

CHAPTER FIVE

“Girl, don’t be no fool,” one of Charity’s longtime friends, Yolanda, said before she crammed an appetizer into her mouth.

Charity sighed as she picked at the cucumbers and tomatoes in her garden salad. She had since called Elisha and apologized for not making it to her book fair. Instead, she decided to go out to lunch with some friends she hadn’t seen in a while. Since talking with Milton this morning, she still had reservations about meeting him later in the evening.

“Don’t listen to her, girl,” another one of her high school friends, Renita, chimed in. “We were just kids back then. That was so long ago. But look at him today. He’s a college graduate, an officer in the military—”

“*Decorated* officer,” Charity corrected with a smile.

Yolanda rolled her eyes and shook her head as she reached for another boneless buffalo wing.

“Yes exactly, a decorated officer. And he’s come back home to get the woman he loves.” Renita smiled.

Yolanda mimicked a gagging motion with her finger in front of her mouth. “You two are living in la-la land. No man is going to come back for his *supposed* sweetheart,” she said with curled lips while her two friends looked on, “to start anything serious while he’s traveling the world over.” She sucked her teeth. “Get real.”

“What are you trying to say, Yolanda, that I’m not good enough?”

“Charity,” Yolanda started in a daunting tone, “I have dated plenty of guys in the military and some who work for Fortune 500 companies. And all they want to do is play little childish games. Did it ever occur to you that maybe when we were *kids* back then,” she grimaced at Renita, “that all he wanted was a good time? Hence what I said, *games*.”

“You can’t believe that all guys are like that,” Renita challenged her.

“Hmmm, let’s see . . .” Yolanda stared at the friend they referred to as the black Barbie doll with a soulful voice and said, “What happened to Jason?”

Renita abruptly closed her parted lips.

“Yeah, I thought so.” Yolanda smirked and then turned back to Charity. “All I’m saying is to watch yourself. You’ve saved yourself this long, don’t mess up now.”

Charity’s eyelashes gently fluttered as she took Yolanda’s words to heart, remembering that she had been saving herself until Milton.

“Charity, follow your heart,” then Renita rolled her eyes at Yolanda, “and not *her* head. If you listen to her, you’ll see where it’ll get you.”

Charity smiled as Yolanda sucked her teeth at Renita again while Renita gave her the hand. They took playful jabs at one another that ended in a good-hearted laugh. The three young women only

met when they all traveled home for a visit and this happened to be the weekend of the season. Yolanda was visiting her parents for an extended Thanksgiving holiday since she had settled in Seattle and was scheduled to work through Christmas, while Renita drove down a few hours from Alabama simply because she knew her friends would be in town.

“Where is our food?” Yolanda gaped around the crowded restaurant for their waiter. “They need to hurry up because these wings are about to run out.”

“Girl, how do you stay in shape with the way that you eat?” Charity asked Yolanda.

With a proud smile, Yolanda replied, “Good ‘ole fashioned exercise and my daddy’s good genes.” She laughed as Renita and Charity nodded with smiles on their faces.

“That’s right, your father was a slim man, but he had a big heart.” Charity gently touched Yolanda’s hand from across the table, remembering the funeral from three years ago.

“A big heart *and* a firm hand,” she mentioned with a giggle. “That man didn’t play around when it came to whooping us. My sister and I used to hide under the table when he would try to beat us as kids.” Yolanda giggled again as she dipped the last wing in a small cup of ranch dressing. “That’s the kind of man I’m holding out for, someone like my dad,” she paused, and then added, “minus the firm hand.”

All three women busted out laughing. Outings like these really made Charity homesick, but not enough to move back to Lewiston Springs. She was comfortable where she lived and the only thing that would make her consider moving is the husband God chooses for her.

“Well, I told Milton that I’d give him a trial run,” Charity said as she slowly stirred her pink lemonade with a clear straw.

“Cee, are you sure?” Yolanda gazed at Charity and then raised an eyebrow at Renita.

“Hey, don’t look at me,” Renita responded, “I think she should go for it. People do change.”

Charity nodded, contemplating the opinions posed by both of her friends. She took a sip of her drink and carefully placed the glass back on the table as she said, “I’ll give him until Christmas to prove himself ... make him my *Christmas* boyfriend.” She intermittently smiled with a sense of confidence. “Yes, that’s what I think I’ll do.”