

# Chapter 1

“Face it,” Charles said, “you were a hireling when you worked for the church.”

“Hey, wait a minute, I was a dedicated pastor” Aaron retorted.

“Yes, with a nice salary and a hefty benefit package,” Charles went on, “still you were a hireling. He would rather you be a true shepherd to his people. In other words, a father like figure and not just a paid preacher.

“Pass me the ball,” George yelled. Aaron, who was holding the basketball under his arm, then took it and did a two hand chest pass to George. George caught the ball, dribbled a couple of times, and did a jump shot. “We can start a fellowship in my den,” he offered.

The ball hit the backboard and rim but didn’t go through the net.

“Hey muscles,” Shawanda called out as she came around the side of the house. “I see you haven’t improved any yet.”

Shawanda was Tabitha’s new friend. Tabitha was a house guest of George and Juanita Meadows while she attended the American University. Having met Tabitha during their missionary journey to Africa, they had acquiesced to an elderly pastor’s request that the young lady be given accommodations.

“So introduce us to your new friend, George,” Charles suggested.

“This is Shawanda Perkins, who is a good student at the University and a friend of Tabitha’s” George began. “And Shawanda,” he said as he turned toward her, “meet Aaron Cooper and Charles Okinyi.”

“Hey guys,” she responded. “Hey muscles, what’s with you and these Africans,” she said as she winked at Charles Okinyi, indicating she was kidding. “Are you trying to prove you’re a good white liberal or what?”

“Not liberal enough to let you beat me playing basketball again,” George retorted.

“How you gonna stop me?” she asked as she grabbed the basketball and executed a perfect hook shot that swished through the net.

“I’ve got my buddy Aaron,” George stated confidently, “the two of us will beat the two of you” he said as he pointed to Shawanda and Charles.

“Oh, I get it, the blacks against the whites” Shawanda came back again. “You sure it won’t start a race riot in this neighborhood?” Shawanda teased.

There was something George was attracted to in Shawanda’s brazen forwardness and yet it made him laugh half the time.

“You can mix it any way you like” Aaron offered. “Charles and I can team up and you and George can play us if it is racial mixture that you want.”

“Yeah, that sounds good,” Shawanda said after a moments thought. “What do you think, Muscles . . . can you play with me or will your wife be jealous?” Shawanda teased again as she was about to take a jump shot.

“No, I won’t be jealous,” Juanita stated. She had slipped out the back door unnoticed.

Shawanda froze just as she was about to extend her legs for the jump shot.

“Wh . . . uh, are you the Mrs.?” she asked.

“Yes, I am,” Juanita answered.

“Hey, I’m sorry, I was just teasing your husband, I didn’t mean any harm.”

“That’s quite alright,” Juanita replied. “You go on teasing him, he deserves it sometimes.”

Juanita had felt a tinge of jealousy but she wasn’t about to admit it. The camaraderie between her husband and this African American woman was something that she had once had with George. And although they still loved each other deeply, there wasn’t the playfulness there once was.

George and Juanita along with Aaron had studied polygamy before and during their trip to Africa. They had seen it working since Charles had two wives there. They had presented all their best arguments against it in the beginning but were proven wrong from a scriptural viewpoint.

Juanita knew that George might actually considers such an arrangement someday, but until now, she had never thought that a black girl might be considered.

## Chapter 2

“Hey, you wanna play?” Shawanda asked, interrupting Juanita’s reflections.

“Uh . . . no, I’m not much of a basketball player,” she said as she begged off.

“Well, you watch, Mrs. M., and I’ll make your hubby look good?”

“Mrs. M.?” Juanita questioned as she looked to her husband for explanation.

Shawanda answered for him. “Oh, he’s Muscles, so you’re Mrs. Muscles -- M for short. You see, I give everybody a nickname.”

“Yeah,” George jumped in, “then I’m going to call you ERBB, for Eveready battery bunny, because your mouth just keeps going and going and going like it says in that TV commercial.”

Everyone had a great laugh, after which they settled down to play the game. Afterwards, George invited everyone to a meeting of the new fellowship they were starting on Saturday evening. Everyone was enthusiastic, but Shawanda was hesitant.

“Oh, I don’t know, my parents brought me up Pentecostal and crammed more religion down me than I could stomach,” she explained.

“Hey, this won’t be like the formal religious institutions you may be familiar with.” Charles offered.

“It’s just people coming together in an informal atmosphere eating, having fun, loving one another and sharing God’s word.”

“Well, maybe” Shawanda answered. “Is it all right if I bring a date?”

“Sure,” Aaron said enthusiastically.

George enjoyed Shawanda’s banter, but knew he had no claim on her. Still, he was slightly disappointed that she might be coming with a male friend.

He was sure that would dampen their usual exchanges he had come to enjoy. Although it was ever so slight that only a wife could notice, Juanita did notice the change in her husband's mood and facial expression when Shawanda mentioned bringing a friend. She now knew, even if he didn't, that he was falling for her.

After all the guests were gone, and George and Juanita were getting ready for bed, she challenged him. "You like her, don't you?" Juanita asked.

"Like who?" George played dumb.

"Come on, honey, I can see it in your eyes" Juanita pushed.

"Well . . . uh . . .you mean Shawanda?"

"Yes, dear; stop playing games and tell me the truth."

George was in a dilemma. He didn't want to lie to his wife, but he didn't know if she could handle him having feelings for another woman.

"She's fun to be around," he hedged.

"So you do like her?" Juanita mused.

"In a way, I guess, but you dear are the love of my life" he quickly added.

"Stop trying to change the subject!" Juanita insisted.

"Okay, okay . . . but what are you trying to do? Start a fight or something?" George queried.

"No dear, I'm just trying to get you to admit you have feelings for her" she stated calmly.

"Okay! I like her," George stated, feeling cornered.

"No dear, we're just getting started" Juanita returned sweetly.

George began to think "Oh, no, I'm in to one of those nights." He was referring to one of those nights when a wife goes over and over and over the same ground on the same topic. Most men would finish and go on. But there is something about wives that make them want to go on and on and on.

This night was rough in a sense, but the coming Saturday fellowship would be rougher, but in a different way.

## Chapter 3

Saturday evening arrived and the guests began to come in and fellowship with those that had lived in George and Juanita's household. There was Judy Chandler, a cute 35 year old widow who had two rambunctious boys. (George had a teenager to babysit so Judy wouldn't be disturbed during the meeting). Then there was Tabitha, who was from Africa, Kenya to be exact. Aaron, the former pastor and his wife Cheryl, were the first to show, and Charles Okinyi, the Kenyan with two wives back in his home country. It was almost 7:00 and time to start when the doorbell rang again.

Juanita answered the door. "Hello, Juanita," Shawanda said.

"Well . . . hello . . . Shawanda?" She said almost not believing her eyes. This playful tomboyish girl had cleaned up well and now was speaking so formally.

Shawanda wore a beautiful patterned A line dress that came down just below the knees. She was wearing hose and 3 inch heels, which of course gave her the appearance of being taller and more slender than she was. Her hair, which had previously been worn in a ponytail, now was well groomed and stood out full and lovely draping over her shoulders. Her cosmetics were light and almost imperceptible but she glowed with a radiant beauty. This was all topped off by a very pleasant smile, which was quite different than smirks she usually gave off while wise cracking with George, Juanita's husband.

Beside her stood a tall, dark brown skinned man. Shawanda introduced him.

"This is my friend Jesse King. Jesse, this is Juanita Meadows."

Jesse nodded slightly and didn't bother to take off the sunglasses he wore even as he entered the house.

The rest of the group was already downstairs in the den as Shawanda and

her friend made their way down.

George looked up and noticed the beautiful tan hosed legs that appeared first and wondered who was this stranger that Juanita had invited. As she descended the room quieted and the rustle of her silky slip as it brushed against her nylon covered thighs beneath the dress could be heard as Shawanda came into full view and George rocked back for a moment and dropped his mouth open involuntarily. He was stunned by her beauty.

Of course close behind her came Jesse King, wearing gray slacks, a tan turtle neck shirt, and a navy blue blazer. And he was still wearing his sunglasses, giving a very ominous appearance.

Now it was George's turn to feel a tinge of jealousy although he had no right to. As they were all making introductions, Jesse stood silently, nodding occasionally, and offering not much more than grunts of sound. He never smiled and that unnerved George. Who is this character, he thought, and why is he with Shawanda. What are his intentions.

“Unfortunately, we'll have to leave early tonight,” Shawanda announced. “We're having a late dinner at the Lucky Lady.” George had heard of the Lucky Lady. It was more of a bar than a restaurant, that also had dancing and had troubling reports of violent events in the newspaper on occasion.

George was concerned for Shawanda's safety and her physical and spiritual well being, but he knew he couldn't say anything.

After everyone was seated with cups of coffee, tea and hot chocolate they sat around in a circle and occasionally grabbing doughnuts or sweet rolls from the platter on the coffee table in the middle of the room.

“This fellowship is going to be different than what most people know as an ordinary church service,” Aaron began. “We want to fellowship and eat together, pray together and study God's word. those of us who have a little more background in spiritual things will do our best to help make sure we are all progressing spiritually. I'll be assisted by George, who has been to Bible college and Charles, who, well . . . let's just say he is a real student of the word.”

He paused for a moment as he looked around the room to see if everyone was taking in what he was saying. Everyone seemed pleased except for Jesse, who sat with his legs crossed, his arms folded over his chest, and his shades still covering his eyes.

“Why don’t you tell us a little about yourself, Jesse,” Aaron suggested, trying to draw him out a little.

“Mmph -” Jesse started with a guttural grunt. “First of all, I don’t believe much in this God stuff and second, I want to know what you really want from my girl Shawanda. So if you want the truth, I just came to check you out and make sure you weren’t some type of cult group trying to take advantage of her.”

Aaron cringed at the word ‘cult’ and looked to Charles for help.

“I can assure you” Charles began “that we are not, nor will we ever be, a cult . . .”

Jesse broke in before he could finish: “Right! And you, my man, are being duped by these white folks. What are you, fresh off the boat from Haiti or Jamaica?”

“Actually I’m from the Western part of Kenya . . .” Charles began.

“Whatever,” Jesse interjected, “You haven’t been here long enough to know that the white man in America is only going to be your friend as long as he can use you in one way or another.”

“Jesse!” Shawanda called his name as she put a hand on his arm, indicating that he had said enough.

He turned his head toward her direction and then back again as he pointed toward Charles. “Now I think the brother is being used, unknowingly, to bring in African Americans like you. There’s no telling what kind of no good intentions they have!” Jesse shouted.

Shawanda stood up “I’m sorry, Juanita,” she said as she grabbed Jesse’s hand. “I think we need to leave.” She marched up the stairs and Jesse followed without another word and without looking back.

Aaron took a deep breath and blew it out his mouth. “Don’t be discouraged, Pastor.” Judy Chandler offered. “There will be others that will come.

Aaron leaned back in the chair and said “Whew! Where did all that come from?”

George furrowed his brow and thought about Shawanda’s friend Jesse and whether she’d be safe with him. He kept thinking about the Lucky Lady. Being more of a tavern than a restaurant and with it’s reputation of bad things happening

there, he was concerned. When he came out of his private musings, he heard Aaron teaching about cults and showing why they weren't one.

"A cult," Aaron began, "is a pseudo religious group that brainwashes innocent people to the detriment of themselves and sometimes society. This is possible because of their lack of understanding of Scripture."

"Why don't you show some of the characteristics of cults," Charles suggested.

"Well," Aaron started as he followed Charles' suggestion, "they often times have a strong, charismatic type of leader that everyone looks up to. He presents himself as a messiah or the prophet of God or the only spokesman for God. A cult leader would not have two strong men of God working along side him as I have in Charles and George."

Charles began to interpret. "It is also true that cults use

1. Love bombing;
2. Isolation;
3. Constant reinforcement of the idea they are the only right ones;
4. Peer group pressure to make sure everyone comes into conformity with the group;
5. Material dependence;
6. Psychic dependence to the point that no one can make any decisions without checking with the leader;
7. And finally, number seven is fear. People are told that if they leave the group they may die or something bad will happen to them." Charles concluded.

"We certainly won't be using those type of tactics" Aaron stated flatly. "So just because we're not meeting in a building with a steeple and a cross on it does not mean we're a cult," Cheryl said.

"Right!" Aaron responded.

George had remained quiet during the session because his thoughts were elsewhere. He didn't like the idea of Shawanda being with this Jesse King fellow. He wondered if he would see him again. He would, but the next confrontation would prove to be far worse than the first.

They finished the evening in discussions of the hopes they had for the group and how they would each help it grow, but George's mind was more on Shawanda. And Juanita knew it.

## Chapter 4

“Is she the one?” Juanita asked as they retired for the evening.

“Who?” George asked.

“Oh, you know, Shawanda,” Juanita replied, irritated that George insisted on playing this game. “They both knew who and what she was talking about.” She thought.

“Is Shawanda the one what?” George retorted.

“Is she the one that is going to become your second wife?” Juanita clarified.

“What?! Don’t be ridiculous. The girl obviously likes that jerk Jesse, whoever he is.” George replied.

“Does that bother you?” Juanita asked.

“Yes, I guess it does.” He muttered. “I hate to see a nice girl like her hooked up with some racist with a chip on his shoulder.”

“What is it to you unless you care about her?” Juanita questioned further.

“I care about her as a person, a fellow human being, that’s all.” George replied.

“No, there’s more to it than that,” Juanita mumbled as she turned her back to him. “I can tell.”

“They slept, and George dreamed. He dreamed of dancing with Shawanda - not that he was a great dancer, but in the dream that he dreamed he danced

around in the air. He enjoyed the smell of her perfume, the softness of her body against his. They laughed, they played, until he was awakened by a nudge in the side.

“Hey, wake up!” Juanita said as she poked him again.

“You were laughing and talking in your sleep.” She said.

“Huh? I was? What did I say?” George asked.

“I couldn’t make it out, but you were mumbling something about that Shawanda chick, and you were laughing and giggling,” Juanita reported.

“Sorry, go back to sleep” George suggested.

The rest of the night was uneventful, but George suspected what would be the topic of conversation when they were alone.

After they had awakened and dressed and groomed themselves, they made their way downstairs where Tabitha had a full breakfast waiting. Judy was already finishing her coffee and toast in a rush to get off to an early job interview.

“Thanks again for taking care of the boys.” She said to Juanita.

“The daycare is so expensive! I’m hoping to get this job. It should pay well, and if so, I’ll be out of your hair real soon” she said apologetically.

“Think nothing of it . . .” Juanita began her reply when she was interrupted by the booming sound of the oldest boy running down the hallway and jumping part way down the stairs.

George wondered how it was that the children in Kenya could be so disciplined while the children in America ran amuck. “Maybe it’s the sugar,” he thought. But he also was determined to ask Charles if he had an answer.

“I hope everything is okay.” Tabitha said. “I have an early class, but I’ll do the dishes at lunchtime.”

“Don’t worry about them,” Juanita said as she waved her hand. “I’ll just put them in the dishwasher.”

Finally everyone was gone, and the kids were in the backyard playing where George and Juanita could watch through the plateglass patio door.

George got himself a second cup of coffee and began to sip the hot liquid when Juanita spoke again.

“George,” she paused, “if . . . you really believe God wants you to have her as a wife, you can pursue her.”

“What?!” George said as he spilled some of his coffee. He was surprised by the statement.

“I . . . uh . . . I don’t know what God wants yet. I . . . just don’t want her hooked up with the wrong guy.”

“Pray about it.” Juanita suggested. “I’ll pray about it too.”

She had mixed emotions. On the one hand, she liked Shawanda, but she still felt that twinge of jealousy knowing that George was attracted to her. She had been the only one for some time now. To share him was . . . was . . . different. Yet she had seen Charles’ wives - Rachel and Elizabeth - get along well. Her question was, could she do it herself.

“I’ve got a house showing at 10 AM. I’d better get out of here” George said as he broke his wife’s train of thought.

He bent down to kiss her on the lips before calling out to her “I love you, honey” as he made his exit.

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Later that evening George stopped by Charles’ apartment catching him just as he was coming in.’

“Hey Charles, how are you doing?”

“I’m blessed” came the familiar reply.

“I want to talk to you about a couple of different things” George began.

“Sure, go ahead” Charles encouraged.

“How is it that the children in Kenya are so well disciplined?”

“We use biblical methods,” Charles said. “We whip them when they are naughty. They soon learn obedience.”

“Wow, they’d call that child abuse here in the U.S.A.”

“Yes, I know” Charles said. “It’s sad what a downhill spiral the United States is in. Ever since it began to leave out God and the Bible and exalted science and research, it has been in decline.”

George put his hands in his pockets and shook his head as the two men walked along the street. “I’ve been thinking about how to help Judy get her kids under control.”

“Thou shalt beat him with a rod and not spare for his crying, for he shall not die, and thou shalt deliver his soul from hell” Charles quoted the Scripture from Proverbs.

“Man, that sounds drastic” George replied.

“It only sounds drastic because so called professors, who are liberals of the worst sort, at major universities and the media have fed the public the lie that to whip a child is child abuse. Now look at the results. Kids are going around shooting teachers and other students, kids are in rebellion against parents and all other authorities. God’s way is the only right way,” Charles preached.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” George acquiesced.

“I know I’m right, because the Bible is always right.” Charles stated confidently.

Next George wanted to talk about Shawanda, but Charles’ answer to that one would be far different than he expected.

## Chapter 5

Ding dong, ding dong . . . the doorbell at the Meadows home was ringing. Juanita eventually opened the door only to see Tabitha and Shawanda standing there.

“Oh Tabitha, where’s your key?” she asked.

“I’m sorry, I must have left it in my room,” she responded.

Shawanda, who was now dressed as her usual self, with jeans, tennis shoes, and a tank top, spoke up.

“I’m sorry about the commotion the other night.”

“No problem,” Juanita replied. “Come on in, let’s talk.”

Tabitha went up to her room to study while Juanita and Shawanda moved to the kitchen, where Shawanda was offered a Pepsi, which she readily accepted.

“Do you like this Jesse character?” Juanita began.

“Hey, don’t be too hard on him,” Shawanda answered. “I know he’s a little rough around the edges when it comes to white folks, but he’s basically OK. Besides, good single black men are hard to find.”

“Have you ever considered a man who was not black?” Juanita questioned further.

“What? Me and a white dude? Ha ha ha,” she chuckled. “No, I’m not prejudiced or nothing, but I don’t know how me and some white cat could make it.”

Juanita was puzzled. The other night, Shawanda had appeared so elegant, well spoken, and ladylike. Now she had reverted into slang and double negatives.

“Who are you?” Juanita asked.

“Excuse me?!” Shawanda replied.

“The other day, you acted like a different person. And today, you’re, well, you again.”

“Ha ha ha ha” Shawanda laughed, as Juanita sat with a puzzled look on her face.

“Don’t you know, Mrs. M., that when you are black in America, you have to be doubly cultured? I mean, that is, if you want to be successful.”

“Why? What do you mean?”, Juanita queried further.

“I mean,” Shawanda began her answer, “you have to be able to walk, talk, sit, and be like white people when necessary. And then we have to be able to relate to blacks and black culture when we’re with our own.”

“That’s a shame,” Juanita said, “why can’t we all just be one, and be color blind?”

“Hey, lady,” Shawanda said defensively, “I don’t make the rules. I’ve just learned to live by them.”

“The Bible says, ‘By this shall all men know you are my disciples, that you have love for one another,’” Juanita said as she attempted to get the final word in on the subject.

“Hey Mrs. M.,” Shawanda started, “you’re preaching to the choir. ‘Some of my best friends are white people,’” she teased, even though Juanita didn’t quite realize the underlying message.

“Some of my best friends are black” was one of the things blacks often heard from whites. It had become a statement that blacks resented hearing, and they almost never believed the speaker. Some blacks, like Shawanda, had taken to reversing the statement in mockery of it, but all those subtleties went right over Juanita’s head.

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Meanwhile, Charles was questioning George about Shawanda.

“Are you being moved by your head, your heart, or your loins?” Charles asked.

“What?!” George reacted, surprised at the directness of the question.

“Is it God? Is it the idea of having a second wife? Or is it a curiosity about how she would be in bed?” Charles challenged further.

“Well . . . uh . . . she is good looking, all right, but I . . . uh . . . don’t think it’s just a physical attraction . . .” George began before being interrupted.

“Then why not Judy?” Charles asked.

“Judy?” George repeated. “Why uh . . . uh . . . she’s five years older than I am.”

“Does that make a difference?” Charles asked.

“Well . . . uh . . . I mean . . .” George stuttered.

“Who needs a husband more right now?” Charles asked.

“Well, uh, I can see that Judy needs a father for her boys, but Shawanda needs someone to protect her from wolves like this Jesse character” he replied defensively.

Charles decided to lighten the atmosphere and said with a chuckle, “Who knows, maybe God will have you marry them both.”

“There’s a thought,” George replied in a like light hearted manner. “I guess I’ve got a lot of praying to do” he said.

“Yes, I think you do,” Charles agreed.

Trying to convince Judy she could be his second wife would be difficult in and of itself, George thought, but what would be the repercussions of trying to take Shawanda away from Jesse?

He wouldn’t have long to wait to find out.



## Chapter 6

“Meadows Real Estate, this is George speaking. How may I help you on this glorious day,” George answered his phone in his usual flamboyant manner.

“Hello, honey,” he heard his wife say in the receiver, “Tabitha is stuck at the University. Apparently Shawanda’s car broke down and is in the shop so she can’t give her a ride. Can you . . .”

“Yes, yes” George interrupted, anticipating her question. “Let me finish drawing up this offer and I’ll pick her up on my way home. Where is she going to be?”

“At the Union” came the response.

“Fine, I’ll take care of it. See you later, hon.” With that George hung up the phone, finished with his clients, then headed out across town. Swinging his B.M.W. into the driveway of the Union Building, he pulled up to the front door. Tabitha, who ran out obviously happy to see him, was followed by Shawanda.

“Hey Muscles, can I get a ride too?” She questioned.

“Sure” he said with a wide grin. “Hop in.”

Tabitha climbed into the back seat and Shawanda plunked down in the front seat.

“Muscles,” she said, “I have to hand it to you. You got it going on.”

Although he wasn’t used to the slang talk, he could tell she was impressed

and he was pleased.

Just as he put his foot on the accelerator to take off, he had to slam on the brakes! A figure came out of nowhere and jumped in front of the car.

“Get out!” he yelled. George now recognized the figure was none other than Jesse King. Shawanda pushed the button to run down the automatic window and just as she did Jesse reached in and unlocked the door and opened it.

“Hey, wait a minute!” Shawanda screamed as he grabbed her arm and began to pull her out of the car.

Slamming the gear into park, George leapt out of his side of the car and started around to the other side to confront Shawanda’s attacker.

As Jesse saw him moving toward him he held out a straightened left arm and one finger pointing at George. “Whitey! You betta get back in your ride and get outta here or I’ll whip your behind all the way back to suburbia” Jesse yelled.

“Jesse don’t!” Shawanda screamed at him as she shoved him backward and placed herself between him and George, who was still moving toward them.

George’s heart was pounding and his face was red and his jaws clenched. He hadn’t been in a fist fight since he was a little boy but he knew he was stronger than Jesse, although probably less experienced in hand to hand combat.

“What’s the matter with you, Girl?” Jesse questioned Shawanda as he shifted his focus on her. “You can’t stay away from this white dude?”

“I . . . I was just getting a ride . . .” Shawanda began to explain before being interrupted by George, who was now directly behind her.

“Look!” he said, speaking to Jesse, “Even if you are her boyfriend it doesn’t give you the right to . . .”

“Boy!” Jesse yelled. “Boy!?” he repeated. “I know you ain’t got the nerve to call me a boy in broad daylight without a sheet over your head.” Jesse yelled back.

Shawanda turned her head toward George with a pleading look in her eyes as she kept a hand on Jesse’s chest to hold him in check. “Please, Mr. Meadows, just leave!” she urged.

“Oh he’s Mr. Meadows now, and I’m the boy! Huh?” Jesse spat out.

In one swift move, Shawanda reached in and grabbed her book bag off the floor of the car and took off running across the front lawn of the Union, and down the street. The move caught both men off guard and by surprise. They each glared at each other for a brief moment as they clenched their fists, then Jesse started after Shawanda.

“I’ll see you another day. This ain’t over!” he yelled over his shoulder as he attempted to catch up with the fleeing female.

George got back in his car and slammed his fist against the steering wheel. He was perspiring heavily and his heart was still racing.

“It’ll be O.K.” Tabitha offered from the back seat.

“Huh?” he responded, turning quickly toward her. He had forgotten for a moment that she was there.

“Yeah, right” he said as he slammed the car into gear and sped off.

When they arrived home, Juanita could tell something was wrong. His shirt collar was uncharacteristically wet with perspiration and his brow was furrowed. This wasn’t her happy go lucky husband.

“What happened, Dear?” she questioned.

“I don’t want to talk about it!” he roughly replied.

“George, what is it?” Juanita demanded, becoming alarmed at his response.

“Jesse! That Jesse!” he replied. “I was so mad! I could’ve just squeezed the life out of him!”

“Why? What happened?” she queried.

George moved to the kitchen, pulled out a glass, pushed the lever on the refrigerator door for ice cubes, poured himself a Coke and began to share the afternoon’s events.

As he concluded his story he questioned himself. “Where was my Christianity? What about ‘turn the other cheek’ and all that? I mean I really blew a fuse! But he had no right to grab her by the arm and drag her out of my car like she was some rag doll!” He leaned back in his chair, took a sip of Pepsi, and looked out into space.

“You do really care about her, don’t you?” Juanita stated.

“Yeah, I do” he said simply.

He couldn’t hide it anymore. He cared. He really cared.

## Chapter 7

“We’re going bowling,” Aaron answered as he and Cheryl walked into George and Juanita’s home.

“Who, when?” Juanita asked, surprised by the suggestion.

“All of us - the whole fellowship” Aaron said.

“I can’t” Judy said as she came down the stairs. “I’ve got the boys to take care of.”

“I can take care of them for you” Tabitha offered. “I don’t know what this bowling is anyway.”

“That’s why you should go and learn” Juanita interjected. “I’ll stay with the kids; Judy, you go,” she said.

“Well no, I’ve been too much of a burden on you guys already,” she protested. “They’re my responsibility. I’ll stay and take care of them.”

Juanita looked at George and communicated with him mentally in a way that only a wife and a husband can.

“Nonsense!” George spoke up. “This is your night out! Juanita would love to take care of the boys. She needs to practice just in case we have our own soon.” He grinned and winked at Juanita.

Juanita winked back and gave George an appreciative smile.

It had been a long, long time since Judy had had a night out just for fun, she thought back. It was probably before her husband had been killed in the accident by a drunk driver. She had played the night of the accident over and over again in her mind. What if she hadn't asked him to run out to the drugstore that night? What if he had left five minutes later? What if, what if. But nothing could change what happened. All she could do now was go on with life, try to raise her boys, and hope that somehow, someday, God might look down on her and bring some happiness into her life again.

"Tabitha," Juanita's voice interrupted Judy's thoughts, "give me Shawanda's phone number. I'll give her a call and see if she can make it as well" she said as she glanced at George and gave him another quick wink. "Don't forget about Charles Okinyi" Aaron added. "Although he's been working late recently, maybe he can make it before we leave the bowling alley."

None of the group were great bowlers, although Aaron was considerably better than the rest. Still they jumped and shouted and giggled with glee as the balls hit spares or occasional strikes and had a good time laughing at the gutter balls.

George glanced at the door several times, hoping against hope that Shawanda might show up. In between times he looked at Judy. She was a few years his senior but still a very attractive lady. He also began to realize that this was the first time he'd ever seen her laugh or seem to have a good time. Her life was constant wear and tear of job and kids, kids and job, with hardly ever a break for herself.

A thought came to him. "You can change that."

George wondered if it was his own thought or if it was the still small voice of God as it was described in first Kings when God spoke to Elijah.

Just then Judy accidentally hit a strike and was so excited she jumped and yelled and screamed. George, excited for her, grabbed her up in his arms and swung her around a full three hundred and sixty degrees. As he put her back down their eyes met for a brief moment. Judy quickly turned away and asked what the score was now.

George knew he felt something and she had felt something. But was this God or just Charles' crazy talk about marrying both of them?

George wondered. Was God confirming something or was it all something he was imagining? The games had wrapped up and everyone had taken off their

bowling shoes and returned to their street wear. Just as they were headed toward the restaurant attached to the bowling alley, George was walking beside Judy gave her a brotherly hug around the shoulders, complimented her on her game.

“Thanks George,” she said as she slid her left arm around his waist and leaned her head against his shoulder. “You’re a very special man.”

“Hey muscles!” Shawanda called from behind them, having come in the opposite door. George reacted by quickly pulling away from Judy as he turned to see Shawanda, bubbly and bouncing as she often was, heading in their direction. Judy noticed the quickness with which George had moved away from her when he heard Shawanda’s voice and shot darts of jealousy toward the other female.

“Hey girl, you’re late for bowling but we’re going to the restaurant. Come on and join us” George invited her.

“Don’t mind if I do,” Shawanda shot back.

“George,” Judy interjected, “your wife . . .” she began with special emphasis on *your wife* “. . . may be frazzled with the boys, maybe we should head home.”

“No problem!” Shawanda responded. “Mrs. M. is okay, she’s the one that called me and suggested I come down.”

Judy took a deep breath and blew it out as she turned her head away and looked for a table. She had enjoyed for a brief moment the attention of a man, even if he was married, and also had relished those few moments but now it was being taken away by a sweet young thing that was prettier, younger and less encumbered. She had no real reason to feel jealous since George was already taken, but yet she did.

The group ordered burgers, fries and cakes and teased each other about their bowling abilities or lack thereof. After a while, though, the conversation turned more serious.

“What’s with this Jesse character?” George asked as he looked at Shawanda.

“Hey, he’s a black man in America” she replied.

“So what? Does that give him the right to be a royal jerk?” George replied, as he was repulsed by the idea that Shawanda would defend him.

“His brother was framed by white cops on drug charges!” Shawanda shot back at him with a serious, almost angry, look on her face.

“How do you know his brother wasn’t really guilty? I find it hard to believe the police would wrongfully charge someone.”

“George!” Shawanda stated his name sharply and with emphasis.

George sat up and took notice because she was no longer the happy girl calling him by the nickname ‘muscles.’ He knew she was now deadly serious.

“George, are you so naïve as to think that the Mark Furmans of this world don’t exist?” She asked incredulously as she referred to the infamous policeman who was proven to have framed blacks for the fun of it at the O. J. Simpson trial.

“I knew” she went on “white people could be blind to racism but I thought you would be better than that!”

“Well . . . uh . . .” George stuttered, trying to change the flavor of the direction things were headed. “Maybe we can have a lawyer look at his case and get it reversed,” he said.

“Too late!” Shawanda stated.

“What do you mean?” George asked.

“They hanged him in prison. Claimed it was suicide! So you see, Jesse’s got reason to hate white people!”

“But wait a minute,” Aaron interjected. “We’re not all guilty.”

“You contribute to it,” Shawanda countered as she turned to face Aaron.

George had never seen this serious - almost angry - side to her. He began to wonder if all African Americans had this resentment of whites hiding somewhere beneath the surface.

“How do we contribute to it?” Cheryl asked.

“By turning a blind eye. By pretending it doesn’t exist. By allowing it to happen but never stepping out of your comfortable life styles to protest or demand that corrupt cops be fired or corrupt judges be removed from office. That’s how!”

Shawanda said dramatically.

“The kid was seventeen. Never had an offense or any kind of record. An officer stops him for DWB.”

“What’s that?” George asked.

Shawanda rolled her eyes to the heavens. “Muscles, don’t you know anything? ‘DWB’ is ‘driving while black.’” She took a breath and blew it out and shook her head as if she had to spell everything out to a child. “The officer says ‘Do you mind if I search your truck.’ If he says yes I mind, then the officer can search based on the suspicion that he’s guilty because he doesn’t want his car searched.” Shawanda paused and looked around the table to make sure everyone was taking in what she was saying.

“The officer put 5 ounces of crack cocaine in the trunk, then claims he found it there. That’s a guarantee of at least five years in prison. They were putting together a fund to get a top notch lawyer to get him out when he was found hanged with his hands tied behind his back and bruises all over his body.” She paused. Everyone was silent. “But you wouldn’t know about that kind of thing because it doesn’t happen to you. Only us!” Shawanda dropped her head, drew on the straw placed in her coke and said nothing more.



## Chapter 8

"Aaron, what happened to you and the church?" Judy questioned, trying to change the topic but only bringing in another unpleasant one.

"Well...uh, there were some inquiries about certain truths that they were concerned we'd preach and I just thought it is better to resign than cause a big controversy." Aaron tried to be evasive and hoped to change the subject.

"Truth? What truth?" Shawanda asked springing back to her huffy personality.

"Polygamy" Cheryl stated dryly.

"Yeah" George piped in with a smile and a wink. "According to what he learned from Charles the scripture says that I can have both you girls" he said as he grabbed the hands of Judy and his left and Shawanda on his right.

"Muscles," Shawanda jumped in, "You might be good but you ain't that good!" She said as she leaned away, put her hands on her hips and raised her eyebrows.

Judy saw her opening and jumped in. "Oh, I don't know," she began. "If Juanita was willing to share this hunk of a man, I'd certainly consider it." She said as she put her right arm through his left and leaned her head onto his shoulder.

Shawanda shot a quick visual "don't" at Judy but it was so brief no one noticed but Judy. She then jumped up. "Sorry, gang, I gotta run, got a test tomorrow and I have got to study. Maybe I'll see you Saturday night." She said over her shoulder.

George was pleased with Judy's response on one hand but suspected it may have been the thing that made Shawanda run away so suddenly. He hoped Shawanda would make it Saturday night, but he also hoped she'd leave Jesse at home.

When George, Judy, and Tabaitha returned to the house, they found that the boys had been put to bed and were sound asleep. George scooped Juanita up in his arms and swung her around and kissed her warmly and deeply.

Judy was somewhat embarrassed at the scene made in front of her and mumbled, "I'm going to make me some tea" as she move toward to the kitchen.

"I'll join you in a minute," Juanita called after her and then she whispered to her husband as she looked deep into his eyes, "What was that all about?"

"I love you dear," He said simply. "I love you more than ever."

"Why?" She asked. "Because I called your girlfriend and told her to go over and join you?"

"I...mmm" He started to answer but she interrupted.

"Never mind," she said. "Why don't you go upstairs and make us a hot tub of real soapy water and I'll join you in a few minutes." She whispered seductively.

"You've got a deal!" He replied.

As Juanita joined Judy in the kitchen she noticed that she had made two cups of tea. "Thanks," Juanita said. "That was thoughtful of you."

"I wanted to ask you a question." Judy responded.

"Go right ahead," Juanita answered.

As she opened the sugar bowl and scooped two teaspoons into her cup, "George was telling me about the polygamy thing." Judy began. "Not that I would even consider doing anything that might hurt you," she hastened to add. "But would you ever consider sharing George with another woman?"

"Well, I have considered it," Juanita responded slowly. "And I guess if I knew God

was directing it, I'd have to."

"You better watch out, I don't know if God is in it or not, but I think that Shawanda chick has a thing for your husband" she said, trying to direct any suspicion away from herself.

"Yes, I know," Juanita said calmly with a distant look in her eye. She was reflecting back on comments she had made to Charles' wives, Rachel and Elizabeth, when she had hinted that he might be considering a third wife in Nigeria. "If it be God's will, so be it." They each had suspected. She had never met people so attuned to seeking God's will in every matter. They were even to the point that they would deny their own needs and desires if they felt it was God's will. Juanita certainly didn't know many American Christians like that. She hoped she could be one, if necessary.

Undressing completely and then covering her nude body with a silver colored silk housecoat, she opened the door of the large, spacious bathroom which was part of their master bedroom, pausing for a moment to give George a chance to open his eyes, she untied the cloth belt of the housecoat and slipped it back over her shoulders and let it drop to the floor.

George took in the full view of her statuesque, voluptuous figure before she slipped into the warm water beside him. He was hers. All hers. At least for now. Whether that would remain true in the future only the future would tell.



## Chapter 9

"Mr. Meadows" came the call over the office intercom.

"Yes, Mrs. Keeting, what is it?" George answered.

"You have a visitor to see you. A Ms. Perkins," came the reply

"Does she have an appointment? I'm in the middle of coordinating some important papers needed for today's close." George answered.

"She says it'll only take a few minutes," Mrs. Keeting answered.

"Okay, send her in." George gave in reluctantly. He wheeled his desk around as the door opened.

To his pleasant surprise, Ms. Perkins was Ms. Shawanda Perkins, dressed in a suave two-piece blue-skirted suit and three-inch heels. She glided into the room with the smoothness of a professional model. One foot was placed almost directly in front of the other as the toe of her shoe encountered the floor slightly before the heel. Her hair was once again fluffed out full and draped down to sweep gently over her shoulders. The slight cosmetic touches were again impeccable and she wore a radiant beam of a smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Meadows," she said professionally.

"Well, well, well," he replied. "To what do I owe the honor of so special a visitor this morning?" He asked.

"May I have a seat?" She asked.

"Of course, of course," he said as he held out his hand toward one of the leather-covered office chairs opposite his desk. She elegantly moved around in front of the chair, brought her ankles together, and slowly and gracefully seated herself.

"Mr. Meadows," she began as George leaned back in his chair with a quizzical look on his face as he wondered why she was being so formal.

"I don't like to..." she hesitantly as if trying to choose each word very carefully. "to impose on our...our... friendship."

"Sure, sure," George said. I'd hope we were at least friends.

"I need a favor," she continued.

"If you need a favor, you've got a favor," George snapped, actually quite delighted that he might be able to do something special for this vision of loveliness.

"I know you are a man of means and influence..." she continued.

"Yes, yes," George was growing impatient. "How can I use my means and influence to help you?" He asked directly.

"Jesse's grant for money for his last year of grad school has been denied." She said as she lowered her eyes. "I wonder if you would do something about getting it restored."

As she looked up after finishing the statement, he thought he saw moisture in her eyes. Yet he couldn't help but let out a whistle as he turned away, stood up and walked to his office window. Whirling around after a moment he blurted out, "He's as close to a mortal enemy as I have and you want me to help him?"

Shawanda sat silently, her eyes lowered again.

"It might be better if he did drop out." George went on. "Then maybe he'd go back to wherever it is he came from and leave you alone!" He almost shouted.

Shawanda stood to her feet and looked him in the eyes. "Mr. Meadows, I realize its difficult and you must realize my struggle in even coming here to ask, but," she paused a

moment. "He doesn't know I'm here. He doesn't know I am asking, in fact, he'd be furious if he did know. But, Mr. Meadows, we don't have the resources that you do."

George understood that she meant we (black people) and you (white people). He didn't like the separation but he knew what she meant and even knew that to some degree it was true. "So you want me," George began, "to help him out. That is, use my money, my influence, whatever, but not let him know I'm doing it. And all the time he'll still hate my guts and think of me as his enemy."

Shawanda slowly moved toward him while maintaining he gaze into his eyes. As she came within arm's reach he could smell the sweet aroma of her perfume. "George," she said, using his first name for the first time since she had come in. "You say you're a Christian man. Well I remember having to read the Gospels when I was a little girl. I think Jesus said something about loving your enemies, and doing good to them that abuse you and despitefully use you."

She paused, never letting her gaze into his eyes waiver. "Are you that type of Christian man, George?" she asked. "I think you are." She stated without waiting for an answer. She quickly kissed him on his right cheek, spun around and briskly left the office.

## Chapter 10

Saturday came and Shawanda was the first to arrive. Juanita answered the door and sent her downstairs where George awaited the group. "Go on down," she said. "You two would probably enjoy some time alone."

Shawanda thought it curious that Juanita would make such a statement. "Hey muscles," she blurted out as she came bounced down the stairs. "What's with Mrs. M?"

"What do you mean?" George asked as he glanced at what she wore. Ladies' slacks, two inch pumps, and a yellow blouse made her look more dressed up than the school kid but less than the professional that had entered his office a few days before. Neither mentioned the visit.

"What's this about us being alone?" She asked. "Are you trying to get me in trouble with Mrs. M?"

"No," George smiled, his wife's progress was a wonderful surprise. "She knows I have a thing for you and she wants me to enjoy it." He said teasingly even though it was true.

George walked over to her side, put his arm around her waist and said, "You are one of my best girlfriends, aren't you?"

"Whoa! Look out muscles," she laughed as she pushed away from him. "You're a good man but I'd hate to hurt your feelings."

George was coming to know more and more that Shawanda was to belong to him. He only wished she knew it. A few minutes later, Aaron, Cheryl, Charles, Juanita, Judy, and Tabaitha were all downstairs. After prayer and a couple of choruses of praise and worship songs, Aaron prepared to begin the Bible lesson for the evening.

"Pastor," Judy began before being interrupted.

"Why don't we drop this pastor stuff?" Charles interjected.

Even Aaron was caught off guard but knew enough not to challenge Charles in his Bible knowledge.

"There is no one in the Bible that used Pastor as a title. We are not some stultified organization that has to use designated titles to gain respect like some of the denominations. Why don't you just call him Aaron or if that sounds too informal, call him Brother Aaron. Peter referred to Paul as Brother Paul, but nobody ever called him Apostle Paul. Even he himself says Paul, an apostle. So the apostle part was not a title but a job description like the word Pastor should not be a title but a job description." Charles ended his sermonette and let Judy continue.

"Uh...Brother Aaron. tell us more about this polygamy stuff."

Now Aaron was becoming very irritated; he didn't want the group centered around a belief in plural wives and he was determined to let them know it. "Wait a minute," he started. "Listen, our fellowship is centered around Jesus Christ. there is a lot more to the Gospel than discussion on plural wives. So let's not get bogged down in that. We can't remove it from scripture, but most people are not going to be involved in it so let's drop it for now and go on."

"But..." Judy persisted. "Suppose there's a Christian man who is married who wants to marry me, Should I?" She questioned.

Aaron was now visibly showing his frustration with the topic and sought to give a quick answer so he could go on to what he felt were more important topics. "Well, first pray and consider. Consider a lot of things. Like what will people say? What will the neighbors say? What will your friends and relations think? How will you explain it to most Christians who will think you are in sin and will it be stumbling block to others? All those things need to be considered, so I wouldn't rush into anything."

He paused a moment hoping there would be no further comment and then proceeded.

"Let's talk about more important things."

"Like love," Charles offered.

"Yes," Aaron said. "Love. We must love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves."

"In fact," Charles jumped in again. "How we love God is often expressed through how we love each other. If a man loves God enough, he'll help take care of those that God loves, like widows."

Aaron looked at Charles with his mouth dropped open. He couldn't believe he was going right back into the topic he was trying to steer away from.

Charles continued, "Yes there are many considerations, but the ultimate consideration is am I more willing to please God or man? Do I love Jesus enough to take up my cross and follow him even though it may mean persecution of one type or another? In the Gospel of John it says there were certain Jews that believed in him that did not confess him because they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God.

"There are many today that love the praises of men and therefore many many millions of single Christian women and widows go unloved and uncovered spiritually by a husband because of traditions of man and the fact that most Christian men yield to peer pressure. We all like to be accepted, but to be accepted by man and rejected by God is too high a price to pay."

"But Brother Charles," Judy answered. "When you say it, it sounds good but there's a part of me that seems to say it's just not right!"

"I'll tell you why that is," George interjected. Aaron leaned back in his chair. His wife Cheryl was quiet, looking down at the floor.

"We are brainwashed into believing that monogamy only is the only right system. We are programmed from little children that it is the only right thing." George said before his wife Juanita joined the fray to help him out. "Every fairy tale, every romance novel, every soap opera, and every romantic song essentially indoctrinates and re-indoctrinates that monogamy is right and anything else is wrong. Then the churches confirm this erroneous lie as well. So obviously when plural wives in a marriage is considered, it will seem wrong. It will by many even seem sinful. Why? Because we've been told over and over that it is."

"But what does the Bible say?" Charles asked jumping back in again. "The Bible is our plumb line. Not church traditions, not our feelings, not even what society or our laws say. The word of God stands supreme in all matters of life!"

Charles went on. "Think of all the Christian women who'll be tempted to go out to bars looking for a man and end up with a non-saved man who will abuse them. How many thousands or hundreds of thousands of times has that happened. Then instead of growing up in God, these women are put down, beaten unnecessarily and even turned away from God when a Godly man who already had one or more wives could have taken them in and been a blessing."

"Then women's lib hasn't helped either." Juanita interjected again. "We've been fed the lie that men and women are equal in every respect. So obviously, if a woman can only have one husband, the man can only have one wife. That keeps us equal, they say. but it's out of God's order and therefore wrong."

Judy was gradually warming to the idea, while Shawanda sat back shocked.

Shawanda thought to herself, I thought only fundamentalist Mormons or David Koresh type cult groups believe in this multiple wives stuff, but these seemed like good decent and ordinary Christians except in the one respect. She finally decided to speak up. "Well, if you guys are so right about this stuff, why is it almost every other Christian church or group disagrees with you?"

"Because," Charles began to answer. "They fail to study the Bible and they fail to study history." He said. "You're a student," he went on. "I challenge you to study it for yourself with an open mind and I can almost guarantee you'll come to the same conclusions as we have."

Though the evening's discourse began to ease Judy's thoughts about the matter, it would be bringing new tensions between the two old friends.

## Chapter 11

"Guess who!" boomed the male voice of the man whose hands had been placed over her eyes as she sat at a table alone in the university union building.

"Let's see, could it be Mr. King?" She said knowingly.

"You're right!" He said with a smile on his face as he let go and moved around to sit in the seat opposite her.

"And guess whose grant came through after all?" He said with a grin.

"Yours!" Shawanda responded delightedly not giving the least hint that she knew how it had happened.

"Oh, girl, one more year and we'll be out of here. With a Master's degree I'll be able to get me a good job, some threads, a set of wheels, and..." He was about to go on but Shawanda interrupted him with a question of her own.

"And what about us?" She asked.

"What do you mean? We'll be the same." He replied.

"Well, what about marriage?" She was more pointed now.

"Hey, babe, let's not rush into things. Besides babe, if you won't let me try the goods, how do I know I want to marry you?" He said softly in an enticing manner.

"James King! I told you a thousand times, I promised my mother I'd be a virgin when I married and I meant it. So if you don't want to buy the cow, you don't get to drink the milk. If you get my meaning."

Jesse's eyes narrowed and his grin tightened. "Well lady, I'm a man and I got needs. If you won't satisfy those needs, then I'll find somebody who will!" With that he stood up, turned his back, and walked away.

Shawanda who had learned to be hard over the years blinked her eyes to make sure not a tear would run down her cheek.s

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"Charles, are you down there?" Aaron asked. "You took over the meeting and went right into that polygamy stuff again. You know my wife doesn't want to hear anymore about the stuff." He said in exasperation.

"Well, I thought we were forming a group to meet people's real needs not just a group to preach pretty sounding theories to" Charles said.

"Loving God is not a theory" Aaron retorted.

"No! Not when you bring it down to the reality of being a doer of the word and not just a hearer." Charles replied.

"Yeah, well why does everything have to go back to this plural wives stuff?" Aaron questioned.

"Because I was answering the question being asked. I was meeting the need." Charles responded.

"You've got a widow who is concerned about whether she can ever be married again and a young lady who may be considering marrying an unsaved man because he is of the same race she is." Charles went on. "Do you want them to be lost in making wrong decisions while you tip toe around hard issues to stay with more safe ones."

Aaron paused, bit his lower lip and turned away from Charles for a moment. He knew it was difficult to beat Charles in an argument. He took a deep breath and decided to spill his soul out to his friend.

"Look, man." he began. "I'm living on my savings. That's not going to hold out forever. I've got to support me and my wife."

"Oh, if it's money you want, why not get a job?" Charles said.

"I had a job and a very nice one thank you, before you got us involved in this whole polygamy mess." Aaron said angrily.

"You were a hireling," Charles responded. "And it sounds like you want to be one again. why don't you just get a job driving a truck.?" He suggested.

"Why...I...uh...was trained to be a minister." Aaron retorted.

"The fact is you were trained to be a hireling, and you don't want to work a real job where you might have to get your hands dirty. You don't want to face the humiliation of not being a paid professional preacher. Face the fact, Aaron, I know the truth and you know it too, if you're willing to face it!" Charles concluded.

Aaron paced a few steps away, placed his hands on his hips, then turned his head from side to side. He then turned ninety degrees, crossed his arms across his chest and glanced at Charles out the corners of his eyes. He wondered how could this black man from Kenya see through his heart so clearly as if it was a pure glass windowpane.

He paused and thought for a long time. Finally, he turned to Charles, stretched his hands to the side and said, "Okay, help me. what should I do?"

"Well first of all, forget about being a pastor for a while. Get a job. Have some kids. Natural children will help you learn how to train spiritual children. Then your charge is not to preach sermonettes on Sundays and counsel them when they need it. Your function is to raise sons and daughters to maturity. When you really do that the financial support will be there although it may be a while. Be a father to a family of people not just a paid preacher."

Aaron thought about what Charles had said. It made sense. Abraham was a father to his children and a whole clan of people. Israel was a father to twelve sons and then to their wives and families. Moses in a similar way was a father figure to the children of Israel.

In the New Testament, Paul had said "though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ye have not many fathers." John the apostle had spoken to children, to young men, and to fathers.

He and Cheryl had purposely avoided having children. Why, he asked himself. Had his potential children, so far been sacrificed on the altar of self or selfishness not wanting to have the pain, trouble, and the expense of children?

It wasn't a pleasant thought, but was it his own or was God revealing an important truth to him? Charles and Aaron's talk was revealing, but so would be Cheryl's and Shawanda's.

## Chapter 12

"How would it work?" Judy asked.

"How would what work?" Juanita asked, answering a question with a question.

"You know, if your husband married another woman?" She clarified.

"Like you, maybe?" Juanita said as she looked up from putting dishes in the dishwasher.

"Well..uh...no...I...just....." Judy stuttered. She didn't want to lie yet she didn't expect to be caught so unexpectedly and she didn't know how Juanita would really feel.

"Relax," Juanita reassured her. "It's okay. George and I have talked about it."

"About me?" Judy was surprised. What type of couple was this that they could openly talk about adding another woman to the husband's life?

"Yes, you." Juanita said as she smiled at Judy's surprise.

"Weren't you jealous or anything when he brought it up?"

"Um..I'm not sure if it was he or I that brought it up first, but I've known for some time that God might be leading us in this direction so we've talked about various possibilities."

"Well, how do you feel about it?" Judy asked.

"Look, you need a husband and a father for those boys. You probably also would like to have a man to hold you in his arms and to make love to you. Am I right?"

Judy blushed and turned beet red in the face.

"I can tell by your face that it's true and I'm sure you've thought of George."

Judy's face once again revealed Juanita was right.

"You and I get along fine. So when all three of us are sure it's what God wants, we'll have a small ceremony here in our home, Of course, it won't be something that's legal or that can be registered that is. It will be right before God and witnessed before God by us all, but that's all. George will be your husband as well as mine. Some nights he'll spend with you and some with me." Juanita said matter of factly.

"What will people who know us think?" Judy asked.

"Well, for some people, even most, it probably would not be wise to tell, Oh, Charles would know and Aaron and Cheryl and Taibaitha, but they all understand and would approve."

"What about neighbors?" Judy asked.

"Well, they already know you're a house guest and our sister in the Lord. I suppose they would just assume that the arrangement continued to be more permanent than we expected." Juanita replied.

"But suppose George and I took a walk around the block; there'd be talk." Judy posed tentatively.

"Yes, there could be," Juanita said as she reflected on all the possibilities.

"And if you get pregnant, everyone would be speculating if it was George's or someone else's." Juanita said half out loud and half to herself. Looking up and speaking more clearly, Juanita announced, "I guess some things we'll just have to face as they come up."

Juanita looked forward to sharing with her husband the conversation she'd had with Judy. But Shawanda showed up first.

"Mrs. M, do you mind if I speak to muscles." She asked.

"No, not at all, but he isn't home yet." Juanita answered.

"No problem, I'll just get a basketball and shoot some baskets till he gets here."

Within half an hour, George came home and joined Shawanda in the back yard. "What's up?" He asked.

"Here, shoot," She said as she passed him the ball.

George dribbled three steps, did a jump shot that was off just far enough to hit the backboard and go in.

"Lucky shot," Shawanda howled as she grabbed the ball and went up for one of her own. This time she missed but she ran and grabbed her own rebound and shot a lay up that went in.

Juanita brought out two lawn chairs and reported that she'd have lemonade shortly.

After they were seated, Shawanda began. "Muscles, I like the Christian fellowship and all but this polygamy talk has got me a little unnerved." She began.

"Really, why?" George asked.

"Well, let's assume for a moment, that's just for a moment," she insisted, "that you guys are right."

"Yes," George said encouraging her to continue while realizing she was groping for words.

"What about my big wedding with the white dress and the tuxedos and all the friends

and relatives. It couldn't happen! the most important memorable day on a girl's life would never happen! I mean nobody's coming to a wedding where you're marrying a married man!" She exclaimed.

"I see your point," George said as he reflected on her point of view. "I suppose it's a question of..." He paused as he began his answer. "if whether we really want what God wants or whether we want to live out all of our own fantasies and dreams."

"It's not just me!" Shawanda howled. "My mom! She's been looking forward to my wedding since I was a little girl. I couldn't just take that away from her." She said conclusively.

"Oh, I see better now," George replied. "It's not just our own fantasies and dreams but it's others as well. Let me ask you a question. How many girls do you think live out their beautiful princess and handsome prince ideal wedding scenario and are then divorced on less than five years?" He asked.

"Um...about half, I'd say," Shawanda replied.

"I'd say you're about right." George conceded. "Now," he went on, "How many of those girls suffer for years if not a lifetime for one day of memories and a picture album?"

"A lot," she replied.

"Yeah, a whole lot," he agreed. "It's a matter of do you believe God wants you to have a known proven product or an unknown entity. We know for sure he doesn't want you marrying some unsaved man. the scriptures say 'Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers' in Second Corinthians six." He concluded.

"Still," she said as she stood up to dribble the basketball. "I've looked forward to a big wedding for a long time." She went up and made a perfectly executed jump shot.

George grabbed her as she came down and gave her a quick hug and a kiss on the cheek. She returned the kiss on his right cheek.

Juanita was watching from the kitchen window, and was somewhat surprised that it didn't bother her.

Judy was also watching unbeknownst to the other three from her bedroom window. She didn't take the interchange of hugs and kisses nearly as well.

"Oh, by the way, Jesse and I broke up," she called back over her shoulder. "So I don't think you'll be bothered by him again."

That's what she thought, but she was dead wrong!

## Chapter 13

"Come on out, buddy," Aaron yelled to George. It was noon on Saturday and Charles and Aaron had devised a plan to evangelize.

The three men climbed into Charles' older vehicle and headed out to a basketball court on campus. they figured the older car was likely to give the impression that they were students.

They drove around the campus until they found a game of three on three being played.

"Next!" Aaron called.

"Next up, next down, two more points and you're in, buddy." The lanky ball player then leaped high in the air, release the ball at the apex of his jump and called swish long before the ball got there to actually swish the net.

"Whoa! I told you so, He bragged. "Where are the next chumps?"

Aaron, Charles and George took the court. The three opposing players welcomed the three although none had seen the trio before.

"If we lose," Aaron announced. "We'll buy you ice cream."

"Hey, this ain't for gambling," The lanky one stated. "It's just for fun."

"I understand," Aaron replied. "If you lose, you don't have to buy us anything, just listen for a few minutes."

"Well, we ain't losing," said Lanky. "So get ready to buy."

Aaron surprised them. He started off scoring and doing so easily.

Lanky made his own come back dunking the ball several times in a row. Although George was of no big help on scoring, he did manage to hold his man down to four points.

Charles used his height to snag rebounds. Finally the score was tied sixteen to sixteen. They were going to twenty going by twos, and the winners had to win by four. When the shorter man in the opposing team went down with a twisted ankle, they looked for a replacement.

"I'll come in," someone called out from the side lines. George thought he recognized the voice. He looked about to see who it was, as Jesse King came running in.

"I get the strongman," he said as he pointed to George.

As it was the ball was passed to George. "Shoot!" Aaron yelled; but George hesitated before going up for the shot and Jesse who had jumped high to block the shot came down hard on George.

"Hey, watch it!" George complained.

"What's the matter, rich guy?" Jesse taunted him. "Cant' you take it?" George got the ball again and began a dribble when Jesse hacked him hard across the arm.

"Man! This is basketball, not football, get off me!" he yelled.

Aaron got the ball and shot a jump shot which scored. Lanky returned the favor and the score was tied again. The ball was passed to George again. He shot it but missed. Jesse went up for the rebound and came down swinging his elbows.

One caught George in the nose and blood went splattering. "Ow!" He howled. "You did that on purpose!" he said.

"If you can't take the heat, stay out of the kitchen," Jesse laughed.

George moved toward Jesse but Aaron and Charles held him back. "Remember, your Christian witness is on the line." They whispered.

"Let him come! Let him come!" Jesse yelled. It seemed that this fight was what he had wanted all the time.

This time there was no mistake, as soon as the ball was passed near George, Jesse came in swinging. George managed to duck under the second blow and grab Jesse around the waist with a mighty grunt he lifted him clean off the ground and then rolled to own back, held Jesse in a bear hug. He then tied up Jesse's legs so he couldn't kick either.

"Let me go! Let me go!" Jesse yelled.

"No, I love you with the love of the Lord, my brother. But I won't let you hurt me or my friends."

"Fight!" Someone yelled and many came running to see a melee. Instead all they saw was a helpless Jesse being held tightly around the waist and arms by a mad and stronger George.

"Why didn't he hit him?" Lanky said not understanding why George was being so kind.

"Security is coming!" Someone yelled. George let Jesse go and as he got up Charles, Aaron, and George stepped in front of him to take the blame.

"What's going on here?" The officer questioned.

"Sorry, officer, it's my fault. We just got kind of tangled up and someone thought we were fighting. No damage done. Forgive the commotion, please."

"Oh, all right," the officer said, although it was obvious that he didn't completely

believe the story as reported.

"Game's over, we're buying ice cream. Come on, guys. Let's go to the Dairy Queen."

At the Dairy Queen, they discussed their belief in Christ and the difference it had made in their lives. They also invited their basketball counterparts to meet them at the big tree in the park that evening where they planned to eat hot dogs and hamburgers and talk more about spiritual things.

They had planned to bring the whole fellowship group, reminding them that the church is not a place or an organization but people and wherever the people met there the church was meeting. Still they had no idea that that meeting too would have a major disruption.

## Chapter 14

The group was excited. they had planned to start the meeting at seven but at seven no one was there but themselves. Having brought an amplifier and a small generator with the all the foodstuffs and cooking gear. They felt ready for a crowd. Disappointment began to set in, as it seemed no one would show up; but George suggested cooking anyway and they got a fire going and began to put on some hot dogs.

George tried a couple of Christian folk songs on his guitar as he sang over the microphone, and even though his voice was deep and rich for that type of music, Shawanda

saw the need to take over.

She first versed them in tapping in a two-four beat and had them clap together as she rang out a rousing Pentecostal song:

I feel good  
when I think about  
What He's done for me

I feel good  
When I think about  
What He's done for me

Over and over again and again she belted out the tune until a crowd began to gather. when she stopped the small crowd of twenty or so gave her a round of applause. George sat back in amazement as he admired this multi-talented woman.

Shawanda then went into a rendition of 'Give me a Clean Heart'/ Mot the Charismatic version, but the Pentecostal one which included plenty of soul and feeling:

Give me a clean heart  
And I follow Thee  
I'm not asking  
For the riches of the land  
I'm not asking  
For high men to know my name  
But give me Lord  
A clean heart  
So that I  
May follow Thee  
Give me a clean heart  
And I'll follow Thee

At the end of the song, they could see tears in the eyes of many in the audience. Shawanda then decided to give her testimony.

"Some of you out there are just like me. You were brought up right. Your parents and your grandparents and your aunts and uncles told you about Jesus. You got older, like I did, got out on your own, and you strayed away.

"Well, let me tell you, it's time to come back. It's time to reaffirm your love for God and your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Now I know, some of you like playing Mr. Tough guy and Ms. Tough Lady. You don't like to admit your need for anyone or anything. But you need Jesus! and I need Jesus!

"I'm going to kneel down here and pray and admit my need. those of you with enough guts to not care what people might think, come on kneel with me."

Aaron's fellowship group looked on in awe as the majority of the group moved forward to pray with Shawanda. Aaron was reminded of when Charles had preached at his church. Shawanda had some of that same mysterious power to almost mesmerize people with her words. He wondered why he didn't have it, although he didn't like admitting that he didn't. Still, he determined to ask Charles about it at a later date. He knew he would have an answer; a real answer.

Shawanda had barely finished praying when someone who hadn't come forward called out.

"What you doing with those white oppressors?"

She recoiled in horror realizing it was Jesse's voice. Still it had to be answered and only she could do it.

"Jesus didn't die for just black people or white people or red people or yellow people." She called back.

"The Bible says, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life'. These people are whosoever and so am I.

"This is about love and not about hate. Yes I know there are some white people that have done evil things but there are people in every race that do evil things. We must not let skin color or facial features or hair texture put a barrier between brothers and sisters in Christ!"

By now there were choruses of amens between each sentence that Shawanda spoke. These hearty amens came from the very people that had just a few moments ago had prayed with Shawanda.

"You're coming with me!" Jesse commanded as he lunged forward to reach her.

George immediately jumped between the two facing Jesse. He had determined he would not hurt her again.

"You want the goods, but you don't want to pay the price of commitment." Shawanda yelled back. "We're through! I'd thought you understood that!"

In a rage Jesse drew back his fist and came across George's face with a hard right cross. The force of the blow turned George's head and began to buckle his knees.

"Oh!" Shawanda gasped. "Jesus help us!"

George stood back up straight. He wouldn't move from his position. Jesse started with a left hook, but this time out it stopped in mid-air. Slim had grabbed his arm and the others quickly surrounded him, picked him up and removed him from the park amid his screams of protest.

Shawanda fell to her knees and began to belt out another song:

Thank you Lord  
Thank you Lord  
Thank you Lord  
I just want to thank you Lord

The second time through everyone joined in singing, "Thank you Lord....."

Afterwards the people ate together, talked among themselves and told each other their backgrounds. Aaron explained what he believed God was doing and most expressed an interest in returning the following week.

After the newcomers had left and the old crew began cleaning up, Shawanda went over to George, threw her arms around his waist and planted her head against his chest.

"Muscles, you're my hero," she proclaimed.

Judy looked on realizing that Shawanda was a real rival, and one that could be tough to beat, but she had a few tricks of her own that would very soon be put into play.

## Chapter 15

"Praise the Lord for George and Shawanda," Aaron added. "if it hadn't been for her singing and preaching, our evangelistic outreach wouldn't have been what it was," he announced.

"You're so right," Judy added. "But of course I'm sure the sister would much rather give the glory to God and the praise to the Lord where it rightly belongs."

Shawanda shot a quick glance at Judy annoyed at how quickly and easily she had redirected Aaron's brief exhaltation of how she had been used.

"You're so right, Judy," Shawanda countered. "I realize that without Jesus none of us can do anything. so I thank my God for what He did through us all tonight."

Judy grabbed a cloth, put some left over pieces of ice in it, and went to tend to George's bruised jaw.

Shawanda saw the gesture for what it obviously was: an attempt to fondle over the man and say without saying, "I know how to take care of you."

"I'm out of here," Shawanda answered.

"Let me walk you over to your car." George suggested.

"Never mind, I can see you're otherwise occupied." She responded as she looked and nodded toward Judy.

Juanita observed it all and was somewhat amused. "I don't think either one of them realizes," she thought, "that George wants them both. There's no reason to compete, he wants it all!"

After reaching the house, the three began to make cups of tea, as it had become their ritual. Once made, Juanita announced, "I'll take mine upstairs. Judy, would you mind looking at George's jaw once more?" She said as she winked at Judy to let her know she was giving her the chance to be alone with him.

Judy wasted no time in beginning to subtly put forth her best points while undermining Shawanda's "I think it's sweet that that young lady is maintaining her virginity." She began. "But, of course, that also means she might lack the experience of how to really pleasure a man."

George was no dunce and realized what she was doing but used the opportunity to ask a question of his own. "If," he began slowly, "If God had you to marry me, do you think you could keep me satisfied and pleased?" He asked working her own words back into the question.

Judy looked at him seductively through half closed eyes and whispered as she slowly drew her face close to his. "Without a doubt, honey, without a doubt." With that she kissed him gently on the lips, gave him a quick hug, and jumped up and walked toward the door of the kitchen. As she did, she swayed her hips and paused briefly before exiting, glancing over her shoulder to see if he was watching. He was.

As George entered his bedroom, he noticed that Juanita was sitting in bed reading a book. "I think she's ready to marry you, if you're ready." She said without glancing up.

"The real question," he countered, "is whether you're ready." He stated flatly.

"George," she said as she looked up at him. "You've been headed this direction for a while, I suppose I'm as ready as I am ever going to be."

"Good, then I'll ask her tomorrow," he said as he watched her very closely to see if there'd be any reaction.

"Fine," was Juanita's only answer as she returned to her reading. She was trying her best not to be jealous, still she didn't know how she would react, the first time she knew he was making love to her.

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As George came downstairs, he smelled his favorite breakfast cooking. It was comprised of French toast, sausage patties, and eggs over easy with coffee and orange juice. But Juanita was sleeping in late, so who's cooking, he thought. As he turned the corner and entered the kitchen, he saw Judy dressed in a shiny, silky, black house coat that was closed with a tied belt. Since the lower portion split opened as she walked he would see a glimpse of her thighs and calves and noticed that she was wearing high heels. Her hair and makeup was done to perfection and the scent of perfume mingled with the breakfast odors.

George could easily surmise that this picture she presented was for his benefit. He grabbed her around the waist swinging her around to face him and pulled her close to him as he looked deep into her pale blue eyes. "Ms. Judy Chandler," he whispered, "will you be my second wife?"

Judy blushed, looked down and then up again. she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him deeply, before answering as if that wasn't answer enough. Then she whispered into his ear. "You know I will."

He was pleased with her answer and yet he wondered how he'd break the news to Shawanda and ask her the same thing as well.

## Chapter 16

Shawanda hurried to her apartment door to see who was knocking so urgently. As she opened it, she was surprised to see George dressed in a T-shirt and jeans and tennis shoes.

"Hey, muscles, what are you doing here?" She asked

"I came to get you," he replied.

"Me?" she questioned. "For what?" She queried further.

"It's a surprise," he said as he glanced down to see that she was barefoot and dressed only in a pink night gown that was short enough to reveal the muscular form of her thighs.

"Get dressed," he ordered. "Casual," he added.

"Well...uh...come on in," she said as she scampered to her bedroom to change.

George looked around her living room as she dressed. He noticed pictures of Dr. Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall, and other obviously famous black people who George didn't recognize.

"Can't you give me a hint of where we're going?" She called out.

"No!" He replied. "Not even a clue!"

In a few minutes she reappeared and the two were out the door and climbing into George's car. "hey, where' Mrs. M?" Shawanda asked.

"At home sleeping in," George answered nonchalantly.

"Does she know you're with me?" Shawanda asked, hoping she wasn't being used in some mischevious way.

"My wife and I are very open with each other." George replied. "She knows. Don't worry; she knows."

A few moments later they were out of town and on the highway. Shawanda continued requesting to know their destination but George continued to refuse the information.

Before long they were on a country road and driving through the woods. George brought the car to a stop at the top of a hill overlooking a beautiful lake surrounded by leafy green foliage.

Taking Shawanda by the hand, the two half walked, half slid down the steep hill. At the edge of the lake, George uncovered a rowboat. The two were soon out on the water with George paddling from one side of the boat to the other.

"Wow, Muscles, you sure know how to impress a lady, don't you?" Shawanda said. "I still wish you were black and single, though!"

"My dear Shawanda, didn't you make the statement that Jesus died for all people and that color, and features and hair texture should not separate people?" George reminded her.

Surprised, Shawanda threw her head back and laughed out loud.

"Now, Muscles, you know that is not fair, I was under the anointing when I said those things."

"If you were under the anointing, then it must be true." He countered. "Don't you agree we should live out God's truth?"

"Uh...yes," she said hesitantly. "Where are you headed with this?"

The boat was out near the middle of the lake. George gave it two more strong pushes of the paddle and then gently pulled Shawanda over to himself. She sat between his legs with her back against his chest. He wrapped his strong arms around her as the boat slowly floated across the lake.

There came a pause as the two listened to the sounds around the lake. A cricket somewhere in the brush along the edges of the lake. The occasional fish that broke the surface of the water and the sound of a bird call in the distance.

"Shawanda," he whispered in her ear. "I love you and I want you to marry me."

Shawanda was quiet but she squeezed his arms that were wrapped around her. After a long while she responded.

"George, you are one whale of a man. Any girl could easily fall in love with you. But I can't marry you. You have a wife. And as understanding as she might be, I want my Prince charming to be all my own, and nobody else's."

"Maybe," she went on. "Maybe I'm a fool to pass up an opportunity like this, but I can't marry you now. Maybe someday, maybe."

George was quiet, and heart sick. He had planned everything so perfectly. He hadn't counted on being turned down. He paddled back to the edge of the water, put the boat away and then headed back toward her apartment. He hadn't realized how much in love with her he was.

Shawanda was concerned that she'd hurt her friend. He was a man she cared for greatly, but she didn't want to jump into something and make a mistake.

George never told her about his proposal to Judy and her answer, there seemed to be no need. This would later turn out to be a mistake, but he wasn't thinking clearly now.

A week later, George and Judy spoke their vows in front of Juanita, Tabitha, Aaron, his wife, Cheryl and Charles.

That night, their honeymoon night, Juanita took the kids and Tabitha to a motel and left the newlyweds in the house alone. Judy was pleased to have a husband, a man in her life to love her and help take care of the kids.

George was still thinking of Shawanda. He was convinced God wanted her to be his

as well. If she was worth having, she was worth pursuing, he thought. He determined he would not give up.

**THE END**