

A romantic couple embracing on a beach at sunset. The man is leaning over the woman, and they are both looking down. The background shows a warm, orange sunset over the ocean, with a palm frond visible on the right side.

ISLAND HEAT

*Two Weeks
Too Late*

VICTORIA HALL

The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Island Heat: Two Weeks Too Late

Copyright © 2009 Victoria Hall

ISBN: 978-1-55487-284-8

Cover art by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by eXtasy Books

Look for us online at:

www.extasybooks.com

Island Heat: Two Weeks Too
Late

By

Victoria Hall

Dedication

To my mother Edna Hall for her continuous encouragement and complete certainty that I am an author. To my sons Jordaire and Joshua for being the joy of my life. To Tanya Serber, Shelley Audet and Mabel Sweeney for going above and beyond to help me research for accuracy in my project. Last but not least, to my husband for his love, his patience, and support throughout this project.

Author Note

In Jamaica, there isn't a set form of the English language on the social level. Most educated people speak all English in a formal setting or circumstances, but in social situations, they often mix. In a comfortable situation, they move in and out of English and Broken English according to the mood and flow of the conversation. If their social companion is an English speaking foreigner, they speak more English than Broken English.

mi and *I* - I, me and my

fi - for

Raashole - asshole

Raas - ass.

Raatid – goddamn!

Dem - them

Fi - for or to

De - the

Chapter One

Toni's wide easy eyes gazed endlessly at the picture in her hand. She was certainly satisfied with the sperm donor the doctors had found for her. Its owner could be voted the sexiest man alive, she acknowledged for the hundredth time. If only he was a little more tan, she thought, inadvertently shoving her plane tickets back down into her bag. Of course, the thought of skin color lasted only for a second because she knew her own genetics would easily remedy that. It didn't matter. He was the one. She glanced up at the door that led to the doctor's office and the examination rooms as she eased back in the soft mint green leather sofa for more comfort. Funny, how she ended up getting a white man to provide the sperm for her artificial insemination. It was never her intent.

She had specifically requested an African-American sperm donor. However, the Caucasian American donor they found happened to fit all of her added requirements. His IQ was well above average, he was attending law school, he was athletic and he had no history of mental illness in his family. Nonetheless, the decision was something about which she had to think deeply.

Toni came from a long line of proud, yet paranoid, Jamaicans who would assume she was not proud of who she was if she specifically selected a white baby instead of a black baby. With this in mind, she was about to turn the donor down, but when she saw his picture—well, in addition to all of his other

attributes, she just couldn't. He was drop dead gorgeous. She knew right then and there that a child who was that good looking and sporting a natural tan would be looked upon by the world as a second coming of Adonis or Venus in black.

Mainly, she really wanted to be a mother and it took the fertility doctors three years to find a donor she would accept. Therefore, she was preparing herself for the comments that her extremist sister would undoubtedly be making.

"Because you think you're white, doesn't mean your child has to be."

She could almost hear her sister's voice echo in her ears. Emerald was a raw Jamaican girl with some radical tendencies. *White girl* was her second name for her sister. In her eyes, Toni showed her up by going to college. Her resentment worsened with every degree Toni added to her portfolio. Now, she was Dr. Dawn, a full professor at Columbia. Her name became, *the white pretentious bitch*, since a smart investment made her rich a few years back. Emerald would never believe her sister didn't purposely request a white sperm donor. Toni still hoped that she and her sister would stop the silliness and be sisters again.

Maybe in Jamaica, she thought. The busy city life had ruined the best of relationships. Toni and her sister had the best rapport when they were growing up in Jamaica. She often worried about the fact that since her family moved to America, it seemed like their closeness, especially hers and Emerald's, kept drifting apart. She took one last look at her sperm donor's picture, carefully slid it back into its protective sleeve and placed it back in her black leather purse.

Toni readjusted herself on the sofa and smiled as she imagined what her baby would look like. The possibilities were endless, but the only association she could make was with her sister Susan's baby boy, Stafford. Stafford was a cute little baby

boy with bright eyes, a great infectious laugh and a soft caramel skin tone. She loved that angelic nephew of hers. It would be amazing to have a baby like Stafford calling her mom or mommy. It didn't matter which. She smiled.

Toni uncrossed her legs, stood and slid off her leather jacket for more comfort. It's always as if these darn medical professionals, from dentists to sperm specialists, seemed to enjoy keeping their patients waiting. With the intention of tuning out the three jabbering women sitting to her left, she reached for the parenting magazine on the coffee table. Their Australian accent had lost its appeal after forty-five minutes worth of nonstop babbling. As she flipped through the magazine, she wondered how many times she would have to do the insemination before she actually became pregnant.

It had taken her three years before she found the perfect sperm donor who was also willing to present a picture. So, by God, she was going to get a baby from his sperm. It was going to be her third insemination and she hoped it would take effect this time. God knows that going to the gynecologist every month to have Dr. Blake shove her thick fingers inside her was not a cup a tea, but if that's what she had to do to become a mommy, that's just what she intended. Now, sitting there in the waiting room—an hour after the actual time of her appointment—was not going to deter Toni Sandra Dawn.

She had worse things to occupy her mind. There was the torturous *motherly advice* her mother had dispensed earlier. Her mother had especially focused on the way she had chosen to have a child.

"There are so many babies in Jamaica without mothers. Why don't you adopt a baby if you must have a child now? There are far too many orphaned black children in this world for you to do such a *white thing* as artificial insemination. We don't know

about those sorts of things where we come from. You can be both American and Jamaican, you know. You don't have to be all-American. My goodness girl, don't you have any sense at all?" Her mother had rambled on and on as she continued her verbal assault on Toni.

She heard the same reservations about how young she was to make such a drastic decision and how she never thought things through. Toni listened attentively each and every time, but the bottom line was, she wanted a baby from her own body more than she had wanted anything else in this world. Her family just didn't understand. Her biological clock had been ticking as loud as church bells in her ears since she was twenty-four. She had promised herself, for as long as she could remember, that she would not have any children after thirty-five. Thirty-five was only four years away. This was her time. It was her body and it was her choice. Did it matter she was going to have a child of mixed heritage? No. The child would be exceptional and she would be a great mom, a great single mom. She didn't want any man in her life to mess things up.

Toni had given up on ever meeting Mr. Right. Men were not her primary concern, not with her ex still fresh in her mind. If he was an example of the men she would meet, she was doomed. She was not going to allow herself to get pregnant by that adulterous, sex partner that she had saddled herself with for the past three years. No, she certainly wasn't perfect, but having a child by a taken father was never an option. She had told him that from the beginning. Even when she believed she was in love with him, enough to begin acting the role of a home wrecker, she wouldn't allow their relationship to get too deep, too involved. She wasn't sure if she wanted the burden of wrecking Steve's marriage on her head.

At this time, Toni wasn't certain that she wanted him

anymore. How could she when, whether she liked to remember it or not, he had slapped her down to the floor in front of his friend over a silly argument. No, she had closed that chapter of her life. She closed the life between them for six months, two weeks and one day. She remembered it exactly because that was the last time she had sex. Unfortunately, she did miss him. After all, they had been seeing each other for three years and he was quite comfortable in the sack. The break up hadn't quite sunk in her mind yet because she kept calling him her boyfriend rather than her ex. It was over. It had to be.

Toni wanted to get on with her life. Her best friend, Christine, was right. Why should such a distinguished woman like herself sneak around behind some woman's back for her man? Steve was African-American so she couldn't help feeling that to her, Steve's Caucasian wife, was stealing him from *her*. She hated to face the reality that she was the one who had to be sneaking around just to get a now-and-again sexual gratification. That is of course, if Steve's obligations as a husband and father of three did not get in the way.

It wasn't as if she had not prepared for their relationship to fail. Her friend was always warning her about all the bad luck that followed women who slept with married men and how their relationships always ended in failure. Toni loved Christine, but she was glad that she lived in Jamaica and visited only occasionally. She could not deal with another mother.

She could understand Christine's point of view. But she believed that her friend didn't understand that she was just a magnet for low-class bums, dressed in high-class clothes. The male specimens that she dated before she met Steve were enough to scare any woman away from dating. The man she dated, right after her breakup with Steve, was Edward, a math professor she met at City University. He was a well known and well respected,

mild-mannered professional. Yet, she had only to reach over to turn up the radio volume when he startled her half to death by shouting at the top of his lungs at her.

“Don’t fucking touch my car radio, bitch! Never, ever touch my car radio again!”

Talk about a man with two different personalities. That crude pecker was certifiably crazy. He went off so badly that Toni demanded for him to pull the car over onto the shoulder of the Belt Parkway and let her out. She wanted to get away from this nut-job as quickly as possible.

There she was, Toni Dawn, a respectable college professor with a PhD in English Literature, left on the side of the busy Belt Parkway with sleazy drivers passing by, probably mistaking her for a hooker.

“Oh yeah, mommy, how much for tonight?” yelled a rugged man from a construction truck.

Yeah, that was certainly a wild scene. A scene she would never want to go through again. Yet, one she could have avoided if she had listened to her friend and neighbor, Jennifer.

According to Jennifer, Toni should have known the mental state of this man because he was in his mid-forties, very good looking, had no kids and never been married. There just had to have been something wrong with him. It was only natural that she sought refuge with Steve. Yes, he was married, and, yes, he had a family, but he was safe. Nonetheless, that’s over now. Currently, she was right back where she was before. Going out again was something she didn’t want to do.

Toni’s friends had been hammering it in her mind that she should get out and date again. Maybe they were right. Meeting someone would probably help alleviate some of her bottled up frustrations, especially the sexual ones. Christine had been trying to hook her up with her brother, Cleave, for the longest time. The

idea was ridiculous because he lived in Jamaica and Toni lived in New York. Besides, she had no luck with men and she didn't want to have to force her friend to choose sides if things went sour between the two of them. Cleave wasn't bad looking, but she just wasn't feeling it for him. At least from looking at his picture or even talking to him on the phone, the connection simply wasn't there.

So now, she was in the waiting room of the doctor's office to see the Grand Wizard of Sperm. This way, it was quick, efficient and she didn't have to worry about the owner of the sperm passing out on top of her after he did *the deed*, snoring and drooling in her ear.

"Doctor Dawn," a portly nurse called. "You can come in now."

The nurse looked tired, but she smiled pleasantly. The weariness could be because it was four in the afternoon, exactly one hour before closing time and Toni just happened to be the last patient left for the doctor to see. It wasn't her fault that her doctor was slow as molasses.

She had to be at the airport the next morning by six, in order to go through all the check-in procedures for her eight o'clock flight. According to Doctor Blake's calculation, she was ovulating at the time. She wouldn't have known herself since she had never kept track of her cycle. Nevertheless, she had to do the sperm placement—*now*.

The nurse placed a faded hospital robe on the examination table. "Undress from your waist down and put this on. The doctor will be with you in a moment."

Toni really hated the process. If there was a better way to do it, she would have taken it, but there wasn't. *I bet any amount of money that if I didn't want to get pregnant, I would have been pregnant*, she affirmed as she carefully removed her stockings.

She assumed that Dr. Blake knew what she was doing since she heard she was a very good doctor. Nevertheless, Toni couldn't miss this appointment. If she had missed it, she would have to wait another month until she ovulated again and then have to reschedule another one.

She was going to be spending the next couple of weeks in Jamaica, perhaps longer. She probably would miss her next chance and then, the wait would be more than a month. No, that wouldn't do.

She was disappointed that she didn't get pregnant the last time she went through the insemination process because she was hoping to fly to Jamaica, pregnant. She wanted to let her old neighborhood acquaintances see that she wasn't *a poor mule, not worth her value*, as she heard that that jackass, Cindy Cooper, called her.

Toni grew up with Cindy. She was supposed to be Toni's friend, that is, until her brother tried to rape her. Cindy Cooper had defended her brother by questioning her character. She even went as far as calling her *the whore of the community*—quite a *friend*, she turned out to be. That was then. Now, Toni was above people like Cindy Cooper.

She wasn't going to drag herself down over not being pregnant because, if she was anything like Susan and Darlene, her two older sisters, she would gain a lot of weight and that would have prevented her from proudly displaying her hot swimsuits. She was half-thinking half-daydreaming when there was a knock at the door. Before she could say anything, the door opened and in came in a very handsome man.

“My name is Dr. Michael Brown. I'll be taking care of you this afternoon. How are we feeling today, Ms. Dawn?” inquired the doctor who seemed to have stepped right off a GQ shoot. The man was sizzling. He was bald, by choice. He wore a neatly

trimmed goatee and he was physically gifted. In fact, his body structure was such that his muscles were popping out of his white lab coat. He was the most handsome doctor she had ever seen in real life.

She watched him walk over to the desk and sit down. *Who is this man? Where is my doctor?* She wanted to ask him these questions “My appointment was with Dr. Blake and I was expecting her,” she declared after noticing he volunteered no explanation for the reason why he was there in place of her regular doctor.

“I’m sorry, didn’t anyone call you?” His confused eyes questioned hers.

“No.” Her agitation was slight, but obvious.

“She had an emergency,” he explained. “It was nothing serious. Someone was to call and let her patients know that I would be filling in for her today. Listen, if you feel uncomfortable, we can reschedule.” He had a deep, baritone voice.

“It’s not a problem.” She wasn’t quite sure if it was though. To be truthful, it was a problem. Someone should have told her about the change in doctors. She silently seethed as her mind wrestled with the fact that this man was definitely not Dr. Blake. Doctor Blake was a homely, middle-aged female doctor. Dr. Michael Brown was definitely not homely. She should not have to hang her rear out the back of a faded hospital gown for this Dr. Brown.

Toni didn’t want him to think that she was impossible either. How was she to deal with this man? She could have told him that she would have preferred to work with her own doctor because she was a woman. That would have been a perfectly normal reaction. A lot of females could not deal with male doctors. He didn’t intimidate her, but she just couldn’t tell him that she

wasn't comfortable with him. If she told him that, he would probably leave and then she would never get her insemination done, which wasn't acceptable to her.

"Ms. Dawn, it really is all right if you prefer a female doctor."

She wondered if he was reading her mind. Toni quickly switched on her firm defensive look. She couldn't risk smiling. He would have gotten the impression that she was pleased to have him touch her. Toni could not afford such misconceptions, at least not if she wanted him to wonder why he didn't flatter her. She always took pride in making people think. After all, she was a teacher.

"I understand that you want to have your doctor take care of you," he kept on talking.

He wasn't wearing a ring on his wedding finger. She had used her super *available* vision, which keyed on the finger of his left hand

"I wouldn't be disappointed if you chose not to be my patient today because then I would be able to ask you out to dinner. There wouldn't be a doctor-patient relationship to get in the way." He chuckled slightly, his laugh seemed to erupt from his large, broad chest.

Toni smiled while she analyzed the statement to prepare for her reaction. She wanted to find the joke in it. This baby business was serious to her. "Oh goodness, they sent me a comedian for a doctor." She smiled, rather weakly.

"What's comedic about asking a beautiful woman to dinner before I miss the chance of never seeing her again?" He used his large, brown eyes to make her melt just a little bit more.

"Well, you are too fast for me." She laughed nervously. Why was she always finding compatibility with men at the most inopportune time? If they weren't married, they were unavailable or homosexual. Ahh! This Dr. Michael Brown was gorgeous

though.

For an instant, Toni felt cheap for drooling over the doctor so much. Thankfully, she had a knack for concealing her lustful feelings. Of course, there's nothing wrong with lusting as long as the person who was the object of the lusting was unaware. What's a girl to do when her sex life was none existent? If she was a nun, she could probably be pure in thought when looking at a gorgeous man, but she was no nun. She even doubted that a holy nun could remain pure in thought, especially after looking at this man. *What am I thinking?* She scolded herself. *The fact that I haven't been with a man in a while is getting to my head.* She had been sucking on lemon for months with hopes that the juice would reduce her sexual urges, but no dice. One thing for sure, celibacy was going to be hell.

Toni was both, grateful and disappointed, when a skinny little nurse entered the room. The hard look on the nurse's face ended her thoughts of the doctor's good looks. The nurse didn't need to tell her what to do next. She was familiar with the entire procedure. She clenched her teeth and let her imagination take her away from the process.

Think Jamaica, think of a tall glass of virgin pina colada, on a sunny beach in Jamaica. The clinking sound of metal sounded like they were making a meal down there. It was a big relief when the Doctor announced he was done with the procedure. She hoped with all her heart that it would work this time. It would be disappointing if all this mess lead nowhere. The insemination was uncomfortable as usual, but it didn't seem to take as long as when Dr. Blake did it.

"Now Ms. Dawn, you know that there is only a 25 percent chance of becoming pregnant each time you are inseminated."

"I am aware of that," she asserted. She was especially annoyed because it was tiring to hear the same speech each time

her doctor inseminated her. She was very happy when they both left the room. In no time, she was dressed and out of there. She had hoped, for an instant, that Dr. Brown would have stuck his head back in the room after she was dressed and flirted with her. It would have been nice.

Oh well, too bad. She sighed as she sat behind the steering wheel of her car and rubbed her tummy. She was experiencing some cramps due to the catheter he used to dispense the sperm inside her uterus. It was an unfortunate side effect, but a necessary one.

She wondered how Doctor Brown was able to work in that area of her body without his imagination going wild. She couldn't help but wonder what he thought about while she was exposed in front of him. *Maybe I should have shaved.* A frightening honk of a large luxury truck startled her on the way out of the parking lot.

"The same to you, idiot!" She shouted to the person in the truck who gave her the bird. She couldn't wait to get out of the city and away from all its drama. It was time to get ready for some tropical fun. She beamed with excitement as she blended in with the rush hour traffic. No one or nothing could take away the excitement that she was feeling.

Chapter Two

Toni trembled with excitement as she tried unsuccessfully to relax in her first class seat. The plane's soft, gray interior invited a soothing sense of tranquility, but she just couldn't keep still. She was excited not only because she was going back to her homeland for the first time in eighteen years, but because she was sitting next to Erica Williams, a world famous pop star. Sitting next to a celebrity like Erica Williams made the flight so much more pleasing. Her mind drifted back to when she was traveling to America eighteen years earlier. She tried to compare which sensation was more exciting.

She imagined that she had been more excited back when she first left Jamaica because that was the biggest life-changing event in her entire life. She couldn't accurately compare the two levels of excitement at that moment. All she knew was that she was happy to return home.

She packed her suitcases to the brim with gifts for her friends and relatives. She didn't worry about whether or not people would like her gifts because her mother had assured her it didn't matter. If she had brought only key rings or socks, her family would have been appreciative. It was the thought that counted. Her mother, on the other hand, had mailed two barrels packed with gifts. If Mrs. Dawn didn't have the ugly tendency of bringing up the gifts she had given her friends in the past whenever she

had disagreements with them, they would have considered her a perfect saint. But even Toni's mother wasn't perfect.

Her mother had been in Jamaica for a week and had mapped out Toni's first few weeks there to run errands all over the island. Toni was tired of getting into arguments with her mother over the phone so she just agreed to do what she wanted, just to get her to pipe down. She rarely ever won a battle with that woman and this time was no exception.

Though it was her sister's wedding that took her to Jamaica, the beaches and dance halls called to her as if she was a long, lost lover returning home. She was not planning to spend her time going through overstuffed suitcases and running errands. She was going to be too busy having fun and being a free spirit. She planned for her mother to *see her whenever she sees her*.

Toni shuffled through the magazine collection in front of her seat. On the cover of one of the magazines was a picture of a woman holding a gorgeous baby. For rather obvious reasons, she pulled that one out and flipped through its pages. She sighed as thoughts of Dr. Michael Brown entered her mind. He was incredibly handsome and a medical doctor at that, all tied up in one tempting package. *Irresistible*, she almost said aloud. It would have been nice to meet someone like him before she got pregnant. She quickly realized that she had been through it all and as a result, knew that men like Dr. Michael Brown came with a price. A woman had to be ready to give up her bank account, her worth or her sanity for a man like that. She knew that there was always a man waiting to screw up a woman's plans. She was not going to let a little titillation change the direction of her life. Besides, she knew now that no man could give her an orgasm.

She was wondering what he must have thought of her receiving an artificial insemination. Noticing that Ms. Williams was peering over at her, looking at the magazine as well, she

blurted out, “You are so much more beautiful in person than you are on television, Ms. Williams.” She couldn’t help herself. She just had to tell her.

“Please call me Erica. Ms. Williams is my mother.” Her voice was sweet and melodic.

“Thank you, Erica. My name is Toni. It’s a real honor to meet you.” She flushed with excitement. It wasn’t every day she got to converse with a genuine star.

“Well, Toni, it’s a pleasure meeting you. I love meeting new people.” Her words had sounded phony, but her voice and her eyes were sincere. Erica had the most beautiful hazel eyes that blended incredibly against her cocoa color and a pretty smile, all with the most pleasant personality.

For the remainder of the flight, the two women conversed about Jamaica, the airplane food and other miscellaneous topics. Erica talked a little about her own toddler and Toni talked a little about how much she wanted to have a baby—she didn’t want to inform a total stranger about how she was going about getting one. She didn’t know Erica’s position on artificial insemination and she wasn’t up for a debate on the pros and cons of it at this point. She tried not to talk to her too much because she didn’t want the celebrity to remember her as an annoying passenger.

She knew what it was like the night before people traveled. They were up all night, packing and preparing, barely having enough time to sleep. Toni was feeling tired herself and figured it was time for them to rest. Well, that unfortunately did not occur.

What dominated Erica and Toni’s attention the rest of the flight were two women sitting directly in front of them. One of them seemed like she wasn’t able to sleep from her occasional responses of *mmm* and *hmm* as her friend kept talking nonstop. The verbal tirade was going on and on about God knows what.

“A tree kids she have. Tree kids.” The woman’s Jamaican

accent was getting thicker and thicker by the minute.

Erica leaned her head back and closed her eyes.

Toni tried doing the same, but to no avail. She just kept thinking how raw the Jamaican accent sounded on some people and how people form many misconceptions about Jamaicans based on people like this woman.

“If only I could get some sleep.” She yawned and leaned back into a cozy position.

It appeared that everyone was as anxious as Toni was to get off the plane and out onto the streets of Kingston, but she couldn't slip out of the airport as easily as she had hoped. People were competitive from the moment the plane's seatbelt light turned off all the way up to the custom lines.

It was thrilling to escape the bustle of the airport walkway into the first class passenger's line. From then on, passing through immigration was fairly painless as compared to some of the horror stories she had heard from many of her friends and family members. There was the time when a customs officer had reached inside her Aunt Lisa's container. She was carrying a twenty-five pound, roasted turkey to share Christmas dinner with her friends. While examining her luggage, the customs officer shoved his bare hand right up inside the turkey. He scooped out all of the stuffing and wiped his hand on her brand-new beach towels, which he piled on the top of the suitcase. That son-of-a-bitch broke off one of the turkey wings, wrapped it in a piece of tin foil and set it down on his desk, near his orange juice carton.

Knowing Aunt Lisa's quick temper, she would have made a big stink over it, but she restrained herself because she was traveling on her expired green card. She figured that was why that ass was pressing her buttons. Toni concluded that she might not have experienced similar problems because she traveled first

class.

She sheepishly endured the peering eyes of the coach travelers that were stuck behind endless custom lines as she marched smoothly through the first class line. It was hell hurrying to keep up with the man pushing her luggage on a large cart. She wondered what would be an appropriate tip for him, especially for carrying all of her suitcases. She would have preferred to over-tip him because the man who carried her luggage at Kennedy Airport back in New York did not take too kindly to the three dollars that she gave him for carrying the same luggage. Ten dollars felt right, but that was it. She didn't want to give anyone the idea that she was rich.

She knew from reading the stack of Jamaican newspapers her mother kept on display like a trophy in her New York dining room that it wasn't safe to give anybody the idea that she was rich.

It was unbelievable how small and simple Norman Manley Airport appeared. She didn't think that she would have any trouble finding her girlfriend who had promised to meet her at the Airport. She remembered that same airport seemed large and extravagant the last time she was there. She reflected, sighing deeply.

Toni pretended not to notice the line of people who stared at her as she passed down the aisle toward the waiting area. She could only imagine what some of them thought. Probably the same thoughts she had when she was in the crowd looking at people coming in, she imagined. She carefully searched, looking for her friend as she followed the thin and frail looking luggage handler outside the airport building.

"Oh man," she exclaimed as she inhaled the sweet, fruity scent of Jamaica. For an instant, the scent was interrupted by a funky armpit smell, probably from the frail luggage handler. She

couldn't believe that she was actually back in Jamaica. A surge of pure joy filled her body, releasing tears. It was such a delightful feeling that it left her excited in many ways.

It's true what they say about this damn tropical air, Toni confessed. She tightened her body in order to contain herself. She and her girlfriends had this discussion about the tropical air before. She never really believed it, but damn, her sweetness was throbbing like an angry drum.

"Toni Dawn!"

Christine's loud voice interrupted her titillating thoughts. Her tone bellowed out her name, causing everyone in the vicinity to turn their heads. It was downright embarrassing.

"Where the hell you going, girl?" roared the deep voice.

Her friend's dark, excited face appeared to Toni from out of a crowd of taxi drivers.

"Did you forget that mi was going to meet you here? "

She hurried to throw her free arm around Christine's neck. "No, I was just thinking about how I was going to kick your butt if you weren't here waiting for me."

"We've been here waiting for a long time, girl. I was hungry. So mi send Cleave to go pickup something to eat, then I saw you shaking you ass going by like you didn't see me," her friend mocked and belted out a rich laugh.

Toni raised her eyebrows when she heard Cleave's name.

"Mi told you that him was going to come to drive mi car back since we are picking up you rental here," her friend stated carefully.

"Oh goodness, I forgot to call and tell you that they had made a mistake at the rental place. The car I wanted won't be ready until tomorrow."

"Those idiots need to get their act together," Her friend affirmed as she waved Cleave over to where they were. "I hope

you are not mad that I brought him.”

“You need to stop it, Christine. I want to meet Cleave.” She wasn’t being completely truthful, still she would humor her best friend, for now. She would meet him and let her friend see for herself that it would not work between the two of them. Besides, long distance romances rarely worked.

Toni was hoping that she would have been away from all the strain and expectations of a relationship for a while, but what was she to do? There were no friendships like theirs. They had shared laughter and tears with each other for many long years. She couldn’t hurt Christine by blatantly refusing her brother.

The women had met in college when Christine traveled to the States to represent Jamaica in the Goodwill Games—the Track and Field competition. Toni was a sports reporter for her college newspaper back then. They started to talk about their hometowns. She discovered that Christine was from St. Thomas and she was one of those *Morant Bay High School* girls that she always thought were snobs. However, her friend was the complete opposite of a snob—she was down to earth. From that moment on, they just hit it off. It certainly felt great to see each other again.

They had not seen each other since Christine last visited the States three years earlier. When she visited New York the last time, she overstayed her allowed time and the Jamaican Embassy refused to renew her visa. She had told Toni in one of their e-mail conversations that she could either use her money to get around the bullshit and get another visa or use her money to furnish her mansion that her boyfriend built her in Fairy Hill Portland. Needless to say, she chose to furnish her mansion.

“Girl, I’m so glad you decided to stay with me. We are going to have fun. You are gonna have men all over you,” her thick Jamaican accent blending in with everything else around them.

“You look prettier than when mi see you in New York. Maybe because so much ugly people standing around us,” Christine exclaimed loudly, beaming with enthusiasm.

Toni could not conceal her embarrassment as she scanned the area to see if anyone had heard her friend’s rude comment. Whatever words came out of her friend’s crude mouth, nothing ever surprised her. “So you’re not going to try to hook me up with your brother?” she asked sheepishly with a forced grin.

“Of course, but if it doesn’t work, I hope you brought your thongs for the beach and your short-shorts for us to go dancing. You’ll get a man that way.” Christine flashed a brilliant smile to her friend.

Toni was used to her Christine’s excitable personality. She knew that she was going to have a blast on the island of sun and fun. Something about Jamaica...something that said unmistakably—*this was paradise!* It felt like it. It looked like it. It was indeed paradise. She was there and loved it. The soft, cool breeze searched seductively through every opening of her gorgeous silk blouse that had hung sensuously over her body-contoured cotton pants. She was also wearing a pair of cute gold high-heeled pumps that added a playful elegance to her style. Her soft brown feet were accentuated by her painted toenails with fun French manicure designs on them. Cleave froze in her presence. He stumbled over his words just to say it was a pleasure, finally to meet her. She shook his hand and returned the compliment. He was nice looking and tall, *very tall*, she thought. As she watched him from the corner of her eye, he did not look this fine in any of the pictures that Christine sent her. He wasn’t half-bad. She wondered why she never met good-looking men like Dr. Brown and Cleave when she was looking for a man.

Chapter Three

The East Coast of Jamaica has some of the most frighteningly narrow roads that seemed to have far more hills, cliffs and steep curves than Toni remembered. Maybe it's a good thing she didn't get her car when she arrived at the airport. She'd questioned whether she would have been able to drive herself on those hostile roads as she nervously watched Cleave expertly maneuver yet another turn.

It seemed like an eternity before they arrived at the elegant homes and rich estates that lined Drapers and Fairy Hill in Portland. There was an indescribable air of tranquility about this parish. It didn't have the energy of say, New York City, but somehow it promised exciting activities to fill every hour of every day.

She wanted to tell Christine how her doctor made her heart throb, but Cleave was sitting in the driver's seat, studying her in every way imaginable. Regardless of Christine's attempt to draw out the freaky hussy that she knew her friend had the potential to be and the person that made her laugh like crazy, Toni kept the conversation to neutral topics. She bored her friend with topics like her meeting Erica Williams on the plane and about how she promised her mother that she would stop by the old district on her way from the airport and a bunch of other bullshit about a sexist English Department Chair forced to resign from the

college.

* * * *

Christine humored her friend's dull topics because she realized that Toni would not reveal her true self in Cleave's presence. She had genuinely cheered up when Toni asked her about the progress of her novel. She had been writing that novel for the past five years and it was a delight to finally share with her friend that she was getting down to the final few chapters. Toni smiled broadly when her friend told her that she had printed the first twenty-five chapters and left them on her bed for her to read.

Cleave jokingly expressed disappointment in his sister for not having been offered to read the manuscript.

"I'm your brother and you didn't let me read your book, Christine?"

"If I let you or anyone in the family read it, I would have had to change my heroine into a virgin."

"So it's an X-rated book you writing, Christine?" Cleave asked.

"Be quiet, and keep you eyes on the road," his sister demanded

"Well, mi no want to read it then."

"Mi never asked you to read it."

"You right." Cleave admitted and receded back into his quiet world.

* * * *

They arrived at Christine's house at sundown, which disappointed Toni a little. She had wanted to enjoy Portland's beautiful scenery, but the journey from Kingston's sloped roads made a sixty-mile drive feel and last as long as a three hundred-

mile New York roadway. She was going to need every hour of rest to repeat that exhausting journey in order to head back to the airport in the morning to pick up her rental. She lamented at the mere thought as the car pulled up to a beautiful home.

"This has got to be it," she said as she leaned her head out the window. The house was clearly the house that her friend had described to her...down to the *Welcome* wreath on the front door.

Before the car could come to a complete stop, Christine jumped out with renewed excitement. "This is my castle," she exclaimed as she hastened to the other side of the car.

Toni's feet had not yet set firmly on the ground before she felt her friend clutch her wrist. After she recovered from a slight stumble, she found Christine tugging her toward the house.

"This is it, girl," she announced upon their entrance into the formal living room.

Toni gawked at the lavishly decorated house. She was still breathing heavily from running and laughing loudly behind her friend. Christine was like a child showing off her toy collection. Toni followed her around with as much excitement, leaving Cleave to unload her luggage from the car.

"Tomorrow morning, I will show you the yard and all the land space mi have around this baby." Christine continued to smile wildly after an hour of touring.

Cleave had called out from the kitchen, asking them if they wanted tea.

"Linden must truly love you, girl," Toni attested, still gawping at the house as she marched behind her friend into the warm blue kitchen.

"Not enough to ask me to marry him," she exclaimed. "He gave me whatever I want, in exchange for me not to ask him about marriage."

"It sounds like he is just not ready yet."

"Is that what it is?" she sneered. "At his age?" She poured tea in two large mugs.

"How old is he?"

"Fifty nuff, nuff."

"Oh goodness," Toni exclaimed. "That's like thirty years your senior."

"Even so, he doesn't want to be married."

"I know what you mean, but some men are just that way."

"Yea well...at least he gives me my space." She collected the cups and headed for the table.

"I know," Toni assured, "but you prefer to have him than the space?"

"Yea, well..."

"You see now, that's why I have decided to start my family on my own. I am done with men."

"Yea right."

"No. I am serious. Soon I'll have a baby of my own."

"What are you talking about?" Christine asked as she almost gagged on her tea. "Oh...please tell me you didn't let that married man knock you up?"

"Oh, come on, now," Toni scoffed. "You know me better than that."

"Then who?"

"No one," she meekly replied.

"Okay..." The anxiety echoed in her friend's voice.

The discussion instantly ceased when Christine's housekeeper emerged from the back door.

"Toni, this is Bell," she announced as Bell closed the back door. "Bell, this is Toni, my friend from New York. The one I told you was going to be staying a couple of weeks with me."

Bell hurried over to the table and Toni stood and shook her

hand.

“What are you still doing here? I told you that you could go home,” Christine said.

“Mi jus finish organizing de shelves in the garage. Mi will just stay here tonight since it’s almost dark outside now,” Bell mumbled on her way toward the entrance to the basement apartment, about to put away some paint cans.

“You think she heard us?” Toni asked.

“I hope not,” her friend whispered, as they turned to resume their tea drinking.

“Is she okay?”

“I found out she took mi business out a here once and mi warn her that if she do it again mi ah go punch her in her mouth.”

“I bet your business is safe now.” Toni chuckled.

“She is always stealing my shit,” Christine grumbled.

“You kidding?”

“Yea! Last week I bought ten pound a pork for dinner with Mamma and Daddy and there was hardly enough meat on the table for us to eat.” Christine pouted like a child as she complained to her friend.

“Oh, that’s wrong,” Toni couldn’t avoid laughing.

“The thing hurt me you see, mon.”

“I can understand that.”

“It’s not funny!”

“I’m sorry... I just...” Toni tried to hold in her laughter, but it just refused to settle.

“Mi can’t stand her, mon.” Christine shook her head in disgust.

“I can see that.” Christine’s childlike expression made Toni laugh even more. She hoped that her friend would have fixed her face so that she could have stopped laughing, but she was so

angry it took her a while to stop thinking about the whole affair.

“Okay then, let’s get back to you. What the fuck is going on?”

“Oh yea. Well...I’m adopting a baby.” She sipped from her teacup. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to hear her friend’s opinion on the topic of artificial insemination.

“Why? Don’t you think you can have one of your own?”

“That’s not it. I told you before, I am not going to sample every man in my search for the right one. I am tired of looking. Before I met Steve, I must have dated all the filth of the earth. I am not doing it anymore.”

“If you are really serious about this, then you are ready.”

“Ready for what?”

“You start the adoption process yet?”

“Yes...”

“When a woman stop looking for a man, that’s when she find the one.”

“Yea, right.”

“I am serious. I bet you’ll have a man. A good man... In the next six months. One that’ll work the pussy till you grunt like a hog.” She imitated a pig sound halfway to the cupboard.

“You are crazy,” Toni laughed.

“You watch and see. It’s a fact...”

There were many things for the two girls to catch up regarding what was going on in their own lives. They reminisced on some fun things that they did in New York. They laughed aloud at their men and at their acquaintances.

Cleave had moved his motorcycle to the front yard and reentered the house, but that was the last the ladies saw of him. They were having so much fun Toni had forgotten that she was tired from a long flight and the aggravations of traveling.

They didn’t spend the entire evening talking about fun times. There were some sad topics, too, like when Christine had to

speaking out against Toni's relationship with her abusive married boyfriend. If it were up to Christine, she would have told her about it the first time he put his hands on her friend. Toni would never tell the wife though. She held onto the belief that his wife did not deserve to be hurt like that since she wasn't the one having the affair. Christine was just out to get him. She didn't bug her friend too much though, because she understood that loneliness could be such a heavy anchor.

"Trust me, mon." Christine assured as they dragged themselves to their respective bedrooms "You will not have to raise your adopted child alone. See deh. Cleave nuh gone home yet. The only time him sleep here, is if mi have a party and him get drunk. A yu im a wait fa."

"Cleave could not be waiting for me."

"Then, who is he waiting for?"

"Look, I am horny, but not desperate enough to give it up to your brother on my first night here..." Toni almost sank to the tiled floor when the sofa came in view and she saw Cleave laying on it with his eyes wide open.

"Goodnight, miss," Cleave said. She made out the smile on his face in the dimly lit living room.

Fuck, Toni mentally shouted, but all that came out her mouth was a careful, "Oh dear." She was not sure if he had heard her. She imagined that he might have been sleeping before she came up on him. She felt Cleave eyeing her all the way to her room.

Chapter Four

The sun beamed into Toni's room as the gentle breeze softly swayed the delicate white curtains about the opened window. She lay with her eyes half-opened. She had felt a tender flow of the country breeze caressing her skin, but her tired nerves would not let her wake up. As much as she was hungry to see, smell and taste Jamaica, she allowed the morning sleep to take her away again. If she wasn't jolted awake by the loud roar of a motorcycle rolling up into the front yard, she would have slept away the morning. She needed to get to Kingston as soon as possible or else she would not be able to get a rental car. Even though she hated the pounding echo of the motorcycle's engine against her eardrum, she appreciated it waking her.

She was half-way conscious when she heard it, the pleasant and familiar sound of reggae music flowing in through the bedroom window. She had forgotten how, in Jamaica, people turned up their sound systems to entertain the entire neighborhood. If it were America, people would be angry. Not everyone wanted to hear music so early in the morning. In Jamaica, there was no democracy in music sound wave. Thank God, this wasn't America. It was good to be in Jamaica.

It was only six in the morning, but outside there was life. The smell from the ackee and codfish cooking for tea filled the air. As

Toni opened her bedroom door and walked through the living room toward the veranda, she could hear quiet talking in the backyard. It appeared as if all of Jamaica was awake. She just had to be a part of that morning energy.

Her body vibrated to the sound of Berris Hammond music that echoed from beyond the hills. She wanted to see all that she didn't get to see when she arrived the previous night. She turned the doorknob and pulled the front door open. A brilliant green land, adorned with picture perfect features, welcomed her. Jamaica's campsite fragrance was divine. She was admiring the glorious hills and valleys that stretched out before Christine's property when she saw Cleave's timid smile emerging from the corner of the house. She wondered if he had heard her when she told his sister that she wasn't going to have sex with him the previous night. Maybe it was good that he heard her, she observed. She wasn't sure if she wanted any man pursuing her. "Where is that music coming from so early?" she inquired from him.

"That music is coming from over at Winifred Beach, mon. There is a beach party there today." Cleave eyed Toni bashfully.

"It's going on right now?" Her eyes lit up with the anticipation of attending the first party of her vacation.

"Yeah—you wanna go?" Cleave's breathing had quickened, noticeably.

"I would lo—" Toni stopped her answer abruptly. She had not been to a beach party in many years. She wanted to go, but didn't want to give Cleave the wrong impression. She didn't want to appear available to him.

Cleave walked onto the veranda carrying a fresh, ripe mango. "Here. You eat mango?" He handed her the fruit.

"Yes, thank you." She searched his eyes for signs of other intentions. "I would have loved to go to the beach party today,

but remember we have to pick up my car at the airport.” *Is it Cleave or the Jamaican air that’s sending these surges of heat through my body?* Toni contemplated.

“No problem, mon. The party is going to be going on all night. Christine and one of Donna, had planned to take you there. She nuh tell you yet?”

“No, she didn’t,” she exclaimed, her face filled with excitement.

“No worry. Christine and Donna don’t miss no dance. When them finish with you, you will be exhausted,” Cleave assured.

She turned and watched him briefly as he disappeared into the living room. Jamaica was indeed, beautiful, Toni acknowledged as she admired her surroundings. The houses in the distance around her friend’s home were glorious. She could hardly see some of them because they were tucked behind splendid palm trees and large bushes, revealing only little parts of their roofs, patios or extravagant pool areas. She could sit there on that patio and look at the scenery for all of eternity, but she had to be on the road as soon as possible. Her mother was also depending on her to show up and help with some of the final wedding arrangements. Toni wished that she could hang around Portland for the day, but what was she to do? She certainly didn’t want to hear her mother’s mouth. God forbid if she didn’t help to make Emerald’s wedding perfect. She didn’t want to think about responsibilities at that moment. If Bell had not stuck her head out the door and asked her if she was ready to eat, she would have stayed out there on the front porch until she left for Kingston.

Christine’s house was incredible, to say the least, Toni affirmed as she walked through the living room. *She is very lucky to find a man who loved her enough to build her such a mansion. Wow. This is the life.* She inhaled the sweet scent of the

mango Cleave had given her, her thoughts turning to Portland, houses, and other wonders.

Toni pretended not to have noticed that Cleave was scrutinizing her every movement, as he had done earlier that morning, as he had done ever since they met. Now, if he would just say something to her, make a comment, start something or even get a little fresh, then it would have made more sense to her. Whenever he had enough looking, he'd tell her what he was thinking, she imagined.

She wondered if he had a girlfriend, which could be the reason he wasn't expressing himself. *God bless her whoever she is. Men like those are hard to find.* Toni rolled down the passenger side window and let country wind bounce off her face and flow through her hair.

The magical scenery was captivating. Modern asphalt road had found its way in one of Monet's masterpiece. The beach that went along Portland Road was so close to the road they could just pull right over and go for a quick swim. Some parts were a little scary though. All that stood between her and careening toward her death was a very narrow road and her faith in Cleave's driving skills. If he were her man, she would have grabbed his arm and screamed with excitement. She attempted a few times to reach over and grab his muscular arm, but each time she scolded herself for going outside her square personality. Toni couldn't figure out why she was so darn stiff and self-aware at times.

Why can't I just let my guard down and just live a little? When her heart almost fell out of her chest as they drove by the horrific cliff of Dead-man Press pit in Leath Hall, Cleave told her that she should feel free to hold on to him. She immediately obliged and grabbed his arm. They had driven almost a quarter of a mile

away from Dead-man Press pit when she snapped back to reality and realized that she could have felt his muscles harden as she grasped his arm, but instinctively let go.

“This Island is truly paradise,” she said only to cover the lustful thoughts that rushed through her mind. *I’ve been here only a day and my honey pot is throbbing for my best friend’s brother.* Toni fixed her eyes on the blue ocean to her left. It had nothing to do with chemistry because her heart wasn’t beating for him. No matter how she sliced it in her heart, she was still searching for her dream lover. She realized that he didn’t exist, but a good looking man like Cleave who happened to excite her always made her wonder if he did exist.

Who knows, maybe Cleave could be the man who would bring her to an orgasm. Toni smiled at her own delusion. Orgasms were no longer a problem for her—certainly not since she discovered them in the past four months. Her last one was about three weeks ago to the day.

It was in her shower. Toni was feeling so excited as the force of the handheld shower massager sprayed up against her intimate area, her body trembled with pleasure. She had moved the massager away in shame, only to place it back again. This turned her on so much she couldn’t bring herself to stop.

She positioned the showerhead for better optimum usage, once the pulsating water began giving her extreme thrills. Her entire body quivered with excitement. She licked her lips with sweet delight. Moaning freely, she slowly moved her other hand, sensually caressing her skin. She searched for her sensitive areas, seeking her g-spots hungrily. She began with her inner thigh. Lightly rubbing in circles, her nails scratched herself, not too hard, yet not too soft.

Toni then gently worked her way up her flat, tight tummy, slowly massaging around her navel. Before too long, she cupped

her size thirty-four C breasts with her hand. She closed her fingers around her nipple, trembling with anticipation, squeezing her soft buds. She gently pinched them, not like Steve did, but like her imaginary lover would have done, pulling them ever so gently, twisting a bit. She moaned a little louder. As always, her imaginary lover knew just what to do.

Toni had an imaginary man since her late teens. She had not met him in real life yet, but they had made love on so many occasions. Her hand anxiously slid from breast to breast, squeezing and pinching her nipples, pulling and twisting, just as her dream lover would do. Her nipples were fully erect and aroused.

The shower was her lover now—it was living and throbbing. As it beat against her clitoris, making it swell with rapture, her body quivered with sweet ecstasy. Her clit, aching for pleasure, called for her attention. She brought her hand down, searching for the one spot that most men, including Steve, did not know how to touch, manipulate or please. Her dream lover knew. Her finger circled her clit, rubbing it up and down, soft at first. The strength of the shower and the precise movement of her finger made her clit seem as if it was on fire. Her breathing came in short bursts as she, or rather her dream lover, was getting ready to make her come.

Toni felt her body quiver and then contract as her vaginal muscles tightened, tighter and tighter. If a hard penis was inside her, she was sure her pussy would squeeze it to pieces, perhaps snapping it in two. She yelled aloud as wave upon wave of orgasms rocked her very soul. Her dream lover had delivered, yet again. She exhaled deeply. Toni was physically drained, yet incredibly relaxed.

It was one of her better orgasms, but then all of them seemed like they were better than the last. She had looked about her,

guilty and shy now, even though no one else was in the bathroom with her. She always surprised herself, as she had done every time she accidentally masturbated. Once again, she promised herself not to do it anymore, though she knew that this was one promise she would never keep. It was hard not to feel shame, even though she read somewhere that masturbating was a healthy act.

“You looking forward to tonight?” Cleave interrupted her thoughts, flashing her a warm, yet manly smile.

“W-w-hat?” she stammered. Though her body was actually sitting respectably in the car, her mind was certainly not being respectable.

“You know, the beach party. The beach party, I was talking about for the past half hour.” If Cleave sensed her sexual excitement, he certainly wasn’t letting on.

“Oh yeah,” she quickly answered as she recognized what he was talking about. She hadn’t forgotten. How could she? She couldn’t wait to unveil the fun person that she really was. Toni wanted to go out and act wild on the beach. Her imagination was too wild for her own good sometimes. She tried to cover her embarrassment with a casual smile.

They had just pulled up in front of the Avis Car Rental Building. Thank goodness. Thoughts of shower orgasms, beach parties and Cleave were starting to make her tremble with anticipation. Getting her rental would certainly give her a change of thought, for now.

Why have I been thinking so much about sex since I got on this Island? She shook her head in perplexity as she walked along the concrete platform of the Airport’s Rental Center. She proceeded to sort out in her mind what she was going to wear to the beach party that evening. Toni had brought along twelve swimsuits. If she hadn’t brought so many, it would have been

easier to choose, but there was no way she could have left any of those suits behind, not even one.

No matter, I'll eventually wear all of them. Toni chuckled lightly to herself. It was time to get in her rental car and drive toward parties and excitement.

Chapter Five

The drive back home from the airport was uneventful. Toni drove behind Cleave's car all the way back. They had spoken on their cell phones a few times along the way, but there was nothing exciting about their conversation. The frequent hesitation in Cleave's voice implied, a few times, that he wanted to say something more than just the topics of their casual talks. He didn't say anything out of the ordinary. She wondered if he was either too dull or too shy to boost a girl's ego. They had stopped only once to buy gas and picked up some food, which they ate in their cars as they drove. By the time they reached Morant Bay, the sun had almost completely descended so they decided against stopping at her mother's.

Instead, they were going to the party when they got back to Fairy Hill. That would be his last chance to loosen up and say something. If he didn't pay her a compliment, not that a compliment was going to get him into her panties, at least she had a male driver to ward off thugs when she traveled late at night along the treacherous Jamaican country roads.

By the time Toni and Cleave got to the house, Christine and Donna were raring and ready to *get their groove on* all night long. Toni had liked meeting Donna. She was an intern at License Hospital. Donna was very muscular and her body resembled that of a man with breasts, but she had a soft baby face with the most

pleasant smile. She was also as crazy as Christine. Once Toni got together with these two characters, she didn't have a moment of boredom. They made her laugh so much that her sides hurt. They really got her to loosen up, even with Cleave being there.

She wondered if Cleave was tired of listening to them just talking bullshit for so long. As they sat in her friend's car driving to the beach party, he didn't say much as they went on and on about some of their experiences that they had with *brainless* men, as they referred to them. Only when something they said seemed to strike a nerve with Cleave that he decided to take part in the conversation.

"So what you expect the man to do, tell you that you have pieces of tissues all over your face?" he added, after Donna told them about a date who danced with her all night and didn't tell her that pieces of toilet tissues were left on her face. She had wiped her face with a piece of thin, white toilet tissue as she was sweating up a storm on the dance floor.

"It was when mi reached home and looked into the bathroom mirror that mi saw mi face. Pieces of white tissues all over mi face." Donna was still fuming over the account.

"Him probably felt that if him tell you, you would get embarrass and cut the date short."

Cleave understood, of course, that there were no excuses, but felt that he had to stand up for all the insulting talks that were being waged against men. In reality though, he himself had to laugh at some of the sheer stupidity he heard. For the brotherhood of men, he just had to come up with some defense, no matter how ridiculous it sounded to the ladies.

"Oh, my God, look at those sorry looking fools," Christine exclaimed as they pulled off the asphalt road and drove on to the sandy beach entrance. A group of raggedy looking men was at the entrance selling tickets.

Two of them held up coconut limbs across the path. The others stood around like bouncers. They had to be the *welcoming committee*.

"I didn't know we had to pay to get on the beach?" Toni said.

"A Capletan a play, mon?" Cleave added, "How you think the man them make them money?" He stuck his head through the car window and asked how much it was to get in.

"Two hundred dollars per person," one of the men told him, displaying a toothless mouth.

"That's not bad." Donna said as she dug through her purse for the entrance fee. They all paid and proceeded to drive in.

"Where on earth do they get so many Acuras, Lexus and Beamers in this place?" Toni exclaimed as they pulled into the parking lot littered with cars, jeeps, SUVs and trucks. Almost every other car was some late model, brand name and extremely cool ride.

"Them have everything in Jamaica," Cleave said eagerly.

"A lot of these cars belong to rich white folks," Donna added. "A lot of the rich white people have been moving down here. Jamaica is a salt and pepper island these days. Everywhere you go in Jamaica, you see rich luxury houses and cars, especially in Portland. They like the spirit of the island, I guess."

As they got out of the car in the parking area overlooking the beach, the group watched four women walk by them. All four of the women were wearing some hot swimsuit with their behinds proudly on display. Toni, Christine and Donna had to check themselves because they weren't sure if they were keeping up appearances.

Toni was glad that her friend talked her into wearing a thong. She thought it was way too showy when she picked it up at Sacks Fifth Avenue, but she bought it anyway. She almost chickened out while they were dressing for this evening's beach party, but her

friend talked her into wearing it. Thankfully, she listened to Christine and wore her hot thong swimsuit, even though she wore a sheer scarf around the bottom part of her suit when few others did. As they got closer to the party scene, they realized that it was like a huge thong competition.

Winifred was colorful, not only for the beautiful swimsuits that most of the women were sporting, but for the people. How on earth did so many diverse people find a beach that was tucked so nicely away in the back of Fairy Hill, Portland? It was nice to see the diversity, but the paradise of Jamaica was not a secret anymore. Donna was right about the salt and pepper. Toni never remembered seeing so many mixtures of races in Jamaica when she was living there.

Some people were dancing and some were hanging out in the water, talking. The remix of *Turn Me On* was playing loudly, vibrating throughout the beach. Some people were clearly having sex in the water. A few of the love makers were being very loud. It was as if they wanted everyone to know what they were doing. With moans and groans everywhere whenever the DJ stopped the music to *big-up* his buddies, there was certainly no shame in their game. Winifred Beach was buzzing. Almost every other girl's ass was hanging out of a thong. It was also very evident that some of the swimsuits weren't even thongs, but rather regular bikinis where they simply pulled up the material into the buttocks to look like thongs. It was a virtual rear-fest with plenty of male tongues hanging out all along the beach.

Unattached men were just walking around, watching women's hips sway. They didn't see any problems with some of the cellulite jiggling by them like Jell-O. They were just there, lusting after every butt cheek that passed by. Some men were leaning up against tree trunks, others were just standing around while some were walking with their own women, straining their necks to

look at every ass that wiggled by them. Talk about being disrespectful.

Toni felt she was the only one thinking that what was going on at the beach was shameful because Christine, Donna and Cleave didn't seem to see anything unusual. Christine laughed a few times, only because she found Toni's reaction to be funny and, in a way, naive.

"This is how them do it down here, mon." Cleave jokingly giggled for the ladies.

He spent all night staying close to Toni's side. She noticed his territorial behavior and she didn't resist him. Nevertheless, she wasn't going to make any effort for him or make it easier for Cleave to win her over. That was his job.

Besides, she had been waiting all day for him to stop being a chicken and at least make her feel like a woman by making a pass at her. Other men on the beach were propositioning her, even though they saw Cleave almost glued to her side. It was apparent the other men could not have cared less about who was by her side. To them, Cleave was just a statue, just standing in the way.

"Browning!" shouted one bare-chested man.

"Nice lady," leered another macho man, sporting a thick mustache.

"You can't handle a woman like that, Don," the bare-chested man added.

"That woman would look much better on my arm, boss," exclaimed the one who was leering.

"Leave her give mi, mon," shouted yet another short and stubby male, holding a Red Stripe beer.

Goodness, those men have no respect. Toni giggled to herself. It was downright wicked.

The beach was overcrowded. The women spread their towels

out and lay down at a very cozy spot that had taken almost half an hour to find. The night air was warm and soothing, coming right off the water. The music was not too close and not too far off, the air filled with excitement and people were in and out of the water constantly.

Cleave invited her to go take a dip with him, but she told him no. She did not come to the beach to get wet, especially with her *Calvin Klein* swimsuit. Her suit was for looking, not for wetting.

"You crazy," Cleave said.

Toni then appealed to Christine who immediately agreed with her with a nod.

"Are you kidding me? You come to a beach with a swimsuit and you don't want to use it? Cleave was stunned by their attitudes toward a simple piece of clothing. He just shook his head and headed for the water.

Damn, Cleave sure is a slow man, she lamented. He still hadn't really made a pass at her. Now, he was asking her to get in the water to wet her delicate swimsuit? He must be out of his mind.

Toni felt his eyes on her sexy rear as she unfastened her scarf from around her waist. She laid face down on her large beach towel. He may be cute, but he wasn't much of anything else. *He might as well just look*. She sighed to herself. She positioned herself on her towel. Cleave, not being able to convince anyone to go swimming, decided to go it alone.

"Does anyone want some cream liquor?" Christine asked.

"How about a virgin pina colada? No alcohol for this girl." Toni proclaimed with pride as she soaked in the tropical scenery, beginning to unwind for the first time in months. She would be incredibly busy for her sister's wedding preparation tomorrow, but for now, she was going to enjoy the evening.

She hadn't kept her promise to go up to St. Thomas and help

with the wedding preparations. She wasn't feeling guilty though. She'd think of something to tell her mother by morning. Right now, she was just going to have fun. She rolled over onto her back, rested her hand on her tummy and watched Cleave swim over the waves. She wondered if she should say *to hell* with her swimsuit, run in the water and swim over the waves with Cleave. Before the thought had completely unfolded in her mind, she was in the cool blue water, hyperventilating from the large cold wave that rolled down upon her.

"You are a teaser, you know that?" Cleave was behind her, almost in her ears.

"I'm a what?" She wasn't sure what he meant by that statement.

"You are a teaser and you know it," Cleave whispered and then swam away.

She wasn't sure whether to pursue him for an explanation. *Was that the compliment I have been waiting for?* She wasn't sure. It was certainly something that she could live with. Well fulltime...for God sake.

Chapter Six

Mrs. Dawn's sarcastic attitude toward her daughter after she arrived at the family's house was not unexpected. She could have dealt with her mother's condescension, but when Emerald started saying that her sister was not happy about her marriage, it became far too much for Toni to take. She almost lost it when Emerald kept demanding that her daughter admit that she wasn't happy to see her get married. Toni had come very close to telling her sister that it was *she* who was the one financing her wedding. However, she was also aware that that would have been disastrous because her mother asked her not to tell Emerald that she helped. So she bit her tongue. The best thing for her to do was to get out of the house.

Fresh air became an absolute necessity after a few hours with her mother and sister. She had had enough of their scorn. Besides, she was ragged with exhaustion. It was no wonder. She and her friends did not leave Winifred Beach until five o'clock that morning. Needless to say, she was not at her best, yet she had to fulfill her promise to her mother.

Toni certainly preferred strolling through her grandfather's garden rather than be at the house attaching ribbons to roses. As she recalled, she paid thousands of dollars to professional wedding planners to do all that cutting and pasting. She knew that her family was frugal, but she was hoping that her mother

would, for once, spend her time pampering herself and allow professionals to do the wedding planning. She knew that it was possible that her mother saved some of the money to use toward her campaign to feed and clothe all who were in need. She admired that quality in her mother, but she wanted her mother to enjoy some of the finer things in life. She recognized that being able to give to those who need was her mother's idea of happiness and she respected that. Back in New York, Toni spent all her time between her home and her college's English department because that was enjoyable to her. She only wished that her mother wouldn't get an attitude because she wanted to enjoy her trip instead doing the work that she had paid for other people to do.

Toni tiptoed down the path of her grandfather's garden. The soft warm breeze caressed her naked belly that she tastefully revealed below her halter-top. She shifted her weight to the balls of her feet in order to prevent the thin heels of her cute, pink pumps from sinking in the soft ground.

Emerald's wedding would be in a week and a half and Toni couldn't wait for it to be over. Alleviating some of the work, even with all of her protests, her mother still scheduled her to taxi around her friends, delivering gifts. Hell, she was staying at Christine's to avoid being her mother's delivery girl. Mrs. Dawn, as usual, had other ideas for her daughter.

Grandpa's garden was unbelievably beautiful. The scent of mangos and berries combined with the woodsy air, was intoxicating. She felt like she was in a real, honest to goodness paradise. Yet, the trees, she remembered seeing thousands of times in her childhood, seemed much livelier, much more exotic today. These same trees that at one time in her life had seemed repulsive and whose fruits she labored to harvest from the age of seven as if she was an indentured servant, were now much more

inviting and peaceful.

How could she, under all the weight she was carrying as a child, understand that a large harvest was a good thing and that it was a big help to her parents to provide for the family? It wasn't her place to understand. All she knew was that she was doing the job of three men when she was but child.

In spite of all the painful memories, her grandparent's yard now seemed beautiful. Somehow, she found herself smiling at some of the more enjoyable memories of her and her siblings, which were few and far between, considering the circumstances. Today, Toni felt like she was at home, where she belonged. She could only imagine it because this yard was the only place where she and her siblings were close. The thought that she really belonged there seemed satisfying. Just before the thought came back to her that she would have been miserable under the same roof as her sister, she felt a smidgeon of shame for choosing to stay at Christine's house rather than with her family.

There is no doubt that this place and its sweet, warm air, is magical. I could really love it here, yet—voices coming from the other side of the fence interrupted her peaceful thoughts. Simply known to her as *Pappy Land*, ever since she was a child, she knew that Old Pappy had to be dead by now, but she didn't know if they still called it by that name. Toni ducked behind some sirocy shrubbery at the foot of the giant mango tree to avoid notice.

She wanted to know who they were, but didn't want to have to share her special moment with anyone. She wanted them to pass and leave without having to talk to them. She knew that they had to have been there to visit the family or help with the wedding preparations because those would be the only reasons for them to walk boldly onto her family's property. She watched them as they came closer.

There were three of them. Toni watched them as they walked right up to her tree. The two she recognized were Paul and Boo, childhood friends from the village, but there was an unfamiliar face with them, someone captivating, with brilliant eyes.

His eyes seemed to stare right into hers as she peeked through the leafy branches at him. He was not entirely handsome. His eyes were dreamy, incredibly dreamy... bedroom eyes.

He was wearing khaki *Dockers*, brown sandals and a green *FUBU* shirt. He was hip, without being too gaudy. He had a diamond stud in his left ear and his hair shaved very low, but it was clear that he wasn't balding because he still had his hairline intact.

"M-M-M...my goodness" she whispered. She wondered if she might have known him. She should have because for the most part, she remembered everyone in the district, if not by name, at least by face, but she just couldn't place this man. She felt that she should have known him though because people don't normally move to Winchester District—they *leave* from Winchester.

Who is this man? She struggled to recall. She was relieved when they passed by without seeing her. *Good.* She stood and checked her clothes, making sure that nothing foreign was on her. Toni had resumed her walk, but within minutes, she was tired of walking on the balls of her feet and decided to go back to the house. Maybe she was just anxious to find out who that man was? Either way, she and Christine were going to a play in Ocho Rios and she didn't want to exhaust her feet any more than she had to.

She was afraid that if she got back up to the house, her mother was going to set her to work again. It was a risk she was willing to take. She wanted to know who Dream Eyes was

because there was something about him that fascinated her.

“Now, which gangly, immature boy from around this area could have materialized into such an interesting man?” she asked as she tiptoed carefully over dried twigs and leaves. Toni couldn’t stop racking her brain, trying to remember that interesting face. She was still behind the trees when she saw him again. He was standing there in the backyard, holding onto one of the ropes that hung from the number eleven mango tree. He was talking to Boo, but Paul wasn’t there with them.

Toni emerged from behind the large cedar tree that stood at an adjacent angle over her grandpa’s red pea field. Dream Eyes immediately noticed her. He continued to talk to Boo who didn’t see her at first, but his long stare caught his attention.

She said hello to Boo, but he didn’t say hello back. He didn’t seem to remember her. It was no big deal because it wasn’t like she and Boo ever spoke when she lived in Jamaica. He had graduated from Stokes Hall Secondary when she started the seventh grade there so they were not exactly schoolmates.

Since no one talked, not even Dream Eyes, Toni continued on her way to the front yard, greeting him with a casual smile.

* * * *

The long silence under the shaded mango tree was broken when Wayne asked his brother, Boo, who she was. She was still walking away from them, toward the front yard. “Do you know her?” Wayne asked Boo casually, never once taking his eyes off the attractive woman. He was enjoying the view and wasn’t about to stop watching her.

“She looks good, right?” Boo said, still filled with admiration. He continued to watch every movement her ass made as she walked away. “Her name is Toni. She’s Emerald’s sister.” Boo

looked curiously at his brother. "Is my first girl that. Me use to date her when she did live out here." He beamed.

"What happened?" Wayne asked, not really believing his brother.

"She forget me, mon."

Wayne was smarter than that. "A lie, mon," he scoffed.

"Yeah, she no remember mi, that's all." Boo *was* lying.

"She married?" Wayne asked. This time he couldn't avoid revealing his interest, even if Boo was crowing.

"Not as far as mi know," Boo responded with a puzzled look. "She couldn't be married after that smile that she gave you," he added with a hint of jealousy in his voice.

"No, mon, that smile was for you," Wayne said with mild admiration for his brother.

"What you talking about, mon? I saw how the girl looked at you."

"Why would she smile at me if she was trying to say hello to you? Which, by the way, you never even acknowledged because water fill you mouth." Wayne knew how to push all of his brother's buttons.

"I answered her, mon."

"When? Mi never hear you answer. All mi saw was you tongue hanging out and a puddle of water forming under you mouth." Wayne was really enjoying letting his brother have it.

"You go on, Wayne," Boo hissed through his teeth in playful frustration.

"A true, mon." Wayne laughed at his brother who tried to ignore him. He knew he always got the girl's attention whenever they hung out together, but he was going to let this one go to his bro. After all, she used to be his girl.

They didn't even remember what they were talking about because of how consumed they were salivating over this

gorgeous woman. Wayne knew that he shouldn't have inquired too much about Toni, but he was going to ask Boo if her man had come on the trip with her. Just before he asked, they resumed their previous conversation. Yet, the sight of the beautiful Toni lingered in his mind, tantalizing him.

Chapter Seven

Toni, Christine and Cleave were standing on the Orange Walk High School soccer lawn with sodas in their hands, slowly swaying to the Capletan Sound. It was nice. This was a scene that she had often visualized when she was just chilling in her apartment back in New York. She had always wanted to do what she was doing now.

She had never been able to go dancing as a teenager because when she was growing up in Jamaica, even if her grandparents would have let her out of the house to go to a dance, she didn't have the clothes to wear. All she had worn were hand-me-downs and rags. Besides, her crippling insecurity would not allow her to dismiss the idea that she looked poor and ugly.

The only thing to ruin her perfect picture was the sadness she felt for Cleave standing next to her. Wherever she moved, he eventually moved next to her, yet for the entire time they have been there, he said nothing to her. She wondered why he even came to the dance. After a while, some extremely bold men bypassed Cleave and propositioned her and Christine.

Toni was astonished at the level of disrespect the men had for each other when women are present.

Men were making catcalls and eyeing the ladies continuously. More than one sauntered over and asked them to dance.

"Back off you ugly, frigging creep," Christine shot back. Even

with her venomous looks and cruel insults, they showed no regards for Cleave at all. It was surprising because he was by no means unattractive.

Cleave was being disrespected so badly after a while, Toni asked her friend to go to the bathroom with her. She needed to find a reason to move away from him and spare him any further embarrassment.

* * * *

Christine looked at her brother and told him that Toni was giving up because he wasn't making any move on her. "For crying out loud, what do you want me to do, strip her and put her in your bed?" she retorted to him, walking away in frustration.

"Christine, you no know say *a patient man ride donkey*," he told her.

"Oh, just shut the hell up!" she barked.

* * * *

Toni was sporting a pair of low-rise jeans that revealed the Panther that she had tattooed just above her tailbone. The hook-and-eye shirt that she bought from Sacks Fifth Avenue did the trick at perfectly accentuating her breasts. She knew that she should be releasing her feelings and cutting loose now that Cleave was not around. Inside, she was feeling like kicking up her heels and acting wild. Hell, she was in Jamaica where it was electrifying. She needed to get with the program and act accordingly. No one knew her in Jamaica so her co-workers at her job would never find out she was getting down and wild to the rhythmic Jamaican music.

However, she just couldn't get crazy. She always wanted to

and this was her chance, but she couldn't do it. She wondered if her friend might be thinking that she had turned into a snob. It was obvious that she wanted to get down, but she felt compelled to stand and rock slowly.

It wasn't until several hours into the night when Toni's favorite song, *Champion Bubbler*, started to play. She raised her arms and started to copy what the other girls were doing, which was winding and wiggling their bodies. Finally, she began to release her wild child.

"I was wondering when you were going to let us have some fun," she continued, but she has spoken too soon.

As Toni was to the step to come out of her shell and truly enjoy the dancing, she saw him—the same man she had seen in her grandfather's garden a week and a half earlier. She didn't know if he saw *her*. He was just standing, drinking a beer, as cool as could be. Boo and some other familiar faces, which she couldn't quite place, were with him. Two of them were dancing a little, but Dream Eyes was just standing as if he was too cool to dance. He was cool.

"He is hot," Christine said "elegant tall and stand out among the other hustlers. I know him. I mean, I've seen him before."

"Who?" Toni was surprised at her friend's announcement because she didn't notice that she was watching her, but she knew exactly whom her friend was talking about.

"You know who I'm talking about," her eyes sporting a devilish grin. "The man who stopped you from dancing. The one that you keep acting like you are not looking at."

"Him? No. It's nothing. I saw him over at our yard. I thought he was one of the caterers." She was trying to sound disinterested, but was failing miserably.

"And you think he's hot, right?" Her friend asked with a playful tone.

"N-No, not at all," she lied through her teeth. She was not shocked at her abrupt accusation because she knew her very well. Everyone knew Christine never kept any of her opinions to herself, no matter how harsh they may sound to her friends.

"I could get him to come over here, you know," she teased.

"H-how would you do that?" Toni couldn't believe that she was asking her friend that question. She sounded like a shy schoolgirl, guilty of a serious crush.

Christine rose one eyebrow playfully. "Mi thought you were not interested in this man?"

"I'm not," she answered quickly. She knew that she was lying to herself. *What if I am?*

Her friend gave her a curious glance. "Yeah right. Don't give me that. I know you too well."

"I'm not interested, honestly," she innocently proclaimed, yet was failing miserably.

"Okay, then dance and have fun. Don't worry about the boy looking at you then. Go on and cut loose."

Toni wasn't interested in her Christine's plans. She would dance if someone asked her, but she wasn't there to like or get involved with someone. She certainly didn't want anyone to think that she was there man hunting because she wasn't. Toni was somewhat lonely because Jamaica was so romantically inclined. It felt as if everyone should be with someone.

Yet, she wasn't going to chase an idiot boy because the mood was calling for it. When she was at home in the States, she didn't behave this way. Why would she start now? She was a grown woman.

Damn, he does look good. Toni sighed. He looked distinguished, but in a casual way. That was a plus for him. *On the other hand, why the hell is he wearing those shades? It is night for crying out loud. What the hell is he trying to prove?*

Please.

Slowly moving her hips from side to side, just nice and easy, Toni kept dancing stylishly to the rhythm of the music. This is who she was and she wanted him to see her as classy. She didn't notice when her friend left, but then saw her standing on the other side, winding her ass against one of Dream Eyes' buddies, winking back at her delightfully.

Oh, no she didn't do that. Toni hoped with all her heart that her friend didn't go over there and humiliate her by saying anything. She continued to sway to the music, pretending as if she didn't notice what was going on. Christine was with one of Dream Eye's buddies, laughing as if they knew each other.

What is her problem? She better not be doing what I think she's doing. Toni kept on dancing. She knew that as soon as the bitch returned, she was leaving. She had enough.

Her cheeky friend and her partner danced a few slow, tight jams. Christine showed up next to her friend only when the DJ had stopped playing the music and started talking.

"Mi sorry to leave you, girl, but that fine-ass I was dancing with, well, I know him." The grin disappeared from Christine's face "He was my boyfriend in high school," Christine told her in an apologetic tone.

"So you didn't go over there to try and hook me up?"

"No. Mi just wanted to make sure that was Eugene. That big-lipped idiot wanted to beat me up when we were dating because I went dancing with him and I ended up dancing with this other guy all night instead— Slapped me in my face and everything—that son of a bitch." She laughed.

"So?"

"So what? I kicked him in his crotch." She laughed.

Toni was annoyed at her friend, but had to admire her. Not that she was surprised at her defensive skills. She was only

surprised that anyone was foolish enough to strike Christine. "Did you talk to him?" *Oh God*. Toni caught herself sounding desperate.

"Did I talk to whom?" She shouted over the music.

"The tall one?"

"What are you talking about? I thought you didn't like him?" she said playfully.

"No, I didn't, but I thought, maybe if... oh hell, forget it." Toni knew that if she went on any further, she was going to sound like a complete love-struck child.

"Toni, do you want me to get him over here?"

No. The deed was done. *Oh God, what have I started*. Toni deplored herself.

"Listen. You're only young once. You are in Jamaica. You don't have a man. Live a little girl."

"I know I don't have a man, but—"

"Exactly. Then what are you worried about? You need to hang and have fun. You do not have to fuck him, but he is hot. If you like him, admit it. Don't be trying to hide from yourself or me. If you want to have fun, then have fun. Cleave is my brother, but mi no see him doing shit but look at you. Go on and get yours, girl."

"Why are you trying to hook me up so badly?" Toni was softening, beginning to listen.

"You need to pull the bug out your ass and have some fun. You only have one life. I'm not telling you to go be a whore or nothing, but come on now, girl. You need to live life before it leaves your ass. You not living. Girls like you when they get old, will be hating young people who will be trying to enjoy their lives." Christine thought to herself.

"All right, all right. Shut the fuck up, go and...oh no, he's leaving. He's leaving, Christine!" The women watched as all four men walked out the gate. It was for the best because the way

things were going, Christine would have showed her up to this man, which was the last thing that she wanted. He would be sure to think that she was just a horny foreigner. She didn't want that. She occasionally looked toward the gate to see if, by some chance, he would return and ask her to dance.

He did not return.

Her Dream Eyes has walked out of my life.

* * * *

Wayne should have sped off behind his brother's car, but instead he sat on his motorcycle with his feet still flat on the ground. The party was still blasting over the school soccer field and that sweet looking girl, Toni Dawn, was still in there. He couldn't figure out why Boo did not go over and talk to her. Something was up with that. Still, he didn't know how to handle it. He didn't want to disrespect his brother. Boo was his true brother, which meant everything to Wayne.

He didn't have to go home, but he had promised his son, William, that he would sleep over tonight and he didn't want to let him down. Yet, he could have gotten there in the morning and William wouldn't have known the difference. Still, a promise is a promise.

How could I be such a fool and let the chance to ask that girl to dance, pass me by? He could have kicked himself. *It would have just been one dance. It couldn't have been more than that because she is my brother's ex-girl.* He knew that it would have been risky. He had a girl at that dance. She broke up with him only a week earlier. If she had seen him dancing with Toni, the break up would become permanent. He had better just go home and get some sleep because it had been two nights since he saw his bed.

People were still coming into the park. Boo and them may have skipped out on the party when it is just about to get hot, he thought as he watched a line of five cars roll by him. His brothers were going to another dance in Yallahs and he was heading home. He didn't know why he was going home when all he would have to do is see that bitch's face sitting up on the veranda, chatting about other people's business.

Enough is enough man, he decided. For years, he never did anything but to try to please her. He knew now that it was impossible. The fact that he was still with her was all for his son. Wayne revved up his motorcycle and peeled off up Stocks Hall Road. He wondered again, what it would have been like to be dancing and holding Toni Dawn in his arms. He couldn't imagine it being anything less than magical. He also couldn't imagine that she was single. She had to be seeing some big shot lawyer or doctor.

She was very beautiful. She stood out above every other girl at that dance. Yeah, most of the women were there, shaking their behinds, wearing almost nothing, but this girl was classy. Her shape was ideal and those low-cut pants that she was wearing revealed just enough. He couldn't see the tattoo on her backside, but that was incredibly sexy.

"Wow!" Wayne blurted aloud. He could barely stop thinking about her. "Why am I going home when mi can be in the arms of a gorgeous woman?" There was only one answer. He was going home because he promised his son. That was reason enough.

Toni left Jamaica when she was a big girl, and until then, not even Boo had tapped that ass. Wayne was remembering what Boo had told him over at the Dawn's place. Beanie Jackson had started a rumor that he and his friends had sex with her in the Banana Walk at Works Yard. A few years after she had left Jamaica, the truth came out that Beanie had started that story

only because she didn't want him. He could see her being hard to get, but he wasn't planning to chase her. If he was to get her, he would.

She looks like the quiet type, but with that incredibly sexy shape, mmm, mmm, she must be magnificent under the covers. His new Yamaha motorcycle zoomed nosily across the lonely dust-covered road, leaving clouds of white dust behind him in the night.

Wayne was about to enter into Village District when he saw a white Toyota Corolla parked up under the overhanging branches of the dogwood tree at the corner of Bamboo Corner and White Road. He was sure that he saw his wife Becky in the car. He had passed the car when he abruptly stopped the motorcycle, turned off the engine and reversed the bike back to the parked car. He leaned over and shined his flashlight into the tinted window, seeing his wife's face. The rage inside him was forcing him to jump off the bike, punch that idiot's car window in and drag her through it. Instead, he took a deep breath. "Becky," he said in a significantly calm tone, considering the fury he was feeling inside. "Come out of the car."

He was waiting for the punk in the car with her to say something so he could pull him out and punch his fucking face in. The punk didn't even have the nerve to look at him. He briefly turned his head to look at Becky. He was a chicken-shit. He just kept looking straight ahead of him with beads of sweat running down the side of his head. Through all of that, Becky still didn't budge. "Becky," his voice thundered. "Mi say, get out of the car."

She hissed at the sound of his deep commanding voice, then flung the door open and climbed out of the car. She didn't seem to care that she was wearing disheveled hair and clothes. "What?" She leaned up against the car, a sarcastic smile on her face.

“Come over here,” Wayne demanded.

“Why, so you can hit me?” she said.

“I did think we we’re going to try to be a little civil in this whole thing.”

“Civil?” She chuckled. “What the fuck you a talk about civil? Where you coming from at this hour, huh? Shit should apply to me and not to you? What time in history you think you fucking living in, huh?”

“You know what?” he said, frustrated. “Get the fuck on the bike now.” His control had all but left him.

“No!” she shouted back.

“We said that we would keep this marriage pretence going for William’s sake, but you are making it hard for me, Becky.” He turned the key in his bike’s ignition, and immediately turned it off again. “Doesn’t it bother you that those mother-fucking lowlifes in the district laugh at me every time I ride by them, Becky?” His voice cracked.

“If you were a man, they wouldn’t have to laugh at you.”

“They laugh at me because everybody knows, Becky.”

“Me never tell nobody that it was true, you know.”

“Look, Becky...you have emasculated me enough.”

“When you ah go do Wayne, hit me again, huh?” confidence resonating in her voice.

“No. But I will bust up your boyfriend’s head if you don’t get on the bike.”

“You know what, Boogy...fuck you,” she shouted, then turned and opened the car door. “Trevor, mi will call you later,” Becky slammed the door car door shut and climbed on to the motorcycle.

Wayne vowed to himself for the hundredth time as he rode home, that he was going to find a place for Becky and move her out of his mother’s house for good. He didn’t know where he

was going to find a place nice enough to fit the lifestyle she was accustomed to, let alone afford. This had been going on far too long. He couldn't keep it up. He couldn't let her ruin his life any more than she had.

Chapter Eight

The wedding day was simply gorgeous. People idly walked by the beautifully adorned church and stared at the shiny white limousine that seemed a little too large for the driveway. This attractive display was most welcome by the people in Morant Bay. Even though Morant Bay was the place where it all happened whenever anything big was going on in St. Thomas, it was not often that a long stylish limousine was seen parked in front of one of its churches. Some bystanders watched the beautiful bridesmaids emerge from the limousine, others dazzled by the large car.

It was spring in Jamaica and primroses, lilies and hibiscus were blooming along the sidewalks and in nearby gardens. Everything seemed especially bright, even for Toni who was feeling a bit nauseous. "I need a mint to settle my stomach," Toni announced as she struggled to prevent her sister Emerald's headpiece from blowing off her head.

"You succeeded in getting yourself pregnant, huh?" Emerald asked in her usual arrogant tone.

This was the second time she heard that question in the past half hour. She brought it up when they got in the limousine at the house in the presence of her bridesmaids. "If I am, I would be happy," Toni snorted back. Emerald was being her usual impossible self, starting when they were at the house. This was

making everyone, except her sister's friends, very upset. A few of them giggled at everything that came out of her big fat mouth. Toni ignored her because she knew this was how Emerald behaved whenever she received just a little bit of attention.

Of course, their mother could never see how much of a bitch her baby girl was being. As far as she was concerned, it was everyone else who was screwing up. Also, according to Mrs. Dawn, it was Emerald's day. She could do no wrong. That little shit was relentless with her superior attitude and condescending tone toward her so-called *subordinates*.

Toni, as always, wanted to cut loose and tell her sister and her mother what she thought about their special little relationship. She held her tongue because she was serious about doing everything she could to improve her and her sister's relationship instead of adding fuel to the fire. She loved her sister, and like their mother, she wanted her to be happy, but she knew that she couldn't do it all by herself. Emerald had to give a little in order to make their relationship work. She was never good at giving anything. She just enjoyed taking. Emerald was twenty-four years old and all she did was sit on her behind all her life. She never went to college even though her mother encouraged her to go.

Toni's mother was so overprotective of that girl, she refused to say or do anything that displeased her *baby girl*, regardless of the fact that she saw her wasting her life away. Yes, she told her to go to school, but she never pushed her. That girl walked all over everyone in the family because no one wanted to upset her.

Everyone was afraid that if she got hurt, she was going to keel over and die. Emerald had a congenital heart disease, which made her sickly. She had experienced frequent trips *to death's door*, as she puts it, on several occasions when she was a child. When she was nineteen, she had a valve replacement surgery that

was very successful. She hasn't been sick since. However, her family still tiptoed around her, treated her like a priceless jewel and worse, took all her bullshit. Sometimes, when she held her chest after her mother or anyone else took a different view than hers, Toni and her sisters looked at each other and rolled their eyes. The sisters concluded that Emerald was a drama queen.

Now, there she was putting on the biggest performance of her life on her expensive wedding. It would have made sense for her to be happy and complementary to the people around her, but no, not Emerald. She complained about the limpness of her hair, the smell of food sticking to her veil. She did not like the high temperature of the day, criticized everyone for not moving fast enough and about her dress being too big on her. Toni agreed about the dress. It could have been a little more closefitting if her mother had allowed her to buy the expensive wedding gown she wanted her sister to have. Mrs. Dawn insisted on sewing the bridal and the bridesmaids' gowns, herself. She was sure that her sister wasn't going to say no to the dress that she would have bought her. It was one of *Bridal Magazine's* centerpieces, but she could only do what her mother permitted.

She tripped over her maid of honor gown more than a few times. While she was trying to keep from stepping on the front of her gown yet again, she desperately tried to hold up her sister's train. In all honesty, she was sure her mother was the one who forced Emerald to ask her to be the Maid of Honor. She didn't know why she accepted. She knew her sister, all too well, to place herself near her when she was acting arrogant and feeling on top of the world. They were forty-five minutes late for the church and Mrs. Dawn and *her baby girl* were both acting as if it was all Toni's fault. Nevertheless, they got there.

"Toni this is your sister's wedding, you have to see to it that everything goes smoothly," her mother scolded for the fourth

time.

"But, Mom, you are the one running this whole thing. If I had said hurry up even once, you would have said that it was more important for Emerald to look her best."

"What are you, young lady, a psychic?"

"No, Mom, but—"

"Then how do you know what I was going to say?" Mrs. Dawn inquired crossly.

"Mom, can we just try to enjoy the day?" Toni asked sarcastically.

"Toni, are you trying to get fresh with me?"

"No, Mom, but you and Emerald need to allow me to enjoy the wedding, too. It may not be my wedding day, but it's my sister's. I want to enjoy seeing my sister get married."

"No one is stopping you from seeing your sister get married," Mrs. Dawn said with a much more gentle tone.

"Toni," Emerald called softly.

"Yeah," Toni answered looking away.

"I'll be at your wedding, too," she told her. "I'm sure that it'll be soon."

Toni exhaled as a cool flow of satisfaction swept through her body. She loved her sister. Certainly, they had their differences, but times like these, reminded her just how sweet Emerald could be, when she wasn't acting like her difficult self.

They adorned the outside of the church with beautiful white roses. Mint and white ribbons decorated the gates all the way along the path, up the steps, around the door and throughout the yard.

By the time the bridal party got ready for the procession, Toni looked like a complete mess. She had a flushed face and her pink lipstick somehow smudged on the mint dress. The bridesmaids had to get to work putting her hair back together

before they started the procession. Until the bridal party faces lit up when the church door opened and the procession commenced, there was nothing romantic about the process before the actual walk down the aisle. After that, everything was just picture perfect.

The inside of the church was beautifully coordinated with the colors of the bridesmaids' dresses and groomsmen's cummerbunds and ties. It was unbelievably romantic. Toni wasn't feeling her best, but it was the most wonderful feeling in the world to see her sister so happy. For that moment, her sister looked like an absolute angel. There was one thing about Emerald that would always get her noticed—she had the prettiest smile anyone had ever seen.

Her face was very charming and she happened to be very pronounced in the chest area, which made men go wild for her. Still, she was too skinny. It didn't matter how fitted Emerald's dress was, it still hung from her body too much.

The minister had just started to speak when a member on the groom's family side, clearly up to no good, started whispering loudly. So much so, that most of the church couldn't help but hear this person's crudeness.

"A no nothing, but fucking showoffs why them so late."

The girl who spoke was sitting next to Dream Eyes.

"Delroy should a change him mind."

The loud whisperer was a beautiful Indian girl, but because of what she said Toni saw just a boorish woman with her arm resting on Dream Eyes' lap. Her hand was almost on his crotch. She had to be his woman. *It's not my concern*, she assured herself. *That woman must be his girl because why else would her hand be so close to his dick.* The hand on Dream Eye's lap was eating at Toni for a little while. *It's not like I'm interested in him. I came here for my sister's wedding and that's it.* Even to herself,

she was not the least bit convincing.

She tried not to look over at them throughout the whole ceremony, but she couldn't help it. He didn't see her when she looked the first two times. The third time though, he caught her eyes and looked right into them. She didn't try to appear obvious so she smiled and pretended as if she was studying the room. She didn't wait to see if he was going to smile back. Toni tried to make it look as casual as she could.

As uncomfortable as it was for him to catch her, it was kind of a blessing that his girl didn't see her looking at him. Toni had a feeling that such a misfortune would have invited some unwanted attention. The desire to turn her head once more and look at him was beginning to overpower her. Toni almost didn't hear the ending of the wedding ceremony.

The minister said, "I now pronounce you husband and wife."

With that last line, she knew that it was time to leave the church and all of the potential problems behind.

The reception was at the Villa, a beautiful hotel resort that overlooked the ocean. It was an absolutely marvelous sight with a three-story glass complex, which stood out like a perfectly crafted, black and golden Faberge Egg on the shore of Morant Bay. The interior contained many splendors. All of the decorations and refineries set out for the reception were of the finest sort.

The light that sparkled against the gold trims of the dinnerware, the silver and the wine glasses shone like rare jewels on all of the tables. The ribbon trims against the walls and across the ceiling, glittered like lines of stringed pearls. Among the musical selections were artists like Dennis Brown, Alicia Keys, Barry White, Torrus Riley and an array of Jamaican and foreign artists. There was even some Jacob Miller and Shawn Paul added

to the selection to make the wedding guests lose control on the dance floor and forget that they were supposed to be sophisticated in their gowns and tuxedos.

Everything was perfect and everyone was beautifully dressed in their most extravagant outfits because this was a Dawn's evening. Their name was now the talk of Eastern St. Thomas. Everyone wanted to be in league with them. To just keep up, they had to wear the very best that they could afford to purchase.

Standing next to the bride at the toasting table, while the Master of Ceremonies struggled to speak like an American, Toni's eyes searched the room for Dream Eyes, even as she told herself that she wasn't looking for him. She just wanted to see what was going on with him and that girl, but he was nowhere in the room. Maybe he wasn't going to be there. She needed to think about something else anyway.

She couldn't wait to go upstairs and fix herself up. She knew that her evening dress, which she specifically picked out for this occasion, would make all the difference in how she was feeling. She felt more and more unattractive each time she tripped over her way-too-long dress. It did not accentuate her figure and her face felt flushed. She was dying to leave her post at the table and go change.

The bride and groom had to have their first dance, the guests had to eat and they had to cut the cake. Once all that was over, Toni would have the chance to get away and dress comfortably and sexy, the way she wanted to. After listening to the speaker ramble about nothing for another twenty minutes and after they cut the cake, she was able to escape to the dressing room. Her mother ruined her euphoria once she stepped out of her changing room. She leaned over and whispered in Toni's ear as she was walking back from the dressing room, feeling like a million dollars.

‘You know, young lady, today is your sister’s day. You should try not to outshine her,’ she scolded.

Toni was wearing a stunning navy blue *Ralph Lauren* stretch-satin gown, which accentuated all her curves. She had spent more than three thousand dollars on that dress to wear on this occasion and no one was going to make her remove the dress.

Her mother was the one who insisted on sewing Emerald’s dress. As far as everyone else knew, she had been praising herself on how she sewed her dresses compared to wedding stores in New York, priced well above five thousand dollars. Toni wasn’t even going to try to understand what on earth her mother was talking about. She continued to walk as if she didn’t hear her.

R. Kelly’s song, *Step in the Name of Love*, was just ending. Toni had one thing on her mind as she walked into the reception hall. She didn’t care if Dream Eye’s girl was with him—she was going to dance with him that evening, if she could find him. Drastic times called for drastic measures. While Christine, Cleave and Donna were waiting for her, Toni carefully made a quick search around the room to find Dream Eyes, but she didn’t see him or his girl. She kept herself in check, trying to maintain her graceful style and attitude as she walked around, talking with the people with whom she had grown up. It was exciting to see some of them. She spent most of the time with her gang. A lot of people, some of whom she didn’t even remember, were seeking her company like she was the star of the evening, as if she was the one who had gotten married.

Toni couldn’t settle down because she wanted so much to see if Dream Eyes was anywhere in the resort. She focused on her determination so much when Cleave asked her to dance, which shocked the hell out of her, she couldn’t accept. She was sure that she had seen Dream Eyes coming through one of the doors.

It seemed as if the band played all of her favorite songs and she didn't get a chance to dance to any one of them. It was obvious to her that Dream Eyes was not coming to the reception.

As the evening wore on, it was becoming more uneventful to Toni. She settled into a conversation with an old family acquaintance, Pauline Prescott. Pauline was asking her to explain what a Jamaican nurse had to do in order to obtain work as a nurse in America. Toni was telling her what a friend of her mother had shared with her about the process once, when she felt someone touching her on the shoulder. She thought it was her mother since she hadn't made contact with the wedding party for over an hour. When she turned, she was staring right into Dream Eyes' face. He didn't bother asking her to dance. He just took her hand and led her straight to the dance floor.

Dream Eyes was wearing a stylish chocolate brown suit, which hung on him so very well. He had on a cream-colored shirt with a matching silk tie and dark brown leather shoes. He was, by far, the most elegant man in the reception hall.

As if perfectly planned, the tall, attractive man pressed her body against his with Luther Vandross' song, *Here and Now*, starting to play. She almost melted into his arms. His cologne was intoxicating. Toni was captivated. This man was literally sweeping her off her feet.

Toni wanted to ask him about his girl, but there was no place for that question. Besides, who the hell cared about the Indian girl? Right now, he belonged to her. *Hey, if she's not here with him, they can't be all that tight with each other.* She enjoyed this romantic time to its fullest. It was as if her fairytale was coming true.

"I hope I wasn't too presumptuous." His voice was deep and incredibly sexy. "I had forgotten to ask if there was anyone here to bash my head in for stealing his girl."

"No." She answered faster than she would have liked to. If she could have taken back her quick response to him, she would have. The man enthralled her. Toni had never wanted someone more than she wanted him.

* * * *

"I'd like to keep dancing with you all night. Would that be all right?" Wayne asked, yet, with his voice, it sounded more like a command. He looked down at her wanting eyes, eyes that gave away all of her secrets inside. He knew that she was his girl, now. He was still nervous. Each new love endeavor was an adventure, and Toni seemed to be the greatest adventure of all.

"Yes," she almost whispered. The feeling of her body moving seductively against his, made it hard for him to remain a gentleman. "Toni, you nice, mon." The words had escaped.

"Thank you. Wait a minute. How did you know my name?"

"I asked someone." He didn't mind if she knew that he had been seeking her out discreetly.

"Are you a cop?"

"Yes. Does that bother you?" He smiled because he knew that she must have been talking to someone about him. That meant that she was interested in him long before that night. "How did you know?"

"I didn't. I felt your gun." Her face turned timid and her cheeks flushed. He could have taken her statement sexually, but he didn't. Toni was clearly not that type of girl.

"I'm sorry, I'll move it." Wayne was about to reposition his pistol when Toni grabbed his hand. This simple gesture ignited their fire even more.

"No, it's okay. I'm fine," she said and rested her hand on his chest.

Wayne knew that he had liked her when he saw her at her mother's. His heart skipped a beat when he noticed her at the Orange Walk dance. Not prepared for what he was going to feel, he took her into his arms. The world seemed to fall away, leaving only him and his lady in complete bliss. A familiar place that he had never been, a familiar feeling that he had never felt, a familiar hunger that he never knew was being completely satisfied. Wayne was home in Toni's arms and he didn't think that he could ever let her go.

"What is your name?" she finally asked.

"Boogie Knight." he exclaimed with pride.

"That's an unusual name," she giggled.

"My actual name is Wayne Knight. My friends call mi Boogie."

"Why?" she asked incredulously.

"It's a long story. Let's just say since I was a little boy..." He hoped that she wouldn't ask him to explain that whole embarrassing tale.

"I'll stick with Wayne Knight while we're together and if I see you again." It was Toni's turn to have fun with him.

"What do you mean, *if* you see me again?" He wasn't laughing because he meant to see her as much as she would permit him to.

* * * *

Toni was a little unyielding for a while. She tried to hold back and not touch him more than she had to, but she couldn't help stealing a feel of the perfectly defined muscles in his arms. As she assumed the traditional slow dance position, she gently rested her right hand against his arm, and occasionally, his chest. When she felt the hardened shaft against her tummy, she knew that she should have pulled herself away, but she didn't. She tried,

instead, to pretend as if she wasn't aware that the hardness in his pants touched her. She wondered if he was aware that his hard-on was so obvious. For a split second, she questioned if he was looking to get her into his bed, but it was hard to develop any of those thoughts since emotions flowed through her body like a river of rich delight. This was the sweetest feeling in the whole world. She had never truly fallen in love with anyone so she wouldn't know how love felt. She experienced a feeling unlike anything she had ever known. Because of this she let herself go in his arms and danced. Toni was not going to remove her arms from around him, even if someone had to use a crowbar to pry them apart.

She was living out one of her fantasies and in the arms of a tall, attractive man, who smelled delicious, dancing to the songs that she had always loved, but was only able to enjoy as she drove to and from work and fantasized about fairytale romances. They were so lost into each other that they even danced to the fast music at the same pace as the slow ones. She had forgotten her family, friends and everyone else. She did not want anyone to interrupt her.

Toni had danced almost half the night with Wayne before it occurred to her that she should have danced at least one song with Cleave since he had asked her to dance earlier. At least she had to try to make it seem less obvious that she was falling for Wayne Knight.

"Toni, I'm taking off." Christine interrupted and handed her friend her house keys.

"Will you be taking her home?" she asked coldly.

"Yes," he hastily declared.

"No," Toni interjected just as quickly. She couldn't let him take her home. It struck her even harder that she wasn't being considerate by dancing with this one man all night long. *It's not*

my wedding. It's Emerald's wedding. Goodness, what would everyone think if they saw me leave with this man? I just met him and everyone knew it. What must he be thinking of me? She couldn't understand how she allowed him to sweep her away like that. Toni refused to hold her head up to meet his eyes as she hurried away from him. *It's too good to be true.*

Chapter Nine

Mentally Toni was still in Wayne Knight's arms as she and Christine drove home. The swift breeze against the opened passenger side window blew her hair about. She was grateful that her friend didn't interrupt her dream. They were halfway home before she noticed that her friend was unusually quiet. With the radio turned off, Christine's quietness did not make sense. There was only the sound of the night breeze rushing through the car windows. She attempted to test the situation by stating her satisfaction about the wedding celebration, but Christine met her with a short and dull response.

"You know, you really hurt Cleave tonight," she said with a tone of disdain.

"What?" Shock and confusion vibrated Toni's entire body.

"Cleave stood there all night waiting to dance with you and you disrespected him."

"Christine," she began carefully. "How could I disrespect Cleave when we are not an item? You yourself encouraged me to *go for mine*, remember?"

"I know that I told you to have fun, but I thought that you would have given him a chance once him get up the nerve to ask you to dance. Instead, you blew him off and made him look stupid in front of everyone at the reception."

"Stupid? Please. What's really going on here, Christine? Am I

reserved solely for your brother?"

"No, but he went to the wedding because of you." The discontentment between the two friends heated up even though the energy of the discussion was controlled.

"It wasn't my wedding and I didn't invite him," she rudely blurted.

"Come on, Toni. You know that if it weren't for you, he wouldn't have been there. He didn't really know anyone other than you and me."

"I refuse to be made responsible for what your brother feels."

"Mi not trying to make you feel guilty, but don't say things like that. That's fucked up," she shot back.

"I'm sorry about mentioning the wedding. That's my fault. As far as the dancing is concerned, I was there for almost an hour before Cleave asked me. I lost interest. It's not my fault that he took so long. Look, let's end this now. I'm tired."

"It's just not right." Christine stated after a few minutes of silence.

"I am very sorry that all this happened, Christine. I would have been honored to dance with Cleave, but he just took so damn long to move. By then, well, as I said, I sort of lost interest."

"It's over, okay? End of story."

For another half hour drive, the tension in the car was still thick.

* * * *

Wayne had never before resisted an occasional *quickie* with Becky whenever she turned to him at night as long as she allowed him to use a condom. Sometimes he initiated sexual

contact with her. He was never proud of himself after it was over, but he often admitted to himself that his dick made the decision for him. Tonight, however, he lay on his back with his eyes closed hoping that Becky wouldn't wake up. This way, he could keep reflecting on the most electrifying evening he had ever had. He didn't bathe before he came to bed, which should have alarmed Becky, if she had been awake. Wayne would never go to bed without bathing. This evening, he brushed only his teeth.

If he had kissed Toni Dawn, he wouldn't have brushed his teeth either, because he would have wanted to keep the taste of her on him for as long as he could. He could still smell her perfume even after he changed out of his suit. It was a faint essence of some kind of flowers. Her hair smelled like strawberries. If he bathed, the aroma would have washed away. That would not do. He fantasized that she was there, against his chest, her hair against his chin, her body pressed up against his.

This woman aroused feelings in him that he never knew existed. In an instant, she introduced him to world he never knew was possible. He had to see her again and it had to be soon. He couldn't imagine that a girl like Toni would want him, but he was sure he saw desire in her eyes when she looked at him at the dance. He saw it more than once. *If a girl like her wanted me, Mi can't sit back and allow her to realize that she is too sweet for the likes of a ruffian like me.* Wayne turned and looked at the back of Becky's head. Her long lush, black Indian hair took up a third of the bed. At one time, that would've been such a turn on, but now there was nothing, nothing at all. He knew that Becky wasn't feeling anything for him either. She continued to stake claim on him while everyone knew that she had her other man.

He was aware that he had to be careful of Becky's mad sister and her friends who would attack Toni if they ever found out he

was trying to pursue her. Her idiot friends acted as if he was Becky's personal property even though they knew that they were only living together. None of her friends was at the reception that night, but it wouldn't have surprised him if the news that he was locked down all night with the foreigner would reach Becky's ear by morning. He knew that he had to look out for Toni, just in case. She wasn't rough like the other girls he had dealt with so Becky would certainly try to hurt her.

He still believed that Becky had something to do with what happened to Karen, a nice Christian girl with whom he was friends. They were *only* friends. Nothing happened between them, yet now she had a scarred face. For years, he didn't believe that Becky had anything to do with the attack on that girl, but about two months ago they had an argument and Becky told him that she would disfigure him like Karen.

Becky didn't admit being responsible for what happened to Karen, no matter how hard he shook her. It was funny. For years, he had heard the talks about her connection to this cruel occurrence, but he never bought into it. Now, he was sure of it. He was preparing himself to be on his guard because he couldn't have anything bad happen to Toni. He just met her, but he was certain that if they messed with her, they would have to kill him. Becky's cousin, Delroy, was now married to Toni's sister. Wayne hoped that at least that connection would protect her from his psycho wife and her mad-ass sister.

* * * *

"He is a slow-ass idiot anyway." She struggled to change her tone. "I mean—just look how long it took him to make move on you. For goodness sake, look how pretty you are. If I was that cop, there was no way that I was going to let you go either. You

would have been a perfect dancing partner, among other things..." Christine added with a chuckle. She never wanted to hurt her best friend's feelings.

"Thank you, but..." Toni blushed from the compliment.

"I don't wrong you, if it was me, I would be in that man's arms, too. He is fine." Christine didn't know a whole lot about that man except that his name was Boogie Knight and that he was a cop. She also knew that he had a reputation for being a player and that her friend might be in over her head with this Mr. Knight. She advised her friend to proceed with caution, but this man might have all ready swept her away.

Christine turned her car into the quiet little lane that led up to her newly built house. It didn't matter what hour of night she came home, the drive up to her fully owned spread always lifted her spirit. The road was a little bumpy because it was still not finished so she had to slow down to a crawl whenever she drove on it, especially since she was overly protective of her Volkswagen convertible.

* * * *

Toni didn't talk much since they ended their conversation of Cleave. Her mind was playing one hell of a game with her. She thought about how dumb Wayne's nickname sounded, *Boogie Knight, please*. That should have been enough to turn her off, but it wasn't. It didn't turn her off at all.

Oh, she hated to admit it, but he really did get to her. She couldn't stop recalling how good it was being in his arms, his strong, yet gentle touch. She touched her cheek where he had touched it, hoping that Christine would not notice how silly she was acting. The feeling of his fingertips on her face was still there and she hoped that the feeling would never fade.

What is it about this man? Toni wondered. Was it his eyes? They kept romancing her every time she looked at him. Was it his lips? They were incredibly kissable. Maybe it's just some magical connection that she created in her mind. He felt like he belonged to her. She didn't know how to understand or explain it. He made her come alive.

Toni hated to admit that he got to her that much. She hated to admit that she wanted to stay with him. She couldn't allow the Jamaican heat to control her. It *had* to be the heat because she had never felt so powerfully attracted to anyone on a dance floor like that, least of all a Jamaican man. They all think that they are hot stuff. How could she allow that to happen to her?

She was going to savor those dances in her mind for as long as possible, but that was it. She wasn't going to tease herself into thinking that he was her dream lover. She couldn't take her mind off the fact that she acted so immaturely on the dance floor of her sister's wedding reception. How could she allow herself to act like that in the presence of her mother and her brothers? She wasn't thinking about her sisters because they didn't count. They would have done the same thing or worse.

Toni remembered that at one time in her life, she could never understand how a woman could lock herself tightly on a dance floor in the arms of a man that she had just met for the first time. Now, here she was doing the exact same thing. She knew that

Her mother was going to talk about it and, if she happened to let it slide, which she was sure she wouldn't, Emerald would definitely have something to say. Her sister would not stop until she made something out of it, she was sure of that as well.

"So what we doing tomorrow?" Christine asked, her voice back to its playful self.

"Actually, I have to go up to Dalvey for mom, to drop off some things to Sister Rita. Sister Rita doesn't have anyone so our

family helps her from time to time.” It was a long time since Toni had visited her, but she was looking forward to seeing her again.

“Great. I’ll go with you. On our way back we could stop at Golden Grove Market and pick up a few things.” Christine’s mischievous smile was back and flashing in full force.

Chapter Ten

With the exception of the underwear on the dressing table, socks hanging on the lamp and a large champagne bottle that lay spilt on the cream-colored rug, Emerald and Delroy's bridal suite in the Villa looked like it was worth every cent of the thirty-five thousand Jamaican dollars that it cost.

Emerald should have been sleeping since she had not slept in three nights before the wedding. Added to that was the fact that since Delroy had worked her out three times that evening, she should have been downright comatose by now. Yet, at three-thirty in the morning, she wasn't sleeping. Lying there with her head in the arms of her new husband, her blood boiled with anger. Her entire wedding was ruined. It was supposed to have been her special day, not Toni's.

No one asked Toni to be their wife. She, as always, told herself that her sister was a pig, but she never believed that she would have come to her reception and acted like such a whore. She really believed that her sister did it on purpose. Everyone was looking at her and that man on the dance floor with Toni seemed to have enjoyed it. Emerald knew that she was going to be the laughing stock of all St. Thomas because of what her sister did at her wedding. Oh, she hated her. She hated how she thought she was perfect and better than everyone else was there. Emerald reached over the nightstand, picked up the phone and

dialed. "Pam." She started anxiously without even saying hello. "Who was that man Toni was dancing with tonight?"

"Girl, what you doing calling me on you wedding night?"

Emerald ignored her question. "Come on, who was he?"

"Him name Boogie," she stated in her sleepy voice. "He is Boo's brother by their father side. He is from the North Course, somewhere. He is one of your husband's cousin's husband. One cooly gal name Becky. Mi hope Toni no start nothing with him because he is a woman beater and a womanizer."

"How you know?" Her interest was seriously peaked.

"Once, about two years ago," Pam continued, "he slapped her down unconscious. They had to throw cold water on her to revive her."

"Why?" She was really intrigued by this for reasons too sinister to fathom.

"I don't know what had happened. Some people said that him caught her in their bed with a man. She fucks around a lot, too. In fact, them have one son. He loves that child more than life itself, but everybody know that it's not his child. Boogie know it by now, too, but him still love the kid. The kid is the dead stamp of this thieving boy named Marshall who drive Taxi to and from Golden Grove and Rollans Field."

"I know Marshall, mon."

"Yes, girl. I wouldn't want somebody like dirty Marshall. Becky really make Boogie look bad in the district, mon. Mi no know how him stay with her so long. Still, a no good situation for your sister to get mixed up in."

"If my sister wants people like those to call her name around town, that is her business."

"That's not all. Becky have a crazy sister who them said escaped from the mad house. Mi no know how true the story is, but mi know that that sister is insane. She wear one big red

weave and is like a spy for Becky. She watches Boogie like a hawk. She no afraid to attack people, too.”

“All right, Pam, thanks.”

“No problem. Just warn you sister to be careful.”

Emerald hung up the phone and with a smile on her face, she turned to her husband. “Is it true that Boogie beat his wife to until she fell unconscious?”

“Mi no like to get into people business, mon.”

“Cut the crap,” she demanded “is it true or not?”

“That’s what I heard.” Delroy sighted.

Emerald smiled even wider. She was going to enjoy telling Toni that Boogie is a disgusting woman beater and that he is married. As far as she knew, her sister didn’t want to get involved with another married man, not after her last experience with Steve. “No, not Toni. Not my perfect sister,” she said aloud, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

Emerald was in such a vengeful state of mind that she couldn’t think of anything else but getting back at her sister, even as Delroy began kissing her. She didn’t feel anything at first. It was when he slid his fingers between her that she realized he was awake. She heard him whispering in her ears.

“Mi immigration papers will come through by Christmas, right baby?”

“I told you baby.” Her voice was about five octaves louder than usual. She was annoyed since she had answered that same question a thousand times. Jesus, talking about it was not going to make him get to America any faster. It wasn’t as if she was leaving anytime soon. She was going to be there for a whole month with him. *What is his problem?*

“Honey, if you are afraid of being away from me, don’t, because I told you that I was going to stay a month down here after the wedding,” Emerald calmly stated.

"I thought that it would be better if you go back up and just put in my immigration paper. That way I would a get to come up and be with you sooner." He caressed her tummy as he spoke.

"Delroy, which do you love more, America or me?" she blurted, pushing his hand away from her.

"It's you I love baby. What you talking about?" He reached for her lips with his.

She pushed his head away. "Oh, because it sounded to me like if you don't get to America right now, you are going to die."

"I love you more than anything in this world and I just don't like the idea of my baby being in that big country without me by her side."

"Well, I have been there for years without you and I'm here now, aren't I?" Delroy sounded like a desperate man, but she wasn't going to make a big deal out of it because this was the only man that had ever given her quadruple orgasms.

That was the reason she married him. It wasn't because he was intelligent, because that, he wasn't. He was tall and skinny. He was not even good looking. Her mother called him *Sin*. Whenever her mother was asked why she called him by that name, she would nonchalantly answer, "Him ugly like sin, mon."

Ugly or not, he still made her melt in bed. Yet, even as they began their fourth round of the night, Emerald couldn't help but drift away at the thought of how she was going to surprise Toni, finally exacting her revenge on her. Her sister was going to regret messing with her.

Chapter Eleven

Toni's enthusiasm for visiting Dalvey District changed after she started loading the trunk of her car and struggling to load a twenty-pound bag of rice, a two-gallon bottle of vegetable oil and God only knew what else her mother had packed in a that large and bulky burlap sack. The quicker she got it over with, the better her day would be.

Dalvey roads looked considerably small compared to how she remembered them. The same little old rusted-out smoke shop still leaned to the side of Cane Lane. Smoke escaped from an old shack just beyond the road across from the pipe. Toni and Christine didn't give the smoking shack a second look and so were not alarmed. It was common for some people living in such tight corners of the countryside to cook on open wood fire in their kitchen. She was more fascinated with how the place hadn't change much since she was a child.

The pipe that supplied water to the town still dripped under the shade of the large breadfruit tree that leaned from Brother P's yard and hung out over the narrow potholed filled concrete road. The small one-room post office still stood across the street from Aunt Jane's yard. Its exterior walls only looked a little more weathered and mildewed.

Toni looked over at an old man who sat at the stoop of the post office, resting his arms on the handle of his walking stick,

studying the newcomers in their pretty cars with curious eyes.

"Him must be waiting for the post mistress to arrive so that him could get his pension check," Christine said.

There wasn't much going on in Dalvey Square. Nothing except a stray dog that barked and chased a speeding motorcycle after it drove by and almost ran it over. Her heart leaped, but stray dogs escaping speeding traffic were a common thing for Christine. She didn't even flinch at the sight of it. She locked her car, which she had parked underneath a large mango tree that shaded the dirt-banked sidewalk.

"You sure that this is it?" Christine asked.

"Yep, this is it," Toni responded. A familiar smell of roasted breadfruit filled the air, which brought her back to childhood on bright Sunday mornings when no one in the house had to work and her mom's cooking was heavenly. She took a deep breath. The only other thing that reminded her of this scent was when she went camping with her friends back in college. The smell of the woods and an open campfire was just about the equivalent of what she smelled now. For her friend, this smell was of an *old hat*.

"Now, where are we goin'?" Christine asked with obvious apprehension.

Toni pointed to a path leading through some thick woods.

"You kiddin'?"

"It's not that far. Only about a half-mile walk, if I remember correctly."

"Toni, this is bullshit," Christine exclaimed still struggling behind her.

"Oh, Christine, relax. What's the worst thing to run out of these bushes at us, a goat?" Toni wasn't that much worried about the walk. It annoyed her that she and her friend had to walk and carry these bulky and heavy items. If she had thought clearly, she

would have found someone to help them.

"Toni, a half-mile walk through those bushes is far enough for me." Christine couldn't hide her fear.

"Did I tell you that Sister Rita is an obya woman?" Toni hoped that this revelation would take Christine's mind off the woods.

"You kiddin'?" Christine stopped walking.

"I'm kidding," Toni said as she gestured her friend to continue. "My mom said she is a foolish old woman while others say she can really see things that are going to happen, as if she's a psychic." She didn't know a great deal about Sister Rita's psychic powers. She had been hearing things about them since she was a child, but the woman had never told her about her future so to her it was just a myth. Besides, she didn't believe in those things anyway.

"Maybe we could ask her to give us a readin' then." Christine was always up for an adventure or something out of the ordinary. This definitely qualified as one of those moments.

"If you want to, go ahead, but I don't want anybody reading me."

"I don't care. I'm gonna ask her," she said eagerly.

"I used to be up here more often than I cared to remember."

Christine was being a Prima Donna, but she admitted when they finally got out of that annoying little path and into the open yard that it wasn't a half-mile walk at all. They both realized that it only seemed like it was a long walk to Toni when she was a little girl because her strides were much smaller.

Toni also realized another reason why it seemed like such a long and annoying walk to Sister Rita's house. That woman used to snitch on her for the simplest things. Those snitches led to some of the most memorable ass-whippings she had ever received. No, she couldn't say that she liked Sister Rita much. She did feel sorry though, when her mother told her that she had

lost her sight. She certainly didn't mind bringing her the things that her mother asked her to, even if they were cumbersome.

Yet, the dislike for Sister Rita came from the time, many years ago, when she walked all the way to Dalvey to fill that woman's water jars for her. Sister Rita, in turn, walked all the way from Dalvey District to Winchester District to tell Toni's grandmother that she took more time than she should have to fill the jars because she was wasting time playing at the pipe with the other children. Toni absently rubbed her backside as she remembered the switch striking she received for that little excursion.

"Sister Rita was a big pain in the ass back then," she whispered to Christine as she knocked on the crack-filled, weather-beaten front door. "Hello?" Toni called, "Sister Rita, are you home?" She called out a few of times, but there was no answer. The place looked barren, as if no one lived there. Checking the front door, it did not open at first. It looked like someone pulled it up and locked it tightly.

Christine pushed the door with force. It made a creaking sound as it opened up into the dark room.

They walked in. The room was musky and dirty with wet clothing hanging over the windowsill and the linoleum that covered the floor plastered with what seemed like mounds and mounds of dried mud.

"Sister Rita?" Toni called out again.

"Edith, is that you?" Both women jumped, frightened at the sound of Sister Rita's voice. She was sitting on a chair behind the door near the window.

"No, ma'am, it's me, Toni...Toni Dawn." She approached Sister Rita in both horror and sympathy. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. It was dark in the room, but she clearly saw that she was now approaching a small, old withered woman. This was not the Sister Rita she remembered. The Sister Rita she knew

was a short, thick woman, who kept her house spotless and shone with cleanliness. The woman in front of her was but a shell of her former self. ‘Oh, Sister Rita. Why are you hiding behind the door?’ Toni knelt down to her chair and hugged her. She didn’t realize that tears were flowing down her face because she couldn’t understand what had happened to Sister Rita.

She was a woman that was so prosperous and full of life. How could she live in such filth when she used to travel so far on her stubby little legs to lend a helping hand wherever someone needed her? What happened to this woman’s voice, which was so big and commanding? Now, she sounded frail and beaten.

‘Go back outside and turn around three times. You was followed here,’ Sister Rita stated without a preamble and niceties. She was all business when it came to foreseeing premonitions.

Toni hesitated at first but Christine hurried back to the door and turned around three times. She was anxious to hear what Sister Rita had to say.

Toni did it hesitantly just to get it over with.

Sister Rita’s voice seemed to gain some strength as she continued her opening dialogue. (join) ‘You sound so much like you mother. Mi believe it was her comin’ in since she sent me a letter tree weeks ago and said dat she was comin’. Mi sit here, since yesterday waiting. Mi never even move fi go peepee. Mi know dat she can’t walk up the hill anymore and mi can’t go over to Winchester. So mi no see her in more dan eight years. Mi knew her voice still. You sound just like you mother, Toni. Yes, you do sound a lot like her.’

The ladies were amazed over her outpouring of words, yet taken aback over the forcefulness with which she delivered her statement. In fact, it took Toni a little while to register her opening words. *“You was followed here.”*

“Who was following us, Ms. Rita?” Christine asked with great concern and enthusiasm. “Was it a ghost?” she added, half-hoping it was her.

“No, my child. It was someone much worse because ghosts can’t hurt the living.” Sister Rita spoke in a calm and nurturing voice.

“Who was it?” Christine asked.

“She was sent to watch you... Her heart full with rage,” Sister Rita affirmed.

Toni was generous and had a large heart. She sensed the goodness in her. She also sensed something else, a problem or dilemma, perhaps. She changed the conversation immediately. “You have been sitting here since yesterday?” She wanted to stop the silly talks of spies and their intentions. *Hurt me, indeed. What foolishness.*

“Yes, since eight o’clock yesterday mornin’. Even when it was rainin’, I never even move to shut the window. Mi sleep with my head right against dis door.”

“Oh, Sister Rita...” sadness filled Toni’s heart to hear her speak in such an irrational way. Immediately, she turned to more pressing issues. “Have you eaten?”

“Not since yesterday mornin’, child.”

“Why not?”

“Mi a wait on the little boy to bring me grocery.”

By the time Toni turned to look into Christine’s face, she was heading toward the kitchen. Toni placed her bags next to the chair in which Sister Rita sat. She walked into the kitchen where Christine was searching through the cupboards for something to go with the cornmeal she found there.

“If she had some condensed milk, mi could make her some cornmeal porridge, but there aren’t a lot of options here.” Christine said. She glanced out the kitchen window. “Them must

have duppy in a these bushes,” she chuckled.

Toni walked toward a shiny refrigerator in the corner of the kitchen, which seemed entirely out of place. What was odder was that the woman didn't even plug it in. As she turned to get Christine's attention over this oddity, she noticed that Sister Rita was at the kitchen door, bent over as if to reach for something on the floor. However, she folded her arms behind her. She was looking but her eyes had a white film over them. This was the first time that Toni saw Sister Rita's blind eyes. Though bent over, she seemed a little taller, now that she had lost so much weight. She always seemed old to Toni, but she never acted old. Her hair was completely white now. She was frail and her back hunched over. She walked quickly across the kitchen floor, but she did so with her body in a right angular position.

“It was you mother who sent that refrigerator for me, but since they turned off mi electricity five years ago, mi no bother to fuss myself over it. Mi have no use for it anyhow.”

It was as if Sister Rita had read Toni's previous thoughts about the refrigerator. Chills were going up her arms. She was going to ask her how she kept her food preserved, but quickly remembered the old days when her family didn't have a refrigerator. Her grandmother used salt and smoke as preservatives so not having a refrigerator was not the end of the world to these old folks. She wasn't going to cause any problems for Sister Rita. This old woman certainly deserved peace at this time in her life.

“Then, Sister, who go to the shop and carry water for you?” Christine asked her.

“A one little boy name Neville. Him come by two or three times a week. Him go a shop and carry water. Him mother collect the little pension money for me once a month. Dem don't treat me too bad.” Again, Sister Rita's voice filled with life.

The ladies agreed that this dear old woman needed full-time help because the house that she was living in looked and smelled as if it had not been cleaned in at least five years. Spider webs were all over the walls and windows.

Her pots, dishes and silverware were worn and tarnished. Two of her pots were actually large cheese cans converted into pots. Yet, she was standing there, telling Toni and her friend that the woman who collected her pension check, didn't treat her bad. Sister Rita needed help without a doubt.

After they talked quietly in the kitchen, Christine hurried back down the bushy hill, toward the main road to purchase food to make something for Sister Rita to eat.

Toni stayed back to clean. First, she took an old broom from the corner and started to sweep away the spider webs from the walls. It took a while for her to unlatch the door because it seemed like as if no one opened it in years. She finally did manage to pop it open and swept things out through the back. There were so many things needed cleaning. She got to work, sweeping and throwing the garbage out of the house. Throughout all of Toni's actions, Sister Rita sat smiling, as if she could actually see the job Toni was doing.

"You turned out well, Toni," Sister Rita told her. "I'm glad to see you turned out so well. You mother wrote that you not married yet. You going to be married soon. Stop worrying dough, you dream mate is closer than you know. He is going to fall madly in love with you." She made the predication matter-of-factly and in earnest. No crystal ball, no incense burning and no *call me now*, just a flat statement.

"W-who?" Toni was puzzled, amazed and yes, even joyful over this prediction.

"You will find out soon. Some tings no meant to be discovered before them time. Have patience, darling, and you

will enjoy life more.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” though she understood that those words were just the ramblings of a senile old woman, yet in the back of her mind, she hoped that she might be a real clairvoyant. She hoped that Sister Rita was a real psychic because if she were, she would have relaxed with her words. A loud knock at the front door started Toni out of the furthest corner of her dreamland. She didn’t understand why Christine was knocking when she knew that she could just push the door open and come in.

“Maybe she has too many things,” she told Sister Rita as she hurried to pull the door open. Toni smiled at the unfamiliar face under the most ridiculous red wig she had ever seen. She gave no imagination or coordination into creating that hairstyle. The girl stood in front of the step to the front door with a rude attitude on her face. “Hi, can I help you?” Toni was friendly and inviting even though in her mind was screaming, *What the fuck!*

“You are Toni Dawn, right?” Ugly Weave began. “Mi have a message for you.” She spoke in a slow yet daunting voice.

Curiosity and perplexity stirred Toni as she looked at the gross injustice to hair. She gestured for the strange woman to continue.

“Watch your back.” Ugly Weave pointed a finger with a seriously tacky and long nail. Her name must have been *Ghetto Superstar*.

“Excuse me?” Toni asked in her best street attitude. She was both mystified and shaken, but she wasn’t going to show fear.

“Don’t say dat mi didn’t warn you, gal.” Ugly Weave’s fury seemed to vibrate the atmosphere around her.

“What have I done to you?”

“What have I done to you,” she mocked, “Just a friendly message, slut,” she said and then sucked her teeth and walked away.

Toni stood frozen in the entrance of Sister Rita's front door. She was baffled as to what had just happened. Was she to be sacred now? Who could she have offended since she'd been in Jamaica? She watched as Ugly Weave disappeared down into the bushy path. Toni had no clue as to what her message meant. She had asked herself if the world had gone crazy before she turned and walk back in the house.

Christine took a while at the shop, but when she came back, she brought more things than she could carry. Thankfully, cleaning the house temporarily wiped away the memory of Ugly Weave's performance. She had brought back rubber gloves, bleach, soap, ammonia, Windex and many other household cleaners. It was enough to clean most of Dalvey's house. Toni was still in disbelief as she told Christine about her little visitor.

"It's just some bush gal who felt threatened by you," she rationalized. "Maybe Cleave must a fucked her once and because she saw you and him together since you've been here, she felt threatened. What else could it be?"

Toni was even more confused. That couldn't have been the answer, could it?

"It couldn't be about that boy from the reception. How could a woman be after you about that so fast? Girl, forget about that bush gal."

By the time the two women were ready to leave for home, Sister Rita's house was livable. She sat on the chair next to the window. The gusty breeze now blew through the window and flaps without a hint of dirt or dust blowing around. The scarf that Mrs. Dawn had stuffed in one of the package that Toni brought looked beautiful tied around Sister Rita's head.

Feeling pleased with the job they had done, Christine and Toni were ready to leave. Toni kissed Sister Rita on her cheek

and was heading out the door following Christine, but before she stepped out, the old crone called out to her. ‘Yes, Sister Rita? She was starting to like the woman more and more each minute they were together, her childhood hatred dissipating.

Sister Rita was smiling broadly, rocking in her chair. “Actually, darling, there is something you must be aware of.”

“Really, what is that, Sister?” Toni’s curiosity was getting the better of her.

“A little advice. You are trying to get pregnant, my child. You will have children. The first one will come before you know it. Do not do anything hasty when you find out. Nothing will happen before its time. So do not fret. As mi said before, have patience. You young people too impatient.”

With Toni’s mouth hanging open, still standing on the porch, Sister Rita closed the front door and began humming to herself, a familiar Christian song. ‘How the hell did she know that?’ She looked at Christine for answers.

“What are you talking about? I thought you were adopting.”

“Yea but you have to admit, that was pretty close.”

“Come, let us go back inside,” Christine grabbed Toni’s arms. “Mi of to find out if mi will ever get married.”

“Christine, that’s enough.” Toni pulled her back. “If Sister Rita could see things, how come she could not tell me that Ugly Weave was at the door?”

“She knows that there was nothing to worry about with Ugly Weave.” Christine stamped her feet like a spoiled child and reluctantly followed. All the way back to the car, she lamented that Sister Rita didn’t read her future

Chapter Twelve

This day is definitely one for the books, Toni thought as the motorcycle she was on pulled up into Golden Grove Square. After going to Dalvey and seeing Sister Rita living in such a horrible condition, then getting threatening messages from ugly weaved mutants, getting her car stuck in mud on the way back was the icing on the cake. To finish off this day from hell, the only ride they could get was from a 70's afro-wearing, forty-year-old man named Dexter. Dexter's motorcycle was small and appeared to be on its last legs so he could only carry one person at a time and Toni was given the honor by Christine who insisted that she went first.

Ordinarily, a motorcycle ride would have been a thrill. The only problem was Dexter's armpit was emitting the most unpleasant of odors. Toni suffered all the way Golden Grove. If the stench from his armpit were tolerable, it would have been a nice ride. This was her first chance of riding on the back of a motorcycle and the experience was ruined. It was a big relief when they finally got to Golden Grove.

* * * *

Wayne was sitting at his desk talking to a petty criminal and his mother about his misdeed that landed him in jail for two days

when he saw the motorcycle roll around the roundabout of Golden Grove. He admitted to himself that he didn't have Superman's vision, but he was sure that it was Toni Dawn he saw riding in on the back of a motorcycle. He didn't want to appear insensitive to Miss Gyatta and her son, and he truly didn't want that nimble handed fucker, Officer Clark, to rough them up. He had busted up the boy's face and was threatening to keep him in jail for a month.

Wayne looked anxiously out the window and back at Miss Gyatta. He leaned to the furthest corner of the casement window to see if his gaze could follow her. They disappeared as the motorcycle rode up to the front of the hardware store. He waited for a while to see if they rode back onto the main road because he had full few of the stretch, but the motorcycle did not ride out. He needed to get away for Miss. Gyatta and her son.

"I tell you what." He hurried back to his desk. "I am going to have Juliet draw up the release paper and let you go home and discuss this further." He signed a document and handed it to Miss Gyatta. "Give this to Miss Juliet—the lady at the front desk."

"But what about him?" Miss. Gyatta pointed to Officer Clark who was standing by the door talking to Officer Bernard.

"You don't have to worry about him," he assured her. "Let me worry about that, ma'am."

"Tank you, sir." Miss. Gyatta reached over and hugged Wayne tightly. "Tank you, sir."

He turned toward the young boy. "Look, Desman, you're not out of the woods yet, but you should know that you're takin' a chance with your future when you shoplift."

"Yes, sir." Desman answered.

The kid's face still swollen, he smiled at the punch Miss. Gyatta delivered to Desman's back as he walked by her. Wayne's face changed from pleasant to defensive when he saw Officer

Clark hurrying over to his desk.

“Man, a what you just did?” Office Clark demanded.

“What do you mean, what I did?” Wayne reached for his motorcycle keys on his desk. “Look, mon, the boy is only sixteen and he never did anything like this before.”

“Man, you can’t do those things.”

“I can do what is right?” He looked sternly at Officer Keith. “Look how you busted up the boy’s face, mon.”

“I never touch him,” Clark stated very unpersuasively.

“Would you like someone to do that to your son?” Wayne asked as he made his way to the exit door.

“I don’t have a son,” Office Clark exclaimed. “Technically, you don’t have one either, you fuckin’ pussy.” He said the last sentence under his breath. Officer Clark stood his ground when he saw Wayne walking back over to him.

“If you daddy wasn’t a pussy, he wouldn’t have left you dumbass mother for a teenager.”

Before Clark’s fist could reach the officer’s face, Wayne’s hand locked around his neck. Seconds later, six other officers swooped down on them. Before any one was hurt, Wayne found himself grasped by four of his co-workers. He ripped himself from their hold and headed for the exit. He heard Keith calling him a raashole, but he had to catch Ms. Dawn before she rode off.

* * * * *

A sharp sting on the lower part of her left leg that sent her flying to the ground, interrupted Toni’s excitement for getting away from the armpit stink. She had jumped off the motorcycle so fast she burnt the lower inside of her left leg on the bike’s muffler. It was just a little burn, but it hurt like hell. Dexter was nice enough

to help her up, carry her across the street and placed her on the post office's stoop. He then crossed the street to the drug store, and in seconds flat, brought her back a box of Band-Aids and a jar of Vaseline.

"Mi a go pick up you friend now," he told her.

"Thank you."

Toni was sitting on the post office stoop, rubbing on the Vaseline and covering her burn while waiting for Dexter to return with Christine. She couldn't avoid thinking of Ugly Weave. That crazy girl's threatening message was disturbing. *Who was she? What was that all about?* Toni hoped that she wouldn't find herself in any confrontations with anyone while she was in Jamaica. She was a grown woman, for crying aloud.

She was a little annoyed considering the whole day's events, but not for long. Remembering where she was, Toni's spirits began to improve. She had not stopped at Golden Grove since she had arrived in Jamaica. It was the perfect opportunity to check out the place.

Golden Grove was rocking on that damp, Friday afternoon. It was like a big dance. Elephant Man's, *Pan the River, Pan the Bank*, song was blasting while the sweet aroma of jerk pork and jerk chicken grilled on the sidewalk across from the supermarket filled the air. The street was festive as people went about their business. Many of them were just on their weekend errands. The post office lines extended out onto the sidewalk. It felt like Jamaica Avenue in Queens on Christmas Eve. The only difference was, in Golden Grove the music was loud.

Standing against the post office pole waiting for Christine, Toni could not believe how stylish most of the people going back and forth looked. It was hard to believe that this was supposed to be a third world island because people didn't look like they were poor. Most of them looked middleclass.

Saturday afternoon in the Roosevelt Field Mall in Long Island had nothing on these people. Women and girls in their high-heeled pumps and gold jewelry with decked-out hairstyles were walking back and forth. There was this one fat-ass woman sporting a purple version of Toni's Max Mario shorts set. It may have been a knock-off, but who could tell?

The only people that looked like they were struggling to make a living were the sunburned peddlers who were calling after people to buy from them. They were hard workers. They were true role models for those who didn't have the stomach to work. Thankfully, Toni's mother and grandmother instilled in her a wonderful work ethic, which enabled her to thrive.

If she could only incorporate this with her love life, her existence would be complete. Her financial life was in quite good standing, thanks to great investment advice that her stockbroker friend gave her years ago. She could not help but to recall used to walk the hot asphalt, barefooted, carrying crocus bags filled with mangos. Thinking about her feet, Toni reached down again to massage her burning calf. *How could I have been so silly, burning myself like this? Damn it.* The Vaseline wasn't doing a hell of a lot for her either. *This was just what I need.* She chuckled. *To be hindered by a burn on my calf.* It was just a tiny circle, but it was starting to swell up. She didn't hear when Dexter's bike pulled up in front of the post office. She only heard Christine's loud bellowing voice.

"Come on, Toni, daylight's burning. Let's go get some tings from over de market." Christine's enthusiasm was certainly contagious.

Toni hurried off the post office steps and hastened to catch up to her friend. They were hurrying along when they heard the loud roaring of a lager motorcycle behind them. They turned and looked, but didn't recognize the rider because he was wearing a

helmet with a shaded visor.

"I was planning to make some chicken soup tonight for dinner but if there is anything that you had in mind that you would like to eat, tell me and I'll get." Christine step up to the high sidewalk and ushered Toni to climb up. "I would like up to have a nice dinner before we go to the Stone Love dance Portland tonight?"

Toni did not hear a word her friend said. She was a distracted by the loud roar of the approaching motorcycle. "W-what?" she asked, but the motorcycle was almost upon the sidewalk where they stood. It was as if the psychotic rider planned to run them over. She stepped a little further over on the sidewalk, but the rider pulled up right next to her and Christine and proceeded to remove his helmet. It was he. It was Knight. Butterflies filled her stomach.

"Will you have lunch with me?" he asked in his strong sexy voice.

She looked at her friend as if she didn't notice that he was talking to her.

Christine looked back at her and shrugged her shoulders.

"When?" she asked him.

"Now." He handed the helmet to her.

"No, I couldn't," she told him with little conviction.

"I'm sure your friend won't mind," he told her. "You can ask her along."

Toni searched her friend's eyes.

"Go ahead." Christine gave her a wink of approval.

"Okay." She refused the helmet Wayne handed her. She did not want to wear that big heavy thing on her head.

Wayne attached the helmet to the front of his motorcycle.

Toni wasn't sure if she was doing the right thing. She only knew that she couldn't say *no* to him. He was riding a very stylish

motorcycle and he looked hot on it. She climbed on and they sped off down Golden Grove Road. *What am I doing?* There she was on the backseat of the motorcycle, going God knows where with some man that she didn't even know. It's not as if she could get away from him if she found herself in a compromising situation. He was in total and complete control of her life the moment she got on the bike.

It was obvious that he worked out because had defined muscles in his back and stomach. She held him tightly around his waist as her hair blew wildly in the wind, just like the cool New Yorker girls she had seen back on the New York highways. It was heavenly. "Where are you taking me?" Toni shouted over the roaring sound of the motorcycle and the wind.

"Don't worry." His sexy voice was nice.

* * * *

Wayne wasn't sure that when he got off the motorcycle Toni wouldn't slap his face for his forwardness. His biggest worry at that time was to get by Stokes Hall without Becky's friend's seeing her. He also didn't want to take her through White Road because she would definitely ruin her clothes with all the white dust that would be kicked up by his motorcycle.

He knew that he should have thought about it a little better before he picked her up. The only thing that came into his mind when he saw her on the post office stoop was to be able to have a moment with her, alone. He was about to walk over to her, but her friend came. He just couldn't risk the chance of losing her again.

Maybe Portland would be the place I could take her to for lunch. Wayne wasn't sure if the rain had stopped for the rest of the day. He wouldn't want to get her wet on his motorcycle while

they were riding, but he was willing to take a chance because he couldn't afford to hang out around that part of town without someone spotting him. Becky had too many connections around there.

Wayne rode for about fifteen minutes before he spoke again "I'm taking you to Boston," he told her. "Is that all right with you?"

"You're asking me that now?"

"I know that if I had asked you before I picked you up, you would have said *no*." Wayne was not entirely sure if she would say *no*. He said it only to avoid seeming arrogant.

"How would you know that?" She grabbed his waist just a little tighter when the motorcycle leaned to its side as it drove around a curb.

"Because you ran away from me last night." He was determined not to let her run away today.

* * * *

"I can't hear you. The noise from the bike," Toni lied. She wasn't prepared to answer that question so when he laughed at her response, she let it slide. Besides, she was a little bit more concerned about the dangerously narrow road that they were speeding on, and worse, riding on a vehicle that did not protect their bodies if they crashed. She now scolded herself for not taking the helmet when he offered it to her. She had driven on this road when she was coming to St. Thomas and it was scary, but at least she was inside of a car.

"It's going to rain again," he said after a few minutes.

"I don't care about the rain. Get me off this road," Tony shrieked at the sight of the steep cliff alongside which Wayne zoomed at what seemed like two hundred kilometers an hour.

The ocean stretched out to the right of her. She could see its waves smash up against the foot of the cliffs that seemed to stretch out for miles.

* * * *

“Hold on tight. I’m going to speed up.” He grinned, enjoying the feeling of the side of her face glued to his back.

“Oh my G-God. Are you kidding me!” she yelled, clutching him tighter.

“I never kid on my bike.” He continued grinning, driving both toward their destiny.

Chapter Thirteen

The motorcycle pulled up across the street from a restaurant that didn't have a name on it. It was not uncommon to find businesses without signs in Jamaican countrysides, but Boston was like a little city. There should be a name on everything—unless they are hiding something magnificent inside.

Toni climbed off and immediately started to fix her disheveled clothes. She tugged at her blouse, pulled on her shorts and pushed her hair from out of her face. Boston wasn't particularly spectacular. It was just familiar and cozy. This was the first time that she had ever been there, which was a shame because Jamaica was her home.

It seemed as if everybody knew her country more than she did. There were more races in Boston than there were in other provinces, speaking so many exotic and interesting languages. There were people just walking around, lovers holding hands and entire families strolling about the bay, enjoying the scenery. Some of them were dressed up as if they were going for a walk in an African safari. There were places in Boston where people could go hiking, biking and swimming. It really was a cozy, fun place.

In addition to the tourists, there were the Jamaican elites, the wannabe elites and the native folks of Boston. Many of them were working in bars, the jerk kitchens, the gift shops and the fruit

stands. Some were just out to enjoy the day. Some men were just hanging out near the jukebox in front of a bar.

Reggae music and the smell of delicious food filled the air. The place was alive. Toni had been hearing about Boston and its famous jerk pork ever since she was a child. She would have loved to go over to one of the jerk stands, but Knight had directed her toward the no-name restaurant where they were going to eat.

"No worry about jerk because inside this restaurant, they serve it up nice and anyway you want it."

It was as if he was reading her thoughts.

"If you want some to take home, we can pick up some from the stand on our way back," Wayne told her.

"I'd like that," Toni replied softly. Ever since the harrowing ride, she had been on edge. She was becoming relaxed with him.

The old blue painted restaurant was ugly and dull from the outside. Advertisements of a dragon stout, Red Stripe beer, rum cream and an array of Jamaican liquors pasted on top of remnants of old posters that were removed without care. She couldn't imagine that anyone other than old country farmers were inside, smoking cigars and taking their weekend drinks, but she was wrong.

It wasn't gleaming with lights from elegant chandeliers or romantic candles. Calabash lamps under a flow of water lilies that hung suspended over each dining table provided the only lighting. Bright white tablecloth covered all the tables. It created the illusion that one was sitting in a secluded garden. It was incredibly romantic.

It was not very formal though. They seated themselves in chairs made from bamboo and padded with very soft multicolored fabric cushions. Toni looked about with delight. Beautifully decorated walls displayed pictures of all the

prominent Jamaican entertainers framed in glass. If his intention was to impress her, it did.

It was the coziest hideaway one could think of. The jukebox was playing *You Don't Know What It Means to Be Loved*, by Denis Brown. If Toni intended not to enjoy this moment, she would have failed because she was swept off her feet. Occasionally, she found herself gazing at him.

Toni didn't want to be caught staring, but she couldn't believe how gorgeous he was. His eyebrows, his forehead and ooh, those sensuous lips were entrancing. Everything about him was irresistible. His whole disposition was alluring. The way he just sat back in the chair and folded his arms commanded attention.

Wayne leaned forward and gently took both of her hands into his. He turned her palms around and looked at them as if he was a palm reader.

"Oh, please." She thought that he was being a little too corny. "Don't tell me you know how to read palms?"

"No, actually I don't, mon," he laughed. "Mi just wanted to see how your hands fit into mine." He played with her fingers gently.

"Why?" She was being a little rough because she didn't want him to think that she was falling over him.

"Well, it's like a puzzle, you know? If they fit together, there is hope for me in you life." He continued playing with her fingers, massaging the palms as well.

"Can I take your order now?" the waitress said interrupting their sweet moment.

Toni was glad for the intrusion. In truth, she just didn't want to admit to herself that she liked being with this man. She was fearful to own up to the fact that even though the motorcycle ride was a little dangerous, it was the most exciting thing that she had ever done in her whole life. She was afraid to face the reality that

last night, at her sister's wedding reception, dancing with this man had awoken the most erotic feeling she had ever experienced. She kept telling herself none of this mattered because as soon as she returned to New York, all of those feelings would disappear. It didn't matter how much he made her desire him, she wasn't going to sleep with him.

"What do you want from me?" Toni asked. "What are you going to do, huh? Are you going to start something with me only to have it end quickly once I leave? That doesn't make any sense since we are not teenagers and this is not a fairytale."

"To tell you the truth, I wasn't thinkin' about all that." He clasped his hands and rested his chin on them as if to think about his answers. "Mi just wanted to have lunch with you, that's it. I wanted to spend at least one evenin' with you. Mi don't know if you will ever see me again after this, or even if you want to but at least mi get my wish to be with you for an evening. I'm a man who likes to go after what I want. I'm not gonna make a ting that me want pass me by and then when mi old and can't do it over again, mi a go spend my life regretting that mi never try."

Toni listened carefully to how Wayne had spoken like a man who was single, and if he ever stated that he didn't have a girl, she was just going to get up and walk out of the restaurant. "Who was that girl that was with you at the church?"

The waitress interrupted their question and answer session to place a basket of festivals and two glasses of Ting on the table.

She watched his face as he studied the entire restaurant, as if it held the answers to her questions.

"You know, I was hopin' that you wouldn't find out about her."

"Well at least you're honest," Toni responded as if she was surprised. Actually, it was good news to her because with the other woman around, she couldn't fall in love with him now.

That little piece of information was her salvation.

"I wouldn't lie to you." Wayne studied her face.

"So are you married?" She folded the white cloth napkin across her lap, not showing her anticipation for the answer.

"Yes."

Toni could understand why his answer drove what felt like a needle through her heart. She didn't even know him long enough to be in love with him. Why would she be hurt to hear that he is married? "Well at least you are honest." She drank from her glass.

"We are separated."

"Oh?"

"Yes. We have been playin' the role so that my son could grow up with me in his life, but our little game had been played out."

"You have a son?"

"Yes...yes I do." His face lit up. "His name is William and he is great."

"Wow!" His story made him seem even more attractive, if that was possible. He touched her hands, which were now resting on the table.

"I would never put you in any awkward position."

How the hell was she going to get out of this when she felt like she could sit there in that restaurant with Wayne forever? She reached over and picked up one of the festivals just to avoid being caught admiring him. She had heard about festival for years, but she had never eaten one.

"It is made with cornmeal dough and sugar," he told her.

"Are you kidding?" She was surprised, but after trying the festival, it actually tasted just like cornmeal dough with sugar. What made it also special was that it reminded her of something her grandma used to make when she was a child.

The waitress set a bowl adorned with small cubes of jerk pork. The couple nibbled as they sat and gazed at each other for a while before Toni started to feel nauseous.

Wayne told her that some fresh air would do her good. He paid for the food and they left the restaurant.

The nauseous feeling had passed quickly once they got outside. They walked and walked, mostly without talking. There was a lot to talk about, but both were too self-aware to find the right words without concern for saying the wrong thing or talking too much. Listening to their united footsteps against the damped blossomy pavement was just as good as talking.

The road was carpeted with blossoms that had fallen from the dogwood trees along the side of the road. Toni playfully kicked at them with her heels as she walked. They were walking so closely together that their hands occasionally bounced against each other. Toni wanted to wrap her pinky finger around his, which seemed to make it available to be clinging to, but she wasn't sure if she should.

"I've got to say this, you are incredibly pretty." He wasn't even looking at her.

"Thank you," Toni answered softly. She felt her face flush.

"Even your voice, oh man." He was struggling to describe how he felt.

"Thanks," she said again. Her gaze still wandered about the trees that lined the sides of the road. She realized he was openly romancing her and she couldn't stop it.

"You've got mi going out of my mind, ever since we danced last night, you know that?"

She wanted to say *me, too*, but didn't. She had no intention of revealing her feelings to him. Her body language was speaking loud enough. The ground was still damp from the rain and Toni was wearing heels, which were not very comfortable, but she was

afraid to tell him because she didn't want him to suggest ending their lunch date. It felt like they were a couple and she liked that feeling very much.

Without words, their fingers crept together and they were holding hands like old lovers. Neither of them said anything about it. It was just a special moment and they both knew it.

There's nothing wrong with holding hands with him, she tried to convince herself, but she knew better than that. She knew that this was real. She couldn't tell what was going to happen next and it was wonderful and scary.

Before they even said another word, large drops of water were falling around them.

"We better hurry back," he told her. He whispered a curse at the weather for ruining this perfect evening.

"Okay." Toni offered a similar oath to Mother Nature. The rain was tumbling down very hard before they got halfway up the road, but the noise from a pickup truck was what got their attention. She composed her excitement.

Wayne stuck out his hand and stopped the truck. The pickup pulled up to them and the driver called out to Knight as if they were old friends.

"Boogie, you old thief. What you doing out here so, mon?" The driver was a big, burly man with an enormous smile.

"What's happenin', Kitchen." Wayne reached into the driver's side and shook the man's hand. He turned toward Toni, "Give me a minute, Kitchen." He pulled Toni aside. "I know this man my entire life. We grew up together. He is the godfather to my son. Would you mind if I ask him to drop you home? I don't want you to get soaked on the bike."

"Will it be okay?" she asked. She smiled faintly at Kitchen.

Kitchen returned her smile with a huge one. "You needn't worry, Miss. Boogie would kick my ass if I got out a line," he

said with a loud hearty laugh.

"Yeah, mon. It'll be fine," Wayne encouraged Toni. "I trust this big bear with my life."

She searched his eyes and agreed. "O-okay."

"Kitchen, take this lady up a Fairy Hill for me and take good care of her." He reached over and punched Kitchen on the shoulder.

"No problem, mon. I am like that American insurance commercial, *Allstate. She's in good hands.*" He laughed again. It was so contagious that they both laughed along with him.

"I promise you'll be all right. This big tree is my son's Godfather. No worries, all right." He reassured her again as he escorted her to the passenger side of the pickup. "I have to see you again," he whispered in her ear as she sat inside the truck. He stood in the rain holding the passengers' door open.

"I can't tomorrow."

"What about later tonight?"

"I can't tonight either. I am going to a Stone Love dance with my friends. I can't..." Toni thought of blowing off her companions and telling Wayne that she was free for the night, but she felt it wrong in the idea before the words escaped her lips.

"Listen. I have to find a way to see you, all right?"

"Y-yes." Toni gave into his persistence. Their gaze danced from each other's eyes to each other's lips for what seemed like eternity.

Kitchen cleared his throat loudly. "Look, mon, where is you wheels? You gone and crashed again?" Kitchen laughed. His laughter rumbled out like a roar.

"My bike up at the restaurant, mon. If you remember, it was your big ass that crash my bike last time."

"Well, squeeze your narrow ass in the seat next to the lady and I'll drive you up there. That way you can look at the girl a

little longer, mon.” His laughter filled the truck again.

They could have both sat in the passenger seat, but Kitchen suggested that Wayne have the girl sit on his lap to allow more room. Toni got up out of the seat and allowed him to hold her hips as she sat on his lap. His hands were strong.

* * * *

Wayne behaved as casually as he could. He knew that he didn’t have to hide in front of Kitchen, but he didn’t particularly want to kiss her in front of him either. It was not easy though, even for such a short ride. It was difficult to sit, trying to control his instincts. He tried as hard as he might not to kiss her. His control weakened considerably when Toni’s eyes pleaded with him. His control finally failed. The second his lips touched hers, his body burst into a burning inferno. As her sweet tongue hungrily fought his and explored, he trembled. Every nerve in his body burst into flame. Delectable sensation shot through his loins.

When he unlatched his mouth from hers, she reached out to his lips for more. But he couldn’t. If he did, he would have climaxed all over her in Kitchen’s truck—in front of Kitchen. His friend would have concluded that he was an animal. He looked into her eyes and pled with her to save him from making a fool of himself.

The truck pulled up in front of the restaurant and stopped. Wayne thanked Kitchen with his gaze still locked on Toni. He didn’t attempt to get out of the truck. Toni didn’t move from the perfect position she was in on his lap. He wanted to kiss her again and he wanted to stay right there with her for as long as he could. His eyes asked for it. He used his fingers to move her hair from her face and then slid them over her cheekbone followed by her lips. Her cheek was touching his nose. All he had to do

was touch her chin and she turned her head for more. Their lips touched. He kissed her again.

Every nerve in his body stood to attention for this girl. He wanted to take her there, but he remembered that they were sitting next to his friend. Thankfully, Kitchen looked away and whistled out the window.

He whispered in her ear, "I got to get back to work, but I'll ride behind the truck, okay." It took him another several minutes before he climbed out of the truck. Wayne knew without a doubt that he was in trouble. He had fallen in love with a woman who was about to walk out of his life.

Chapter Fourteen

It was hard to believe that Becky was anything less than classy by the way she treated Emerald during their short visit.

Emerald had broken one of her shoe straps as she stepped out the car in Becky's driveway. The way Becky hurried to help her impressed her. She picked up the sandals, called her maid to bring her tools and glue and spent half an hour fixing her guest's sandals even though Emerald kept telling her not to worry about it. She loved Becky's elegant home. She calculated that they had to be rich by the elegant styles of furniture in her home. She was awed by the kind way Becky spoke to her maid. She liked Becky instantly.

Emerald was disgusted that her sister Toni was attempting to interfere with Becky's man. She knew that Becky may have screwed around on Wayne, but she imagined that he might have done something to deserve it. *Maybe Becky could do better than a man who beats her anyway.* She swallowed a large mouthful of the lemonade.

"Congratulation again, Emerald." Becky set her glass on top of the table.

"Thanks." She felt confident that she found a new friend in Becky.

"What are you all doing tonight?" Becky asked.

"I don't have any specific plans."

"You wanna go to a Stone Love dance with me and a few friends?"

"Hell, yea!" Emerald looked at Delroy who leaned up against the verandah rail. "Where is it going be?"

"In Portland." Delroy told her.

* * * *

Toni walked as if in a haze along the concrete walkway, bordered with pink and yellow lilies. She flung her head back, inhaled the fresh, clean country air and let its freshness tickle her throughout. She was feeling like a schoolgirl falling in love for the first time. The tap, tap sound of her heel against the concrete pavement was musical as she walked toward Christine's house, savoring the thoughts of her moment with Wayne Knight.

As his delicious tongue eagerly entangled and explored hers, delectable sensation gushed through her loins. When he unlatched his mouth from hers, she hungrily reached out to his lips for more. But he hesitated. If he didn't, she would have exploded and his friend would have concluded that she was a wild beast. He touched her chin with his fingers and when she turned her head, his lips met hers. He kissed her again.

Toni exhaled the heated mouthful of air from her body. *I got to get back to work, but I'll ride behind the truck, okay.* His breath was warm and sweet against her cheek. Toni knew without a doubt that she was in trouble, but couldn't wipe the big smile from her face.

Toni, Christine and Donna were attending another dance on the beach that night and Toni would have loved it if Wayne could be there. She could have invited him, but wasn't sure if she should. If he had invited her, her mind would have told her to

say *no* to him, but she knew that her heart would have said yes.

Maybe he didn't know about the dance. Yet, how was that possible when everyone knew about it? The radio advertised the dance for days. Other than the radio, Jamaica's countryside was famous for its word of mouth advertisement. This form of advertisement was faster than any other radio announcement, especially since it was going to be a Stone Love dance, a group that was incredibly popular. All of the Portland, Kingston and St. Thomas residents knew that Stone Love was coming.

"It would have been exciting if he asked, but maybe it's for the best." Toni sighed as she walked toward the house. She couldn't wait to go inside and get dressed for her fun evening with Christine and her friends.

Anyone who has never been to a Stone Love dance has been seriously deprived. Stone Love dance was filled with excitement, music, beauty, trendy fashions and swarming with incredibly hip people. Girls were dressed-to-kill in their short-shorts and hipster pants. Toni felt pretty in her black Victoria's Secret full body swimsuit with a short skirt over it.

It was a beach dance, but most people were not wearing swimsuits. Some were wearing them under their dance clothing. Her friends were dressed in their swimsuits, worn under short-shorts. If the atmosphere were right, they would go for a dip in the water later in the evening.

Outside, the gate was jammed with people. The ladies had to squeeze their way by.

"Get out de way, mon," Christine shouted to a man who was shoving his sack of peanuts in her face. She was in good spirits, but slightly annoyed by some of the idiots crowding the gate because they couldn't afford to pay for a ticket. "Why they left their yard and come out here if them no have no money." She led

her crew up to the gate.

The fact that she knew the promoter helped her and her friends immensely. No payment was even necessary where Christine was concerned, thanks to her flirtatious personality and carefully placed wink with the gateman. The three girls were awash with excitement and anticipation. All the ingredients for an exciting evening were present inside the gate.

The moon was out, larger than life. Sean Paul and Sasha's, *Still in Love with You* filled the air. A gorgeous beach with gleaming white sand stretched out as far as the eyes could see. It all seemed magical. A soft warm breeze tickled all the erotic nerves and encouraged longing.

Christine was feeling reckless and free. Her man was working this evening and was nowhere in sight. Even if he wasn't working, she didn't want him there. He would just be in the way. Besides, this was the ladies' night out.

"Girl, please. Some of their men are beatin' their asses at home. Better for us women to go out and get ours," she said to her companions. "All we need any raas men to do tonight is buy us drinks." She was right about the drinks. What we're really missing were some nice, cool, alcoholic drinks to relax the nerves and unwind.

"Raas, what the hell you doing here, Keith?" she shouted one of her trademark yells when she spotted a few familiar faces at the concession stand. "Donna, come on, let's go introduce Toni to some real men," Christine said as she ushered the others inside. She led the way toward a group of three men. "That big-headed one there that's stuffing his face, his name is Akeal. Him is a Professor at UWI," Christine said.

The one that was eating was short and dark, sucking a fishbone from an aluminum plate. The other two were drinking Heineken. One of the beer drinkers was tall and muscular with a

very good looking face. The other beer drinker was half-Indian and fair looking. His beer belly hung slightly over his swim shorts.

Christine jumped right up into the arms of the muscular one, almost knocking the man down onto the sand. They created quite an excitement for two people just greeting each other. Donna gave the half-Indian one, Lee, a tongue kiss that lasted almost a minute. There was no doubt that they were old buddies.

Toni didn't know anyone so she stood and watched as her buddies got over their initial excitement and finally introduced her. Christine climbed Keith, the one with the six-pack, like cat scaling a tree as Toni stared with a delightful curiosity.

"Wow" Keith said after a long look at Christine's friend.

"You like her?" she asked Keith

"Yeah, mon." he answered beguilingly.

"Good. Me like her, too, but she's not for you. Mi want you for this evenin'. So, any bitch that you came here with tonight you are going to tell to go on about them raatid business, understand?"

"Mi no have no woman, you know dat," Keith announced with pride.

"Yeah, right." She jumped down off him.

"Toni, you pick the professor," Christine exclaimed. "You two will have lots to talk about."

"I got this one here." Donna announced to all. "Mi going to work this one out tonight." She grabbed Lee by the arm and he followed her with no complaint.

"This one here," Christine continued toward the one getting rid of his aluminum plate, "is available, but this one..." she went back over to Keith, "...he is a womanizer." She turned Keith's head away from Toni as he was eyeing her lustfully.

"You can't say those things, mon," Keith defended himself as

Christine directed them toward the shore.

Toni was fascinated by how outgoing her friends were, but embarrassed at how awkward her introduction was. She could understand why Keith was a womanizer. He didn't look like he had to chase any women. He was gorgeous. Women would chase *him*. She didn't even look at Akeal because he kept on sucking his fishbone throughout most of the introduction. Soon after Christine started to call him greedy, he dumped the fish and cleaned his plate.

"How you can embarrass man in front of a nice lady like dis, Christine."

"But you just a stuff you face so. You no shame?"

"How mi fi shame when me hungry, Christine? You no ordinary?" His gaze followed Toni.

She felt sorry that Christine interrupted Akeal's meal because of how he stuck himself to her like glue. Even when they went back to the car to collect their stuff to set up their spot, he followed her and offered to carry her chair. After they set up, he and his two pals moved next to the ladies. It seemed all right for the others, but Toni wasn't comfortable. This man seemed to be announcing to everyone that she was his woman. She hung around with him, talking about what it's like teaching college students for a while, but the entire time, her mind was really thinking about Wayne's kiss.

"I'm going to use the bathroom," she announced as she got up from her beach chair. The smell of fish grease from Akeal was too much for her to handle.

"Do you want us to come with you?" Christine asked.

"No, I want to go alone." She was actually feeling like a third wheel and wanted to get away.

Chapter Fifteen

The sweet night air caressed Toni's senses as the seawater breeze frolicked with her hair. She felt a little lonely, but would not substitute Wayne, or for that matter, his kiss. She imagined that it would be bizarre if she were to bump into him right at that moment. Would she resist him? She didn't think so. He was too enthralling. Everything about him—his lips—those full lips that enveloped hers. She was lost in the belief that she could feast on his delicious kiss forever and ever. She would settle for just one more time with him. *What a torture I've brought upon myself.*

She didn't really need to use the bathroom and went past it. With quiet dignity, she walked along the beach, smiling to occasional comments from men who couldn't avoid saying something. She walked for almost ten minutes. She looked up and around her surroundings to study the sheer joy and excitement that all those beachgoers brought to the beach.

Toni certainly wasn't going to make this her last visit to Jamaica. She was coming back in the summer, if it was the last thing she did. This was what life was all about. She knew if given the choice, she would have lived on this beach. It was beautiful. The water seemed alive at this moment. She walked closer to its edge and watched the waves beat up against the shore. The sea breeze chilled her shoulders. It felt divine. She could understand

how some people were so content to be bobbing about in the water, kissing and making love.

Now, Toni knew why so many of her relatives in the States waited anxiously each year for their tax return money so that they could spend it on vacations in Jamaica. She certainly couldn't blame them now that she knew what they were coming for. She spread her arms wide and threw her head back. She was free and uninhibited. The soft sea breeze tossed her hair about her face.

Jamaica was the greatest place in the whole world. She felt like screaming for joy as she twirled around with her outstretched arms. That was when she glimpsed his unforgettable face coming from down the beach. It was Wayne Knight, the man with the haunting kiss.

He was about thirty feet away, but she would have known him from anywhere. She had memorized his distinguished walk, even in the sand. Toni stopped and turned her back to him. She was both frightened and excited. She stood still for just an instant, to regain her composure, before she continued to walk again. She couldn't believe that he was there. *Did he invite himself along because I told him I was going to be here? Is this how he impressed a lady?* Hell, she didn't care. He was there. He was right behind her. She could almost hear his breath now. He could certainly hear hers. She was hyperventilating.

"Where are you goin'?" Wayne's deep voice interrupted her anxiety.

"Just for a walk," she answered guardedly, trying to hide her nervousness.

"Can I walk with you?"

"Yes." The evening was perfect with Wayne being there with her. She was both nervous and thrilled. Toni would never exchange this moment for anything in the world.

“Is Akeal your man now?” he asked with just a hint of jealousy. His eyes were demanding an answer.

“Not that it’s any of your business, but he is Christine’s friend.” Toni tried to remain calm and cool, though her heart raced with anticipation.

“You know him long?” His annoyance over Akeal was still evident.

“No, I just met him after we got here.” They walked quietly together down the beach. She would have turned back, but he was with her now and she didn’t want to go back to her companions anyway. They talked a little bit about her life. It was wonderful because she loved talking about herself. She loved to discuss her likes, her dislikes and some of the interesting experiences that she had. He listened and laughed each time she said funny things. Toni was never very good at telling jokes, but somehow he knew when and where her punch lines were.

It was refreshing each time he asked her to elaborate on something, which she thought would have been too long and too boring to tell. He seemed to enjoy hearing her talk. Wayne smiled and laughed from his heart. At least that’s what it seemed like to her. She was in love with that, too. He laughed and showed interests in hearing absolutely everything about her. She thought how magical it was being with this man. It was almost too good to be true.

Toni abruptly stopped talking. There was just too much to absorb so they just strolled along holding each other’s pinky fingers. Wayne seemed to be lost in his own thoughts as well. The music was beginning to fade out. “We are pretty far away from the beach, you know,” she said, quietly.

“I know. Do you wanna go back now?”

“No.”

He instinctively tightened his pinky grip to hers when he felt

her easing her finger from his hold and then exhaled when he realized that she just wanted to interlock all of her fingers to his in a binding clasp.

It was comfortable. Perfect, as it should be. This was a storybook night. They stood and watched the ocean waves beat calmly up against the sandy shore. They were just standing there, holding each other's hand.

* * * *

Wayne wanted to make love with her more than anything in the world and he could see in her eyes that she was falling for him. Yet, he would not *casually* fuck this woman, even though his body ached for it. The first time with this girl would be on silk sheets in a setting fit for a princess. No, she was not a quick lay on the beach at a Stone Love dance.

Her hair caressed his shoulders as the wind blew it about. He looked down at her and moved the waving hair from her face with his free hand. When she looked up at him with burning desires in her eyes, Wayne thought that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He leaned over and kissed her, gently pecking at her soft delicious lips. He then slipped his tongue inside her mouth, sucking ravenously. It was as if they couldn't stop kissing. It took all of his inner strength to unlock his lips from hers. She watched his eyes as he searched about the vicinity for some place to sit and think.

Maybe he could cool down if he sat for a while. "Come here," Wayne said gently and led the way over to a palm tree just on the other side of a sand dune and she followed him without any questions. He leaned his back against a tree that grew along the ground and then bent upward like a chair. He held her hips, led her to stand between his legs and just looked at her. At least

that's what his head meant to do, but his body was saying something different.

"What are you doing?" Toni whispered in a childlike voice.

Wayne responded to her question with a gentle kiss.

* * * *

When he touched her lips with his, a jolt of ecstasy shot right through her and exploded in her middle. With soft, sweet lips, he kissed her again. Her heart raced and every part of her body throbbed. While his tongue explored her mouth, she exploded with passion.

He didn't need to say words. The warm succulent kiss lasted forever. She could stay sucking on his delicious lips and tongue forever and ever. His hands were all over her, making her throb even more. There was something special about the man's touch that was different from any others she had ever felt.

It was as if her dream lover had come to life. She thought that she was going to come right there, but she didn't. It was just pure ecstasy. It was unbelievable. When his hands slid into her panties and his fingers touched her clit, Toni was sure that she would climax. It felt like pure bliss. She was dripping wet. She had never been so excited in her life.

There was no hiding how much she wanted him now. She reached down and hurriedly undid his belt and unzipped his pants. By the time she slid her hands inside his shorts to release his penis, it was standing in front of her majestically. Oh, it was thick, long and hard like a rock. It wasn't abnormally big, but it *was* big. As far as Toni was concerned, the answer was yes to everything he said and did.

* * * *

Wayne gently eased her straps from off her shoulders and gasp at her perfect breast. Her erect nipples sent an extra voltage of delight through his loins. He reached down and moved his lips about them, gently pecking at them at first, but he couldn't avoid sucking in her plump nipples. He bit them hard enough to make her squirm, but gently enough to make her moan. He picked her up easily as if she weighed only a few pounds and seated her on his lap. His fingers were wet and sticky from the juices of her sweetness. He wanted to place himself inside her right then, but thought better of it. He stood from the tree trunk and carried her toward a clearing at the end of the beach.

* * * *

She didn't ask him where he was going because she didn't care. Toni kept her arms tightly wrapped around his neck and her legs wrapped around his waist as he walked.

He quickly located a sandy spot where she wouldn't hurt her back on anything hard. He removed his shirt without asking her to climb down off him and though it wasn't big enough to cover the entire sandy spot, he carefully set her down on it.

She anxiously watched him as he quickly removed his clothing. She was pleased with his muscles. He was a perfect male specimen as she held his hardness in her hand before he placed the condom on it. God, it felt like steel.

Wayne knelt down and started kissing her lips. His lips were more than mere lips. They belonged on her lips—on her body for all of eternity.

She was so anxious, she had almost lost herself by acting like a hungry animal, grabbing and clawing at him. Her body was on fire.

She was so turned on that when he kissed her neck—which normally didn't do anything for her—her sweet juices flowed even more. When he sucked her breasts into his warm magical mouth, she moaned aloud. He played with her nipples, nibbling on one while gently twisting the other.

He slid his tongue down the center of her tummy and into her navel, playfully licking her. He began his journey downward, kissing the insides of her thighs. The gentle caresses of his lips and glides of his tongue against her inner thigh drove her crazy.

Toni was wiggling with anticipation, arching her hips, begging him to touch her sweet spot, but Wayne eased her legs over his shoulder instead. She felt him grab her waist with enough force to exert his dominance. Toni began to anticipate his penetration. She was wet and ready.

She watched as he lowered his cock and began exploring her entrance. It was deliciously big and hard.

She groaned. He pushed himself deep inside her, slowly thrusting in and out of her. She moaned even louder. He loved her slowly and carefully for a while, but before he realized it, he loved her with all of his power.

* * * *

Toni nearly exploded. She clutched his hips with her legs, thinking it would have stopped her from reaching that final orgasm too quickly, an orgasm that was going to drain her of all her senses.

Wayne pushed her legs apart and enraptured her so incredibly well it felt as if it was the god of ecstasy's magic dick bewitching her into absolute madness.

Toni was so into the lovemaking, she felt the friction from the condom give way, as if it had broken. She knew she should have

stopped, but could not. Her body was being pleased as it never had been before. The sweet feeling of ecstasy had riveted every fiber of her body. She grabbed and scratched and tugged and pulled every part of his body that her hands could reach as an untamed thunder of absolute delight, burst inside her and shot voltages of pure pleasure into every part of her body. Her body shook and tightened as waves of sweet ecstasy rocked her very foundation. She screamed and her voice hit an octave higher than she thought humanly possible. In the middle of her explosion, she heard when he cried out like a wounded boar. They were climaxing together. What a glorious feeling.

When it was all finished, she could faintly hear Joe's song, *I Wanna Know*, playing up the beach. She exhaled. She wondered what was going to happen next. Were they just going to go their separate ways? How was she going to feel going back to her friends after what had just happened? She knew that they had to have been looking for her by now, but she was a big girl now so she didn't have to explain anything to anyone. The condom had broken. She should have been scared, but she wasn't. He was too perfect. She could not conceive of him being unclean in anyway. Even his scum felt wonderful inside her. She kissed his shoulder. Even his skin was sweet. She could spend the rest of her life wrapped in his arms.

Wayne lay there on his back in the sand. He had his eyes closed, but she knew he wasn't sleeping. She didn't want to sound corny by saying that was the best sex she had ever had. She also didn't want to reveal that she was in love with him so she looked out at the water. The waves were crashing loudly up against the shore at that part of the beach. Toni couldn't understand how she was able to hit such a high note when she wasn't a singer. The breeze rattled the leaves and branches against the trees along the shore. She had to know how he felt

before she told him what she was feeling.

“What on earth did I get myself into?” she whispered. “I’m a grown woman, but I have never been so mentally screwed up in my entire life.” They wrapped themselves in each other’s arms and became lost into the great wonder that they discovered in each other for a while before they were startled to their feet by Becky’s angry voice.

“What the bloodclaat is this, Boogie?” Becky shouted. “You don’t have no fucking business messing with me when you are doing the same fucking ting.”

“Becky, hold up, hold up...” Wayne stammered.

“Hold up what? You almost beat my ass on White Road the other night. Now you want me to hold up.”

“Becky...just make mi take her home,” he pleaded.

“Who? This whore... You fucking mad?” She walked up to Toni who was covering herself in Wayne’s shirt. “These stuck up bitches come down here tinkin that them better than us. Mi have a great mind to stab her in her fucking chest.”

“N-now you see...I’m tryin’ Becky. Don’t fuckin’ test my patience,” Wayne’s voice thundered as he pulled Toni behind him, shielding her as he scrambled for his pants.

A stifling cloud of humiliation, fear and anger bore down on Toni like doom. She watched frantic as Becky picked up a hand full of sand and flung it at him, hitting him in his chest. He turned and grabbed Toni’s arms and hurried with her up the beach. “Honey, I’m so sorry I got you into this. This is not your kind of scene. I know that. Go back to your friends,” he panted. “Please believe me that I wasn’t looking to disrespect you. I just had to make love to you. I had to.”

Toni was frozen by his words. She could not speak or think. She could only watch him speak and then walked away. She didn’t know whether she should turn left or right. She stood still

even as he walked back down the beach to his frantic wife. Should she go back down there and punch that bitch in the mouth? He was right. This wasn't her scene. This frazzled her so much she couldn't cry, or even breathe. He had told her that they were separated. He was a liar. How could he?

Toni proceeded to walk toward a nearby sand bank and up through some shrubbery that led to the parking lot. She had no idea where she was going. She had to think quickly but her mind was a disorganized mess. She was not dressed enough to bum a ride to the house. She didn't have her cell phone on her. It was in the car, but she didn't have the keys on her.

Maybe sitting at the car until Christine and Donna came would be okay, but how long would that be? They would be worried if they didn't see her return. Maybe she would just cut her losses and go up there wearing that shirt. She could say that she lost her body suit in the water and found that shirt. Absolutely not! She was just going to have to go back down the beach and get her swimsuit. There was no way she was going to let her friends know what just happened to her. She was going to go there, pick up her body suit, throw his stinking shirt in his face and walk away. If Becky were to say shit to her, that would be it.

Toni took a deep breath. She turned around and walked back through the bushes. She walked over the sand bank and back down the beach, mentally preparing herself for some serious street fight. By the time she arrived where she and Wayne had made love, he and Becky were farther down the beach. She almost vomited in disgust of seeing Becky's face buried in his chest, crying. She could hear him.

"Thank you, thank you. You know that this wasn't what I wanted. But it's for the best."

It was too dark to tell if they were looking up the beach

where they could see her. She scrambled around in the sand a little before she found her body suit. She took off Wayne's shirt and dropped it on the ground. She stumbled about as she hurried to shove her legs through her body suit. A dark shadow of despair enveloped her. It chilled her. She wrapped her arms around her torso as she hurried up the beach.

It was nothing new for someone to treat her like a cheap woman and so was confident that she would get over it. Tears flowed down her face. There was no way she could go back to her friends looking like that.

When she got back to the crowded part of the beach, she walked into the water. The water was busy, but there was no one around her. She dived under the clear blue ocean and came up again. She washed all the sand from her body. Toni wiped the water from her eyes and pushed her hair out of her face. Tears ran from her eyes freely again. *It's fine.* Her friends wouldn't be able to tell the difference. She would just tell them that she was swimming by herself for a while.

What was she going to do? It was all her fault. Her friends warned her he was a player. Well, she got played. She wasn't going to let this ruin her time in Jamaica. She came to Jamaica with a baby on her mind and that's what she was going to focus on. She knew that it wasn't going to be easy to just dismiss Wayne and this night altogether from her mind, but she was going to have to try. She took one more dive under the water and came up again. She held her chest because she was still having trouble breathing. She was not going to say a word to anyone about what just happened, ever.

Chapter Sixteen

Wayne had walked into his house just before dawn. He dropped Becky home and went back to the beach party to see if Toni was still there. She had not been answering her cell phone. However, his heart was filled with excitement. After Becky caught him with Toni she told him he could have the divorce that he wanted so badly for so long. He also couldn't stop thinking about the most amazing sexual experience he had ever had in his life. He kept telling himself that it wasn't the sex. It was Toni herself. She was everything he dreamed that she would be and more.

He sat on the sofa, fluffing his pillow. He was not going to lie next to Becky that night. He had hated her for years, but now all the hate that he felt for her was gone. All he knew was that he had fallen completely in love with Toni and Becky said that she would give him a divorce. There was no room left in his heart for hate. She did him a favor by fucking up their relationship. If she had not, he would have never know love like what he was experiencing.

Wayne thought about the fact that he and Becky didn't really discuss the sleeping and living arrangement when she agreed to the divorce. He wasn't sure if sleeping in the same bed was the right thing to do until they ironed out their divorce. He felt that if he had gone and lay beside Becky on the bed, he would have

been cheating on Toni. The feeling was unusual because Toni certainly wasn't the first woman he had been with while he was with Becky. It wasn't just because she looked nice or because she was an excellent lover. This woman was all that and more. She was sensuous, elegant, graceful and intelligent. It was very rare to find all of those combinations in one package, but Toni Dawn possessed them all.

He couldn't wait for morning to come so that he could see her again. He knew that he would have to explain why Becky caused such a scene even though she felt no love for him anymore. All Becky did was to be overly dramatic because that was what she was, a drama queen. Becky must have finally realized that she couldn't hold him prisoner for the rest of her life. Now, only one woman had the power to hold onto him.

Wayne was surprised to wake up to Becky's hand pulling his dick out of his boxers. He looked at her for almost a minute, clearing the cobwebs from his brain, before he asked her what she was doing. She had not done a *wakeup call* with him in almost two years. She had pushed her ass up on him when she was horny at night a few times, but they were not *wakeup calls*.

"Just this one last time, for old time sake?" she said, easing herself slowly up and down on his shaft, teasing him, taking him all in. His whole body was on fire. Her pussy felt new because he hadn't touched her in months.

"Tell mi that I'm the only one who can set you on fire like this." She continued bouncing up and down on his shaft.

He didn't answer because he wished that it were Toni riding him instead.

"Tell mi before mi stop right now," she said.

If he were to tell her what she wanted to hear, he would have to pretend that she was Toni.

"Tell me!" she shouted. She started going up and down faster and harder.

"There is no contest, baby." *It's Toni...* He envisioned her face looking down at him. He grabbed Becky's hips to control her ass, making her sit on him harder. He thrust himself upward, hitting her g-spot, making her moan.

"Say it again."

She was riding hard with Wayne grabbing her ass cheeks firmly, leaving his fingerprints.

"Mi love this pussy, it's so damn sweet." He almost slipped and said *Toni*. He had forgotten himself and whom he was with.

"Yeah, and don't you forget it," she yelled as they pumped hard against each other, her clit rubbing hard against him.

Becky was good, but Toni didn't need words and hysterics. She was real. When she moaned, showed sensual facial expressions or called his name, it was natural. He had never noticed how Becky over dramatized her expressions and sounds whenever they were having sex. It was such a turn-off that the very thought of it made him cringe in disgust.

"Now here's the deal," she said, still sitting on his dick that was now powerless inside of her. Becky was smiling wickedly, but her eyes filled with hatred. "We are gonna use her."

"Use who?"

"Toni Dawn."

"What are you talking about?"

"You said that you don't want to go to America unless you had papers, right?"

"Yeah?" He was still curious to hear what the fuck she was talking about.

"Well, this is our big break." Becky talked as if her words were self-explanatory. "You are going to ask her to marry you." Becky's wicked smile was even larger.

“W-What!”

“Yeah, you heard right. That’s what it’s all about.”

“That’s what *what’s* all about? Mi sorry, mi don’t quite follow you.” Wayne was confused and tired of her sitting on him for the entire conversation. He eased her off him so that he could be more comfortable.

Becky took his boxers and wiped herself. She sat next to him on the sofa.

He never noticed how nasty it looked whenever she did that, until now.

“Don’t worry. We can be divorced in only a matter of weeks,” said Becky with a wicked grin.

Wayne felt like he could have kissed her for using the *divorce* word again. One thing that he could not take away from Becky was her conniving mind. Divorce and a matter of weeks were the words that stuck out in his mind during that conversation. As far as the rest of it, he just thought she was crazy.

“Those foreign bitches are so desperate because they can’t find a man in their own country. They will marry the first decent Jamaican man they meet here at the drop of a hat. You, my dear Wayne, can go to America with all your papers that way. Why do you think Delroy divorce Claire and marry Emerald? When he gets to America, he is going to divorce the skinny, spoiled bitch and come back for Claire and her kids.”

“How you so sure him going to come back? Those are not his kids. They are Claire’s kids.”

“Me sure of it. Him love those kids like they are his own.”

“And this crazy plan of yours...this is what you want me to do?” Wayne asked sarcastically. Becky must be stark raving mad, but if it meant that he could get a divorce from her, he was in. Up to the final signing of the divorce papers, that is.

“This is our chance to get out of this shit hole, baby.”

“So that’s what my mom’s home is now, a shit hole?”

“Wayne, you are the only one who can do it. Think about our son,” she said, trying to deflect his attention toward a subject that he could never ignore—his son.

“My son do not think this is a shit hole so don’t start telling him so.”

“Mi not talking about the house. Mi talking about a better future for our son. Doesn’t he deserve the best? Tell me that you at least think about it.” She looked deep into his eyes with extreme determination. Becky knew that by mentioning their son that Wayne would consider her proposition.

Above all else, Wayne loved his son. He would do anything for him. She kissed him and got off the sofa. She was happier than he had ever seen her, but all that kept going through his mind was how conniving and sneaky she was. Could he really trust this woman? “Becky?” His deep voice quietly called to her as she walked toward the bedroom. “The Dawn’s are Jamaican. They are from here.”

“So?” She was standing there, defiantly, without panties. Her hands were on her hips and she had a snide look on her face. Her arrogance was on full display.

“Mi just letting you know that she is one of us.”

“Then she’ll just be giving back to the community, right?” She smiled one of her treacherous smiles and closed the door behind her as she entered the bedroom.

He could not be with Becky any longer, that much was for certain. From her long hair to her irritating voice, he simply didn’t like her anymore. She was a turn-off in every way possible. Now, hearing her demands, there was no way he could even consider doing something like that to Toni.

Becky must be out of her damn mind. Wayne was angered over what transpired. He knew that it was all too good to be true

that night when she told him that he could have his divorce. He couldn't believe what he had just heard. She would divorce him and have him marry another woman if she could get something out of it. He always knew that Becky was a greedy woman, but wow!

Well if that's what she wants, then that's what she is going to get. But if she thinks that I am going to marry Toni for her, she has another think coming. What this entire conversation meant for him was that he didn't have to worry about any of her silly-ass friends attacking Toni. Thank God for small favors.

The idea of freedom in this relationship enabled Wayne to get up off the sofa, put on the wet and sticky boxers and walked toward his mother's room. His little talk with Becky meant a lot more to him than he had even realized in the beginning. It brought a new sense of freedom.

He could really enjoy the last few days in Jamaica with Toni. What was he to do now? There were so many places to take her, but he didn't know where to start. It felt as if he had wanted freedom all of his life and now that he had it, didn't know how to organize it all.

Maybe Negril, she'd like it there, he imagined. He could take her to Negril for a few days. Becky wouldn't say a word and she would even pack his bags. It was also a good idea because even though Becky may not have a problem with him seeing Toni for obvious, selfish reasons, others would certainly talk about their open relationship.

"Yeah, Negril is a good idea." Wayne was happy with his plan. He walked softly to his mother's room. He had visited her the day before, but he wanted to see if Carmen, his mother's caretaker, had cleaned up her room. If she didn't, that would have been it for her big, fat, lazy ass, and this time Becky wasn't going stop him from kicking her to the curb.

As he had done on many occasions whenever he was not in a hurry in the morning, he went to see his mother. He had to look in on her at least once a day. It was hard to see her like that though. She wasn't physically ill, but the Alzheimer's really kept her mind in disarray. At times, she didn't know her own son. His mother was forgetting to do many everyday activities such as bathing. He slowly opened her door.

A half-eaten bowl of chicken soup was on the floor next to her bed. It was the same bowl of soup lying there yesterday when he had come in to see her. He pretended there wasn't a profound stench in the room and as usual, kissed his mother good morning.

Not recognizing him, she continued to rock herself in her chair.

His eyes became watery as he kissed her again on her forehead. He was not satisfied with the condition of her room. As Wayne exited his mother's room, he shouted for Carmen, the housekeeper.

Carmen hurried to him.

At the risk of having Becky screaming vulgar profanities at him, he scolded Carmen. "It stinks in a Mama room. It's a shame that the rest of the house is so perfectly kept as if Becky ran a competition with Good Housekeeping magazine, and yet Mama's room stinks. It's Mama's house for crying aloud. Carmen, I hired you to take care of my mother, not to be Becky's maid." He said it loud enough for Becky to hear. He knew that she heard him. It was surprising Carmen didn't say anything in response. *What the fuck is going on?* Not that he had a problem with silence, but it was incredibly strange.

Could she be taking this ridiculous idea about me and Toni that serious? No matter. He continued on his way out the house feeling like an asshole. He couldn't even say no to Becky. He

should have pushed her off him, but he allowed his dick to control him. Where were his fucking values? He had always wanted to get out of that house, but the desire had never been stronger until that morning. It was not easy. His entire life was inside that house. Everything that he held dear was there. Even the thought of leaving it, felt like he was thinking of amputating a limb. He knew that it was going to kill his self-worth if he stayed. It was clear that he was going to be fucking her if he didn't leave. He could not believe that he was so fucked up that he had the most beautiful woman just the previous night, yet only a few hours later he was fucking the woman who made his life a living hell. He had to go. She was giving him the opportunity to go. He walked through the gate rocking his brain for a solution to the mess that was his life.

Chapter Seventeen

Toni and Christine sat on Sister Rita's freshly scrubbed steps and briefed her on her new in-house help they hired that morning. The help just happened to be Bell's sister, Daphne. Daphne didn't have the same reputation as her sister, but they knew her to be chatty from time to time.

"Well, being out here with Sister Rita, Daphne has got nothing to chat about," Christine rationalized. Besides, Daphne was a good worker. She thoroughly cleaned Sister Rita's house from top to bottom. The steps were scrubbed as bright as diamonds. It was certainly a far cry better than the first time they visited Sister Rita.

Toni didn't say anything about what happened the previous night on the beach, but something told her that her friend knew she was with Wayne. She couldn't tell her that after he had made the most amazing love to her, his wife showed up and almost attacked her with threats of stabbing her in the chest.

She had turned off her phone when she saw he was calling her. She didn't want to talk to him, but pressed that okay button just to satisfy her curiosity. She had to see if he had called again since the previous night. As soon as the phone switched on, it was ringing. If she hadn't picked it up, Christine would have become curious about her reason for blowing off her calls. She answered the phone with an alarmingly stern tone. "Hello!"

Christine stared at her.

“Please don’t hang up on me—”

She pressed the *End* button on her phone and crouched down to hold her stomach.

“Are you okay?” Christine asked with alarm.

“It’s my stomach. It’s got to be something I ate,” she told her in a weak voice. She hurried to the rear of the house where she had seen an outhouse. It was by no means inviting, but she felt like she was going to throw up. The phone rang again, but she couldn’t answer it. She didn’t want to. It stopped and rang again. She straightened up and answered it. “Hello?” Toni could hardly breathe.

“You have all rights to not take my calls, but I have to clear this thing up.”

“You are free to talk, Wayne.” She pulled the wooden latrine door closed.

“Becky told me last night that she would give me a divorce.”

Toni’s heart was clouded by anger. “Before or after you wrapped her in your arms and comforted her?”

“I comforted her because she told me that she would give me my divorce and I was happy for me and sad for her because she was crying. I didn’t want to seem cold. I have to tread carefully with her if I want this divorce.”

A spark of hope rushed through her. “Is this true?”

He almost whispered, “Yes, it is. Where are you now?”

“I’m in Dalvey.” She wanted to add, *I knew it, I knew it*, but contained herself.

“Where in Dalvey?”

“At the little blue house beyond the bushes on the side of the old post office.” The pain in her belly was gone and the restriction of her breathing was relieved.

Toni walked to the house with Christine with renewed

strength. A heavy smoke that was dispelling above the trees alarmed the two girls. They hurried through the thick bushy path, panting and out of breath, only to find Sister Rita's neighbor burning her trash. Sister Rita was hanging freshly washed clothing on the clothesline. Christine covered her face. "What is that smell?"

Mrs. Maude, the neighbor, was burning garbage and leaves in a nearby dung-heap. The odor from the fire made Toni's nausea return. She felt like vomiting. It took all her control not to start throwing up.

"Girl, you all right? You look pale," her friend cried.

"I-I'll be okay. I need...some water..." Toni could hardly get the words out.

A shocked Christine hurried to her friend. "What's the matter?" She held her to provide support. "Raas!" Christine jumped backward.

Toni had vomited all over her sneakers. She was wearing them for the first time since Bell washed them a week earlier to look almost new.

Mrs. Maude hurried to remove a towel from the line so Toni could clean herself up.

"I'm sorry," she told both ladies. Her head still hung down over a pool of clear foamy liquid. She had nothing in her stomach to throw up since she hadn't eaten breakfast.

"Sorry for what, young lady? You sick," Mrs. Maud told her. "Come over to the house and let me get you some water to wash up." She led the way as the women followed.

Christine placed her arm around her shoulder.

"It's the burning garbage," she whispered.

The thought of pregnancy crept in her mind. It seemed a bit soon to be experiencing morning sickness, but what else could it be? This should have been the happiest time of her life. She had

prayed for it for more than three years. She had also spent an exorbitant amount of money in the past three months for doctors to inseminate her. She had to be happy.

Mrs. Maude was kind. She gave her ginger tea to soothe her stomach and some Scope to wash out her mouth.

Christine helped her walk back down the hill.

The nausea had slightly subsided. She still needed to get away from the burning dung-heap as quickly as possible though. Returning to Sister Rita's house, they settled on doing some activities with the older woman.

Toni was guiding Sister Rita's hand and showing her how to use her fingers to read the phone numbers. Daphne had carved the telephone numbers onto the surface of a small flat board and glued it to the inside of her nightstand drawer. She showed Sister Rita where she will place the phone after the phone company installs it the following morning. Just then, she heard the familiar sound of Wayne's motorcycle. Her heart fluttered with delight.

As she waited for him, she weighed the option of telling him about her artificial insemination. She knew that if they were ever to have anything significant, she would have to tell him about it. Of course if she didn't get pregnant from the last one, it wouldn't matter.

Toni anxiously peered through Sister Rita's bedroom window then gently closed the drawer with the phone numbers. "Now, you can reach anyone whenever you need help. When I return next summer I'll take you to the eye doctor in Kingston to see if anything can be done for your eyesight." She saw when Wayne entered the yard, but she wasn't going to hurry through the door to meet him as her initial instinct urged her to do.

"Toni, why you a worry yourself over me so much?" Sister Rita said, smiling at her. "Mi eyes are just fine. Mi see better than

most. Mi can see how happy you are with your beau coming up mi steps. Go on and greet him.” Sister Rita gestured toward her bedroom door. “He’s waiting for you.”

“You don’t worry about me, Sister Rita. I’ll go once I know you are settled,” she said as she anxiously waited for him to knock on the door. The bedroom door opened and Daphne came in, wearing a sheepish grin.

“Officer Knight is outside and him said he wanted to talk to you, Ms. Toni,”

“Don’t keep the boy waiting, darling. Him is a good man, that one. He needs time, as do you. You fit well together. Now, go to him. Go on.” Sister Rita patted her gently on her rump as she ushered Toni out of her bedroom.

She didn’t rush down the steps to the front door. Instead, she controlled herself and walked out the front door.

Wayne had stooped down at the trunk of the large pear tree that was in the very center of the front yard.

The very sight of him was titillating. One thing was for sure. There was no way she was going to tell him. She needed at least a few more days. Maybe then, she would be strong enough to break that link that seemed to have a firm hold on her heart and that made her attached to this man. It had to because there was no way that she could give him up at that moment. It was not going to be this day. This day she wanted to be in his arms so badly she did not want to tell him something that she knew was going to chase him away. She knew that being pregnant was not a secret she could keep indefinitely. She would get to it, but not now. “Were you hiding from me?” she playfully asked.

“Why would I hide from you?” He grabbed her hands.

“I don’t know.” She felt happy and protected in his company.

“Then why would you say that in the first place?” He had turned her around and was hugging her from behind, gently

kissing her neck.

“Paranoid, I guess.” She felt warm and safe in his arms.

“You have no need to be paranoid.” He squeezed her a little tighter.

“I’m glad to hear it.” She was overwhelmed with love. He watched her as she released herself from his embrace and began unconsciously circling slowly around the pear tree. “So how did you get here so fast?”

“I was in Dalvey when I was talking to you on the phone.”

“Why are you in Dalvey?”

“Mi gave a friend a lift.” He reached for a little twig on the ground in front of him. “He had to go check out a girl.”

“Oh?”

“Yea, but I would have been here even if I didn’t have to give him a lift.”

“I’m glad” she said.

It was hard to stay on one topic as the conversation went on between them. Toni was not her usual self, partly because of her nausea. She felt like her secret was on full display for him to see. They had talked a little bit about the fact that they were there in the open for Daphne to see.

He told her that he knew that Daphne and her sister talked a lot, but he was able to convince her that she didn’t need to worry about anything.

“Daphne is my brother, Boo, baby’s mother. Mi know her. She is cool,” he nonchalantly said.

She believed him. His words felt reassuring. Toni felt like Wayne could take care of anything. She wouldn’t dare share that feeling with anyone because she wouldn’t want anyone else judging her, but it was an unbelievably real feeling, one that she had never felt before.

“Will you go to Negril with me for a few days?”

"Yes," she blurted. She knew that she said it faster than she wanted to. She didn't care. There was no reason why she couldn't spend the last few days that she had in Jamaica with him in Negril. Toni remembered right away that she had always wanted to go to Negril because she had never been there. She wouldn't have to worry about sneaking around because no one would know them there. It was perfect.

"Do you want to leave tonight?" Wayne asked.

"I don't have a problem with that. I was planning to go to Negril before I went back to New York anyway. It was just that Emerald's wedding took a lot of my time from me," she lied. She knew that he probably guessed that she was lying, but she couldn't help it. She realized she was saying too much about how she felt about him with her actions and body language.

"Mi missed you last night," he said just loud enough for her to hear him.

She was standing against the tree with her back turned to him. "Me, too," she said in the same manner. Toni heard his feet walking on the dried grass as he got closer. She waited for him. She felt his presence and she smelled his cologne. It was entrancing. Toni predicted that her friends were watching her, but she didn't care anymore. Wayne had said that she didn't need to worry about anything and she believed him. His breath warmed her as he reached down and kissed her on her neck. He wrapped his arms around her again.

"We drive your car, yes?" He kissed her left ear.

"Yes," she whispered.

"I'll pick you up at Christine's at six o'clock." His hands were playing with her shoulders, barely touching her breasts and making her gasp with excitement.

"Yes," She whispered again.

* * * *

“Can I get a kiss?” he asked, not waiting for the answer. He took her by the shoulders and gently turned her around to face him. He knew that Daphne was watching, but he couldn’t resist kissing those pretty lips before he left. They were so perfect, soft and delicious against his tongue. He slipped his tongue between them, explored deep inside her mouth and immediately discovered that he couldn’t do that without preparing himself for embarrassment. He had made love to her already, yet he was still nervous about appearing like a horny dog in front of her. He couldn’t have her thinking that he only wanted sex from her because he wanted more.

Everyone at work noticed that something was different about him in the past few days. His captain noticed it when he went into his office this very morning and asked him for a couple of days off. Officer Blare noticed it when she flirted with him that morning—a pleasant glow about him, she had said. She had also told him that whatever it was that had changed in his life, he should go with it. He could not help but to go with it. He was going to take her away where there would be no interruptions. “I can’t wait for to be alone with you.”

“Me, too,” she said.

“You, too?”

“Yes.”

“I’m glad” Becky gave him the go-ahead. He didn’t have to worry about anything. It was all a part of the game. He was going to enjoy every moment and hope that he remained standing when it was all over.

Chapter Eighteen

Rocky Point Beach was quiet and rather empty in spite of its perfect weather conditions for beach goers. Lovers cuddled on large towels were making out and fondling each other under almond trees, while others were enjoying the water. A few tourists lay out in the sun getting some tan. Others were just walking along the beach, enjoying the breeze blowing playfully through their hair.

Emerald laughed wildly as Delroy tried to stick his finger in her bathing suit crotch while he gave her a piggyback ride. They were just returning from ordering roast fish for everyone's lunch. They were on their honeymoon, but somehow they got themselves accepting another invitation to spend the day with Becky and her friends on the beach.

It wasn't a problem though, because she liked Becky and her friends and she was enjoying their company. That was until they came up behind the almond tree and heard them talking. She told Delroy to be quiet so that she could eavesdrop, only because she had heard her sister's name mentioned several times. Becky and two of her friends were clearly discussing Toni and this was making Emerald very angry.

"Don't worry, mon, mi have something for her ass," Becky said with anger.

"The Dawn family a not anything special. A since them go to

America, them start act like them a somebody, but they are nobody at all. Toni and Emerald are nothing but gully gals. Before them went to America, you should a seen them out a Golden Grove a sell mango, looking like them starving Ethiopians,” one of the ladies added, then they all burst into loud laughter.

Delroy attempted to alert them of their presence by clearing his throat, but Emerald covered his mouth and stopped him. She wanted them to say all that was on their minds.

“Me don’t know why Toni a front. You all don’t notice that she don’t speak pattwa no more,” Patrica added.

“Girl, me hear say she and your man was like glue a the reception. Mi was like, shit. You know,” another friend added.

“Where have you been? Wayne has been fucking her,” Becky stated.

“And you no care?” Both of her friends exclaimed in unison.

“Of course, mi care.” she exclaimed with a sly look in her eyes. “Mi a go fuck her up, but after she married Wayne and bring us all legally to the States.” They all began cackling again.

Even though she was fuming, Emerald kept a smile on her face, the one she displayed when everything was all right. She walked around the other side into the little bitches’ camp, not showing any emotion.

Before Emerald could say anything, Becky blurted out, “Listen, we don’t have anything against you. It’s just Toni, all right.”

“Oh, really?” Emerald had to struggle to control her anger. “So it not my ass all three of you are going to kick? It’s my sister’s...and that should be all right?” She chuckled, still maintaining her firm eye contact with Becky.

“We cool. Oh, by the way, did you want me to help? Should I hold her while you kick her ass?”

She chuckled sarcastically again, then exploded. "You dumb slut. You man was the one to chase my sister. If he had thought much of you, if he even cared about you, he would not have chased mi sister so shamelessly. My sister no want you man, but if she was to want your man, you frigging bitch, you couldn't stop her. Let me tell you something, there is no way in hell a man, having a choice between my sister and you, and would ever choose you." Emerald's vicious verbal rage staggered Becky's friends. They slowly began backing away, but Becky stood her ground.

"Bumboclaat!" Becky laughed aloud. "You are elevating you sister way the fuck out of her league!"

"Bitch, my sister has her PHD in English Literature. She is a full professor at one of the most prestigious Universities in New York. What have you done? You couldn't even finish Happy Grove High School. You're nothing but a mangy dog next to her."

"Yea, I caught the great Toni Dawn fucking my husband on the beach. Mi think she is the one acting like a dog," Becky exclaimed, bracing herself for a fight.

Emerald was removing her earrings and bracelets, and place shoved them in Delroy's uncoordinated hands.

"Come on, Star, you better than this," Delroy called out.

Becky proceeded to remove her hoop earrings. "Whatever, bitch. As far as I am concerned, you all nothing but no-class whores coming down to Jamaica a steal our men!"

"A man is not an object, bitch. He can't be stolen. In case you didn't know, we are living in a society where we all enjoy the luxury of freedom of choice. If a man chooses me and I chose him, it is perfectly fair. So I don't know what the fuck you talking about us stealing your men. You lose your man because you can't get your shit together."

"You so fucking boney, you can't even give Delroy a good

fuck. ”

Before Emerald could touch her, Delroy grabbed his wife, pulled her away and lifted her off the ground in spite of her kicking. He carried her down the beach and away from Becky.

“You better take her, Delroy, and tell her why you really marry her,” Becky exclaimed.

* * * *

“What, bitch?” Emerald struggled to get out of Delroy’s hold. She didn’t quite hear her, but she knew that she was talking some shit. The humiliated trio stood there and laughed as if they had it all under control, even though sweat was pouring down the sides of their faces.

She was still angry as she continued her verbal assault, walking away from Becky. “When we were living here in Jamaica, bitches like those made us feel like we wasn’t good enough. I was only ten, Delroy, but mi saw what it was all about.” Thinking about the past made Emerald feel a little less angry toward her sister. She had forgotten what they all went through.

“Toni is better than them. Toni is a college professor. Bitch like those can’t walk in her shoes. It ain’t right, Delroy!”

“But mi think you did not like her?” Delroy added meekly.

She stopped walking and faced Delroy. “What are you talking about? No, I guess I don’t like her, but still, she is my sister. You want me to just stand there and let bitches like those talk about my sister!”

“It’s just that you were saying some mean things about her just last week. Hell, you were saying mean things yesterday,”

“Yeah, and?” Emerald was puzzled at her husband’s statement. He really was a simpleton. “Because I said some things about mi sister, that doesn’t mean anyone else has the

right to say them, too. That bitch is my sister, not theirs.” With that proclamation, she decided to do something. *I have to find my sister.* She was not going to frolic there at Rocky Point Beach having a good time while some man used her sister to get his family to America. Hell, no. “I’ve got to find mi sister, now. I wanna see that low-life Boogie so I can punch him in the face.” She didn’t want her husband to see her rebel side, but she was too angry to care. She could tell that he was surprised, but what could she do?

Chapter Nineteen

Toni realized that she had over packed her suitcase when she found herself struggling to zip it closed. She knew that she wasn't going to wear most of the clothing she had packed. Most assuredly, whatever she left behind would be what she was going to end up needing the most. It never failed.

So, she might as well pack her suitcase with all of her things. She packed Christine's manuscript so she could finish reading the remaining chapters at her first opportunity. She also packed an Old-English translation book she had been studying. She wanted to be sure that she knew what she was talking about when she taught the segment on Geoffrey Chaucer the following month. Toni had almost zipped the suitcase completely when her cell phone rang. She hurried over to the dressing table where she had placed the phone and answered it.

"Where have you been, Toni?" Emerald demanded without bothering to say hello. Her tone was accusatory and belittling.

Toni cautiously answered, "Why?"

* * * *

"I've been trying to reach you for hours," she continued. She was sitting on her bed, wearing just her bra and thong underwear as she was getting ready to go out to eat. She was not going to tell

her sister about how she almost had to kick Wayne's wife's ass for her. She certainly didn't want to give her the impression that she forgave her for trying to outshine her at her own wedding reception. She was too happy to rain on her sister's little love parade. Besides, she couldn't see Toni competing with someone like Becky for the same man. Toni wasn't rough enough and she wasn't going to always be there to fight her sister's bottles for her. Toni was the older sister, for crying out loud. It was good for her ass, anyway. She was always acting like she was better than people. Now look at the shit in which she was involved. If Toni was looking for her to make her situation easier, she had another thing coming. Emerald intended to tell her sister the fact about her situation and that was that. *Fuck her.*

* * * *

"Yeah?" Toni couldn't have ended this call fast enough.

"I have some news on your new man." Emerald emphasized *man* with a very sardonic tone. "He's just looking to use you to get to America."

"What are you talking about?" It was no wonder she avoided her sister at all costs. She could be the most annoying woman in the world.

"I take it he didn't tell you that he is married."

"Go on, Emerald."

"He is also a womanizer and wife beater. The last beating he gave his wife, they had to throw water on her to revive her. Listen, I'm telling you this for your own welfare."

"Who told you this?" She couldn't see him hitting that lady unconscious. He was not that type of person. He couldn't be.

"I was mad at you both my wedding night," she began " I

wanted to find out who he was. So I called a friend of mine who knows all the shit that happen around here and she told me the whole story, and Delroy confirmed it. Look, I was angry with you then, but I am over that shit now. You are my sister and I can't just sit at this information and let this guy start beating you."

"Beating me," She gasps at the thought. Her sister's words froze her brain. The announcement that Wayne was married wasn't surprising due to his honesty back in Boston. The information that he was a wife beater was a blow. The knowledge that he beat her so badly that *she fell unconscious* echoed in her ears. Emerald was a bitch but she was never a liar.

"Hello...Toni, you still there?" Emerald had to have known she had just gotten to her. At first, her tone was that of vindication, but almost instantly, it changed to a voice of concern. "I hope that you did not go and fall in love with this man. He is not in your class."

Toni cleared her throat. "I-is there anything else?" Tears were forming at the corners of her eyes.

"Well...no..."

She was hurt, but wasn't devastated. Why should she be? She wasn't that far into the relationship enough that this news about Wayne being a wife beater would be crushing to her. *He hit her so hard that they had to throw cold water on her to revive her.* She couldn't get over that part. She shook her head at the realization that the moment she made love with him, everything went down the drain.

"Oh my God," she said. "This has got to be a sign," she held her stomach and exhaled as she walked toward the back porch to tell Christine the news. Wayne as a wife beater was too much for Toni to handle. She knew that Wayne Knight was too good to be true. No one is perfect, yet he seemed so perfect to her. Her grandmother had told her once that people who appeared the

most unflawed are usually the most flawed. She wished that her grandmother's philosophy was wrong, but unfortunately, it was right. Learning about Wayne didn't just hurt her.

She was also angry. She couldn't wait for him to show his face at the gate so that she could tell him to get lost. She didn't want any man who laid their hands on a woman. Steve had hit her and it was one of the worse experiences she had.

Now, here she was, in love with someone who beats his wife viciously. News that he was a womanizer turned her off, but as a wife beater, she couldn't have him.

Toni was about to open the glass sliding door that led to the back porch where Christine was sitting, writing up checks and placing them in envelopes, when she heard his motorcycle rolling up the front gate. She quickly turned around and hurried to the front porch. When she got there, he was waiting for her at the entrance to the garage gate.

* * * *

He turned off his motorcycle engine when he saw her walking toward him, wearing a face that he had never seen on her before. "What's wrong?" he asked as she approached.

"Did you think I wouldn't find out that you were a wife beater?" she yelled. "You beat that woman so bad that they had to throw water on her to revive her. My goodness! "

"Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! What are you talking about?" The sudden unexpected attack shocked him.

"My sister told me about you and your wife. It's no wonder she doesn't want you. You beat her." Toni's anger was unchecked. "What was I thinking to get involved with a lowlife like you?"

"A lowlife...like me?" The strength of her words nearly

knocked him off his bike.

“What did she do to deserve being knocked unconscious, Wayne?” With a mocking tone, she added, “She burned the meal, did she?”

“There is—”

“Get out a here before I stone you,” she shouted.

He turned the key in his motorcycle ignition and cranked the throttle but the motorcycle didn’t start.

Toni panted from the rage that left her breathless.

Wayne cranked the throttle again, but the motorcycle still wouldn’t start. He gave up cranking the gas pedal and sat in his riding position. “Let’s get one thing straight. I’m not a wife beater! If you must know the reason mi hit Becky was because mi caught her in our bed with another man.” He had not had to relive that dreadful memory for quite some time. “I was faithful to her up until that point.”

“My goodness.” Toni sighed

“That’s terrible,” she added considerably calmer.

“Yeah, well.”

“But still, couldn’t you have just walked away instead of hitting her?”

“I tried, but she broke the lamp from the nightstand on my back after mi called her a whore while I was walking away. I smacked her ass down, but I never knocked her out. That part was made up by people who weren’t there.” He unconsciously. “Sixteen stitches I received in my back from that lamp.”

“In your back?”

“I bet they didn’t tell you that part of the story.” Wayne continued. “I guess I still could have controlled myself. Honestly, mi never, ever laid hands on any woman before that and I will never do that again,” he lamented over the incident.

“Oh Wayne, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have jumped to

conclusions.” Toni exclaimed. “I should not have accused you without knowing the entire story.”

“That’s okay. I probably would have done the same thing if I were in your shoes. No apology is necessary. Let’s forget the whole scene.” He was still sitting on his motorcycle, his arms folded. He unfolded his arms when she moved closer.

She leaned over and buried her face in his chest and he hugged her.

He smiled at seeing Christine pushing up the garage door.

“Well you not gonna leave your bike outside while you’re, are you?”

“No ma’am”

“I’ll get my bags” Toni said.

“If you ever hurt my girl, you can count on yourself being dead, you hear me, Police Boy?” she smiled.

“You no have anything to worry about, Christine.” He smiled one of his seductive smiles as he pushed the motorcycle into the garage. “I just want to show her around a little bit.” He was actually looking forward to the trip again.

“Yeah right.” She looked at him from the corner of her eyes. “Mi know what you want to show her...well you better show her around carefully. You hear me?”

Wayne chuckled at her motherly warning. “What are you talking about, Christine? I’m a true gentleman.” “You no have nothing to worry about. Relax, mon. Mi got this.” He winked. He liked Christine.

Toni came out wearing a simple pretty sundress with her hair in its usual ponytail. Her face beamed like an anxious little girl.

“Listen, sweetie, you be careful, okay,” Christine said as Toni hand the bag to Wayne. “I would have preferred if you had fallen for some hot rich American boy, if not Cleave, but I’ll just have to learn to live with this rugged motorcycle cop. There is only one

thing I need to know.” She hung her head to create suspense. “I need to know the actual size of his trouser lizard when you return.”

Toni playfully shooed her.

“Measure it!” she shouted at her friend who hurried in the passenger seat.

Nothing that comes out of Christine’s mouth surprised Toni.

She waved goodbye.

Toni and Wayne drove slowly along the bumpy dirt road that connected her property to the Port Antonio’s main road.

* * * *

They held hands as Wayne drove. He definitely couldn’t wait until they got to Negril to kiss again. He looked at her pretty face at every opportunity. *She’s sweet like syrup.* He recollected the dozens of other times they shared a kiss since he had met her. He squeezed her hands in his. They were soft and smooth. He just couldn’t understand how she kept such long nails. They must get in the way for some things.

“How are you going to cook mi food with those nails?” Wayne knew that he was going to get a rise out of her with that comment. Maybe it would take his mind off pulling the car to the side of the road just to kiss her.

“What?” Toni’s denouncing eyes scrutinized him without even turning her head.

“What? You don’t intend to cook for me?” He continued to egg her on. Even when she was cross, she was pretty. It gave him an incentive to upset her some more.

“Now, I know that you are not taking me down to Negril to enslave me as your house servant,” she playfully confirmed.

“No, I intend to take you down to Negril and make you fall in

love with me,” he replied. He wanted her to tell him that she had fallen in love with him.

“How do you know that I have not fallen in love with you?” she finally asked.

Wayne didn’t see the road in front of him anymore after hearing what she just stated. He could not remove his gaze from her face. Oh, how he had wanted to hear her say that. He had started to wonder if he was crazy since he had been feeling like he was in love with her since the moment he touched her at her sister’s wedding reception. Toni opened her mouth when he drove the car off the asphalt street and onto the dirt bank. He let her statement flow through him. She was in love with him. They both may have been crazy, but this was definitely real. There was no doubt he was seriously in love with her. It was hard to come to terms with it, but it was a fact that he could not deny.

* * * *

How could he not know? No, she had never told him in so many words that she was falling in love with him. Yet, the way she made love with him, he should have known.

The car had hardly reached its full stop when Wayne reached over to Toni and proceeded to kiss her. A sweet sensation flooded through her body. They spent almost three minutes with their lips interlocked. With almost equal abruptness, he broke the kiss, pulled the car off the dirt bank and proceeded back on the asphalt road toward Negril.

How could she have lived her entire life and had not enjoyed this feeling. She had been missing so much, and she didn’t know it. There are so many other women who are missing out on a feeling that no amount of money can buy, and they don’t even know it. But it’s just as well because if everyone knows about it,

woman would be killing and destroying themselves to find it. Oh, but if only it could be bottled, she would have given away bottles of it to everyone she knew. It was a crime that everyone could not enjoy the feeling that she experience whenever she was with Wayne. Even one of his kiss could last her an entire life time.

Chapter Twenty

“My place is not as big as any of these houses,” Wayne stated as they cruised by some of the luxury homes in Negril. It was midnight when they reached Negril, but they could still see and feel the richness of the Parish. The magnificent trees that encircled the road were breathtaking.

It was very pretty there. The night air was slightly cool. Toni had to put on the sweater that Wayne had told her that she would need once they got there that night.

“My grandfather left me a small cottage on a little piece of property not far from here. It is not much, but it is quiet and secluded.”

Toni felt him squeeze her hand when he turned the car onto a small dirt road that almost reminded her of her hometown in Winchester. She snuggled closer to his arms as he cruised along the dirt road. The woods that bordered the thoroughfare appeared to darken as they drove farther into deep country. Toni wanted to set herself free and enjoy this romantic moment.

The only thing that was visible to them was the light from a few fireflies in the distance. “Those fireflies must have lost their way to civilization and ended up here,” Toni joked. Their car headlights showed only about five feet ahead. It felt like a long drive, but when she looked at the clock it was only ten minutes since they turned off the main road before they saw Wayne’s little

log cabin with running vines and water lilies covering it. "Is this the only cabin down here?" she whispered. The romantic scenery mesmerized her.

"No other house within ten square acres around here." He smiled at her reaction to the place.

"You own all of this land?" she whispered again.

"Only since last year," he said as he came to a stop and put the car in park. "My grandfather, by my mother's side, died. He owned this property."

"You own it now?"

"Yea, but not too many people know about this place..." He climbed out the car and she followed. "Why don't you stay inside the car until I get the flashlight out of the trunk?"

"I'm tired of sitting." She hurried to the back of the car to be next to him.

He loved every move she made. "The cottage has been shut up for a while. It might not be very comfortable at first."

"I don't care." She hung on tightly to his arms even as he struggled to pick up the flashlight from out of his bag in the trunk of the car. He never even asked her to free his arms for a moment. "This is a lot of land." Toni knew now that he wasn't just an average man. It's not that she thought about his financial status because she didn't need to. She had her own money, but it was good to see that he had something of his own. Now no one could say that he was looking to use her.

Once they entered the house, they found it pitch black inside. Toni's heart fluttered with excitement. She knew that he could hardly move his arm to reach anything as he searched the cabinet drawers for some matches. After a little shuffling about, Wayne found a box and soon located two kerosene lamps that were on top of two little bamboo tables in the cabin. After lighting the lamps, he quickly moved over to the fireplace.

Once he lit the fire, she saw how cozy and dreamy the inside of the cabin was. She stood and watched him as he dusted the wicker chairs and rattan coffee tables, making everything comfortable. She could not wait for him to finish so that they could cuddle together in front of the fire. They were in the middle of nowhere, together and alone. It could not be more romantic, more perfect.

“Well?” Wayne asked her approval of his place after he threw a sheet over the rug in front of the fireplace.

“Oh, this place is gorgeous. I love it,” she told him. Her Knight had taken her to his castle. It was a fairytale come true.

* * * *

That night they made love in front of the fireplace. He had taken a very slow and deliberate time to explore her body. Her soft, silky, burning body reached out for his every touch, his every kiss. He took his time because he wanted to savor every single moment. The night was theirs and theirs alone. No one was within miles of the cabin. They didn’t have to be afraid of someone catching them. They could be free and uninhibited.

Toni used her lips to explore every part of his body.

Her warm breath and soft lips awakened every nerve in him. He was erect and ready to take her from the moment they walked into the house. He had wanted her to sit on top of him and slide his dick in her more than he wanted anything at that moment. He continued to control himself because he wanted to explore and get to know every inch of her as he wanted her to get to know him. She was delicious, every bit of her. Wayne tried to savor the moment, but he couldn’t, not for long. He yearned to be inside her.

She firmly held his rock hard cock in her hand and looked at

it, for while as it throbbed, before she slid the condom over it. It stood firmly at attention anxiously waiting to be sucked into her delicious pussy. Just when he thought she was never going to sit on it, she crouched down over him and positioned herself over his cock. Toni didn't have to guide it to her pussy. It was as if his dick had a mind of its own. She was so wet, his thick shaft poked in with little trouble. She braced herself up above it for a while but before long she was bouncing up and down on his dick like an expert lover. He held back until she was ready for the full length of his dick before he grabbed her hips and truly fucked her. He wanted her to enjoy him like he was enjoying her.

He loved to look at her breast bouncing above him. Her soft flawless caramel skin, flat sexy tummy and her face askew in pleasure was an aphrodisiac in itself. Each time his eyes caught her, another voltage of ecstasy shot through his loins.

Wayne found himself lost in ecstasy as they made passionate control love. He was about to explode when he forced himself to stop. He didn't want to climax without her. He lifted her up off of him. Her eyes asked why, and eyes pleaded for mercy. But how long could he hold out when his cock was burning with the desire to be inside her? When he penetrated her pussy in the doggie style position, she moaned loudly.

Before Wayne knew it, he was fucking her to a wild angry imaginary beat. The movement of her ass to his pounding and the feeling of her wetness almost made him lose command and erupt inside her. It took all of his power to hold his orgasm back so she would be able to come with him. He had to suddenly pull out a few times to avoid exploding, but each time he pushed himself back inside of her, he hit his peak point. No matter what, he didn't want to leave her unsatisfied. He stroked her until he couldn't restrain himself one second longer.

"If you pull out one more time, I am going to fucking kill

you!” she shouted.

The sound of her voice threatening him was so sexy he lost every ounce of he had. Even though his own orgasm enraptured him, he knew when Toni was having an orgasm. He could hear when her moans grew progressively louder. She scratched and grabbed at his muscles with all her might. He knew she was home when he heard her let out the longest and highest screech he ever encountered. They both experienced the most earth shattering explosions at the very same time. He loved her. He loved her more than he had ever loved anyone ever in his entire life.

* * * *

Toni knew that what she had experienced with Wayne could never end. She knew that she could never go back to living her life without him being a part of it. That night, the artificial insemination disenchanted her. Up to a few weeks ago, she had wanted a pregnancy that she had prayed for and cherished. This pregnancy meant more to her than anything. That night as she cuddled in Wayne Knight’s arms, Toni’s heart ached with regret for hurrying as much as she did to make that last insemination appointment. She whispered to God asking him to tell her what to do. She begged god to make her not be pregnant. She started to tell him her secret. “I might be pregnant and it’s not yours.”

“What’s not mine?” He took a swig of his soda. “You don’t want me to drink from your soda can?” He didn’t see the tears in her eyes until he turned her head to kiss her, but she turned to face the fireplace.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” she answered, but then the words that came out were not the ones she had intended. “I have fallen seriously in

love with you.”

“So what’s wrong with that?” His face gleamed with happiness. “This is real, baby—one hundred percent real.” He wiped her tears with his fingers.

Toni wanted to hear him say more than, *this is real*, but she told herself that *real* did mean that what he felt for her was genuine. What she did know was that everything that she had planned was different now. She wanted love and she wanted a baby. She had been ignoring the nauseating feeling that she was experiencing for a while now, signifying that she might be pregnant. If she was indeed pregnant, how could she keep Wayne?

The cool sea breeze blew Toni’s hair about while the soothing white sand and warm water massaged her bare feet on Negril’s beautiful beach. She was blissfully enjoying the feeling of the water from the remnants of the waves that were crashing against the shore. The water was perfectly blue. At nine o’clock in the morning, tourists were sunbathing. She could have stayed there all day with Wayne who was just lying back on the sand, watching her as she walked. She had never felt so pretty in her life. Yet, with all her happiness, Toni couldn’t help but think that her house of cards would soon tumble down. The smile left her face.

* * * *

Wayne could have lain there and watched her for all eternity. He had never thought that it would have happened to him, not like this. He had thought that he was in love when he first met Becky, but that wasn’t love. *This* was love. He knew because he couldn’t imagine his life without this woman in it. Not since that day at her

sister's wedding reception. It was as if she had climbed into his chest and joined herself to his heart.

If its Obah Toni obah me, I'll keep on living with it because she got me good. I am truly under her spell How could he even go back and live under the same roof with Becky? Wayne kept recalling the last conversation he had with his wife, as he sat there watching Toni walk up the beach. He couldn't stop thinking of Becky's audacity to ask him to use Toni for her. The conversation was like a scratched record in his head.

Her crazy proposal really bothered him. She could not be of right mind to suggest such a wild scheme. *She must be fucking crazy!* Wayne shook his head in disbelief. *If I were to develop the courage to marry again, it certainly wouldn't be for Becky. It would be because I want to have Toni in my life.* He tried to relax, but other words and conversations kept popping into his head. Wayne began recalling another conversation. This one involved himself and his brother Boo, which took place a while back.

"Boy, that girl has got you pussy-whipped!" Boo had told him. But he wasn't pussy whipped. He was trying to make his marriage work. Even when he knew that he didn't love Becky anymore, he felt that he owed it to his son to try. They had married for better or for worse. It shouldn't have been expected that when worse hits home he was to run. He would have run but his child was his life. His friends, hell, everyone called him a fool, but they didn't know what it was like to have a child like William.

It was over between them now, but he didn't want to have to leave his mother under her supervision.

Her aunt had told him that Becky's behavior might have been a result of hormonal changes due to giving birth, but damn, that was about seven years ago. He knew that her behavior was because he didn't use his Visa to go and live illegally in America.

She didn't care what kind of shit job he would have to do while working illegally in America. All she cared about was that the American dollars were heavenly and he would be better able to pay for her ridiculous spending and rich lifestyle back in Jamaica.

Meanwhile, she was fucking just about all of St. Thomas' male residents. As a result, his son was a dead resemblance of the low life, Marshall Cummings. At first, his son looked like any other baby. Then he began taking shape, his face forming and taking on character. It was obvious to everyone whom the boy resembled and who the true father was. Wayne acted as if he didn't notice because he loved his son. That boy was his life and he could do nothing about it anymore.

The latest buzz was about Becky and Aunt Sill's husband, Bongo. *Her aunt's man. Damn, how could she do that?* Wayne shook his head in disgust. *Nevertheless, if that's what she wants, who the hell am I to stop her. Screw her.* He believed that he could do a hell of a lot better than all that drama. He salivated as he watched Toni walking toward him.

A whole hell of a lot better. He knew that he was with the right woman. He was beginning to feel at peace. Smiling to himself, he reached out and pulled her into his arms. He was never going to let go of this woman for as long as he lived. He was going to do everything in his power to make her happy.

Together, they explored all of the excitement outside of the gorgeous Negril resort. They went to see stage shows, frolicked on almost every beach, went sightseeing, dancing, fishing and they ate at some of the finest restaurants in Negril. They also ate at some spots famous for being the best at cooking curry goat, fried fish, jerk pork and festival. With every moment they spent together, they fell even more in love.

Chapter Twenty-One

Boo had driven his company car out of the yard and onto the roadside because he didn't want to hear his mother's mouth about him coming to her house and flooding her yard. Unfortunately, the water hose could not quite make it to the car and he had to spray the water from a distance to wet the car. He had bent down to turn the hose and unscrewed the nozzle from it when he heard the scream. When he turned and looked, water was running down his ex-girlfriend's face.

"Aaah! Boo Knight you did that on purpose," Daphne shouted.

"Oh, shit!" he shouted. "No, mon. You know that I would do that to you."

"Mi don't believe you." She yelled.

"Oh goodness, sorry Daphne." He tried to whip the water from her face with the dirty hand rage he was carrying. He couldn't avoid laughing through the side of his mouth. The laughing also meant that he was going to get a shoulder punch. When he saw her running after him, he dropped the hose and ran from her. They began playing around, one of their usual lover's romps that was always confusing to their neighbors who knew that they had separated and were living separate lives.

After they had exhausted all their energy, they found themselves leaning up against the car, trading harmless insults.

Daphne was his baby's mother, and usually whenever she sees him it was always about money. So, he was bracing for the sarcasm and putting down that he was almost sure to endure because he didn't have any money.

"You brother Boogie has bad luck," she said with a sympathetic tone.

"What do you mean?"

"Mi saw them," Daphne said.

"Saw who...saw what?"

"You know that Dawn girl that everyone has been saying that Wayne is seeing behind Becky's back? Not that mi care because mi can't stand Becky, but mi know Toni and she a look for a father for her baby. Bell says that she and Christine were talking about it the same night she came down from New York. Bell said that she no want the father of the baby no more because he beats her up. So she was here looking for a man."

"Bell hear them say this?"

"Yeah, mon."

"Bell is a liar, you know that." It wasn't an accusation, but rather a statement of fact. Bell's tendency toward gossiping was more than Daphne's.

"You can ask her yourself."

"Mi fucking will."

"You no hear it from me though."

"Look, I don't want to get into this shit," he said "but that is my brother you're talking about. So you better be sure of you facts."

"That's why mi told you because I know how you feel about your brother. And mi sure."

Boo was aware that Daphne confided in him because she was trying to gain his favor, but it wasn't going to work. They tried getting back together four times already, and it all ended the

same way. She was too possessive and he didn't want her to drive him crazy. He kissed her on her forehead, not on her lips. He knew that once he made the mistake of becoming intimate, she'd be at his house that very evening, cooking him dinner and washing his clothes. He would have to get into another huge fight with her in order for her to stop, and if he couldn't get her out, she would be kicking him out of his own house in a month because he was going to keep on doing what he wants whenever he wanted.

"You know what..." she asked him as he removed his lips from her forehead. "Fuck you!"

"What?"

"Fuck you!" Daphne hurried away.

"What mi did?" He continued to ask the same question that he had asked her each time they went through that same head game. He forgot about Daphne as he began thinking about his brother. He sincerely hoped his brother was not in way over his head.

* * * *

Wayne sat up in his grandfather's old bamboo bed, staring at the streams of sunlight beaming along the walls for a long time. Hundreds of ideas had flashed across his mind regarding what he had to do to make his dream of being with Toni a reality. One thing was for sure. He was going to ask her to marry him before she went back to New York. He didn't know how he was going to do it, but he was going to devote himself completely to Toni Dawn. He could not believe what he was thinking, but he was finished with all other women.

Maybe it was time I moved to New York. He didn't care if he had to clean horse manure for a living. All he cared about was

being with the girl who was there next to him in his grandfather's old bed. He lay back down on the bed and watched her sleep for a while, studying every single feature of her face. He didn't mean to wake her up, but he couldn't help touching her gently with his fingertips. As he caressed her silky soft skin, she smiled at his touch.

Wayne discovered that she was not sleeping and started to tickle her. They laughed and ramped for a while before they settled down and admired each other's bodies in the morning light.

* * * *

The most pronounced mole on his tummy next to his navel caught Toni's attention. She kissed it, but was also intrigued by a six-inch scar on his back.

"This is it, huh?"

"What?"

"The cut she gave you?"

"Yea."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?" He said "You didn't do it."

"I know, but..." She inspected his body some more. "Your body has its own language."

"Then what is it saying now?"

"I love you."

* * * *

After a round of wild romping, he told her, "I have something to show you." He led her out of the house by her hands and into the woods behind the cottage. Since they had been there, he hadn't

really shown her around the property because he had been too busy showing her around the rest of Negril. He knew that she would have loved the little stream not far beyond the trees at the back of the cottage.

They were going to be driving back to St. Thomas that morning. Wayne wanted to end their stay with something memorable. His grandfather had told him dozens of stories. The one story that stood out the most was the one about how Wayne's grandmother asked his grandfather to marry her by that stream.

"Colin," Grandma said, frightening grandpa who had sat on the rock steps with his feet in the water. She was only twenty-seven and he was thirty. "No keep you feet too long in the water, you catch cold. Oh, by the way, we getting married on December 15, mi mother's birthday. It will be nice. Come in when you finished, She then turned around and hurried back up to the house which was not far from where the cottage is." Wayne pointed to where the house was located. "Hurricane Gilbert destroyed it."

Toni laughed heartily as Wayne told her the story about his grandparents. They hadn't walked long before they arrived at the most magical little creek. The stones at the bottom of the stream looked like jewels and the water was crystal clear. The morning sun created mosaic patterns as it shined through the leaves and branches onto the water. The woods around it were rich with marigolds, dandelions and colorful dogwood trees. Everything looked clean and perfect. *This is heaven*. She smiled. She wanted to jump into the water even with her nightgown on, but Wayne beat her to it. She screamed.

He covered her mouth with his, silencing her as his tongue plunged into her mouth. She wrapped her legs around his waist, her arms around his neck and hung on for safety.

* * * *

With her, Wayne's life felt complete. If they could stay there for all of eternity, it would have been ideal, but they couldn't so they made passionate love in that spring water. It was so intense that it continued out of the water and onto the ground at the bank of the spring. They had finished making love and were only kissing when Wayne's cell phone inside his short's pocket rang.

He picked up his shorts and looked at the phone number on his caller ID. There was no way he was going to talk to Boo at this time...especially not while he was there with the woman he loved. He turned off the phone. *My brother can wait.* "It was nobody," he told her as he lifted her off the ground and carried her back to the cottage. No one was going to ruin this moment.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The trip back from Negril had an epilogue feeling to it. Toni wasn't sure that she would ever experience the passion that she felt in Jamaica again—certainly not after she told Wayne that she was pregnant. She was sure he would lose interest in her after that little piece of truth came out. She didn't know many men who stuck with a woman after she revealed to him that she was pregnant with someone else's child. The thought that she might not have him in her life for much longer, felt like doom.

It was early morning and the road was slick with the morning dew. A few women were walking along the road carrying baskets and assorted things. Some children were out playing against the banks as stray dogs strolled about the roads as if they were people.

Toni wasn't sure if it was because she was back in the warm Portland climate as opposed to the chilled climate of Negril, but she was becoming more and more nauseous the closer she got to her friend's house.

There was very little talking between the two. They held hands and gave each other knowing looks from time to time. Wayne turned and drove toward her house. To no one's surprise, Christine was flying out of the house, waving her hands and smiling broadly as the car pulled up in the driveway.

"Welcome, you two. You treat mi girl right, sir?" she asked as she opened the passenger side door. She practically pulled Toni out the car to give her a hug.

"Mi told you she'd be fine. Mi took good care of her, mon," he assured with a grin.

"I bet you did. Go on and walk for me, girl. Let's see if you still know how," she said, wickedly rude.

"Christine!" Toni's face flushed with embarrassment. "You can be so broad. You're just out of order," she said laughingly.

"I may be broad, but mi no out of order. You can barely walk. Him work you that hard?"

Toni reminded, "If you must know, Miss, I am tired and not feeling so well. I think it's that stomach virus I told you about before I left."

"Oh, yeah, that."

"It's funny. I was fine all the way up until I reached Portland," she told her.

"Well, go on inside and rest. You need to catch up on you sleep." Christine gave Wayne a knowing wink. "You probably never slept at all."

"Would you like to stay for tea?" Toni asked.

"No thank you, sweetie. Mi want to go see mi son, mon. Mi miss him. I'll take a rain check though."

"Suit yourself, more for us."

At the thought of food, Toni kissed Wayne, said goodbye and ran quickly into the house. Her nausea was back in full force.

* * * *

"What's wrong with her?" he asked.

"Like she said before, a stomach virus. You probably feed her something that did not agree," Christine answered casually.

Wayne finished bringing the bags in. He pulled his motorcycle out of the garage and started it up. He noticed Toni had not come out since she ran in. "Tell Toni that I will call her later." He revved his motorcycle.

"All right then, later, mon," Christine waved as he sped away.

Wayne did not want to stay for tea that morning. He was too excited that the change that he was going to make in his life. A renewed energy had filled him and he could not wait to make things happen in his life. The ride home felt like it took forever. He arranged everything in his head as he rode. He was just going to leave for work and that would have been it. He was concerned about the fact that he was going to leave in the morning while everyone was up and about. He didn't want anyone to know that he was moving out. He would return only when he visited his son and his mother.

His only concern at his mother's house now was his son and his mother. He hated to leave his mother in that house with Becky, but it was his mother's house. He knew that his brother Boo wouldn't mind if he hung out with him until he found a little place of his own. His cabin was too far from his job to be a solution for his housing problem, he thought as he pulled up in front of the house. He hoped that Becky wasn't going to expect him to walk her through the progress of her little *project to use Toni*.

The house wasn't cold that morning, as it usually was. It was sweet with the smell of fresh coffee, fried dumplings and steamed snapper fish. That was his favorite combination for tea. Becky had not made that in years. He didn't know what to make of it, considering he was away for three days with Toni. He was sure that Becky knew that he was with Toni so what was up? Why this sudden burst of good household energy?

He knocked again softly on his mother's door, before he

pushed it opened. “Wow!” Wayne exclaimed. The room smelled fresh and clean, complete with cut flowers. There was also what looked like new sheets and blankets. He wondered if all those changes had anything to do with Becky’s brilliant idea about his marriage to Toni Dawn, but he had no complaint because if it was a benefit to his household, then he was going to ride it out.

His mother sat by the window in an antique rocking chair, staring at a hill behind the house. He told her good morning but she didn’t acknowledge him. She was rocking herself gently. He went to her, kissed her cheek and left as she continued rocking herself.

Wayne continued on his way out of the house. He walked through the gate, thinking that he did not want to have to go back to that house anymore than he had to, but he had to be on top of them every day because he wasn’t sure how long his mother was going to get this special treatment.

A row of neighborhood rabble was sitting out on the overpass when he rolled his motorcycle out of the yard. He wasn’t going to stop for long, but they were his neighbors. He had to be neighborly by finding out what crap those unemployed, broke-ass brothers were talking about before he rode off.

“Boy, Boogie, the girl them still nah left you alone, mon.” Big Dolly’s booming voice interrupted the deep discussion all the men on the bridge seemed to have been engaged in. Big Dolly was bigger than three men put together. He was so big that no shoes could fit on his feet. He used a big, ratty towel to wipe off his perspiration.

“That’s all right, Dolly, because me no have no woman,” he replied. Big Dolly’s statement didn’t surprise him because Dolly was a human echo. He quickly escaped into the serious discussion that they were having about some cricket game between Duckensfield and their rival team in Bath that had

escaped Wayne's attention. As quickly as he joined the discussion, he found himself daydreaming about his walk in the rain with Toni when they were in Boston.

"Boogie! You here?" Dolly called, throwing his towel over his shoulder.

Wayne snapped out of his daydream and started to leave, walking his motorcycle down Springside Road. He had said goodbye when Dolly called.

"Boogie, to hell with the whole lot of them and go on with the American gal if you know what's good fi you," he said offhandedly, but with enough conviction to make Wayne know that his and Toni's name have been at the top of discussion.

He smiled as he watched Dolly walk. He had hoped to hear a little bit more detail on the subject, but he knew Dolly all too well to expect another word. He searched his neighbors' faces for something. They all shook their heads in agreement with what Dolly said. Wayne revved his bike and sped off down the tranquil country road.

He couldn't wait to buy the engagement ring and ask Toni to marry him. If she said yes, he would divorce Becky within the month. After all, it was her idea. As far as Becky knew, he would just be doing what she wanted. He also wanted to share with Toni that he was moving out of the house he and his ex-wife shared, but he had to wait to make sure his soon-to-be-former wife would not cause any unnecessary drama over the next few days. As far as he was concerned, things had finally started breaking right in his life for a change. He was experiencing happiness.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Toni's hand slid quickly out from under the bed sheet and grabbed the small trash basket. She jumped off the bed and hurried out the room, holding the basket to her mouth. Her stomach was so upset, she was sure that she was going to throw up before she got to the bathroom. It was only ten in the morning and the day was bright. The smell of steak and fried dumplings cooked for tea filled the air. Unfortunately, Toni couldn't enjoy any of it. She was too sick. She stood, spitting over the toilet seat for about fifteen minutes, before she sat down to pee.

"Oh God," she sighed and looked down at her tummy. "You certainly chose a fine time to happen, didn't you?" She patted her belly gently. Tears began rolling down her cheeks.

"Toni, are you okay?" Christine called from outside the bathroom door.

"Toni," she called again. "Is everything all right?"

"No," her raspy voice answered. She was choking back her tears.

"Oh, honey, can I come in?"

"Yes." Toni unlocked the door.

Christine entered and found her sitting on the toilet seat in tears. "Talk to me," she said as quickly closed the door behind her.

"I love him, Christine," she stated. "I really love him. I have

never fallen in love like this, ever.”

“So? That’s wonderful. Mi say that every time mi have good sex.”

“You remember when I told you that I was adopting a baby?”

“Yea?”

“I lied about the adoption.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that, I think I am really pregnant.” Toni blew her nose in piece of toilet tissue and Christine unreeled another handful for her.

“So...you are really pregnant?”

“I think so.” Tears streamed down Toni’s face.

“How are you so sure?”

“Look at me.” She looked up at her friend “I have been experiencing morning sickness since I have been down here.”

“But this is your dream coming true.”

“Of course it is,” Toni snapped at her friend.

“Okay, look, calm down. The fact that you’ve fallen in love should make you feel even happier.”

“What am I gonna do, Christine? This pregnancy will chase him away. I’ve wanted a baby for so long and now...” Tears flowed out her eyes freely.

“Mi don’t know sweetie,” her friend backed up to the edge of the bathtub and sat down, holding both of her own cheeks.

Both girls stared at the floor for a while. Christine attempted to assure her friend about the concreteness of having a child that she had long dreamed of having as opposed to the love of a man that she wasn’t sure if he was going to be there once the fire burned out. Christine’s tone had changed in the middle of her big speech after she saw the truth in her friend’s eyes. Her friend had fallen more in love with this man than she had with her pregnancy.

"Is Steve the father?"

"No," Toni said crossly.

"Well, thank God for that." Christine sighed with relief.

"You know I wouldn't let that happen," she assured. "I had an artificial insemination." There, she said it. She had not told anyone since she started the process. She had told her mother that she was thinking of doing it, but had never once told her that she had done it. If her friend didn't like her for whom she was or was going to label her, then so be it. Artificial insemination was a perfectly legitimate way to have children. If anyone were feeling what she was feeling, they would not turn up their noses to a perfectly safe and clean procedure as artificial insemination.

"A what?" Christine cried.

"I had an artificial insemination." She searched her friend's expression.

"Toni, My God!"

"Oh come on, women have been doing it for years." She angrily ripped more tissues from the tissue real. "Don't judge me, Christine. Don't you dare. It says something about a person who knows what she wants and goes after it. That's what I was doing. I wanted something and I was going after it. What's wrong with that? How was I to know—"

"Calm down." Christine said. "I'm not judging you. I have nothing against artificial insemination. It's just that I had no idea you wanted to be a mother that badly."

"I did," she replied calmly. "I mean, I do." They stared at the floor again before her friend interrupted the silence again.

"Mi have an idea. It's brilliantly simple. How do you know that you are pregnant anyway?"

"I had the insemination done the day before I came here and I've been nauseous almost the entire time that I have arrived."

Christine gave Toni a hard look. "For a smart, college girl,

you can be so dumb. That does not mean anything. You telling me that you going through all this hysteria and you are not even sure that you are pregnant? Damn, girl.” She gestured an attempt to smack Toni’s head.

“Y-you think so?” Toni looked Christine with childlike hope in her eyes. Maybe she was right. Why was she working herself up for nothing? She had been a worrywart her whole life and it had not been beneficial. It had been a curse. She was sure that it was going to ruin her. Now that she had found happiness, fear and discontent had to creep up on her. Why? Because a little nausea? It could be anything. She had been eating foods that she had not eaten in a long while.

“Of course. You have not been in Jamaica for many years. Your body might just be reacting to the climatic change.” She put her arm around Toni’s shoulder.

“Yeah, you’re right.” She sat up with renewed excitement. That was it. She had forgotten that she had experienced the same nausea when she visited Mexico five years ago. She had spent half the two weeks in Mexico chugging Pepto-Bismol and Tums. She couldn’t believe that her body didn’t know how to handle a little climate change.

She watched the door close behind Christine as her mind fought to remain calm. After all, there was no proof that she was pregnant. She might not be. In reality, she did live in a climate that was dramatically different from Jamaica’s. How could she not experience any bodily changes? Why would she be pregnant this time?

She didn’t feel like she was ovulating when the doctor did the insemination. The doctors were certainly not God. They could have missed their mark. After all, she should know when she was ovulating. She was always horny when she was ovulating and she wasn’t that day. Well, she did lust after that handsome doctor, but

she wasn't horny.

Toni stared at her face in the mirror. "What's the matter with me? How could I be thinking this way? If I am pregnant, I should not be angry about it. It would be my child, the child that I had wanted more than anything. It would call me mommy." She let a faint smile slide across her face.

I would not see Wayne again, but I would have my dream. I haven't even known him long enough to be feeling this way. Suppose he doesn't feel the same way about me? Her mind went through a thousand scenarios. It was impossible to figure them out so she hurried up, washed her face and went to breakfast, much more relaxed.

* * * *

Christine was convinced that it was much to do about nothing. She had never been pregnant, but she knew enough people have been pregnant to know that Toni should not be experiencing morning sickness yet. *But what if she really is pregnant?* Christine thought as she prepared the morning tea. *She would just have to say fuck it and have her baby.* By the time she removed the mint tea from the stove, the idea to solve all of her friend's problems had unfolded in her mind. She smiled brilliantly. How could Toni be so dumb and not see the solution to her problem? *Toni could have both of her desires. She could have both the baby and Wayne Knight.* Christine loved her friend but she hate people who crumbled under pressure. Toni just seemed to just jump from one problem to another. She was a very adventurous woman. A writer needs Toni in their lives, Christine smile. She keeps the plot moving along smoothly.

* * * *

Christine and Toni had not settled in the house for one second, arriving back from the pharmacy with the pregnancy test, before Toni hurried to the bathroom with it in her hand. She shut the bathroom door, leaned her back against it and exhaled loudly. She trembled as she ripped open the pregnancy test packet. She wasn't sure if she was to hold the stick thingy over the toilet and urinate on it or if she was to urinate in a cup and stick it inside since the directions stated the stick should be held under a *stream* of urine.

"Maybe a cup would have been better," she mumbled, even though there wasn't a cup in the package. She didn't see any cups in the bathroom either. She opened the medicine cabinet and looked for a disposable cup, but there wasn't one there. After a little confusion, she decided to urinate on the stick as she held it down, just above the toilet. She looked up at the ceiling and prayed as she pushed down her underwear. It was hard to believe that up to two weeks ago she wanted this pregnancy more than she wanted anything else in this whole world. Now, she wanted Wayne Knight more than she wanted anything in the whole world.

Toni urinated a good amount on the testing stick when her fingers fumbled. It fell from her hand and dropped into the toilet. She quickly shoved her hand down into the toilet water and snatched up the tester. She was sure she completely ruined it because the water in the toilet was cold. There was no way she could get a proper reading now. The tester needed a certain temperature in order to provide the correct reading.

It had a faint appearance of a pink plus sign on the tiny screen. Was this a correct reading? She didn't want to go back to the drugstore again. She had to hope that the mixing of the two temperatures wasn't the actual cause of the tester showing a plus

sign.

"Damn!" She plopped down onto the toilet seat. "Christine..." Toni called as if she was a child in pain calling her mommy for help.

Christine's name had barely left Toni's lips, when she swung open the door and hurried inside. "Well...W-what is it? Tell mi!" she asked, crazed with anticipation.

"Positive," she announced.

There was complete silence in the bathroom. They both stared at each other for a while. Were they to celebrate or mourn? Her dream had come true. She was going to be a mother. Then why was an air of doom squeezing her windpipe? Why was a feeling defeat consuming her? Why did the world stop moving and every sound disappeared? It was good news. She was blessed. She had a baby insider her. That was a sure sign of blessing. It would have been blasphemous for her to reject something she wanted. Most women who became pregnant by accident accepted their babies with love. What kind of woman was she for being so frightened that she is going to lose a man before she thanked god for giving her a child.

"Well, there you go," Christine exclaimed after a minute.

"Yeah," Toni answered defeated. "It fell in the cold toilet water just before the reading came out, but..."

"But what?" Christine asked with her excitement, slightly dimmed. "So you are not sure if the reading was correct?"

"It doesn't matter. I'm pregnant." She retreated into herself. "Look, I have lived in this body for thirty one years so I know my body. I am pregnant."

Christine replied with, "On the other hand, Toni, you haven't been to Jamaica in thirteen years. It is perfectly normal for you to have the stomach problems that you've been experiencing."

"Christine, it's not like this is an accident, I have been trying

to get pregnant. Now I am.”

“Toni, mi no care how much you try to sound positive, you are not sure.”

“Christine, I am pregnant,” she emphasized.

“All right, honey, you win. Just promise me that you’ll buy the test tomorrow and do it again. Do it for me because right now I can’t think of anything else to . . .”

“All right, but . . .” Toni didn’t want to go through it all again, but then she saw her friend’s face transformed into sly smirk. She knew that look. That was the expression she saw when her friend is on a mission to humiliate some over confident prick they met in some bar in New York.

“Listen,” Christine revealed her thoughts. “Mi have a way to solve this whole problem if you really are pregnant.” She reopened the bathroom door.

“How?”

“Finish in here and come into the kitchen.” Christine was smiling.

Toni got up off the toilet seat and walked over to the medicine cabinet mirror. She looked in the mirror at her face for a few minutes before she could even think straight. *What kind of a woman would be sad when she was carrying a beautiful child because she is worrying about losing a man?* She knew that it wasn’t right, but she couldn’t help but be sad because she knew that she could not have Wayne Knight—the man that had aroused feelings in her that she never knew existed and the man that she was now madly in love with. From the moment she met him at her sister’s wedding reception, he magically became a part of her. It was hard to explain or even comprehend, but even the thought of losing him felt like she was waiting to have her body ripped in half and then forced to walk away from one side of it. Christine said that she had a solution and even though Toni

believed that hers was not a solvable problem, she was still curious to hear her plan. She went to the kitchen.

"I've been thinking about your problem since you insist on believing that you are pregnant," Christine started "It's simple. You can have them both," she announced, pleased with her resolution.

"What are you talking about?"

"You can fuck Boogie some more, then tell him that you are pregnant with his child." She beamed as she waited for her friend's thrilled reaction. "That's it. Your problem is solved."

"What?" Toni didn't want to believe that she heard this woman right? She was shocked. How could she even say that aloud? It was amazing that in only one day a lifetime of integrity was flushed down the toilet. If she had no integrity she might as well give up. She couldn't do such a thing. She felt dirty even thinking about it. She would prefer to tell him and risk losing him than living a lie that ugly.

"Do not play Miss goody-goody. You are the one that's breeding and don't have no baby's daddy. It is a good solution," Christine scolded.

"Christine, I understand that you are trying to help me, but I can't do that."

"Yeah, well, but here you are. Listen, it's being done every day by bitches that are much less smarter than you."

"Not me. I couldn't do that." She wanted her friend to drop the whole idea. In fact she would have given her anything if only she would stop from further degrading her situation.

"You love him, Toni, and you want the baby so the only way is to keep your mouth shut and work with what you've got. If it was him in your shoes, him would have done exactly the same thing."

"I'm sorry, there is no way I could do that, Christine." Even if she gave into the absurd idea of pinning the pregnancy on

Wayne, there was the little matter of the baby's skin coloring that would give away the daddy's identity without a doubt. Toni wasn't about to tell her friend this little tidbit right now though.

"Look, there is a solution to every problem. In most cases, it's not the solution that we would like. It's not the pretty one, but the world doesn't make it easy for us to get what we want. Fuck, we were put on this earth to fight and fucking win. There wouldn't be challenges if we weren't meant to fight. When people fight, they get bloody and dirty. The most elegant and successful women in this world have had to get downright dirty at one point or another in her life. If what we are going after is of any value it's not going to fall in our laps, honey. Women can't be weak. We had the world set on our heads the minute we come of age and we are expected to carry it on heels with a graceful smile. Nobody respects women who crumble under the pressures of this world. How do you think I came by this house shares in Sugar Estate? I had to fight dirty or else Linden would have got me a little apartment and come to me whenever he is horny like he did with a couple of girls before he met me."

"There might be a solution to most problems, but we have a responsibility to maintain our integrity, so how we solve our problems does matter. We must find a solution that doesn't compromise our integrity. I would never be able to live with this solution." She wanted to say that she didn't want to cheapen her morals, but she didn't want to insult her friend who was obviously trying to help her.

Christine gave her friend a nasty look and kept on staring at her until she finished talking. "You were fucking a married man," she cried. "So don't give me that bullshit—"

The presence in the living room attracted Toni's attention. She was frightened to see Bell fluffing the pillows on the sofa. The pillows were not in need of fluffing and that wasn't one of her

duties that morning. Bell normally headed straight for the kitchen when she showed up from a long morning of washing and ironing down in the basement.

“That bitch!” Christine announced a little too loudly. “I hope she wasn’t listening to us.”

“I didn’t even see when she came in,” Toni whispered.

“Bell.” Christine’s imposing voice echoed. “Mi give you a fifty-dollar raise if you keep you fucking mouth shut,” she said, not bothering to listen to Bell’s denials. She didn’t have time for a bullshit discussion with her. She looked at Toni and added quietly, “That should do it. That bitch is greedy.”

“Mi never hear nothing,” Bell said innocently.

“Good, because that’s the way it is going to be if you wanna get you money and keep on working here.” Christine warned.

“Damn it! There are far too many spoons in my stew,” Toni yelled aloud as she stormed out of the kitchen.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Boo was on the sofa watching television and eating banana chips, when he heard Wayne's motorcycle pull up into the front yard. He didn't know why his brother was there, but he had hoped that he would have heard Toni's story from someone else. He cringed to think that he might have to be the one to tell his brother that the girl that he was falling for was a whore who was trying to trick him with a child that wasn't his. It was hard to believe that the same thing was happening to Wayne twice in his life.

The first time, Boo didn't know enough to warn Wayne and as a result, the first woman made fool of him. However, this time he was glad that he found out. It would hurt him to have to tell him this news, but he had to. It just was not right what that girl was doing. So he forgot about his jittery nerves and decided to handle the situation like a man.

Wayne fell in love too quickly, too hard. That was his problem. That's why he got hurt so easily. Even though he heard his brother walk up the steps, Boo sat on the sofa until he knocked on the door. His body felt heavy with pity for his sibling. He wanted him to know the truth no matter how much it would hurt him. *Hopefully, he would have heard it from someone else, and if he hasn't, well then, it's got to be me.* He opened the door. He hugged his brother enthusiastically. "What's up, mon? When

did you get back in town?"

"Late last night," Wayne said, seeming at ease.

"Why didn't you call? Suppose me and my woman was in bed," Boo asked jokingly.

"Who, Mad Darres? Please." Wayne grinned at their private joke.

"You go on, joke, mon." Boo laughed.

"Mi can stay here with you for a while?" The question came out quickly.

"As long as you no come here and mess with my honeys." When Wayne was angry with Becky, which was almost always, he would sleep over at his brother's house.

"Mi done with them things there, mon," Wayne announced with conviction.

"Mi no want fi hear that right now, boss." The smile crept away from Boo's face. This wasn't his usual reaction.

"Mi serious, mon."

"A because a that girl Toni, right?" He was starting to piece together his brother's thought process.

"Mi sorry, boss, but mi like her." He paused and looked at Boo's face. "Mi likes her a lot. A whole lot, mon." He shoved his hands down in his pockets. "Listen, boss, mi know you was dating her when she lived here..."

"Mi lied about that, mon." Boo couldn't believe his brother had taken him seriously.

Wayne gave a sigh of relief. He jokingly slapped his brother on the head. "You fucker!"

Boo took a step back and hardened his face. He was about to break Wayne's heart. "Listen, mon, she is not being truthful to you," he hoped he would listen to reason.

"W-what...what are you talking about?" "The gal, Toni. She came down here pregnant, mon." Boo prepared himself for the

worst.

“Where you get them things de, mon?” he laughed and headed for the guests’ bedroom.

Boo grabbed his arm and stopped him. His face was like a rock “Mi not joking, mon. You go and ask her.”

* * * *

Wayne’s insides grew numb. He knew his brother was serious. He was angry. “Toni’s hardly been here two weeks and people are talking shit like this about her.”

He pulled his arm away from his brother. He was disappointed in Boo for listening to gossips. “Mi never expect you fi get mixed up with bullshit gossip. I thought you were better than that.” He stared angrily at him.

“Mi know it hurts, boss, but you got to believe me. Just ask her because mi get it from a reliable source.”

“Daphne?” Wayne turned his head in disbelief.

“Yeah.”

“Please...you gonna believe what Daphne says.” He scoffed. “Of all people to rely on...Daphne?”

“Daphne chat, but she no tell lies. Are you gonna ask her?” Boo plugged away. Wayne paused for a few seconds before he answered. He knew Boo wouldn’t be so persistent if he didn’t believe in what he said. His heart was aching. “Yeah, okay, but so help me, if you are wrong...” He left the threat unfinished. He hurried into the guests’ bedroom and closed the door behind him. “It’s a lie, a fucking lie,” he muttered to himself. He felt like he was suffocating. He walked over to the window and opened it to let the night air in the room. Maybe he would be able to breathe a little easier. “There’s no fucking way that shit about Toni is true,” he spoke quietly.

“Why mi sitting here talking shit? Mi should ask her. Prove Boo wrong once and for all.” He knew the story had to be a lie. Yet, what if it wasn’t? What if she was playing him? His finger trembled as he dialed her number on his cell phone. He waited for the phone to ring, but heard a recording instead. “Her batteries must be dead. Mi will try her other number,” he kept talking to himself, trying to hold onto his sanity. He dialed Christine’s house number. It rang four times before Bell answered. “Can I talk to Toni?” he asked without niceties. He needed to hear her voice. His own voice was shaking.

“Hi, Boogie, how you doing? Mi saw you come by earlier. All the time you were here and you didn’t even come in and to say hello.”

“Bell, is that you?” Wayne’s mind was too confused to recognize anyone.

“Of course a me, silly. Hey, mi like how you a flex these days.” Bell was trying to hold a friendly conversation.

“What you saying, Bell? You don’t know how it is, mon?” It was obvious he wasn’t in the mood to chitchat with Bell.

“Yeah right,” Bell continued her playful tone.

“How you a treat me so, girl?” He tried extra hard to relax, but was failing miserably.

“How mi treat you...just forget it. Listen, you coming to the party tonight?”

“What party?” he answered roughly. He didn’t have time for this.

“Christine invited some of her friends to hang out at the house. It is no big thing. She is just planning to feed them tea and cake. You coming?”

“Mi don’t know. Look, let mi talk to Toni, please. Mi of to speak with her now.” He needed to be eased of his pain. He wanted his fantasy back. He wanted so desperately to be back at

his cottage with Toni.

"She in the bathroom." Bell lowered her tone. "As a matter a fact they are both in there. She been having morning sickness all day." Bell stated innocently.

"Come again?" Wayne felt as if someone stabbed him. He sat on the bed, crushed.

"Oh God, no..." She hurried to the backdoor with the phone. "A you them trying to saddle with this pregnancy?" Bell anxiously whispered.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" His angry voice boomed in his brother's house. He felt like he was in a freefall without a parachute.

"Oh God," Bell exclaimed. "Mi said too much. Please, Boogie, no make them know that mi talk to you or else mi will lose mi job."

Wayne cut off his cell phone. He was numb. The curtain blew about him as he sat on the side of the bed staring through the window into the night. Every instinct in him told him to go and hurt something or someone. He couldn't. How could he hurt a pregnant woman, much less the woman he loved?

Chapter Twenty-Five

Toni picked up the phone from the nightstand to dial Wayne's number and hesitated for about the hundredth time. This whole fantasy-drama became a reality for her that day. As she had done the other ninety-nine times before she shut off her cell phone and put it down. What was she going to say to him? "It's over, Wayne. I'm going back to New York and I won't be seeing you again, even if you come up there." A chuckling cry escaped her lips as she whispered to herself.

"No, I can't do it." Her whole body was numb. Tears flowed out of her eyes and ran freely down her face. "Or maybe, *Wayne, I'm pregnant and it's yours.*" Toni tried to restrain the sound of pain that came from way down in her belly and echoed through her mouth, but she couldn't.

"I can't do that to him. It's not right. Maybe I should just tell him the truth and see what happens. Oh God, how desperate would I appear to him? Getting inseminated and not waiting for the right man, not waiting for him." She cried freely. What had happened to her beautiful, perfect vacation?

Two weeks ago, this would have been the happiest day of Toni's life, but today she was ashamed to admit that she was sorry she was pregnant as a result of the artificial insemination. If it was his, it would be perfect—but it wasn't. She was sure of it because she had been feeling morning sickness before she had

sex with him. She knew that the condom had broken the first time they did it, but she knew she was pregnant even before then.

"How could I be so selfish?" she whispered. "I am choosing a man over the baby I'm carrying, a baby I wanted more than anything else. In fact, I went out and bought this baby." She let a chuckling cry escape again. "Am I that much in love with him that I'm thinking this way?" Christine suddenly popped the door open and startled Toni whose face stained with tears and eyes red and swollen.

"Listen now, girl, mi want you to stop crying and clean up." She hurried around to the side of the bed that Toni was on and sat next to her. "He is outside."

"Who? Wayne?" She jumped up from the bed and hurried to the dresser mirror. "Oh my God, what's he doing here?"

"You mean you didn't call him?"

"No," Toni almost shouted as she frantically cleaned up her face.

"Well, he's here and he's sitting on his motorcycle just outside the gate," Christine stated.

"Why?" She brushed her hair back, but realized it showed her swollen eyes even more.

"Mi don't know. Ask him. Him is just sitting there. Listen, mi wanted you to be here at the party so that you could meet all my other friends, but mi want you to handle your business also. Go do what you gotta do," Christine said encouragingly.

"I'm sorry..." Toni hated the idea of causing her friend embarrassment, especially since she had friends coming later.

"Don't worry about it. Just remember what we talked about. It is his baby. You do not even have to say anything about it right now. You can talk to him about it after you return with him to..."

Toni's face dropped to her chest as her friend spoke.

"Listen, Toni, it's your call. Mi saw you came here two weeks ago, loving a pregnancy you didn't even know you had. Now, mi looking at you hating the pregnancy because you will lose you man. I'm telling you that you can have both and you are acting stupid. It is perfect, him will never know, not if him loves you the way mi thinks him does." Christine patted Toni's shoulder.

"The baby will be half-white," She announced. She had no choice but to finally tell her the whole story. Now was the time for her to come clean.

"W-what!"

Tony had clearly caught her off guard. "Even if I could deceive him like that, it simply wouldn't work because the donor is white. So you see, I could never tell him the baby is his." She was feeling totally helpless. The situation kept getting worse and worse.

"Damn, Toni, why didn't you tell me this? Now you are screwed."

"It didn't come up." Toni didn't understand why her friend was acting as if she owed it to her to tell her all her business. She was not up for hearing it. She was not in the mood.

"Why did you choose a white man's sperm?" Christine sneered.

"What does it matter?" She sneered back at her. "A baby is a baby. I wanted one, now I 'm pregnant."

"Sorry I asked." Christine apologized with a hint of sarcasm.

"Look..." Toni sighed. She realized that she was being cross with Christine. "I waited for a long time to find someone. He was the only donor that matched the characteristics that I wanted in my child."

"Well, now it's a different ball game. You don't have many choices, honey. Gotta make the best of it." Christine was trying to provide Toni with strength.

“No kidding.”

“Go out there, do not tell him anything and fuck him one last time. What else can you do? Have your child and live your life.” It was a simple suggestion.

Toni hurried to continue to fix up her face, but her eyes were still red and swollen. “How do I look now?”

“Well, you eyes are all fucked up, but its dark out. He won’t be able to tell,” Christine added while fixing her Toni’s eyeliner.

When they got out the front door, Christine went to the backyard and Toni continued walking toward the gate. Her heart was thumping as she tried to put on a normal face. It took a lot of effort for her to walk with her usual confidence. *If Wayne doesn’t notice my eyes, I’ll be just fine.* She hoped as she walked toward him. She was wearing one of her hipster jeans with her strapped six-inch heeled black pumps, and a body contour blouse that accentuated her curvaceous body. She could feel him watch her walk down the concrete pavement.

* * * *

He wanted to see the elegant sexy woman he fell so hard for, but now wondered if she was a slut or a lady? Normally, he would have enjoyed watching her walk to him, but now he was angry. He hoped with all of his heart she would tell him it was all a lie. If it were all a lie, Wayne would take her out for a ride and propose to her with his grandfather’s wedding ring.

“You know, I was here all day helping Christine to set up for her party, but I was planning to come and get you.” Toni struggled to sound relaxed.

“Where were you going to come get me?” Wayne said abruptly.

“Where? What do you mean?” His tone startled her.

“Yeah, where? At mi house? At work? Where were you going to pick me up?” Wayne spoke as if he was speaking to a hearing-impaired person.

“Are you upset at me?”

Wayne asked her straightforwardly. No more games. “Are you pregnant?”

The wind blew her hair about her startled face. She was too stunned to answer. It was as if he smacked her in the stomach with a stone.

“Are you fucking knocked-up? Yes or no?” His stony glare bore into her frightened eyes.

“Answer me! Tell me the truth right now!” His voice and face over flowed with anger.

“Y-Yes.” The word barely came out in a whisper.

“Who’s the Goddamn father, Toni? You know what? Don’t answer. Mi no give a shit. We are history! You can go back to the baby’s daddy because me gone. I wish I had never met you, mon.” Wayne turned the key in his ignition as Toni stood silent. The very instant that he revved his motorcycle was the very moment she began to tell him her entire story. Toni began to shout in order to counteract the loud sound of the motorcycle. It was to no avail. He ignored her words and drove off.

* * * *

Toni was in shock. She stood there on the white rocky road and stared across into the thick greenery for about five minutes before she turned and walked up the concrete pavement. She didn’t cry and her face didn’t display the great sorrow that was wrenching her heart. She just wanted to pass by the few people that had arrived for her friend’s party to get to her room and left alone.

She passed Bell in the living room, trying not to make eye contact with her. In her mind, Toni believed that Bell's mouth was responsible for what had just occurred. If she could have torn her into pieces, she would have. She knew that Bell overheard her conversation with Christine. Just as Christine had warned her, Bell brought the news to everyone in the district.

So instead of lashing out at Bell, she smiled a fake smile and disappeared into her bedroom. What could she do? Nothing she did was going to make a difference. She was defeated. As she sat on the bed, the breeze blew the soft white curtain about her. It would have been soothing if she could have felt it, but she was too numb to feel anything. Even the hair on her head ached that night. Toni was hurting so badly, she wanted to cry aloud, but not one tear fell from her eyes. She was just numb.

What am I going to do now? She kept asking herself as she stared out into the darkness. Wayne did say that he didn't want anything to do with her. He just rode off, out of her life. *How could he want me? It's over.* The way he spoke to her, it was clear that it was over. He didn't have to say it. It was in his eyes as well.

He must be disgusted with me. Oh my God. Tears began forming in her eyes. Just then, Christine popped the door open and strolled in. Normally, her Toni's energy was contagious. It wasn't this time.

"So what happened?" she asked before she even sat down.

"Nothing. He just dumped me." She didn't look away from the window. What a difference a day made.

"Mi told you not to tell him." She sat next to Toni and clasped her hands between hers. "Why did you go and do that for?" Christine scolded, shaking her head.

"I didn't tell him. He knew." She still didn't look away from the window. Her world seemed empty now.

“What do you mean?”

“Someone told him that I was pregnant and he came here to ask me if it was true.” Her red, swollen eyes pierced Christine. It was then that Christine knew who had told Wayne the news.

“That fucking bitch!” Christine’s eyes turned toward the living room where Bell was. “That fucking big mouthed rat! She’s outta here tonight. You hear me? Her gossiping days are over. She’s gone, tonight!” she shouted and hurried out the room.

Toni turned her head back toward that open window, searching for answers. None were coming.

* * * *

To hell with Toni Dawn! Mi don't need her, Wayne declared angrily to himself, driving at full speed down the road. The light from his motorcycle only allowed visibility to about fifteen feet ahead of him, yet he rode his Yamaha along the dark Leith Hall road at full speed with reckless abandon. The road was familiar to him so there was no reason to be extra cautious. Wayne and his motorcycle were flying on the quiet road with an overwhelming desire to get away. He wasn’t even sure where he was going. He just knew that he had to get away.

How could I have been so stupid? He bewailed, cutting a dangerously tight curve. *Fuck. What am I, a magnet for women to dump other men's babies on? How could I be so wrong about her? Mi thought Toni was different, mon.* Tears were streaming down his face. He tried wiping them away with the back of his hand. He welcomed the darkness because it saved him from someone catching him out of character. He wiped his eyes again.

Look at me. She turned me into a fucking pussy. How could I have been such a sap? She probably not even love me. How could she be knocked up with someone else's kid? He continued to

wipe away his tears, trying to ease the stinging in his eyes.

The fact that he was a fool and a bad judge of character was the harsh truth he now had to face. The problem was, this one hurt his heart more than he could ever imagine. It was as if she ripped his heart out of his chest, leaving him with nothing but indescribable pain. *How mi going to deal with this one?* He lamented while his motorcycle sped onward. He kept reliving the entire evening in his head.

She came to Jamaica pregnant. It's not yours. Boo's words kept resounding in his head. *She came to Jamaica pregnant. It's not yours.* It was a maddening repetition. She couldn't even lie to him. He would have lived his entire life with a lie. He could believe that she could be so cold. *Y-Yes*, she told him when he asked her if she was pregnant. What the fuck. She should have lied. She wasn't better than lying. She is a conniving bitch. What difference would it make if she lied to him. *I'm sorry that I ever met you.* He wanted her to feel as much pain as he was feeling. The fact that she hadn't been honest with him from the beginning was what truly made him angry

The market bus' horn echoed like thunder. Wayne's heart instantly froze in his chest and in a fit of horror and fright, he swung his motorcycle at an angle as best as he could to avoid slamming head-on into the bus. Though he missed the bus, his momentum flung him and his motorcycle off the road. He had been riding near a cliff called Dead Man Precipice. His body soared into the open air, spiraling down to the rocky bottom of that gorge.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Toni was still sitting on the side of the bed with the window opened. She had tried to mingle with Christine's friends a few times, but she had asked to be excused, telling them that she was not feeling very well. She had curled up on the bed and cried for a long time. After crying, she found herself back in front of the window.

She was sitting there for a while when her cell phone finally rang. She grabbed it up with hopes that it was Wayne, but the number that displayed on the caller ID was that of her sister, Emerald. She didn't answer because she didn't need to talk to her right then. She was relieved when the annoying ringing had stopped, but in two seconds, it had started to ring again. Knowing it was her sister, she let the phone continue to ring. Within two seconds of it stopping, the ringing started once again. This time she decided to answer. "H-Hello." Toni's voice was faint and distant.

"Are you sitting down?" Emerald asked anxiously.

"Yes I'm sitting, what is it now?" She couldn't imagine that anything could be worse than what she was currently going through.

"Oh God, Toni, I don't know how to tell you this but—"

"What is it?" she demanded. Emerald sounded like fingernail scraping across a blackboard to her.

“Wayne had an accident.”

Toni flew up from off the bed where she was sitting.

“Him and his motorcycle went over Dead Man’s Precipice on Leith Hall Road about two hours ago...”

“Oh, my God, Wayne!” She could almost hear her heart thump angrily against her chest.

“Yeah. Them said that he is dead. I’m sorry,” Emerald stated awkwardly.

Toni dropped the phone as she fainted.

“Christine, I had the most terrible dream.” she spoke without any attempt to ease up from the floor. “Emerald called and told me that Wayne crashed his motorcycle and was killed,” Toni said just before she noticed the smelling salts in Christine’s hand and tears in her eyes. “What am I doing lying on the floor?” She realized that something was wrong, “Why are you crying? Oh God, it’s real isn’t it? It wasn’t a dream? He is really dead?”

“They brought his body to the hospital for examination.”

Toni was lying on the floor with her head in Christine’s arms, while some of the guests from the party stood around looking at her. “That’s a lie! He is not dead!” She hurriedly got up from the floor. She turned around as if searching for something. She was forgetting one thing, but she couldn’t remember what and rushed out the door.

Toni rushed to her car. She fumbled to open the door, her balance not completely regained. She tumbled down the flight of stairs on to the concrete pavement. She did not stop to acknowledge her fall. She scrambled to her car and somehow tripped and fell into the driver’s seat.

“You are in no condition to drive, Toni,” Christine exclaimed.

“I’m fine to drive,” she reiterated. “You coming or not?”

Christine relented and sat in the passenger seat.

"Thanks." Toni took her purse from Christine's outstretched hand. She hurriedly snatched the key from her pocketbook and jammed it into the ignition. She stepped on the gas full force and the car tore out of the driveway, the way a racecar would leave from a pit stop. The car nearly took one of the gates off as she sped her way toward the man she loved.

Toni drove her car at top speed, not caring that she was on a narrow road with deadly and steep cliffs to their left. Christine's slammed down on her imaginary brake more than a few times. Toni kept saying to her friend who held on to the dashboard for dear life, "I'm sorry for driving like a madwoman, Christine, but I've got to get there. I've got to show everyone that my Wayne is not dead." She struggled desperately to convince herself that he was still alive.

"Wait a minute. Donna is doing her intern at Lysson Hospital," Christine announced after a half hour on the road.

"Call her!"

"She's not working tonight. She was supposed to be at my party."

"Try anyway," Toni pleaded.

Christine dialed Donna's number, but the answering machine came on. "Donna, this is an emergency. Me and Toni are on our way to Lysson Hospital. They admitted Toni's boyfriend there tonight. His name is Wayne Knight. Please check the situation out for us. We were told that he is dead—"

"Don't say that," Toni demanded. "Please don't say that again. He is not dead!"

"I'm sorry, sweetie...I—" Christine clicked off her cell phone. "She may be off duty but she's got pulls there."

Toni didn't care about cops or speed limits on this dark evening. Even as they flew through Golden Grove, past the police station, she did not slow down. Luckily, her skills as a driver

prevented her from getting into an accident. The rest of the drive wasn't as dangerous. She was determined to see the man she loved one way or another.

She shot by the security at the hospital gate and drove right up to the emergency entrance.

A security guard with a huge potbelly and thick glasses came out of his security cubicle. "Hey lady, you can't leave that car there. This is only for ambulances. Your car will be towed." He coughed loudly, very winded from his three-foot walk.

"I don't care, tow the damn thing." She rushed through the entrance of the emergency room.

"A Mr. Wayne Knight was brought in?" Toni nervously asked the nurse. "A motorcycle accident." The nurse wore a sour face with a mole over her upper lip.

"I'm sorry, sweetie," the nurse said, looking down at her record book. "Are you a family member?"

"Is he alive?" she anxiously asked again.

"I'm sorry, young lady, but are you a family member?"

Toni shook her head like a mad woman. "He can't be dead," she panted.

"Are you a family member?"

Christine was prepared with the standard answer. "Yes...yes, we are."

"Well then, please wait right over there." The nurse pointed to where Boo was standing with someone else.

"The doctor will come out and talk to you when he is finished," the nurse said politely, then went back to her files.

Wayne's wife, Becky, was sitting on the bench next to Boo. She hugged herself as if cold and rocked back and forth.

Toni and Christine walked toward the area where they were, but they didn't stand near them. Tears flowed freely down Toni's face while she searched her friend's face for some crafty

solution.

“Where is Donna?” Toni queried impatiently. “Let’s find Donna, she’ll help us.”

“I been calling, but there is no answer.” Christine’s answer was solemn.

“Where could Donna be?” Toni lamented “Why would the nurse tell us to wait here if he was dead? That wouldn’t make any sense. If he were dead, they would have told us to go home. Maybe he is not dead.” Tears flowed freely out her eyes.

Christine held her friend’s arm and they walked together to the visitor’s bench.

Toni was feeling so numb she barely felt her legs. There was no way that she was going to accept that Wayne was dead. *No, it can’t be. He just has to be okay. I don’t know how I could stand it if...* The thought of a life without him made her shake with despair. She would never be able to live without him. She knew now that she should have told him about the pregnancy before he found out. She should have been honest with him from the very beginning.

If I had told him since the vomiting episode over at Sister Rita’s, the worst that could have happened was that he would have walked away then and I wouldn’t have had a chance to fall in love with him. She sobbed inside. *How could I be such a fool?* Her stomach quivered with pain. “Christine, he can’t be dead. If he dies, I will die.” Toni’s desperation was starting to overwhelm.

“She’s coming,” Christine told Toni as she nodded her head toward Becky as she walked up the hall.

Toni watched her anxiously. She wanted to ask Becky the truth about Wayne, but she saw that Becky had been crying, too. The tears rolling down her face was not reassuring.

One minute after Becky disappeared up the hall, the ladies saw her coming back down with a security guard. They couldn’t

believe what they were thinking until Becky walked up to them and said to the guard "They are not family. Get them outta here." She continued to walk down the hall.

"Technically, she is not a family member either," Toni told the guard who was now asking them to leave. "He left her."

Christine continued holding her friend as they left the hospital building. She couldn't allow her to continue to act in ways that she would regret. She wanted to punch that bitch Becky in her face, but that wasn't the time or the place. When they got to the car, Christine just went into the driver's seat. Toni didn't question her. They sat there in silence. Christine didn't know what to say and Toni couldn't talk. They sat in the car for a while before Christine turned the key in the ignition and started the car. Toni didn't speak.

Christine drove slowly out the hospital driveway and started toward home. No one said a word until they almost reached Pleasant Hill Road.

"Let's go to mom's," Toni said.

"Okay." Christine turned down Pleasant Hill Road. It was a very dark road at that late hour. The bumpy pothole-filled road did not make for easy driving, but they arrived at the house okay. As they entered inside, they could hear their mother talking with one of her friends in the kitchen. Mrs. Dawn talked quietly. Yet, she still was always aware of anyone entering her home.

"W-who's there?" the frightened woman called from her kitchen.

"It's me, mom," Toni's trembling voice answered.

"What's the matter, baby?" her mother came hurrying out the kitchen. "Come, come. Come tell you mother what's wrong." Her voice quivered slightly. She was frightened.

"Wayne is dead." A loud cry burst out of Toni's mouth. Every muscle in her body tightened.

The mother hugged her daughter and squeezed her up against her own body. "Who is Wayne, baby?"

"I love him, mom," she mumbled.

"Is he the boy you was dancing with at the reception?"

"Yes mom."

"H-how did it happen?"

"His motorcycle crashed in Portland earlier this evening." Tears were flowing freely down her face.

"That same young man she was dancing with at the reception?" Toni's mother directed her question to Christine, while shaking her daughter gently.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Lord Master God, have mercy." Her mother covered her mouth in shock. She kept her daughter in her arms and Toni held onto her mother for dear life. They cried together for a while. She lifted up one end of her wide, checkered skirt and wiped her daughter's face.

The stifling scent of overdone fried fish in her mother's skirt didn't distract Toni from the pain that was scorching her insides.

Eventually, Mrs. Dawn led her upstairs to her old room. She gave her daughter some sweet tea and was in the process of tucking her in like she was a child when they heard Christine who was now in the dining room talking to someone on her cell phone

"You sure, Donna," her friend's voice echoed throughout the house.

Toni's heart wilted as she now feared the worst.

"Him dead or not?" Her voice echoed even louder. "You sure you saw him?"

She hurried to the dining room where her friend was sitting, a cup of tea next to her, talking to Donna.

"What is it?" Toni anxiously asked. *God the suspense is killing*

me.

Christine ended her call and a slight smile crept on her face. "That was Donna. Wayne is not dead. He is unconscious." She exhaled very deeply.

"He is not dead?" A great wave of relief swept through Toni's body. With renewed strength, she kissed her mother and shot for the front door. "Christine, you can stay if you want to. I'll just come and get you after I see him."

"That's okay. I'm coming," She took one last sip from her cup and grabbed her pocketbook.

Becky and Boo were still at the hospital, sitting in the same place where they were before Becky had Toni and Christine thrown out. The ladies didn't go inside this time. They sat on a bench in the corridor between the children's hospital and the emergency room. Becky and Boo saw them, but Becky did nothing this time. Christine saw her saying something to Boo and they both looked at her and Toni. All Toni knew was once the doctor came out to tell them that they could see him, she was going in to see him, too, no matter what. "If I have to stay here in Jamaica for the rest of my life to get him back, I will," She cried. Tears were still flowing freely.

"Don't worry, sweetie. You'll get him back."

"He is going to be okay, right?" she asked, hoping Christine had the answers.

"Of course,"

"Are you sure?" She truly wanted to believe Christine. She wanted to hope for the best, not the worst.

"I'm sure as I can be, sweetie. Have some faith."

That's all anyone could do at this time is to have faith. Toni believed Christine because if she didn't, the alternative would lead to thoughts of death.

If only the doctor would hurry up and tell them what was going on, it would have made all the difference. Donna had called one of her associates at the hospital for an update on Wayne. Toni had appreciated that a lot because she would have still believed he was dead. It would have been nice if Donna were on duty. It would have made things much easier for her.

She stared down the hall at the entrance to the operating room. It was four-thirty in the morning. Doctors and nurses were going in and out, but there was no sign of anyone coming toward them. She wanted to get closer to see what was going on, but she would have to get by Boo and Becky to get there. She really didn't want to get into any confrontation with Wayne's wife. Not at that moment, but she was prepared to handle herself if she was forced to.

Christine had dozed off on Toni's shoulder as they sat on the bench. Toni jumped to her feet, letting her friend's head fall with a thump onto the bench. She finally saw a doctor coming up the hall toward Becky and Boo. She pushed the glass door open and hurried down the hall. She was too anxious to be afraid of pushing up next to Boo and Becky to hear what was going on. She looked squarely into the doctor's face as he spoke to them.

"Mrs. Knight, your husband suffered a broken arm and mild concussion. According to the CAT scan, there is a slight brain swelling. Other than that, I didn't see any obvious injuries, but he is unconscious now so we'll see what we are dealing with when he is conscious. We have scheduled an MRI in the morning to check for possible injuries to other parts of his body.

Everyone exhaled. The once quiet hall was now alive with whispers and anticipation.

I can deal with anything if he is not dead. Toni sighed. The man she loved did not die. Her heart felt lifted, repaired.

The doctor continued. "He is in room 104B. Wait five

minutes, then you can go in. It was a miracle that he didn't break his neck, considering the fall he took. If you have any other questions, the desk nurse knows how to reach me." He bid a good evening to everyone and entered the glass doors leading to the OR.

Becky stared at Toni with a fury in her eyes as the doctor walked away. Toni wondered if she knew that Wayne was coming from Portland where she stayed when he crashed. She wondered if she blamed her for what happened because she knew that if it weren't for her, Wayne probably wouldn't have been riding through Leith Hall Road that night.

"What the fuck is she doing here?" Becky asked Boo.

Boo quickly redirected Becky's attention down the hall to room 104B.

That was the least of Toni's worries at the moment. She wanted to see Wayne. She wanted to make sure he was okay. She had no reason to worry about Becky's idle threats. She was just a slut anyway. It was only a technicality why the doctors allowed her to be there being addressed by the doctor as *Mrs. Knight*.

To hell with her! Toni concluded as she hurried back up the hall to wake up Christine to tell her the good news. They would wait until that bitch wife of his and his brother got out of his room, then she would get to see him. She was going to tell him how much she loved him and would do anything for him.

* * * * *

Toni and Christine had stood outside of Wayne's room for twenty-four minutes. As Toni reached for the doorknob, the door flung open. Boo and Becky were coming out, having finished their visit with Wayne.

Becky turned toward Toni. "You are just a fucking meal

ticket!" she hurled. "That's why I'm allowing you to see my husband."

"We'll see. Won't we?"

"Girl, you can't let people see you talking with trash like that out in public," Christine stated as she approached Becky very calmly. She gently pushed her friend inside Wayne's room and pulled the door shut behind her. "Now listen to me very carefully, you slut. Mi will speak slowly so even you can keep up and understand. Bitch, I will stomp you the fuck out if you even get near my friend. You understand? I will fuck you up." She kept a synthetic smile on her face and her voice, almost a whisper. She couldn't afford for anyone to see her in a brawl with someone like Becky.

"But a what this gal a talk about?" Becky directed her statement to Boo, backing off ever so slightly. "Me suggest you step off." Becky steamed "You step the fuck off or I'll break mi foot off in you ass!" She pulled back from Boo's grasp.

Christine couldn't believe how relentless that girl was. Becky didn't back down even though Christine was a full four inches taller than she was. This girl was either very brave or very stupid.

"You step the fuck off, you little shit. I have heard about some of the crap you done and let me tell you, mi no impressed." Christine had made up her mind to shove her to the floor when Boo pulled her away. *He must have seen me coming.* "Yeah, you better take that ghetto bitch away. That little tramp has a good beat-down coming, and I'm just the one to do it," Christine said.

Boo was walking away holding onto Becky who was trying to pull away from him.

Christine looked around to see if her scene had caused a commotion. Thankfully it didn't. After composing herself, she quietly opened the door to see how Wayne was doing without interrupting them. He still looked like he was unconscious.

* * * *

Toni stood over him, transfixed. She was watching the rapid movement of his eyeballs under his eyelids. He was obviously having a bad dream.

“She came to Jamaica pregnant. It’s not yours...” he was saying aloud. “She came to Jamaica pregnant. It’s not yours...” he repeated as his head tossed from side to side. “Mi mother didn’t raise no pansy...” He awoke from his dream.

“E-excuse me?” Toni asked. “What are you dreaming about?”

“Where am I?”

“You are in the hospital, my love.”

“What are you doing here?” he asked, his voice sounding hoarse.

“I came to see that you are okay. W-what’s the matter?” The anger in Wayne’s eyes, even though she expected it, still startled her.

“Mi no want you here...do you hear me?” He stared steadfastly into her eyes. “Get the fuck out! I never want to see you again.”

His voice wasn’t strong enough, but the words came out like thunder in Toni’s ears. “Wayne, I was gonna tell you—”

“Tell me what? To tell me that you are a liar? Please. Just get the fuck out of mi room and out of mi life, now.” His voice gave way and he coughed. He rang the nurse. “If you don’t get the fuck out of my face, I am going to have you thrown out.”

Toni hurried out of the room in tears. She hurried past her friend and ran down the hall. Christine raced behind her.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The long, monotonous ride back to Portland was excruciatingly painful for Toni. Christine attempted a couple of times to shine some positive light on the whole experience, but Toni couldn't see the upside to it. In her mind, she wasn't able to save her destroyed world. She just wanted to get out of Jamaica. She wanted to go back home to New York where it was safe. She wanted to go hide away in her apartment and not come out for a very long time.

I should not have come to Jamaica in the first place. I should have let someone else be Emerald's Maid of Honor and I would have stayed in New York where I belong. She hated Jamaica now. The once beautiful Portland Road now seemed ugly and treacherous. It didn't take her long to pack after she got to the house. She began to pull her clothing down from the hangers out of the closet and stuffed them recklessly into her suitcases.

"Toni, please stay." Christine pleaded. "You can't allow him to get to you like this. You don't have to see him if you stay. We won't go to St. Thomas. We can go hang out in Kingston or Ochi. Don't just leave like this."

"I don't want to go, Christine," she said, "I just need to go home."

"Okay, then." Christine shot her a cold look "Go. You're acting like you are the only woman to ever lose the man she

loves. You know, I know love, too. I was made into this hard bitch that I am now because of a severe broken heart, you know that. I thought you were strong—my mistake.” Christine left the room.

* * * *

“Please forgive me for behaving like a child,” Toni pleaded. “I am aware that I am not handling this very well, but it’s not fair for me to stay here and drag you down. I need to be by myself now. Please understand.” She switched the phone to her other ear. She was on the phone, trying to book herself on the earliest flight out of Jamaica.

“You can’t drag me down.” Christine assured. “There is enough room in this house for you to disappear. I won’t bother you.”

“I need to go home.”

“Suit yourself.”

Toni booked herself on a flight going to Miami that night because she couldn’t wait. She couldn’t find one single flight that went directly to New York until the next morning. She didn’t care if she slept in the lobby of the Miami airport until she got on a flight from there to New York—as long as she was out of Jamaica.

She just wanted to forget the whole thing. She wanted to forget him and the faster she was out of Jamaica, the faster she would be out of pain and he would be out of her life. She couldn’t take it anymore. She hated Jamaica, Wayne Knight, the pregnancy, everything. If she had stayed with her ex-boyfriend, Steve, she would not have to be in this mess. Life was so much simpler before. How did it get so complicated?

“Christine...” Toni quietly spoke to her friend as she

struggled with her suitcases and bags toward the front door. "I'm hurting. Please forgive me for seeming so ungrateful. I'm not. I just have to go. I love you so very much. Where would I be without your strength? I'm sorry for everything." She hurried out the door, struggling with one of her suitcases while tears streamed down her face.

Christine grabbed the other suitcase and struggled with it to the car. Tears flowed down her face, too.

The two friends hugged each other heartily before Toni climbed into the driver's seat and reversed the car out of the driveway. She didn't see herself coming back to this place as long as she lived. At the moment, Toni was unable to see any of the good times that she had with Christine while in Jamaica. She was too angry. The ride back to the airport was incredibly depressing and arduous.

The trees that had looked magical when she first arrived looked like night creatures reaching out to get her. It was dark so she wasn't able to see the mountains with their peaks in the clouds. She could see the ocean to the left of her, but rather being beautiful, it was dark and frightening. The narrow little roads were very annoying and primitive for Toni's liking, but she coped with it. The drive up to the airport road was less cumbersome with more streetlights and wider roads.

Norman Manly Airport was a blessing when she reached it. It was her way out. Toni knew that once her body felt the cool New York spring air, she would begin to heal and forget.

It had to have been the loneliness. She attempted to explore the cause of her miseries. She couldn't understand how she came to Jamaica and allowed herself to fall in love so easily. One thing was for sure—this was never going to happen again.

Going through immigration wasn't as easy as when she was coming into Jamaica. The custom officer searched her suitcases

so thoroughly she wondered if at one point he was going to be sniffing her panties, to see if she had drugs in them. She could understand their reasoning though. People have been doing some of the craziest, wildest shit these days, especially when it came to drugs.

Yet, airport security was not after only the drug smugglers. The fright that the 9/11 attack gave the world put everyone on edge. Toni had no complaints, but Jesus, the officer was taking a long time examining her underwear.

She didn't have to wait too long before her plane took off because she had just made the flight. The ensuing flight was uneventful and tranquil. Toni spent most of the time lost in her own thoughts. The feeling of excitement and anticipation that she felt when she was going to Jamaica seemed like a hundred years ago. Now, her only anticipation was that of seeing her apartment back in New York.

In Miami, she didn't have too much trouble with a connecting flight either. She just purchased her ticket on the first flight that was going to New York. It was certainly a plus when money was not an obstacle. As a bonus, her tickets were for first class. She was able to stretch out and relax going back to New York. There were no *Erica Williams* and no loud, boisterous women either. Toni enjoyed the silence. She reclined her seat and was able to finally close her eyes and thought of nothing, something that had eluded her for quite some time now.

Toni arrived back at her apartment in New York about midday. The apartment welcomed her as she popped the front door open and walked into its warm embrace. She was almost all the way across the open living room when she remembered that she had not given the taxi driver an extra tip for lugging her two heavy suitcases up to her apartment. He was still dragging the

suitcases through the door. "Please be careful not to scratch the floor," she stated, after finally turning to address the cabbie.

"What's your problem, lady? I carried your suitcases for you, Geez!" the cab driver snapped back. He was breathing heavily.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to come off like that. This hasn't been one of my better weeks," she said as she fumbled about in her purse for tip money.

"I kinda noticed that when I picked you up at the airport. I was meaning to ask you what's the matter, but you looked like you didn't want nobody to say nothin' to you. That's why I kept my mouth shut..." He spoke with a thick, New York accent.

"Here." She handed the taxi driver a fifty-dollar bill. "Keep the change." She hoped he would just take it and stop talking.

"...cause I saw that you was a nice lady. That's what I said when I saw you struggling with your bags. I said to myself, *you know, I want to help her out...* and all that—wow, fifty bucks...thanks a lot lady." The taxi driver was genuinely impressed.

"No, no...thank you." Toni hoped to end the conversation quickly.

"Now, you have a great day. Nice people like you..." the cab driver continued.

She held the door open as he talked his way out the door. She tried to be nice, but she had to end his conversation and his compliments as politely and as quickly as possible.

"Stay beautiful, lady. More people gotta be like you...say that reminds me...you know I met this man the other day and..."

His voice faded as Toni eased the door shut. She slid her black leather jacket off and dropped it on the area rug as she walked across the living room. She flung her pocketbook into the cream leather sofa that was set so elegantly in the middle of her mahogany living room. A living room that said Toni had style in

every aspect of her life. She decorated her apartment with the finest and most elegant furniture accessories with paintings and porcelains of some of the most popular up-and-coming black artists of her generation.

Toni made her way to the kitchen and just out of habit, pressed the play button on the answering machine. There was a message from her housekeeper saying that she was going to be away for a couple of weeks. She didn't bother to listen to the remainder of that message. A few other insignificant messages played when Dr. Brown's message caught her by surprise as she reached for a can of diet coke in the refrigerator. She had almost forgotten about him.

"I just wanted to apologize for what happened last week. I spoke with the office about the mistake they made in not informing you that I would have been taking Dr. Blake's patients. I'm really sorry about that. If there is anything I can do, call me."

Three weeks ago, she would have taken his number down in a heartbeat, but this time she just listened to the message, not showing any interest.

"You can call me anytime it's my private number..."

Toni wasn't annoyed, but she wanted to finish her messages before she went up stairs.

A few of the recordings were from Steve. There wasn't anything unusual about any of the messages from her ex-boyfriend. Steve knew they were history. It was just routine for him to call her. She was sure he didn't expect her to call back.

As she was about to walk away, she heard another message from Dr. Brown. This time he introduced himself as Michael. Toni could faintly hear the remainder of his message.

"I meant it when I said that I would have asked you out to dinner. Do you remember when I said that?"

She started to remove her clothing as she climbed the steps

toward her bedroom. She drank from the coke can, as she undid her blouse buttons. She left a trail of clothing from the loft through the bedroom, all the way into her bathroom. She had traveled all night and was desperate for a shower. She quickly turned on the shower nozzle and rested her soda can on the makeup table. It was exhilarating getting into that shower. She just let the warm water beat on the top of her head and cascade down her body. Toni stood there under the water for about ten minutes before she reached for the shower gel.

It was hard to get the experience of the past two days out of her head, no matter how hard she scrubbed. "Wayne Knight is not the end of my world," she said aloud as she lathered herself with soap. "I can get over him." She didn't make any sense to herself, but she still wanted to say something, anything, to try to give herself strength.

"There is nothing special about him. He is just a man... a man with no sense." She started to sob. She couldn't fool herself. "Oh, but I do love him so. Oh, God." A thousand calls from Dr. Brown couldn't ease Toni's pain.

"That's okay," Toni stated, rationalizing her thinking, "I'm allowed to cry. That's the best way to get rid of a broken heart." She sobbed uncontrollably as she spoke. She wanted to hate him, but how could she hate him when he was the only man whom she had ever, truly loved. He was the only man who loved to listen to her talk. He told her to tell him more. He laughed heartily at her jokes. He hugged her and she was in heaven. He was the only man who had ever given her an orgasm. She would have never thought of doing any of those free-spirited experiences with anyone. Wayne had her making love outside in the open air. She had sex with him outdoors, in broad daylight, in a stream.

All she had now were the memories. Every moment she spent

with him was orgasmic, in one form or another. From their first encounter in the garden, their first dance at Emerald's wedding, to the last time they made love in the stream in Negril—that was all she had left of Wayne. Their last love making in the stream at his cabin was still fresh in her mind. No one had ever loved her like Wayne loved her. No one's touch had ever felt so magical. The touch of his lips as he kissed the back of her neck while they stood in the stream, shot currents of delight throughout her body even as she stood wounded in her shower. The kiss in Kitchen's truck still made her squirm. His eyes—the way he looked her. The smell of his skin, the taste of his lips, his very presence filled her.

She could never forget him. The tears flowed freely down her face. She allowed the shower water to fall on her face. She had no idea such pain existed when she was not bleeding from anywhere. She cried out like a wounded cow, holding the wall as she lowered herself to the shower floor where she balled her eyes out. How was she going to live without him? She had lived her whole life without him, yet it didn't seem possible to live without him. No one had told her about this part of love. She had never heard it anywhere that when people fall in love, the mental attachment was like Siamese twins' attachment by the heart, the chest and the head. How could she live without her heart? The muscles in her face and belly ached as Toni bellowed in the shower.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Dr. Brown had called again. Toni was kind to him, but she couldn't say yes to a date. She was not in the market for any more complications. For the following weeks, she spent as much time as she could on campus, teaching or working on her Old English research project. She kept her professional look at all times, smiling often, but barely speaking with anyone. The rest of the time, she spent in her bed, saturated in depression and tears.

Every day, after she returned home, she crawled into her bed and thought about Wayne Knight, down to the very mole on his tummy near his navel. Everything about him was beautiful. The mole on his navel was beautiful. Even the scar on his back where a farmer chopped him with a machete during a gardening dispute when he was just a rookie cop was beautiful.

Toni hadn't felt any of the nauseating feelings that she had felt when she was in Jamaica, but she knew that she was pregnant because she had missed her cycle. Missing her period had never happened before so she had no doubt she was pregnant.

From time to time, Toni read e-mails from Christine, always in tears. When Christine wrote that Wayne was out of the hospital and didn't move back in with Becky, it that made her cry even more. Christine didn't visit St. Thomas as much and since she

fired Bell, she hadn't heard any of the local gossip. She tried to keep tabs on Wayne and what he was up to. She never had much to say to her friend whenever she e-mailed her except meaningless chatter about the weather and other inconsequential items.

In fact, she didn't have much to say to anyone about anything. Her friend, Jennifer, from next door, stopped in at every opportunity to check on her, but Toni hadn't been good company. Jennifer didn't mind her lack of enthusiasm though.

Jennifer had been her neighbor and friend for years and God knows, Toni had been there for Jennifer through some of her own tough times. Nevertheless, she didn't have any problem inviting herself into her friend's apartment, even when Toni blatantly told her not to come in.

* * * *

Jennifer ignored her, working around the apartment doing different things. She pulled the curtains open from Toni's bedroom windows, letting the much-needed sunshine in. She cooked her soup since she wasn't eating anything and was beginning to lose weight. Jennifer had listened to one of Dr. Michael Brown's messages on the answering machine. She heard him asking her friend out on a date. She tried, hopelessly, to get her friend to go out with him. She was not interested in anyone.

Jennifer, also, bought a pregnancy test and practically forced Toni to take the test again, just to make sure. Jennifer had said exactly the same thing that Christine had told her back in Jamaica.

"You hadn't been to Jamaica in many years. When I went there on my honeymoon, my period, which I had a week prior to my trip, came down full blast on me." Jennifer struggled to get

Toni to think straight. "Come on, I told you that story. I couldn't keep anything down for the first week. I was miserable and the honeymoon was a total loss," Jennifer recalled, remembering how horrible it was for her and her husband.

"Jennifer you weren't born in Jamaica, I was," she stated, trying hard not to believe her.

"Toni, you haven't been there in my son's entire lifetime. How can someone so smart, be so stupid?"

It took a while, but Jennifer's constant nagging finally got through to Toni. She went into the bathroom and tried the test, again.

Jennifer pattered around the bedroom until she settled down to trying on shoes. She was trying on silver Armani pumps when Toni emerged from the bathroom with the same defeated expression with which she entered.

"All right, so it did hurt to try," Jennifer affirmed.

* * * *

Toni had made up her mind what she was going to do. She had asked herself the same question about a thousand times. "What could I live without? A baby that I had artificially inseminated into my belly or the deepest love I have ever known?" She kept coming up with the same answer. She wanted Wayne Knight.

"Honey, when the fire burns out, you will be left with nothing," Jennifer's face drooped with pity.

"You think I haven't thought about that?" she barked. "I am dying here. My heart is missing and I can't live without it. I can't be a mother if I don't have a heart." She felt like a monster choosing a man over the baby, but she was going to get the cluster of cells out of her body before it turned into a fetus. She had to. She had been back in New York for three weeks and had

lost fifteen pounds. Her life had taken an uncontrollable depressive turn. She had made the biggest mistake in her life and she had to do something fast.

Toni hurried across the City University campus lawn, trying to make it on time to her twelve-thirty class, when the ringing of her cell phone slowed her up. She had to set her book bag and laptop case down on the grass to dig into her bag for her phone. It was Christine's ring tone.

"He needs you now, girl," Christine declared.

"Who needs me and why? What happened?" Although Toni knew that Christine could only be calling her at work with such frantic enthusiasm for only one person, she was still puzzled.

"His mother died yesterday," she announced.

"Oh, my God!" Toni gasped.

"Guess what's interesting about this call?"

"What?"

"He called me and told me the news, himself. I'm not family. Hell, I'm not even a friend and yet he called me, saying that he thought that I would like to know his mother passed away. I felt for him, but I had to wonder why he felt I needed to know. I didn't really know him, until you started to go out with him. He called me, girl."

"Why?" Hope spread through her body as her friend spoke.

"You figure it out while you packing your suitcase. We are going to a wake so get your ass on the first flight to Jamaica, because, honey, your man needs a shoulder to cry on. You better get you ass moving."

"When did he call you?" Gladness swept though Toni's heart like a tornado.

"Two minutes ago. Stop asking so many dumbass questions. I'll answer everything when you get down here. Just get going."

You got time, but you got to move.” Christine hung up the phone, leaving her friend anxious and excited.

She was going back to Jamaica. She wasn’t sure that she should have been happy about it. After all, his mother had passed away. She should have been sad. Any human being would have been sad for him, but Toni couldn’t think about Wayne’s loss. All that went through her mind was hope and gladness.

She didn’t give her friend an answer, but it was Thursday and she didn’t have to teach a class on Friday so she could leave that night if she could get on a flight. She had to go. He needed her. She collected her bags and hurried across the campus lawn. Toni was sure that she was doing the right thing by removing the insemination.

Her appointment for the removal was on Monday afternoon. How was she going to make it back for her appointment? *I can be back, by then.* She hurried up the steps of Philosophy Hall, toward her classroom. *If not, I’ll just have to reschedule, but I have to go to Jamaica. Maybe my life might be back in order by late Monday evening. He called Christine. She did not call him. Why would he call her if he didn’t want talk?*

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Time had flown quickly for Toni as she was enjoying driving her rented red convertible. She drove comfortable along the roads of Jamaica toward Portland with her dark shades on while listening to a Brian McKnight CD. It was incredible that she got such a nice car on short notice. She had to settle for a car that she didn't care for much when she came to Jamaica the first time.

It was okay now. She was enjoying the breeze, tossing her hair about, as she drove with the top down. The rental agent told her that it wasn't a good idea to drive with the top down because she would look too much like a tourist and it would attract the attention of criminals. She told him that no criminal was going to cramp her style as long as she had God with her.

She was disappointed when she couldn't get on a flight the night before, but her mood improved when she got on the first flight to Jamaica that Friday morning. It allowed her to drive to Portland on her own because it was midday. Christine didn't know when she was coming. She didn't want to tell her. Toni couldn't wait to pull up to her house and surprise her.

This was the happiest Toni's mood had been since she arrived from Nigril and all the mess started. Jamaica seemed to open up and welcome her, once again. She didn't want to build up her hopes, but she couldn't help looking forward to seeing

the man she loved.

He did call Christine to tell her that his mother had died. He must have called her because he wanted her to tell me. Why else would he tell her? It's not as if they were friends. They hadn't even met before I introduced them. He must have contacted her for me. She analyzed the issue a thousand times as the breeze caressed her face. *Why else?*

She couldn't figure out how they were going to reconnect. She hoped that he would call or come and visit her, but somehow she doubted he would. Oh, she was sure he knew she had arrived in Jamaica. There was no way he could not know the way rumors always spread like a wildfire. In Jamaica, it just seemed as if the breeze carried tales throughout the provinces. Yet, even if he did know, she doubted very much that he would make the first move toward their reconciliation.

Toni had never been the one to go after a man, but it was quite likely that she might have to be the one to go after this man. She wasn't looking forward to doing that, but if it meant getting her man back, she was willing to do anything. She couldn't live without him. She had tried, but it just wasn't happening. So there she was in Jamaica again. Was this going to be a happy visit or was this one going to chase her away from her beautiful island, forever?

When the new housekeeper let her into the house, Christine was on the computer, e-mailing her back in New York.

* * * *

"What the fuck is going on with you?" Toni asked, standing directly behind her friend, startling her out of her wits.

"Aaahhh.... You idiot!" Christine jumped up from around

her computer, knocking the keyboard to the floor as she hugged her friend, ferociously. ‘W-when—I heard the doorbell rung, but I was anxious to find out what was up with you. I just emailed you asking you, what the fuck was up with you. When did you get here?’

“Just now?”

“I meant, when did you arrive in Jamaica?” Christine looked her friend over with a perplexed frown.

“Just this morning. What the hell are you looking at?” Toni was self-conscious about her weight loss. She wrapped her arms around herself as if to cover up her thinness.

Christine cringed. “How much weight did you lose?” She looked concerned.

Toni was still beautiful, but the weight she had obviously lost made her look ill. “I don’t know. About fifteen pounds, maybe.” Toni sat down on the computer chair.

“This was really killing you? My God.” Her stunned eyes stayed fixed on her friend.

“It could be the pregnancy. I mean, not everyone has to gain weight when they’re pregnant?” she asked a little agitated.

“Are you still experiencing morning sickness?”

“No. Please, Christine, let’s drop this. I’m going to be fine. My weight will come back, I promise.”

“I know, love, but I have never made love drain me down like you have. If it never happened to me when I was foolish enough to give my heart to a man, mi have no intention to let love happen to me again. I love me better than I love Love.” After a good helping of Toni’s agitated demeanor, she switched subjects. “Why didn’t you let me come meet you at the airport?”

“How else could I frighten the crap out of you?” Toni happily welcomed the change of subject.

“I was just about to e-mail you and curse you out,” she

grinned.

"I saw that."

"Girl, it's good to see you." Christine offered another ferocious hug. Serenity and laughter filled the house, again. "Ms. Pearl." Christine called for the housekeeper. She whispered quietly to Toni. "Mi listened to you advice and got me a grown woman."

"Good for you," she smiled as the housekeeper approached them.

"This is Toni Dawn, my dearest friend. She will be staying with us."

"Good evening, Ms. Toni. Please, follow me to your room." Ms. Pearl was certainly different from Bell. She was more refined.

"It's nice to meet you, Ms. Pearl. I know the room I'm in, so don't worry about me." The air felt safe.

"Girl, mi no want no young gal in a mi house again. Them too gossipy and lie," Christine whispered as they walked off to the bedroom in which Toni had stayed when she had first visited.

"So, missy, tell me what's going on with?"

"Do you mean other than the fact that we are going to a wake this evening?"

"I've been meaning to ask you about that. How are we going to the wake? Wakes are normally at the house where the person lived before they died here in Jamaica, aren't they?"

"Yeah, so?"

"That's where his wife lives?" Remembering Becky's angry face at the hospital, her body trembled at the thought of Becky coming after her with her dreaded knife at the wake.

"You mean his bitch-ass wife?"

"Yeah." The memory of Becky's words at the beach were enough to scare away a lion.

“Who gives a shit about her? We can handle her.”

Everyone needed a source of strength, Toni had found one in her friend, Christine, but she found it much better to stay away from physical fights than gaining victory through them.

“I’m not going there if it means causing a scene. I don’t want to embarrass Wayne,” Toni insisted. “I don’t want to screw things up more than they all ready are.”

“Then how are you going to patch it up with him?” Christine asked. “Girl, you got to take a chance.”

“I don’t know...I still don’t think it’s right making trouble during a wake. I know I need to contact him, but I want to do it peacefully without drama.”

“Well, you’re probably right. If you don’t see him at the wake, then how you going to let him know how much you love him?”

They searched for a solution in their minds for most of the evening. If the decision were solely up to Christine, she would have walked straight up to that house and told Wayne that she was there to love him, even if Becky was standing shoulder to shoulder with him.

Christine came up with some of the boldest, most outrageous ideas, but Toni met each of them with opposition. She wanted to maintain her pride in getting her man back even though she knew that it might not happen flawlessly.

After a long debate, the women agreed on writing him a letter. They figured that they would drive by, hand it to him and then just let everything flow naturally.

“It’s the perfect approach to take. He’ll feel compelled to read the letter to the end. It is very unlikely that he would cut the letter off in the middle of a sentence. He can’t walk away from the letter. It will be allowed to speak where I might not be able to.” The piece of paper would spark his curiosity where her presence might anger him.

They would have asked someone to take it to him, but Toni had wanted to see him. Even if at a distance, she wanted to see him.

They drove up to St. Thomas for the wake, that evening. This way they both could be satisfied with the solution. Christine was happy with the *get up and go right now* part and Toni was happy with the *let's not cause a scene* part. If part of it would only go smoothly, everything would be all right hopefully.

Chapter Thirty

When they drove slowly down the narrow lane near Wayne's home the first time, they didn't see him, mostly because of a large crowd going in and out of the yard and hanging about the gate. It was during their second drive-by that Christine stuck her head out the window and asked a little boy who looked twelve or thirteen years old standing by the overpass. He was admiring Christine's Volkswagen Convertible when she asked him to go and get Wayne.

Christine had to remind him that Wayne was *Boogie*.

"Oh, Officer Knight?" the boy exclaimed.

"Yes, tell Officer Knight that Christine and her friend are outside waiting to see him. He'll know who we are. Also tell him that we won't take up much of his time." She bribed the boy with a twenty-dollar bill.

"All right, miss, no problem. Him soon come." The boy wore a grin from ear to ear.

The women drove away from the front of the gate and pulled over to the side of the road as they watched the young boy scurrying up the walkway into the house. Toni's heart beat frighteningly against her chest. She imagined that he would come out to the car and scoop her up in his arms as he poured out his heart. She could imagine him telling her that he would love her

for all of eternity. She anticipated him asking her to marry him. She would never leave the island until his papers came through. *But what about my job at the college. I can't give up my position. I could request the time. What about my dictionary project? I could work on it right here. I couldn't leave him. I couldn't be without him.*

She watched anxiously out the window as the car rolled slowly up the lane. She was nervous and couldn't hide it. She didn't understand why she couldn't control her excitement. He was just a man. There was no reason for her to be shaking like a leaf. She couldn't have him see her nervous like that. He would think her weak and lose all respect for her. She had to muscle up and show strength. *Never let them see you sweat.* She recalled the phrase. *Never let them see you sweat.* She drew strength from that phrase. It was a powerful phrase. She pulled down the passenger mirror and looked at her face—just to see what he would see when he got to the car. Her lip gloss was fine. Her face was clean. She exhaled. “Everything is going to be fine.” If she had to fight for him, she was prepared to do it.

* * * *

Inside, the home had wall-to-wall people. Wayne was busy, making sure to take care of his guests. The boy ran up to him, almost knocking the bunch of beers that he was carrying out his hands.

“Officer Knight, two ladies outside. One a de lady said she and her friend want to see you. Dem say dem won't take too much a yu time.”

“What you say the lady them name, Prento?” He placed the cold beers on a large domino table in front of a circle of loud, middle-age men. The beers were intended for only a few of the

dominoes players who had finished theirs and requested more. However, the news of ladies waiting outside made Wayne stop in his tracks and just set the beers in front of Old Man Charles.

“One a dem name Christine, but mi no know the other lady name. She never tell me.” The lad smiled and went on his way.

“Thank you, Prento.” Wayne’s stomach started acting up immediately. If Christine was outside, then that would mean that the other girl with her was... *Oh my god, she came. She actually came back.* Gladness overcame him. He had phoned her friend about his mother’s passing on a whim, not really believing that she would actually tell Toni. He had hoped that Christine would have told her, but never thought she would actually fly to Jamaica for that. He didn’t even believe she would have called. Yet, obviously, she came. He really wasn’t prepared to see her. What was he going to do? He didn’t want to see her.

There was only one way to go. He made up his mind to meet things head on and so he started toward the gate, hoping he would have the strength to handle this situation. As he walked toward the parked car, he could see two very familiar women sitting in it. *Mi not going to show any weakness.* He summoned up the courage to face the woman he still loved.

* * * *

Toni sat in the passenger seat unable to control her enthusiasm as she watched Wayne walk at his own comfortable pace up behind the car. His left arm was still in a cast, but his khaki pants and a black, V-neck sweater hung comfortably on his perfectly proportion body.

Toni couldn’t read his face. He was showing no emotion at all as she watched him through the rearview mirror. A ray of euphoria at seeing Wayne again sent Toni flying out of the

passenger side seat to meet him. Every instinct in her told her to swoop down upon him, but a quiet stroll proved dominant. She breathed heavily in the anticipation of his embrace. Every moment that they had enjoyed flashed in her mind. Every single moment sent vibrations of gladness through her body.

Wayne's behavior was the opposite. He displayed no emotions at all—not anger, joy or sorrow. In fact, he was downright indifferent. “Hello, Ms. Dawn,” Wayne said pleasantly, passing by her as if she was no more than a casual acquaintance. He continued toward the driver side.

Toni was embarrassed. She had acted like a schoolgirl, jumping out of the car all giddy to greet her boyfriend. She wanted to hold him tight and tell him how sorry she was for his loss. *Oh my God, I'm such an idiot.* She turned and looked up the dimly lit street, acting as if she had stepped out of the car to get a better look at something up the road. She was trying to cover her childish enthusiasm. She knew that it was pretty lame to pretend she was searching for something up the road, but she had no choice. She felt awkward standing there, not knowing what to do with her arms. Wayne had hurt her with his non-emotional greeting. She continued to stand and look up the road at nothing in particular. He hunched down toward the driver's side window and started talking to Christine. Toni listened as he jovially greeted her friend and she inquired about his arm.

“It is all right. No big thing,” he affirmed casually.

“Man, you don't have to be so cold, you know.” Christine handed him the letter Toni had composed.

“What you talking about, girl? Mi said hello.” He folded the letter into two halves and stuffed it in his pocket.

“You no think you needed to say more than just Hello Ms. Dawn?” That was not very nice of you,” Christine reprimanded.

“No, ma'am, mi beg to disagree. Mi greeted her properly and

mi showed respect. What else was I supposed to do?" He was so polite and courteous that it was sickening.

"How about treating her fairly or treating her like someone you love, which mi know you still do."

His jovial face changed to display the pain of a defeated man. He looked toward the streetlight up the road.

"Mr. Knight," Toni interrupted the silence. "Please accept our deepest condolences. Let's go Christine." That was her best way of saying that she was sorry about his loss as well as you can kiss my rear, Mr. Wayne, without actually saying it.

"Thank you, ma'am," he answered just as casually as if he was talking to a complete stranger. "Take it easy, Christine. Mi don't want to upset your friend," his tone remained painfully indifferent. He looked over at Toni who kept her eyes steadfast ahead of her. She was not about to give him any satisfaction at this juncture. He had hurt her with his indifferent behavior and she wasn't about to let him hurt her anymore.

"Look, mi friend will be just fine. Don't worry about her. You do your part and read the damn letter, okay."

* * * *

She was serious and Wayne knew it. He softened his actions a little. "You have mi word, I will read the letter. Don't worry, mon." He stepped away from the car and Christine drove off. He took the letter out of his pocket. He sensed that he knew what she wrote.

She probably wrote to me about the fact that she was pregnant when she came to Jamaica and lied to me. She also probably wrote how she planned to pass off her kid onto me and that she was probably sorry for trying to do that. She also probably wrote about how she loves me. Please, it's all lies.

Wayne walked over to the side of the road and sat down on the curb. He needed a few minutes before he could go back to the house with a straight face. Seeing Toni threw him for a loop.

He was still in love with her. He knew that he was in love the minute he laid eyes on her. Her sister's wedding reception only confirmed his feelings. The moment he touched her, he knew that she was magical. She was like an angel then. She was perfect, every time he saw her face since that night. When he made love to her, she was perfect. Now, it was over. Toni turned out to be like Becky. Wayne couldn't believe that he was such a love-struck ass. He even brought her to his grandfather's cottage. He had never brought a woman to his grandfather's cottage. *How big of an idiot am I, really?* He had no idea, but he knew that he was not able to stop thinking about how she got into his heart.

The first time he kissed her in Kitchen's truck—even when he rode to Boston with her on his bike was still enslaving his thoughts. God knows how much he missed her. There was no way that she could have faked the genuine oneness that they shared. She had to have loved him, then. She was perfect. She was still perfect when he looked at her in the car. The fact that she tried to do what Becky did to him made him even more wary of her. He had raised another man's son, thinking it was his own, while people were laughing behind his back. Wayne was not about to go through the same ordeal again.

"This shit ain't going to happen to me again. Damn you, Toni Dawn," he looked angrily at the unopened letter before he folded it, placed it back in his pocket and started toward the house.

There is nothing that you could say to me in this letter, that will change my mind about you, Toni. He trotted angrily up the veranda steps with his hand against the letter in his pocket. A loudmouth guest who wanted to know where to find the white rum interrupted his thoughts.

“Where you been?” inquired an old, gray-bearded man. He had come out of the refreshment tent. He staggered slightly toward Wayne.

“Easy, Mr. Taylor, what you want, sir?” He grabbed a hold of the old-timer, making sure he was steady.

“Mi was looking for you, son. You got to continue you hosting duties. Bring out the other case of white rum. The man them thirsty.” The old timer slurred as he breathed heavily on Wayne.

He realized where the first case went as he fanned his nose with his good hand. The elderly man was referring to himself rather than the other guests when he said that the men were thirsty. *Well, the letter will have to wait. I got to attend to my company. Toni Dawn can wait for all eternity for all I care.* He headed toward the shed where the rum was stored.

* * * *

The ride back to Christine’s was inordinately long. All Toni could think about was the letter she had given to Wayne. The letter wasn’t a guaranteed way for her to get him back, but it was a chance for him to hear her side of the story. She wanted him to know all about the artificial insemination, why she did it and the fact that she wasn’t planning to trap him. It stated that she just happened to fall in love with him and that she was going to remove the insemination in order to save their relationship.

As the drive continued, Toni wondered if she had said too much in the letter. She wondered if she had sounded too desperate. It didn’t matter anyway since he pretended as if he didn’t know her before. It was all very confusing because he had called Christine and told her about his mother’s death. Why did he do that? Did he do that just to humiliate her? He must have known that she would have come. How could he be so cruel?

Calling her friend was as good as calling her.

Yet, this very evening, he didn't even acknowledge her existence. She couldn't get it out of her mind how she felt like a fool for getting out of the car, thinking he would have come to her with his arms open, professing his love for her. She was so stupid.

"God!"

"Toni, you have to understand, him don't think highly of you, right now," Christine took her gaze off the road. "Once he reads you letter, he will come to you. How could he not? Him loves you. You can trust me on this, girl."

Normally, Christine's enthusiasm would be contagious, not this time. Toni couldn't help but feel that nothing could help her now.

Chapter Thirty-One

The day of the funeral was so windy that the minister had trouble keeping his Bible open as he delivered the funeral sermon. The wind blew so hard the women wearing flair dresses had to use one hand to pull them tightly to their sides and use their other hand to hold their hats onto their heads.

To make matters worse, the grounds were muddy from the rain that had fallen a few hours earlier. Many people had trouble finding a place to stand near the grave without their shoes sinking into the fresh dirt. Even with feet sinking and the wind howling, no one wanted to miss the chance at getting a view of the casket descending down into the grave. There were more cops at the funeral than if it were the funeral of the police commissioner.

The women watched from underneath a mango tree, not far off from the funeral services assembly. With utter distaste, Toni stood there and watched as Becky hugged Wayne's arm, acting as if she was the dutiful wife. He didn't seem to mind her hanging onto his arm. Toni couldn't help but wonder if they were back together since he hadn't responded to her letter at all.

Christine came up with all the excuses as to why he did not to respond. None of them made Toni feel any better. The best excuse Christine mentioned was that he was in the middle of arranging his mother's funeral while dealing with the emotions of

seeing his mother for the last time. It was a very reasonable excuse and it did indeed make sense that he didn't respond to her letter right away. Nonetheless, Toni was too anxious to understand and wait. Now, seeing him standing there with Becky hanging onto his arm was even harder for her to deal with.

Toni was wearing a gorgeous black lap dress that she had picked up at *Express*. The fact she had lost a little weight didn't take away from her figure, which she elegantly displayed in this dress. She saw when Wayne briefly turned his head toward her direction, once or twice, but she couldn't tell if he looked at *her* because he wore dark sunglasses. Christine was sure that he looked at her, but she knew that Christine was only trying to spare her feelings. She was glad she wore her shades, too. That way he couldn't tell that she was watching him.

She watched when he gave his handkerchief to Becky and it was hard for Toni to take. It should have been her by his side, not that woman. "You know what, Christine? I want to leave now." She walked off. She didn't even give her friend a chance to state an opinion on her decision. She knew it was a mistake coming back to Jamaica. *I don't know why I keep listening to Christine, and making a fool of myself.* Toni led the way to the car parked on the side of Stokes Hall Road.

"He doesn't want to have anything to do with me. He is back with his wife. How could I be such a fool?" *That lousy cop was just using me because I was the new face in town. It had to be so because I wrote to him and told him everything and he didn't even have the decency to call and tell me he read it. He obviously doesn't care about what I have to say. He had made up his mind. He just doesn't want me anymore. How could I allow that to happen to me? I am going to have myself declared certifiable because something is seriously wrong with me.*

There has to be something wrong with me because men are

always dumping on me. Maybe I need to find me an ugly ass motherfucker because these so-called fine ass men have nothing, but shit for brains. Toni had been in Jamaica for two days and it was all...for what? He didn't call or say anything to her. Now her time was up. She had to go back. There was no reason to hang around any longer. All she had to do now was to go back to the house and collect her bags. She had class in the morning and after that, she had a doctor's appointment. It was a good thing that she hadn't unpacked her bags. She would just call and arrange for an earlier flight to New York. *The earlier the better.* Toni pulled her cellular phone from her purse.

* * * *

Christine was very sure that Wayne wanted to see Toni. She had really made herself believe that it was going to work out between them. She wanted to say something to her friend that would have made her feel better than how she was currently feeling, but she didn't know what else to say. Toni had built her hopes up and that man didn't even acknowledge her. She had exhausted all excuses. Her friend didn't want to hear it anymore and Christine wasn't going to push the issue.

* * * *

Wayne had seen when Toni left. He didn't need to ask himself why she had walked away because he knew that it was from Becky hanging on his arm. He wished that she didn't have to hang on to him like that, but Toni couldn't expect him to be thinking about shit like that, not at a time like this. Regardless of what Becky was, she had been living in that house with his mother for almost eight years. She was going to need him to lean

on. The loss of his mother was hard on all of them. What did she expect?

It was not as if she was perfect herself. As far as he knew, she was no better than Becky was. The problem was...he still loved Toni. He couldn't wait to go after her and tell her that he loved her, but as he watched the casket of his mother descend down into the grave, he couldn't think about Toni or Becky anymore. He had never cried since he became a man, not until he met Toni.

Now here he was losing a fight to hold back the tears for the second time in less than a month. His mother was gone. He wanted to tell himself that it was better to see her go than to see her get any worse. Yet, all he could see was his mother, the energetic woman who used to kiss his face as he clenched his eyes shut even though she knew that he didn't like it when she did it in front of his friends at the school gate.

Boo tapped Wayne on the shoulder. They didn't share the same mother, but Boo had come to know Mrs. Knight, very well. "How you holding up, Boogie?"

"Listen, mi have some business fi take care of. You can take William and his mother home fi mi," Wayne asked Boo while he removed Becky's hand from his arm.

"Where are you going?" Becky asked.

"Mi of to take care of something." Perplexed, he didn't understand why she was suddenly concerned about what he did. They weren't living together anymore.

"Okay." She turned to Boo. "Whenever you ready."

Wayne walked quickly out of the cemetery, toward his friend's car that he had been driving since he lost his bike in the crash. He hadn't read the letter Toni had written. He hadn't mustered up the courage to deal with that as of yet. Besides, he was sure he knew what she wrote. He didn't care about that

anymore. He just wanted to see her, to ask her if she had loved him at all or if it was all a lie. He just wanted to ask her that one question. He didn't care who she was sleeping with in New York before she came to Jamaica, before she came into his life. If she loved him at all, he was going to love her back.

Wayne had tried to live without her and it was the hardest thing that he had ever done in his life. Something about her made it impossible to get over her. As he stood there, destroyed over having to say goodbye to his mother, he couldn't help but watch her as she stood there under that mango tree looking incredibly beautiful. He wanted to just wake up from the nightmare of his life, hurry over to her and take her away. By the time he had looked again, she was walking away.

If she says that she don't love me, then mi just turn around and come back to St. Thomas and deal with it like a man. Wayne drove along Golden Grove roads toward Fairy Hill, Portland. He was going to have to pass through Leath Hall Road, the place where he had crashed his motorcycle. He wasn't ready to drive by there yet, but he had no choice. He needed to see her, even if it was for the last time.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Christine was lying out on her front veranda, looking like a movie star, when Wayne's friend's, old Yugo drove into her driveway and disturbed her relaxation. She sat up on her lounge chair and watched him take his own sweet time to open the car door. "You raas you!" She watched him walking into her yard. "She gone." She wished that he had showed up much earlier.

"Hello, Miss. Christine," he greeted.

"You fucker, you! You too late!" Christine yelled, not bothering with pleasantries.

"Too late for what? What are you talking about?"

"Toni left. She went back to New York with no plans of ever coming back here." She walked down the steps of the veranda to meet him. "That was what you wanted, wasn't it? It was not like you made an effort for her, did you!"

"W-why did she do that?" He fidgeted with his car key.

"Why? You should know why. Shit, you not even call her, mon."

* * * *

"What, she couldn't understand that my mother died and I was busy arranging her funeral, huh? What can I do?"

"Nothing," Christine exclaimed "It's over."

"Well, if that's how it is, fuck it." A dark shadow of despair swallowed up Wayne's entire soul once again.

"Did you even read the Goddamn letter?"

"Mi no need to read it, Christine. Me know what she was going to say and mi no want to hear it." Wayne stood steadfast over his belief of the contents in the letter.

"You big dunce, read the fucking letter! Where is it?"

"Mi have it right here..." mired in ignorance, Wayne patted his shirt pocket.

"Take it out and read it now, you dunce," she commanded.

He was very sure that there wasn't going to be anything in the letter that he wanted to hear. However, Christine's insistence made him change his mind.

"Well then, if you want me to read it, I will if it will make you happy." He didn't want to hear who else she was fucking. What was she going to tell him? He already knew. She had a man in America that she was cheating on when she fuck him. He was sure that she wasn't going to write the truth, that she didn't know who the father of her child was and she was hoping that he would take the job since she heard that he was a big joke. He took the letter from out of his shirt pocket and began to read it just to please her friend.

My Dearest Wayne,

I cannot begin to tell you how very deeply and truly sorry I am. I never meant to cause you any pain. After all, how can I ever want to hurt the man I love?

It is true that I am pregnant. What is also true is that I had myself artificially inseminated. Up until when I met you, all I ever wanted was to be a mother.

By doing artificial insemination, I could become a mother

and not have to worry about meeting a man. With my plan in place, I thought my world was secure. That was until I met you. I never dreamed that I would fall in love. I was wrong. You are my dream, my future and my reality. My heart belongs to you, Wayne. I only hope that the same holds true for you about me.

I should have been honest with you from the beginning. A strong, loving relationship is formed and kept on the principles of respect, trust, honor, truth and love. I violated these principles immediately. I should have trusted you with my secret. I know that you would have honored my trust with respect and would have loved that I spoke the truth. I should have had faith in you, but I am only human and was fearful that you would think me desperate for having the insemination. I did not know that I was pregnant until after I met and fell in love with you.

So that you know, I will be removing the insemination immediately. I no longer feel the same way about the procedure as I had when I first received it. I would rather try a thousand times with you and be blessed naturally. Can this happen for us?

I cannot shake the feeling that I am too late. In fact, I fear that I have lost you. I am sorry for not trusting you. I hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive me.

Upon reading this letter, please, please contact me. I want us to be in love again. Is this possible? Please let me know.

*With All My Love, My Heart and My Soul,
Toni*

An array of emotions flood through him, one after another about a hundred times in the two minutes it took him to read the letter. He sighed after he finished, then folded the letter and placed it back in his pocket.

“All that she wrote...it is true?” He needed a little more confirmation of the truth, though he knew what the answer

would be.

"All of it is true, you idiot. She love you, mon! What are you gonna do about it?"

"Where is she now?" he asked as he hurried into the driver's seat.

"She gone to the airport a long time now." Christine's voice rose to overcome the noisy Hugo engine. "You could probably catch her, if you drive fast enough, but be careful."

Wayne reversed the car out of the yard at top speed and shot down the road.

Wayne had driven for about five miles before the stupid old Hugo started progressively slowing down no matter how hard he pressed on the gas pedal. He eventually had to coast the car at about twenty kilometers an hour before arriving in a little town. Luckily he stopped, or rather the car died, just in front of a small grocery shop.

"Hey, boss," Wayne called to a tall, thin man standing outside the shop next to a rusty, yet serviceable Yamaha motorcycle. "A you bike that?"

"Yeah, mon." The thin man looked at his motorcycle.

"You want to hold onto the car here while mi borrow it?" His desperation was unconcealed.

"You mad, mon." The thin man was chewing on a toothpick.

"Mi know say if mi search you, me a go find some weed on you," Wayne said. He dipped into his pants pocket and allowed his badge to fall to the ground as if by accident. He figured that being nice wasn't working. "You no worry about nothing, mon. Mi won't trouble you. Mi have an emergency, mon." Not waiting for a response, Wayne hopped on the bike.

"All right, but if something happens to mi bike, you a go pay fi it, you hear, sir." Cop or no cop, the thin man stood his ground.

“Ya, mon. You no worry about that,” her assured him as he turned on the motorcycle and tried revving it.

Looking at Wayne, the man noticed his arm. This didn’t make him happy.

“You hand all in a cast, mon! How you gonna ride with one hand?” the man asked nervously.

“No worry about that, mon. Now, step aside, boss, this is official police business,” he shouted over the sound of the motorcycle engine as he tried to get his broken arm to adjust to the motorcycle’s handle.

“Official police business mi ass! A pussy that raas boy de a chase!” the thin man angrily exclaimed as his head danced to the movement of his motorcycle.

Wayne raced off with the man’s bike, leaving him behind in a cloud of dust. He sailed along the hills, valleys and curves of Portland’s roads as he had never done before. His heart jumped a few times whenever he saw a dog or a goat hurrying across the road in front of him, narrowly escaping their death. He was even more shook up when he rode through Leith Hall Road again. He slowed down a little due to his own fear, but once he drove through it, he rode like lightning, hoping he would get to the airport before Toni left.

“God, I hope I can catch up to her. Please Lord, let me get to her in time.” He wanted to tell her that he loved her and didn’t care about the pregnancy. He wanted her. What he didn’t want was for her to do that abortion. He would never be able to live with himself if she did that. He was ready to love another man’s child as if it was his own, for the second time in his life.

* * * *

Toni was now used to the procedures at Norman Manley Airport

and so wasn't as annoyed as she was the first time she left Jamaica. They still searched her luggage completely, but thank God it was a woman this time because the last immigration agent all but sniffed her underwear. She had arrived half an hour before departure so it was comforting to know that she didn't have to sit around in the waiting area for too long before she went home.

Her heart weighted with disillusion, she walked into the waiting area carrying her pocketbook and her cosmetic case. She was leaving the man that she loved once again, but it felt more like she was leaving one of her limbs behind. She had tried to get him back, but failed. She had never failed so blatantly at anything in her life. She had poured out her heart to him and that didn't work. She begged his forgiveness for her dishonesty in a letter and he didn't even call her to say he read it. She still showed up at his mother's funeral though her gut reaction was that Wayne never meant for her to come even after he called Christine.

What else was I to do? Was I to go and throw myself at it his feet and beg him? That was the only thing left for me to do." She placed her shades back on her face. She couldn't risk having anyone see tears forming in her eyes. The last thing she needed was for someone to come up and ask her if she was all right. She would definitely be bad company right now.

They are sure taking a long time to start boarding. She avoided thinking anymore about Wayne Knight. It was only five minutes since she had been waiting, but it felt like an eternity.

He must hate me for him to treat me the way he did this weekend. It cost me almost five thousand dollars to come to Jamaica and he treated me like a piece of shit. Wow, I sure do know how to spend my money on myself. Toni chuckled regretfully. The sad thing about it was that she still loved him. If getting him back cost money, she would have spent every cent

she had to do it. She had lost him and no money could help her to get him back.

If she had felt the same way about the baby she was carrying, she would have at least carried the child full term, but how could she after she had blatantly chosen Wayne over it. Toni knew that she would look at the baby for being responsible for losing the man she loved and that wouldn't be fair because it would not be true. She didn't have the man she loved because she withheld a major secret from him and he found out the truth in the worse possible way.

"Air Jamaica, flight 017, New York, boarding now at gate number two. Air Jamaica, flight 017, New York, boarding now at gate number two."

The announcement fragmented by other sounds that filled the airport sitting area, but she heard it loud and clear—it was time to board and forget about Jamaica. It was time to forget about Wayne Knight.

* * * * *

Wayne pulled up to the airport's main terminal building and parked the motorcycle at the first available, no-parking spot. He was about to leave the bike illegally parked when an airport police officer, told him that he couldn't leave it there.

"Listen, mon, mi soon come back." He pulled out his badge and showed it to the officer. "Just watch it fi me for one minute, mon." Wayne had never willfully used his badge to break the rules. He was just using the only resource he had in a desperate situation.

"All right, mon, but hurry," the officer answered with resignation and a little agitation and then resumed his patrolling of the airport corridor.

“Air Jamaica flight 017 to New York is boarding now at gate number two. Air Jamaica flight 017 to New York is boarding now at gate number two.”

The announcement echoed in his ears. His heart beat faster. *That has to be it.* He hurried up to the airport security near the entrance to the check-in counters.

“May I have your passport and ticket please,” the security officer affirmed, a little bored and very smug.

“Listen, mi need to see someone inside.” Wayne showed security his badge again.

“I’m sorry, officer, but no one is allowed inside without a passport and ticket unless they are on the airport staff or given clearance by security. Since you have none of what I just mentioned, I can’t let you in.” The security officer was sounding more and more arrogant with every word he spoke.

“Listen, mon, this is an emergency. Mi ‘av to get inside.” Wayne didn’t have the patience for this arrogant prick. He wanted to belt the man right in his smug face.

“I can’t change the rules, Officer.”

He was ready to leave when the security officer stopped him. “Wait, mon,” the security officer spoke slowly.

“Yes. Yes, what is it?” A glimmer of hope appeared.

“As I was about to say, I can get you connected with the police department that works inside and they may be able to help you. But then again it would have to be about something official—”

“All right, boss, whatever you say!” Wayne interrupted. “Listen, mon. There is a lady inside that mi need to talk to right away on official business. You understand? Mi need to officially speak with her now.”

“All right, sir, just calm down. What is her name? I’ll try to have her paged for you,” the security officer picked up his

phone.

“Her name is Toni Dawn.” He kept looking at his watch.

“What flight is she on?”

Wayne didn’t have the answer. “Don’t really know, but she is going to New York.” He could have kicked himself for not asking Christine before he left for the airport.

“The only flight that’s leaving to New York now is the Air Jamaica flight 017. That flight has finished boarding by now. It’s taking off in...” He looked at his watch. “Goodness, t-two minutes. There is no way she is still in the airport. I’m sorry, sir.” He was being sincere.

“Just, just page her for me, please?” All that had transpired, frustrated Wayne. If the security guard had let him in immediately, he may have caught up to her. *What them think mi a go do, jump on top of them plane and run away?* Wayne pulled out his cell phone and dialed.

“Christine, what flight is she leaving on?” This is something he should have known.

“You see her?”

“If mi did see her I would not have called you! Listen, tell me the information, mon.” He had lost what little patience he had left.

“Oh, she a leave on Air Jamaica flight 017. If—”

“Toni Dawn please report to the information booth...Toni Dawn please report to the information booth...” The announcement echoed throughout the building.

Wayne listened to the announcement and stared through the glass door down the hall to see if Toni would walk up the hall. She did not. He stood there until he heard a plane engine roar. He knew that it was her plane, but wanted to be sure. He hurried up to the observation deck to see for himself because he couldn’t believe that she was flying out of his life for good. *It can’t end this*

way. He noticed someone standing nearby. “Was that the American Airline flight to New York?” he asked a young lady leaning against the railing next to him. He knew the answer, yet needed confirmation.

“Yes,” she answered sadly. “Mi baby’s father is on it.”

Wayne had forgotten all about his illegally parked motorcycle. He stood against the rail and watched as the plane disappeared off into the sky. He turned and walked slowly toward a life without Toni Dawn. He couldn’t live up to his own last name. This Knight had failed, and oh, how his heart hurt. He hoped that she would have just walked up behind him and touched him on the shoulder and fall into his arms, but he knew that things like that only happened in the movies.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Toni's stomach quivered as she walked over to the examination table looking at the row of metal medical tools lined out perfectly on a stainless steel table covered with a gleaming white sheet. *I should have taken a shot of white rum before I came in here.* She fumbled to double-wrap the old, faded-out hospital gown around her. It was a warm day, yet the examination room was cold, like ice. The cold didn't seem to affect her too much though. She was too numb to feel anything. She had cried all night, and at this point, used up all her tears. She had searched her brain completely for answers, but all that she could come up with was that she had to do this.

She wanted to do it, but she wasn't ready for it. Her dream just wasn't meant to be and she had to come to terms with that. Maybe being a mother just wasn't in the cards. If it was, then this wasn't how she wanted it. She didn't want to have children after thirty-five, but maybe that's when God planned for her to have one, if it was to be. She would just have to face that fact and live with it.

Toni realized now that she needed to straighten and organize her own life before she decided to bring a child into her complicated world. In the beginning, she was very sure that she wanted the baby more than anything. Then she was sure she wanted Wayne Knight more than she wanted anything. Now, she

was still sure that she wanted him more than she wanted anything. Unfortunately, this thinking was not conducive to bringing a child into the world. Jennifer had told her that once the baby was born, she would love it a thousand times more than she loved Wayne, but she couldn't see it. She couldn't even conceive of it. She had tried.

"Girl, before Michael was born, I couldn't exist without my husband Stanley. After I had my baby boy, he became my sun, my stars, my very existence. Without him, I would die. If Stanley even spanked my son, I would kill him," Jennifer had told her.

Even with Jennifer's encouragement, Toni still didn't think she was fit to be a mother anymore and that thought killed her inside. 'I'm going to have this doctor go inside of me and remove the embryo and then I'll go home. I'm going to have this doctor go inside of me and remove the embryo and then I'll go home. I'm going to have this doctor go inside of me and remove the embryo and then I'll go home.' Toni chanted repeatedly as she sat up on the examination table. "Dear God, please forgive me." The tears flowed down her face as a chuckling cry escaped her mouth. She hated herself for doing this. "Why did they call me in if they weren't ready for me?" The ten-minute wait felt like an eternity.

"You know where mi can get some jerk chicken and festival for lunch?" asked a deep, sexy, familiar voice.

Toni didn't even hear when the door opened behind her. *It couldn't be!* She didn't turn her head because she was fearful of waking up from her dream. Could this really be happening?

* * * *

"Please tell me that you didn't do it yet." Anxiety shook his body at the thought that he might have arrived too late to stop her. The

thought of scooping her up in his arms was overpowering. She was a hundred times more beautiful than when he last saw her, but she wasn't answering him. Her red swollen eyes just kept staring at him. Her trembling lips parted, but she wouldn't speak. He didn't care. He did care as long as he could hold her in his arms for the rest of his life.

"N-no..." she said.

"You didn't?" He kissed her wet swollen eyes and trembling lips.

"No!" she said again. "I was waiting to—"

"Come on, get up. You have to take me to lunch. The American Airline people, they acted like they never wanted to feed me," he said.

* * * *

"H-how did you..." She was shocked, frightened, embarrassed and confused.

"No worry about that. You know mi is a policeman. I got mi sources you know. Actually, your friend Jennifer dropped me off here. Now, get dressed, my love. Mi no want you to have this abortion." The love in his dream eyes had returned.

"B-But..." Toni was at a loss for words.

"But nothing, I am an idiot. Mi could not live another day without you. I love you," Wayne said, kneeling on the metal footrest at the base of the examination table.

"Are you sure?" she timidly asked.

"I've never been so sure about anything else in mi entire life. I'm extremely sure about this," he declared, as confidence and assurance rang in his voice.

"Cause you have to be sure, you know," she carefully stated.

"You gonna have to marry me for mi green card." He smiled.

“Also, because mi can’t go back to Jamaica unless you coming with me. So I guess what I’m saying is that you stuck with me, for better or for worse.” He rose from the footrest, produced a gorgeous diamond ring from his pocket and placed it snugly on her left ring finger.

After the initial shock, Toni declared, “Yes, I’ll marry you.” Tears flowed freely down her cheek as she slid into the arms of the man she loved.

Chapter Thirty-Four

By the time the Knights reached the hospital, Toni's water had broken and she was experiencing a dry labor. The baby had been due five days earlier, but Toni had lost her patience and convinced her husband to let them go and spend the weekend at East Hampton, Long Island. They were visiting a friend of Wayne's who had left Jamaica and lived in the United States long before he arrived and they were begging him to visit.

Toni had told herself that once she was too far to get to her own doctor, it would have been when the baby decided to start pushing out. She had been saying it for months. It was happening exactly as predicted and no sooner had they had arrived at Wayne's friend's house in the Boondocks of East Hampton. Wayne's friend and his wife had opened their door and stood there, smiling ear to ear with happiness for seeing their old friend.

Wayne was so happy to show off his wife that he hurried over to the passenger seat of their Lexus SUV to open the door for her and fumbled with the door handle. The very second Toni's right foot touched the ground, she screamed and held her lower tummy. A thunderous pressure slammed down on her lower abdomen.

"Oh my God, baby, something is happening?"

* * * *

Toni was not sure if she was more excited or more frightened by the violent pain that left her frozen at the car door.

“Y-you h-having contractions now?”

“I think that’s what it is,” she giggled, then moaned.

“Okay, okay...nobody panic. I got this. Let’s get back in the car and we’ll drive to the hospital,” Wayne looked up at his friend and his wife who were now both hurrying down the steps to help.

“The baby has decided to join us. I’m sorry, mon, she’s going into labor. We’ve got to go back. We’ll make this up later,” he replaced his terror with responsibility and anticipation. They roared out of their friend’s driveway.

Wayne had spoken with Toni’s obstetrician on the phone and the doctor directed them to meet him at the North Shore Community Hospital in Maspeth, Long Island. He also called Jennifer to collect Toni’s suitcase—packed and ready for over a month. So far, everything was going according to plan.

When they arrived at North Shore, Jennifer was there, standing in front of the building with her cell phone at her ear, reporting the news. She called everyone and their mother. She left Christine for last. She knew that for her, she would need a chair, some coffee and one thousand free cell phone minutes. The moment she saw Toni and Wayne pull up in front of the hospital’s main entrance, she hurried over to take over for Wayne. The security in front of the hospital was yelling at him not to leave the car there as Jennifer was trying to remove his arm from around his wife and place hers there. Wayne had grown very fond of Jennifer, but he had to be abrupt and direct with her.

“Jennifer, here are the car keys. Go park the car before I get

towed.” He was going to be calm and collected, even if it killed him.

“Why can’t you park it?” Jennifer said, upset over being the parking attendant.

“Jennifer. Don’t be a pain in the ass and just do this for me, please,” he made little attempt to hide his annoyance. He wasn’t about to leave his wife.

“Oh, all right,” Jennifer snatched the car keys from his hand and hurried around to the driver’s side.

By the time Wayne finished filling out all the forms, showed their medical cards and arrived in the maternity ward, Jennifer had found them and commenced taking over with her bothersome motherly attitude. He had to be firm to keep her smothering ass out of the delivery room. From his point of view, Jennifer wanted to be the one in the delivery room comforting Toni through the labor. It took some serious self-control and wittiness, but he was able to ward her off without hurting her feelings.

He had a hard time watching his wife in so much pain. More than a few times, he had attempted to walk out the room because he was sure that the doctor was hurting her on purpose. He watched in disbelief as the doctor forced his thick hand inside his wife. Toni explained that the doctor had to do this to help open up her cervix in order to allow the baby to descend.

Wayne controlled his emotions and wiped his wife’s face instead. He couldn’t leave her. Her nails sunk into his arm as she muscled up and pushed with all her might at the doctor’s command. His heart leaped. The baby’s arrival was near.

Then he heard the baby cry. He didn’t look in its direction. He was too preoccupied with the health of his wife when the doctor placed the baby all wrapped up in a blue blanket on Toni’s stomach. She was so exhausted from all the pushing that

she could hardly keep her arms in position to hold the baby. She was listless when her half-closed eyes saw the beautiful brown baby cradled on her chest.

* * * *

Seeing her baby, Toni's eyes popped. A glorious feeling of joy filled her and lit up her face. Sweat beads on her forehead, and within seconds, tears flowed freely down her cheeks and into her mouth. The nurse tucked a tissue between her hand and the baby's blanket. She looked at the doctor in awe, as if he was responsible for giving her life.

* * * *

The doctor, standing beside Toni smiled. "Take your son."

Wayne's heart cringed slightly. His mind was made up about fathering another child, yet this wasn't his blood so it still felt funny to hear her say it so easily. "I know," he said. They had known the sex of the baby for seven months.

"No, you didn't hear me correctly. Here is your son, Mr. Knight."

Wayne reached over and took the baby from Toni's arms. When he pushed back the blue blanket in which the nurse had wrapped the baby, Wayne couldn't believe what he was seeing. "It cannot be. H-how is this possible?" He was flabbergasted.

"Well, Mr. Knight, if you don't know how this little man got here, then you are in serious trouble. By the way, Mrs. Knight, you're owed a refund from the last insemination. I guess they missed and your husband didn't." The doctor continued giggling, walking out of the delivery room.

There in Wayne's arms was a perfect, tiny replica of himself.

The ears, the nose, a mole near his navel like his daddy, and yes, the same *dream eyes*.

* * * *

“He’s beautiful, isn’t he?” Toni said, with a weak, raspy voice, her heart filled with joy. Now she was truly blessed.

“Oh man, he’s the most perfect creation I’ve ever seen.” He stood there next to his wife’s bed, engulfed with pride.

“Wayne...”

He didn’t answer.

“Wayne...”

Again she received no answer. He was just smiling at his own son. His boy. The baby was *his* flesh and blood.

“Boogie.”

“Yeah, honey?” His boy.

“We’re sticking with the name I picked.”

He reached down and kissed her with all of his heart and soul.

* * * *

Emerald and her mother had almost given the rental agent a heart attack over their enthusiastic response to the news that Toni had given birth. They had tried to contain themselves, but it was too much to ask, particularly of Toni’s mother. When Jennifer told her that the baby was a perfect replica of Wayne, she reached her hand up to the sky.

“Thank you, Father,” she said. “Thank you, Master Jesus.” She held her breast as if to prevent them from falling off. “My daughter who is a doctor of English at the University give birth to her first child. She and her husband are at the hospital,” she

boasted to the young rental agent who just wanted to get back to renting her first apartment.

Mrs. Dawn was anxious to get to the hospital to see her daughter.

Emerald stared at her mother in annoyance. She agreed that it was nice that Toni had her baby, but it was no surprise. Everyone knew that she was going to have a baby for months. Emerald was just tired of her mother telling everyone they met about her daughter, Toni Dawn, now it's Toni Dawn-Knight, the big University professor. She was tired of hearing it. Her mother acted like Toni was a princess or something. She moaned as she fumbled to pull her ringing cell phone out of her purse.

"Hi, baby." It was her husband and she was relieved that she didn't have to listen to her mother any longer. She would have talked to him until her mother finished with her phone conversation, but they were in the rental office and the rental agent was sitting there with a fake smile, waiting for them to finish chatting. Well, someone had to have some manners. Emerald cut her eyes at her mother.

"Baby, me and mom are still at the rental office. She's helping me to apply for our apartment..."

About the Author

I am a proud mother of two sons a happy wife and an energetic teacher. I love nature, music and comedy.