

Destiny's Grace

By

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FOREWORD

FAIRY TALE LOVE

In order for love to be true, it has to be seen in the foresight of God.

In order for a prince to find a princess, he has to consider the good of more than himself.

In order for a princess to find a prince, she has to consider more than a blood line.

And in order for fairy tales to come true, belief has to encompass more than circumstance.

And sometimes the strongest love of all is that which is founded upon blindness.

Sometimes a man can't look beyond an image until he is touched by a soul.

Sometimes a woman can't look past glimmer until she is saved by what's truly golden.

And sometimes we all see with lustful eyes until we are sanctified by what is holy.

And maybe fairy tales exist for only those who seek faith beyond this world.

Maybe divine right is only such when the man humbles himself before God.

Maybe a throne is not in vain if the woman takes responsibility.

Maybe nobility is uncommon simply because most of us choose not to believe.

So maybe life has a way of rewarding those who choose to believe in more than the material.

Maybe a king is such because he adheres to his King's decree.

Maybe a queen is such because she conceives the Lord's blessings.

And maybe a fairy tale is simply love conceived in the blind faith which God has for his regal servants.

Chapter 1

Saturday 3:15 p.m.

Derrick's right foot was in a chair and his back was bent forward as he laced a tight pair of rented vinyl shoes stuck to his feet. A bright but lazy light guided itself through the colored windows of the church meeting room and after tying a bow on his shiny, size nine-and-half's, he raised his head, then exclaimed, "Man, I wish somebody would turn up the heat in this place. Only your ass would have a wedding in the dead of winter," he grimaced while looking up at Mac.

"I can tell you're from Atlanta. A little snow on the ground and you start to freak out," Mac replied with a smile.

"Well, I ain't in my long johns for nothing," Vince interrupted as he started putting on his rented, black formal jacket. "I don't care if this is Virginia, it's February, and it's cold."

Mac, who was still rushing to get dressed, swiftly walked across the medium-size room, but smiled as he quickly looked back at his friends. "Well, it ain't like I had much choice. This is where Denise is from, and this is where and when she wanted to get married. Besides, that open bar at the reception will warm y'all up a bit. And after all the beer we drank last night, staying warm should be the least of your worries," he said while turning his head in order to complete dressing in front of a full-length mirror.

After lifting his foot from the chair he was leaning over and wiping off his shoe print from the seat, Derrick sat down next to Vince, who was now seated at a large,

wooden, boardroom table looking at Mac with a silly grin. As soon as Derrick was in ear range, Vince leaned over so that none of the other four men in the dressing room could hear him, then in a serious tone told Derrick, “Look, man, me and Carol are getting married in less than seven months from now, so I’m giving you plenty of warning — You and the fellas better do more than last night ...”

“Chill. What could we really do?” Derrick quietly replied. “That’s the best man’s job. Besides, we ain’t been to Norfolk since we left school. It ain’t like we could plan anything.”

“As long as you know that I’m expecting more than last night. A case of brew and an old, flabby stripper ain’t no way to send a brotha out on his last night,” Vince said as he raised his eyebrows.

“You know we gonna hook it up. But isn’t that supposed to be your brother’s department?” Derrick whispered as he patted Vince on the shoulder.

“That’s what I mean,” Vince said as he arched his eyebrows even higher. “You know his lame ass can’t hook nothing up, not with a wife and two kids. That brotha wouldn’t know what another coochie looked like if it smacked him in the face.”

“Isn’t that the way it’s supposed to be?” Derrick replied with a cynical brow. He knew that Vince would agree with his point and had no problem implying as much. “I mean, it ain’t exactly like you gonna get laid, and it ain’t exactly like you done seen any new pu in a while either.”

“Oh, by the way,” Mac interrupted, “thanks for driving to the reception. Sorry we

couldn't get any limos, but this shit is really costing us. Denise's parents couldn't cover everything, and you know my cheap ass," Mac said with a smile as he stood in front of his two fraternity buddies. "Frat, frat...DTX."

"Don't sweat it, brah. You know we'd do anything to see our boy go down," Derrick said with a grin.

"Look who's talking," Mac replied with a comical air.

The light which filled the cathedral was quiet and heavenly. Only a few people from the wedding party were in the hall, so the quiet which filled the air was impressionable. The high vaulted ceilings of the establishment accented the glare of fuzzy light coming from stained glass windows and awoke the meeting hall with an air of contemplative brilliance. Candace just sat still with her chin resting in her arms, which were crossed against one of the pews in the back of the church. Since she was with Derrick, she not only had to get to the wedding on time, but she also had to be a little early.

While she sat and watched a few of the bridesmaids and groomsmen at the front of the altar, a fond recollection came over her and Candace began to smile as she watched one of the emotional bridesmaids almost begin to tear up. *I did the same thing at Beverly's wedding*, she thought as the memory of her cousin's matrimony made her reflect. *I love weddings*. It was the sight of continuation that made her happy, the thought that someone had found another to love them forever. The idea that a man could make a

commitment to her, believe in her, and love her forever was overwhelming.

That's why she sat with a smile on her face. She wanted to sit back and take in the picture. She wanted to let the thought of one day doing this herself sink into her mind. And even though her intellect told her to be fearful of the possibility, her heart could not help but delight in the concept. *I could be doing this with him*, she thought as her smile widened. Candace and Derrick had only been dating eight months, but somehow, the bond which they had managed to build spoke towards the continuation of what had become a strong foundation.

She knew that this could really happen to her one day. It was as if she were beginning to plan her own ceremony. Beverly would be her matron of honor, and Shawn and Lisa would be two of her bridesmaids. As her mind started to ponder the possibilities of her could-be day of bliss, Candace stopped and almost chuckled. She had already been in seven weddings.

She let out a snicker as the words, "always a bridesmaid, never a bride" bounced through her head. But suddenly, she got serious as the complete issue entered her mind. Derrick had told her that this was the sixth wedding he'd been in. As the concept behind her thought took form, she mused, *I know why I've never been married, but what about him?*

It was almost as if she didn't have to go over her past with men in order to be understood. Any participant of the female gender could have sympathized with her predicament. It goes without saying that a good brotha is hard to find these days, so why

had she stumbled across this one? Why wasn't he already snatched up?

The issue of continuation once again crept up in her mind. Candace was secure in the fact that Derrick was a good man, but still, with all the shit that's going on today, why is it that she somehow got a brotha with a job and no kids? It was enough to make her wonder if something was wrong with him. And even in the house of the Lord, doubt sometimes has a way of making itself an accompaniment to the thoughts of humans.

Mac stood in front of the large wooden meeting desk at the center of the room with his hands in his pockets. "Come on brah," he said as he shook his head. "I've seen you with her, and from what Vince has told me, looks like his won't be the last wedding I'm in," he continued as he stared in Derrick's direction.

Derrick just nonchalantly turned his head towards the culprit and replied, "You know V, some of you brothas really have a tendency to enhance the details just a bit too much."

Vince raised his eyebrows and with a friendly look, replied, "Don't worry, Mister Poet. We never called you a punk for writing your poems, and we ain't goanna call you a punk for falling in love."

Derrick's eyebrows rose to the same level as Vince's as a word broke itself from his stunned face. "What?!"

"You heard him," Mac interrupted while taking his hands out of his pockets and straightening his bowtie. "There's nothing wrong with falling in love and looking at a

sista as ... as more than just a piece of ass,” he commented with a hushed voice while looking around the chamber they were in.

Derrick looked at Mac, then looked around the now-empty room. “You know, the preacher and all of her relatives have left. It’s just you and the boys,” he said with a chuckle. “So you don’t have to act all saved in front of me. You just worry about getting married and let me lead my own life.”

“We’re not trying to push you into anything,” Mac replied with an offensive posture. Since he, Vince, and Derrick were close friends, he knew that his words would not be taken as rude or judgmental.

“And it ain’t the fact that we’re married, or getting married,” Vince rebuked as he got up from his seat. “It’s just that everybody thinks Candace is really nice...even your parents.”

“I know that you ain’t talked to my parents about her,” Derrick said with a friendly, but stiff posture.

“Derrick, you’re the one that told me what your parents said about her. And she already told Carol what her mama said about you,” Vince replied as he placed his hands on Derrick’s shoulder.

“You know, it must be the wedding,” Derrick returned as he shook his head, “‘cause right now, it seems like y’all are acting just like a bunch of little girls.”

“Fuck you ...”

Candace had moved her position to a pew further up in the church. People were starting to come in so she moved in order to get a good seat on the aisle. She wanted to see her baby. She wanted to smile as she saw Derrick walk down the aisle in his tux. She also wanted to envision one day doing this with him.

“Don’t you just love weddings?” a cinnamon-colored, thin sista sitting next to Candace said.

“This is just so beautiful, I’m so happy for them,” Candace replied with a glowing smile. Mac was Derrick’s friend from D.C., and Candace was introduced to him and the bride while she and Derrick were on a business trip/vacation. She had managed to get to know them because of Derrick, but she was truly happy for her newfound friends. “Denise and Mac make such a nice couple.”

“So do you and Derrick,” Carol commented as she moved a little closer to Candace in order to get a good view of the ceremony.

Carol was Vince’s fiancée, and because he was a close friend of Derrick’s, she had also become a citizen in Candace’s life. But the sista next to Candace was also an independent woman. She was a soul Candace had clicked with, and regardless of their means of introduction, Candace was beginning to consider her as a friend.

“Well,” she shyly responded.

Carol had grown to consider Derrick a friend, and as such, Candace was also becoming a part of her life. “You don’t have to be shy with me girl. I’ve known Derrick

for a while, and besides that, I know men, and I know that he's serious about you."

"I know he is," Candace agreed. Somehow, the atmosphere seemed right for confession and the time and place seemed like the perfect opportunity to be real. "And I'm serious too, it's just that ... I don't know...."

Carol shifted her position to get a better look at Candace, and as the reflection of the hazy sun bounced off Candace's face, Carol saw something that she recognized. It was doubt. It was the doubt that a brotha could do something like this, something like believe in God and proclaim his intentions towards her in a real way. Something like getting married. "Don't worry, baby," she said while sliding her arm around Candace in a show of support. "I know how you feel. Me and Vince will be doing this same thing in a few months, and I'm even more scared than you."

"But you're still doing it, you're still trusting him. Where did that come from?" Candace asked as she turned to Carol. By now, she was being as honest as she could be. The aura resonating from the moment seemed eternal, and her affiliation with Carol began to grow in the absence of anything artificial. "I mean, how did you know that Vince was the one? What made you believe that you weren't settling on something that wasn't right for you?"

"I can't answer that for you. Only you know what you want, but if you're like me, then being with Derrick isn't settling, because to me, he's just like Vince. And I know that I'm not settling with him," Carol said with a homely posture.

As she spoke, a final parade of people crowded into the chapel. The pew that they

sat in was already full, so they didn't have to make any uncomfortable adjustments as the ceremony started. *Maybe that's it ... Maybe that's why I'm so scared*, Candace thought as she took a camera out of her purse. Carol had settled in her seat and Candace continued to think to herself as a flower girl came down the aisle of the white-colored, large religious meeting hall.

What scared her was the fact that she truly loved Derrick. She was frightened because she had begun to think of this man in terms of forever. And even though the scene seemed a perfect complement to her thoughts, time and situation had nothing to do with the reflections roaming through her head. She recognized that the most important thing is that she loved him. The most important thing was that she couldn't or didn't want to think of a life without Derrick, the man of her dreams. The man that made her glad she was a woman. The man that made her glad she was his godly companion.

Derrick was the first groomsman on the left side of the bride, and even though he tried to be firm and rigid considering the formality of the moment, his mind and emotions were less than prim. *They're gettin' married*, he thought while looking at Mac and Denise.

As his eyes focused upon the bride, he reflected on the fact that Mac had found the finest sista he could. Indeed, Denise had a very pleasing figure. She was attractive, but Derrick thought about the true meaning of the day. Most importantly, he loves her. He is pledging to spend his life with her, and her alone.

As he thought, his eyes rested upon the groom. The light of the overcast snowy day spotlighted a glow on Mac's face that was indescribable. It was everything Derrick thought he had found with Candace. It just wasn't the infatuation of lust, instead, it was the fulfillment of divinity. ***Damn, this could be me in a little while***, he thought as a bead of sweat surfaced from the corner of his forehead.

He couldn't believe it. He couldn't believe that he had so suddenly come to this point, the point when Candace was all he ever wanted. He couldn't believe all the shit he'd done just to be with her, things like writing her love poems. Things like sharing himself with her. Things like falling in love with her.

Then seeds of doubt sprang up. What if she doesn't want the same? What if she winds up leaving? The emotion of the day forced itself upon Derrick and made him contemplative. His thoughts seemed to drown out the ceremony and as the reverend bowed his head at the union of Mac's and Denise's unified hands upon the altar, Derrick continued to ponder upon his situation with Candace.

Eight months seems a little quick to be thinking what I'm thinking. But it was what he was thinking that was the most shocking. ***Marriage ... Me and her ... forever...*** That was the little thing that made him contemplative. That was the little word which made him stand up and reflect upon everything that was going on.

Glancing at his friend at the altar reminded him that Mac couldn't even think about another woman. ***He got to stay with her for the rest of his life.*** And that made Derrick think about Candace. Could he do that with her? At that point, the reverend stood

up and began to say a blessing over the matrimony taking place.

Chapter 2

7:39 p.m.

The reception was being held in four rooms on the top floor of a building which had a view of the bay. The ballroom was a mixture of music and people swirled around a concoction of food, fun, and conversation, which served as the foreground to the light of a full moon that bounced off the waters of the Chesapeake. Derrick was standing next to Vince at the open bar in the largest of the rooms, which had a romantic glimpse of freshly fallen snow resting upon sidewalks that led to a boat landing by a hotel adjacent to the reception hall.

“No wonder they couldn’t get limos for everybody,” Derrick said as his glance rose from the window and he began to take in the ambiance of the room. “This brotha is going out in style.”

“Chill brah. Mac told me that Denise’s dad had the hookup on the rooms, and her uncle had the hookup on the bar and food.”

“Either way, it must be nice marrying a sista with some funds. And she’s about to finish up that law degree in a few months. They ’bout to get paid. I mean, that lobbying job he got ain’t exactly making him a millionaire, but they’re going to be doing Ok,” Derrick said as he raised his hand in order to get the bartender’s attention.

“Well, you know how much it costs to live in D.C. That’s why they’re in Maryland. Besides, I don’t care what those Republicans say. Times ain’t exactly great for everybody. Even Mac and Denise are goanna have bills to pay.”

“Two Coronas,” Derrick said to the bartender as he turned and looked at Vince with an almost dismal reply. “I know. That’s why I’m glad I’m back in school. I definitely can’t chill with what I’m making now. I got to get that CPA if I’m going to make any real money.”

“Who you telling? When I move into Carol’s crib, what I’m paying on our mortgage and utilities is going to cost me an extra \$400 more a month at least. Man, let me tell you, a crib and a yard is a lot to handle, even with both of us working,” Vince said with a frown as the bartender interrupted him.

“Two Coronas for the fellas,” the friendly attendant said with a Southern drawl.

“Preciate it,” Derrick replied to the bartender then turned his head and while grabbing the beers, looked at Vince and exclaimed, “Dang brah, y’all ain’t even married yet.” Derrick handed one of the brewskies to Vince and began to lead him to the serving line. “She already got you worrying about a mortgage,” he commented with a comical air as they walked.

“Well, since we’re supposed to be together forever, then we might as well be real instead of just living for the moment. Besides, we’re just blessed that she was already in the house.”

As Vince continued to ramble about the logistics of property ownership, Derrick thought to himself, *That sounds familiar*. It was something he and Candace had talked about a few months back. It was just a friendly conversation they were having about finances, but somehow the recollection made him ponder.

He wondered if they would be able to get into a nice house. But the issue just wasn't a house and it just wasn't material stability. It was whether or not Derrick and Candace would be able to do things like that together. Would they become a real team and work for the future?

Candace was reclining in a large and comfortable cushioned chair which blended right in with the dark wood paneling in the room she was in. Twelve or so people were milling around the elegant sitting room, but the flow of pedestrians didn't crowd the place. "Now how old are you, Hassan?" she commented while putting a half-filled glass of wine on the table next to her, then observing a cute little boy seated on the lavender and gold striped couch beside her.

"I'm four in June," the bubbly, brown bundle of boy replied as he swung his short legs against the couch, diverting his attention from his coloring book momentarily.

Candace looked up at the lady seated next to the polite young fellow and commented, "Danielle, he's so smart."

"Thanks," the polite, chubby-cheeked woman said.

"I know, girl," commented Carol, who was seated next to Danielle. "You and Vaughn must be so proud of him."

Danielle affectionately guided her left hand over Hassan's head and said, "This is my little angel, although ..." After moving her arm around the boy's shoulders and squeezing him in a motherly way, she continued with a cynical smile, "he can be a little

devilish at times.”

“Mama,” Hassan interrupted as he raised his head and looked at her in a surprised way, “I act good.”

“I know you do baby, now go ’head and finish your picture,” Danielle said as she grinned at him.

Candace just sat and smiled at the scene. It was something she had often thought about and it was something that was becoming a possibility. *Having a baby ... Carrying a life ... Living for somebody besides myself.*

“So, looks like you’ll be doing this pretty soon,” Danielle said as she looked at Carol. “Are you getting ready?”

“Huh?” Candace grunted as Danielle’s question caused her attention and emotions to snap.

“Girl, there is just so much to do and plan for,” Carol said as she noticed an emotional look on Candace’s face. “I mean, the wedding is only a few months away. I don’t know how we’re going to pull it off.”

A large crystal chandelier lit the main ballroom of the reception with an amber glow and a mass of people huddled in different corners of the room and on the dance floor. The people in the corners were munching as they conversed. The people on the dance floor were doing the same since the DJ had taken a short break and left a slow, rhythm-filled tape to accompany his absence.

“Well, it won’t be long before you join me,” Vaughn, Danielle’s husband, said to Mac. Vaughn was dressed in the same groomsman’s outfit that Derrick and Vince were in, and as he placed his right arm over Mac’s shoulder, continued, “Pretty soon we’ll be calling you ‘daddy.’”

“Don’t worry ’bout that brah. Me and Denise got plenty of time. You just worry about Hassan and Danielle. Denise and me ain’t nowhere near ready for that,” Mac said with an amusing smile.

“Yeah,” Derrick interjected as he joined in the conversation. “Let him get used to being married before he does anything else.”

“Look who’s talking,” Vince said with a grin that was shared among the group. “Candace just about got you on lockdown. Looks like Mac ain’t the only one goanna be gettin’ used to married life,” he continued as the music provided a quiet but upbeat backdrop while the circle of four friends laughed.

Derrick turned his head towards Vince and with a sarcastic smile, replied, “You just mad ’cause I’m about to be the only single brotha between us.”

“Single my ass,” Mac interjected with his own sarcastic voice. “Derrick, you hooked and you know it. Ain’t no need in frontin’, ’cause if she didn’t have a ring through your nose, then you wouldn’t have brought her to the wedding.”

“Chill,” Derrick said as he shook his head in an almost conciliatory way. And because he was amongst family, he couldn’t pretend. These men had been his friends

over a long period of time and he trusted them. He not only believed in their love and support of him, but he also had faith in them. Faith in the fact that his brothas could be caring individuals. “We’re just taking our time getting to know each other,” he said in an almost stumbling fashion.

“Yeah, right,” Vaughn replied while smacking his lips as he enjoyed a piece of shrimp from the plate he was juggling in his left hand. “Vince might be the only one of us down in Atlanta with you but we all know you really like her.”

“And we all know you have a tendency to sometimes act like a married brotha with a child, chill,” Derrick said in an effort to try and steer the conversation away from him. It wasn’t that Vaughn’s comment wasn’t on target, it was just the fact that Derrick was becoming a little insecure about the implications. He had just seen one of his boys get married and somehow merely the thought that he could one day be doing the same with Candace started to scare him.

Candace placed a now empty glass of wine on the table near her, and then eased back. As she reclined in her seat, the cushions of the elegant yet comfortable chair sopped up her back like a fat man sucking on a neck bone. While shifting a little to the left and then to the right, her back once again fell in love with the comfort of the atmosphere and she began to observe Denise, the center of today’s formality, mingling about the cozy room.

Hassan was focusing all his attention and energy on the coloring project on his

lap, and Danielle and Carol joined Candace in dreamy gaze of love cast by the presence of the bride. Denise was beautiful in her wedding gown. Her face radiated a glow that could only come a few times in life. Her aura was a multitude of emotions and attributes. She was proud and filled with jubilation yet she was humble and tolerant at the same time. She was in love.

The frosty air of the snowy night stuck itself to the windows in the room and added a cozy layer of home to the atmosphere. Candace threw out a breath of air from her lungs and while observing Denise in an almost envious fashion, thought, *I hope he does this with me*. She was stuck in a rut, but still, it was a pleasurable compulsion. She was somehow stuck to the action of being in love with Derrick. It was becoming automatic and that was something she hadn't expected.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this, not at this time in her life. Eight months ago, she didn't even think it possible that she could be this wrapped up in somebody. She hadn't planned on just stumbling across the man of her dreams, the man that could be what he proclaimed to be. *The man I love ... Derrick ... How did this happen?* She tried to recollect as her thoughts focused on her current situation. She wanted to specify the moment in her mind, the split second she gave all that she was and trusted and believed in to this man.

"I wonder if I'll look as pretty on my day," Carol said as Denise walked out of the room. Since her nuptials were coming up, her face revealed a sort of dreamy, yet unsure outlook.

“Don’t worry, girl,” Danielle replied as she placed her left arm around Carol. Her right arm was draped over her son and the supportive smile on her face filled the room. “You’ll be lovely. Vince will feel like the luckiest man alive.”

“I hope so,” Carol said in a sisterly fashion.

As the conversation between the women seated on the couch went on, Candace sort of eavesdropped. She didn’t take part in the discussion; instead, she just sort of sat, listened, and thought. It was almost as if a before and after picture unfolded in front of her. *One sista single and in love and one married with a child.* It was as if she were looking at her present and future with Derrick wrapped up in a brief summary.

“Muthafucka you hooked. Man, Carol got that ring in your nose so tight that all she got to do is think about pulling it and yo ass will jump,” Derrick said humorously as he stood in front of Vince in the buffet line. Since leaving Mac and Vaughn in another area of the reception, they’d each been drafted into the voluntary service of someone else.

Vince just shook his head, and with a smile replied, “Look who’s talking. All Candace had to do was say she wanted a little more wine, and your ass is in the serving line with me, just to get her some cheese and crackers to go with it.”

Vince and Derrick had met in college and became friends from the time they were introduced. “You the one that’s hooked. Matter of fact,” Vince said as he placed some food on a plate meant for Carol, “if I’m not mistaken, you were hooked enough to get her those diamonds. Or is that a different pair of earrings she’s wearing?”

“Chill, it was just a Christmas gift.”

“Aha ha,” Vince said with a smile. He noticed a type of defensive posture in Derrick, so like any strategist, he went straight to the heart of the matter. It wasn't that he was pursuing an aggressive posture, instead, it was friendship that led his mark. “You must be in love, 'cause I thought you were broke, especially since you always claiming that your job don't pay anything.”

“I told you to chill,” Derrick said with an amused, yet cool voice. “It didn't set me back too much.”

Vince just smiled and replied, “Why you always got to play the hard role? Just admit it. You really like her...You're the one that's got a ring through his nose.”

Derrick shook his head in a somewhat uneasy fashion. Nothing could come from his mouth because all he wanted to do was trust in the sentiment behind Vince's last words. He couldn't get her out of his mind. Candace had not only become a fixture in his emotions, she had also become a desired conclusion in his life.