

**Love** is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

I Corinthians 13:4-7

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# Chapter One

## Beyond Love

Three years later.

October 10, Brandon visited Aisha. She greeted him at the door he gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Hi Sis, how are you? What you got to eat?” as he opened the fridge. “I want something to snack on.” Puzzled, Aisha looked at him, “There is some left-over meatloaf you can make a sandwich or pop a frozen pizza in the microwave. What brings you out this evening?” Brandon sat in the oversized-chair with meatloaf sandwich in his hand. “I just want to visit and talk.”

Aisha took a seat, “Okay, Bro, I’m all ears.” “Sis, you know within a year TT and me are getting married.” Aisha seethed her teeth, “Tell me something I don’t know.” Brandon put his sandwich to the side. “Well, you know Ned will be there.” She stood, “I know that, Brandon.” He took a sip of his fruit juice. “How would you feel seeing him? Would you date him again?”

Aisha’s voice went up two octaves. “Brandon, I haven’t seen or spoken to Ned in three years. I don’t know if I would date him again.” Brandon sat to the edge of the chair. “What kind of answer is that? If you don’t know, then who does? You got to do better than that.” In a calmer tone, Aisha softly spoke, “I don’t hate Ned. We didn’t see eye to eye on some issues.”

Brandon cleared his throat, “Let me put it to you another way, what if Ned came to the wedding with a date or maybe a wife?” Aisha threw up her hands, “Then that’s something out of my control and it is what it is. Do you know something that I don’t?” He sat with his back pressed to the chair, “No, just giving different scenarios.” Brandon’s visit was two-fold.

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Aisha eyeballed Brandon as he sat his drink on the coffee table and determined, she insisted, “Now I know you didn’t come over here just to ask me about Ned. What gives?” Brandon stood, “I’m a little hesitant about the wedding. Not because I don’t love TT, because I do. I want to be her everything,” Aisha interrupted, “Is that why you’re not getting married this year?”

Brandon sat, “No, it’s not. We wanted to be financially sound. I’m second guessing the marriage, because I have deep love and devotion for TT, but I question whether that would be enough to sustain our marriage. I want to respect her space. And, I don’t want to make a mistake like dad did when he made the decision to marry Marlene.” Aisha laughed, “Marlene faked a pregnancy to get dad. TT isn’t pregnant...is she?” “No, she is not.” “I believe ya’ll are off to a good start as long as there is no distrust between you.” “You’re probably right Sis.” Brandon had his own drawbacks and withheld some information from Aisha.

It’s been two weeks since Aisha had spoken with Brandon. She awoke to the sound of her alarm clock. With one eye opened, Aisha peeped at the red digital numbers that read five fifteen a.m. She didn’t need to get up until five forty-five a.m. Aisha pushed the snooze button for another fifteen minutes. Setting the clock thirty minutes early had become a habit with her.

Aisha took a quick shower, had a bowl of Special K, and a six ounce glass of orange juice. There were times before she would have eaten more for breakfast. For a year Aisha has been on a health kick.

Aisha was pleased her ride to school was uneventful, because she wanted to get there early so she could walk a mile around the track. Aisha had put in a request to leave

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early. Once in the classroom, she wanted to make sure her lesson plans were laid out for the substitute teacher, Aisha was glad the substitute was on time.

She left work, drove her car to the subway station, caught the train, and got off at Metro Center. Aisha strolled through Freedom Plaza taking in the sites. She stood in the center of the Plaza and marveled at the view of the Capitol. Then she went across the street to the Ronald Reagan Building to get something to eat. Aisha noticed some people seated to the left of her as she was headed to one of the food stations. She did a double take, because one of the three gentlemen seated at the table with this non-descript woman looked like Ned! She thought *it can't be*.

To satisfy her curiosity, she purchased her food and walked back in their direction looking for a seat. Before she reached their section, Ned walked towards her. Aisha nearly dropped her tray of food. With a wide grin, "Aisha, I thought that was you. It's good to see you again. How have you been?" Nervously, she replied, "I'm fine, Ned, and how have you been?" "I've been okay." It was awkward Aisha managed to extend her sweaty hand under the tray. "Put that tray down. I don't want a hand shake, I want a hug." Aisha did as she was told. She enjoyed Ned's quick embrace.

His next remarks caught her off guard. He searched her face, "You've changed your number?" With assessing eyes, "Yes, I did have it changed." Ned paused for a moment, "May I have your new number and is it okay if I call you sometimes?" Aisha reached in her purse and gave Ned her card. The warmth that came over her from Ned's embrace was still there even after he left her standing and returned to his table. She thought *he is still fine!*

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On the subway ride back to her car, Aisha was smiling as if she had some deep, dark secret. She was pleased with seeing Ned again. Aisha wondered if the woman at the table was with Ned.

She was reasoning with herself. I know Ned's been dating since our breakup. I know I have. My dates have been far and few in between. Goodness knows casual sex was definitely out of the question. There is too much going on in the world today. There are a lot of brothers on the down low.

Two weeks later Ebony visited Aisha. They had finished eating a tuna sandwich on wheat toast, chips and a Kosher Dill pickle. Aisha cleared the table and placed the paper plates and napkins in the trash. She joined Ebony in the living room where they chatted. Ebony played a Stanley Clark jazz CD. She danced to the beat of the music. Aisha watched Ebony dance and blurted out, "I bumped into Ned two weeks ago."

Ebony turned the volume down her voice went up an octave. "You did what?" "Where did you see him?" Aisha sat with her back arched to the sofa. "I saw him downtown." Ebony narrowed her eyes. "And you're just telling me now!" Nonchalantly, "There isn't much to tell. I saw him at the eatery in the Ronald Reagan Building and he asked for my number."

"Uh-huh." Ebony turned the CD off, sat on the sofa and eyeballed Aisha. "How did it feel seeing him again?" Aisha looked down at her open palms. "I had mixed emotions shocked, angered and puzzled." Ebony asked, "Why mixed emotions?" "I don't know how to say this." Aisha paused looked to the ceiling as if to get an answer.

"Shocked because he was not alone, he was with two men and a woman. I said to myself

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that she was non-descript, but she was gorgeous. I was angered because he embraced me, and I felt the warmth even after he left me standing there.”

Ebony’s next question was direct. “Would you go out with him if he asked you?” Aisha looked away. “I’m not sure if I would.” She turned to Ebony, “Okay, give me one good reason why I should go out with Ned?” Ebony snapped her fingers, “Let’s see, for starters you don’t hate the man.” She massaged her chin. “I can give you numerous reasons. Ya’ll are months away from becoming family.” She touched Aisha’s shoulder. “You know Aisha, some things go beyond love. Face it girl you did love the man.” Aisha stood, “Why should I listen to you?” Ebony smiled and shot back. “The fact that I’m thirteen years older and the wisdom alone should be enough.” Aisha waved her hands, sat on the arm of the over-sized chair. “I’m changing the subject. So, what are you wearing to the fund raiser for the Boarder Babies?”

Using her calculating mind Ebony sighed. “If the two hundred guests show up at one hundred and fifty dollars a plate, thirty thousand dollars is a nice piece of change and it’s for a worthy cause.” Aisha went behind the sofa and whispered in Ebony’s ear, “I know that, but what are you wearing?” Ebony turned in Aisha’s direction, “Oh, I see you got jokes. I guess I’ll wear my black dress I wore at the Christmas party last year or maybe buy a new outfit. What will you grace us with?”

Before Aisha could answer, their conversation was interrupted when the phone rang. Ebony noticed the gleam in Aisha’s eyes as she said, “Hello.” Ned nervously on the other end tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair. “Hi Aisha, this is Ned, are you busy?” She smiled, “No, I’m not.” “I was wondering would you consider going for a ride in the countryside with me one day next week.” “I’ve got to think about that.” She sat on

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the sofa beside Ebony with the cordless phone. Ebony rubbed her index fingers in a teasing jester at Aisha. She looked at Aisha with a smile and mouthed, "I've got to go." She used her key to lock the door behind her.

Aisha thought when Ned suggested calling her that it meant getting together and going out for a drink. That way she could make a quick exit. A ride in the country would mean more time with him. In her silence, Ned continued, "I've some time off next week. Let me know which day would be better for you Wednesday or Thursday?" Aisha stood, "Okay, should I call you at the number that's on my caller ID?" He answered, "Yes, you can. It's my cell."

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Roz was up at six thirty Tuesday morning she allowed herself plenty of time to get to her appointment. Roz ascertained ailments sure play a major role when you get older. Now, not only does she have to see an eye doctor, arthritis has her body in such pain. She could remember a time when she didn't have any aches and pains.

Roz had not been a lady of leisure. She viewed her retirement as a chance for her and Bill to do more adventurous and fun things. In the grand scheme of life, it doesn't always work out that way. There are the grandchildren, which she adores. Then there is Brandon's upcoming wedding. Her hands would be full. So, the fun things would be put on hold.

Roz showered and was dressed by seven thirty. She heard the whistle of the tea pot on the stove and went swiftly to the kitchen. She brewed a cup of Earl Grey lemon flavored tea, had a banana and a slice of wheat toast with orange marmalade.

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She arrived at the doctor's office at nine a.m., signed the appointment sheet and noticed three patients were already there. By the time she sat down four more patients walked in. Her appointment was scheduled for nine thirty, and by the looks of things fifteen more people had that same appointment. Roz thought *why do doctors do that? Schedule everyone for the same time?* She observed six more patients that walked in before the technician called her back to one of the exam rooms. Leaving the exam room, Roz returned to the waiting area, squinted and took a seat as she tried to adjust her eyes to the light.

Several patients entered the waiting room and spoke, "Good morning." Some patients spoke. The fact that they spoke back was rare. In today's society, everyone is preoccupied with their own thoughts. Roz remembers being taught that when you entered a room you should speak. She had lots of waiting time that she used to listen to and watch other patients in the waiting area.

Roz overheard two women patients seated across the room as they discussed their ordeal with the technician. One lady said, "I hope what I have isn't astigmatism." "What's that?" the other lady asked. "I don't know. The doctor checked my eyes. I'm going blind in one eye."

Roz noticed a middle-aged white couple seated across from her. She was intrigued by their interaction and conversation. The wife dressed in a gray T-shirt and blue jeans pulled out her cell phone the husband did the same. The husband was dressed in a dark blue T-shirt, Levi's and worn a dark blue cap that he removed several times to scratch his head. They were comparing something. The wife yawned. The husband asked her, "Why are you so tired?" The wife never answered him. Instead, she rubbed the nape

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of his neck with the palm of her hand, massaged it, and moved her hand down to his shoulder. He massaged her knee and rested his hand there. She palmed the top of his head, interlocked her arm with his. "Is that better," he asked?" He got up to go to the rest room.

Roz thought, *how awesome, so early in the morning and this couple displayed such strong affection for each other. Love still reigns.* The wife looked at Roz, "We got up early this morning to tend to the horses and he drank a pot of coffee." Roz looked at her with assessing eyes and smiled.

Roz was still waiting for her second visit to the exam room. She closed her eyes momentarily only to be jolted back into the moment when an elderly male patient entered the reception area yelling. "I don't like things past due! I thought I had paid my bill. I got a bill from you stating my payment is ninety days past due. I don't want anything to go to the credit report. It's your fault, not mine! I told you to take sixty dollars you took thirty dollars instead." Roz didn't know how that turned out because she was called back to the exam room to see the doctor.