

Foreword

'My formula'

If my recipe is fit for mass consumption, then who's to fault me for being a good cook.

If my thoughts are seen as simple and plain, then who's to fault a country boy for remembering his roots.

If my actions speak to a belief in God, then who's to fault a sinner for striving towards redemption.

And if my actions within my surroundings are aimed in the positive, then please forgive me for believing.

If I can remember a time when my community was not a detriment to society, then please forgive me for not forgetting.

If I can work towards and envision a better tomorrow, then please forgive me for dreaming.

And if I have the possibility of making God's will come true, then please don't fault me for trying to be what I'm supposed to be.

If I can at least hope enough to believe in what's good, then please don't fault me for throwing out negative vibes.

And if I can in some form or fashion make strides towards a blessing, then please don't fault me for living my life.

...A true believer is never a hypocrite.

'Bliss in a Glance'

Chapter I

Thursday 1:15 pm

Two bright ceiling lights illuminated three walls of a cubicle on the 12th floor of an uptown office building. A stack of papers lying on the desk of the semi-open space was highlighted by the gleam of a computer screen which Candace was looking at. She was reviewing her resume, but momentarily diverted her eyes from the pc after its glare became too much for her eyes to stand. In an effort to relieve some of the pressure building in her pupils, she squeezed the bridge of her nose, then closed her eyelids and took in a heavy breath while raising her head towards the ceiling.

When her four second break was over, Candace opened her eyes and looked around her work space. A calendar hanging on the cube wall caught her attention and as she looked at the picture of a fat bird centered in the space for the date of the 27th, she thought, *Thanksgiving is one week away...I can smell Mama's turkey in the oven already.*

Candace smiled as thoughts of a trip back home came to mind. In the ten years since she left Silver Springs, MD to attend college at Spelman, Atlanta had become her home. But during

the holiday season, Atlanta was not where her heart was. She was looking forward to seeing her mother during her scheduled time away from work, but she wouldn't be able to go home for Phyllis' turkey this year. *Me and Derrick are going on a romantic vacation to a resort in Aspen during Thanksgiving...Speaking of which, why hasn't he called me yet? He must still be at school*, she remembered.

Six weeks ago, her new beau started giving up his Thursday lunch hour to donate his time towards the benefit of his community by tutoring at a local urban elementary school close to his job. She was proud of Derrick's actions and was beginning to feel like she knew him, or at least the type of man he was. It had been a little more than four and a half months since they first met and started dating. 'Almost five months,' she reflected while leaning back in her chair. 'So much has happened so quick.'

Derrick returned to his office and walked past the receptionist without saying a word. He went straight to his desk and took off his coat and suit jacket, then hung them up. His throat let out a long and depressed sigh as he retrieved a phone book from an oblong cabinet and tossed it on his desk, after which, he plopped in his chair and began to thumb through the pages of the directory. Once he found the desired number, Derrick picked up his phone and pushed ten digits, then placed the receiver to his ear.

The phone line clicked and a voice was heard on the other end. "Body shop, may I help you?"

"Yeah," Derrick said in a low and solemn voice.

By the time he hung up the phone, his mood for the rest of the day had been set. *Damn! \$500...* He shook his head as anger began to rise in his body. *I can't believe this crap.* His feet started to tap with an almost evil rhythm as he thought, *that means...*

"Hey Derrick."

Suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by a voice from behind. He turned his head over his left shoulder in order to identify the person standing in his cubicle and breathed just a bit easier when he saw a female standing at the entrance of his office space.

“So, how did it go at school today?”

“Bad,” he replied in a disgruntled tone. Normally, Stephanie’s curiosity would have been welcome. Being that she was one of the few sistas in his office, and also being that Derrick was one of only two brothers in their working environment, they had a close friendship. On any other day, her voice would have been a welcomed relief from the grind of the office.

“What happened? Did everything go Ok with the kids?” she asked.

“The kids were fine.”

“So, what’s wrong?” Stephanie could tell that something was really bothering him.

He shook his head briefly, then blindly stared down towards his desk as he told her, “when I left the school and got out to the parking lot....”

Candace was caught up in thought and almost jumped out of her seat when she heard a voice call out her name. After steadying herself, then switching her pc to something other than her resume, she turned around in her chair and greeted the person standing before her with a lukewarm smile. “Hello Susan,” she said as her teeth began to grind together. Even though her voice was not confrontational, it was not joyful either.

enamel peering through her parted thin lips. She knew that they had not been on the best of terms for the past few weeks and was trying her best to compensate for the uneasiness between them. "I just wanted to confirm your vacation request," she said in an overly friendly tone while twirling her fingers through her long bleached strands.

"Great!" Candace replied as the thought of, *leaving this place behind and getting away from these people*, instantly brought an expression of joy to her face.

Susan picked up on her brightness and was almost envious. "Hell," she said as a small bit of sincerity rose within her. "I'd like to get away for a few days too...especially with someone like Derrick." She had never seen or met Derrick, but the gossip was spreading throughout the office, and for some reason, Susan's ears had always managed to pick up on conversations not intended for her. "Anyway, everything has been approved...You're all set," she said while walking away from Candace's cube. But just before she left, Susan turned and said, "Oh, and remember...You still have three more days to take...You can only carry over five days for next year."

"Ok," Candace said as she waved Susan off. *Don't worry*, she thought to herself. *If I got three free days to be away from this place, then you better believe that I'll be away*. She was completely dissatisfied with her work environment and had recently started putting out resumes. She already had a second interview from a prospect and was hoping, *to be away from this place in at least three months....An MBA will have to do more for me than this crap*. Her present corporate function provided her with nothing but unrecognized work in an hostile environment, and she figured that not only could she do more, but that she could also do it someplace that didn't make her cringe whenever she walked through the door.

"Derrick, why did you make your deductible so high?" Stephanie asked with an upset look on her face.

position.

“But baby that Civic is only three years old,” Stephanie commented as her facial muscles shifted and revealed a look of concern. “And what are you going to do about your vacation with Candace?”

“I don’t know, but a vacation ain’t looking too good right now.”

Stephanie walked towards him, then placed her hands on his shoulders and said, “that’s alright...She’ll understand.”

“I don’t know Stephanie,” Derrick muttered while shaking his head in an uneasy fashion. He needed some type of support, some type of feminine voice to reassure him that women were understanding of disappointment.

“Derrick, yawl been dating almost five months now,” she said while using her hands to steer his shoulders in her direction. “And from what you tell me, she’s real understanding.” Once his head was turned in the same direction as his shoulders and his eyes were equal with hers, Stephanie looked at Derrick with an air of sisterly love and told him, “she won’t go crazy over this...Don’t worry baby, she won’t want to stop seeing you or anything...” She stepped back, now that Derrick’s whole body was facing her, and continued, “yawl might even be in love.”

Derrick raised his eyebrows and looked at her sarcastically, then said, “what?”

Stephanie knew him well. “Don’t play hard with me...I know you, and I know how you talk about her...You’re probably already in love.”

Derrick just continued to look at her with a sarcastic frown.

began to walk out of his cube, but before leaving, turned and said, “don’t worry, she’ll understand.”

Candace looked at the clock on the wall and thought, *1:25...He should have called me by now*. He was supposed to call her and say that all the arrangements had been made. He was supposed to tell her that this time next week, they would be in each other’s arms and involved in an exciting romantic interlude. They would be, *I need to call him...He should be back from the school by now*, she thought.

As she picked up the phone, Candace began to reflect on her lover. A smile appeared on her face while she eagerly dialed his digits then pressed her ear close to the receiver. Her past few months with Derrick had been exciting and romantic, but they had also been fulfilling. It was something that filled her insides and told her that this was a feeling she wanted to hold on to.

“Southeast Federated Banking, may I help you?” Derrick said as he picked up his phone on the second ring.

“Yes, you may,” she replied in a low seductive voice.

Damn, why did she have to call me right now? He hadn’t devised a plan yet. He hadn’t conceived a way of telling her that they wouldn’t be enjoying a vacation in passion’s embrace. “Oh, ah, hey,” he said in a jumbled manner.

“Hey.” There was something in his voice which seemed to indicate that something was wrong so she asked, “is everything Ok?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you sure?” She still sensed something behind his vocal. “Did anything

“Huh?” ‘Are you psychic or what?’

The tone of his voice revealed everything she needed to know. She was beginning to read him like a book and could almost tell all of his feelings and thoughts. “Did everything go well at the school?”

“Well...”

“So something happened at school?”

“The kids are alright.” *Maybe if I make a big deal out of it, then she’ll feel sorry for me*, he thought while stumbling with his reply.

“What happened?” she asked with a concerned tone.

“Well...”

“What!”

He squinted his eyes and told her, “somebody broke into my car while I was at the school.”

She was instantly brought to sympathy. “Oh baby, I’m so sorry...But you’re Ok, right?”

“Oh yeah, I’m fine.” *But that’s not the real news.* “But...”

“What?” She was becoming worried that maybe everything wasn’t alright with him. “But what...”

“But they smashed out my window,” he said quickly.

“You weren’t in the car were you? Derrick, are you Ok! Where are you calling from?”

“Candace, you called me.” His eyebrows rolled up in curiosity and Derrick thought, *damn, they just took my stereo*. But then he remembered that he and Candace were supposed to be in love and that she cared nothing about his car stereo. “Chill, I’m at work. Don’t worry, I was in the school when they did it.”

She let out a patch of air and said, “thank God.”

Her reaction shocked him. Even though Derrick had professed to be in love with Candace, he couldn’t believe that the mention of what to him was just an inconvenience could sound like a life threatening episode to her. It not only made him thankful that nothing more had happened to him or his car, but thankful that he had someone so concerned for him.

“I’m just glad that nothing happened to you.”

He was regretful that he tried to make the episode more than it seemed. *All this because I was afraid about the vacation*. He wondered how he could be so dumb as to give into all the rhetoric which stated that material vanity was the only thing that guided black women’s emotions. “Nah, don’t worry about that...I was safe and secure in the school...I mean, everything’s Ok...It’s just a little broken glass and a radio.”

“It’s a shame what’s going on today...DAMN!” After her exclamation, she tried to calm her voice since she was in a professional environment. “It’s a shame that a brother can’t go to a school and do volunteer work without some fool breaking into his car.”

time to tell her, *she might not be so sympathetic later on*. “The only thing, is that I got to spend all my money to get it fixed.”

What do you mean, all your money? she thought as her eyebrows rolled up. Now that her baby was Ok, her mind had once again started to focus on the romantic interlude they were supposed to be taking. It wasn't shallowness or materialism that made her thoughts jet to their get away rendezvous. It was instead the fantasy of being with him in a secluded, romantic and adventurous hideaway that made her mind flash to the thought. “Well, how much do you think it'll cost?”

“About...Ahmmm, \$600.”

“That's an awful lot.”

His voice became shallow as he replied, “Yeah. That's a hell of a lot.”

From the way his voice sounded when he said his words, she instantly knew that, *we can't go on vacation...Cause, I can't afford to come up with your share...I ain't rich...And paying off this loan for grad school takes up all my extra money.*

She didn't count this episode against him or blame him for being the victim of a troubled world. Her oncoming melancholy was in the fact that they wouldn't be able to spend quality time together; Time when they didn't have to worry about the world; Time when they could only think about the love which had grown between the two of them. “Well, if your window is broken, then you got to get it fixed,” she said in a sympathetic tone.

The corners of his chin pointed towards the ground as he spoke. “Yeah, it's gettin' cold...and I ain't trying to ride around in the winter with a broken car window...then I got to get a new radio...I might even have to get a new motor for my window.”

“Really...” The logistics were becoming boring, but she didn’t want to just come right out and express her disappointment, so she took in a quick breath and decided to let him break the news.

“Candace.” *Here goes*, he thought.

“Yeah.” *Here it comes*, she thought.

“I don’t think that I’ll be able to go on vacation with you...But the reservations are all set...” He didn’t say our vacation because he wanted to leave her an out. “I mean if you want to go, then you still can.” He wanted her to know that if she wanted to go alone, then he wouldn’t try to stop her.

Deep down inside, however, he didn’t want her to go without him. He was looking forward to the vacation just as much as she was. He wanted a time to be away. A time to truly be with her and contemplate the thought of them being together forever.

“Baby...I don’t want to go without you.” Their love was so new and yet so timeless that she was instantly at his side. It was done because something within her said that if things were different, *he wouldn’t leave me*. She had to have faith that if times became hard for her, he would be at her side. “We can just spend the time here and be together,” she said in a caring voice.

Her words pierced his heart and layers were stripped from his guarded interior. It was as if time stood still and he could only think of the blessings he felt for knowing and loving her.

“We can just...Hold on,” she said, while placing her hand over the phone, then turning her head to address someone who had just entered her cubicle. Her words, even though muddled, could still be heard. “Yeah...Ok. I’m coming.”

After removing her hand from the phone, Candace told Derrick, “baby, I’ve got to go to a meeting...But we’re still goanna meet at your apartment tonight, right?”

“Yeah.” His reply was instant. “At least we can watch a little tv or Tavis Smiley.”

“Ok, I’ll see you later...Bye.”

“Bye,” he said as her voice left the phone. *That was easy.* He first thought that she would curse and not understand his predicament concerning the vacation. But more than anything, he was afraid that she would not support him. The support was needed because of economic bind, but the understanding in no way degraded or lessened her. Instead, the insurance strengthened the bond between them.

“Derrick...I heard that you might not be going out of town,” an unexpected visitor said while interrupting Derrick’s thought process.

His thoughts were so consumed by Candace that Derrick didn’t completely recognize the voice behind him, and since he didn’t feel like turning around to identify the speaker, he just blurted out, “after paying for my car, I won’t be able to...Shit, might as well almost forget about my whole vacation.”

“Really?”

That voice sounds familiar. The sound of the tall, slender grey haired person behind him instantly brought Derrick back to reality. He turned around to see, Ron, his manager. The busy season of the year was coming up and Derrick knew that, *if this prick finds out that I’m not going out of town, then I know he’s goanna want me to work instead of taking off...Especially since Thanksgiving is next week.* “Ahmm, well maybe. We’ll have to see...I think I might find a way to go.”

“Really?”

Derrick saw a look in Ron’s eyes and instantly knew that, *he’s going to ask me to work those days that I would have had off...Hell no...* He remembered that Candace said, *we can spend those days together here instead of on the slopes.* “Yeah...I think that I’ll still be gone those days,” he said while trying his best to put on a convincing act.

Ron responded with his own confidence and commented, “well I overheard Stephanie saying that you wouldn’t be able to go.”

Busted!