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Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my love to Daughter Taneshea, Sons Timothy and Tristan. Brad for your loyalty to me and your undying support. Sending love up to my first-born adult-Daughter Tashawna Marie and baby-Daughter Taleah Rose in heaven. I can imagine my little girl running through the lavender fields in paradise holding her big sister’s hand.

Book Cover Design: Valerie Caramella

Philippians 4:13 “I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Strengths Me”

Author’s note:

I was pregnant in 1988 with my second child that was said to be a boy, that turned out to be a girl that I renamed (Taneshea Ladawn) The name Jaylon Origin: Greek a boy name that means “calm” that went unused for many years until now. So then, Rose a girl’s name Origin: Latin means: “rosa” a flower. Taleah’s middle name is named after my sweet, Italian American Aunt Rose. So, there you have it a small story behind the book title Jaylon-Rose of Rolling Brook.

I hope you love the character Jaylon-Rose as much as I do. \_\_Valerie Caramella

“I dwell in possibility” \_\_ Emily Dickinson

“That’s what we storytellers do. We restore order with imagination. We instill hope again and again and again. \_\_\_Walt Disney

The Fox and the Hound: “Forever is a longtime, and time has a way of changing things,”

\_\_\_ Walt Disney

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Chapter 1

The sunrises and sets on a banner of hue colors vastly attached to a brilliantly blue canvas in the Midwestern sky. Smoky white clouds sail across the horizon like ships in bubble shapes as it merges into the Midwest sector. However, that passes over the historic practically barren city of Cairo, Illinois. Whereas Cairo sits on the southern tip of the state. Therefore, that link connects to the bridge that carries you across the Mississippi River that crosses paths with the state of Ohio.

In addition, the barge traffic that floats underneath the bridge that glides on into Cape Girardeau, Missouri’s Midwest waters. The train that was running north and south parallel to the Mississippi River and towards Memphis was on schedule. Far as Samuel and Edie Paul, they were traveling home on a typical route from a Baptist Church Sunday evening service. Although, they stayed over later than usual conversing with church friends, Lance Robin, and his wife Wanda. Whereas their conversing continued out in the parking lot as members one by one departed. Mr. and Mrs. Paul and Mr. and Mrs. Robin got into their cars and drove out of the deserted dark church parking lot. The Paul’s were on their way home when Samuel decided not to get gas while passing by the convenience store. Samuel was confident his faithful Ford Ranger would make it home, not so much the case for Edie who sat uncomfortably in the passenger seat.

At this point, they were riding on his one-sided decision with his belief, they could make it home on what he thought was 1/8th of a tank. Edie kept quiet, just biting her lower lip for she knew her stubborn husband well enough. She gazed worriedly over at her husband and then lowered her worried gaze unto the gas gauge, that lit up the words low fuel. The red Ford Ranger was approaching the railroad tracks, and Samuel’s foot pressed down even harder on the gas pedal a quarter of a mile from the railroad crossing. However, that is when the Ford Ranger started to spit, sputter, and jerk. Samuel was pumping the gas pedal frantically hoping they could make it across the approaching railroad crossing before the Ford Ranger stalls out. At this critical point, the signals lit up and started flashing and then the arms dropped down and just by a smidgen of a pinch it cleared the Ford Ranger’s bumper. Samuel immediately plunged into pumping the gas pedal even harder, while the red Ford Ranger was stuck inside the protected railroad arms. He was turning the ignition over with pounds of pressure that almost bent the key in half with no results. During this time, Samuel’s sweat bled through his dress shirt and sweat beads formed and dropped like tears down from the sides of his temples.

Edie was begging her husband to move them off the train tracks as she fixed her fearful eyes onto her husband, who was powerless in moving the Ford Ranger. Coming unexpectedly, and too fast was a blinding bright light that shined on the side of their faces as the fast approaching, train came around the bend. The engineer noticed the stall out Ford Ranger on the tracks with wide open eyes. Samuel and Edie both were motionless while they sat frozen in terror while their eyes locked into the blinding light of the train and the ear-piercing sound of the loud horn blowing. Monday’s sunrise unfolded unto the small Midwest town with the top page announcement that hit the morning local newspapers. An old gray scruffy bearded man was sitting on a worn bench outside an old antique store reading the paper as he crossed his leg. A train running through Scott City, Missouri tragically killed Mr. and Mrs. Paul, Sunday night. The Paul’s nineteen fifty, three-bedroom, ranch-red brick home located in, Dutchtown, Missouri. Their only son, Winston Paul will indeed inherit the family home. Once upon a time, Dutchtown was a thriving village that had rolling hills with a general store, and a tavern with modest homes-where the locals like Winston’s Father Samuel best known as Sammie would-meet up with his buddies to drink and shoot pool. Then, construction came in and leveled the ground out. In-which some believe, the culprit was the water from the Mississippi River that was flooding the small village. The old tavern is now an antique store. Dutchtown’s population is 94 at the 2010 census. It is apart, of the Cape Girardeau-Jackson, Mo-IL Metropolitan Statistical Area. And, also known for being a flood prone area that has washed out most of its original residents.

The village is, located in Missouri and sits inside of Cape Girardeau County and is located at the intersection of Routes 25 and 74. The Midwest sun was shining down Edie’s fringe tree that morning. Although, it was Edie’s favorite tree that stood vibrant all by itself on the edge of a running brook. The delicate strap-like petals of the native fringe tree hang from the ends of stout branches in mid to late spring. In the fall clusters of berry-like drupes ripen to a dark blue-purple and loved by birds.

The downside was the running brook tends to rise and flood the square lot whenever bands of rain passed through the small village of Dutchtown. A rusted white metal swing sits on a raised concrete pad facing the brook, where Winston’s Mother Edie and his Father Samuel often sat to read the newspaper and Edie mostly enjoyed watching the birds land on her fringe tree. Winston hammered two white wooden crosses in the ground beside the old white metal swing baring their names. Oftentimes, Winston would sit on the swing, gazing with a remembering eye at the beautiful fringe tree that he and his Mother Edie planted at the tender age of five one crisp mid-spring day.

He stuffed his dad’s last newspaper in a metal storage box that he tucked under the bench. Whereas the rest of the village and down the road apiece were experiencing the last of the dog days of summer’s heat wave. However, the briskness in the air brought elation in the early morning hours and at night. The Show Me State could feel the Midwest fall winds sway the golden soy flowers back and forth like a slow dance on top of the soy fields that paraded across the land. Therefore, the different kinds of jagged trees of maple, ash and oak planted along the hilltops as far as the eyes can see. A landscape, of fall’s finest colors, were in full bloom such as rustic red and deep purple bushes. Even more, beautiful colors of lemon, and lime beside patches of sparkling silver shrubs. Just radiating in the sunlight on the sides of the hills facing the enchanting view of the glistering golden soy fields.

Now, Winston had dark blonde hair and was in his mid to late thirties a six-foot-tall ladies’ man with bedroom pale blue eyes and a guitar to pick and a song to sing with a handsome dimpled smile. Nevertheless, while at home, he would leave his full glass storm door open that faced the two-lane street and the direct blinding sun. A Hank Williams Junior’s song, ‘A Country Boy Can Survive’ was turned up loud on Winston’s Pioneer radio inside his 1969 red Ford pickup truck. Winston had on a pair of grease-stained Levi’s jeans and a worn-out T-shirt with a writing on the back that was printed in faded black letters, Biker Rally in Fruitland, Missouri. Best friend Toby Mitchell, known mostly by his nickname Dawg, stopped by ‘round three thirty p.m. that afternoon and parks his 1969 raven black Shelby Mustang beside Winston’s 1967 cherry red Mustang that was covered up with a tarp. Winston had gotten off work early that day and wanted to use the rest of the afternoon tinkering on his Ford truck. Winston was singing along with a Hank Williams Junior song with his truck hood raised up and his tall black toolbox on wheels beside the truck bumper where he would grab a wrench from time to time. On the other hand, was his trusted friend Dawg who offered to help and change the oil. That is when he wasted no time in grabbing a pair of navy coveralls and pulling it up and over his clothes. He slid under the truck, where the oil pan was then reached up with a ratchet to begin unscrewing the bolts.

“No disrespect to your ole man.” Dawg paused as he unscrewed a tight bolt while grunting under the truck.

“Ford trucks are like old ladies, always having to go to the doctor for a tune-up,” gasped Dawg.

“Maybe so, Dawg. Nevertheless, if my stubborn ole man was here to hear that, you would be looking for a proctologist to pull his boot out of your hairy butt for being a pessimist ‘bout a Ford truck,” ranked Winston.

“That’s my prerogative!” Dawg said from under the truck.

“Sounds like to me, your somewhat of a hypocrite,” said Winston.

“How do you figure that?” Asked Dawg

“Take Shelby over there, isn’t her maker a Ford?” Asked Winston and chuckled out loud from under the truck hood.

“Yes. Miss Shelby stands with no comparison to this ready for the junkyard rest home old lady Ford truck,” answered Dawg humorously.

“No doubt, your stubborn ole man was an ornery old cuss.”

Winston grunted, “good ole mule traits that runs in the Paul Family DNA” while leaning over the truck engine.

“Nothing no better than two shady mechanics having a good old fashion griping session, while performing maintenance repairs,” gasped Winston.

“No griping, its old Ford truck’s handbook information,” laughed Dawg. Coincidentally, Winston’s black 1200 Harley Davidson-Panhead motorcycle was leaning on a kickstand, in plain sight across from the back door leading into the house.

Once Dawg rolled out from underneath the truck, he then heaved up to his feet and passed by Winston saying, “going to the John.” Winston nodded his head at Dawg as he was tightening a bolt under his truck hood. At this point, Agatha’s long droopy ears perked up, and raised her wrinkled eyebrows that open her sunken brown eyes. However, Dawg, who was approaching her boundary of rest, grazed the top of her head, as he kept his perpetual pace that was advancing him to the back door as planned.

From a calmness that brewed up into a sinister breeze, that provoked the motorcycle to wobble back and forth that disturbed the kickstand. Gravely, the motorcycle’s balance broke and fell on top of Dawg before he was able to reach the back door.

The unexpected terrible noise spooked Agatha into quickly finding another resting spot. As a result, the un-foreseen force drove him into the pavement like a metal rod. Leaving Dawg cursing for help underneath the heavy motorcycle that had him pinned. Winston immediately stopped, what he was doing under his truck hood and dropped his wrench that dinged on the concrete driveway to shoot over to Dawg. Winston grunted loudly while he exerted all his physical power to heave on his motorcycle while staying in rhythmic motion to lift it off his friend.

“Dawg, are you alright?”

Winston pushed out as he took in deep hard breaths in between.

“I might live now-since your piece of junk is finally off me!”

Winston bows down to check him out. At this point, Dawg had not found the strength to ease up on his own. Dawg cursed some more as he laid flat gazing up at the ceiling of the carport. He gradually raised his arm up to gently place his hand on his head. He began to moan as he touched the side of it then tightly squeezed his eyes together. Pain flinched in his face, when he reopens his eyes and arched up his eyebrows while slowly relaxes his tensed face. He clenched his teeth, while heaving up from the carport. He then fastened his left hand onto his right shoulder that was throbbing with pain. He gazed down at his arm with brooding eyebrows, while he turned it up sideways to view the nasty cut on his elbow that was dripping blood and stinging with pain, “Owl!” He yelled.

“I hate it, man!”

“Sorry-this happen,” said Winston with empathy in his voice as he eyed his friend’s arm with an ouch expression.

“It’s not your fault” He paused for a moment then spoke tightly with his teeth clamp together; while he was expelling shuddering breaths while his diaphragm drew up then lowered back down painfully.

“Well, it is my motorcycle that fell on you, so I do feel responsible regardless,” Winston said sympathetically.

“Gnaw-man, little bit of duck-tape and a bottle of your extra strength pain-relievers,” he loudly grunted.

“It’ll be alright as soon as this pain decides to go away,” he groaned.

He was feeling pain from a throbbing headache as he cradled his rib cage while gazing hard at Winston’s motorcycle.

“All I need is a pretty girl lying beside me and a bottle of Jack Daniels,” he said.

“Don’t we all,” grinned Winston while shaking his head amusingly as he tossed some duck-tape at Dawg’s feet. The conversation dwindled as Winston gazed at his carport then drifted off to pick-up the empty oil filter boxes and the 10W30 oil bottles and other trash that was lying about on the carport. He kicked the duck-tape closer to Dawg as he walked to the trash can with his hands full. Whereas Dawg moaned like a dying calf and reached for the duck-tape then began walking stiffly towards the back door like he originally planned to do earlier. Winston narrows his pale blue eyes at his friend while he tightly grips the doorframe for support while stepping inside the house. Once Dawg made it to the bathroom to wash the dry blood off his hands, he checks his self out in the mirror and swiveled to view his sore shoulder. Next, his brown eyes twitched as he peers at his silver dollar sized skinned cheek. He turned on the faucet and allowed the water to run while he cleaned the lacerations on his arm and elbow as the reflection of his face flinched. A black shadow was staged behind him while Dawg’s brown eyes stays fasten onto his arm.

“Winston is that you?” Ask Dawg figuring it was as he looked up while pressed up against the sink. Dawg felt uneasy as he rotated around then paused and saw nothing then wheeled back to face the mirror. So, what he previously thought was dismissed as the black shadow went undetected. Although, the sulfur burnt smell manipulated Dawg to think a wire in the light socket was shorting out in the bathroom, when the bathroom light flickered on and off. It became likely that seeing the accumulation of dust on the light bulbs. In-which made perfect sense to Dawg that it was the smell of the dust getting heated up so, he shrugged it off and resumed concentrating on doctoring his wounds. He prowled into Winston’s medicine cabinet for pain relievers but only found what he called, “sissy aspirins for the pretty boy” then seeing a tube of antibiotic crème and squeezed some out on his lacerations. Unfailingly, using his teeth he tore off chunky pieces of duck-tape and pressed it on his arm and elbow. Furthermore, he went back outside and stood two feet away from Winston gazing at him putting his tools back in the drawers of his toolbox. Dawg made steps alongside of Winston while pushing his toolbox back into the storage room.

I could not find any he-man strength pain-relievers in your bathroom cabinet, only sissy aspirins. I will make a stop and pick-up some he-man pain-relievers. Never-mind that I do think your ole man ah, did this?” Dawg spoke as he cradles his arm.

“What? Who did what?” Asked Winston with a puzzled look on his face as he cocked his head inward.

“I think, your ole man might have gotten mad at me for talking ‘bout his old piece of junk Ford truck or, better yet maybe it’s your wife Karrie,” he said inquisitively as he eyed the motorcycle with fear residing on his face.

“What are we playing here, the Clue game, who did it?”

Winston arched his eyebrows as he cut a sharp gaze over at his friend, as he made steps towards the tall metal shelve in front of him, searching for a bottle of degreaser in his storage room.

“Maybe. What harm can that do?” He said from behind him.

“A lot, making me as stupid as you,” he chuckled.

Winston felt redundant by not saying another word. Then walked in the back door to go in the house to wash the grease off his hands in the bathroom. Once, Dawg was alone on the carport the dark shadow briefly reappeared and stood behind him. The uneasy feeling of the dark shadow made itself known again unexpectedly that once more, Dawg was not standing alone on the carport.

“Hello,” said Dawg while swiftly pivoting to see nobody was there.

“Ok, that’s it” said Dawg as he gazed ‘bout his surroundings.

Winston promptly powered out the storm door rambling. Dawg yanked his self-back around and looked at Winston with suppressed eyes. At this point, he was impeded with stillness on the carport.

“Dawg, you look pale as a ghost. Not that you weren’t before I went in?” He joked and laid his hand gently on Dawg’s good shoulder. “What’s going on with you?” Asked Winston. “I-I-feel like I wasn’t alone out here,” he gasped while his unsettling brown eyes darted from side to side. “What!”

“I - I felt like someone was standing behind me or out here with me,” he paused as he sucked in air.

“I don’t know man, it’s strange,” he explained.

“Man, that is strange and sounds like you need to go to the hospital and get checked out,” said Winston.

“No. I don’t need a hospital-I need a paranormal team,” answered Dawg. “Now your turning paranoid on me,” he said.

During this time, Dawg kept his eyes fastened on the motorcycle.

“I do-not believe that motorcycle fell on me by accident. Someone or something pushed it over on me-and tried to hurt me, and someone was out here a minute ago,” voiced Dawg seriously.

“Your head injury is a culprit of this nutty conversation.

“Lighten up. Do you feel like coming along for a test drive?” Asked Winston.

“If your old man puts his cold dark green dead hands around my throat, I’m bailing out!”

He emitted when the truck door popped open. Winston turned the key and cranked the stubborn old Ford truck while chuckling heartedly.

“Ok, that sounds like a yes to me,” said Winston. “You and your superstitious thoughts can bail out anytime,” said Winston with a horse grin on his face.

They rode down the country road with the muffler rumbling while he smashed down on the gas pedal, with Agatha barking ruff-ruff. Just then, a shiny black SUV pulled out onto the road, turning the opposite way towards Cape Girardeau.

“That’s flexible enough for me,” said Dawg as he craned his neck out the truck window smelling gas fumes in the air from the truck.

Winston’s long hand dangled over the old Ford truck steering wheel as they both chuckled and poked fun at each other, while traveling down highway T.

“Oh, by the way, I smelt something burning while I was in the bathroom maybe a wire shortening out or, could be all that dust lying on your light bulbs,” added Dawg.

“Yeah, I will check it later,” said Winston not sounding too concern about it. Dawg just looked over at Winston oddly. The afternoon was winding down into the evening, when they both agreed that the old Ford truck was running perfect for two shady mechanics they joked, while heading back to Winston’s house. Just as Dawg turned his head out of the truck window, he spotted two girls riding on their ten-speed bikes on the side of the road dressed in tank tops and shorts. He was rubber necking out of the truck window howling and whistling at the girls.

“Stupid horn Dawg, I thought you were an injured duck?” He Asked.

“Can’t you see, I am bird dogging?” He cracked.

After that, he withdrew his head from the truck window and settled back down in the old Ford truck as Winston drove closer to his house. He turned his steering wheel and pulled up in his paved driveway. Dawg jumped out of his truck door and got in his Shelby Mustang and yelled out his driver window, “when is the fish fry?”

“What fish fry?” Asked Winston with a quiz looked on his face.

“The catfish supper, you will be cooking for us,” he laughed.

“Keep an eye out for an invitation in the mail,” he grinned widely.

Dawg raised his middle finger up and stuck it out the car window as he slowly backed out of the paved driveway unto the street.

“I got some girls to catch up with later mate,” he said.

He revved up his 1969 raven black Shelby Mustang Boss 302 engine and squealed tires down the street leaving behind a cloud of burnt rubber smell. Winston shook his head with a comical chuckle saying, “stupid Dawg.”

He noticed his neighbor Mr. Yikes was outside while walking to the edge of his driveway to check his mailbox. Winston threw his hand up then pulled the mail out of his box and closed the lid and walked back to his house with Agatha his bloodhound by his side. They both walked under the carport and went through the back-kitchen.

Chapter 2

Winston walks into the living room and drops down on his couch and begins to stretch out and reach for the remote off the coffee table and aims at the TV just as the evening news was coming on. Better yet, he is lying on the couch relaxing with his beloved Agatha while watching the news, when his mind reminisces back to the Gulf Coast with the TV remote resting in the palm of his hand. Every now and then, he remembers a French girl and whenever the bayou parades on his mind like a colony of ants. Winston arrived on the Gulf Coast eager to start his new job on an oilrig and performing at the Thrills Nightclub. The first week in Gulfport, Mississippi Winston flew back in by helicopter and gets in a taxi and from there he went straight to his hotel.

His room number was two-fourteen in bold black wooden letters stamped on a solid hunter green door. Approximately forty-five minutes later, he strolled out dressed to kill and shutting his hotel door. He was every bit of a polished groomed act stepping off the curb in his brown oxford dress shoes, leaving his loud woodsy leather scented cologne lingering in the air behind him. Conceitedly, slid under his leather retro slot style steering wheel then, revs up his 1967 cherry red convertible Mustang high performance 289 V8 engine. He proudly sits and listens to the addicting sound of the engine which also revs up his confidence. Next, his pale blue eyes focused into his rear-view mirror as he backs-up, then moved his eyes onto the road ahead of him and drove out of the hotel parking lot, and unto highway 49 like he was the king of romance. The over-head signs for Gulfport/Biloxi were in his sight as his Mustang was approaching highway 90.

Once in Biloxi, Winston was amazed at the scenery on the breezy sandy highway with the bright colorful lights flashing in his eyes with a landscape of businesses, casinos, and hotels along the animated side the blue Gulf Coastline waters.

His pale blue eyes captured a lighthouse in the middle of the highway like a camera as his full lips emits the word “cool.” He takes a second look back at the lighthouse in his rear-view mirror. The classic 1967 Mustang rolls into the scenic port of Biloxi and stopped at a nightclub called ‘Thrills.’ Winston turns his leather retro slot steering wheel into the fully packed parking lot. The chrome wheels cruised slowly looking for a place to park and spots one and quickly pulled into it. Finally, he puts his gear shifter into park and slides out from underneath the retro slot steering wheel. He nonchalantly looks around while walking towards the entrance of the night club with his guitar hanging from a strap. Upon entering, he first glanced over at the crowded dance floor as the loud music hits his ear drums and vibrates his chest.

Winston waits as he digs in his back pocket for his wallet and pulls out his driver’s license after that he is waved to enter in then walks away pushing his wallet down in his back pocket and ventures up to the bar. His eyes become a scope on a gun while he sharply gazes at every corner of the nightclub. His keen pale blue eyes were set in stone, when spotting a captivating sight in bare feet on the dance floor wearing a long flowing lavender backless maxi dress. Winston starts walking closer to the dance floor to get a better look. Then, he made swift steps towards her while making eye contact. She whisked off the dance floor when the song ended. She pressed through the crowd towards Winston. As a result, she was breathing too deeply to exhale the words to introduce herself to the stranger in the nightclub.

“Hello! My name is Dancer,” she said as her chest pounded with the beat of the music in the club.

“Hello!”

He extended his hand out to hers and said, “I’m Winston Paul. It’s a pleasure to meet your acquaintance, Dancer,” he smiled widely.

“Is Dancer your nick-name?” He asked.

“Yes.

“That’s cool. Your named after the famous saltwater/sweet candy,” he said with assuring expression.

“For the most part, I can be salty and sweet,” she smiled.

“I don’t doubt that” he signed with a grin.

“Where did you come from?” She asked.

“Missouri.” He answered.

“Yay! We have a guitar-man in town,” she said as her voice perked up as she took a step back to take a better look. So, guitar-man, what brought you to Biloxi?” While she eyed his guitar.

“My Job-did,” he quickly replied, as her mouth formed into an o then closed.

“Are you from here?” He asked as his eyes dipped up and down her body.

“Not exactly from here in Biloxi, however, I do have family and friends that are. I am originally from New Orleans,” She replied.

“I love to dance, I love to write poetry, I love gumbo and pecan pie that’s me in a crawfish,” she giggled.

“I thought it was in a nutshell?” He asked looking puzzled.

“Well, just between you and me, I like to spice it up,” she giggled again.

“Oh ok. I will trust you on that one,” he smiled as his eyes rolled away.

“So, what’s your story guitar-man?” She asked.

“Well. I like to sing and play guitar. Matter of fact, I will be debuting my act here in a little bit,” he said proudly.

“I am a sucker for a guitar-man,” she smiled, while gazing at Winston’s guitar.

“Yeah. That is why us guitar guys get the girl,” chuckled Winston confidently.

Other than that, I ride my motorcycle back in Missouri. My pride and joys are my cherry red convertible Mustang and my old girl Agatha.” he smiled proudly.

“Oh, is that your wife?” She asked confusingly with a frown.

He chuckled loudly as he turned away.

“No,” he replied.

She studied him seriously, while waiting for an explanation.

“Agatha is my bloodhound,” he smiled at her. She felt relieved but stupid at the same time and lowered her head embarrassingly.

“So, ah, did you say where you work?” She asked while lifting her head up at him.

“Oilrig, I work on an oil rig.” He stuttered.

“I should have figured,” she signed while she swiveled her shoulder from left to right to peer at the front door.

“So much for being a mystery man,” he grinned.

Nevertheless, she hunched her shoulders up as she eyed faces in the nightclub, one being her friend Marigold who was chatting with Hank and a regular blues singer at the Thrills Nightclub.

“Ok, so what do you do in New Orleans?”

“I work in a store that sells healing remedies and other cool stuff.”

“Nice. Why are you here in Biloxi and not at a cool nightclub in New Orleans?” He questioned.

“Well in spite of that, it is only an hour away and I like Thrills, that’s why.” she said as she quickly shifted her gaze on his face.

“You know, you have cute dimples,” she said.

“Thank you, mademoiselle.”

Just like a puppy, Winston followed Dancer to her table before going on stage. A military type of man with a Thrills Nightclub dog-tag that said Hank, he poked Winston firmly on the arm and said, “you’re on next, follow me.”

Winston gazed at Dancer and said, “I will be back in a few,” then proceeded to push through the crowd to the stage behind Hank. Winston sang a Creedence Clear Water Revival song ‘Born on the Bayou’ his second song was ‘King Creole’ that was taken from a nineteen fifties Elvis Presley movie, with another cover song from a band called Orleans ‘Dance with Me’ that he dedicated to Dancer, and his last song was ‘Walking to New Orleans’ by Fats Domino. It was completely transparent, she was having fun and loving every minute of his performance as she vastly whistled and clapped her hands. After his set of songs were finished, he returned to their table using up the rest of the night getting to know Dancer. Nonetheless, her friend Marigold and Hank watched their every move. It was three a. m. when she gazed down at her watch then became unpredictable in a high-strung manner.

“What’s wrong?” he asked concerningly.

“I - I have lost track of time.” she said in a rueful tone.

“I - I must go,” she stressed.

“Don’t leave me,” he begged.

“I have to,” she fretted.

“Am I caught up in some modern-day Cinderella story?” He wondered.

Her frowned eyebrows and her soft but worried brown eyes gave life to his question as she lightly licked her pursed lips. Her eyes broke free from his gaze and insisted she must go.

“Wait, please?” He asked.

He trusted her to wait while, he rips a pen out of his pocket and quickly scribbles his name and phone number down. Ever so gently, he gazes down into her scared brown eyes, but with masculinity takes her arm into his hand, turned it face up and placed his phone number on a piece of napkin on her open palm. She stared down at the napkin with a startled face by his swift action. He let go of her arm. Once free, she breezed past him and ran out of the nightclub with her hoop earrings and her many bracelets jingling and her lavender maxi dress flowing behind her. Winston kept a watchful eye on her until she vanishes all together. He then pressed through the crowd to leave but searches for her once he is outside of the nightclub. His body pivoted while standing in place with his feet anchored to the parking lot with no signs of Dancer, the pretty French girl. He paused momentarily, then broke free from his spot then jogged towards his cherry red convertible Mustang with the sparkling clean chrome wheels in his sight. Once, he unlocked his trunk first to set his guitar in it. Last, he was noticeable heated with sweat and breathing hard sitting in his driver seat. Vastly, took one last look around before he revved up the 289 high performance engine that moved out of a partially baren dark parking lot. In the meantime, he scoured the coastline with thoughts and doubts crashing his head before traveling back to the Palms Inn Hotel in Gulfport.

Three weeks later, he came back to shore by helicopter, before a severe thunderstorm was warned to hit Gulfport/Biloxi and the surrounding areas late that night. He went directly to his hotel and parked in front of his door two-fourteen. He reached into the back and pulled out a tarp to cover his Mustang. He quickly steps up from the curb while reaching down into his jean pocket for his card as he slid it into the door. Out of the blue, the front desk clerk of the hotel was standing outside trying to get Winston’s attention with hand gestures and whistles to signal him to come to the office.

Winston heard someone, whistling and turns around and saw the front desk clerk with a puzzled look on his face. He pointed to himself at the clerk who nods his head yes. He re-shut his door and begins walking towards the office. There were low hanging rain clouds, and the wind was picking up as he crossed the parking lot. His hands gripped the door and walks up to the front desk and the clerk handed Winston a sealed envelope. He narrowed his eyes at the front desk clerk then drops his gaze unto the sealed envelope then walked out of the office with it in his hand. He passes by glancing at his car with the wind blowing the tarp while walking back to his hotel room. Attempts to unlock the door again while the wind is blowing his dark blonde hair wildly ‘bout.

Once stepping inside the cold air conditioner hits his body as he feels a sudden chill, while closing the door behind him. Lastly, stops by a round table with two chairs and laid his keys down on it.

He grabs a can of soda out of the compact fridge that was looking bare.

Once sitting down on his bed, he opens a can of soda then takes a drink of it and sets it on the nightstand by the bed. He grabs the remote that was beside him and turns on the TV. None the less, every detail was being reported about the thunderstorm that is on its way. Without further delay, he proceeds to open the envelope as he stretches out his body in full length on the bed with his feet crossed.

My dearest Winston,

Forgive me, my darling for leaving you in such a rush. I was scared that I had overstayed at the nightclub. I may not have mention due to our sudden meeting of hearts that I have a daughter that I had to get home to. I cannot stop thinking about you, my handsome new love. I was a lonely French Dancer until I danced with you. I dream of dancing with you again and again. I miss you, my love. Please meet me tomorrow at midnight on the Biloxi beach. My lips crave to kiss you. My arms crave to hold you. My body craves to dance with yours. I will dream of you on a silver lit moon by night. French Dancer

Good night, goodnight! Parting is such sweet sorrow. That I shall say good night till it be morrow. William Shakespeare

Dancer’s poetry carried the scent of Jasmine in the air. The Jasmine fragrance was traveling up into his nostrils, in-which unleashed a beastly appetite for her that swam through his veins like a shark.

“Wow, wow, a female Shakespeare,” sailed out of his mouth.

Her poetry dropped over his open guitar case while he watched it land, then picks up his guitar and strums acoustically to the song by Bob Seger, “Night Moves.” He starts singing a couple verses of the song then puts the guitar back in its case.

A result of, he started watching TV and calls his best friend Dawg back in Missouri, and share the news about Dancer, and reads the poetry out-loud, Dawg immediately thinks, she is married and warns Winston with heavy words of your asking to get shot-man. Winston laughs it off and finally just dozes off on his king size bed with extra pillows he requested. Faithfully, the morning comes sneaking inside his room with outside noises of housekeeping and people passing by his hotel door. The longer he laid there, the more he craved a cup of coffee. By now, he was hoping on the hotel being open for a continental breakfast, so he got dressed and walked over there. Once outside there was no doubt whatsoever that it had definitely rained last night with pine needles scattered ‘bout with a light drizzle of rain still falling down.

Straightaway, he stood in a short line in a nicely decorated room with a centered crystal chandelier light that added an elegant touch to the small eating area. A curvy five-foot-five woman casually stood-by watching Winston while he chose his breakfast selections. However, she was dressed in a taupe trench coat and matching colored taupe hat that hid her hair. As-fore Winston, he decided on making two Belgian waffles, also picked up one oversized blue berry muffin, cup of coffee and some orange juice that made it complete. Next, he eyed around for a table. Then steps over to pick-up the Sun Herald Newspaper of Biloxi, Gulfport, and Pascagoula, finally, settles down at his table and starts to read the headlines while he drinks his coffee and pours syrup on his Belgian waffles.

The curvy woman asked Winston if she could sit down at his table, and he said yes and kept reading the newspaper then a conversation lightly stirred up between them.

After he finishes up with his breakfast and the conversation, he walks back to his room two fourteen and the woman drives away in a black Cadillac. Winston lays around most of the day picking up his guitar playing some songs. Boredom causes him to doze off and peeking outside at his car that is still covered and protected with a tarp. By this time, the parking lot was trying to dry up with the help of the sun coming out that was pushing the clouds away. He snacks on some peanuts and drinks a soda and naps some more.

He wakes up notices the time “it’s ten thirty p.m.” he cursed. Nonetheless, he bounces off the king size bed heads towards the bathroom and takes a shower. After showering, he swipes his keys off the small round table then swiftly shuts his hotel door and steps off the curb. He briskly walks around his Mustang to pull the tarp off and folds it up and stuffs it behind his seat. He opens his car door and slides under the leather retro slot style steering wheel and sits proudly smashing down on the gas pedal to rev up the 289-high performance-engine. In no time, he is cruising on highway 49 then onto highway 90 when he noticed a souvenir shop was open and made a point to stop to browse for a perfect gift for Dancer. He spots a black cord mood color dragonfly pendant that caught his eye. The cashier gazes oddly at him while he stood there imagining Dancer wearing the dragonfly pendant. He vividly saw Dancer walking bare footed on the white, thick sand with the Gulf waters rushing in over her pretty feet. He pictured her dancing in a long palm tree print tropic dress split up the sides under the endless sultry sapphire blue night that kissed the Gulf Coast. The beachfront of Biloxi lies directly on the Mississippi sound with barrier islands scattered off the coast and into the Gulf of Mexico.

Finally, he snapped out of it and took the pendant that was clutched in his hand up to the counter and walked out holding his bag then whisked the bag on the passenger seat. Just before shifting into 1st gear, he gazed at his watch then sped off in a hurry and smashed down on the gas pedal. Winston loved to hear his 289-engine talk, while he drove past the speed limit on his way to the beach feeling pumped. Upon arriving he whipped his Mustang into the first parking spot. He got out then closed his car door and locked it and set off walking slowly towards the Biloxi beach that perhaps, is the most famous beach in the Gulfport area. Fishing, boating, swimming, and simple relaxation can all be enjoyed on this beach. At this point, Winston’s view is the longest stretch of sand and surf which has 26 miles of gorgeous man-made white sand beaches along the Mississippi Gulf Coastline. Notable, what makes this place so appealing is its humid subtropical climate that is heavy influenced by the Gulf of Mexico.

It was a welcome nonetheless, the wind off the Gulf Coast blew his dark blonde hair straight back, just the same, blew a combination of salty/fresh Gulf Coast air up his nostrils. His soft black button-down shirt was making ripples sounds against his six-pack stomach. This was revealing his muscular shaped chest and arms as the Gulf wind braced itself against his athlete physique. However, the waves along the beaches are small and mild blocked by a string of barrier islands 10 to 12 miles from shore. Perhaps, the sounds of the sea and ocean-splashing waves is like no other. Nevertheless, you can count on the high tides from the sea bringing in the tumbling crest waves that surf to the edge of the beach that is by far the most relaxing sounds on earth. In-which was certainly tranquilizing his spirit. It became a soothing elixir to his body that rocked and ached with anticipation of seeing Dancer at midnight.

He constantly gazed at his watch then turned back to look upon the Biloxi beach in front of him that dilated his pupils. Overhead was a twinkling blanket of handcrafted pearl lit stars. They reflected on top of the girdling and perfect flips and curls of the midnight blue waves that made their way out to sea before the hue colors of dawn. Winston’s pale blue eyes continued to embellish on the intoxicating and luminous view. Instantaneously, a surprise of soft warm hands covered his eyes like a bandana. He smiled widely with a bursting sensation that evolved from his stomach, as he reached for her. He gently pulled her around in front of him and twirls her into his embrace.

It was a magical moment for them both, as they kissed for long periods without taking in a breath of air. They huddled down infused together onto the thick white sand, as she laid inside his masculine arms. Not to mention, her long brown hair blew wildly in the wind, as the white-crested waves crashed to the shore. Her hair wrapped coils around his masculine arm with the rest of her brown locks that were scattered in a bed of twisting, twirling out of control curls. Despite, the jet wind gushing ‘bout that is stinging her pretty round cheeks. Not to mention, her large, hoop-earrings and long bohemian necklaces that were playing whimsical notes in the wind on the top layer of the thick white sand.

“I have something for you,” he spoke.

He sprung to his feet like a young chicken. Dancer follows and swaying side to side as her feet felt heavy plowing through the white sand. The arms of the wind were tossing her sideways while trying to keep-up behind him. In the meantime, he is making it to the car without much effort as he reached in to grab the red striped plastic tote bag from his passenger seat. Blame the night or the seducer’s ambition nevertheless an innocent boyish smile was sketched onto his handsome face that night.

Perhaps, the warm midnight and the Gulf waters can bring other alluring qualities as he handed the tote bag to her. Dancer pulled her hair away from her face and secured it in her hand when she gazes up at him then sweetly drops her eyes inside the bag.

He could not help but, to eye her jovial expression that formed on her round face. All the while, she was pulling out the gift from the tote bag like a surprised little girl.

“I love it!” She exclaimed as he moved her hair to the side then fastens the dragonfly mood pendant around her neck. Soon as the mood pendant made contact on her skin the dragonfly turned from blue to black on the way walking back to their spot to watch the waves rush ashore. In the next few minutes, Winston heaves up impulsively and offered his hand down to her as she sprung to her feet. Winston gazed at the pendant and said, “wow the blue dragonfly turned onyx black,” he said with oddness. She covered her smile with her hands as if she knew it would,” then giggled like a squeaky mouse. She sweetly sprung up on her tippy toes and popped kissed him on the lips as her bohemian jewelry jingling with every little movement, she made.

A leap of confusion crossed his face, “what does that mean?” He asked.

“Whatever,” she answered. As they set off walking along the beach picking up seashells while she sings a Doris Day song, “Que Sera, Sera (Whatever Will Be, Will Be.”) She stopped singing and picks up a thick sea branch then took a few more steps to kneel-down with it clutched in her hand. “What are you doing?” He asked with a booming curiosity as he sharply eyed the sea branch. She craned her neck up towards him underneath her mounds of brown hair that was blowing wildly in the wind and whispered sweetly “you’ll see.” She started to draw in the thick white sand, while holding back her unmanageable tangled hair that was blowing in every direction across her round pretty face. She went around drawing a huge size heart in the thick white sand with a sea branch. The night’s moonlight hovered over the ocean waves that were crashing to shore. Enchanting was the moonlight shining down on the top of her silver toe ring that first caught Winston’s eyes.

Lastly, Winston became immutable on her red nail-polished feet that were making impressions in the thick white sand. Dancer stretches out her soft delicate hand to invite him to step inside the heart to join her. Once inside the heart the moonlight glowed down on them while they danced. They were wild hearts, laughing and loving the feeling of being weird and free in this magical midnight fairytale.

“You are definitely something special and something different,” he said as he kissed her mouth while they slowed dance inside the heart.

Their bodies spiraled down onto the firm packed thick white sand under the intoxicating star lit sky. The sapphire waves splashed, rippled, and girdled with passion as the dolphins chanted to one another, while they rode out to sea. Winston and Dancer passionately kissed and held each other. In the meanwhile, the ocean’s salty/fresh breeze hovers over them like angel wings, with the silence of the seagulls sleeping on the beach. Winston rolled over on top of her like a warm wave and drove his nimble hands through her wild mane. All the same, they held each other and kissed passionately like longtime lovers inside the heart that she drew with a sea branch.

For once, she felt protected under the velvet night with the glowing stars of space bathing their souls with freedom. At the same time, she opened her brown eyes to stare up at the galaxy that almost felt like her body was floating away into eternal heaven. Fraudulently, she relaxed her eyes to enjoy him even more as she held him tight with her small hands. Then only then, releasing his dark blonde hair to grab it and gently pull and clutch it as they howl in laughter together like the wild wind. Time did not exist, until Winston broke away and force reality to return when he heaved up from the thick white sand floor. He brushed the sand off his body then pushed his muscular arms through the sleeves of his shirt and eased down sitting upright beside her, then grunted as he dove inside his pocket to pull out a cigarette. He was in a peaceful state of mind when he took a long drag off his lit cigarette and blew out the smoke. He props his arm on his bended knee and gazed at the natural features of the offerings of the beach, much like any other: palm trees, piers and, sparkling waters, an honest therapy for the spirit.

In the meantime, covering his cigarette with his other hand to protect it from the breezy winds. Dancer gazed at him, “this wind reminds me of a poem written by Emily Dickinson care to hear it?” She asked. “Yes,” he replied.”

She reached for his hand to sit up beside him while the wind blew against her efforts. She narrated the poem: ‘The spry Arms of the Wind’ after finishing the poem, a car pulled up and Dancer became alarmingly spooked with a change of thoughts and feelings. In which prompts her to jerk away from Winston to turn her head around to see if she recognized the car. She blows a line of air out of her mouth as the car backs up and drives away.

Her rattled nerves start to calm down then sits quietly for a moment beside Winston. Nonetheless, he takes full advantage of his last long drag off his cigarette and nonchalantly watches her then switches to eye where his car is parked.

At this point, she was looking elsewhere as if in another world. Unexpectedly, she spontaneously goes forward on her knees with her feet in mid-air behind her. She reaches out to grab a seashell and brought the shell to her ear to listen carefully. She motions with her hand for him to come closer and inched over to put the seashell up to his ear. He held the shell and listened then took it away from his ear and gazes over at her strangely.

“Why hold this shell to my ear when I can hear and see the ocean right here in front of me?” She gazed at him and with a trembling smile as he handed her back the seashell.

“What you can hear and see in front of you is temporary” she whispered.

Frequently, he was speechless and smitten by her unique weird way that was ever so tempting for him to fall in love with her.

“Ok, so what did that poem mean?” He questioned.

“It’s the perfect sense of spry the wind, it is as old as time but-yet full of life, spirited and vivacious (especially like a woman,”) she explained.

“I am amazed. I would have never sum up the meaning of that poem as you cleverly described,” he said. Her enchanting style and the ultrasounds of her jingling Boho jewelry that was ringing loud and true in his ear. This midnight was every bit of extraterrestrial it was whatever it could be, unearthly. Winston’s heart was melting but somehow, he must resist her.

Dawg’s words were playing loud in his head, as he knew, he was leaving for Missouri soon. All at once, the phone started ringing in-which yanks him back to reality and back on the couch in the small village of Dutchtown, Missouri.

“Hello” his voice drags out, as he tightly holds his eyes close then reopen them as his living room becomes clearer in his sight.

“Hello this is Misty. You fixed my stopped-up kitchen and bathroom sinks, not to long ago.”

With hesitation, he answered, “if you say so,” while rubbing his pale blue eyes.

“I was wondering, when will you be in the St Louis area again?” She asked.

“Well, he stutters. My-My partner and I are-are in St. Louis quite a bit,” he finally dragged it out of his mouth as he rose up halfway to reposition his self on the couch.

“No. I mean, just you. Here’s my number-call me when you are in the area,” she said.

“Yeah, sure thing,” he signs, while scribbling the number down in his appointment book when he heard a car pull up in the driveway.

“Thanks for calling,” he rushed.

“My name is Misty.”

“Yeah. Got it” he said.

He hung up the phone upon hearing his wife Karrie entering through the back-kitchen door. He felt awkward and jittery as his muscles felt tense while repositioning his-self again on the couch. It was a lot to swallow down, as he moved back home after the death of his parents. Upon coming home to Dutchtown, Missouri, Winston also returned home to his wife Karrie Williams to perhaps a warm body but, more so importantly to re-connect instantly like old-time buddies. Karrie, just relocated from Tennessee, while Winston was away. During this absent time, she was taking care of Agatha his beloved bloodhound for him and rejoined her real estate family business in Missouri. Nevertheless, all was back on track and Karrie with her sharp eye out on buying property anywhere on the map. A savvy, boss-babe type with baby blonde hair in her early thirties with unforgettable frosty blue eyes. Karrie called for, “Winston.”

“What Karrie? I’m here on the couch,” he answered.

She sat the grocery bag on the counter and puts some items in the cabinet and in the fridge and started cooking dinner. Winston made his way into the kitchen and snooped over her shoulder to see what was cooking. Something she adopted, since becoming domesticated only for the sake of Winston and perhaps their unconventional marriage.

“Oh, beef stroganoff again,” he said while walking away.

“Oh, what does that mean?” she frowned, as she was stirring the stroganoff ‘round, in which Winston’s remark put a halt on the wooden spoon in her hand.

“Nothing,” he answered from the living room, as she took a deep annoying breath from the kitchen.

She then, switched her frosty blue eyes sharply from side to side, as she gritted her white veneer teeth. She stares down at the stroganoff in the large frying pan as if it was an enemy. The phone started ringing with a wave of Winston’s voice that vibrated to the kitchen.

“Hello.” Winston answered.

“I don’t believe that would be a good idea,” said Winston to the customer who called earlier.

“Sorry to bother you again,” said Misty.

“Just wanted to make sure you got my number and maybe you remember me” she squeaked.

“Well, no better than I did before,” he squirms while cutting his eyes towards the kitchen.

Karrie’s attention left the pan of beef stroganoff, as she tuned in to what Winston was saying.

“May I?” She asked sarcastically, as she breezed in beside Winston with her arm stretched out with her open hand firmly waiting for the phone.

“I can handle it,” he said as he arched his eyebrows up at her.

“Really?” She put her hand on her hip then gave him an evil look that would make a priest nervous.

“Maybe that’s why you are still on the phone,” she sarcastically grumbled while snatching the phone from his ear.

“Who is this?” Karrie growled.

“Misty,” she answered nervously with a swift reinstatement of only requesting Winston’s plumbing services to his upset wife.

“Go steal someone else’s husband and stop calling this phone number, tramp,” she cursed. Then firmly presses the phone down on the arm of the couch. Karrie coldly spun around and marched back to the kitchen. Winston appeared shocked by her unannounced jealousy, as his stunned face hung like a curtain.

“You can’t treat my customers that way, will lose business,” stressed Winston.

“There’s a difference between customers and tramps. I only got rid of a tramp no losses to you,” she said spinning off to the kitchen.

Again, Karrie picks up the spoon to resume fast and heavy stirring the beef stroganoff around in the pan. Winston’s eyebrows frowned at the phone resting on the arm of the couch beside him and started watching TV with no visible care on his face, as he sat relaxed in a slumped over position. At this time, Winston was working as a technician earning a minimum of eight-teen dollars an hour for a locally owned company named, Marc Andrew’s plumbing. A company his father was also employed with until his passing. Furthermore, their many commercial accounts across the spectrum of the larger cities inside the state of Missouri, however, due to that demand made it difficult sometimes to make it home. Dawg and Winston would stay overnight at a hotel whether it be in St. Louis, Kansas City or in St. Joseph. At that point, working their way back home according to the account they were on. Sure enough, Winston would be on the phone feuding with Karrie, because he was not able to travel home when expected.

“Dinner is ready,” she said and so was her petulant temper that arrived at the edge of the doorway. First, she gazed at him and at the TV then back on him as he sat motionless on the couch. She spun around, heads back to the kitchen and dishes the beef stroganoff out on two plates and poured ice-tea into the glasses. Shortly after setting the kitchen table, she pulls out a chair and waits with an impatient face for Winston to join her.

All the while, harboring her pet peeved stinging feelings.

“Are you going to eat dinner with me, or do I eat alone like usual?” She questioned.

She rolls her frosty blue eyes up. Winston heaves off the couch and heavy steps to the kitchen table and eyes his plate with a sour face. Nevertheless, she looks up and catches his facial expression, in short causes them to argue and glare at each other. Karrie’s gazes down at the beef stroganoff she made then losing her appetite as she rudely pushes out her chair. Winston watches her faithful routine as she grabs the phone, stomps over to the back-kitchen door, sits on the step, calls her mother and cries. Winston gazes at the back door and listens quietly as Karrie voices her complaints about him. Agatha his beloved bloodhound, comes in and plops down at his feet as he rakes off most of his plate of food down on the floor for Agatha and watches her scarf it up. Winston hoist from his chair and drinks down his tea and sits his plate in the sink. He walks back into the living room, where he lays down on the couch and goes to sleep. Agatha then jumps on the other end, where she lays her head down on his feet and goes to sleep too. Karrie comes in after bashing Winston to her mother. She shuts and locks the back-kitchen door, cleans up the kitchen, puts the dishes in the dishwasher in a fussy mood and turns out the kitchen light when her wifey duties are done. Then, stops dead in her tracks to gaze jealously at Winston and Agatha sleeping together on the couch. She rolls her eyes up then dares to say, “you deserve each other.” Just the same, she hissed like an angry cat while walking by the couch as she went down the hall then slams their bedroom door as hard as she could. The unexpected shuddering sound of the door caused Agatha’s head and ears to pop-up like antennas. She lowered her head back down on Winston’s feet, when all was quiet again. Better yet, in the coming days their quarreling worked itself out into another one. Karrie came home ‘round six forty-five p.m. and set her mother’s gently used hand me down Gucci designer handbag on the kitchen counter. She paused to remove her Giorgio designer sunglasses then put her sunglasses in their protective case and laid the case inside her open handbag. Karrie begins to smell something wonderful then gazes at the stove and embellishes on the good Italian food and sneaks up behind Winston.

During this time, he was standing in front of the stove, busy making Italian seasoned meatballs. Even more delicious, was the Italian bread baking in the oven.

“This is nice!” She purrs, while snooping in front of him at the pot of spaghetti that was boiling on the stove and noticed on the counter a salad tossed in a bowl.

“You have no idea, how happy I am that you are cooking not to mention, my feet are aching from showing properties today and wearing my new high heels mom bought me.”

“Enlighten me on how?” He asked.

“Well, I am very hungry and very tired,” she said while she nibbled on his ear. Even more so, because this food smells so out of this world good,” she said with flattery. She walked away from Winston and picked up the newspaper off the counter then eased down her tired body at the kitchen table. First, she pulled off her shoes and rubbed on her throbbing feet before acknowledging the newspaper.

“It would be nice, if my husband would rub my feet,” she said while gazing over at him.

“Your husband is cooking,” while he made a twisted face looking at her swollen unattractive feet. “I thought just maybe, you might be a little bit tired of beef stroganoff.”

From the kitchen table, she hid her angry face behind the newspaper. Eventually, she recovered from his outspoken remark about her beef stroganoff and quietly steps up to administer a playful spank on his backside then she took off running.

“What was that a hit and run?” Asked Winston as he drained the spaghetti in the sink. She laughed devilishly as she ran to the bathroom.

“Where are you, my dark angel?” He asked.

“Come and find me,” she said as the door closed.

“I shall find you!” He spoke.

Then he, dumped the spaghetti back into the pot and whipped out of the kitchen. He went prowling down the hall following the sounds of the shower running. Once opening the bathroom door, he flew in like a bird, dropping his clothes to the floor. Secondly, he steps into the shower with his wife Karrie. Winston powers in and passionately kisses Karrie up and down her back and swivels to sweetly kiss around her neck.

He takes control as he turns her around to face him without any words. He plants a long kiss on her mouth as he pulled her closer to him. The hot water sprayed from the shower head above and pulsed down to their feet like a heartbeat. She hated facing the truth, that their wet hot bodies were no longer sucked together, when Winston’s wet feet stepped out first onto the floor mat. He grabbed a towel and wrapped it around his trimmed waist, then walked out of the bathroom with no words. He drifted into the bedroom, where he pulled out a pair of drawstring blue plaid sleep pants from his bureau. Karrie, on the other hand, could not help but feel abandon and used as she finished showering alone. His reflection stops him in the process of closing his bureau as feeling prompt to gaze hard into the mirror. Recollections of Dancer washed into his mind like an ocean of waves. Consequently, he would have sworn on a stack of bibles, that Dancer’s round pretty face appeared to him in the mirror. However, the transparent image startled him while slowly pressing the palm of his hand onto the mirror, that held the image of her round pretty face that eventually faded away under his palm. During this time, the sounds of Karrie using the blow dryer returned loud and clear as she stood in front of the mirror. Winston strolled by the open bathroom door and brakes briefly to look at her then resumes walking as his mouth curves into an ironic smile.

Chapter 3

Karrie came into the kitchen ‘bout eight minutes later, with her baby blonde hair blow dried perfectly straight and settled down comfortably in her hot pink pajama shorts. Winston set her plate down in front of her and poured some red wine for the two of them. They were typically enjoying their spaghetti dinner until Winston reminded her, that he was going night-fishing with his friend Dawg. At this time, she had a wad of spaghetti in her mouth and giving knife sharp gazes over at Winston. She then, swallowed it down and took a sip of her wine after that, she clammed up and held her baby blonde head sideways.

“Okay, I see you got an attitude,” he said.

His eyes switching to her face then back down onto her plate as she twirled her fork around and losing interest in finishing her dinner. She wore a long sulking face, tracing the outline of the rim of the wine glass with her index finger.

“What’s wrong with you, Karrie?”

She was pouting at the kitchen table with watery eyes.

“Gees, you are so good at making me feel guilty,” he pressed.

“Karrie. Talk to me?” He asked.

“Is this your-butter me up spaghetti dinner? And after, how you treated me in the shower,” she stated sarcastically.

“What are you talking about now?” He replied with a twisted face.

“Forget it. Obviously, you already have,” she simmered.

“Ok. Truth is, I wanted something different to eat instead of that awful beef stroganoff.”

“Oh really! So, my cooking is awful?!” Karrie cursed as the rude comment redden her cheeks with anger.

“Since um, you’re the better cook, you can cook your own dinners for now on,” she blurted out hurtfully.

“Furthermore, it certainly does seem like you’d rather do things with Dawg than me. By the way, do you ever get tired of him? You too are always held up in a hotel somewhere between Kansas City and Cape,” Karrie vocals.

“You’re being unreasonable! Here are some truths. You do not like to fish. You only like going shopping with your mother to spend my money.

My job has me laid over and you know this. Just the same, your high-priced wants eat up my paycheck, like a school of piranha’s.”

“I hate you!” She grunted annoyingly.

“I’m not too fond of you either,” he said bluntly.

“Just, what does my mother have to do with any of this?” She cussed.

“I’d be happy to oblige. You and my dear mother-in-law are spending my paychecks on the stupidest and most worthless junk in Missouri!” He ranted. And, every-time, I pass gas the wrong way you run and boohoo to your mother, so she can hate me some more,” he shouted.

“No! FYI. My family doesn’t need your money, we have plenty of our own,” she said as she sucked in a deep breath into her lungs.

“Right, then, why are using my bank card, if you don’t need to?” He asked.

“I am your wife that makes me entitled, jerk. You are going to lose me, and that makes you the most-stupidest man in Missouri.

“I know you boohoo to that stupid friend of yours and run your mouth about me.”

“Did you ever love me? Just once, ever, since we got married?” She asked in a broken voice. Winston’s face fell as he searched for the right answers as his eyes rolled away and gazed on the floor at his bloodhound Agatha.

“Winston, my God! Please,” she begged as she revoltingly eyed his bloodhound, Agatha.

“What is wrong with you?” She asked I can see that dog is more important than me too.

“Why do you block me out?”

“Did you fall in love in Mississippi? I know you had to getaway, I know it was your escape from your parent’s death and me? Seriously, you haven’t been the same since you came back?” She cried with tears streaming down her cheeks.

“What happen to you? I am sick of this cold vacant marriage,” Karrie said in a trembling voice.

Her fork, she held made a ding on her plate as she dropped it and turned away in tears.

“Look, I am sorry,” he paused as he eyed her tears wetting her face.

“Karrie, I-I am not out to hurt you,” he said trying to look at her face that she kept hiding from him.

“Then why do you? You insult me, you don’t care about my feelings,” she cried.

She sniffled and got up to rip off a piece of paper towel to blow her nose with then clutched it inside her hand for security.

“I didn’t realize, I was. Give me some credit, I’m trying to make this work,” he said as he downsized his tone, feeling bad.

“It sounds more like a chore,” she sobbed.

“You know I care about you and this marriage,” he explained.

“No. No, I don’t know that or feel that” she explained as her hands swirled around in a circle.

“Ok. While we are in bed, I can tell you are not there for me. Your eyes have a dead glaze in them as if you see another face other than mine,” she said painfully.

“It hurts. Afterall, I have invested in you and this marriage,” she cried.

“I’m sorry, it’s not you, it has nothing to do with you, we are a team.”

She roughly scooted out her chair from the table.

“Karrie don’t!”

She blew passed him and stormed out of the kitchen in tears.

“Team,” she cried.

“I want and hoped for so much more, than just a team. Oh, just leave me alone!” She sobbed running off to the bedroom and slams the door.

Winston drops his head down and sat at the kitchen table gazing down at his bloodhound Agatha. The rest of the afternoon faded away quietly with Winston offering no attempts to reconcile with Karrie. As a result, she stayed in the bedroom with the door shut crying to her mother. Winston could hear her crying while he stayed on the couch with his bloodhound Agatha. The air turned cool but comfortable while the sun bedded down behind the Midwest hills as dusk began to set in. As the bedroom had grew dark, she came out, stirring around the house and working her way into the kitchen.

Lastly, she made a sour face as she peered out of the kitchen window and noticed Danny Mitchell had pulled up, in his 1969 Shelby Mustang with “Dawg” on the license plate. He was a comical short, husky built, skirt chaser and who prefers to be called by his nickname-Dawg. He got out of his car with his shades resting on top of his shaggy caramel brown head of hair. He also kept a safe distance from Karrie and Winston’s motorcycle that was parked under the carport. He casually walked up to peck on the storm door, in his long brownish-yellow-colored shorts and collared red stretched out shirt. Agatha darted to the door, “woof, woof” She barked deeply as she wagged her tail. Winston heaves up from the couch after noticing Karrie was ignoring Dawg pecking on the door. Winston sneered at her saying, “You’re so dang rude!”

“Hey, dawg,” as he held the door open to let him walk in. Most evenings after work the two buddies would shoot the routine daily bull about their plumbing jobs. Just the same, Dawg followed Winston into the living room as they both dropped on the couch in front of the TV. Dawg was talking about a smoking hot girl he met on a service call he made earlier today. After listening to his friend go on and on about this girl, Winston squeezed a question out of his mouth.

“Are you ready to go?” Asked Winston.

“Heck yeah, let’s go reel some fish in!” Dawg exclaimed as he fell back on the couch, moving his legs in motion of a bicycle as he cast out a line.

Once, she heard Winston say night fishing, the color in her face washed away. Karrie narrowed her frosty blue eyes into the living room at Winston and Dawg, while she stood stiff with her arms folded snug under her breast. Her sour attitude and her apparent jealousy steaming for obvious reasons as she picked up their dishes from the kitchen table and carried them to the sink. She stomped around in the kitchen, while still casting a snobby glare at the dirty pots in the stainless-steel kitchen sink. She continued to grumble impatiently, while fishing for the buried dishcloth that was under a stack of dirty dishes. Karrie’s lips tighten with anger as her frosty blue eyes darted from right to left, when she heard them talking ‘bout going night fishing. She then, walked angrily up to Winston with her hands on her hips, “No, you’re not!” She spoke sternly.

“Woman you’ve gone crazy?” Said Winston as his pale blue eyes shot up at Karrie’s face like an aimed gun. Dawg glanced up at Karrie with timid puppy dog eyes as she imposed her demands. Dawg repositioned his self and sat up straight on the couch like a schoolboy.

“You’re not going fishing,” Karrie stomped her foot down on the carpet in front of the couch.

“Nothing you can say or do that’s going to stop me or change my mind. You knew Dawg and I planned this a week ago,” he stated.

“I don’t care what you planned a week ago. It’s not right to leave me here alone, so you can spend time with him,” she fussed.

Winston heaved up from the couch as so did the animosity that spiked in the middle of them.

“He has a name. Dear, have you gone crazy?” Asked Winston in an elevated sarcastic voice. She grunted with annoyance.

“Yeah, and you’re the cause of it,” she hissed.

Winston felt the spit off her four lettered words she was using and started cursing back as he drew back his hand to hit her. He dropped the thought along with this hand as he grabs his keys off the coffee table.

“I dare you!” She said while bucking up to him.

“You will go to jail, if you ever touch me,” she said as her voice grew louder.

She stood puffed up and breathing heavily and out of control, pushing, and slapping on him. Winston grabs her swinging arms and pushes her backwards down on the couch. She bounced back in his face, pushing, slapping him, and cursing at him, all over again. Winston gazed down at her with disgust, and once again, tightly restraining her swinging arms and hands from hitting him any longer, “Get out of my face, you idiot!” You’re not worthy of me touching you!” Winston walked out of the house with his bloodhound Agatha following closely behind his heels. Karrie shot up from the couch and angrily grabbed their framed wedding picture from the end table and threw it at Winston as he was walking out the door, he braked then picked up his pace while their framed wedding picture sailed in the air and shatters into pieces behind him, just as the kitchen door closed.

“You are not worthy of a wife!”

“I hate you. I hate you,” she shouted.

Dawg slipped outside and lit up a cigarette as the loud noise of them arguing vibrated outside, as he paced back and forth. Then Dawg, looked up and saw Winston storming out of the house cursing at the top of his lungs while moving quickly towards his 1969 red Ford pick-up truck. He jerked open his truck door and told Dawg, “Let’s fish!” Dawg did not waste anytime jumping inside the old truck.

Winston was breathing heavily behind the wheel revved up the old stubborn Ford engine as grey smoke blew out of the tail pipes. Just as, Karrie came out on the carport screaming, “I hope you-faggots drown!”

“I doubt it, but you can hope it,” he cursed back.

He left squealing tires and charged down the street with Agatha barking, “woof, woof.” Karrie stood there pouting with her lips curled up and her arms folded under her breast, where Winston’s pickup truck was park and Dawg’s 1969 black Shelby Mustang was parked in the grass. She shook angrily as tears streamed down her face. She then marched upsettingly back into the living room where she flops on the couch to phone and break down to her mother. Whereas Winston, and Dawg were traveling on highway 24 heading towards Gordonville then he turned left on Highway 00.

They proceeded on driving approximately seven more miles, talking non-stop about the argument Winston just had with his wife Karrie. Winston turned left on a gravel county road and followed it out for another five miles, and that is where the conversation about Winston’s wife, and the road ended in front of Lake Girardeau. Raw blackness was staring them in the face. Shadowy figures of trees appeared like giants with long branches stretching out in the devoid night with the forbidding thoughts of the trees waiting patiently to grab you. Winston and Dawg eagerly bailed out of the old Ford pick-up truck, reaching inside the truck-bed, and pulling out their fishing poles, cooler, and chairs. In addition to all of that, they found a good spot to sit, then they stepped away to gather up some dead wood and soon built a fire and had it burning. The air was tang with smoke and a fishy smell as they sat four feet away from the lake with two tree limbs ‘bout ten inches long shaped in a letter Y in their grasp. Winston and Dawg began to push the tree limbs down into the soft ground in front of them and laid their poles down on it.

Behind them were sounds of coyotes that were howling on a hillside up in the distance. At this point, an hour of silence lay perfectly still on the lake then, without a notice a screech owl echoed throughout the black daunting woods. Winston was not scared he was consumed with feeling angry at Karrie. He was ready and willing to punch someone or something in the dark, it made no difference to him. On the other hand, Dawg stayed aware of his surroundings, “What was that?!” Asked Dawg as he twisted around to see what was behind him.

“It’s just a screech owl. I will protect you, little girl,” smiled Winston.

Dawg flips his middle finger up at Winston then nestled back down in his chair when suddenly, he noticed his line was wiggling.

“Man, I got something!” Dawg yelped excitedly as he reared back and started reeling in his catch.

Winston’s line started to wiggle, as he proudly reeled in a nice size catfish. Then finally, Dawg reeled his catch in after he struggled with his catfish that was fighting to get loose. Bats started to circle the glow of the fire to eat bugs. Winston and Dawg sat facing the lake eating pork rinds, salty peanuts, drinking bottles of Mountain Dew. They talked about women, hunting, and their work, during the night.

As the night was drifting into the morning, they begin to throw **their** catch into the cooler. Winston then, anticipated on frying some catfish breaded in the old family Paul’s corn meal recipe. Winston kicks some dirt on the burnt wood with his boots. They finished packing their stuff and headed towards his Ford pickup truck. Winston and Dawg swung their loaded fishing gear onto the bed of the pick-up. Winston jumps in the driver seat turned the key over and pumps the gas pedal a couple of times. The stubborn cold motor hesitated to turn over but finally did as the rumbling muffler bellowed for a few minutes, warming up. They drove away from the lake with Agatha barking, “woof, woof.”

It was four o’clock in the morning, when the old Ford’s headlights shined in on the living room walls and woke Karrie up, after hearing the old truck’s rumbling muffler.

Few minutes later, Winston walked up to the kitchen door and pushed it open at exactly four o’clock that morning, while he carried in his cooler and sat it down on the floor that was filled with ‘bout nine catfish. He then marched coldly to his bedroom leaving a fishy scent behind and Agatha to find rest by his side of the bed on the floor.

Karrie was acting as if she was asleep on the couch, when Winston pasted by her then her eyes popped open and listen to his every move. He made a beeline to the bathroom with his blue plaid night pants, white Hanes T-shirt in his hand and slammed the bathroom door shut. Karrie jumped at the unexpected sound and rolled her eyes and said, “Jerk.” Winston came out of the hot shower smelling the bathroom up with his fresh smelling cool mint bodywash and went straight to bed. Karrie’s hurt feelings flickered in her frosty blue eyes as she stood like a statue in front of their bedroom door. Then thundered on into the bedroom, where Winston was at as he pulled the comforter aside and begins to power down into bed. At that point, she stood there with her arms folded and glared at him with possessed eyes. Winston glanced over at her and turned away. She then moved to his side of the bed. Winston raised his head off the high pillow to gazed up at her and asked with a thick annoyance in his voice. “What! What do you want?” He asked rudely. There was a long pause as she peered at him with steady evil glaring eyes.

“How long is this argument going to last?” Karrie asked as she propped her hand on her hip. “I don’t know,” he answered tiredly as he re-adjusted his head on the pillow.

“Oh,” she paused with tightness in her chest thinking, Winston was feeling different about her and their marriage.

“Don’t tell me, you’re going to divorce me and marry your mutt friend,” she said.

Her devious laughter lit up her frosty blue eyes, as she unfolded her arms to cover her mouth with her palms.

“It’s sad, you think more of your stupid friend Dawg than your wife,” Karrie said.

She turned like the cold wind away from Winston’s bedside and stomped out of the bedroom and marched to the living room with her pillow and blanket tucked inside her arms. She threw down the pillow and blanket and her dead weight drop down on the couch. Karrie screamed from the couch in the living room, “You and that stupid Danny-Dawg deserve each other!” While she rolled over on the couch cushion pulling the blanket up to her shoulder and huffing words out of her mouth.

“Who in their right mind would ever name their son, Dawg,” she spoke in absurd manner. “What!” Winston asked.

“They couldn’t come to terms, if they wanted a child or a dog,” she chuckled.

“Do us both a favor and, shut up!” Winston shouted from the bedroom.

He flips over onto his side pulling the blanket to the edge of his stubbled chin. Moments later, silence passed through the turbulent air. Karrie finally found sleep on the couch, clutching her soft pillow. Winston was in his bed alone on his back-staring up at the ceiling with his face washed in doubt. Sleep fell on him while in the stream of thinking of Dancer, in-turn he slept in all day. During this time, Karrie was in and out most of the day going shopping. She would often stop in and go stand by the foot of the bed and look at him with angry eyes as she would turn away, walk out, just to leave again. That night when Winston got up out of bed, he noticed Karrie was gone so he started filtering about in the kitchen fixing his self, something to eat when the phone rang.

“Hello” he said.

“Oh, you’re finally up?” She asked.

“I am. Where are you?”

“Having dinner with family,” she said with an ice cubed tone.

“That figures,” he said flatly while opening-up a can of tomato soup and pouring it in a small saucepan on the stove.

“Yeah-it does. See you later,” she said dryly.

“Yeah-uh-huh,” he grunted as he grabs a loaf of bread and pulled out two slices to make a grilled cheese sandwich. She returned to the table and sat down with a long face and tried to settle back in with her family.

“Is everything alright?” They asked caringly.

“Yes, of course,” answered Karrie.

Karrie’s family drops her off later that night ‘round ten o’clock. Winston got up off the couch to go peek out the window, when he seen head lights shine in on the wall.

He saw it was Karrie and sat back down on the couch cool and relax. She opens the door, travels in through the kitchen lays her designer handbag down on the counter and sees dirty bowls, glasses, a pan, silverware, all stacked up in the kitchen sink.

“Why is it beyond you to clean up your mess?”

“I was going to, he paused. I got into watching this movie and just forgot.”

“Yeah-right, I’ve heard that line of bull before,” she hissed from the kitchen.

Winston turned off the TV.

“Come home like a scorn woman to anger me even more,” he added.

He growled swiftly down the hall to his bedroom. After she washed the dishes, dried them, she set the dishes back in the cabinet. Then, walked in the living room holding the kitchen towel in her hand and saw the TV was turned off, the room was gloomy and empty. She stood there gazing at the couch in tears as she walked back into the kitchen.

Now, it was every bit of four a.m. the next morning, when the alarm buzzed loudly for five long minutes before Winston acknowledges it or made any attempts towards it. Finally, he reached over to shut it off and to his surprise, he finds his wife Karrie hugging the edge of the bed. Through her mouth, she made some grunting sleep sounds and claimed more of the bed after he got out of it, and he left her sleeping and slipped out.

Chapter 4

Plymouth white rock rooster, Foghorn began yodeling cock-a-doodle-doo.

“Thanks Foghorn. I’m up now,” yawned Winston as he peered out of his bedroom window at the breaking of dawn on a chilly November morning. At this point, he was putting on hunting clothes and slipping on his boots, his dog Agatha pulled up then stretched and begins to follow Winston down the hall like a shadow. He drags his feet down the hall and yawned loudly as he grabbed his bright orange backpack from the closet, then it pinged on the kitchen table, when he set it down.

In addition, he started up the coffee maker and while it was dripping, it was also quickly scenting the kitchen with a dark roast aroma. Once his taste savored the first morning sip, his taste buds were more than satisfied. He lastly, just hung around waiting in the kitchen for the coffee maker to finish, so he could pour the rest of it in his black plaid thermos. From there, he grabs some drinks and groceries out of the fridge and puts the groceries into a small box to carry out to his camper. Before heading outside with his box, he fed Agatha and poured her some fresh water in her large stainless-steel bowl, then Winston and Agatha went outside with his box of groceries in his hands and went inside the camper to set the box of groceries down and secure it. He came out and shut the door tight and hooked up the camper to his pickup truck.

During this time, Foghorn the rooster was following Winston around for food. Winston moved at a regular pace towards the shed and stepped inside and scooped up a cup of corn and poured it in a tin pan on the ground for Foghorn. Winston went back into the house for a last check and believed he was ready to go.

“Almost done, old girl,” Winston said to Agatha, while she looks up at him with her droopy brown eyes, wagging her brown straight tail. The phone was ringing on his way out the door.

“Hello,” said Winston holding the phone up to his ear, “yes, mother, I am leaving now.” chuckled Winston.

Dawg started cursing but Winston ended the call grinning ear to ear. He paces regularly to his old faded red 1969 Ford pickup truck with his bloodhound waiting by the door to jump in and ride shotgun.

“Ready to go on a hunting trip, old girl?” Asked Winston while reaching over to rub the top of her head as Agatha barks a deep raspy woof, woof.

“That’s what I want to hear from my girl,” said Winston patting her brown head.

Winston grabbed hold of his shifter on the steering column and pulled it down into reverse and backed out of his dark paved driveway.

Karrie heard the old Ford truck’s loud muffler as it was backing out, she jumped out of bed to gaze out of the bedroom window that faced the street and watched him drive away. While on his way, he stopped at a country store that had an old wooden bench attached to it with three old men sitting on it gossiping, dressed in overalls, smoking, chatting, ‘bout a bunch of nothing and chewing tobacco. Winston ordered three sausage egg and cheese biscuits to go and unexpectedly bumps into his father’s old hunting buddy Henry, while waiting in line. Briefly the two men engaged in a short catch-up conversation. Henry was standing behind Winston with matted pepper grey hair that was sneaking out although, his balding head was well hid under his dingy ballcap and dressed in an old dingy, dirty looking grey jacket with un-kept whiskers on his age face.

At the same time, he laid his rough, cracked hand on Winston’s shoulder and paused for a moment then spoke with solace, “just know this, your old man is up there watching over you.” Winston stood still as he grabbed two Slim Jim’s out of a box, while he listened to Henry talk. He gave a rueful look ahead with a relaxed musing face while he waited in line. Next, the cashier rang up Winston’s order before leaving, Henry stepped up an gave Winston a final good-bye pat on the shoulder. Winston’s eyes rested on Henry’s aged hand. Out in his dad’s old faded 1969 red Ford pick-up truck, he put the key in the ignition then took a moment to study on what Henry had said about his Father Samuel. He looked out in the distance, turned the key over and pumped the gas pedal a couple of times. The stubborn old truck motor turned over as he smashed down on the gas pedal then eased off. Once the truck was idling on its own, the radio had static in it to the point of barely hearing the Hank Williams Jr. song, ‘Old Habits,’ as it prompts him to hit on the dash. He then reached in the plastic bag and pulled out two Slim Jim’s and gave one to Agatha and stuck the other one in his mouth and bit off a chunk sized piece.

He gave his beloved trusted hound a generous amount of affection as he reached over and ruffed up her big brown ears then, she shook her head a couple of times. “Are you ready to go old girl,” Agatha barked woof, woof. He started chewing on his Slim Jim, as he pulled the shifter down into drive and drove out of the rough parking lot. In the meantime, he merged onto the highway. The song on the radio was trying to come in clearer as Winston started to sing along with Hank Williams Jr. song, ‘Old Habits’ as he sang to his bloodhound Agatha. He pats her on the head, she barks, woof, woof. Agatha was looking down the highway then she soon rested on the bench seat and went to sleep. Winston gazed down at her, “you, worthless old hound,” he joked. He drove an hour in most of the dark morning to Apple Creek, arriving before dawn. He was now driving into the parking lot, whereas the other hunters were scattered ‘bout and looked up one by one as they heard the sound of the rumbling muffler. He pulled in hauling his camper behind his 1969 old faded red Ford pick-up truck. He got out fully dressed, in camouflage pants matching shirt and jacket with a bright orange vest, as he eyed the other hunters standing around chatting. The crisp morning had a bite as the wind cut through the trees.

He stopped to thrust inside his backpack, he pulled out the deer urine and sprayed it on his camouflage boots then dropped the bottle back in his backpack. He reached up to pull down the bill of his bright orange cap and got inside the cab of the truck to get his Ruger American rifle 30-06, off the gun rack on the back-glass window. Lastly, he walked cautiously looking nose down at the narrow dirt paved trail that led into the woods with high hopes of finding that same trail. Right off the bat, he spotted a deer, heard a hooting barn owl, with echoing sounds of coyotes howling in the distance. His ears and eyes stayed peeled to every sound of the tree limbs rustling back and forth like a witch’s broom, with the wind gust trying its best to pick up speed from the west. He walked with the fog hovering over the ground like a ghostly forest with the eerie nocturnal sounds. The bewitching wind made its way through the dark woods, his boots softly snapped small sticks in two, leaves were swirling in circles and blew apart at his every step. He came upon a creek crossing that was looking familiar. After passing several deer trails, he eyed a rut, a patch of ground, kicked away by a buck’s back hoofs. When the barn owl hooted, it tied him back to the same trail a month earlier. Better yet, what Henry had said had popped in his head as well as, his eyes gazed down and met the water. For a split second, he could have sworn, he had saw his father’s face in the fog that laid across the water like a white bed of cotton. He blinks his eyes and reaches up to rub them then, he began to squint to see the image again. The image was no longer there as he had hoped.

“Hello” Winston said in a low utterance.

A strange sound twirls up in the air, that whispered his name “Winston.” He pivots to see nothing there.

“Dawg is that you?” He called.

“Winston.”

He pivoted again, in a 180-degree angle as strangeness fell upon him, he made cautious steps away from the bank, daring expectations of any given moment for a werewolf to jump out of the fog morning and attack him.

His next careful steps pressed gently down on top of fall’s gold and rust, auburn brown colored leaves, that are sticking like glue to the earth’s bald ground. Consequently, he was tightly gripping his rifle while glancing back to see if someone or something was behind him. Then, he came upon a sassafras tree on his path as he continued to venture into the woods. His past steps became vaguer as his eyes focused on the tree, while mumbling to himself while drawing closer. He pulled with his hands and kicked with his camouflaged hunting boots on a sassafras root, until he broke loose enough bark to make tea out of it. After this mission was accomplished, he put the thick bark in his backpack side pocket and moved on through the woods. He squinted his pale blue eyes in the distance, he carried his Ruger American rifle 30-06, feeling a bit more confident of his surroundings. He stepped out onto a soft bed of pine needles when he heard a gobble.

He held his next step and waited, until he heard another gobble sound. Just as the full moon illuminated over the hill in an indescribable way. In course of portraits of long shadows that met the ground as the wind swayed through the dark woods with the echoes of a serenading hooting owl. In a short distance ahead was of a herd of whitetail deer, as they leaped over an old wooden fence. He stops to listen to the noise of sticks breaking and the crunching of brown paper sack- colored leaves as he raised his rifle. Soon after, out from an oak tree was his friend Dawg, who came walking up.

“I knew, I heard a turkey,” He whispered with a grinning face, pointing his gun down at the ground. Dawg flips up his middle finger.

“I walked past a sassafras tree-one fourth of a mile back. I knew you had to be close by,” said Dawg quietly.

“How’s that?” Asked Winston.

“Because it looked like a kleptomaniac took part of a slaughtering of a sassafras tree.” They both laughed quietly.

“Dawg, did you see the herd of Missouri Whitetail Deer out before daylight?”

“Yes, my bet is, they got spooked out of their bed.”

“That’s good news for us,” said Winston in a low tone.

Dawg gazed across the low laying pastures as he arched his eyebrows in doubt. Dawg’s tired brown eyes moved off the woods and fell onto the sassafras bark sticking out from Winston’s side pocket of his backpack. Winston noticed, Dawg staring at the sassafras bark.

“I’ll make a gallon pitcher of tea for us to drink,” Winston added.

“No thank you. I’ll take a free pass on sassafras,” said Dawg.

“Some ole timers, believe it to be an aphrodisiac,” chuckled Winston.

“Unlike you, I don’t have limp noodle syndrome,” Dawg flipped his middle finger up and they both covered their chuckling with their hands. Winston became serious and trouble minded as he lit up a cigarette. He leaned up with one leg bent, back up against a beautiful mature oak tree just like, his Father Samuel did one year earlier. Winston was in a traditional hunting frame of mind as he took a drag off his cigarette. Looking like the rugged fictional character, the Marlboro man.

“Don’t know what you’re missing.”

“Let’s keep it that way.”

“Man, I wish I was still in my bed,” cried Dawg as he drew smoke in his lungs.

“Stop whining,” said Winston.

Then he, gave an eye to Dawg’s cigarette and brought up the fight he had with Karrie last night while he puts his cigarette lighter in his pocket.

“She’s an embarrassment to our marriage and to my friends,” said Winston in a low serious voice.

“She scares the devil out of me,” Dawg signs.

“No wonder. Your still scared of your own mama,” chuckled Winston.

“I will get you,” Dawg said and frogged Winston in the arm with his knuckle.

He frogged him back. Dawg cursed under his breath as he rubs his sore arm in a circular motion. The air grew quiet between them until Winston spoke again.

“I am tossing the idea about divorcing Karrie,” Winston whispered.

“I still think Karrie had something to do with that motorcycle falling on me.”

“Man, I don’t doubt it anymore.

“Good. Can we concentrate on some whitetail before we spooked them away?” Asked Dawg.

He aimed his gun to the ground with steps going forward. Winston gazed hard at his friend with a half agreeing smile. Their boots scuffed the trail with the cover field up ahead in the distance, Agatha quietly leading the way with her nose sniffing the ground.

The luminous Midwest morning glistered a majestic golden sunlight that streak and slanted its way down into the thick of the woods. The running streams rippled that was nearby. Three deer gathered carefully in a clear spot of the clover covered field.

All at once, the deer were twitching their ears as a six-point buck step out to protect them. Winston and Dawg’s hands dip down into their front pockets for their compact binoculars. They were tracking the buck with their binoculars pressed to their eyes in their sight was the clover-covered field as the buck flicked his whitetail. During this crucial stage, the paramount of serious monitoring a buck passing by, an age wooden rail fence with a country scenery backdrop. In their binoculars, were scenes of broken sticks, a pile of buried soggy paper sack-colored brown leaves that cushioned the ground, while patches of grass were protruding up like sprouts on the worn-out dirt trail.

“I got this one,” whispered Winston.

Dawg glances at the deer that were now calmly staged together. Sounds of gunshots firing were behind them in the woods, while they were tracking the six-point buck. The sudden blast of firing scared off the deer, they quickly scurried and leapt deep inside the woods where they vanished. The buck froze for a split second with Dawg having his sights set on him. Winston drops his binoculars that hung on a string around his neck. Instantaneously, the buck was gone. Winston stomps his camouflaged boots in fury as he cursed. Dawg cursed in anger as he watched the buck vanished in the woods in his scope. Winston was upset with Dawg’s hesitation of not shooting the buck. Winston gazed over at Dawg with sharp piercing eyes.

“Why did you hesitate?” He cursed.

“I don’t know. I was distracted,” he shouted.

“Because of some asinine hunter that scared off our six-point,” ranted Winston to Dawg as he marched like thunder towards the hunters.

In the meantime, they were pushing through the thickets dodging and ducking their heads under low hanging crooked twisted branches, with silvery tips as they stamp up the winding hill breathing hard, and intakes of grumbling to each other. At the same time, Winston and Dawg came up on the other hunters, who were still target practicing. Dawg stays back while Winston marches up to the hunters, cursing and blaming them for his six-point buck running off.

“This is deer season. Target practicing was last month. You see this Ruger American Rifle 30-06 I am holding? Well, make no mistake about it. I aim to shoot a buck, something, or someone,” ranted Winston. I will be just as happy to make a trophy out of one of your heads and mount it on my wall,” ranted Winston as he aims his gun at the two young hunters. During this time, Dawg watches amusingly just chuckling his head off. Nevertheless, the young hunters scurry in fear towards their car with echoes of cussing at Winston and Dawg. They still felt ten feet tall holding their guns of glory. All the while, gazing at the back end of the car diminishing in the cloud of dust. At-last both turning amusingly away and headed back into the woods.

Once in the woods, their camouflage boots started snapping sticks in two, and crunching the brittle leaves down to the ground like compost. In a good bit of traveling on the dirt trail, they could finally see pieces of the upcoming field. Once they stepped out into the clearing, in their sight was the thick woods that outlined the clover-covered field. Steering their camouflage boots in the direction of a rusted tin roof old red barn, that sat at the edge of the woods, that met the tree lines. Once, they reached the old red barn, they climbed up a creaky age wooden ladder made from two by fours. After getting up there, they both sat down on a broken straw bale in the front window of the barn that faced the entire clover field. They pulled off their bright orange backpacks and drove inside of them to pulled out their ammunition and their guns.

Once that task was completed, they got out their thermos bottles filled with hot coffee and quickly unwrapped their sausage egg and cheese biscuits that Winston had bought earlier at the convenient store. They drank coffee, ate while holding their gaze out the barn window whispering back and forth to each other. Winston fumbles for his binoculars and raises it to his face. Winston peers through the binoculars lens into the distance trying to discern the black image that was walking along the edge of the woods. He laid the binoculars down by his side, reaches for his thermos, and turned it up to swallow down some coffee that warmly coated his throat.

“See anything?” Dawg asked in a low whisper, “no.” He paused. I believe it’s an ole black lab hunting dog.” Winston whispered back and not telling him, what he first thought it was. They sat patiently for a couple more hours talking low and watching for any sign of a deer. At-last, Winston and Dawg put their thermos beside the bale of straw and the talk dwindled down to staring out the front window, with their guns lying in their lap. The sunlight was blinding and had warmed up the day to sixty-two degrees with buttercup clouds. Directedly out from the barn window, were colors of lime, gold, and rust painted leaves decorated the trees. On the existing hillsides flatten the curves out in the distance. Three o’clock p.m. was drawing near, when the anticipated moment grew suspenseful and deafly silent. Suddenly, Winston spotted an eight-point buck in his binoculars. The excitement swelled his chest cavity and had his heart racing.

“Man-ole-man, this old buck has some battle scars.”

He drew up his 30-06 rifle. Winston’s eyes looked sharp into his scope as he carefully lines up his target. He squeezed the trigger. The next sound was POW! The power of the rifle jerked him back from the barn window as the buck fell to the ground. As a result, yielding a full ten minutes or so to be sure the buck was dead and before heading down the wooden ladder. Once at the sight, Winston took out his tag and made the proper markings on the tag then placed it on the deer’s horn. Then he, started to field dress his deer. In his hand was a rope to tie the deer front legs together with, then, Winston dragged the deer off. Dawg was carrying Winston’s rifle and orange vest then took off walking towards Winston’s old faded red Ford pickup truck. While drawing closer to the truck, Dawg walked ahead to lower the tailgate. At the same time, they swung and heave-ho, the deer unto the rusted truck bed. After that, they used the outhouse-bathroom at the firing range going in talking about the eight-point buck. At this time, they were walking back and all at once Winston peripheral vision caught glimpse of a coyote from the corner of his pale blue eye.

“Coyote!” Cried Winston as he peers into his binoculars.

“Beep-beep,” Dawg chuckled.

“Stand in front of my gun. It’s my lifelong dream to finally shoot the kooky road runner!” Winston chuckled some with a wide size smile.

Dawg flipped his middle finger up at Winston and cursed.

“You are a yellow spine coward!”

Winston joked and cursed at Dawg in amusing tone as they went back to walking when they both spotted the coyote on a hillside. Dawg said, “lucky for you, we are friends,” he cursed back, while taking off his backpack then got in the truck and left the door open. By this time, there was a thick, dark, charcoal grey clouds rolling in that had completely taking over the blue sky. The radio was on a roll talking about a rain system that was passing through from the west. By now, it was nearly six thirty-five p.m. The smell of grilled hamburgers, hotdogs that was leaving a delicious fragrance in the air that was making them both hungry as they enter the campsite.

Chapter 5

Dawg improvised when he spoke up and asked Winston…

“Do you want to hear a campfire story later?”

“As long as it’s interesting enough to keep me awake,” answered Winston yawning out loud.

“First, Dawg, we need to hang this buck up.”

They worked together before it got any later. So, they tied a rope around a tree branch, while Dawg bear hugged the buck and lifted. Winston then pulled on the rope as the buck went up. Dawg continued to hold onto the buck while Winston tied off the end of the rope. Dawg picked-up the conversation where he left off.

“Trust me, it is,” said Dawg in a somewhat delayed tone while taking the last drag off his cigarette then flipped it in the air.

“This story is about my Uncle Kemp,” spoke Dawg as they sat outside on their folding chairs around a campfire.

Winston went straight to roasting hot dogs, on a stick. Giving Agatha, the first hot dog and settled down into his chair to tune in to Dawg’s story, while fastening his eyes on him.

“My Uncle Kemp told me a story about what happen one night, camping in these very parts, in a remote area,” said Dawg.

Winston eyed him for a couple of seconds before putting a large marshmallow on a stick and held it over the fire.

“My Uncle Kemp was drafted to go to the store one night, because he and his other hunting buddies ran out of beer and cigarettes, during what was, an intense card game. Therefore, he went to the nearest store that night which was approximately ten miles away from the cabin. On his way there, he believed he saw a black dog crossing the road up ahead in the distance and thought nothing of it. On his way back from the store, he saw the large black dog again and pulled his truck over to the side of the road. He got out and stood by his truck door and whistle for what appear to be a shiny black lab. Nevertheless, Uncle Kemp’s pure intentions were to take the dog back to the cabin with him, since it was most likely lost and hungry. All at once, there was a stillness that fell upon the night air as Uncle Kemp stood by his truck door peering at the black image under the moon light.” Dawg paused, just staring at Winston. Unexpectedly, Dawg jumps out of his chair and spooks Winston, who drops everything on the ground and cusses Dawg.

“Out of nowhere,” Dawg continued.

“A long body and tail with a shiny coat of dark fur, jumps out into the dead of the night unto the dark road, a good twenty feet away from the front of his truck. Staring Uncle Kemp down with tantalizing eyes of emerald, green. No doubt, this had Uncle Kemp shaking in his boots. A blood curling woman’s cry that sounded like Wow! The scream echoed like a concert inside his eardrums. During this, heart wrenching episode the blood curling sound stretched for a mile into the blackness of the dead night. Uncle Kemp’s coarse curly hairs on the back of his red worn wrinkled neck, stood straight up like needles. After the unexpected moment of terror released his mobility and his senses that were now kicking in high gear. Without any hesitation, he jumped inside his truck. He cursed and slammed his truck door and with his left elbow, he smashed down on the door panel to lock the door. Next was his boot hammering, his gas pedal to the floor of his truck that plowed the unnerving dark road. Lastly, he did not remember the drive back to the cabin nor did he care to. But he did remember, one valuable thing from that disturbing night,” Dawg narrated.

“Which was?” Asked Winston with a skeptic face.

“A dead abandon night that sounded like a frighten woman crying for help. He never forgot those tantalizing emerald eyes or, the scream that never left his memory,” replied Dawg.

“Uncle Kemp turned philosopher,” said Winston.

Recalling in his mind, the black image that he saw in his binoculars.

“You know, earlier today up in the barn window?”

“Yeah,” answered Dawg.

He sprung up to make himself a grilled cheese hamburger then taking a bite and chewing on it as he sat back down with his other hand diving down inside a potato chip bag, between him and Winston.

“I believe the image was a dog that belonged to a hunter,” Winston said.

And held his hand up to stop Dawg from interrupting him.

“The image appeared to be a black long shiny image sleeking through the woods. He stops Dawg again from interrupting, “it’s most likely the image could have been mistaken for a black lab? I see-where your superstitions stem from. Ok, just say, your uncle had a few too many beers before leaving the cabin,” Winston said.

And continues to talk and motion for Dawg to remain quiet but Dawg’s mouth was anxious to spit out words. Finally, Dawg butted-in saying, “What a crock,” he widely grinned shaking his head.

“You just don’t want to see it for what it really is. One day the truth will cold cock you sideways,” barked Dawg.

“Yeah-sure-whatever,” said Winston.

“Let’s just say, again, being two-thirds drunk, you’re probably going to see a pink elephant, dancing in a purple tutu in the middle of a dark road,” chuckled Winston.

In the meantime, opening-up his mouth to shove in a good size bite of his loaded grilled hotdog that was dripping on the sides with chili and cheese and onions.

“My Uncle Kemp told me, the same story all my life, he was an honest man.

Yeah, he drank his fair share of beer but, he was no liar,” he gruff.

“Alright whiny puss. I do not want to see you run off crying into the camper, like a whipped girl. So, tell me, what did honest Uncle Kemp see that night?” Asked Winston.

Dawg wipes the corners of his mouth with a paper towel and swallows down a gulp of soda and flips his middle finger up at Winston.

“Bring the finger down or I will grill it and eat it,” chuckled Winston.

“What did good ole Uncle Kemp, see that night?” Winston cried as he gazed up at the rain clouds in the sky.

“Please shut up so I can finish my story,” chuckled Dawg.

“There should be a law against you tiring me,” said Winston.

“I can’t handle idiots-telling campfire stories,” Winston turned up his soda can to his mouth and guzzled down the rest of it then crushed the can and tossed it in a nearby trash can.

Winston came back with his curiosity stirring like stew.

“What the heck, did he see?” He insistently asked.

“Black panther! You idiot!”

As the fire blazed an orange glow on their faces as their eyes shockingly met.

“No way,” shouted Winston while he mentally broke free from the sudden shock and pushed his chair back.

“Man, panthers are nocturnal, and furthermore panthers do not live in the state of Missouri, what a lame girl scout story,” he rushed in to say while his chair falls on the ground.

“Yes. This is a good campfire story for girl-scouts,” laughed Winston, lighting a cigarette. “Contrary. What if-the black image you saw in your binoculars was a black panther?” He asked. The air grew quiet between them.

“We both know it was probably a black lab,” said Winston.

“Wrong answer. We both don’t know, that,” said Dawg.

And after, that he started rubbing his eyes then heaved up from his folding chair. The night ended a bit crossly as he stepped into the camper, “I am going to bed,” said Dawg.

Winston nodded his stubborn head at Dawg. Once Dawg was inside, he climbed up on a bunk and rested on a pillow. Winston was not tired just yet, he was feeling argumentative, and decided to call his wife Karrie. He finally went inside the camper after wrangling to the bitter end and locked the camper door and kicked off his boots and dropped like a brick on the small couch. The cloudy dark evening hid behind the hills as it began to rain outside and pound on the camper roof. The light inside the camper grew dark and gloomy. Winston turned from side to side, feeling his lower back aching from the small uncomfortable couch. Nonetheless, he finally found rest on his side with breathing sounds whistling through his nostrils. Agatha took rest on the floor. Late in the night, he rose-up to a sitting position and yawn out-loud then, stretched and popped his back as he got up. He heard the rain pounding the roof and the wind blowing up against the camper. Then, peeks out the window. In short, he could see the rain pouring down with the sounds of the wind blowing the rain sideways that slapped a splash of water against the camper.

He gazed down at his wristwatch and saw it was eleven forty-five p.m. His stomach was making growling sounds, not to mention his mouth was dry as cotton. He moved over to the kitchen area, where he opened-up the container of hot dogs, hamburgers, grabbed a soda and bag of potato chips. Then, he sat his food and soda down on the small coffee table. He went to use the bathroom, while passing by, he yelled at Dawg to get up. Winston stop by the bunk Dawg was sleeping in and jerk the blanket off him. Dawg cursed angrily and jerked it back then turned away from Winston. Dawg finally got up dragging his feet and crashes down in a chair, soon after his stomach begins growling too. Then, made his steps towards the kitchen area and snoops around lifting the lids off the leftovers in the plastic bowls. He untied the buns and then reached into a small cabinet for the potato chips to lie beside his hamburger bun on the Styrofoam plate.

“What time is it?” asked Dawg while yawning and reaching inside the refrigerator for the onion dip.

“It’s almost two in the morning,” Winston replied.

On the couch, eating his hamburger and watching a Clint Eastwood movie, ‘Pale Rider.’ After Winston finished eating and drank the rest of his soda, he heaved up to toss his plate and soda can in the trash. He bent over to put on his boots and stepped out of the camper door with Agatha wagging her tail following him down the steps.

Once outside, Agatha took off sniffing the wet grass searching around in circles for that.

perfect spot to squat in. Winston stood in front of the camper smoking and gazing out into the dark rainy night and said, “Isn’t that just like a woman, so dang picky.” He then started up a conversation with Dawg, who was still inside the camper eating. In the meantime, Agatha wandered out of Winston’s sight with her nose down to the soggy ground. The next bewitching hour would change everything. An unexpected scream bellows out of the blackness. The horrid cry mimics the sound of a frighten woman. By this time, Dawg ventured out of the camper in his sock feet and stood on a step. He gazed into the darkness with the unnerving sounds of the night with a wad of hotdog laying inside of his mouth.

“I didn’t know it was raining,” said Dawg surprisingly while chewing on his hotdog.

“Yes, it has been for a-while now,” he signed.

“I could have sworn, I just heard a woman scream for her life,” Winston said to Dawg as he gazed seriously out in the pouring rain.

“Are you for sure?” Dawg asked.

“Ok Einstein,” said Winston sarcastically as he turned to arch his eyebrows.

“Tell me what you think, I heard?”

“Calm your jets, sissy boy,” jabbed Dawg as he peered out into the rainy night, shoving the last bite of his hotdog in his mouth.

“Go get the guns! I heard something strange, just now,” Winston ordered.

“I’m not your wife,” he belted back.

“Dawg if I have to get the guns, I am shooting you first.” Dawg flips him off behind his head and stamps the sole of his wet sock feet up the steps into the camper. Next, Dawg hurried inside to put on his boots then rounded up the guns and handed one to Winston at the door. Winston repeatedly whistles for Agatha to come back.

“Agatha!”

“Come on old girl,” he called and whistled. The next few moments were a stale stillness that brought a heart-wrenching thump to his chest. He careened away from the campsite. Unexpectedly, Agatha started barking loudly and growling and snarling at something.

“What did you find old girl,” he called out.

He swiftly ran towards the sounds of her barking with his rifle locked in his hand. Just the same, Dawg runs out of the camper with his gun in his hand as he heard the barking and the eerie scream that bled through the rainy night. Now, dawg catches up taking caution with sounds of Winston’s voice calling for Agatha. At this point, he is trailing behind with his knuckles turning white while gripping his 30-06 rifle. The next bone chilling and uncanny scream that mentally pierced the soul of immortality. Perhaps, and yet another scream followed thereafter that possess life or death. These disturbing sounds shuddered the internal darkness.

“You frighten woman is a black panther,” said Dawg with fire in his voice.

“Listen, I hear Agatha.”

The bloodhound yelped an echo while it punctured the black rainy night with a high pitch cry. “What isn’t around here in these parts is fighting with Agatha!” Dawg confirmed.

“It’s black and it’s back,” uttered Dawg.

Winston cursed as he listened to Agatha whimpering. Winston’s head spun around in circles trying to pin-point the location. Even more so, he strained his eyes to see a whole lot of nothing as he pressed on. He then shot like a bullet near a clearing next to a paved road. He ran beside Dawg with his rifle an heard another unmistakable spine-chilling scream! Dawg picked up his stubby legs and ran behind a bush and hid with his gun shaking in his hand, hearing Winston call for his bloodhound. Winston unfailingly shouted out her name as if his voice could save her. The creepiness was undeniable, a blinding vapor suspended the rainy night and armed it with a cloud of confusion.

The unnerving rainy chill helped to stabbed Winston’s chest cavity with a dreadful ache, vastly searching for his beloved old girl. By now, he was breathing heavily through his nose and marching through the woods. Untiringly, he pushed back the rain-soaked tree limbs and ducking and dodging branches. The absence of light was straining his pupils. Although, that did not stop him from picking up his pace, calling for Agatha. Dawg called for Agatha too and looked sharply both ways while turning his head nervously back and forth. They plowed through the blackness as the rained poured unmerciful upon them. Then sadly, Agatha was found lying lifeless on her side, with her neck resting on a flat piece of a pointed large rock, with her blood dripping unto the saturated ground. A sickness exploded in Winston’s stomach. His pale blue eyes burst into tears, and a huge lump grew inside of his throat that was restricting his airways.

All color and hope drained from his face and body then he, crashed to his knees that dug into the muddy soaked ground, with his rifle by his side. The rain rolled down to the edge of his nose with raindrops splattering onto his bended legs, that was soaked clean through to his already cold skin. Carefully, he picked her up noticing her nearly severed neck and gently cradles her head in his hands. Gently, laying her down with her blood mixing in with the pouring rain and swirling into the muddy ground. Dawg came out from a bush and marvel at the black image and grabs Winston’s arm to stop him. The black panther stood staring at them with emerald-green tantalizing eyes with blood-stained teeth. Winston pulled his rifle around in front of him and fired every bullet where the black panther was standing until he emptied out his chamber.

“That’s enough man. It is gone. You’re shooting at nothing,” Dawg stressed.

“It will never be enough, never,” he shouted back to Dawg.

“Alright,” said Dawg as he stood by his best friend in the pouring rain with his hands up in the air. Winston was cursing and squalling the entire time walking back in the pouring rain to his camper with Agatha in his arms. He slept in the front seat of his truck with his rifle by his side crying as Agatha laid in the bed of the truck covered up.

“Man, are you serious ‘bout sleeping out here?” Dawg asked.

“I cannot leave Agatha alone,” Winston pitifully cried.

The next morning, Winston was somber making a pot of coffee that soon overpowered the air in the camper. Winston put a couple of sausage biscuits in the microwave for him and Dawg. After drinking couple cups of coffee, he began to pack up the left-over food and empty out the fridge and secure the cabinet doors. Winston was ready to leave as he turned the key in the ignition over. Just as, the cold motor hesitated to start. He smashed, pumped with force on the gas pedal. He cursed with impatience as it was getting the best of him before the stubborn engine finally turned over and started idling on its own. They finally unhooked from the power pole and hitched the old pick-up truck to the camper. The truck took off bouncing with the rumbling muffler echoing down the street. Riding down the road, Dawg had a face of empathy as he occasionally gazed at Winston, who was leaning over hugging the door panel. Better yet, it was every bit of a lamentable time that sat in the middle of two close buddies. The old Ford pick-up swung in the parking lot with the muffler rumbling and pulled up alongside Dawg’s 1969 black Shelby Mustang. Dawg threw the strap of his backpack over his shoulder while he grabs the handle to yank on the old truck door to pop it open. Before shutting the door, he said, “for whatever it’s worth,” he paused.

“I am sorry. I know Agatha meant a lot to you, I am going to miss her too,” said Dawg.

Winston looked away. Dawg paused for another moment and held his gaze on Winston then he steps back to shut the door. He deviated to his car with his head hanging low, he tossed his backpack on the passenger seat and laid his rifle down on the back seat. He revs up his 1969 black Shelby Mustang and drove south towards Cape Girardeau.

Winston headed home to bury Agatha by the white old-rusted swing. He spent the whole day at home making her a wooden cross. The next day, he was on a mission and got on his motorcycle and just rode most of the day. Then he stopped in the wildlife division, he walked in to report the incident about the black panther. The wildlife officer looked at Winston with a dumb founded face while he listened to Winston’s grim, macabre story.

“I can assure you there is no black panther here in Missouri. A good forty or fifty years ago that could have been a possibility of one being sighted in the Ozarks. Gee whiz, those claims usually came from hunters not wildlife officials.”

“Well, I am assuring you of what’s out there today. Why isn’t it credible-because the claims are from hunters?” Questioned Winston.

“I have never saw or had one reported in these parts since I have been a wildlife officer.”

“I am telling you I have!” Said Winston. “I will shoot what don’t exist here,” he cussed, “and dump it at your feet! I bet, that will make a believer out of you,” said Winston.

“Now, if you choose to do that, you’ll be fined and possibly arrested. In all essence, there are no black panthers. It’s simply not a native to North America,” said the wildlife officer with clarity.

“Did I just hear a contradiction? This out of place cat was sighted and killed my bloodhound,” ranted Winston.

“No more than a second ago,” he paused. “You’re holding your laughter in and doubting what killed my bloodhound,” said Winston.

“Look. I understand your upset that your dog died.”

“No, you look! My dog did not-just die,” he yelled in anger.

“There is no known sense of existence or an official discussion of a large black cat like you described in the state of Missouri Department of Conservation’s officially cited,” stated the wildlife officer.

“Well, I can,” he growled. “I saw the black panther with my own eyes. This cat does exist,” stated Winston.

Both men, exchanged tough and crossed heated words with puffed up chests.

Winston never went hunting again and sold all his guns and hunting gear. Nor did he ever own another bloodhound for no other could replace his dear old girl, Agatha.

This was vastly majoring as the most rottenness time of his life, at least it was feeling that way. Karrie left Winston, while he was gone on his hunting trip. Lastly, Winston returned home that evening to an empty house and found divorce papers on the coffee table in front of his TV. He grabs a beer out of the fridge and picks up his acoustic guitar that was leaned up against the wall, sits back on the couch and started singing the country song; written by: Kris Kristofferson, ‘Help me make it through the night.’

Chapter 6

Ten miles from Dutchtown Village and you would never think who your neighbors might be more-less ever meet them. It has been proven time and time again it truly is a small world at least for some of us that does ring some truth. As for Jaylon-Rose and her retired Navy Officer Father Frank Seabaugh a native of Gulfport, Mississippi. They moved to Cape Girardeau, Missouri from New Orleans to live with Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich. Besides that, Aunt Claire relocated and remarried a Missouri native Richard Nitch after the divorce of her husband from Tennessee. A decade had pasted since the death of Jaylon-Rose’s Mother Taffy Bruce-Seabaugh, a native of New Orleans with a proud French heritage. Jaylon-Rose really did not know or cared that Dutchtown even existed. She had other important things on her mind, one was reading her horoscope and the other was to solve the mystery of her mother’s death.

One sunny afternoon, Aunt Claire brought the ladder down from the ceiling and started to climb up it. Once in the attic, she strolled over to the window to stand in front of it. Quickly, the memories in the attic wrapped around her like a shawl, not counting, the deep reflecting gaze in her eyes that extended out the window. The old-retired bridge that the railroad used many years ago was in her sight. Jaylon-Rose was sitting on her bed reading the newspaper and flip to the back to read her horoscope sign Aquarius. That read ‘life is destine to change.’

“Lord knows, I deserve a change - a good one that is,” she spoke up and said to Salem her sable and white sheltie collie. She drops her brown eyes on the newspaper and circled her sign Aquarius with a yellow highlighter. She folded it back into place and laid her pen down and stops to listen to the creaky noise that came from out in the hallway. Next, she whisks off her bed and slowly turns the doorknob open and cranes her neck out as the door opens wider, she notices the ladder. Then, she took a curious step out into the hallway and walked over to the front of it.

“Hello,” Jaylon-Rose called as her brown eyes gazes up at the open ceiling,

Salem begins barking.

“Hello,” Aunt Claire answered.

Jaylon Rose was relieved it was her aunt and started climbing up. Salem waited in the hallway by the attic ladder. Once her feet stepped un-to the attic floor her brown eyes darted around until she spotted Aunt Claire by the attic window. She studied her aunt after settling down on the dusty floor, whereas Aunt Claire just stood like a statue. Finally, she steps back from the window and begins to sweep the dust-off the beige curtain panels that hung in the small window. She wiped her hands off on the sides of her hips and sat down carefully onto a faded red old wooden crate. Aunt Claire then gazed around the attic complaining, “boy, I need to get back up here and dust and knock down these cobwebs.”

“Attics are supposed to be dusty with cobwebs,” said Jaylon-Rose gazing at her Aunt Claire.

As well as the antique cherry wood mirror that stood out in the open that held their reflections, and a large box of Christmas decorations that was running over with green garland. There were many boxes stored up there that had an inch of dust sitting on them with the smell of mothballs dominating the air.

“What are you doing up here?” She asked with a cheery smile.

Aunt Claire gazed softly at her niece’s young round pretty face before answering.

“I’m up here looking for scraps that I stored in a box for a quilt.”

“Want some help?” Asked Jaylon-Rose.

“Sure. Two helpers are better than one,” she agreed as they both hunted for the box while moving other boxes aside-until they came across the box that Aunt Claire was looking for.

“I thought you were going to ride your bike to the park?” Asked Aunt Claire.

“I was. I got distracted reading the newspaper. Then, my little cat ears could not help from hearing the ladder lowering down from the attic,” replied Jaylon-Rose.

“Well, isn’t that just cute. But can I guess what you were reading?” She rolled her cobalt-blue eyes around like a Ferris wheel.

“Yes, you will anyways,” she signed gazing at her aunt with a guilty face.

She quickly perked up to boldly say:

“Horoscope Devil!” She slammed.

“Yes, but I believe it’s right this time. My horoscope says, “my life, is destine to change and most importantly, I am going to meet the love of my life,” she proudly added.

“Hog wash. Jay, it is never right. Do not waste your time on reading that foolishness. The bible tells us not to dabble in sorcery, mediums and fortune tellers,” she candidly said.

“Your dusty old attic is bringing out your preaching side,” giggled Jaylon-Rose.

Aunt Claire placed her hand on her round stomach, “I reckon there isn’t nothing wrong with that,” Aunt Claire said pompously.

“I miss my mama,” said Jaylon-Rose eyeing her aunt’s full face with sadness as she tied a red bandana around her head.

Aunt Claire covered her mouth looking shocked.

“What’s wrong?” Asked Jaylon-Rose sweetly.

“Where did you get that bandana at? You look just like your mother,” she questioned as if she was seeing the ghost of Taffy.

“You’re scaring me. It was mama’s, is there something wrong?” She asked nervously.

“No. It’s just me being silly,” she emits.

Jaylon-Rose took it as a protruding oddness that she could not put her finger on as she held a peculiar gaze. Outside, the square attic window the long warm streaks of burnt orange and gold that glistered heavenly. A spray of deep purplish fuchsia graced the horizons. It was a notable colorful sunset that stretch remarkably from the north to the south. What is even more beautiful, was the wavering gold rays that peeked in the attic window that late afternoon. The gold rays hand-picked the ruby red pigments out of Jaylon-Rose’s shoulder length curly chestnut hair. After sitting down on the wooden floor with her legs crossed Indian style in front of Aunt Claire. She started to prowl through the box of scraps and Jaylon-Rose’s eyes drifted away.

“If I stare long enough-I can see mama over there stretching her legs on that bar,” she said with a trembling smile.

“Well, if I look long enough, I can see Taffy sitting at her desk writing letters home and writing poetry of love,” said Aunt Claire.

“I can too,” said Jaylon-Rose while holding a piece of cloth in her hands. She shifted her gaze unto Aunt Claire, who lowered her head back into the box of scraps. She anxiously wanted to hear anything about her mother, even if she already heard it for the umpteenth time. Aunt Claire pauses and peers her cobalt blue eyes unto her niece’s pretty-round face and soft features.

“You look so much like your mother,” as she drops the pieces of cloth back in the box.

Automatically, she took hold of a couple of her niece’s strands of hair and reminisces. Jaylon-Rose shook lightly with goose bumps as Aunt Claire softly held her hair. Although, seeing her Mother Taffy’s belongings on display did wake up nostalgia air.

“I would often find your Mother Taffy up here alone. Taffy, liked to come up here to write and look out the attic window,” explained Aunt Claire sentimentally.

“This old desk? Is that not a disable sewing machine?” Jaylon-Rose asked while giving it a funny look.

“The table had one drawer on the left side with the sewing machine still intact but not usable,” she explained. Jaylon sprung up from the floor to get a better look. Aunt Claire started to chuckle as she got up too.

“Taffy thought, it would make a perfect desk. She saw its worth, your father saw a waste of money,” said Aunt Claire, as she wiped off the dust.

“So, how old is this sewing machine-turned desk?” She asked curiously.

“Actually, we were told late nineteen forties or early nineteen fifties. I have my doubts, that the seller even knew. She didn’t really care,” replied Aunt Claire as she remembered that day.

“We?” She asked with her brown eyes cutting over at her Aunt Claire.

“Yes. Taffy and I went antique shopping. Your father was not happy to say the least,” then rolled her cobalt blue eyes.

“Why?”

“Well, because Taffy was gone all-day. Frank fussed at her. Lord, I thought, he would never shut up. However, she cleverly led your Father Frank to believe-that I bought it. In-which, I only had to endear my brother ‘the fault finder,’ who thought it was stupid of me to buy something of no value that didn’t work.”

“When did mama buy this?”

“Few months before her passing.” Jaylon-Rose gazed at the desk and felt a strange connection with goosebumps as she shook all over. Lastly, Jaylon-Rose eyed bawled the pole that was bolted to the wall that her mother use to practice ballet on. She drops her eyes, while forming a sentimental smile.

“Mama loved to dance. We used to dance all the time,” she paused. “Mama would grab me by the hand, and we would sing the Doris Day song, “Que Sera, Sera (Whatever Will be, Will Be)” Jaylon Rose teared up and blinked her brown eyes.

“I often wonder-whatever happen to mama’s best friend, Marigold?” She asked.

“I imagine still singing the blues, and working in her devil shop in New Orleans,” she critically replied.

“You remember Marigold’s big gaudy hoop shiny gold earrings and layers of chains and layers of bracelets to match? She sounded like a wind chime,” chuckled Aunt Claire. Jaylon-Rose agreed as she shot a nonjudgement smile at Aunt Claire.

“Mama started feeling good about herself dressing like her with the bohemian necklaces, layers of bracelets, long maxi dresses, bearing her fruitful aesthetics. As well as Mama being proud of her French heritage,” Jaylon-Rose reflected.

“Yes, she pulled it off well however, Frank was not happy about her new look. Yes, again she researched endlessly looking for family only to find your Father Frank calling it a waste of time. Frank induced the idea to Taffy to accept things the way they are. She secretly searched anyway in-spite of Frank’s uninvited persuading,” explained Aunt Claire.

“Poor mama,” said Jaylon-Rose.

“You know Jay, your father was against Taffy’s friendship with Marigold,” emits Aunt Claire.

Jaylon-Rose nodded her head in agreement and narrow her eyes while listening. Aunt Claire engaged on the loneliness that use to bed down in Taffy’s eyes. The priceless long talks, we use to have up here in this attic, she hovered in deep thought.

“Taffy’s cravings to dance and write poetry helped her to escape life here in Cape.

She often took trips back home to Gulfport, Mississippi to visit her sister and go home to New Orleans to visit Marigold and to let you see Erika,” said Aunt Claire.

“What happen to my mother?” Asked Jaylon-Rose as her eyes set up camp with sadness.

“Every giving chance, Taffy would jump up and go back home. For she despised Missouri and Frank for moving up here. All we know is what Frank told us that he would be coming back without Taffy,” said Aunt Claire.

“I wish, I could have gone with her. If I had, she paused. She would still be here,” she ruefully said.

“I won’t have you-blaming yourself,” said Aunt Claire.

“Frank insisted, you stay here with us while Taffy visited her sister,” she added.

“And what did daddy say happened to her in Mississippi?” She asked.

“I’ve told you this a thousand times,” complained, Aunt Claire.

“Make it a thousand and one,” she said.

“Are you hoping for something that isn’t there?” Aunt Claire searched in Jaylon-Rose’s sad brown eyes.

“Maybe, I am,” she answered diligently.

“Frank came back and said, Taffy vanished from a nightclub where Marigold was singing at into the stormy night with a strange man. Rumors were that Taffy was having an affair with a man working in Gulfport, Mississippi and Frank believed Marigold knew more than what she let on.”

“Did she?” Asked Jaylon-Rose.

“I don’t know. All I know is Taffy and Marigold talked a lot on the phone and wrote letters to each other.”

“Where are the letters?” She asked earnestly.

“You know, Frank wants this story kept closed in Taffy’s cedar chest.”

“Why?”

“I have the right to know what happen to my mother, so where are the letters?” She asked brusquely.

“You argue that demand with your father,” said Aunt Claire.

She sprung up from the floor and bolted towards the attic door and started climbing down the ladder, Salem stood up wagging his tail as he watched her come down.

“Oh, dear lord! You sound just like your Mother Taffy,” mumbled Aunt Claire who worryingly gazed at the cedar chest.

“Aunt Claire are you coming down?” Asked Jaylon-Rose who was waiting impatiently at the bottom of the ladder.

“I’ll get there soon enough. The turtle won because the hare was in a hurry,” said Aunt Claire. Jaylon-Rose made a face and rolled her brown eyes annoyingly. Frank came out of his bedroom as they were extending their discussion. In the meantime, Frank, caught pieces of the conversation but the name Taffy rung out the loudest as he remained unseen. Jaylon-Rose and Aunt Claire walked downstairs. Frank came out and stared down from the top of the stairs until they parted out of his sight.

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” she said as the phone was steadily ringing off the hook until Aunt Claire was close enough to answer it and said, “hello,” then laid the phone down and called for, “Jay.”

“It’s your supervisor from work.” Jaylon-Rose came rushing up to the phone.

“Yes. Give me about twenty minutes to get ready,” and lays the phone down on the counter.

“Isn’t this your day off?” Asked Aunt Claire.

“Yes.” she answered and hurried around and flew into the laundry room to throw her wrinkled scrubs into the dryer and ran upstairs to put on her make-up and fix her hair.

“Were you and Jay in the attic earlier?” Asked Frank.

Frank crept in behind his Sister Claire as he makes sure Jaylon-Rose was completely out of sight.

“Sweet Jesus, you scared the dog mess out of me,” said Claire laying her hand on her chest.

“Yes.” She carefully answered not sure of her Brother Frank’s intent.

“I heard Taffy’s name mention a time or two,” as his intimidating dark eyes peered down unto his sister just before Aunt Claire opens her mouth. Jaylon-Rose pops her head in the kitchen to say, she was going to work.

“Come here first,” cried Aunt Claire.

“I’m going to be late,” whined Jaylon-Rose.

“You got time to hug your favorite aunt goodbye,”

“Not really,” she said as she gave her aunt a quick hug and broke free to rush out of the house. Once outside, she opened-up her car door and toss her large brown leather handbag in the passenger grey seat and backs out of the driveway waving to her Uncle Rich. She quickly looked both ways and pulled out on the street. Uncle Rich held is hand up to his forehead to block the sun from his eyes as he gazed at the car and shook his head hearing the Gran Prix engine roaring out of his sight. Uncle Rich walked in and found his wife Claire and Brother-in-law Frank in the kitchen watching Claire making tuna salad.

“Where is Jay going in such a hurry?” Asked Uncle Rich with hungry eyes that dipped down at the tuna salad.

“She was called in to work,” answered Aunt Claire as she added diced onions, sweet relish, and celery to the tuna.

“That car sounds like a demon,” chuckled Uncle Rich.

“Yes, it does,” agrees Aunt Claire.

Aunt Claire started making sandwiches for her brother Frank and for Uncle Rich. In addition, Frank took his sandwich and walked out of the kitchen taking a hearty size bite out of it without adding a word to the conversation. Aunt Claire lifted her head away from the bowl of tuna salad and gazed at her brother’s back as he walked coldly away. Not counting, Frank settling down in the living room with his hickory cane beside his armchair, grabs the remote and turns on the TV and takes another generous bite out of his sandwich. Few minutes later, Uncle Rich joined Frank in the living-room with his whole sandwich on a plate and sat down on his multicolored brown recliner. Uncle Rich made idle conversation about quail hunting and guns, and Frank just half-way listened. Aunt Claire stayed behind in the kitchen nibbling on her sandwich and talking on the phone to Mrs. Talent, who is always wanting something made for her house. After that, she went to check in on Rich and picks up his plate then heads back to the kitchen. Whereas Frank popped up behind his Sister Claire again unpleasantly.

“No sense in you breathing down my neck like a dragon,” she grumbled while keeping her back to him as she washed the plate off, dried it and set it back in the cupboard.

“Why were you and Jay up in the attic?” Frank asked in an oppressed tone.

“I thought-I answered that. Have you gone senile?” She asked sarcastically.

“No,” Frank said flatly.

“Why were you up there?” He questioned.

“Looking for scraps for my quilt,” she snapped.

“Good grief that’s my attic,” She growled.

“So it is,” grunted Frank as his dark eyes were fixated on his sister’s nervousness.

“Well, it is Frank,” She hissed.

“Jay wants to know what happened to Taffy,” she emits.

“What did you tell her,” Asked Frank with a crossed look.

“That shouldn’t concern you as much. Jay wanting to dig inside of Taffy’s cedar chest,” she replied in a divulge tone. Not to mention, Frank’s forbidden presence had Aunt Claire pinned from moving.

“Jay was asking questions about Marigold,” she added with caution.

“Avoid answering any questions,” he stressed.

Then, patted his sister on the shoulder and walked away with his hickory cane towards the living-room, where he settled back down in his armchair by the window.

Aunt Claire gazes at the picture of the Last Supper on the wall with teary cobalt blue eyes. Salem came in the kitchen moments later, sitting at her feet staring up at her with his sweet brown eyes.

“Now what do you want?” Salem started running around in circles.

“I know what that look and doggie dance means” as she began walking annoyingly out of the kitchen as Salem eagerly follows behind her.

“We need to invest in a doggy door,” she said in a fussy tone.

In reliance, Jaylon-Rose was heading into work at the retirement home and meditating on the unwavering conversation with Aunt Claire. She boldly walked up to push in the four-digit code then went through the double doors. She checks in at the nurse station and took her orders from her charge nurse. Not counting, the first hour on her shift dragged by to the point, Jaylon-Rose was anxious for a break as she brisk down the hall towards the break room. She walked over to the vending machines and thrust her hand into her navy-blue scrub pocket for change. A short plump woman with a Brenda Lee hairstyle, a co-worker named Stella Stencil sat down with Jaylon-Rose during their break with their selections.

“I hate coming in on my day off. But I love the overtime on my paycheck,” complained Stella as she lit up a cigarette and stretched out her short thick legs.

“I don’t mind,” said Jaylon-Rose as she tossed peanuts’ in her mouth.

Stella gave her a kind eye and smiled.

“A storm is supposed to hit us by tomorrow,” said Stella.

“What else is new in Cape?” Asked Jaylon-Rose as she sipped on her can of diet soda while reading the newspaper that was left on the table.

“Aren’t you from the Gulf Coast?” Asked Stella.

“Yes-I am,” she said as she looked for her horoscope sign-Aquarius.

“So, you’re no stranger to Hurricanes, Tornadoes and such?”

“No, I’m not.”

“I don’t like spiders and snakes and that ain’t what it takes to love me. You fool, you fool, she sang the Jim Stafford song. Then, reads out-loud, “it says: a whirl wind of love and romance is in the air but watch out for jealousy among friends and spiders.”

“Okay, Stella looked at her co-worker like she was crazy but cute.

“You believe in that stuff?” Asked Stella.

“I don’t know,” This sounds odd but interesting. I am going to watch out and see,” emits Jaylon-Rose.

“Seriously, I think it’s a bunch of Bologna. By the way, I have not heard that song in a long time,” laughed Stella while getting up from the table.

“Yeah, well. Back to horoscope reading my Aunt Claire thinks it is foolish too,” said Jaylon-Rose dryly.

“We may have a point. Well, my break is over-I better head back to my floor,” said Stella.

“Poof, mine is too,” she said following Stella out of the break room.

They both stepped aside to let other chatting nurses come in. Two maintenance guys enter in, and the last one guy held the door open for them. The two guys said “hi” and smiled only at Jaylon-Rose as she walked past them. Stella peered back with jealous eyes at the two guys drooled over Jaylon-Rose. Stella pokes fun about Jaylon-Rose’s horoscope and her whirlwind of lovers as well as, the song she sang in the break room. They both parted ways going down the hall as Stella laughs heading back towards the floor they were originally working on. As for Jaylon-Rose, she was not very amused by Stella’s pokes of fun. Anyway, she walked up to the round nurse station and spoke with the charge nurse name Nancy Fits, who had a stern dry face with wet blonde stiff curls that hung down to her collar bone. The unfriendly charge nurse instructed cheerful Jaylon-Rose to shower a resident and change her bed. Jaylon-Rose turned away and grabs a wheelchair heading towards Mrs. Hyland’s room. At the same time, she is trying her darndest to ignore all the rudeness. She pushed a wheelchair into Mrs. Hyland’s warm room with a soft smile. The eighty four-year old, woman was sitting in her beige chair with a bed pillow behind her back as she watched a game show.

“Hello Mrs. Hyland!” She said cheerfully.

“How are you?” She asked in a soft and friendly voice as she came up to her side.

“Good. Thank you,” Mrs. Hyland said.

“I’m happy to hear that,” she kindly answered.

“Do you need me to water your plants?” Jaylon-Rose asked as she gazed at the dry plants sitting in a row on her long narrow windowsill.

“I believe, they’d appreciate some water,” she answered shaking her head.

“I am here to give you a shower and change your bed,” said Jaylon-Rose kindly as she retrieved a plastic cup from under the bathroom sink and filled it up with water.

She came out and went over to the window to water the dry plants as she gazed out for a moment at the green lawn, the red knockout roses that were staged by the building and the cars passing by on the busy street in front of the retirement home.

“Yes, I know. I’m happy too it’s you giving-my shower instead of that Stella,” said Mrs. Hyland making a sour face. Her smile stretched very sweetly across her round pretty face while putting the plastic cup back under the bathroom sink. She started preparing Mrs. Hyland for her shower. Mrs. Hyland’s clothes were draped over the armchair on a hanger and her brown shoes were sitting on the chair cushion. Her room was neat with a nineteen-inch color TV that was sitting on a wooden oak cart stand on wheels, with shelves of Mrs. Hyland’s knick-knacks and pictures of her family on display. She gazed at a framed picture of Mrs. Hyland, when she was young standing beside her beloved husband that was on her dresser and attractive gold oblong tray that held her toiletries.

Mrs. Hyland slowly eased up from her chair with Jaylon-Rose’s assistance, she guided her safely into the wheelchair that was locked into position. Jaylon-Rose reaches down to unlock the wheelchair, pushes Mrs. Hyland out of her warm room and down the long hallway. The cool hall breeze was appreciated as she was already feeling hot and sticky from Mrs. Hyland’s warm room as she wheeled her into the shower to bathe her. As she shampooed Mrs. Hyland’s gray perm short hair, she started talking proudly about her son and his girlfriend coming to see her, all the way from Gulfport, Mississippi. That sparked Jaylon-Rose’s interest.

“Really. That is my father’s hometown,” she said in an upbeat voice.

“What about that. Maybe you know them?”

“My son manages a nightclub. “I can’t think of the name of it,” says Mrs. Hyland with a forgetful expression.

“That’s ok. What’s their names?” Asked Jaylon-Rose.

“My son’s name is Hank and his girlfriend well shoot-I don’t remember her name either,” said Mrs. Hyland.

All the while, she is rinsing her hair, while she stares straight ahead.

“I hope, I get back in time to watch my game show,” Mrs. Hyland mentions, while Jaylon-Rose turns off the water.

“I am sure you will,” while placing a towel on her wet head. Jaylon-Rose wraps a sheet around Mrs. Hyland and wheeled her back to her room. She pushed her beside the bed. She assisted Mrs. Hyland in dressing then assisted her safely back into her beige chair. She took off her bed sheets, put on clean linens, made her bed, gathered everything up and tosses it into a laundry hamper outside her door.

“May I sit here long enough to fill out this form?” Asked Jaylon-Rose.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Hyland, who seems less stressed that she was back in her chair in time for her game show Jeopardy and dressed for her son to visit. She got up from the chair and stood beside Mrs. Hyland.

“Have a nice visit with your family,” as she held her clipboard close to her chest.

“Thank you, I will,” said Mrs. Hyland, holding a small round compact mirror in her shaky hand, applying lip stick to her thin lips, she brought the mirror down to look up at Jaylon-Rose and smiled. Once back at the nurse’s station. Soon as Nancy the charge nurse saw Jaylon-Rose, she turned her back and walked away talking on the phone. Jaylon-Rose gazed at Nancy vacantly then switched her eyes onto the clock on the wall before going to the next resident. Not counting, behind her was Mrs. Hyland’s son and his girlfriend, who faithfully came to visit. Just the same, they enter the room Jaylon-Rose just came out of and with the sound of the door closing, she jerked around and hunched her shoulders up and lurched away.

“Hello Ms. Dennis.”

“I am here to check your vitals and change the dressing on your leg.”

“Yes. That will be fine,” Ms. Dennis answered.

She was a large size woman with gray mixed short brown hair and lying on her bed watching TV and dressed in a maroon cotton night gown. Ms. Dennis’ room was brighter, much cooler with ivy plants sitting in plant stands and even more plants bunched up on the windowsills. Not to mention, an eyeful of an untidy collection of Harlequin paperback books. Jaylon-Rose was finished with Ms. Dennis and her shift.

It was approaching eleven p.m. and she wasted no time pacing towards the front of the building to clock out. She stood behind other workers waiting to swipe their employee card. She steps outside the building and goes to her car. As she was backing out, she noticed a car with Mississippi tags as she narrowed her gaze onto the licenses plate.

She broke her gaze and drives out of the retirement parking lot. The headlights on her Gran Prix shined on the front of the two-story white house as she pulled in the driveway. Jaylon-Rose walked in, and the TV was on low and Uncle Rich, was asleep in his recliner in the living room and her Father Frank was watching an old black and white movie. Jaylon-Rose saw the light on in the kitchen and found Aunt Claire, in the kitchen smoking and drinking coffee at the dining room table by herself. Jaylon-Rose poured herself a small glass of chocolate milk and joined her Aunt Claire at the table.

“You look tired, Jay,” said Aunt Claire as Jaylon-Rose pulled out a chair and sat down.

“Believe me, I am pooped,” she said.

“Are you okay?” Asked Jaylon-Rose.

“Well, you should know this being a caregiver, people my age always look-like a sad basset hound,” Aunt Claire half smiled as she gazed down into her coffee cup in deep thought. Jaylon-Rose shook her head amusingly at Aunt Claire’s remark.

“I love you, I’m going to bed,” Jaylon-Rose, yawned as she got up and kiss her Aunt Claire goodnight on the cheek.

“You should think about switching jobs, one less tiring,” Aunt Claire added.

“What job would that be?” She asked.

“Well, what about real estate? Your friendly, pretty and smart,” she questioned.

“No thanks.”

“I love you too, sweet dreams,” said Aunt Claire.

“Are you sure, your okay-though?” Asked Jaylon-Rose gave her aunt one last concerned look as she put her glass in the sink. She nods her head twice, “goodnight, Jay,” said Aunt Claire. She drifted out of the kitchen to blow goodnight kisses at Uncle Rich and her father before heading upstairs to bed. Soon as Jaylon-Rose entered her bedroom and kicks off her sneakers, pulled her scrub top over her head, steps over to her bureau, pulls out her sleep pants, a shirt, slips them on and climbs into bed. Salem curls up in the corner of her bedroom. By this time, she could feel her feet ache and throb as she sunk into bed from walking the floors in that retirement home. Although, she was tuckered out she still felt a touch on her hand that laid beside her face on the pillow but, was to limp to open her eyes. The, next morning came with golden sun glistening on the top of the dew that was lying on the house windows from the west. Aunt Claire was up bright and early as usual brewing coffee in her turquoise housecoat and brown scruffy house slippers. She kneads the dough then, stamps the biscuits out with a small plastic juice cup that came out of a Quaker Oats box. About that time, Jaylon-Rose bolted downstairs like a whistle of wind as her nose picked up the brewed coffee.

“Good morning,” she said cheerfully as she poured coffee into her cup and leans up against the counter beside her aunt.

“Morning Jay,” smiled Aunt Claire.

“Good morning. How are you feeling this morning?” Asked Jaylon-Rose watching Aunt Claire rinse the self-rising flour dough off her hands.

“A good night’s rest will make anyone feel better,” said Aunt Claire while turning the water off and dried her hands off on her apron. She grabbed the pan of buttermilk biscuits and slid them into the pre-heated oven. Aunt Claire eyed her niece and returned to the counter.

“Well, my feet disagree-they are still killing me today.”

“It must be the concrete floor, it has no mercy for my feet,” complained Jaylon-Rose.

“Take two Ibuprofens before you start work and after work, you should be able to tell a difference and if not it’s time to find another job,” poked Aunt Claire.

“Why do you have a dying wish for me to quit my job?” She asked.

“Besides, it’s not optional until Romeo sweeps this Juliet off her aching feet,” remarked Jaylon-Rose.

“I’ll keep an eye out,” said Aunt Claire.

Suddenly, she recalled the touch, she felt on her hand last night that was beside her face on the pillow and shared it with her aunt.

“I don’t believe the dead can visit or touch us,” signed Aunt Claire.

“Well. I felt close to mama up there in the attic yesterday,” she spoke with sadness as she wrapped her hands around her warm coffee cup.

“I did too,” agreed Aunt Claire.

Tears were stinging Jaylon-Rose’s brown eyes as she moved away from the counter to sit down at the dining room table. She reached up to wipe her eyes after freeing her hands from her coffee cup.

“I was so exhausted, but I just know something or, someone touched my hand last night,” she argued.

“Jay that can only happen when we are tired,” said Aunt Claire.

“No, I don’t think so, not last night,” she added.

Chapter 7

“It did, it did, I know it did, I know it was mama,” she sobbed.

“Ooh Jay,” said Aunt Claire with empathy in her voice.

“I know, you’re missing your Mother Taffy and that’s probably why you think you felt.

her.”

Aunt Claire turns off the oven and pulls out the buttermilk biscuits and dumps them in a straw-basket. Even more, she gazed at her niece while pulling off her oven mitten. Aunt Claire walks behind her chair with solace and attempts to caress her back.

“Come with me-Jay,” said Aunt Claire.

She got up from the chair and follows her aunt upstairs to the attic. Jaylon-Rose sat down on the dusty floor and all at once, she felt a cold chill come over her as she shook with goose bumps.

“It’s chilly up here,” she shivered.

“It shouldn’t be, heat rises,” said Aunt Claire.

“That’s what I thought too,” she replied.

“I know it sounds crazy, but I wonder, if mama haunts up here?” She asked with curiosity while looking around, hoping to see a glimpse of something or better yet her mama.

“The bible teaches about the dead and that the dead know nothing. Jay the dead are asleep until they rise from their graves on judgment day,” said Aunt Claire.

“I beg to differ, I’ve read about a visitation in the bible of Moses and Elijah, who came down from heaven to meet a selected disciple named Peter. Moses and Elijah are not under a sleeping coma until judgment day, matter of fact they were introduced, so that gives hope to the fact, we can comeback if it’s God’s will,” emits Jaylon-Rose.

“Jay-you are not a prophet nor is your mama needless to say, you have always carried a torch for the what if’s,” Aunt Claire signed heavy with annoyance attached to her speech.

“I just hope mama is a kind and friendly ghost,” she emits.

“Like the husband and wife that stays in their attic in the movie Beetle Juice,” she said amusingly.

“Don’t you agree that daddy has forgotten her?” She asked while gazing into her aunt’s cobalt blue eyes that were so annoyed.

“Mercy, you haven’t listened to a word I have said. Oh, my poor aching joints,” she moaned while pulling herself up.

She walked a few paces across the dusty attic floor. Aunt Claire motioned her niece to get up and follow her over to the cherry wood, oval mirror. Jaylon-Rose cast a puzzle gaze directedly at her aunt before rising to her feet. Once, she was within her aunt’s reach, she coiled down to the floor, staring up at her aunt abnormally, not knowing what to expect.

“Look into the mirror,” said Aunt Claire. She slowly lowers her brown eyes directly into the mirror like her aunt instructed.

“Is this a magic mirror?” Jaylon-Rose asked with a lopsided grin.

“No, it isn’t, pay attention,” she snubbed.

“Anyhow, your mother lives in your reflection. And, when your father sees you, he undoubtedly sees Taffy,” said Aunt Claire.

She shrunk down behind her niece to pull back her chestnut curly hair into a ponytail then securing it in her hands.

She stared at the mirror and soaked-up her aunt’s words. Not counting, Aunt Clare thrust a chocolate cover cherry out of her pocket and hands it to Jaylon-Rose, to perhaps soften the moment.

“Why does daddy seem so uncouth expressing his own loss?” Questioned Jaylon-Rose. Next, a snap sound was heard when she sunk her teeth into the creamy center, and the liquid spilled out filling the inside of her mouth as she chewed it.

“His military hardness is the only way to explain his actions,” referenced Aunt Claire as she eyed her niece enjoying the chocolate covered cherry.

“I miss her,” Jaylon-Rose cried sadly with tears bubbling inside her eyes with her reflection standing in the mirror.

“Aww, you poor thing,” said Aunt Claire.

Moreover, she gently swiveled her niece, to embrace her, comfort her, and softly stroking her chestnut curly hair. After releasing her niece, she then scooted across the floor over to her mother’s cedar chest and gazed up for permission before touching it. Aunt Claire closed her eyes and nodded yes. The hinges creaked as she lifted the lid open and locked it into place. Her hands hovered over her mother’s treasures with poise. The strong cedar scent was release in the attic air as she pulled out her mother’s long lavender maxi dress and held it close to her body. Her fingers hovered over the many photographs that she took out of a plastic zip lock bag. Suitably, she spotted a dragonfly mood pendant that was seal in another plastic zip lock bag. Jaylon-Rose gazed up at her aunt with puppy dog brown eyes, “can I have it, please?” She unnecessarily begged.

“Of course, you can have it,” said Aunt Claire while keeping her teary eyes on her niece. She eagerly thrust the necklace out of the plastic bag and moves her hair to the side while she hooks the clasp.

“I am sorry, we must close the chest now,” said Aunt Claire with a facade expression. Jaylon-Rose closed the lid on her mother’s cedar chest like Aunt Claire requested.

“Oh, my goodness!” Jaylon-Rose cried out in amazement.

“What’s wrong?” Aunt Claire asked in a tragedy tone.

“I just realized something mama wrote a poem about a dragonfly pendant.

“Thank you, thank you. You have no idea how much this means to me,” she said as she sprung to her feet then dusted off the back of her jeans and lurks towards the door.

“Yes, I do,” whispered Aunt Claire once she was standing by the attic door as Aunt Claire softly touch the side of her face.

Then, they both paused for just a moment before climbing down the ladder and pushing it back up into the ceiling after Jaylon-Rose stepped away. She laid her hand across the dragonfly pendant that was clasped around her neck and closed her eyes with deep channeling thoughts of her mother. When she reopened her eyes, Aunt Claire was staring a hole through her.

“Is there something wrong?” She asked noticing her scrutiny cobalt blue eyes.

“Heavens-no,” scurried out of her mouth.

“I just, ah,” she took a breath. “I need to finish-up breakfast and put my pot roast in the crock-pot before my morning slips away,” Aunt Claire rushed.

The subject matter was quickly switched as Aunt Claire cleverly asked for some help canning. Likewise, Frank kept his presence invisible as he listens to their frivolous chatter about canning. The air between them became quiet while walking down the hall together as well as advancing in Frank’s undetected presence.

And, additionally, Frank spooks them as he steps out of his corner in from of them, using his hickory cane to obstruct their path.

“Sweet Jesus!” Aunt Claire cried while grabbing her chest from being startled.

“Did I miss the secret meeting in the attic?” Frank asked.

“Have you gone mad?” Aunt Claire spoke in an upset tone.

Frank tilted his head back in emotionally hardened laughter.

“Glad you find it amusing to scare two women half-to-death.”

He aimed his cane at his sister’s bubbled gum shaped behind while she was grumbling. “Why the secret meetings in the attic?” Questioned Frank.

“No secret meetings, Aunt Claire and I were just up there talking about, um,” she paused.

“Oh yeah, canning!” Added Jaylon-Rose.

In the meantime, Frank narrowed his eyes unto the dragonfly mood pendant, she was wearing and noticed it was black.

“Yes, um, the time when Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich met,” she said with her arms folded and guarded as her father questioned her and strangely reviewing the dragonfly pendant.

“Is that it?” His dark eyes open to their original size.

“Did Claire tell you, why she married on April fool’s day, soon after her husband died,” said Frank with a musing gaze.

Jaylon-Rose was speechless and said, “no she didn’t.”

“Meaning of their marriage is a joke,” Frank insensitively laughs with a perimeter eye on his Sister Claire.

“I resent that. I love Rich with all my heart,” she said defensively. Frank oddly set his laughing eyes on her.

Yeah, sure you do,” he laughed.

Jaylon-Rose confusingly eyed the two of them arguing.

“I didn’t know, you had a husband that died. I always thought you were married to Uncle Rich.”

A surprised Jaylon-Rose looked duped as nobody offered her an explanation.

“Thanks Frank, for this shameful nonsense of yours,” Aunt Claire said upsettingly.

Jaylon-Rose’s ended up walking away to her bedroom. She could not help hearing their ongoing disputes outside of her door. Later, in a familiar way Jaylon-Rose stood scrupulous by the window, like her mother once did holding the curtain aside, observing her father sitting under an oak tree with his cane leaning up against it and crossing his leg, Jaylon-Rose drew in a deep breath then exhaled as she let go of the curtain. Coincidently, Frank was reading the Dragonfly’s Mood poem. Perhaps, a flinch of regret, a bitter-sweet veiled in his dark eyes, as he thrust in his pocket for his handkerchief to wipe his eyes. He pushed the handkerchief back in his pocket, remembering that dark stormy night and yanking the dragonfly pendant off Taffy’s lifeless body.

“Dragonfly’s Mood”

Dragonfly is fluttering his wings of pearl that dance in the sky, as this French girl falls for you from the blue bayou. A golden sign from above magically changed all the frowns of amber brown, into a sapphire stone of electric blue, with no other than a grand of dazzling mood colors of me and you.

The Louisiana lavender wind blows as it flourishes, as I walk with slumber to my Parish.

Under a satin moonlight to cherish my own reflection of a drifting raft out to sea. My dragonfly’s mood is flying without any regret on this fuchsia velvet eve.

And, yet the images of my dancing spirit twirling, above the gold sunset as it guides into a dream, to be recognized and set aloft with gleam. The crashing waves splashed a captivating love over our bodies, that bring your hands in to hold mine like a keepsake. My, darling do not waken me from this dream, as the luminous tropical sunset our romantic night together, in this island night under the tiny star lights.

Your arm is clasped around me like a charm bracelet, as we sleep together on a

Thick bed of sparkling white sand, as the dolphins leap in the distance, with a band of bold glistering twilight diamonds that dance under the moon light. I shall miss, as I ascend in flight away from my new love. The Louisiana lavender, the gusty winds create a romantic blanket that wrapped us into enchanted howling in a haunting breeze. Thence, l will be captured and leave for all eternity, by none other than the Mississippi waters. Perhaps, my darling l will be remembered when my heart loved you.

Written by Taffy Bruce-Seabaugh

Jaylon-Rose flittered down the stairs to where her Aunt Claire had strips of bacon frying in the cast iron skillet.

“This kitchen smells so yummy,” said Jaylon Rose as she grabs a buttermilk biscuit out of the straw-basket. She takes a bite while she had a wad of biscuit in her cheek and enjoying the taste, she chewed.

“Mm,” said Jaylon-Rose while pouring some more coffee into her cup.

Aunt Claire eyed her niece with a pleasingly smile, then swiftly gives her attention to the stove and at the popping grease from the strips of bacon. Aunt Claire backed up and bent over to pulled out the large crock pot out of her cupboard, patted on some seasons on the roast and plugs it in an outlet. Jaylon-Rose grabs another biscuit from the straw-basket and poured honey on each bite.

“What’s cooking in the crock-pot?” Asked Uncle Rich.

“Pot roast,” answered Aunt Claire as she slid the last bit of her egg onto her biscuit and swallowed it down then pops up to put her plate in the sink.

“Honey, these biscuits are scrumptious, just like the one who made it!” Uncle Rich said with a hearty bite of biscuit in his mouth.

“Thanks,” smiling bashfully.

“Did you ever finish Mrs. Talent’s curtains yet?” Asked Rich.

“No. She reminds me every-day, I have to make the tiebacks then I will be done.”

Out of the blue, the phone started ringing.

“Hello.” She covers the phone with her thick hand and whispered; “speak of the devil.” She took her hand away to speak, “yes, Mrs. Talent,” with a cheerful voice.

“I have to make the tiebacks then your curtains will be ready. I expect to have them-finish today.”

“Mrs. Talent sounds impatient for those curtains,” said Jaylon-Rose.

“She is,” grumbled Aunt Claire.

“How much are you charging her?”

“Fifty dollars,” she signs.

Jaylon-Rose nodded her head in agreement with the price.

“The curtains are beautiful. It will be worth her wait,” she replied.

“We’ll see,” said Aunt Claire as she smiled sweetly at her niece.

“Well, I am going to take a nap,” yawned Jaylon-Rose as Salem followed her up the stairs to her bedroom.

“Sounds like a good idea,” said Uncle Rich yawning.

Soon enough, the kitchen became empty, and Aunt Claire was the only one left putting dishes in the dishwasher. She took the glass lid off the crock pot and peeks in on her pot roast that was cooking slow and smelling good. With a satisfied face, she took off her apron, and headed up stairs to work on Mrs. Talent’s tiebacks in her sewing room.

Well after her nap, Jaylon Rose came downstairs snooping in the kitchen with her belly growling. So, she lifted the lid off the yummy smelling crock pot that led to her grabbing a fork. Last, she took a piece of steaming hot roast and shoved it in her mouth. Immediately, she tossed the piece of hot meat around in her mouth, like it was a hot lava rock. She then, reached for a glass from the cupboard and filled it with tap water and gulped it down, hoping to cool her scorched tongue.

“Was it hot enough for you? A slice of bread might stop that burning,” laughed Aunt Claire.

“Yes, it was,” she answered as she untied a loaf of bread on the counter.

“Forgive me, your pot roast smells so good, I couldn’t resist,” she said.

“Oh my, you made apple pie too. You’ve been busy while I was napping.”

As she lowered her head over the pie to breathe in the rich apple cinnamon through her nose.

“Yes, you could say that I first finished Mrs. Talent’s curtains. Never mind all that, must I chase you out with a broom, before you nibble everything up like a field mouse?” Sounding unnaturally moody.

“Yeah, Rich loves my homemade apple pie too,” Aunt Claire made a full circle turn-around as she proudly turned her pie to view it from different angles.

Next, Aunt Claire smiled over at Jaylon-Rose, “I’m going to round up the men,” said Aunt Claire. Well after, her aunt left the kitchen. Jaylon-Rose was speechless over her aunt’s unexpected rudeness that hurt her feelings as she set the table.

By this time, Frank was sitting in his favorite armchair by the large window with long soft black plaid plantation curtains draped to the pine wood plank floor. Aunt Claire made the round olive green and black braided rug that laid on the floor under his feet. Frank’s hickory walking cane was leaned up against his armchair that he carved himself, after he slipped down the icy driveway a couple of winters back.

Uncle Rich came inside and went straight into the bathroom that was a few steps away from the front door to wash his greasy hands.

“Dinner’s ready,” She called.

“It sure does smell delicious,” said Uncle Rich as he rubbed his stomach that was lapped generously over his belt.

“Yeah, that’s why that stomach is steadily swelling like a basketball,” said Frank pointedly teasing Uncle Rich.

“Don’t blame me, blame your sister’s cooking,” said Uncle Rich as he pulled out his chair.

“The only one around here not getting fat is Jay,” grinned Aunt Claire.

“I know. Jay is just getting prettier and prettier every-day,” said Uncle Rich as he winks at his niece while picking up his fork. Jaylon-Rose sweetly grinned at him but could not help being appalled by this sudden outspoken rudeness. Everyone was quiet at the table until Frank narrowed his dark eyes onto the pendant.

“Where did you get that pendant?” His dark eyes held a born gaze on it.

“I found it in Mama’s cedar chest while Aunt Claire and I were in the attic this afternoon.”

“It’s alright, isn’t it?” As she placed her hand delicately on the pendant as if to protect it.

“You and Claire already settled on it being alright, little late asking me,” Frank spoke crudely.

The pain in Jaylon-Rose’s brown eyes was visible as she gazed at her father, who showed no remorse for his deeds at the table.

“Did you give this to mama?” Asked Jaylon-Rose as she laid her hand on the pendant. Frank kept eating his dinner as if she had never spoken a word.

“I didn’t give it to your mama,” answered Frank coldly as he kept eating and made no eye contact with his daughter.

“Did she buy it while visiting home?” She questioned.

“I don’t know, where it came from,” he said roughly.

“Didn’t you notice it on her?”

“Not soon enough, “he signs as he took a drink.

“Are you playing detective with me-Jay?” Asked her Father Frank.

“No,” she said feeling hurt.

“Just wondering, how this dragonfly mood pendant inspired a poem,” she replied as she dared to looked over at her father. Aunt Claire nudged Uncle Rich to switch gears in the conversation. Meantime, Frank was dealing with flash backs and snap shots of Taffy’s last moments. Aunt Claire noticed the change in his face.

“After we um, get through eating dinner, I’ll challenge you to a game of chess?”

Uncle Rich waited on Frank’s answer.

“No!” He finally replied. “I want a piece of my sister’s apple pie first,” he signed.

At this point, the air grew stagnant as the silverware became the only chatter. Meanwhile, Jaylon-Rose lost her appetite and excused herself from the table.

Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich just looked at each other just as, Jaylon-Rose walked out. Outside, the kitchen wooden frame pane window the rain fell steadily, and one could clearly see Aunt Claire’s white Bonneville Pontiac parked out front of their white two-story house, that Uncle Rich’s grandparents sold to him dirt-cheap. A dark shadow stopped and peered into the kitchen and living-room windows, as the rain blew against it on that rainy night. However, Frank and Uncle Rich distinction was their temperament and their mood, in-which graded their game of chess that night as well.

Consequently, Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich’s home is in walking distance to the historic downtown district, that still thrives and brings visitors to the Riverfront Park. Furthermore, the city of Cape Girardeau was recognized in January 2008 by First Lady Laura Bush as a preserve America community for its work in surveying and protecting historic buildings. The city is known to some as “The City of Roses” because of a nine mile stretch of highway that was once lined with dozens of rose bushes. (Wikipedia.)

So, it is notable for being Missouri French and is nicknamed “Paw-Paw French, the founder was established before 1793 by the French-Canadian Louis Lorimer, it was named, for Jean Baptiste Girardot (Girardeau.) who had built a trading post in 1733 at nearby Cape Rock. I fail not to mention, is a town touched by the likes of Mark Twain, Lewis, and Clark. And additionally, the Missouri Wall of Fame Mural protects the downtown from the Mississippi River that also magnificently rolls along the Riverfront Park. The prominent historic landmarks cover the downtown shopping district and behind the flood walls lies the Riverfront Park of Cape Girardeau, where river boats dock and visitors can view the Mississippi River. The next day proven to be just as important, as Jaylon-Rose stood in front of the mirror parting her hair down the middle and started braiding it, then tied a red bandana around her head. She hurried down the stairs wearing distressed blue jean shorts, a white tank top with white converse sneakers and closes the front door. She walked over to Uncle Rich’s shed, where her metallic light blue bike was. From there, she sat down on her brown seat and rode off.

The day was luminous and sunny not counting, she wished she had not forgotten her sunglasses, but regretfully did. She persevered on and eventually stopped to pick berries for Aunt Claire, then little ways from there she could not resist picking some roses for herself and laid them in her basket. She rode her bike into the midst of the well-known Rose City, as she relished the French framework of the historic district. She went on her way to the River Front Park where she settled down beside her bike, fading into the scenery and there she simply lost track of time as visitors came and went.

Just the same, she stayed fix-dated on the Mississippi River, in a state of hopeless yearning. The day was getting noticeably hot as it rosy her round cheeks and sunburned her shoulders and legs. None the less, well on her way home, she grunted tiredly while pedaling with her muscles burning tight in her calves going up the driveway. She was glad to get off her metallic light blue bike and, push it the rest of the way into Uncle Rich’s shed. She grasps the handle of the basket and walks in the house.

“It feels so good in here,” she said after closing the front door.

She headed into the kitchen with a basket of berries clutched in her hand, she puts the basket on the counter and kneels-down with the sound of her knee’s popping and trying to hold her balance, while she is pulling out a stainless-steel colander to drop the berries in the sink for Aunt Claire. Not to mention, searching for a vase as she pushes aside cleaners and other stuff that was stored underneath the sink. She notices and grasps one of Aunt Claire’s mason jars and is glad to stand again, in front of the sink as she fills it with tap water, then trims each rose, places each one in the Mason jar as well as, she sweetly tells each rose how beautiful they are. Besides, stopping by the fridge to take the last diet soda and breezes up-stairs. Jaylon-Rose stops by Aunt Claire’s sewing room, looking for a ribbon that she spots in a box and pulls one out and gives it a pleasing eye, while tying the ribbon around the jar. Before leaving, she gazes at the newspaper on the floor and picks it up on her way out and closes the door. Gracefully, she enters her bedroom and puts the red roses on a crochet scarf that Aunt Claire handmade. She laid the newspaper down and stands two pillows up against the headboard and sits propped up in bed then flips through the newspaper to find her horoscope. All the while the fragrance of the roses sweeten the air, and somehow makes it easy for her to daydream of someday having a house decorated with roses, as she begins to read her horoscope out loud. Not counting, the box of chocolate covered cherries on the nightstand, she enjoyably puts in her mouth that Aunt Claire makes sure, she has plenty of.

“You may find yourself, if single with someone new and in a new location that will change all that exists,” she read and smiled delightfully as she ate another chocolate covered cherry and folded the newspaper in half and drops it on the floor beside her bed.

Collectively, having intrusion thoughts about the conversation with Aunt Claire in the attic. It was blistering enough, how Aunt Claire withdrew her words from the final hours of her mother’s life. Not to mention, her Father Frank’s disturbing reaction to the dragonfly mood pendant, that truly is an invariable process of the poem her Mother Taffy wrote. Its undoubtedly tricky, when daring to believe her Father Frank is hiding the truth from her too. Salem watched her every move as he rested on the floor with his bushy tail fan out along-side her bed. Composedly, her brown eyes swirled the room like a merry go round. Likewise, she decided to bring herself up in the middle of the bed and pulls her curly hair straight back into a ponytail and secures it with a rubber-band. She scooted to the edge of the bed for no given reason and started looking intently at her black and white stripe storage box, that prompted her off the bed.

Next, she spiraled down in an Indian style position on the pine wood plank floor as she aimlessly took off the lid. She pauses as she irregularly gazed down into the box and pulled out her senior yearbook. She roamed through the pages with a reflected folly smile. Her eyes traced over goofy snap shots in the classrooms and sneaking a kiss by the lockers and voted most likely to be successful. By this time, Aunt Claire begins tapping on the bedroom door and peeks in.

“Knock-knock,”

“Come in.”

“What are you doing?” Aunt Claire asked as she lowers her gaze down on the floor.

“Nothing, just looking at my yearbook,” she said while craning her neck to gaze up at her Aunt Claire’s face.

“It’s unbelievable how fast time flies by,” said Jaylon-Rose.

“When you reach my age, you will see and feel how fast time flies across your face and body,” Aunt Claire said comically.

“I am going to the store do you want anything?”

“Well, I am almost out of my chocolate covered cherries,” smiled Jaylon-Rose.

Aunt Claire jotted them down on her grocery list.

“You mean to tell me you already ate that box, I just bought you?”

Jaylon-Rose smiling yes.

“Just like your Mother Taffy, craving chocolate covered cherries just like a French-chocolate- whore, I was planning on buying you a box,” chuckled Aunt Claire.

“Good. Studies suggest, it keeps you beautiful. You must admit mama and I are beautiful,” smiled Jay.

“Aren’t we so vain,” replied Aunt Claire.

“Guilty. That reminds me, I picked some berries today, I put them in the sink,” she said with a perky voice.

Aunt Claire was not enthused as she held her grocery list and pen.

“Yes-I saw the berries in the sink. Here is your chance to learn how to can.”

Jaylon-Rose nodded her head yes.

“Ooh!” She said as she jumped up. She swiftly went to her handbag that was hanging on the closet doorknob. She dips her hand inside and pulled out her wallet and gave her a five-dollar bill.

“Salem needs dog food,” she finished saying.

“Well alright. I’ll be back soon,” said Aunt Claire as she closed Jaylon-Rose’s bedroom door. Aunt Claire then bumps into her brother Frank.

“I want the dragonfly mood pendant put back in the cedar chest,” said Frank.

“Stop popping up in my face, I gave that pendant to Jay, what’s the harm in it?” Huffed Aunt Claire.

“Don’t get all sentimental on me-now,” said Frank harshly as he swung around his sister like a snake with his hickory walking cane, that blocked her from taking another step.

“I’m warning you-put it back,” ordered Frank as he stepped out of his sister’s way.

“How dare you, warn me in my own house,” she blasted with gritted teeth.

His dark eyes narrowed at his daughter’s bedroom door as he strolled by it with his hickory walking cane tapping the floor. Next, Uncle Rich was talking to Aunt Claire and to her Father Frank. Thankfully, the traffic sounds of footsteps and voices finally faded away as well. She lost interest in looking at her yearbook and put the lid back on the storage box and slid it under her bed.

Chapter 8

It was Friday night in Cape Girardeau, Missouri and Jaylon-Rose just got off work from the retirement center. As soon as making it home, she took a shower and hurried to her bedroom in her white robe with her wet hair twisted up in a towel, she answers her friend Abby’s phone call and quickly saying yes to her invitation to go out. Jaylon-Rose was standing in her white robe pushing aside each clothes hanger, in her closet searching for something to wear to the Crawfish Nightclub.

“I hope that guy, I saw last weekend is here tonight,” said Jaylon-Rose with her phone on speaker.

“He might be,” said Abby dryly.

“I hope so,” she replied.

Endlessly, she tried on blouse after blouse that were piling up on the bed.

“My horoscope spoke about a whirl wind of love and romance.”

“You’re a hopeless romantic basket-case,” chuckled Abby.

“That’s a good thing,” she emits with a hopeful grin.

“Okay, if you say so, I’ll see you in a little bit,” she replied and hung up the phone.

Abby showed up a half an hour later, just as Jaylon-Rose finished the final application of make-up to her round face. They both, giggled and chatted on their way downstairs, she waved goodbye with her hand clipped onto the doorknob, when she noticed Aunt Claire’s hand motioning for her attention.

“Wait a minute, Abby,” as Jaylon-Rose released her hand from the doorknob and walks over to Aunt Claire, who was sitting on the couch in the living room, knitting a scarf and mittens with a straw basket full of large balls of yarn by her side. Jaylon-Rose bends over to give her Aunt Claire a hug.

“Have fun Jay,” said Aunt Claire.

When she reunited with Abby at the front door, who whispered into her ear.

“Please ask your aunt about leaving my car?”

“Can Abby leave her car here?” She asked while peeking back into the living room.

“Yes, but, after midnight it will be towed at the owner’s expense,” chuckled Aunt Claire.

At last, they both looked at each other and smiled. No sooner, Abby shut the passenger car door, Jaylon-Rose started complaining about her father’s rudeness, and how strange Aunt Claire was becoming. It leads me to think, they’re hiding something from me,” rambled Jaylon-Rose as she stops at a traffic light. Abby lit a cigarette as she listens with a bored expression, then gazes over at the dragonfly mood pendant, as it laid lovely against Jaylon-Rose’s glittered skin.

“Hey, getting out will give your mind a break, from all of this heavy-duty drama,” said Abby as she took a drag off her cigarette then blew the smoke out the window. Jaylon-Rose pressed down on the gas pedal and the black Grand Prix roared down the street towards the next traffic light.   
 “Where did you get that dragonfly mood pendant?” Asked Abby.

“It belonged to my mother,” she replied.

“Oh really, well it’s pretty. Love the black mood stone,” Abby added.

“Thanks. It matches my car,” she smiled.

“Yeah, it does,” said Abby as she oddly cut her eyes at the pendant.

“I love the way this car roars like a lion,” said Abby as she rested her head back.

Just then, Jaylon-Rose switched on her blinker that was making a traditional clicking sound while waiting on the cars to pass, once all was clear she drove into the parking lot and whips it in a parking space. The telltale signs clearly existed that Jaylon-Rose missed her mom and was passionate about solving her mother’s unsolved mystery, that she under-lining believes exist. However, Abby was not onboard tonight playing the detective Sherlock game or showing much perceptiveness towards Jaylon-Rose, she wanted her friend to forget her troubles for tonight so, she chose to opt out of the subject matter.

“Can you just imagine hugging the curves around an open oceanside road in a red sporty car?”

“Boy, I can,” chirped Abby.

“Well, I can too, but, where on earth did that sudden imagery come from?” Questioned Jaylon-Rose with a puzzled gaze.

“Savannah smile on me!” Abby shouted out loud unexpectedly as they were walking with the Crawfish Night Club entrance in their view.

Once, Abby’s feet touched the sidewalk, she was greeted with a cloud of bystanders that were already chatting, when a girl gazed up and pulled Abby into their conversation, Abby vastly squeezed herself out of the huddled crowd and briskly caught up with Jaylon-Rose as they enter the club together. Now, they both looked around for a place to sit-with loud music vibrating, people dancing, as they maneuvered past tables with ranges of voices talking and laughing, as they said hello to friends, they knew.

Winston Paul from Dutchtown was at the nightclub too singing and playing his acoustic guitar on stage. Winston became weak in the knees while he stood on stage, steadily peering his pale blue eyes at the chestnut brown-haired woman that just graced by. Equally, Jaylon-Rose took notice of him on stage too, as they passed by with Abby nudging her to press on, as she glanced up behind Jaylon-Rose seeing the guitar man’s preying eyes on her pretty friend. However, neither one made a move to say a word to instigate a meeting that night. The next weekend, Jaylon-Rose and Abby Brown were sitting at a booth with a glass of wine in front of them. Not to mention, Jaylon-Rose’s busty girlfriend, thick built Abby Brown, who had fair skin with auburn bob styled hair. As well as, wearing a widely noticeable low-cut flowered print blouse and hanging down from her neck was a long strand pearl necklace that decoratively helped in showing off a-lot of her cleavage that night.

“So, tell me more about Savannah smile on me?” She asked.

“Savannah, Georgia and Tybee Island. It is a beautiful historic place, like no other. Furthermore, Tybee Island has a breezy beach with a night life attraction that is approximately 20 miles from Savannah. I went there on Spring Break to dodge the Florida chaotic teen fest,” explained Abby.

However, Jaylon-Rose had gotten painfully quiet after that clarification and drifted away. Voluntarily, Abby was every bit of loose and loud as she yelled at friends coming and going. Now, on the other side of the club it was undeniably clear that Winston was checking out every girl entering the club that night with hopeful ‘crossed fingers’ to see that one girl again, that had his memory held hostage, that had him still feasting from last weekend. Ironically, Jaylon-Rose was sitting at a booth with Abby and with her motivated high hopes set on, seeing the guitar man again too. So, she slid out from the booth with ambition as she moved her shoulders with zest, while walking boldly towards the crowded dance floor and carving out a space to dance in.

Vastly, Winston spotted Jaylon-Rose and from that point on, it became virtually impossible for him to keep his eyes off her, while on stage. A mere social cue was getting the best of him, as his memory was throwing him for a loop, that was challenging his artistry as he stumbled over the words while performing the song ‘A Country Boy Can Survive,’ like his favorite artist, singer-songwriter Hank Williams Jr. Even that technicality, had no baring, on his preying pale blue eyes that were tracing Jaylon-Rose’s every move like a crayon and craving her very essence, like a thirsty beast, as she dazzled across the packed dance floor with a breadth of exhibition.

Jaylon-Rose was dancing in a white sequin tank top, that hugged her body tightly, she sparkled and shined beautifully with body glitter on her skin. Magically, her boot-cut Levi blue jeans were complimenting her every curve, as she kicked up her heels in her brown stylish cowboy boots. During the dance, she drew up her head like a bucket of water from a wishing well, that swept her chestnut brown tousles back with both hands, that were sticking to her hot pink heated face. No sooner than, Winston finished his last song, he then, lurked off the stage with his guitar strap hanging from his shoulder, and shrewdly marked his next move as he stops first by the bar to buy a beer.

Craftly, Winston moved smoothly and undulating as he edged over to Jaylon-Rose and Abby’s booth holding his beer in his confident hand and staring with hungry blood shot pale blue eyes. Winston arrived saying hello to them both and gets an unapologetic eye full of Abby’s cleavage that her low-cut blouse was offering. Instantly, Jaylon-Rose winked at Abby with a cracked smile who was fully aware of Winston’s peeping Tom eyes. The next few blocks of minutes, Jaylon-Rose had invited Winston to join them at the booth as she gladly inched over so he could sit beside her and without wasting another second, Winston introduced himself.

“I’m Winston Paul. And you are?” As he eyed them both.

“Jaylon-Rose Seabaugh,” she answered first.

“What a uniquely beautiful name,” he said as he winked at her.

“Thank you.” She giggled.

“You sounded really good up there,” she smiled widely.

“Thank you, mademoiselle. Well, you looked really good on that dance floor and the culprit of why I was forgetting the words to my song,” he chuckled humorously.

Abby just rolled her eyes boringly and puffed on her cigarette.

“I am sorry,” she laughed covering her mouth.

“No-no, it was a pleasure to watch you and now, finally meet you, mademoiselle,” while taking her hand to kiss it while he gazed into her soft brown eyes.

He oddly stares at her dragonfly mood pendant, as his eyes narrow unto it then, she smiles sweetly, as she introduces her best friend.

“This is my best friend, Abby Brown.”

“Nice to meet you Abby” while stretching forth his hand across the table to shake hers. “Likewise, I am sure,” Abby said while she drew a drag off her cigarette and blew out a line of smoke. Abby in-turned gazed at her love-struck friend.

“Well, I guess your horoscope came true after all,” she added while starting to lose some of her momentum that she started out with.

“Thank you so much for inviting me out,” she said with gratitude.

“You’re welcome,” said Abby with a face of regret.

Winston eyed them both-but only stirring up, what became an endless conversation with only Jaylon-Rose. Her face showed the emotion, she was every bit elate and hooked. She covered the side of her mouth to whisper across the table.

“He’s so hot!” She inflamed excitedly.

Abby took countless drags off her cigarette, then blew smoke out from the corner of her mouth as she studied Winston with jealousy.

“Calm down before you explode,” Abby said cruelly to Jaylon-Rose as she oddly eyed her pendant.

As a result, she became withdrawn with stray thoughts about Winston and his reaction to the pendant that belonged to her mother. Just the same, Abby watched the newly love birds like a detective. However, the smooth operator had dark blonde hair that was styled neatly behind his ears that met his neckline, his trim sideburns on a five o’clock shadowed face. His midnight blue string tie front shirt was open and baring most of his sexy chest. Jaylon-Rose found him to be intoxicatingly handsome that night. He wore faded boot-cut blue jeans and brown scuff cowboy boots.

As the night grew late, Jaylon-Rose forgot all about her friend Abby. Truly, she was not profiting only growing insanely bored and crazy, as she listened to their frivolous chatter. By now, she had a belly full of watching them exchange goo-goo eyes at each other. Not to mention, Winston and Jaylon-Rose were sitting so close to each other that a butter knife could not slice them apart.

“Two’s company, three is a crowd, this third wheel-is out of here,” she said as she slid out from the booth.

They were so smitten by each other, they barely noticed or even cared best friend Abby was leaving as she lip sync the words good-bye. She shook her head with a fed-up look residing on her face as she threw the palm of her hands up.

“This is so strange. It feels like I hmm,” he paused as he narrowed his eyes and gazed lightly down at the dragonfly mood pendant.

“Have, I met you once before?” He questioned.

“No, because I would of have remembered you,” she answered.

“Are you having a Déjà vu moment?” She asked.

“Yes-that’s it!” He admitted.

“Dance with me!” She asked.

In the meanwhile, she bumped his side with her hip to let her out. Winston slid out from the booth and stood straight up and took a step back as Jaylon-Rose grabs his hand and shoots them forward like an arrow to the dance floor.

“Slow down rover,” he said being dragged like a dog bone.

Once on the dance floor, she rested her arms on top of his shoulders as he held her gracefully as they slowed danced on the crowded floor. Next, was the 1980 song by Johnny Lee ‘Looking for Love’ from the movie ‘Urban Cowboy.’

Gently, he touches her delicate chin and lifts it up to where her mouth lines up with his.

“Just hearing this song makes me, feel like Sissy, wow, I love it!” She said delightfully.

“I’ll be your Bud tonight?” Said Winston charmingly as they two-stepped around the dance floor in a locked hold.

Typically, calm, romantic, guitar man, wanting to serenade the words to his lovely dance partner with his heated breath on the tip of her nose as his lips reached out to kiss hers. Winston’s sexy, woodsy cologne was driving her wildly insane, that generously scented her white sequin tank top. Jaylon-Rose closed her brown eyes as their lips melted into one moist mouth as she drifted out of this world. Her heart soul and mind surrendered to this handsome guitar man. His love was like a vapor that drew her into his endless kiss. Being underneath, his steaming, warm touch caused her skin to tingle as if tiny needles were drawing tattoos all over her body. Jaylon-Rose felt the pulsating rush of a whirlwind of love, that was beating like a drum, and humming like a bird, through her veins, as it sung a melody of whispered love tunes to her heart, that heavenly romanced her lonely spirit, as she glowed like a flaming star. Their warm bodies, tingle passionately as they generated a hot steam that naturally moisten their skin. He held her firmly to his body with one hand and held her hand close to his chest with his other hand.

By now, it was close to four in the morning and the nightclub was closing, so Winston and Jaylon-Rose walked outside and got into his cherry red convertible Mustang, as the late night was quickly catching up to him, as he was sinking into his white seat under his retro slot steering wheel with heavy eyes. On the other side of the car, she was ready to break all the rules, just before the break of dawn, and of course, while the night was still in charge. The bare truth was, she was willing to surrender her body underneath his. However, hopes of that quickly weathered away like a fig tree, as she looked very disappointedly at him, twisted under his retro steering wheel passed out and snoring awfully loud. Jaylon-Rose sat up alone, then grunted as she attempts to moves his weighed down dead legs off hers, so she could get out of the car. Once that was successful and standing outside on the pavement she then, bends the passenger seat forward and climbs in the back.

Besides, the nightclub and its parking lot was fully abandoned and dark. Jaylon-Rose was having trouble going to sleep in the back seat with an aroma of stale alcohol filling her nostrils that only added to her misery of hearing Winston snoring in the front seat, it was all she could do to cover her ears with her hands to block out the loud annoying log sounds with wide open eyes. She sat up, and spotted her Grand Prix parked on the side of the building, with thoughts that came and went ‘bout driving home, as she gazed at her car just as, the thoughts quickly crashed and burned. So, she switched her gaze unto Winston sleeping in the front seat and decided to stay with him, but, honestly, she was missing her warm bed and thick handmade quilt that Aunt Claire made, as she tossed back and forth trying not to fall off the white vinyl small bench seat.

Even more so, she kept readjusting her body to find a comfortable position. Perhaps, the one last thing, she remembered was looking down at her watch and saw it was almost five in the morning. The sweet sleep, she begged for finally came, as she curled up like a ball on her left side behind Winston, who was still snoring in the front driver seat. The heat from the morning sun was beginning to melt the frost off the windshield. Now, it was almost eight, when Winston started stirring awake from hearing the street cleaner, sweeping the parking lot. He opens his car door to untangle himself and scrambles his way out from under his retro slot steering wheel, then stretching out everyone, of his aching joints in his body. The beautiful violet sky was bowing down to the breaking dawn as the yellow morning sunrise was taking over and setting up nicely in the sky and shining brightly down. Winston was stretching and then gazing cute shots at Jaylon-Rose curled up in a ball on his back seat. He hated to, but pecks on the back window, as she eventually blinks her raccoon brown eyes open, with black mascara smeared underneath them. She looked up and saw his face and smiled as she drops her head back down, as he goes ahead and opens the car door and holds back the seat for her to climb out.

“Oh, dear Jesus!” She cries.

“What’s wrong?” He asked caringly.

“My side and hip are killing me, my body hates me right now,” she signed as she pulled down and adjusted her sequin tank top.

“Oh, I know, mine isn’t too fond of me, right now either,” he said.

“My eyes are so heavy, it’s as if, I never closed them,” she yawned.

“Yeah, me too,” agreed Winston.

He grabs his jacket from the front seat and drapes it around her cold shoulders.

“I would’ve given you my jacket sooner but, I was laying on it, sorry.” He said as he grinned crookedly.

Jaylon-Rose smiled at him, as she shivered with the morning chills, just as, he assisted her with putting on his jacket.

“Let’s go eat breakfast,” said Winston as he opens the passenger car door for her with a positive smile. No sooner than her door shuts, she flipped down the visor mirror and cringes at her eyes and wets her finger and tries to wipe away her smeared mascara as the car moves out of the parking lot, stressing, of what he must be thinking about her not so attractive morning look. As bad as it was, she had no other choice, but to go with the flow of the morning, as Winston slipped around his Mustang and opens her car door as they strolled closely together entering the restaurant and ordering breakfast then sitting down by a window. Anyhow, wearing his oversized jacket made her feel comfortable and warm, as he looked at her being so, darn cute.

“This coffee is so good,” she emits as she drops four creamers into her white coffee cup. Winston nodded his head yes at her as his eyes swirl around the crowded restaurant, and as he sips on his hot coffee and digs his fork into his eggs and hash-browns.

For the most part, they were engaged in small talk in a busy and loud restaurant, as they ate. Afterwards, they both got up together and walked out of the restaurant holding hands. Not without Karrie jealousy eyeing them both, as he stood by the passenger car door waiting for her to get in and shuts it and swiftly swings around the back end of his cherry red convertible Mustang. Casually, on purpose, his estranged wife Karrie walks boldly out of the restaurant, with her nerdy looking dude by her side, making sure Winston sees her, before he drops down inside his car and drives away. Next, Winston was on route to taking Jaylon-Rose home, even though, she much rather be with him, but gets out of the car anyway saying…

“Thank you for breakfast,” she said sweetly.

“Pleasure was all mine, Mademoiselle,” he replied.

Salem was barking at the door running around in circles. “Shh! Salem,” she said bending down to pet him on the head as he instantly calmed down. From the living room, Frank watched his daughter like a hawk as she petted Salem. At this point, he just sat in his armchair gripping his hickory walking cane.

“You come crawling in the next day, like an alley cat. I take it you were with that-there man?” Her Father Frank asked as he holds back the long black and white plaid curtain aside to get a better look at Winston backing out of the driveway.

“Yes daddy, with that-there man,” she signs.

“Are you trying to insinuate something, daddy?” She asked.

“No, He answered.

Although, his face cracked a smile that caused his deep lines to stretch out from the corners of his dark eyes. In the meantime, he turned to gaze out the window at the kids lining up to board a school bus in front of Aunt Claire’s house, while he drank his black coffee.

“Nice looking classic Mustang. Is that a ‘65?” Her Father Frank asked.

“I think, it’s a ‘67’. It’s nice, just not to sleep in,” she shrugged while treading upstairs.

“Are you trying to insinuate something Jay?” Her Father Frank asked, while he arched his thick salt and pepper eyebrows and chuckled.

Aunt Claire heard someone coming up the stairs and came out of her sewing room to see who it was.

“Is that you Jay?” Aunt Claire asked.

“Yes,” she answered tiredly.

“I figured it was you by Salem’s barking, he seems lost without you. Oh my! Your hair looks like a family of squirrels built a nest in the back of your head,” said Aunt Claire, while she reached up to pull the tangles out.

Jaylon-Rose jerked away, “Ouch!”

“Since I walked through the front door, I have been called an alley cat and now, I have a family of squirrels living in the back of my head,” she cried as she rubs her tender head in the sore spot Aunt Claire was yanking on.

“When you were a little tot, I had to deal with you running around in circles under the brush,” said Aunt Claire while brushing her niece’s hair.

“You’re acting like a wild child, by staying out all night?”

“Now Aunt Claire, I did exactly what you told me to do, have fun,” she said defensively when Aunt Claire’s hairbrush got twisted up into her matted tangles.

“Ow!” she yelled out-loud.

“Well, good heavens,” she snapped back.

She rolled her droopy brown eyes away from her aunt. Her eyes wandered upon a picture that was on the wall, of a split foyer tan house with black shutters, with the front yard decorated in knockout roses and myrtle trees.

“I wish, to live in a house like that, someday,” she said.

Aunt Claire’s cobalt blue eyes noticed her niece’s gaze, at the picture on the wall, as she reached up to smooth down her tangled twisted curly hair. Aunt Claire freed her hands from her niece’s hair, as she tucked her hands inside her lime green silky pajama’s deep pockets.

“You know, what the old saying is? Be careful of what you wish for.”

“Why-you just might get it all?” Jaylon-Rose retorted.

“Yes, so, think of everything-when you make a wish,” said Aunt Claire with a particular-narrowing of her cobalt blue eyes.

“Where did this picture come from?” She asked.

“Oh, someone gave it to me as a gift and maybe someday, I will give it to you as a gift,” remarked Aunt Claire.

“I would love to hang it in my future home someday,” she quickly added.

She thrust her hands out of her deep pajama pockets to reach up to massage Jaylon-Rose’s temples. She readily absorbed the heavenly massage that had almost put her to sleep standing up under Aunt Claire’s therapeutic hands, that is until, she exerted back to being fastidious about her all-night fun.

“Clubbing, played the leading role in your mother’s death.”

“Good grief. I only danced. You and daddy act like I am Mary Magdalene.”

“No-no. We worry about you,” said Aunt Claire.

“Well, stop worrying. I am fine. I had fun. Can’t you be happy for me?” She asked.

“Sweetie, that’s like telling the state of Missouri not to have tornados and snow.

Here is some trivia. Did you know Jesus, cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene?”

“No. I did not, she snapped. Oh. That feels so good,” as she stood limp as a noodle with her head hanging down as she rubbed deeply into her temples and neck.

“So, did you sleep the wrong way last night? Your muscles, feel as tight as a corkscrew?”

“Well, I slept in the back seat of a ‘67’ cherry red convertible Mustang and I have been paying for it ever-since, I woke up this morning,” she replied.

“Serves you right, staying out all night,” she said un-merciful. So, where is your car?”

“It’s parked at the Crawfish Night Club. I thought daddy or Uncle Rich could get it later,” she answered.

“Guess what, Aunt Claire?”

“What?”

“I met someone last night,” Jaylon-Rose said pensively as she lifted her head up, just a notch to gaze into Aunt Claire’s cobalt blue eyes.

“I figured, there was a man involved somewhere in this story,” she answered sourly.

“Well, anyways, his name is Winston,” she said as her cheeks lit up as if a lightening bug was inside her mouth as his name rolled off her tongue.

“Winston, you say,” answered Aunt Claire as she rubs Jaylon-Rose’s neck in a circular motion. She turned around to grab Aunt Claire’s hands and made mini jumps in the air and cheered in delight.

“Yes, that’s right oh and he is ever so handsome,” she said as she twirled in a circle.

“What kind of work does ever so handsome do?” Asked Aunt Claire after her hands became free from her niece’s clasp, with the oxygen being sucked out of the air.

“Plumber by day and a handsome guitar man by night,” she answered.

“That’s a well-rounded resume,” Aunt Claire replied.

“Is that pendant broke?” She questioned.

“No, why?” She asked.

“It never changes from that awful black color,” she said with staleness.

“Black is not awful. It’s an absence color until it finds a color of happiness to belong to,” she explained.

“Who told you that hogwash?” Asked Aunt Claire.

“Me,” she smiled.

“Jay please stop this foolishness.”

At this point, she was constructively untouched by Aunt Claire’s impoliteness, who was deliberately derailing their conversation at every given chance.

Zestfully, she retreated dreamily to her bedroom. Aunt Claire who stood like a statue watching her niece dance like she was in la-la land going to her bedroom. Outside in the hallway Aunt Claire stopped studying her niece’s burst of happiness and went to her sewing room.

“Handsome-Winston,” she mumbled as her nostrils flared as she sat down in front of her sewing machine. She shuts her eyes and reopens them and exhales a deep breath then, begins sewing. Shortly after, Jaylon-Rose stuck her head inside Aunt Claire’s sewing room, and tip-toed into the room and tap Aunt Claire on the shoulder that startled her to bounce-up from her chair.

“Oh-My-Stars!” She blurted as she placed her hand across her pounding chest.

“What are you making now?” She laughed.

“Curtains for Mrs. Talent,” who has already called five times this morning.”

“Well, you better hurry-up before she calls six times this morning,” she giggled.

“I expect she will before the morning gets away,” grunts Aunt Claire.

“I got you something, Aunt Claire ebbed while sewing.

“You did, what is it?” She asked with a surprised face.

“Go look Jay,” signed Aunt Claire.

She hurried out of the sewing room and returned to her bedroom and takes full notice of a box of chocolate covered cherries and smiles, as she opens the box and grabs a couple of chocolate covered cherries and pops them in her mouth.

“Thank you, Aunt Claire, you have redeemed yourself,” she said out loud.

She glides over to slip her feet into her favorite old pair of fuzzy warm white slippers and walks out of her bedroom. Although, she could not help hearing the phone ringing and by the sound of it, Mrs. Talent was calling about her curtains, as she held up six fingers while passing by the sewing room. She heads into the bathroom as planned and swallows down a wad of chocolate covered cherries and shuts the door. She locked it behind her and took off her bathrobe and hung it up on a hook then, she stood in front of the mirror and asked a question.

“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the happiest girl of all?” She broke away from the mirror laughing, “well, of course silly, I am,” she giggled as she turned the nozzle and placed her hand under the running water to adjust the temperature.

She took out two towels off the shelve in the closet and laid them down on the counter, then steps into the shower and pulls the black and white circle shower curtain close and hums, a sweet melody like a blue jay on a spring day. She squeezes the bottle for some shampoo to pour into her hands and started washing her hair.

At this point, Aunt Claire stops what she is doing to listen to a happy Jaylon-Rose singing in the shower then, goes back to working on the curtains in her sewing room. She turns off the nozzle, her wet feet sank into the large size memory foam rug. She came out of the warm bathroom with heavy eyelids that were begging for sleep, as she snail paced down the hall. A simple little thing like her own shadow was largely creeping her out, while on her way to her bedroom.

“What is wrong with me?” She asked herself.

In the meanwhile, she turned her doorknob and thankfully made it to her full-size bed in her bathrobe with her hair still twisted-up in a black and white checkered towel. Lastly, she reaches over to grab the box of chocolate covered cherries that Aunt Claire had set on her nightstand. Then, put the box on the side of the bed and ate the first row and closes the lid and pushes the box away from her.

“I better stop before I gained 20 pounds,” she lightly chuckled.

It was close to noon, when she finally rested her head on the pillow with the return of her throbbing headache. As a result, she put the blame on last night as she managed to fall asleep regardless of the nagging pain. By six-forty-five that evening, she began to stir about rubbing her eyes open. Furthermore, the loud sounds of thunder that rumbled and boomed outside her window were now filling her ears. Not counting, once lifting her head up, her towel was left waddled up on the pillow as Jaylon-Rose sat up in bed.

She scoots off the edge and sweeps across the floor to open her bedroom door. She sticks only her head out into the hallway, that is lacking light as she calls for Aunt Claire. Salem follows closely behind her wagging his tail. The rain was pouring down relatively hard, while peeking into Aunt Claire’s sewing room. Her hand moved the curtain aside and saw the measurable rain was already flooding the front yard, and the driveway had standing water that was well over shoe deep level. She backs away from the window and twist her curly chestnut brown hair up in a bun and grabs a pair of grey sweatpants and a white printed t-shirt and guides her feet into her white slippers.

She walked down the hall craning her head into Aunt Claire’s bedroom, and saw it was empty. She carried-on down the hall and stretches out her hand to grab the banister and ventures down the stairs in her white slippers. Lightening, strike, brightly through the windows then the thunder cracked violently and rattled the house like it had divided the earth outside. Jaylon-Rose jumped in fright and cried out, “Dear Jesus,” as she held her next step before stepping down. The overhead light bulbs were blinking on and off just as, the electricity goes completely out.

“No, please don’t. I apologize for saying our electricity always goes out,” she begged ambling down the stairs. She hunted around in the dark for a flashlight and bumps into the wall, felt one that was already charging in an outlet and pulls it out.

“Thank you, Jesus” she says unnervingly while flashing the light onto her Father Frank’s empty armchair.

“I hate darkness and being alone in a storm,” she said out loud feeling debilitating. Suddenly, Salem started barking, at last, she heard a car pull up and a door slammed in the driveway. She dashed over to the window and was glad to see it was Aunt Claire.

“Thank you, Jesus,” she said out loud as she darted to the front door to open it.

Aunt Claire bustled in from the rain with several wet plastic bags twisted around her fingers.

“Where is everybody?” Jaylon-Rose questioned as she takes the wet bags from Aunt Claire’s hands to the kitchen,

“Just my luck, a big storm brews up while I am grocery shopping,” she huffed.

“Well, the last I heard was Frank and Rich were picking up your car,” Aunt Claire gasping as she stops to take off her saturated wet shoes. Jaylon-Rose took the groceries out of the drenched plastic bags and breezed over to the broom closet with a hand full of plastic bags and stuffing them into a red bag keeper that hung inside the broom closet.

“That thunder sounds like civil war cannons going off in the front yard,” uttered Jaylon-Rose.

“I heard on the radio, we are under a thunderstorm warning,” said Aunt Claire as she shook her umbrella and folded it up by the door then went to help put groceries away as her black slippers made squeaky sounds on the linoleum floor in the kitchen.

“The sky looks so wicked and dark. Stella from work mentioned this storm last night to me,” said Jaylon-Rose as she gazed out the kitchen window.

“You should know by now tornados and snowstorms are happily married to Missouri, just like the hurricanes are in love with the Gulf Coast.”

“I imagine so,” she signed off with a pensive expression as she moved away from the window.

“Do you ever miss the Gulf Coast?” Asked Jaylon-Rose.

“Certainly not the hurricanes,” replies Aunt Claire as she quickly switches gears.

“What about hotdogs and sauerkraut this stormy night?” Aunt Claire suggested in an up-beat voice that stretched over to Jaylon-Rose, while pivoting to face her aunt with a frown, “What! Something wrong with hotdogs?” Asked Aunt Claire with her hands on her plump hip.

“No. Nothing is,” she responded but stuck her tongue out and made a puke face when her aunt was not looking.

“Turn on the light Jay, it’s awfully dark in here,” grumbled Aunt Claire scattering about in the kitchen.

“I would like to but, the electricity is out,” she said calmly.

“Are you kidding me?” Shaking her head no.

Aunt Claire tries to turn on the light over the sink and flips the switch on and off.

“Darn it,” grunted Aunt Claire.

So, Jaylon-Rose made her rounds to light the candles in the kitchen, living room and bathroom with a flashlight. None the less, they both retired at the table with the only light they had was from the candle’s flame.

“Frankly, it feels good to sit down even in the dark,” said Aunt Claire.

“Well, I am glad, I am not waiting in the dark alone,” she added.

“Why aren’t daddy and Uncle Rich here by now?” She questioned.

“I don’t know. But they are missing out on all this fun, we are having,” said Aunt Claire.

A good thirty minutes later, the lights blinked on and off. At the same time, they both looked up at the overhead hanging light as the appliances started to beep and the sound of the refrigerator begins to hum as it kicks on.

“Thank God!” Aunt Claire’s face gleamed with a satisfying grin.

“Yippee! Now, I can cook hotdogs and sauerkraut,” said Aunt Claire.

Although, she made yet another nauseated face and headed upstairs to her bedroom.

In the Meantime, she retrieved her brown leather handbag from her bedroom and shot back down the stairs and grabbed the umbrella by the door.

“Where are you going Jay?” Asked Aunt Claire, who had a puzzled look on her face.

“Taco Bell,” she laughed and shut the door.

Chapter 9

The house phone was ringing, Aunt Claire answered it and said, “hello” and walked over to give the phone to Jaylon-Rose, “It’s Abby.” No sooner than, she put the phone to her ear, Abby started babbling about a blonde-haired woman that came into the store today. A prominence type, who talked with a disarmed frankness about her estranged husband. She rolled her brown eyes up, at the gossip as she was eating her food not counting, the lightening cracking and breaking on the land line with Aunt Claire raising all kind of cane in the background that she needed to get off the phone.

“Abby… I am trying to listen, eat my food with Aunt Claire fussing at me, because of the lightening,” she stressed.

“Okay. But listen to this part and I promise to let you go,” said Abby.

“Alright,” she answered tiredly.

“I asked Winston, who? And she answered by saying, Winston Paul. The woman said, his name as clear as day and that they were getting back together. I knew, he was too good to be true.” Jaylon-Rose pleaded with Abby, “I need to get off of the phone,” she then ended the call. Jaylon-Rose was stunned.

“What is it, sweetie?” Aunt Claire asked caringly.

“Winston’s wife came into the store today where Abby works at and bragged about getting back with him,” she cried.

“Winston’s what?! I don’t believe it,” Aunt Claire said shockingly.

Jaylon-Rose’s mind was in tangles, causing her to lose her appetite, that resulted into pushing her food aside. Aunt Claire gazed hard at her upset niece after her phone call from Abby. She pushed up from the table and stormed upstairs to her bedroom and slammed the door. Aunt Claire’s face turned somber, making a phone call shortly after, quietly discussing the matter, perched at the table. In the meantime, she drops lifelessly on her bed sobbing, and crashes down on her pillow and buries her wet face.

A measurable half hour had past, by when the house phone started ringing downstairs. All the sudden, Jaylon-Rose’s bedroom door swings open as Aunt Claire breezes over to her bedside to hand her the phone.

“Jay, it’s for you,” said Aunt Claire.

“I don’t want to talk to anyone. I might get electrocuted,” she whimpers.

“Alright, I’ll tell handsome Winston, you don’t want to talk,” she suddenly rolled over unto her side, “give it to me,” Aunt Claire leaves with a promising grin.

“Jay. How are you?” Winston asked.

“Not so good. I am feeling really stupid,” she sniffled with the fit of crying.

“Why is that?” He wondered.

“Don’t play dumb with me. Abby called to tell me, you are getting back with your wife,” she flustered. Thereafter, was a dead silence between them.

“Well… Are you going to say something? Telling me, it’s not true would really help me right now,” she cried into the phone.

“Winston!” She blurred as tears coursed down her round cheek. Longer than she preferred, he was silent as he listen with empathy from the other end of the phone.

“Abby told you this garbage?” He finally spoke.

“Yes, she did,” she replied as she wiped her nose with a tissue.

“Abby can mind her own business,” he ranted.

“Your wife had no business gossiping to my best friend either,” she hissed.

“My ex-wife,” he sternly pointed out.

“Are you seeing me to make your wife jealous?” She asked.

“No-no! May I remind you again-no!” He growled.

“Don’t hang up. He spun in anger and cursed!”

The dial tone buzzed loudly in his ear as he cursed with deep annoyance as he pushed redial on his phone.

“Jay! I hate when a woman hangs up or won’t talk,” he said out loud.

“Are you there?” He asked.

“Jay, answer me!”

“I can hear your sweet breathing.”

“Don’t sweet talk, me,” she snapped.

“Has it occurred to you, that Abby jumped on the gossip train to break us up?” He asked sensibly.

“Why would she do that?” She asked as her tone tapered down.

“Think about it, Jay. Blabber mouth Abby is probably jealous of you and me. She broadcasted this bogus lie across the state of Missouri.”

She hissed and ended the call with him again. Well after ending that call, she was pacing the floor with spells of crying and hating what she did, wishing, he would call back. Exhaustingly, she drops down on her bed, wrestling with fickle thoughts, and nervously biting on her thumbnail. Aunt Claire slowly turns the doorknob, and pushed open the door, that allowed the hall light fixture in the ceiling to cast a light into her dark bedroom.

“Would you be up to joining me for a cup of coffee and peanut butter cookies, that I just took out of the oven?” She pulled herself into an upright position on the edge of the bed.

“Come downstairs with me,” Aunt Claire said as she turns and gazes at her niece. Jaylon-Rose follows Aunt Claire out of her bedroom as she puts a tissue in her bathrobe pocket. She slouched down at the kitchen table, watching Aunt Claire put peanut butter cookies on a plate. She picks a cookie up and nibbles on it then, takes a drink of her coffee.

“Aunt Claire is it crazy, to be hurt, to be mad, and to want him, all at the same time?”

“No, not at all. It’s called love,” said Aunt Claire as she calmly sips on her hot coffee, while holding her cup with both of her hands, gazing at her niece.

“I do love him,” her trembling lips said just as her puffy eyes drifted away from Aunt Claire’s face. “That’s all that should matter, just let everything else take care of itself,” said Aunt Claire comfortingly.

“I don’t want to be known as a husband stealer,” she dreadfully said.

“I don’t think, you have anything to worry about,” said Aunt Claire as she chewed on her peanut butter cookie.

“You remind me so much of your Mother Taffy,” commented Aunt Claire.

Just then, her brown eyes gaze deeply into Aunt Claire’s cobalt blue eyes as her frowned face reshaped to a light smile.

“Some of your mother’s favorite songs are on this cd, ‘How Am I Supposed to Live Without You,’ by Michael Bolton,” added Aunt Claire.

“Taffy had that same look of love in her eyes, as I see that same look of love in your eyes,” she said as the music by Michael Bolton played in the background in the kitchen.

“Vividly, I can still see the same tears that swelled in her eyes then, that, I see swelling in your eyes now,” Aunt Claire grasped as she gazes tangibly at her niece. Although, she witnessed her aunt’s own regret at the table.

“Well. These songs will cause anybody to reflect backwards in time,” she chuckled lightly.

“Importantly, history has its own unique way of circling back around, haunting just whomever it chooses,” said Aunt Claire bewitchingly.

Jaylon-Rose sat rather quietly as Aunt Claire deviated away from Winston to swerve abruptly upon her Mother Taffy. After finishing the rest of her coffee, she was feeling a bit sleepy from all that crying so, she drew up from her chair and gave Aunt Claire a kiss on the cheek.

“Thank you for inviting me for coffee and cookies,”

“Your welcome Jay.”

She wines around the foyer and grabs hold of the banister and travels up the stairs to her bedroom toting a sad and tired face.

“What’s wrong Jay?” Asked Uncle Rich as he met her in the hallway.

“Everything,” she said disappointedly.

“Whatever is going on will soon pass,” said Uncle Rich.

“I hope it hurry’s up,” she signed.

“Me too,” added Uncle Rich with a warm smile.

“Thank you and good night,” she replied.

Lastly, Frank was retiring also as he passed down the hall with his hickory walking cane inching and tapping his way to his bedroom. Jaylon-Rose’s phone on her nightstand was ringing and she picked it up said, “hello.”

“Jay. Please hear me out. First, I want to say, I am sorry,” said Winston.

“I am sorry too.” she rushes in to say.

“Jay. I love you,” he said.

“I love you too,” she replied.

“Can I see you tomorrow?” He asked.

“Yes!” She quickly replied.

After that, they held each other on the phone all night and just before the break of dawn. At times, Winston laid still listening to the sounds of her breathing. However, he despised the thought of attempting to disturb her awake verses not having the heart to hang up.

“Jay.” he gently spoke into the phone.

“Hey, you’re asleep. I will talk to you tomorrow,” he said.

“No-no. No. I am not,” she denies being sleepy. “Tell me one of your hunting stories?” She asked. He could not deny her either. Just barely two minutes into the story, they both fell asleep together. The next day, Winston drove over to-Aunt Claire’s house. Winston asked Jaylon-Rose to ride with him to Bollinger Mill to have a picnic.

“I love you Winston Paul,” she said.

“My magic spell must be working on you?” Replied Winston as he turned to yawn.

“Must be,” she said yawning too, as they both laughed and kissed. Aunt Claire and her Father Frank smiled widely from the kitchen door entrance, upon returning to his armchair in the living room. She goes into the kitchen to see what Aunt Claire had packed for their picnic basket with Winston tracking closely behind her, she peered inside the wooden picnic basket that was on the table.

“Everything, looks beautiful, thank you!” She said with a cheery smile and grasped the handled of the wooden picnic basket and kissed Aunt Claire on the cheek.

“Your welcome sweetie,” she said.

On the way out the door, she put down the picnic basket by Winston’s feet and walked over to kiss her Father Frank, who was tapping the side of his leather cheek with his finger, as he sat in his armchair by the long window. Nevertheless, she gave him a goodbye hug than out of nowhere, Aunt Claire shows up holding her favorite quilt, just before, she rushes out the front door without it. She shot a smile at her thoughtful aunt and closed the front door. Winston had already picked-up the wooden picnic basket, that she sat down by his feet earlier and carried it out to his car. Not to mention, he was standing patiently by the open passenger car door waiting on her.

However, his compromised time was compensated indescribable, having her silk down on the white leather seat in a floral dress that fluttered around her knees. A chic flower and leaf embellished wavy brim sun hat, projected poise to her masterpiece look with her handmade star quilt folded nicely on her lap. Winston swung around the rear end of the Mustang up to his driver door and guided the classic cherry red Mustang into the direction of highway 00. Smiling at each other holding hands. This was marking the beginning look of their love, journeying to Bollinger Mill State Park. A happiness, she felt deep inside that beamed in her eyes. Embarking on a romantic picnic at the 19th Century Heitman’s Grist Mill, that is made of brick and stone.

They hand-picked, the perfect shade tree with a picnic table under it and preserved the cozy area by sitting the wooden picnic basket zealously down. She then, extend out a hand-stitched multi-color star quilt for them to lay on. Her true favorite Grandmother Lane Bruce handmade this quilt for her, a Christmas long ago in New Orleans. Even more so, the handmade star quilt held every stitch of her favorite memories with her Mother Taffy’s side of the family. The handmade star quilt was placed underneath them, she then nestled close to Winston by the waterfall that spilled out into the lower part of the channel. Jaylon-Rose reaches for her camera, she lowered her head back down onto Winston’s arm to take their pictures. Shortly thereafter, she hopelessly slid into his embrace and welcomed the warm lips that sought hers.

Once, breaking loose from his tangible touch to offer their romantic food of small sandwiches, chocolate covered strawberries, cubed cheese, baby size pretzels, grapes and one dark chocolate bar. Lastly, she handed him the wine bottle, he then popped the cork in full throttle, he poured the wine into their glasses. A toast to their romantic picnic, their glasses clinked then swigged a mouthful of wine with much delight and laughter.

“Let’s eat?”

“Yes!” He grabs her and lays her down on the handmade star quilt using his mouth with the course of desirably kissing her neck. Jaylon-Rose squirm, squealed, and giggled. Once again, they untangled from each other, she freely picked out some chocolate covered strawberries for their outdoor dinner for two. Her nourishing faith in him was symbolized on the handmade star quilt. First, her soft delicate hands administer grapes to his mouth as she cradled his head on her lap, accompanied by a tang of the Whitewater River in the air. Next, they fed each other chocolate covered strawberries and kissed with the taste of chocolate on their lips. He trailed hot kisses down her neck. Jaylon-Rose is feeling overwhelmed with his scent, his touch that set fire to a desire stronger than any she ever experienced. Vastly, lying on their sides facing each other with a gentle breeze stirring the leaves and rippling the surface of the Whitewater River, the warmth of the sun’s rays shined onto the earth’s soil.

By this time, they were yawning with their very full stomachs and dozed off on the handmade star quilt. During their peaceful slumber, one after another, cars were pulling up and getting out of their cars in-which, led to their misfortune, the noise of the people spooked them awake, as they walked up to claim nearby picnic tables.

Although, they were napping on some of the forty-three acres that surrounds, a historic and still working grist mill powered by the Whitewater River and the vintage covered bridge. The mill still contains all the necessary equipment to produce flour and wheat, dating back to the Civil War. However, in the south each community had their own mill since bread was a staple of the diet at the time.

At this point, they were looking at each other and jumped up to their feet, laughing.

She snatched up her handmade star quilt from the ground and fanned it a couple of times in the air to get the grass off and grabbed the wooden picnic basket and sat it in the back seat of Winston’s Mustang. Winston took out his guitar and put the strap on his shoulder. They stopped to kiss then continued to stroll inside historic park with Winston’s arm wrapped around her waist and Winston’s guitar strapped to his back, heading to the block wall behind the mill. Once there, they spotted a place to sit down with their feet dangling in the air and gazing out at the Whitewater River. Winston leaned in for a quick kiss and repositions his self on the wall.

You could see the happiness in her brown eyes, that were watching Winston swing his guitar around in front of him. He started to sing and strum on his guitar, the song by Otis Redding, “Sitting on the Dock of the Bay,” as they sat closely on the block wall of the Historic Gristmill. Two teenage boys were fishing in their view down below but decided, to spring up to their feet and moved to the front of the mill and started walking towards the vintage covered bridge.

“Can’t you just imagine hearing the early settlers in cover wagons passing through this vintage bridge with their families?” She candidly asked.

“Frankly, I can hear the tangible sounds of the horses trotting hoofs echoing inside the walls of this bridge. I can vividly see a plain and simple lady in need of a smile, wearing a beige colored bonnet tied under her chin. Her long muted colored full skirt reached the ground with modest knee length stockings and leather low heeled lace-up boots with her hands resting properly on her lap. The husband has a long beard with serious eyes, wearing a brown wide-brimmed straw hat, dressed in a canvas shirt with deer leather suspenders and cotton trousers that she had made for him. Just trotting along with their two quiet young girls dressed in colored cotton gingham, a flowered print, and matching bonnets,” she said as she spun a creative colorful imagery of a pioneer family passing through the vintage bridge heading to their homestead that was on a chunk of land.

“Wow! Nice story. Ok, here goes my covered bridge story,” he narrative.

“I can see a headless horseman trotting up at dusk, from the other side of that hill over there,” with his finger pointed towards the southwest. “I can also clearly hear the vastly, anticipated sounds of the headless horseman looking for his head, that was decapitated by an American cannonball, and the shattered remains of his head that were left on the battlefield while his comrades hastily carried his body away. Recklessly, the headless horseman riding horseback, as his eerie gallops approach this cover bridge. It takes the horseman all night to trot through to the other side of this vintage covered bridge,” said Winston with a mangled look that was aimed to playfully scare her.

“Well. The light inside this old bridge is fading into darkness anyway,” she said eye bawling the hillside that Winston pointed at.

They began to travel back to the car with Winston falling back behind her to light a cigarette.

“Hurry up before the headless horseman gets us!” Winston chuckled as he gallops behind her like, he is riding horseback.

She rushed to the car and shut her car door as fast as she could and locked it. Winston chuckled at her, putting his guitar in the backseat along-side of her wooden picnic basket. He grabs hold of the door handle and settles under his retro slot steering wheel and stretched across the console towards her.

“Kiss me mademoiselle.” She met him half the way and puckered her lips.

Winston turns the key over in the ignition and revs up the 289 engine and chuckles at Jaylon-Rose and took off squealing tires.

“Was that story you told me back there even true?” She asked.

“Actually, I borrowed it from the short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” by Author Washington Irving. You know, Ichabod Crane?” He chuckles.

“Oh yes. The movie, “Sleepy Hollow.”

“Yes. I thought that story was most fitting for the covered bridge,” he chuckled.

“I hate to admit it, it was perfect and unnerving,” she added.

“So, you find it amusing to scare me, huh?” She asked with a grin.

“Well, yeah, you have that little girl cuteness that I am falling hard for,” he said.

She felt loved and safe as they held hands. So, at this point, they were riding around on what was left of the evening and ended up back in Cape Girardeau’s business district. Winston parked his cherry red Mustang across the street from the club where they first met. She pulled a warm white crochet shawl around her dress and got out after Winston open the car door for her. Their feet walked in sync, once they stepped onto the sidewalk to a line of closed shops, except for a corner diner that was still open with a few late-night customers perched at the counter eating.

Like most nights and this one was no different, Cape’s nightclubs and bars were now open and coming to life with attractive black iron pole lamps providing light for the downtown business district. The French enrich tapestry backdrop in the downtown Cape Girardeau, soulfully keeps the bluesy jazz heart of New Orleans, that intertwines with a wistful affection for the lower Mississippi River that is overcome with a, acute nostalgia, that made it rich with its profound history. Although the city is better known, as the Rose City to its residents. It was now one-minute past midnight with a light steady rain and not so far away in the distance thunder could be heard rumbling, just after the lightening had lit-up the stormy Missouri sky. Winston reached behind him and grabbed his umbrella and opens it up, as he guided Jaylon-Rose by her hand that was clasped safely into his.

They huddled under a changing traffic light with Winston holding the umbrella over their heads. He cleverly posed in the symbol of a mistletoe bringing her lips closed to his that kept her in awe, looking up at him under the blessed sign that he had made especially for their kiss. And after, tenderly, he led her into a slow dance with her soft round cheek pressed up against his unshaven face. She giggled out loud at how romantic he was being. “I can easily fall in love with this kind of craziness!” She giggled so happily.

“I am not done yet,” he said.

He twirled the umbrella in his hand like Gene Kelley and singing the classic song “Singing in the Rain,” she threw her head back in laughter with the rain falling, down from the sky like teardrops that landed on her round face. She never dreamt of dancing in the middle of the street in the pouring rain with a handsome man. Silently, she asked God to never allow this night to end as her eyes loved on him. Directly across the dessert streets was the club where they met. This night enabled her to forget Winston, ever had an ex-wife or even yesterday did not existed either. Perhaps, this night confirmed it and made it quite believable this was her whirl wind of love.

From the corner diner that was still open, a waitress could not resist peering out from the diner’s large bay window with white country curtains. The waitress was sweeping the floor then just stopped holding the broom in her hands, gazing out at the dancing couple. Winston and Jaylon-Rose danced in the light rain with her dark brown eye lashes fluttering, just as he scooped her up into his arms and let go of the umbrella that dropped on the wet street by his side. She was the happiest girl that rainy night as they passionately kissed with her feet suspended in mid-air.

The intense kiss dialed up their pulse numbers, just as their attraction for each other sizzled through their bloodstream as he gently set her back down on her feet. He picked up his umbrella from the wet road and handed it to her to hold, while he bowed down at her feet and took her hand and kissed the top of it. He gazed up at her round pretty face with her hand shaking inside of his. Un-certainty showed up in her brown eyes, gazing down at him and listening carefully.

“I brought you here for two reasons,” said Winston as he gazes into her brown eyes.

“One, this is the night of our anniversary. Second reason is I am in love with you, Jay.”

“Will you marry me, Jay?” He genuinely asks. Few moments went by that seem like a thousand years as he held his gaze on her round pretty face waiting for an answer. She answers nervously as tears fell from her brown eyes that moisten her soft round cheeks.

“My French blood is telling me to say no but my heart is telling me to say yes.” She said shaking.

“Tell your French blood to give in to me,” he whispered.

“Marry me, Jay. I do not want to live my life without you. I won’t let your French blood down, I promise to love you forever,” he promised.

With his nervous hand, he gave her a black velvet box, she stood still frozen while she opens it the black box that reveal a gorgeous sparkling diamond engagement ring that was on a white satin pillow.

“Oh, Winston this ring is so beautiful,” she cried.

“Like you Jay,”

He gently took the box from her clasps then drops it back inside his pocket, he then slipped the engagement ring on her finger, he heaved up from his bended knee, she wrapped her slender arms around his neck. He picked her up like a little girl and swung her around in circles kissing her. Suddenly, out of nowhere appeared a 1969 Shelby came roaring down the slick glossy street. The shiny car had to swerve around Winston, who was holding his soon wife to be. The driver slowed down, he narrowed his eyes at his best friend Winston holding a woman up in his arms, he passed by to stick out his head out the driver side window and yelled out loud at Winston.

“Get out of the road, loser! Why aren’t you playing at the Crawfish tonight?” Yelled Dawg. Winston knew, who it was and stuck out his middle finger.

“I got better things to do tonight,” answered Winston.

“I see that, does she have a sister?” He chuckled.

“No but, she has a single-girlfriend,” replied Winston.

“Hook a friend up! Later mate!” Chuckled Dawg.

“You know that guy?” Asked Jaylon-Rose, as Winston set her down on her feet.

“Yeah, that crazy fool is my best friend Danny,” grin Winston while attaching his gazed unto his best friend Danny’s red taillights that were growing smaller down the street.

“I should have guessed that” she said with a smile.

“Yeah, you’ll like him,” said Winston as his eyes widen at the police car that rolled slowly out from a side street. Just then, the car buzzed its siren coming to a complete stop, where Winston and Jaylon-Rose were standing. The police officer got out and made his way over to them. She gave Winston a nervous look, just as, Winston gave a faint look back.

“We had a call ‘bout two subjects loitering, do you have a car?” Ask the probing police officer while pointing a flashlight in their face.

“Yes sir.” Winston pointed his finger across the street, where his car was parked.

“Walk me over there to it,” said the police officer.

“What is your name. I will need to see your driver’s license, Ids, insurance and registration?” Questioned the police officer.

Once, they crossed the street and stood at the rear end of Winston’s car providing their adequate information to hopefully satisfy the police officer.

“My name is Winston Paul, and yes, I got all of that for you to see,” said Winston then Jaylon-Rose step forward and politely gave her name “Jaylon-Rose Seabaugh.” Winston thrust out his wallet and dug out his driver’s license and handed it to the officer. She opens the passenger car door and reaches in to grab her handbag from the floorboard, then retrieves her driver’s license from her pink fuzzy wallet and hands it to the officer. Winston grabbed his insurance and registration out of his glovebox. The police officer shined his light on their licenses, insurance, and registration then, aimed his flashlight in the car then, got on his radio to run Winston’s license plate number in. Winston and Jaylon-Rose swapped looks at each other.

“Look, I am sorry, if we spooked anyone. All I was doing was proposing to my girl.”

“In the rain?” Ask the police officer.

“Yes sir. I thought it was a romantic idea until you showed up,” Winston grinned crookedly. However, the police officer was not amused to say the least.

“You could be arrested for loitering alone?” They both shook their heads no at the officer. He gazes at two of them with a scornful eye.

“It makes businesses around here nervous,” said officer as he aims his light down on the floorboards of the car.

“Ok I get that but, we are not loitering,” said Winston.

Jaylon-Rose nodded her head no-in agreement with Winston.

In the meantime, a dispatcher gave a clear report on Winston Paul and Jaylon-Rose Seabaugh. The police officer, then, parted ways from Winston and Jaylon-Rose, who were left standing at the rear chrome bumper of his Mustang. Once, they were back in the car, they drew in air from their lungs and exhaled nervously through their mouth that inflated their lips.

“Whoosh.” said Winston.

He stuck the key in the ignition and gazed at her sitting quietly in her seat.

“Wow,” said Winston. She closed her eyes while resting her aching head back on the headrest then reached up to rub her throbbing temples. Winston drove to a nearby convenient store and before shutting the off the car-he revs up the engine a couple of times. He bails out his car as his door made a clicked sound, he caught up with Jaylon-Rose and stepped out in front of her, to open the door as they enter the convenient store. Just as, she eyed around the store for a rest room then spotted a sign and made a beeline down a hallway. Winston stepped over to the fountain drink area where he selected a grape flavored soda. He then, picked-up a small bottle of ibuprofens for Jaylon-Rose. Winston was walking down the aisle when he saw Karrie walked up giggling with her new boyfriend. The sounds of her long bobbing earrings could be heard Chia-ling from the next aisle over. She steps out in the open in her animal print fur collar jean jacket and tight white leather mini skirt, high heel red shoes and loud perfumed. They both made eye contact. She then, pranced off in the store giggling. Winston stood there with his plastic cup and bottle of ibuprofens in his hands looking a bit surprised.

“Aren’t you the dude that sings at the Crawfish?” Karrie’s boyfriend questioned as he walked up behind Winston.

“Yeah-what about it?” Answers, Winston without turning around.

“Don’t quit your day job,” he chuckled.

“Where did you find this guy at, the zoo?” Winston asked Karrie who was now standing in front of Winston.

“Does it bother you?” Karrie asked.

“No. But, you are brave for bringing that out in public,” laughed Winston.

“How dare you, Winston Paul,” Karrie hissed with her boyfriend growling cussed words at Winston.

“No, how dare you?” Chuckled Winston.

Karrie then spotted Jaylon-Rose coming out of the restroom.

“Leave her alone,” warned Winston looking at Karrie’s icy blue eyes glaring at Jaylon-Rose.

“Aww, isn’t she just a sweet, pretty thing, like Dorothy, aww, where is Toto her little dog?” Chuckled Karrie.

“Shut-up Karrie!” Winston said.

“Oh, does it bother you?” Karrie asked.

“Yes, it does,” he replied as Karrie’s face turned with jealousy.

“What’s going on?” Asked Jaylon-Rose.

In the meantime, Winston kept an eye on the baby blonde-haired woman traveling out the door with a grumbling man.

“Nothing, Jay,” signed Winston while giving them a final piercing eye.

“Who are they?” She asked as she could sense the hostility between the three of them.

“Nobody,” he snapped.

She too watched them go out the door with the rain adding a chill to the night air that blew in the store. She gazed at Winston and noticed the change in his face and could feel his anger. She went onto grabbing a bag of trail mix and a diet soda and stood in line with Winston holding her hand tightly. Winston opened the car door for her and stood outside long enough to smoke a cigarette and stew on Karrie and her new boyfriend.

Jaylon-Rose noticed he was upset as he took his last drag off his cigarette before flipping it in the air and getting in the car. He revs up his 289 Engine and squealed tires out of the parking lot. While traveling down the highway and for the next twenty miles, he was quiet and hugged the door panel. She simply could not handle another mile of silence when she reached for the dial on the radio.

“Did those people back there upset you to the point, you have to ignore me?” She asked.

He gave her an evil look, “those people are jerks, okay,” he growled.

“Ok. I get that. Well, at least you are talking to me, again, she smiled showing her white straight teeth. Soon after, he reached for her hand and gently squeezed it and gave her a much softer look. Jaylon-Rose peered out the window with a perplexed face. Winston pulled up in the driveway and shut off the engine. He was silent and deliberate to collect his thoughts.

“Does this mean, you’re having second thoughts about us?” She asked with epitome of grace and goodness. Winston turned with a poignant control charge at her and said “No!” It does not. I am just not good company right now.” He answered.

“Okay,” she said opening the car door.

“Wait,’ he said while stretching to grab her arm with their eyes locked in place, he leaned over to lightly kiss her. He gently held the sides of her face in his hands then he released her. Winston waited and watched her walked into the house and slowly backed out of the driveway. Jaylon-Rose walked in disappointedly and flew upstairs with crushed feelings, and flopping on the bed missing Winston, so bad that she could just scream. She hated being dropped off with her anxiety getting the best of her.

Two hours pasted by then four hours went by without a phone call from Winston and she was dying inside. Not having much of an appetite, when Aunt Claire told her that dinner was ready to come downstairs. She swallowed deeply and trailed downstairs into the dining room and sat down at the table with her Aunt Claire, Uncle Rich, and her Father Frank, faking a smile and quickly joining in on passing the bowl of mashed potatoes around the table. In the meantime, only putting small serving on her plate and force down some food, so she would not be hassled with questions of why her sudden loss, of appetite. So, she sat quietly nibbling on her food and listening to her Father Frank and Uncle Rich’s nonstop chatter, about getting tickets for the St. Louis Cardinal’s game.

Jaylon-Rose got up with Aunt Claire to help clean up the kitchen and gather up the dishes from the table as her father and uncle moved to the living room to talk more about the Cardinal’s game. The phone was ringing, and Jaylon-Rose’s eyes darted at it with hopes it was Winston but instead it was Mrs. Talent calling about her curtains. Jaylon Rose’s face fell with sadness then she eyed the newspaper that was rolled up on the counter, Aunt Claire saw Jay looking at it, “take it, we are done with it,” said Aunt Claire. Jay picks the newspaper up and went back upstairs to her bedroom. Upon opening-up her door to her lively eggshell bedroom walls that were a breath of fresh air, instead of that stuffy filled kitchen as she gladly shut her bedroom door. She climbs into her bed and pulls down her quilt that her Aunt Claire made and turns on the TV then unfolded the newspaper and read the first couple of pages then turn quickly to the horoscope section with her pen in her mouth, she gazes down to read her horoscope and circles it and folded the newspaper up.

“If you’re single? Listen for bells to ring,” she said it again and again with smiling face that powered down on her pillow.

Chapter 10

The digital clock was showing it was seven thirty in the morning, boldly displaying on her nightstand. Not to mention, it was nearly eight o’clock, when she had gotten up and made it to the bathroom. First, she washed her hands and saw her messy hair in the mirror, she picked up a hairbrush and ran it through her chestnut-colored tangled hair.

In the meantime, she stared steadily into the mirror before lowering her reflection, she splashed cool water onto her face with both hands, pressing the water onto her skin for a good measurable of seconds. She grabbed a towel with her left hand and patted her face dry. Next, she was brushing her teeth and swishing the water around in her mouth and spit in the sink and held back her hair. Last, blotted her mouth with a towel and twisted up her hair into a bun. She opens the bathroom door and happily treaded downstairs with the fragrance of the dark roasted coffee brewing in the kitchen, that was strongly filling her nostrils.

“Good morning jay,” said Aunt Claire.

“Good morning,” said Jaylon-Rose reaching up in the cupboard for a coffee cup.

“Do you have to work today?” Asked Aunt Claire sipping on her coffee.

“No. And if they call, just say, I went missing,” she giggled grabbing one of Aunt Claire’s buttermilk biscuits.

The phone started ringing as Jaylon-Rose was drinking her coffee and eating a biscuit by the counter standing next to her aunt, who was standing in front of the stove, attending to her sausage patties frying. Just the same, Aunt Claire leaned over to answer the phone.

“Hello. Good morning to you, too. Well, matter of fact, she’s standing right here,” said Aunt Claire.

Jaylon-Rose perked up and eye bawled her Aunt Claire and lip synced, “who is it?” She asked.

“Take it and find out,” she replied.

“Hello,” she spoke softly into the phone.

“Good morning beautiful,” said Winston.

“Good morning handsome,” she said smiling widely at her aunt moving out of the kitchen with her cup of coffee.

Aunt Claire had a pleasing smile on her face, turning over her sausage patties with a fork in her iron skillet. It was an hour later, when Jaylon-Rose came running into the kitchen, “Aunt Claire, Uncle Rich, where are you,” she called.

“Were in the kitchen talking with my sister-in-law Marjorie,” answered Aunt Claire. Marjorie was every bit of old fashion, plump, jolly, with short thick pepper gray hair and a nylon scarf tied loosely around her double chin.

“Hello jay! How are you?” Asked Marjorie cheerfully.

“Hi Marjorie. I’m fine, thank you,” replied Jaylon-Rose.

“That’s good to hear,” she answered.

She leaned forward to kiss her aunt and uncle goodbye. Aunt Claire looked up at Jaylon-Rose.

“Where are you off too?”

“I’m going over to Winston’s house, and I’ll try to be back for dinner,” said Jaylon-Rose with excitement in her voice.

“See you later Jay,” smiled Aunt Claire.

“Where is Jay going?” Asked Uncle Rich.

“Jay is going to visit Winston, who lives in Dutchtown,” she replied.

She then, gazed over at Marjorie and said, “it was nice seeing you.”

“Nice to see you too,” said Marjorie.

Aunt Claire, Uncle Rich resumed their conversation at the dining room table. As well as Marjorie biting generously into the middle of her cinnamon bun. Besides that, she wipes the corners of her mouth, that left a copy of her red lipstick on the paper napkin as the chatter picks up. Jaylon-Rose heard the background noise fluently that was coming from the dining room, as she goes out the front door. She got in her black Grand Prix, started up the engine, and roared down the street headed to Dutchtown. She pulled into his paved driveway and parked her black Gran Prix, gazing briefly at his house then, grabbed her handbag off the passenger seat. She became startled at the sight of Winston, who was already standing by her car door. And after, easing out of her driver seat with her handbag as she drew up to him. In the flutter of her eyelashes, she became weak in the knees, while gazing into his possessing pale blue eyes. All the while, this was allowing him to successfully, seize the moment and hence his lips onto hers.

He then, shut her car door and took her by the hand. They enter in through the kitchen ack door, when she smelt a clean pine scent, as she looked comfortably around at his neat home that was set in the eighties style. On course to the living room, he invited her to sit down on the couch, where she first saw Winston’s guitar on a stand. She eyed the family church portraits and school pictures of Winston, other than that, the paneled walls were bare.

“Did you have any trouble finding the place?” He asked.

“No. Not at all,” she answered.

“Good,” he said.

“How long have you lived here?” Asked Jaylon-Rose as she meshed her hands between her knees.

“Since I was ‘bout seven,” grinned Winston gazing at her knees.

“Is this your parent’s home?”

“Well, it was. I inherited it after they died,” he replied.

“May I ask, what happen to your parents?” She questioned.

“Yes. Sad to say, my parents were struck by a train after a Sunday night church service,” he said.

“Oh, that’s terrible, sorry for your loss,” she said, feeling bad for asking.

“No. It’s okay-really,” he assured her.

Jaylon-Rose cast her eyes on his living room just as, he kept his eyes on her the whole time.

“Can I use your bathroom?” She suddenly asked.

“Absolutely, the bathroom is at the end of the hallway. Whoever built this house must have not wanted to hear bathroom noises,” smiled Winston.

“Ok, that’s comforting to know,” she said with a half-smile.

Once in the bathroom, she gazed around and noticed, a make-up bag, female clothing, and feminine products as she sat down on the toilet. And after, washing her hands, she felt uncomfortable and jealous especially after seeing a woman’s belongings residing in the bathroom as she gazed at her reflection. Lastly, she opens the bathroom door and filters down the hall back to the living room, and where she left Winston sitting on the couch waiting. She sat down beside him trying to be still in her skin, but her shaky hands were showing she was nervous.

“Is everything alright?” He asked.

“Yes, I’m just cold natured, I guess,” she answered.

“Allow me to put my warm blanket on you,” said Winston.

“Thank you. So-ah. Does your wife still live here?” She asked.

“Ex-wife, no,” he replied.

“You must have saw my ex-wife’s left-over stuff while in the bathroom,” he emits.

“Well yes, I did. Just wondered.” She drew in a deep breath and exhaled nervously looking out the living room window at every car passing by.

“You have nothing to worry about. Would you like something to drink?” He asked.

“Sure,” she said.

But honestly, she was craving a mixed drink to calm her nerves.

“Are you in the mood for some hot cocoa, and snuggling outside on the front porch swing with a warm fuzzy blanket?” He asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

Quite frankly, she never in a million years expected to hear that come out of his mouth.

“Sounds perfect, crazy romantic, and I would be nuts not to accept,” she delightfully said.

“I totally agree, let’s take this party to the porch swing,” he said.

All the while, she gazed deeply into his intoxicating pale blue eyes. She sprung up to her feet and followed him to the kitchen. So now, she was standing by the counter watching him, as her eyes drifted away like a leaf taken by the wind. At this point, Winston looked over at her and witness the far-away gaze that was in her brown eyes, admiring her pretty, round face.

“Do you like marshmallows?” He abruptly asked.

“Yes. Love them,” she said.

In the meantime, she tucked her hands inside the back pockets of her jeans and

watched him count and drop eight mini marshmallows into each cup then slid a cup over to her with a spoon.

“So, is eight your favorite number or are you just superstitious with marshmallows?”

“Maybe, maybe not,” he answered coyly.

“Please tell me, why you put exactly eight marshmallows into each cup?” She asked.

“What’s in it for me?” He questioned.

“How did this turn into a business proposition?” She smiles while shaking her head to this weird moment that was turning cute real fast.

She stirs her cocoa with eight marshmallows in it with a teaspoon, she took the spoon out and laid it down on a napkin. She smiled reaching for her cup and took a sip she then, lifted her soft brown eyes that met his that were already searching into hers.

“Join me on the porch swing. The sky is endlessly blue and perfect,” he poetically said.

He grabs a blanket off the couch and gentlemanly held open the full glass storm door for her once she stepped out on the porch and sat down first on the swing with her cup of hot cocoa. She marveled at the picture, perfect day, just as, he had described. He then, covered the blanket over her and joins her on the swing. And after sitting down, his eyes dared not to stare at her beautiful face or the gentle breeze that was blowing through her beautiful chestnut- colored swirls of long curls, that was making his heart skip a beat. He sipped on his hot cocoa then, sat his cup down on the wicker glass top table and pushes the swing back and forth as he held her in his arms with the chained creaking.

“Look, a deer!” Jaylon-Rose excitedly said.

“Yeah, I see it. You like the great outdoors?” He asked gazing at her pretty face.

“I do,” she answered with a cheery smile.

As they both watch the deer walk on the edge of Winston’s property.

“Hang on while I get my rifle.”

Winston pretended to rise-up from the swing as she yanked his arm back, “don’t you dare,” she gasped.

“Wow, calm down, I was only joking?” He emits.

“I used to hunt but not anymore,” he signed with thoughts of his beloved dog Agatha.

“Now, I just keep a salt block out there.”

“You do?” She asked.

“Yes. I really do-right over there, along that fence line,” said Winston pointing his finger at the fence.

“What? What kind of person do you think I am?” He questioned.

“Very romantic and handsome.” she shrunk down with a cowardly smile.

“Your, wanting to buy some brownie points,” chuckled Winston.

He drove his hands into tickling her, she squirmed and wiggled her way off the swing, then she took off running.

“You want to play catch me if you can?! You remember, what happen to the gingerbread man?”

“No. What?” She asked.

He just kept a sharp eye on her as she ran around an oak tree.

“The fox ate the tasty little gingerbread man,” he chuckled.

He then, jumps out and grabs her and tackles her to the ground with half of his body pinning her down. They both were breathing hard with their hearts beating together. To say the least, he felt his heart pounding in his throat as he rolled off her body to get a grip on his emotions. She sat up against the oak tree feeling a bit worked up with butterflies in her stomach. There were several minutes of silence between them with only her gazing at him as he looked up at the Missouri endless blue sky.

“What are you thinking about?” She asked.

“If I should devour you now or wait later,” he smiled.

“Seriously,” she asked.

“Ok, if you insist. I am thinking about us getting married and you becoming my beautiful bride. Thinking of the best songs for our wedding day,” he articulated.

“Honestly, you were thinking that?”

And after, pulling her down and deeply kissing her that was taking her breath away until their lips separated that allowed her to breathe again.

“Yes. Honestly,” he said. So, do you like poetry?” He asked.

“Yes. I do. My mother wrote poetry,” she smiled overwhelmingly.

“Ah, mother like daughter?” He questioned.

“I am told that. I love reading my mother’s writings.”

“Maybe one of these days you will write something about us. Something like Bonnie and Clyde,” he added while chewing on a long stem of grass.

“I don’t think so,” she laughed.

However, I am a fan of Bonnie’s famous poem, “The Story of Bonnie and Clyde” and it is believed to be the last one she wrote according to the legend reports that Bonnie gave a copy to her mother just weeks before the couple was gunned down. This poem will remain in the wind of our hearts and minds forever,” she said sincerely.

“Well, don’t laugh too hard, Sara laughed too and gave birth to a son at ninety,” he chuckled.

“So, are you still wanting to know about the eight marshmallows that’s in our two cozy cups of cocoa, that is probably cold by now?” He asked.

“Yes. I admit, I am still curious about that,” she replied.

Winston heaved up from the ground then extended his hand down to her then they walked back to the front porch holding hands.

“What is so special about the number 8,” she questioned.

“Number 8 represents infinity goes on forever and that Mademoiselle is us.”

Winston picked up both cups and went into the house to warm up the cocoa in the microwave. In the meantime, she was back on the swing with the thick blanket on her lap, pushing the swing back and forth with her heart smiling. She played back the words Winston had said to her as the wind blew in her face.

A stillness rapidly came over her, when she noticed a shiny black SUV slowing down to a crawl with dark tinted windows in front of Winston’s house. She stopped the swing with the top of her sneakers and narrows her eyes to try to see, who was driving the car. Moments later, Winston trailed out of the house, with the two warm cups of cocoa in his hands.

“Now, we can pick up-where we left off,” said Winston handing her the newly heated cup of hot cocoa.

“Something wrong?” He asked.

He noticed, she appeared uneasy and different, sitting down on the swing beside her.

“No, I am fine,” she answered.

As a result, she appeared frozen in thought, tightly holding her warm cup with both hands. He scooted over closer offering a gentle smile and warmth.

“Did something happen, while I was gone?” He asked.

She shook her head no and braced her lips in.

“Come on. What is it, Jay?” He asked tenderly.

“Maybe. I’m over-reacting,” she commented.

“Let me be the judge of that,” he said.

“Ok,” she paused. A car slowed down in front of your house with dark tinted windows and when you came out the car sped off in a hurry,” she said.

“I agree, you’re over-reacting. Maybe he or she was looking for someone on this street,” he replied.

“Come here mademoiselle, you are safe with me,” he said.

She started scooting over closer to him as the swing rocked back and forth resting her head on his chest.

“Don’t be paranoid about Karrie,” he said with assurance.

In the meantime, she nodded her head at him as they sipped on their cocoa as the sun shined down on them that added some extra warmth, with the birds tweeting in nearby trees. Foghorn the rooster walked proudly keeping a dominating eye on the little brown hens that were wondering and pecking on the ground. They sat down their empty cups on the wicker glass tabletop. Winston lifted her chin to line-up with his mouth and gently pressed his lips onto hers. She wrapped her arms around him as he caresses the back of her neck and slips his hand underneath her curly chestnut hair. At this point, it was a headlight flash that got Winston’s attention to peer at the road, seeing Karrie’s vehicle idling at a neighbor’s driveway and quickly withdrawing his hands from her neck.

“Something wrong?” She asks poignantly.

“Nothing,” he answered.

“Are you sure?” Jaylon-Rose questioned him.

Her mind held the image of the make-up bag in the bathroom and the mystery vehicle.

He cradled her small round pretty face in his hands then anxiously turned away to open the full glass storm door. On the other hand, she was struck by the sudden changes in him stepping inside the house. Furthermore, Winston did not waste anytime shooting to the kitchen table, to sit down and start reading the newspaper. She stood gazing at him very strangely, feeling a headache coming on, rubbing her temples.

“You got a headache?” Asked Winston.

“Yes,” she answered.

He folded up the newspaper in half and laid it down on the table and got up and stood behind her and massaged her head.

“It’s so achy,’ she said lowly.

“Maybe, I should go,” she suggested.

“I was hoping, you would stay for dinner,” he said with puppy dog eyes.

“I can’t. I told Aunt Claire, I would try to be home for dinner,” she signed.

“Well, I don’t see anything laid out,” she grasped.

“Sure, you do,” he said.

He quickly scrambled to the refrigerator to grab steaks out of the freezer and after that, he spun around to grab two big baking potatoes out of the wooden bin and asked, “will you join me for dinner mademoiselle?”

She giggled at Winston while covering her mouth as she thought of Beauty and the Beast. Although Winston brought her hand down from her mouth and said, “your smile is way too pretty to cover up.”

Her smiled became relaxed, as she reached up to rub her forehead in a circular motion.

“Boy, you got a bad headache, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she answered tiredly.

“Rest on the couch, I will wake you when it’s ready.”

Winston takes her by the hand and guided her into the living room to lay down and covers her with the warm blanket and kisses her gently on the lips as she closes her heavy brown eyes. After that, he moves over to the window and holds the curtain back and squints his eyes at a vehicle that is slowing down. Just then, Jaylon-Rose started stirring around on the couch calling for Winston, he quickly dropped the curtain and rushes over to her.

“Would you please get me some water?” She mumbled.

He jumped up and went to the kitchen to get it and came back with a glass of water as she sits up half-way to look inside her handbag for a bottle of ibuprofens then dropped the tablets in the palm of her hand.

“Are you alright?” He asked caringly.

“I will be, once this kicks in,” she replied.

He returned to the kitchen and began cooking. A good half hour later, she began stirring around to the smell of steaks cooking. She got up when, she seen Winston in the kitchen preparing a salad. She hugged him sweetly and laid the side of her face up against his back.

“Did your headache go away?” He asked.

“Yes, for the most part,” she answered.

Eventually, she swayed back to the living room with the plan to lay back down on the couch. Instead, she willfully dodged the couch to perhaps, get a closer look at the pictures displayed on the paneled walls. Pictures of Winston playing football and singing on stage with his guitar and lastly with his beloved bloodhound Agatha.

However, her gazed brighten at the sight of a piano with a picture that she figured to be Winston’s mother sitting on top of it. She moved over to the piano with marveled eyes, as well as her hands sliding appreciatively across the keys.

As a result, she could not resist pulling out the bench and sitting gracefully down and started to play beautifully. Now, Winston stops midway to peek into the living room and witnesses a very lovely Jaylon-Rose sitting at the piano. Once, she was left alone again, she felt a presence behind her that prompted to pivoting her head. She lowers the lid on the piano and sprung up from the bench feeling a bit chilly and spooked as she rubs her arms. She faintly seen a silhouette of a woman from the peripheral corner of her eye.

She felt disturbed and paced to the kitchen expecting Winston to be there and due to her disappointment, he was not as she called for him. Upon leaving the kitchen, she went down the hall calling for Winston. She nervously turned the doorknob on a closed door and peeked inside and by the looks of it was not being used and closes the door. She wondered yet, to another bedroom suspecting it to be Winston’s bedroom with an unmade queen size bed and clothes on the floor and closes that door.

“Winston” she calls while filtering back to the living room, she had no clue a vehicle had virtually backed out of the driveway. Winston furtively sneaks up behind her and taps her on the shoulder.

“She jumped and screamed, “Jesus!”

“Are you lost in my castle, mademoiselle?” He asked.

“I um, was looking for you,” she stuttered.

“Where were you?” She asked.

“In the kitchen,” he said.

“No, you were not. Were you hiding from me?” She asked.

“No. I would not hide from my lovely Mademoiselle,” he signed.

And, guided her to the kitchen table and pulled a chair out from the table for her.

He went to get her plate and sat it down in front of her then he got his plate and sat down across from her.

“How is it?” He asked with his intoxicating smile that smooth away her doubt.

She had a mouthful of loaded baked potatoes and takes a drink then wiped her mouth with a napkin, “very good,” she finally said.

He grins wide as he manly stabbed his steak and poured steak sauce on it. He had a pleasing look on his face as he gazed over at her with every other bite he took. Looking curiously over at the piano in the living room, she stirred up a conversation, “do you play the piano?” She asked. He looked up at her with a relax face that was so incredibly handsome that she almost forgot her question.

“No. I prefer my guitar.”

“But you on the other hand were playing very nice so, what about that, huh,” said Winston.

“I used to play religiously,” she said while toying with her fork.

“Why did you stop?” He asked.

“Well, after my mother passed away, I, um, just stopped,” she signed.

“Sorry. What happen to your mother?” He asked.

He cut into his steak and gazed up and studied the pain twitching in her brown eyes, before she spoke.

“I really don’t know,” she said looking down at her plate.

During this time, she was aimlessly stabbing the fork into her salad.

“Sounds like you got an unsolved mystery on your hands?” He emits.

“I really do,” she promptly answered.

She spiritedly came back hoping the conversation would continue until seeing his no longer interested expression staring back at her so, they finished up eating. After dinner, they settled on the couch together to watch a movie. Right after the movie started, she started to nod off on Winston’s shoulder but like a prince, he kissed her awake with a gentle kiss.

“I cannot make my mind up, if your more beautiful awake or asleep,” he said as she rested her head on his shoulder.

“I better go-I am so tired,” she yawned.

“You’re welcome to stay here. You can have my bed and I will sleep on the couch.”

“Thanks for the invite. I should go home,” she smiled.

She got up from the couch as they stand close to kiss her on the mouth. They proceeded to walk towards the door with her brown leather handbag on her shoulder, he kissed her goodnight one last time then shuts her car door. Jaylon-Rose pulled up in the driveway of her Aunt Claire’s house. The lights in the house were dim as she walked in with Salem barking and wagging his tail. “Shh,” she said as Salem follow closely behind her. The TV was on low in the living-room, Aunt Claire was asleep on the couch with her knitting needles resting on her lap. She softly kisses her aunt on top of the head. Uncle Rich was sitting in his recliner.

watching a late-night show. She hugged him goodnight then quietly left and went upstairs to her bedroom with Salem following. Once in her bedroom, she flipped on her bedroom light then kicked off her shoes and changed into her pajamas then drop her clothes in her laundry basket. After that, she walked over to the light switch and turned it off.

Her feet traced to her bedside and pulled down her covers and thankfully sunk down onto her mattress and found sleep. The next morning, Jaylon-Rose sprung up out of bed feeling well rested and craving a hot cup of coffee. She opened her plantation blinds to first see her Aunt Claire and her father outside, just few good steps away from the front porch. Her eyes peered out disturbingly seeing them arguing and her father forcefully grabbing Aunt Claire by her arm. Jaylon-Rose craned her neck to see if Uncle Rich left for work yet and apparently, he already had because his white Dodge Ram pickup truck was not in the driveway or, under the carport.

Aunt Claire stormed into the house and her father gazed up at Jaylon’s bedroom window from outside. She hurried and hid from the window. Jaylon-Rose leaned up against the eggshell painted wall and tightly closed her eyes. She moves away from the wall and got dressed and made her bed then went downstairs. She entered the kitchen eyeing her Aunt Claire with her back turned, gazing out the kitchen window with her cup of coffee in her hand. Jaylon-Rose steps in quietly and gets herself a cup of coffee.

“Good morning-Jay,” said Aunt Claire.

“Good morning Aunt Claire,” smiled Jaylon Rose.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, my sinuses are acting up something awful this morning,” Aunt Claire said.

She tore off a sheet of paper towel and blew her nose, Jaylon-Rose sip on her coffee and eyed her Aunt Claire’s burden face.

“Is Uncle Rich already gone to work?”

“Yes. He had to leave a little early this morning.”

Jaylon-Rose gazed over at the empty straw basket that was usually full of biscuits.

“I am missing your biscuits this morning.”

“Sorry. Lord willing, I’ll feel better tomorrow and I will make a nice batch,” she said. She unusually, left the kitchen, to plop down on the couch and started knitting and watching TV. Jaylon-Rose stopped by the living-room doorway with her arms folded and gazed puzzling at her Aunt Claire, who took no regard of her niece’s presence. Jaylon-Rose left the doorway and went back into the kitchen and opened-up the pantry door to pull out a box of raisin bran cereal when the phone rang.

“I got it!” She yelled out.

“Hey,” said Abby.

“Hey!” replied, Jaylon-Rose.

“What are you doing,” Asked Abby.

“Eating cereal,” she crunched in the phone.

“So-um, how is it going with your hot boyfriend?”

“Good.”

“Have you slept with him yet?”

She pulled the phone away from her ear and then brought it back.

“No.” He respects me,” she came back to say.

“He must be erectile dysfunction,” Abby laughed.

“You’re so wicked,” she signed.

“Sounds like you found a boring one?” Abby laughed.

“No. He’s not boring. He’s um,” she paused. “Old schooled.”

“Is that what womanizers are called now days,” said Abby laughing.

Jaylon Rose blinked her eyes close then re-opens them irritatingly.

“Abby, I need to go.”

“Why,” laughed Abby.

“I have better things to do than listen to your wise cracks about Winston.”

“Like what?” Asked Abby.

“Finish eating my cereal for one,” she said tiredly.

“Wow! You are so defensive over him these days,” she said.

After that, Abby rolled her eyes up as she made a face.

“No, I ‘m not,” she said in a cranky voice. I just want to eat my cereal in peace.”

“Ok. Lighten up. I actually called to see if you wanted to go shopping, I got a bonus check from work and it’s driving me nuts-lying in my handbag.”

“I don’t know,” she answered in between bites.

“Come on. I will go by the bank first, while you are getting ready. Most importantly, I need to talk to you, see you soon,” said Abby.

“Oh, what now?” She said tiredly to herself.

“I must be insane going shopping,” she said out-loud as she rinsed her bowl out and took off upstairs to take a shower. Abby pulled up in the driveway close to an hour later in a blue Volkswagen. They have been shopping for two hours, when Jaylon Rose started complaining of a headache. Abby suggested they dine in at a Pizzeria and relax a bit.

“Have you been to the doctor?” Questioned Abby as she picks up a slice of pizza.

“No-I haven’t. My mama suffered from headaches. So, I guess I inherited it from her,” she signed eating on a bread stick.

“Why not?” Asked Abby reaching for another slice of pizza and a dessert.

“I don’t know,” she said looking away sipping on her soda.

“Ok. I just never heard of inheriting a headache from a parent. Did you, um workout your ex’s marital issue?” Questioned Abby.

Jaylon Rose swung her head around annoyingly.

“Yes-Abby,” she answered eating a slice of pizza and wiping her mouth with a napkin.

“Look, all laughs aside. I think you should investigate his relationship and his connections with his ex-wife Karrie. Better yet, if you search, you’ll find a closet full of secrets.”

“What closet full of secrets? He told me it’s over between them,” she signed.

“Is it now?” She asked.

“Yes. It is,” she said with a mouthful of pizza in her mouth.

“Listen-there is something fishy going on with Winston and Karrie,” Abby stressed.

“Why on earth, do you think that?” She questioned while eating a dessert.

“I believe they have unfinished business,” Abby signed.

“That’s crazy. You are just causing trouble. By putting these ridiculous ideas in my head. Just because you are jealous,” she said raising her voice with nearby people looking up and over at them.

“Sorry-if you think that of me,” said Abby feeling hurt and stunned.

“Look Abby-I’m sorry for what I said and how I reacted. I am under a lot of pressure. But try to understand that I love Winston.”

“You’re forgiven. Darn it, Jay. Something just isn’t right.”

“Likewise, something isn’t right at home either,” she admitted.

“I am worried about you, Jay,” said Abby at the table.

Jaylon-Rose made eye contact with Abby with a sincere gaze for her concern. They both decided to get up from their table. They walked out of the restaurant and got into Abby’s blue Volkswagen and drove away. Jaylon-Rose headache by now was pounding like a jackhammer on the way to her Aunt Claire’s house.

“How are things going with you and Dawg?” She asked trying to be polite.

“Good. He is a lot of fun. I love his Shelby,” she laughed.

“Well maybe we can double date or something?” She suggested.

“Ok. Sounds good to me,” said Abby.

The Volkswagen pulled up in front of Aunt Claire’s house. Jaylon-Rose was so glad to get out of Abby’s car with her bags in her hand.

Abby leaned over, “please just think about it,” said Abby.

Jaylon-Rose agreed then waved goodbye with a grin as she shut her car door with sounds of Abby’s Volkswagen in the background going down the street.

She felt bad for being rude to Abby, but her headache was all that she could think about at that moment. Aunt Claire held her curtain aside watching Abby back out of the driveway.

Chapter 11

Jaylon-Rose went straight upstairs with her bags in her hand to nurse her headache. She

passed by her TV and picks up the remote and set it on a low volume and laid down on her.

bed. She was hugging her favorite heart shaped body pillow tightly against her chest and dozed.

off. Moments later, Aunt Claire gave three light pecks on the bedroom door and came in.

“Are you still upset with Winston and now including everyone in the house too?” Aunt Claire chuckled.

“No-I have a headache and I am just tired.”

The phone rang and rang on her nightstand, she finally fumbles across to pick it up.

“Hello.”

Aunt Claire goes out and waves bye and eases the door close as she listens outside. Frank walks up and takes his hickory cane and lightly swat his sister’s round behind. Aunt Claire jumps at the surprise attack, seeing it is her brother Frank.

“What are you doing?” She asked.

“I ask you the same question?” He smiled.

“Making sure all is well?” Asking Brother Frank.

Aunt Claire stood by Jaylon-Rose’s door listening then walked away too. In the meantime, Jaylon-Rose was on the phone in her bedroom with Winston.

“I was taking a nap,” answered Jaylon.

“Were you asleep?” He asked.

“Yes,” she grunted into the phone.

“Sleeping should be saved for night-time,” he said.

“Yeah, I know.”

This headache came on while shopping with Abby. So, I thought a nap would help relieve it,” she signs.

“You did what?!”

Winston’s voice skyrocketed into the phone scolding her.

“Why are you so angry?” She questioned.

“After the fight, she caused between us, you have the audacity to go shopping with her?” He hung up in her ear.

Winston was calling back to say, “I want to marry you, soon as possible,” and hung up again. Jaylon-Rose fell backwards on the bed and smiled, gazing up at the ceiling with the phone resting in her hand.

She laid in bed and reached over and turned off her TV, casting her leg over her body pillow, drifting peacefully asleep. Two hours later, the doorbell was ringing having Frank to pull up from his armchair to answer the front door.

“Is Jaylon-Rose here?”

“Yes, she is,” answered Frank.

“Can I see her?”

“I don’t see why not, come in,” welcomed Frank.

Winston stepped onto an oriental rug. Frank narrowed his dark brown eyes onto Winston and spoke. “I believe Jaylon-Rose is taking a nap.”

“It’s very important that I see her?” Stressed Winston gripping the papers in his hand.

“Her bedroom is upstairs third door on the right,” said an older female voice that came from the living-room. Frank gave Winston an extension of his Hickory walking cane pointing to the stairs. Winston then ran up them to Jaylon-Rose’s bedroom. Winston knocks softly on the solid white door and turned the nickel doorknob then slowly steps in. His eyes found her sound asleep breathing deeply through her nose. He could not resist the temptation of kneeling-down by her bedside to softly press his full lips against hers. She began to roll her eyeballs then open them.

“I wasn’t expecting to be woken up by a kiss,” she said.

“My queen deserves, to be awaken by a kiss from her king,” he spoke softly to her.

She reached out and drew his body close as he slid his body on top of hers.

“What do you have in your hands?” She asked.

“My divorce papers from Karrie. Marry me mademoiselle?” He asked.

“Yes! Yes!” She cried out after reading the papers.

Abby called and Aunt Claire answered it from downstairs.

“Is Jay there, she’s not answering her cell?”

“She has a visitor. Can I take a message?”

“Yes, please tell Jay to call me,” Abby stressed.

“I will,” Aunt Claire hung up the phone.

Abby was pacing the floors and went back to settle in front of her computer to continue reading clips of news-bits in Mississippi and New Orleans.

She stumbles upon some disturbing news on Taffy and her best friend Marigold and two little girls. Abby saw a picture of Taffy with the dragonfly mood pendant on and a man with to her on a beach. Abby zoomed in on the picture and drew her hand up to cover her mouth. Next, Abby hears her doorbell ringing.

“Who is it?” She calls out hating to leave her computer screen to answer the door thinking it was Dawg, “didn’t I give you a key,” she said to herself going to the door.

“May I come in?” She asked.

“Um, yes,” she said looking shocked.

Abby was puzzled holding the door open allowing Aunt Claire to walk in. She gazed about before sitting down on the couch and setting her handbag by her feet. Aunt Claire found her home to be fresh and clean. She gazed at the large canvas art pictures that hung perfectly on her bunny white walls that Abby proudly collected. Some family pictures on a nearby accent table. Abby followed behind her and sat anxiously down to hear why Aunt Claire is paying her an unexpected visit.

“I know you are wondering why I am here,” she signed.

“Not to be rude but yes I am,” Abby said directedly.

“I will get right to the point. Jay has been through a lot with her mother dying then moving to Missouri. A move that was not easy for her. I believe your friendship is putting a lot of unnecessary pressure on her and her boyfriend.” She said candidly.

“I would never do anything to hurt Jay,” Abby replied defensively.

“And, this ridiculous witch hunt is actually waste of good time,” Aunt Claire firmly said.

“Witch hunt? What do you mean?” Abby questioned.

Aunt Claire stood up as her eyes roamed a bit as she picks up her handbag then moved to the front door in her robin-built frame.

“It’s always been Jay’s quest to solve her mother’s murder,” said Abby.

Aunt Claire held her step then continued out the door to her car.

Then Abby closed the door behind Aunt Claire and blew air out her mouth and rolls her eyes in disbelief.

“Jay is right, there is some kind of cover up going on,” Abby spoke out-loud locking her front door.

Aunt Claire stops by the grocery store to pick up a few items and one of them being a box of chocolate covered cherries for Jaylon-Rose. Aunt Claire made another stop at the hardware store and picked up some screws for Uncle Rich’s project he was working on. On her way out of the store, she ran into an old family friend asking about everyone. Aunt Claire got in her old Bonneville, driving home. Uncle Rich answered the phone and gave a quick look around and told Abby to hold on. Uncle Rich went to the bottom of the stairs and hollering Jay’s name.

“What is it Uncle Rich?” She asked.

“You got a call saying it’s important.”

Jaylon-Rose looks back at Winston and said, “I will be back in a minute.”

“Who is it,” asks Winston.

“Not sure,” and she slipped out of her bedroom door and traveled downstairs and met Uncle Rich at the bottom of the stairs then took the phone.

“Hello”

“Thank God. Jay, your Aunt Claire just left my house,” Abby said.

“She did what?!” Jaylon-Rose was gazing around for unwanted listeners.

“Something about a witch hunt that needs to stop. She was being strange and saying that I am putting too much pressure on you and your boyfriend,” she stressed.

“Jay, she wants us to stop being friends.”

In the background, Aunt Claire came in chattering, that she saw an old family friend of Uncle Rich’s as she set her bags on the kitchen counter and sharply looking over at Jay, pulling stuff out of the bags. Jaylon-Rose eyed her aunt and half smiled, telling Abby, she would talk later.

“Is your cuckoo Aunt Claire nearby,” asked Abby.

“Yes” Jaylon-Rose ended the call saying Thanks.

“Who was that?” Questioned Aunt Claire while cramming plastic bags in her rooster bag holder she made.

Winston also asking, “who was that?”

Aunt Claire turns and smiles at Winston then narrows her eyes on Jaylon-Rose for an answer.

“I feel like I am being interrogated over a simple phone call,” switching her brown eyes on them.

“No. Baby you just left me all alone upstairs,” as he kissed her.

“I’m sorry for leaving you dying in suspense. It was Stella from work, um, telling me about a patient.”

Winston and Aunt Claire looked relieved as well as, Jaylon-Rose that the lie satisfied them. Across town, Abby was on the phone talking to officials in Mississippi, when her back-door opens, and someone dressed in all black enters in the house. A pair of black gloved hands lifts-up the lid on the gas stove. A puff of air blows out the pilot light and turns the knobs on and closes the back door very quietly.

Abby was on the phone discussing Jaylon-Rose’s Mother Taffy’s mysterious death, when unexpected symptoms targeted her as the gas fumes were dominating the air that was creeping through each room in the house. She was feeling tired with anonymous sickness nauseating her stomach. She started coughing that grabbed her throat then managed to say, she needed some water and laid her phone down on her desk. Once on her feet, she was swaying side to side with dizziness clouding her way as she stumbled and staggered into a state of confusion, where she finally collapsed on her kitchen floor. The next day after breakfast, Aunt Claire was humming like a bird and went out early to do errands. Jaylon-Rose got up and peered out the window and saw that Aunt Claire’s car was gone. She started calling Abby’s phone and got no answer after several attempts. Secondly, she called the store where Abby worked, a salesgirl said, “she didn’t come in today.” Jaylon-Rose quickly got into her black Gran Prix and drove over to Abby’s home. She pulled up and parked behind Abby’s blue Volkswagen. It was odd seeing her car at home, “is Abby sick?” She wondered knocking on the front door.

“Abby,” she called out repeatedly.

A firefighter finally opens the door saying, “you can’t come in due to carbon monoxide.” She panicked and started crying and ran behind the house to the back door where ambulances and fire trucks were all parked. They were opening doors and windows and doing investigation, as they walked through Abby’s home.

“Where is Abby?” A paramedic pointed at the ambulance, she ran over there out of breath and saw Abby covered with a white sheet, Jaylon-Rose crumbled to the ground crying into her hands. Winston showed up and extended his hand down to her and pulled her close and comforted her inside his arms, sobbing, guiding her to his car.

“I am sorry. They are suspecting this was a suicide,” said Winston.

“No, I don’t believe it. Abby wouldn’t do that, no,” she cried upsettingly.

“Ok. Just calm-down will figure this out,” he said.

Just then, an unexpected shiny black SUV slowly drives by Abby’s house and disappears down the street as Winston steers away in the opposite direction.

Winston droves around for an hour then stopped to buy some lunch for Jaylon-Rose, who only took small bites, and after, she could not stop crying, feeling guilty, missing her best friend, as they drove with no destination in mind.

Winston brought her home with him to Dutchtown to stay a few days after Abby’s funeral. She was in low spirits, not caring to change out of her pajamas with her chestnut hair twisted up on top of her head. Besides, having a stack of used tissues by her side, dark circles under her swollen eyes from crying, a lack of sleep and suffering from a headache, she was a grieving mess. Winston came strolling in singing and stopped to kiss her on the mouth. however, she was heart-broken and did not feel like kissing him.

“What’s wrong with you?” He disturbingly asked.

She snapped at him “please leave me alone,” she signed very annoyed by his question.

“Whoa! Remember me, the guy that wants to marry his mademoiselle?”

“Yes. I am really trying to remember that” she signs.

“It doesn’t look like it. Is being depressed over Abby more important than us getting married?” He asked.

“No but, she was my best friend. I love you Winston, I do want to marry you,” she sincerely said scared he would leave her too.

“That sounds more like it,” he said smiling.

She sprung up from the couch and traveled down the hall with her backpack and took a shower then he drove her to Aunt Claire’s house. Jaylon Rose was so exhausted from crying and from Abby’s funeral, she went straight to bed. She woke up refreshed the next day with her wedding on her mind as she sat up in bed. The sounds of pecking had her eyes gazing at her door, watching it ease open, seeing it is her aunt as it open wider. Aunt Claire walked softly over to the bed and sat on the edge expressing how proud and happy she is for her niece as they began to talk about the wedding.

“I wish mama and Abby were here,” she candidly said with a sad face.

“They are here, Jay. In spirit and forever in your heart. Besides this is your happy day, do not spoil it thinking about all that,” she added.

“Lavender was your mother’s favorite color.”

“That’s why I chose it,” Jaylon-Rose said proudly.

“I kind of thought so,” replied Aunt Claire as she kisses her niece on the top of the head.

“Listen, Jay don’t waste another minute on stuff you can’t fix or change, it is what it is,” said Aunt Claire a bit coldly.

Jaylon-Rose oddly stared at her Aunt Claire as she exited her room with great sadness. Better yet, she had a wedding to think about and go shopping for a dress. She immediately thought of Abby and was missing her. She called her number to listen to Abby’s voice as Jaylon-Rose swiped away her tears.

Later that day, she was greeted by her Aunt Claire at the bridal shop. She met Aunt Claire with a fake smile and tried on dresses and tried to act happy. She picked out a beautiful bridal dress, swerving at herself in the mirror along with Aunt Claire and the shop owner behind her saying, how beautiful she looks. However, Jaylon-Rose’s insides were swelling with pain and tears, she wanted so badly to run away and cry.

“I want this one,” she said to the bridal shop owner.

Aunt Claire carefully carried the bridal dress out of the shop. Jaylon-Rose made sure Aunt Claire was long gone when she made it to her car and sobbed. The shop owner peered out the store window, at her customer crying inside of her car. Perhaps, she has the bridal blues and walked away from the window. Just then, her phone started ringing with her upset aunt, asking why she has not arrived yet. So, Jaylon-Rose quickly pulled herself together, the best she could and drove on over to the chapel.

Winston and Aunt Claire rushed to her, once she stepped in and bombarded her with questions of her whereabouts, she just simply answered, “I was stuck in traffic,” all was satisfied. Aunt Claire carried on to the dressing room chatting every step of the way. Jaylon-Rose walked along-side her aunt quietly entering the dressing room where, she got ready for the rehearsal with the help of her bridesmaids, that were dressed in Lavender off the shoulder matching dresses. It was late, when Jaylon-Rose got into her car, waving at Winston, but he did not even notice. He was rather too occupied chatting and laughing with his best men and planning a bachelor party for that night, outside the chapel. However, she did refuse a bachelorette party with her bridesmaid that booed hoping for a girl’s night out. Instead, she apologized for being a party pooper and throwing gloom over their hopes of fun. She drove to Aunt Claire’s house then traveled upstairs to her bedroom and went to bed crying. Aunt Claire was pecking on her door and open it to see that Jaylon-Rose’s bedroom was dark and she was asleep. Uncle Rich stops and sees Aunt Claire in Jaylon-Rose’s bedroom and standing by her nightstand with a box of chocolate covered cherries with gloves on. Uncle Rich moves onto his bedroom and gets ready for bed when Aunt Claire comes in moments later.

“Hello dear, where were you?” Asked Uncle Rich.

“I had to use the bathroom and shut off the lights in my sewing room,” Huffed Aunt Claire.

“Dear, I came upstairs expecting to see you in bed,” he yawns.

“You’re just a stupid fool, go to sleep,” she gruff and rolled on her plump side away from Uncle Rich, who felt the effect of her blunt rudeness.

The next day rolled out like a red-carpet event, the anxious groom was all set and ready for his bride. They were married in the elegant wedding chapel at the Rose Inn Bed & Breakfast. The photographer had taken lovely photographs outside in the beautiful rose garden courtyard on this gorgeous day. Jaylon-Rose looked happy and marveled at the beautiful day and her handsome husband she, could not feel more blessed, however, she did feel a bit sad on the happiest day of her life as she silently thought about all, who was missing from it. After the I Do’s they slipped on the rings. The kiss that made Winston Ford Paul and Jaylon Rose Seabaugh, husband and wife.

During the reception, Winston, and Jaylon Rose, slow danced to the song, “The Rose” by Bette Midler with everyone in awe. Breathtaking, Jaylon Rose was a stunning bride, a gorgeous goddess, having a touch of body glitter on her skin with her off the shoulders white laced sparkling sequin long sleeved wedding dress with a long train. Her chestnut hair color radiated like dazzling rubies, swept up beautifully in a bun of pinned curls. Winston was remarkably handsome in his black suit with a lavender rose pin to his jacket. Winston had it prearranged with the small band that was playing at their reception that he serenades two love songs to his new bride. Winston picked up his guitar, sat down on a stool, and began to strum the strings to a song, ‘Can’t help Falling in Love” by Elvis Presley and ‘My Eyes Adore You’ by Frankie Valli. Jaylon-Rose’s face lit up surprisingly as tears floated in her brown eyes and streamed down her blushed pink cheeks. Jaylon Rose glanced over and smiled bashfully at her Aunt Claire, patting her face and eyes with a tissue. Before, the ceremony ended Jaylon-Rose’s Father Frank looked handsome and proud in his dark grey suit. His black hair was streak with silver and deep lines of hard military life stretched out from his dark brown eyes and his tan leathered worn face. He held up a toast to the bride and groom.

“May my daughter and my son in law, to their new life together.” The crowd cheered as they all drank to the toast. Frank held onto his Hickory cane as with the other hand holding his wine glass. He moved closer to his daughter, gave her a gentle kiss on her pink blushed cheek, “you are extraordinary, beautiful,” her Father Frank gaped.

“What is it - he scrambled to think to say, something old, something new, something blue,” placing a navy blue rose in her beautifully pinned-up hair. They both turned to face a photographer in the courtyard as they wrapped their hands around each other’s waist and smiled with the blue flower in her hair.

Frank stepped aside with his hickory cane and joined Uncle Rich, for a glass of red wine and hors d ‘oeuvres. Winston moved in closer to his bride and kissed her while holding a gift bottle of champagne. Jaylon-Rose turned her back to the crowd and threw her bouquet of lavender roses with baby breath that was secured with a white lace ribbon. An attractive baby blonde-haired woman caught the bouquet and blended into the crowd. Winston whisked her away, in the middle of everyone blowing bubbles at the newlyweds. Winston picked up his new bride Jaylon-Rose Paul as she held up the side of her long train and a bottle of champagne that she sipped on and shared sips with her new husband Winston. He carried her over the threshold of the entrance to their room. Her heart was heavy as she smiled brightly.

The room was decorated with fine furnishings of the early 19th century era with white rose pattern fabric curtains that were gracefully held back, in the double wood windows with fabric shades that were pulled down. The wallpapered walls with dark brown trim set off the paintings that were hung on the walls of old Victorian homes and ladies in Victorian dresses strolling with a bride twirling their white fabric parasols. The artist sketch admiration quite well on the women’s faces, strolling upon a beautiful wonderstruck garden, that was craftly planted nearby, a windmill turning inside a flowing creek. Authentic large sized oil lamps sat nicely on needlepoint scarves, that decoratively protect the Queen Anne nightstands by each side of the bed. Winston fell on the antique four-poster bed with his bride in his arms. Screaming in delight, kissing, and spilling good champagne on each other in the bed. He laughed rolling off her as she cupped her laughter with her hands then climbing off the bed. She took off her wedding dress in front of Winston. His pale blue eyes watched her as he slowly sipped on their bottle of champagne. She laid the white wedding dress across a flowered antique bench, took off her shoes, and under garments then stood there in the nude.

Winston jumped to his feet to un-button his white dress shirt that revealed his six-pack while letting his pants drop to the floor. He then proceeded to scoop his new bride up in his muscular arms and softly lay her down on the bed. He then sang a tiny part of a song by Bad Company, “Feel Like Makin’ Love,” she giggled at him that blushed her cheeks hot pink. He took a smiling closer gaze at her round pretty face. He then moved the back of his hand down her cheekbone and traced her lovely, shaped lips with his index finger.

“You are so beautiful. I am the luckiest man on earth tonight,” he said kissing her lips.

“I am the happiest woman in the whole wide world tonight,” she said with a trembling mouth, gazing into his pale blue eyes.

“What do you want from me?” He said in an Irish tone while he kissed her neck.

She studied for a moment eyeing their wedding cake and decided to wait before answering his question. She got off the bed and cut a chunky slice of wedding cake and laid it on a plate with a fork and napkin. She poured a glass of bubbly champagne that she placed on the nightstand. She carefully got back into bed with a chunky slice of wedding cake. She gave him the first big bite of cake then he gave her the next bite and a sip of champagne and after that, she answered Winston’s question, “forever.”

“Peculiar. You should say forever,” he said.”

He reached over to set the glass of champagne on the nightstand. Winston raised his head up and stared into her brown eyes and admired her beauty, while he took out the pins that were holding her chestnut hair up and let it wave down onto her bare fragile shoulders. He gently held back her curly hair and kissed her softly around her neck as she eased her body into his caressing touch. Winston moved away from her and got off the bed to grab his coat to grasp a small box. She fully rolled over onto her back wondering what he was up to, watching him dig inside his pocket.

“What are you doing over there?” She asked curiously, narrowing her eyes on him.

“Never mind, what I am doing.” Winston climbs in from the foot of the bed.

“Do you really want to know what I have in my hands?” Winston asked while he was crawling up in the bed.

“Yes, I really do.”

“Prove it by closing your pretty little brown eyes,” he said.

And she did with much anticipation.

“If this is one of your tricks, Winston I swear.”

“Hush. Keep your eyes closed until I tell you to open them,” he said as he raises the level of his voice. He slips behind her on the bed and the box springs squeaks until he adjusted his self on his knees behind her back.

“What are you doing?” She pestered.

“Hush, I said.”

He continues opening-up the box and pulled the gold chain out and swung it around her neck and fasten the clasp. He bends around and handed her a mirror and said, “open your eyes.” She opens-up her eyes like a flower and gazed into the mirror as her eyes misted over with joy.

“This is a symbol of my love that will go on forever,” he said. Her ears treasured his every word as her eyes admired her pendant in the mirror. She put the mirror down on the bed, so her hands could be free to touch and gently hold the sides of his handsome face, kissing and hugging him with tears spiraling down her round cheeks. Jaylon-Rose’s finger ice-skated on the figure eight inside of an open-heart pendant.

“This is the most beautiful pendant I have ever seen. I so dearly love it,” she announced it in a loving elongated intone.

“Come here and show me how much you so dearly love it,” he requested.

Jaylon-Rose moved in closer as he started kissing and nibbling on her neck, his hands passionately roamed all her body. He could feel the heat rise to the top of her skin and the moisture that met his fingertips. His hands and his arms held her body as she moved her hips up and down in slow rhythm motion with her eyes closed. His body smooth on top of hers as Jaylon-Rose’s hands were in and out of Winston’s hair, caresses his neck then her delicate hands, squeezed him closer to her while she kissed on his neck then repeatedly whispered in his ear, “I love you. I love you.” Later that night, they fell deep asleep locked inside each other’s arms. They sprung up the next morning in a playful mood. However, the housekeeper, did not appreciate hearing the newlyweds horsing around in the shower. The slim, seventy-year-old housekeeper, made a sour face as she quietly but quickly left fresh white towels on the flowered bench by the window and slipped out of the room, rolling her weathered eyes, “honeymooners,” she squawked and closed the door. They were dressed in social attire as they headed down to eat breakfast in the dining room, where they found an eyeful of other seated guests at their tables, drinking coffee and chattering gracefully. Winston and Jaylon-Rose admired the many exquisite pieces of authentic period furniture while whimsical music of Edison Victrola played throughout the dining room area that had olive green walls with the brown wood trim and long Plantation curtains and sheer panels that decorated the dining room with charm of its originality. While looking at the menus, the owners stopped by to say good morning and the server then came up to serve them.

“This is a lovely place,” said Jaylon-Rose.

“Thank you. We do our best. Is this a special occasion?” Asked Ralph the owner.

“Yes, we just got married in your courtyard,” replied Winston.

“Oh yes. You are the newlyweds, I heard from our staff it was a beautiful ceremony. Congratulations to you both,” said Ralph.

“Thank you for the gift basket, very nice,” said Winston.

“Oh yes, it was very nice, thank you so much,” Jaylon-Rose added.

“Just our way of saying thanks for choosing to stay with us,” said Ralph.

The server left their table with a friendly smile as he stepped away to say salutations to other guests in the dining room.

“My name is Glory.”

A pretty, dark-skinned woman with a beautiful smile said.

“I will be serving you today. Are you ready to order?” Asked Glory as she placed a menu in front of them.

“Yes, we are. We would both like the spinach cheese omelet with toast and coffee,” said Winston. Glory picked up the menus and took their orders to the kitchen.

Glory came back with two cups, poured their coffee, and left complimentary packets of creamer and sugar on the table.

“By the way, I love your name,” Jaylon-Rose said as she eyed her name tag.

“Thank you. When I was born my mama shouted Glory to God it is over,” Glory smiled and said, “enjoy your breakfast newlyweds,” they all chuckled charmingly and picked up their silverware. Jaylon-Rose’s brown eyes then marveled at the flat black antique piano displayed by a fireplace and a large window.

“A piano brings enchantment to a room,” she fondly said picking up her hot cup of coffee that soothed her dry throat.

On the other hand, the piano reminded Winston of his Mother Edie the longer he gazed at it. Soon enough their food arrived, smelling scrumptious as the server took the stainless-steel lids off their plates. After finishing their breakfast, they walked around holding hands towards the gift shop, just browsing. As they walked out of the shop, they bumped into the owner named Ralph. Now, he asked if the newlyweds had time for a quick tour. She instantly liked the idea and was in. Although Winston did not like the ridiculous waste of time as he half listened. Ralph quite proudly started his introduction, “Rose Inn was built in 1908-1910,” as they walked around inside the historic building and passed by the guest rooms, dining room, courtyard, and the gift shop. “Unusual feature of this home and its Midwest location is the flat-topped center of the roof referred to as the “Widow Walk.” When the owner said, “one can surely see the Mississippi River from this very rooftop,” as they continued with the tour. The humble owner Ralph stopped to ask Winston and Jaylon-Rose a quick question.

“Do you believe in ghost?” Ralph asked as he eyed them both. However, taking notice of Jaylon-Rose being awfully curious.

“No, we don’t,” Winston spoke up tiredly and rude. But the subject caught her attention.

“I think it’s interesting,” she spoke up as Winston gave her a look of resentment.

“Ok well, at least we have one, who is open minded,” smile Ralph.

“The Rose Inn has a ghost haunting quest named Alec that has been a resident here. This intriguing guest dates back several decades to a love triangle in which ended in a suicide in this cozy building. Missouri hauntings legend tells us and perhaps, it is a mere fascination with ghost stories and historical buildings that just rhyme nicely together. However, Alex has made his presence known by moving objects or misplacing the guest’s belongings, opening, and closing doors to an unexpected touch. Now I hope, I did not scare you or darken your stay with doubt. This getaway has plenty for our guest to embellish on. May you have a pleasant stay” as he walked away to mingle with other guest in the building.

“Thank you,” she said pleased with the tour.

They held hands entering the courtyard, admiring the scenery of green foliage with countless different colors of heavenly roses. Afterwards, they sat down at a nearby table drinking lemonade together. Later that evening Jaylon-Rose and Winston drove to the annual county fair on his motorcycle. They rode the Farris wheel first and then onto other carnival rides throughout the evening then walked around eating buttery popcorn and sharing a funnel cake with cool-whip and strawberries. They ran into friends and chatted a bit, stopping to listen to some country western music. Lastly rummaging by contests, games, livestock as they made their way out of the county fair. The newlyweds before returning to the bed and breakfast, they rode a little while in the sunset.

By now Jaylon-Rose was tired and hanging onto Winston, while he turned the key to unlock their door. They walked in the room and found it to be a bit chilly as Winston turns on the heat. They undressed and dropped their clothes on the floor and climbed into bed and turned on the TV. She snuggled up close to Winston as they nibbled on little love snacks that were provided in their room, on a tray. Winston brought her close to him, kissing on her when she gazed over at the flowered bench. Something had dawned on her that pressed her to question, “where is my wedding dress?” she signed pushing Winston away to look for it.

“Winston, my dress is gone?” She cried.

“Jay, honey, calm down. Your dress has to be here,” he said while watching her get more and more upset.

He then, calmly suggested she look in the closet. She does and finds the dress hanging up in the closet as instant relief beams in her brown eyes and on her face.

“I did not hang my dress up in this closet. I laid it down on that bench,” she said.

“Housekeeping could’ve come in and hung the dress up for you,” he calmly stated.

“I don’t believe that. Housekeepers don’t come into your room and hang up wedding dresses for brides,” she fussed.

“I know-I know! Boo, Alec took your dress while we were out and hung it up in the closet for you.”

“Winston, what if he did?” She asked.

“Ok, then he did. Come back to bed,” he said.

Nevertheless, she calmed down and got back into bed with Winston and all was quiet. A man perhaps, the ghost of Alec stood at the foot of their antique poster bed smiling.

Soon after their honeymoon, Jaylon-Rose moved into Winston’s brick ranch style house that was willed to him after his parents died, in the small village of Dutchtown, Missouri. Lastly, learning the happy news, they were pregnant with twins. During her pregnancy she glowed and talked to her twin babies, day, and night. Although, she spent most of her weekdays at her Aunt Claire’s house for extra precaution, while Winston worked.

Chapter 12

Winston extended his hand down to help his wife up.

“I have Louisiana spicy gumbo with shrimp and sausage cooking on the stove. Stay and eat with us?” Asked Aunt Claire.

“Love to, but I already have beef stew slow cooking that I put on before I left this morning,” said Jaylon-Rose as she put on her coat.

Missouri’s winter snowflakes were falling around the clock as they arrived home. Dawg pops in while she was putting rolls in the oven. He came in the kitchen smelling the food that was cooking, feeling welcomed with her warm and friendly smile. He left the kitchen to join Winston on the couch for a little while in the living room as they waited on dinner. Half hour later, she called out from the kitchen, “dinner’s ready.” They gathered at the table to eat a hearty size soup bowl of beef stew and hot buttered rolls. She half listens to Winston and Dawg’s chatter about their work and their Ford Mustangs as she tears off pieces of her roll. In the meantime, she is experiencing an upset stomach and with the smell of the beef stew raging up from her soup bowl, that was gagging her to the point of almost puking, she quickly covered her mouth with a cloth napkin, pushing her bowl away. No doubt, her anxious babies were pushing their way down that was putting pressure on her pelvis. After dinner, Winston and Dawg were playing cards and by now, she was feeling her worst and sitting uncomfortably in her chair. However, she started having labor pains this morning and did not say anything to anyone about it and left the table. Winston noticed, her cradling her lower abdomen as she eased up from the chair, gritting her teeth, with a brave face.

Winston asked, “Are you alright?”

“No. I am going to bed,” she grunted.

“Dawg is ‘bout to lose and I’ll be in there shortly if not sooner.”

“Winston is the loser,” sign Dawg.

She smiled as she moved slowly holding her stomach and stops by the bathroom then eased down in bed. Later, that night Jaylon-Rose was experiencing the signs with repeated contractions as she squeezed her pillow tightly. A rush of water mixed with blood escapes from her and saturates the bed, where she was lying.

“Winston!” She cried out.

He laid his cards down on the table and gazed at his best friend Dawg as he heaved up from his chair and rushed to their bedroom. She rolled over and out of bed, slanted in pain, moaning, and crying as her cheeks filled up like a small balloon then blowing out air that deflated her cheeks back to normal as she held onto the bed post for support. And, losing her patients waiting on Winston to get ready and not to forget her suitcase, she growled at him to hurry up whenever a contraction punched her lower abdomen. Winston and Dawg escorted her slowly to their car as she cried in pain. Winston threw a blanket over her and backs out of his driveway with Dawg following behind in his car as they sped to the hospital. Once there at the hospital, she was rushed back to the labor room and quickly hooked up to a fetal monitor, to her belly to check the babies’ heartbeat, blood pressure and contractions, next, a nurse checked her cervix and called the doctor. Winston held her hand as she cried long piercing screams of pain and writhing in the bed, he was calming her down and helping her to follow the doctor’s guidance then finally, she gave birth to a girl weighing five pounds even. A few minutes later, she screamed again until she gave birth to a boy weighing five and half pounds. For two hours, she rested as her beautiful newborn babies got adjusted to living outside in the world.

“Winston, I want to name our Daughter Navy Rose,” compelled by the navy colored rose her Father Frank placed in her hair on their wedding day.

“I want to name our Son Danny Ford after my best friend and after my Ford truck and my mustang,” said Winston.

As a result, Dawg swelled with honor standing beside Winston as he was also asked to be the children’s God parent as he held newborn Danny in his arms. Jaylon-Rose lovingly embraced her new family and truly fell in love with her new mommy role. Her family was beautiful and perfect in every way. Navy and Danny grew up like weeds and were doted over by their grandfather, aunt, and uncle. Grandpa Frank taught Danny how to make things out of wood as soon as he started walking and saying words.

Grandpa Frank often read storybooks to the twins as they piled up on his lap.

In the afternoons, he would play checkers with the twins. Jaylon-Rose took pictures of these moments as she stood by the back-kitchen screen door and watched with a warm smile on her face. The next time Frank was outside with the twins pushing Navy and Danny on the tire swing, he receded back and grabbed at his chest and Jaylon-Rose narrowed her eyes at him and almost ran outside but, noticed he was back to pushing the tire swing and appeared to be ok. She would sometime play the piano and sing old-time favorites like, ‘Over the Rainbow’ by Judy Garland and ‘Que Sera, Sera’ by Doris Day and songs from the Disney movie Mary Poppins as the kids sat contently on their Grandpa Frank’s lap, falling asleep as he proudly held them in his arms.

By now, Navy and Danny were quickly approaching schooled aged and their first day of kindergarten and riding the school bus was heartwarming. On the other hand, Frank was showing prominent signs of poor health, feeling drowsy and sleeping most of the day and growing complaints of headaches and being nauseated. As a result, his eating slowed down to small bites of breakfast and dinner. In the coming days and weeks, his appearance looked sickly. One morning, Aunt Claire found her brother asleep in his favorite chair. In spite, of that, she brought him a cup of coffee and two chocolate covered cherries. Her first glanced at her brother’s face, she bluntly said,

“For heaven sakes Frank, you look like a homeless man,” Aunt Claire guff.

Although, she oddly gazed at her brother before going back to the kitchen with no derogatory remarks from him. She returned to the living room with her cup of coffee and noticed Frank has not moved a muscle. She sat her cup of coffee down on a nearby table, narrowing her eyes as she walked slowly over to his chair, just as, his hickory cane ejected out of his hand hitting the floor. Aunt Claire was scared witless and started screaming for Uncle Rich as she whisked out of the living-room. Aunt Claire, phoned Jaylon-Rose as she was quickly thrown into a disarray of emotions.

The funeral was especially hard for Navy and Danny however, Jaylon-Rose comforted her sad children the best she could as she sat numb with her arms draped around their little shoulders, listening to opening eulogy remarks made by Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich. And well after, family and friends headed over to Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich’s house to eat and fellowship. Winston takes his family home and on the way there he gazes at Jaylon-Rose looking out the window quietly. Once at home, she was not ready to go inside just yet.

“Where are you going daddy?” Asked Navy and Danny.

“To check on mommy,” he replied.

He went on to follow Jaylon-Rose to the white swing. Winston sat down beside her and held her hand as he gazed at her sad face and switched his gaze unto the weeping willow.

“After my parents died, I found myself sitting here a little more than I use to,” Jaylon-Rose stayed quiet as she gazed at the creek bank.

“I ‘m sorry, you lost your father,” he said with care.

After long periods of silence, he sprung up and said, “we need to be heading back to the house before the kids filed a missing report on us,” he grinned.

“Can I sit here for a few more minutes longer?” She asked.

“Of course, you can,” then walks back to the house alone.

A cool breeze rustled the hanging limbs on the weeping willow as the branches brushed back and forth over the creek. She closed her eyes as she sat there feeling a cool breeze that touched her cheeks like a kiss. Finally, she got up and pulls herself together before going back to the house. It was an intolerant task for Jaylon-Rose with her contemptuous feelings for Dutchtown. She nagged Winston about finding a house in Cape, near her Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich. Plus, living in this house was troubling her internally.

However, Winston was thinking very differently and had an idea already in the works, putting his house up for sale and moving out of the state of Missouri. Likewise, the small village of Dutchtown prepares and complains every-time springtime rolls in the heavy rains, in-which raises the laying waters to flood. Their house was among the other residences that battled with the swollen river that spilled over into the community, that rose high enough to force the people to travel by boat around their neighborhoods. Residents of Dutchtown are livid every year over the springtime flooding, it is common to see residents setting out sandbags to make a levee or, complaining on the evening news. Jaylon-Rose hated the flood prone village and complained right along with the small community. She brought up the flooding issue to Winston for the umpteenth time, while cleaning the house and pitches her ideas about moving away from Dutchtown to find a house in Cape. He rolls his pale blue eyes up towards the ceiling while she complained. She stopped to gaze at his face to say, “staring at the ceiling fairies again-huh?” She asked.

“Yes, any minute now the fairies will sprinkle down gold pixie dust on this I already know argument,” he said in a comic tone.

“The other day, when I was out grocery shopping in Cape, I seen a cute house for rent.”

“I don’t want to rent a house and make the landlord rich.”

“Aunt Claire has more than enough room and has offered many times over for us to move in with them,” said Winston.

“I can’t do that. I will be constantly expecting to see my father sitting in his favorite armchair,” she said with intolerant tone.

“Jay come on,” he said.

“All I know is I can’t. Whatever. Will just stay here and turn into goldfish, she stomped off. What’s the harm in looking at the house that is for rent in Cape?” She asked.

“Because we’re not,” he replied annoyed.

She slammed the bathroom door. And reopen the door to yell out, “what has to happen - us getting a written notice from Cat in the hat” that our house has to turn into a fishbowl before you will realize we need to move out of this flood village,” she slammed the door again.

“Ha–Ha, I can’t stop laughing!” He yelled sarcastically at the top of his lungs.

After their argument simmered down, Winston hopped up from his recliner and went to his computer. He pulled out his old brown swivel wooden chair and flops down in it and wiggled his mouse and waited for the screen to load.

He privately sent an email to his ex-wife Karrie, who was a realtor and had her looking when she emailed back about a position for a traveling management consultant. And looks up from his computer screen, because of the shuttering sounds of doors then of Jaylon-Rose pulling out the vacuum cleaner. Once, she put the cord in an outlet, a loud suction noise filled up the brick ranch styled home, So, he reached over with his hand that gripped the corner of the door and swung it close. He readily went back to his computer screen and found a whole page on a job position with the Williams’ firm with the average salary being $92,867. “Wow!” Slipped out of his mouth as he read the contents of the page. His pale blue eyes widen with gleam as he filled out the online application and later that next night, he carefully prepared his resume. He asked her to listen while she was peeling potatoes, as he submitted it online that evening after dinner for the traveling management consultant position. Three long weeks later, he received an email of an interview scheduled in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

“Jay!” He called.

“I got an interview in one week for the job I applied for,” Winston said excitedly.

“What Job?” She questioned while raising her eyebrows up at him.

“The job, I applied for online,” he said enthusiastically.

“And where is this job at?” She asked while narrowing her brown eyes at him.

“In Chattanooga, Tennessee,” he answered.

“What!” She asked shockingly.

“Chattanooga, Tennessee! Winston, how are you getting there for an interview? Did you not tell them you live in Missouri?”

“Lay your guns down honey. Yes, they know where I live. They are sending me a plane ticket.”

“Oh, I see,” as she turned away and folded her arms under her breast feeling angry.”

“Jay come on, I think this is a good opportunity to leave Missouri and start over somewhere else,” he said as he stood behind her rubbing her shoulders.

“How come I am the last to know?” She moved away a few feet from him.

“I wanted to wait and see if I could get my foot in the door first. I did not want us to get our hopes up, honey, you have been harping at me long enough about moving out this fish tank village. Be careful of what you ask for-it just might come true,” he added.

“Jesus-Winston. I counted on us moving to Cape or St Louis maybe but not out of the whole entire state of Missouri. Aunt Claire an Uncle Rich, we would be leaving family and friends behind for heaven sakes. Winston what ‘bout the twins,” she protested as she whisked to their bedroom in tears.

Few moments later, Winston walked into their bedroom behind her and found her sitting on the edge of the bed and seen that she was crying. He sat down beside her and put his arm around her shoulder to comfort her.

“Jay, we can come back anytime you want and visit with Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich. Jay, it’s no time to be-scared of what you ask for.”

“For the last time, I did not ask to move out of Missouri,” she said with a broken voice as she wiped her running nose.

“I don’t know anyone in Tennessee.”

“You know me and the kids,” he assured.

Winston embraced her inside his arms, and she hid her face in his shoulder with anxiety swelling inside of her. Winston released his hold and lifted to his feet as she watched him walk out of the room, leaving her sitting alone on the edge of the bed, thereafter, she laid down on the bed and curled up in a ball. In the other part of the house, Winston was on the internet and talking on the phone to realtor Max Felon. One evening during the week, Winston brought up a discussion to move away and sell the ranch style home, while seated at the table during dinner.

“What do you think about moving to a place called Cleveland?” Winston asked randomly as he lightly gazed over at Jaylon-Rose while he was chewing his food.

“Cleveland, Ohio?” She questioned as she arched her eyebrows.

“No Jay, Cleveland, Tennessee,” he correctively answered.

“So-um, what’s in, Cleveland, Tennessee?” Jaylon-Rose wondered while setting Navy and Danny’s plate of food down on the table.

“A house, I found for sale that is approximately thirty miles from Chattanooga,” he replied.

Jaylon-Rose gazed at the kids as they ate their dinner with a relaxed face while uncertainty skipped in her brown eyes. The conversation faded when they began eating as other subjects gradually popped-up that evening. Days later, Winston was notified by an agent about a house and set-up an appointment to look at it in Cleveland, Tennessee on Tuesday July 1st at eleven thirty in the morning. The very next day, Winston had an interview lined-up in Chattanooga about a job on Wednesday July 2nd at nine a.m. sharp. They stopped by Aunt Claire and Uncle Rich’s house to say goodbye. Jaylon-Rose stood on the porch talking to Aunt Claire about Tennessee. In her view, Uncle Rich was walking away from the car. Winston then started blowing the horn at Jaylon-Rose. She turns to hug her aunt and uncle then she stepped down off the porch waving good-bye to them.

“Wait,” says Aunt Claire as she quickly went into the house to grab the newspaper off the counter in the kitchen and handed it to Jay, here in case you get bored, I know you like reading your horoscope,” said Aunt Claire as they exchanged smiles.

“Aunt Claire are you slipping? You never liked me reading my horoscope?”

“Don’t remind me Jay, just take the free pass,” Aunt Claire Chuckled.

“Ok people, let’s roll,” said Winston as Jaylon-Rose shut her car door and flipped through the newspaper straight to the Horoscope section. It says here, she read, “you will soon travel to a strange land. What is strange can go from strange to stranger.”

“Why are you reading that hocus pocus stuff to us in this car?”

“Well, aren’t we not going to a strange land called Tennessee? This hocus pocus stuff has been 99% accurate,” as she folded the newspaper and stuck out her tongue at Winston.

“It’s like warning signs that we sometime miss,” she said.

“You think so huh?” Winston asked as he cut his pale blue eyes at her.

“Yeah, I do,” she said.

In the meanwhile, she was biting into a chocolate cover cherry that snapped in her mouth from a box Aunt Claire given her. Winston leaned over and kissed her while being stopped at a traffic light.

“We better grab you another newspaper to see if you will get another kiss at the next traffic light,” joked Winston. “Well, I am betting it will say, you won’t be as lucky as before,” she said while gazing at him crossly. “Drop your guns Jay, just joking honey,” said Winston amusingly.

On a whim impulse, Winston moved his family to the Tennessee Valley, then they moved into a suite hotel on Paul Huff Parkway with a rented U-Haul truck filled with all they owned and pulling Winston’s cherry red convertible 1967 Mustang. And she followed behind driving her black 1993 Gran Prix and parked it in front of the Hotel. Now, Jaylon-Rose sat on the bed with a slice of pizza in her hand gazing at Winston who appears confident.

“I hope we’re doing the right thing,” she said while taking a bite and chewing slowly while waiting on his response.

“Jay, you worry enough for the both of us-that’s why I don’t worry,” he added while typing on his laptop.

“Is that an answer?” She asked with a quiz look on her face.

“I need to prepare this paper,” he coldly replied as he kept typing. She gazed at him sourly and grabs her bottle of diet soda then interacted with the twins, and later told them to take a bath then she would read two story books lastly, kissing them goodnight and turning off their bedside lamp.

“Navy.”

“Yes-momma.”

“I love you.”

“I love you,” Navy’s drowsy voice drag.

“Danny.”

“Yes, momma,” he said tiredly.

“I love you.”

“I love you,” yawn Danny as he rolled over onto his pillow.

Jaylon-Rose stood there for a minute at their bedside with a sweet smile on her face before she walked away. She prowled through her bags and pulled out some night pants, a T-shirt and her toiletries then trace off to the bathroom to take a shower. Winston finished up with his paper and layback on the bed, watching TV and eating a slice of pizza. She came out of the bathroom, glad to see Winston off the computer. She hopes, he will pay some attention to her now as she climbs into bed beside him. He kisses her as she snuggled up to him and she laid her head down on his chest. And after, he was done eating pizza, he rose out of bed to take a shower and found her asleep when he got back into bed. He shut the TV off and let out some air through his mouth as he adjusted the pillows under his head and fell asleep too.

The next morning came with the alarm clock buzzing loudly as they got up to get dressed. In the meanwhile, Jaylon-Rose woke up the twins, they were squirming and fighting to stay asleep for a little while longer. Winston stepped outside to smoke and gaze around the area. “Come on-get dressed, so we can grab some breakfast before the hotel puts it away, when Winston looked down at his watch and it was by now 9:15 a.m. when he spoke.

“We need to roll people,” he said as they set off walking to the Hotel office.

Upon returning to their room, they all got into Winston’s Mustang and went to the realtor’s office then, follow behind the realtor to Rolling Brook Drive. They journeyed onto their appointment, as Jaylon-Rose stared at the picture of the house that she held in her hands. Once pulling into the bumpy driveway, Jaylon-Rose reached out to take hold of Navy and Danny’s hands, after getting out of the car, with their sheltie collie Salem barking and following behind. They waited behind the realtor to unlock the door. Once inside they climbed up the five creaky stairs and swirled around the living room that had thick white trim and olive-green walls then swung into the kitchen that was partially olive green with the dining room area having, a wild looking dark red background with huge, flowered wallpaper on the longest wall. Navy and Danny ran off towards the back of the house looking at the bedrooms. Jaylon Rose then worked her way down the hall to the one bathroom and three-bedrooms in the back of the house and down the creaky stairs to a full unfinished basement filled with spiders.

“You have to admit; it’s more spacious than our house back in Missouri and being on the hillside means no more flooding.

“Yay!” she clapped her hands. Navy strayed away from her parent’s conversation to pick out her bedroom and Danny following suit. Winston held Jaylon-Rose’s hand as they wandered around the tan split foyer home with black shutters. They walked around inspecting the property. Winston popped a question-to Jaylon-Rose, “Do you want to continue to look? This driveway is bumpy, this pie shape lot is sloped and is going to be a hassle to mow, I am already exhausted from walking sideways around the house and dodging gopher holes and sprain ankles,” he added roughly.

“Honey, I am tired of living at the Hotel, the twins need to get settled into a home and a school. And besides all that, this move was your idea,” Jaylon-Rose stressed as they stepped upon the untreated back deck.

A large web was stretched over the banister and hanging down from the corner of the house. The black spider fastens the rest of her web on the banister.

“My great idea,” Winston said.

“Yes! Your, great idea back in Missouri and the equation you left me out of,” she said.

Winston moved his lips sarcastically in mimic behind her back. She then stepped into a spider web and began hollering, “Oh Jesus! Is anything crawling on me?” She panicked pulling the sticky web off herself.

“Yeah, hang on. Let me pull that elephant size spider out of your hair,” he comically said.

“Oh, my goodness, screech out of her mouth. Winston get it out of my hair!” She cried as she danced on the deck under his hands.

“Jay, calm down. I was just joking,” chuckled Winston.

“You are so wicked! Look! There’s the spider!” Cried Jaylon-Rose.

She pointed her finger at the huge black spider as it came down from the corner of the house to quickly repair the damaged web. Her eyes stayed fixed on the spider until Winston whistled loudly to get her attention. She lifted her eyes off the spider and quickly stepped over to Winston who was impatiently holding the door open.

“That’s a huge spider and look, how clever she is!” Said Jaylon-Rose with fascination in her voice.

“Geez, Jay,” said Winston in an impatient tone as his head shook in annoyance.

She kept staring at the spider and pulls out her camera and snapped a picture of it.

“Come on, this is beyond ridiculous,” said Winston in a cranky tone.

“I am coming, crabby,” she stepped in looking crossly at Winston. She nicely brought her eyes down and kindly offered up a short grin at the agent as she dropped her camera into her brown leather handbag.

“So-um, what do you think?” Asked the realtor as Jaylon-Rose and Winston entered, into the kitchen, Winston gazed down at the twins, eagerness in their eyes and rolled his eyes over at Jaylon-Rose who approved by nodding her head yes.

“We’ll take it,” said Winston.

Navy and Danny jumped up and down happily. The twins started pulling down on their dad’s arm, so they could take him to see their new bedrooms. Winston looked up at the realtor and grinned, while being dragged down the hall by his twins. A dollar sign smile dialed up in the agent’s eyes, while she made notes on her paper.

“So, why did this house sit vacant for so long?” Asked Jaylon-Rose as she glanced at the heavy foliage at the edge of the lot behind the house.

“Well, it was a foreclosure.”

“Do you know the previous owners?” Jaylon-Rose questioned the realtor.

“No. The house has been termite inspected and comes with a one-year warranty,” the realtor added as she lifted her eyes up at Jaylon-Rose and Winston, who came up to join them, at this time, the agent’s phone was ringing.

“Excuse me, while I take this call,”

Winston, Jaylon-Rose, Navy and Danny and Salem walked around the property then walked inside the house again. They stood in the kitchen talking and they both agreed to buy it. It was settled, when the agent step back inside the house and joined them in the kitchen. The agent spoke and said, “You are welcome to follow me to the office, so we can finalize the paperwork there. They all walked down the creaky stairs together as the agent locked up the door then went to her car as the Paul’s sat in their car waiting to follow. She slipped her papers into her folders and laid them on her passenger leather beige seat and buckled up and backed out of the bumpy driveway.

And after leaving the realtor’s office, they drove around the city of Cleveland. In addition, liking what they saw as they drove on the Historic Ocoee Street that is a tapestry of beautiful well kept, historic homes that line upon both sides of the street. The aged trees and if they could talk what stories would they tell us about yesteryear, and newly fresh cut green lawns. The Historic Luther Church bell rang as they went by the Public Library and Lee University campus that makes up the groomed historic neighborhood. The students, pedestrians walking their dogs and joggers keeping the sidewalks full of life. Lastly, Winston stopped by the wooded Indian outside of the Five Point Museum and knocked on it.

“Don’t take any wooded nickels,” said Winston with a large grin as Jaylon-Rose laughed as she took a group picture standing by the wooden Indian Chief.

“Ok, let’s roll out of here before people start thinking, we are bunch of tourists,” Winston chuckled as he held Jaylon-Rose’s hand and open her car door, then shut it. He swung around the back end of the car and opens his door and slide under the retro slot steering wheel and turned the key over. They drove back to the hotel and stayed by the poolside for the rest of the day. The following week, the Paul family met-up with the realtor at the title office. Then they were escorted to a small cramped warm room that was noticeably lacking air conditioning and the center tan colored wall was filled with long vertical windows, Navy and Danny stayed seated out in the lobby. On the corner of the long table were three stacked piled high papers waiting for the Paul’s to read and sign. They were overwhelmed, while focusing down on the stack of papers. Their eyes lifted upwards and met with anticipation as they pulled out, a plastic white-chair, and sat down at the same time. Winston reached for Jaylon-Rose’s left hand and held it in his palm as she looked into Winston’s pale blue eyes and smiled. They sat in front of the long windows, which were facing the busy street. She took full advantage of the view as she broke away from looking at the papers. In the meantime, while every detail of the paperwork was being discussed. They tiredly read and signed their signature on each paper that was slid over to them. Soon after, leaving the small room to go towards the front entrance attractive slender baby blonde-haired woman with frosty blue eyes dressed in a cream-colored sleeveless summer pant suit in tan high heels walks up to Jaylon-Rose extends her hand out.

“Congratulations! I hope you and your family enjoy your new home.”

“Thank you. I am sure, we will,” she smiled then something changed in her face as she made close eye contact.

The woman had a large slate blue designer handbag on her shoulder, clutching it close to her side. Baby blonde haired attractive woman reached deep into her large slate blue handbag to retrieve her designer sunglasses, tilted her head up to put her sunglasses on she then pushed open the glass smoked colored door to go outside to the parking lot. Jaylon-Rose stood at the door smelling the expensive fragrance of her lingering perfumed that she left behind then moves her eyes off the door down onto Navy and Danny to tell them quickly to behave, while they waited on Winston. Better yet, watches the baby blonde-haired attractive woman drove away in a shiny black SUV, Navy and Danny continue to cutup. But something about her was so familiar for the life of her, she was unable to place where or how as it nagged at her mind. Winston walked out jingling their new house keys in his hands.

“I was just about to take them to the car,” said Jaylon-Rose.

“What are you guys out here doing to mom?” Winston gazed down at the twins with requiring eyes.

“Danny will not leave me alone,” said Navy.

“Ugly, fat liar,” Danny yelled.

“That’s enough you too,” said Jaylon-Rose in a tired voice.

Winston opens the car door for Jaylon-Rose and shut the door. He got in, buckled his seat belt, and said, “Who wants to go to the hotel or to our new house?” Winston grinned like a jack-o-lantern as he held the house keys up in the air.

“Whew-ugh!” Blew Winston as he vigorously fans the air with his hand.

“Man, it was hot in there as he turns on the a/c, headed northeast on Paul Huff Parkway.

“Yes, it was. But that blonde-haired woman back there didn’t we see her before?” She asked.

“Who cares Jay if we did, we are now Tennessee homeowners,” he said.

“Okay kiddos were off to live in our new house on top of Rolling Brook Hill!” Winston said out loud cheerfully. “I’ve found my thrill on Blueberry Hill” Winston sang as he pulled into the bumpy narrow driveway. Once the car stopped the car doors swung open and the twins were anxious to get out of the back seat. Winston held the seat back, so they could get out of the car, he takes a step back to let them pass as he cracks a smile at them, racing to the front door. They ran up the cracked narrow sidewalk while Winston held the house keys and Jaylon-Rose’s hand as they walked together to the front door. After Winston let go of her hand, they all fell in behind him as he unlocked the black solid door before he stepped inside to pivot and kiss Jaylon-Rose then scooped her up and carried her up the five creaky stairs with Navy and Danny giggling behind their father with Salem barking as they traveled up the five creaky stairs. Winston set her down on the top floor.

Chapter 13

“Baby you need to lay-off those chocolate cover cherries,” as he sucked in air and out of his mouth chuckling. Jaylon-Rose playfully hit Winston’s arm. They were all elated as they wandered about their new home. But she did wonder after that comment Winston made, “Was she getting fat?” Winston later went outside to back up the U-Haul truck in the doorway. Winston came in and stood at the foot of the stairs and claps his hands loudly and said, “Snap-crackle and pop back to reality, we have a truck to unload!” Jaylon-Rose listened to Navy and Danny grumble while trudging down the creaky stairs. Winston, Jaylon-Rose, Navy, Danny, and their sheltie collie Salem, exhaustedly settled into their new home late that evening. Jaylon-Rose and Winston carried in the last box and a piece of furniture up the creaky stairs. Tired-some after setting up the beds in all three bedrooms Winston and Jaylon-Rose both tiredly fell backwards onto their unmade bed.

The first night in their new home and after the twins were fast asleep, Jaylon-Rose and Winston planned on christening their home. They both got up at two in the morning and shared a glass of wine. Vacuity compelled his mind as he turns on the TV and channel surfs, just as, Jaylon-Rose grabs the remote from his hands and turns it off. Her lips kiss Winston’s neck as she tries to guide him back to bed. Instead, he gradually silks her down on the area rug in the living room in front of the fireplace. By this time, they were kissing passionately. Suddenly, a metallic knocking on the front door interrupted their passionate engagement on the floor. She abruptly stopped kissing Winston and slipped out of his embrace to eye the stairs. A strict uneasiness was causing her bodily discomfort. She started to shiver as the air quality drastically changed that disconcerted her. Even more so, keeping her gaze stationed over Winston’s shoulder towards the five creaky stairs and fearing the unknown knocking.

“Who could it be at this hour?” She spoke with her lower lip trembling with a frost bit fear of an unnerving confusion resting on her round face.

“I don’t know, and I don’t care,” mumbled Winston kissing her.

“Well, I care, so please stop and check it out,” she requested.

She completely moved out from under Winston, who became irritated with her undying request to see who it was. He heaved his body up from the floor and ran his fingers through his dark blonde hair and shot down the creaky stairs, on his bare feet to open the front door. Winston grabbed the doorknob and yanked it open, and surprisingly found nobody at the door. Winston stepped out and looked sharply both ways and straight ahead at the road in front of their house. Navy crept slowly down the creaky stairs and stood behind him at the front door.

“Thanks pal, for ruining my first night christening my living room!” Yelled Winston in a cocky tone as his pale blue eyes darted from left to right.

“Daddy,” Navy said sweetly.

Winston picked her up as she yawned. Jaylon-Rose yanked on his arm and pulled him inside as she stood shaking cold while rubbing her arms.

“Jay, you’re as cold as ice,” he said.

“I’m freezing,” she chattered nervously through her teeth.

They walked back up the creaky stairs and stopped by the digital thermostat in the hallway.

“Oh, my Goodness, it’s sixty-five degrees in this house. Winston why on earth did you lower the temperature that far down?” She fussed.

“I never touched it,” he said as her finger held down the digital button to raise the temperature to a comfortable seventy-two degrees, gazing up at Winston’s face strangely.

Winston traveled down to Navy’s bedroom and laid her down and covered up and kissed her cheek and smiled. Then, Winston and Jaylon-Rose went to their bedroom on the left and Winston held her cold body in his warm arms for the rest of the night.

She shivered in his embrace until she warmed up and sleep found her.

“Our first night in our house and you get spooked while making out in front of the fireplace,” said Winston laughing while kissing her cool lips and hearing her deep breathing through her nose, as she slept. He stroked her hair and pulled her gently into his arms. The next morning, the Paul family and their dog Salem rose early and dined out for breakfast to a restaurant to eat pancakes. After Breakfast, they walked to their car in the crowded parking lot. They traveled down highway 64 east, taking the exit pointing towards Benton with the majestic sight of the Great Smokey Mountains in clear view. It was a three-hour drive once they got on 411 North on the scenic route. After passing Maryville and entered the foothills with the Smokey Mountains peaks touching the sky. The antique malls, gift shops and log cabin rentals that are staged along the way to 321 to Cades Cove. They drove into the park and stopped at a small cabin gift shop, the smelled of fresh cut cedar wood fragrance filled the air. Their every step was heard by the cracks and creaks made across the real wooden knotted floor. Once seeing the small display of books, she slips over to take a quick look. Few minutes later, they went up to the counter together with two t-shirts for Navy and Danny and, a paperback book about the history of Caves Cove. She quickly opened the paperback book, and started reading it, as soon as, they settled down into the car and shut their doors. Winston backed out of the parking spot, as they joined the other cars and followed closely behind on the narrow, one way out route through the 13-mile park. Right away, she began sharing what she read,

“I feel nothing but remorse for these mountaineers, who gave up their homes, so the government could make this homestead a national park.

It must have been lonely and tough for the women, baring children without medicine, cleaning, baking, and farming. Isolation alone sounded, roughly like the anti-social mountaintop it came to be,” she added.

“Modern conveniences have ruined women,” said Winston in a cocky tone shooting looks at her.

“Male chauvinist,” she playfully hit his arm.

“Thanks honey,” leaning over for a kiss as she moves closer to him.

A silence came, while she dug deeper into reading her paperback book. Jaylon-Rose had a couple of pages left to read that so captured her attention. Just as Winston stops the car at a gravel large size parking lot, “come on honey, put that book down,” said Winston.

“Ok, I am almost at the end of it, she said with her eyes fixed on the pages.

Just as fast as, they all got back into the car, she was just as fast at reading the last pages.

“The Cherokee,’ called Cades Cove, ‘Tsiyahi,’ which means in English, ‘Place of the river otter.’ In addition to the river otters, elk and buffalo that once grazed in the cove. All though the Cherokee never lived in the cove, it was only used for hunting ground.

With the rise of Andrew Jackson’s Presidency that led to the removal of the Indians and the tragic, “Trail of Tears.” However, a few Cherokees refused to move from their area. They hid in the Great Smokey Mountains wilderness dodging the United States Army and local authorities. The U.S. government allowed the renegade Cherokees to claim some of their land in western, North Carolina. Well after the Cherokee removal and the fear of Indian harassment. Cades Cove opened-up the surrounding areas for European settlement. The Civil War was responsible for shattering hopes for Cades Cove remaining residents who were mostly pro-union. Furthermore, small children guarded the mountaintops by blowing horns and shouting, “The Confederates are coming.”

The Civil War prominently changed the Cades Cove’s culture, that were trampled by the Confederates and abandon by the union. More than ever, their minds were set on operating in a fierce independence. Isolation became evident, Cades Cove’s settlers stop trusting or welcoming any outsiders. By turning inward, the mountaineers intermarried and especially when immigration stopped altogether.”

She was astonished and a fan of history. Nevertheless, she finished her paperback book. She then, returns to looking out the window to gaze at the beautiful untouched land, that is set in a remnant of time. Jaylon-Rose’s imagination runs wild like an untamed horse, framing the pioneer way of life in her mind. She sets her eyes on a small herd of deer that is gathered by a wooden rail fence switching their white tails. So now the traffic stopped, and cars line up behind their bumper with cameras hanging out the car windows at the gathering of deer.

The outline of the woods, a step away from the road exposing a layout of timeless fields, array of wildflowers, fresh, pine and cedar trees that fragrant the air of this virgin nature, enchanted mountaintops that touch the castles of clouds in the sky. Not to mention, the mountaineer’s finest workmanship of the 1800’s, cabins, barns, churches, and cemeteries. Fascinated people of all ages embellish the sight of a grey coyote standing on a rocky high dirt bank in the noon of day as a picture of the proud moment in nature was taken. And yet, another attraction soon came up, a black mama bear and her small fuzzy black cubs. Couples, families had a picnic neither out on the coarse ground surrounded by fields that are nestled inside the bosom of the Smokey Mountains or having a tailgate picnic. Even more so, could be easily mistaken for a mere vintage cameo glimpse of a 50’s family enjoying a simple sandwich together in the smokies. Poignantly, Jaylon-Rose’s mind ran rapid like the wild wind. Winston knew this kind of place would fascinate her to no end.

The soul of deep rich mountain soil, the virgin landscape of what still embraces the authentic memory of the mountaineers and the winds that whispers and haunts through the cabins, churches and the breeze that howls like a coyote as it vibrates the wooden rustic rail fences that freely dials the mind up to appreciate the culture and how it was a century ago.

“Can we feed the baby cubs, momma?” Navy asked from the backseat.

“Oh no Navy, mama bear wouldn’t like that and beside the signs in the park tells us not to for our own safety,” answered Jaylon-Rose as she stared out her window.

“I want to see a werewolf come out of the haunted forest,” said Danny.

“What!” She gazed over at Winston.

“Sorry Dan but, they too are asleep in their den. Where did this were wolf stuff come from?” As she turns her head to eye her son in the backseat.

“Daddy,” said Danny.

“I don’t doubt that one bit,” as she gave a curled-up look at Winston as he turned his head towards the driver window.

Danny shrugs his shoulders as he looked out his backseat window. They, all got out walking through empty primitive cabins, churches, and old cemetery, thought of the lives that once thrived here and reading names on old head stones. The smell of different trees, wildflowers with bees buzzing ‘bout on the pollen and eating the nectar out of the flower, no denying the eerie presence of dusty spirits with stone imagines blowing in the breeze as the waist high fields swayed off in the distance. The park’s once upon community of log cabins describes how life was for the mountaineers.’ Jaylon-Rose could imagine the mountaineers living in their cabins and isolated from the outside bustling world surviving on their chunk of land by their crafted tough cracked farming hands.

“I can imagine the Cherokees sneaking down on bare foot making ruts on the dry crackling leaves on the ground, carrying their homemade bow and arrow while on the hunt for buffalo,” said Jaylon-Rose.

Suddenly, Navy spotted a large spider web stretch across the outside back door of a log cabin.

“Momma, look out, you are ’bout to walk into a spider web,” cried Navy.

“What!” Shouted Jaylon-Rose as she stopped on a dime and dodge the web as she made her way down the wooden steps.

“This makes the second spider web I have run into,” stressed Jaylon-Rose.

“Eight-legged spider, so that means you will come-in contact with six more spiders, momma,” said Navy.

“Navy, where did you come up with that, theory?” She asked with a curious tone.

“I don’t know, I um, just subtracted two from eight,” said Navy as they walked back to the car. Jaylon-Rose began thinking about infinity and the number eight. She became distracted with her thoughts as they continue through the park. One car after another lining up then people were bailing out with cameras and binoculars trying to catch a glimpse of a black bear sighting poking alongside the edge of the woods.

“By their reactions, you would think a movie star was coming out of the woods,” said Jaylon-Rose with a subdue tone as she propped her arm up on the car door passenger window that was rolled down.

“Are you trying to convince me, you would not jump out of this moving car to take a picture of a bear?” Winston said as he gazed at her while he drove along slowly on the dusty paved bumpy road.

“Ha -ha,” she belted. You think you know me,” she said as she locked her eyes onto fields and the edges of the woods for a mere glimpse of a bear.

The paperback book made an educational impact on her mind as she gazed out her car window dwelling on what she read about the history of Cades Cove.

“Eight years brings divine intuition,” marked Winston. They exited the park satisfied with what they saw so they travel on gazing at more sights in the area. A pearly white waterfall beautifully bubbled as it hit the river rocks down below the mountain like a bottled of champagne. Jaylon-Rose and Navy would excitedly get out and snap pictures at every sightsee stop. Moreover, they marvel at the herd of deer that covered the landscape on the sides of the road.

“POW! Hunters, back in Missouri would have lost their minds if they saw a deer this close to a car, POW!” Said Winston as they drove by deer.

“How could you? With their sweet innocent brown eyes staring back at you,” she asked seriously.

“Dang Jay, drop your guns,” answered Winston with an insolent grin on his face, she shot him a quick glare with her brown eyes.

“You have no appreciation for wildlife,” she protectively said as she turns her head away from Winston to gaze out her window, while they were heading back home.

“That’s a lie!” Snap Winston as he darted his eyes up at the roof of the car and shook his head.

“Seeing fairies again?” She asked as she gazed over at him.

The car became quiet, while Jaylon-Rose and Navy and Danny gazed out their car window. Winston pulled the car over to the shoulder of the road. She gazes over at him and suspected he was upset, in-which did not seem to take much to achieve.

“Why are we stopping?” She asked. Winston got out and pulled a cigarette out of his pack, lit it, and took a deep drag off it and blew out the smoke as he leans up against the car, facing the beautiful mountainside that was in his view as the spring water trickle down the side of it onto the river rocks down below. She looks back at the twins in the backseat and said, “I am going to see, what’s going on with your father,” as she too gets out of the car.

It was obvious to her something has been bothering him for a while now.

“What are you doing?” She asked.

“Smoking a cigarette,” he said as he held it out for her to see.

“Okay. Um, is there something wrong?” She peered into the car at the twins.

“I just needed to smoke Jay,” he said.

“Did I say something to make you mad?” She asked.

“Never mind,” he said firmly.

“I cannot fix what I did or what I am doing wrong-if you don’t talk to me,” she stressed.

He kept his gaze on the mountainside in front of him, took a drag off his cigarette, and flips it in the air. Jaylon-Rose just stares at him with a dumb founded face and threw her hands up and walked back around to the passenger side and got in the car. Winston settled in under the steering wheel with a façade expression as he turns the key over in the ignition and pulled out onto the highway. They drove down the long highway the air became silent between them and eventually the sun rays began beating down on the car window cause her to feel drowsy as she rested her head back on the seat.

She turned her head towards the window then her heavy eyelids clamp shut. The twins in the back seat where asleep too Danny was up against the car window and Navy’s head was slumped over on Danny’s shoulder pressed up against the car window, while on their way home. Winston gazed over at his wife then narrowed his eyes in the rear-view mirror for he saw in the mirror the twins were asleep too. He smiled at them then readjusted his rear-view mirror. Reached in front of him and slightly turned up the knob on the radio to sing along with Hank Williams Jr. ‘Old Habits’ while he drove down highway 411 south. Winston had long-list of thoughts on his mind. One thought in-particular was a woman from his past that he could not get out of his head. He gazed over at Jaylon-Rose, gently moves her curly chestnut hair back away from her round pretty face and pretended for a just moment he was seeing Dancer.

The next day, Jaylon-Rose registers Navy and Danny at school and while there, she met a volunteer mom named Diamond. They struck up a conversation and a friendship. Diamond showed Jaylon-Rose around the school, then, they went outside and walked the wooded chip trailed that circled around the school playground. Being, single mom herself asked if she was married.

“Yes. Eight years,” she smiled riveting, while placing her open hand on her gold infinity necklace, “what a pretty necklace,” she said as her dark dime shaped Indian brown eyes gazed at the necklace sparkling as the sun light touch the chain.

“Thank you.”

“You know infinity means forever and its love is countless like the stars,” Diamond generously said. Jaylon-Rose’s face was luminous as she pondered on her deepest wish and her eight year-marriage to Winston.

“I like that, is that some kind of love quote?”

“Are you psychic?” She asked. Diamond laughed.

“Being Cherokee Indian, I am sensitive to the spiritual world and to love.”

“Well, umm, my eight-year-old daughter Navy said something strange to me yesterday that rhymes with all of this during our stops through the Cades Cove Park.

“What was that?” Asked Diamond.

“I have been somehow bumping into spider webs and I have had two encounters so far and Navy says, out of the blue, I have six more spiders to go. Meaning spiders have eight, legs and she subtracted two leaving six,” said Jaylon-Rose as she drew a deep exhale.

“Sounds like you have six more changes coming up,” Diamond said with much certainty. Jaylon-Rose shook with chills as a breeze whirl up blowing her curly hair ’bout her face as she reached up with her hand to pull the flying twisting locks away from her mouth then the wind dissipated her curly locks fell in between her fingers like a comb. “Tell me, has anything out of the ordinary happen to you yet?” Asked Diamond with a concerning eyes.

Jaylon-Rose stopped and looked at Diamond with thoughts circling her mind like a bird.

“Well-ah does, moving here to Tennessee and my father dying count?”

“Yes, it does,” Diamond answered as they pick-up their pace on the trail.

“I wish, I could write something extraordinary,” Jaylon-Rose stressed as she lay her hand on the mood pendant.

“That is a pretty mood pendant too, where did you get it?” Asked Diamond whose dark dime shaped brown eyes were fastening onto Jaylon-Rose’s pendant.

“Thanks. It belonged to my mother.”

“I never saw a color so black”, she commented strangely.

“How did you meet your husband?” Asked Diamond.

Jaylon-Rose eyes wandered away from Diamond’s face as they walk the trail.

“Are you changing the subject?” Jaylon-Rose questioned.

“No. Course not.

“Okay.” Jaylon-Rose’s brown eyes pop with blankness.

Um… we met in a nightclub in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Winston and I share a spontaneous side. That should explain, why we married within four months of dating. I was pregnant with twins and had them by the first of year,” Jaylon-Rose said jokily.

“So, you married prince charming,” said Diamond with a southern chuckle.

“Sure enough, he’s a prince charming, alright.

“I am beginning to believe Tennessee has turned my husband into a workaholic toad,” Jaylon-Rose said as she stuck her tongue in and out of her mouth like a lizard.

Two of them threw their heads back in laughter as the trail came to end at the back, parking lot pavement, where they parted and walked off towards their cars. Jaylon-Rose waved as Diamond pulled out of the school parking lot in her blue Ford Taurus.

“Mrs. Paul,” called an office secretary at the back door of the school building. She turns her head to answer, “yes” as she began to walk back towards the school with a curious look on her face as she met secretary at the door.

“You forgot to fill out an emergency form on Navy and Danny,” she said as she handed the forms to her as she stood firmly behind the counter. After walking out of the office, the lights were turned off and the secretary disappeared. She walked down the hall as the lights were turning out one by one in the ceiling in sync with each step she made on the large tile floor, but it became unnerving as her gaze was up then her eyes fasten to the long hall ahead of her when she became startled by a strange man that came out of nowhere and started following closely behind her. She became spooked and pick-up her pace and began breathing hard with perspiration beads on her forehead. Suddenly the door open and a strange man reached out in front of her and held the heavy gray metal door open for her to exit. She steps outside with her hand lying across her chest as she gave a quick glance at the closed door. She swiftly walked to her black Gran Prix with her car key clutch tightly in her hand. She jumps in car and starts the engine and back out in a hurry as she pulled onto the street. A whoosh of air came out of her mouth, and blew her curly hair straight up, she sat at a red traffic light with her arm prop up on the door to cradle her pounding head as she rubbed the left side of her temple.

Once driving home and pulling into bumpy driveway she felt safe. Jaylon-Rose walked up her narrowed cracked sidewalk as she approached the front door, the smell of food frying became stronger as she turned the doorknob to go inside. She was happy and relieved that Winston was home and had started supper, her stomach was already making rumbling sounds. As she stepped up on the creaky stairs looking up at Winston wearing his chef apron and smiled. She flowed into the kitchen and started to snoop and sniff around Winston, who was steadily stirring his gravy while she lifted the lid off the cast iron skillet to peep in on country-fried steaks.

“I am so glad you made mashed potatoes,” she said as she pulls the drawer out to grab a teaspoon. She lifted the lid off glided the spoon lightly across the top.

“Mm,” then she drove the spoon in again.

“Save us some, Mama Bear,” he said.

“Can I help it-if I am madly in love with your mash potatoes,” she kissed the side of his pucker lips, his five o’clock shadow face made him look so sexy standing there in front of the stove cooking, she thought as she felt his sharp whiskers brush across her soft cheek.

“You love my mashed potatoes more than me?” He asked, curiously with a sly grin.

“Of course not, silly. I love you both,” she smiled then laughed.

“So, I see you are breaking in the kitchen,” she said. as she laid her teaspoon down in the sink. Then she put her arms around his waist and laid her head flat against his back, while he stirs the gravy.

“Well, since I am the man of the house, the king of this castle, I should be the elective one,” Winston grin devilishly as their cheeks met and stuck together for a few moments. Jaylon-Rose laughed, while releasing her brace position and amusingly slaps the back of his shoulder blade. She reached up, got a glass down from the cabinet, and filled it up with ice water.

“How did it go at the school?” Winston streamed.

“Good. They are all set. I met a school mom named Diamond. We became acquainted as we walked around the school playground trail.”

“Really. Oh, Aunt Claire called.”

“Okay, well-I had better call her back, while I am thinking about.” She left the kitchen with her glass of water feeling pumped. The smell brought hungry kids in the kitchen while Winston was setting the kitchen table.

“Since, I got some kitchen helpers,” Navy start filling the glasses with sweet tea.

Danny put the forks and yellow napkins out by the dinner plates. Winston gazed at Navy and said, “momma has been on the phone talking to your Aunt Claire for over thirty minutes now and I can’t keep supper hot for much longer. Tell momma to come and eat,” said Winston.

“Why, do I have to?” Questioned Navy. Winston raised his eyebrows at her.

“Because, I said,” he answered, she then rolled her eyes up as she stomps her feet out of the kitchen.

“Momma, daddy said come and eat,” Navy said dryly.

“I heard him. Do you want to say hello to Aunt Claire real-quick?” She asked.

“Hello, Aunt Claire. I miss you too,” Navy answered sweetly.

She then handed the phone back to her mother and waited on her to finish talking to Aunt Claire. Few moments later, she hung up the phone with Winston hollering from the kitchen, “let’s eat people.” Navy’s pale blue eyes watched her momma pull a quarter out of her jean pocket and slap it on the back of her hand, “heads or tails?” She asked.

“Tails,” Jaylon-Rose flips the quarter over and lifted her hand off it and it was heads.

“It’s not fair,” cried Navy.

“You have to help clean the kitchen tonight!” Navy mope behind her mother to the kitchen and slouched down on the kitchen chair at the table.

“What’s going on ladies?” Questioned Winston, while his pale blue eyes darted from left to right from Jaylon-Rose’s upward smile to Navy’s pouting face at the dining table.

“I have to clean the kitchen up,” she pouted with a long face.

“Oh, I see, you lost the coin toss again,” said Winston, while gazing at Jaylon-Rose’s face.

“Cheer up, dad will help you,” he winked at her.

“I am sensing favoritism around here,” complained Jaylon-Rose as she shot Winston a contempt glare.

Winston winks his eye and gives Navy a grin. She was now sporting a much happier face.

“I was thinking after we eat that we could go to the store. I am looking for a new cd, learn some new songs to sing,” said, Winston.

“In that case, I am looking for a good book to read,” added Jaylon-Rose.

Navy and Danny shouted, “Yes! We want toys!”

“Maybe-afterwards, we might stop for some ice cream!”

“Yes!” Danny wailed excitedly.

“So, what did Aunt Claire have to say that kept you in there so long?” Winston questioned her while picking up his glass of tea.

“I wasn’t on the phone that long. Anyhow, Aunt Claire is thinking about visiting us in the near future,” said Jaylon-Rose with gleam in her brown eyes. Navy and Danny both smiled as they turn towards each other.

“I can’t wait to see Uncle Rich,” said Danny as he ate his last bite.

“Well, I can’t wait to see Aunt Claire,” said Navy.

“Me either kiddo,” Jaylon-Rose said as she gently grins at her.

“So, Uncle Rich is coming to?” Asked Winston.

“He better,” she replied.

After supper, they left to go to the store. They bought a few grocery items then Winston and Navy and Danny swung by the toy section. Winston told the twins to stay put in the toy section while he goes across the aisle to look for a new cd. In the meantime, Jaylon-Rose split off from them and pushes the cart towards the books that are located at front of the store and stood there browsing. She picks up a book thinking she might be interesting in reading this one as she flips the book over and started reading the synopsis. The story was ‘bout a romantic ghost story had her glued. Winston and Navy and Danny came up sneaking up and Winston looked back while holding his finger to his mouth and said, “Shh,” while gazing over at Jaylon-Rose in her own little world. Winston tip toes up behind her and says, “boo!” She jumps with a startled scream then quickly covering her mouth.

“Oh, my goodness you guys are terrible!” As she clutches the book to her chest panting. Winston, Navy and Danny laughed.

“My blood pressure cannot take this!” She said amusingly.

Winston and the twins fell back behind her back snickering while she pushes the cart towards the checkout line. There waiting in line, Winston was horse playing with the twins and Jaylon-Rose pick up her book and started reading the first page. Winston stopped like he promised for ice cream and the twins jump out of black Gran Prix and ran inside the restaurant. Jaylon-Rose offered a fulfilling gaze at the twins feeling good seeing they were happy. Navy was eating her chocolate sundae and Danny’s tongue was diligently licking away on his ice cream cone in the back seat as the Paul’s drove home. Jaylon-Rose kept Winston and her banana splits secure in her hand.

Navy and Danny ran off to their bedrooms with their new toys. Jaylon-Rose and Winston sat down comfortably in the living room began eating their banana splits and started watching Everybody Loves Raymond. Jaylon-Rose later picks the plastic dishes and spoons off the dark wood end table, flowed into the kitchen, and deposited it the trash can. While in the kitchen, she started to convey her vision of a new remodeled look for their 70s built home as she stared at the kitchen from an angle and began to channel her ideas to her Husband Winston, who was still watching TV in the living room as she went to un-wrapped the rest of the glasses and plates then placing them up in the cupboards on her tippy toes.

“Do you want to hear ‘bout my ideas on reinventing our retro kitchen.”

“Natta-word of it.” Winston said firmly, while shaking his head no.

“So…um, is later an option?” She said as she poked her head into the living room with a grin raising her cheeks on her round pretty face to upward freeze.

“Where did that leap of epiphany come from? Jesus, Jay, give it a rest,” as he rolled his eyes up at the ceiling.

“Seeing those ceiling fairies again,” asked Jaylon-Rose.

“Yes. I am,” he responded dryly.

She hurried up and closed the French door while Winston was throwing his two-cent in the ring behind the closed door. She turns on the radio in the kitchen to drown out the noise in the living room as she unpacks and hangs pictures on the walls up until midnight. Then, she carried the empty boxes down the creaky stairs to the basement. While putting the boxes down on the floor, she had an un-easy feeling that she was not alone in the basement but also figured basements are just meant to be creepy.

It was unnervingly enough to hear creaky sounds that caused her to think someone was traveling down the stairs to the basement. However, she had high hopes of seeing Winston but instead a gulf of air pushed the basement door open, “Winston is that you?” She called. There was nobody there, and she was feeling spooked. So, she quickly opens the closet door that is on the other side of the basement door and throws the empty boxes in. The unfinished closet is tucked under the basement stairs with insulation tucked in the cracks between the two x fours that went straight in then turns like elbow to the left that added more storage space. Then lowered her head to dodge the cobwebs while pushing the boxes in further. She dusted off her hands on her jeans and closed the closet door and headed back up the creaky stairs. She felt much safer once her socked feet grip the living room floor, with much panting and blew Winston’s name out through her lips but found him asleep snoring in the recliner.

“I should have known it wasn’t you, sleeping beauty,” she uttered traveling down the hall to check in on the Navy and Danny in their bedrooms. Thinking, it could have been one of the kids up roaming ‘bout.

“Danny was that you, traveling down the stairs?” She asked while entering his bedroom and found him asleep in his bed.

She smiled at him and kissed his cheek. She then checks in on Navy who was also asleep in her bed. One thing was certain she felt relieved the twins were okay and asleep. Jaylon-Rose got the willies pondering on the sounds that she heard while in the basement. Jaylon-Rose filtered back into the living room and push on Winston shoulder to wake him up to go to bed. She heard Winston shuffle his feet down the hall, while she was in the bathroom brushing her teeth. She climbs in bed with Winston but as soon as his head hit the pillow. She nudged him to roll over on his side, because his annoying snoring was bugging her as she sat up in bed reading her new book.

She stopped reading when she heard the floor creaking and lifted her eyes off the page she was reading and circled her eyeballs around the room. Currently, the noises the house was making caused her to lose concentration and decided to place her bookmarker on page fifty and close the book. She leans over and laid the book on the nightstand and turns out the lamp. She glanced over at Winston and was having trouble going to sleep and decided to get up and peek in on Navy and Danny then peacefully filters into the kitchen and pours herself a small glass of tea while drinking it, Winston pops his head in the kitchen doorway and startles Jaylon-Rose.

“What are you doing up?” Winston questioned.

“I - I was thirsty,” she said while she raised her glass up with tea in for him to see.”

“I also check in on Navy and Danny,” she added.

“Gees Jay, go to bed and stop patrolling the house like a military officer,” he said.

She followed him back to bed and laid awake.

on her right-side feeling Winston warm morning breathe blowing on the back of her neck then she held onto his arm that was under her head and stared at the wall across from the bed. Winston’s out of town job was in its early stages of troubling her as she listens to him breath heavy but soundly through his nose. The daylight was breaking through the windows. The hour hand on the grandfather clock was chiming seven o’clock am in the living room. She stretched out her legs before pulling the satin comforter back and reaching with her feet to slip on white fuzzy slippers that were below her bed. She had a craving for coffee-she stopped to use the bathroom. She dragged her white fuzzy slipper into the bathroom, she caught a glimpse of her wild looking hair in the mirror as she was ‘bout to walked out. In addition, step back in to brush the wildness out of it and toss the brush back in the drawer. Sleep had one eye open and the other half eye closed.

Once in the kitchen, she starts to make a pot of the coffee and the dark roast aroma was waking her up and opening her eyes. Sounds of footsteps walking towards the kitchen caused her to think it was the twins or one of them.

“Kiddos, you have a few more minutes left before you have to get up.”

Then she got a cup out from the cupboard and began pouring herself some coffee and pause, when sounds of feet shuffling down the hall filled her ears.

“Dan, is that you?”

A shadow was on the wall next to the bathroom door. She did a double take, “what was that!” Jaylon-Rose felt anxious to wake Winston up or tell somebody. She grabs the phone and calls her friend Diamond. While on the phone, she let Salem out then went wandering back down the hallway to peek in on the twins and make sure they were okay, she found them asleep in their beds. She pulled away from their bedroom door and watched, Winston rolled over on his side at least he is home, she signs securely.

“That’s funny,” she lightly muttered.

She scratched the top of her head while walking back befuddle to the kitchen then continue her conversation with Diamond.

“Winston is always asleep, whenever strange things happen,” she told Diamond.

Upon entering the kitchen, she picked up the coffee pot, when she heard Salem barking nonstop outside.

“Oh, my goodness, what is he fussing about this early in the morning?”

She walked over to the back-French door and darted her brown eyes out the window. All she could hear was Salem barking continuously at the very edge of the slope yard. Muchmore, was a neighbor’s yodeling rooster from behind the house perch on a fence, yodeling his rise and shine morning anthem. She finally sees what the noisy ruckus is all about, a peculiar woman with short dark hair, who routinely walks up and down Rolling Brook with a yardstick in her hand passed in front of the house twice a day. Just shrugs it off as nothing important and opens the French door for Salem to come back in. Salem stood at the door staring up at her with his begging brown eyes.

“Okay, I get it,” she said sweetly.

Jaylon-Rose bends down and picks up his ceramic black bowl and carries it in the house and puts the bowl up to the icemakers with the sound of the ice dropping in the bowl made Salem’s tail wag back and forth. She filled it with water and set it down for him.

“Is it okay with you, if I go pour myself a strong cup of coffee?”

Salem lowers his long nose in his bowl and began licking on the ice cubes. In the meantime, Jaylon-Rose went back to the counter to pour her second cup of dark roast coffee, and took a sip and Salem began barking at the door. After she told Diamond all about her morning encounter, she hung up with her. Winston then snuck up behind Jaylon-Rose, lifted-up her chestnut brown hair, and started kissing her on the back the neck. She squirmed with tingling goose bumps popping up on her skin, while she splashed some of her coffee on the counter then setting her cup down to pour Winston a cup.

“You are going to raise my blood pressure to the moon if you keep sneaking up on me,” as she wiped up the coffee spill.

“So, are you feeling guilty about how rude you were last night?” She asked.

She dropped the dishcloth on the counter then turn to face him, and started playfully nibbling, kissing on his neck and lips.

“No, not at all. But I did wake up missing you,” he grinned.

“That is a lie!” She belted out amusingly.

“I lie not, my lovely mademoiselle,” as he kept smooching on her lips.

“I am no longer a single mademoiselle,” she giggled.

“True. But you will always be my beautiful French girl, aye?”

“True,” she said while nibbling on his earlobe and trying to persuade him back in bed by whispering sexy words into his ear. She slid her moist lips down his neck tasting and smelling the woodsy scent cologne on his skin. She continues teasing him as she hiked her leg upon his hip. Winston picked her up with intension of taking her back to bed when he noticed the time on his watch, At the same time, his brief case sat by the top of the stairs as it caught the corner of her brown eye while her arms were embraced around his neck. “Last night, when I carried down our empty boxes to the basement, the basement door flew open and I heard sounds that made me think it was you coming down the stairs,” she finished.

“Jay, there is register by the basement door and when the heat-pump kicks on the air blows out and most likely open the basement door.”

“Ok. Explain the creaky sounds I heard coming down the stairs?” She asked.

“This house is what forty years old?! Nails back out and cause the creakiness you heard when walking or the house is settling, it’s no big deal,” he explained.

“Ok Jay, why are you bringing this up now, knowing I am about to leave?” He said skeptically as he gazed at her.

“I was spooked being down in the basement last night by myself. Somehow, I will have to get used to being here alone and hearing the creaky noises,” she signed.

“Yes, get use, to it, Jay. This is our life now here in Tennessee and living in this house.”

Chapter 14

Her face frown as her brown eyes gloomed down onto his brief case while he kissed her. Fixedly, hid behind the yearning ache that pricked her heart with

sadness to see him leave. Jaylon-Rose had a drooping posture, while standing by the

counter and manages a fake smile as Navy and Danny enter the kitchen, she turns away.

to take two bowls from the cupboard and poured cereal and milk in it.

“Good morning, kiddos,” Jaylon-Rose said cheerfully as she set the bowls in front of

them.

“Good morning, momma,” said Navy and Danny groggily as they both pick-up their spoons. Winston finishes his coffee and Danish then bent down to kissed Navy and Danny on the cheek and told them to be good for mom. Jaylon-Rose walked with him down the creaky stairs, where they hugged and kissed goodbye. She watched him leave in his ’67’ cherry red convertible Mustang. She treaded back up the creaky stairs feeling choked up with tears. Navy and Danny were putting their bowls in the dishwasher. She then kissed them goodbye and watch them board the school bus then it went roaring down the hill. She took slow steps up the creaky stairs then woefully sat down on her recliner with Salem resting by her feet for the rest of the morning. Later, that afternoon, and after-school for she thought it might do her some good to get some fresh fall air and start acting like a happy homeowner. So, she decided to go outside with Navy and Danny to rake the leaves up in their new front yard. The weather was unbelievably warm.

unlike Missouri this time of year. Jaylon-Rose laid the rake down and pulled off her gloves to grab the camera that was sitting on the bench in front of the knockout pink roses.

She started taking pictures of Navy and Danny falling, down on the leaves that were swept into piles. Salem was licking their rosy cheeks and barking as they rolled and tumbled happily on the sloped yard in laughter. Jaylon-Rose, Navy and Danny went to the store to buy fall decorations. Last, they drew funny faces on their pumpkins and sat them on a bale of hay along with three fall bright yellow mums and a scarecrow that was standing up on a five-foot stick.

“Fun time is over-put your gloves back on and let’s gathered the scattered leaves and bag them up this time,” she said while putting her gloves on.

Afterwards, Jaylon-Rose, Navy and Danny ventured back out and went shopping for Halloween costumes. Danny chose to be a werewolf and Navy chose to be little red riding hood, a perfect match. They stop at a drive thru-restaurant. Then Jaylon-Rose parked her black Gran Prix so they could eat. The tangible layers of hue colors of the sun had set over the horizon that met the earth’s soil with splendor. She began handing out hamburgers with/ cheese and French fries to Navy and Danny in the back seat. Jaylon-Rose focused back around to the windshield, while guiding her straw to her mouth and sipping on her large unsweetened tea. She marveled in delight at the beautiful sunset that was in front of them. In-which, was responsible for her reaching inside her brown handbag to pull out her camera and step outside the car door to snap a picture of it.

“Momma, what are you doing?” Danny asked while taking a bite out of his hamburger w/cheese.

“I am taking a picture of this magnificent sunset.”

“Why does the sunset for?” Asked Danny while chewing on his French fries and gazing at his momma’s camera. “Well, so other parts of the world can enjoy the sun like we have today,” said Jaylon-Rose while she drew up unsweetened tea through her straw while enjoying the refreshing taste. Muchmore, gazing was spent on the windshield at the bold dusk-colored ribbons that air brushed the sky like a Leonardo Da Vinci painting. Jaylon-Rose was now driving home when the burnt orange sun was drawing closer to the ground and disappeared behind the hills. Dusk was covering the day up like a blanket as they pulled into their bumpy driveway with the moon staged above the aged trees in the Rolling Brook neighborhood that seem to follow them home. Crickets, whip-poor-wills, and a hooting owl are masters at aghast haunting sounds during the night especially in backyard where woods are present. They got out of the car and head up the narrow-cracked sidewalk in quickness to their front door. Once Jaylon-Rose unlocked their front door, Navy and Danny shot up the stairs ahead of her. She heard popping sounds down in the basement underneath the creaky stairs. She winced while lagging-behind and stood briefly on the stairs holding onto the banister to listen, while her eyes fell on the basement door. All was quiet except for the loud nocturnal sounds of the night that were carrying on outside. She shrugged it off then lightly shook her head as she continued-up-the creaky stairs with a pleasing grin on her face at the sight of Navy and Danny in the kitchen rummaging through the cabinets for a snack.

“Kiddos, I need to make you a doctor’s appointment.”

“For what?” Asked Navy while dipping her ruffled potato chip into onion dip container.

“Capturing the anaconda that is hibernating inside your bellies,” she said while tickling, Navy and Danny ‘s stomachs.

“What is anaconda?” Asked Danny while sticking his hand inside the potato chip bag that Navy was holding.

“You, the largest eating snake,” giggled Navy with Danny sticking out his tongue at her.

“Okay kiddos, its bath time,” Jaylon-Rose said firmly holding back a smile.

Navy drop the potato bag on the counter and raced down the hall towards her bedroom and grab her pajamas then make a dash for the bathroom door. Danny shot out of the kitchen like bullet, grab his pajamas out of his bedroom, and skid down the hall in his socks yelling and beating on the locked bathroom door.

“You are welcome to watch TV with me, while you wait on your sister,” said Jaylon-Rose while patting the cushion beside her. Danny kept beating on the door and whining.

“It’s not fair,” cried Danny.

“Dan, come sit with your momma on the sofa until your sister comes out.”

He drags his pajamas across floor into the living room then hop onto the sofa.

After the baths were all finished, Jaylon-Rose tucks them into bed and finally was able to soak up a moment of peace as she sunk down comfortably into the recliner reading a book by a lamp light in the living room. The next day, Navy and Danny school’s fall festival was under-way and Jaylon-Rose volunteered for the ticket booth. The weather was beautiful with an azure sky to match, the continuous breeze made it perfect for the kids to take full advantage of the kite flying weather. The kids took off running towards the festival to meet up with their school friends. Jaylon-Rose’s face showed a smile of contentment as she watched them running with the wind blowing the hair back as they met up with their friends. Another mom was volunteering and stopped by Jaylon-Rose ‘s booth to chat.

“Hi, my name is Eva Mendez, a stay-at-home mom in her mid-thirties with soft black shoulder length hair. I am a volunteer mom too.”

“I’m Jaylon-Rose Paul. You can call me Jay.”

“Ok-I will. You have a long name,” she said in her broken English-Spanish accent.

A little birdie told me you people are new to the area. “

“Yes,” answered Jaylon-Rose as she listens carefully.

“Maybe, we can get together for lunch,” said Eva as she widens her brown eyes.

She turned her gaze away from Eva and towards a sixth grader that came up to her booth to buy tickets.

“I would like that,” said Jaylon-Rose as she restacked her tickets then lifted her eyes on Eva.

“Where do you live at?” Asked Eva.

We bought a house in Rolling Brook.”

“Oh really, where abouts?” Eva asked.

“I say it’s about 2 miles in. It’s the tan house with black shutters,” she added.

“Oh yes, before you top the hill. I had friends that use to live there,” said Eva with a strange look in her eyes.

Some parents came with their children to buy tickets and Jaylon-Rose took their money then handed the tickets to them and made small talk.

“Oh.” Who were your friends?” she asked curiously.

“Ray and Melanie Blake, they attend my church for a short time until tragedy struck.”

“Melanie Blake,” said Jaylon-Rose.

“Yes. You know her?” Asked Eva.

“No-not personally-we-ah bought her house!”

“But were you told the house has a curse on it?” Said Eva as she turns to watch her daughter jump up and fall-down onto the balls inside the net while hiding her odd expression on her face.

“No-what curse?” Jaylon-Rose asked, Eva’s cheeks fell with a mysterious grim expression as she took a deep swallow then she said, her husband died unexpectedly on Christmas Eve night.”

Then, Eva’s daughter runs up.

“Come and watch me race in the potato sack!” Said her daughter with excitement as she tugs on Eva’s arm to leave.

“Sorry, I have to go” said Eva with a doubtful grin.

“I understand. But. How is the house cursed?” She questioned as her elated face faded away, while she wondered why Eva acted so strangely and walked away without answering her. She focused back on her volunteer duties at her booth and reached up to rub the achy area on her forehead in a circular motion. Anyhow, kept a motherly eye on her kids with their painted faces as they ran from one booth to another playing games. She took her eyes off them long enough to look down at her wristwatch when she noticed the time was approaching four o’ clock and the festival was ending. She hurried around to clean up her area and pitch her water bottles in the trashcan, rushed to follow Navy and Danny upstairs to their homeroom to gathered up their prizes and candy. Fatigue looking Jaylon-Rose, lean up against their homeroom door waiting as other parents and children were busily down the hallways.

She was exhausted as she unlocked her front door and dreaded each step going up the creaky stairs, she made it the top floor and over to her white sofa where she drops down sideways and laid there and dozed off to sleep in the living room in the meantime, the kids ran off to their bedrooms. Sometime after an hour past, she was stirring about on the sofa and slowing waking up from her nap but still had her eyes closed as she was coming to, when she heard the stairs creaking and assumed it was either Navy or Danny. Jaylon-Rose gathered herself into a sitting position then yawned a couple of times then arching her back as she drew up to her feet looking around.

“Navy-Danny is that you?” She peers into the kitchen and then ventures off down the hall to their bedrooms when she hears their voices outside. She walked over to the window in Navy’s bedroom and gazed out at the bumpy driveway and saw them playing on their wooden swing-set and smiled.

All the sudden the door slam shut.

“What in the world!” She pivoted as she swirled out of Navy ‘s bedroom.

“Okay, she rationalized. “Maybe I left a window open,” she walks into the bathroom and found the window closed. She steps out of the bathroom and gives a quick look down at the front door in-which was also closed so she shrugged it off and headed into the kitchen to-make-dinner-when Navy and Danny came barreling up the creaky stairs.

“Hey kiddos, did you work-up an appetite?”

“Yes, I am starving,” panted Danny with his long chestnut brown bangs sticking to his sweaty forehead and red flushed round cheeks.

“You’re always starving,” Navy said, while pouring tea into a glass.

“Shut-up!” Shouted Danny.

“That’s enough!” Jaylon-Rose corrected.

“You both smell like goats,” she said.

“Do your mother a favor-go take your baths without arguing,” she stressed.

They both went down the hall grumbling at each other on their way to their bedrooms. Jaylon-Rose was counting on Winston to come home for Halloween. Winston called while she was searching inside the freezer for a frozen vegetable to add to their baked chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy and buttery rolls. In the meantime, while holding the phone with side of her face, Winston suggested her friend Diamond accompanied her, Navy and Danny on Halloween night. She instantly became upset and started questioning him on why he could not come home, he then showed a cruel regard and callously ends the call. Her mood changed drastically while the kids were taking their baths, she became withdrawn and bitter but hid her opposition from them. During dinner that night, Jaylon-Rose broke the news to Navy and Danny that their Father Winston will not be home for Halloween. They were disappointed, especially Danny.

“Dad said, he was going to dress up like me, a were-wolf,” whine Danny downheartedly.

“I know. I know but, Dad has to work and wishes he could come home,” she said trying to talk without crying while gazing at their sad faces.

Jaylon-Rose was having a tough time speaking well of their father as her voice broke in two as she comforted her two children.

“He lied,” cried Danny as he scooted his chair out and shot out of the kitchen upset.

Jaylon-Rose gazed over at Navy with watery eyes at the table. The following next night was Halloween, Jaylon-Rose and Diamond join forces and made the best of it for the kids. The light rain drizzles down, as they strolled through the crowded Halloween festive neighborhoods, with soggy wet brown and gold leaves stuck to the streets and sidewalks. Navy looks perfect in her bright red hooded cape with her daddy’s blond hair peeking out from her hood. Danny looked cute but realistic in his were-wolf costume and joined the other kids at the door saying, “trick or treat.” Halloween ended up being an enjoyable wet evening after all. It was perceptible that Jaylon-Rose was sad and lost without Winston, for she swirled in atmosphere of neglect and abandonment that were almost tangible. Danny unwrapped his candy and started eating it out of his plastic, orange pumpkin.

“No Dan, I need to check it first,” Jaylon-Rose firmly said.

“I’m hungry,” he whined with his hairy were-wolf mask on.

“Are you, kiddos ready for some pizza?” Jaylon-Rose asked energetically.

“Yes! Screamed the kids from the backseat.

“That sounds like it to me,” said Jaylon-Rose as she gazed over at Diamond who chuckled said in slow thick southern drawl,” It sure does,” she yawned.

“Don’t get that started,” yawned Jaylon-Rose.

“I am ready to call it quits,” yawned Diamond.

“Trick or treating with four children is exhausting,” Diamond tiredly cracked a laugh in her southern Georgia drawl. Jaylon-Rose agreed with a yawn and pointed to her mouth.

“Be thankful it’s once a year,” she said after she found a parking spot for her black Gran Prix. Then the kids all bailed out of the back seat and race ahead excitedly towards Pizza Hut’s doors, while Jaylon Rose and Diamond lag, behind talking.

“You left me hanging with our conversation the other day?” She said, with eagerness to continue.

“Do you believe in spirits?” Diamond asked.

“I do.”

“The unsolved mysteries may come back to haunt you,” said Diamond.

“Great. I have to battle with ghosts and goblins too,” She clustered.

“Ok. If that is the case, I will wear a garlic necklace,” she teased.

“You are too much-girl. Will talk later,” Diamond tiredly laughed.

After, they got home She told Navy and Danny to take their baths while Jaylon-Rose squatted down and crisscross her legs on the area rug in living room in front of the fireplace and dumps the candy out on the floor in front of her and examines every piece.

The phone started ringing, Jaylon-Rose lifted herself off the floor to answer the phone and it was Winston on the line asking; how their Halloween night went. She squatted back down on the floor with the phone pressed to her ear. She was still disappointed with him for not being home as her eyes and hands and continues to prowl through the candy.

“Tell Navy and Danny, I love them and save dad some candy,” Winston said.

“I can’t grant any guarantees on the candy,” she snickered.

“Did you miss not being home for Halloween?”

“Jay, Halloween is not that special,” said Winston in a flat tone.

“It is to the kids,” she said with a breath of distressed.

“Dan was very upset with you,” he said, you lied.”

“It’s late,” he paused. I had a long day. I just want to go to bed,” he answered tiredly.

“Don’t let me keep you from it! She said hastily and ended the call then tossed the phone. She could feel her French blood pressure rising to an ungodly number as she drew in a deep breath. She managed to squeeze out a smile on her exasperated hot pink cheeks when Navy and Danny came into living room dressed in their pajamas, smelling squeaky clean of children’s watermelon hair /bath soap as they grabbed for their plastic pumpkins and dug into the candy with their little hands. She watched her son as he un-wrap one piece of candy after another. She then scooped up the two plastic pumpkins and put them on the counter.

“Okay kiddos, that’s enough of Halloween for one year and candy for one night,” as she grunted getting up off the floor.

“It’s time to brush your spooky teeth kiddos and go to bed, mommy is all tuckered out.”

“I don’t want to go to bed,” whined Danny,” after he brushed his teeth and went moaning to his bedroom. Jaylon-Rose began to apply foam cleanser to her face while she stood in front of the mirror rubbing it on in a circular motion. She leans forward to the sink and splashes water on her face and reached for a hand towel and patted her face then she brushed her teeth. She checks in on the kids before she went to bed.

“You put up a good fight, but you are the first to go to sleep,” she whispered as she bends down to kiss Danny’s plump cheek as he rolled over on his side, she smiled sweetly.

“Good night, I love you,” she said.

“Good night momma,” said Navy. They hug then she laid her blonde head of hair down on her pillow, yawning.

“Good night I love you,” she said.

She turned all the lights out and lay down on her pillow gritting her teeth, while stewing about Winston’s negligence for his family until sleep found her too. Sometime during the night when the rain was still drizzling down and, thunder could be heard rumbling deep in the distance. A shiny black SUV pulls into the bumpy driveway and sat there idling with head light beaming. A black heavyset woman in her mid-sixties lived across the street from Jaylon-Rose’s house. The woman moved her curtain over to peep out the window at the bright red taillights that were in Jaylon-Rose’s dark bumpy driveway that were reflecting in her living room window. The black woman drops the curtain as the vehicle back on the two-lane street. The next morning came with a frosty moist breeze in the air with the sun taking longer to warm up the fall chilly Cleveland morning.

The lyrics of the birds had woken her up, hearing their songs and chirping loudly right outside her bedroom window and merrily congregated and peck at the window screen. She stopped to use the bathroom then made a pot of coffee and yawn, while opening the door for Salem to go out, then pours some coffee into her cup. By this time, the sun’s golden rays were shining on the French door and defrosting the frost off the windowpanes. The sunlight radiated the side of her face and the morning sunlight brought out the red pigments in her brown chestnut hair and honey stone in her brown eyes. She took her coffee cup and went out the back French door, once her white fuzzy slippers touched the back deck, she stepped over to the redwood-stained banister, and gazed up at the partly cloudy sky. Her brown eyes fasten upwards unto the passing puffed white clouds as they became obsolete over her bronze tin roof. Every now and then, the sunlight would squeeze through the over-stuffed clouds to shine down to dry the morning water droplets that lay on the ground from the night before cool temperatures. She leans over the red-wood- stained banister and sat her cup of coffee down on it.

Wrapped tight in her white robe with her feet snug deep inside her white fuzzy slippers. While gazing at the woods and the tall, crooked trees that made a boundary line behind her house as she listens to the neighbor’s faithful rooster yodeling his morning anthem. She de-attached her eyes from the somber woods. After swallowing her last drop of coffee, then pondered on Winston trying hard to wrap her head around why he hurt Danny. Her face told the story of her thoughts that weigh in her eyes. Winston being so preoccupied with his job, she fretted over his apparent lost interest in the family. She shrugs her shoulders and goes back inside with Salem following behind then closed the French door and shook off the chilly air. Then, looks at the time, and prepares breakfast for Navy and Danny before they head off to school. The smoked flavored crisp bacon frying in the iron skillet along with fried eggs and toast popping up from the toaster was circulated through the whole house like a fan. The tempting savory smell enticed the kids to the kitchen. Jaylon-Rose began preparing their plates as the kids pulled out their black chairs from the black cottage table. She eyed their hungry little faces, while she brought their breakfast to them.

“You-kiddos have your book bags ready?”

“Yes momma, we do,” answered Navy.

“Perfect,” replying as she gave a motherly gaze down at their plates.

Soon afterwards, they both pick up their plates and put them in the sink then they ran off to the bathroom to brush their teeth-arguing over who goes first. Jaylon-Rose stops to turn on the TV then, sat down on the sofa stretch across an end table to twist the table lamp on. She rested back comfortably on the sectional and began watching the early morning news as she sipped on her second cup of coffee with background noises of Navy and Danny arguing in the bathroom.

“Move over,” yelled Danny.

She gazed up at the grandfather clock it was ten minutes before six forty-five a.m.

“Just brush your teeth and stop acting like Gremlins.”

“What are Gremlins?” Danny asked.

“A decade before your time kiddo,” answered Jaylon-Rose as she scratched the top of his head.

“What’s that mean?” He questioned.

“Time for the bus,” she said with her coffee cup in her hand.

“But what is it?” He asked as he went down the stairs.

“But Dan. Will watch the movie when you come home from school,” she smiled.

Navy dashes off into the bathroom to brush her long straight blonde hair again and to apply lip-gloss. He gave his momma a hug and ran down the stairs yelling, “come on, Navy.”

“Hang on,” she shouted from the bathroom.

Jaylon-Rose stood by the bathroom door gazing pleasantly at her daughter looking at herself in the mirror.

“Your brother is going to have a panic attack, if you don’t hurry up,” she smiled.

“Beauty comes first,” Navy pranced.

“How do I look momma?” Navy asked.

“Is gorgeous prestige enough?” Jaylon-Rose asked her daughter with a smile.

“Yes,” giggled Navy as she flew down the stairs to catch the bus with her brother.

She waited for the bus to pass then closed the door with a smile on her face thinking about her little girl growing up too fast already primping in the bathroom. While she whistles through her pursed lips on the way back up the creaky stairs. Jaylon-Rose started cleaning the breakfast dishes and placing them in the dishwasher and wiping down the countertops and the black cottage table when she heard the doorbell ringing.

“Oh-dear who could that be?” She wondered.

So, she dried her hands on the dish towel and laid it down on the counter and walked out the French door entrance and Salem follow her down the creaky stairs to answer the door.

“I am coming,” she said out loud.

When her feet reached the bottom floor, and her hand grips the doorknob to turn it and opens the door with anticipation on seeing a person standing there. Oddness struck her eyes that nobody was standing there, so she steps out with one foot firmly on the door thrust to looked both ways. She steps out a little further onto the concrete narrowed cracked sidewalk to look out with only her car in the driveway. She grabs for the storm doorknob and look over her shoulder before going back inside. Salem ran off towards the side of the house to hike his leg on a bush, then he came running to the door that she held open.

“Salem is you’re barking off duty this morning?” She asked Salem as he leaps inside. She steps back in and closes the door with still an odd suspicious look planted on her face. She then paused with a strange drape in her brown eyes as the color left her face as she went up the creaky stairs. Jaylon-Rose pick-up her dishcloth off the counter, began wiping down the counter as if in a trance, she re-wiped again and again while in deep thought before stopping and putting the dish cloth up to dry, then began sweeping, mopping the kitchen floor. She left the kitchen carrying the mop and broom to the closet.

She closes the French door behind her, then, filters to the back of the house to make up the beds, when the phone started ringing. She let go of the hem of the comforter that was in her hand and was about to spread it out across the bed. But instead steps over to the bedside cherry wood nightstand to answer the phone.

“Hello. Hello. Hello.” After the third time saying hello, she pushed the off button.

She stared at the phone and shook her head and went back to finish making her bed up then fluffing the pillows. The phone started ringing again, she jumps. Then, she paused slowly backing up from her bed and staring at the phone resting on the nightstand ringing. A dark shadow stands by the bedroom door on the left while she answers the phone again.

“Hello.” Hello. Hello.” Then, she hears, “Jay, honey you there?”

“Winston,” she called his name out.

“Hi honey. What are you doing?” He asked.

“Trying to make the beds up, in between the phone ringing,” she answered.

“Kids get off to school alright?” He asked.

“Yes-they did,” she replied in a short-breath.

“I got to go, I’m in a rush, love you-bye,” Winston quickly said.

“Love you too,” she frowned.

She held the phone in her hand as her eyes moved from side to side. She went onto finishing bedrooms and vacuumed then closed their doors. While wrapping the cord up on the vacuum cleaner, she heard the stairs creaking and peered down the hall, hoping it was Salem resting on the step. She went ahead and put the vacuum cleaner away. And filters down the hall holding the phone in her hand. She filters down the hall with Salem following closely behind her wagging his fluffy tail with the sounds of his nails tapping the laminated floor. She automatically felt at ease being in her writing room and dropped down in her chair at her desk.

A whoosh of air came out her mouth while gazing at her laptop screen and felt at peace. Salem walked around several times in a circle until he found a comfortable spot to curl up by her feet under the desk.

Chapter 15

I never gave much thought to myself ever living in a suspected cursed haunted house.

I must say, my house is raising that very inclination that my house might be. Many un-nerving strange noises like knocking on the front door, creepy footsteps on the stairs and I must add I feel like someone is watching me. Diary, after strings of calls then finally the last call, my husband speaks out. At this point in the game, I do not know, if I should label it as coincidental. However, I refuse to let it damper my perspective.

Frankly, I am enjoying putting my personal touch on our retro home. How to a break the news to my skeptic, preoccupied husband is a whole new ballgame? How do I, keep my skeptic Husband Winston from speculating I have gone looney tunes?

Anyway Diary, I do have some good new Navy and Danny love their school and they are making new friends and seem to be adjusting. But not so much for me I am struggling along like a tugboat.

I have met a new friend Diamond however I am not making much of a connection with other school moms, but you cannot win them all. I feel so lonely in this house when Winston is gone and every sound comes alive, it intensifies all I see and cannot see, all I hear do not hear.

Dear Diary,

I am feeling troubled, and I am not myself today. I hate being left alone in this older retro home. I am trying to learn how to stuff my feelings inside of you perhaps, like an envelope. Diary. I have not the energy to write today, sorry diary. My body is begging me for a nap.

Then pushes out her black computer chair away from her desk and gazes out the window before she knew it her eyes closed. The sun disappeared behind the Smokey grey rain clouds, the room lost it ’s brightness, and gradually faded to a subdued light as it began to drizzled rain outside the roads became wet and every few minute’s sounds of squishy wet tires passing by. Made her sleepy but the outside activity jarred her awake. Which caused her to turn away from the window, just as a vehicle slowly crept by while she rolled back to her desk and click onto the internet to read her email. She yawns and rubs the sleep out of her eyes then brings her focus onto reading messages from her Aunt Claire. Then click onto reply, while hearing the bus breaks squealing to a stop in front of split foyer house while gazing over at the window at Navy and Danny jumping the ditch charging towards the front door. The twins race up the stairs and shot down the hallway to drop their backpacks in their bedroom floor. Danny stopped by the doorway, “what’ cha doing momma?” He asked as he was coming out of his bedroom.

“Replying to Aunt Claire ‘s email,” she answered nicely with a small smile.

“Tell, Aunt Claire, I said hi, as he rushes off to join Navy in the kitchen.

“I will,” she smiled.

He later came back by the computer room and waved, who by the way is a spiting imagine of his mother as he swept his long straight chestnut hair away from his brown eyes. She waved back at him. Danny turned on his TV upon entering his bedroom then he grabs for his fire truck on the toy box shelf. The fire truck lit up and the sirens sounded off soon as Danny touch it the firefighter shouted from his seat “don’t play with fire or matches” as he rolled it across the floor in front of him as he occasionally looked up at his TV. His bedroom walls were painted in blue denim color with a fire truck red border.

“When are we going to watch that movie?” Danny asked, while poking his head out his bedroom door.

“Shortly,” she came back.

Navy walked by the computer room with her phone mashed up against her ear applying watermelon lip-gloss to her heart shape lips. She waved and smiled at her momma, and she waved back with a grin. Navy favored her father in every way with his dark blonde hair and pale blue eyes. Navy close her bedroom door and flop on her bed, landing on her stomach that is where, she began giggling on the phone to her new school friend and gazing at her crystal princess Tiara, she won at a local beauty pageant in Cape Girardeau mall. Jaylon-Rose painted her walls pink with a purple border. It went magically with her white wooden bedroom suite. Navy place a sign on her bedroom door that read…

“Must say the magic password,” as she got up to shut her bedroom door. Jaylon-Rose was reading her email, when things sudden changed from a calm atmosphere into a chaotic outbreak. She tried to ignore the constant interruptions of loud banging on Navy’s bedroom door, and Salem their miniature collie standing by Danny ‘s feet barking. Jaylon-Rose tries her best to block out the noise.

“Let me in!” Shouted Danny as he banged harder on the door with his fist.

“You have to say the magic password first!” She shouted back, while on the phone.

“I forgot the magic word Let me in” he continued to shout.

Jaylon-Rose lost her train of thought she looked up at the clock above her desk on the wall it was six thirty p.m. so she decided to close out the story and clicks onto shutting down her computer. She watched the screen shut down, while sitting at her desk. She lowered her head and began to rub the back of her achy neck, suddenly a loud crash in Navy’s bedroom and Danny is crying.

“Oh, dear Lord,” said Jaylon-Rose as she rose-up from her computer chair, feeling stiff in her lower back as she reached around to rubs the sore area in a circular motion as she drag her feet into Navy’s bedroom.

“Navy, what on earth is going on with you two?”

“Momma, Danny, open my door then he crashed into my desk,” giggled Navy as she hid her laughter behind her hand. Angry Danny got up from the floor; he started swinging his fist at his twin sister.

“Whoa! Calm down Dan,” said Jaylon-Rose.

Navy kept backing up and dodging him, giggling, “Dan needs a dog lash, momma!”

“Shut-up ugly. No. Navy made me fall, it’s her fault,” Danny cried.

“You came up pushing on my door and crashed,” Navy giggled.

“Okay, that’s enough kiddos turn everything off in your rooms and go to the living room and sit down, while I figure out what to cook.”

Jaylon-Rose pointed her finger down the hall and closed her tired brown eyes and rested her head on the wall while she still rubs the back of her achy neck while the kids past by grumbling.

“Why do I have to, when it’s Danny’s fault?” Asked Navy.

“Twins that do crime together spend time together,” answered Jaylon-Rose with an evasive tone.

“That’s dumb,” Navy snapped.

“Keep your opinions to yourself,” she replied. Navy repeated sarcastically, “keep your opinions to yourself.”

Jaylon-Rose shot Navy a warning glare from the corner of her eye. Navy grin sarcastically and twisted off down the hall with her snotty attitude and her blonde ponytail swinging back and forth across her back.

“Go Navy,’ is the magic word, dummy,” said Navy.

Danny stuck out his tongue and she pushes him.

“Momma, Navy pushed me,” Danny squealed.

Salem was looking up at Jaylon-Rose, barking.

“Navy I saw that. Salem be quiet before I put you outside,” she stressed.

Salem lowers his head to the floor sulking as he searched for a hiding place in the living room to lie down. The kids shuffled on into the living room and plopped down on the floor in front of the TV. She turned on the radio that hung under the kitchen cabinet. She was singing along with a song that was playing on the radio, while bending down reaching in her cabinet for two pots, when the phone started ringing a call from Winston Paul.

“There’s the third kid,” she said as she straightened up her back and placed the two pots on the counter and leaned over to pick up the phone.

“Hello honey,” said Winston.

“Hey,” she tiredly, while putting her apron around her waist and tied the strings into a tight bow behind her back, while she tilted her head to the left to rest the phone on her shoulder.

“Is Danny still mad at me?” Asked Winston.

“No. I am sure he is over it by now,” she answered in a tired atone.

“So, where are you at?” She asked while opening-up a jar of spaghetti sauce and pouring the sauce in the saucepan. She turned off the running faucet, stepped over in front of the stove to stir the sauce with a wooden spoon.

“I am in a law firm building in Boston,” said Winston.

“What are you doing, Jay?”

“Um. Being a referee to our darling twins, listening to the radio, while I cook spaghetti,” she smoothly spoke.

“What ‘s going on with them?” Winston, questioned.

“Oh um, Danny forgot Navy’s magic password. furthermore, her little sassy attitude is getting out of hand.

“That is a catastrophe for both,” chuckled Winston.

“Yes, it really is.

“Is he swinging at his sister again?” Winston chuckled.

“Yes, same ole sibling rivalry.”

“I have to be in a conference meeting in 30 minutes, I just wanted to check in” he replied swiftly. Winston’s dark blonde hair was neatly, styled in place. His confidence was evident, while looking handsome in his dark navy-blue suit. His pale blue eyes were alert and roaming ‘bout as he steps into a waiting elevator clutching his black leather briefcase in his hand and bracing his cell phone to his ear. Last, he pushes the first-floor button.

“Call you later - love you.

“Love you too,” she softly said.

Winston jogged ahead to catch up with his associate Max Felon as they rushed into a waiting taxicab and sped off into the busy Boston traffic. Jaylon-Rose grinned widely, while placing the phone back on the base. She kept stirring the spaghetti sauce and went back to singing along with the music on the radio. She stopped singing when she heard someone clearly saying her name. She pivoted around and heard it again.

Jaylon-Rose walked over to the entrance doorway to the living room, “did you guys say my name?” Navy giggled, “no,” while watching a program on nickelodeon.

“Okay,” she said then shrug up her shoulders and returned to the kitchen.

“Go wash your hands kiddos. Dinner is ready,” she called out from the kitchen.

While they sat together at the table, the radio was turned down low. As the afternoon grew later into the evening. It became windy outside, and the floating leaves caught Jaylon-Rose’s eye as it glided in the air. She enjoyed the harvest view through the French door windowpanes the gold and red leaves on the trees as she walked to the door to look out. The kids chatted about their school friends. When Jaylon-Rose heard, the bathroom door slam shut. “Did one of you open the bathroom window?” She asked.

“I didn’t,” said Navy. Danny nodded his head no while he twisted spaghetti on his fork. She scooted the black chair out and carried her plate over to the sink to rinse it off and placed it in the dishwasher. Minutes later, she heard the faucet running full blast in the bathroom, she stopped loading the dishwasher and left the door down and went to the bathroom. She opens the bathroom door, and her eyes widen open at the water that had filled the sink up and was spilling over unto the floor.

Her mouth formed a huge size o, as she shouted, “oh no!”

“Who left the water on!” She shouted from the bathroom.

The twins came running towards the bathroom; their feet came to a sudden halt at the bathroom door.

“Who was the last one in here,” she asked as she looked up at the twins with anger piercing inside her brown eyes.

“Me,” said Navy.

“Grab a towel out of the closet and help me,” she said in grouchy tone.

“Make sure you turn the water off next time.”

“I did turn the water off,” said Navy while on her knees drying the floor with the towel.

“What! You said you were the last one in here,” hissed Jaylon-Rose.

“I was, but I turned the water off,” said Navy as she laid the wet towel on the bathtub. Jaylon-Rose turned towards her with an unusual gaze that followed Navy as she walked out of the bathroom. She came out last and notices the floor was wet around the top of the stairs while her eyes follow the stream that ran down the steps, and strangely all the way to the front door. Jaylon-Rose grabs another towel from the bathroom closet, drops to her knees, and began wiping up the water.

“How in the world did this water from the bathroom travel towards the stairs?” She asked aloud as she pauses to look down the stairs.

Later that night, after dinner she called for Danny.

“Still want to watch Gremlins?” She asked knowing she was fighting sleep.

Danny ran in the living room and cuddled as close as he could beside his mother.

“Navy, do you want to join us?”

“No thanks, I’m too updated for that,” she said on her way back to her bedroom with headphones stuck to her ears.

“Oh really.”

A couple of times during the movie Danny hid his face. And, made jokes about Navy acting like a Gremlin.

“Okay kiddos, it is time for bed,” She went in and softly brushed back Danny’s chestnut brown hair. She then kissed his cheek and whispered, “I love you. Did that movie scare you?” She asked as she stroked his chestnut brown hair.

“No momma, it was hokey, so eighties,” confirms Danny.

“Hokey, so eighties,” she scrunchies up her eyebrows.

“Where on earth, did you learn this from, young man?” She asked curiously.

“Navy says it too,” said Danny.

“It’s ok, kiddo,” Danny yawned as she pulled his denim blue comforter upon him.

Navy was already sideways in her bed, with her phone beside her head. She tenderly smiled while gently moved her back on her pillow and pulled her hot pink comforter upon her. She pulled her long blonde hair away from her face and bent down to kiss her round rosy cheek, then she put Navy’s phone back on its base.

She turned out the light, quietly stepped out of her bedroom. Then flipped on the kitchen light and walked over to the pantry to take out the coffee can and filters. Within minutes the brewing coffee filled the kitchen air with a delicious hazelnut scent invitingly smooth away all the cares of the day. She poured herself a cup then precedes lightly into the living room. She heard the wind blowing outside and the rain hitting the tin roof.

“Boy, it sure does rain a lot here in Tennessee,” she said.

Her voice drops down to a whisper while setting her coffee cup down on the end table, then she reached over to turn on the brass table lamp.

The living room had olive green walls and a large black mirror that was on the wall above the sofa. In addition, the family portraits that were arranged on the other wall above her head, where she began to whine down to watch a movie. She sank down into her white Italian leather roomy recliner, and in her comfortable lavender cotton pajamas with her long chestnut brown hair loosely pulled back into a twist.

She folded her legs under her to carefully lean over gently to take hold of her hot cup of coffee. She was deeply involved into the movie, “The God Father Part 1,” sipping on her hot coffee. The creaky stairs started to creak like someone was traveling up the stairs. Salem the miniature collie was lying on the floor in front of the recliner by her feet.

The creaky sounds coming from the stairs alarmed Salem as he lifted-up his head off the floor, started growling then Salem got up started barking. An unnerving chilly feeling was inserted into the air like a hypodermic syringe into her calm evening. She gave a quick gaze at Salem barking his head off at the stairs.

She picked up the remote to lower the volume and paused the movie she took her eyes off her flat screen TV for a brief-moment to listen to the sounds the creaky stairs. She calmly gathered her wits and brushed it off thinking the house was settling like, Winston had said. Then turned the volume back up and resumed the movie; in the meantime, she held her coffee cup a little bit tighter. Salem continued to bark at the stairs.

“Shh Salem, you are going to wake the twins up, be quiet!”

Salem lowers his long nose down to the floor sulking. Just then, the front door swung open and grab her attention. Salem’s long nose raised straight up in the air snarling. Jaylon-Rose sat stiff as a board in her recliner.

“What are you barking at?” She nervously asked Salem while biting down on her lower lip. Fearing the worst, that someone had broken into the house. She thought, someone was at basement door jiggling the doorknob. The air quality only in the living room changed drastically to freezing. She felt the cold draft blowing on her body while reaching up to touch the tip of her ice-cold nose. Reaches for the burgundy throw and spreads it on her body. Then she sat there hearing the stairs creak again. Takes the throw off and slowly unfolded her legs down, firmly braced her socked feet on the cool dark wood floor carefully turned to sit the half-drunk cup of coffee on the end table.

She lifted-up from the recliner and tip toed quietly over to retrieve Danny’s baseball bat that was leaning up against the olive-green wall with his baseball sitting inside the glove. Tightly grip the end of the ball bat with her shaky hands using caution approaching the stairs. Suspense was beating like a drum roll, inside her chest.

She stretched her slender neck around, while up against the wall securely holding the ball bat in her hands that was ready to swing. A nervous Jaylon-Rose impulsively jumps around in front of the stairs swinging the ball bat, in midair. {Ring-ring} She screamed and jumped around as if her feet were on hot coals of fire.

She drops the ball bat, then it hits and dings loudly on the floor and quickly she raised her shaky hands to cover her mouth while leaping over to answer the phone.

“Oh, thank God, it’s you Winston,” she cried.

“Jay, what’s wrong?” Asked Winston with concern in his voice.

“Winston, I heard noises. As if, someone was trying to break in the house. Winston, the front door swung open by itself and um I heard someone in the basement walking around, I walked over to the stairs with a ball bat in my hand, preparing myself in case the intruder tried to come up the stairs. Jaylon-Rose panted heavily into the phone.

“Did you make sure all the doors were locked?” Asked Winston.

“Yes, yes,” she panted into the phone.

“Call the police, now!” said Winston.

She calls 911. Tells the dispatcher, “It’s an emergency I hear noises and I believe someone has broken into my home,” she stressed. Two officers responded to the call when a short siren sounded as they pulled into the dark bumpy driveway. The two officers knock hard on the front door. Salem started barking at the top of the stairs. Jaylon-Rose and her dog, Salem shot down the stairs to answer the door, upon opening the door Salem flew out, barking and running in circles around the two officer’s wet shoes.

“Ma’ am, put your dog up,” said the officer who was wearing a dark full-length raincoat.

“Does he bite?” Asked the other officer.

He looked down to observe the miniature collie with his long black flashlight that had rain drops on it.

“No. Salem would not bite anyone. He just gets overly excited sorry,” she admits as she bent down to pick Salem up. She went on to explain, what she heard on her stairs and in the basement. They came in to check around and then went downstairs to the basement then went out the basement door to check around outside in the dark with their flashlights. Two officers came back around to the front door and reported to Jaylon-Rose that nobody was found in or outside her home.

“What is your full name and address, asked the officer with a pad in his hand taking down the report. Well, if you hear anything else, just give us call. Will patrol the neighborhood tonight,” said the two officers.

“Thank you, I feel much safer knowing that” she signed.

“No problem ma’am.” She stood at the door and watched the police officers leave in their patrol cars then she shut and locked her door. On the outside, up on the hill a shiny black SUV was slowly creeping by in front of her house in the pouring night rain. The phone was ringing as she put Salem down and locked the front door and she ran up the stairs to answer the phone and Salem followed closely behind her socked feet.

“Jay, did you call the police?”

“Yes, they just left. They checked the house inside and out. No sign of anybody in the house,” Jaylon-Rose gasped with her heart hammering inside her lavender pajama top.

“Are you alright?” Winston questioned.

“I think so. I am so befuddled about tonight. I feel silly and scared. I so need a mixed drink,” she mutters vaguely.

Winston listens quietly while she spoke brokenly.

“Are you there?” She wondered.

“Yes. Paused. Go to bed and I will see you tomorrow, okay?” Winston said.

“Okay,” she answered Winston back nervously.

She slowly turns to face the wall that hid the steps and fumbling backwards to hang the phone up, then turned off the TV, she pauses at the stairs then speaking to herself “Whew! What a night.” Then, filters down the hallway rubbing the side of her temples as she felt a headache coming on, while entering her bedroom on the left.

“Thank God tomorrow is Friday. Winston will be home,” she said as she climbed into bed and fell asleep on her pillow.

During the night, she was disturbed by her ice-cold feet as she pulled her comforter up to her neck then rolled over on her side then rolled back on her back, restless feeling cold. She dreaded getting up found the power to and pulled out her drawer and took out a pair of socks and slips them on her feet, went back to bed where she found sleep. Winston lay in bed and stuffed the pillow under his head and tossed back and forth causing the springs in the mattress to squeak while pondering about Jay’s unexplained noises and now this. He was restless and asked his self, questions a loud, “is she doing this-to force me home every night? Or worse, is Jay becoming a disillusion unstable wife and mother?” His wandering thoughts burnt holes in his mind for the rest of night on which way to approach this new fork in the road, hmmm?!

Chapter 16

The next day, Winston flew home while on the plane he dozed off feeling sluggish from his restless night at the hotel. He pick-up his mustang at the Chattanooga airport and put his leather brief case and suitcase in the passenger seat and rive up his 289 motor then lit a cigarette and took a drag off it, blew out the smoke, put on his dark sunglasses. He drove off and got on interstate 75 heading north then exits off on 27.

“Honey, I’m home,” said Winston as he walked up the creaky stairs. He sat his briefcase down, when Jaylon-Rose came running into his arms; Salem was jumping on Winston’s pant leg wagging his fluffy tail and barking for his attention. They kissed passionately with a close sensual hug.

“I missed you so much,” she said.

“I missed you too,” he said as he glided his hands up and down her back caressing her soft cream toned skin. He pick-up Salem, I miss you too as he rubbed his thick sable and white fur vigorously.

“I bought you a dress, while I was in Boston,” said Winston as he put Salem down and dusted off Salem’s loose fur from his suit.

“You did?” She said, surprisingly.

“Where is it?” She asked.

“Let me see it,” she said eagerly.

“Okay, since you insist,” laughed Winston as he shot down the stairs.

“Winston, where are you going? Are you playing a trick on me?”

“Yeah, going to Walmart’s to buy a magic trick bag,” he shouted back. Shot down the creaky stairs heading out the front door towards his cherry red convertible Mustang. He came back holding in his hand a long silver bag hanging on a clear plastic clothes hanger.

“Here it is,” said Winston as he held it up in the air. With bright teary eyes, she pulled the dress carefully out of the bag.

“It’s beautiful. Where on earth did you ever find such a beautiful dress?”

“The Goodwill Store in Boston,” he said with a big grin, and then he chuckled.

“What? The Goodwill Store-there is no way,” she said.

“No Jay, I am just kidding.” She playfully hit Winston’s arm while still admiring her new dress.

“Stop joking me,” she smiled.

“Okay… the truth is after lunch, I was walking down the busy sidewalk in Boston, when I happened to see this eye-catching dress in the window of a small boutique store.

I stopped by the window gazing at the mannequin wearing this dress; I began to imagine this dress on you.” She wrapped her arms around Winston’s neck and pressed her rose-colored lips deeply into his.

“Oh Winston, I love it-thank you, darling,” she kissed him several times more on the lips and squeezed him close to her breast.

“You can count on a new dress more often as long as I receive this kind of reception.”

“Honey let us find a sitter for the kids and go out tonight for dinner. I want to see you model your new dress,” said Winston.

“I love your spontaneous side,” she said.

“I know that is why you married me. She ran down the hall then moments later,” she returned to the living room, smiling.

“I found someone!”

“Fabulous,” said Winston.

She laid the dress up against her body and adored what she saw in the mirror. She carefully lays her new dress down onto the bed and begins to undress. She then slipped on her new wine-colored backless dress with white diamond sequins that hugged every curve of her body. She wrapped a clear shawl around her shoulders.

“Here is Diamond’s address and phone number in case you get lost.”

“Men never get-lost women do,” joked Winston.

“You-male chauvinist swine!” She squealed as she threw her shoe at him as he ran out of the bedroom saying, “I am off to take the kids to Diamond. Be ready when I get back.”

“I might be if I don ‘t, get lost in the bedroom,” she smirked.

“I can leave my GPS,” said Winston. Navy and Danny were yelling,

“Bye, momma.”

“Bye, kiddos.”

Then, she heard the sound, of front oval glass black door closed. She could hear Navy and Danny talking outside in front of the house as they climbed into their father ‘s mustang. “Ha - Ha.” She muttered, while pondering on Winston’s early wisecracks.

She sat down at her brass vanity, brushing her chestnut brown hair, pulled her hair up, pinned it with an antique wine, and silver barrette. Then, reached inside her jewelry box for her diamond earrings that Winston had bought her last Christmas. And began to put the earring in her left ear when she heard their front door open and close. Pausing for a brief second then tilting her head to the right began again to put the other earring in.

Staring at her reflection in the mirror, when she heard footsteps traveling down the hall and her name was even called “Jaylon-Rose,” then she paused for a moment as her eyes stays fasten to her reflection.

“Winston, is that you? I’m almost ready!” She got up from her ivory-colored cushion bench. In addition, she twirled around like a ballerina doll in front of her vanity mirror. She stopped twirling, meanwhile in her mind, she assumed Winston was back, according to the noise in the house. She walked over to her closet to pull her black high heel shoes out of her clear plastic shoe bag. She was standing in front of the closet door mirror looking pleased at herself.

“Winston, you have such exquisite taste,” she spoke to herself as she turned sideways to admire her beautiful dress.

She closed her closet door; bent down in front of her mirror to check her hair and make-up once more before leaving her bedroom. Upon gazing down, she spoke in a haste “oh my goodness, I almost forgot my favorite mood dragonfly necklace,” while putting it around her neck. Instantly a bundle of fibers censors in her body sent out an impulsive message that changed the pink color to black. Then, her brown eyes zero in on a chocolate covered cherry that was sitting on her vanity table. She picked up the chocolate covered cherry, and smile.

“Awe, how sweet,” thinking Winston set the chocolate covered cherry there, while putting it to her moist rose-colored mouth to take a small delicate bite as she swayed down the hall feeling radiantly beautiful.

“Winston, where are you?” She called.

She pivoted around to see that Winston had not yet returned. She shrugged up her shoulders at her assumption. In the meantime, she went into the bathroom check her make-up spray some more perfume on her dress and hair. Winston opened the front door and came in then stop halfway up the stairs, “honey, are you ready to go? We have reservation for seven pm, as he gazed down at his expensive gold wristwatch, it is six twenty-five. We have an exactly thirty- minute drive.”

“I am ready,” she signs coming out of the bathroom across the dark wood floor in front of the stairs looking luminous in her new dress.

“How do I look?” She asked as she twirled around.

“Stunning,” he was in awe as the dress dazzled in his pale blue eyes.

She gazed at him with an intense deep infatuation stare that produce a merry dance in her brown eyes as she absorbed his pretentious pose on the stairs that were flashing red hot. He was dressed in black pants and white button-down silk shirt that went alluring well with his fit body structure and made him extraordinary sexy. So, whatever he did wrong his-handsome face made him flawless in her eyes.

“Wow! You look gorgeous,” he said.

“I think you do too, Winston.”

Winston cradled her small round face in his hands, softly pressed his lips to hers. She closed her eyes to savor his kiss, his touch weaken-her at the knees. He tenderly gazed at her lovely round face as he reached down to clasp her hand, “let’s go before I change my mind.” They both laughed and dazzle their way down the five creaky stairs out the door into Winston ‘s cherry red convertible Mustang and zoomed down the Rolling Brook hill like Barbie and Ken. Upon arriving at the Italian restaurant, Winston open-up Jaylon-Rose’s passenger door for her and took her by the hand. The host seated the couple by the window a cozy round table for two, their silverware was wrapped napkins that were placed on the table as they both gazed at their individual menu. They placed their orders with the waiter. Instrumental Italian music created the perfect romantic atmosphere as waiter came back with two wine glasses and a bottle of wine and sat it on the table. “Grazie” they both said to the waited as he bows his head and said “benvenuto” and moved along to other tables. They picked up their wine glasses and said “salute” as their glasses gently chimed.

During the meal, Winston received a text. He slid open his phone, “where are you?” Winston bent his head down and text back saying, “I am at a restaurant with Jay.”

“Who text you?” she asked as she dunked her bread stick into the dish filled with butter garlic oil.

“My ah co-worker Max Felon.” Winston got another text right after that read,

“Having fun?”

Winston, texted “Yes.” Now, stop the texting please.” Max frowned at the text.

Her face fell long during their meal, disappointment and concern grew in her eyes as she watched Winston send another message as she pours some more wine into her glass.

“The food is really good,” said Winston as he chews the remaining eggplant and parmesan that was left on his plate. She nodded her head yes, as she drank her last sip of wine. Upon sitting her glass down, she casually mentions, she was going to the restroom. Winston got halfway up to excuse her from the table and stood up to leave.

She pushed the door open, and a strong cinnamon sticks potpourri smell met her nostrils. Then her eyes roam in delighted at the spacious clean bathroom that was decorated in pictures of countryside villas along the seaside of Italy. She was intoxicated and moved unsteadily in her high heel shoes to the bathroom stall. Winston was still seated at their table and waiting patiently on Jaylon-Rose to return. She was too impaired to realized-how long she was taking. He gazed down at his watch and said in low voice,

“What is keeping her?”

“Can I get you anything else?” Asked the waiter.

“No. Thank you,” said Winton, I am waiting on my wife now.

The waiter nodded his head up and down with understanding grin, the waiter moves to another table. Winston backs out his chair then motion his waiter to come to the table and gave a quick glance towards the restroom while the waiter made his way over to the table, whom was a neat looking Italian dark-haired college aged young man, “what can I get for you sir?”

“Check, please.”

The waiter came back with a black leather receipt holder and four chocolate mints wrapped in green paper tucked inside. Winston gave the waiter his credit card while she was away Winston pulled out a tip from his billfold and laid it on the table as he gazed at the restrooms. He was reading his text when the waiter handed back his credit card.

“I hope you found everything enjoyable,” said the waiter.

“Yes, we did. Grazie,” Winston said.

He briefly gazed up to take the card and put it back in his billfold and cast a puzzling gaze at the restroom, and then went back to his phone screen as he left the table and walked out of the restaurant and into the parking lot. In the meantime, she was still in the bathroom staggering ‘bout. She gazed into the mirror and wiped away mascara that had smear lightly under her eyes, with her index finger. She reapplied rose-colored lipstick to her faded lips. She had seen a rippling effect when she brought her hand down from her face. She rubs her finger across the dragonfly pendant and began to cry. She puts the cap on her tube of lipstick, drops it down in her brown handbag and wipes the tears out from her eyes and push the bathroom door open. And gazes over at their table and noticed other people were occupying it. She asked their waiter, “have you seen my husband, Winston?”

“No, I am sorry.”

“Winston, where are you?” She shouted.

She turned in a circular motion and bumping into people walking in. A waiter went outside to get Winston who was talking on his cell phone.

“Excuse me,”

“Hold on. Yes,” as he turns to face the waiter.

“Your wife is looking for you inside the restaurant.”

“I have to go, I will call you later,” and ends his call.

Winston follows the waiter back into the restaurant to find his wife. She is stumbling around yelling Winston’s name. Winston was slightly embarrassed when he walked up to her and took her by the arm and escorted her out of the restaurant.

“Where were you?” She asked in slurred speak into his ear.

“Been waiting on you,” he said calmly as they walked out passing other customers inside and outside waiting on benches for available table.

“No, you left me in that restaurant. You are a rude man,” she slurred. In addition, they could feel and see everyone eyes from all around the building staring at them.

“That’s a lie. You left me, so you could text secretly on your cell phone,” she spit out.

Her emotions were mixed, unpredictable and intoxicated. She gave a livid gaze at Winston that he had yet to see as he planned on opening the passenger door, but she grabbed the car door first. “I can do it myself, grazie,” and flopped down in the seat then slammed the door shut.

“Jay!” He cursed do not take your anger out on my car door.

He gave her an angry gaze as she re-adjusted her dress and her position as she pulled the dress down in front of her knees and totally ignore him. He put his phone inside his pocket and swung around the back of his car and settled under his retro slot steering wheel. Winston drives around in Chattanooga sight-seeing for a little while trying to smooth things over. She remained in upheaval quiet manner.

Muchmore, silence by the time Winston drove to the front of the Southern Belle Riverboat. He turned off the ignition and pushes the gear shifter into park as he gazed over at her face. The city’s surroundings lifted the turbulent air. The river boats were floating in the Tennessee River, the tall building was lightening up the entire Chattanooga city. The overhead bridge was stocked with pigeons nesting underneath in the pockets as the night traffic flow on top. Their view crested against all that sailed across the breast of the mountains. It was a gorgeous starry night with a black velvet painted sky with a white hanging quarter lit moon that sent thousands of tiny crystal shaped lights that dance on top of the midnight blue greenish tint river. Her eyes marvel at the river view, although her face stayed relaxed, while she absorbed the prevailing atmosphere and her surroundings that soften her mood and sober her back to their date night with Winston and trying to let loose of her green thoughts and savaged the rest of the night.

All the while, the barges floated by in the dark night as schedule carrying cargo.

In addition, just on the other side of the river was a nearby line of houses perched along sides of a ground wall with boat docks bolted like cliffs to a mountain. A station river boat and gift shop attach to its own station dock out by edge of the river to serve boarding passengers onto the Southern Belle River Boat Dinner Cruise that sails up and down the Tennessee River. “May I open your door, Miss?” Winston asked with a gentleman charm before getting out. She nodded her head yes and waited on Winston to open her door.

He walked around to the passenger side and opens the door for her. As moments past by the velvet night air lingered off the river whistle while it blew a chilly breeze across their faces as they strolled along the sidewalk quietly holding hands. Then strolled along side of Winston and found solace while gazing closely at the water while holding his hand. The midnight azure sky sparkled like aged wine and glistered like expensive imported diamonds as they walked along the riverfront. She noticed a small playground beside the road; her hand broke free from Winston and scurry off towards the swing-set and sat down like a little girl and kick off her high-heeled shoes to the side in the sand. She gazed up at the tranquilizing sky decorated with stars as she tightly griped the plastic-coated chain and said to Winston, who came up behind her, “push me,” she leans back into his flat hands as he pressed against her back and push her while she folded her legs underneath the swing to go higher in the air. She held her head back and glide with the fall night cold wind blowing her hair ’bout and loosen her chestnut-colored curls from her barrette as she sang; “Twinkle, twinkle little star how I wonder where you are, up above the clouds so high like a diamond in the sky. This is a perfect night to wish upon a star,” she said with a deep innocence.

“Can I have a penny?” She asked him.

“Sure, but what for?”

“So, I can make a wish.”

Winston stops pushing her while she gradually stops the swing with her feet as he reached inside his pant pocket to dig out a penny. She stared down at her feet and the black iron pole light shined directly down on her toenails that sparkled as the light danced on her rose color nail-polish. He laid the penny on the palm of his hand she pinches up the penny. She squeezed the penny tight inside her palm as she made her wish, while still sitting on the swing.

“Twinkle, Twinkle little star,” she paused and closed her eyes, “I wish to be a famous author someday,” she earnestly said.

Winston gazed up at the starlit sky and lowers his eyes back onto her. She sprung up from the swing to grab Winston’s hand, ran towards the water in her bare feet, and kneels-down on the pavement tucking her dress under her. She kissed the penny before throwing it into the water.

“Do you have eight pennies?” She asked.

“Yea, but what for?” He said with a puzzling gaze.

“A toast to our infinity,” she signs.

Therefore, he dug deeper inside his pant pocket and gave her eight pennies. She sat there by the edge of the water and gazing deep into it, then lifted her eyes up at the stars that were hanging in the sky like a treasure of twinkling luminous diamonds overflowing inside a sea chest. She then lowers her gazed down unto her dragonfly pendant and put her hand on it and close her eyes and one by one she tosses the pennies into the river.

A vision form behind her closed eyelids as she saw her smiling friend Abby. A street lined with palm trees and a beautiful beach house by the ocean where the powder blue sky touches the top of the water and the voices of sea gulls gathering by the shoreline. In addition, the waves rippling endlessly without fail. She visualized herself sitting by a window viewing a delightful sight of the children building sandcastles, all the while writing another best seller, and while tingling joyful tides splash inside her soul. She smiled and opened her eyes as she sips on her straw from a diet soda can. The vision dissipated, when Winston pulled her up to her feet, so he could embrace her slender body securely in his arms and pressed his full lips into hers. Winston spoke as he released her, “I love you.”

At that moment, she penetrated her gaze into Winston’s eyes. His pale blue eyes lower onto her dragonfly pendant and saw it was black and never said a word just blinked and lifted-up his eyes to gaze into her hers. “I wish,” as her long eyelashes flutter a couple of times as her eyes searched his blood shot pale blue eyes for a reflection of her inside of them. His phone was singing a musical tune of a text alert. Her watery eyes gazed at him, while he received another text and step away from her to read it. She felt abandon standing there.

“Okay, what you wish to tell me?” Asked Winston whiles he closes his phone and slid it back into his pocket and step back over to her.

“No, never mind,” she spoke with her anticipated words lying dead on her tongue.

She drew in a breath and look away as she put her high heel shoes back on.

“What is wrong now?” He asked with concern.

“Forget it. It doesn’t matter,” she said.

“Yes, it does matter. Tell me,” He cursed as he grabs her arm and spun her towards him.

“I wish your Attila the Hun manners would cease to exist,” as she coldly stared into his eyes then jerks her arm away.

“What is wrong with you, Jay?”

“It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out your cell phone is far more important than me tonight?”

“For the record you did rudely leave me in the restaurant,” she hissed.

“No! I got tired of waiting on you to come out of the restroom, so I paid for our meal, then I went outside to get some fresh air and smoke.” Winston shouted as he spun his body away from her then turns back around to pointedly say, “you are a jealous pathetic woman,” he cruelly said.

“How dare you say that to me,” she angrily said.

“Winston you are obviously preoccupied with your job and cell phone. Why did you even take me out tonight?” She hissed while her facial muscles flinched in anger.

“I am sick of hearing about your delusional stupidity!” Winston voice escalated.

She kept on babbling in the background.

“Just shut up,” he demanded.

“No. I will not. I am sick of you too, putting your job first and tossing your family aside,” she ranted as her nostrils flare out as she breathes deeply in and out.

Winston instantly became belligerent. He stomps the ground, swearing, swung around and punch his fist in the air several times, lastly begins talking angrily to himself.

“I buy you a dress and take you to a nice Italian restaurant. Behold the deplorable, I am condemned to hell because I work out of town, he ranted. FYI-I worked and lived out of state and before ever meeting you, so it’s nothing new,” he emits.

“Now you are being creepy, talking to yourself,” she said as she cut her brown eyes at him from the corner of her face.

“Shut up!” I did not give you invitation to ridicule me. You-are the one, who is creepy with your haunted make-believe stories,” ranted Winston.

“You know our house has suspicious noises!” She paused.

“Our house is haunted, she cursed! I will not shut up!” She said, rigidly.

Winston grabbed her face and squeezed it with both of his hands.

“Yes, you will,” he growled.

His piercing pale blue eyes formed into sharp daggers as his hands tighten. Unto her face while turning it hot pink as Winston held his grip firm and steady?

She screamed, “let go of me! You animal.”

She pulled down on his hands with both of her hands, with all her might to defuse his tight grip and it warrant effortless, and it drained her of all her energy to fight. After that, he finally noticed she was getting limp he released her face from his tight vising grip that was tracing the outline of her jawbone inside his hands that he could have crushed with one more ounce of pressure. He left his handprints, on the-both sides of her cheeks and shove her away from him and she lost her balance and fell, down on the ground as she later pulled up on her knees, when she looked down at her torn dress and began to piece the seam together, but it fell apart when she turns it loose from her hand. She cursed Winston and yelled as she gazed down at her torn dress then sharply over at Winston, with a blaming gaze in her eyes. Winston gave a cross look at her torn dress as he stepped away to disowned, his actions.

A police car pulled into the parking lot. He reached inside his car and grabs a small bottle of mint mouthwash that was lying on his console, he unscrewed the cap, took a quick sip, and goggled mint mouthwash, and he then turned his head away and spit it out on the ground. In the meantime, she gazed up at the police car and pull herself the rest of the way up from the ground and stumbled in her high heel shoes over to the passenger side of their car, sobbing and wiping her eyes feeling both sides of her cheeks throbbing with pain, that work its way down to her lower jawbone. The police officer walked up to Winston and took out his flashlight and aim the light up and down the full length of Winston’s body then walked to the back of Winston’s mustang and aimed the flashlight on his license plate as the officer called in the tag numbers to the dispatcher then started his line of questioning.

“What’s going on tonight?”

“Nothing officer,” Winston nonchalantly said while gathering his self together, wiping the sweat off his face with his white silk sleeve.

In addition, his usually neat styled dark blonde hair was messy, and hanging down just passed his brows. He used his fingers to comb back his hair. The officer made his way over to Jaylon-Rose when he noticed she was crying and shaking.

“Ma’ am, are you alright?” Questioned the officer and shined his flashlight onto her bruised face.

“Yes. I’m fine,” while keeping her head down low as she weakly spoke and wiping her wet face with her hands.

“A complaint was called in about a disturbance or possible domestic violence.”

“No, we were talking without realizing, we got a bit too loud,” said Winston aloofly.

“Have you too been drinking tonight? Let me see your driver license, registration and insurance card.”

“No. We stop here before heading home,” said Winston.

He took out his leather billfold and pull out his driver ‘s license then reached in his car and pulled out the out of the glovebox his registration and his insurance card and hand it to the officer. The officer perusal the items in his hand then gave them back to Winston, while he oddly study Winston ‘s demeanor. The officer then turns his focus onto Jaylon-Rose.

“Ma’ am you sure, you are alright?” while keeping Winston in his eyesight as a report responded on the radio from dispatch, “all clear from the subject in question.”

“Copy.” replied the officer.

“Yes.” She answered in a fragile.

“If I get another call you, Mr. Paul will go to jail for domestic violence, is that understood?”

“Yes sir,” answered Winston.

He gave a final look at Winston and settled into his patrol car. Winston nervously stood on the sidewalk keeping his eyes on the officer every move while reaching inside his pocket for a cigarette. He lit up a cigarette and took a deep drag. His feet moved swiftly to his cherry red convertible Mustang as he reached out to open the passenger car door for her. He took another deep drag, and then flips the lit cigarette in the air.

“If I didn’t know any better that cop was itching for me to sneeze the wrong way.”

“This is déjà,” she popped.

“What makes you say that?” He asked curiously.

“Remember, the night you ask me to marry you and a cop almost arrested us for loitering.”

“Oh-yeah, let’s get out of here,” Winston walked away from passenger door, and jumps behind the retro steering wheel and stuck his key in the ignition and rev up the Mustang 289 engine. Winston yanked the gearshift down into drive then drove nervously slow out of the park with the officer following closely behind. He peered into his rear-view mirror and watched the officer turned the other way. His jittery nerves instantly mellowed out. In the meanwhile, they both played the mute game. Unknowingly to Jaylon-Rose and Winston. Winston glanced over at her from time to time as he drove 85 miles per hour on the interstate heading back to Cleveland, while reaching across to hold her hand. She pulled her hand away as she sat in the passenger seat reluctant to look at Winston. He took the exit ramp off the interstate and pulled over on the shoulder.

In addition, put the car into park and turned off the engine then shunt his body to one side to face Jaylon-Rose who was still visibly upset.

“What are you doing?” She asked in a broken voice.

He stared at her with a relax face. She stared back for as long as she could before cracking a smile. Winston began grinning back at her. She melted like butter as she gazed back at him in the dark car. The dash lights and the light from the radio shine on his handsome features.

“I am sorry. I-I don’t know,” he signs. “What came over me, back there. Blame it on too much wine tonight,” said Winston.

She turns her head away from his face, feeling some consolation from his words.

“Finish telling me your wish,” said Winston.

“I forgot,” she answered slowly. She searched his eyes and wondered, “who does he see, when he looks at me, I wish I knew what he sees in me,” scroll across her mind, all the while, her wish laid tucked underneath her breath.

“Do you forgive your Attila the Hun husband?” Winston said as he pushed a smiled out on his face.

“Can I think about it?” She asked her eyes squint with a smiled at the remarked, he made.

“Absolutely, and um-we can sit here all night,” he calmly said.

“No, I do not,

“Okay,” she hissed.

On the other hand, watching him shrinking down in his seat and closing his eyes caused her to have a change of heart.

“Okay-Okay-I forgive you,” she signs.

“Good, because I am out of pennies,” said Winston amusingly.

“What?!” She then, let out an unbelievable laugh.

Winston leaned in to hug her then he pressed his moist lips unto hers. She pulls her head back from his lips while getting tickle at him and his humorous remark, in-which became contagious in the car. Winston turns the ignition key and rived up the 289-Mustang engine grinning at her. Before leaving, he leaned over to kiss her on the lips again.

“I was impressed with your star wishing ritual back there.

“You were,” she asked as her brown eyes beamed.

“Yes absolutely.”

Her heart smiled through her eyes as she gazed at his handsome face that kept her hanging on no matter what he said or did. Winston took hold of her hand and kissed it, then rested their clasped hands on his leg.

“You don’t believe me-do you?” She asked.

“What are you talking about?” He wondered.

“You really don’t believe me or that the house is haunted?” She gazed at his face looking for a true answer.

“I was mad. I really do not know what to believe, Jay,” he said as he gazed at her then cast his eyes back on the road then back on her again. However, I am worried ‘bout you.”

“Are you worried about my insanity level?”

“No! Look. I do not want to go down that road again, okay?”

“Besides all that, I miss us,” she invoked.

And after, became quiet and gazed out the window into the darkness. He then turned his head to the left to look at oncoming headlights shining in his pale blue eyes then drove across the highway onto the entrance ramp heading northbound to go home.

Chapter 17

The dusk transferred into dawn with the pale hue colors of purple, Indian orange and violet blue tie dye that stroked the morning sky like a feathered pen. As dawn’s light broke through, revealing the daisy shaped clouds that were hanging low as the violet blue tie dye colored sky became more transparent as the day became more distinctively as the moon receded behind the crest of the Rolling Brook hills. The sun piercing the horizon with flashes of color awaking the atmosphere as the sunrises from the east side of the split foyer house. Just outside the back bedroom-window were birds singing cheerfully as they perched outside their window. She woke up hearing the birds chirping and pecking as she kept her eyes lids close. A sweet smiled swept across her cheeks as she pretended, she was in a fairytale story nestled deep inside enchanted forest locked away in his warm embrace as she gazed up from his chest. Winston opens his pale blue eyes, and noticed she was staring at him. His eyes then gazed back into hers. Better yet, like a magnet their lips drew together into a kiss as they breathe good morning to each other. They laid in bed with her head on his chest inside his warm arms, while listening to the birds sing outside their window.

“Other than a child’s laughter, I love listening to birds sing,” she relayed softly.

“It does bring tranquility,” as he drew her in closer to him and pressed his lips to her mouth. They lied in bed holding each other until they started talking which led Jaylon-Rose to break away from their hold and began rambling ‘bout her anxiousness to get started on renovating their kitchen. Winston had his reservations about the whole remodeling idea. She showed Winston the advertisement paper as they were discussing plans. All the sudden a loud hammering noise was pounding somewhere on the back side of the house. A startled Jaylon Rose eyes popped open to say,

“Do you hear that?”

“As a matter of fact, I do,” answered Winston as he gazed at her round pretty face.

“What is making that noise?” She asked.

“I don’t know. But I hope something is not going out like our air conditioning unit,” said Winston, who got up to investigate, whereas the noise stopped and was soon forgotten. Jaylon-Rose references back to advertisement paper to revisit the conversation of plans for their kitchen.

“This is exactly what I want,” she exclaimed smiling with satisfaction as she held the page down with her index finger.

Winston wanted to make her happy especially after last night’s episode. He focuses down on the picture in the advertisement paper with far away gaze in his pale blue eyes as he pondered on Max ‘s text messages last night too.

“I think a cheerful yellow color for the walls with black trim, will be like a breath of sunshine,” she remarked.

Last night weighs heavy in Winston’s eyes in which went unobserved by his wife, who was overly excited. The days past and their new kitchen was underway and completed with her satisfaction.

“I love my new kitchen,” Jaylon-Rose happily said while arranging a mix bouquet of fresh daisies in a vase that she placed in the center on her oval black cottage table and four chairs as she stood back to admire her kitchen. Winston withdrew from the kitchen to lay down and watch TV in the living room. The rain clouds were grey and hanging low that resulted in the living room was losing its light and causing Winston to yawn and fall asleep. So, while in bed that night, she laid in Winston’s arms as they both listen to the pouring rain hit their tin roof like musical notes as the wind blew and splashed rain at their bedroom windows. There were flashing and blinking glimpses of lightning. In addition, few moments later the thunder cracked with loud explosive boom that sounded like a grenade hitting the ground as it tremored the house.

Jaylon-Rose moved her head across his shoulders to rest more securely on Winston’s chest. He gently stroked her apple blossom scented hair.

“I love rainy nights in bed,” she said. She drew her head up from his chest as she gazed into his pale blue eyes.

“I do too,” he whispered down to her.

He stroked her hair as he began to sing a tiny part of its, “A rainy night in Georgia,” a smiled spread across her round face, while she listens to Winston sing. She gazed over at the cinnamon stick candle burning on the small table, the burning flame reflected in her brown eyes, like a honey stone-lit glow.

“Thank you for the new kitchen,” she said.

“You’re welcome,” he said, while kissing the side of her temple. He started to caress her slender, soft body with his fingertips. Her skin teased his nostrils with the inviting vanilla musk fragrance in which arouse him that raised his blood pressure that began pumping blood faster inside his heated body. The rain was pouring down steady and hard.

He became playful and frisky as he pressed his full moist mouth onto hers. When the door flew open, Danny came in the dark room rubbing his eyes, whining, he was scared, of the storm. Jaylon-Rose immediately shot-up and comforted her son. Winston disappointedly fell back on his pillow and rolls over to his side. She felt jittery, as if she had drunk a whole pot of black coffee as she comforted Danny.

She then returns him back to bed. She climbs back into bed herself and waves her body under the comforter next to Winston. A whoosh of air from her lungs as her rattled nerves began to calm down. Winston resumes kissing her, as if he had never been interrupted. He sprung up to his knees and bent down to nibble on her navel. You taste like sweet chocolate gold coins as he wiggled his nose into her navel and tickle her stomach with his stubble chin.

“Yummy enough to gobbled up in one bite,” he snickered as he drops chocolate gold coins on her breast making a coin trail as he drops the gold coins in a straight line down to her navel.

“Eat me gold coin,” he requested.

He gazed up at her face unwrapping a gold coin, pops it into his mouth, held a chocolate coin between his teeth, slid back up towards her mouth, and shook his head for her to take it from his mouth.

“No deal,” she laughed while she turns away from the chocolate coin he was holding with his teeth.

“Me wants you to eat me gold coin,” he spoke like Irish leprechaun then he dove his head into her stomach and began tickling her.

“I am going to pee, you weirdo,” she squealed while she twisted sideways in the bed under his body.

“Eat me gold coin,” he demanded amusedly.

“You’re a deranged leprechaun,” she laughed, while gasping for air.

Winston places a chocolate coin on her tongue while her mouth was open.

“Me wants you to taste my chocolate coin, so the magic will last forever,” said Winston.

“What magic?” She asked as she raised her head up in curiosity as the chocolate coin dissolved in her mouth. She swallowed it then gazed up at his face.

“Our magic,” he answered.

“Where did this spawn from?” She asked while narrowing her brown eyes into his.

“Never-mind that. Shh,” Winston said as he put his finger up to her lips to close them.

She raised halfway up looking downward at him, laughing becoming breathless, as she begs him to stop tickling her before she wets the bed. Winston stops and slowly worked his way back up towards her. Winston’s dark blonde hair was falling forward and sticking to his heated forehead as he pulled her hair to the side, so he could kiss on her neck.

He un-wrap yet another chocolate coin and place it on her tongue and French kissed her until chocolate saliva oozed from the corners of their mouth. The bed sheets were sprinkled with gold chocolate coins as she tosses them up in the air several times.

She traced the outline of his bottom lip, with her cherry red polished fingernail.

He slides her aside and climbed on top then her arms drape around his broad shoulders, with each kiss his heated breath carried a whisper that deposit into her mouth. She put her arms around his neck and caressing his scalp with her fingers.

He tightly embraced her body into his and they kissed like passionate lovers deep into the stormy night. Jaylon-Rose and Winston’s shadow glowed as the fire flame flicker un scrutinized on their dark bedroom wall sinisterly. All was left was a sweet rich scent of chocolate golds coins that was smear on the sheets as her head laid on Winston’s chest.

“That was so sweet of you to leave a chocolate covered cherry on my vanity,” said Jaylon-Rose.

She waited on a reply from Winston as she raised her head up to deflect towards him. Jaylon-Rose offered a halfway smile, while gazing at Winston, who lay asleep, and began to snore lightly. She felt warm and fuzzy inside, while she caressed the side of his head and, his dark blonde hair slips through the tips of her thin fingers. Her eyes grew misty as the whim of their fight pass through her mind. A short time, fleeting as her mind ponders on their fight. “Why, do we fight so viciously then, make enchanted love and call it magic,” she questioned. “We are a pair of weirdos, I guess,” he laughed.

“Why are you so handsome?” She smiled.

As a result, she brushed away the night’s negative energy that tried to invade her mind. She began to put her optimistic gazed on his closed eyelids and listen to him breathe out his nose and carefully watch his face drift off to a deep sleep. All was calm as she laid in perfect stillness listening to his heartbeat.

The next morning came too soon as far as Jaylon-Rose was concerned. Winston’s phone was going off inside his pant pocket, Jaylon-Rose immediately wondered if it was Max calling. Winston was getting ready to leave for work as he finished his cup of coffee. She was busy getting Navy and Danny ready for school and making breakfast with feelings of jealousy and doubt crawling inside of her. It is her turn to volunteer at Navy and Danny’s elementary school. She only did this once a month, she was pushing for time while gazing up at the clock on the wall.

“It’s almost seven thirty I hope, we make it there before the bell rings-kiddos,” she said with dread lying on her tongue,

“I got to go, Jay. I will call you later.”

He kissed her good-bye on the lips and kissed Navy and Danny on their head, while they were eating their bowl of cereal.

“Be good for mom. Okay?” Danny nodded his head yes while chewing.

“I will, daddy,” confirmed Navy.

“That’s daddy’s girl” Winston said as he stuck his thumb up in the air then hurried down the stairs holding his black leather briefcase. Emptiness and insecurity overtook her as she paused from the kids to stand by the window to watch Winston leave with mounds of tears building in her eyes. He gazed down at his cell phone, and then he put the phone up to his ear, while he backed up his cherry red convertible Mustang out of the bumpy driveway. She held her white cup in her hand, while she swept falling tears to the side with her index finger. Shortly afterwards, she broke free from the window then started up the dishwasher. She gave the table, and the counter tops a quick swipe then rush out of the house. They loaded up into black Gran Prix and roar down the Rolling Brook hill. “When will daddy be back?” Asked Danny.

“End of the week,” answered Jaylon-Rose while looking at him in the rear-view mirror.

“Okay kiddos this is it. Momma is going to volunteer in Ms. Peterson’s classroom. Bon-voyage until lunch time,” she said as she gave wave goodbye to Navy and Danny.

“Bye, momma,” said Navy, Danny while parting ways.

Navy and Danny met up with their new friends. She briefly watches them head towards the gym with the other children. Jaylon-Rose reported to the office when Diamond Comers walked up dressed in dark blue jeans. Diamond’s short dark straight brown hair was at her neckline with her skin tone reflected beautifully against her soft yellow blouse. Her long turquoise feathered earrings dangled when she spoke.

“Good morning,” Diamond said in a friendly slow Georgia drawl, while sipping on her tall plastic cup of coffee.

“Good morning,” said Jaylon-Rose dressed in khaki pants and a tangerine-colored blouse with a tan sweater tied around her shoulders with her chestnut-colored hair pulled back into a ponytail. Jaylon-Rose signed in, feeling a bit nervous as she backed away while students were lining up at the front counter, lead pencils and paper filled the aired in the office. She pressed her way past the students and filter into the noisy hallway.

“Whose class are you going to volunteer in?” Asked Diamond.

“Oh-hi,” she said while gazing over at Diamond unexpectedly.

“Ms. Peterson.”

“She can be a royal pain in the,” she paused.

“Hi Ms. Diamond,” said Robert.

“Hi Robert,” said Diamond.

“She can be a royal pain in the butt,” said Diamond.

“Oh No” She replied as they went down the hall together.

“Oh yes. I had her last year. Never again,” said Diamond.

“Great,” Jaylon-Rose clenches her teeth as her face flinched with anxiety.

“You smell good. What are you wearing?”

“Thanks, its Vanilla Musk,” she said.

“I will have to pick me up a bottle.”

“Well, this is my room. See you at lunch,” said Diamond with smiling eyes,

“Yes,” she answered back as she nervously walked straight into Ms. Peterson’s classroom across the hall. Mrs. Peterson had dark tight curly perm hair. She wore designer prescription glasses. Her plump shape was dressed in apple vest lay on top of an ivory sweater and jean skirt with a stale personality. Jaylon-Rose was studious with the students but was most happy to see the clock strike eleven twenty-five.

Jaylon-Rose was instructed by Ms. Peterson to have the children form a line. Five minutes later, they all proceeded down the hall with Ms. Peterson leading the way, with a trail of children following behind her. Jaylon-Rose gazed at the artwork of the students posting on the hallway walls as they breezed by. Ms. Peterson’s classroom walked into the noisy cafeteria. The kids got in line to get their tray and Jaylon-Rose looked for Diamond while grabbing hers. Navy and Danny ran up hugging their momma as their teacher stop to say hello. She went ahead and ordered her lunch then carried her tray to the table where the teachers were seated. Diamond came up and taps Jaylon-Rose on the shoulder then sat down with her tray.

“I was wondering what happen to you?”

“I got held up back in my classroom,” answered Diamond.

“So. Tell me, how was your dinner date with your hubby?”

“It was wonderful; Winston bought me a beautiful dress from a boutique in Boston.”

“Wow, no kidding!” Diamond said with surprising eyes.

“I bet you felt like Cinderella,” signed Diamond while taking a good size bite out of her cheeseburger.

Diamond’s eyes could not resist seeing the black stone on Jaylon-Rose’s dragon fly pendant. Jaylon-Rose took notice of Diamond’s alarmed facial expression.

“Something-wrong?” Jaylon-Rose brought her hand up to protectively lay across the pendant.

“No” Diamond answered after swallowing down a wad of cheeseburger and took a small sip of her drink.

“I did. I felt beautiful,” she said while being discreet about their argument.

“Bet-cha had a lot of fun over the weekend?” Diamond teased while poking at Jaylon-Rose. She playfully poked Diamond back, while smiling and nodding bashfully. The unexpected forward talk was making her uncomfortable.

“How do you like snooty Ms. Peterson so far?” Asked Diamond.

“She is challenge to communicate with,” replied Jaylon-Rose as her brown eyes widened, while drinking her iced tea.

“Sounds like repeat from last year. Are the kids getting on your nerves yet?” Asked Diamond.

“No, she nodded her head. However, they do act as though their bottoms are hooked up to a fuse box,” she said while rubbing the sides of her temples in the noisy cafeteria.

She leaned back in her chair to retrieve four ibuprofens’ pills from her large size brown leather handbag to treat her headache. She looked up and met Diamond’s smiling face.

“I have a straight-jacket and duck-tape in the trunk of my car if you ever need it for Mrs. Peterson-gotcha! Bet, you thought, I was talking about the kids,” joked Diamond.

“Yeah, you got me, Hahaha” she delayed a little smile.

“I am going for an afternoon walk, after I leave here. Do you want to join me?” Asked Diamond as her grin faded away.

“I better not. I have to go to the market and pick up a few things for our dinner before the kids get home,” answered Jaylon-Rose tiredly with a nagging headache that reflected in her face. A kindergarten teacher came up talking to Diamond then, her six-year-old daughter with short brown straight haired named Sue-Lynn stood beside Diamond before it was time to line up to go back to their classroom. Jaylon-Rose smiled at Sue-Lynn then waved good-bye at Diamond walked out of the cafeteria. Jaylon-Rose could not get to her car fast enough as she drove out of the school parking lot heading to the groceries store and came out with three-bags and carried them up the narrow-cracked sidewalk and up the five creaky stairs and sat them down on the counter and was completely out of breath. She got a glass out of the cabinet and pour herself some cold tea from refrigerator then went onto unloading the food from the bags and putting it away when the phone began {ringing}. She glanced over at her phone and saw it Uncle Richard & Aunt Claire Nitch. She reached up to shut the oak cabinet door and picked up her phone.

“Hello Aunt Claire!”

“Hi jay, how are you guys doing?” Asked Aunt Claire cheerfully.

“We’re good,” she signed.

“I just got home from volunteering from the kid’s school. I have had a terrible headache all day. I hated being there, I was anxious for the day to end so I could go home,” Jaylon-Rose tiredly said, while she rubbed her temples.

“Lay down before the kids come in. Oh, oh, keep an eye out I sent you a package of your favorite chocolate covered cherries,” said Aunt Claire.

“I will and thank you,” she said.

Then. shuffled down the hall to her bedroom on the left. She took off her clothes, slipped on some loose striped sleep pants, and a solid white t-shirt.

Goes onto washed and patted her face dry, then opens the medicine cabinet to pour four ibuprofens in her hand, swallows them down with a glass of water. She lies down on her Italian beige leather sofa where she soon falls asleep. During her sleep, she is stirring about downstairs in the basement. She put a load of clothes in the washing machine. Then snatched up her straw basket of clean clothes and tucked it under her arm. She went towards the door to go upstairs, when a pink ball bounce towards her and hit her ankle. She put the basket down and threw the ball towards the back door.

The pink ball bounces back and rolled up to her feet and stop. She just stood there staring at the ball, and then kicks it away. She picks up the laundry basket and resumes her original plan to reach for the doorknob to go back up-stairs. Although, she paused with her hand holding the doorknob then her eyes looked up to follow the sounds of someone walking across the floor upstairs. She stands still then drops her hand from the doorknob and gazed up at the unfinished two by fours above her head that have cobwebs in it. The floor stops creaking up above her head, while standing still listening with her eyes darting about, and shifted her laundry basket into her other arm. Then, she took one-step backwards, when her eyes capturing the doorknob turning itself and the basement door opening on its own. In a split second, a full-length dark shadow of a person was standing on the first step on the other side of the door. Her tongue was anchored down inside her mouth as her jaw drop. His image was becoming more transparent, and she narrow her brown eyes unto the imagine. He had a handsome face and dressed in blue jeans and a plain white t-shirt. He stood still on the step facing her with a gentle poise. She stood there holding her straw laundry basket staring at his handsome face.

“Mama, Mama,” Navy was nudging her back and forth.

“We’re home,” she said.

She slowly started to wake -up as she flutters her eyelashes as her eyeballs roll as she found the strength to open-up her eye lids. She reached up to rub her eyes then let out a big yawn and stretching. Blinking her eyes several times and wiping the sleep out of them. Navy was watching TV and sitting on the floor with her legs crossed with her homework on her lap. Jaylon-Rose stared at Navy who was a spitting image of her father, it caused her to miss Winston even more as she stared at her daughter Navy, and finally asked “do you need any help, sweetie?”

“No-I know how to do it,” answered Navy who let out a giggle at the Nickelodeon program, she was watching.

“Dan, do you have any homework?”

“No,” he kept on playing his game in his room.

She pours a glass of iced tea, nibbles on some cashews to get her bearings straight and went down the hall carry her glass of tea yawning.

“Okay kiddos, since I am not needed - I will be the computer room for a little while,” She stood at the entrance of the door as they both shouted “okay.”

Jaylon-Rose sat down in her computer chair and unlocked her diary and started writing.

Dear Diary,

In my afternoon nap today, I went down to the basement to get our laundry as I was carrying my straw basket filled with laundry and heading back upstairs when I came face to face with a stranger standing on my basement steps! She paused from writing and began to think as she narrows her eyes up and feels jittery like she drank too much coffee.

Yes diary, I was most startled by a man standing on my basement step. Strangely enough, my fright began to dissipate as his image filter in clearer. He had a handsome face as he came to life in front of my eyes. My fears surrender then drop to my feet as his eyes were lock onto mine so was mine lock unto his. Without a word spoken it was encounter that whirls my mind I am afraid this dream will possess my thoughts without much effort I can see his handsome face.

I was brought out of this dream by my daughter Navy nudging me out of my sleep. After my body fully wakes up, I could not help but think about the stranger on my basement step. What was he doing there? Where did he come from? Why was he visiting me? Now I will wonder is he watching me when I sleep in my bed or while I take a shower. These questions are now haunting my mind. With a curbing question, will I meet the stranger again on my basement steps? Okay, diary it is now four fifteen in the afternoon and I need to say good-bye. The kiddos are home from school, and I need to fix dinner and snap back to reality. Be back soon. Jaylon-Rose closed and lock her diary.

Hour hand on the clock was approaching four thirty-five pm, when she happens to look up and see Danny standing in the doorway. He was whining, he was hungry.

“Alright,” she grunted as she gazed up at the clock on the wall.

“Let me sit here for a minute,” Danny made a frown and went slumping back his bedroom.

She tightens her face as she slowly got up from the chair feeling stiffness in her lower back then slowly moved down the hall with her tea glass in her hand. Once in the kitchen she pulls the dishwasher door down then put her glass on the top rack. And grabs a can of sloppy Joe out of the cabinet, “this will be fast to cook,” she said then steps over to the fridge and pulled out a bag of French fries out of the freezer. All the sudden a sunken feeling came over her when noticing she had not heard from Winston and ponders with insecurities at large in her mind. She kept asking herself the same question over and over, “who is Max Felon? And why would Winston turn on me like a mad dog over him?” She drew a deep breath in then dial his number, listen to it ring and ring then it went straight to his voice mail.

“Winston remember me, please call me,” she said. She was feeling lonely and desperate, needed to hear Winston’s voice. It was exactly six pm on the clock on the kitchen wall, while reaching up to pulled three plates down out of the cabinet and stacks the plates on the counter. In the meantime, she took out the pitcher of tea out the refrigerator began to pour tea into the glasses. Then, put the pitcher of tea back in the refrigerator, and returned to the counter to pick up a plate that she earlier stacked on the counter. There were no plates on the counter.

“I know, I-I took three plates out of the cabinet,” she said strangely.

And slowly reached up, took three more plates out of the cabinet, and began preparing Sloppy Joe sandwiches. Just brushed it off as being overly tired and just thought she did. At the kitchen table upon sitting down Navy started talking about her friends and Danny interrupting her with his own stories. She sat there with her droopy tired eyes holding her sloppy Joe sandwich.

“Okay kiddos, we are going to bed at eight pm sharp,” Jaylon-Rose said while picking up her glass of tea.

“What, my favorite TV show is coming on at eight pm,” stressed Navy.

“I told my friend Curtis that he could come over after dinner,” said Danny.

“Not tonight,” she said.

“It’s not fair,” grumbled Danny.

Jaylon-Rose drowsy gaze stayed fixed on her frowning children’s faces at the black cottage table. Couple of hours later, her body sank deep down into her bed while pulling her champagne satin comforter over her shoulders.

“I am bored!” Danny hollered out from his bedroom.

“Good-night bored,” Navy hollered back at Danny. Jaylon-Rose lay on her side silently on her pillow grinning as she listens with her two hands clasped together under her round pretty face. The house was quiet, Salem jumped up on the bed and settled down along side of her feet. In the meanwhile, lying still on her right side, thinking hard about Winston, and missing his warm body lying beside her. That strange dream, she had earlier this afternoon entered her mind. But she was too drowsy to think about it any longer with-out further due her eyes closed. During the dark night, five minutes past midnight she was violently pulled out of a dead sleep. And, found herself gazing at a black spider that was hanging from the ceiling and dropped down in front of her. Her eyes widen in fear as she slid out carefully from underneath the black spider. Jaylon-Rose’s feet hit the floor; she then shot over to turn the light on. Her entire body shudders in terror.

Furthermore, she was left trembling with no spider in sight. and lays back down like a rock. Labor breathing was withdrawing heavily from her expanded lungs, she feared it would be her last breath. Her drooped eyes stayed fixed on the ceiling, in the meantime, her body shiver while her heart pounded like hammer under the satin comforter, short moments later she was back asleep with a light snoring sound blowing out her mouth. The neighbor’s rooster was crowing non-stop at six am, sharp.

“I wish that crazy rooster would get a severe case of laryngitis,” she said as she drowsily lifted her head up off the pillow to glanced up at the clock and it was sixty thirty. She stretched over to push the snooze button, with her index finger.

“Just a few more minutes of sleep,” she mumbled with her head dropping down on her pillow and closed her tired eyes. Navy was up and getting dressed. Hearing sounds of Navy in her bedroom when she decided to drag herself out of bed. And slip into her fluffy white slippers, pick up her white robe that lay across her vanity bench and began tying the robe strings around her waist.

“Danny, it’s time to get up,” she said groggily while passing by his bedroom door, yawning.

Jaylon-Rose shuffled down the hall in her slippers still half-asleep, looking grumpy as she enters the kitchen making her a pot of coffee. She pulled the egg carton out of the refrigerator, began scrambling eggs in a clear bowl then pouring the eggs in a black cast iron skillet. The toast was popping up out of the toaster; the coffee was brewing when the phone rang and leans over to pick it up.

“Hello jay, I got your message this morning,” said Winston energetically.

She yawned, I was, just missing you,” she answered tiredly, while taking a sip of her hot cup of coffee.

“Is everything okay with you and the kids?” Asked Winston.

“Yes, yes we are fine,” as she put the plates on the table.

“Where were you?” She asked.

“Sorry my phone was turned off. You miss me already,” Winston questioned.

“Yes,” she replied.

“I miss you too. Oh, and I schedule an alarm company to come by the house sometime ’round noon today so do-not forget. I got to go I love you.”

“Okay, I Love you too,” she said, sincerely.

She stood by the door holding the phone and waving with her other hand as the school bus passed by in front of the house. She then closed the black solid door, curled up on the sofa, and threw, a burgundy, soft throw over her. She laid there staring at the ceiling clutching the burgundy throw in her hands thinking about Winston until her eyes shut tight and she began to breathe deeply through her nose.

The stairs creak as pressure was put on them. A shoe as if on tipping toe sounds down the hall to the bedroom on the left, then came back and stop by the bathroom.

Upon leaving the bedroom, a chocolate covered cherry was left on the vanity. The dark shadow showed up beside her while she slept on the sofa. Her eyeballs began to make jerky movements and her close eyelids twitch, while she lay mumbling. She stirred about as her brown lashes fluttered open. Her gaze was fuzzy as she blinked several times. She brought her eyes down and moved her head sideways to the right as her eyesight became clearer. She could have sworn someone was there. The figure faded away as she stirred about and finally open her eyes. A frigid cold air began blowing her hair, she started to shiver as her teeth made a light chatter. She grabbed the burgundy throw and wrapped it around her. Goose bumps popped up like

popcorn, on the outside of her arms.

She struggled up to a sitting position and her awareness became sharper. She heard a ball bouncing outside her front door and Salem was barking.

“Shh, Salem.”

She eases up and began to walk slowly over to her living room window and peers out from the corner of the window and saw no signs of anyone bouncing a ball.

Then traveled down the creaky stairs and open the door and step out on the narrow-cracked sidewalk and looked down the bumpy driveway and saw nothing. She ventures out and walked to the edge of the house where the wooden swing-set is and noticed the swings were moving back and forth. Quickly she turned around and walked backed up the narrow-cracked sidewalk whereas she pasted by the wooden bench and her pink knockout roses then headed back in the house, so once inside she heard the floor creak down the hall, according to the sounds she believed it was coming from one of the bedrooms. Slowly she went down the hall with caution while approaching Danny and Navy’s bedroom, without hesitation her force abruptly opens the door, her eyes drop to where she sees Navy’s dolls and dollhouse not in its usual place. Suddenly, she heard the bouncing ball again and ran to the window. Jaylon-Rose felt confused and tired, which prompt her to laid down and drifted off to sleep. Her eyes widen as her face flinched when she saw a large black spider staring down at her.

The doorbell was ringing ding-dong that pulled her nervously out of her sleep then pulled herself up to a sitting position feeling like her body was running ahead of her as she heard the doorbell again.

Ding-dong,

“I’m coming!” She said while rushing down the stairs.

“I was just about to give up on you,” said Diamond.

“I had fallen asleep on the sofa what time is it?” She said tiredly.

Diamond looked down at her watch and said, “just a five-minutes past one o ‘clock.”

She began to walk up the steps and Diamond followed closely saying,

“I stopped by to see what you are doing. By the looks of it, you look like you had been running up and down Rolling Brook’s steep hills,” laughed Diamond.

“Yeah, I bet I do,” she said dryly.

“What’s going sis?”

“I have no clue,” she said. Just then, she remembers.

“Oh, no, I totally forgot about the alarm company is supposed to be here at noon,” answered as she rubbed her tired brown eyes nervously.

“For your sake, it’s good he’s running late,” Diamond said with a smile.

She lifted her eyes up and grinned as she nodded her head yes.

A vacant look washed up on her face as a veil drop down in her brown eyes.

“You look so tired,” she signed.

“Come on, drink a cup of coffee with me, so I can perk-up and stop this yawning,” she said.

“Hot coffee sounds real-good, okay,” said Diamond as her mouth formed a small o as she followed behind her into the kitchen.

It was obvious to Diamond that she was acting strange as her hands shook a bit, while she poured water into the coffee pot. Diamond continued to keep her eyes on Jaylon-Rose’s hands and then gazed up at her back when reaching up in the cabinet for two coffee cups.

“I have been writing in my diary,” she signed while pouring coffee into a cup.

“I have been putting a journal together about this house,” mustered Jaylon-Rose while holding her white cup in the air. “Sound interesting! I know, you will pull a story out of your hat,” smiled Diamond. Jaylon-Rose smiles back.

“Yeah, or pull it out of my dairy,” she grins while looking inside her coffee cup and Diamond was looking a bit strange at her.

“Yes, I will make a long story short. Long after my mother passed away and moving in my Aunt Claire. My father and I often read my mother’s diary and her poetry it was our way of keeping her spirit alive so since moving here I have indulged in keeping a dairy. I guess it’s a start for me.”

“Oh, I see. Is your father still alive?”

“No,” she pauses while waiting for the lump in her throat to go down. “No, my father died before our move to Tennessee.” Her brown eyes drop down sadly.

Diamond patted on her back and felt the sadness in the touch as she walked towards the oval black cottage table and sat back down and crossed her leg.

“Kitchen looks great!” Diamond added as her dime shaped dark brown eyes scanned the room. “Awe thanks,” she said while squeezing a smile on her face. However, she is contemplated in her mind whether-or not to discuss Winston and the house with her best friend. Meanwhile, she drank her last sip of coffee, rose from the chair to put her white cup in the sink. “I hate to leave, but I have to go,” said Diamond.

But just then, she noticed something in her face that suggested Jaylon-Rose wanted to talk more or did not want her to leave whatever it was Diamond did not press her friend, so she let discretion be the judge of that call.

“Thanks for coming by,” she said while watching Diamond go down the creaky stairs. She looked up at her, while holding the doorknob at the bottom of the stairs, “call me later,” said Diamond. “I will,” she said while staring down at her from the top of the stairs. She stops before going out then turned around to gaze up and knew something was not quite right with Jaylon-Rose, the sadness in her eyes alone was heartbreaking.

“I love you sis, and you know I am always here for you,” said Diamond as she waited on her to answer.

Chapter 18

“I know, and I love you too,” she answered and watched her close the door.

Jaylon-Rose turned around to go back in the kitchen. And, started to cry as she rinsed out her coffee cup, and put the cup and Diamond’s glass in the dishwasher.

She then dried off her hands and hung the towel over the oven handle.

Suddenly, felt a weird eerie sensation come over her as if she were not alone and for a moment or two while standing in the kitchen. Then, she wiped her eyes with fingers and shook the feeling off. Slumbering back to her bedroom on the left to make her bed and tidied up the room. A chocolate covered cherry was on her vanity. And, picked it up, held it in the palm of her hand.

“Where did you come from?” She asked.

Looked up at the family pictures that were in black matching frames sitting on a dark brown wall shelve that hung above her bed. She left her bedroom and filtered down the hall holding the chocolate covered cherry and laid it down on the counter.

“Why do you keep popping up on my vanity, I know you’re my favorite but, I am positive I ate all my chocolate covered cherries from Aunt Claire’s last shipment,” she said with a weirdness and pop the chocolate cover cherry in her mouth anyway. Just then she began hearing a lawn mower start up, first thought enters her mind was one of the neighbors are mowing. However, by the close sound of it - it was her yard being mow, so it was worth her time to peep out the living room window to check it out.

“Why is a strange man, mowing my yard?” She mumbled to herself.

Quickly ran to the bathroom to sprayed water on her tangled curly hair, so she would not look-like she just rolled out of bed. In the meantime, going down the creaky stairs to find out who was mowing her grass. She steps out holding her storm door and gazes out at the man push mowing her front slope yard. Thinking, how odd that someone would take it upon their self to mow a yard without asking first. She paused outside her front door watching for few seconds before slowly letting the storm door leave her hand, then went walking towards the strange man and motioning with her raise arm to turn off the mower. He finally looked up at her and turned it off.

“Why are you mowing my yard? Did my husband hire you?” The strange man never answered her questions. The stranger, just stood still looking at her with a green dead stare, resembling a zombie.

“Did you hear what I said?” She questioned the strange man, but he said nothing, just staring at her.

“Is this some-kind of joke?” Pauses then slides her hand underneath her curly hair, with a puzzle face and laughed out bewilderedly.

Then, decided while observing the stranger to call Winston for some answers.

“Wait here. I am going to call my husband.” She turned away from the stranger and paced quickly towards the front door and swung open and ran up the creaky stairs completely confused and creeped out. Once her feet made it to the top of the stairs, she quickly got her phone and called Winston immediately.

“Did you hire someone to cut our grass-without telling me?” She asked.

“No. Why you ask? What’s going on?” He then asked.

“Okay. Well, umm,” she paused.

Then she peered out the living room window and gazed at the front yard.

“Explain to me, why a strange man is mowing our grass?” She questioned.

“I have no idea, Jay,” he stated.

“I am clueless when I ask him if you hired him. He does not answer nor will speak a word to me. He creeps me out,” She moved away from the window holding the phone to her ear.

“Is he breathing?” Chuckles Winston.

“That’s not funny.”

“Okay. Okay. Is he still out there?” Asked Winston.

“I don’t know. Let me check. A moment of silence as Winston waited on the line for her to come back, “yeah, he is,” she breathed heavily into the phone.

“Take the phone out there to him and put him on.”

She filters down the stairs, opens the front door, and cranes her neck out to the left and to the right of her front slope yard before opening the glass storm door. And March, down the narrow-cracked sidewalk carrying the phone.

“Winston.” she emits into the phone. He’s gone,” she grunts in a befuddled tone as she breathes heavily in the phone walking around in circles in the spot the stranger was just mowing.

“Jay. Are you sure someone was mowing our yard?” He asked tenderly.

“Of course, I am sure. What-you think, I made it up?”

“No. I mean ah maybe a neighbor was mowing, you just thought they ah cross over into our yard. I do not know, Jay. I-I got to go-will figure it out later,” he kissed into the phone. “Yes. Okay. It’s probably a mix-up-bye,” she kissed back into the phone and hung it up. Then took a walk to check her mailbox before going back inside the house and pulled out a package from Aunt Claire. She smiled as she carried it into the house and up the creaky stairs. Mrs. King, a heavyset black widow from across the street drop the curtain she was holding back in her hand and let it fall to its original spot in her window that faced Jaylon-Rose’s home from across the street. She paces down the hall to the computer room, once there, drops down like cement block into her black chair and unlocked her diary. Once picking up the pen, her thoughts rewind all the back to the beginning. In the meanwhile, sitting in a daze with the pen stuck in the corner of mouth with haunting fragments of the entire strange unexplained events shored up from all corners of her mind. She shook with chills as the waves rushed in of the un-nerving strange man mowing in the yard. She raised her diaphragm up while drawing a deep breath then released the held air through her nose and mouth. After that pause, she began documenting, what happen in her diary as her left hand covered her mouth as she wrote.

Dear Diary,

Oh my God. A strange man appeared literally out of nowhere and was mowing the yard. I ask this strange man, did my husband hire you He never answers me. He looks like a zombie staring at me. I go back inside my house to call Winston and I went back outside, and the strange man is gone. I am so creeped out. It was almost like the stranger thought he lived here. I know Winston, by now thinks a few screws are missing in my head. I know what I saw-I know-I talk to him. He was real! Diary the strange man was real. I promise he was. It took place during and after my strange dream. Then, I heard the doorbell ringing, and it was Diamond stopping by to visit. I woke up with a slight headache, diary there is so much happening in this house I cannot hardly remember all of it or better yet to keep up and write. J. R. Paul

The day has slipped away without a notice and the school bus just went roaring down the hill and sounds confirmed, Navy and Danny have shot through the front door.

“Mama, Mama,” they called out! Navy, and Danny dropped their book bags kicked off their shoes and made a beeline straight for the refrigerator. She closes her diary then locks it and makes her way down the hall hearing the Navy and Danny rummaging through the refrigerator for drinks and food. Jaylon-Rose open the package Aunt Claire sent and pop one or two chocolate cover cherries in her mouth. Soon as she swallowed it, she began to feel funny. The sunlight in the house became a gloomy, gray.

The outside was growing dark as well with hanging rain clouds over the tin bronze roof. The wind pick-up some speed then the rain started to sprinkle then gradually span into band of showers that afternoon that lasted way into evening hours. A car pulls into the driveway and sits there for a few minutes then backs out then disappearing down the hill. Jaylon-Rose did not know, nor did she know a vehicle was sitting in her driveway. Jaylon-Rose felt dizzy, and her vision was fading, her knees were buckling, her crème tone complexion was turning to a pale ash color. She was losing control of her mobile ability. Even more, a nauseating feeling dropped like a penny inside her stomach. The bright yellow kitchen was spinning and turning dark fast.

“Oh, dear Jesus, I better lie down before I fall down,” she muttered out-loud in distressed. She grabbed the doorway for support then rushed to the living room, just barely making it to the lay down safely. She stretched out and covered her eyes with her arm for a few seconds.

“Nav would you please bring me a wet washcloth?” Asked Navy.

Navy walked quickly to the bathroom to retrieve a washcloth from the closet. And turns the bathroom sink facet on and wet the washcloth then twisted the excess water out.

“Momma, are you alright?” Asked Navy as she handed the cool wet washcloth to her mom. She nodded her head, yes then laid the washcloth across her pale forehead.

The cool cloth was cooling her head down and lighten her red flushed round cheeks.

She felt confident that she could get up and go to the bathroom to splash her face with cold water. She got up and made her steps count to the bathroom once in there, opened her mirror medicine cabinet and poured four ibuprofens in her hand, then-closed the medicine cabinet and fill a glass of water to swallow the pills with, and some drops of water dripped down her chin while drinking from the glass of water. Standing in front of the mirror, she began to dry her mouth and chin with the white hand towel.

Briefly shifted her eyes onto the gold brass towel ring to hang the white towel on it, when gazing back into the mirror, she could have sworn, someone was standing directly behind her. Icy goose bumps covered her entire extremities were, only proof fear was near. She quickly scattered out of the bathroom to the living room and sank back on the sofa breathing hard, “what is happening to me?” She asked herself with uncertainty stamped on her tongue as she spoke quietly. It was few minutes past midnight, while asleep in bed, she began to toss and turn when sirens filled her ears. There was a baby monitor set up on her nightstand there was also a monitor in the twin’s bedroom.

All the monitors were unplugged and had been for some time. She continues to hear a woman gasping in a fretful cry and running to a bedroom and then seconds later sounds of someone collapsing to the floor subconsciously. This agony sound came out of the monitor for three solid hours, meanwhile Jaylon-Rose tossed and turn in bed. Her control was being suspended against her will to break but, finally upon being released she mustered up the strength to draw herself up in bed while continuing to hear voices and a woman’s anguish cry and was terrified those voices were coming out of the monitors and she believed it to real like people having a real emergency. She peeked in Navy and Danny’s bedroom to check in on them, found the twins sound asleep in their beds.

But, kept hearing a woman weeping, went on back to her bedroom and looked out the window both ways to possibly see what house had a light on or show any signs of activity that something was dreadful going on. As far as her eyes could see the house around her were dark and quiet. Backs away from the window and began to follow the sound to the unplugged monitor that was on her nightstand. She pick-up the monitor and her brown eyes penetrated the speaker her mouth dropped open with amazement at what she was hearing. A man’s voice in the background consoling the grief-stricken woman voice reduce as the weeping woman voice faded out of the speaker. Her shaky hands threw the monitor down and she became emotionally upset and shook with fear trying to mentally process, what was heard as she filtered to living room and sat down on the sofa with an unsettling chill while wiping fallen tears away and reach over for the phone, she needed to share the crazy episode with someone. She called Winston.

He said, “hello.”

“I am so glad you are up,” she stressed.

“What is it, Jay?” Asked Winston.

“I have been hearing a woman weeping for three hours,” she spoke as rational as she could.

“Is it possible to hear someone crying and running up the stairs in a panic from our baby monitor that is unplugged?” she calmly asked.

“Yes, a monitor can pick up from another monitor nearby.”

“How can I hear this woman in deep distress of some kind, if my monitor is unplugged so how Winston?” She asked.

“I assure you their monitor was on, and you happen to hear the commotion on yours. Jay do us both a favor and go back to bed,” Winston said dryly.

She rolled her eyes upward and agreed to go back to bed. She lay frozen in bed hearing cracking sounds, every now and then, the stairs creaked, and she could hear footsteps of a woman’s shoes coming down the hall then it stops at her bedroom door on the left. These sounds were doing a good job keeping her awake while she lay on her back until she fell asleep and rolled over onto her side until morning. The next day came and Jaylon-Rose was happy that Winston would be home. Well, Winston was home for the weekend however he had a lot of paperwork to do and spent most of Saturday in the computer room. Jaylon-Rose came in with glass of iced tea and a sandwich for Winston and reached around to kiss Winston on his flatten lips.

“Too busy to kiss me back?” She asked.

“Yes! I have a deadline to meet. This paperwork must be completely done by Sunday night. Please, stay out of here until I am finish!” Winston growled.

“Wow” and raised her hands with palms facing out in an arresting manner.

“Sorry, I bothered you,” she fest. Winston jerks his head up from his laptop with an evil glare at her. She was in living room lounging on the sofa with her feet prop up on the coffee table channel surfing, when suddenly, heard Winston shout her name, “Jay.”

“Winston. What is it?” She shouted back from the living room.

“Jay. Just come here,” he called.

“Since I am needed-I become privileged to invade your privacy?” She said lined with criticism.

“Jay shut-up and come here,” he ranted.

She finally laid the remote down on the sofa cushion and filters down the hall slowly.

“It is sweltering hot back here,” complained Winston with sweat dripping down his face.

“I thought something was really wrong with you?” She said while propped in entrance doorway.

“There is something really wrong with me,” he crudely spoke as he swerved around in his chair to gaze over at her holding his stomach and feeling nauseated.

“You look like a normal hot head, to me,” she jester.

He gave her an evil stare as his face turned chalk white and quickly heaved his self-up from the chair and rush to the bathroom to vomit. She stood there up against the wall listening to Winston gagging in the bathroom and noticing the hot air quality in the computer room was a lot different in the cool hallway. After a serval minutes past, she left the computer room to stand in front of the thermostat to turn down to 69 degrees. Immediately you could feel the difference in air quality then she went on into the bathroom to retrieve a washcloth from the closet, while Winston was still on his knees puking and coughing into the toilet. Winston mustered the strength to pull his self-up from the bathroom floor. She helped him to the living room sofa, where the room was much cooler. Winston flopped down on the sofa and fell asleep.

She then sat on the recliner gazing at Winston as he lightly snored. She begins to feel tired and a nap sounds inviting to her body as well. Quietly she goes back to their bedroom on the left and lays down on the bed as the mattress springs coils squeaks until a comfortable position is found. Then finally rolls over on her side and folds the pillow comfortably under her head and puts another pillow between her legs, then, clasped her hands together underneath the side of her face. Her eyes were fixed on her open bedroom door, her spirits were low as she laid perfectly still with Winston ‘s rude attitude clouding her mind while drifting off to a nap. A set of eyes veer in the front of the open bedroom door entrance on the left and stops briefly to watch her sleep then turns away to travel down the hallway. Later, in bed that night, Winston gave his wife a full thirty-second-long kiss then he rolled over and went to sleep facing the wall.

She was flat on her back with her eyes widely fastened to the ceiling with deep thoughts. A disturbing sound filled her ears with the stairs creaking. Then, someone was shuffling up and down the hallway and the hall closet door popped open. It was unnerving experience as she laid in bed listening to every sound. It caused her to alarmingly draw up and sat on the edge of her bed shivering. Then cradling her stomach with her arms to calm the nauseated feeling that shot up to her throat. Her mouth started to fill with water as she swallowed the excess water down carefully.

“Winston,” she called then nudged his shoulder, “Winston wake-up!”

Winston was drowsy and answers, “What is it now!” in a grouchy tone.

“I hear noises and the doors are opening and closing,” she whispered in hastiness.

“I don’t hear anything.”

“Of course, you don’t, you sleep like the dead,” she jolted his shoulder back and forth and pestered him to wake-up. He finally rolled out of bed to check it out and found nothing unusual and went back to bed.

“Jay, go to sleep,” yawned Winston.

She got up, went into the bathroom, opens the medicine cabinet, pours some Pepto-Bismol in a small measuring cup. Then heard something fall, while in the bathroom so she came out and felt brave enough to investigate then quickly turns on the light in the kitchen to see what it was. Her eyes gave a quick scan around the room and found nothing. She returned to her bedroom and got in bed and scoots her body closer to Winston then pulled the satin comforter over her head and went to sleep snuggled up to Winston ‘s warm back. Next day, she was sitting at the kitchen table drinking a cup of coffee, notice while sitting there that a white candle was missing from the candle holder directly in front of her on the wall.

“So that is what I heard fall last night,” she spoke softly, she simply got up then pick up the white candlestick and put it back in candle holder. Upon returning to the black cottage table to mentally recap on the strangeness going on in the house, she decided to discuss it with Winston when he gets up, so she waited at the table drinking coffee. Good fifteen minutes or so were sounds of him going into the bathroom and coming out and shuffling to the kitchen in his dark blue sleep pants and white T-shirt with his messy dark blonde hair heading straight for the coffee-pot with a dry, coffee craving mouth. Then pour himself a cup and took a couple of sips.

“Something is seriously wrong with this house,” stressed Jaylon-Rose while holding her coffee cup and popping a chocolate cover cherry in her mouth.

“What are you talking about now?” Winston asked with a quirk expression on his face. He was now looking in the refrigerator trying to figure out, what he wanted to eat.

“Remember back, when I called you one night telling you; I heard someone in the house.”

“Yes,” he answered uncaringly, while pulling out a gallon of milk and grabbing a box of- raisin-bran cereal off the top of the refrigerator and pulled out a bowl from the cabinet and headed to the table with his bowl and coffee cup.

“Jay, it’s an older house. The foundation is settling,” said Winston while he scoops up cereal on his spoon.

“I Think the foundation is not the main source of the noise, I believe it is such an enigma that no one took the time to trace it down, because of not willing or non-caring to investigate,” she gabbled.

“Something strange is going on here,” she expressed with a knowing burning in her eyes.

“Explain yesterday to me. Why did that room become so hot that it made you sick?” She presented curiously.

“I need to check the air vents in that room. They could be accumulated with dust.

This is an old house-you know. I just got over heated, is all,” replied Winston.

“Oh brother,” she said as slapped the table in disgust.

“I am sick to death of hearing this is an old house. You diminish every strange thing that has happen! A poltergeist could be haunting this house,” she stressed.

“Jay that marks the most ludicrous thing, I have heard you say yet,” Winston said scornfully.

“Winston I was awake, when I heard the closet door open and shut last night,”

She stretches her tone, while her hands rubbed the white coffee cup up and down in frustration. “But I did not hear anything,” Winston clearly pointed out.

“With safety locks alarm system, you have options to call the police or ghost busters,” he joked as he walked away taking another sip of coffee and putting his bowl in the sink and left the room.

“Ha-ha!” she said walking towards the computer room to do some writing in her dairy. Later, he peeked in to say “Boo!” She flopped down on the computer chair. Then, reached for her diary. She unlocked it, then, grabs a pen out of a tin can. Winston went away chuckling down the hall as she rolled her brown eyes up.

Dear Diary,

Another strange unexplained sleepless night, and I feel like this haunted house is driving Winston and me apart. It is so hypnotic, that I find myself dwelling more and more about the supernatural; it miraculously found a way to slip inside my head. Winston is home for the weekend, and he is nothing short of being a jerk and isolating his self in the computer room. I wonder why he even came home. “Probably to torture me with his rudeness,” she mumbled, while writing her deep thoughts and snacking on chocolate cover cherries that Aunt Claire sent to her.

Anyway diary, Winston was working on his paperwork when he became ill and nauseated and throwing up violently, while he complained he was sweltering hot. All the sudden, she had shooting pain in her head. And that caused her to pause from writing to hold her aching head in her hands, while her head was bent down. The air quality suddenly changed in the room. Fingers were felt pressing down on the top of her head. She bolted up, shot over to the door, slung the door back, and ran out and hurried to the living room, panting.

“What’s wrong?” Winston asked while he sat motionless in front of the TV.

“Nothing,” she said shakily peering at the TV.

She got up from the edge of the sofa and went into the kitchen to make her a sandwich and calm her nervous body. She was sitting at the black cottage round table once again. The wind was blowing, and it was drizzling rain. Squirrels were running up and down the trees. Her brown eyes gazed out the French door windowpanes with her chin resting on her left hand with her sandwich on a plate in front of her as she picked half of it up with her other hand and took small bites. The phone was ringing, Jaylon-Rose spoke up.

“I got it.”

“Hello.”

“Mrs. Paul?”

“Yes. It is.”

“This is Greyson Finley from Safety Locks Alarm Company,” Jaylon-Rose’s face lit up luminously.

“Hi!

“How are you liking the alarm service?” Asked Greyson.

“We like it a lot,” she smiled.

As she was taking the phone down from her ear, Winston walked up.

“Who are you talking to?”

“Greyson from Safety Locks Alarm Company asked, how we like the service,” she locks the bathroom door and stood in front of the mirror watching her smile overtake her face. The next week, Jaylon-Rose got up from the sofa to peer out the window to see what Salem was barking about. It was a service truck that pulled in behind her black Grand Prix. She rushes downstairs to open the door, but he was walking back to his truck. “Hey” she calls out to him. He turns ‘round and walked back up the narrow-cracked sidewalk “I hope I did not spook you. I was passing by, and I notice your sign had fallen over.”

“Oh.” Steps out to look. I guess it did, thanks for noticing,” she smiled.

“So, are you working in the area?” She asked.

“Well. Sort of I had some leads I was following up on.”

“I better not keep you,” she said.

“You are not,” he invitingly grins as he looked down at the cracked sidewalk.

“I am actually going on lunch break. Would you care to join me?”

“Thanks for the offer.”

She looked away and down at the narrow-cracked sidewalk then back into his friendly eyes.

“I-I better not,” she answered unhappily.

“Come on. I am harmless. I promise I won’t bite,” he grins.

She looked at him in way that she did not mind if he did.

“I don’t know if I should. My husband might get mad if I go out with you,” she said while trying to wiggle out of the tempting offer.

“I would have invited him too if he were home,” he claimed with a convincing look.

“Ok, I guess lunch is harmless,” she said in trusting tone.

She ran in and grabbed her brown leather handbag and jump in the passenger side of the truck and they drove off down the hill. They went to a Chinese restaurant for lunch. They sat in a booth by the window and chatted as they ate. And better yet, they never had a reason to take their eyes off each other. All the while, oriental music played in the background. Later that night, she laid flat on her back in bed next to her husband Winston as she pulled the satin comforter up to her chin with her lips pursed while in deep thought of earlier today, then dozes off into a deep sleep. After midnight, she woke-up with her eyes widen to a black spider hanging down from the ceiling. She bolted up in bed then her feet hit the floor like two bricks. Moments later, her legs reconciled with her feet.

She launched up like a rocket off the edge of the bed, like a bullet she darted over to the light switch to flip it on. Her entire body was shivering. Her heart was hammering inside her chest, while standing immobile beside the light switch. Her brown eyes searched with intensity at all four corners of her bedroom walls and ceiling for the black spider. When she heard someone say her name, “Jay, Jay.” But was so afraid and began to cry.

Trying to gain the strength, to move her weak limp body and heavy feet towards her bed so, she could climb back in bed with her pounding heartbeat and, with shivering hands clutched to her chest. Another normal day of life was in its first stages of setting up. The sun appeared from the east and sat at the back of the house in its usual spot for the first half of the day. Winston woke up first propped his upper body on his arm gazing at his pretty wife’s sleeping face. He rolled out of bed and pulled on his dark blue sleep pants.

He checked in on the Navy and Danny in their bedrooms and they were sound asleep in their beds. Winston proceeded down the hall in his bare feet. He reaches and gets a glass out of the cabinet, when his eyes stumbled onto the dead rat in the sink.

“What the,” he cursed and put his glass down, so he could pick the tail of the rat up, open the back door and slunk the rat out the back door. He turned the faucet on and filled his glass halfway up with water. He was drinking the water then sat his empty glass inside the sink where the rat was. Unexpectedly the phone began ringing loudly and Winston turned around with unannounced jarred insides, he quickly evicted the uneasy feeling as he picked up the phone. An unexpected call from his boss, “dang,” he said as he covered the phone with his hand, who was telling him, he had to leave right away. Winston stops to use the bathroom before going back to bedroom. In the meantime, he was in the bathroom, when he heard Jaylon-Rose scream. Next thing, he heard was a thump to the floor. He hurried out of the bathroom and enters his bedroom on the left, saw Jaylon-Rose laying on the floor.

“Jay, are you alright?” He squatted down next to her.

“I was dragged out of the bed,” she cried.

“What are you talking about?” Asked Winston.

“I-I was dragged out of bed,” she cried.

“No, Jay you had a bad dream,” he drilled.

“No, I didn’t,” she pleaded while grabbing his arm to hold.

“Jay. We had a visitor,” he calmly said.

“I told you. Do you believe me now?” She rushed to add.

“Jay, he paused. I found a dead rat in the kitchen sink,” signed Winston.

“Oh…well, that is disgusting,” she said as she suppressed her beliefs.

“Anyway, you were talking in your sleep last night,” he said as he helped her up.

“I-I was. W-what was I saying?” She asked while searching his eyes.

“You were murmuring something about a date and a sign. I couldn’t make it all out,” replied Winston.

shook nervously and listens.

“That does not matter, I have to leave today. My boss called to say; we have new client.”

“You’re kidding me,” she said hurtfully with tight lips.

“I wish, I was,” shrugged Winston as he proceeded to retrieve his suitcase out of the closet and lay it flat on the bed and began to pack it.

Her face fell with sadness as she laid in bed watching Winston pack.

“Cheer up. I will be home by the end of the week.” He bent down to kiss her goodbye.

“I cannot believe you are willing to leave without a talking to me about it first,” she said with a pouted mouth.

“Jay, it does not matter which comes first I am telling you now. The fact remains I have to leave regardless,” he candidly said.

“You never talk to me about anything you just throw it on me to accept until I see you again,” she cried,

“Ok, I got an idea,” he hit his forehead with end of his palm, “Go ask your poltergeist to pay the bills. So, I can play my guitar and sing love songs to you in the nude,” he said sarcastically.

“I hate it, when you talk stupid,” she said and rolled her eyes up in disgust.

“Jay, I’ll call you later.” Winston laughed and reached over to kiss her, but she turned her head away from him.

“It doesn’t matter remember,” she hissed.

“I’ll call you later,” she listens to Winston talking to himself saying, “can’t live with them and you can’t live without them, Jesus.”

He got his car and rev up his Mustang 289 motor before he backed out of the bumpy driveway. She sat in the middle of her bed agitated as tears boiled in her eyes and coursed down her cheeks.

“I hate you Winston and I hate this haunted house,” she grumbled and hissed.

“Momma, why do you hate daddy?” Danny asked.

“Oh-no, kiddo, I didn’t know-you were standing there in the doorway,” she said feeling bad.

Danny stood there with his backpack on. She slid over to the edge of the bed with her legs hanging off. She opens her arms up and invited Danny in. She rested her hands onto his small shoulders.

“No-no. I don’t hate daddy. I am very mad at daddy,” she explained.

“I heard you say, you hate daddy,” he mumbles pitifully.

“I know. What I said,” she said regretfully.

She climbed out of bed and kneels-down to give Danny a hug.

“Will you forgive me, kiddo?” She asked.

“Yes momma, but promise not to say that again,” said Danny.

“I promise to do my best,” she smiled.

“Dan, come on, the bus is coming!” Yelled Navy.

“Thanks,” she said while bowing down to kiss his soft cheek and rubbed the top of his chestnut brown hair.

“You’re welcome,” Danny said while smiling at his momma.

She got up and smiling holding back her tears.

Danny then ran down the hall. She felt bad, that Danny heard what she said, and that Winston was gone again. Pain pulse behind her eyes, pressure from her fingers laid against her eyelids to ease the ache. She ventured out of her bedroom, while going down the hall with an eerie feeling draped over her like a cloud. She most simply could not shake the feeling that she was not alone in the house but on the other hand she felt alone and abandon in the house she lived in. Pouring herself a cup of coffee with hopes waking her up and clearing her mind in-which always seem to assist, even if it was temporary. The Grandfather clock chimed at eight o’clock am in the living room. In the meantime, just trying to cope with the uncanny atmosphere as she sat down on the recliner with her cup of coffee and crossed her leg over her knee; turned the TV on to make something sensible of her morning. The phone rang as she said hello in a tired low voice while sitting slouched in the recliner.

“Hello. Jay,” said Greyson.

“Yes. Hello,” she perked up and sat up straight and move the phone to her other ear.

“This is Greyson Finley. I hope I didn’t wake you,” he asks in a gentle tone.

“No. I-I was ah just tossed away there for a moment,” she says while re-positioning herself.

“How’s that if I may ask?” He wondered, while he waited on the phone.

“Oh well. The only person to ever call me J. R. was my mom,” she paused.

“I apologize,” he politely said.

“No, it’s ok,” she tilted her head as she sips on her hazelnut flavored coffee.

He cleared his throat.

“I wanted to tell you I enjoyed our lunch the other day,” said Greyson.

“I did too,” she admitted.

“I just passed by your house and thought I would call,” said Greyson.

“You’re in this neighborhood a lot,” she commented.

“Yes. We’re staying busy signing homeowners up in the area,” he proudly answered.

“I better let you go. Try and have a nice day,” he said.

“Thank you. And you too,” she follows to say.

She hung up the phone and smiles widely and thought about Greyson most of the day.

She was stump on why did he call me J.R.? Then, felt sad thinking about her mother and remembering her mother would call her inside to eat dinner.

“J.R. it’s time to come in,” Jaylon-Rose’s brown eyes tear up as the phone started ringing beside her again.

“Hello,” she answers as her index finger wiped the tears away.

“Honey, I just wanted to call and tell you I love you, and I am on my way home,” said Winston.

“I love you too,” she said unexpectedly and made a face. So, where are you now?”

“I am coming into Chattanooga right now,” he answered back quickly.

I have-to stop by my office then, I will be heading home. Love you, bye.”

“Alright, love you, bye,” she said as they both hung up.

She felt somewhat better as the minutes ticked on. She stopped thinking about her mother and started concentrating on her husband coming home. Winston was pulling up in the bumpy driveway in his cherry red convertible Mustang with the top down and his shades on with his messy wind-blown dark blonde hair. Once hearing the Mustang engine fueling into the bumpy driveway. She runs to the window and peers out and sees Winston looking so sexy and so handsome sitting in driver seat chatting on his phone in his shades. A smile engulfed her pretty-round face while thinking, how incredibly handsome he is and again instantly falls under his spell. She sees him get out of the car with his briefcase and runs back to resume her position. In the meantime, Winston came through the door and made his way up the creaky stairs. He took notice of her and sat his briefcase down at the banister, came to her, kneels-down on floor, hug and kissed her.

He carried his briefcase and duffle bag to their bedroom on the left. She jumps up and prepares dinner and had the table all set, Jaylon-Rose was feeling tired and doze off before dinner. During the short-lived nap, then felt a sensual press on her lips then Greyson’s name moans out her mouth, while her body flinches in her sleep.

Upon, opening her eyes and immediately becoming nervous by waking up and seeing Winston staring down at her as if he caught her hand in the cookie jar. And was fully aware of her dream and the name that pasted through her lips, just moments ago. Fearing the question of how long was he standing there, like a guard? In addition to that thought, was he mad at her? She drew up to a sitting position then pulls her hair back away from her face.

“Come and eat,” said Winston as he coldly went back into kitchen.

Winston was quiet during dinner. She yawns all through dinner as she trembles inside with guilt. The twins were the first ones to finish and were excused from the table.

“What is wrong with you?” She finally asked.

Winston shook his head, heaves his self-up from the black cottage table sat his plate on the counter went back to towards the bedroom on the left, and closed the door. Jaylon-Rose sat there alone at the kitchen table feeling as if she had been severed in half with a sharp sword. She drew herself up from the chair and dreaded cleaning up the mess. Afterward cleaning the kitchen, she turned out the light and shut the French door behind her and filters down the hall to her bedroom. She opens the door and Winston was lying in bed watching TV.

“What are you doing?” She asked nicely.

“What does it look like,” he growled.

“Why are you back here, avoiding me? What have I done?” She upsettingly asked.

“Nothing, I just want to be alone, so leave,” he said with an edgy acute tone.

She did notice his face was contrast and pale. She slams the door shut, stomp back to the living room, and flop down on the recliner. A few minutes later, the bedroom door open and Winston came blundering down the hall with his keys jingling in his mouth, while he put on his jacket.

“Where are you going?” She asked.

“Stop acting like my mother,” he said, while he shot down the five creaky steps.

She sat there with water eyes as Danny came running out of his bedroom looking around for his daddy.

“Did daddy leave?” Asked Danny.

“Yes son, just go back to your bedroom and play, okay,” she softly said.

He turned around and went back to his bedroom, as his mother said, Jaylon-Rose’s insides filled with worried and guilt as she pondered, while biting on her fingernail that Winston might know something about the lunch she had with Greyson. She begins to shiver coldly. She gets up and moves over to the sofa then wraps up in a thick sun and moon print black velvet blanket on the sofa. Winston never came back that night and she went to sleep on the sofa. During the night, she heard noises down in the basement.

Even though still could hear faint sounds of someone in the basement but, was too tired to open her eyes. Falsely assured herself, while lying there it was Winston and rolled over on her side as the noises reduced in her ears, due to light snore and breathing deeply through her nose until morning. Approaching voices of the twins and Winston and the appetizing smell of eggs and toast from kitchen was slipping into the living room under her nose. Winston brought her a cup of coffee and stood beside the sofa waiting for her to rise-up and take the cup from his hand. And, gave a trusted look at him and smiled, hoping to see him smile but his face stayed relax as he turned away and walked back in the kitchen with the twins. She felt unsure about her next approach or if she should even make one as she drank her coffee with much uncertainty of what to expect next as she listens to their chatter in the kitchen. The phone was ringing, then Winston answered it with a short, “hello and yes she is.” The next round of seconds, he handed the phone to Jaylon-Rose in living room and returned to the kitchen with the twins.

“Hello,” she answered with no idea of who was on the other end as she watched Winston walk away.

Jaylon-Rose of Rolling Brook Vol.1

ScriptMag: Where did the inspiration for this book come from?

Author: I went on a trip to Cape Girardeau Missouri, and it was in the fall when vibrant bold colors are most attractive and showing off their glory as the state is known for. My recently purchased home in 2005 and the road trip gave inspiration to write the book.

ScriptMag: What was your hardest scene to write?

Author: Hardest thing to write is the description. Its crazy torment.

ScriptMag: What kind of research did you do, and how long did you spend researching before beginning a book?

Author: I researched beforehand. Research is my go-to during writing and after.

ScriptMag: What was the most difficult thing about writing your characters?

Author: Naming my characters.

ScriptMag: How many hours a day do you write?

Author: 4 hours it varies.

ScriptMag: How many unpublished and unfinished books do you have?

Author: One, my first book I plan to revise and put it back on the market.

ScriptMag: Do you read your book reviews? How do you deal with bad ones or good ones?

Author: Yes, I do. This book was barely out a month, and I received a bad review. Reviewers, opinion of this book said it was complex with typos and a confusing read, went on to criticize the for not having a professional editor. I asked around in the author community, and I received no satisfaction. I took my burden to my publisher, who read the description. After reading the description, person reply, “no errors to correct.” I regained my confidence and was glad I investigated the review that came from two reviewers.

ScriptMag: What are some common traps for aspiring writers?

Author: Insufficient research and reading.

Regards,

Sandra Byrne ScriptionMag founder

link @ https://www.flipsnack.com/ScriptionMag/scriptionmagissue-3html

Jaylon-Rose of Rolling Brook Vol. 1

An e-book version is available on Amazon, Kindle Unlimited, Barnes & Noble, everywhere books are sold online.

If you want to know when Valerie’s next book will come out, please follow Author Valerie Caramella hhttps://www.facebook.com/valisdreaming and Instagram when she announces her next release and book signings. Please leave a review for the next reader. Thank you so very much for reading Jaylon-Rose of Rolling Brook Vol.1

Austin Macauley Book Publisher:

I can confidently state the editorial board found, Jaylon-Rose of Rolling Brook Vol 1 is to be thoroughly immersive and well-written book. We particular-compelled by your unique storyline as we followed the thrilling journey, Jaylon-Rose goes on while also diving into her complex and evolving relationship with Winston. Editorial board had their eyes glued to the page for every twist and turn your tale takes, and we believe that audiences everywhere could enjoy reading Jaylon-Rose of Rolling Brook Vol1 as much as we did. \_\_ Editorial Board

Silent Radio Station UK: 5star review

“Oh, I love the American Accent.” What a treat! Interviewing the amazing Valerie Caramella, author of Jaylon-Rose of Rolling Brook Vol 1. A paranormal love story. Valerie was charming and enchanting, reading from her book, with her delicate author’s tone, and dancing the tune of visualization and story enactment. Oh, I love listening to her read from this book. Valerie has clearly mastered the art of storytelling, from what I have heard tonight, I know it will be a gripping roller coaster of emotions. A class act by the wonderful Valerie Caramella. It was such a pleasure speaking to Valerie, I feel blessed to have the opportunity to hear the story told from all over the world. \_\_Malcolm Campbell A True-Crime Author

“Everything will be okay in the end if it’s not okay, it’s not the end.” \_\_\_ John Lennon