

Days of a heart taken
by surprise gives people
Gossip about a
5 Minute Life, but
when talking to God
they say I'm
faithfully Yours...

God opened His window
to say... "ABC... TARDY
MAKES 3" You're

BLACK therefore you
shall not slack. When you
find Contentment within
yourself, you shall come
back to me for...

JUDGEMENT

How could such a depressing moment for me
be an extreme joyous occasion for you?
You are so close, yet so far away,
You turned you back just to hear me
say...stay.

Wonderful times, remember how they were?
Coming to your house for the summer,
sitting under your gigantic tree that
provided

Shade from the sun, yet peaking just
enough to show the shadows of our bodies.
Sipping on a glass of ice cold lemonade
or eating chocolate ice cream as we
watched the

Younger kids play kick ball in the
street.

Helping you cook, then waking you up when
I smelled the food burning.

Laughter as the man you loved quarreled
with you about the burning of the food.

Children of God, Sinners on earth walk
into church as you usher them into a
vacant pew.

Clapping your hands in the isle of God's
house as you waved your hand to Thank God
of His many blessings because you always
said, "He is the only one that can bring
me though"

So close, yet so far away,

You turned your back just to hear me
say...stay.

As you began to mature you forgot what
was right and wrong.

Time lost track of you, who you were and
what you stood for, it began to dwindle
into a

Place your loved ones could not see nor
imagine.

Time left me in a place where I knew it
would be that I could never sit under
your

DAYZ OF A HEART TAKEN BY SURPRISES

gigantic tree, sip on a glass of your ice
cold lemonade, eat your chocolate ice
cream, help you cook, laugh at you when
you began to quarrel back at the man you
loved and praise

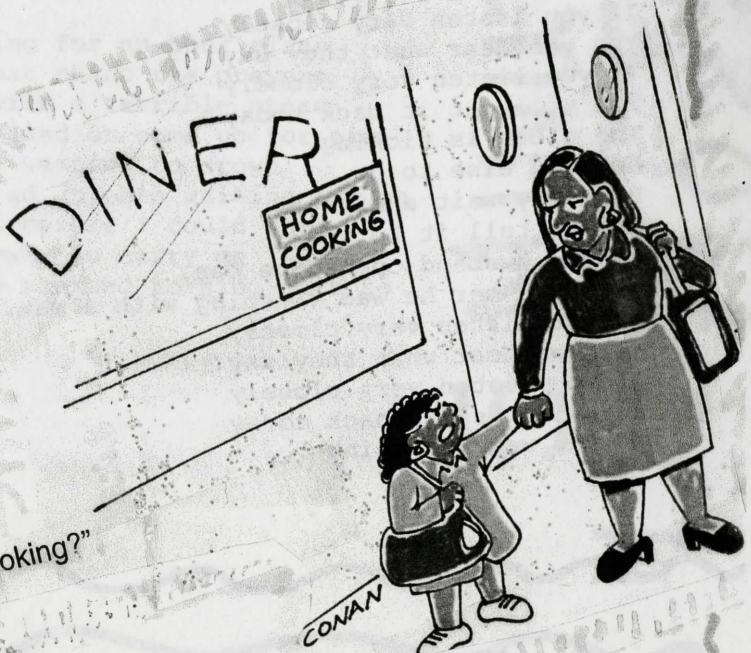
God in your special way.

So close yet so far away you turned
Your back just to hear me say...stay.

I know, you are keeping the Angels busy
with the stories about your life, you
know the ones you told me, except they
get to hear something I may never get to
hear about your life...The Ending.

As I bid you farewell, I glance at what
time has left me with...memories,
memories to make me laugh, cry and say
I'll see you later to my grandmother,
sister in Christ and best friend.

So close yet so far away you turned your
back just to hear me say...thank you for
your time with me, now enjoy your time
with The Lord, where we will soon meet
again.



If you listen very closely
 You can hear what they say.
 If you listen very closely
 You will get it back today.
 Your boyfriend just broke up with you,
 And you don't know what to do.
 They criticize, they laugh
 And some of them pray.

The conversation could end
 Sometime around May.

If you listen very closely
 You can hear what they say.

• If you listen very closely
 • You will get it back today.

• Your best friend, a cousin,
 • A stranger on the street.

It seems like your life
 Has walking feet.

You've been sleeping with him for a year
 and a half,

What are you waiting for...go take a bath.

Is he your boyfriend, your girlfriend,
 Your husband, or your wife.

Oh my goodness,

Who's living your life?

If you listen very closely
 You can hear what they say.

If you listen very closely
 You will get it back today.

The clock is ticking

Nothing else to do.

Hold on, wait a minute,

Let me tell it to you.

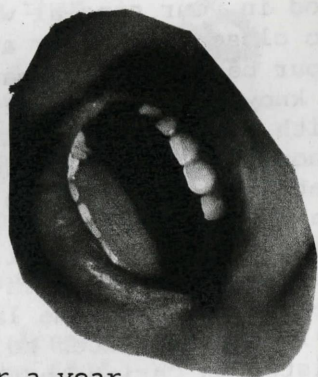
Lisa's husband opened the can,

And told her he was sleeping with a man.

If you listen very closely
 You can hear what they say.

If you listen very closely
 You will get it back today

If you were to think



GOSIP

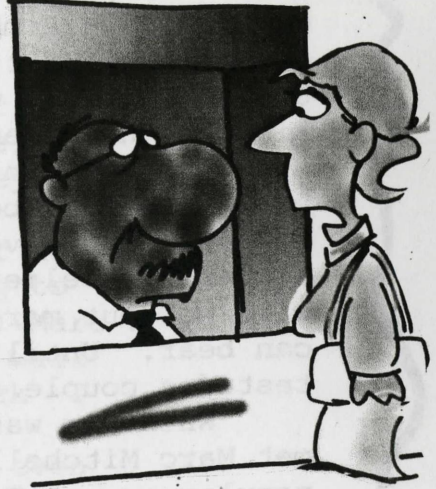


4

BUREAU MISSING PERSONS

About what you went through.
Then you would reconsider
Who you told your business to.

"I knew something was up
when he went jogging with
two suitcases."



Each minute that passes is another minute
wasted
As the tick, tick of the clock sounds
endlessly
Like sand looking for an hour glass
The seagulls that chant the prayers
Kill my heart with a terrible stare
Never to be revived or come up for air
Like a Sullivan wanting to drown
And the enchanted dolphin waiting for me
Lifted my heart before I could see
The wave that came to carry me
To the place we started to sing each to
each

5 MINUTE
L - 1 - F - E

When you lose God you lose everything. Kimberly Jackson is a dental hygienist, a single mother of two a strong woman of God. Kimberly has been attending church since she was in her mother's womb. She has been christened, baptized and saved. It is Kimberly's belief that the Lord will not put more on her than she can bear. Until her faith was tested a couple of years ago.

When Kim was in college she met Marc Mitchell, the most, popular guy at Tuskegee University. Marc Mitchell, the star quarter back for the college, tall, dark, handsome with a nice athletic body and a Colgate smile. Kim heard all the girls talk about how polite Marc was and how most of the girls desired that their boyfriends were more like Marc. Kim was curious to know a little more about Marc, other than what her friends told her. She had seen him around campus but never really thought she would get an opportunity to know him on a personal level.

"Girl, there is Marc Mitchell. I want to go and tell him he played a wonderful game but I am afraid he will look at me and

FAITHFULLY YOURS

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laugh," Pam Allen told Kim.

Pam Allen is Kim's friend. They met in college and became friends. They had the majority of their classes together because they were both major's in biology.

"Pam, get a grip. What is the chance that we are going to get to know or even talk to, Marc Mitchell?" Kim said as they walk to the student union to check their mail.

"You're right, I don't even know what I would do if he spoke back to me," Pam replied opening her mailbox and slamming it with the disappointment of it being empty.

"You would probably pass out on site," Kim said as she laughed at Pam pouting her lip.

"This is the third day I have come to this stupid mailbox and I have no mail." Pam said as she walked away from Kim as she tried to gather all of her mail in one hand, while holding her soda bottle in the other.

"Its okay, Pam, you can hold some of my mail so that you can make it look like some one really cares for you," Kim said giving her mail to Pam as she took a sip if her soda.

"Thanks girl, you know how to look out for me," Pam replied as they giggled all the way back to the dorm.

The next day, Kim was on her way to biology class, she was running a little late so she decided to walk in quick, lengthy strides to class. As she reached for the door to the biology building, it opened. All of Kim's books fell to the ground along with Kim. As she lay stretched out on her back on the ground outside the biology building, she heard a male voice asking if she was all right. When she began to focus her eyes, she realized who had not only pushed her life to the ground, but made her later than normal to her biology class. Marc Mitchell was standing over her as she continued to lie on the ground contemplating whether to slap him for embarrassing her or ask for his phone number.

"Are you okay? I apologize for knocking you down," marc began to utter as she got up. "I didn't mean to push the door open so hard, please forgive me," he continued to apologize.

"It's okay; I'm just late for class, so if you would excuse me I



have to go." As Kim began to walk away, she looked back to see if Marc was still looking at her. To her surprise he was looking at her and waving "good bye". She saw him say something to his friend that was standing next to him. As she turned her head in the direction she was walking she heard Marc say, "Hey, thanks for being so understanding. Again, I apologize," Kim did not even turn to his last apology because this was her third tardy that week in biology class and she could not afford anymore.

Kim opened the door to her biology class. Everyone was in their assigned seats as she thought they would be and the professor had already begun her lecture.

"Late again, Ms. Jackson, this makes three absences in one week. You have reached an all time high. Have a seat," not only was she embarrassed by a couple of the guys on the football team when Marc knocked her with the door; now her biology professor stopped her lesson to focus on the fact that she was late for class again. Kim sat in class feeling like an idiot. *Why didn't I say something*

to marc? She sat in class unable to focus because of the incident that had occurred just before class.

"Just because you come late to my class does not mean that you have free time. It means you work just as hard to catch up with the notes you miss at the beginning of the class, Ms. Jackson," her biology professor said, interrupting Kim's thoughts of Marc.

That evening, in the cafeteria she sat at the table with her friends discussing her encounter with Marc. They all laughed and joked about her clumsiness. Kim did not find it funny, but laughed along with her friends to hide her embarrassment. "You mean to tell me you talked to Marc?" Pam said in disbelief as she took a bite of her pizza. "How could you not see Marc? I see Marc three miles away. I have what they call "Marc-onic" vision," Pam's roommate, Lisa said. Marc and his teammates walk into the cafeteria after football practice. Kim immediately noticed and turned her head in opposite direction to keep marc from noticing her. Suddenly, one of

Kim's roommate yelled, "Hey Kim isn't that Marc?" Marc turned his head in Kim's direction and immediately walked her way.

"This just isn't my day," Kim said to herself as she noticed him coming toward her. Kim began to get up from the table to keep Marc from speaking to her.

"Hey, hey...Kim, can I talk to you?" Marc said as he dapped over to Kim.

Kim turned her head in disbelief to see Marc standing directly behind her.

"How do you know my name?" Kim asked.

"When I bumped into you today, your pen dropped and I noticed it said 'Kimberly Denise Jackson'. I figured either it was your name or you borrowed it from your mom. I have never seen you around campus before, and I would like to get to know you a little better, if that's okay with you," Marc said, as he looked her in the eyes.

As time went on Kimberly and Marc became boyfriend and girlfriend. Kim was at every one of Marc's football games cheering him on; because she was his number one fan. After the games, they



would attend parties. Marc would tell Kim that she could not attend the parties because other guys would want to dance with her. He would finally give in and allow Kim to go, but under some strict conditions.

"Kim, if I allow you to attend this party, you have to wear something that covers your whole body. I must approve of what you wear before we leave or you don't go." Marc said to Kim as he walked her to her dorm after his game.

"I left my father in Florida, Marc. And even when I was in Florida, he didn't tell me what to wear. So you're not going to tell me either. If I want to go to a party and wear a mini skirt, that's what I'll do," Kim said as she stopped to get her keys out of her purse.

As they were walking to the dorm, Kim passed a guy that was in her algebra class.

"Hey, Kim! How are things going with you?" the guy stopped to ask Kim.

"Things are going great, for me. How do you think you did on your test?" Kim asked noticing Marc getting irritated.

"I think I did okay, but we'll find out on Monday. Are you guys going to the party tonight?" the guy asked looking at Marc.

"Yes, we're going to be there to celebrate the victory of today's game," Kim said excitedly as she grabbed Marc's hand.

"Well, I guess I'll see you there. Bye," the guy said as he walked off.

"Bye," Kim said as she began to walk, holding Marc's hand she felt his hand pull away from hers.

"That is exactly what I'm talking about. Wear something that covers your whole body, or it's over!" Marc said as he walked away leaving Kim to walk alone the next mile to her dorm.

Two years later, Kim was engaged to be married to Marc and pregnant with their first child. They graduated from Tuskegee's School of Biology in May of 2002, and they were getting married July of the same year. Kim was excited about marrying Marc because she believed that Marc loved her. Even though Marc was demanding, Kim thought it was all in the name of love. Kim's best friend Pam told her she should not marry Marc because of his demanding ways.

"Kim, why are you going to marry that jerk? Pam said to Kim as they walked around the gym track they belonged to for exercise

"He is not a jerk, he loves me God brought him to me and I can't allow this opportunity to pass along," Kim said between breaths

"What opportunity? He abuses you in so many ways, and the sad part about it is he has you brain-washed to believe that he controls your every move Kim, you need to pray about this before you actually marry Marc. Just make sure he is right for you And this time when you pray listen God could be trying to tell you something important. That's all I ask," Pam said taking longer strides to finish the exercise

When they finished their last lap, Kim walked over to her gym bag She pulled out her bottle of water and began to sip it "I've heard what you had to say and I will take all of that into consideration But I think it is too late for most of that because we are about to have a baby together," Kim said.

Kim thought that Pam was

jealous of Kim and Marc's
 relationship Pam always wanted
 Marc, even after Kim started
 dating him

"All I am saying Kim is just
 worry about it," Pam said as she
 wiped her face with her towel

"I will, Pam," Kim said as
 she grabbed her bag to leave

"Kim, whatever you decide to
 do I will still be here for you,"
 Pam said as she watched Kim walk
 off without turning her back

Lord, give me strength to
 keep my friend, Pam Help her to
 gain self confidence, so that she
 won't have to give me daily
 lectures about my man, which she
 wants. Amen Kim prayed as she
 drove home

After Kim and Marc were
 married, Marc began to abuse Kim
 He would come home from work and
 expect Kim to have dinner cooked,
 the baby fed and put to bed and
 the house cleaned. If the chores
 were not done by the time he got
 home, the back of his hand would
 reach Kim's face like a car
 slamming into a wall. Kim would
 be bruised from head to toe

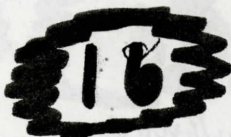
Kim stopped attending church
 to take care of her husband (who
 was in perfect health) and their

Trish Tully Ueno

newborn. Not going to church was something Kim was not used to. She used to be in church every Sunday praising God. Now that she was married to Marc, he told her there would be no time for church on her weekly agenda. When Kim prayed at night she would often ask God to strengthen her to be able to stand up to her husband for God, and give her husband peace, love, and understanding of God's will for his life. She began to feel as if her prayers were going unanswered.

God, please help me. I know I haven't been a dutiful Christen, but I just need you to see me through my marriage. Strengthen me, Lord. I need it for my baby and my husband. If you will just allow Your will to be done in my family...whatever Your will may be Lord. Just please see me through. Amen."

Kim was pregnant with her second child. Things had gotten worse in the marriage, because Marc had begun to abuse their one year old son and continued to abuse her. One evening, 'Kim's was cooking dinner for Marc and watching the baby as he played with his toys in the living room.



She heard the door slam. Marc came in the house yelling at the baby for having toys all over the living room floor.

"Pick up these toys! I don't expect to come home to a house full of baby toys." the baby began to cry as Marc kicked the toys as he passed by them.

"Stop yelling Marc, you're scaring the baby," Kim said frantically. Marc walked over to Kim bawled his fist and knocked Kim to the floor. After Marc knocked Kim to the floor, she unexpectedly went into labor.

"Marc, I am about to have the baby. Please take me to the hospital," Kim cried as she lay on the floor in fetal position holding her stomach. Marc knew that Kim was in labor, but instead of helping her, she walked out of the door as if he had not seen or heard a thing. Kim lay passed out on the floor, while Marc Jr. cried.

After about 30 minuets, Pam knocked on Kim's door.

Pam opened the door from which Marc had left unlocked. "Oh Lord, Kim!" Pam immediately called 911. While in the hospital Pam waited in the waiting room holding Marc Jr., while he slept peacefully in her arms.

Pam began to pray. *Dear Lord, please help Kim. Give her strength, courage, and knowledge. Lord, guide Kimberly in the direction you want her to go in. All I ask Lord is that you bring my best friend and her baby out of this situation safely. She needs you right now, andi know you are with her.*

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Just keep her in your tender loving care. If you do this I will be so ever careful to give you all the praise, the glory, and the honor. Amen.

The hospital staff questioned Kim about the bruises on her face. Kim had no reason to lie. If she wanted to be content, she would have to tell the truth. She told the hospital officials that her husband had knocked her to the ground and that is when she went into labor.

Marc was not in the delivery room when the baby as born, but he came to the hospital the next day. Marc was immediately handcuffed by police officials, as he walked in the hospital room to see his wife and newborn baby. He was charged with battery and attempted murder, and he was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

After the sentencing, Kim and Pam walk with their arm around one another out of the court room.

Kim stops to hug Pam. "Pam will you ever forgive me for being so stupid?" Kim said as she backed away to look at Pam.

"Kim, it's not the fact of me being right or wrong. It's the principal of prayer. Prayer is one of the main things that could kept you from going through this. But you chose to forget what was right, because of a man you loved. Kim, I love you. You're like my sister ; yes, you were stupid, but I feel that it has only made you wiser." Pam said as she wrapped her arm around her to walk out of the court house.

"Yes, it really has made me look at life in a different way. I cherish my life much more and

Faith Fully Yours

more importantly, I put God at the head of my household. Thank you, Pam. I love you," Kim said as she walked with her best friend.

Kim divorced marc. Kim is living a wealthy life, in more ways than one. She is a dental hygienist for a great dental company. And better than that, she gets to attend church every Sunday with her two children, Marc Jr. and Michelle. Kim is also a spiritual mentor at her church and at a battered wives shelter in her community. The advice she gives women today is "pray, pray, and pray! There is no problem too big for God to solve. You must pray that you will be able to stay strong in the Lord, no matter what things may seem like. God works on His time not ours, you will see that His time saves us just before we fall. So have faith and don't ever give up on God."

Faithfully Yours...

Faithfully Yours...

Faithfully Yours...

Anyone have a pencil?

Brittany is always late to class

Causing a scene by asking for a pencil.

"Damn traffic", she says taking her seat

"Everyone's always on the road, when I am on my way to you class, which causes my tardiness.

"From now on you will be marked absent, when you are tardy to my class." shouted her professor

"Get out of here..." Brittany exclaimed

"How do you expect me to make it here on time tomorrow if I wasn't on time today?"

"I know...I will expect for you to be late..."

"Just don't expect to be marked in my grade book as present", exclaimed the professor

"Known for being late, yeah that's me"

"Let's make a deal"

"Marking me absent doesn't sound too good to me", Brittany said

"No one said this option I chose was up for discussion, Brittany"

"Oh, please hear me out professor"

"Proceed, Brittany", professor Trotman looks at her watch.

"Quarter til 4, Brittany. Time is running out

"Right...okay here's the deal. Every time I am late I will sing to the class." Brittany said.

"Sing to my class?" professor Trotman exclaimed

"This is biology..."

"Understand?" professor Trotman said to Brittany

"Very cute proposition, Brittany"



fee
t you must now do is listen to me..."
uses are for the weak."

r tardiness could cause you to fail
lass." professor Trotman explained
ask Brittany is brought back to reality
he changing of the traffic light.

James
Estes

PRINCIPAL'S
OFFICE



asl
nom says our school days are
est days of our lives. Boy, I
hope not."



TARDY

B

C...

MAKES 3

21

Is the color of my skin important to you?
Or do you just have nothing else to do?
You look at me everyday, then you ask:
Why is my skin color made that way?
You criticize me and put me down,
You stomp on me like I'm an ant on the ground.
I tell you, "why does it matter all of our blood is
red".
Do you need proof or do you want me dead?
I'm an African American proud to be.
Black and proud yep, that's me!

RoKeisha Greene

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BLACK
AM

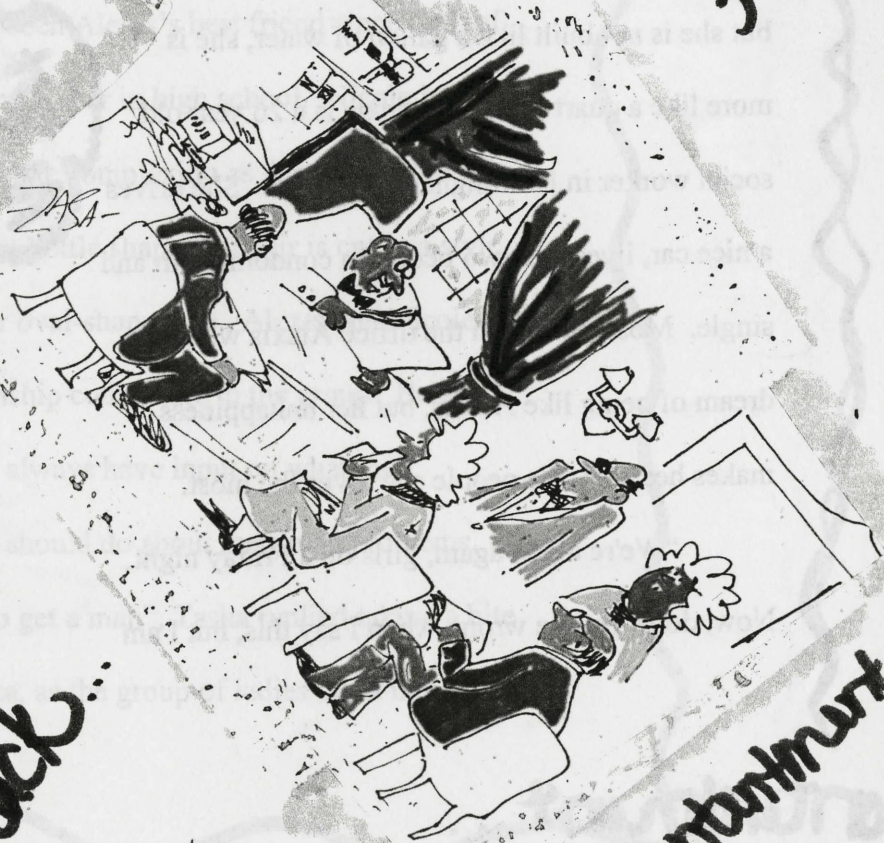
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Gossip...

Faithfully
Yours

ABC... Tarry makes

"Your uncle Frank's will reads:
'Being of sound mind and body,
I spent all of my money myself.'"



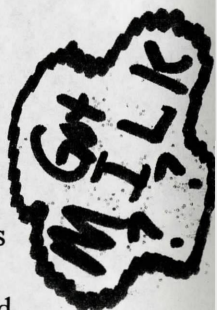
Black...

Entertainment

"Contentment"

Chapter 1

When you are content with yourself, love will be content within you. Alexis Jones, skin as rich as a Hershey's candy bar yet soft and delicate as if it were melting, eyes whose shape and color of almonds, and light brown hair that kisses the arm of her shoulder, she is not the shape of a coke bottle but she is not built like a gallon of water, she is more like a quart of milk. Alexis is a 26 year old social worker in Birmingham, Alabama. She drives a nice car, lives in a two bedroom condominium and single. Most women in the office Alexis works in dream of being like Alexis, but her unhappiness makes her envy the people she loves the most.



"We're alone again, girls on a Friday night.

Now, don't get me wrong when I say this, but I am

Contentment...

getting tired of hanging out with y'all every weekend." Nicole said to her girlfriends that sat around on Alexis's black leather couches, listened to the sad rendition of Toni Braxton's sulky voice singing about her past relationships, ate pepperoni pizza, 3 bags of Doritos, chocolate ice cream and diet coke's, while they predicted their future.

Nicole has been Alexis's best friend since both of their freshman year in high school. Nicole has the same chocolate complexion as Alexis, but has the perfect coke bottle shape; her hair is cut in a style that fits her oval-shape face. Alexis and Nicole are the relationship counselors in the group. Both are single, but always have input on what their girlfriends should do about their man problems.

"So get a man", Tasha replied taking a bite of her pizza, as the group of ladies burst into

laughter.

"Very funny Tasha, just cause you and Toya have a man doesn't mean that you can pick on Brandy, Alexis and me." Nicole said as she grabbed her diet coke off of the table.

"Speak for yourself, Nicole. *Remember*, you and Alexis hooked me up with Tony." Brandy said as she swayed her head from left to right to Toni Braxton's song "Just Be a Man about It" while taking a spoonful of her chocolate ice cream.

"Why is it that Alexis and Nicole can hook everyone else up, but not themselves?" Toya asked everyone, yet looking at Brandy who tried to move her spoon in the direction of her head as she moved to the music.

"Because we are waiting for love to find us. When people look for love they never find it, so

CONTENTMENT

d just rather be patient and let love come

irally.” Alexis explained as she got up to turn

volume up on her stereo.

“Alexis, I am 25 years old...love has not

and me yet. The only thing that continues to find

is men that treat me like trash. I am tired of

ting, girl.” Nicole said as she walked over to the

case to find more sad yet, over played love

gs.

“That’s your problem, Nicole. You must be

ent and know that God has someone made

cial for you. And girl, let me tell you, he gotta

pecial to deal with you” Alexis said as the ladies

gled at the comment.

“Whatever, all I know is that I am tired of

ting. My patience is growing short, and, as you

tell, so is my time. It’s time for me to look out

for *me* and search for the love that I need.” Nicole said as she walked away from the case of CD’s.

“It’s time for me to go; I have some shopping to do in the morning. Night ladies, it’s been real,” Nicole said as she got up from the couch and straightened her skirt. “Next week, my house,” she said as she walked to the door. Alexis got up behind her to walk her out.

“Hey, I hope you are not upset with what I said,” Alexis said closing the door behind her to her condo.

“No, I know you are looking out for me, but I meant what I said, Alexis. I am tired of being alone or with y’all. I need a man to fill the void in my life, and it’s time I did something about it. I’m going to the mall tomorrow to buy my cousin a wedding gift, wanna go?” Nicole said as she

grabbed her keys out of her jean pocket.

"Yeah, call me tomorrow. Goodnight.,"

Alexis said as she hugged her best friend.

"Goodnight," Nicole replied as she returned the hug and walked toward the elevator.

Alexis walked back into her apartment.

"Was she upset?" Toya asked as she strolled into the kitchen to place her paper plate into the garbage.

"No, she just meant what she said and that's what scares me." Alexis said as she thought back to what she knew about Nicole.

What Alexis failed to tell the group of ladies that was so close to her was that, Nicole never had a real father figure in her life. Nicole was conceived through rape and her mother felt obligated to keep Nicole because her mother didn't believe in

abortion. Her mother took the responsibility, and played two roles in her life, her mother and her father. And Alexis is afraid that Nicole is looking for a love that cannot be replaced by any man. Nicole is looking for the father figure that she never had.

"What are we going to do about it?" Tasha asked worried about Nicole.

"What do you mean 'what are we going to do?' What can we do? Nicole has to find out on her own what she needs. As much as we want to help, we can't," Brandy replied.

"Brandy's right...there is nothing we can do," Alexis agreed

There is a moment of silence. Everyone looks around, but they never make eye contact with one another. But they all are thinking the same

thought. They must help Nicole, but they all know that the solution is within Nicole. Breaking the silence, Toya gets up from the couch.

"Well it's time for me to go now. My husband is probably thinking you ladies kidnapped me," Toya said as the ladies chuckled.

"Yeah, that's my ride, so I will follow her," Brandy said as she got up from the couch to place her empty bowl of which she once ate chocolate ice cream, into the kitchen sink.

"I agree with Toya, my husband probably thinks the same thing. Next week, are we going to Nicole's house?" Tasha asked as she grabbed her Toni Braxton CD out of the CD player.

"Yes, we've done my house for 3 weekends in a row. I know I live alone and my house could use the company, but it needs a rest from you all for

at least one weekend," Alexis said as she got up from the floor where she lay comfortably with her favorite red pillow.

"Next week, I'll bring Diet Pepsi, this way we won't have to feel like we are cheating on our diets," Toya said as the ladies laughed and walked out of the condominium.

"Goodnight girl, we'll talk tomorrow," Toya said as she reached for a hug.

"Thanks again for the ladies night out, it was truly needed after the week I had" Tasha said.

"Yeah, I really needed a night like tonight. You know I get all of my advice, laughs, tears and dinner from y'all. Who needs a man?" Brandy agreed with Tasha as the ladies burst into laughter.

"I am glad you all enjoyed yourselves, I had fun also. Thanks for coming again. Next week I'll

C O N T E N T M E N T

bring my Anita Baker CD's, because I think Tony Braxton is tired of us. Goodnight everyone," Alexis said as the ladies walked down the hall snickering.

"Goodnight," Toya, Tasha, and Brandy replied in unison.

Alexis closed the door of her luxurious condo. She began to straighten the pillows on her couch. As she picked up her favorite red pillow, she reminisced about the memories and symbolism of the pillow. It was given to her by her first love two years ago. After their mutual agreement to separate, she decided she would keep the pillow just to remind her of how much she still cared for him, and it coordinated with the color scheme in her condo. Alexis and Malcolm decided to separate two years ago because Malcolm was offered a higher position at a hospital in Atlanta. Alexis

trusted Malcolm, but Malcolm did not trust himself. He told her that there was no need for them to be tied to one another in different states. He told Alexis that it would be best if they were just friends, and that he would keep in touch. That was the last she heard of Malcolm. It did not surprise Alexis that Malcolm never kept in touch. She was always known for losing a man right when she became comfortable with him. The ringing of the telephone interrupted her thoughts.

“Hello” Alexis answered the phone, wondering who could be calling at 2am.

“Hey girl, it’s me Nicole. Sorry to call so late. I just wanted you to know that we will leave to go shopping around 2pm if that’s cool with you. I have some things to do in the morning,” Nicole said excitedly.

"Yeah, no problem. I was hoping that it would be later in the day. Cause I am going to the office in the morning to catch up on some paper work. What's up with you? Why do you sound like you just found the man of your dreams at two in the morning?" Alexis stated curiously.

"Oh...I....uh...I just got off the phone with a uh...friend of mine, that's all" Nicole said.

"Who?" Alexis asked.

"Don't worry about it...just a friend...you wouldn't know him," Nicole replied defensively.

"Okay, sorry for asking. Talk to ya later,"

Alexis apologized for intruding on Nicole's private life. She was never the one to ask about anyone's life, especially Nicole, she was the type to tell you about her life when she felt like it.

"I'm sorry..." Nicole began to say, but she



realized that Alexis had made her apologize to the dial tone.

When Alexis hung up the phone she heard Nicole say something, but hung up before she knew it. 'What's wrong with her?' Alexis thought as she finished straightening up her home.

As Alexis got ready for bed she began to think about her life. She had only been in love once, and still was in love. Malcolm Ross, rich brown skin, dark brown eyes that sparkled, and facial hair trimmed to reflect the oval shape of his face. He was a couple of inches taller than Alexis, and well toned like a football player. Malcolm was a romantic man that treated Alexis like a queen. Malcolm and Alexis met their freshman year in college. They were friends throughout college, but when they graduated and both found jobs in



Birmingham, Alabama, they became closer.

Malcolm and Alexis began dating a year after they graduated. Malcolm was the one for Alexis; at least that was what Alexis thought. A year after they had been dating, Malcolm was offered a job at the Atlanta University Hospital. Alexis prayed that Malcolm would ask her to move with him to Atlanta, to her surprise, he never did. Now, all she was stuck with was the memories of their love or what she thought was love.

* * * * *

"I'm sorry..." Nicole began to say as she realized Alexis had hung up on her.

"I didn't intend to sound so rude," Nicole began to say to the man that was sitting beside her.

"It's okay, I think Lexi...I mean Alexis knows you well enough to know that you didn't

intend it in a cruel manner." he said.

"Well all I know is that you have to be gone by tomorrow morning just in case Alexis decides to come over." Nicole said as she placed a kiss on the man's forehead. "Alexis would kill me if she knew I was having an affair with you".

"Well what Lexi doesn't know won't kill her" the man replied as he returned the kiss to

Nicole's lips.

"I don't need a remote control... with six kids my chances of watching it are already remote."



May 4



Chapter 2

That afternoon, Alexis's father did not leave Nicole's house until 12pm. Nicole would have allowed him to stay longer but she was afraid Alexis was going to come to her house. Even though he parked his car down the street, Nicole knew that Alexis could spot her father's car anywhere. It was the only white BMW in Birmingham that said 'Alexis's Father' on the front tag. Nicole could not afford to destroy her relationship with her best friend, so she told him to leave after she made him breakfast. Nicole went to pick up Alexis from her apartment around 3pm.

Alexis knew Nicole would be late to her own funeral. So Alexis stayed at her office until 2pm to catch up on some paper work from the previous week. Alexis was putting on her makeup



when Nicole knocked on her door.

“Hey girl, sorry I’m late.” Nicole said as she walked through the door of Alexis’s apartment.

“I am so used to you being late, until it doesn’t bother me anymore.” Alexis said as she walked back to her bathroom to finish her makeup.

Nicole began to go through her purse and get out her lipstick and apply it to her lips.

“I’m sorry about last night I didn’t mean to jump out at you over the telephone.” Nicole said as she put her lips together to make her lipstick look even.

“I just wanted to know who you were on the phone with or who was over your house. I know you too well for you to keep anything from me. Plus, you can’t hold water so you might as well tell me.” Alexis said as she put the finishing touches



onto her face.

"It was Mitchell Taylor. The new guy at the office I work with. He called me and we started talking about things that go on in the office. It was only about work, no personal things." Nicole said as she looked down at her shoes, too ashamed to face her best friend because of the lie she just told.

"He called to talk about work at 2 in the morning? Okay, Nicole if you say so." Alexis replied in disbelief. Alexis can always tell when Nicole is not telling the truth. Nicole always looks down at the ground or her shoes (Alexis never knew what Nicole's focus was when she was not telling the truth).

"Ready to go?" Alexis said to Nicole anxious to leave Birmingham, Alabama, and head to busy city of Atlanta.

413

"Yeah, let's go" Nicole said

The ride to Atlanta was girl talk about the week they had. Even though, Nicole and Alexis talked about their week with their other girlfriends last night, they told the whole story to one another. Alexis normally talked about her social work cases with Nicole. She told her about how parents would get away with abusing their children, physically and mentally, and the state would allow the parents to regain custody of the children. Nicole could do nothing but just listen to Alexis when she discussed work about children. Nicole knew that Alexis had an unconditional love for children, even children she did not know. She knew Alexis loved her job, because it involved her doing what she loved the most, loving children.

"The other day, a woman came into the

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office to tell me that she could get custody of her child again, after she watched the father beat the child to death,” Alexis said, mocking the woman that entered her office. “Nicole, her baby is only six years old and she watched a man beat her child.

I’m gonna tell you like I always do, I know I don’t have any kids; but if I did I wouldn’t allow them to be treated the way some people come into my office and treat their children.” Alexis said

“People just don’t have any respect anymore, for anything, not even their own children” Nicole said as she pulled into the closest parking space in the Atlanta Underground Mall parking lot.

“I don’t know what it is, but something has got to give...and mothers will fight harder for their husbands than for their children.” Alexis said as she grabbed her purse from the back seat of Nicole’s



car.

"Okay, it is now official..." Nicole said, as she grabbed Alexis's arm before she reached her purse.

"What?" Alexis said

"You're not to utter a word about your job. And I mean it! You came with me to help me look for a wedding gift for my cousin, and to shop a little. So relax, girl!" Nicole said as she released Alexis's arm.

"Okay, I'll try but I don't know how good I'll do at relaxing. The last time I relaxed disco music was probably in style," Alexis replied, as she got out of the car and laughed at her own comment.

"That's the spirit; live a little. Don't always be such a bore," Nicole said as they walked up to the mall.

"My feet are killing me" Alexis said as she sat on the bench, crossed her legs, took her shoes off one at a time and began to rub her feet in the mall. "I shouldn't have tried to break in these new shoes with you in a shopping plaza."

"Being cute is painful, isn't it?" Nicole said as she laughed at her best friend taking off her beige high heeled sandals that matched her beige and black dress. "You know every time I come to the mall I stay longer than any normal human. How long have you known me? You should know this by now."

"But we have been into five stores already in the last 30 minutes. Don't you think we deserve a little rest? You already bought her a sexy negligee, a set of wine glasses, a coffee maker and a bread maker.

Contentment



My goodness, what else could she ask for?" Alexis said, while she rubbed her feet.

"I just want to be as generous as I can. She is my favorite cousin and I wanted to show her, that I am happy for her. And the sexy negligee...well that's mine," Nicole replied.

"Well you can go ahead and shop. I will be right here, rubbing my poor little toes of which you have destroyed." Alexis said, sarcastically.

"Okay, this is the last store. I promise. I have a date tonight with..." Nicole began to say as she looked across the mall to see a familiar face.

Alexis tried to figure out the look on Nicole's face. Before she does, a tall handsome brown skin man with beautiful and mysterious eyes gives Nicole a hug. Alexis knew that face anywhere.

"Long time, no see, Nicole. I see you still



love to shop” Malcolm Ross said jokingly, as he remembered the times she kept Alexis away from him because Alexis spent countless hours in the shopping malls with Nicole.

“Malcolm, I am going to die shopping”

Nicole said as she laughed in a fake gesture and winked her eye at Alexis.

When Alexis realized that it was Malcolm she immediately put her shoes back on her feet and stood to her feet to greet Malcolm. *I think he has gotten taller and he is definitely cuter. I wonder if he has a girlfriend or is he married?* Alexis began thinking trying to keep her sophisticated composure.

“Hello Malcolm” Alexis said as she put her hand out to shake his.

“Hello, Alexis. How has life been treating

you?" Malcolm replied as he rejected Alexis's hand shake and wrapped his arms around her.

"Fairly well, I won't complain." Alexis said trying not to let him see that she is very vulnerable and will come back to him the second he asks.

"Well I can see that the two of you have a lot of catching up to do. I'm going to finish my shopping. I'll meet you right here, Alexis. Don't go anywhere." Nicole said, interrupting their conversation to let them know that she was gone and they were free to talk about whatever they needed to get off their minds.

"Nicole, please don't take forever," Alexis said, becoming irritated with her shopping addiction.

As Nicole began to walk off, Alexis sat back on the bench where she first sat to rest her

"So, how is your job going?" Malcolm

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ed as he sat next to Alexis.

"Things are going well with my job; if

ngs go as planned I will receive a transfer to

orida." Alexis said, as she crossed her legs and

ned her body towards Malcolm.

"Florida? Why so far away?" Malcolm

"My
the
sure

"I need to get away from Alabama. I am

oking to begin a new life in Florida. Meet new

ople, earn more money, get married, have

ls....you know the deal of settling down," Alexis

plained upset with his concern.

"I didn't mean to pry, Alexis. I was only

ondering how you would do alone in Florida,"

"Thank you, but no Thank you for the

concern Malcolm. You act like you really care about me. And for your information, I can do just fine alone in Florida. I have been alone in Alabama, for all you know, because you don't call me to see how I'm doing. So don't give me this bull about your concern for me," Alexis said, uncrossing her legs to stand up and place her hands on her hips.

"Alexis, I do care about you. I have thought about you ever since I moved away. I never called because I thought you had moved on with your life and forgot about me. But, you tell me that I don't care. I care more than you will ever know, Malcolm said as he stood up to face Alexis.

"Prove it..." Alexis said, taking her hands off of her hips and shifting her body weight to the right.

At that moment, before Alexis could breathe



for air, Malcolm had wrapped his arms around her, and gave her breath. The stood in the middle of the mall joined by the mouth as one, while each couple that passed grabbed their loved one tighter, as if they could feel a connection of hearts between Malcolm and Alexis.

As Malcolm slowly released Alexis, she stood in her same spot in a daze of the moment that lasted forever.

"You told me to prove it, so I did. I know you felt my love for you through the kiss," Malcolm said as he grabbed Alexis's hand.

"Malcolm, I didn't mean for you to kiss me. Proving it can be more than just a.....a, a touching thing," with a loss of words Alexis pretended to not have enjoyed the kiss of love, when it only made her love for Malcolm stronger. "I can't do this again

Contentment...



with you Malcolm, I still love you, but I can't allow you to come into my life again just because it is convenient for you," Alexis said as she turned her back so she wouldn't have to face him.

Captivated by her beauty and her scent, Malcolm takes Alexis by her hand, looks her in her eyes and tells her how much he has missed her.

"I have done nothing but think of you while I was here. I have tried so many times to pick up the phone and call you, but every time I pick up the phone I set it back on the receiver. I'm afraid of what you might say," Malcolm confesses to Alexis

"What were you afraid I would say?" Alexis asks

"I was afraid that you would say, 'you moved on'"

Alexis smiled and gave Malcolm a gigantic hug.

She backed away to ask Malcolm a question.

"Are you single?"

"Yes, I am single," Malcolm replied

Malcolm gave Alexis his contact numbers and said that they will keep in touch. Malcolm wrapped his arms around Alexis, kissed her on the cheek, and whispered into her ears.

As Nicole walked towards Alexis and Malcolm she sees them give one another a friendly hug and kiss, and Malcolm walked away.

"What was that all about?" Nicole asked smiling.

"Girl, I don't think I am going to be single anymore. Malcolm said that he still loves me," Alexis said as she smiled and looked in the direction he left. "Hey! You said that you had a date tonight. Did my ears deceive me or did those



words really come from your mouth?" Alexis asked
turning back to Nicole.

"Well, I do" Nicole said vaguely

"Don't tell me with the new guy that you
talked business to at 2 in the morning," Alexis said

"Well..." Nicole said as she began to walk
away.

"I knew it! That call last night was not
about business. I am so happy for you Nicole,"
Alexis said as she followed Nicole out the mall.

"We all should double date next weekend to
celebrate our non-single life or whatever you want
to call it" Alexis said

"No! I have plans next weekend...uh
Mitchell and I are going to a gospel play and he
already bought the tickets." Nicole said becoming
fidgety.

Contentment...

"Oh, well maybe some other time" Alexis
id as she got into the car.

Nicole and Alexis drove in silence on the
ay back home. Alexis thought about all the good
mes she used to have with Malcolm and reminded
erself that she still loves him, and he loves her.
he couldn't get out of her mind how when they
ugged and kissed each other the words Malcolm
hispered in her ears "I still love you, Lexi".
Alexis smiled the whole way back home.

Nicole does not want Alexis to know that
Nicole is going out with Alexis's father tonight.
Even though, Alexis's mother died 5 years ago,
Alexis never liked the fact of her father dating other
women. It would kill Alexis to know that her best
riend who is twenty years younger than her father
was in love with Thomas Jones, Alexis's father.



Chapter 3

Thomas was preparing for his date with Nicole. He was cooking a romantic Italian dinner for two, when he heard a knock on his door. He fixed his tie, checked his appearance in the mirror next to the door before he opened the door.

Alarmed at the face he saw, he turned to look at his apartment which was neatly decorated, dim lights, vanilla aroma scented candles burning, table set for two with food already placed on the table and softly playing Luther Vandross's Greatest Hits which was currently playing, "Anyone Who Had A Heart", he then turned back to Alexis with a smile.

"Hey daddy" Alexis said as she hugged and kissed her father on the cheek. As she walked in her father's large, spacious apartment she swung the door close but not hard enough for the door to close.




"I was wondering what you were doing this evening, and if you're not busy I thought we could go out to dinner but it seems as if you already have plans. Is it that Mrs. Parker lady again? Daddy, I told you, Mrs. Parker has been married three times already and you..."

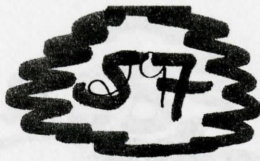
"Hello to you too Lexi," her father said in a sarcastically, cutting Alexis off from stating anymore concluding statements about his social life.

Thomas was used to his daughter jumping to conclusions, when it came to him dating other women. Alexis never agreed to the fact that her father moved on after her mother had deceased.

Thomas loved his deceased wife greatly, but he was at a point in his life where he could not stand to be alone.

"And to update you on my personal life I am





having dinner with a friend. No one you should be alarmed about Lexi...just a friend.” her father emphasized.

“Well, maybe I need to get an appointment with you. It seems to be every time I call you are either occupied with work or you’re not home.”

Alexis said as she sits on the couch and crosses her legs.

“Sweetheart, I promise you tomorrow we can have lunch together. I will clear my calendar for my precious daughter” Thomas said as he continued to stand.

“That’s fine daddy. When did you say you were going to Florida for your vacation?” Alexis asked.

“In two weeks. I think I may stay for two weeks in Florida. It has been almost 10 years since



I had a vacation.” Thomas replied. Putting his hands on his hips and shifting his body weight to his left foot he asked Alexis, “What are your plans for tonight, sweetheart?”, hoping that she will remember that she had something more important to do instead of pry in his life.

“I just may order some Chinese food and find a movie on Lifetime. Since Nicole has a date tonight, I’ll get some quality time to myself,” Alexis said looking at the wall in front of her noticing it’s emptiness. She got up off the couch, walked over to the wall, and touched it.

“Where is the picture of mom?” She asked her father quietly

“I put the picture in my bedroom, if that’s okay with you.” Thomas calmly replied, trying not to let his daughter know that he is becoming



impatient with her presence.

Thomas had a romantic evening planned and it did not include his daughter. He was never concerned about introducing women to Alexis, but this was no ordinary woman he was dating, it was Nicole.

"I'm going in the bedroom to see where you hung the picture, and then I'll leave. I know you have an important evening with a friend. Maybe I can meet her tonight and we all can..." Alexis said as she walked back to her father's bedroom, yelling to make sure her father heard her over the music of Luther Vandross that still played softly as the song changed to "If This World Were Mine". Alexis began to talk about something else, but her father did not pay her any attention all he was worried about was getting Alexis out of his apartment so



that he could finish preparing for his evening.

As he straightened up the couch from the imprints Alexis's body made on the couch he thought, *hopefully she'll be gone by the time Nicole gets here.*

A gush of wind blew from the outside that swung his door open even wider than before. As Thomas walked over to the door to close it, he heard clicking noises of shoes that came closer to his door from the outside, as he walked closer to the door from the inside. Just as he reached the door he was greeted by a beautiful, young black woman.

"Come back in a few minutes, Lexi is here."

Thomas said quietly, trying not to let Alexis hear him.

"How long is she gonna be here?" Nicole asked angrily, remembering that not less than one



hour ago she dropped Alexis off.

“Not long, she’ll be gone soon” He replied

Nicole furiously walked away.

It’s not enough that she has to speak to her father everyday, but does she really need to take up my time with him? Nicole became even more upset to know that Alexis had something she did not have.

Alexis jokingly told Nicole a couple of years ago something that Nicole will never forget. She said, “We share everything Nicole except men, let’s keep it that way”. Even though they laughed about the comment, Nicole knew that Alexis meant exactly what she said. Nicole continued to walk to the corner of the building where there was shade and no one would see her.

I wonder if that meant her father too.

“Daddy, why are you doing this to me?”



Alexis asked as she walked out of the bedroom angrily. "You lied to me. I can't believe you would do this to me" Alexis said as she walked toward her father.

"Now Lexi, calm down. I can explain..."

Thomas began to say, but Alexis was so furious that she didn't allow him to explain. All he could do was stand at the door with the knob in his hand holding the door halfway open.

"Daddy," she said calmly, "when you feel that you can tell me the truth, I will talk to you, other than that...I just need time to think things over," Alexis said as she walked out the door her father was still holding halfway open.

"Alexis...Alexis...please come back so we can talk about this," Thomas began to call his daughter's name louder, but it was as if he were



calling someone else's name. Not once did Alexis turn around to acknowledge her father's plea.

Thomas watched his daughter walk all the way to her car as he stood at his apartment door. He saw her stop, as if she was going to turn around, but she continued to walk to her car.

Maybe she had thought about coming to talk about what she had heard between Nicole and I, that's why she stopped, Thomas began to think.

As Alexis drove off, Nicole came around the corner to greet Thomas for the second time that evening.

"What was wrong with Alexis?" Nicole asked as she walks into the apartment, leaving Thomas still outside looking out over the rail.

When Thomas did not reply, Nicole walked outside





to him and asked him calmly, looking straight into his eyes, "did she hear us?"

"Yes, she heard us," Thomas said walking away from Nicole and into the apartment.

Switching the lights to a bright light, walking around blowing all seven candles out and cutting off Luther Vandross's Greatest Hits CD, he sat on the couch.

"She was going to find out anyway, Thomas. You can't hide this relationship from your own daughter and expect her to never find out." Nicole said as she followed him in and slammed the door.

"I just wanted to be the one to let her know. I didn't want to come out like this." Thomas said as he put his elbows on his knees to cup his face with his hands.



"Well what are you going to do now that she knows?" Nicole asked as she sat next to Thomas on the couch.

Thomas took his hands away from his face, looked into Nicole's eyes and replied, "I have to tell her the truth about everything".

"Everything?" Nicole exclaimed.

"Yes, everything. I can't allow anything else to come out the way our relationship did. I'll tell her tomorrow at lunch. Until then, let's have dinner, the food is getting cold." Thomas said as he helped Nicole up off of the couch and walked her over to the dining room table where they quietly ate dinner.

* * * * *

How could daddy lie to me? He told me the picture of mom is on the wall in his room and it's not there.

I hope he didn't give it away at any of those apartment sales that he participates in. Why couldn't he tell me the truth? Alexis thought as she drove home.

What was Nicole's car doing at my daddy's apartment complex? Nicole thought back to when she stopped walking to look at Nicole's car before she got to her car. Maybe the new guy on her job lives here. I'll have to ask her tomorrow. I just need a long hot bath to think about some things. Like my father's betrayal.

Alexis rides home silently.

Antennas
ABC...
Tardy mags

Days of a heart
taken by surprise

U D G E M E N T

Crossed

Black
5 Minute
Life

Faithfully
Yours