

Stormy Weather Friends

By

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FOREWORD

THE ONE YOU NEED

I may not be the one you first wanted, but I'm the one you need.

I may not be your fantasy, but I'll fulfill you still the same.

I may not be your first love, but I'll make your afterthoughts
something godly.

To reach God, we have to be humble.

To seek absolution, we must pursue something different.

To be divine, we have to feel worthy of redemption.

So I'll be the one.

I'll be the one that testifies for you.

I'll be the one that truly loves you and fulfills your needs beyond the
bonds of infatuation.

Chapter 1

Friday 8:25 p.m.

The setting was in a city known for jazz, and the rhythm that accompanied the hot and hazy June night provided the perfect serenade for an evening between friends. Bryon was sucking down a roux filled with fresh seafood from the gulf and the look on his face said everything his taste buds were going through. As he rested his spoon in his bowl, he eased back a little further into his chair, then rolled his eyes and patted his stomach while letting out a deep patch of wind. “Damn, girl,” he said with a delectable smile, “you sho’ can cook some gumbo, yeah ...”

“Thanks,” Morgan replied as her plump, copper-toned cheeks puffed up with pride. “I aims to please,” she continued with a down-home ‘N’aleans’ accent that seemed to fit the comfortable surroundings of her upscale yet inviting house.

“Keep it up and he’ll start to think twice about leaving,” Chuck interrupted from his space across from Morgan. A framed photograph behind him served as a mark to the tradition taking place, except for the fact that one of the crowd was missing.

“Excuse me, but I don’t know how to cook bad,” Morgan replied with a playful grin towards her college buddy.

“Well, if he doesn’t miss your cooking, then I know he’s at least gonna miss your smile,” Imani, the fourth figure in the picture behind Chuck said to Morgan as she entered the scene and instantly made everything seem whole.

“Everything Ok?” Chuck asked as he moved his attention towards his wife.

“I feel Ok, thanks, baby,” the frail frame replied with a smile that was mustered from a strength that radiated from within. Her pale-brown flesh seemed to disappear under the outline of her cheekbones, and that, combined with the stubble peeking from her shaven head, seemed to accentuate some type of pain she still had to go through.

“Yeah Daddy, Mommy almost didn’t throw up nothing ... I listened from the door, but I didn’t hear anything,” the bubbly five year old following Imani interjected as she caught up to her mama while approaching the dinner table.

“Kenya, I told you about saying that,” Imani rebuked as she looked at her child while they joined hands and moved in the direction of their shared loved one, guardian, and friend. *Who would have thought that this would have happened?* she reflected while gazing at the portrait behind her beloved.

The image was an old photo of her days at Dillard University. Chuck was in a basketball jersey, she was under his arm, and Bryon and Morgan were split between them as they all shared a smile that seemed to radiate from the foundation of something special. Bryon was Chuck’s boy from the neighborhood and Morgan shared the same bond with Imani. Chuck and Imani had known each other and dated since high school, and Bryon and Morgan had been introduced through their friends while living on the campus of a college in the town they were all from.

“I’m sorry, Mommy,” Kenya innocently commented as she reached her place at the table between her parents, then pulled out her mother’s chair before she sat down. “I

meant that you ate most of your dinner.”

Morgan almost began to tear up as the scene unfolded before her. For the past few months, she had seen her closest friend diminish before her and that, combined with the sight of her godchild being more than a child, made her emotions surface in a way she had not planned. “Kenya,” she commented while rubbing the impending drops from her eyes, then rising from her chair and extending her hand in an effort to gather the little lamb, “come on and help your aunty with dessert.”

As soon as the indication that sugar was about to be spooned out, Kenya perked up and looked at her mother with a questioning smile that indicated she was after something. Imani returned the joyful glee resonating on Kenya’s brow, then glanced at Morgan and discreetly bestowed a smile that beheld a reflection of gratitude. “It’s Ok, baby,” she uttered while directing her undying love upon her child.

“You can help your aunty ... and while you’re at it, make sure she gives Mommy a big piece of cake,” Imani continued as she almost pushed her child in a happier direction, all the while trying to hide a moment of pain that seemed to pounce upon her frail figure.

“Go ’head, Kenya,” Chuck said as he rose from his seat in order to comfort the moment. His movements were quick in conception but because of routine and sorrow, he almost seemed prolonged and emotional in the way he implemented his actions. “Give Aunty a hand, Mommy is Ok,” he continued as he noticed a demeanor of concern and impending fear upon his child as he casually tapped Imani on the back.

“Ok Daddy,” the kid replied as her father’s words reassured her. Still, because of her mother’s predicament, Kenya had become worldly before her parents intended her to be. “And don’t worry,” she finished while starting to walk out of the scene, but looking back at her father as she made ready to go, “Mama can always keep dessert down.”

“Come on, baby,” Morgan interrupted as she felt the atmosphere become heavy with the weight of Kenya’s innocence and bravery. “Let’s go and cut the cake.”

“Ok,” the tot replied while swiftly running around the dining room table, then taking her guardian’s hand and moving to a different set. But before she parted the act, the little soul took a little time to watch and gather in the events taking place. Even though she was young, the circumstances surrounding her had brought Kenya to an understanding that seemed clairvoyant at times.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Morgan asked as she observed the little cherub in a moment of reflection.

“Nothing, Aunty ... I just wanted to remember it before next time,” the innocent soul replied with the naïveness of her years.

“Remember what?” Morgan asked as she tugged her goddaughter out of sight.

“Nothing,” Kenya returned after watching her mother then accompanying Morgan to the kitchen.

Chuck was almost in tears at the sight of his treasured gift, but somehow managed to shore up his strength as he looked at Imani, then asked, “You sure you’re Ok baby? We don’t have to stay for dessert if you’re not up to it,” he insisted with a caring stare.

Imani looked into her husband's eyes and was so endowed by their vision of love that she was able to hide the sorrow streaming from her soul. *I'm sorry I'm leaving all this*, she thought remorsefully while at the same time reaching deep within her heart in order to find enough devotion to keep believing in happiness.

"I'm fine Chuck," she exclaimed with a brave smile as she looked deep into him and conveyed some type of reassurance that everything would eventually be Ok. "Why don't you go on into the kitchen and help with dessert?" she continued with a fortitude that seemed to lend aid to her husband. "I'd like a little time to say goodbye to the guest of honor in private ..."

"Why? I'm only moving to Atlanta," Bryon commented with a courageous demeanor. He wasn't running away from his home or friends; instead, he was departing in order to spread his wings.

"You guys didn't have to say goodbye," he continued with a gallant grief that he tried to hide from his friend. Witnessing her leave was not only hard to handle, it was hard to keep in. "N'aleans isn't that far from 'Joja.' Besides, before you know it, I'll be back home and y'all be telling me that Kenya's brother or sister is on the way."

His new job opportunity in Atlanta was the perfect boost his career needed. The new position was not only more money, it was a chance to progress towards realizing the dream of seeing his art produced under his own name. Still, even though the night was meant to be a celebration of his steps, he couldn't help but reflect on the track Imani was taking.

Chapter 2

Kaya's body rubbed against her bed sheets with a restlessness that was caused by the memory of him on top of her. The recollection agitated her emotions and conjured a pain which she was now strong enough to bear as well as overcome. *It was just that sometimes being alone is too much to stand, even when you have God to comfort you,* she wrote in her diary while almost weeping to her thoughts. *But this is not what I want and not what I'm worth,* she lamented as the light upon her dresser filled the shadows in her darkened room. *And he thought he was doing something too,* she silently chuckled, watching his shadow in the light of her bathroom while recounting the past few strokes of time, which she prayed would eventually become forgettable.

"Here," he replied while thrusting his body against hers.

"Yeah, but a little softer," she uttered, simultaneously using her hands to stop his torso from completely crashing upon her. *Damn Sparky... Take it easy. We got more than just a few minutes,* she inwardly laughed while hiding her head in his shoulder. *I know this is a booty call, but do you think we could do just a little bit extra to go along with it?*

"Just a little slower," she purred, trying to push her upbringing away from her current situation. *Please, don't count this against me God, but You really just don't get it... Sometimes I feel alone, and sometimes I'm afraid that love and salvation just ain't around the corner,* she grieved as she tried to guide her lips away from any contact with his. *So Lawd, please, just turn away right now... 'cause unless something changes*

between us, then I don't plan on keeping this up.

“Do you like it?” Effrim huffed in what he thought was a romantic voice.

I'd like it even better if you thought about me for half a second, she sighed, at the same time moving her head just a little over his shoulder and catching a glimpse of a program as she tried to drown out the image of his body connecting with hers. “Yes,” Kaya casually replied in a methodical manner as she squinted her eyes to get a better look at the news brief flashing across the idiot box.

“Wait a minute, hold up, right there!” she said regretfully while comforting in the feeling of having another person touch her where she wanted to be touched. *Since we stopped being lovers before we even started, then I might as well get something from this*, she surrendered with a depressed bearing while detaching her focus from the broadcast and onto her own personal drama.

“Just a little slower,” she continued, contemplating his actions. *Just hold on for a little longer ... I know I ain't gonna come, but at least stick it right there a little longer*, she thought, momentarily closing her eyes.

“OK,” Kaya said as the picture of his body on top of hers unconsciously entered her consciousness. “Now, move ... Get it, daddy ...” *Just go 'head and finish up and get off of me*, she inwardly sobbed.

“Yeah baby ... What's daddy's name?” E shouted as she used her hands to take control of the situation by reaching down and gently grasping the sack holding his thing one and thing two.

It's time for you to finish up, she speculated while exclaiming, “Oh yeah you

nasty muthafucker...Go 'head and give me all you got.” *And do it in the next few seconds if possible*, she joked to herself as his so-called passion exploded in the confines of the rubber protecting the two of them.

We can't be special together, at least, not forever, so you must go ... I need more, so you must go, she reflected silently to herself as the memory of the night as well as the past year surfaced. *God, I know I gave in to loneliness, and I know I disappointed You*, she lamented as her words carved out an impression upon her pad and predicament.

But I want to and can do better ... 'Cause I'd rather find peace in solitude than be involved with something that doesn't fulfill me and can't be sacred with me, Kaya finished writing as she noticed his presence and closed her feelings in order to escort this soon-to-be remembrance out of her life.

“Before you go,” she exclaimed while getting out of bed, “we need to talk about a few things ...”

“What?” he said with a calculated, dumbfounded tone that was meant to cover his tracks. *Damn, the Braves won*, he thought while momentarily diverting his attention towards a news brief flashing across her set. “Hold up,” he continued, moving to the dresser and turning up the volume.

“Is that baseball game all that you can think about?” she hissed with a resolve that was conceived in the true vision of this man.

“You know that you're probably gonna have to move to get a better time slot,” Effrim said as he stood in the middle of the bedroom, his long and tone muscles seeming

to bulge just a little bit more than usual.

“Like I’ve been trying to tell you for a while, since there’s nothing holding me here, then maybe it’s time for me to spread out,” she continued looking at him as her back rested against the backboard of her antique wood-framed bed. Richmond, Virginia was her home, but Kaya was pursuing the action of expanding her horizons and in the process realized that she would have to develop beyond her experiences in order to grow.

“So you just gonna up and move as soon as something comes up?” he replied with a shocked show. “Damn, how you just gonna play me like that?” he continued, pulling an athletic jersey over his well-formed chest. While pulling the shirt straight enough for the hometown team to be definable, he paused in order to look at her. “You know that I won’t know where I’m gonna live until I hit the majors next year,” he continued with an arrogant attitude as he bent over in order to tie his high-tops.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?” she rebutted while perking up just a little further into the backboard of her bed in order to get a good view of him. *He is fine*, she reminisced, doing her best to divert her attention towards something more lasting than the way he used to make her body feel.

Come on now Kaya, buck up, she thought, as she adjusted her tone. “The fact that you can’t or won’t move has nothing to do with this...You knew this has been a while coming,” she proclaimed, stiffening her spine and raising her back against the sturdy frame of her oak-constructed, sleepy-time configuration.

“But you never really said that you were serious about sending out your resume,” he replied, watching her switch her attention from him towards the TV.

“I never said that I wasn’t, either,” she countered while reaching for the remote on her nightstand, then pressing a button which brought the volume of the tube to a level beyond mute.

“And tomorrow, I’ll be at town hall for the council meeting,” Kaya heard as she watched her news promo flash across the screen of her set. Since graduating from Hampton University, she had managed to somehow live out her dreams.

Kaya Bolden was a young woman pursuing a career she hoped would live past the normal fluctuations of being in front of the camera. She was on a lifelong mission and at the point where striving could make up for some of her regrets. *And I don’t even know why you tripping anyway, we been knowing this wasn’t gonna last.*

It just wasn’t the time she caught him with another woman, but that, combined with the fact that he really didn’t care, made up her mind some time ago. For more than a few weeks, she had been making preparations for her escape, and for some reason it seemed as if this was the best time to make her break.

“Maybe if you didn’t concentrate on that so much,” he exclaimed while pointing to her job which was flashing across the screen, “then there would be something holding you here,” he continued in an effort to win the battle that had been brewing between them.

“As long as you know that I plan to move on, then we can end this any way you like,” she replied with a confident brow as her back stiffened against the backboard of her bed.

“You sound just like you’re reporting one of your stories,” he interrupted with a

slick sincerity. “Is that what this has come down to?” he finished with a dash of humility to add flavor to his sale. “Are we just another news flash? I thought we meant more to each other than that.”

For some reason, his testament halted her. She had heard similar lines and on more than one occasion had either fallen for, or looked past the deceit, so she knew that he was relaying on a certain weakness on her part. ***Do you really think that bullshit is going to work this time?*** she thought while shaking her head in a dumbfounded manner.

On paper, they were the perfect match. He was a dashing, muscular, baseball player about a year off from making it to the majors. She was a news reporter with a pretty face and a figure to match her long, toned, shapely legs. They were both attractive professionals with glamorous careers, but at least in Kaya, there was something beneath the surface.

That’s why there was nothing anchoring her. She was in the process of moving forward and finding that her current opportunities, as well as some of her relationships, were holding her back. ***I mean, I’m gonna miss Mama, Daddy, and Grandpa, but they understand ... I got to get to a bigger station if I’m going to be a national anchor one day. And as for him ...*** she pondered while almost sneering at the sincerity he tried to portray.

“Like I said, Effrim,” she calmly replied to his act, “we can end this whichever way you like. If you want to try and bring up the truth, then I’ll go there, but as long as you know that I’m moving on, then whatever,” she said with a flippant attitude.

“I don’t know why we have to end. Just because you might move don’t mean

nothing. I can..."

"What!" she exclaimed in an effort to halt his implied lies. "You can roll into town, have your little fun, then skip out the next morning. You mean, you can keep up the same shit you been doing for the past few months."

"You know I travel, and you know I got to practice, and..."

"You don't get it. This has nothing to do with our jobs or even being in a different city, 'cause if we were going in the same direction, then none of that would matter."

"I thought we were on the same page; you know I love you," he interrupted while approaching her side of the bed.

Damn, he ain't thrown out the Hail Mary in a while, she thought with a sarcastic tone delivered with an honest voice. "You know, it's been so long since I believed that, that now...now, all I want you to do is be a man and stop lying to me."

"I'm not lying," he replied, doing his best to try and force a tear in order to gain support for his game. "I'll do anything to keep loving you," he proclaimed while trying to take her hand.

How could I have been so damn stupid and so damn lonely? she pondered as she held her hand up in order to halt his advances. "Effrim, I didn't want to make this hard, but you wouldn't give up; you wouldn't stop lying till the truth almost became confused. But like I told you, I'll end this any way you like, so you just remember that the reason I'm moving on is because to you, the only thing we'll ever be is lovers."

Chapter 3

“Yeah, baby,” Chuck interrupted as he tried to hold back his tears. “You know this vagabond brother? He’s just trying to live the artistic life, but don’t worry, before we know it, he’ll be right back in N’aleans, bugging us,” he finished while adhering to Imani’s request and retiring to the kitchen in order to take a short break from the responsibilities of caring for his wife and loved one.

Damn, Bryon grieved as he almost reached out and grabbed Chuck’s shoulder in a show of support, *you’re losing what everybody wishes for, but usually takes for granted. You’re losing the love you thought would be forever*, he thought remorsefully while trying to hold back the sorrow he divined his friend was going through.

“He’s right, you know,” Imani said as she watched Bryon watch Chuck.

“Huh?” Bryon replied as he turned towards Imani and was caught by the resilience in her character. *How can you not be crying right now?* he wondered as he looked upon the rooted and blissful glow cast by her soul. It was all he could do to not shed a tear at the thought that such a foundation would be remembered with a premature eulogy.

“Chuck was right,” she continued with a steady bearing, signaling for Bryon to come a little closer. In the time since the chemo had seemed to be doing more harm than good, Imani had learned to be stronger than she was, and she had also learned to bestow that strength by continuing to care for the people she loved. “You are starting to become a vagabond brotha,” she chided with a smile. “Settling down wouldn’t be such a bad

thing.”

Bryon simply chuckled at her comments as he scooted his chair a little closer to her. “You’d think that with all you’ve been through, you could dwell on something else,” he said with a boyish response to her motherly tone. “Please don’t start that…”

“Bryon, you know the best part of my life?” she interrupted with an honest tone.

“What?” he replied with a loving smile that was delivered in response to the light cast by her spirit.

“I’m not alone,” Imani said while lowering her head and covering her mouth as she used what little strength she had to muster up a cough that seemed to relieve an unexpected pain. “I have people that I love and people that love me around me,” she continued with a caring posture that couldn’t be overshadowed by agony.

“You Ok,” he replied as he swiftly turned his focus to the action of caring for his friend. “You need me to get you anything?” Bryon asked while massaging her shoulders in an effort to relieve the pain his heart was going through. *It’s too early for you to leave them, us*, he almost whimpered while watching her.

“I already got everything I want and need,” she replied with an affection that spoke to the loved ones in her life. Her lecture was delivered with a tone meant to guide him and so the speech almost seemed to overpower the moment, and because she meant it to, Imani gave Bryon a little quiet time to learn.

How can you think about anything but yourself right now? he pondered with a questioning confession. *How can you believe in anything right now? How can you love*

anything so much that leaving this life is not an overpowering misery? he lamented while trying to return the show of strength that was being delivered through her deeds.

Since meeting him, Imani had taken to Bryon. Regardless of the fact that he was Chuck's best friend, over a period of more than ten or so years, she had developed her own personal bond with him. As such, she wanted him to be happy, and since she was a soul that seemed to always show the way, she had no problem illuminating the light that sometimes seems to be lacking from this world.

"Don't waste this time on us," he said with a genuine fondness. "What will be, will be," he continued with a caring tone. "I'd rather talk about you and how you're doing than think about..."

"Think about what?" Imani interrupted with a determined brow.

"You need to stop and concentrate on more important things," he replied while watching her, once again, hunch over and relieve herself with a cough.

"I'm just saying," she continued through her short relief, "while you're out of town, stay in contact. Give her a call."

"If you're talking about what I know you're talking about," he interjected with a comical grin that wasn't uncomfortable for the moment, "then you need to change the subject. You know me and Morgan are just friends."

"I don't see why," she replied while placing her hand upon his arm and massaging his skin. "She's a nice girl, and besides, you said the most important thing," Imani proclaimed while looking into his eyes. "Y'all are friends."

“You never could stop that,” Bryon returned while shaking his head with a scolding smile.

“Ok, I’ll stop, but baby,” she continued with a pause meant to enhance the lesson she was trying to convey, “if it ain’t her, then it’s time for you to find somebody. I just don’t want your paintings to be the only thing in your life,” she confided while focusing a type of decree upon him.

“What are y’all talking about?” Chuck interrupted as he entered from the kitchen.

“I was just telling him that he needs to stay in contact,” Imani replied as she conspicuously straightened up a bit.

“It’s more like she was trying to set up some contact,” Bryon rebutted with a comical bearing.

Imani quickly assumed a dumbfounded demeanor in front of her husband and with a quick smirk, looked at Bryon, then replied, “I just thought that...” But before she could get anything else out, a sudden shock hit her body.

As the blow took form, she seemed to gather her strength and laid into the impact. The medication didn’t always deaden the pain and her steadiness was not due to the fact that she was learning to anticipate the hurt, but in the fact that she was too happy to acknowledge any more distress. “I’m Ok,” she responded while trying to catch her breath as Bryon patted her on the back and tried to relieve what the old folks in the “quarters” used to call a death rattle.

God, why do You test us so much? Bryon thought as he tried his best to show

some type of faith. *It's going to take a lot for this to be alright*, he grieved silently to himself as he moved his arm off Imani as Chuck laid two dessert plates on the table, then took a seat beside his wife.

“You alright, baby?” Chuck asked while placing his arm over his wife’s shoulder.

You don't have to cry baby, you'll always have me. Whenever you need me, whenever you need to feel me, I'll be there. And when that's not enough, I'll understand. In the past few months, Imani had not only been going through her own suffering, she also had to endure the burden of watching her loved ones suffer, all the while knowing that she was the cause of their pain.

“I’m fine,” she quickly replied with a quiet resolve that was mustered from a place she had only discovered a while ago. “I was just trying to talk some sense into this knucklehead friend of ours yeah,” she continued as the pain let up and she smiled at the relief as well as the gathering of souls around her.

“She’s trying to do the same thing she did when we were in school,” Bryon replied with a cheerful tone that was delivered in support of Imani’s strength. There was a peace that hovered around her and the specter allowed the moment to be easy.

“I don’t know what he don’t see in her,” she whispered with a nonchalant tone. Her body was in a period of ease and she felt like enjoying every second not accompanied by pain. “I mean, if she’s good enough to be Kenya’s godmother, then she’s good enough to consider for anything,” Imani continued with a smile as she relieved her feelings, then politely rose from the table.

The usual gathering of loved ones had done wonders for her spirit and it seemed as if a type of energy had overcome her. “I’m going to get some whipped cream for my dessert, so while I’m gone,” she warmly continued, “be sure to talk some sense into this boy ...”

“Why is your wife still trying to hook me up with Morgan?” Bryon asked with a hushed voice as he looked at Chuck with a sarcastic tone.

“You know her,” he said with a sublime smile while watching his Mrs. depart.

“Yeah, once she gets something in her head, she just can’t let go,” Bryon continued with a loving reflection.

“Well, besides that,” Chuck replied as he began to sense Imani’s absence, “ever since she got sick, she hates to see people alone,” he contemplated as her void filled him. He was doing his best to believe in more than the moment and not give up on God’s plan. *But why do You have to take her now?* he questioned while almost adhering to the sorrow that was staring him in the eyes.

“But like I told her before, I’m not alone,” Bryon interjected in an effort to interrupt his friend’s impending misery.

Chuck almost chuckled at his companion’s naive reply, then looked at his young friend and commented, “She just thinks that your art isn’t enough.”

And as Bryon tried to understand the proclamation, a certain type of hush overcame the moment. Chuck simply smiled, then turned in the direction of the kitchen. Bryon just watched as his friend continued to toil with the agony of losing part of his

soul. There was a calm which attached itself to the moment and even though the mood was remorseful, the attitude was peaceful ... And even in the specter of stormy weather, the faithful can find deliverance ... and ... and ...

In belief, in divinity, those cast to flesh can become whole.

In faith in something beyond this world, those who have seemed forsaken can be redeemed.

In God, those consigned to mortality can achieve a vision beyond the mortal.

And if death is an abrupt angel, then blame the sloth of sin that causes the scorn of God's timeliness.

If devotion is a process, then the blindness, which accompanies faith, should be judged as good.

If love is defined beyond time, then enlightenment should not be viewed in the transitory.

And if this life is what the Lord intended it to be, then we will always have to be faithful.

If the Creator knows less than the creation, then the child cannot grow.

But as long as the soul realizes God, then the light of salvation will always glow.

... And so as a light seemed to fade upon the moment, their destinies glistened in a glow seen only through steadfast belief, devotion, and love ...