

# *Missing Births*

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& *Not With My Son*

## *Prologue*

Tracey cringed, watching the menacing light dancing along the scalpel's razor-sharp edge. She had never felt the bite of a knife before. Desperately she clinched her restraints while praying for a quick ending. A light too bright for her eyes and too hot for her skin, lingered above her, not even three feet from where she lay. There was a tremble in her stomach and she knew it was time.

Her blood felt hot escaping her body in rhythmical spurts as the blade tore into her flesh. She fought the urge to scream although the pain was more than bearable. A masked face stood over her with only narrowed eyes revealing an identity, intently penetrating layer after layer. Perspiration stung her eyes and Tracey turned her head trying to clear it. The burning wasn't as intense as the probing hands that peeled her flesh back pulling at her muscles and tissue, robbing her of the child she patiently awaited for nine long months. She cursed Daniel for leaving her. If he were there, he could save her, but he wasn't. Tracey realized for the first time how alone she was. Her boyfriend had abandoned her, the projects didn't offer the best of friends and her parents put her out when she told them she was pregnant. Many times she tried to reconcile with them but they didn't understand, at least they didn't

seem to understand.

Tracey felt a tug and out popped her baby. She could see the child's penis saluting proudly between his bowed legs.

“It's a boy.” The voice behind the mask said narcissistically. She wiped the child with the towel she pulled from her bag then wrapped it in a receiving blanket followed by another blanket.

Things were getting dark by the second. Tracey knew she couldn't hold on much longer. The agonizing pain subsided and her legs ceased to writhe as the sensations ended. She began to feel faint and instantly, her heart stopped beating.

# *A Child Of My Own*

## 1

“Honey, come on, please sit down. The doctor will call us after the next patient.”

“I can’t Duane. I’ve got a feeling that something is wrong. I can’t bear to lose another child,” Zenobia responded pacing the waiting room floor. It was a tiny room that seemed all too confined as Zenobia continued to walk past Duane one time too many. A few times, other patients looked up at her, shook their head then returned their attention to either the music or magazine they were previously engaged in.

“I know how much having a child means to you, but maybe “ he said choking back his words, “It’s not meant for us to have a child.”

Zenobia glared at him. “How can you say that?” she said breaking into tears. “Look at all these girls in here.” Duane allowed his eyes to follow the direction Zenobia indicated. “Why should they be bearers of children? Most of them don’t even have husbands or proper homes for these children to live in.” She rested her glare on a young woman sitting across the room. She was wearing a headset attached to a CD player, bopping to music that had to be too loud because Zenobia could hear it clearly Pass the Courvoisier. “You hear that? What kind of mother would be

listening to a song about a drink while carrying a child?" She remarked, twisting her face into a distasteful frown. "She can't be more than sixteen. If it was up to me, I would take that child from her and give it to someone worthy and responsible."

"Stop it Zenobia. Why are you scrutinizing that child? She made a mistake but at least she's responsible enough to own up to it. And there's nothing wrong with that song. I happen to like it myself."

"I'm sure you do. It probably reminds you of drinking."

"Please don't start that here. I haven't had a drink since two years ago. I'm clean."

"Maybe you are now but what about before? Maybe you've killed all of the healthy sperm."

For a moment, the couple fell silent. Duane and Zenobia were at their fifth attempt to have a child together. Never in a million years would Duane have thought this to be a difficult task. He wondered if Zenobia was right. Maybe it was his earlier drinking habits that caused their inability to bare children. She reminded him of it every time she found out that she's lost yet another child. The couple was held together by the bond of their past. Duane worked at Long Island University Hospital in obstetrics as a surgeon while Zenobia now worked at St. Mary's Hospital as a mid-wife and supporting nurse to her husband's former colleague and friend Dr. Shaw.

Duane slouched in his seat and closed his eyes, shunning out the faces of angry women that were now looking at them. He said a silent prayer that none of these women decided to attack them. Zenobia always picked the wrong time to bring up these issues.

Zenobia continued watching the young girl, longing for her child. She imagined cutting that child right from her belly and nurturing it. After delivering children for twelve years, and assisting during several emergency cesareans, it was possible. Shaking her head, she dismissed the thought. Her mind wandered back to Long Island University Hospital where she worked side-by-side with Duane. He was such a skilled surgeon. She was only twenty-two when she met him. He was like a God to her. What power he possessed, bringing life into the world, a child's life. At the time, Duane was twenty-eight and single. He had practiced obstetrics for four years and most of his time was spent at the hospital. Because his reputation preceded him, his patients often insisted on his presence and service. One early morning about three-thirty, a patient went into labor. When Duane was notified that his patient was ready to deliver, he hurried from the cafeteria and to the delivery room. Immediately, he realized that the child was in danger as the cord protruded from the birth canal. Making matters worse, the child's feet were directly behind it. It was at that moment Duane's eyes locked with Zenobia's frightened stare. Her eyes betrayed her fear but that look of vulnerability attracted him. His second nature caused him to push the child back up into the mother. He ordered a local block and began the process of cesarean. Zenobia watched as he skillfully cut through the woman's swollen belly and found the impatient child. It was like watching God display his magnificent power as he pushed forth his hands and pulled from his creation another life. Tears of praise welled in her eyes as he handed her the child. Their eyes met as they held on to the child together for a few seconds. Duane remained behind and continued

working on the woman, returning her whole again.

Zenobia took the child and proceeded to clean it and follow through with all necessary processes. When done, she left the child with the nurses. She returned to the patient and gave her a reassuring smile. The nurses returned the child to her and she handed it to its mother. For some reason, Zenobia looked up at Duane again and his eyes again found hers and she thought she saw a wink. She discarded it as her imagination, but Duane found her in the staff lounge alone. He congratulated her on a job well done and that she assisted him well. They began seeing each other for a year before secretly getting married. Because of hospital policy, Zenobia retained her maiden name Taylor and not assuming her husband's name Jones.

"Mrs. Taylor." The nurse called searching the room for one of the women to respond. "Zenobia Taylor." She said again. This time Duane heard her and pulled Zenobia from her trance.

"Honey, they're calling you. Come on let's go." Duane caught hold of Zenobia's hand and then ushered her through the doors the nurse indicated. Down the corridor, they were directed into one of the rooms and Zenobia was told to wait for the doctor there.

"Should I remove my clothes?" she asked the nurse. The nurse looked at the chart then met a hopeful gawk.

"That won't be necessary Mrs. Taylor. The doctor only wants to talk to you. Just wait here." She instructed, quickly making her exit back to the station. She couldn't bear to answer another question and she knew exactly where the patient was going.

"Duane. It's true, we have lost another child." She

began to cry. Duane reached for her and pulled her into his arms.

“You don’t know that sweetheart. Maybe the doctor doesn’t need to examine you this time because everything is okay.”

“You know that isn’t true. You’re an OB and you know that this is not normal. Duane don’t you use that pacification on me. You know I know better than that.”

Duane only held her. He knew that their marriage couldn’t stand another loss. Things at home had gotten really bad to a point where he no longer wanted to have sex for fear of adding false hope. His loving wife had become verbally abusive and her obsession with taking someone’s child away was beginning to scare him. Although he knew that she would never carry it out, he hated hearing her talk about it. It wasn’t something that she should be entertaining. There was so much he wanted to tell her, to give her hope. His pet project was under way and it wouldn’t be long before he would give her all she wanted and she would see the greatness that she had once seen in him before.

“Mr. and Mrs. Taylor how are you?” The doctor greeted as he entered the room. He held a very nonchalant expression and maintained the text book demeanor. “How are you feeling Zenobia?”

“How’s the baby?” Zenobia responded, dismissing his evasive question. She hated trivial gibber, especially when it’s something important as this. She shifted in her seat and Duane squeezed her hand whispering for her to calm down.

The doctor let out a sigh while opening her file. His eyes scanned the contents masterfully. His lips mumbled

unintelligible jitter as he read through the reports. Zenobia waited as patiently as possible with the added restraint of Duane. Dealing with his own patients was easy, but calming his wife was difficult. There was far too much riding on his gestures and responses. He understood first hand how much having a child meant to her, maybe even more than him. After a few moments, the doctor raised his head, tapped his pen with his thumb to close the retractable pen, now focusing his attention on Zenobia alternating between her and Duane.

“According to the last blood tests taken, there has been no increase in the development of your child. Your hormones are exceptionally low for signs of pregnancy. I suspect that you have undergone a miscarriage. I would like to draw more blood to confirm these assessments.”

“Doctor, are you certain that there is no baby?” Duane questioned, but this was information that he already knew but to show face, he had express his enthusiasm for his wife’s sake and all of their sake. He understood exactly what her doctor was saying. He was glad that he hadn’t run the tests and had to give his wife the news.

“I have reviewed the contents several times and I am also aware that you two have tried numerous times to bare children. Have you both been checked for sterility or infertility?”

A silence befell them. Duane turned to face Zenobia. When he saw her mouth bopping, he answered the doctor’s question

“Yes. I’ve had negative tests for sterility. Nothing was found to hinder the projection of healthy sperm.” Duane deliberately avoided looking at Zenobia. She was so busy

blaming him for their inability to bare children that she never considered herself. From the corner of his eye, he could see her head drop at the mention of his negative results. He had harbored her from this revelation, sparing her the probable blame.

Without further questioning, the doctor dismounted his seat and started toward the door. He turned on his heels to face the couple “I will send the nurse in to draw the blood.” Just as quick, he disappeared down the corridor to the adjoining examining room. They could hear him speaking with the next patient, Tracy Spencer, the young girl from the waiting room. She was within her ninth month of pregnancy. Zenobia listened carefully to the muffled conversation of the doctor and the girl. She was so excited about her baby. The doctor had questioned her about the father of the child and she told him that he didn’t want to have anything to do with her or the baby. She was going to be a single parent and was proud of it. The thought made Zenobia sick. Here she was a qualified parent with a stable relationship and these irresponsible teens were the only ones having them.

“What are you thinking about sweet heart? Everything is going to be fine?” But Duane knew that this was far from the truth. He wondered just how much more of this he could take. Zenobia never answered him. She only shook her head, nothing. The nurse entered the room and began sorting through blood containers. Without a word, Zenobia left the room with Duane at her heels.

As they exited the doctor’s office, the nurse hurried behind them.

“Wait a minute Mrs. Taylor. I need to get some blood from you.” She called, but they continued walking until they

were out of the clinic and into the parking lot where their car was parked. Duane opened the door for his wife and secured her in the passenger's seat then he rounded the car to the driver's side and got in. Without saying a word, he started the car. The ride home was silent. Duane didn't even turn on the radio as he usually would upon starting the car. Zenobia stared out the window at the houses as they passed by until there were none to see. This did not hinder her; she continued to stare at the black pavement until they pulled into their Jersey City driveway.

Without waiting, Zenobia quickly opened the door and emerged from the car. Her steps were quick as she mounted the three steps then entered the house. She closed the door behind her and Duane could hear the locks being engaged. Of course this didn't encumber his entrance, but he took the opportunity to get his own head cleared. His tires sounded as he pulled from their driveway and continued on his way. He could not deal with the harsh episode that he knew would follow when he entered the house. If his wife only knew what he had done for her and the sacrifices he was about to make to give her the children she wanted. So it begins, he thought to himself. The road was not only going to turn bumpy from this point, but spiral into perilous curves that mean a lot of broken hearts and promises before all is said and done. He prayed that he wouldn't run into the proverbial brick wall before he could see this thing through to the end. He thought about his pet project that he and Dr. Shaw had been working on and in a small way renewed his spirit enough to do what needed to be done next.

Fifteen minutes into the drive, he reached for his cell

phone and dialed a number by memory. The phone rang twice and a woman's voice answered. She sounded so sweet to his ears and definitely welcoming.

"Hello."

"Hey baby, can I see you?" he asked hoping that she wouldn't refuse. He needed so badly to wipe away the terrible memory that plagued his mind.

"Of course you can. You don't sound good. Is everything all right?" He paused, savoring the cheerful sound of her tone. Duane fought back the tears that betrayed him, making his best effort to mask the quiver of his words.

"Everything's fine Sheree. I just need to see you, to be with you. You make me so happy."

Sheree knew that Duane was holding something back. She also knew that when the time was right he would open up to her and let her know all that was going on. Duane was wonderful to her and she never pressured him about anything for fear of forcing him away.

"I'll be here. Are you hungry? What would you like to eat?"

He smiled weakly and again his emotions welled. He waited until he settled down then responded.

"Don't go out of your way. I just want to see you."

"Okay, no more pressure."

"I'll see you soon then."

He disconnected the phone line then turned off his phone.

*MB*

Zenobia locked the door, turned and let her back fall

against it. All the emotions she fought to control came crashing in. She listened as Duane backed out of their driveway and off he went to get drunk again she presumed. How could she be mad at him? Had she become his Nemesis, the origin of his doom? Had her obsession with having a child forced the man she loved away? She balanced herself back onto her feet. After removing her coat and hanging it in the closet, Zenobia went straight to her bedroom. Her body flopped onto the mattress. She considered the possibility of her being unreasonable, wondering how a man so perfect for her could not father a child. He was a bringer of life and unable to bare to his wife one of his own.

Duane's image flashed in front of her a strong man, capable of accomplishing anything. Just as he has not abandoned her, she would not abandon him. They would go through this fertility issue together. If they could not bare children together, then they would grow old together without them. With all things being considered, she realized that she and Duane shared something beautiful together they shared the task of bringing life into the world. This thought was short lived because her desire to have her own was stronger than her desire to watch other mothers experience the miracle of childbirth.

Zenobia picked up the phone and dialed Duane's cell phone the phone didn't even ring, it went directly into voice mail which told her that he had turned off his phone and didn't want to talk to her. This behavior was quite unusual as he would always respond to her calls after they had a fight. Everything has changed and Zenobia knew that this time would be different, she was losing him and he was

growing tired of trying.



It was a long drive, but Duane parked in front of Sheree's building on Linden Boulevard in Brooklyn. He looked up at the eight story building and spotted an anxious face peeking from the window. Her fingers wiggled a slight hello as she watched Duane ascend the walkway and disappear into the building. Shortly after, the bell sounded and he emerged from the elevator on the sixth floor. Sheree had already opened the door and was waiting for him. Immediately upon approaching her, he clasped her within the sanctuary of his arms, holding her tightly as if to never let go. The impotent feeling his wife left him with dissipated when Sheree's warmth and affection welcomed him. He needed her as much as she needed him.

"I've missed you so much," he told her still clinging to her.

"Honey, come inside," Sheree offered gently extracting from his embrace and ushering Duane into her apartment. She held on to his cold hands and began rubbing them. "I've fixed some tea. That should get you all warmed up. Her eyes were warm and lovely. She shuffled into the kitchen with Duane at her heels. He took a seat at the table and waited as she poured him a mug of tea. "Would you like some milk or lemon in your tea?"

"Lemon," he said still watching her. His mind was spinning but he noticed something different about her. He understood her wanting to pamper him, but she seemed to be wrestling with something of her own. When she placed

the mug on the table in front of him, her hand shook nervously. Their eyes met and it was as if a passageway into her soul had been opened up.

“Sweet heart, tell me. What’s on your mind? Why are you so nervous?”

Sheree disconnected from his penetrating gaze and shook her head no. This was not the manner in which she wanted to confide in him, but if this were the way God intended, then she would have no choice but to tell him this way. She feared exposing something she had been hiding from him for so long. Her confession was long over due and left no room for decision making. He patted his lap for her to take a seat but she chose a chair next to him instead then faced him.

“Duane,” she hesitated, fumbling with a ball of lint clinging obdurately to her knit sweater. She had rehearsed her revelation in the mirror numerous times but saying it in person was a thousand times more difficult than she’d imagined. God, why did I wait so long? Why can’t he see that I’ve changed? She looked down at herself and mentally assessed herself.

“Honey, what is it?” His ambivalence was obvious which made confession even more difficult. “Sheree you’re scaring me.”

Snatching the white ball from where it clung...”Duane I’m pregnant,” she blurted out while releasing all of her fears.

He couldn’t believe his ears. His eyes shifted to her structure looking for any signs of change. Sheree was a full-figured woman and didn’t show any real signs of pregnancy. Immediately, his mind shifted and for a few seconds he was

lost in his own triumph, yes! He thought to himself, floating in a cloud of successful bliss, this was going to be history in the making and his life would change in so many ways. He snapped out of it. But it didn't stop his wheels from turning. His wife came to mind and he accessed their situation. He had been extra careful since futilely then trying to have a child with his wife for three years and none were successful. Each child had been miscarried by the second month. His wife had convinced him that his drinking in earlier years was the cause of these deaths. She told him that his sperm was contaminated and would never be capable of successfully fertilizing a full-term child. Afraid to ask knowing already what the answer would be "Are you sure it's mine?" he asked, confirming what he already knew to be true.

"How dare you ask me that?" she said admonishing him for his insinuation. "You know there has been no one else in my life besides you."

He reached for her but she pulled away regretting ever attempting to confide in him. "Sheree, I'm sorry. Really I didn't mean it. It's that I've been trying to have a child for so long that I couldn't believe I could have done this. You must be "

"I'm seven months."

Duane shifted in his seat and appraised her while mustering through the many questions that went through his mind.

"When were you going to tell me about this? What was your plan, to just show up in my operating room and say, by the way, I'm having your baby?" his emotions surged forward thoughtlessly. He was hurt that Sheree didn't trust

his judgment enough to confide in him, he truly thought that he had embedded himself in a place in her world that was unbreakable. With all that was riding on this, he needed that trust, depended on it.

“How could I tell you Duane? You’re still married and you told me that you were not going to leave your wife. I knew that you didn’t want a child like this and God knows we’ve done everything to prevent this from happening. I was afraid to tell you. I was afraid of losing you. I just felt like when I started showing that you would realize for yourself and things would just work themselves out.” She sighed. “Duane, I’m sorry. I should have told you and there is no excuse for my behavior.” Sheree let out a quick chuckle. “Who would have thought that I would still not show after all this time?”

Although this wasn’t his intention, he would never do anything to hurt her. Things were about to become really complicated. He wondered what he would tell Zenobia. This news would certainly kill her especially since he couldn’t give her the entire story, not yet at least. She wanted a child badly but he couldn’t give her one and now, he’s having one with another woman outside of his marriage that was going to be tough on both of them and he hoped that her love for him would endure until he could show how the true meaning of love. Duane shook the selfish thoughts from his mind and focused on the situation at hand.

“Is everything all right? Have you checked with the doctor yet?”

“Calm down. I’ve been undergoing prenatal care since I first found out. The child is fine. Everything shows normal.”

Duane convinced that he would be the father he should be and always wanted to be, immediately planned to pack his things and abandon what he had called home for seven years at least for now until the child was born.



Zenobia had come home from a long day at work, instantly getting the feeling of emptiness. Duane had been gone since their visit with the doctor three weeks ago. He hadn't returned her calls at work either. The staff told her that he wasn't there or was in delivery. This behavior was different and it had definitely gone on too long. Their marriage was in danger. She hurried upstairs and opened the closet-nothing. She went into the bathroom and searched the hamper-nothing. Now feeling frantic she went downstairs slowly entering the kitchen. Zenobia froze as she stood in front of her refrigerator and noted her husband's name at the bottom of a note he left her. It was held by a magnet which read "Home is where the heart is." He had been gone for three weeks and although she felt like their relationship hadn't ended, all the signs that made it the opposite were there, his clothes were missing, his cell phone number was disconnected and he was always unavailable at work. There was something about reading the words that marked the end that always pushed the knife in real deep. For Zenobia there was no exception, it hit the bone. She pulled the note from under the magnet and began reading ...

Dear Zenobia, I just wanted you to know that I love you

with everything in me. You have stuck by me with all my imperfections. I'm sorry to say that I have not held up my by cheating you out of the life you deserve. I couldn't tell you this face to face, but I have betrayed you and now she's pregnant. With my child! Zenobia, I never wanted to hurt you but maybe this is God's way of telling us that we were not meant for each other. I hope that you will understand. My leaving is the best thing for both of us. You take care and know that you will find the right man soon. Sorry I've wasted your time.

Duane.

His signature was scribbled unsteadily at the bottom of the note. Not believing what she had just read, Zenobia sat at the table and reread the note. After reading it for the eighth time she carried the letter over to the stove holding it purposefully between her fingers while turning the knob to open the gas line. A hissing noise started as the noxious fume released through the pipe. Zenobia listened methodically to the humm of death and as an after-thought turned the knob again and the clinking sound of ignition brought forth a bellowing flame that reached for her, all but two inches prevented it from searing her perfect cinnomin complexion. She held the note toward the dancing flame and slowly fed the hungry fire the remnants of her broken heart. Sparks ate through the fiber of the white sheet like termites, twinkling, as it grew higher. All the tears, and memories of the past vanished from her cares as black ashes fluttered around her then cascading downward as discarded reminiscences.

All the love she once felt for Duane diminished into loathing and at that moment she swore that all that he

touched would perish by the tool of his trade. With love comes hate and with life come death. A few minutes had past before Zenobia collected herself and gathered the strength to escape the trance the flame had put her into. She turned the knob counter-clockwise until it clicked off. Beneath the sink beside her was a small cabinet that shelved cleaning supplies, she shuffled through bottles until she retrieved an all-purpose cleaner and a few Mr. Clean wipes. Using her sleeve, she smeared eyeliner across her face while wiping her eyes. Fragile flakes of scorched paper lay sporadically about the floor. With the wipes she retrieved from the cabinet, Zenobia began clearing away the expression of her anger. The few stubborn smudges yielded to the all-purpose cleaner she added to clean wipes. Afterwards, Zenobia moved through her house as if a stranger to her own surroundings. She opened all of her closets and wept when she again witnessed the emptiness Duane left her. She entered the walk-in closet and sat on the built-in carpeted step. He did leave a few things behind, an old pair of sneakers he liked to wear when he went running, Black leather bottomed shoes he purchased from Lord & Taylor and the surgical kit she gave him when he graduated medical school. She opened it. Inside there was a Vortec Headlamp with four AA batteries, a wound probe, sterile suture, scalpel with blade, a bandage scissors, four prep pads, forceps, tweezers, penlight and suture scissors. Each item was carefully placed next to her on the carpet. After some consideration, she gathered the items she needed and returned the rest into the bag placing it back under the step.

The phone rang calling Zenobia from the closet. She hurried into her bedroom and placed the items into the

nightstand draw then picked up the phone. In a weak voice she answered.

“Girl, what is your problem?” Tameka squealed into the phone as she heard her friend’s rhaspy tone. Her excitement was evident. “This is the second time I’ve tried to reach you, honey, what were you doing? You and Duane still working on that baby?”

Tickled by her friend’s statement, a partial smile appeared then vanished from Zenobia’s face. She hadn’t told her that Duane left her and that she had lost another child. That would start a whole other discussion that she was not prepared to get into. Of course, Tameka was one for revenge. If you did anything to her, you were definitely going to be punished for it. Discarding her own problems, Zenobia entertained Tameka’s enthusiasm.

“What’s got you all in the clouds?” She asked.

“You are not going to believe this. I am pregnant, girl,” she replied extending the word girl to sound like a broken record. Just the thought of it excited her; she and Jerome had been working on a child for five years. Unlike her friend Zenobia, she didn’t lose any children she never had the potential of having one.

Zenobia broke into tears, “I’m happy for you. At least one of us is going to be a mother,” she managed to congratulate her friend.

“Honey, everything in time. Don’t worry yourself so hard about it. You know it hasn’t been easy for me, but I’m pregnant now and the doctor told me that everything was fine. Look at it this way, you’ve got a gorgeous guy that you can practice on until you do get pregnant and believe me, playing is fun.”

Bitter acid scorched her throat when she thought about what she lost. She didn't realize how much having a child meant to her. Fighting back the vile urge, Zenobia gripped the phone and reiterated her well wishes. Besides, what did Tameka have to do with Duane leaving her or her inability to bare children?

"You know, I'm not feeling so good right now, why don't I call you tomorrow when I'm feeling a better?"

"Don't run that man away Zenobia. I know how you can be. You're not still riding him about his earlier drinking are you?"

Hesitating for a moment, she responded "No. There's no reason for me to be hounding him about the past. Don't start lecturing me Tameka."

"I'm not, I just want you to be happy. Zenobia, Duane is a good man and he worships the ground you walk on. It would be a shame if you two were to ever part."

"I've got to go, Tameka. I'll talk to you tomorrow. Congratulations again. We'll have to celebrate with some apple juice later."

She laughed and ended the call.

Zenobia fell across her bed and thought back to the last time that she saw Duane.



The next morning she waited patiently outside the hospital for him. Just like clockwork, he emerged through the doors and raced to the parking lot to get his car. Zenobia followed him in a black sports car with dark tinted windows she rented from Avis. Not far from where he worked, he

waited for a woman appearing about sixty pounds overweight. Her hair was long, but feeling a bit synical, Zenobia imagined it was a weave. She let her eyes follow the woman's big ass, watching as it flopped from one side to the other. As annoyed as she felt, a sense of humor came to mind and she made the shriel noise of a horse then chuckled behind it. Zenobia watched her husband hop out of the car, racing around the front to the woman's side. For the first time, she saw the woman's face. She was very pretty with cherubic cheeks which forced her eyes shut when she laughed. He assured her with a kiss while helping the woman clumsily into the car. After about forty-five minutes of driving through traffic, he parked the car in front of what appeared to be projects. She waited while watching them ascend the walkway to building number 2676. Zenobia removed her shades from her purse and placed them on her face. She stepped out of the car, catching the attention of a teenager passing by. "What are these buildings?"

"These are the Pink Houses. You don't want to move here. The apartments are better across the street in Linden Plaza." He pointed to the high-rise buildings just on the other side of Linden Boulevard. She noticed the terraces and height of the buildings-about twenty floors she guessed. "Are these projects?"

"Yeah they both are. But Plaza's apartments have larger rooms and they keep the buildings cleaner over there."

"I see." She said taking better observation. "Thank you very much young man." Zenobia returned to her car then tucking herself behind the steering wheel. The only thing clear in her mind was revenge. Duane had abandoned her

for the one thing she couldn't have a child. Twenty minutes had passed before she found the courage to pull off. Her tires cursed the pavement as she sped off. The heart stopping noise caused passersby's to look in her direction. It was an arduous drive home, but with loathing comes strength and in strength comes power and with power comes punishment. "You'll pay dearly Duane," she said through clenched teeth.

## *The price of a child*

### 2

Mrs. Joyce Baker and her husband Steven waited in room 303 for the discharge papers from her doctor. This was their fourth time losing a child. Joyce wept in the embrace of her husband. Their marriage seemed falsified without a child to rear. There wasn't anything wrong with her physically, but either divine intervention or a plain simple curse prevented her and her husband from the experience of true family.

Joyce was grateful to her circulating nurse who attended her while in the hospital. Her words were comforting and quite timely. Zenobia entered the room.

"Mrs. Baker, I have the discharge papers here for you to sign."

Her heart went out to the woman because she knew all too well the pain she felt. Her husband reached out for the paper taking it from Zenobia's hand. He nodded and thanked her while continuing to hold his wife in a comforting manner. His eyes traveled across the contents of the paper. Staped to the bottom of the form was a number and name for his wife to call in three days.

Composing herself, Joyce pulled out of her husband's security and stood to face Zenobia.

"Thank you so much Nurse Taylor," she told Zenobia

taking her hand into her own. “I appreciate everything you have done for me.

Zenobia topped her hand with her own and the two women’s eyes met. Zenobia gave her a reassuring smile “remember what I told you.”

The woman nodded now taking her hand from Zenobia then clearing the tears from her eyes. She was confident that everything was going to be fine. She leaned in close to the patient and hugged her. “Money can fix anything except death.” Her whisper was not heard by the woman’s husband but he was glad to see that Nurse Taylor had taken a personal interest in his wife and had comforted her in her time of need. She had done something that he would not have been able to do alone.

“Nurse Taylor,” he interrupted their connection, “I am so glad that you took care of my Joyce. I am forever grateful to you and I’m sure that my wife feels the same.”

Zenobia smiled humbly at him then left them in the room. As she ascended the corridor away from the room, she heard the couple as they left. By this time, Ms. Baker had quieted her tears and was looking forward to a brighter day.

*MB*

“Steven, I don’t want us to have secrets between us.”

Baffled by her statement he looked at his wife strangely hesitating momentarily. He shoved his hands into his pockets as he always did before he commented on something that made him uneasy shrugging his shoulders. “Honey did I do something wrong?”

She kept walking by his side to the elevator. Although Zenobia told her not to discuss it with him until everything was finalized, she felt compelled to confide in him. Making a major decision as this could cost her a marriage and the family she's been trying so hard to have.

"What if I told you that it was possible for us to have a child?"

"Joyce, let's make a date with Dr. Peters. We'll do it together as a couple. I really believe that the both of us need to talk about our feelings. This whole baby thing has put so much strain on us."

"I'm not crazy Steven. I don't need to talk to Dr. Peters. You're already passing judgment when you haven't even heard what I wanted to say. That's your problem, you never listen always talking and evaluating somebody." Her fury was evidently building to argument level.

"Wait a minute. I'm not passing judgment. Please honey; it wasn't my intention to upset you. I was talking more about myself than you, I know that you're strong and can handle this, but I can't."

"Let's adopt, Steve."

"A baby? You know how difficult that is?"

"It won't be. I was told about a surrogate mother that will give us her unborn child if we pay her a hundred thousand."

"A hundred thousand dollars. Honey, that's a lot of money, we should talk to our lawyer to make sure that this is even legal. Baby I don't want to go to jail for this."

"Just forget it. Pretend I didn't say it."

"Honey, I'm trying to protect both of us. I know you want a child, but this may not be the way to get it. I'm not entirely

saying no, all I want to do is see what the legal ramifications are. Come here, don't be upset," he told her pulling his wife to him. "Baby, I want to do this, I want us to have this baby, but I want us to do it the right way."

They stepped from the elevator and began through the main floor of the hospital that led them out to the street. Steven had parked his car two long blocks from the hospital. Joyce was quiet for the first half of their walk somewhat resenting confiding in him the discussion she surreptitiously had with Zenobia.

"What are you thinking about, Joyce? I don't like when you become silent. Like I said before, I'm not saying no, I just want to proceed cautiously. Would you really want to pull a hundred grand from our account for a child?"

She turned to face him appalled that he could even ask her that. She would withdraw the entire five hundred thousand for the gift of a child.

"Yes I would, and I would feel completely justified in doing it. I want this child Steve."

"I know you do honey. What guarantees do we get that the child is healthy? What happens if the child is sick or dies, will we get our money back?"

"Would you ask the same question of the hospital if we birthed a child and the child was born sick or died? This is not merchandise we're talking about here. We're talking about a human life. We have a chance to complete. I'm willing to take that risk, but if its any consolation to you, the child will be screened before we receive it. All documents will be given to us as the child's birth right parents. The only way anyone will know that we are not the parents is if we tell them.

“What about the mother of the child? Will she want visitation rights? What if she changes her mind? You know the courts have been known to reverse these types of contracts. Unless she is unfit in some way, we can lose everything. I won’t be able to handle that kind of loss. It’s one thing to never father a child, but to have a child taken away from you once it’s born is another. I just don’t want our hopes up and we end up with heartache.”

Joyce interlaced her arm with her husband’s and pulled him along toward the car. He unlocked the door and waited for her to enter. He squatted next to her and took her hand into his.

“Whatever you decide, you know I’m with you all the way, but all I want you to do is promise me that you will proceed with caution. So when is this child to be born and when must you make a decision?”

“Three days.”

“Three days? Honey, that’s too soon to make a decision like this. Tell them you need more time.”

“I can’t, if I don’t bring her the money in three days, someone else will get the child. I don’t want to miss this opportunity.”

“Okay, okay, but I want you to know that I am uncomfortable about this whole thing.”

“Don’t worry, she’s really nice. I feel very confident that this is going to work out.”

“I’ll go with you and we’ll do this together.”

“No. She only wants to deal with me.”

“So you’re giving her a check right.”

She shook her head no. “She wants the money in cash. The mother will only take cash for payment. Honey

something like this can't be transacted with traceable money. No money orders, no bank checks, only cash."

Steve stood up and stretched his legs. He moved around the car, opened his door and got in. After closing the door, he pulled away from the curb and drove quietly. He couldn't believe that his wife was so blind not to see that something was wrong with this scenario. Why couldn't she see that she was being led to an ambush and that they were going to take her money from her and give her nothing for it? He could feel his wife's eyes on him, beckoning him to look at her but in this case there was nothing she could tell him about paying someone a hundred thousand in cash that would make him feel comfortable about it. He reasoned that her blind ambition was making her think irrationally. Joyce connected with the nurse so well, he wondered if she was the one trying to hoodwink his wife out of their hard-earned money. Not wanting to upset her further, he didn't say another word about it during the ride home.

Joyce realized that this whole situation made him uncomfortable, but she had a really good feeling about it. Nothing about this woman made her feel the need for precaution; it was well worth the risk.