A Realistic Fictional Tale by



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Those longing to be loved. Those looking to love.



Ou's Garage buzzed with clanging tools and racing engines as Dani and Nikki waited for the mechanic to finish servicing her car before they got on the road on the next day.

"Girl, I am so glad that you took Mr. Walker up on his job offer. He is so excited that the gifted Dani Griffin is coming to work with him. He and his wife, Mother Ruby, invited us all over for Sunday dinner," Nikki said.

"Him, excited? I'm the excited one. I am so glad you gave him my name! His graphic design work is the best I've ever seen. To tell you the truth, though, I am more excited about finally meeting Mother Ruby. You've talked so much about her cooking that my mouth is already watering," said Dani, smacking her lips.

"My bae, Gaines, loves her cooking so much that I asked her to teach me. Next Sunday, I get to cook the meal...*with* her help, of course," boasted Nikki. "Besides, I got you, Queen! I would do anything, absolutely anything, to get my bestie back to California."

"You're going to love Clifton. It reminds me of Troupeville without the mosquitoes and the humidity. Its quaint main street is lined with colorful storefronts and blooming flower boxes. The community exudes a sense of warmth and hospitality, with the locals always ready to greet visitors with a welcoming smile."

Dani smiled. "Sounds like my kind of town."

Nikki exclaimed, "Just think: we get to be roomies again at the retreat we first met...just like old times! And, yes, there will be tea!"

As she thought about that first retreat, Dani dropped her head, remembering their beloved mentor, who passed away six summers ago. "I miss Mrs. Fletcher. She took care of me. If it had not been for her, I don't think I would have ever recovered."

"Yeah," Nikki said softly. "I miss her, too. I still remember the first scripture she taught us, Philippians 4:13."

They looked at each other with a glint in their eyes. Then, they proudly and loudly recited it in a single breath that would have made even Mrs. Fletcher stand up at attention. "I have strength for all things in Christ, who empowers me! I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him, who infuses inner strength into me! I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency."

"All joking aside, that carried me through everything I've been through. It still does today." Dani trailed off, swept away by the torrent of memories that flooded her soul.

A mechanic approached them, interrupting her thoughts. "Excuse me, ma'am, your car is ready."

As Nikki headed outside to update Gaines on the phone, Dani

made her way to the counter. The technician behind the counter stared at Dani, grinning. "Dani Griffin, it's been a long time. Remember me?"

She squinted, recognizing him as John's roommate. "Louis, right?"

As Dani locked eyes with Louis, memories of John came flooding back, causing her heart to race and her palms to sweat. Still, she maintained a calm exterior, but the sight of Louis brought back a rush of emotions she thought she had burned long ago.

Louis' grin widened. "Yeah, yeah. It's been a while since I've seen you around here. Oh, girl, I can't wait to tell John that I've seen you. How long has it been?"

Dani forced a smile as she pushed down the barrage of memories that threatened to overwhelm her. "Almost seven years," she said flatly. Not wanting to give too much space to the thoughts trying to invade her mind, she shifted her focus and steadied her voice. "How much do I owe you?"

Giving a menacing look, Louis proceeded just as Nikki walked in, unaware of the storm brewing. "Nothing at all for one of John's ladies."

Dani's antennas shot up. Not wanting to alarm her bestie, she shifted her stance and firmly and politely stated, "No, thank you, sir."

Nikki looked up, recognizing the curtness in Dani's voice. Dani enunciated every syllable when she was bothered and didn't want her

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emotions to run amok, cloud her judgment, or speak for her. Nikki dug in her pursue for the little bottle she kept for special occasions like this. Knowing that something was about to do down, Nikki pulled out her phone and pressed record.

Ignoring Dani's mood shift, Louis continued, "I'll gladly hook you up if... if you... finish what you started by hooking me and my boy John up with a threesome."

Nikki widened her eyes and peered over her glasses as she cocked her head to the side and looked over at Dani. "Did I hear what I think I heard?"

As seething anger rose to the surface of Dani's face, she balled up her hands into a fist and shouted, "Not today, devil! Have you lost your ever-lovin' mind? No, devil!"

Ignorant of what he had just unleashed, he toyed with her, continuing with his verbal assault. "John told me all about that day. He told me how you played coy all those months. You knew you wanted him that night. He could see it in your eyes. He's still talking about how you came back. Talking about you the best he ever had. Since you put it on my boy like that, and we share everything, I want you to put it on me like that."

Refusing to let his words rattle her, she maintained her composure even as his insults grew more personal. "Wait a minute! You think I'm some kind of ho?" She shot back and slammed both hands on the counter. Unfazed by her defiance, Louis insisted with a devilish grin, "We pick 'em. We break 'em in. We turn 'em and tag 'em. That's what we do. Once we've had you, we own you. You ain't know?"

As his words sank in, a sense of anger and betrayal washed over her. How could she have been so blind to their true intentions? She had been just another pawn in their twisted game. That realization slammed into her, weighing her down with their expectations. But she refused to let it break her spirit.

With a steely resolve, she straightened her back and met Louis' gaze head-on. "Well, you may think you own me, but you're dead wrong," she declared while slowly moving her hand to her holster.



**Maphelia Odette** is a wife, mother, author, poet, song writer, freelance artist, and publisher. She is a woman of the Word, where she finds the power to prevail in every area of life. With the help of the Lord, she passionately ministers the unadulterated Word of God to all who have an ear to hear.

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God has blessed them with five beautiful daughters, Cierra, Katia (son-in-love Rashad), Diamond, Erin and Erica, two beautiful granddaughters Atiya and Aniya, one fur baby Mercy, and one fur grand baby Shadow.

> Scan QR Code to listen to the author's testimony, *The Struggle is Over.*





As long as Dani Griffin could remember, she held onto the hope of finding her one true love. Her life in Troupeville, a mosaic of bitter and sweet memories, left her heart heavy with scars. As she prepares to leave everything behind, she faces a new journey filled with hope with her best friend, Nikki, by her side in Clifton, California.

Dani's journey of hope leads her to Abe, a kindred spirit with a passion for photography and a longing for a love as profound as his grandparents. As Dani and Abe share their vulnerabilities and dreams, a delicate bond forms, rooted in shared pain and hope. But traumatic pasts threaten their hope of love, leading them each to a crucial decision that could either restore their spirits or shatter them forever. The question remains. Will they choose a life defined by the pain of their past over the promise of their future?

Dive into this contemporary inspirational romance and satisfy your craving for a story of faith, resilience, and the redemptive power of love in this heartwarming tale as you learn what it means to be Set by the Master Jeweler Himself.

MAPHELIA ODETTE HANNAH is a wife, mother, grandmother, author, poet, song writer, freelance artist, and publisher. She is a woman of the Word, where she finds the power to prevail in every area of life. With the help of her Lord, she passionately ministers the unadultereated Word of God to all who have an ear to hear.

