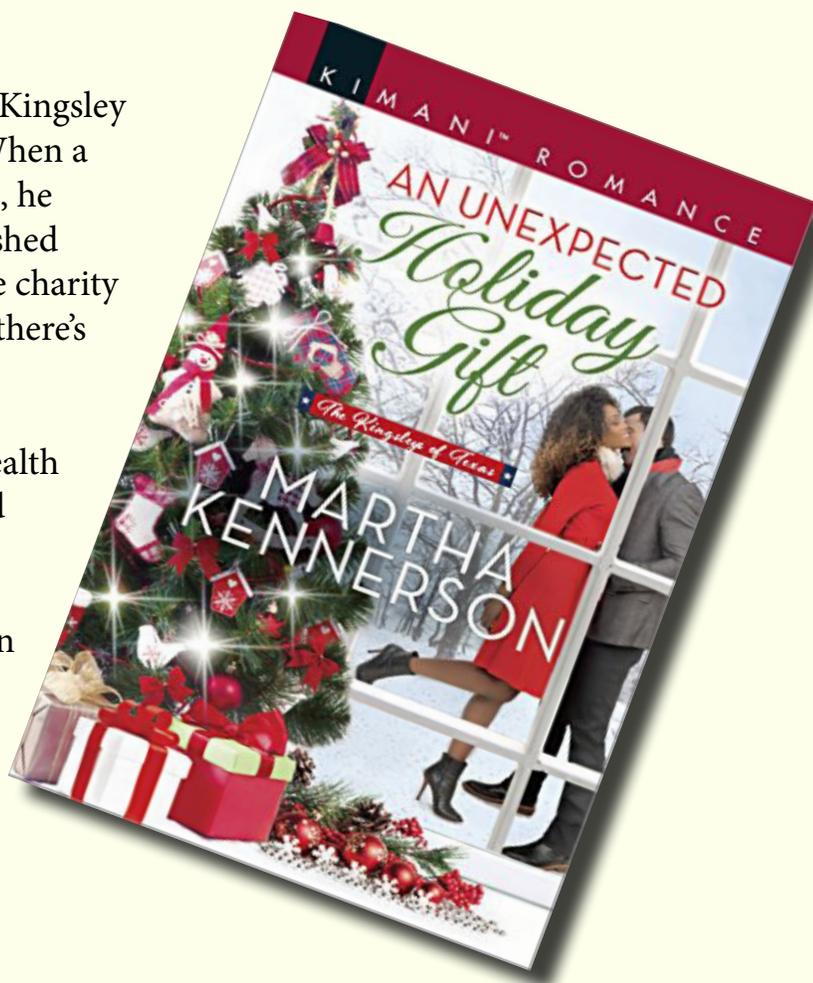
Shannan Harper is a simple person who takes pleasure in the simple things in life. She highly enjoys fourthings in particular: Jesus, books, traveling, and coffee. You can keep up with Shannan on her blog: harperscourt7.blogspot.com

Presents a holiday themed romance
by national bestselling author

A Season for Seduction

NBA star and oil company heir Keylan “KJ” Kingsley is the ultimate player on and off the court. When a midgame scuffle leads to community service, he opts to devote his hours to his family’s cherished foundation. And once he meets no-nonsense charity executive Mia Ramirez, he’s driven to prove there’s more to him than the wary beauty believes.

Single mother Mia isn’t impressed by KJ’s wealth and fame. Her college sweetheart abandoned her—and their baby—to follow his hoop dreams. But KJ is a caring man beneath his superficial image, making an easy connection with her young son. Soon Mia plunges into a sensual relationship that ignites dreams of forever, until KJ returns to the court...and the headlines. Will the glare of celebrity blind them to the family that could be theirs by Christmas?



Tribute to Tanishia Pearson-Jones



If I had to sum up a woman who cannot truly be explained in one word, I'd have to say it is "Unshakable faith. On a personal level, I've struggled with how to believe in God nearly all my adult life. I've done the spiritual chit'lin circuit of Baptist, Methodist, Apostolic (for one day if that counts), Muslim, Ausar Auset, New Age/New Thought and Bahai's. I've seen many examples of people who embrace different religions and belief systems, but only a few have left an impact on my life the way that Tanishia Pearson-Jones has.

Through personal struggles that did not have anything to do with the health challenges she experienced over the last two years, I bear witness to a woman who knew and held fast to a God that was her all and everything. As a daughter of a mother and a father who were pastors and ministers of the Christian faith, she had a foundation that was steadfast, but what I admired is that she found her

own path to God and did not have an issue sharing the life lessons she's learned.

We always speak well of people who know how to live, but what of those who know how to die? Everyone is different, yes. But faced with the knowledge that her spirit was raring to go, but her body wasn't able to hold to that notion, she chose to meet things head on as though there was no other way to be but blessed and well-favored. No pitying or lamenting the fact that her body was being ravaged by the disease.

I went to visit her last year at the Cancer Treatment Center of America. When she walked out of testing and saw us (I brought sister scribe Janice Pernell along), Tanishia looked like a billion bucks—not million—billion. Beautiful, and did not look anything like what she was going through. Hair was laid. Face was slayed. Attitude was all about winning and overcoming. No hint that it was taking more of a toll than she wanted anyone to know.

Tanishia kept that "overcomers" attitude all throughout. So much so, that I didn't realize she was slipping away. If Tee was a death's door, she certainly didn't look or seem ready for someone to open it so she could walk into God's eternal light.

That's the main reason her passing was a shock. Treatment was winding down, and I had in my mind, "She's kicked Cancer's behind." She did, but then right before she was set to come to my 2017 Cavalcade, she called and said she was having an issue with her legs that rendered them numb at times and painful at others. Well, no big deal, right? She'd kick that too, right? I'd see her at next year's Cavalcade, right? One of the last messages she sent me was, "Hey would you invoice me for your new book. I was supposed to be there. I wouldn't want to miss your latest work." She sent this while she was in a great deal of pain and

“Unshakeable Faith”

what did her focus happen to be? Supporting me. When I responded, she later said, “Love ya. Wishing you great success this weekend. Lord knows, I was coming, but all of this happened.”

Yes, “all of this” was more than she let on and the way she handled everything else, I had no idea that it was something that could take her from us. God surely would reward his faithful servant with a renewing of her strength and healing of her body, right? She’s one of the good ones. She’s one of those who never showed one inkling of doubt. She is so much unlike me in that regard—me, who questions everything; who has to reaffirm my belief in The Creator more often than some who profess to be Christian would like. She told me once, “God has a calling on your life. He’s going to use you whether you like it or not; whether you know it or not.”

I shrugged it off because I considered her the woman with the calling. Her life was a testament to the kind of faith I’ve aspired to but come short at times. God was using her to touch my soul. Her last words to me were, “Just looking out for you like you’ve done for me.”

No truer words were spoken, and here’s hoping when I have those moments when the world seems so unkind, unfair, and unforgiving, that I can hear her voice whisper ... “Remember, God’s got your back and so do I.”



Tanishia at her first book signing.
Cavalcade of Authors in Chicago

Brenda Hampton

At the snap of her finger, Tanishia could make a person feel so special and loved.

I sit here, thinking about the first message I received from Tanishia. The email was dated Sunday, July 15, 2012, and I still have it in my inbox today. As a writer, I often get messages from readers who express their thoughts about my novels. Those messages truly mean the world to me, and when I received Tanishia's message that day, I couldn't believe she'd made plans to drive all the way to St. Louis, with her husband, to meet me.

Dear Ms. Hampton,

*I am very excited about the Pajama Jam. I've never attended anything like this, but when I saw you were going to be there, I said I'm going to take this trip all the way from Louisiana in hopes of meeting you and other readers! My birthday is the week before, so my husband is making this trip happen as my gift! I'm not a book club member, but I love to read, and I do as often as my schedule permits. I've read the complete Naughty Series, *If Only for One Night*, plus many more of your books. I'm going to read *In My Shoes* too, but I'm kind of concerned because I've never read anything by K'wan, Nakia Nashaul or Maxx Kilbourne. Can you suggest any particular readings from those authors, so that I won't be totally lost when I get there? Or do you think there will be other attendees who have not read books by all of the authors? Anyway, as I close, I want to encourage you to keep writing "your style of books" because it was your books, along with Carl Weber's books, that turned this non-recreational reader into an avid reader and endorser of your books and reading itself!!!! See you in St. Louis!*

With love, Tanishia Pearson-Jones.

I couldn't wait to meet her that year, and when I did, we both were so excited. It was as if I had known her all my life. We talked about my crazy characters and about some of the many things we'd had in common, like both of our husbands' names being Aaron.



Tanishia and Brenda

“Amazing”



After the Jammy Jam was over, we kept in touch. Sometimes by phone, other times through messages where she would simply say hello. Whenever I had book signings, she would wish me well or show up and surprise me. “I got my copy, Brenda,” she would say. “Can’t wait to read it!” Yes, she read them all and shared them with readers everywhere she went! Our bond became stronger, and not because of her ongoing support. It was because I had rarely met anyone who came across so genuine, kind, sweet and caring. At the snap of her finger, Tanishia could make a person feel so special and loved. She definitely had a magic touch, and from the book industry to many of the events she attended, many of us felt it.

Year after year, Tanishia showed up and showed out for me. She didn’t have to, but there was something about her “favorite author” that made her feel like she had to. “I’m on my way!” she said in a message on November 5, 2015, right before coming to a movie premiere in St. Louis. It was the last time I actually saw her, and I remember how blessed I felt to have her there.

Shortly thereafter, she started to share her journey with me. I never cried while on the phone with her, because she was so strong and definitely fueled by the best.

Her faith was admirable, and I was so impressed by her, yet sad at the same time. We never know what God’s ultimate plans are for us, but I do know that Tanishia had a purpose to uplift and inspire as many people as she could. She did that and so much more! I can honestly say that I’ve never met anyone like her before. I will miss our talks, her laughter and advice to keep on pushing, no matter what. She encouraged me to do just that, and some of the most powerful words I ever heard her say were this:

I had to live my life as a victor! Instead of saying “woe is me” I said “since it’s me, here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to pray only what I want to happen. I’m going to believe that God will do it. I’m going to get up every day, put my clothes on, beat my face and do my hair. I’m going to look like I belong to something higher than I.

Even now, I take a deep breath and can only say . . . What a woman! I do believe that people come into our lives for a reason, season, or a lifetime, and I thank God for making this connection. He must’ve thought a lot of me to put an amazing woman like Tanishia in my life. Plenty of times, she was my motivation. Her impact was huge, and I will never, ever forget my dear friend. So much love. Heaven certainly gained an angel.

Sheryl Lister

“Strength, courage”



Front: Lora Darlene Pearson (Tanishia's mother), Sheryl Lister, Tanishia, Joyce Brown
Back: Elle Wright, April Lachelle, MarZe Scott

Do you know the saying that some people are only meant to be in your life for a season? I never thought that season would be such a short one with my sister-friend, Tanishia Pearson-Jones. We bonded over our love of books. I think she had read one of mine and sent me a message. Our friendship blossomed from there in a way designed only by God. The next I knew we were praying for each other via Facebook messenger. Our greetings went from, “Hi, Tanishia” or “Hi, Sheryl” to “Hey, Sis!” and that’s what she became over the two and a half year span of our relationship.

When I think of Tanishia, a few words come to mind: encourager, fighter, prayer warrior, woman of faith, and sister. There would be days when I struggled with pain, and somehow, she would send a message just when I needed. Even though she’d be in as much pain as I was,

or more, she still encouraged me to keep trusting God. I know she did the same for others. I’d tell myself, “If she can get through this, so can I.” “God’s grace is sufficient” became our motto. My best memory was when I surprised her while I participated in an event in a Chicago. We’d chatted on the phone about how we were so sad about not being able to finally meet in person (she was originally scheduled to be at the same event.). The look on her face when I walked in the door is one I’ll remember for a lifetime. The joy of finally seeing each other had us both emotional. Yes, it’s still an emotional memory.

Though our friendship wasn’t as long as others, the bond was strong and the impact great. I miss my sister, and I am grateful God allowed our paths to cross. I know we’ll see each other once more. Tanishia left a legacy of strength, courage, and faith in Christ that we all can follow.

“brilliant writer”

Elle Wright



Elle Wright and Tanishia

“Keep the faith. Keep Pressing. Keep believing! I Love You, Friend” - Tanishia Pearson-Jones

Sometimes we are blessed enough to meet a kindred spirit, someone who comes into your life at exactly the right time. Tanishia Pearson-Jones was one of those people for me.

We met when I inboxed her to ask her to review my debut novel, *The Forbidden Man*. And we clicked. From there, she put me in touch with people who had a lasting impact on my career as a writer. I can honestly say if it had not been for her, my book wouldn't have made it into so many hands. For that, I am ever grateful. She was such an amazing supporter, a bright spot in so many lives. And she was a brilliant writer.

Our interaction didn't stop with her review of my book. We continued to bond and soon were taking every day. One message turned into hundreds. We talked about everything and nothing, from books to sports to food. Tanishia always seemed to know when I needed to hear from her, or when I needed a prayer or just a cyber hug. Then, she would send me a message like the one above, reminding me to keep the faith and let God be who He is.

Tanishia was my friend, and a Godsend to me. She was a friend who I could talk to, confide in. A friend who said what she meant and meant what she said. A friend who knew how to laugh, how to find the good in every trial, and how to call on God for her loved ones and herself. We were that for each other. And I loved her so. That love will never die, even if she is not here on Earth any longer.

Her faith in God in the face of adversity was inspiring. With everything going on, she still found a way to remain positive and encourage others. I often marveled at her willingness to be there for so many people while in excruciating pain and going through her own problems. That was a testament to her spirit and her relationship with God.

Tanishia had a gift, and her gift made room for her. I know she is basking in God's glory. As she would say, "All is well."

My friend was an amazing woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, and friend. I feel honored to have known her, to have laughed with her, to have learned from her, to have prayed with her, to have loved her. She is missed.

Joyce A. Brown



Tanishia and Joyce

In John 10:10, Jesus said: I came that they may have and enjoy LIFE, and have it in abundance, to the full, till it overflows.

This is Jesus' own teaching about how to achieve many of our most important needs, including a new start, healing, peace of mind, spiritual growth, wisdom and most of all how to live an abundant life. Tanishia built her LIFE team before she knew she'd experience a rare cancer where little is known about the cause, how it spreads, the treatment protocol, and what the prognosis is. Tanishia was blessed to have a team inclusive of her husband and children; parents, siblings, extended family; church community, and a huge share of the literary community. God was the head of Tanishia's team and she served Him faithfully.

I was blessed to be part of her team for two reasons. First, I loved the Baby Diva's spirit when she evaluated my first manuscript. Second, I also walked a similar cancer journey with my sister from 2004 to 2017. I understood the medical terminology, could clarify "doctor speak" and learned how to walk alongside the patient, letting her faith and stamina lead every step of the way. God gave me the needed insights to understand the ferocious battle Tanishia was facing from the day she told me about her rare cancer, the existence of very few treatment protocols, and the distances she would have to travel, whether to Houston, Texas, or Zion, Illinois to receive treatment.

“counted it all joy”

I chose to focus on what Tanishia needed by observing how she responded to pain, surgery, bad news, and uncertainty. I learned more about who she was by witnessing how she interacted with the people around her.

Tanishia's first surgery was on September 19, 2016, and lasted for 11 ½ grueling hours. However, the night before surgery Tanishia threw a surprise birthday party for her mother. From Delhi, Louisiana, she called and arranged the details of the party, including dinner and a special birthday cake prepared by the hotel. Ms. Darlene's three sisters: Mama Linda, Aunt Mimell, and Aunt Brenda were there as well as surprise guests, Kimberla Lawson Roby and her husband, Will. Tanishia was focused on abundance and LIFE.

Following surgery, Tanishia underwent an additional six weeks of radiation treatment. Her beloved Jai, her mother, and I, each spent two weeks with her. During my two week stint, we broke up the monotony of hotel living and eating out by spending one weekend at my house. The weekend was a chance for her to prepare one of her famous dishes—hodgepodge. On Saturday, we had a special lunch and catching up with D.J. McLaurin, another sister scribe. We returned to Zion on a snowy Sunday afternoon. It was the first time she'd driven in a Chicago snowstorm with cars inching along while snowplows tried to stay ahead of the wet, heavy snow. During follow-up visits, Tanishia adapted to the cold and snow, never confining herself to the hotel room.

Tanishia was a diva and looking her best was part of the fight. We drove to the Zion Walmart for manicures, pedicures, light shopping and explored the area which included finding restaurants, driving into nearby Gurnee for Tuesday movies at the Gurnee Mall, complete with lunch and even more shopping. One wintry evening in February, we ventured out to the Gurnee Mall bookstore to surprise Kimberla Lawson Roby who was signing her latest book, *Copycat*.

I will be eternally grateful for the three years Tanishia played a significant role in my life. We were connected from the first book evaluation she wrote for *What You Can Get Away With*. Together we learned to be there in the moment, to love, laugh, and treat each day as special regardless of what the doctors reported. When she shared her diagnosis, I listened and prayed with her. When she decided to go to Zion, she'd say, I have to be in Zion for "X" number of days. I'd reply, "I'll be there." Thankfully, I was able to keep that commitment each and every time.

Tanishia lived every moment and counted it all joy

Joyce A. Brown is the national bestselling author of What You Can Get Away With and Getting Away With Everything. She is a contributing author to a romance anthology: Signed, Sealed, Delivered... I'm Yours and a non-fiction book on writing: Baring it All: The Ins and Outs of Publishing.

Susan D. Peters



Toward the end, my prayer for Tanisha was, “God please heal Tanisha, but if that is not your will, please provide her a smooth trip home.” I believe my prayer was answered. Thank You God!

My favorite memory of Tanisha, was over Sunday brunch at Pearl’s Place in Bronzeville. She was returning home from treatment at the Cancer Centers of America. I expected her to be tired and perhaps a little cranky but she was in great form. She brought a small cushion to allow her to sit comfortably but she was funny and exacting about her meal.

I noticed Dr. Joyce Brown, who served as Tanisha’s “wing woman” during her trips to Chicago, was looking extra special with a lovely pashmina and a different hairdo. Joyce was benefiting from Tanisha’s glam and relationship coaching. We both received some makeup advice that day. At one point during our conversation she referred to herself as “Baby Diva”—the name that our writers group had given her. Knowing all that she was going through physically, I countered, “You are no longer baby Diva to me. You are just Diva.”

We had a delightful time of girl talk and the warmth of sharing a soulful meal. This Louisiana woman so enjoyed Pearl’s version of shrimp and cheese grits that she vowed to make them that way for her family. I didn’t know it that day, but it was the last memory I would make with Tanisha. This serves as a reminder of the importance of being fully present for people in your life whenever you can.

Reflecting on other fond memories of Tanisha at the Cavalcade of Authors and over another Sunday brunch I realized that I never heard Tanisha utter an unkind word about anyone. She was direct with people, but never a source of conflict, always witty and it was extremely clear that she loved and was faithful to God. She showered love on her family and friends. A way shower.

“A way shower”

The Members of M-LAS
(Macro Literary All-Stars)

Right to left;
J. L. Woodson,
Tanishia Pearson-Jones,
D. J. McLaurin,
Joyce A. Brown,
Naleighna Kai,
Lorna L.A. Lewis
Valarie Prince,
Martha Kennerson
and Janice Pernell



When Tanisha became embroiled in the battle for her life, she exhausted all medical avenues open to her, but most of all she suited up with the whole armor of God and fought mightily with the tools of her deep Christian faith.

I believe, as a spiritual woman, at some point, Tanisha knew, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, that she would not be continuing in her body as a wife, mother, as a daughter, and our friend. At thirty-five she was about to transition leaving behind a loving husband, children and a host of family and friends ... and yet she continued to praise and thank God. She demonstrated through her transition how to remain faithful even when God's will is not the outcome we want. A way shower.

With style, and grace and incredible courage, she fought fiercely for her life while maintaining her dignity. She leaves behind a powerful legacy for her children, particularly her daughter. She leaves a powerful example for us.



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

Jay Jay Jones, Jr.



As the tears flows, I just think of all the good times. Every weekend me, Chaddie, Deydey, Ashari and Alexis would wake up and watch Law & Order SVU and along with Dad (Aaron Dewayne Jones) wait for one of your marvelous breakfasts.

You gave the best hugs and cooked the best meals from chicken and waffles, omelet and grits, spaghetti, to my favorites wings, rotel, tilapia and broccoli. And those homemade biscuits!!!

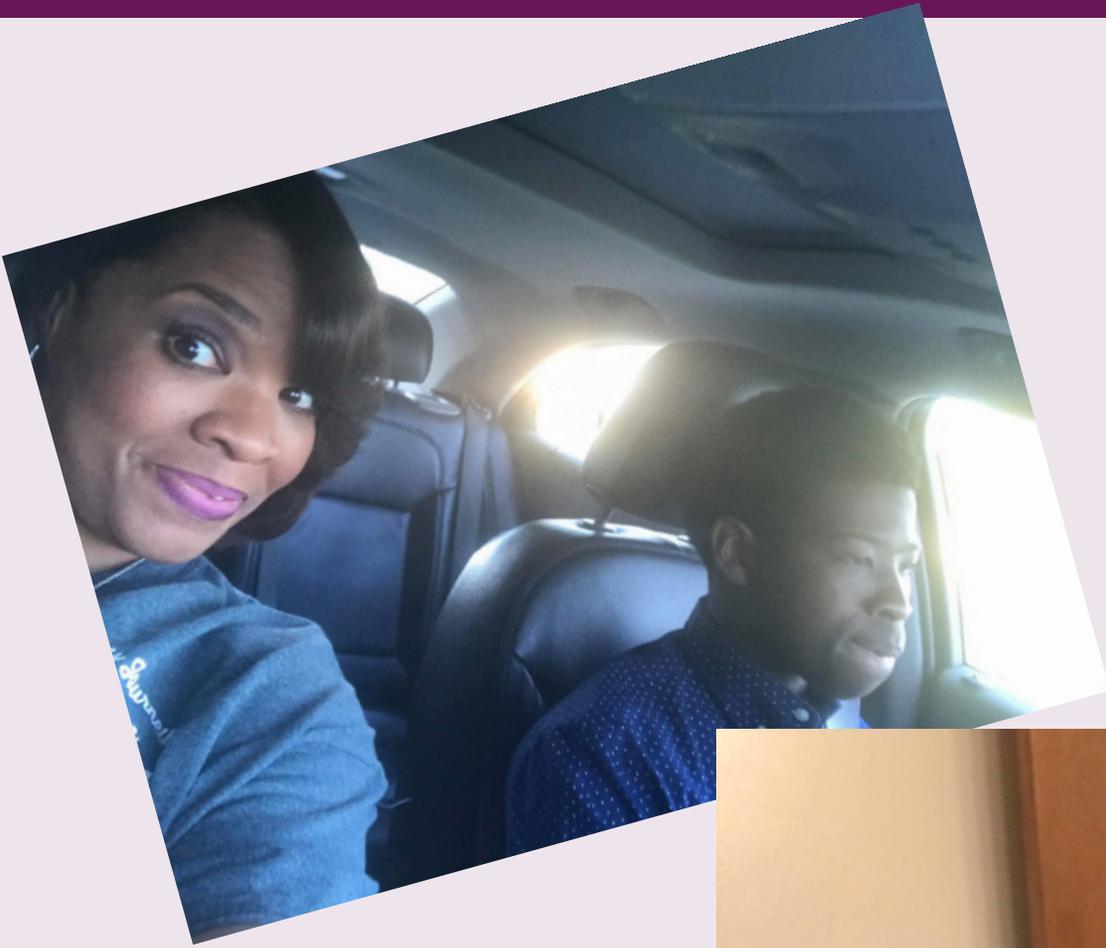
You meant the world to me. Anything I needed, it got done pronto. You always tried your hardest to get to my AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) Games, to Ashari's track meets and Deshumbra Jones high school games.

I remember all the places we went like Panama, Georgia, The French Quarter and Dallas, Texas. We had so many great things that we still didn't get to do.

For those who didn't know her, I'd like for you to understand that she was an excellent mother, encourager, support, doctor and coach. She was everything. She always said "the just shall live by faith" and that "I always find peace in everything because I know all is well." From November 2015 she fought so hard. She fought for her author friends and her family. She was amazing and had unmovable faith.

Before she made her departure, I got to tell her that I loved her and there would be no more suffering. She still had joy despite her last couple

“A great mother”



days on earth. By far, she's the strongest woman I know. Even though her not being here, hurts; I know that all is truly well. She fought the good fight and lived an amazing 36 years.

You were a great mother and I think about you everyday. I will forever cherish our amazing memories.

Continue to rest in Heaven, Mama.

Your loving son,
Jay Jay Jones, Jr.





Tanishia Pearson Jones!

Many words come to mind when I hear that name. Devoted wife, mother, daughter, sister and most of all a true friend. She embodied the true meaning of a friend. Although she's not with us in physical form, her spirit will live on forever.

She had a saying “All is well” which she lived by until her last breath. Her Faith was unwavering and everlasting. I only pray that I'll become half the person she was here on earth.

Love you friend and I'll see you again. Until then I'll hold on to the many memories we shared.



Introducing the Members of Cilla's Book Maniacs



An Elite Book Club of Avid Readers



The Book Maniacs started in 2007 as part of the Beverly Jenkins Yahoo Group. When her Yahoo Group dissolved, we remained as a Yahoo group under the name Readers Who Enjoy Black Romance. We are simply readers and authors who enjoyed reading books, supporting each other and traveling to different literary conferences. In 2013, we finally decided to officially consider ourselves a book club and changed the name to Cillia's Book Maniacs.

After attending many conferences, we felt that the conferences we were attending were offering the same things—panel discussions about how to get published, question and answer sessions that covered the same material that readers can find out online or at other conferences; explanations of why authors write in certain genres—all of which seem to be featured or presented at the many conferences over and over.

With much discussion and encouragement from Beverly Jenkins, we stepped out on faith and planned our first conference.

Our conference, Maniac Book Extravaganza, will differ in the fact that it will be totally interactive to allow readers and authors a chance to get to know each other beyond authors explaining why they write and readers sharing why they love certain books and authors. Only one panel will be offered, "The Talk" where everyone can voice their concerns on what's new in the industry and how do we as authors and readers continue to support authors, conferences, and online bookstores.

The Maniac Book Extravaganza will be held June 21-24, 2018 at the Conference Center for Maritime Institute in Linthicum, Maryland. We have 38 confirmed authors from diverse genres – romance, inspirational, Interracial, paranormal, fiction, urban and historical. We will have a traditional Maryland Crab Feast, Gospel Breakfast, Maniac Award Ceremony and a few surprises.

Early registration ends December 31, 2017. \$75 non-refundable deposit holds your place at what we Anticipate will be Liveliest Event of the Summer.

Visit our website for registration information
www.cillasbookmaniacs.com

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Victoria Kennedy

excerpt from *Sometimes Love*



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I understand."

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

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

www.victoriaadamskennedy.com

L. A. Lewis

national bestselling author

excerpt from *Double Down & Dirty*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

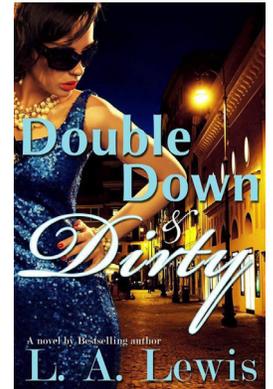
“Okay, then I’ll be honest,” she shot back. “I don’t like the way you do business. I don’t like that money means more to you than people. You’re not the type of person I’m interested in dealing with. Does the truth satisfy you?”

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

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

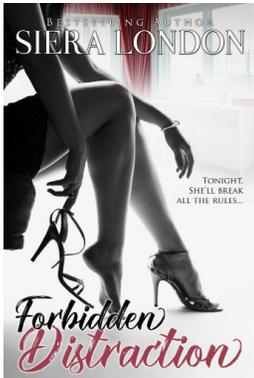
“So that’s it.” He inched closer. “You’re not afraid of doing business with me. What scares you is the fact that we’re very much alike. Isn’t that right? We both know what we want and would risk it all to make it happen. What frightens you the most,” his mouth nearly touched hers, “is knowing what will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

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



Siera London

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Did you approve this without my input?"

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

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

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

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

In a daze, she came to her feet.

"Carson?" She pleaded.

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

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

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

* * *

www.sieralondon.com

Nicole Hampton

Glimmer in the Darkness

The road to forgiveness is paved with shards of deceit.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sierra Kay

Excerpt from In the Midst of Fire



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

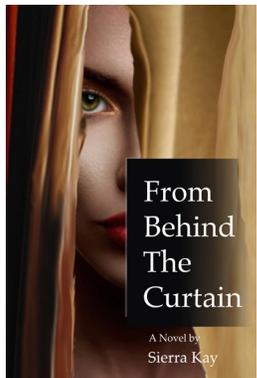
As Giselle rushed from the room as though a burning fire were nipping at her heels, Chase pulled Sera into a hug. "See, that wasn't that bad. Was it?"

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

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

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

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



www.sierrakay.com

Lisa Watson

excerpt from *Interview with Danger*

“Pierce, what’s going on?”

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

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

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

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

“Jacob Toliver.”

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

“Jacob Toliver,” he repeated.

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

“He’s me.”

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

He was right on her heels.

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

“I don’t understand.”

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

Her smile faded. “What?”

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

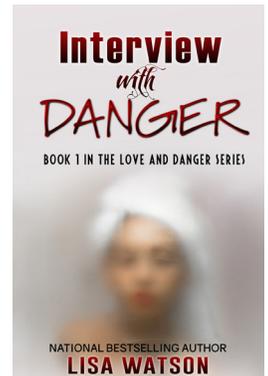
She eyed him from head to toe. “Well, are you?”

His expression turned indignant. “Certainly not.”

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

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

“Wait, what do you mean back?”

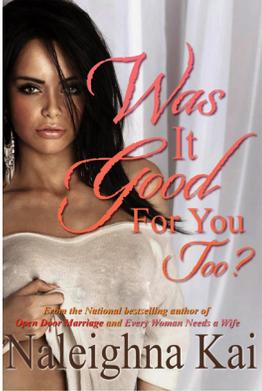


coming
December
2017

Naleighna Kai

national bestselling author

excerpt from *Open Door Marriage*



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

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

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

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

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

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

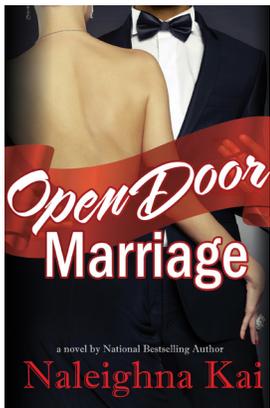
In unison, everyone nodded.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

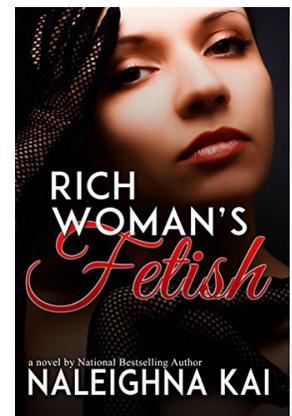
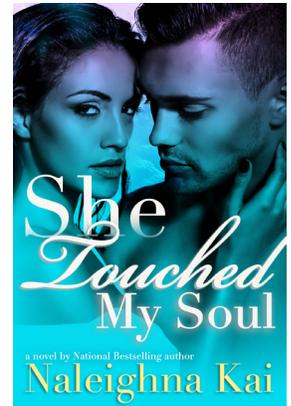
Yoli gave him a lusty once-over. "He's the type of man who can make a woman put a for sale sign on one thigh and an open for business sign on the other. Yes, Lawd!"

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

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

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

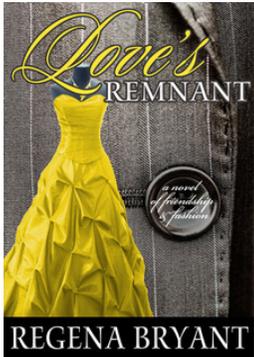
The front door slammed and Tori stood frozen. Bernice's voice snapped her out of a trance. "Girl, I taught you better than that," Bernice yelled, gesturing to the door. "You'd better go get your man."



www.naleighnakai.com

Regena Bryant

excerpt from *Love's Remnant*



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

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

When the door flew open, she stepped back.

"Hey!" Tyler beamed.

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

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

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

"Can you come in?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Just the driver."

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

www.regenabryant.com

Karen D. Bradley

excerpt from *Shattered Illusions*

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

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

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

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

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

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

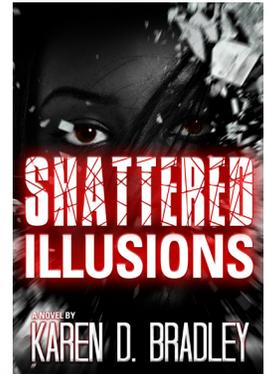
"Miss, we need you to slow down and repeat what you said." The voice was calm and steady.

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

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

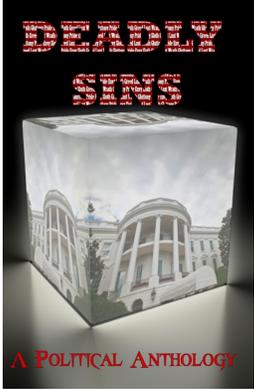
The pain was so severe, Terry struggled to speak. She ignored the dispatcher's questions. She held her head to the side so that her voice wouldn't sound stifled. "I also need the police. The assailant is still in the ..."

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



T. L. James

Excerpt from Deadly Sins



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

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

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

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

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