

1109 Sixth Street

by
Janis Wright

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If I missed anything including your name, it is a mistake of the head, not the heart.

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Chapter 1

“Friendship, Yams and Collard Greens”

Tina’s eyelids fluttered for the tenth time since the alarm clock so violently went off about ten minutes ago. She was definitely not a morning person and never had been. As a child, she had taken pretending that she was up and moving around to a whole new level. Big Mama would wake her up and warn her every morning that she was not coming back to call her again and Tina better get up and get ready for school. Well, Big Mama wasn’t here, but that alarm clock was just as bad. Tina just could never seem to jump out of bed like some morning addicts. Some folks love to get up early. Those pitiful folks should seek counseling. It should be against the law for anyone to get out of bed before 10:00 A.M.

“Oh, no. I waited too long. There’s that darn snooze alarm. I hate you.”

Tina said these words with enough venom to kill a 300 pound man from a distance of 50 feet. She banged her hand on the table several times before finally finding that snooze button. Tina’s thought each morning was that she would love to find the person who invented alarm clocks. She would go up to the person with her phoniest smile and best sugary tone and just break all ten of his fingers. She didn’t know who’s bright idea it was to invent the annoying dastardly alarm on the clock but it had to be a man because a woman had better sense than to invent something so disgusting.

Tina walked across the room to her bathroom without opening her eyes. You would think that she would have learned her lesson two years ago when she broke her baby toe while walking to the bathroom. Tina discounted this accident because her cleaning lady had moved her vanity table from it’s normal place on the wall.

Tina turned on the faucet, adjusting the flow of the water to make it lukewarm. She grabbed her toothbrush and tooth paste. She gave the toothpaste a generous squeeze and begin to vigorously brush her teeth. She rinsed her mouth out and threw water on her

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face. Now she opened her eyes for the first time that day. Tina took a big swig of Listerine and thought why is it that Listerine is the choice of mouthwash for everybody born south of the Mason-Dixie line? You know everybody who's anybody from the South live and die by the merits of Listerine. Thank goodness they finally flavored it. She turned on the shower and adjusted it to lukewarm, not a degree warmer.

"My first day back. I gotta look professional and no nonsense. Gotta remind my staff of who's in charge. Let's see, navy blue suit, off-white blouse, and navy-blue pumps."

Tina carefully laid her *power* outfit on the bed. She grabbed her navy hose, her Victoria's Secret navy bikini panties and matching push up bra. She wanted to look stern on the outside but in her own mind she still had to be feminine. Tina glanced at that hideous clock. She knew that she had better get a move on or she would be late. Tina considered the start of her day to be perfect when she could take a leisurely 20 minute lukewarm shower. She would have to cut it to 10 minutes this morning. This was not going to be a good morning starting out this way.

* * * * *

Having dressed quicker than normal, Tina stood in front of her vanity and shook her newly done twist hairdo and applied her lipstick. Then she walked over to the mirrors in the north corner of her bedroom. One of Tina's few pet peeves was that a professional woman should always look the part. She had three adjoining mirrors installed in her bedroom like the ones you see in an upscale department store where with one look she could see herself from the front, back and sides. She stood admiring her size 14 body. If only she could slim those hips down, that would be great. Nothing seem to help. She'd tried dieting, exercising, yoga, prayer. Nothing has helped. If it wasn't for those darn hips, she could squeeze into a size 12. At least she has a nice pair of legs to go with the hips. Oh well, the entire package looks darn good. Tina grabbed a blackberry yogurt and headed out the door.

"Hold the elevator! Thanks."

“Good morning Ms. Samuels. Your car is out front, engine running and air on.”

“Thank you, Carl. I take it your new assistant has started since you’re on the elevator and my car is out front running.”

Carl, a man on whom humor was always wasted, dressed in his perpetually wrinkle free door man uniform stared at Tina with open mouth. “Yes, he started last Wednesday. It seems like I’m always training assistants. Maybe this one will stay more than a month.”

“I hope so too Carl. Have a nice day.” Tina punched in her alarm code and hopped into her candy apple red Nissan 350Z. She smiled and waved to Carl thinking that Carl would have better luck with his assistants if he wasn’t so anal about everything. She supposes because Carl worked 16 hour days, six days a week, 51 weeks a year, he can’t help but be anal. As Tina entered the ramp to I-71, she was grateful for the light traffic. She’d better enjoy it because the state fair was starting in a few weeks and that’s always a traffic nightmare.

* * * * *

“Good morning, Ms. Samuels. Welcome back.”

“Good morning, Jennifer.”

“Ms. Samuels, you have a meeting at 9:00 and 11:00 today. I prioritized your messages in the order of importance. People who didn’t want to leave a message, I told them that you weren’t returning until day after tomorrow. That will give you time to get caught up on those messages on your desk.”

“Good looking out, Jennifer. Who’s my 9 and 11 o’clock with?”

“Your 9 o’clock is with the president. He sent a memo to all of the VP’s on Friday. Your 11 o’clock is with the marketing director from Hills Foods. You were courting him for their account before you went on vacation. You set it up the day you left.”

“That’s right. This 9 o’clock with the president sounds like a knee-jerk meeting. Our weekly VP meeting is tomorrow. What’s in the rumor mill about this meeting?”

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“Rumor mill has it that ‘Jorge of the Jungle’ has been offered a job on the west coast. His secretary, Lori, said the president asked her if she had ever considered moving to California.”

“Well, well. I go down South for four weeks and everything goes haywire.”

“Ms. Samuels you mean four days don’t you. You left on Wednesday and returned Saturday night.”

“Believe me Jennifer, it was four weeks. Here, it may have been four days, but there it seemed 10 times longer.” Tina sifts through the first few messages. “Jennifer, get Mr. Nash on the phone for me. Wait ten minutes and get Mr. Neilsen for me. If I’m still talking to Mr. Nash, buzz me. You know how Mr. Nash gets going about his daughter-in-laws from Alabama. He thinks everybody from Alabama knows each other.”

“Right away, Ms. Samuels. It sure is good to have you back.”

* * * * *

Tina was lost in thought replaying her conversation with Mr. Neilsen. He wanted champagne service for orange juice money. Plus, he was a name dropper. She had little tolerance for name droppers. Most of the time if you asked that person whether they know the name dropper, they don’t. Tina couldn’t stand people who go through life always trying to get something for nothing. Big Mama always says if it’s too good to be true, it probably ain’t. Oops. Its 8:55. Better get going. Bill Jorge hates it when his VP’s enter a meeting after he begins talking. The man was a control freak and had a serious case of needing 100% attention all of the time from everybody in his meetings.

Tina was the second vice-president to arrive in the president's conference room. The table in the conference room could seat 16 people, seven on each side and one person at each end. Tina thought as she looked at his empty chair, you'd never know it seats 16 because "King Jorge" won't allow another seat to be placed at the opposite end from him. He wants to make sure that everybody knows he is in control. That's why he always enters when he thinks all VP's have answered and arrived to his summons. He had some

strange idiosyncrasies, but thus far he had been very fair to Tina. In fact, he has always taken a special interest in Tina. She had no idea why he showed special interest in her, but she was grateful he did.

Tina looked around the room and began to reflect on how hard she had had to work to get the opportunity to sit and hang with the big boys. She always had to be smarter, quicker, more accurate and darn near psychic just to get what she deserved. She was the only female and the only African American vice-president in the entire corporation. Tina always sat in the chair closest to the door. You never knew who these good ole boys may have pissed off. Just in case someone came in on a hot July day in a black trench coat and a sister had to make a quick exit, she could be out of there in a flash.

Sitting to her immediate right was John the whiner. That man whined more than any two-year old. No matter what the situation, he complained and whined. Anytime procedures changed, he made the biggest fuss. He was always trying to get out of work. Now, if she did that, the first thing that would be said is that she was lazy and didn't want to work. The last time John came to Tina's office whining, Tina told him that she had been meaning to show him something. She then asked him to follow her. She walked outside of her office and when John came out behind her, she walked back in and slammed her door right in his face. He had the nerve to peek in and tell her that if she expects to progress further in the organization, she has got to learn to be a team player. Tina rolled her eyes, swiveled her chair around so that he could only see her high back chair and proceeded to make a telephone call.

Tina glanced up when she saw Jim the Jerk walk in and sat next to John. He always played John like a piano. Jim is a fire-starter. He starts the office fire and then hides and watch the fireworks. When Tina first got her promotion to VP, she'd had it out with him. He hasn't messed with her since. He had the audacity to tell one of her directors that he did not need to check with her before sending an ad campaign to production because the director had more experience than Tina did in that department. After Tina counted to 10, she marched to Jim's office and had a "Dutch aunt" conversation with him. Big Mama always said when you have to have a Dutch aunt conversation, make sure that there are no witnesses. It becomes their word against yours. Mr. big-bad Jim hasn't crossed her since

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and that's been over four years ago. Tina looked up and smiled at Jim as she thought about the words and things she had said to him. Jim caught her smiling at him, and he did as he always did, turned red and glared at her. Other VP's couldn't understand why Jim hated her so much. Let's just say that it is one of those don't ask don't tell situations.

The last VP to come in is cigar-chewing Alex Mann. He must be the most disgusting man on earth. He's five feet three inches tall, wears glasses as thick as pop bottles and he has one-fourth of his hair left that he combs to the front to cover a portion of one of his many bald spots. The company has excellent dental benefits and the man has never had his teeth cleaned in the 20 years that he has worked there. He weighs 260 pounds and was born with a cigar in his foul mouth. Since the building became smoke-free, he just walks and sits all day with the cigar hanging off of his lips. His wife spends 363 days a year in Florida. She comes home to spend Christmas Eve and Christmas day with him. Rumor has it that she has a boy-toy living with her under the pretense of being a handy man. Alex is VP of research and development. He never liked Tina from day one when she was hired as a marketing analyst. He still has yet to congratulate her for being promoted to VP four years ago. Tina always makes sure that the powers-to-be know exactly when her department receives their work from Alex's department just in case he gets selective amnesia if a deadline is missed. The man definitely has issues.

Tina knew that it was nine o'clock without looking at her watch. Bill Jorge entered the conference room from his office. Bill was over six feet tall, athletic build, ruggedly handsome, close cut dark hair, always meticulously dressed and wore a permanent scowl. He has never been married and no one has ever seen him with a woman. The women in the company have decided that he must be gay to be over 40, relatively handsome, never married and never fools around with any woman in the office. The men believe that he must be involved with a married woman and keeps her hidden away. The one thing that everyone agrees upon is that he is Mr. Perfection and always super professional. He always gets right to the point, no preliminaries.

"Glad to see all of you are on time." Bill looked directly at Alex as he emphasized the words *on* time. "I'll get right to the point." He has never done anything differently. "The parent company has offered me a position on the west coast with another subsidiary. I will be working between the two companies from now until the end of the fiscal year. At which time, one of you will most likely be named as the new CEO. I will have a major say in who succeeds me. I know each of you, your strengths and your weaknesses. I have a couple of front runners but will make my final decision three months from today. This is not a competition. Just do your job the way you normally would. Please remember our weekly VP meeting tomorrow morning at 9:00 A.M. Thank you for your time and attention. Have a good day." No one was really shocked at his announcement since the rumor mill is usually true, everyone was expecting just what he said. The VP's got up, gathered their things and began to leave. Usually, Bill Jorge would have gone back into his office, but today he was watching his executives.

"Tina, please come into my office before returning to your department."

"I'll be right there." Tina thought what is it now. She gathered her stuff and walked into his office. Each time she came into his office she felt like a secret service agent trying to find some clue as to who Bill Jorge really is. First of all, it was quite rare that he ever invited anyone into his office. He generally came to his subordinates or they would meet him in his conference room. The man was a little strange. He didn't have any photos, paper weights, desk ornaments or anything that indicated that he had a life outside of this office. The only things on his desk were a telephone and a desk pad; no calendar, no pens, no paper. He ate alone and rarely attended any company functions. He made it mandatory that his VP's attend all company functions. He had been with the parent company for a little over ten years. He was not well-liked, he did not communicate well, he never exhibited any camaraderie with any employee, yet he is the CEO of a major subsidiary. Tina worked at not being resentful knowing how hard she had worked to earn her Bachelor's and then her MBA just to be able to play ball in this game. The one good thing Tina could say is that he fought to get

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her promoted. She still can't figure out why he went to bat for her like he did. The other VP's didn't want a woman and they definitely didn't want a Black woman. Like Big Mama always say, you don't always get what you want.

Tina entered the president's office and sat opposite him at the small round table in the east corner of the room. "Bill, I have an 11:00 A.M. appointment with the marketing director of Hills Food. Should I reschedule?"

"No. This will only take a few minutes. First of all Tina, I want to go on record to say that you have done a tremendous job as VP of Marketing. I knew you would and that is why I went to bat for you four years ago. I got beat up on the telephone, in the board room and on the golf course for my selection. I knew you were the right person for the job and I wouldn't take anyone else. You have made the company millions with your innovative program of accepting projects from other companies who wanted to outsource. Now, your program is used by all the other subsidiaries. They haven't been able to bring in the dollars like you have."

"Thank you Bill. My department is a team of dedicated employees who make me look good."

"People who don't really know you may believe that, but I know better. Anyway, that's not what this meeting is about. I wanted to let you know that you are one of the two front runners to be my successor." Tina blinked several times and stared at him in amazement. Never in her wildest dream would she have thought that she would even make the list; the very short list. She was working her mouth but nothing was coming out. Finally, she found her voice. She could almost feel her voice box traveling back up her body from the bottom of her feet, past her shaking knees, then past her churning stomach back to where it should be to allow her to speak.

"Bill, I am flabbergasted. I am speechless and that's a rare occurrence for me."

"Well, Tina. I have known for almost three months that I would be moving to the West Coast. I have been in conversation for that length of time about whom would be the best person to take the reins from me. I gave them two names, yours was one of them. I'm fighting the same battle as I did for you four years ago. It is

unbelievable that a company the size of our parent company has never had a Black female CEO in any of the 50 plus subsidiaries. This is the twenty-first century! We have Black women in charge in almost every walk of life. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we had a Black woman as president of the United States within the next 16 to 20 years. Just wanted you to know, Tina."

"Bill, thank you for your support and confidence in me."

"I didn't do anything. You prepared yourself educationally. You started out at the bottom and worked hard to get where you are."

"I was raised to be prepared when opportunities come your way. My grandmother always said opportunity is like a bald-headed man, you can only catch it when its coming towards you. Once an opportunity or bald-headed man passes you, no matter how hard you try, you can't grab either one."

"That's one that I have never heard."

Bill Jorge abruptly got up from the table facing the rising eastern sun and walked to his desk and sat down. He began working just as if Tina wasn't in the room. Tina knew that their talk was over. That's how the man ended his talks. The man has some issues. He obviously has never heard of transitioning. And another thing Tina thought, it is strange that no one has ever seen him smile or laugh. That is too strange. Tina gathered her things and left quietly through the door leading to the conference room.

When Bill Jorge heard Tina close the door leading to the hall from the conference room, he collapsed on his desk and began laughing hysterically. He couldn't get the image out of his head of someone trying to catch a bald-headed man from the back. He was finally able to say two sentences to himself, "Tina's grandmother has some terrific sayings that describe every situation to a T. I've got to remember that one."

* * * * *

Tina walked as professionally as she could down the hall. In her head she was doing cartwheels, the cabbage patch, and talking to herself, "You bad. Tina, girl you are bad! Wait until I call Big Mama tonight and tell her what list her baby's name is on. CEO!"

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CEO! Who would have thought that a little Black girl from Greenfield Junction, Alabama, would be in the board room of a major corporation in Columbus, Ohio, and now being considered for CEO. I've got to tell somebody now. I can't call Big Mama now. She's not home." For as long as Tina could remember, Big Mama has always gone to mission meeting on Monday mornings and then to her sewing circle in the afternoons. Tina continued having a conversation in her head, "I'll see if I can get Kim on the phone. CEO! I've got to tell somebody." It was very difficult for Tina to keep both feet on the floor. She was as close to flying as she had ever been.

"Jennifer, will you please get Attorney Kim Davis on the phone?"

"Right away, Ms. Samuels."

Tina walked calmly into her office and closed the door. She walked over to her large window that looked out onto her department of 40 people and closed the blinds. Then she did the happy dance and said a silent prayer. The intercom brought her out of her reverie. "Yes, Jennifer."

"Attorney Davis had court this morning. I left a message for her to call you as soon as she returns."

"Thank you, Jennifer."

Tina met Kim Davis the very first day that she arrived in Columbus. They met at Jake's. Tina had just moved into her apartment and had not unpacked any kitchen utensils and even if she had, there was no food. She had asked the apartment manager where was the nearest place to get a meal. The manager told her to walk two blocks east and there was a small restaurant called Jake's. Tina was a thick girl and she felt as if she had not eaten for days. In reality, it had only been six hours since she had eaten breakfast. Tina walked the two blocks in record time. She saw this old wood single story house with a very modern looking sign out front that said Jake's. Tina thought her apartment manager must be out of her mind to send her to a place that looked like this and expect her to eat here. The paint had peeled in so many places for so long that you couldn't tell what the last color was. Had the house been last painted white, gray, or that vulgar green. Tina stood out front deciding

should she continue further east or go back, get her car and go to one of the fast food restaurants near the airport.

"Girl, you need to get your behind off of your shoulders and go on into Jake's."

"Excuse me."

"That's right, you should be excused. The way you are standing out here with your nose turned up as if you can smell a paper mill nearby. Just who do you think you are?"

"I know who I am. I am Ms. Samuels. Who might you be?"

"Who might I be? I might be your mama. Or, I might be your man's woman."

One thing for sure is that we are all in the same boat so don't try to act high and mighty with me. You probably one of those educated sisters who thinks she's better than the rest of us."

"I don't know who you are but..."

"*Ms. Samuels*, girl you know you are hungry. I can see it in your eyes. Plus, you stood out here too long debating whether you should go in. Those hips you are trying to hide under that jacket shows that you know about Southern cooking and Jake's has the best collard greens cooked with smoked turkey, candied yams, three cheese mac and cheese, over 21 and under 21 potato salad, ribs and blackberry slickum."

"They have blackberry slickum?"

Kim grabbed Tina by the hand and pulled her quickly to the door.

"*Ms. Samuels*, we won't be able to get a seat if we don't go in now. I see a group of regulars driving up."

Once Tina's eyes adjusted to the dim lighting inside, she couldn't believe her eyes. There were about a dozen tables that seat a maximum of four people each strategically placed around the room to provide privacy. Each table had a linen cream colored table cloth on it with a centerpiece filled with sunflowers. There was sparkling china, silver and crystal at each place setting. The servers were all men and wearing tuxedos. The hostess dressed in a black strapless tea length dress, silver dressy sandals and wearing a brilliant smile came over to them.

"Good evening ladies, welcome to Jake's. Table for two?"

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"Since the cat obviously has *Ms. Samuels'* tongue, I guess I'll have to answer. Yes, it's just two of us this evening."

"Follow me please"

"Jake, could we please sit on the patio."

"Of course, Attorney Davis."

The two women, who were as opposite as any two women could be, followed their hostess to the patio. The patio had about six or seven tables set exactly as the tables were inside. There was a fountain and the most beautiful flower garden Tina had ever seen encircled the fountain. For the first time, Tina noticed the soothing sound of an alto sax. She saw movement to her right and sure enough there was a man sitting on a stool playing "You are so Beautiful" on a shiny alto saxophone. They were seated right next to the fountain. The sound of the water was so relaxing. Listening to the sax and the water in the cool of the evening helped Tina to clear her head. Tina picked up her menu pretending to read it while she was actually looking at this crazy woman sitting at the table with her. Who does this woman think she is. She couldn't be more than 5 feet tall, weighs about 90 pounds, skin the color of a ripe pecan, sporting a short cut natural and talking to her as if she just saw her fall off of a turnip truck.

"Instead of sizing *me* up *Ms. Samuels*, you better look at your menu and get ready to order."

"Listen here Attorney Davis..."

"Are you ladies ready to order?" Both ladies jerked their heads up to see the face that went with the West African accent. The server was about five eight, dark complexion, shaved head, one deep dimple in his right cheek and blinding white sparkling teeth.

"Lu, we will have my usual, The Kitchen Sink."

"Sir, this is my first time here. I just met this mad woman outside and she is not ordering for me. Give me a few minutes."

"Etiquette says I should wait for you to eat. Today, I am throwing etiquette to the wind. Lu, while *Ms. Samuels* is studying the menu, please place my order. Thank you."

Tina rolled her eyes at her dinner companion. She thought the nerve of this little bitty woman trying to control her. This woman has some serious issues. Maybe she's on a day pass from the insane asylum. No, they know her here. Maybe she should be a permanent

resident at the insane asylum. The server returned to refill their glasses with water.

"Your bread will be out soon. Have you decided yet lovely lady?"

"Yes, I think I will try The Kitchen Sink too. No ribs please, instead I will have a double order of chicken, over 21 potato salad, vegetarian baked beans, cole slaw, corn on the cob, no yams but double the blackberry slickum, thank you." The server smiled and discretely walked away.

Kim threw her arms in the air and burst out laughing. "See, that's the very reason brothers say women like you are hard to get along with."

"I have taken all of the mouth and psychobabble I am going to take from you, a stranger to me, in one day. I want to have a pleasant meal. I am tired. I am hungry. I am sleepy."

"Say, no more. I am with you on all three. Let me formerly introduce myself. I am Kimberly Davis. I am short, sassy and have a whole bunch of mouth."

"I am Tina Samuels and you are right on all three accounts."

"I saw your reaction when we walked inside Ms. Snooty 5000. Fooled you didn't it?"

"Yes. Why won't they fix it up outside? Curve appeal is everything. Customers don't want to come into a run down looking place."

"Look around you, Tina. Do you see an empty table? Did you see an empty one inside? Curve appeal or not. This place is busy 7 days a week."

"I'm in marketing. I look at everything from that standpoint. If they fixed the place up, they could probably double their business."

"Well, I thought the same thing when I first came. Then Jake explained her philosophy to me. She said her place is like a good woman. You can't judge the good from the outside. She wants customers who appreciate the good things in life, like good food, fine dining, soft music, family and friendships. Her passion is in what she does, not how it looks."

"That all sounds good but it buys nothing at the grocery store."

That meeting happened almost 15 years ago. Kim is the sister that Tina never had.

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They laugh together. They cry together. They yell at each other and try to tell each other what's best for the other. It has proven to be very unwise to quite a few to challenge these two women together.

Chapter 2

“One Cup of Anxiety Mixed With One Gallon of Rage”

Jennifer only had about 15 seconds to decide whether she should buzz Ms. Samuels with this call or give it to her in person. Jennifer decided to do it in person. She knocked lightly on Tina's office door.

"Yes."

"It's me, Ms. Samuels."

"Come on in, Jennifer."

"Ms. Samuels, you have an important telephone call on line one."

Tina looked up from the report on which she was doing an analysis for her afternoon meeting. "Oh, is it Attorney Davis? You could have just buzzed me."

"No. It's a lady by the name of Emma Brown she said you would know her."

"Oh no. She's a friend of my grandmother's and her sister's daughter is relocating here. I told her that I would assist her in looking for an apartment. I haven't had time and I don't have time to talk to Miss Emma right now. If I stop to talk to her, I'll never get this report done today. Tell her I'm in a meeting."

"You better take it Ms. Samuels. She told me that your grandmother was rushed to the hospital and it is serious."

Tina heard ringing in her ears and her eyes felt like someone had just taken her picture using a giant flash. She couldn't focus on the telephone on her desk to pick up the receiver. It seemed like she had been trying for several minutes to lift the receiver. She could feel her pulse pounding in her head. She knew the exact second that her brain stopped working. She was paralyzed. She couldn't make her hand pick up the receiver. Jennifer lifted the receiver and spoke into it, then handed the receiver to Tina.

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Tina took the receiver and put it to her ear. She didn't say a word. She tried to say hello, yes, I'm here, but nothing came out. Finally, the whining condescending voice that she had heard every day of her life for 18 years rang in her ears.

"Tina, girl, are you there. This Miss Emma. Tina. Tina."

"I'm here."

"I know you just got back up there to your important job and all, but you got to come back home right now. Ida Mae got sick and they took her to the hospital in Montgomery. She looked real bad. I don't think she's going to make it. I haven't heard a word about her condition. She may be gone on to Glory right now for all I know. She was just talking the other day about who she wants to do what at her funeral and..."

"Miss Emma could I at least find out what's wrong before you start planning Big Mama's funeral?"

"Well, you don't have to get so snippy, Miss Important Executive. I was just trying to let you know what's going on. I didn't have to call you. It took me forever to find your number that Ida Mae wrote down for me a few years ago."

"I appreciate you taking the time to call me. I didn't mean to come off that way but I am worried about Big Mama. I'll get back there as soon as I can. I'll see you when I get there."

"Are you driving that fancy expensive red car of yours down here?"

"I don't know right now how I'm coming. I've got to go. Thanks again."

Tina felt like someone had punched her in the stomach and clobbered her in the head. Even the sick feeling in her stomach and the pain between her ears didn't stop her from wanting to just tell Miss Emma off. That woman would make the Pope commit assault and battery on her. One thing anyone who knew her could say is that she has never changed. She was nosy, rude, condescending and jealous. She had always been jealous of Tina. She had one adopted daughter, Evelyn. Miss Emma told everyone from the time she got Evelyn that Evelyn wouldn't be like the rest of the Black girls in Greenfield Junction. She and her husband showered Evelyn with everything imaginable. The rest of the girls got one pair of new tennis shoes when school began but Evelyn always had two or three

pairs. Evelyn had so many clothes that sometimes they would buy the same piece twice because they didn't remember that she already had the item. No matter how nice Miss Emma dressed Evelyn, she still didn't do well in school. Evelyn was retained twice in elementary school, once in junior high, and she finally dropped out in the tenth grade. Evelyn's lack of academic achievement only made Miss Emma hate Tina more.

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Tina had prayed all the way to the airport that she would not have to sit next to a talker on her flight. In the state of mind that she was in, it was no telling what she might say. She hated when people continued to talk to her after she had given out vibes to them that she did not want to be bothered. She often wondered what is wrong with people who cannot take a hint. As she walked rapidly through the plane to find her assigned seat, she dreaded this flight more and more. Finally, seat 6B, an isle seat. Well this flight is starting out on the wrong foot already. Tina put her two small pieces of luggage in the overhead compartment and slammed it shut with the force of a body builder. She was mad because she couldn't get any information from the hospital over the telephone. She was mad because one of her managers was out ill today and she would have to call back tomorrow, if he showed up, and brief him on the meeting she had with the other managers before leaving for the airport. She was mad because Big Mama was probably sick when she was home just a couple of days ago and never said a word about feeling bad and she was mad that she didn't have a window seat.

Tina sat down in seat 6B. She leaned her head back, closed her eyes and took a cleansing breath. She was just starting to relax a little when someone banged her in the head. She turned around to give whoever had hit her in the head a good tongue lashing when she looked into the face of a woman who looked like someone's grandma. The woman was too short to reach the overhead compartment. She was swinging the bag around trying to throw it in. Tina thought, now if she does get it in by throwing it up there, just how did she plan to get it down. Tina hated it when people did

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not logically think things through. Tina was about to suggest to the woman that she could take the bag up front to the closet when the flight attendant appeared.

“Ma’am, I can help you put that up there.”

“Well, it took you long enough to come and help me. I’ve been here five minutes just trying to get this bag in. That’s what I say about young folks, they don’t have any work ethics.”

The flight attendant’s smile got just a little bit tighter as she put the bag in the overhead compartment, “Okay, you are all set. The window seat is yours. If you need...”

“If you think for one minute that I am going to sit next to any window on this flying piece of metal, you must be crazy. If we start to go down, I don’t want to see the ground before I hit it. I told my son I didn’t want to fly, but that wife of his wouldn’t let him come and get me. She said flying would be better for everybody. Better for her, if we crash. She acts like she doesn’t want me to come and visit them. You better find me another seat quick, fast and in a hurry.”

Tina counted to ten and then stood up. “I’ll switch with you. I wanted a window seat anyway. Here, take my isle seat. You remind me of my grandmother. Once she makes up her mind, no one can change it and no one surely will get any peace until she gets her way.”

The older lady eyed Tina suspiciously, “What do you want in return? I know you want something. You’re not one of those people who try to get people involved in pyramid scams are you? I may be old, but I’m not stupid.”

“Look lady. I work an average of six days a week to take very good care of myself. I don’t need to try to get anyone involved in anything. I just offered you my seat because number one I wanted a window seat and number two I had a soft spot for your request because I would want someone to do the same for my grandmother. If you want the seat, let’s switch. If you don’t want it, please sit down and let the rest of us have peace and quiet.”

The flight attendant looked like she was about to burst with laughter. The lady stared angrily at Tina for a few seconds and then