

The book cover features a 3D digital illustration of a Black woman and a man. The woman, on the left, has short dark hair and is wearing a blue patterned dress. She is looking at the man and touching his shoulder. The man, on the right, has long dark hair, a white feather earring, and a beaded necklace. He is shirtless and wearing dark jeans. They are standing in a room with a large arched doorway in the background, through which a blue sky and some greenery are visible. The overall style is that of a digital art book or a novel cover.

*Felicia
Cummings*

*Black
Horizons*

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Black Horizons

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Dedication:

This book is dedicated to my best friend for 12 years, Jamie Marshall. These characters have no life without her, and neither would I. Thank you for believing in me – sisters forever.

Chapter One

The deposition in front of me will have to wait until morning. I've been reading it over for hours and I am no closer to finishing my work than when I started. The endless reading made my eyes ache and itch, so I slump sleepily up the stairs. Passing by my little girl's room, I smile. She is sleeping with her tiny fingers clenched around her teddy bear. She's one of the most important things in my life, besides my wife, whom I see is asleep as I step into the bedroom. She must have been waiting up for me because she is still dressed in her evening clothes.

God, she is beautiful.

Kneeling over her, I try to slip her shirt and skirt off so that she would be more comfortable. I know what you're thinking; if I wanted to have sex with my wife, it wouldn't be while she was asleep.

Forcing the long cotton sleeves over her arms, her eyes begin to open, but overcome with sleep, she just falls back into her peaceful slumber and allows me the freedom to discard the garments.

I suspect the reader has assumed that I lead a

normal, regular life, within a placid atmosphere. I have a wonderful two-year-old daughter, a successful and enchanting wife, and a very prosperous law firm. I'm a typical thirty-four-year-old man.

Oh, really? Well, let me show you something. There's a room I have in the house. A private haven, if you will, that Cassy, my wife, doesn't know about. If she did, I'm sure it would freak her out. Now before I reveal this side of my personality, all I ask is that the reader allow me the benefit of the doubt. We all express love towards others in varying ways. Mine towards my spouse happens to be obsession, the very force of nature that drove me to have her in the first place.

I come into this room whenever Cassy and I have fought or she's away visiting her family. Let's see, where do I begin? All four walls are beautifully plastered with photos of her in different places and environments. I even have pictures of her with her ex-husband, but of course he's been blotted out, as he is in her life itself. I'm sure a strange whimsical look is upon your face now, as you picture this scene, but please bear with me for a few moments more. There are objects that I keep in drawers and boxes that remind me of her. Nothing unusual, at least not to me, but perhaps to you, these materials may seem strange to savor and cherish. I've got a sexy rainbow array of her panties, arranged in order of the color spectrum, filling the bottom drawer. She's always wondering where her panties disappear to. Every time I look at them, I think about her; the expression on her face when she can't figure out where they've

gone and it makes me laugh. I soon became wise and started replacing them as I took them, but sometimes I find it troublesome to replace the erotic lace and satin just right.

And just miscellaneous items are here, too, like locks of her hair, packed securely in a velvet box, napkins from our dates, painted with her deep blackberry lipstick, and pieces of old garments that she has given to me to throw away but I secretly kept them, intoxicated with the seductive aroma of her perfume. I think I should stop right now.

It just occurred to me that my actions probably frighten you, and seem a bit neurotic. Maybe if I explained how I acquired these feelings for the woman, you could understand me better. It's a long story, but it's worth telling. Anything to explain the lusting obsession I feel for her, but hey—I just call it love.

I was twenty-eight when I met Cassandra Morgan, (actually, she was Cassandra Ryan at the time, but I choose to ignore that fact—it doesn't suit me) and we were in our third year of law school, about to receive our Doctorates of Jurisprudence. We were teamed up in a sort of a group project in defense...you know, actually, I shouldn't start right there. I need to back up a bit so that you'll understand the kind of man I was and how her love, the very presence of her in my life, completely transformed me. You see, at first, Dr. Slocoumb paired me up with this Asian woman named...you know, I can't even remember her name.

All I remember is that we fucked all the time.

The very first day we got together, I rubbed myself

against her until she was in my lap, rocking her small-framed body against mine. There was no way she could resist me; I was 6'2, with jet-black hair and a body with a tan that most women themselves would die for, except for the paleness of my hands. But they were busy handling other things, so I doubt she cared about the varying tones of my skin. You have to understand; in those days, that's all I wanted. Couldn't get enough. I do believe if someone had asked me to drop out of law school to become a full-time male prostitute, I would have. That's how much I loved fucking, and *love* hadn't been in my vocabulary since that bitch I dated my freshman year.

I came home to find her in bed with...no, not another man, but another woman. I know, most men would cum on the spot if they walked in on that, but not me. I'm a man of performance, and to me, it seemed as if my performance wasn't satisfying enough if she had to turn to a woman, for Christ's sake, so I wasn't planning on falling in love ever again.

It was the day of our mock preliminary hearing, when my professor realized that his assignment of partners, in my case, wasn't going too well. God, I wish I could remember her name. We prepared a half-assed case to present in court that day between fuck sessions, and as we performed in front of the class...well, let me put it this way; it was so shitty and unprofessional that Dr. Slocoumb stopped us halfway through to question how either one of us had gotten accepted to the law curriculum. Oh, the ingenious old man loved doing that, embarrassing you in front of

the group. It forced you to work harder, if only not to look like an ass the next time. He broke up the partnership I had with her immediately, instantly realizing the distractions that were keeping us from doing our work; it was almost as if he smelled the sex on our clothes that day. It was then that he teamed me up with Cassandra.

Cassy was a very bright and hard-working law student, but I doubt that's the real reason why he chose her to be my new partner. I suspect he thought that a black woman would not entice my sexual appetites and that I would have to settle for doing my work. Lord, was he wrong.

I remember the first day we met at my apartment to begin our work. When I opened the door and she walked in past me, the sweet smell of her perfume lingered in my nose, and she had me aroused instantly, although I doubt she even noticed. I stared at her, calculating my next move, wondering how I would seduce her. I was too afraid to use my obvious tactics on her because after all, she was the first black woman I had ever attempted to seduce, so I finally decided on praise as my best tool for the moment.

"It's very impressive when a black—I mean, African-American—woman such as yourself, is doing so well at a college like Penn State. Congratulations." I helped her out of her jacket, taking in her smell once more. Man, I prayed she wouldn't take offense to that; I wasn't insinuating that black women were stupid. And oh, she was a chocolate I wanted to munch on so badly.

"Thank you. I figure if my dad could graduate

from Harvard Law back when racial tensions were more obvious and volatile, I have nothing to complain about. So, I'm managing."

When she turned, her eyes almost made me take a step back. We had been in most of the same classes for so long, and that was the first time I had been close enough to see every detail of her face. Her eyes...they were the deepest blue I had ever seen. One could argue that it was the dark pupils she'd been born with that gave her blue contacts that deepened glow, but to me, there was something else there. It was as if I could see right into the depths of her soul when I stared into them and that, dear Reader, was something I hadn't planned on.

She began to look at me questioningly.

"Your eyes are gorgeous."

"They're just tinted contacts, Robert. Don't try that boyish charm on me. I don't want to look like a fool in class when it's our time to present."

"Yeah, I really screwed up the other day, didn't I?" I sat down on the sofa, pulling out my casebook.

"Literally." She smirked. Positioning herself on the floor, with her side propped up against the edge of the sofa and my feet, she began pulling out papers from her briefcase.

My fingers curled tightly around my pen, as I took a peek down her shirt. Hey, since I had the perfect view, why not, right?

"Was it that obvious?"

"Not really. Your little partner was gossiping about you to some of the other women in class. From what I heard, you really know how to tear it up," she joked.

That made me laugh, and how I wanted to 'tear it up' with her at that very moment.

"It's better to experience it then hear about it, you know." I began to wrap one of her dark curls around my index finger and gently brush the other digits against her ear. She quickly hit my hand away, as if it were a buzzing insect.

"Stop it, Robert, we have to get to work."

"Call me Bobby. I can't stand it when people call me Robert. Only my dad and my professors call me that."

She rested her chin on my knee and looked up at me with a sarcastic expression on her face.

"Fine, then. *Bobby*, stop it, we have to get our asses to work. Is that better?" she asked, finishing it off with a smart-ass grin.

"That's what I'm trying to do...get our asses to work, so to speak."

"I didn't mean it like that, and you know it. And by the way, you can call me *Cassy*."

"You don't like *Cassandra*?" I dropped down onto the floor next to her. She made a nervous little sound.

"No, I do. It's just that my twin sister and I have names that are so much alike that people usually call me *Cassy* to tell the difference." She pulled a few strands of her hair back behind her ear as I drew closer to her.

"Twin? You mean to tell me there's a sexy copy of you walking around here somewhere? Is she single?" This statement made her laugh, and that deep, sultry giggle made me want her even more.

"She's not exactly walking around here. She's

married to this rich Italian man, living in Monte Carlo in this fabulous beach house. Sorry, Bobby."

I shifted even closer, feeling the heat of her body rising even though she tried desperately to hide her arousal.

"So I guess that leaves you," I whispered in her ear.

The feathery feel of my breath against her earlobe made her tremble, and she briskly blamed it on the coldness of the apartment.

"It's freezing in here, and you're out of luck again, so can we please get started on this project? I didn't plan on staying here all night, you know."

I leaned back against the sofa and wondered what she felt inside, at that moment. I wondered if it was the pull that I had sensed from the beginning: the chemistry that had to be more than a simple fuck.

"I see. Don't like us white guys, right?"

"That's not it at all, Mr. Powell. My husband is white." This information surprised me and raised my hopes all at the same time.

"Oh, is he now?"

"Yes, he is. He's a cop and I have two eleven-year-old children; they're fraternal twins."

"You know, you said all of that except the husband part with so much joy and contentment. I wonder what could be said about that."

She glared at me angrily. I had undoubtedly hit a chord within her...the right one, too.

"You listen here. You're digging too deep into my affairs. I don't pay Penn State thousands of dollars to go to law school just so you can snoop around in my personal life and use it to get between my legs. Either

you shut up and do the work, or I'll tell Dr. Slocoumb that you can't get sex off your mind long enough for us to do anything. It's your grade, not mine," she snapped at me, pointing and waving her slender bronze finger.

Now you may think this sick or perverted, but listening to her yell at me turned me on so intensely that I had to put my notebook in my lap so that she couldn't see the growth.

There are a mixture of reasons why I wanted Cassy so much back then: she was the first woman who had ever turned my sexual advances down, the first black woman I had ever been attracted to, and the list goes on and on. I think it was the whole forbidden fruit thing; forbidden fruit always tastes the sweetest. Besides that, I felt a connection with her, and I think she felt it, too. She was so quick to defend her marriage when I had gotten to the root of all her unhappiness, and I wanted to bring happiness into her life, but it would be awhile before we got that far into our relationship.

Instead of me seducing her, it seemed as if the tables were turned, and I swear, her every move made me want to pin her against the floor and fuck her to death. I wanted her to stay there with me that night so badly, but she was an honest and righteous woman, and no matter how she failed to hide her attraction towards me, she was going to be a good wife to her husband, even if it meant sacrificing her own happiness.

After our paperwork had been done, we decided to give it a dry run. As I paced to and fro, practicing

what I would say in our imitation court session, I felt her lustful gaze upon me. It was filled with so much heat and passion, I felt as if her fiery blue eyes would melt the cloth right off of my body. I stopped in my tracks and stared back at her, trying to penetrate her soul with my gaze.

"Why'd you stop? You're doing great, surprisingly. I had no idea you were this good." She cleared her throat. I grabbed her hands and pulled her up to stand with me, assuming she was as turned on as I was...

"Stay with me tonight," I whispered against her lips, roughly massaging her back.

"Now, how did you go from an attempted murder case to this silly shit again?"

"Because this absolutely sumptuous woman is here in my apartment, driving every part of my body and soul crazy." I pulled her to me and pressed my lips ever so softly against hers. I hadn't kissed a woman so sweetly in a long time. Her eyelashes flicked, closing as she surrendered to the passionate ease of our embrace. With the opening of her mouth, I took it as an invitation for my tongue to enter and explore. She allowed me the entrance, but the full examination was canceled by the strong moral streak she possessed. Cassandra shoved me away and gathered her scattered belongings.

"I can't believe Dr. Slocumb paired me up with such a creep. You're not even taking this stuff seriously. God, I have got to get the hell out of here before I end up killing this asshole." She fumed as she bunched her papers together and hurried towards the

coat rack for her jacket.

Now I must warn you that what I said next might not be excellent proof that I was falling for the woman, but you must understand I was frustrated and horny, and those two emotions in my life usually equaled anger.

"You didn't think I was such a creep when you just had your hand down my pants," I yelled, watching her struggle into her coat. Don't worry if you don't remember reading that bit of action in the story, reader. She never put her hand down my pants while we kissed; I just love to add that part in whenever I tell the story to feed my ego. Besides, she confided in me later that she was so overwhelmed with lust that she doesn't remember half of what happened.

"Don't flatter yourself, Bobby. I lost my mind for a brief second. Life is not one big fuck. I have a husband and two kids to think about before I go spreading my legs for you. Next time, we're meeting at my house. I'll see you in class, asshole." She stormed past me.

"No, don't *you* flatter yourself, Cassy. I just thought I'd give you something to keep you satisfied, since I know your husband isn't doing his job. If he were, you wouldn't be grabbing all over me."

The only response was the door slamming behind her as she exited the apartment. I lied. I hadn't forgotten about her, and I would soon realize that I never could. She would become the only thing that mattered; the one thing I would do anything to have.

Chapter Two

Cassandra Morgan soon became a delicious poison that had seeped into my life through my own stupidity. I found myself dreaming of her, waking up in the middle of night with erections that almost broke the waistbands of my boxers. It was hard enough just passing the time 'til we would work on our project again when I just couldn't get her off my mind. And class, that was pure hell. It's amazing that I was able to get my law degree at all with her just one row down from me in class, looking up at me with those seductive artificial blues whenever she felt my gaze upon her. I found myself jacking off in my bedroom after class more and more, rather than hitting the books. But the worst of my torture hadn't come yet. Two days after our meeting, I was to see her at her home, and with that came the introduction to her family—the family that should have been mine to begin with.

I arrived at her house, ten minutes before the time we agreed upon. I wanted Cassy to see me in a professional and serious light. I suspect she wanted me at her house so that she could behave herself,

luring me onto her turf, so to speak. That didn't faze me at all. If her husband was standing right there in the room, I still planned on flirting and enjoying every minute of it. I hoped that she would answer the door, but a cloud of bad luck surrounded me that night. The asshole, I mean, her husband, was there instead.

"Yes, may I help you?" he asked, standing in front of the cracked door.

My forehead crinkled as I decided on the right words to say. I must admit, the moment I saw him I wanted to punch the hell out of him, but naturally I resisted. I stood there with a bouquet of flowers in my hand and ignored the cruel, cocky words that had formed in my throat, swallowing hard and pushing them down into the pit of my stomach. Ah, the things I did for that woman.

"I'm Bobby Powell. I'm here to see Cassandra. We're in law school together," I answered, gradually maneuvering the bunch of flowers behind my back.

"Oh, yeah. You two are working on something together. That's right. Come in." He stood aside to allow me to enter.

I glared at him with disgust. I could immediately deduce that he didn't love her the way she deserved to be loved. He hadn't even asked me why I was about to give his wife a dozen roses. Any man in his right mind would be wondering what the hell his wife is giving up for a gift like that, but not this stupid S.O.B.

"I take it you're her husband? What is it, Tim, Tad?" I knew damned well what his name was, just

wasn't going to give him the satisfaction to think that I cared.

He stared at me and chuckled slightly.

"It's Tom. Tom Ryan. Nice to meet you, Bobby." Holding out his hand, we greeted one another, a quick and easy shake.

To me, it was a declaration of war; he had something that I wanted, and I was willing and ready to fight for it any way I knew how. Then, she bounced her way into the room, wearing an NYU tee shirt and very short gray shorts.

"You're here? Kinda early, though." She declared with a surprised, but not unhappy look on her face.

"Is that a problem?" I asked, approaching her with the flowers in my grasp.

"No, it's good, actually. Shows you're ready to get to work. What's this?"

"Roses. I wanted to apologize for the way I acted before. I'm sorry. My attitude was totally unacceptable." The peace offering seemed to please her, and I was back into her good graces once again.

She bent slightly to place the bunch of flowers down on the table and to see her at that angle made me stiffen a bit, but not enough to be noticed.

"You know, that's very sweet, Bobby. Thank you. I take it you've already met my husband." Cassy spoke as she cleared the table.

She said the word '*husband*' as if it didn't belong in the sentence, and her head dropped down in an image of shame...or it could have been sadness.

"Yes, we have. I was just about to leave so you two could have some privacy," he said, grabbing a

basketball in the corner of the room. She appeared irritated, but that could have been just my assumption.

"Fine, then. Next teacher conference, you're going—not me. Come on, Bobby, let's get started. Have a seat. Let me go get my things," she said angrily. This obviously was not one of their best moments together.

When she exited, I heard voices above on the stairway, and then a young boy made his way downstairs. He was creamy in complexion, as if he had gotten the perfect tan, and was completely bald. Covered in a basketball jersey and slouching blue jeans, he smiled politely when he passed me and greeted his father with a punch on the shoulder.

"Your mom doesn't want you neglecting your school work, although she's completely overdramatizing the situation," Tom remarked.

"No, it's okay. I overreacted. You're right, he's got two more days until his essay is due. You two go have fun." She plopped a handful of notebooks and papers down on the table.

I watched as Tom approached her. Her expression changed from happiness to...well, there are no words for it really. It was just a blank expression.

"Don't try to pretend you have time for these kids just because your friend is here. We both know that's not the truth." I heard him whisper.

He exited the house with his son, leaving her there to put on an act for me.

"Sorry about that," she said with a deep sigh.

"It's okay. I learned a lot from it," I remarked,

making my way out of my jacket.

"And what was that? How to handle eleven- year-olds?"

"No, I learned a lot about you and Tommy boy."

"I don't even want to know," she answered, grinning deviously.

"Cassy."

She stopped flipping through her papers long enough to look at me from across the glass table. "What is it, Bobby?"

"I've been thinking about you lately," I willingly admitted, placing my hand on top of hers. Her mocha-dipped fingers spread and allowed me to tease the inside corners.

"Not this nonsense again. I thought you were over that quest." She was avoiding eye contact with me.

"It's not a quest, baby. It's a mission. I can't ignore it or fight it."

"Oh, please, Bobby. You're going to have to give me a better line than that. This is not Star Wars, for God's sake. Now, let's work."

I really had all intentions of working and being serious, but as she moved and shifted in the chair, I noticed she wasn't wearing a bra. The hypnotic movement of those breasts underneath the waves of cotton took me to a world of sex and feverish hunger, and I'm sure I was drooling right over my briefcase. I must have been because when I came back to reality, I saw a young girl staring at me through the banister with hatred and disgust in her hazel eyes. It was Cassandra's daughter Claudia, and from day one she sensed that I would be a problem within her fairy-tale

family. Standing, she glided down the staircase, glaring at me like some wild tigress protecting her cubs.

"Mama, where's Daddy?" Claudia looked at me as she spoke.

I think she wanted me to know that their household already was complete, and my services weren't needed or appreciated...through her eyes, anyway.

"Playing ball at the park with Clint. Why, sugar?"

"Aunt Veronica's on the phone. She's looking for him. Something about plans for Rita's birthday party or something," answered Claudia, staring me down through her long blonde-and-brown-streaked curly locks.

Cassy's whole exterior began to change. Her mouth turned up cynically, and she pressed her thumb down hard on the tip of the eraser. With her eyes slanted, she turned to give Claudia her response.

"You tell Miss Veronica that Tom isn't here and that she'll have to call back later. Damn that woman." She grunted.

"You want me to tell her that part, too?" she asked with a cocky smile creased across her face.

"Tell her whatever you want. Just get her off my phone. And you could tell Mr. Powell hello. That would be a nice thing to do, and I know I'm raising a nice young girl with manners."

Claudia sneered at me and decided to put up the effort.

"Nice to meet you. Anyway, I'm going back upstairs. I'll tell her." She exited the room.

Cassandra sighed as she watched her twist her way back upstairs, delivering the message to the cordless phone in her hand.

"I swear, she's too grown for her own good."

"Tell me more about this Veronica woman. I take it you don't like her." I was highly intrigued by this revelation.

"Bobby, she's a fast, hot-ass black woman. Quite your speed, I guess." She answered.

The topic obviously irritated her, but only made me want to know more.

"Sounds like it. So you just hate her lifestyle?"

"Yeah, something like that. Could we please work?" One glance told me she wasn't in the mood to talk about it.

When her daughter finally left the house to go visit a friend, I decided to use my irresistible charm again. Anything to get close to her.

"You look tired," I said, finishing up an argument I was preparing for our case.

"That's just the compliment I needed. Thanks," she answered sarcastically, walking back and forth along the carpeted floor.

Standing, I positioned myself in her pathway of pacing, and she bumped right into me; a collision my body gladly welcomed.

"Lay down on the sofa." What I had in mind was fucking her and mmm...I can't even go into words about what I wanted to do to her, but knowing she would refuse me, I decided to use the massage rationale as a back-up story.

"Excuse me?" She cocked an eyebrow.

"Come on. You need something to calm your nerves. You're taking this project way too seriously. Hell, we're not even practicing lawyers yet and you're stressed out." I guided her to the couch with my hands resting firmly on her shoulders. She tensed up even more at my touch and despite all her protests, I had eased her onto her stomach awaiting my sensual medication.

"You don't understand. I have to get this degree." She let out a deep sigh as she positioned herself more comfortably.

"Law is that important to you?" I sat behind her and raked my hands across her shoulders roughly.

"It's not the law that's important to me. You wouldn't understand."

"Try me." I slid my large hands underneath her T-shirt and kneaded her honeyed flesh. I believe she was so caught up in her thoughts that she didn't realize I was rubbing her bare back. Otherwise, she would have protested much sooner.

"I'm just trying to keep a promise to a very important man in my life; I have to accomplish this before it's too late," she answered with an air of sadness to her voice.

Without even asking, I knew she referred to her father, but I didn't know the extent of the situation. I had heard others saying how she had an easy gig set up in her father's law firm after school, but it wasn't a barrel of laughs to her.

Her skin was of a luxurious softness, and I found myself being seduced by the feel of her flesh.

"Bobby, that's enough, okay?"

I don't know why I couldn't stop touching her, but I just refused. I drew my arms around her waist, as her breasts set perfectly on top of them.

"God, you feel so damn good," I murmured in her neck.

"Bobby, I'm serious, let me go," she said, now more frightened.

For that brief moment, I must have experienced the thoughts of rapists. No matter how she protested and refused my advances, I just couldn't stop and I wouldn't.

"Stop trying to deny what you're feeling, Cassy." I breathed into her neck. Scooping her breasts in my hands, I thumbed her erect nipples playfully.

She threw her head back, as the loveliest moan I had ever heard escaped past her full lips. And then the bastard returned, gradually opening the front door. She shot up off the couch as fast as lightning, and I just lay back, pissed off as hell.

"Hey, Tom. We were just wrapping things up and talking and stuff, you know, talking law stuff."

I'm sure he was uneasy about her nervousness, but he didn't even question her. This in itself infuriated me.

"Okay. I'll go start dinner. I dropped Clint off at Joe's; he's eating dinner over there. You know I can't say no to that boy."

"That's fine. Umm, Bobby, I think we're done here, so I guess I'll see you in class tomorrow," she said, tucking her shirt into her shorts as if to hide the scene of the crime.

I was lounging against the sofa now, amazed by

this display of 'family values'. I had to speak my mind, or otherwise I would just blow up on the ride back home.

"Just a goddamn minute here. Something is seriously wrong with this picture."

"Excuse me? I don't appreciate you cursing like that in my house. I have an eleven-year-old daughter in the house, you know," he said.

Oh, this was quite a sight. The blonde pussy was actually growing balls enough to stand up to me. I stood slowly, ready for the confrontation.

"Bobby, I think you really should leave. Right now." Cassy positioned herself between us.

I smiled and thought how appropriate, the beautiful damsel caught in the middle of the brave knight and the court fool she married.

"No, Cassy. He doesn't treat you with the respect you deserve."

"You've been in my home once and you automatically know how I treat my wife—my wife for twelve years. How dare you, you son of a bitch."

"I'll tell you what I do know. You leave your enchanting and very attractive wife alone with a man who has just brought her roses, for Christ sake. And to top it off you're not even the least bit curious if anything happened. Hell, you don't care one way or the other about this woman, do you?"

"Damn it, Bobby! That's enough," she yelled, burrowing beside Tom.

"I want you the hell out of my house. Right now," he said calmly.

I do believe that night was the start of my madness.

Black Horizons



Well, you might *call* it madness, but I would categorize it as a glitch in my predicament. Me, Bobby Powell, mad... Now that is funny.

Chapter Three

When I saw Cassandra in class that next day, she couldn't even look at me, she was so furious. We met a little early in the classroom to make sure our case was presentable, and I had to force the words past her lips.

And what lovely lips they were, too.

I realized that peace wasn't going to be regained unless I apologized for the scene the night before. There was one slight problem, though; I wasn't sorry for what I did. Any of it. Made perfect sense to me. I very rarely make mistakes in judgment.

As she spread out papers across the desk, I grabbed her arm and gently coaxed her to face me.

"Cassy, please let me apologize. I am so sorry about last night, sometimes I get out of hand with my opinions and...I just hated to see him treat you like you're nothing," I lied, remarkably well,

She took in a deep breath and replied quite calmly, to my surprise, "First of all, Tom doesn't question my every move because he trusts me, but I doubt you have any clue what trust is all about. Second, I guess one could see it as sort of sweet that you stood up for

me. Well, sweet or psychotic, whichever you prefer...so, apology accepted. The last thing I need right now is a partner who I can't get along with. Besides, this is the last day of the project, and we won't be in each other's lives anymore."

She took her seat at the table. I sat beside her and opened my briefcase, letting what she said sink in. "*Won't be in each other lives anymore.*" I don't think so. I wouldn't allow that to happen.

"Well, you will indulge me in a celebration dinner, since I know we'll win this so-called trial."

"I don't think that would be a good idea, Bobby." She rolled her delicious blues at me.

As the rest of the class gathered into the room, I reached under the table and lightly squeezed her knee.

"Please, Cassy. Don't make me beg; I've never begged before in my entire life." She smiled devilishly and cocked her head to the side.

"You know, Bobby, I seriously believe that. Bobby Powell doesn't have to beg, right? Women just fall down at your feet."

Her teasing didn't amuse me.

"Yeah that's right. So, please, I'm begging. Shouldn't that mean something?" It had better, because I wasn't kidding. I'd never begged a woman, but I was prepared to beg Cassandra to have dinner with me for the rest of the damned day if I had to.

She laughed. God, I loved to see her smile.

"Fine, Bobby, but here's the deal; we clink glasses, drink, eat and then I'm out of there, you got that?"

"Sure, whatever you say," I answered, knowing

damned well I had more plans for the two of us than a simple meal.

Our performance in class was pure brilliance, and Dr. Slocoumb was completely blown away. Before verbally assessing our progress, he just leaned back in his aging wooden chair and stared at us. He stood and shook his head in utter amazement, probably from the fact that Cassandra was the first female to get me to concentrate on my work instead of my dick. He approached the two of us and shook Cassy's hand.

"You're a miracle worker, Ryan." That old bastard! The class began to laugh...at my expense, unfortunately, but he did offer me some consolation.

"Robert, you have potential after all. I see a very bright future for you."

Looking at Cassy, I thought, I see an even brighter future with this woman by my side.

* * * *

I familiarized myself with her daily routine. I found she never went home for lunch. Between classes, I would always see her seated by the school fountain, snacking on a sandwich while intensely studying for her next class. She had to be the most studious woman I had ever seen, but of course she was driven by a force beyond most students.

Sometimes she wouldn't be alone, though, which were the days I hated the most. She had a friend named Michael Webster, this red-headed ass that was attached to her hip. The thought of him being attached to her in any fashion made me sick to my

stomach. I disliked that man so much. Why didn't I like him? The same reason why I didn't like Tom, or any other man who'd been around Cassy. I don't understand it, really. How can any man be near her, smell her, breathe her essence and not fall in love with her? So, as contradictory as it may sound, I hated guys being around her and not praising her for the lovely, sexy woman that she was, yet it made me nauseous to think of them touching her.

Receiving my project grade from Dr. Slocumb about a week later, I decided to approach her on her lonely lunch break and inquire about our dinner. She lifted her head from her book, as I strode across the courtyard towards her. That attractive face of hers sparkled with a playful smile and my steps grew larger, hurrying to be near her. Closing the textbook, she held up her graded progress report and flashed her glimmering white teeth.

"Yeah I know. I just looked at mine. We got an A." I sat on the fountain beside her.

"I must say I wasn't expecting to do that well." She threw her juice bottle in the garbage can adjacent to the fountain.

"Why? Because of me and my slack-ass attitude?"

"No, not really. I mean, yes, but Bobby, you're not lazy. You just have sex on the brain too much. You're a dick with eyes."

I laughed, conjuring up the ridiculous image in my head.

"I'm not about that. I know that's the persona I portray, but I'm actually very loving." I raked her hair over her shoulder.

The bright rays of the sun cascaded down on her like a halo, making her black hair shimmer with an auburn glow.

"I just bet you are." She answered with a soft, low tone to her voice. I knew she was developing something for me, then. That tone, so sensual, almost lifted me up by its syllables.

"I'm serious. Cassy, you do realize there's something going on between us, don't you?" I asked playing with her thin fingers.

"That's in your sick imagination, Powell. You seem to have developed a fixation on me." She answered and gradually slid her fingers from my grip. She pulled her hair back behind her ear and re-opened her book.

"A fixation, huh?"

"Yes, and you need help."

"You'll come around. It's just a matter of time." I closed the book again.

"I wish you wouldn't do that. Bobby, isn't there some blonde you should be chasing?"

Now this statement was quite intriguing.

"How would you know I chase blondes in the first place if you hadn't been spying?"

"Spying? Bobby, please. You have such an ego." She opened the book again. I closed it and took it from her. She was playfully irritated.

"Will you just stop it?"

"Stop what? Taking the book, or wanting you? One I have control over; the other, I don't know."

She jerked the paperback from my grasp and tucked it into her bag.

“Is that why you came over here—to aggravate me to death?” she asked, standing.

I stood alongside her and helped place the strap of her carrying case across her shoulder. I had a quick glance of her gold wedding band, snickering at me like a cruel joke.

“No. Just reminding you of our celebration dinner.” I stepped aside to allow her to walk.

She didn’t move. She just stood there, with her mouth almost hanging open.

“Bobby, you’ve got to be joking.”

“Nope. I’m dead serious. My place at seven. Bring your appetite.” I began walking away, and I just stopped in my tracks, feeling her apprehensive stare upon me. “Cassy, it’s just dinner. What are you afraid of?”

“Nothing. It’s just that...”

“Fine, Seven tonight. And I know you may say you’re not coming, but I also know you’ll be there. I can feel it. ‘Til then.” I pivoted on my heels.

* * * *

That night I had no candles lit or any seductive music playing. Yes, I wanted a romantic evening with the woman, but she was denying her feelings for me. If I had all that makeout shit going on when she got there, she would have run like a bat out of hell—if she even came. I might have seemed cocky when I was with her, but just between you and me, I was very unsure of her coming.

As I walked across the smooth, tiled floor with two

"I know this outfit looks stupid. My sister bought it for me. She says it's fashionable," she mumbled, peering down at the floor.

"I don't know about fashionable, but it's very sexy on you," I replied, pulling her in for a kiss, but as always, her moralistic flaw forced her to withdraw from my invitation.

“Where’s the soft music and the candlelight, Powell?” she asked, surprisingly. Grabbing the wineglasses, I stared at her and put on my serious lawyer façade.

"Isn't this another attempt to get me into bed?"

Reverse psychology is always a useful tool. If I couldn't seduce her, I'd make her believe she was seducing me.

"Oh. I'm sorry, Bobby."

I brought in the glass of wine and set it down on the table.

"I'm not a one-dimensional soap opera character, Cassy."

Guilt is also a good weapon. I pulled the chair out for her, and as she looked at me like a wounded animal, I compared it to the lustful look I received when we first met.

"Bobby, I'm really sorry. I tend to be too judgmental at times. Can I make up for my insincere attitude?" She approached me and placed her hand on my shoulder, massaging it in a comforting motion.

A grin creased across the corners of my mouth.

"A kiss would be nice."

Hey, I hope you didn't expect me to go the entire night without flirting.

To my surprise, she drew close to me and grabbed onto my arm. Then she pulled me down to her lips, but, alas, it was a simple peck on the cheek.

"How's that?"

"Not what I had in mind, but it'll do for now."

As I sat across from her, many questions bounced around in my head. *Had she ever thought about me? Was I on her mind 24/7, the way she was on mine? If she wanted to resist me so damn badly, then why did she come in the first place?* I took a chance on my last thought and decided to give in life in our conversation.

"Why'd you come?" I inquired, swallowing a big mouthful of pasta. Her sleek black brows arched as she sat her glass of wine down on the table.

"Not for the reason you're thinking. Tom is at the

police station, Claudia is spending the weekend with her best friend, and Clint is over at his uncle's. Just was bored, really." she replied.

Personally, I didn't believe her answer. How could all those activities be happening at once?

"What a coincidence. Seems like fate wanted you to come here." The long, cylindrical piece of pasta flipped between her maroon velvet lips as she winked at me.

"You don't believe me, do you?" I picked up my napkin and wiped the remaining marinara sauce from the corner of my mouth.

"Did I say that?"

"No, but..."

"So you're a mind reader now, huh?" She paused and stared at me mischievously from the rim of the wine glass.

"You know what, Bobby? I don't think I want to read your mind. It might scare me," she teased as she crunched on the crisp leaves of her salad.

I picked up the fork and dug the silver prongs into the mass of lettuce and dressing across her plate.

"If you could read my mind, you'd be blushing all day, my dear Cassy. Trust me on that one." She opened her mouth wide and I slipped the fork inside, imagining my tongue there instead.

* * * *

When I had returned from clearing the table, I found her admiring the few items I had on the fireplace mantle.

The fire embedded under the mantle sparkled and flared down below her knees. Grabbing the bottle of wine, I sat down on the rug, hoping she would join me. If I couldn't seduce her, then perhaps I could luck out and get her drunk.

"You don't have many pictures, do you?" She turned and dropped her gaze to me.

I stiffened, a frown descending across my face.

"That's because I don't have many people to take pictures of; I don't have a lot of people in my life." I was feeling the mood of the night gradually switching to something more deep and meaningful.

She paused at the picture in the far corner, wrapped in its silver frame. Lifting it up, she studied it carefully, immediately noticing the similarities between it and me.

"This must be your mother?"

The muscles in my cheek twitched. I didn't like discussing my mother. It had been so long since anyone had brought her up, I had almost forgotten the circumstances of her life.

"Yeah. She's dead," I answered quite plainly. Over the years, I had managed to say it with as little emotion as possible.

She gently laid the frame back on the mantle, as if she were handling my mother's dead body instead of just her picture. After she joined me on the rug, she took hold of my hand and searched my eyes with her own.

"I'm sorry, Bobby."

"Suicide," I said, every muscle in my body fighting the urge to cry.

She must have sensed something within me, for she moved closer and began to pour me a glass of wine.

"You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to," stated Cassy, lifting the glass and holding it towards me.

I took the glass and almost drank the whole lot in one gulp, swallowing my pain along with the alcoholic tranquilizer. She began to run her fingers in a feather-like caress over my temple, sending sweet sensations of delight sprinkling through me. When I peered up at her for answers, she blinked, shutting out the dark flame that I saw burning in her eyes.

"No, it's okay. You see I come from a very dysfunctional family, Cassandra. My dad left my mom for another man when I was around fourteen, fifteen, maybe. She couldn't take it." I looked down into the half-empty wineglass.

I wanted to scream with the intensity of the emotions that flooded me when she took my hand.

"That's terrible."

"Oh, no, don't say that yet. Save it for the end of the story, because it gets deliciously worse. I knew the bastard was gay. I remember the 'friends' he used to bring over, but I was young and I didn't understand. I never told my mom about it. Maybe if I had, she would have had the courage to leave instead of—well you get the idea." I raked my hand through my hair, wanting to pull every strand out.

You know, I could have used that sympathy she was feeling for me to my advantage, but I was so caught up in this feeling that she was causing I didn't

want it to happen that way. I didn't want to have to trick her into making love to me. This woman— this woman who was practically cradling me in her arms was too good for that.

"Oh, Bobby." She whispered against my ear.

"I've never told anyone else about this. But I'm a big boy, I can handle anything." Anything but the way her eyes pierced me. My statement must have astonished and confused her, for she pulled away.

"So why did you decide to tell me?"

I shrugged my shoulders. I honestly didn't know. I didn't want the evening to be some depressing psychodrama, so I definitely had to turn things around. Sliding my hand underneath the curtain of black hair, I gently kneaded her flesh.

"Come on, now. I don't want any pity from you. At least one good thing came out of it. It did inspire me to become a lawyer. Figured if I could go through all that crap, I could handle anything. I'm not as study-prone as you, Cassy."

I poured another glass of wine. I just sipped it a bit. I didn't want to get so drunk that I couldn't remember being so close to her, the feel of her skin, or the aromatic scent of her perfume.

"Not exactly. I didn't want to be a lawyer. I still don't, to be quite honest with you." She climbed on her hands and knees on the rug, then sprawled closer to the fireplace.

Seeing her stretched out there on her stomach amidst the fiery sparks, my mind was quickly diverted from my own fucked up childhood.

"Oh, really?" I rolled over beside her as I spoke.

"Yeah. Doing it mostly for my father."

"Why?" I inched closer to her, our sides brushing lightly against one another.

"Since you've made your confession, I guess it's my turn. It's for two reasons, really." She paused and—unless it was a mirage from the wine—licked her lips.

"I was a music major until I found out my father was dying of lung cancer. He's got a few years left. It's like...God, I don't know how to explain it. You know how guys prefer having boys instead of girls because it's an extension of their immortality?"

"Yeah, a guy's last name never changes. I'm with you, continue." I watched the curve of her lips and wanted to be with her in more ways than one.

"Well, my dad had two girls and one ended up a Ryan and the other Tantaloni. His law firm is the only thing he has left. So before he dies, I'm going to make Morgan & Associates his immortality. Plus I owe it to him, I've let him down in the past."

"I find that hard to believe. Cassy, you're a wonderfully honest woman. How could you possibly let the man down?" I teased her bottom lip with the back of my thumb and slipped it in for a sample.

She suckled it gently, then pulled away, breathing heavily.

"You were right about Tom and I. I got pregnant when I was sixteen and he had so many expectations for me that..." Her words trailed off into silence, as I leaned in for a deep, intoxicating kiss.

As our tongues danced, I rolled over on her, pressing my body tightly against hers. She didn't pull

Black Horizons



away nor did she fight me, entrapped in a prison of passion that her body could only unlock.

Chapter Four

2attacked her lips with such hurried need and lustful force, I barely gave her a moment to breathe. Stopping, I looked down at her, offering her a chance to say no, but I knew she wouldn't. I wiggled my body between her thighs, and she moaned—yes, it was all there in her voice; the passion, the erotic sensations, everything.

"I bet every part of you tastes so good," I whispered against her wet lips.

They creased into a smile as a channel of heat whipped out, brushing lightly against my own. She reached up for me, moving her quivering tawny hand across my taut cheek. I wondered if she felt the tight muscle of my skin clench below her touch, and the hard tremor that seemed to move my whole body. With a dark flame in her eyes she savagely pulled my lips down to hers, forcing me to taste her like I had never sampled a woman's lips before.

"This is wrong," she breathed against my waiting lips.

I didn't respond, and it wasn't wrong. I stood and held my hand out to help her to her feet. I think she

assumed I had an attack of morality and would allow her to leave, for she looked completely surprised when I scooped her up in my arms.

"Forget being wrong. I want you, and you're not getting away this time."

I carried her off into the bedroom, her legs flailing and her conscience speaking, but I ignored her. I threw her on the bed and she scooted up towards the headboard, staring at me with fear instead of the longing look of desire she had just a few seconds ago.

No, I wouldn't have raped her, which I'm sure that's she was thinking. You're right, she did say no, but there's a fine line between no and no-but-fuck-the-hell- out-of-me.

"Bobby, I..."

I silenced her with another kiss, deep and long that made every muscle in my body come alive. For a moment, I reared over her body, my breathing staggered and my eyes searching her face.

"If you want me, then stop talking, but if you honestly feel nothing, then walk away. Just remember, I'm not chasing you, Cassy," I lied, knowing damn well if she walked out, I would be hounding her even more.

I rolled off of her, lying on my side with my head propped up against my hand and waiting for her to make the right decision, to stay there with me. As an extra incentive, I teasingly played with the zipper of her pants.

Hey, I was becoming a lawyer, what better time to practice not playing fair?

She snuggled beside me and began kissing my

neck.

"I hate you, Bobby." She laughed against my skin.

Well, damn, she had a funny way of showing it. I slowly slid the zipper down.

My fingers dallied there underneath the lace of her panties as her lips hovered over mine. I was breathing her, absorbed by the fierce hurry of my heartbeat. The anticipation to be inside of her grew more intense as I felt the warm texture of her sexual juices, running and sticking between my fingers. I lay there, staring at her squirming body while my fingers provided a preview of all the sensations that my cock would provide.

Gripping my wrist, she guided me in deeper, caught up in a web of passion that I had spun for her from the moment our eyes connected.

"Oh, God." Her voice cracked.

"Yes," I said in a breath of satisfaction, "I want you feeling good." I stopped and jerked her pants and panties down over her hips, demanding a taste.

As I spread her wide, the pink, glistening flesh stared up at me and I began writing the alphabet inside her wet center with my eager tongue. I hadn't even made it up to H before she grabbed my hair, urging me for more. The sounds of her moans filled the room, each one making me harder than before; I had to fight the urge to whip it out and slide it into her immediately. I didn't want that. For the first time, in a long time, I wanted to *make love* to a woman and I would, with everything I had in me.

I sat up, peering down at her with a devilish grin upon my face. Her body coiled like a cat as my own digits, intoxicated with the fragrance of her, moved

leisurely down her golden, caramel body in sweet, stroking investigation, tracing the gentle crevice between her breasts and the supple flesh of her stomach.

When she removed her sweater and bra, I have no earthly idea; I was preoccupied with something much better at the time. The pinkish hue of my fingers looked almost foreign against the sumptuous texture of her honeyed skin, but the feel of her heat pulsating against my fingertips felt perfect.

Where my hands moved, my mouth followed, like sweet dangerous fire, burning my mark into her chocolate exterior. Finally, overcome by a need to be joined with her, I guided my stiffness inside, savoring the feel for as long as I could. There was a torrid heat inside of her as powerful as the blazing sun in the sky. So caught up in the feel of the wet, hot folds contracting and releasing around my cock, I was hardly aware of the lips that tantalized my pink nipples.

And beyond that, I hadn't even noticed that we were completely nude, her sweet, deliciously bronzed body wrapped perfectly around mine.

There was a resistance in her not to moan, forcing her not to enjoy the moment. She had been held down with so much shit that tonight, our night, I would make her release everything and feel all the pleasures that she had been denied.

"Moan for me, baby."

She said nothing, just rotated her hips up towards mine, as she licked my bottom lip. I pulled my face away, wanting her to work for her reward.

"I said moan, Cassy," I commanded with a heavy, stern voice and pressed my fullness into her as deep as I could go.

I gave her no choice, and her mouth opened, releasing everything she had in her. Digging and diving into her, I felt so close to a climax. I didn't want that. Not now, too soon. I stopped, pulled out, gradually grazing her inner thigh with my swollen organ, and lay against the bed on my back.

She wasted no time climbing back on, locks of her curly hair sticking to the corners of her lips and forehead.

"Don't tell me the infamous Bobby is giving up?" She began moving on top of me, and I watched her through half closed eyes.

My fingers ground into her hips, as they bounced and bounced—Oh God, they bounced—up and down, giving my dick a workout it eagerly appreciated.

"Of course not, baby. This is all about you. Take it Cassy; it's all yours."

Moan after moan rose in her throat; I loved every minute of it. I wanted her to moan the fucking roof off if she could. With her hips glued to mine, I slid my hands up her sides and cradled her to me. Her eyes connected with mine and her speed slowed down. She gradually rolled her sweet, wet nectar against me; our eyes locked on each other's for what felt like a blissful eternity. It was that precise moment I realized I wasn't being fucked by some woman I wanted for the hell of it; I was making love to a woman I needed more than life itself.



* * * *

It was Saturday morning when I awoke, expecting Cassandra to be cuddled up next to me, but instead she was crawling around on the bedroom floor for her clothes. I sat up in bed, the black sheets gathering in a pool of fabric in my lap. I smiled as I watched her round ass bobbing up and down as she rummaged. She had propped herself on her knees when she saw that I was awake.

"I have to go," she said casually, pulling her sweater over her head.

"I thought maybe we could go get breakfast."

Hell, what did one do after making love all night long? This was the first time the woman was actually still there in my bedroom in the morning.

She stood and slipped into her panties, gazing at me with a condescending schoolteacher façade.

"I don't think so, Bobby." Sitting, she stepped into her pants and was ignoring me, as if we hadn't just spent the entire night fucking.

I scooted up behind her, planting a kiss on her neck; the scent of sex lingered in her hair.

"Why you being so mean, beautiful?"

She stopped dressing and turned to face me.

"I'm not being mean, just realistic. Last night was a mistake. You got what you wanted, so let's just leave it at that." She stood, zipping her pants and using her fingers as a human comb through her ragged hair.

I climbed out of bed, mad as hell.

"No, Cassy. I didn't get what I wanted. What I

wanted was you. If I wanted a piece of ass I could have slept with any woman, but guess what, you're not any woman to me."

"You know what, I'm not an available woman, either. I'm married, Bobby and you knew that before you started all this shit."

"You know, you better put an end to that tone of yours, woman. I know you're not trying to blame me for what happened last night. I didn't force you to fuck me, Cassy. And that's really what's bothering you, isn't it?"

She didn't answer. She just stood there with her arms folded across her chest. I approached her, cupping her face in my hands.

"You just can't swallow the fact that you've found what you've always been looking for. It just so happens it's not your husband. I want you, Cassy. I want to be everything to you, and that's saying a lot for me." I drew her into my arms and held her tight.

"Oh, God, Bobby..." she broke off.

"Shh. Don't say anything. Go home and make things right. The way they should be. I'll be over later," I said, rocking her in my embrace. I kissed her softly, feeling my love for her intensify with every second that passed. She took my hand in hers and kissed it lightly.

"I'm sorry, Bobby. I'm so sorry," she whispered before she turned to exit the room.

I had no earthly idea what she was apologizing about...that is, until I made the biggest fool of myself later that afternoon at her house.



* * * *

I had within my heart all the highest expectations about Cassandra and I. I hadn't felt so alive, so happy from a woman's touch in so long. She was special to me, and I just knew we would spend the rest of our lives together. I had prepared the apartment as if she would move in that very next day. Okay, that was a bit premature, but I was in love; rational thinking was far from my mind.

I stood outside her front door, anxiously waiting to see her beautiful smile again. This time I was hoping Tom would answer the door. I wanted to see the look of failure on his face so damned bad.

As I waited, I was preplanning a romantic dinner for the two of us, when the door finally opened. It was Claudia, Daddy's Little Girl. She snarled at me as if I was the human equivalent of a disease.

"Hi, angel. Is your mother home?" I asked with all the sincerity in me. I mean after all, I was her future stepfather.

She took the sweetness of my voice and the politeness of my words totally the wrong way and assumed I was flirting with her. And I had an ego? Oh, please.

"Angel? Don't you think you're too old for me, Mr. Powell?" she asked.

I see she wanted to get smart. Okay, she was a bright girl. If she wanted to play games, I had no choice but to accept the challenge.

"Oh, I'm sorry, my dear. I didn't mean to give you that impression. I prefer the older version. I assume

she's able to handle my services much better than a little girl."

Placing her hands on her hips, a mirror image of her mother, she was about to give me a mouthful of sass, but was interrupted by that man's presence in the room.

"Who's at the door, Claudia?" asked Tom.

"Nobody, and I seriously mean, nobody."

He guided her out of the way and stood in the doorway, a questioning look on his stupid face.

"What do you want?" asked Tom.

"Cassy," I said quite honestly.

"She's in bed sick. Must have been something she ate last night."

"No it was probably something she swallowed. She had quite a lot of it in her mouth last night." I leaned my head back, laughing at my own sexual joke.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" He asked.

There was that macho side of him coming out. I was not impressed in the least bit.

"Listen man, I don't want to make this some drawn-out occasion. I just came to see Cassy. I'm sorry it had to be like this, but you should have learned how to love her." I pushed my way into the living room.

"Excuse me. You know you got a lot of fucking nerve coming into my house, making all these ridiculous accusations about my wife." screamed Tom.

I sat casually on the sofa, spreading my arms wide open across the back.

"Funny, you say that as if you give a damn, when the truth of the matter is you could care less who Cassy's sleeping with."

He leapt towards me, grabbing me by the collar and jerking me up from the sofa.

I know he didn't put his hands on me. This bastard was asking to get his ass killed.

"You're a second away from me literally throwing your sorry low-down ass out the door."

I pushed him away from me, my eyebrows raised and my nostrils flared.

"Man, I will kill you. Play with me if you want to. You have no idea who you're fucking with."

"Bobby! Stop this insanity right now," I heard Cassy screech from behind me. She stood in the entrance of the living room ready to rip into me, and I'm not talking about sexually, either.

I approached her and took her hands from her waist, placing them in my own. Massaging her knuckles gently, I searched her eyes, trying to look past the anger and into the love that once bled through those blue circles.

"I thought you told him! I told you to go home and make things right," I whispered.

She jerked away from my grasp, as if she had no conscious idea what I was talking about.

"There's nothing for me to tell Tom, and I am making things right," she bellowed loudly, peering over my shoulder.

He was too busy ushering his children outside and to a neighbor's house to even notice her 'noble stand' against my proposal of affection. I drew close, not

knowing he had come into the room.

"Don't do this, Cassy. Don't deny what you felt last night. This is your chance to get away from this marriage." I tilted her chin, forcing her gaze to lock with mine. "Don't walk away from me, Cassy."

"Get your fucking hands off my wife." Tom demanded, while he pulled me away from her body and cradled her close in his arms like a trophy.

He probably hadn't held her like that in ages, and that was the sad part.

"She's too good for you, you know. You don't even deserve to breathe the same air that she does," I grunted.

"Bobby, please leave." Cassandra said in a small voice that was almost nothing.

"Not without you."

"Where do you get off believing Cassy is going to leave with you?"

I slid Cassy's frame to the side and got up in his face. "I'm not talking to you, so you stay the hell out of this," I snapped, ready to reach into him and yank his heart out.

He drew a steady breath, leered back, and punched me.

Collecting my thoughts and my senses, I was about to kill the bastard.

"You punch like a girl." I punched him back, double-time.

"Oh, my God, Tom." Cassy ran to nurse him.

What the hell... what about me? Shit, he was a big boy; he could handle it.

"Go get my gun, Cassy. I'm gonna kill this son of a

bitch right now." Tom squawked at her.

I watched her cup his face in her hands and press her forehead against his.

"Why is this shit happening in the first place, Cassy? Why's he here saying all these things?"

I bent down, resting my hands on my knees and taking deep breaths, all the drama causing havoc on my usually mild asthma. She sat down, burying her face in her hand.

"Tell him, Cassy. It's now or never. Tell him about our dinner last night, and how we made love all night long. Tell him, please," I begged. Blondie stared from me to her, searching for the truth, I suppose.

"Cassy, did you sleep with him last night?" asked Tom. Her troubled face went from me to him in a series of expressions and finally she spoke.

"It's true, we did have dinner last night as a celebration about the project, but," she looked at me with sad eyes...eyes that almost said to me *I'm sorry*, "nothing happened between me and Bobby."

"Cassy, no, don't do this, please. Don't let the situation intimidate you like this," I pleaded as I shook her shoulders, almost breaking her in two.

Tom quickly pulled me off of her and shuffled me towards the door.

"She's lying, man. I'm telling the truth. Cassandra and I are in love, and we made love, too..."

"The day Cassandra Ryan lies to me will be the day the earth comes to an end. She's the most honest woman I've ever met. You get the hell out of my house, you sick bastard, and don't ever come back. If you do, I swear I'll kill you," he said through

clenched teeth, as he pushed me outside the door, slamming it shut.

Never had a woman hurt me so much...made me feel so rejected and unwanted. It made me want to...

"Cassy....no!" I screamed, clutching the side of the railing.

Tears blurred in my eyes, and my heart throbbed against my chest. I sat down on the top step, watching the tears drop and lightly stain the denim covering my thighs. It wasn't an ending. It was a beginning: the beginning to my need to have that woman in my life, permanently and I would get her at all costs. Standing and wiping my eyes before anyone saw that a woman actually made Bobby Powell give a damn, I gazed up at the house towards the living room window. I knew she was watching me. I could feel it, even though I couldn't see her silhouette amidst the curtains.

"It's not over. Not by a long shot, honey." I made my way down the stone steps to my car.

Chapter Five

Jhe next day in class, she made it her mission to avoid the subject and me completely, but I had other plans in mind. When class ended, our last class at that, I quickly maneuvered my way through exiting bodies to get in her pathway.

She was looking down and almost stepped on my foot when we ran into each other. I grabbed her arm and pulled her over in one of the aisles. I probably looked a wreck. I had a final debate to give in my next class and I was half way out of my attire: shirt almost unbuttoned and my shiny blue tie dangling around my neck.

Speaking of clothes, she was incredibly sexy that day. She had always come to class as if she were already a practicing lawyer, but that day—that day she was in this wispy white dress. It flowed so smoothly around her voluptuous body, as if it would fall off with one small gust of wind. And her hair was down, curls dancing about the flawless chestnut complexion of her face. She looked as if she had lost some submissiveness and gained some life in her soul from our sexual encounter...but I digress. God, was

she gorgeous. I could have made love to her again right there with every fiber in my soul.

"Cassy..."

"Bobby, please don't make matters worse than they already are," she whispered, looking to see if anyone was watching us exchange words.

"I'm disappointed in you. I never would have expected you to do something like that. It hurt, Cassy, it really did. You made a fucking fool out of me," I whispered back.

Everyone had left the room, and she slammed her books down on the desk.

"Damn it, Bobby, what did you expect me to do? I have a family to think about, and I'm not about to lose them over one night of passion."

"You know damned well what's happening between us is far more than sex." I grabbed her and jerked her close to my body, a move that I suspect she enjoyed. "Look me in the eye and tell me you're not falling for me," I said softly against her lips.

Her eyes searched mine. I could feel her lips quiver, knowing she would fail the test.

"Bobby, please don't do this to me."

"Say it, woman, and only then will I leave you alone." My brows snapped together, irritated by her resistance.

"Cassy, you ready to go to lunch?" I heard a voice ask from the back of the lecture room. I let her go and she slowly backed away from my body.

"I'll be with you in a minute, Michael." Cassy gathered her things and pulled herself together. He approached us with the cocky stride he would carry

for life. The red-headed bastard. Lord, I hated him!

"You know, Bobby, going into criminal law is a real good career move for you." Michael said, placing his arm around Cassandra's shoulders; only to infuriate me, I suppose, since I had never seen him do it before.

"Oh, yeah, Webster, and why is that?"

"Well, I'm pretty sure you'll be able to sympathize with your clients, you being a stalker and all. I mean damn, you have stalked this woman to death, haven't you?" Michael teased.

"Fuck you, Michael. Never mind, I take it back, you probably do swing that way, since your stupid ass is full of shit all the time."

He chuckled lightly as Cassandra dropped her head in hidden laughter at my comeback.

"Real cute, Powell. Good luck on the BAR."

Shit! I had forgotten all about that. I hadn't even signed up to take the damn thing.

"Cassy, when are you taking your exam?" I asked, hurrying to catch up with them at the door.

"I pre-registered. I'm in the Saturday session since I have to take Claudia to choir rehearsal on Friday. If you haven't signed up yet, you better do it soon or they'll assign you to any session without caring if it accommodates your schedule or not. Good luck, Bobby, with whatever you do." She expressed, blinking and turning to walk away from me.

Oh, I intended on succeeding in absolutely everything I approached, including making Cassandra Morgan my woman.

I managed to get the last space for the Saturday

test. I learned early in life that my charm could get me almost anything. So with that in mind, a promised-date and a fuck for the lonely old bag in charge of registration, I secured my ticket. Not only that, but a ticket in the seat number right beside my Cassy.

You know, come to think of it, I never took that woman out. Hell, it doesn't matter now; I probably would have given her a heart attack anyway. Besides, those three days before the exam I was too physically drained to fuck anything.

My days were spent skimming over the law texts that I had accumulated over the course of my studies, and my nights calling Cassandra, but she never answered. Either she was avoiding me, studying like crazy or as I suspected, a mixture of the two. Needless to say, law and the love that developed for Cassy, soon became the only aspects of my life that received my undivided attention.

I remember getting to the examination room quite early that morning. I was so nervous. If I flunked this fucking test, years of study and money would be flushed down the drain, then I was going to be one mad son-of-a-bitch.

I gazed down at my watch every second it seemed, waiting impatiently on two things: for the goddamn test to start before I forgot everything, and to see my African princess take her rightful seat beside me.

Overcome by my childish behavior, I laid my head down on my desk, an action I hadn't done since I was in middle school.

"What the fuck is happening to me?" I tapped my pencil against the side of the desk, trying to out-beat

the rhythm of my ticking watch.

"I thought you hadn't registered? How'd you manage to pull this one off?" asked Cassandra, slowly sitting down beside me with a speculative look upon her face.

My head shifted to face her, still resting upon the wooden desktop. "The same way I pull your clothes off, easily and carefully," I replied with a boyish grin.

"I need all my concentration for this, Bobby, please don't screw around like you always do. I have to pass this test; it's imperative."

"And you will pass. I have complete faith in you. I have complete faith in us as well."

Her head snapped towards me. "Bobby, I thought I told you not to screw around with me."

I sat up and raked my hand through the back of her hair, massaging her neck with my fingertips. "Don't you think it's a bit late for that, Cassy?" I whispered seductively.

"You're proud of that, aren't you? Especially the fact that it got a rise out of Tom. I can see it in your eyes."

I grinned devilishly. "Well, I am proud that it got to Tom, but as far as you and me, I want more, Cassy. I want you." I reached across the empty space of the aisle and placed my blanching hand on top of hers.

She sat still for a moment, gazing down at the bi-colored digits entwined within each other with analyzing blue eyes.

"You make everything seem so simple, so easy. It may be to you, Bobby, but it's not for me. I have too much to lose."

I squeezed her hand tightly and felt her muscles contract, then squeeze back.

"For every thing you lose, my love will replenish it with...I don't know exactly what I want to say. Maybe I should have taken more English classes. Cassy..."

"Bobby, you think you're in love with me?" she asked with a slight smile on her face.

I became nervous. It was the first time I had ever admitted out loud to her and to myself that I had fallen in love with her, in the brief moment of time we had together. I wanted to tell her more, but fear tricked me into hiding all my feelings.

"I mean, I've developed strong feelings for you. Feelings I haven't felt for another woman in ages," I mumbled as if I was an awkward teenager again.

As she brought my hand to her warm lips and brushed them against my flesh, it felt as if she was opening up her heart for me, and for the first time, I was excited about something other than climaxing during sex.

"Bobby, Bobby, Bobby...what am I going to do with you? I don't know what to say, except that I doubt you're falling in love with me. Wanting the woman you can't have and falling in love with her are totally different things. You don't even know that much about me."

"I know you make the ice in my heart melt, and I also know you feel the same. It's in your eyes. Those contacts may hide your true eye color, but they'll never be able to hide your true feelings, Cassy."

The instructor began making his preliminary

speech about rules and regulations of cheating, as if he gave a damn one way or the other.

"I find you irresistible," I whispered.

She took out her pencil, freshly sharpened, and changed into her down-to-business façade as her eyebrows slanted. "What your ass needs to do is stop talking to me so I can pass this damned test."

"Yes, my love." I felt a newfound confidence as if we had crossed a new boundary in our relationship.

As the instructor made his way between our two rows he set the thick examination down on our desks. I shot a quick glance from her to the paper, determined to pass in order to convince society I was ready to practice law, and to convince Cassandra that I was ready to be her lover forever.

When I finally finished my test, which was nothing but page after page of statutes, laws, and 'what if' questions, I found her outside in the back parking lot on her car phone. My aim was to walk up to her and flirt my ass off, but when I noticed the worried and frightened look on her face, I paused for a moment.

As she finished her phone conversation, she became bleak and troubled.

If that blonde bastard is trying to keep her kids away from her, I'll kill him, I thought, assuming she was admitting her feelings about me to Tom.

Okay, perhaps I had a slight ego back then.

"Cassy, are you okay?" I asked, kneeling down at her car door so that I was eye level with her.

She gradually placed the slender black phone down on the sleek leather of the car seat and peered at me through the window. Taking a series of deep

swallows, she opened her mouth to answer, but suddenly leapt for me, grabbing onto my neck for dear life. I could feel her heavy breathing against the side of my neck and the vibrations of her muffled scream as well.

"Baby, what's wrong?"

"Daddy died this morning," she whimpered into my shirt collar.

As I held her tight, I recalled the feeling of losing my mother when she committed suicide. I knew all too well the pain from the loss of a parent. I've always felt as if that was one of the main things that connected Cassy and I. Perhaps God, if he exists, brought us together to heal one another's pain, but I don't want to get too philosophical with you.

"Oh, angel. I'm so sorry. Hold on to me all you want, precious. I'm here for you, always," I said quietly in a somber tone.

"Thank you. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to attack you like that. I just needed to grab onto something."

"It's perfectly okay."

I began wiping her tears away with my thumbs and then something extraordinary happened that totally convinced me of her feelings for me. Without any persuasion on my part, for a change, she reached for me willingly and lightly kissed my lips. I could taste the salty texture of her tears in that kiss, as if she wanted to share her pain with me. I lurched forward, pressing my lips even harder to hers.

"I have to get home and get ready to go to the airport," she said, when we finally broke apart.

I closed the car door for her and rubbed the back of

her neck through the car window.

"Call me later. I'll come with you. You shouldn't be going alone."

"Bobby, I won't. Tom will be with me."

Damn it. For one sweet second in time, I had forgotten she was ever married to the ungrateful son of a bitch. My disappointment in my reality check must have been showing on my face because she felt the need to wrap everything up in one brief, yet cruel summary, before driving off.

"I'm married, Bobby, and to be quite honest with you, I probably always will be. You like to put on this 'I don't give a damn' act, but deep down inside you're a very caring man. But really, you shouldn't waste your time on my affections. I'm not worth it. Goodbye." She began backing up.

God, the way she said "goodbye". It sounded so...final, but if I had anything to do with it, nothing was final until that woman was mine completely. I didn't care how long it would take; Cassandra Morgan would belong to me.

Chapter Six

Q stood in line at the bookstore with my cap and gown slung over my wrist, waiting to make my purchase. Graduation was the last thing on my mind, as my body inched closer and closer to the cash register. I felt this need to be with Cassy through stormy weather, safe and warm in my arms. I should have gone with her; she needed me. I just knew it. And it was funny, without her there, I felt lonely; the thought of knowing she was around, anywhere, seemed to comfort me.

"Undergraduate or graduate?" asked the cashier, preparing to check my name off an endless list of computer printouts.

"Robert Powell. I'm a graduate of the School of Law. Hey, let me ask you a question?" I set my things down on the marble counter.

"Yeah, shoot."

"Has a woman by the name of Cassandra Morgan, I mean, Ryan, placed an order for her cap and gown set?"

He looked at me questioningly.

"That's confidential information."

Confidential information, my ass. Sometimes I believe rules were made up by bored assholes, just to give them something to do. I leaned forward on the counter, trying to fight the urge to stare at his thick uni-brow that stretched for miles across his forehead.

"Come on, man, help me out. My friend's father died yesterday, and when she gets back, I doubt she'll be in the mood to fight this crowd just to pick up a damned cap and gown. I want to make things easier for her by buying it. Come on, what harm will it do?"

He sighed and gave into my persuasion. Flipping through the pages, he had trouble finding her name.

"I don't see it. In fact, I can't find yours, either. Oh never mind, here's the two of you, under the Honor Graduates."

My elbow slipped off of the edge of the counter, and with my charm, I tried to play off my shock. Cassandra I was certain would be an honor graduate, but me, that I wasn't anticipating. She really had an impact on my performance in school.

"Really? Umm, of course. I'm sorry I didn't mention that."

"Yeah. Top ten in the class, apparently. Anyway, I see she already ordered it. Want me to get it and add it to the purchase?" he asked, opening the swinging door to make his way through the stacks of packaged fabric.

"Please." I answered, leaning against the counter smiling.

Wow, top ten. Pretty impressive.

I had decided to follow my intuition and hand-deliver Cassy's cap and gown in person...wherever

she was. I remembered that she and Tom came from a southern state, but which one, I didn't know.

Through a lot of snooping and prying around in personal records, I managed to find the answer and immediately bought a plane ticket to Georgia. The lonely country roads I went through in the rental car seemed to comfort my soul. It was as if I was driving through some oil painting that someone just couldn't stop working on. It was breathtaking and majestic; something this city boy took to heart.

It was hard, stepping out of the car into the pouring rain at the funeral. Perched under the stripped umbrella, memories of my mother's funeral flooded back to me. I could still see her stretched out on that bed of white satin, looking beautiful with death's cosmetics painted upon her lovely face.

God, I missed her; she was the only woman I had ever cared about, until now.

As I approached the scene, I saw her standing close to the casket, with her loved ones close by. I stood under an oak tree, quite a distance from the ceremony, with its wet peat moss dripping down on my umbrella. I looked up into the sky at the rain, the world offering a few tears of sympathy for the passing of her father.

There she stood, with a cloak of mourning wrapped around her. Tom was on one side of her, with his arm thrown around her shoulder, as her head rested comfortably on his.

"That should be my shoulder she's crying on." I thought, swallowing the knot that had formed in my throat.

The woman standing at her other side must have been her twin sister she had mentioned. Her mirror image held her hand tightly, as a dark haired gentleman occupied the other hand. Her husband, I assumed. They were twins, gorgeous and sexy in every way, but I could tell by their composure that Cassandra was the classy one, which only made me love her even more. The children of the two grieving beauties stood in front of them with their heads lowered, as if they recited a prayer in unison.

Then family members and friends laid roses and tulips on top of the raised casket. They moved in turn to get into their cars and limos, and began the procession towards the house.

I thought then, perhaps I should've gotten back in the car. I only wanted a glimpse of her; not cause a scene, but when she turned, she saw me. Our eyes connected, and she blinked, as if her grief had conjured up this apparition of me. Those delectable eyes of hers darkened dramatically, as her soul seemed to be reaching out towards me for comfort.

I flashed a sympathetic grin, threw my hand up and turned towards my car, deciding to visit her at her family's house later that night, when all the visitors had gone.

After getting directions from three different town's people, I finally found the Morgan family home. I don't know how I could have missed it, though. One would have to take a thousand steps back just to take it all in. It was like something out of a Southern Living magazine, full of style and grandeur. Carefully, I approached the front porch and

conveniently, she sat against the Roman architecture of the one of the columns along the framework.

"So you really are here. I thought maybe I was imagining things."

I smiled and sat down beside her. I laid the bouquet of white roses in her lap, searching for the right words to say.

"Yeah. I just couldn't let you go through this alone. I mean, I know you're not alone, but..."

"I know what you mean, Bobby," she said, saving me from my rambling.

"Cassy, I know you're probably angry at me for following you here, but I just had to."

She took one of the flowers and rubbed the white petals against the side of her cinnamon-hued cheek and closed her eyes.

"I'm not mad. Life's too short for that. Thank you for caring enough to come."

I looked at the windows of the house at the shadowy figures that grazed against the laced curtains, wondering if Tom was amongst them.

"Where's Tom?" I asked.

Her eyes opened with a surprised look on her face, as if my voice had stolen her away from her fantasy and back to the harsh reality of that moment.

"Oh, Tom's next door visiting his father."

"You two lived next door to one another?" I asked.

A slight grin spread from one corner of her petite mouth.

"Yeah, all our lives. His father and mine were like brothers, but I'd rather not think of that right now; I'd rather not think of anything, to be quite honest with

you. I just want to be. What's in the bag?" she asked casually, brushing the rose across her lips as she spoke.

"Your cap and gown. I went ahead and paid for them." I handed her the plastic bag.

"You do too much for me, Bobby. Too much," she said with no emotion whatsoever.

It was as if something of herself died along with her father. Slanted light creaked forth upon the floor of the front porch and a curved silhouette followed.

"Cassy, aren't you going to invite your guest in?" asked the woman emerging from the door.

I stood and held my hand out to help Cassandra to her feet. She placed her hand in mine and squeezed tightly, as if grabbing onto the tendrils of my pounding heart.

"No. He didn't come to visit for long. Bobby Powell, this is my sister Cassondra Tantaltonni," she said cryptically, as if she hadn't wanted us to meet at all.

Cassondra held out her hand and turned it downwards, indicating for me to kiss her soft, brown skin. That would be what a true gentleman would do, but the only skin my lips would ever touch would be Cassy's, so I took it, shook it delicately, and took my rightful place beside Cassandra.

"So you're Bobby. I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Powell. You're a long way from your neck of the woods, aren't you?" asked Sondra.

"Well, I came to give my condolences to Cassy and your family. I know the pain from the loss of a parent myself. May I say how absolutely beautiful you look

in the moonlight, Mrs. Tantaloni? But I suspect it's because you're Cassandra's twin; she's always radiant." I admired Cassy.

"Thank you, I think. I don't know if you gave me a compliment or not. Maybe Cassy should be thanking you instead." She stared at the two of us, sides close together in front of the tall white column. I'm sure we looked picture perfect, at least I thought so.

"Sondra, weren't you about to go somewhere or something?" Cassy scratched the top of her head.

"Oh, yes. I'm going to go see Sonny. It was nice meeting you, Mr. Powell."

I nodded, as Cassandra ran up behind her sister to catch her before she made the first step off the porch.

"And why are you going to see him? Girl, Andy is going to flip the hell out." She preached with her grip fastened tightly on her sister's arm.

Sondra's eyes flared with brightness as if she was Satan himself.

"I'm not in the mood for this, Cassy. I need him. Especially tonight. I need to be comforted and held by someone I love," turning she looked back at me and smiled politely, "and if I were you I would do the same, if you know what I mean." She snatched her arm away and bounced her way down the steps to her car.

I stood there, watching Cassy, as she followed the movement of the car until it was out of sight, down the dark highway, disappearing in the horizon.

"What was that all about?" I asked.

"Sondra has always been reckless and now...now she's sleeping with her brother-in-law. Personally, I

think she's fucking with fire. Antonio is not a man you play with. His whole family isn't. That's why Daddy..." She choked on the word, and I drew near her from behind, ready to catch her suffering in my arms.

"Daddy never liked that marriage."

I placed my hands on her shoulders and gave them a squeeze. Her skin was warm and soft, making me recall the feel of it against mine when we made love.

"I wasn't talking about that part." I whispered beneath the jungle of curls covering her ear.

She sighed and turned to face me. We were close and I had to fight all the urges in me not to press my lips down on hers.

"What are you insinuating, Bobby?"

"Just how much have you told your sister about me?" She drew closer and my senses went wild.

"More than you know, Powell." Her sweet palate was inches from my mouth.

"Cassy, get your tail in here right now." Her mother demanded from the front door.

She startled us, her words pouncing on us like a stalking tigress.

"Mamma, umm, let me introduce you to..."

"I don't give a damn who he is. Get in here right now. Tom's on the phone, and he wants to speak to you," she snapped. Cassandra took the phone and buried the receiver in her chest.

"I'll see you back in Pennsylvania, Bobby. My family will be there for graduation. Thank you for everything." She picked up the bookstore bag.

She began conversing with that bitch she called a

husband, and her mother sneered at me as she passed.

"Goodnight, Mrs. Morgan, and I'm sorry for your loss," I said politely, reaching into my slacks for my car keys. She said nothing clear; grunted, growled or both and slammed the door in my face.

* * * *

That week was a long one for me, from the last day of class all the way up to graduation. I stood outside the auditorium in my cap and gown and felt only emptiness. I should have been on top of the world—I mean, I was finally getting my law degree, but it meant nothing without Cassy.

As they began to assemble us by schools and in alphabetical order, I saw her amongst the other graduates. She was being hugged and kissed by her entire family before they exited inside. I felt so alone when I witnessed that. I had no family, no one to wish me good luck or to say congratulations. It was as if through some telepathy she felt my loneliness, and I saw her approach me with a warm, loving smile painted across her face.

"Hi there, Mr. Honor Graduate," said Cassy as she playfully tapped my tassel.

"I still don't understand it—me, an honor graduate. The world is fucked up sometimes."

She threw her head back in laughter, her dark curls glowed and shone in the afternoon sunlight. God, I wanted to slide under her gown and just have a celebration of my own. With that thought, I licked my

lips, but I doubt she even noticed.

"You're telling me. No, but seriously, I'm proud of you. I came to give you a hug." She wrapped her arms tightly around me, and I buried my face in her neck.

"I'd rather you give me something else besides a hug," I whispered in her ear, sliding my hands down to her ass and giving it a slight squeeze.

I felt her body tremor and shake before she pulled away. She held my pale hands within her coffee-colored fingers, and gazed into my eyes with so much care.

"Bobby, this is neither the time nor the place for that."

"Ah, I see. So what you're saying is that later, at the appropriate time and place, you'll allow me the pleasure of tasting that sweet body of yours again." I pulled her close, licking the side of her neck.

She moaned quietly and gradually placed her hands on my chest, pushing me back.

"Stop it, you. I didn't say that either." I took her delicate hand in mine and lightly kissed it.

"Okay, love, I'll be good, but only for you. God, I love you, woman."

"Bobby, I wish you wouldn't say that. Those three words shouldn't be taken lightly. Nothing can ever come of us, and..."

"Cassy, those three words don't come from my lips that easily either, so when I say it, I mean it. You're wrong, something will come out of this. I know you feel it, too. You can't lie about that."

Her head dropped, knowing I was right.

"Bobby, I'm married. It's not as simple as you think."

"Then divorce the bastard.... I mean, Tom."

"Bobby, be nice."

"Sorry, Freudian slip. Seems simple enough to me."

She opened her mouth to explain, but instead just rubbed my freshly shaven cheek.

"I wish I could make you understand. Listen, you better go up there, they're doing the P's now." She pressed her full lips against my ear, her hot breath beating against the flushed flesh. "I'm falling for you too, Bobby, but baby, that's all I can give you; words and nothing else."

She made her way through the assembled bunch to greet some fellow graduates, and I stood there, bursting with happiness. That was the first time she had ever admitted to me that she was falling for me; God it felt good to be me that day. Standing in line, I mentally made a promise to myself. I would follow Cassandra to the ends of the earth to earn her love, then I would cherish that woman's love until the rest of eternity.

Chapter Seven

Q arrived at Cassandra's home late that night. The lights were still on and cars were lined up along the street. It must have been a graduation party. I needed to see her, to talk to her before I began my journey back to that place I had spent years running from.

I was walking up the steps to the front door when something made me stop. I leaned against the railing and peered up at the door. No—maybe the back door was a better idea since so many people were there. I changed my direction to swing around to the back of the house, where I found a patio and pool. The night was hot and sticky; the only relief came from a breeze that broke in from an unknown direction.

I sighed and sat down in one of the patio chairs, watching the moonlight dance across the ripples of the water. For the first time, ever since I had started my quest for Cassy's love, I felt doubtful and pessimistic. I mean, why not? I had lost everything that meant anything to me. Why not her, too?

I reclined and gazed up into the starlit sky. *Why me, God, why does all this shit happen to me?*

And so, I asked him myself.

"My father used me like some porn-shop novelty; my mother killed herself when I needed her most, and every woman I've ever been with has been some fucking slut picked off the streets. And now what? Look in there. He has the most beautiful, loving woman in the entire world, with two gorgeous children. Why God? Why are you doing this to me?" I said into the darkness.

"God's not doing this to you; you're doing it to yourself." Cassy said, leaning against the glass patio doors. She drew the curtain behind her and approached me, her hair bouncing and flowing in the night air.

She wore an emerald green dress that split on the side, her chocolate leg exposed seductively. She absolutely took my breath away. My body melted as she moved towards me, the scent of her arousing memories in my heart.

"What?" I asked, quite angrily.

I mean, after all, how could she even begin to understand all that I've gone through?

"God didn't do anything to you. True, he allowed it to happen, but sometimes he puts us through tribulation to make us stronger, so that we are more deserving of our rewards that are yet to come." She sat on the patio table in front of me.

Her legs crossed and I massaged the softness of her ankle as I looked up at her.

"And what's my reward, Cassy?"

She stood and gazed into my eyes for a long moment.

“I don’t know, Bobby. That, I can’t answer. What are you doing out here?”

“I need to say something to you before...wait, I know how to do this.” I reached underneath my shirt collar for my necklace.

I unlatched it and squeezed it hard in my hand; the ring attached to it left a pink imprint on my palm.

“What are you doing?” she asked. I slipped the silver band off the chain, its row of diamonds glittering like her eyes.

“My mother owned a jewelry store before she met my dad, and he forced her to sell it. This eternity band was the only thing she kept from it. She said she tied it to my crib when I was a baby and as I got older I began to wear it around my neck. She used to say no matter where she goes, she’ll love me for an eternity and since then, I promised to always keep this ring out of love, and to only give it up out of love.”

My cheek twitched, and I tried desperately not to cry, but it was a battle I was to lose. She took her hand and caressed the fallen tear as it slowly glided down my cheek.

“What are you trying to say, Bobby?”

“In my mother’s will she told me to go away for school, because she didn’t want me to go through the shame people would put on me from what she had done. She said that after I had completed all my studies to return back to Michigan, because she had a surprise waiting for me. I won’t be gone long, I guess. I really don’t know what she meant, but I have to go to her lawyer’s office and see. I want you to keep this.”

I slipped the ring on her ring finger of her right hand, our eyes connected in a deep trance. I knew in my heart that I would be doing it again, someday making her my wife.

"Bobby, I can't keep this, I mean..."

I pressed my lips firmly to hers and silenced her with a passionate kiss, one that left me breathless, I must say, but I'm not bragging.

"I want you to keep it to know I'll be back. And when I do come back, you're going to be mine, that's a promise I plan to keep as well." I kissed her lightly on the forehead.

She stood in silence for a while, studying the ring on her finger.

"But I have nothing to give you—or maybe I do." She exclaimed, taking my hand and slipping it underneath the slinky green fabric, covering her cleavage.

"I've never wanted anyone as much as I've wanted you. You make me feel alive, and you make me feel things inside that I never thought I could feel. You've been in my thoughts, my dreams, and my fantasies every since the day we began to breathe the same air. I can still taste you on my lips, and God help me, I want to feel your body against mine every night, if I could. Bobby, I want you—all of you." And there she gave me the one thing no one had ever given me—the beating of her heart, pounding beautifully against the palm of my hand.

She kissed me once on my wet lips and made her way back into the house. I stared down at my hand and clenched it as if I was holding her love in my

grasp, never letting it go.

"I'm coming back. I promise," I said into the silence of the summer night.

* * * *

Once I exited the terminal gates at the airport, I knew whom I had to see. No, not the lawyers; there was someone I needed to talk to who was much more important than anything the lawyers had to tell me. Sitting in the back of the taxi, I peered out of the window at familiar buildings as the cab driver made an attempt to carry on a conversation with me. I answered his questions as simply as possible, mentally preparing myself for my next destination. I don't know why I felt I needed to talk to her. I just needed some contact with her, even if she couldn't answer me back.

Leaning over the cracked window, I paid the driver and watched the yellow vehicle scramble away, its white stripe glistening in the city sun. Turning, I could see the tombstone over the maze of shrubbery.

There was a pain in my chest like a jabbing needle as I made my way through the cemetery. It had been an eternity since I had last been there but for some reason the pain felt real, as if I was about to witness her being laid to rest all over again. There was an elderly woman tending to a grave nearby. When I passed, she smiled slightly, but I didn't respond. I just focused on the path into the cemetery, leading me straight to my mother.

Staring at her name, forever inscribed on the

headstone. I wished that somehow I could forget that she ever existed. Then I wouldn't have to feel the pain of missing her.

I didn't bother with flowers and I couldn't even shed a tear. The connection we had in life was strong, that I knew without a doubt, wherever she was, she knew what I felt and the pain that still lingered from losing her. I wasn't worried, and I wasn't afraid. I sat down by her grave and began my conversation as if she was there seated at the kitchen table, where she used to listen to me babble on and on about everything and nothing.

"Hey, Mama. Been quite a while, huh? I'm sorry I haven't visited in so long. Been trying to get my ass through school and you know what—I finally did it. Yeah, I got my law degree the other day. I wish you could have been there. Hell, I wish you could be anywhere except where you are now, but perhaps it's better where you are, I don't know. Never been too religious, you know."

I needed to see her face, so I reached into my pocket and pulled out a small picture of her from my wallet.

"Anyway, I'm back to keep this promise I made to you—see what this surprise is you have for me. I've got a surprise for you as well. I'm in love. She's wonderful, Mama. I'm glad you were never a prejudiced woman, because she's black. A gorgeous woman who's the sweetest thing I've ever laid eyes on, besides you that is."

I chuckled lightly to myself, remembering how much my mother loved compliments from me.

“There’s just one problem; she’s married. But don’t worry—that will be over with soon. She doesn’t love him the way that she loves me. I’m not in a rush; I’d wait an eternity for her. I gave her your eternity band. That’s how much I love this woman. I hope you’re thinking of me, Mama. I’m always missing you. I need to go back to the hotel room now and give her a call. Love you.”

* * * *

I paced back and forth in the empty room, impatiently waiting for Cassy to answer her cell phone. I glanced over at the calendar the last tenant had left behind. It had been a little over a week since I had last heard her sultry southern accent. I didn’t want to call her at the house and take the chance that Tom would answer.

The bastard didn’t intimidate me, if that’s what you’re thinking—just wanted to avoid him at all costs.

Finally, on the hundredth ring of the day she answered.

“Woman, I swear you are hard to get in touch with these days, aren’t you?” I joked into the receiver.

“Bobby, *hey*,” she answered excitedly.

I sighed, overwhelmed with joy at the sound of her voice delighting in the rapture of my call.

“Hey, baby. You have no earthly idea how much I’ve missed you, Cassy.”

“I think I know the feeling. Oh, God, I’ve got so much to tell you,” she said ecstatically.

I turned and noticed my reflection in the window. Man she had to be the only woman who could make

my blue eyes twinkle on command.

"I have some things to tell you too, but let me go first before I lose the nerve to do this."

"But, Bobby, I really need to..."

"Cassy Baby, let me say this, okay? I visited my mother's lawyer, and they told me that she left me some money to help me get on my feet when I was done with school. Actually, a lot of money, but I only get half of it right now." I leaned against the kitchen counter.

"Well, Bobby, that's great. And you thought good things didn't happen to you. See, God looks out for everyone, just like I told you."

"Hold on for a minute; there's more. I only get the other half after I've worked for an entire year. I guess my mom remembered how unfocused I used to be. And the senior partner at the firm was very impressed by my school record, so..."

"You're not coming back, are you?" There was a solemn, dead tone to her voice.

"Don't say it like that." I replied.

"Well, obviously I'm right, aren't I?"

"No, not the way you're thinking. I am coming back just not tomorrow, or the next week like I had planned. I was offered a clerk position in the firm and I've taken it. Moving into my new apartment as we speak, but I'm coming back. You're all I want in life Cassy, trust me, I'm coming back."

She was silent for a moment then I heard her let out a long sigh into the receiver.

"You believe me, don't you? I am coming back to be with you, Cassandra. I cherish what you mean to

me."

"I guess. I have no choice but to believe you, right?" she answered.

"Don't be like that, baby. Please don't." I slid down the smooth wood of the counter and onto the black tiled floor.

"I'm not being like anything, Bobby. I'm happy for you."

"Yeah, I can hear it in your voice." I uttered sarcastically. "Why don't you tell me what you wanted to tell me?"

"It's not important now," she said, being difficult about the whole thing.

"Oh, Cassy, just tell me already. It must have been important for you to be so excited about it. I really want to know."

She sniffled a bit; she was crying slightly, and I felt the urge to reach through the phone lines and hold her in my arms for comfort.

"I just wanted you to know that I am in the process of moving my father's law firm."

I chose not to question her about other reasons for staying, her pause told me everything I needed to know. She was ready to say farewell to the dark of night and see the coming of the sun. She was staying in Pennsylvania to be with me.

"Hey, that's great, Baby. You'll have your firm established and you'll have the time to settle things with Tom. When I come back, everything's going to be perfect." I meant and believed every word I was saying.

"I guess." She answered like some wounded

animal.

"Cassy, I don't fall in love every day. I'm coming back, but if you don't believe I am, then what the hell is the point? I might as well stay here and find someone else to make love to at night."

"Why do you insist on being cruel to me, Bobby Powell?" she whimpered into the phone. Even across the miles between us, I could still feel the sharp intake of her breath whenever she was crying.

"I'm not being mean, angel. I get so angry when you don't believe in us. Have I ever lied to you before, Cassandra?"

"No."

"All right, then. When I say I'm coming back I mean I'm coming back. I love you, woman," I said, stroking the slender receiver as if I was massaging her soft, brown skin.

She let out a small giggle, and I felt better.

"I just don't want you making promises you may not be able to keep, Bobby. If you say you'll be back, then I believe you, but remember this—no matter what happens, I'll always have a small part of you with me."

We vowed our love to each other one last time and then the conversation ended. I stared into the emptiness of the apartment and was overcome with fear. What if she was right? What if circumstances of the future held me here longer than I expected? Cassandra meant too much to me to play this fucking what if game. If I wanted things to go the way I planned, then damn, I would have to keep a close eye on them myself.



Chapter fight

Six months had passed. Fear of Cassy moving on and forgetting about me forced me to make idiotic decisions, while I was in Detroit. I became involved in a brief relationship with this woman, only because she reminded me of Cassandra, physically.

Personality-wise, she was something the devil had dreamt up. Egotistical and cocky in every way.

I know what you're thinking—we sounded like a perfect match, but you know what they say...opposites attract, and she simply was not my Cassandra.

Desiree—God that woman drove me to a madness I never thought existed in me, and one day I exploded. Unfortunately, she was caught in the crossfire.

"Damn it, Bobby! I swear that was a good fuck." She was muffled by my shoulder blade.

The rough sound of her voice was the only proof I had that she was there in the room. As I tasted her and moved within her, I only thought of Cassy being wrapped around me. Desiree was just a body there, a

replica of the true angel of my heart.

"Thanks, Ray. That's so romantic," I answered, unsticking my body from hers.

"Oh, you know you like it when I talk dirty." She always tried snuggling near me when we finished having sex.

I turned away from her and rolled over on my side, repulsed and sick to my stomach by my actions as I thought of Cassy. I wanted that woman more than life itself and all I could have at the moment was this high-class whore by my side.

"I've got to work in the morning. I'm going to sleep."

She slobbered a kiss upon my neck.

It was as if my emotions had made my body numb and cold; I ignored her full lips of affection, closed my eyes, and tried to keep my faith alive for Cassy.

And then it happened.

My cell phone began to ring. Desiree usually answered my phone whenever I was asleep or busy, so I didn't bother to open my eyes. It never occurred to me that Cassy would call after all this time.

Soon, the cell phone awakened me, ricocheting across my forehead.

"Who the fuck is Cassy?" yelled Desiree.

"Woman, what the hell is wrong with you?" I yelled back and got out of bed.

"I couldn't get to your cell phone in time and the voice-mail got it. Who the fuck is this Cassy bitch, saying she misses you and all that shit?"

I paid no attention to her anger. I hurried out of bed and scooped the phone up from the floor.

She continued yelling and squawking in the background, as I held the phone to my ear, mesmerized by the sweet sultry tones of my Cassy, missing me and warming my heart all over again.

I turned and held the phone to my chest, my body alive with the essence of her in my soul. For a split second, I had forgotten Desiree was there. In fact, I had forgotten she even existed until she marched up to me and slapped the goofy grin of infatuation off of my face.

"You're pushing your luck tonight, woman," I grunted under my breath.

"You muthafucka! Who's this ho you been fucking behind my back?"

A slight smile spread across my face. It was funny, she assumed she was the number-one woman in my life and that Cassy was the other woman. As far as I was concerned, there was no other woman but Cassandra.

I raked my hand across my mouth to hide my amusement from her and contemplated how to answer.

"I'm not sleeping with anyone behind *your* back. Cassandra is very special to me," I answered, calmly slipping into my boxers.

"So refresh me, but what am I? I mean, are we not together?"

I sat on the bed and peered up at her, glaring a fiery hole in her body.

"About the only thing we do together, Ray, is fuck, and besides..."

My cell phone began vibrating in my hand and she

angrily snatched it from my grasp. I heard Cassy's voice say hello, and that's all she could get in.

"Listen, bitch, he's my man now, so you just calm your hot ass down and back the fuck off." Desiree yelled into the slim, gray electronic receiver.

I snapped.

She had no right to yell at her like that. Something came over me and my anger and frustration with my life collided, erupting into an upheaval of destruction.

I jerked the phone away, clicked it off and grabbed her by the throat. I pinned her against the bedroom wall and breathed on her like a dragon ready to devour every bit of her flesh.

"You are just some whore I picked up to waste time until I was able to get to her. She's a real woman, one you can never compare to, so don't you even try. I love that woman more than anything. If you ever talk to her like that again..."

"What? What you gonna do? You such a big man; what you gonna do?" she said.

I was infuriated now. Apparently, the fact that my hand was squeezing her throat and I was fully prepared to rip it out didn't affect her at all.

Reaching beneath her hip, I twisted her arm behind her back and threw her down on the bed. I slapped her as hard as I could, but that wasn't the part that scared me the most.

The fact that I couldn't stop hitting her was what did me in. If I could hurt her that way, then perhaps I didn't deserve to be with any woman. I transformed into a monster, and 'til this day I have regretted that night, that terrible moment in time with every fiber of

my being.

I'd rather not continue if the reader doesn't mind. I wish it was one of the events in my life that I could wipe out, forget; just block out of my memory for always, but unfortunately it'll always be there. Let's just say she ran. Desiree ran as fast as she could away from what I had become.

Ever since I met Cassy, I've had no control over my emotions—the good or the bad. I had to get back to her before my eruption of emotions made me explode as well.

I dropped everything. I gave up on my mother's promise, quit my job and took off. I was running back into the arms of my African goddess. I was driven by something inside of me that had no name and didn't fall into any category. It was more powerful than love and beyond what we humans call obsession.

* * * *

I stood at the silver luggage carousel when he noticed me. Michael Webster was not the first person I wanted to welcome me back to Pennsylvania. He strutted towards me, his eyes squinting as if I was something he conjured up from his idiotic imagination. He placed himself between me and the path towards the front gates of the airport, smiling like the redheaded annoyance that he always was.

"Powell. I thought you went back home after graduation? Back so soon?" His hands dug deep in the pockets of his gray slacks.

"That was only temporary, Mikey. I had to come

back for something."

"Either you really love that woman or you're totally obsessed with her," he exclaimed, escorting me along the pathway to the doors.

"Why can't it be both? Obsession can be a good thing."

As he held the door open for me, I wondered why he was taking so much time to be so damn nice to me. It hadn't been that long since graduation. I mean, he did remember that I couldn't stand him?

The pasty- faced bastard!

"Just can't stay away from here, huh?"

"Michael, I would love to stay here and reminisce with you, but I need to get a hotel room before it gets too late."

"Why don't you stay with me until you figure out your next move?" He said *next move* as if I was some psycho stalker with an agenda.

I set my bags down by my feet and stared at him in silence for a while. I chuckled lightly, then flashed him a peculiar gaze.

"Webster, you do know I don't swing that way don't you?" Stay with him—what the hell did he have on his mind?

"Bobby, you really need to get rid of that ego of yours. As difficult as it may be to grasp, believe me, every woman, man, cat, and dog in the world does not want to sleep with you. I know what went down between you and Cassy." He paused.

"Yeah, so?"

"She's my best friend, and I care an awful lot about her. I also know she feels the same for you. Why, I

don't know, but..."

"Michael, cut the bull and get to the point. God, I hope you're not like this in court."

His creamy forehead furrowed, as if he wanted to respond to my remark. His Adam's apple contracted, swallowing his comeback and storing it for another encounter, I suppose.

"If you honestly want to build a life with her, that's fine with me. Whatever makes her happy, but you can't just waltz into her life again after all these months. There's a lot that's happened and it looks like you need an informer right now. Who better than her best friend?" He stretched his arms out in an embracing gesture.

I raked my hand through my coarse black strands and peered at him through the slits of my fingers.

"What the hell do you get out of this, Michael?" I asked.

"It's called being a good friend, Powell. You should try it sometime, you know."

I wasn't in the mood to fight him, and I was wasting precious minutes of my life standing there talking to him so I just gave in.

"Whatever, let's go. You're so damn righteous sometimes you make me want to throw up. You sure law was the right career move for you?"

He said nothing, only smiled from the corner of his mouth. He slung his brown leather satchel back over his shoulder and led me to his car.

* * * *

I quietly made my way into the courtroom, trying to seat myself as close to the front as I could. She was so wrapped up in her closing argument that she didn't notice my presence. Watching her maneuver, I released a sigh of relief, as if I had just climbed Mount Everest. I couldn't believe it. She was about a foot away from me and still, that wasn't close enough.

Her hands spoke and moved as eloquently as her words. In mid-sentence she turned on those dark green heels of hers and our eyes connected. Her expression transformed into anger as her hands dropped down by her sides. We stared and stared, as if those were the last moments we would look upon each other.

The sudden tension was thick and strong; it filled the entire courtroom.

"Ms. Ryan, are you able to continue your closing arguments?" The Judge's voice echoed through the silence.

She turned slightly, her gleaming blue eyes widening under her reproachful look. She assured him with a nod and continued.

As the jury exited to make their decision, she marched towards her seat, glanced at me for a nanosecond while rolling those delectable eyes in disgust, then having a private conversation with her partner.

I was a disturbance in the balance of her world now, and I decided to wait for her outside when the trial was over.

I sat on the top step of the courthouse, legs spread and gazing out into my own world. I was back, but so

what? What did I have to offer her, but my heart? I wasn't sure she wanted that anymore. That look—God she had never stared at me like that before, not even when she was mad me for starting that fight with Tom.

I leaned back and relived that night. It brought a somewhat satisfied smile to my face. I had accomplished something important that night: wedging myself in between their bullshit marriage, and forcing her to realize she loved me.

I was jerked from my memories when Cassy exited the courthouse.

"You know, I hate you so much. You have a lot of damn nerve showing up here," Cassy screamed in the midst of whacking me across the shoulder with her bright legal pad.

"Damn, woman, what's wrong with you? That shit hurts." I massaged my abused shoulder.

"I'm glad it hurts. I want you to feel pain. I want you to feel so much pain that..."

"Cassy, is everything okay?" Her partner asked, as he interrupted our so-called reunion.

She slid her pad into her black leather briefcase and flashed him a comforting smile.

"I'm fine, Jack. I need to handle some things here, so why don't you head back to the office without me; I can catch a cab."

"Are you sure?" he reiterated, looking me up and down.

I don't know what he was thinking, but he wasn't about to start something with me because I wasn't in the mood, especially after being attacked by her

without any notice.

She took his arm and whispered to him as she ushered him down a few steps. Watching him until he disappeared around the corner to the parking lot, she peered back up at me, now standing, waiting for the showdown.

"What are you doing here, Bobby? You want to do more damage to my life?" she ground out, her eyes beaming with anger as she approached me.

"That's not fair, Cassy. I didn't force you to make your decisions."

"You're right; no you didn't. I regret those decisions, and wish I could go back in time and fix everything you've destroyed."

"I don't understand this attitude. I thought you would be happy to see me," I exclaimed, my voice rising.

Her mouth opened slightly and she swung her head side to side.

"Oh, yes, everyone loves Robert Powell. I should be worshipping the ground you walk on, shouldn't I?"

I grabbed her wrist and squeezed it tightly, jerking her curved frame to my body.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" She tugged herself out of my grip and pulled me behind the cylinder white column amidst the shadows of the building.

"So tell me about her, Bobby. Is she blonde? Good lay? Is she drop-dead gorgeous?" She blinked then swallowed hard, tears forming in her eyes. "or was she just another piece of ass like I was?"

As I looked into her blazing blue eyes, I remembered...Desiree. I sighed and tried reaching out for her.

"Cassy, baby..."

"Don't you dare 'Cassy baby' me. You played me for a fool. I was about to give up everything too—I was going to give up everything to be with you." She turned her back to me. I rushed in front of her and unfolded her arms.

"Well, you now you know how it feels. Night after night, thinking of you lying in bed beside that sad excuse of a husband of yours. And let's talk about him. Why haven't you divorced him, huh? If you were so ready to be with me, why are you still with him? You can't answer that, can you? Because you're a coward, Cassandra. If you couldn't have me then you were going to settle for him, was that it? Was that it?"

She kept turning her face away from me. Then finally her head lifted, tears streaming down her creamy mahogany cheeks.

"Because Tom was there when I was pregnant with your child and Tom was there when I lost it. When all I wanted to do was die, Tom was there. Where were you, Bobby? Tom was here when I needed you—that's why I'm still with him. He's a real man; he stuck around." She quickly dried her tears and rushed down the stairs, leaving me there, pinned against the courthouse from shock.

Chapter Nine

*L*ife is full of chances and risks; therefore, if we have nothing to lose, is it safe to say we have nothing to gain. I thought, as I sat at the bar, finishing my fourth beer.

I always felt philosophical when I was half-drunk. I never was a drinking man, but that night I needed something to make me numb—numb enough to stop the pain I was feeling until I couldn't even feel myself breathing.

Fuck! I was so angry I felt like fighting the next guy I saw, but someone was looking out for me, because the next guy I saw, turned out to be my ticket back into Cassandra's life. I knew it was her partner, Jack Craven, but I was so entranced by the seduction of alcohol, that it didn't sink in until later in the conversation.

"Don't I know you?" he asked, seating himself beside me at the bar.

I gazed at him through hazy vision. My first thought was to ignore him and just leave, hoping I would wander out into the street like the drunk I was

and get hit by a car, but something made me stay and talk with him.

"Got a girlfriend or wife?" I asked.

"No."

"Well, you probably don't know me if you don't have any woman for me to sleep with. That's how us male whores operate."

He ordered his drink and casually laughed at my self-pity.

"Bad day?" asked Jack, loosening his tie.

"Man, bad life. I totally fucked things up with this woman. I mean she was intelligent, sexy, great in bed, and I loved her. And today, I found out she was pregnant with my child, and I wasn't even there for her." I took a big gulp from my bottle of Miller Lite.

He stared at me for a moment, with his head tilted to the side.

"You're Bobby, aren't you?"

I met his gaze squarely, as I pondered how the hell he knew who I was; regardless of the fact that he worked with Cassy.

"Yeah, I am. You know Cassandra?"

The bartender brought his drink and flashed him a friendly smile.

"We work together. I'm a partner in her law firm. I saw you earlier today at the courthouse. I'm Jack Craven."

He held out his hand, and it took everything in me to get up enough strength to shake it, since I had been sitting there in that same position for so damned long.

"Yeah, I remember, but I never told you my name."

He took some petite sips from his shot glass, then

gazed back over at me.

"Oh, I know you, all right. A little too much about you, I'm afraid."

I threw my hands up in the air and laughed.

"Damn, for a woman who wanted to keep something secret, she sure hell couldn't; telling the whole goddamn state. It's almost as if she's proud of it."

I pushed my half-empty bottle of beer aside, not wanting to drown my sorrows in the brownish-yellow substance for the moment.

"Well, I wouldn't say that. She needed someone to talk to when, well, you know – when Tom left her."

I cocked one eyebrow and tried to figure out if I was hearing right, or if the beer was doing a number on me.

"Say what?"

I stayed at that bar late into the night, talking with Jack. I insisted on knowing everything, and Jack withheld nothing from my ears, but for it to mean anything, I had to hear it from the source.

It was early that next morning, my head was pounding and my stomach ached. I don't know what I was hurting from more; my hangover or my confused heart. How I got her to agree to meet me I have no idea, but as I sat in the coffee shop, I saw her enter straight out of the rays of the sunlight, like an angel descending from heaven. She stood there for a while in her short gray skirt and jacket, eyes perusing the shop until they stopped on me. She sighed and made her way to the table.

The closer she got, I could tell she had been crying.

She tried concealing the puffiness of her skin with make up and her dark eyes were bare from her usual blue contacts. She always said it was hard to get them in when her eyes were watery.

"Good morning. You look ready for business," I said, gradually drinking the hot liquid swimming in my cup.

She unbuttoned her jacket and draped it across the back of the chair before sitting, flashing me a deprecating smile.

"Well, I have to meet with a client after this—whatever this is." she said.

Her head was held high, and she seemed to be looking past me, avoiding contact with me altogether.

"First of all, I want to apologize."

"Do you even know what you're apologizing for, or are you just using it as a tactic to get back to me?"

I reached for her hand, and she pulled away. I wrapped it around the brim of my cup instead and stared down at my reflection in the black pool of caffeine.

"Cassy, please just hear me out. You said what you had to say yesterday; now it's my turn." I looked up at her with a quick glance. "I'm sorry for everything I've put you through since the day we met. The lying, the cheating, tearing your family apart, everything. The only thing I'm not sorry for is loving you. I'll never be sorry for that." I lifted my head and found that she was staring at me.

Her body relaxed and she leaned forward, towards the tabletop.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have laid all of that on you

like that yesterday. That was really mean of me."

I leaned forward and took her soft hands in mine.

"Why didn't you tell me? You knew I would have been here in two seconds flat if I had known you were pregnant with our child."

"I tried, Bobby. I really tried, but you threw that news on me about you having to stay in Detroit for a year. I just couldn't."

So that's what she was trying to tell me that night. Why couldn't I have kept my fucking mouth closed?

"If you would have told me, I wouldn't have stayed."

Her hands slowly slipped from mine and rested in her lap.

"I know, that's just it. If you were coming back I wanted it to be because you loved me; I wasn't going to force another man into marriage because of a baby. Hell, I didn't know what to do. Maybe God knew that, too, and that's why I had the..." She couldn't even bring herself to say the word 'miscarriage'.

"Baby, if anything you should have told me about that. It was mine, too."

She shot her gaze up to me sharply, like a calculating panther. Those dark eyes narrowed and pierced through my heart like a razor sharp knife.

"I did call you, but your girlfriend picked up instead. Even after the miscarriage I still was willing to be with you, but you had gotten what you wanted, moved on, and the hell with what it did to me."

I reached into my wallet and pulled out a picture of Desiree, prepared for her attack.

"Yeah, you're right, I was a bastard, but I was an

insecure bastard, too."

"Ha, you don't know the meaning of the word." she said, her voice rising.

"When it came to you, I did. Here's a picture of her." I slid the picture towards her along the smooth surface of the table.

Swiftly, she pushed the picture away. "I don't want to see that."

"Look at her. Go ahead."

She obviously didn't want to, but she grabbed the picture from my hand and studied it closely. Gradually, she placed it on the table and stared at me in awe.

"Look familiar?"

"Are you trying to tell me you were with her only because she looked like me? Bobby, that's not an excuse."

"I'm not using it as an excuse; I'm using it as proof that I never stopped thinking about you..."

She stood and struggled back into her jacket.

"No, what this proves is that you're crazy. That's sick, Bobby. You used that woman and I'm supposed to see that as being romantic? You really are a crazy son of a bitch, you know that?"

Now it had gotten personal, and I had to retaliate.

"Oh, come on. You would do the same thing." I smiled from the corner of my mouth as I leaned back in the chair.

"I don't think so," she answered.

"Yes, you would. If Tom had dark hair, blue eyes, a great body and a hell of a package, *then* I could understand why you choose to stay with him. You

would have a carbon copy of me, wouldn't you, and no doubts? But guess what, Cassy—you'll always have doubts. Until you walk away from him, rather than just push him away. Unfortunately, the bastard just won't stay gone, will he?"

She slung her purse strap over her shoulder and propped her hand upon her right hip.

"You egotistical punk, you. I hate to say it, but I'm glad I had the miscarriage. There was no way I was going to bring another you into this world. One is enough. Fuck you, Bobby."

"Fuck me? Fuck you," I yelled back.

"Listen, you stay away from me, my family, everything. You're sick and I'm tired of you poisoning my life with that sickness. I can not believe I thought I was in love with you. Boy, was I a fool."

She stormed off. I watched her bounce away, and my mind told me to let her go because Bobby Powell chases no woman, but for the first time in my life, my heart won the argument.

I threw some bills on the table and raced after her. I usually had a plan in my head, but now everything was a complete mess.

"Cassy, don't go. I need you," I screamed. She stood at the edge of the street, prepared to cross.

When she heard my voice, she froze at the first syllable from my lips. I waited in tortured silence, wondering if she would turn and come back to me. I saw her upper body lift and fall in a sighing motion, then she continued on her way, leaving me there in the coffeehouse doorway, feeling like total shit.



* * * *

I stayed with Webster until I started working at a friend's law office and was able to find a place of my own. I also began following Cassy again. She needed more space, more time to realize we belonged together and I understood that, but I would be damned if she was going to turn my life completely the fuck around and walk out as if everything that happened between us had meant nothing.

I kept my distance and allowed her to grow as a mother and a woman and she blossomed into an individual. She finally walked away from that worthless marriage, and for two years I stayed away from her, but not once did I stop loving her.

I soon had enough money to go into practice myself, and we met again, by fate this time.

I was delightfully surprised when I saw that she was the prosecuting attorney in the new case I had picked up.

I sat in the boardroom of her practice with a portrait of her father staring down at me. I blew him a kiss, assuring him I aimed to take good care of his daughter.

When she marched in, head held high and gorgeous as ever, she sat adjacent to me with her professional façade painted across her luscious face.

"Okay, Mr. Powell, I'm ready to negotiate if you are." said Cassandra.

I missed her so much, my body was aching to touch her, but I kept my cool. I was not going to be the one crawling back, not this time.

"I'm surprised you're handling this case, actually."
I opened my briefcase.

I caught her as she stole a glance at my familiar physique.

"Why is that? Don't think a woman can handle a rape case?"

"No, that's not it. Just didn't think you could handle me...in court, that is."

She tapped her silver pen against her right temple and flashed a slight smile.

"Good to know some things never change. To be quite honest with you, I didn't know you were handling the McNeil case until two days ago. Who I'm up against never concerns me. Are you ready to talk or not?" she replied, quite confidently.

"Oh, yes, you've created quite a reputation for yourself." I adjusted my chair so that she would be forced to look at me.

I knew the effect my baby blues had on her, and she's right, some things never change.

"Must be hereditary." She winked at the picture of her father.

Preparing to open her briefcase, I stopped her by placing my hand on top of hers. Her dark brows arched, debating how to react to my touch.

"How have you been?" I asked.

"This meeting is supposed to be about McNeil, not the fact that we used to sleep together, Mr. Powell."

Her fingers were outstretched, inviting me to hold her hand and never let go this time.

"Oh, is that what you're calling it now? I hate to tell you, baby, but it was a lot more than that. Or are

we still playing the denial game? After all these years, you still can't accept what you feel."

She leaned in towards me.

"You listen here, Counselor, I'm not taking your shit. Not now, not ever. And another thing..." Her feisty words faded into silence when Jack entered the room.

"Everything okay in here?" asked Jack.

"Everything's fine, honey. I've got it under control."

Honey? What the hell was that?

He gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze before leaving and she blushed. It maddened me to even contemplate the thought of him fucking her.

"Are you ready to talk plea bargain or not, Mr. Powell?" she asked, grinning, instantly knowing what I was pondering.

"Yeah, let's do this. I'm warning you, I don't give up easily."

"And I'm warning you Bobby, I don't go down without a fight."

As she spoke, I had a feeling we were referring to more than the McNeil rape case.

Chapter Ten

Q t was pure war in that courtroom. We weren't fighting for justice anymore; we were fighting to win, to beat each other in the game of language and legal play. She was amazing in action. That same sweet voice that curled its way around my ears to make my dick stand up on contact was sharp in court, carrying with it a determination to intimidate and manipulate, but I was just as good, and that's what she wasn't counting on.

It went so fast I was drowning in sweat from the battle. Objections flew from both corners, accompanied by quick comebacks and witty litigation. God, it was a turn-on, and eventually we had forgotten the Judge, the client, the jury were even there—just us, our fighting wit and our growing passion for each other.

"Objection, Your Honor—leading the witness," she blurted out. I leaned against the witness stand, opened my jacket and peered across the courtroom at her. A flush ran up her fine-boned face.

"Exactly, Counselor, leading the witness to tell the truth. Where'd you find this one anyway, in the

gutter?"

Judge Wilson began banging her gavel. Cassy stood, her cat-like eyes narrowed.

"Of course not, Counselor; I wouldn't dare roam near your home."

"Oh, we both know that's a damned lie."

"All right, that's enough from you two. Approach the bench." Judge Wilson ordered.

We stood, looking at the judge like wounded puppies ready to be reprimanded by a rolled up newspaper.

"Your Honor, I know we got out of hand, but..." I tried wooing her with my award-winning charm but we had crossed the line with her for the last time.

"I don't want to hear anything you have to say, Mr. Powell, and I'm damned surprised by you, Ms. Ryan. One more display like that and I will hold you in Contempt. Do you understand?"

"I understand," said Cassy, pivoting on her heels to take her seat.

She flashed me one last *see what you've done* look before smoothing out her skirt and sitting.

"Continue with your questioning, Counselor, but keep it professional."

I nodded and continued with the interrogation.

* * * *

She was more relaxed when I saw her again that day, seated outside the courthouse on a bench, curly hair draped on her shoulders with a half-eaten sandwich in her hand.

I had just dropped off some papers for a client and took a chance on approaching her; I figured after everything, I had absolutely nothing to lose. She had already left a burn in my soul that I had carried inside of me all this time.

"May I join you?" I asked, standing cautiously away from her from fear that she might have one of her anger tantrums and kick me or hit me again.

If I didn't know better, I'd swear she got off on that. Her gaze lifted speculatively.

"Why can't you just disappear?" she asked rhetorically.

I took a few strides closer to her as her blue pupils narrowed slightly.

"Now see there you go being mean again. For all you know, I could be coming over here to apologize."

She swallowed the last bite of her ham sandwich and dusted her hands of crumbs.

"Your apologies mean nothing to me Bobby. Similar to your promises."

I removed my blazer and joined her on the bench, my arm thrown on the back of the black ribbed seat.

"Do you honestly hate me that much?" I was peering into her eyes for the truth, since I knew her mouth would do nothing but spill forth lies to try to keep me away.

Her fingertips tap-danced on the ball of her knee as she seemed to debate her next words.

"I've never detested anyone until you crossed my path, Robert Powell."

Cute, she called me Robert, knowing how much I despised it. I grinned, impressed by her game of

hardball and scooted closer to her until our sides touched. Her body jumped from shock or if you ask me, it was from need. But everyone is entitled to their own opinion, I suppose.

"You are so full of shit. I do believe I could chase you forever, and that still wouldn't bother me. Remember what I told you in law school; I don't chase and I don't beg, so you should feel damned privileged."

That's it, Bobby, put on the charm once again.

She cracked a smile and bit down on her bottom lip, groaned and rubbed the back of her neck.

"You are macho, egotistical, sexist, hard-headed, obsessive, and manipulative. So tell me-why the hell do I keep falling for you?"

I didn't answer. I was curious about that myself, but I was glad she was back to her old self again. I leaned forward and gently kissed those lips. Ah, I remembered that taste, so sweet and inviting like a tropical breeze. My creamy white hand rested on the copperd flesh of her stomach underneath the soft fabric, and I thought about the child that we never got a chance to see.

"I'm sorry, for everything," I said as I rubbed her stomach.

I was apologizing for the pain, the confusion and my absence during a time in her life when she really needed me, but she didn't catch on.

"It's okay. It was actually funny. I haven't had that much fun in court in a long time," she said between chuckles.

She gazed over at me and I could see old flames in

her eyes flickering from her mind.

"Yeah, it was fun, wasn't it? Baby, we've lost a lot of time. Too much time. But we'll fix that."

She removed my arm from around her and twisted her frame to stare at me.

"You and Tom are so alike, you know that?" she stated.

What the hell was she talking about? I assure you, the only thing I had in common with that man was the fact we had the same taste in women, the same one at that.

"You've been sitting out here in the sun for too long; it's fried your brain." I reached for her head, pulled it towards me with both hands and planted a big kiss on her forehead, as if my lips were the aspirin to make everything all better.

"I'm perfectly fine, but you two think you can just snap your fingers and expect me to jump, right? With Tom, he decided I couldn't raise our kids alone, so he forced himself to remain in the marriage, punishing both of us and you—you think just because you're ready to pick up where we left off, I'm gonna run into your arms just like that. I'm a successful lawyer, divorced, and my kids are practically grown; I'm free Bobby. This is the first time in my life that I've been able to breathe—not just survive, but actually breathe."

A shadow of seriousness spread across her face and I couldn't understand what she was telling me.

"Are you saying you don't want to be together?" I angrily asked.

She took my hand in hers and brought it to her

lips. "Listen to me, please. I have nobody to answer to but me. Let me enjoy that for a while. Let me have a relationship with myself before I jump right back into another one with you."

She gathered her things, stood and returned my kiss with one of her own on my forehead as I sat there, baffled by what she had said.

"I won't wait for you, Cassandra Morgan, so you better do your woman thing or whatever this is and get it over with quickly."

She just stood over me and smiled, not affected by my raised voice at all.

"You'll wait for me, all right. You've hunted me, seduced me, fucked me, and chased me, so why wouldn't you wait for me, too? I'll give you a call-sometime." She turned to walk away.

The damned woman.

She had learned how to play the game just as well as me, but not for long.

* * * *

I was coming out of the drugstore across the street from Morgan and Associates when I saw their cars, parked beside each other like two lovers lying nude and vulnerable underneath the twilight blackness of the sky. Maybe I was a bit crazy in those days, but the thought of Cassandra with any man always infuriated me to the point of destructiveness. I opened the car door and threw the bag of vitamins on the front seat.

Jack Craven—he better not even think about her, let alone have fucked her.

What the hell were they doing at that office so late at night? We weren't together, I knew that, but that didn't mean I couldn't stop her from being with someone else.

I sat down, trying to make myself look away and start the car, tapping the razor-sharp edges of my keys against the dashboard, wishing it was Jack's throat.

Rational thinking had moved out on me a long time ago, the moment I met her, so I leaped out of the car and made my way into the building.

The light from her office beamed out into the hallway, saying *follow me*, as it led me back into her graces. Her playful laughter echoed as I neared the door. I stood in the doorway for a moment, taking her in and debating whether it was part of a fantasy or not; she looked the more provocative than ever.

Cassy was draped across the couch with her back away from me, one bronzed tinted leg dangling off the side, while the other moved up and down with an invitation for someone to join her. Her silky curls sprawled out on the side of the sofa and her white blouse was unbuttoned slightly, showcasing the peaks of her breasts seductively concealed by a forest of black lace. She rested a heavy law book on her stomach, as she was playing in a world of her own with a pleasant smile on her face.

"Working hard?" I asked.

She shot up and stared at me with shock.

"Damn it, Bobby! You scared the hell out of me. How'd you get in here?"

"Your boyfriend hasn't locked up yet?"

Her face cringed as she closed the book and placed it back on the shelf behind her desk. I knew I wasn't going to make it out of that office without fucking her like crazy. That navy blue skirt rose above her thighs as she reached up for the shelf. God, she was driving me wild. Turning, she let out a breath as she raked her hand amidst the black curls of her hair. My hand closed into a fist, fighting the urge to go do the exact same thing to her hair myself.

"What and who are you talking about?"

"Jack." I closed the door behind me.

Oh, she wasn't getting away from this time-now or ever. She leaned against the front of her desk; her hands folded across her chest and boisterous laughter erupted from those sweet lips.

"Bobby, Jack's gay. If he is still around, it's none of my business. As long as he does his job that's all that matters to me, because he's a damn good lawyer and I can't afford to lose him."

As she spoke, I walked toward her and she didn't run. I grabbed her and jerked her to my body.

"Just like I can't afford to lose you."

"You have to have me to lose me, Powell, and frankly, you've never had me." She spoke against my waiting lips.

"Correction, I had you from day one," I whispered.

Her hands gripped the collar of my sapphire-blue shirt and pulled my face down, my lips claspng onto hers. The silver ring I had given her before leaving for Detroit, glistened at the edge of my vision. I took her hand and held it up to her face.

"It was too pretty to hide in a jewelry box, that's

all."

Yeah right, I'm sure that was the reason. I wrapped my arms around her and just held her; the tension and anticipation of being with her had weakened me to the point where I had no smart-ass comeback.

"I love you. Isn't that funny? I can actually love."

"I love you, too, Bobby. I always will." She answered, her hands moving up and down the broadness of my back.

* * * *

We kissed and fondled our way through the door of my townhouse, desperately ready to submit to each other. We whispered words of love, and promises to remember as we fought our way out of clothes and collapsed down on the cushioned sofa. It had been so long-too long since I had touched her, tasted her, felt myself losing control with her, it was pure bliss, a feeling that no drug or aphrodisiac could imitate. I laid on top of her, savoring the view of her body.

God, she was beautiful, so fucking beautiful.

She licked her slightly parted lips, taking in my hot-eyed gaze.

"No man has ever looked at me the way you do."

"I've never wanted anyone as much as I want you, Cassy. You're bad for my reputation."

She grinned, enclosing me between her powerful thighs. "Well, you've already ruined mine, so I guess we're even."

The night was sultry, and so was my southern lover. My hand slipped underneath her, gently

massaging her thigh.

"I'll let you know when we're even."

I was already hard, so the conversation was not working as a distraction, if that's the game she was trying to play.

"Oh, I see, it's not final until you say it's final? Same *old* Bobby," she breathed.

I tilted my head towards her lips and whispered, "Cassy, shut up so I can make love to you."

Breathless, her flesh heated, she arched her body into mine, letting me know how much she wanted me. "Y-Yes, sir, Counselor."

The only real time was in that moment. That second. That touch. That kiss was all I needed to erase the shit I had gone through.

Moments later we were in my bed, both gloriously naked and without need of any suggestions as to what to do. Her body was like liquid fire, washing over me; spreading now that the shackles her false marriage had placed on her were gone.

A feeling of urgency washed over me in wave after towering wave. It was then and only then I realized I had finally crossed that horizon I had been trying to capture from the first day I had fallen for her, but as time passed, I found more challenges I had to accomplish.

Chapter Eleven

My car pulled up into the stone trailed driveway, but I sat there in silence. I stared at myself in the rear view mirror, making sure every gorgeous fiber of hair was in place and that I was looking exquisitely sexy, as always.

This was more than a dinner with my Cassy; this was a dinner with the family, a glimpse into a future that frankly, I was not prepared to look into.

Hell, there was nothing I couldn't handle, right?

They were practically adults now, no diapers to change-no nothing, so why on earth was I so terrified to walk up to that door?

This is ridiculous. I opened the car door, trotted up the steps, and rang the doorbell.

I was somewhat relieved that she was the one who decided to move out rather than Tom; I don't think I would be able to stomach anything in that house knowing he had touched it, including her. That was one thought I desperately tried forgetting. I didn't want to run into any memories of him, but there was one I wouldn't be able to escape, his daughter Claudia: Daddy's Little Girl. Well, according to the dress she was wearing, as she stood in front of me,

Daddy's Young Woman was more like it.

She shot me a sour look.

"Hello, Claudia. You look beautiful. You take after your mother quite a great deal. This is for you." I handed her a long-stemmed rose.

She studied it, a few brown strands swaying in front of her left eye.

"Trying to buy my love already, I see, how nice. Please come in," she snapped.

I closed the door behind me and propped my hand against it. I wanted to hover over her so she could recognize that I was the adult and that her mother and I didn't need her consent to do a damn thing. I chuckled and cocked one thick, black brow.

"Okay, listen up. I promised your mother I would be nice and polite, so work with me here."

She gazed up at me, with a practiced grin on her face. "I promised her the same thing, so we don't have any problems."

"Good." I seated myself on the couch.

"Fine. I'll go put this in a vase," she grunted.

"All right now, you two behave and stay in your own corners," Cassy announced, gracefully making her entrance down the twisted stairway.

I met her at the bottom, kissing her hand, up her arm and finding my destination on her supple lips, painted in a deep wine color. Her gleaming blue eyes brightened, when our lips parted.

"Cassy?"

"What is it, baby? You are looking edible tonight in that suit, you know that?" She began nibbling at my neck, and ironically, I tried pushing her away.

"I know, baby, I know...Cassy, not now," I protested.

That would be the only time I ever uttered that phrase to her, I assure you.

She lifted her head and enclosed her arm underneath mine.

"Fine, then. Baby, are you okay? You're shaking." She was trying to lead me into the living room.

I stopped her halfway and tried to hide the quivering in my voice.

"Hell no! I'm not okay. Cassy, I can't do this. I can't be a father to them."

"What are you talking about?"

"I don't know how to be a father; I had a fucked-up one myself, remember? And Claudia would rather see me run over by a bus than to see us together. No, I can't do this."

She stood there, hands on her hips with her analytic façade upon her beautiful face.

"I don't believe this. You, Bobby Powell, afraid of something? The world is coming to an end!" she said.

"Cassy, please, this isn't funny. I don't like to fail, baby."

She exhaled and cradled my face in her hands.

"Bobby, they're not a case; they're teenagers. Just take one thing at a time. This is a dinner—that's all. They already have a father, whether you want to admit it or not, and they're sixteen. What you need to be right now is a friend; you can be a role model later, okay? Now come on."

She took me by the hand and led me into the living room, where both of them sat, waiting for us.

“It’s nice to see you again, Mr. Powell.” exclaimed Clint.

He stood and shook my hand.

“Thank you, Clint. I swear you get taller every time I see you.”

“Yeah, that’s what my dad says,” he stated and then quickly closed his mouth, immediately looking sheepish in the awkward silence that the mention of his father had caused.

“I know. It’s hard to yell at him when he’s taller than his mama. But he’s always getting cuter, too. Got all these girls calling the house. He’s my little macdaddy.” She patted him on his cheek.

“Mama, come on now.”

Cassy and I sat on the love seat together, hand in hand, almost breathing the same breath. She looked at me then them and began to speak again.

“Okay, this night is important to me. I want to get everything out and in the open before dinner, so we’re going to take turns to say what we want for the future and for each other. I’ll get the ball rolling. Your father and I married under strenuous circumstances and we were wrong to keep up the masquerade for so long, but your happiness was all that ever mattered to us. It still is, no matter what. As time passed, I fell in love for real, and it’s with this man right here at my side. I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my life, but two things are for certain: I’m thankful to God for blessing my life with two wonderful children and for bringing this loving man into my life. The three of you make me so happy and all I ask is that you give this a chance ‘cause I want this to work so badly,” she said,

resting her head on my shoulder.

Her declaration of love gave me the strength and courage to speak my mind. I sat up and squeezed her hand tightly.

"Umm, I understand that the two of you love Tom and that you always will. I'm not trying to take his place, by all means. It's just a foreign idea to *love* your father, since I had such a terrible relationship with my own, but my mother was my angel and that I can understand. I suppose if any man tried to come into her life and woo her heart, I would feel the same feelings that the two of you feel. When I say I love your mother, it's the absolute truth. I have worshipped this woman since the moment we met, and I will always love her. I mean no harm to you or your lives; I just want you to open the door and allow me in." A tear swelled up in my eye, but I quickly blinked it away.

The twins looked at each other, when finally Clint took a breath and sat up right on the sofa.

"Okay, umm, you're right, I love my dad, but I also love my mom. She has always taken good care of us and sacrificed a lot to keep us happy. I guess now it's her time to be happy, and if you're it, man, more power to ya," Clint said as he eyed me.

Cassandra stood and knelt down in front of him. She kissed his bald head and mouthed the word thank you. They both turned to Claudia who sat there playing with the flaming sequins of her fire-orange dress.

"Claudia, please, baby." Cassy pleaded, massaging her daughter's knee.

She sighed and lifted her gaze up to mine, from across the cubical room.

"I know my parents are never getting back together; I've long given up on that. Just treat her right and don't hurt her. Daddy used to treat her like a princess."

"Well, she's my queen, so I guess we're okay then," I said.

* * * *

I had been sitting outside the Lord's house for a large part of my life, but with the blessing of Cassandra, I found myself tempted to enter. I thought she was the greatest gift he could have ever brought to me, until five months after our marriage, when she told me the news.

She had been bright and cheerful all day around the office that past week. We combined our firms, so now she was more than a wife and a lover but a business partner as well. Little did I know she was about to become the mother of my child, again.

I was in the study, this very study where you first found me, burning the midnight oil, when she decided to let me in on her secret. I didn't hear her enter, just felt her presence there. I shifted in the wooden chair and found her in the doorway in nothing but one of my white, button-up shirts, a giddy smile spread wide across her face. My brows arched with interest.

What the hell was this woman up to now?

"You better not let your kids see you prancing

around like that." I licked my lips at how deliciously sexy she looked.

"Tom picked them up after dinner. They're not here," she replied, bouncing towards me like a little girl.

A gurgle of irritation echoed from the back of my throat.

"I knew there was a reason why I decided to work late at the office tonight."

"Yeah, right. You're probably screwing some blonde behind my back." She wrapped her arms around my neck from behind.

My hand rubbed up and down the softness of her arm and I chuckled slightly.

Her and those damn blondes.

"Now you know better than that."

"You better know better," she whispered, lightly biting me on my earlobe.

She parked her sweet seat on top of my desk and just grinned down at me. I stared up at her, my head tilted, finger tapping against the marble trim of the desk.

"So, what's up with you?" I asked.

"You know what I miss about Clint and Claudia being babies? That baby scent...that sweet baby scent they had."

"Cassy, what's wrong with you? What did you drink tonight?"

"Bobby, I'm pregnant."

I looked at her, blinking, absorbing what I had heard.

"Did you just say...pregnant?" Standing, my body

careened into bliss.

"Yes, I'm pregnant, and don't you dare ask if it's yours," she joked.

She was lighting up the entire room with joy and I was a step away, if it wasn't for fear and anxiety. I placed my large hand on her bare stomach underneath the cotton fabric of the shirt and just stood in awe.

"What about...I mean, will there be any complications like before?"

We had never fully discussed her miscarriage; the ghost of our nameless child still haunted us. Pain filled her hard brown eyes, free from their contacts for the night.

"Depression was the murderer in that situation, baby. Everything's fine." Cassy placed her hand on top of mine, moving it up and down the warm flesh of her tummy.

I grasped her hand and she gave my fingers a comforting squeeze.

"What if I'm not a good parent?" I asked.

She brushed her hand across my temple, down my cheek, and along my chest.

"You will be. Trust me, sugar, you will."

* * * *

And she was right. She gave birth to Nicollete Powell, who's a year and half now. She's my little Nicky and I adore her—the innocent, caramel angel with blazing blue eyes and shiny black hair. She was more than my daughter; she was my redemption for a childhood

taken away from me.

You probably think this room is too much and that my love is too excessive. Frankly, I can't love her enough and if she ever left me...

Oh, God, I couldn't let her leave.

I scraped and climbed over that horizon to get to her; there's no way I could allow her to move to a new horizon. At least not without me.

About the Author

Q live in a small town of Irwinton Georgia. I am 24 years old with a BA in English literature, returning to school soon to receive my MA, in order to teach English Literature at a college level. I am African American, no children, one sister (older by 11 years), and tons of friends! Alot of people throughout my life believed in my talent, but because of troubling teenage years, I found it hard to believe in myself, until I found a way to let go of the negativity of my past and embrace the gems of my future in writing.