

Someday



A DELIGHTFUL INSPIRATIONAL ROMANCE BY

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Chapter 1

I'm A Good Woman Tee

I allow my body to melt slowly on top of the man lying beneath me. My muscles relax, and I lay my weary head against his chiseled chest. I don't care that I just got my hair done and this will certainly flatten it on one side. I don't care that I'm wearing linen and should we decide to go out I will be a wrinkled mess. I listen to the even beat of his heart. It seems almost like music to me. Thump, thump. Thump, thump. Thump, thump. This is the heart that keeps this wonderful specimen of manhood alive to make me feel beautiful. Having him in my life gives me the ability to give love and receive it in return. He brings me happiness, most of the time. I feel the sleeves of his starched shirt brush against my warm skin as his arms enclose me in an embrace. I breathe in his essence. I'm not sure what he's wearing today, but intermingled with his natural scent it's almost intoxicating. I take a deep breath allowing the scent to further inebriate me. Our time together makes me wonder if this is a small fraction of what heaven is like. Life seems so easy and problem-free when I'm with him. Well, there is one problem. I press my head further into him, continuing to listen to the strong beat of his heart, and I imagine that it's telling me to be strong. This one is truly going to be "the one," and if I'm patient, the love I've been waiting for is just around the bend. *Please don't let him make a move on me*, I pray silently. In one sweeping gesture designed to demonstrate power and desire, I find myself

no longer on top of my man, but on my back beneath him. I knew it was a bad idea to watch TV in his bedroom. He never even cut it on. I search his bright brown eyes for an explanation.

“What are you doing?”

“Wait and see. You’ll like it. Close your eyes.”

I uneasily do as I’m told, and begin to feel soft lips on my lips and familiar hands on my hips. The lips stay in place while the hands migrate inward and begin to unbutton my dress.

“No, please. I can’t,” I say with his lips still on mine. “We discussed this. I can’t.”

“Yes, you can. You mean you won’t.”

Choosing between God and man should seem like such an easy decision, but when that man is MacKenzie Elbert Patton, III, known as Mac to all his friends, there’s no way it could be. He has a body that I’m sure the Creator took great time and care to mold because of the intricate definition and attractive details throughout his physique. It’s so perfect! I watch in awe every time he enters the room, and take great pride in knowing that it all belongs to my man. The curve of his jawline, that curly hair, pecs, biceps, and triceps. Oh my!

Now Mac is on top of me, asking me to make that choice AGAIN. At this moment I’m torn between the love my heart wants, the attention my body desires, and my dedication to the God I have vowed to serve with celibacy until marriage. He tries to continue to undo my buttons. I clasp his hands in mine. God wins again. Mac begrudgingly stops unbuttoning my dress and breathes a heavy sigh of exasperation.

“I can’t do this anymore, Tee. I have a beautiful, sexy, woman in my life, but I still go to bed horny every night.

For the last three months, I have done everything in my power to show you how much I care for you and that I'm not going anywhere. Baby, I need you—all of you, but I'm not going to beg. I want to make love to my woman tonight! After everything we've shared, are you really going to lie here and tell me no again? Why isn't the fact that we're in a committed relationship not enough to put your mind at ease and your body in my possession?"

"Mac, I told you when I met you I was celibate and had no intentions of having sex again until I was married. Why are you asking me to do what I told you I wouldn't? You said you understood and respected my decision."

"Because I can't take this. I have to be honest with myself and be honest with you. I NEED SEX."

"Baby, you don't need sex. You need Jesus. Let's pray."

Mac's usually calm demeanor seems to travel from frustration to rage in an instant. His butterscotch-hued skin is now red, and the veins in his neck are bulging. I have never seen him like this. Mac is usually so laid back and reserved. He looks like he is about to explode.

"I'm telling you I want to physically express my emotions, and you want to pray. Girl, that crucifix around your neck must be too tight, because it's cutting off the oxygen supply to your brain and causing you to spew ignorance in my direction. You say you want a future with me. Then prove it! Do you know who I am? I'm one of the most successful attorneys in Memphis. I can have any woman I want, and I choose you. You should be honored I took the time to reach down in the gutter and pick up a ghetto girl like you. You try to act all refined, but I know who you are and where you come from, Ms. High Society Event Planner. I'm trying to give you more than you'll

ever be able to obtain on your own, and instead of being grateful, you behave as if you're sooooo holy. You're enjoying this aren't you? You want a man to go through hell and high water just to get your goodies. Well, I won't do it because I don't have to. It's not worth it; you're not worth it. Tina Long, you don't have to go home, but you have to get the hell out of my house!"

I try to sit quietly through his rant in hopes he will feel better after he got it out of his system, but there is only so much I can take.

"Mac, what are you saying? You would really end our relationship over sex?"

"I'm not ending it. You are with this archaic desire to wait until marriage. No one does that anymore, Tee. We try on our shoes and walk around in them until they are slightly worn and very comfortable before saying *I do* these days. You and I have different beliefs about what constitutes a relationship, and I cannot conform to yours just to suit you. I am only going to tell you civilly one more time. Tee, I need you to leave."

"I'm not going anywhere. We are going to sit here and discuss this like adults. We've only been together three months. Why rush things? You're thinking with the head in between your legs right now instead of the one on your shoulders. You told me you would wait. You can't change the deal now because you're horny. Mac, what we have is special. It doesn't come along every day. We can work this out if you just calm down," I say in an attempt to appeal to his rational side. He's a lawyer. He knows what good can come from two people engaging in dialogue.

"Tee, I've been trying. I do think you're special, but not special enough for me to torture myself. This celibacy

thing isn't for me. I am going to have sex tonight with or without you. I can't remember the last time I went this long without sex, and I don't plan to continue. I feel like I'm about to implode, and you are both the cause and the cure. But since you refuse to administer the medicine for what ails my mind, body, and soul, I know someone I can call who will."

Mac is now sitting upright on the side of his king size sleigh bed with his feet planted on the floor. He moves away from me as if I have some disease and walks over to the mahogany dresser to retrieve his cell phone. He dials a number, and I distinctly hear the voice of a woman answer with, "Hey, baby!"

"Hello, Leslie. How are you? Are you busy? Good. I was thinking about you. You and I haven't enjoyed each other's company in a while, and I miss you, sweetheart. Why don't you come over so we can make up for lost time?"

This can't be happening. This man is actually making a booty call in my presence. Well, I'm not having it! I walk over to him and attempt to snatch the phone, but Mac holds it out of my reach with one hand and pushes me down on the small almond-colored ottoman beside the dresser with the other. Before I can stand he places his hand on my shoulder and pins me in place. I struggle to jump up and get the phone, but he has me firmly confined to the ottoman. The best I can manage is a small bounce aided slightly by the cushions. He brings the phone back to his ear and resumes his conversation. Physically, I am no match for him. Even with one hand occupied, he easily limits my movements. I continue to struggle in vain.

This can't be happening. Not only is he disrespecting me, but he has his hands on me. Mac's grip on my shoulder becomes more forceful as he digs his fingers into my skin to hold me in place.

"Let me go! You're hurting me," I scream.

Mac completely ignores me and continues his conversation.

"I'm looking forward to it, baby. Wear that little red thing I like ... Oh that noise? It's just the television. See you soon."

He hangs up the phone and looks down at me, smiling as if he's won some glorious battle.

"You see how easy it is, Tee? Did you think you were irreplaceable? In this city pretty women come a dime a dozen, and I'm Mr. Moneybags. I got a whole pocket full of change and a lucrative bank account if I require more. Exit my domicile, woman."

Mac has never spoken to me like this before. I always knew he had a pit bull inside, but I had only seen it unleashed in the courtroom, never with me. I will myself not to cry. I cannot let this insensitive, selfish, jerk see me cry. He's right. I should leave. He takes his hand off me, and I leave the ottoman to put on my shoes and locate my purse. I don't want to lose him, but there is no way I'm going to let a man, no matter how fine, refined, or rich he is, treat me like this.

"Or," he says licking his thick, luscious lips, "I can call her back and tell her I changed my mind. All you have to do is give in to all these desires you've been suppressing for years and let me please you unmercifully. Stop acting so sanctified and spread those legs. I bet you're good, too. The biggest freaks I know go to church every Sunday."

When standing close to Mac you cannot help but become fully aware of his size and height. At seven feet, two inches he towers above me. I'm not a big woman. Some may even describe me as a little on the thin side. But I never let my lack of width deter me from engaging in a verbal or physical confrontation with anyone who challenges me.

"Who do you think you're talking to? I'm a good Christian woman. Not some whore walking down Third Street. There's no way I'm going to have sex with you just so you won't have sex with someone else. Ultimatums may work with other women, but not me. For all I know, you've been sleeping with that woman the entire time we've been together. I'll leave, but believe me when I walk out that door there will be no turning back. Do you know who I am? I'm the woman who put up with your pompous, spoiled, arrogant behind in hopes that you could see that real love is based on a deeper connection than sex. So don't get it twisted, Mr. Moneybags. You're the lucky one. Not me. All the money in the world wouldn't make me sleep with you now."

This man is all wrong. What was I thinking when I let him into my life? He's right about one thing, though. I am from the hood. And the same girl who would beat a brother down for calling her names still resides within me and does not appreciate being disrespected in any form or fashion. Now that I'm a Christian, I try really hard to quell her wrath, but some days she won't be shut down. I can feel her just itching to get out.

"Don't do me any favors, mademoiselle," he hisses in a low growl. "Would you like me to walk you to the door?"

I don't move.

“It’s now or never, Tee. I’ve spent way too many nights just kissing and holding you. I need more. Make a decision. I’ve made mine. You’re just a poor girl from the hood who got a lucky break throwing rich folks’ parties. I’m offering you a golden opportunity to truly belong to the social circles you cater to instead of receiving a visitor’s pass. Think carefully. You may not get this chance again because my girlfriend for tonight will be here in about 30 minutes.”

“Maybe I didn’t grow up with money, but your Armani suits don’t make you better than anybody else. You are going to regret this. Good women like me don’t come along every day. So if I have to make a decision, I’ll say NEVER! And by the way, don’t you ever put your hands on me again!”

I grab Mac by the lapels of his shirt. As his body jerks toward me, I issued a strategically placed knee to his groin. He buckles over in pain and falls on the ottoman in the exact place he had previously pinned me. His hands are now clutching his genitals. It is obvious that he is in excruciating pain.

I retrieve my purse from the lavender chase in the corner of the room, and proceed to the door. Before making my exit, I bend over my former boyfriend, being careful to stay out of his reach. “Goodbye, love. And tell Leslie I said hello. You’re all hers. I hope you can still perform tonight.”

He yells some gibberish peppered with several expletives and buries his contorted face deep into the cushions of his furniture.

The only sound I hear is the hollow clack of my stilettos as I walk down the hardwood hallway floor to the front door. I turn its golden handle, open it, and slam it

tightly behind me to make sure Mac knows that I have gone, not only from his expensive home in the exclusive South Bluffs community, but from his life.

It is summer time in Memphis. The temperature is 90 degrees at night, but the rise in mercury is nothing compared to the temperature of the blood boiling within me. The nerve of that man! He's so used to talking to people any kind of way because he has money that he forgot to mind his manners when in the presence of a lady. I was raised that no one, regardless of their status or finances is better than me. That should teach him!

As I descend the front porch steps and walk down Mac's well-lit, well-landscaped street, the thought of taking my keys and carving my initials into his customized red Mercedes SLK enters my mind. He's lucky I'm allergic to jail. Plus, assault and vandalism in one night would be a bit much for a law abiding citizen such as me. Lord, forgive me for my actions, but he deserved it. Besides, I'm not quite sure vengeance would lessen the hurt, embarrassment, and anger I'm feeling right now.

I walk through the artsy South Main District of downtown Memphis, passing some of my favorite art galleries, eateries, and retail shops, but barely even notice they are there. After walking for nearly 40 minutes, I realize that I am nearing the famous Peabody Hotel. I feel like diving into the fountain where they keep their famous ducks to cool off.

I don't want to call any of my friends or family to pick me up because I will have to explain what happened, and I'm not ready to talk about it yet. I hop into the backseat of one of the cabs parked outside the entrance. It smells like stale popcorn. The driver doesn't seem too pleased that I interrupted his nap. If he doesn't want to

work, he shouldn't be sitting in the area that is designated for working cabbies. A grumpy driver is the least of my concerns. I give him my address and relieve my feet of the brand new, red crocodile shoes that I purchased earlier today. Bad "A" shoes aren't made for walking long distances, and these are sho'nuff some bad "A" shoes. I just happened to catch them on sale at Macy's. As I rub my French manicured baby toe, I sink down in the well-worn seat and start praying for strength to get through this trial.

The journey to my house is a long, quiet ride. As we move along I-40, I keep thinking, why me? I gave him everything I had to offer except sex. I cooked. I cleaned. I ran his errands. I listened attentively when he talked about a big case. That man broke all kinds of attorney client privileges with me, and in return for his trust I never told anyone but my journal what he said to me. I even gave him my signature Tee's Baby Massages, lovingly rubbing his neck, shoulders, back, and feet after a long, stressful day at the office. Those massages are exclusively reserved for the man who is lucky enough to wear the title of Tee's Baby. Afterward, I would hold him in my arms and sing to him softly until he drifted off to la la land. He really was my big baby.

I'm a good woman, looking for a good man. Unfortunately, I keep coming up short. This one is fine and wears \$1,000 tailored suits with diamond cuff links and Italian shoes. He is prince charming if I ever met him, or so I thought. Maybe I should have given him some. Hundreds of women would love to be in my place. He isn't all bad.

MacKenzie Elbert Patton, III was born into a politically powerful family in Richmond, Virginia. He is

extremely attractive and rich. Every time I think about him, I almost have to repent for having lustful thoughts: smooth, creamy skin; the physique of a tall, toned basketball player; a gorgeous smile with the whitest of pearly whites; and eyes that beckoned you to “come hither” all times of the day and night. I’m almost certain those teeth are veneers, although he would never admit it. But what I love most about him is his intellect. His parents made sure he became well-rounded by travelling the world. Mac has been to 19 different countries and can speak four languages, including French, Japanese and Spanish. He graduated from Harvard Law School at the top of his class. At the age of 30, he used his family’s money to start a law firm, which in the last five years has grown to one of the more successful small firms in Memphis, TN. Like most rich people I’ve encountered, he’s used to getting what he wants. I guess after three months of wining and dining me without being allowed to partake of my forbidden fruit, his fragile ego couldn’t take any more. I told him when I met him that I am not having sex again until I get married. I guess the challenge my celibacy presented was one he couldn’t resist.

Unfortunately, Mac is the latest casualty in a long list of failed relationships. Why didn’t I see what a jerk Mac was before?

Chapter 2

Kissing Frogs Tee

My sister's restaurant, Mae Lillie's, is abuzz with activity. The lunch crowd is heavy and although Sandy is sitting with me as I relay the drama of another failed relationship, she is also observing her wait staff to make sure they are attending to her patrons' needs. Today is Catfish Tuesday, and the smell of the favorite southern dish is heavy in the air. All the guests seem to be enjoying their meals of deliciously fried, baked or blackened catfish, and completely oblivious to the saddened soul that sits among them. My sister is trying to console me as best she can, but I know she needs to get back to running her business.

"I don't understand," I say in utter disgust. "I tell a man from the beginning that I'm celibate so he won't be surprised when I turn down his sexual advances, but when he tries and I tell him NO, he still gets offended. This one had the nerve to tell me I was a waste of his time. I didn't ask him to send four dozen roses to my job. I didn't ask him to take me to expensive plays and restaurants. And there my dumb behind was, thinking that he really liked me and wanted me to experience the finer things in life, when all he was doing was trying to get my defenses down so he could get in my pants. I'm not for sale, Sandy!!"

“I know,” she soothes. “Be patient, Tee. There is a man out there that’s on the same path as you are. You just haven’t met him yet.”

“Why do men say they want a good Christian woman, and then, when they realize the work that comes with one, they run? I’m getting so good at saying good bye to men that I’m thinking of putting it on my resume!” Tears start streaming down my face, and I quickly dab them with one of my sister’s pristine, white cotton napkins. I find a tissue in my purse and blow my nose.

“Why can’t I find a man who loves the fact that I love God more than I love my flesh? I’m so tired of the relationship revolving door. Maybe I should give up on love, because Cupid seems to have his foot permanently lodged in my behind.”

Sandy attempts to lovingly bandage my emotional wounds, like always.

“Tina Desiree Long, don’t talk like that. God has not forgotten you. You are not the problem. Their lack of spiritual maturity and dedication is. Be patient, baby sis.”

“That’s easy for you to say. You’re married!”

I dab the new tears that seek to escape my brown eyes. “Sandy, do you think all men are dogs?”

“No, darling, I don’t. However, I can honestly say that quite a few are, and some of them occasionally migrate to canine tendencies. But there are some really good men left out there. If you think about it, you’ve actually dated a few. Unfortunately, it wasn’t meant for you to be with them. Remember Dontae? He adored you. What happened with you two?”

“Yeah, he was a really sweet guy, but, unfortunately, when the puppy love phase wore off, we realized that we didn’t have very much in common.”

“There you go. That’s one good one. And what about the keyboard player, Myles?” Sandy says as she rolls through her mental rolodex of Tee’s adventures in dating.

“Sandy, did you forget he stalked me for almost a month after I refused his proposal? I had to get a restraining order against him! Myles seemed nice at first, but he was crazy. That man wanted to marry me a month after we met. He was so sure God had sent him his wife. It was scary. I wasn’t ready for that type of commitment. After I broke up with him, he would show up at my house or my job all times of the day and night, crying about how he couldn’t live without me. Funny how life turns out. Now, I would almost give a kidney to have a man begging me to be his lawfully wedded wife--even if he had been hiding in my bushes for two hours waiting for me to come home.”

“Well, you’re older and more mature now. Why don’t you look him up?”

“You can’t be serious! Even if I did want him, he’s happily married with three kids and a Pomeranian. His sister does my hair, and she gives me an update every now and then. They’re building a love nest in Collierville, TN right now.”

“Oh,” says Sandy, scrambling to find something else to say to make me feel better. “Well trust me. There are some good ones out there. I assure you. When the time is right, God will reveal a saved, successful, fine brother, without codependency issues, that he has set aside especially for you.”

“But you’re forgetting one thing, Sandy. I was getting my freak on back then. I screwed both of them regularly. And although they were nice to me, our relationships were lustful. I don’t understand. The woman I’ve become

is three times better than the one I used to be, but I can't keep a man longer than six months. What am I doing wrong?"

"Have you heard from Jarvis?" she asks.

"Are you trying to make me feel better or worse?" I laugh. "That man dropped me like I tried to steal his wallet, and he hasn't looked back since."

"I was just asking. It's hard to believe that he worked so hard to get you and then did you like that. I was hoping maybe he had come to his senses."

"Well he did, and he hasn't. Please don't bring his name up again. It still hurts."

"I'm sorry," Sandy says.

I am no longer laughing. Even though people are all around us talking, eating, and clinging cutlery and dinnerware, an awkward silence engulfs the table. I love Sandy, but her efforts to cheer me up aren't working this time.

Sandy, formally known as Cassandra, is my amazing big sister and my best friend. Five years my senior, she is wiser and always there when I need her. We have the same mother but different fathers, and we don't look a thing alike. I'm tall and slender with skin the color of cinnamon. I keep my hair natural, often in an afro. Sandy is 5'4" and robust with big momma boobs. Her light skin reminds me of the golden sun as it sets. Her relaxed hair is long and silky. Whenever she throws it over her shoulder, she looks like one of those women you see in the shampoo commercials. It has so much shine and body. Our mother told us that her father was Creole, but we never met him. He left Momma while she was pregnant. Momma said he wasn't the type to be tied down. It's his loss, though, because I couldn't have wished for a

more wonderful sibling. My daddy treated us both like we were his until the day he died. He even legally adopted Sandy and gave her his last name.

Unfortunately, her husband, Patrick, doesn't know what a jewel he's got. Well, yes he does, but sometimes he develops temporary amnesia. I assume Sandy was referring to Patrick with her remark about canine tendencies. He had an affair with the receptionist at his office a little over a year ago. He felt so guilty about it that he told Sandy soon after it happened. She started to leave him, but, being the rational individual she is, she weighed her options. After making him grovel and beg her for weeks not to leave him, she told him she wouldn't. She said she wasn't going to walk away from all they had built together because some gold digger thought she could take her spot by sleeping with her husband. With two kids, a successful restaurant, an equally successful dental practice, a 5,000 square foot house, and a ton of debt, I had to see the logic behind her reasoning. She looked above and beyond her pain to preserve the security of herself, my adorable, seven-year-old niece, Nicole, and handsome nine-year-old nephew, Donovan. I fully commend her for being strong enough and level-headed enough to do so. Sandy also had to admit that even though he had messed up royally, she still loved her husband dearly. She told Patrick that he had to fire his receptionist and get an HIV test. And if it ever happened again, she would divorce his behind and attempt to take everything they owned. The two of them have been going to counseling for months now and seem to be doing just fine. I really do like my brother-in law. For the most part he has been a good husband and he's an excellent father. Little does my sister know, I am

helping Patrick plan a surprise birthday party for her this Friday at the restaurant.

From where I'm standing Sandy still got the long end of the stick, at least she made it to the altar—even if her hubby did defile the sanctity of their vows. I'm still outside the church waiting for an invitation to approach the altar.

Their restaurant, Mae Lillie's, is named after two of the most amazing women to walk the earth: our grandmother Mae, who passed three years ago, and our mother Lillie. Mae Lillie's is a fine dining experience that can best be described as upscale soul food. The tables are set with white linen table clothes and napkins. The crystal chandeliers hanging above are absolutely exquisite, but it's the beautifully adorned walls that set the ambience. Colorful African American art is displayed throughout. My favorite is an oil on canvas piece called "Soul Mate" by a young lady named Morrisette. It depicts a woman with long brown hair massaging the shoulders of her attractive ebony prince. I guess I adore it so much because that's what I'm looking for—my soul mate. The real draw of any restaurant is the food, and Mae Lillie's is no exception. When you enter, you are transported to Grandma Mae's kitchen: fried chicken, smothered chicken, ox tails, catfish, chit'lins, spaghetti, mac and cheese, ribs, mixed greens, squash, cabbage, cornbread, pecan pie, sweet potato pie, her special molasses cake ... well you get the picture. The restaurant is located in a suburb of Memphis called Cordova, and the folks out here keep the place packed. Mae Lillie's is proof that good cooking is color-blind, and my big sister can throw down with the best of them. I've seen blacks, whites, Hispanics, and there's a

Chinese family who comes here to eat at least twice a month.

The restaurant has been open for six years and rarely has a slow night. Sometimes it seems like every woman who didn't feel like cooking decided to feed her brood at my sister's place. It's not uncommon for people to wait for over an hour to get a table. Before, Mae Lillie's folks would have to go into the Memphis city limits to find good soul food, but Sandy, being the savvy business woman she is, saw a void in the area and sought to fill it. It has worked in her favor.

I normally help out on Sundays after church when it's really packed. I also come as often as I can during the week for a free lunch. However, today I am seeking emotional nourishment because I fell for a man who was everything I wanted, but hardly anything I needed. *Lord help!*

Chapter 3

The Magnificent Michael Stokes Michael

As we make our way through the airport to board the plane to Memphis, I get this eerie feeling that someone is following me. It started in the lobby of my hotel, and it seems to get stronger and stronger with every step. I can't go on like this. This is crazy. No SHE is crazy, and she is ruining my trip.

Today was the last day of the celebrity charity golf tournament at Bobby Jones Golf Course in Sarasota, Florida. I normally love these all-expense paid, guest appearance trips. Heck, I love traveling, period. I use it as my escape. For a few days, I can leave my problems behind and focus on entertaining others. But my problems seem to have followed me here. When I checked out of the hotel, there is a note waiting for me at the front desk. It read,

If your stroke on the green was half as good as your stroke in bed, you would have won. Get some rest. You look DEAD tired.

This is the second note this week. She left the first one at the front desk of my hotel in Atlanta. My agent and manager, Peter, was so rattled he tried to get me to cancel all my engagements. How does she keep finding me? I know she is enjoying making me squirm. I refuse to go into hiding. I am a grown man. More importantly, I've got God on my side and the body guard that my manager

made me hire when I'm traveling. Isaac looks like he's the one who should have played football instead of me. But I don't think he knows how big he is, or he would buy his clothes in a larger size. His bulging arms and legs always look stuffed into his shirts and pants. I have to introduce him to my tailor when I get back home. Every man should look good in his clothes, and he looks downright uncomfortable. I noticed a couple of teenagers laughing and snickering at the big man in the tight outfit as we passed through security. I wonder if he recently gained weight and that's why nothing fits. He's not very friendly, and he doesn't say much. But Peter says he's tops at private security.

It's an early evening flight, and I am rather tired. I can't wait to board the plane so I can take a nap. I approach my assigned gate and hear the flight attendant call for passengers in my section. Normally, I fly first class but when I changed my flight, first class was already at capacity. I would have to take a seat in the rear of the plane or take another flight. Another flight wasn't an option because tomorrow, Wednesday, I'm scheduled to speak to some boys and girls at a children's hospital and Thursday I'm the keynote speaker at a charity event to raise money for HIV/AIDS research. I need to get to my hotel room and get some rest while I can.

God has truly blessed me. I went from retired professional athlete to motivational speaker in one very challenging year. I questioned so many times why I had to injure myself and be ejected from the one thing I loved more than anything, but that was the problem. I loved football more than God. Almost everything I did centered around football. He needed to get my attention, and he got it in a very big way.

Isaac and I make our way to our seats. I realize that we are only five rows away from the rear of the aircraft. I'm missing first class already. Isaac takes the seat in front of me. I throw my carry-on bag in the overhead bin and settle into my aisle seat. I buckle myself in and see a blonde white woman boarding the plane. I thought she was afraid to fly. I quickly unbuckle my seat belt and get ready to defend myself. I tap Isaac on the shoulder and give him a head nod, the gesture we previously designated to signal possible danger. As the woman approaches, I see that it's not Becca. Not only that, but this woman has two small children with her; the girl is on her hip drinking from a bottle; the other, a boy in overalls carrying a security blanket, is toddling slowly in front of her. Yeah, she looks real threatening. I laugh at myself. Except for the blonde hair, she bears no resemblance to the woman who is trying to kill me. What is she going to do? Beat me with her diaper bag? Besides, she has her hands full. I have to stop trippin'. This can't be healthy. Despite the fact that I have armed security accompanying me everywhere I go, I haven't slept in days. I close my eyes and try to relax, but how do you relax when you know someone wants you dead? I feel someone tap me on my shoulder. I'm too tired to even be startled.

I slowly open my heavy eyelids. There is a woman, who looks to be in her 50's, standing in front of me, "Excuse me, sir. I believe I'm sitting in the seat next to you." I stand up to let her pass. The woman reminds me of my mother, short but regal with salt and pepper hair. She's wearing horn-rimmed glasses with a gold chain fastened to each end that kind of gives her a professorish demeanor. After we both sit down, she introduces herself.

“Hello, young man. My name is Dr. Ida Foster. How do you do?”

“I’m fine, ma’am. My name is Michael Stokes.”

“Honey, I know exactly who you are. My grandson Steven is absolutely crazy about you. Wait until I tell him I sat next to you on the plane. I’ll be the coolest granny on the block.” She lets out a hearty chuckle. “He’s only 17 and he plays free safety on his high school team. He might possibly be your biggest fan. Steven was devastated when you got injured. How are you holding up?”

“I’m actually doing really well, Dr. Foster. My knee is pretty much healed, and therapy has helped me regain strength in it. I’m happy to hear I’ve still got fans. I have some autographed pictures in my bag. I’ll give you one for your grandson before we land.”

“Thank you so much! Steven will love that. Well, don’t mind me. I saw you had your eyes closed. I won’t talk to you death. You can go right back to your nap.”

Wrong choice of words, lady. I think about death often these days.

I close my eyes. It doesn’t take long before my body gives into fatigue, and I am fast asleep. I begin to dream about my days in the NFL, except instead of some arena, I’m in my high school stadium in Akron, Ohio. The stands are full, and people are shouting my name. “Michael! Michael! Michael!” Evidently, my team is winning. I turn toward the crowd to acknowledge their cheers, and I am tackled to the ground. Next thing I know, I’m lying flat on my back with a woman enveloped in black standing over me. I can’t see her face, but what I can see is a large steel butcher knife coming right at me. As the knife is about to connect with my face, I wake up to Dr. Foster wiping my brow with an airline napkin.

“Son, it’s okay. You’re safe,” she says.

Isaac’s muscular body is positioned above me. Waking up to a huge man in a tight shirt is not exactly how a grown man wants to end his nap.

“Mr. Stokes, are you okay?” I am a little disoriented and unsure of my surroundings.

“What? What happened?”

“We probably should be asking you that, seeing that you were screaming in your sleep. I assume you had a bad dream,” says Dr. Foster. “Young man, you can go back to your seat. He’s fine. I’ve got him.”

I echo her sentiments. “I’m fine, Isaac. You can sit back down,” Isaac nods and retreats to his seat. What exactly does a man say to another man to comfort him after he’s had a nightmare?

“Here. Drink some water,” offers Dr. Foster. “The stewardess gave it to me, and I haven’t taken a sip.”

I slowly drink the water and allow its wet, refreshing sensation to coat my mouth and throat. I am hot and sweating profusely. The cotton t-shirt under my bright yellow Polo shirt is moist, and it is clinging to my skin. I have to cool myself or this will be a miserable trip. I reach up and turn the small personal air unit in my direction, allowing it to blow the air directly on my face. That feels better. I look at my watch and realize that we have been on the plane for at least 30 minutes and we are still on the runway.

“Why are we still sitting here? There’s nothing wrong with the plane, is there?” She wouldn’t try to kill me by sabotaging the plane, would she?

“It seems there’s a severe storm in our path, and we haven’t been cleared for take-off yet. The Captain said it

might be another hour before we can leave, so I hope you don't have to be anywhere soon," responds Dr. Foster.

"I've got a few hours to spare."

"Good. I don't mean to pry, but I'm a licensed therapist. If you want to talk about those demons in your dreams, I'd be more than happy to listen since it looks like we'll be here for a while. I promise to treat you like one of my patients and give you strict confidentiality."

Dr. Foster seems very sincere. Maybe it's the fact that she reminds me of my mother that makes me want to open up to her. Or maybe it's that I haven't shared the entire story with anyone. I can't tell my parents because I don't want them to know about my past indiscretions, and there are very few people I trust with my personal business. I can't tell my manager, Peter, because he is so judgmental. He always has to criticize and tell me how I'm too this or too that. A talk with Dr. Foster may be just what I need.

"Well, it's a long story. And if you don't mind, I'd like to start at the very beginning."

"I don't mind at all. Don't leave out a single, solitary detail."

"Yes ma'am. Well, here it goes."

I allow myself to go back in time, remembering each detail and almost every conversation word for word. It feels like I'm in an extended version of the flashback scenes you see in movies.

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