

Chapter 2

“Meeting in secret”

“Happy New Year!” The entire church at *Faithful Steward* stayed true to its time-honored tradition of bringing in the New Year on its knees; praying and praising the Lord. Members gave love with hearty hugs.

The Johnson family lined two pews praying for guidance and various resolutions. Earlier that week, Kareem and Marie had discussed the changes they were going to make in the coming year. Kareem decided to spend more time with the boys. He wanted to take them on outings that would allow him to learn more about their interests. Places like the museum, sporting events, and even fishing, something his father never showed interest in.

Marie would resolve to work on time management, with working at home and so many children in the house,

it got hectic trying to manage their schedules with chores and fun time. She insisted the children learn to cook, clean and do laundry, boys and girls alike. Her main concern was that they became productive citizens. Goal-setting and planning for the future was high on her list and she would constantly encourage them to do that.

Kareem placed his hand on Carle, and said a special prayer for their foster child who had graduated from high school and turned 18 shortly after. He prayed for her life in college; that she would make the right decisions, meet the right people and earn good grades. He also prayed she would not forget the family values they taught her, like keeping her faith, depending on God with prayer and living for Him. It was a tall order for a teenager, but she had been with them long enough to succeed with this agenda.

“Thank you,” she said, shy and soft-spoken. She hugged Kareem, Marie, and the rest of the family. They were the people who showed her love and inspired her to do wonderful things.

Just then, Pastor Mike approached to encourage Carle on her journey to college life where she would be living on her own in a dorm. Kareem mentioned it to him earlier in the week. As he tried to impart some words of

wisdom, suddenly, Zack began pulling at his robe, trying to hide behind it. “Who is that?” He said in a playful way. The 5-year-old continued to hide behind the pastor. “Wait a minute, I know who that is, Zack!” He had guessed. The boy showed his face with laughter as the pastor acknowledged each one of the children. He prided himself on remembering their names. “Let’s see, we have Lisa,” he pointed to each one, “Jamie, Sarah, Jeffrey, Francis, and don’t tell me...Anne, Lynne, David and Jai!”

“You got the whole brew,” Kareem laughed. “I’m actually impressed.”

“I care about people, so I make it a point to remember their names,” the pastor said. He continued to speak with Carle privately. They bowed their heads for a minute and then she joined the family. She appreciated the support and felt equipped and eager for the new lifestyle that would begin in a few days. Carle settled on Marie’s alma mater, the same university where Mr. Lord had paid all her tuition fees, before she knew she was his daughter.

“Can we eat now?” Anne asked. Kareem began to hustle the kids toward the dining hall. The Johnsons had taken in nine foster children. They adopted David when he was only two, after his mother accused Kareem of being the father; a paternity test proved it was not true.

Ironically, Kareem and Marie adopted him because *she* (David's Mother) was unfit. Three-year old Jai was their biological daughter who was born shortly after they were married.

The congregation enjoyed a big breakfast with all the fixings. The Johnson's sat together with Sandy, Marie's biological mother and her step-father Dan, along with her half-sisters, Tiffany and Sharon. Tiffany's boyfriend, Marcus Marshall, was there too. He was also known as Train, a rap star.

Billy's and Audrey's plates were fixed by one of the church youth. "Thank you, young man," he said. He tipped his cowboy hat and sat it on his knee. He looked across the table at his wife and thought about how far they had come. He met her 30 years ago, when Billy was the sheriff who vowed to find the murderer of Audrey's husband. He not only tracked down the killer, but was a surprise witness at the trial. Billy stormed through the courtroom doors with iron-clad evidence that Jessica Lord ordered Tom Miner's death, for which she was convicted. After a long friendship, the Hunts were married and considered family by everyone.

Grace's smile showed gratitude for the friendship she and Marie shared and thankful for her man, Sean. She

adored him. He was the right man at the right time for the right reasons. And even better, he cared for her young daughter, Kayla and treated her like his own.

Grace had finally settled into her life. A mother and attorney, and she was also founder of *Second Chance*, a non-profit resource for single women who needed hope and someone in their corner. It was a rewarding position. Marie told Grace how proud she was and that she wanted to do something within the community as well.

“I don’t know why you want more to do,” Grace told her, “You have your kids plus the fosters, a husband, a law practice, and me. I don’t see the need,” she said.

“I feel like I’m not doing my civic duty, you, know, in the community.

Grace didn’t understand her friend. The last year was rough on everyone. Mrs. Lord died, and Jason ended up in prison. They’d all gone through a test of faith. She didn’t need more on her plate.

“Mama?” Kareem asked, “Who was that man you were talking to? I’ve never seen him at church. Is he a member?” He took a healthy bite from his chicken breast.

Janet looked up from her fruit, “How would I know? What is your concern? Can’t a younger man show some interest?”

Kareem laughed, "I was just curious."

"I don't know...why don't you ask him," Janet said. She smiled inside; happy she had finally lost the extra weight she hauled around for years. Losing 100 pounds in one year did wonders for her soul and her figure. Having a man look at her twice made her lifestyle-change worth it. Janet was careful with her diet and she exercised regularly. She could have chosen to have bacon, eggs, sausage, biscuits, fried potatoes and pancakes like the others, instead, she ate fruit.

"I personally don't see anything wrong with Janet getting a little attention, it's about time," her daughter-in-law, Pat made a point to say.

Janet remembered that a few years ago Pat would never have sided with her on anything. Curtis made a face. He was from Atlanta, a southern man who didn't think a woman her age should be smiling about a man 20-years her junior, flirting or showing any kind of attention. His children Charles and Yvonne snickered.

Janet asked, "Grace, what do you think?"

"Hey, you know me, to each his own," she replied.

"Really, Grace? Audrey chimed in.

"I don't see the problem," Grace defended. "Janet is a grown woman. If she finds someone who makes her

happy then, May/December is cool by me. I'm not one to judge!"

"Marie?" Audrey looked in her direction.

"If they are truly compatible, it's fine, however, I think a 20-year gap could pose generational problems, especially when the woman is the oldest."

"How is that?" Janet retorted.

"It's obvious, simply not enough in common," Marie said.

"And the woman being older makes it worse, how?" Janet inquired.

"Most women, including you, enjoy being admired for their brains, but more so for their beauty. In my opinion, a younger man might easily tire of her. I think the expectations would be too high. And with Janet's clear sense of purpose, some men might be intimidated by strong women, they get insecure."

"Now that's a fact," Janet said, thinking of her deceased husband who mistreated her for their entire marriage. "I wouldn't have any trouble detecting one lacking confidence."

"And you know why, don't you?" Marie added. "Women are more perceptive than men, it's a proven fact," she said.

“Oh, no, hold up now,” Dan interjected. “Are you really going to sit here and say women are more intelligent than men, Marie?”

“What I said was women have the *ability* to understand and notice things quicker and easier, which, I guess makes them intelligent. It’s a well-known fact, look it up,” she said without reservation.

“Where are you getting your information?” Dan inquired.

“Yeah, where is this coming from? It’s not like you to make a blanket statement, Miss Attorney,” Billy said.

“Excuse me,” Marcus said, “We have gotten off the point with who’s more intelligent, man or woman. I believe that beauty is *truly* in the eye of the beholder and age is just a number. If he sees something in her that he is attracted to, I think he should explore that. She could be the love of his life.”

“Ahh!” Tiffany swooned. “I didn’t know you were such a romantic.”

“But, are you still saying a woman is more intelligent than a man?” Dan asked Marie.

Sandy interjected, “Honey,” I think what Marie is trying to say is that it takes men longer to understand some things.”

“Okay, okay...let’s table this conversation, please!” Curtis said. He was a little annoyed. Neither the conversation of his mother interested in a younger man, nor women being more intelligent than men sat well with him.

“I agree,” Kareem said. “Y’all getting all loud up in the church,” he said with a chuckle.

It wasn’t long before they decided to leave. Marie invited everyone for gumbo the next day and to watch the New Year’s Day parade. Kareem corrected, “What she meant to say is watch the football game!”

As Kareem and Marie arrived at their gorgeous mansion sitting on a couple of acres of lush greens, she thanked God for the home she inherited from her father, the late William Franklin Lord, a man she never knew, who fathered her after sleeping with her teen mother, Sandy who was a domestic at Lord Manor. In return, Sandy received a college education, and became a teacher, something that would have been tough to do on her own, being poor with no family. It was through God’s grace that Kareem uncovered the mystery of a cold case murder investigation that led Sandy to her long-lost daughter, Marie who found her true identity.

The Johnson's hurried to get the children to bed and as soon as their heads hit the pillow, they conked out. Seeing their sleeping faces gave the grown-ups relief so they could spend some alone-time, although it was 1:30 in the morning. It would be the start of a one-week vacation. Not just for them but for the entire office so everyone could rest properly to start the New Year.

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“What are you doing for the holiday?”

“I'm going to be at my sister's, we're having a family thing,” Sharon said.

“Oh, that's nice. I'll just be here at the dorm,” Ericka told her. It sounded like she wanted an invitation.

“You know what? If my sis says it's okay, you can come with me.” Sharon had known to ask first, Marie didn't play that showing up at the mansion with people she didn't know.

“Okay, cool, let me know,” Ericka said.

“I'll call her now,” Sharon offered with her cell in her hand. Marie gave a short interrogation about Ericka before she finally said yes.

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The doorbell rang constantly. Family and friends looked forward to gumbo at the Johnsons and must-see-

tv. The usual's had arrived with a few others. Ericka Davis, Sharon's friend from college was more than happy to tag along. The college buddies had a few classes together: art history, oil painting and beginning sculpting. They'd been spending a lot of time together because Ericka was from California, with no family in Oakridge.

Carle brought her boyfriend, Tony. He said all the right things, "*Yes, Ma'am, most certainly, thank you and it's my pleasure.*" He reminded Marie of Eddie Haskell from *Leave it to Beaver*, she made a mental note to watch him.

"So, ah, where are your folks from?" Kareem asked.

"Caterville."

"Oh," Kareem raised an eyebrow. "Yes, I'm familiar with it."

"I doubt it, Sir, it's not the nicest place to live."

"I had a case a few years back that took me to Caterville. In fact, I know a young guy that lives there, I mentor him. He might even be here today," Kareem added.

"Is that so? What's his name? If you don't mind me asking."

"Wayne Bennett, but I call him, Funnyman."

Tony felt secure about not knowing him, it meant that dude couldn't tell Kareem anything about the life he led. His neighborhood practically raised him. His parents were hustlers. Uneducated, Irresponsible. His mother sold weed, pills and crack while his dad ran women. They were quite the pair. People marveled at the fact that they were still together considering their occupations. Tony was an only child who had probably seen everything wrong at least once in his short life.

Carle sat quietly at the kitchen table while her boyfriend and Kareem talked and got to know each other. She was nervous that Kareem might detect that Tony was from the streets and not the college prep guy that he pretended to be or that Marie was expecting her to date. He was somewhat of a bad boy. Her quiet demeanor with his talkative experience gave her a place to hide plain sight.

“Do you like gumbo, Tony?” Marie asked.

“Never had it before, ma'am.”

“What? Why not, are you allergic to seafood?”

“No, it's just so expensive, at least that's what my mother would say, so she would never make it.”

Marie placed a steamy bowl in front of the 19-year old. He was tall, black and skinny. He wore a haircut with

a designed carved in it. His pants were bigger than he was; it was obvious they were meant to sag, but for purposes of being at the mansion they were pulled up.

“Mmmm, this is superb, Mrs. Johnson, what all is in it?” He asked. It was obvious that he was trying to make a good impression. No one his age spoke the way he did. Marie thought. He dabbed his mouth with a napkin.

“The base is Rue. It has king crab, jumbo shrimp, boiled chicken, sausage, onions and bell peppers, seasonings, chicken stock and that’s it. I just drop my ingredients into the pot after the chicken and vegetables are done and let it cook for a couple of hours. It’s customary to serve over rice,” Marie explained.

“Well, it’s magnificent,” Tony said. “My mother would absolutely adore this dish.”

“Does she cook?” Marie asked.

“Not as much these days. She works a lot,” he said.

“Then you will take her a bowl. What does she do?”

“She works for a pharmacy, she delivers products to those in need.”

“And your dad, is he in your life?”

“How do you mean?”

“Does he live with you?”

“Yeah, I mean, yes, but he’s not home that much.”

“What does he do?”

“He works in a personnel department. He matches certain people to certain jobs,” Tony said and then brought the bowl to his mouth to drink what was left. With all the lying he was doing, he had forgotten his good manners. It was hard to do both at once.

Carle offered to take him into the den, away from curious minds, lest she have some explaining to do.

“When I’m finished,” he replied. His tone was serious. Carle gave a half-smile and waited. Marie’s feelers were activated.

The football game had folks excited. Some cheered and some booed. There were enough people on opposite sides to make watching competitive and fun. “Wow, did you see that play?” Dan shouted.

“It was a lucky catch,” Sean said.

After the game, the older adults said their goodbyes, as it was a long day. Billy and Audrey left right after the game. Dan and Sandy hung around for another hour before they kissed their daughters’ goodbye and warned Sharon to be home at a reasonable hour. “Okay, I will,” she promised.

Grace and Sean were next to leave with gratefulness and then Janet announced she was going out.

“Out? Out where and with whom?” Kareem asked sounding like a father instead of a son.

“I have a date,” Janet told. “His name is Peter Deeds. Before you ask, he is the gentleman from church that you asked about. He called me this morning. Got my number from Joann. She knows him and said he’s a nice man, nothing to worry about.”

“How does Joann know him?”

“She knows his mother. Poor woman died a few years back,” Janet said. “He lived with her before she passed. She was sickly, so he took care of her.”

“Where are you going?” Marie asked.

“To a New Year’s get together of one of his friends. “It’s in Oakridge, I won’t be long.” She got a buzz on her cell phone and answered. “Hi Peter, yes, I’m ready. Just pick me up at the bottom of the hill. Yes, I’m sure. You’ll meet them another time,” she whispered and then dropped her cell phone in her purse. She proceeded to the door. “I’ll see you all in a few hours.”

“Ma, I don’t know about this, I mean, I don’t feel comfortable with it.”

“I know, son, but you’ll be alright. Mama is a big girl. I’ll call if I need you.” With those words, she was out the door.

“Well, how do you like that?” Kareem asked. Marie threw both hands up as if to say she didn’t know. He followed her out to the porch and watched as his mother trekked down the hill in her comfortable shoes. Before she was out of sight, he called on the phone. “Why are you walking instead of having him pick you up?”

She answered, “Good exercise for me and you don’t get to meet him until I’m ready,” she said matter-of factly.

Peter was waiting when Janet came into view. He immediately exited his late model Mercedes Benz and scurried to meet her as she traveled downward. “Hello,” he greeted.

She waved before saying hello. “How are you?”

He took her hand for assistance, but she didn’t need him, Janet was in good shape; her breathing had barely changed.

“You look wonderful, like a breath of fresh air,” he complimented.

“Why, thank you,” she blushed.

Peter helped her in the car, waited for her to strap in and get comfortable and then said, “Your family must think I’m a louse, not picking you up.”

“I told them it was my decision. Don’t worry about them,” she instructed.

Peter made a U and took off. All he could think about was what her family might be saying about him. He wanted to make a good impression, especially since they were nearly 20 years apart, him being that much younger. He was a nice-looking man, someone who could easily attract women his own age and possibly younger.

It had been his experience that people assumed a younger man who dated an older woman must be after her money, but that was not the case with Peter. He had an old soul. He preferred mature women who had come into their own. They knew who they were, not trying to compete with other women. She was usually comfortable with her looks and not always on a diet, trying to find the latest fix to take her back to yesteryear. She was confident, wise, and beautiful in her own right; gray hairs, fine lines, and all. They were retired, so there was no job hopping or corporate climbing to get in the way of the relationship. If she was single, it meant her husband had probably passed, so she would be financially secure or even divorced with a nice settlement; which meant he didn't have to struggle to support her. Her children would be adults, no kids to help raise. Finally, he had to admit, they were always flattered by his advances and so,

whatever aging had started to take place in his body was no comparison to what was happening to hers.

She checked him out as they drove. Handsome, much younger than she was. It crossed her mind why he was interested in her, and so without further ado, she asked, “What did I do to spark your interest?”

He chuckled. “Straight forward, aren’t you?”

She nodded. Seriously wanted an answer.

“I’m attracted to mature women. I’m not after your money, just your trust and love if it comes to that,” Peter said.

Janet relaxed with his answer. Was still impressed with him opening the door for her. It was something her husband had never done. Only Kareem had treated her like a lady and the man at the department store who reached for her hand out of the limo, but he didn’t count because he was simply doing his job. “So, who is this friend we are visiting?”

“Robert. He and his wife are cool. They’re my age, but they know the type of women I date, so they won’t be surprised to see you. In fact, you will be welcomed,” Peter told her.

“So, you do a lot of dating?”

“I’m searching for the right one.”

“What are the qualifications?”

“Not completely sure, I’ll know when it happens; we both will,” he said.

They talked all the way; had more in common than she had imagined. He was easy to talk to, made her feel comfortable, younger and pretty.

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With the kids upstairs, the older adults gone, and Kareem and Marie in the kitchen, the young adults had a kick-back in the den. Marcus hooked up iTunes on his phone and played his jams on the Bose speaker; instant party. They shared the same taste in music, rap; except for Sharon who was into Gospel rap. Her friend Ericka knew every word, and was comfortable singing along with the artist. She sat close to Sharon watching her, interested in anything she said with fascination.

“Ah, yeah, this joint right here is the shi...the jam,” Tony corrected after he realized he was not in the hood with his homies, but with a different crowd; young entrepreneurs and university students. “My bad, my bad,” he said. They all glared at him with disapproval. He would need to watch himself.

Sharon opted for *her* music. Everyone agreed.

The group started talking on different subjects and then the buzzer rang; it was Shay, Sharon's bestie, a cute Asian with a short-cropped hair doo. She brought a friend; her plus one was a black girl with braids, pretty, in college, and very articulate.

"Hey Guys," Shay was bubbly. "This is my girl, Tysha." Everyone spoke and made introductions. The new comers got comfortable on oversized pillows with drinks and dessert.

Z was there with his friend, Christina, a Hispanic recent college grad on the hunt for her first job. She talked like she had many choices; it was just a matter of deciding. Shay did not share her enthusiasm, didn't know if she could make it through college. She told them, "People assume I'm smart because of my heritage, but that is far from true. It's just some stereotypical nonsense that all Asians are bookworms. I even caught this guy trying to cheat off me. I snickered to myself, he'll be lucky if he gets a C." They all laughed.

The conversation shifted to interracial dating, which Christina felt the need to speak on. "So why are black chicks always looking at me sideways because I'm dating a black dude? I don't get it, what's the problem?"

Tiffany said, “They feel like other races are taking their men. They say there’s not enough to go around in the first place. Many are in jail, gay or just plain useless, which doesn’t leave too many good ones. And then, when the sisters are out together, because no one has date, they look up and see a nice-looking black guy with his fingers locked with a Mexican or white girl, it just pisses them off.”

“It’s not my fault they chose me. I didn’t have nothing to do with that. Maybe if they were doing what was necessary to keep their men, they wouldn’t be jocking me,” she said. She moved her long dark hair behind her ear. She spoke freely, without reservation.

“May I?” Tyesha asked. She sat her peach cobbler down, and wiped her mouth with a cloth napkin.

“Speak your mind,” Z said. He made himself more comfortable on the sofa.

“That’s only part of the problem,” she refrained from moving her head from side to side in black girl fashion and spoke intelligently. “The real issue is that these black men are not coincidentally meeting other races because they happen to be in similar circumstances. No, these black men are seeking out other races, on purpose,

deliberately dissing black women. It's as if black women are out of style."

"And why do you think they are doing that?" Christina asked.

"To be honest with you, I think it's because they're weak. They can't handle a *real* woman with a mind of her own, so they pass up their queens for, well...you!" Tyesha said.

"That sounds like an insult to me," Christina said.

"It was not intended, but it is true," she said and looked at Z.

"Hey, we are just friends," Z said. "I'm not her man."

Christina said, "I feel that these black women need to up their game if they want to keep their men and back off, let people be with whomever they choose!"

"And I think these docile women from other races should stop being so accommodating to black men. Spoiling them with gifts, money and their goodies," Tyesha said.

"To each his own. We were just talking about people who date out of their age group the other day. It's their choice," Marcus said. But to be honest, I respect a girl who can hold out. I wanna know she's not giving it up to anybody that shows interest, even me."

“Yeah, yeah, that’s easy for you to say. You have your girl, you probably don’t spend your Saturday nights alone,” Tyesha said. “Although, it’s probably why I have a 4.2 grade point average, holla!” She slapped hands with Sharon and then Shay whispered something in her friend’s ear.

“That was rude,” Ericka mumbled.

“Is that because you didn’t hear what was said?”

“Regardless.”

“Sor-ry,” she sang and made a face. No one would steal Shay’s joy.

“So, you pulling down some pretty good grades, that’s nice, Tymesha,” Tony said.

“The correct pronunciation is Ty-e-sha.”

“Oh, my bad. I always have problems with those ‘eshas, I get confused,” Tony said.

“I get it; I’m not even going to use my real name on resumes. I’ll put my middle just to secure a job, because you know they discriminate when they see ethnic names.”

“What’s your middle name?” Tiffany asked.

“Mary.”

They all laughed.

“I went from a ghetto girl to a saint,” she said.

“I like your name, the real one,” Ericka said. She smiled at Tyesha.

“Thanks.”

“I like the way you look too, your hair, your chocolate skin.”

Everyone Ooo’d.

“Wait, are you coming on to me?”

Ericka eyed her audience. “No, but if I was, what would be the harm?”

“I’m not gay,” Tyesha stated.

“I was just simply admiring your beauty, but everyone makes such a big deal about loving certain people.” She said. “I love everyone, it makes me no difference what race, creed, color, or sexual orientation. It shouldn’t matter,” she defended.

“It matters,” Tiffany said. “As Christians, I’m speaking for myself, my sister, Carle and Marcus, we believe that God made man for woman and woman for man. It’s obvious to me that’s what He intended, otherwise men could bear children.”

“True that,” Z said.

Carle chimed in. “Yes, I agree with the Bible.”

“Oh, you do, huh? Well that’s good. Did you get to the part where it says, wives, obey your husbands?” Tony asked.

“I’ll focus on that when I’m thinking about marriage,” she laughed.

Tony didn’t find anything funny about her remark. “So, you saying you not gonna do what I tell you to do?” His tone was harsh.

She looked surprised. Everyone was staring. “I, I just meant, I’m not a wife yet, so I don’t have to worry about that now.”

“Now, that’s where you’re a little confused, if you are gonna be my woman, you *will* listen to me and do as I tell you to do!”

“Hold up, Tony!” Marcus interjected. “Don’t be disrespecting her like that, man, like she said, she is not your wife.”

“My bad,” he held his hands up. I thought you would agree since y’all believe in the Bible.”

“We do believe in it, but we don’t use it for self-serving purposes. God says that women should listen to their husbands because they are the head of the household, but only when the head is listening to God! You can start leading her when you become her husband

and when you are living God's word yourself," Marcus said.

"Okay, then," Tony said. He soaked in what Marcus said. Thought what he was telling Carle was Biblical. But she knew better, as she had been attending church, watching and listening to her foster parents long enough to know the difference.

"So, ah, what do you do, man?" Z asked of Tony.

"I'm a student at the university with Carle and I'm an entrepreneur," he proudly stated.

"What's your racket?"

"I sell fresh donuts on campus every morning."

"Donuts are cheap, how do you make a profit," Z inquired.

"My mom makes 'em fresh, can't get no better than that. She only makes the powdered ones, peeps be going crazy for them, so I charge a higher premium."

"It's true, he sells out almost every day," Carle co-signed.

"They must be some good donuts," Tiffany said to Carle.

"Oh, I haven't tried them, you know I don't have much of a sweet tooth," she said.

“I’m an entrepreneur too,” Sharon said. “I haven’t decided exactly what I’m going to do yet, but I do know it’ll be in the arts and I won’t be working for anybody at a job.”

“You make it sound like a bad thing,” Christina said.

“No, like Marcus said, to each his own. I’m just not a worker bee,” Sharon said.

More talk went on with different subjects. It was getting late, so the group decided to get going. Everyone seemed to have something to do the next day. The guests thanked Tiffany and Sharon for a nice evening and everyone was out of the door except for Tony and Carle. “Oh, say, can I get that Gumbo Mrs. Johnson packed up for me?” He asked.

Carle rushed to the kitchen to get it and Tiffany followed, “Call me when you get to the dorm.” Carle agreed with a nod.

Tiffany and Marcus saw them out and then looked at each other with amazement regarding Tony. “Can you believe him?” Tiffany asked. Just then Marie came downstairs in her robe. She’d heard everyone leave. “So, how did things go? Sounded like some lively conversation,” she said. Marie took a seat in the den, Marcus and Tiffany followed.

“It was interesting. I’m going to have a little talk with Carle, that boyfriend of hers is not right for her.

“What did he do?”

“He has a mean streak, a real chauvinist in the making, and not even a Christian. She should not be dating him at all,” Tiffany warned.

“Yeah, he came in trying to be all polite, carrying on like he was the perfect gentleman, but that dude is whack. Thought I might have to toss him up,” Marcus said with boxing moves.

“Yeah, I picked up on that too. I’ll have a talk with her,” Marie said.

“I already told her to call me, I’ll do it,” Tiffany said.

“I hope you can talk some sense into her; looks to me like he’s already got her trained,” Marcus said.

“Lately here, she’s been playing that, *I’m 18* jazz, so we’ll need to pray,” Marie told them.