

Forever and a Day

Jae Henderson

Chapter 1

MiTee Management at Your Service

“Thank you for calling MiTee Management, how may I help you?” asked Sheba in her sweetest voice.

“Yeah. Can I speak to my momma?” said a young male.

Sheba hated prank phone calls. She had better things to do with her time than play with somebody she couldn’t see.

“Sir, I think you have the wrong number. Everyone in this office is childless,” she said rudely.

“No. Tina Stokes is my momma. Tell her that her son is on the phone. She’ll know exactly who you’re talking about,” the young man insisted.

Sheba was sure he was crazy. Tee didn’t have any children yet, and if she did, whoever was on the other end was way too old to be her child, but she decided to humor him. “One moment please,” she said and pressed the button to put him on hold. She then pressed the extension for Tee’s office. “Boss Lady, there’s a young man on the phone who says you’re his momma. Do I need to get rid of him?”

Tee giggled. “No, Sheba, that’s my baby. I’ll explain later. Put him through.”

Her phone rang two seconds later. “MiTee Management, where we are lifting our clients to new heights. Tee Stokes here. How may I help you?”

Tee loved to say the name of her and Michael’s new management company. They selected MiTee because it was a combination of their names and it sounded like the word *mighty*. That’s exactly what they planned to be—stronger, bigger, and badder than any other management company in

the nation. Together, they were a force to be reckoned with. They had only been in business two months, and MiTee Management was currently responsible for maintaining the I'm A Good Woman brand and executing the I'm A Good Woman Empowerment Conference. They also managed Michael's career as a motivational speaker and book author, Tiffany's Magic Touch Mobile Massage, and now gospel hip-hop artist Icy Blak. It was an eclectic bunch, but nothing she and Michael couldn't handle. So far, their assistant Sheba was the only employee, but they were looking to add an additional manager to the team so Tee could attend solely to the baby after he or she was born.

Things took off much faster than either of them could have imagined. After the word circulated that MiTee Management existed, many of the celebrities she and Michael knew called to see if they would be interested in managing them. They turned most of them down because they didn't want to take on too much too soon, but when Blak called, there was no way Tee could deny him. He was her mentee, and she was honored that he wanted her to help manage his career. They finally had the details worked out, and Blak would be in town tomorrow to sign the contract. She was quite proud of the businessman he was becoming.

"Hey, Ma! I liked your name better when it was Tina Long," teased Blak.

"Boy, I told you I am nobody's mother. At least not yet, and I think my new name is beautiful and my new life is beautiful!" Tee looked down at her small, almost three-month baby bump. She was actually enjoying being pregnant. She got to eat as much as she wanted, and everyone pampered her. The breast swelling was annoyingly painful, but she was secretly excited about the notion of added

cleavage. They seemed to be getting bigger every week. She hoped the added inches would stay once the baby was born. Although she didn't enjoy the morning sickness she first experienced after finding out she was with child, it seemed to have stopped. Odd eating habits were the newest phase in her pregnancy. She dipped a Cool Ranch Dorito in applesauce and chewed it loudly in Blak's ear.

"I hope it's a girl so I can continue to be your only son," said Blak.

Blak was one of several young people God placed in Tee's life to mentor. When she met Isaac Blakston, he was a 19-year-old secular artist tormented by the fast life he no longer enjoyed or wanted to be a part of. He was bedding multiple women, using excessive profanity, and spouting vulgar lyrics in an effort to live up to the image his record company created for him. Although it made him a millionaire, he was miserable. Tee convinced Blak to find peace by following his heart and his God. Doing so allowed him to repair his broken relationship with his parents, who didn't approve of his lifestyle, but ended his relationship with his record label and management company. He even had to sue them for the money they stole from him throughout his career. But the Lord worked it all out in Blak's favor, and he was now with a Christian music label and was getting ready to release his debut hip-hop gospel CD titled *Walking in the Light*. Blak prayed that his new CD would be well received. Even though he stood to lose thousands of his secular fans, he felt good about the positive messages in his songs that anyone of any age could enjoy. He was hoping to gain new fans and win souls for the Kingdom through his music. He couldn't wait for his first single, "Living the Good Life," to drop.

“Aw, Blak, that’s so sweet. What can I do for you, baby boy? Is everything all right? You usually call my cell phone,” said Tee.

“Yeah. I thought I’d catch you off guard. Nothing’s wrong. I just had the urge to talk to you for a few minutes. I can’t wait to see you,” he said.

“Same here. Don’t forget I want you to do a private meet and greet with the group I told you about, Behind the Bars. These little boys and girls have a mother or father who is locked up, and in some cases, both parents are in jail. I know seeing you would brighten their day. We’re also going to swing by Mercy Children’s Hospital and have you spend some time with the patients there too.”

“No problem, Momma. I like doing stuff like that. I’ll call you when my plane lands. You’re picking me up, right?” he asked.

“Actually, I was going to send a car to get you.”

“No deal. I haven’t seen you since you convinced me to stop sleeping with a bunch of women just because I could. The only person I want picking me up is you.”

Tee had a million things she needed to do, but she couldn’t turn down the young man she had grown so fond of. “All right, Blak. You got it. Tee’s escort service will be there waiting for you.”

“That’s the business! I gotta get to rehearsal now.”

“Okay, Blak. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thanks, Momma. I owe it all to you. I’m glad you’ll be helping to guide my career. I trust you with my life. Holla.”

He hung up before Tee could say good-bye. She smiled and looked around her spacious office. She and Michael had purchased the building right after she got fired from her old job. Upstairs was a luxurious loft they were renovating and hoped to move in within the next month or so. Soon, to go

to work, all the couple would have to do is walk downstairs. So much had changed in only a few months, but the changes were for the better.

The holidays were especially good to her. She and Michael hosted Thanksgiving at their home. His family came into town from Ohio. It was a wonderful time as their two families fellowshiped together. They interacted very well, but there was a noticeable rift between the Stokes men. Michael, his younger brother Maxwell, and their father were cordial to one another but not warm and loving as they had been previously. The Stokes men had a very bad year of revealed painful secrets, sibling rivalry, and betrayal. They were all trying to get past it and become a close-knit family again, but it was going to take time. The bonds of trust had been severely damaged. Michael's mother, Vanessa, prayed day and night that God would restore her family. One member of the Stokes family was oblivious to problems of the adults in the room and had more fun than anyone in there. It was wonderful seeing Michelle play and laugh with Tee's niece and nephew. She truly was a beautiful little girl, and everyone hoped that her mother's past wouldn't have a negative impact on her future. No one would ever guess that her mother was a schizophrenic killer or that her life was the result of Michael's brother sleeping with his now deceased ex-girlfriend Becca.

Christmas held a special present that couldn't be placed under a tree. Tee's premature niece, Little Tina, was allowed to come home on Christmas Eve. After weeks in the NICU of the hospital, she was now able to sleep in her own nursery. It was hard to believe the chubby, gray-eyed baby was only four pounds when she was born. On Christmas Day she cooed, gurgled, and smiled to the delight of everyone in the room, especially her older brother and

sister. They wore Sandy's nerves thin asking every day when Little Tina would come home. Now that she was home, they couldn't get enough of her. The two even stood watch over her crib and admired her while she slept.

Michael and Tee flew to Paris to ring in the New Year. They made some wonderful memories sharing kisses atop the Eiffel Tower and dining on French cuisine. They also took a train through the countryside and admired its beauty. Many romantic nights were spent under the starry skies of a foreign land living, laughing, and loving as happily married couples do. Their trip was short, but they promised themselves they would see much more of Europe in the future. It was now February, and the dynamic duo was hard at work launching their business.

Tee lovingly rubbed her stomach again. She could hardly wait for her and Michael's baby to arrive so they could also experience the joys of parenthood. She suddenly realized that Michael had not returned to the office yet. He said he was going to run some errands and come right back, but that was hours ago.

Chapter 2

It's Getting Hot in Here

Michael exited the mineral bathwater and wrapped himself in a large, thick, white towel. The room was hot and steamy, but the warmth felt good to him. He welcomed this opportunity to release some of the tension resulting from a busy week. Running a management business was hectic. All of the things he used to have other people do for him, he was now doing for himself as well as others. As he tied the towel around his waist, Tiffany entered the room. She loved looking at Michael shirtless. The two of them had grown quite close over the past few months. Michael, being a celebrity himself, took Tiffany under his wing and escorted her personally into the lives of the rich and famous. He, Tee, and Tiffany often went to industry parties to promote their business and help Tiffany get the connections she needed to make her mobile massage service a success. And it was working. Business was going so well she had to hire additional help. What began with only her and her twin classmates, Sierra and Siendy, now included a total staff of five extremely attractive masseuses—four women and one man. They traveled anywhere in the continental United States to see their clients.

Things were going so well that she and Michael were considering making her idea of opening a bathhouse a reality. Doing so would allow her to maintain a stationary location to work in. As the mother of an 11-year-old boy, she welcomed the opportunity to stay home as much as possible.

“Are you ready for me now, Michael?” she said while running her hand down his shirtless back. She loved the definition in his muscles. Even though he was retired, Michael still worked out regularly to maintain his solid NFL physique.

“I really need to go, Tiffany. I told Tee I would be back at the office at 1p.m. and it’s now 3,” he said.

“Well, you *are* working just not at the office. I need you to stay and get the entire bathhouse experience so you can tell me what would entice a man to patronize a bathhouse. Most men take showers, not baths,” said Tiffany.

“So I’m you’re guinea pig?” laughed Michael. “I could have kept my clothes on and told you that. Quality service and beautiful women. It’s the same two things that have been driving them to Tiffany’s Magic Touch from the very beginning.”

Michael’s cell phone rang. He walked over to the area where he laid his clothes and located his phone. The name Dr. Ida Foster was on the screen. He had barely spoken to her since she came to Memphis to tell him that she was unable to locate Becca’s long lost brother. She thought he was living in Nashville, but when she arrived, no one she talked to ever heard of him or seen him. Michael told her to keep looking, but the trail was now cold and Dr. Foster had nothing to report. Michael didn’t worry about it too much, though, because the disturbing phone calls he previously received from someone who sounded like Becca seemed to have stopped. For that he was grateful. Why would someone want to impersonate a dead woman anyway?

He looked at Tiffany and smiled. “Can you excuse me for a moment? I need to take this call in private.”

“Sure, Sugah. Just call me when you need me.” She exited the room, shutting the door behind her.

“Hey, Dr. Foster,” he said.

“Hello, Michael. How are you? Have you heard from Becca lately?”

“First of all, it’s not Becca. Secondly, I’m happy to report that for the last two months I haven’t heard a peep from whoever was making those crazy calls,” he said.

“I’m happy to hear that, but I thought you would like to know that I received a call from Tee Hee today,” said Dr. Foster.

“You did? How’s he doing, and what did he say?”

“He seems to be doing fine, but he told me Accent is planning a big celebration in honor of a new donor,” said Dr. Foster.

“Oh, that’s good. Did he invite you?”

“Not exactly. It seems that someone is giving them \$20,000 to name the recreation room in honor of Rebecca DeFoy.”

“You can’t be serious!”

“I’m afraid so. I called the facility and talked to the director. She said Becca’s little brother is behind it. He is trying to create a positive legacy for his big sister because one of the requirements of the donation is that the mural of you, Michelle, and Becca be preserved as long as the facility exists.”

“No way! That’s crazy!” shouted Michael. “I can’t have a picture of me and another woman up for all eternity. I’m married now with my own child on the way. I’ve been meaning to call Accent and tell them to paint over it, but my life has been so busy I never got around to it. What if the media gets a hold of this? As soon as we get off the phone, I’m calling my lawyer to stop it.” Michael slammed his fist on the bench he was sitting on.

“I understand how you feel, but I’ve been looking for Becca’s brother for months with no success. This room dedication ceremony may be the only chance we have to speak to him. If you get the ceremony canceled, we may never find him. I suggest that you don’t do that,” she advised.

“I understand what you’re saying, Dr. Foster, but I can’t possibly allow them to keep up that mural. It’s an untrue depiction of what happened between me and Becca. It makes it seem like me, Becca, and Michelle were a family. We weren’t. She tried to kill me and my wife, and Michelle is not my child. She created that mural as a part of her delusional fantasy that we would one day be together. I don’t have a problem with them naming the room after her, but that mural has got to come down. When is this dedication supposed to take place?”

“Friday.”

“As in the day after tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

“This can’t be happening. Are you going?” asked Michael.

“I was planning to. That way, I can meet Becca’s brother and find out if he knows anything about the strange phone calls you received.”

Michael was curious to meet Becca’s brother himself. He was Becca’s only known relative, which made him Michelle’s only surviving relative on her mother’s side. Michelle would be five soon. Although she seemed content with the family she had now, he knew at some point she would want to know more about the other side of her family. It would probably be a good idea to find out what type of man her uncle is beforehand.

“I’ll meet you there,” said Michael. “I’ll call you back in a little while to get more details about this dedication ceremony.”

As he hung up, Michael wondered how he was going to explain all of this to his wife. How could he reveal that he needed to go home to Akron to the mental facility where Becca was previously treated to stop them from displaying a mural of him and another woman, that Tee didn’t know existed? Tee was also completely in the dark about several other things. Michael hadn’t told her about the Becca-like phone calls he received or his hiring of private detective Ida Foster to find out who was making the phone calls. He also hadn’t told her that he and Dr. Foster paid a visit to the treatment facility and met Tee Hee, a patient there who befriended Becca while she was there. Michael didn’t see how he could tell her where he was going without telling her everything. Maybe it was time to come clean, but she was in the first trimester of her pregnancy, and he didn’t want to do anything to upset her. He had heard that the first trimester was the most critical stage of pregnancy and that many women miscarried during this stage. He also witnessed how stress and worry caused his sister-in-law to deliver Little Tina prematurely. Maybe it was best to keep her in the dark a little longer.

Tiffany knocked on the door. “Are you ready for some one-on-one time with me, Superstar?”

“Sorry, Tiffany, change of plans. I’m no longer in the mood for a massage; maybe some other time.”

Tiffany’s smile quickly morphed into a scowl. “What? I had something special planned for us, I mean you, today.”

“I appreciate it, but something has come up and I need to go home. I have some business to attend to.”

“But *I* am your business. I’m your number-one client,” pouted Tiffany.

“Tee and I have an entire roster of clients to attend to. You know that.”

The last thing Tiffany wanted to do was get on Michael’s bad side. Because of him, her business was thriving and she was making more money than the rich, married man she used to sleep with.

“Okay. I’m sure there will be other times,” she said softly.

“Of course there will be. Nobody does me like you,” he said.

“And nobody ever will,” she replied. She went over to give him a hug of thanks. As she pulled back from him, she inadvertently brushed against Michael’s towel, and it tumbled to the floor. Unashamedly, she looked down and smiled. Michael had never been a shy man when it came to his body, but at that moment he wanted to run and hide. He was ashamed that one of Tee’s best friends was ogling a part of his anatomy that should only be viewed by his wife. Rather than stoop and pick the towel up, he turned around and said, “Tiffany, I think you should leave now.”

Tiffany had clearly knocked his towel off by accident, but she was not the least bit apologetic about it. She wished he hadn’t turned around, but the back was a sight to behold as well. She stood there admiring the hard muscles that rippled through Michael’s body from his ankles to his neck. He was a dark-skinned dream. She took careful survey of the definition in his thighs, gluts, and back. Still somewhat damp from the bath and sweating from the heat, beads of moisture slowly slid down his body adding to her enjoyment. She licked her lips. He looked delicious. Tiffany recently dedicated her life to Christ and was trying desper-

ately to practice celibacy. She hadn't had sex in almost four months, and this visual feast in front of her wasn't helping her quest to keep her mind off sex. She realized Michael was embarrassed.

"I'm so sorry, Michael," she lied. "You have nothing to be embarrassed about. I've seen you nearly naked several times during your massages," she said.

"Nearly naked and naked are two different things, Tiffany. This is inappropriate. What if someone were to walk in? We are in a spa. Workers are in and out of here all the time. I asked you to leave. I need you to go now. As I said, I have some business to attend to," said Michael sternly.

Tiffany had done exactly what she was trying to avoid. Michael was upset. She wasn't quite sure if he was mad at himself or at her, but either way, it wasn't good.

"As you wish, sir," she said. She gave his backside another long glance before she turned around and exited the steamy room. *Tee is one lucky woman*, she thought to herself. She was trying very hard not to like her friend's husband, but how could she not? He was everything she ever wanted in a man: attractive, intelligent, sexy, charming, funny, and rich. She was now seeing someone, but he paled in comparison to the magnificent Michael Stokes.

Michael dressed hurriedly and left the spa. As he drove back to the office, he wondered if what just happened was yet another thing he needed to hide from his wife or if he needed to tell her before Tiffany did. He hated keeping so many secrets from the love of his life, but they were all things he felt Tee was better off not knowing until he had them under control.

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Forever and a Day

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