

**DREAM COMES
TRUE**

Dreams Come True: Winning is Possible with the First Move
Published by PRELLA BOOKS
JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY

Copyright ©2019 APRIL WILLIAMS. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems without permission in writing from the publisher/author, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

All images, logos, quotes, and trademarks included in this book are subject to use according to trademark and copyright laws of the United States of America.

WILLIAMS, APRIL, Author
DREAMS COME TRUE
APRIL WILLIAMS

ISBN: 978-0-578-50986-0

QUANTITY PURCHASES: Schools, companies, professional groups, clubs, and other organizations may qualify for special terms when ordering quantities of this title. For information, email April.Smiles@Hotmail.com.

All rights reserved by APRIL WILLIAMS and PRELLA BOOKS.

This book is printed in the United States of America.

Book Review!

"Without giving anything away...It is very easy to fall in love with the main character of Mr. G. He is the epitome of achievement at the highest level, a role model to those who may doubt the color of their skin, the true hope of paying it forward, and the near-perfect man that all women deserve in their lives. Now we can rejoice and be assured that future generations will have this life-changing story to experience at the libraries, on their kindles, and via their iPhones."

Keith Perkins - Development Executive / LLeju Productions

"A remarkable book that will inspire you to envision what's possible, overcome setbacks and remain determined in fulfilling your purpose. Dreams Come True uncovers the key to being self-sufficient by embracing a devoted mindset and staying true to oneself."

"A brilliant modern-day reflection of how our ancestors selflessly created opportunities for themselves and others despite opposition. Dreams Come True promotes a non-traditional way of thinking when it comes to making choices and achieving success."

"Dreams Come True connects historical inspiration and purpose with a strong and relentless desire to succeed. A fabulous journey through determination, opportunity, joy and triumph that leaves readers encouraged and wanting more."

– Alicia Boyd, MBA, Corporate Marketing Professional

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

April Williams is a dedicated and passionate business woman who has tried her hands in several business ventures in the bid to get financial fulfillment. She's a divorced single mother of one, and grandmother to two beautiful grandchildren, Aiden and Bryce.

April worked in the Entertainment Industry, with Warner Communications, WEA International and after twenty years of stewardship, she had a Cruise travel agency. Then later she started another business—a brick and mortar store baby boutique. Ever since April ventured into the world of entrepreneurship, there has been no going back. She has ventured into several businesses where she has learnt a lot and helped people in her community. She has now pitched her tent in the real estate world, and this has presented an opportunity for her to apply everything she has learnt in her life and career, and she wishes to pass the knowledge along to the younger generation.

April has drawn inspiration from watching TV shows like “The Profit,” starring Marcus Lemonis.’ She was, however, driven to write this book after watching

Oprah's master class with Jay-Z being interviewed. In the interview, Jay-Z explained that people in his neighborhood and other nearby neighborhoods liked and appreciated his music, and this motivated him to start seeking for ways to make his music accessible to millions of other people who haven't heard his sound. His words resonated in April's heart, and made her start seeking for ways to share all the knowledge she has acquired over the years, with the younger generation, who'll need it to easily navigate the waters of life. Her aim is to use this book to encourage people to believe in themselves and have the passion and inspiration to make their dreams come true.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my grandchildren, Aiden and Bryce. Your dreams are valid! Work on them and make them come true, and don't fail to help other people's dreams come true also.

Tia my daughter and Mona my mother.

Thank you Holy Spirit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	4
DEDICATION.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	1
SUMMERTIME.....	16
NEW BEGINNINGS	67
BLESSED TO BLESS	109
WALKING BY FAITH	131
CLOSING DAY	153
IT'S A SMALL WORLD	170
SAVANNAH	193
BLACK WALL STREET.....	236

INTRODUCTION

As the school bell rings at 8:45 am. G.'s students all enter the classroom. He asks the kids to bring their chairs and sit in a circle around him. When they have all settled down, he starts to speak.

“Tomorrow is the last day of school. I’m going to miss you all. I feel like you are my kids. I have taught you all in the past school year, and you are all doing well. I am very proud of you all. I worked my butt off to make sure you all understood the lessons that I have taught you. Now, today will be my final lesson. This lesson will not be from a book. It will be my take on life.

“After you hear what I have to say, the person you were when you walked into this classroom will not be the same person you’ll be when you walk out of this classroom. I want to give you my perspective on life. I would like for you to use it if you need it. I will not be with you guys when school starts in the fall. So, I want you all to see life in a different way than maybe you see life now. I hope and pray that what I share with you today makes a

positive impact on your thinking. Does anyone have any questions?"

Dana raises her hand.

"Yes, Dana."

"I just want you to know that you have already made a big impact on our thought process, Mr. G. You had taught all of us not to give up when the lessons got hard. You put us in groups so that we could also teach each other. We all had different gifts so all of us could help each other in the areas that we were strong, while you watched over all of us. So, no one in this classroom ever felt we weren't good enough. I want to thank you for that, Mr. G."

The students nod in agreement. Then Mr. G. smiles. "I didn't think you guys noticed that something so small could make a positive impact on all of you."

"So, Mr. G. what's on your mind? It must be pretty important since you have us all sitting around you so close," one of the students say.

"This actually makes us feel like family when we sit like this," another student says.

"We are family," Mr. G. says, and then he begins to speak from his heart as he sits on his desk with no barri-

ers between him and his students. “Okay, listen up. I want to talk to you about trade: buyers, sellers, and slaves. The United States was built on trade. We have people who study trade. They study buyers, sellers, and products. They analyze what we buy, how much we are willing to pay, and how much we can sell a product to make a profit. So, follow this conversation closely because I will be going all over the place to get you to my destination. I don’t want to lose any of you. I want us all to end up at the final destination together. Okay?”

The students nod in agreement.

G. continues, “Who is a slave?” He looks around for an answer, but none is forthcoming, so he proceeds. “A slave is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them. So, a person can be sold and brought to become a slave.

“Many centuries ago, the Portuguese, Dutch, and the British went to Africa and kidnapped Africans, killing many and taking many others home to make them slaves. We will just call the kidnappers as Europeans. Slavery was all about money and greed. I believe, in the beginning slavery was not about color. The Dutch brought the African slaves to Jamestown, Virginia purely for profit. There, they were sold to the Southerners. The Southerners were farmers, and they had a lot of lands called plantations. They needed to buy slaves and have them work

for free in their fields, so they wouldn't have to pay for workers. The Europeans that called themselves confederates became very rich.

“While working the fields, the slaves learned about the soil, herbs, planting, and harvesting. The slaves did all of the work. So, they were skilled laborers. Now, up North, the Dutch lived in this place called Amsterdam. They were afraid that the British would try to come over from Britain and take over their newfound land. So, the Dutch made their slaves build a wall along the north side of Amsterdam to keep the British out. Well, the British outsmarted the Dutch and come in from the south and captured the Dutch.

“They conquered the land and changed the name from Amsterdam to New York. They knocked the wall down, and the street where the wall used to be, is now known as Wall Street. This street was known for trading. Traders brought all kinds of goods from different parts of the country to sell on Wall Street, and to this day, Wall Street is still the hub of trading. It is the place where brokers do their trading. They sell securities and stocks and bonds. People buy little pieces of people's businesses, and they call it stocks. Some people loan money to the government and they call them bonds or securities.”

Mr. G. looks at the kids and sees that they're still paying rapt attention.

“Back in those days of the slave trade, the states also collected taxes to build the infrastructure. They built roads and railroads and so on. The people up north called the abolitionist, while they worked in factories, were seeing how the southerners were getting rich from free labor. They wanted it to stop. I believe they felt it just wasn’t fair. So, they came up with a plan. The southerners would have to pay taxes on all of their possessions. That included all of their slaves. They thought that maybe that would make them give up their slaves, but the Southerners pushed back and said they had more people in their state than up north like Delaware, Rhode Island, New Jersey, etc. So, they decided to go by voting. They voted ‘no’ to paying taxes on all of our possessions. When that didn’t work, the state delegates came up with a new plan called the three-fifths compromise. The compromise meant that out of every five slaves, the Southerners would only pay taxes on three. Out of the five slaves,

they would only consider three to be counted as people, to help balance out the majority. This was called the three-fifths compromise. This would help with the taxation and representation issue. So, my point is, slaves made the Southerners very rich. The Europeans, that’s the slave owners, would let the slaves in their houses cook their food and even feed their babies with their breasts—that’s for breastfeeding mothers amongst the slaves. The European men desired slave women. So, the Europeans

did not have a problem sharing the same space with the slaves. The European children played with the slave children. There was no segregation at that time in the European climes.

“Now, fast forward to today, and slavery is over. There is no more slave-trading. No buyers and no sellers. When slave trading ended, it dawned on the Southerners that they were now going to have to pay their workers. The Europeans in the south also realized that they would lose a lot of their money, if not all. They would have to work, take care of their own babies and cook and clean their own houses. This was when the southerners started calling the slaves *niggers* which is a Latin word that means ‘black.’ The black people didn’t know where to go when slavery ended. It still was a struggle for black people.

“Then the government had a run on land in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The government moved the Native Americans off of their land and sold it to many black people. They had to put them somewhere because the Europeans didn’t want a constant reminder that black people were no longer their possessions and that they had to earn their keep now. So, black people started to migrate there. One of the people that was there was O.W. Gurley. He was black. He built a fifty-two room, rooming house on a dirt road close to the railroad tracks after a small town in

Mississippi and named it Greenwood Avenue. The Europeans lived on the other side of the tracks. They called the other side, where blacks lived, Little Africa. As time went by, the place became well known among black people.

“So, Frederick Douglas came to visit Greenwood and was very impressed. He saw black people living together in harmony. They were doing business together. There were doctors, lawyers, teachers, homeowners—all black people. He called the place Negro Wall Street. Years later, it became known as Black Wall Street. There, black people felt safe and finally respected. They helped each other, and they, as a people, flourished. John B. Strafford, who was a rich black man also came along and built a fancy hotel for blacks. It was just as lovely as the Europeans’ if not more beautiful. J. B. Strafford, whose father was a slave, believed that black people should live separately from the Europeans. He felt we would not be respected, and we could never get ahead trying to fit into a community that didn’t want us in it. So, J. B. Strafford bought acres of land from the government and built houses on it and sold it to black people only. He built buildings for businesses also. J.B. Stradford and O.W Gurley were rich. They helped Greenwood, and the black people in Greenwood prospered. Around this time, we had Madame C.J Walker who started her own hair care business. She was a black woman who relocated to Indi-

anapolis and built a factory there. She employed 40,000 black men and women. This was about fifty years after slavery. Getting back to Greenwood, black people had their own movie theaters and ice cream parlor where people met up and had dates. We had our own hospitals and schools.

“Black people had a thriving community! But the slave trade came back in the form of drugs. Some say that cocaine became popular with laborers who used it as a stimulant to increase productivity, and it was often supplied by employers. African Americans workers were believed by these employers to be better at physical work, and it was thought that cocaine provided added strength since black people didn’t get sick often. The medical field believed that cocaine made black people unable to be affected by the extreme heat and cold. It was used amongst the workers in factories, textile mills, and on the railroad. It was also used to keep workers awake to work overtime.”

Mr. G. smiles and observes the look on his students’ faces Some seem lost, many others are still as intrigued like ever, waiting for him to continue.

“Okay, now, I’m moving around again. Stay with me.” The students nod as Mr. G. continues. “How many of you ever played the game where a person whispers something in your ear and by the time the message gets

to the last person, the message is no longer the same? This is what I believe has happened to black people. As long as we were slaves, we were smart enough to wash the Europeans clothes. We were smart enough to cook their food. We were smart enough to clean their houses. We were smart enough to work their fields, and they became rich off of our free labor. We were smart and good enough to feed their babies with our black women's breast milk. We were smart enough to be midwives and herbalists, but when slavery was over, we were no longer smart. We were not good enough to be in their company. Why would you want to be around black people who made you rich when you never had to work?

“Now seeing slaves with money and eating in their restaurants and shopping in their stores reminded the Europeans of how they were not so rich anymore and now had to pay the very slaves who used to work for free. They had to find other workers, and they worked in their own fields. I guess it was easier for the Europeans to lie and say we weren't smart and good enough to be around them anymore. This lie was passed down from generation to generation, both among black people and white people, just like the game. Slavery started because of money and greed, but as the story passed down, all black people and white people started believing the narrative that black people could never come together and work and

invest in each other when we were just doing it fifty years or so after slavery was over.

“We didn’t see the slave trade coming. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were gone. We were kidnapped from our civil rights leaders. Black people worked hard and were beaten, went to jail, and gave their lives for this generation of black people to be respected and have equal rights and to get rid of the Jim Crow laws in the south. Till this day, we are reminded of the lies told about black people through the injustice that black people have to deal with from the Europeans. Getting back to fifty years or so after slavery, once a lot of black people figured out that we’d get better treatment by dealing with each other, we started building our own schools, Negro colleges, hospitals, businesses, and movie theaters. We had degrees to be doctors, lawyers, and businessmen. This was just fifty years or so out of slavery. Then afterwards, the Europeans started to get jealous that the black people were doing better than a lot of them. They set Greenwood on fire. We started believing the lie, the narrative that we weren’t smart, and we weren’t good enough to survive without being slaves. You see, like I said when I started off, when you walk out of this classroom today, I want you to know that you are smart, and you are good enough to be and do whatever you want.

“Every time you see someone selling drugs, I want you to remember the slave trade where Europeans were buying black people and making them slaves. The drug trade is the new and improved slave trade. The chains are no longer visible. They are no longer around our wrists, feet, and necks, but this type of slavery is worse because you don’t even know that you are a slave. The chains are now around our minds.

“The drug dealer is the seller, and they are selling slavery, and the buyer is the drug addict who is paying to become a slave. The European has lied again to the black people and told us that drugs were the latest and greatest thing ever, and we believed them. It wasn’t the latest and greatest for us, but it was only for them. It made them very rich again. Then it spilled over into their families and communities, but they have enough money and resources to save their own. This slavery is so vicious that we will sell our children to give the master our money. We will steal from our family and friends to give the master our money. We will die for the master in giving him everything, including our life to get the drugs we buy to make the Europeans rich.

“The seller in the slave trade also takes good care of his master. The seller has been brain-washed to believe he or she is getting ahead in life by destroying black people’s lives. The seller has brought into the narrative that

we are not good enough to be or do whatever it is they want to do, but selling drugs is the best that they can do. The seller's only consolation is that they believe they are better than other blacks because they make more money from drugs, only to give the money back to the Europeans by buying the diamonds that black slaves helped them mine, buying the latest clothes that some designers use to remind us that they were the slave masters. You know those kinds of clothing where fashion models wear nooses around their necks, and they emboss black faces on their shoes and sweaters and tell us this is the latest and greatest stuff to buy ever!

“Then the drug dealers buy expensive cars that draw attention to them. One day, they get pulled over by police, and the next thing, they see themselves slammed into jail for selling the Europeans' drugs that they got from these small and poor countries. Alternatively, the drug dealers may get killed by another drug dealer. Why? Because each dealer wants to sell more drugs than the other, just to get more money to put into their pockets. All this happens because we've been programmed to believe that this is the best we can do. The drug dealers are working in the fields for the slave master. The Europeans have found a way for slavery to come back and we bought into it.

“For the rest of us that wanted our freedom and did not buy into the slave trade, we earn our money and run to give it back to the Europeans anyway. We buy their latest designer clothes, pocketbooks, and shoes. We buy their latest cars and liquor to make us feel that we have arrived. Still, we have been brainwashed that we can’t make and buy our own designer clothes, shoes, pocket-books, cars, and liquor. Remember, we had Greenwood Avenue in Tulsa Oklahoma where black people thrived. We had our wits about us. We respected ourselves. That’s the history that was not to be told. When the Europeans burned it down, we rebuilt it! So, the Europeans had to destroy our thinking. We have to not be a part of the slave trade to be free and stay free. We have lost a lot of talented people from the drug slave trade. We have to invest in our communities again. We have to stop always running to give back what we have earned. The Chinese have China Town. The Italians have Little Italy. The East Asian Indians have Little India.

“We have poor communities today because we’ve used our money to make the European communities even richer. We wonder why we can’t afford to live in a better environment, but we fail to realize that we’ve used every dime we get to support the European high-class stores.

“I want you to walk out of this classroom with this knowledge. When you see a drug transaction going on,

you are looking at a slave trade. If you don't want to be a slave, stay away. The education that the slaves got from working for free, they were able to use it to build their communities. The slaves understood education was the key. The bible says give a man a fish, and he will eat for the day. But teach a man how to fish, and he will always eat. Get as much information and knowledge as you can. You're not dumb. If you don't know or you don't understand something, it's just because you have not been taught in a way you can understand it clearly. I care about all of you, and I want you all to win in life, whatever your definition of winning is. Does anyone have any questions?"

The whole class is overwhelmed with the wealth of wisdom the teacher just poured out. One of the students raises his hand. "I never looked at life that way, Mr. G."

"Yeah," another student says, "but I want all of those fancy clothes and cars."

"Then buy them from black people or open up your own store. Sell, make money, and buy your clothes from struggling black designers. Did you know that John Daymond, a black man owns FUBU? Beyonce has Ivy Park. What about TI's Akoo and Kanye's Yeezy? What about other artists who have clothing lines? We need our own hotels, schools, and hospitals. Let us find a way to make our money stay in our community a little longer,

and then we will see that our environment won't reflect poverty anymore. The slave trade has always been about the money and greed, and it's still about the money and greed. Now, you can dictate where you spend your money and how you'd like to help the community."

The school bell rings, and the students hiss. They're so into the conversation that going on break doesn't seem appealing to them.

"I will see you tomorrow. It'll be our last day of school, so I want to see all of you," G. says as the students start departing.

Looking around the empty classroom, Mr. G. feels satisfied that he had given all that he had of himself to his students. He starts wishing that he had the money to help the black community. If he has his way, he would love to build a new Black Wall Street, where every black man with a dream would get an opportunity to see their **Dreams Come True.**

SUMMERTIME

For many, the last day of the semester is the best day ever. Excitement hangs in the air at Peace Elementary School as the students' scamper around, catching up with their friends one more time before they all disperse for the summer holiday.

The sun shines bright in the blue skies, and the cool breeze sweeps across Mr. G's face, giving him that cozy feeling that only comes with summer.

As he walks into the school, across excited students standing in groups while chatting and laughing, he runs into Cedric, rushing toward the classroom.

“Good morning, Cedric,” he greets.

“Good morning, Mr. G.” the boy responds, and they both walk down the hallway in silence, toward G.'s classroom.

As the door opens and they both walk into the classroom, the students, like the ones in the hallway, are standing in groups chatting and laughing. They turn

around and everyone goes to their seats as they see the teacher.

“Good morning, class,” Mr. G. begins as he places his small suitcase on the table in front of the whiteboard. “Everyone has a seat. Today is the last day of school, and I like to hear your plans for the summer.”

As the students settle into their respective seats, Cedric raises his hand. “I’ll like to start out first, Mr. G.”

Mr. G. nods and asks him to go ahead. The class turns in his direction, everyone eager to hear what he has to say.

“I would like to say thank you for sticking with me this whole school year. Some of these subjects were rough. I’m going to graduate next year, and my mom is pretty proud of me because of you.” He opens his backpack and brings out a white envelope. “My mom asked me to give you this thank you card to show her gratitude to you. We are going to relocate this summer to North Carolina where my mom got a new job. I’ll miss Jersey City.” He looks around methodically as if taking a last look at the things he is going to leave behind. At the same moment, brief sighs of emotion come from different parts of the class.

“I’ll register in a new school, meet new people and get a summer job. I want to start my own bakery stand and make cupcakes!” The class cheers briefly, then Cedric walks up to Mr. G. to give him the envelope.

Mr. G. smiles. “Send her my appreciation. I loved working with you this school year, Cedric. And thank you for not giving up when it got hard.”

“I never gave up, Mr. G., because you were right there with me, whenever I didn’t understand the lessons.” Cedric nods and walks back to his seat.

Mr. G. places the envelope on the table and turns to Casey, the pretty brown skin girl sitting beside the window, twirling her hair around her fingers and smiling like she’s living her biggest fantasy inside her mind. “Casey, what are you doing this summer?”

Casey jolts back to the present. “I’m going to work at my grandfather’s restaurant in South Carolina. I did it last year. It’s was hard work, but fun all at the same time. I learned a lot and it’s how I bought my school clothes this past year.

“What are you going to do, Mr. G.? For the summer?” Bobby asks, and the class choruses after him, “Yes Mr. G., tell us what you’re going to do for summer.”

Mr. G. looks at the class, smiling and trying to figure out what to say. He does not expect that they would ask him this, so he has to come up with something quickly—something exciting. He wonders if he should tell them the truth, or create a fantasy, but before he makes up his mind on which to say, the words blurt out from his mouth. “I’m going to rent a house down at the shore and hang out with friends at the beach.”

Sounds of *uhs* and *ahs* fill the room as the students imagine how cool their teacher’s summer holiday would be.

Mr. G. shakes his head slightly, and in his mind, he prays that he would someday live his dream. With the look on their faces, he becomes convinced that he made the right decision by telling them something exciting. After all, it is always good to remain positive to your students.

After almost all the students have shared their plans for the summer vacation, at midday, a voice from the principal’s office announces from the public address system, “All right everyone, it’s time to call it a day. It’s been an amazing semester, and we have come to the end of it. Have a fun summer.”

The students in Mr. G's class yell out in excitement, their voices towering above that of the students jubilating in the hallway and outside the school premises.

“All right, people,” Mr. G. concludes, “have a fun summer and stay safe.”

As the students pick up their books and backpacks and scramble out of the class, Mr. G. sits back and looks around at the empty class. He thinks about how he would spend his holiday. Although everyone loves summer holidays, Mr. G. does not have much to look forward to.

He thinks about cooking out on the grill for dinner tonight. And then he looks down at the envelope Cedric gave him. “What a beautiful envelope,” he says and runs his fingers against the golden patterns used to make a design around the smiling black man drawn on of the envelope.

He opens the card and reads the note written on it:

Thank you for making my dreams come true. My Cedric has a new attitude towards learning because of you. Please kindly accept this little money, and although it's a small amount, I hope it somehow makes your dream come true.

Love,

Cedric's mom.

Mr. G. looks inside the envelope and brings out a \$100 bill. "Oh, I had no idea money was inside," he says and dashes towards the door. He needs to give the money back to Cedric immediately, as it is against school rules to collect money from parents. But as he opens the door and looks out to the hallway, everywhere has become empty, apart from the janitors walking around with buckets and mops, trying to clean up the classes and hallways before the doors get locked. Mr. G. shrugs and puts the money into his pocket, then he goes back into the class to get his bag and leave.

A few hours later, while at newsstand looking around for a few magazines he would read at the beach. Mr. G. sees the lotto machine and all kinds of scratch-off. A few guys stand around, trying their luck. He stands and stares for a while and wonders if he should spend the money Cedric's mom gave him on lotto, or to reserve it for tacos and grilled cheese.

After giving it what seems like a very long thought, he decides to give it a shot. "Dream a little, G. Dream," he nudges himself and walks towards the machine to join the queue.

Mr. G. stands on the queue for minutes and it seems like the attendant is busy with other things. The people on the queue begin to grumble and complain. “Hey, hurry up, we’ve got other things to do!” a man in front of Mr. G. yells at the attendant. The young attendant just looks up briefly and continues working.

After some minutes, the queue in front of Mr. G. clears, he’s the next on the line, and the attendant has just two scratch cards for that particular game in his hand.

As Mr. G. reaches out to collect the card from the seller, a white guy in a hurry jumps in front of him and screams out, “I’ll take those last two scratch-offs.

Mr. G. turns around and looks at the man—at his intimidating seven feet of height and broad shoulders. *This is definitely not the time to fight*, he thinks and swallows hard. Before he gets to open his mouth to protest, the man grabs the scratch cards from the seller, who is already willingly stretching his hands at him.

“Hey, didn’t you see me standing here?” Mr. G. yells at the guy behind the counter.

The white guy smiles. “Oh, I’m sorry about that,” he says and turns to leave, giving Mr. G. a slight tap at the back, like a father trying to placate an angry child.

Mr. G's heart boils with rage, but he tries to control his emotions. He watches as the white guy walks away, then he turns to the guy behind the counter and asks if he still has \$5.00 scratch cards.

The guy shakes his head. "We just sold the last two, to the guy who just left. Would you like to buy these other scratch-offs?"

After thinking for some seconds and gathering his thoughts, Mr. G. points at some other scratch cards and says, "Give me all four of them."

The attendant looks at him surprisingly. "I should give you all that?"

Mr. G. nods.

"That would be \$100."

"What?" Mr. G's eyes pop out in shock. "How much are the scratch-offs?"

"Twenty-five a piece" the guy says.

The guy behind the counter watches with heightened interest as Mr. G. scratches his head, trying to decide if this risk is worth taking.

Mr. G. sees that the guy is trying to suppress laughter. Pride gets in the way, and he pulls out the \$100

bill and drops it on the counter with a half-smile. As he picks up the scratch cards, Mr. G. dashes out of the store immediately without bothering to buy his magazines.

Later that night, after he had gotten some ingredients from the grocery store, Mr. G. starts preparing steaks, seasoning chicken, and boiling corn on the cob with the tossed salad that he prepared earlier.

The doorbell rings and he quickly wipe his hands on a napkin, then hurries to the door to check who his guests are. He smiles as he peers through the door hole and sees his friend Larry and Jesse standing in front of his door.

Larry is a go-getter. He believes in taking risks and being daring. After all, as he always says, you only live once. Jesse, on the other hand, is the direct opposite of Larry. He isn't too ambitious. He is the cautious kind of guy who would rather remain in his comfort zone than take any steps that would turn out being unsuccessful.

Mr. G. opens the door and they exchange warm greetings and handshakes.

“Hey, G.,” Jesse says as they come in. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing much,” G. says and turns around to go back to the kitchen. His friends place the wines and desserts they brought on the table and relax on the couch.

“Last day of school, how did it go?” Larry asks with a smile in his voice.

“It was okay,” G. says from the kitchen as he flipped the meat on the grill. “The students are looking forward to summer vacation, and I’m looking forward to sitting on the beach thinking about how to get to the next level.”

“Hey G.,” Jesse replies. “You got a good job, and the kids and staff love you. Don’t rock the boat man.”

“Ah, come on,” says Larry. “Sometimes you have to risk losing it all to get what you really want. A scared man never gets anywhere!”

“Okay? But you agree that a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, yeah?” Jesse counters.

“Okay, guys,” G. tries to suppress his laughter. He knows that if he allows them, they could argue until tomorrow. “Please don’t get started. I got the steaks on the grill, the corn is cooking, and the salad is ready to go. Now, where is the wine?”

“Oh yeah,” Larry and Jesse both say, chiming in.

Moments later, the three friends sit in the cozy backyard designed with string lights, potted plants, and flowers of all sizes. There are lawn chairs on the cement patio placed around a plastic glass table, with a stone waterfall G. made.

Listening to the sound of the waterfall and Al Jarreau in the background, the friends enjoy the serene ambiance of the evening.

“Come on, somebody, this is living!” Jesse says as he watches the sun go down, casting golden-yellow strips on the smoky blue skies.

“So, Jesse...”

“Yeah, G.?”

“How has being a guidance counselor at your high school been going?”

“G., man, it’s sometimes challenging, but I’m working through it. Now that school is over for the summer, I’ll get a chance to replenish all the energy I’ve lost. I want to come up with new ways to introduce my students to so many different careers out there.” A glow of passion shines in his eyes as he speaks. “I want my students to disconnect with so many of these computer games and get into the real game called life. I’m trying to set them on the right path, but a lot of them have no in-

terest. I need to take this time out and then come back with a new strategy!”

“It’s funny,” Larry cuts in. “You start out as a student not sure what you want to do. Your grades are not where they should be and sometimes, these students think they are not good enough. So, they give up.”

“I went to college and graduated to run a business, but somehow I ended up teaching,” Larry recalls. “Then after five years of teaching, I decided to sell real estate. Now, I’m a real estate agent and teacher!” He rubs his palm gleefully as he speaks. “I’m just waiting for my funds to tell me I can become a full-time agent! So, don’t go crazy with these students trying to guide them when they don’t even know what they want to do.”

A moment of silence follows. Larry pours himself a drink from the half-filled bottle of red wine on the table, takes a sip, and breaks the silence. “So, what about you G.?”

“Yeah, what about you G.?” Jesse repeats. “Are you happy? Are you doing what you really want to do with your career?”

G. wears a serious face. “I love helping and teaching, but it’s not enough. I’m not sure what would be the fulfilling factor. I still haven’t figured it out yet.

“See, Jesse, we are in our thirties, and we are still trying to figure it out,” Larry said sadly, shaking his head.

“I hear you,” Larry said. “Careers are changing so quickly. Even how you go about looking for a job has changed. I remember I would go into a big building in Manhattan and go on each floor and fill out an application for a summer job. Then I would go to a job agency. Now, you have to go online. What happens to getting to know the person by the first impression?”

“Speaking of first impressions,” said Jesse, with concern written all over his voice, “Now, they are trying to get rid of the guidance counselors for the freshmen in the colleges. It’s almost like new money is coming in—in this case, new students—but we offer a little less one-on-one for the students to get comfortable for the next chapter in their life.”

Larry shakes his head. “Just go to the computer and look on the college website and read about the college and figure it out.”

“The parents are not saying anything,” Jesse cut in, sounding rather pissed off. “The parents pay the tuition, but unless they sign permission papers for you to talk to the college professors about their child, the school won’t talk to them! Then when the student spends all of their parents’ money and don’t complete college, or when the

student wakes up one morning and says, *'Oops, I'm in the wrong field,'* then the parents would have no choice but to say they've had enough."

G. nods expressively as Jesse speaks. "Jesse, brother, you are awesome. If none of the parents or kids told you, I'm telling you."

"Thanks G.," says Jesse.

G. then turns to Larry. "So, Larry, how is the real estate game going for you?"

"It's crazy G. Sometimes you have people you know well and they call you and ask you all kinds of questions. Oh Larry, what should I sell my house for? I want to buy a house, but how do I get started? Do I need a lawyer to close? If I do, can you recommend one? Should I sell or should I rent my property out? Then after you've told them what to do, the next time you hear from them, they have listed their house with another real estate agent or they've used another realtor to find them a house. Then when you call them on it, they'd say, 'Oh, I didn't know you worked in this area.'"

"Oh, my cousin is a realtor so I had to use them," Larry chips in.

It all sounds unbelievable to G. “So, wait a minute, why don’t they call other agents to answer their questions if they don’t want to give you the work?” he asks.

“Exactly,” Larry says. “The people that I don’t know are so grateful for my help. Thank you, Larry, for all of your help, they say to me. So, I take that and just keep it moving. Then one client had the nerve to call me after another agent got them a property. And when things started going wrong with the property, they called me with more questions.

“What?” G. asks. “They really did that?”

“Yeah!” Jesse exclaims.

“Isn’t the agent you used to buy the house supposed to be the one to help you if any problem comes up?”

“Yeah, that’s correct,” Larry says. “But then, they’d call me up and say, ‘Larry, I know you know a lot about real estate and you are creative, so I know you would be the better person to help me.’ But then I’ll ask them - so, why didn’t you have me as your agent in the beginning? They’d then say, ‘Oh, I thought I had to go with the listing agent who had the house. I didn’t know I could have used you. But if I know anyone one else that

is looking for a house I will recommend you. So, could you help me out?”

“Wow,” G. shakes his head.

Curiosity gets the best of Jesse. “So, what did you say?” he asks, looking very upset and confused at the same time.

Larry shakes his head. “I just said, I don’t know what to tell you. I’m sure you will figure it out. Then I just moved on.”

“Wow, good for you,” G. says, feeling contented that his friend at least knows how to throw annoying people’s bad attitude back into their face.

The atmosphere stays sober for a moment, then Jesse smiles and raises his glass. “Let’s make a toast to our dreams coming true; whatever they may be.”

“Cheers,” they all say, as they clink their glasses together. They start eating, drinking, and making small talk as the sun starts going down.

The next morning, G. wakes up to the sound of DJ Khaled’s “All I do is win, win, win” blasting on the speakers of his small stereo. He dances all around the house excitedly as he packs his luggage, ready to move to

the house he rented with Jesse and Larry at the shore, where they'd spend the next two weeks.

After going through his pants pockets to take out any change that was left in his pockets, he pulls out the lottery scratch-offs that he brought the night before. He then decides to look at them while he eats his late breakfast so he can throw the tickets in the garbage when he finishes scratching them. As G. settles in to do these, he thinks of the beautiful blue skies, the white sand, the cool breeze, and the rowdy serenity of the ocean.

After mixing his fruit loops and cherries together, he sits down to eat, and then he starts scratching. He scratches the first one, no win. He absentmindedly flings the card into the small trashcan beside the wall and pick up the next one. He scratches it and again, nothing. He checks the third one and flings it right into the trash just like he did the first and second. At this point, G. knows he is just wasting his time. Only one out of every million gamers get to win the lottery, and maybe in his lifetime, he would never get to be that one person.

G. scratches the fourth one without paying any mind to it. If for anything, he only wants to fulfill all righteousness. After all, he bought them with his money. G. doesn't really look at the card. As he shakes the silvery dust away and gets ready to throw the lottery card

into the trash can, he looks at it again and sees \$100,000,000 in matching numbers.

“Oh my God,” he mutters in disbelief. He grabs the remote lying on the table and turns down the music, and then he looks at the numbers again. Still not believing his eyes, G. rubbed both hands vigorously across his eyelids just to be sure that he isn’t dreaming.

“Oh my God! Oh my God!” are the only words he mutters. His mouth is open in surprise, but he can’t find any other words to express the excitement he feels. He can feel his heart pounding loudly in his chest, his stomach walls clenching like a tightened fist, and thousands of goosebumps spreading all over his skin.

He starts pacing around the room, scratching his head and snapping his fingers. “This is not normal. Things like this don’t happen to me,” he finally finds words. “What do I do? Who do I call? Who can I trust? Okay, okay, okay, this is crazy. I can’t even think right now. Maybe I should throw this scratch-off in the garbage. I’m sure I’m not looking at this correctly. If I told the fellas about this, they would laugh at me and tell me to stop dreaming.” G. starts laughing and then realizes that he has become a nervous wreck.

Suddenly, he drops down to his knees then to his face. Then he starts praying loudly. “Heavenly Father,

God, I lay down before you, from whom all blessings flow. I know that I don't deserve this. I don't go to church like I should, but I love you anyway. You have blessed me until my cup has overflowed. Lord, you have given me a gift that I have no idea what to do with. What is your will? How do I bring glory to you, Almighty God?" He pauses to catch his breath. Tears start rolling down his face as he continues pouring his heart out in prayer. "I'm only a seventh-grade teacher just making enough money to pay my student loans and pay my bills, with little savings to take a modest vacation when school is over for the summer. You, Almighty God, have just changed my life in a way I don't understand yet. How do I do the most good? I feel it's not just about my needs being met, but other people's needs should be met too. But how? How do I grow this gift you have given me to continue to be a blessing to me and others? Who do I go to, that will not take advantage of me with this money you have blessed me with? Please, Lord Jesus, send me a trustworthy advocate. Thank you, Jesus, for I can't thank you enough. Please give me guidance, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, mercy, and continued favor. Have your way, Dear God, in Jesus' mighty name. Amen, amen, amen." He keeps repeating the 'amen' as his tears continue flowing.

G. rolls over and looks up at his ceiling as if he could see God. Then, after laying there for a few minutes,

he feels a peace come over him. He doesn't understand the feeling, but he's sure that God has answered his prayer.

He gets up and continues packing, wondering how he would tell his friends when they got there. Later, the doorbell rings. G. runs to the door like a kid running to the Christmas tree. Jesse arrives first.

"Hey Jesse," he greets with the broadest smile ever.

"Hey G., are you ready to go? I've been waiting for this trip since the winter," Jesse says as he enters, carrying a small luggage.

"Oh yeah, I am ready!" G. says. As if on cue, the doorbell rings again. G. goes running to the door again-opening it to find Larry.

"Get ready, get ready, get ready," a super-excited Larry screams. "Beach, sand, ocean, and ladies in bikinis, here we come!"

"Yes, and I made you both a glass of last night's wine before we go," G. offers and rushes to the fridge to get the drinks. "Let's toast to dreams comes true!"

"Yes," reassures Larry. "We will be there soon. "

Jesse smiles and says, “And let’s drink to friendship and brotherhood; my brothers from another mother.” They all laugh.

G. gives them each a glass of wine. The stemless wine glasses have papers taped on their bottom. As Jesse and Larry turn up their glasses to drink, they see the notes written on the papers. Written on them was: Dreams come true. *I won the lottery.*

Jesse and Larry read the notes and their mouths fall open in shock. They both turn and look at G. and read the message aloud. “Dreams come true. I won the Lottery.”

“Really, man? When did you start playing the lottery?” Larry asks.

Jesse gives a half smile and asks, “What did you win? A \$100?”

Larry chimes in and says, “Yeah, dinner is on you tonight.” Collectively they all start laughing. After a few minutes of laughter G. picks up their glasses to take into the kitchen. Walking away, he quips “No, I won \$100,000,000.”

Suddenly, Larry and Jesse stop laughing and look at G. walking towards the kitchen.

“Wow, wow, wow, what did you say G?” inquires Jesse.

“Yeah, what did you say?” Larry repeats.

Then G. turns around and said in a voice he could not contain any longer. He yells out “I won \$100,000,000 off a scratch-off.”

Jesse and Larry are getting all fired up with excitement, but they are trying to absorb what G. is so excited about and are wondering if G. is joking.

“Let me see the scratch-off, G.” says Jesse. “I’m sure you’ve mistaken some of those zeros, my man. We had too much wine last night.”

“Yeah let’s see the scratch-off,” Larry agrees.

So, G. gives them the signed ticket with his name on it. Jesse looks and counts the zeros and Larry recounts the zeros and without knowing the right way to react. They all sit down and just stare at each other.

“What are we going to do?” Jesse asks.

“I haven’t figured that part out yet,” G. replies. “Right now, we are going on vacation. I guess it’ll be a good time to relax and think.”

The three friends load their luggage into G.'s SUV, which is the biggest amongst all their cars, and they drive off, with Donnie McClurkin's "Stand" serenading them from the car stereo.

They drive in silence for a while, each of them trying to take in the reality that one of them has just become a millionaire. After a while G. breaks the silence.

"How are you feeling?" he asks the guys.

"I feel excited that I'm going on vacation," says Jesse. "I have been looking forward to this for so long.

"Well, I am just chilling," Larry says. "What about you G.?"

"I couldn't ask for a better vacation with my boys," he states with a smile. "I feel super happy. I have a lot to think about on this trip, but we are going to have a good time."

When they arrive at the house, which is directly facing the ocean, they all get out of the car and go inside to look around. They're all pleased to see that the house is just the same way it looked in the pictures they saw before renting it.

“Okay, this is my room,” Jesse says, as he flings his bag on the bed in the room next to the small den.

“And this is my room,” says G., as he enters another room with a small attached veranda. Larry picks a room with windows overlooking the ocean

As soon as they settle in, the three friends hurry to the beach to enjoy the beautiful waves of the ocean. G. runs into the water and feels its coolness as the salty water splashes on his face.

After relishing the sweetness of the beach for some minutes, he goes to sit in the sand. Jesse and Larry follow shortly.

“Are we cooking dinner tonight?” Larry asks.

“Sure. I can find a store down here and go shopping,” Jesse says.

“Sounds good,” G. concurs. “I’ll do the cooking after unpacking. By then, Jesse will have returned from the store.”

After spending a few more hours at the beach relaxing, the friends get back to the house to get ready for the night.

Amongst the three friends, G. makes the best meals. It is because of this that his friends love to hang

out at his place to eat dinner anytime they have a chance. Jesse always emphasizes, G. creates magic in the kitchen, and tonight is no exception.

One hour after G. put the steak and chicken on the grill, the sweet-smelling aroma of the meats fill the entire place. After spicing it up with garlic, mash potatoes, and spinach, he sets it on the table while Larry brings some bottles of beer.

“You should have been a chef, G.,” Larry says. Almost immediately, Jesse concurs, “Yeah man, this is the real thing inside you trying to come out,” said Jesse.

G. chuckles, feeling good about the compliment, and then they all sit around the table and have dinner while conversing from one topic to the other while sitting out on the deck.

Over the next week, the friends embraced vacation mode. Acting as if they had never vacationed in their lives. They went deep sea fishing, sun bathing, and walked on the pier. Some days, they woke up and took a boat cruise or went on carnival rides, or sampled different restaurants in the area. They also became friends with some of the ladies in neighboring houses. It wasn't out of the norm to find one of their female neighbors hanging out at the guys' house pool.

The bright morning sun shines in Jesse's face, causing him to wake up. He squints as the shining rays hit his eyes. He gets up and walks down stairs into the kitchen, where he sees G. sitting on the deck with his laptop.

He walks over to the coffee maker and makes some coffee for the both of them, and then he goes to meet G. at the deck and gives him his cup of coffee.

"Good morning G. Here you go," he says and draws a seat closer to sit beside him.

"Oh, thank you Jesse. What are you doing up this early?"

"The sun woke me up. I came down to make some coffee and I see you're already up. What's up with you and the whole early morning laptop thing? You look like you're on a mission."

G. wipes his hand across his face and exhales. "You see, I've been thinking and praying about this money."

"Yeah," Jesse cuts in, "I've also given it a thought one or two times. What ideas have you come up with?"

"I want to buy some land."

“That’s good. Where?”

“I’ve been looking at North Carolina.”

“Okay. Why there?”

“A student of mine’s family relocated there. It’s close to Myrtle Beach,” G. explains.

A worried look creeps onto Jesse’s face. “Are you going to move there?”

“I think so,” G. answers, staring into space.

“Wow, but what about your job?” Jesse blurts, before it occurs to him that his friend wouldn’t need that job, with his new millionaire status. “And what about us, your friends?” he adds, knowing that this would give credence to his protest.

“Look,” G. closes the laptop and turns to face Jesse. “I want to help kids, but maybe in another way. And don’t worry, I’ll invest in you and Larry’s dream. All our dreams will come true, bro. This is our last few days here. I already called the lotto and scratch-offs headquarters and they said I should just bring it in to verify and get it signed. I contacted a lawyer and an accountant. This is no joke. I don’t know how to handle this much money. All I know is, I’m tired of worrying if I have enough money in my account to cover my bills and a lit-

tle to save for Christmas and our summer get away. I still have tuition bills to pay off too. God has blessed me to be a blessing to others, so you better think hard on your dream for me to invest in, my brother.” He stops and observes his friend for a while, as if waiting for the words he said to seep into him. “Here’s your shot, bro,” G. continues. “You don’t have to go to the bank now, you got me.

“You would do that for me G.?” Jesse asks in disbelief.

“Hell yeah!” G. says with a broad smile. “You and Larry trying to do good in this world. You, all of us, people of color just need seed money. Plant it in good soil and watch it grow. Then take it to the market place and make a profit. Then pay back the seed money and then go from there. If you need more seed money because your business is getting bigger then come back and grow your garden bigger. People of color can do this. We just need a shot.”

“I’m working on the details with the lawyer and the accountant. I’m not sleeping on this. I’m wide awake, bro,” said G.

G. and Jesse spent hours conversing on the deck until mid-morning, when Larry comes to join them. The sun had taken center-stage in the beautiful clear blue sky, and

from the deck, G. and Larry could hear the waves of the sea splashing up on the shore.

Larry walks out onto the deck wide awake. “Good morning. I didn’t know you guys were out here. Where’s my coffee?”

“Check in the coffee pot,” Jesse replies.

Larry shakes his head as he goes back to the kitchen to make a fresh pot of coffee. As he waits for the coffee to get ready, he yells out to Jesse and G., “So, what are we doing today?”

No one answers because G. and Jesse are immersed deep in thought even as they watch the large waves roll into the shore.

A few minutes later, Larry walks out with his coffee. “Hello? What are we doing today?” he repeats, breaking their train of thought. He notices the way they’re staring fixatedly on the beach. “What are you guys thinking about?” he asks curiously.

“Dreams,” Jesse and G. says at the same time and they both start laughing.

“Okay,” Larry says, looking genuinely confused. “What’s going on?”

Jesse starts telling him about their last conversation, and before he finishes telling the story, Larry is already welled up his eyes with tears.

“That’s all I ever wanted—to get a hand up, not a hand out. Just pull me up and I can make it from there. Then I can look back and pull the next one up. G., you’re giving me that opportunity. You don’t know how much this means to me.”

“So many wealthy companies start with funding. Funding has always been the missing denominator for people of color who want to start a business. If you are lucky to save up some money or borrow from friends and family, that’s your one and only shot. White people make a mistake and they brush it off and try it again. They have more chances than black people to succeed. We only have one chance to succeed most times. You need a team behind you also. If you can afford a team or if you’re blessed enough to have a friend with money, who believes in your dream, and is willing to take a chance with you, you have a better chance of becoming successful.” Jesse and G. watch silently as Larry continues talking. “There is no reward in greed. Not even for the person who thinks they are winning by being greedy. There is no real happiness in greed. It’s only by sharing that you find true happiness.”

G. smiles and interrupts saying, “Did I ever tell you the story of how God came down and blessed a man who wanted to know what hell was like and what heaven was like?”

Jesse and Larry shake their head. “Oh boy, here we go,” says Larry. They all laugh briefly, as the premise of the story sounds unbelievable. However, Jesse and Larry insist they want to hear the story.

“So, the story goes thus,” G. starts. “There was a man who prayed to God to show him heaven and hell. So, God came down to him and said, ‘I will show you, follow me.’ So, the man followed God. First, they went to hell. There was a door, through which they entered into a board room. In this room, there was a long table, and people sat around it. At the center of the table was placed a pot of stew. Everyone had a spoon and their spoons were long enough to fit into the pot, but too long for them to turn around to put the food in their mouths. The people all looked very gaunt, thin and emaciated, because they couldn’t feed themselves despite the sumptuous meal in front of them.

Then God looked at the man and said, ‘This is hell.’ The man looked at the people and then looked at God. Again, God said, ‘Follow me’ and man did. They went into another room that had the same table with a pot of stew in the middle of the table and the people sitting

around that table were all happy, lively and healthy. Just like the ones in the first room, they all also had spoons. Their spoons were long enough to fit into the pot to get the stew, but too long for them to turn the spoon around to feed themselves. Then God looked to the man and said, ‘This is heaven.’ The man was confused. He looked at God while shaking his head. The man said, ‘I don’t understand. The first room we went in to the people were sitting around the long square table starving with a big pot of stew filled to the top in the middle of the table. They had spoons that could reach in to get the stew, but they could not turn the spoons around to feed themselves, so they looked skinny, malnourished and sad. But then, the second boardroom with a long square table also had people sitting around it with spoons that were able to reach the stew but too long to turn around and put the content in their mouth, yet these people are happy and healthy. Why?’ God look at the confused man and said, ‘Here in heaven, we feed each other. For the people on one side of the table, their spoons can reach in to get the stew, but since they can’t turn it around to put in their mouth, they use it to feed the person on the opposite side of the table. The people on the opposite side also do the same thing, so everyone gets enough food to eat.’

Larry and Jesse, who had been listening carefully as he told the story, nodded thoughtfully. “Wow,” says

Jesse. “The moral of this story is that we could get further ahead as a people if we just helped each other.”

“Yeah,” Larry concurs. “Things you’re good at can be beneficial to me, just like the things I’m good at can help you. This way, we both win.”

G. smiles.

“You see,” Larry continues, “sport teams realize they can’t win unless they learn to play together and lean on each other’s strengths.”

G. then explains, “I want to invest in both of you. I have noticed people that come to this country have people of their race that have been here in the United States and acquired success. They can go to them for a loan to buy a business, home, or car without going to the bank. They get paid back and their community flourishes. More success comes back to the person or people who loaned the money. Then the people in the community become successful. Then everyone wins!”

At the end of the vacation, G. goes to the lottery office and claims his rewards. Out of \$100,000,000, he walks away with \$55,000,000 because of taxes and fees. He set up an appointment with his accountant, Mike, who would advise him on the best way to invest his money.

After a long conversation on investments, G. gets up to leave. He extends his hand for a handshake, and Mike grabs it warmly. “Thanks, Mike, for all of your help through these days

Mike smiles. “It’s my pleasure, G. Thank you for trusting me. It really means a lot to me. You can go shopping now,” he teases. “So, what will be your first purchase?”

G. scratches his chin. “I’ve been thinking about that for a while. So, you know when you cut your birthday cake and you give the first piece of cake to someone. I’m buying my mother a house and I am donating money to her church in her name. After that, I can think about myself.”

On the way home, G. stops by the store where he bought the ticket. He sees the man who jumped in from of him and took the last two tickets he had wanted. He was in there buying more tickets.

The guy looks at G. and asks, “Oh, you’re back to buy more tickets? I turned in my ticket from the other day I saw you. I won \$500 that day.” The man has a sparkle of excitement in his eyes as he announces his winning. The sparkle, however, disappears as quickly as it appeared, as he announces further. “I heard someone came in here and bought a scratch-off and won

\$100,000,000. I heard it was a guy who won the scratch-off. That lucky guy! Well, keep trying,” the guy taps a hand on G.’s shoulder. “You never know when you’ll get lucky.”

G. smiles and shakes his head. Just as the guy turns around to leave, the salesperson who gave G. his winning scratch-offs looks up, sees G. and announces, “Oh, here is our lucky winner!” People start cheering and congratulating G.

The guy who was about to leave turns around and looks at G. saying, “You mean the guy I jumped in front of won?”

The man stands there looking at him. G. makes his purchase, and as he walks out of the door in front of the man, he returns the man’s words to him. “Keep trying, you never know.” He then walks away, laughing out loud!

The man stands there, staring, and before G. gets into his car and drive off, he yells out, “Hey, I’m sorry about jumping in front of you that day.”

G. hops in his car and drives away feeling vindicated as he turns up the car stereo and sings along to Whitney Houston’s “One Moment,” as the song works him up into a teary mood.

Driving down the highway, G. pulls up at the stop-light and looks next to him to see a man in a Mercedes-Benz. As the man's eyes meet G.'s, the man looks at G.'s car condescendingly, and then methodically turns his eyes to the lush interior of his own car. As the light turns green and they both zoom off, G. becomes convinced that the thought that went through the man's mind was - *You see what I'm driving? I know you wish this was your car.*

G. shakes his head and reassures himself that he is proud of his Honda SUV. He had worked hard to be able to afford it. Then it hit him that right now, he could finally pay off his car loan.

When G. walks into his house, he gets on the computer and starts looking for a place to relocate. As he scrolls through houses in different states his phone rings. He picks it up and it's his youngest brother Chip calling.

"What's up?" G. says as he answers the call.

"It's my break at work. I called to see if you got any of your money yet?"

G. smiles. "Yes, I have access to my money why? What's up?"

"We're almost finished this house that I'm the building," Chip says. "I need some more work and I was

wondering if you would invest in me with me starting a contracting business.”

G. nods enthusiastically. He is delighted to know that just like his friends, his brother also has dreams of becoming successful at what he does. “I don’t know about being a contractor,” G. replies, “but I’ll invest in you starting your own business.”

“That’s what’s up!” Chip yells joyously. “Thank you, G. I’ll make you proud and pay you your money back. I gotta go. My break is up. I’ll talk to you later,” he says as he rushes off the phone.

“Sure. No problem,” G. says and hangs up.

G. smiles and goes back to looking for a place to relocate. Once again, he surfs through different locations, and it’s hard to make up his mind on any one. He then comes up with an idea. He picks up the map of the United States from his study desk and thumb tacks it on the wall. He picks up some darts from the kitchen junk drawer and decides that he would randomly select a location by putting a blind fold over his eyes and throwing the dart at the map.

As he puts on his blindfold, G. steps back a little and throws the first dart. He excitedly pulls off the blindfold to see where he’s finally moving to, but his excite-

ment drops as he sees that the dart landed on the wall, away from the map. Just then, he hears the doorbell ring. He looks through the small opening on the door and sees Larry and Jesse standing there with a bottle of champagne.

“Hey, bro,” Larry greets as G. opens the door. They all shake hands and enter the room.

“Wow, you brought champagne.”

“Yeah G., we just came to celebrate with you,” Jesse says, holding up the drink.

As they enter the living room to sit down, Larry sees the map on the wall. “G. is that a new art work?” he asks.

“No, I’m trying to figure out what state I should relocate to. So, I pulled out the map of the United States to throw a dart at the map, so that wherever it lands would be the place I’d be moving to.”

“Oh, okay, so, where did you land?”

“Um, the wall. See the tiny hole in the wall.”

Larry observes the distance between the hole and the map and laugh. “But G., the map is over here and your dart landed almost five miles away.

G. laughs. “Well, let’s have some champagne and then try again.”

“But why do you want to relocate?” Jesse, who had been watching them quietly all this while, asks. “Your work is here; your friends and family too.”

“I want to go where I can do the most good with this money that I have been blessed with.”

“And you can’t do that here?” Jesse probes further as he opens the champagne.

“No, this place is over developed. There’s no place for me to make a big impact the way I would like to. I want to go somewhere that’s peaceful and not overcrowded and I don’t have to compete with the next guy. It’s not about the money, it’s about the people.”

Jesse nods as he pours the champagne. “My brother felt the same way about going where it was peaceful with trees and a lake.” Jesse recalls, passing G. a glass. “He’s happy now.”

“Where did your brother relocate to?” G. asks.

“North Carolina.”

G. pauses for a moment and thinks, wondering why North Carolina always pops up each time the idea of

relocation comes up. “North Carolina, hmm,” he hums, nodding his head.

“One of my students moved there over the summer. That sounds perfect. I guess that’s the confirmation I’ve been waiting for. Remember, I mentioned North Carolina during our summer vacation.”

“So, what happens to the map and the dart?” Larry teases.

“I won’t need that now,” G. says smiling. He raises his glass. “Let’s toast to North Carolina, my new home.” They chime their glasses together and begin to drink up.

Some days later, G. pulls up in front of his mother’s house. He had called his mom and siblings to tell them he’d like to have a family meeting with them. He steps down from his car and looks around the neighborhood and smiles as images from his childhood come rushing back into his mind.

He rings the doorbell, but no one answers, so he lets himself in with his key. As he enters the expansive living room, it is scantily decorated with old furniture. A big box TV on a TV stand stand out in one corner of the large den, he calls out, “Ma! Ma? I’m here. Are you home?”

His mother, Starr, a beautiful slim black woman in her early fifties comes out of the kitchen, wiping her hand on a white napkin. “Oh, I thought I heard the doorbell,” she says as she sees her son. “Hey baby, how are you?” She embraces G. “I’m just finishing cooking for our family meeting. Chip called to say he’s on his way. Bella and Bryce are on their way over here also.”

“Okay,” G. says, distracted by the intense aroma coming from the kitchen. “Ma, what did you cook?” he asks as he makes his way into the kitchen.

Starr follows him. “Oh just a little something; fried chicken, greens, mac and cheese, tossed salad, lemonade, and I baked a yellow cake with chocolate icing. Ice cream in the freezer and I cut open a watermelon.”

“Are you hungry?” As Starr turns her back to G. He answers, “Yes.” Starr replies, “Get your hand away from the chicken and wait until everybody gets here.”

“Ma, how do you do that? Your back is turned to me and you still see what I’m getting ready to do.” G walked out into the living room and sits down.

Just then Chip walks into the house. “Hey, G.,” he greets.

G. just nods and gives him a thumb up, all of his attention is focused on the chicken.

“Hey, Ma,” Chip yells out to Starr, who’s now in the other room. Then Chip turns to walk toward the chicken in the kitchen.

“Don’t do it man,” G. warns.

“I’m hungry,” Chip says and goes ahead to start opening the bowls.

Then Bryce walks in. “Congratulations, Bro,” she says to G., giving him a big hug and kiss. She does the same for Chip and then she calls on their mother, who is still in the other room.

The delicious aroma of the food hits her nose. “Dang! Something sure smells good,” she says and turns to walk toward the kitchen.

“Don’t do it!” Chip and G. chorus, and then Bryce turns around and sits down.

Moments later, Bella joins them, before Starr finishes up in the kitchen and enters the living room. She greets them all and then she asks the girls to help her set the table. She brings out a special red plate and asks them to set it on the corner where G. would sit.

As the girls finish setting the table, Bella puts fresh flowers in the vase to brighten up the kitchen.

“Come on, G. and Chip,” Bella calls, and the boys enter the kitchen to sit with them.

After they had prayed and started eating, Starr asks G., “Okay, son, what this meeting all about?”

G. drinks some water and clears his throat. “Well, first, I’d like to thank you, Mom, for the red plate meaning you’re special for the day, and yes I have something special to say. I decided that I’d like to help more people and I wanted to find a place where I could do the most good. I want to be a resource for people of color to build their foundation and be able to grow from there. I want to create an environment where people thrive, not just exist. I believe our environment should be a place where service should be our mantra, you know, our motto and slogan.”

Everyone listens attentively as he speaks.

“If you have strength where I’m weak and vice versa, then we can win. I don’t think it’s just about being rich as much as it’s about feeling valuable and needed in your community. It’s about having all of your needs met, having someone giving you a hand up instead of a hand out. I know I can’t change the world but I can create a small environment where I can touch some people who want what I want. Maybe there I can make a positive difference in someone’s life. I don’t want to give my money

away. I want to loan my money out. When people are able to pay you back, it gives them dignity. Then other people respect them because they earn everything they got. No one gave them anything but a hand up. Then with a team that complements their goals they have it from there. That's what service is. It's helping one another. Did I ever tell you the story about the farmer?"

"Oh, here we go," says Chip.

"No, I don't think we heard this one G.," Bella says and everyone one starts laughing.

"Okay, what happened with the farmer?" Bryce asks.

"Well, I heard this story about a farmer who needed money for his mortgage and to feed his family. He was afraid he was going to lose everything. So, one night, he went out into his fields and knelt down in the dirt and cried out to the fields. 'I need help! I'm going to lose everything I have worked so hard for, because I'm behind on all of my promises to make my payments on my mortgage and pay my taxes. What am I going to do? Please help me.' He poured his heart out to the field. Then the field said, 'Who is the fool that brings me his needs and brings me no seeds? Bring me the seeds and I will help you by making them grow. Then you take your

crop to the market place and sell them to the buyers and I get the money you have earned to pay all your debts.””

G. pauses and looks at them for a reaction. It is written all over their faces that they are expecting the story to continue.

But then, G. says, “I have the seeds now! I’m going to the place where there is dirt so the seeds can be planted, then taken to the market place. After that, I’d sit and watch the fruits of my labor yield a lot of profit. My dream is to see our people flourish and thrive! Then they can pass the knowledge down to the next generation. Remember, the bible says you can give a person a fish and they will eat one time, or you can teach a person how to fish and they will always eat. I want to be a part of Martin Luther King’s dream just like President Barack Obama! So, I feel the best place for me to begin is in North Carolina! Who’s going with me?”

A loud silence falls on the room as he drops the bombshell. Everyone looks around the room, as if expecting the next person to react first.

“Anymore chicken, Ma?” Chip asks, changing the topic completely.

“Ah, here you go,” Bella says and puts another piece of chicken onto Chip’s plate.

“Okay, okay.” G. smiles, shaking his head. “If you change your mind let me know.”

“I’m proud of you, son,” Starr says, with so much joy and pride in her eyes. “Let me think about North Carolina. My life is here; my friends, my church, and my job.”

“Mom, now you have the choice to work if you want to, not because you have to,” G. chimes in. “You can leave the position you work in, and work in the profession where you have always wished you to be in. You can pick your house anywhere you want it. You can have it built or buy one that’s already built. You have earned that; you took care of me. You deserve that. You’re my mother. I am honoring you. Please give me the honor of blessing you. Please, just think about North Carolina. You can still keep this house and have another house in North Carolina. I’d pay for it. Just think about it.”

“Okay son,” Starr says, unable to hold back tears from streaming down her face. “I feel so blessed to be loved by my children. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your grace and mercy, and for blessing my son.”

G. gets up and gives his mother a hug and kiss. Then he turns his attention back to Bella, Bryce, and Chip. “Chip, come to me with your plan and what you need to start your business.”

“I’ve been working on finding an office space,” Chip starts, swiftly swinging from his playful mood to a serious one. “I know some of the guys I work with would love to come on board. I’m working with a few investors that are buying properties and they would like to hire me to do the work. So, I will get a few of my friends and we do the work on the side. Now that I’ve finished up this last project, I can focus on working with these investors and building more relationships with more stakeholders.”

G. nods as his brother speaks. He loves hearing this kind of speech, the intelligent preach of a vibrant young man who wants to make headway in life.

“I’m building my team, so I just need that seed money you were talking about. This way, I can start on the projects and then the investors or the banks will reimburse us. We can buy some sample materials and price them. Starting from a small budget to a medium budget, we can then spread to a high budget of cabinets, flooring, etc. for the investors to choose from. This way we can control the price, stay within our budget and still make a nice profit.”

“This sounds good, Chip. I would love to be a part of your dream by funding you. Bella, what about you?”

Bella smiles. “I would love to have a building for my art exhibition, to show both my drawings and other

people's artwork also. Sometimes, I do drawings as a hobby, but I would love to share with people how I see people of color, black people, through my artwork. I have a mentor and she doesn't even know it. I love Nicholle Kobi's artwork. She's from France. Look her up! I would love to meet her one day to share our ideas of how we see our culture and people. With all the negativity we see on TV, we still manage to capture the positive image and culture in our people. You know, we still see girls having coffee together with a positive conversation. Further we illuminate our black men nurturing and respecting black women in a positive light.

“I want to be a part of a positive change in our culture, displaying how we see ourselves and each other. When we do this, I believe, other cultures will start to see us differently. They will respect us because we respect each other. I'm tired of us being white people's experiment. They put us in tight places called projects, then with no jobs or opportunities they watch us turn on each other. They create the environment for us to behave the way we do. Anyone would react that way. This will be my way of using my marketing education. With my drawings skills and my marketing skills coming together we could capture the essence of who we are.”

Again, G. is impressed. “It would be a positive image to infuse into our community. Let me know the build-

ing you want to buy and how you plan for the building to pay for itself,” he says.

“I will rent out office space where people can live and work at the same time. One area will be the office and the other area will be their living space. I will have additional forms of income like coin-based washing machines and dryers. I will rent out storage space. I will also have some vending machines in the building for additional revenue.”

“You got it, baby girl,” G. cheers. “Let me see the building when you find the one you want.”

“Yes!” Bella runs over to G. and gives him the biggest hug and kiss ever! “Thank you, big bro. I will make you proud.”

Tears of joy roll down her eyes as she relishes in the realization that that her dream will come true.

“What about you, Bryce? Tell us!”

“Well, okay, you all know that I’ve been working at the ‘Rich Hotel’ for five years and I have been working with a lot of vendors and setting up for different events. I would love to start my own event planning business. I have worked on big companies’ business meetings with people coming from around the world, birthday parties and shareholders’ meetings. I even did a few weddings. I

love what I do. It takes a team to pull it all together. So, I have already started building a team of vendors in different industries. I have worked with a few florists, DJs, bands, carpenters, bakeries, and office supplies stores. What I would really like is to have my own place where I can have events in my own building. I would have it designed where I could have more than one event. It would be beautiful.”

She gesticulates with her hands as she speaks, trying to describe the place as she imagines it. “The grounds would be beautiful. I would have waterfalls, plants, flowers, lights, and a lake where people can take pictures. Outside the building, I would have a glasshouse, just in case some clients choose to have their event in a glasshouse. When there are no events going on, I would rent it out to entrepreneurs who would like to do a flea market on the outside grounds in the mornings and people who would like to have community gatherings or family reunions. I would make a profit. The key for me would be to rent out all of the real estate on the inside as well as the outside. Parking is also important. I’d have to make sure I choose a place that has a lot of parking space. When the building is being used as a flea market we can rent out space for food trucks around the building to bring in more business. I would have benches and tables for people to sit and eat from the food trucks.

“Their customers would have a place to find their favorite food truck and eat there. I would have a bakery truck out there also. It would be a destination place.”

“Wow, sounds so beautiful. I love it already,” Bella says.

“Me too,” says G. “With the plan you have, that place is definitely going to be a destination place booming with customers every day. Bryce, let me know when you find a place also.”

Then Bryce walks over and gives G. a big hug and kiss. “Well, I guess our meeting is over and the food was good as always, Ma.” G. says.

Everyone agrees, and after cleaning up they all start to leave.

NEW BEGINNINGS

G. sits on the train looking out through the window, as the train speeds into the city of Fayetteville, North Carolina. He admired the beauty of the city, from the busy roads to the almost-deserted countryside. He had bantered with Jesse on the idea of taking a train instead of flying. Jesse could not understand why he, a young millionaire, would sit for long hours on a train instead of taking a plane. G. has always been scared of flying. He prefers to ride the train, no matter how long it takes to get to his destination. At least, on a train, he doesn't get to fear that they'll run out of fuel, get stuck in the air, with no other option than to jump down and crash-land on a rock.

“Good afternoon, Sir. It's a beautiful day here at Spring Hotel. Welcome to Fayetteville,” the front desk lady says with a big smile as G. gets to the hotel. “How did you enjoy your train ride?”

“It was very peaceful and I had the chance to think and look at the beautiful scenery,” G. replies. “How did you know that I took the train?”

“Oh.” She laughs. “The train comes in at this time, and you walked in with your suitcase. So, I figured you were from out of town. She has a southern accent that gets G. wondering how friendly she is.

“I’m from New Jersey.

“Oh well, welcome and enjoy your stay. I’m giving you the best room in the house.”

“Thank you. What’s your name?”

“Sandy,” she says, smiling and pointing the name tag on the breast pocket of her striped shirt.

“Well, thank you, Sandy.”

“The pleasure is mine” she says, as she looks at the computer and reads his name from the reservation. “Mr. Graham.”

“Yes, but you can call me G.”

She nods and gives him the key to his room. “Okay then G. Your room is on the eighth floor. If you need anything, you just stop by the front desk and we got your back.”

“I will, Sandy,” G. says. He looks at the room number on the key as he picks up his suit case and heads up to the elevator to the eighth floor.

On the eighth floor, G. admires the exquisite paintings on the wall and the sparkling marble tiles on the hallway. As he opens his door and enters, the sweetish smell of the apple and pear flavored air freshener hit him. He closes the door behind him, and drops his bag on the large king-size bed. The room is large and oozing of class. The curtains were made of damask fabrics and embossed with golden-colored patterns. There was a big plasma television mounted on the wall, showing an Indian movie.

G. walks up to the window and shifts the curtain to one side. From there, he could get an eagle’s-eye view of the streets, buildings, and the train station downtown.

Before he settles in for the night, G. decides to confirm his schedule for tomorrow. He had planned to meet up with a real estate agent, to check out some properties. He picks up the room phone and dials Joy’s number.

“Hello, good afternoon. Can I speak with Joy?” he asks as the familiar voice of Joy’s assistant comes up at the other end of the call.

“Hold on, please,” the assistant says, and seconds later, Joy’s voice rings out.

“Hello, this is Joy speaking. How may I help you?”

“Hi Joy. It’s G.”

“Hello G. Are you here in North Carolina?”

“Yes, it was a really nice ride. How are you doing?”

“I’ve been doing well. I blocked out the whole day for you tomorrow so we can take a look at a few properties. I would like to also give you a tour so you can get familiar with the area,” she says.

“Well, thank you,” G. says and pauses for a moment, as if wondering if the next words he’s about to say would be appropriate. “I would like to take you out for breakfast and lunch. Is that okay? I don’t want your husband or boyfriend to get the wrong idea though,” he says, putting it all out at the risk of sounding suggestive.

“G. Don’t worry,” she says. “I’m not married and I’m single”

From the sound of her voice, G. figures that she’s smiling broadly.

“I look forward to eating with you tomorrow,” she adds. “Our first place to eat would be at the pancake house that is down the street from you. I will meet you there at 9:30am.”

“We have been speaking on the phone few times, but I don’t know what you look like,” G. says, wondering how he’d recognize her when he sees her tomorrow.

“What would you be wearing?”

“A blue shirt with brown khakis. What about you?”

“Um...” She thinks for a while. “I’ll be wearing a blue sundress.”

“So, we are meeting at 9:30 tomorrow morning at the pancake house down the street from the Spring Hotel” G. says, just to confirm that they’re both on the same page.

“Yes,” she says.

“Okay, I will see you then,” he says and ends the call.

Joy’s smile is so radiant that she’s unable to hide her happiness. Her assistant, Maya, had been eyeing her suspiciously as she made the call. “G. sounds really nice on

the phone,” Joy says, as if trying to help her assistant feed her curiosity.

“Really?” Maya asks.

Joy nods.

“You’re smiling, Joy! What’s going on? You have been so busy for four years trying to build your real estate business. So busy that you haven’t had time to even think about a guy. Finally, I see a smile on your face after talking to this guy?” Maya probes.

Joy blushes. “I don’t even know what he looks like, that’s the crazy thing. He sounds really intelligent and he’s a school teacher. He’s looking to buy some land here in North Carolina.”

“Oh, interesting. Why land?”

“I’m not completely sure. He just said, he’s looking to buy maybe 500 acres of land. We talked on the phone about different areas of town. I sent him some listings to look at, but he hasn’t said, why.”

“You didn’t ask him?”

“Yes, of course, I asked him, but he said he’s not sure what he wants to do with it yet.”

“Where is he from?” Maya probes further.

“Maya, he’s from New Jersey,” Joy says with a little sadness in her demeanor, as if she already knows what next would follow.

“Well, don’t get too excited. He’s from the north. He won’t want to move down here in the south. We’re too slow.” Maya drops the cold ice.

Joy had her own share of disappointment from men because of her location. The last one was from a guy she dated for four years. Their love life was a bed of roses until one day, when he decided that he wanted to move to Chicago because he couldn’t see himself making the kind of money he wanted in North Carolina. For this reason, he moved and that was the end of their relationship. Those days were the most devastating days of her life. Joy knew no joy for weeks. She spent days and nights crying and reminiscing on the beautiful moments they had spent together, and all the efforts that were about to go down the drain.

With friends around her giving her the encouragement she needed, Joy was able to rise above that rubble, and now she has built a career for herself. She had since bought herself this downtown building. She has her office on the ground level and a three-bedroom apartment on the second floor with a rooftop terrace. Up there on the roof, she has a kiddie pool to keep her feet wet. A lawn table that’s always lit up at night with string lights,

giving the place the ambience of a beautiful destination place in a huge city.

She was wise enough to save her commission checks when she worked for another real estate company while still living with her mom. Now that it seemed like she has it all, she still feels incomplete without a man in her life, to call hers.

“That’s true, Maya. They don’t like staying in North Carolina. But then after you got your degree at North Carolina Central, why did you ever come back to work for me?”

“Well you’re my best friend and I wanted you to succeed. You helped me buy my first house, and although I couldn’t afford to live in it, I rented it out and now it yields \$300 for me every month. Now, because of you I have five houses that I rent out and they all give me a lot of money. Maybe I didn’t see all these things coming when I decided to stay back and work with you, but I’m very happy and successful because of working with you,” Maya says.

She sees that tears are beginning to form under Joy’s eyelids, so she decided to change the topic. “So, girlfriend, do you have any appointments set up to show this mystery guy?” she asks with a mischievous smile.

“Yes, I set up properties for us to see for the whole day. He’s not going to be here for long. I’m hoping he will see some land that he’ll want to put in an offer for.”

“Wow, the whole day? I can’t wait to see how this turns out. Hopefully, you’ll get a sale and have a good time.”

Joy smiles. After talking for a while, Maya tells Joy where her messages are kept, and asks to leave, so she could catch up with a meeting she has with some vendors with whom she’s trying to do a weekend summer fair business.

Joy wakes up to the sound of music from her radio alarm. She sits up in bed and stretches before she walks, swaying to the sound of the music. As she gets ready to set out for her appointment with G., she wonders which of the properties she should show him first. She is a bit worried that most of the properties are pricey, and she fears that he may not be willing to pay such amounts for a property in North Carolina.

The ringtone of her phone jolts her back from her thoughts and she quickly goes to answer the call.

“Hello,” that familiar masculine voice bellows from the speaker of the phone.

“Hey G.,” she says with a smile.

“I’m just calling to confirm that we’re still having breakfast at the pancake house at 9:30am.”

“Yes,” she says. “I will be there with bells on.”

“Bells on?” he asks, seeming confused.

“Oh no, it’s just a way of saying I’ll be there,” she explains.

“Okay.” He laughs. “I’ll see you there.”

G. walks into the pancake house looking so foppish in his well-ironed navy-blue shirt and brown khaki trousers. He has a pair of Givenchy shoes on his feet, which quickly catches the attention of the waitress as she sees him.

She glanced at his shoes briefly and looks up at his face with a smile. “Hi, welcome to the pancake house,” she says with a sultry voice. “Will you be eating alone?”

“No,” G. says, smiling back at her. “I will be meeting with someone.”

“Okay,” says the waitress. “Come right this way.”

G. follows her, and she shows him to a table for two. G. settles down and glances at his wristwatch. He is

fifteen minutes early for the *date*. He asks the waitress for a glass of water. She brings the water and gives him the menu to study, so he could decide on what he and his date want to eat.

As he looks up, he sees a beautiful brown-skinned black woman at the door, wearing a brown and blue dress. *That must be Joy*, he thinks as he admires her beautiful figure.

The waitress walks up to the lady, and as they speak, G.'s eyes meet hers. They hold each other's gaze for a moment, and then they wave and the waitress walks her to the table.

"Joy?" G. asks as the lady and the waitress get to the table.

Smiling, Joy says, "Yes." Her eyes quickly sweep over the man sitting in front of her. *He's so handsome*, she thinks, but she quickly reminds herself that she needs to be professional right now, so she stretches a hand for a handshake.

"Please sit down," he says, and she sits. They look at each other, smiling in silence for a moment before the waitress interrupts.

"I'll be back to take your orders," the waitress says. "Can I get you something to drink?"

“Yes,” Joy says. “I’ll have some water for now.”

“Okay,” the waitress says and walks away.

“Well, finally, we meet,” G. says, breaking the silence. “It’s a pleasure.”

“Same here,” she says. “Have you ordered yet?”

“Not yet. I was waiting for you.”

“May I recommend the pancakes?” she asks, rubbing her palms gleefully.

“Sounds like you’ve tried it before and it’s nice?”

“Yeah, I’ve tried it. As for how nice it is, I’d like you to be the judge of that.”

The waitress brings the water and they order from the menu. As the waitress takes their order and walks away, Joy begins to discuss the properties they are going to see today. She gives G. the print outs of all five properties they’re going to see, and she tries to describe the size and the scenery around each of them.

When they are done eating, they both ride in Joy’s SUV as they start off with the first property.

“How many acres is this property?” G. asks as they get to the first estate.

“This is twenty acres of land. This is in the town’s limit.” As they walk around the land, Joy points out the boundaries, noting that there are lots of trees on it. “This land will cost you \$1,200,000. This place is close to downtown and the mall, so it would be mid-point between the two areas. If you want, you could build forty houses here or one big house and be happy doing nothing with the rest of the land. You could also build a commercial building or strip mall here. This land is right on the main road. It’s the perfect location.” G. listens as she makes her marketing pitch. He looks around, letting his imagination create the scenery of every suggestion she makes, and his train of thought is only interrupted when she asks if he has any questions.

“No,” he says. “I think I will keep this one in mind.”

“Okay, let’s move on to the next one,” she says as they walk back to her SUV.

They check the next two properties, but even though they are smaller and their prices are less than the first one, G. still doesn’t feel happy to purchase any of them.

They move on to the fourth property, after which Joy takes him to the fifth one, a farmland five minutes away from town, with 200 acres of land and a lake.

“They grow cotton on this land,” she says. “You could keep growing it or build on it.”

“Why are they selling the land, Joy?” G. asks out of curiosity.

“It’s too much work for the owners and their children. They got tired and moved away as none of them wants to work on the farm again. They all have married and have different careers. As you can see, the land is also on the main road. It is \$5,000,000.” She shrugs. “I just thought I should show you because it has a lot to offer and it feels pretty peaceful out here.

Joy tells him that the owners of the house have relocated to live closer to their kids, so they’d be able to see their grandchildren and great grandchildren regularly. She takes him into the family house and shows him around. It is a traditional country home with a wrap-around porch that faces the lake. It has five bedrooms with three full bathrooms and a half bath downstairs. It has a large kitchen which opens into an extensive living room.

“I could see myself living here,” G. says, nodding his head.

Joy looks surprised. “You can?” she asks.

“Yes, I can.”

“Are you considering moving down here?”

“Yes, I’m really thinking about it.”

“What would you do with all of this land?” she asks.

G. looks around, from the porch where they stood to the long stretch of the land. “Could I sell some of it?” he asks.

“Yes, some developers subdivide their land and make a profit that way.”

“I want this property, Joy,” he affirms. Now he has an undeniable conviction that this is the right place he should live. He has already fallen in love with the serenity of it. It was exactly what he needed—a land that is almost virgin.”

“Are you sure?” Joy asks. “I still have another property to show you.”

“No,” says G. “This is the exact land I want. It is right outside of town and it has a house on it, which I can renovate, and it even has a lake on it. The land is on the main road, and it is mostly clear, with not much cleaning or stumping work to do on it.

“Let’s write up the contract,” G. says with a conviction that surprises himself.

They walk back to Joy's SUV and drive to her office.

As they get to the office, G. looks around at the beautiful building and the classy interior decoration. "This is your office?" he asks.

"Yes," she says with a smile as she walks to her desk as sits down.

"Very impressive," G. says, still looking around at the window blinds, the ancient brick walls, the large split air conditioner at the corner, wall screen television, the lush finishing of Joy's desk, and the expensive sofas arranged in a small lounge at the far end of the large office. "It's really beautiful. I like the accent brick wall. It has that city vibe."

"Thank you," Joy says excitedly.

She looks for her contract on the computer and she says in disbelief, "You want to really buy this land?"

G. smiles to reassure her. "Yes, Joy. I'm serious."

"Okay, I'm just checking to make sure you didn't change your mind." She laughs nervously as she scrolls through her desktop to locate the folder where the contract is located. She opens the contract, fills in G.'s names and asks, "What would you like to offer?"

G looks up and shakes his head methodically, as if thinking of what to say. “Um, let’s start with four million.”

She’s a little shocked. She looks up at him briefly, types in the amount in the contract, and asks, “What lending institution are you getting a loan from?”

“I’m not going to take out a loan.”

“Okay,” she says quizzically, expecting him to say more, but as he doesn’t say anything else, she prods, “How many business partners will be on the contract?”

“Oh, it’s just me,” he says. The look of disbelief crawls up her face again.

“Are you serious now?” she asks, and he nods. She presses her thumbs together and observes him for a while, trying to see if the look on his face will prove that he’s joking. She doesn’t see any signs that suggest it was said in jest. “I will need you to provide a proof of funds. I have to present some form of payment source with the contract that I am presenting.”

“When do you need it?” G. asks, acting more confident than any other client she had ever met.

“When I present the contract.”

“Okay, let me make a phone call,” he says, as he gets up and walks outside of her office to the veranda that demarcates Joy’s office from the reception.

As Joy sits there waiting for him, and wondering if he’s really up to this business, her phone starts ringing. She picks it up. It’s Maya.

“Maya,” Joy whispers into the phone.

“Yeah. Joy what happened? Why are you whispering?” Maya asks.

“Oh,” says Joy as she realizes that she is indeed whispering.

“Can you talk?” Maya asks. “Where are you?”

“I’m in the office with G. He stepped out of the office, and he’s making a phone call about getting a proof of funds.”

“Oh, he saw something he would like to buy?”

“Yes!”

“Oh, it’s that property going for \$300,000, right? I told you he would like that one.”

“No,” Joy replies, and before she can explain, Maya chips in again. “Oh, was everything else on the list higher? Which one did he like?”

“The \$5,000,000 one,” says Joy, to the utter bewilderment of her friend.

“What? Maya screams. “Are you serious?”

“Yes, but he’s not borrowing it,” Joy adds, sounding worried, as this whole arrangement still seems too good to be true. “He says he’s paying for it himself and I told him he needed a proof of funds and he stepped out of the office. Now, he’s talking to somebody on the phone. Maya, I have never had a client that offered this much money before. Do you think he’s legit?” Before Maya responds, Joy sees G. coming back towards to the office. “Oh, I have to go. He’s coming back,” she whispers into the phone before hangs up.

“So, how did it go?” She asks him. “Do you need a week or so to get the proof of funds?”

“Oh no,” says G. “What’s your email address? I will text it to my financial advisor and he will send you the proof of funds.”

“Okay,” says responds nervously, trying to remember her email address.

G. looks at her countenance and realizes that she is nervous. “Are you okay, Joy?” he asks as she passes the email address to him and he starts texting it to his financial advisor.

“Yes. I don’t look okay?” she feigns ignorance.

“No, actually you look a little nervous.”

“Well,” she exhales. “Honestly, this is the first time I’m writing a contract for this kind of huge amount. I just want to make sure that the payment is in place before I send in the offer.”

G.’s cell phone beeps. He looks at it and says, “Check your email.”

Joy opens her email on her computer and sees the proof of funds. Her eyes open wide in disbelief as she sees the amount available in the document. She looks up at G. and asks, “Okay, didn’t you tell me you were a teacher?”

G. laughs and says, “Yes, I am. I know you’re wondering how I got this kind of money if what I really do is teach?”

Joy nods, feeling a little silly. “Well, right now, I am just curious. Even the biggest professors may never ever get to the level of having this much money stashed out somewhere.

G. reaches out, places his hand on hers and taps it slowly saying, “Joy, I won the lottery in New Jersey. That’s where I got the money from. I have a financial ad-

visor who handles the money for me. He's the person I called to send you the POF you are looking at now."

"Wow," Joy says. She's completely overwhelmed. "I'm sorry. I didn't know what to think."

G. starts laughing, and once again, she starts feeling relieved. Ever since she saw him this morning, she has developed a special fondness for his smiles and laughter. There is something beautiful about the way he laughs; there is a kind of pure joy she sees in his eyes each time he does, a joy so pure and real like that of a baby.

"Okay," she says, trying so hard not to make it obvious that she's checking him out. "I'm sending the contract over with the POF. When can you close? In two weeks after the title work is done?" she asks.

"Yes," G. affirms. "That'll be fine."

After Joy has sent the contract, they both go off to have dinner, as they had planned the day before.

G. gets back to the hotel, feeling more excited than he has felt in a while. He quickly takes his bath and grabs his phone, excited to share the news of recent happenings

with his boys. He calls Jesse and tells him that he has placed an offer to buy a property. The news comes as a shock to Jesse, so he quickly calls Larry, and puts them all on a three-way conference call.

As soon as Larry joins the conversation, G. repeats the words he said to Jesse earlier. "I put an offer on a property."

"Wait a minute G. You're kind of moving too fast," Larry says. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yes, after seeing the property I feel good about it. I need a change and I even think I want to settle down," G. says.

"Hold on!" Larry interrupts. "What are you talking about?"

"You want to settle down? Have you met somebody already?" Larry asks, with a bit of jest in his tone.

"Just the realtor," says G.

Jesse is flabbergasted. "You mean to tell me you went all the way down there and you've found somebody already? What's wrong with the women up here?"

"Nothing is wrong with the women up there. You know the women I've been with and the ones I'm dating over there currently, but this young lady down here is dif-

ferent from all those other ladies. I like the way she handles business, I like the appearance of her office, and I like her smile.

“The appearance of her office?” Larry blurts, probably wondering if he’d ever hear anything sillier than that.

“Yeah, you know Bella got me into the whole art thing,” G. tries to defend himself. “The decor tells a lot about a person. So far, I’m intrigued by her. I asked her out for lunch tomorrow to get an update and know if my offer was accepted.”

“What did she say?” Jesse asks.

“She said yes. What else was she going to say?” G. replies, laughing and deliberately sounding cocky.

“Go for it, G,” Larry cheers. “And if it doesn’t work out, move on to the next!”

As expected, Jesse counters him immediately. “Just take it slow, G. There doesn’t necessarily have to be a next. Just make the best out of this one. Go for it.”

“Anyway, have you decided what you’re going to do with the property that you’re buying down there?” Larry asks, unwilling to banter with Jesse.

“Well, I got some ideas from Joy and I’m thinking about them. It may fit into what I was thinking about.”

“Oh, so she complements you?” Jesse asks teasingly.

“So far it seems that way,” G. says, shrugging a little.

“Well, I have a date tonight,” says Larry. “I have to get ready and, I can’t do that messing around talking to you two characters on the phone.”

“Oh, you mean the one that acts like a man instead of a lady?” Jesse retorts.

“She’s just confident and a go-getter” Larry snaps back.

“But why is she so domineering though, and why do you always need a vacation from her?” Jesse hits again.

“Whatever,” Larry gives up. “I have to get off the phone. Keep us updated G. And as for you, Jesse, get a date and leave me alone. And by the way, having lunch with a coworker in a meeting is not a date. Goodbye.”

“I never said that was a date, Larry!” Jerry snaps back, but Larry has already hung up before he finishes

his statement. G. starts laughing. “Come on man,” Jesse continues. “I never said it was a date.”

“It’s okay, Jesse. When the right one comes along you’ll feel it,” G. says. “I’m getting hungry again, Jesse, so I’m going to go look around for somewhere to eat.”

G. steps out from the elevator and sees Sandy sitting at the front desk. He looks at his wrist watch and sees that the time is 8:00pm. He walks up to her with a smile. “Hey, Sandy. You’re still working?”

“Yes,” Sandy replies smiling courteously. “How is everything, Mr. G? Do you need anything? More towels, maybe?”

“No, I’m looking for somewhere I can eat.”

“Oh, okay. What are you craving, Mr. G? We have a barbecue restaurant two blocks away, and an Italian restaurant just four blocks away. We also have a restaurant in this hotel, in case you’d prefer to eat in your room. Or do you want fast food?”

G. hums for a moment. “I think I’ll take a walk, and whatever comes to my mind first, I’ll have it.”

“Well then, G., when you go out, turn left and start walking. You will see some fast food places.”

“Okay, Sandy. Thank you.”

G. steps out and walks down the sidewalk. He admires the serenity of the downtown area. It is nothing like the busy streets of New Jersey. The trees are all well-lit and calm, and there are no harsh sounds of car honks tearing into the quietness of the night. He sees a big waterfall, designed with different colors of light that makes the water splash around in different colors. There are a few people sitting in groups of two or three at the ledge around the waterfall, talking and taking pictures. Not far away from there, the surrounding restaurants arranged tables and chairs outside for their guests. Customers enjoy the beauty of the waterfall, and the perfect romantic ambience that comes with the sound of the rustling water.

As G. continues walking without a destination in mind, he finds himself praying and thanking God again for the sudden blessings that have come his way. He sits on the ledge around the waterfall and says a little prayer, whilst struggling to not let the tears of joy forming under his eyes to slide down.

After he prayed, he feels a strange kind of peace overwhelm him. He walks back to the hotel, deciding to call for room service to place an order for dinner.

Just like the first day, G. did not wait too long before Joy arrived at the restaurant. He had arrived five minutes earlier and taken a seat at a table at the end of the large restaurant. His seat allowed him a clear view of the door. He watches in admiration as she walks in, wearing a body-hugging orange dress that shows off her curvaceous figure. As she walks towards the table, G. stands up and pulls out a seat for her to sit opposite him at the table. She smiles warmly, and then he says, “You look so beautiful.”

“Thank you.” She blushes.

As she sits down, G. goes back to his seat, and rubs his palm gleefully, trying to compose himself. He is so mesmerized by her beauty that he can’t think of the right words to say. “Thanks for meeting me here, Joy,” he manages to say. “I hope you like Italian food.

“Yes,” she says. “And I really enjoyed showing you those properties and having breakfast and lunch with you yesterday.”

“The feeling is mutual,” He smiles. “Any update from the listing agent?”

“Yes,” she says with a sad look on her face. “They countered your offer.”

“What is it, Joy? How much did they ask for?” G. hates seeing her wear a sad look. If he had his way, he’d like to keep her smiling forever.

“They asked for \$4,500,000,” she says, sounding defeated.

G. can guess what’s going through her mind. She had already told him that this would be her biggest sale ever, and that the commission would come handy in paying off her house. At this point, he is willing to do anything to make her happy. He already likes the property, and even if he didn’t, the fact that a part of Joy’s happiness hinges on that transaction gives him the boost he needs to make his next move. “Okay, let’s do it,” he says.

Joy shakes her head in disbelief. “What did you say?”

“I said, “Let’s do it!””

Then Joy smiles at him with admiration. “I’ll be right back,” she says and steps out to make a phone call.

From the transparent glass of the restaurant’s door, G. watches as she speaks to someone on the phone. The more he looks at her, the more his admiration for her grows. He is so impressed by how beautiful and collected she is. To him, she is the complete package he’d call an ideal woman. From her wavy black hair that flows down

to her shoulder to her hour-glass figure. G. wonders how a lady could be so beautiful and smart at the same time. Right now, he could feel a tingle in his heart. A tingle that reminds him of that popular saying—when you find the right one, you’d feel it. He could feel it all over him each time he looks at her or thinks about her, and he prays that she feels the same way.

After a few minutes Joy comes back inside the restaurant and sits down. “They have accepted your offer,” she says, smiling broadly. “I will make the changes on the contract and the seller will sign it.”

G. feels so glad to bring that smile back on her face again. “Aha! Now, she’s no longer frowning,” he teases, and they both start to laugh.

“Congratulations G.,” she says.

“Congratulations, Joy, on your first multi-million-dollar sale,” he replies.

She’s so ecstatic and she cannot hide it. Her smile becomes more radiant and she offers to pay for their lunch. G. laughs heartily at her offer. He has always loved the sparkle in her eyes each time she smiles, but right now, the sparkle has become brighter, like the illumination of a thousand string lights sparkling in a dark night.

The waiter comes over and takes their order. As they wait for their food to arrive, Joy asks if he has decided on what to do with the land.

She pauses for a moment, and then he tells her that after talking to her yesterday, his way of thinking changed.

He tells her that he wants to make a difference in people's lives, to give them an opportunity to achieve their dreams, using the seed money he'll give them.

His passion to help others amazes Joy. She just stares and listens with so much admiration. After lunch, she pulls out her money to give to the waiter, but G. places his hand on hers and asks her to keep the money.

"I got you," he says. "I just want you to enjoy yourself."

After spending some time at the restaurant, they drive back to Joy's office and she corrects the contract and sends it to the listing agent. As they wait for the signed copy to be emailed back, G. looks into her eyes and asks, "So tell me, am I sitting inside of your dream right now?"

Joy's heart takes a leap. She is mesmerized by his person. She doesn't know if she should just admire his

passion to see others succeed, adore his beautiful smile, or lust for his finely curved pinkish lips. *Why's he such a stud!* she wonders.

“Joy? Hello?” G. calls.

“Yeah,” she replies as G’s voice jolts her back from her daydream. “Ah, I’m sorry. I was just thinking about my dream,” she lies. “Yes, this is part of it. I also want to make a difference. I have always wanted to buy a land and develop it to create a place where people can hang out—a place where people can come together and enjoy each other’s company. It’ll be something like a destination place.”

“Really?” G. nods, admiring the fact that despite this woman’s success, she still wants to reach for greater heights. This is all the conviction he needs to know that if things go the way he wants, they would make a great team. All he needs now is to get to know her better, especially to know if they can have a future together.

Her phone beeps, and she looks at it. She has just received the email they’re waiting for. The seller has signed the document, so they send it to G.’s attorney.

G. smiles at Joy and says, “If I take you out for dinner to celebrate will your significant other be upset?”

Joy's eyes brighten. Finally, he's making the move! She smiles and says, "There is no significant other. I told you that, G." She holds his gaze for a moment, and then she asks, "What about your significant other?"

"I have no significant other, but I am dating. It's really nothing serious." He averts his gaze for a moment, as if to create an opportunity to talk about something else. "Tomorrow is my last night here, but I'll be back. I have a lot of planning to do. I have some things to take care of back in New Jersey." He adds, "Where would you like to eat tonight?"

Joy is still looking into his eyes. She shrugs, saying, "I'd go wherever you want."

As he gets up to leave, he asks her to meet him tomorrow night at the steakhouse next to the waterfall he saw some nights ago. Joy sees him off to the door and watches as he leaves in a taxi. She walks back into the office feeling like he left with a piece of her heart.

Maya walks in the next morning with loads of questions. "Good morning, Joy," she greets as she enters Joy's office and sees her sitting on the couch, working on her computer. "How was last night?" She sits and pulls off

her shoes so she could put her feet on the couch and relax for a full dose of gist.

Joy just replies with her greeting and focuses back on the document she's working on.

Maya waits for a while, almost holding her breath, and hoping her friend just wants to complete a line and unload the gist. Instead, Joy stops typing and stares askance towards the ceiling. "Joy, I can't stand the anticipation! What happened?"

"The seller accepted the counter offer!" she starts joyfully, holding back the tears in her eyes. "I have been holding back my excitement since I was with G. I'm in shocked, happy and amazed. And to top it off, I'm madly attracted to this guy! My world has turned right side up from meeting just one person. That's crazy, right?" She looks at her friend, hoping she'd tell her that she isn't crazy.

"This is the best news ever, Joy," Maya announces joyfully. She stands up and starts singing and making some dance moves.

Joy laughs. "Well, he's taking me out to dinner tomorrow night to celebrate."

"Where are you going?" asks Maya

“The expensive steak restaurant.”

“Wow. What are you going to wear?” she asks, and before Joy can answer, someone walks into the office.

“Hello?” the person calls.

“Yes,” Maya answers, walking out of Joy’s office to the reception area. “How may I help you?”

The man is holding a big vase with beautiful flowers. “I’m delivering this to Joy,” he says.

Maya reaches forward collecting the flowers, and gives the delivery man a tip before he leaves. She quickly runs back into Joy’s office. She gives Joy the flowers and asks, “Who are they from?”

Joy smiles anxiously as she opens the note. It’s from G. It reads: Thank you for the smile you gave me today. I’m looking forward to you being on my team and seeing you tonight. —G.

“Aww that’s so beautiful, Joy,” Maya gushes. Joy is speechless. She grins from ear-to-ear as she looks at the colorful flowers that match the colors in her office perfectly.

“Wow, I can see why you’re falling for him,” Maya teases. “Does he have a bother?” She laughs. “Do

you think he has a girlfriend? I mean a guy like that has to have a girlfriend.”

Joy sighs. “He says he is dating, but it’s nothing serious.” She looks at Maya with a guilty face. “I kind of asked him,” she confesses. Maya gives her a suspicious look and they both start laughing.

“I just want to make sure you don’t get hurt,” Maya says.

“I know, I know. I don’t want to get hurt either, but I don’t know how to slow down my feeling.”

“I understand,” says Maya. “He is endearing and attractive, and with these, he’s not making it easy for you to slow down your feelings.” She smiles shaking her head. “Hang on there, Joy. This is going to be some ride of a relationship. Hopefully, it will be a safe ride for your feelings.”

“I’m holding on, girl,” says Joy. “I’m holding on real tight!”

The steakhouse is alive with lots of customers coming in to have a nice time. From the table where G. and Joy are sitting, they can see the colorful waterfall. Just like the other night, lots of excited people are hanging around the ledge of the waterfall, talking, taking pictures, and having a nice time. The cool rustling sound of

the water, the ambience of the night, and the different colors of string lights, make the atmosphere the most perfect for a romantic getaway.

“Thank you for the flowers that you sent me this morning G.,” Joy says. “They are beautiful and they put a smile on my face.” She wants to say more, but she stops there, trying to put her emotions in check.

G. smiles. “Your welcome, Joy.”

“This restaurant is beautiful. I love the scenery.” She says, looking around.

Just then, the waiter comes to their table, dressed in crisp-white shirt and coffee-brown trousers. He bows slightly. “Hello, I’m your server tonight. What would you like to drink?”

“I’ll have an Arnold Palmer,” says Joy.

“What is an Arnold Palmer? G. asks. He has never heard that before.

“It is lemonade and ice tea,” says Joy.

“Oh, okay.” G. turns to the waiter. “I think I’ll have that also.

“Okay, I will be right back,” the waiter says and walks away.

“So, G., tell me about you winning the lottery. I mean of all of the places you could spend your money buying a property, you pick a small town compared to big time cities like New York and New Jersey and all that?” Joy asks.

“I want to make a big impact,” G. begins. “I want to go where I can do the most to help. The big city is over crowded and it’s hard to make a difference because there’s too much chatter. Everyone is in your ear and it’s hard to be heard. I want to be a resource for people of color to have a place to go to besides the bank. I guess you could call me a private investor.” He shrugs and smiles as he continues. “Can I share with you a story I once read somewhere?”

“Okay,” she says, leaning in towards him.

“There were two young men. Both of them had jobs and were making a good amount of money every month. One of them decided to build a water irrigation system, which farmers in their town needed badly. One day, the father of the other young man came to his son and said to him, ‘Son, the son of one of my friends is starting a water irrigation system. He’s a young man like you, and he is looking for an investor. I think this would be a good investment.’ The son said, ‘Father, I have a wife who loves beautiful clothes and beautiful furniture. She also loves to eat at fine places. I don’t have any

money to invest now.’ So, years later, the father goes back to the son and says, ‘Son, I spoke to my friend and he told me his son doesn’t have to work anymore because he’s now rich. Now, he can buy his wife beautiful clothes and nice furniture. He can take his wife to fine places to eat. Look at you now. You have to keep working to stay out of debt. You didn’t invest when you had the chance to, because you wanted your rewards right away instead of investing first then getting your rewards from your investments.’”

G. pauses for a while, as if he’s giving the story time to sink into Joy’s mind, and then he continues. “I want to be the guy who invested in the water irrigation system. I want to make a difference,” said G.

“Hmmm...” Joy nods thoughtfully. “So, you will be another resource for the people of this town to go to, so you can invest in their business.”

“Exactly,” he concurs. “I have been blessed to be a blessing and I want to be the guy who invested in the guy who started the water irrigation system.”

Joy is speechless. She has somehow leaned so close that her face is just a few inches away from G., who’s sitting on the other side of the table.

“Are you ready to order?” the waiter asked. He had served them drinks, and was waiting for them to order their meals. When he noticed they weren’t forthcoming, he decided to go and ask them.

“Yes, please,” G. says and places an order. Joy also places an order. As soon as the waiter leaves, they continue their conversation.

“Have you always been so benevolent?” Joy asks.

“Um... I wouldn’t really say so because I didn’t always have this much. But now, I think that I am finally in a place, financially, where this person in me has come to life, and yeah, I like him.”

“I like him too,” she says as she sips her drink.

“What about you Joy? What’s your story?”

“Well, I was raised by a single parent. It was just me and my mother. My mother worked in property management and she brought a few properties of her own that she’s preserving for when she retires. I went to college, graduated and majored in business. I have a best friend, who works with me. Her name is Maya. She keeps me balanced. She handles things that I miss or am too busy to handle. I’ve shared with her the knowledge I have in real estate, so she now has a property she lives in and a few properties that she rents out. Now she is looking to

invest in another property. I have kept my business going with her loyalty, so I give her a bonus whenever I get a big commission. She's not a realtor, but she works in the office with me."

"Do you own any properties?" G. interjects.

"Well, yes I own the office building that I work in and I live upstairs over my office. When we close on the land you're buying, I will then own my building free and clear from the commission, and Maya will get her bonus," she says joyfully.

They stay quiet for a while as the waiter brings their order. "So, there's no man in your life?" G. asks.

Joy looks at him quizzically, shakes her head and smiles. "I know it may be unbelievable, but no, I don't have a man. Sometimes I wonder if men are intimidated by my work ethics and independence. Sometimes I feel like I have to dumb myself down to make them feel good about themselves. It's like I'm the doctor for their self-esteem. I want to be appreciated for what I know and can contribute to a relationship. I feel it should be more of a team effect. We should complement each other. What I'm good at will cover what he's not good at and, the things he's good at should make up for the things I'm not good

at. So, I keep it moving until I can find someone who can value me and what I bring into the relationship. What about you G.? Are you really single?" She stares at him suspiciously, willing him to be entirely honest with her.

G. pulls himself closer to her. "I told you this the last time. I'm dating here and there, but I don't have a serious relationship. I am so mesmerized by you. I've never met a young lady that seemed so sure of herself. I like what you are doing for yourself. I like the way you think. You challenge me and make me rethink the direction in which I'm going. I have dated many young ladies who would make good wives; they all also work and have their things going on for them, but there's always something missing and I couldn't figure out what it was until I met you. I need someone that can challenge me, not compete against me, but to complement my vision, to help me achieve my goals, while I also help her achieve her goals. I want someone I'd be connected to physically, mentally and emotionally, someone who'd be willing to follow me to God when we need help spiritually."

He pauses again to observe her, and then he continues. "Sometimes, the physical attraction may be there, but the mental part would be missing. I need someone I can brainstorm with. I think that's what has been missing and I didn't realize what it was until you and I started checking out those lands together. You were able to give

me ideas that hadn't come to me yet. You gave me something to think about, something to consider. That turns me on because you are taking me to the next level mentally."

Joy smiles. "Finally, someone that understands me," she says and heaves a sigh of relief. "I'm impressed that you noticed so much about me. I never met a man who studied me so closely. Most men just look at the physical and the financial, but they don't look any deeper. It's as though you can see right through me down to my soul. You make me feel like I have all of your attention. I have never been appreciated this much ever. Thank you for telling me the truth that you are dating. I like the way you make me feel special and you respect me, but I can't do anything with you while you're still dating." She drops the cold ice on G.'s chest.

G. looks at her for a moment, and then he holds her hand. "I will take care of that when I get back to New Jersey."

BLESSED TO BLESS

“Good morning, G.” Sandy greets as G. steps out from the elevator. “How are you doing?”

G. smiles and shakes his head. “Do you work every shift, Sandy? He asks. He had seen her here at the front desk when he left yesterday morning, and she was also there at night when he returned from having dinner.

“I fill in the gaps, G.,” she replies. “I do a lot of over time. I want to help my mom buy a house one day and I need a new car, so I have to stay busy.”

“Hmmm...” says G. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“I see you with your suitcase, G. Are you leaving us today?”

“Yeah.”

“How did you like the best room in the house?” she asks smiling.

G. laughs. He remembers some days ago when he saw her attending to some new guests. He was stepping into the elevator when he heard her tell them the same

words she told him when he checked in the first day: *We have reserved for you the best room in the hotel.*

G. shakes his head and says, “I left a tip in the room for the cleaning lady because she did a great job keeping my room and bathroom clean.”

“All right G.,” she says, keeping her smile up. “You’re all checked out. I put the payment on the card you left with us. Is that okay?”

“Yes, that’s fine.”

G. then gives Sandy a thank you card. “Thank you, Sandy, for making me to feel so welcome. Take this thank you card from me to you.”

“Thank you, G.,” she says happily. “No one ever thought of me like that before. I didn’t think anyone notice how hard I worked, G.,” Sandy adds.

“Well, I noticed. It seems like every time I came by the front desk; I would see you. I’m going to look out for you when I come back, Sandy.”

“Okay, G. The Spring Hotel hates to see you leave. Come back soon and visit us again.”

“I will,” G. says as he walks out of the door to hitch a taxi that will take him to the train station.

As G. leaves, Sandy opens the envelope to see the content. She wants to read the note before she gives it to her manager. She just wants to be sure that G. has written nice compliments, because that would count towards her getting a raise. She opens the card and it reads: *To one of the most hardworking people I know, thank you for the “best room in the house!” Inside this envelope, you’d find ten \$100 bills. This is a tip for you. —G.*

Sandy’s mouth falls open in awe. “Oh my God! Oh my God!” she says in an almost whisper. She quickly takes an early break and picks up her phone to call her mom.

“Mom, I have the down payment for the car that I was saving for,” she announces excitedly.

“Wow! How Sandy? You said you don’t have much in your savings,” her mom’s worried voice replies from the other end of the phone.

“I got it in a thank you card from a guest.

“Are you for real?”

“Yes, Mom!”

“I’m so happy for you, baby.”

“I’m so excited, Mom. You know, you were right when you said you never know who’s watching you, so always do your best.”

“You see?” her mom says.

“Okay, Mom, I’ve got to go now. I was so excited I couldn’t hold it in so I had to call you. I love you, Mom!” she yells and ends the call.

As she walks back inside, Sandy wonders what G. does for a living that he could afford to give her such a generous gift. As Sandy gets back to the front desk, she sees her manager. She starts smiling as she hands the card to the manager without the money so it could be added to the wall for all the coworkers at the front desk to see it. She feels so appreciated even if her manager doesn’t express to her how much she is appreciated.

The card says everything.

G. sits cozy in the business class section of train as it speeds away from the country side of North Carolina towards New Jersey. He reminisces on the nice time he spent with Joy, and he feels glad to know that he’d soon be back. He can’t wait to hook up with his boys, to tell them about everything that happened over the past few days.

He opens his briefcase and pulls out the signed contract. He looks at it and reads the texts again for the umpteenth time. It all seems so surreal. He pinches himself slightly, to feel the pain and realize that this is actually happening in his lifetime and not in his dreams. All of a sudden, his life seems to have sped up. A few weeks ago, he was just a high school teacher who could barely afford enough to pay his bills and student loan he took out to go to college. But now, he has enough to dole out money to help people achieve their life aims.

Unlike what his life used to be, today, he doesn't have to save to get anything he wants. He used to be afraid to spend any money because he needed to make sure his meager pay lasted until the next paycheck.

Suddenly, feeling overwhelmed, and just like the other times when this sudden blessing made him feel overwhelmed, G. starts praying.

“Heavenly Father,” he prays, “I just want to thank you again for all the blessings you’ve given to me, and I want to promise you that I and my household will serve you. I have gone from having a little to living in abundance, and my cup is overflowing. Dear God, I feel so strongly connected to Joy. She is so easy to talk to. I felt so alive while I was with her. I didn’t think about money, and I didn’t feel the pressure to impress her. I just really want you to take the wheels and be in charge of both my

finances and this beautiful thing I have brewing for her.” He keeps saying prayers till he doses off.

When G. heard a banging sound on the door, he already knew that it was one of his boys. When he opened the door, Jesse entered the kitchen with a pack of groceries, G. was too sleepy to chat with him. He just went back to bed.

The whiff strong fresh coffee rushes into G.’s room and he wakes up, tempted to go to the kitchen. He quickly takes a shower, to reinvigorate after the long train ride. As the cold water from the shower head splashed on his head, G. heard the doorbell ring again, and he knows that it must be Larry. He quickly finishes showering and goes out into the kitchen to hook up with them.

As he dresses up to go to meet them in the kitchen, he can hear them bantering again about the women in their lives.

As he dresses up to go to meet them in the kitchen, he can hear them bantering again about the women in their lives.

“So, Jesse, what have you been doing this past weekend?” Larry asks.

“I’ve been sticking close to home. I had a painting party. We painted my bedroom, living room and bathroom.”

“Oh, that’s cool. You and who?”

“Me, my brother, his lady, and a lady friend of mine.”

“Oh, you and that teacher? Are still in the friend zone?” Larry teases.

“I’m trying to take it to the next level, but she says she’s not ready yet.”

“What is she waiting for?”

“I think she’s dating someone else. I’m not sure. Most times, we’d have a good time together, but then, she suddenly becomes distant again. It’s starting to get old,” Jesse says, sounding irritated.

Just then G. comes out of his bedroom dressed in shorts and white jersey.

“What’s up G.?” Larry greets.

“Everything is good man. What’s up with you?” G. walks up to the coffee kettle and pours himself a cup.

“I’ve just been spending some time with my lady friend,” Larry gloats.

“Oh, the one you took a vacation from?” G. teases smiling.

“Yeah, and it’s about vacation time again,” Larry says and G. starts laughing as he walks towards the stove where Jesse is almost done cooking.

“Jesse, what’s for breakfast?” G. asks as he starts glancing at the table.

“Well, we got eggs and bacon, fruit salad, coffee and juice,” Jesse says, turning off the stove.

“Yes! That’s what I’m talking about!” G. yells as he sits down to eat.

“Wow, I came over just in time,” Larry says, rubbing his palms gleefully and walking towards the kitchen table. “Jesse you’re the best!”

Jesse places the food on the table. Everyone excitedly dishes out food onto their plate and starts eating.

“This is good Jesse,” G. compliments as he takes a bite of the bacon.

“Come on man, we’ve waited for too long. Tell us how your trip went,” Larry says.

“Well,” G. starts as he swallows a mouthful of the fried eggs. “I found some land I like. I put an offer in on it and it was accepted.” Larry and Jesse stop eating as they become engrossed in what G. is saying. “I’m excited about it but coming out of my comfort zone is a little scary, I must confess. I just feel like I can accomplish so much more there than in New Jersey. I wish I could keep a place here and in North Carolina.” As he says this, his friends look at him quizzically and it hits him that he is a millionaire. He laughs briefly. “Oh, I forget I do have enough money to do that. I have been watching my spending for so long so it has become a part of me.” They all laugh and jeer at him, and then he continues to the more interesting part which the boys have been waiting for.

“So, I also met the realtor Joy,” he begins.

“Aha!” Larry clears his throat and starts rubbing his palm together again.

“Well, she’s the one that showed me different properties to choose from, and she has been very helpful with ideas. I really like her. I mean I just met her, but I find myself thinking about her always. This is crazy, I feel like I’m going 100 miles per hour.”

“This is happening rather fast; don’t you think?” Jesse says, worried.

“I know it is, but I can’t even help myself. I guess that’s the problem that comes with having a lot of money. When you don’t have money, you take your time and you think things through because you can’t afford to make a mistake. But having money, I guess, affords you some room to make mistakes. But then, I believe that having you guys in my life keeps me balanced and I need that.”

“So, when are you leaving? And what are you going to do about your job?” Jesse asks. “I think you’re moving too fast. You worked hard to be a teacher. I think you should stay here. Get a mansion, hang out with other rich people. I think you’re making a mistake. Your family and friends are here.”

“Did I ever tell you the story about the salesman?” G. asks.

Larry starts to laugh uncontrollably. Jesse and G. look at Larry waiting for him to stop laughing. When his friends fail to join in his laughter, Larry feels a little awkward. Then he stops laughing and says “No, G., we didn’t hear this one.”

Jesse shakes his head and says. “Go ahead, G.”

Looking confident, G. starts. “There were two salesmen whose jobs were relocating them. The first salesman goes to the town he’s transferred to ahead of

time to see if he would like the town. When he came into the town, the first person he saw was a man talking to some children. The children were listening to the man very intently. ‘Excuse me,’ the salesman said to the man, ‘Could you please tell me a little about this town? You see, I’m a little concerned because the town I’m coming from has a lot of nosey neighbors and not friendly people. The people there are very greedy and they don’t look out for one another. Since I’m moving here, I just wanted to know how the people are.’ So, the teacher looked up from talking to the children and looked at the man and said, ‘The same people that live around you in that city are the people you will find here.’ So, the man thanked the teacher and continued to walk into the town feeling very discouraged and disappointed. When the second salesman decided to visit the town, he saw the same man talking to the children. ‘Excuse me, kind sir,’ he said to the teacher. ‘Could you please tell me a little bit about this town? You see, I’m relocating here and the place I’m coming from, the neighbors are so nice. They look out for you. If you need anything, they are always there to help. They are so friendly that they’ll invite you to sit down and eat with them. So, I just want to know how the people are here.’ The teacher looked at the second salesman and said to him, ‘The same people that you live around are the same people you will find here.’ So, the second salesman continued to walk into the town with his head

up, smiling. Just then, one of the children said to the teacher. ‘Excuse me, teacher, but why did you tell the first salesman that the people here were not friendly and they were nosey and greedy, but the second salesman, you told him that the people here are friendly and they look out for each other and that they’d even invite you to eat with them?’ Then the teacher said to the child, ‘My child, whatever you look for is what you shall find.’ And then the teacher continued teaching the children.”

As he always does each time he tells a parable, G. pauses and observes his friends, as if he is trying to read their body language, to know if they have assimilated everything he said. “So, you see,” he continues. “My point, Jesse, is that I’m trying to make a difference in a new place where I can do so much more than what I can do here in this city. I’ve been blessed so now I want to be of service to as many people as I can. God told Abraham to relocate and he did. How else can you explain being blessed with this much money, only to help a few when I can help so much more?”

“You guys can relocate and go after your dreams there. Your reach can go as far as you want your reach to go. I’m just trying to get away from jealous people, and people who judge me on what I have, and then when it’s all gone, they go back to not knowing me again. I want something I can pass down to my children. I want them

to grow up knowing how to ride a horse and knowing about planting food and growing up around people who say hello. I want them to grow up around trees and grass and not just around cement parks with a couple of trees. I just want something different from what I had. I want to teach them some skills besides what they'd learn in school. I want them to know that if they have nothing they would still be able to earn a living by serving their community with the skills they have acquired. Is anything wrong with that?" he asks.

Larry looks at G. and says, "Look G., if that's what you want, then go for it. God has given you your vision and nobody can see that but you. So, I'm behind you every step of the way. I think I'm going to hand in my resignation because I believe that God put me in your vision. So, I'm following. I guess I will be moving in with you, G.?"

G. becomes overjoyed. "Ah, I have enough land, so you can build your own house on it. I will give you an acre of land and you will build your own house on it if you want. When you decide what business you'd like to start, let me know and I will finance it and I want twenty percent of the business. You can keep the land and the house as my gift to you. You will have to pay the taxes and insurance and that's it."

Feeling ecstatic, Larry jumps up and gives G. a handshake and a big hug. Then G. looks at Jesse, and back at Larry. “So, you are on board?” G. asks Larry just to be sure that he’s serious.

“Look G., here’s an opportunity that no one would have ever given me. Yes, it’s out of my comfort zone, but if this will give me a better quality of life and pave the way for me to get to the next level in life, to render a great service that’ll better my community, I guess I’d have to take it. If it doesn’t work, I guess this place will always be waiting for me to come back. This is a blessing and I’m going for the ride.” Larry says.

G. now turns back to Jesse. “What’s up with you Jesse?”

“What are you going to do?” Larry asks.

“I hear you, Larry,” Jesse says, “but it’s not that easy for me. This is all I ever known and I have a job here, my family is here, and my girl is here.”

“Oh, the one you think is seeing someone else?” Larry retorts.

“She’ll come around when she sees that I’m the right guy for her,” Jesse snaps back. “And these kids need me.”

“Well, the problem with that is that they don’t know it, so they really don’t use your guidance,” Larry interrupts again.

“I understand,” G. says. “You can stay here if you think that’s the best thing to do. You can always come to visit. There’s no pressure. Now, let’ finish this breakfast and let me finish telling you what happened.”

Jesse smiles and says, “Thanks G. for understanding. I will be there to visit and hang out with you guys.”

G. puts his house up for sale, and contracts Larry to be the realtor. He sets up a meeting with his family, and while he sits waiting for his mom to finish making lunch, he tells her about the new house he’s about to buy, the lake and the serene location of the property.

As Starr listens attentively, G. voices out his fears. “Ma, I’m feeling little afraid,” he says. “I’m virtually walking away from everything I know. It’s as if I’m starting life anew, and I’m really scared. What do you think?”

Starr sits down beside him and holds his hand. “I raised you kids to understand the importance of decisions. I believe you are doing the right thing son.” She tells him the story of two men who were locked in two different prison cells. Both of them had a window they

could look out of. One man looked out the window and looked down and said to the other man in the prison right next to him, ‘Look at all of that mud. What a terrible night!’ The man in the other cell looked out of his window and looked up at the clear sky and saw the moon and the stars and said, ‘What a wonderful night.’ So, son,” she continues, “you keep looking at the clear sky; the moon and the stars and know that you are doing the right thing. Don’t let anyone shake you or make you avert your gaze and start seeing the mud that they are looking at.”

G. smiles “Thank you, Ma,” he says. “I know I can always count on your guidance and support.”

She squeezes his hand a little and stands up to get back to the food she’s cooking. “Thanks too, son, for putting a smile on my face.”

As she turns her back to G., she warns him not to touch the barbecue ribs that she’s grilling outside. G. just smiles and says, “Okay, Ma.”

Just then, Bella and Bryce walk in, singing happily.

*This is the day,
This is the day that the Lord has made,
That the lord has made.
We will rejoice; we will rejoice,*

*And be glad in it. And be glad in it
This is the day that the Lord has made.*

As Starr hears the girls singing, she comes out dancing happily and starts singing along.

Just then, Chip comes through the door that leads into the kitchen where everyone is. “Hey, I heard you all singing outside,” he yells. “Yes, this truly is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Come on somebody!” They all laugh.

“Bryce and Bella please come and help your mother with the corn on the cob,” Starr says. “And yeah, also fix up the fruit salad and put it on the table with the ribs that Chip just took one of while I wasn’t looking.”

They all look at their mother then look at Chip, who just slowed down the chewing movement of his mouth and start laughing.

“You know, Ma got eyes in the back of her head,” G. teases.

As they start eating, G. asks, “So, Bryce, what’s going on with you?”

“I have been working with my manager on a wedding. I’m so excited”

Bryce replies. “I’m not making a lot of money, but I’m learning a lot about people and putting the foundation for events together. I came up with some ideas, but I didn’t get enough credit for it. I’m so frustrated. No matter what I do, trying to shine, someone else takes the credit for it. How do you ever move up like that?”

“What happened,” G. asks, eager to get to the root cause of her worry.

“Well, my manger gave me and another colleague the same project. We had a bride that wanted a garden wedding, so each one of us had to come up with an idea to decorate the ball room. After compiling our ideas, we had to present them to our manager.

“Well, my manger presented each of our presentations to the bride-to-be and she chose mine. I found a florist that was able to get the flowers for twenty-five percent cheaper than the usual price for the garden-themed wedding. Then I got my carpenter to make three oblong tables that had water fountain in the middle of each of them. The water came out on the edges of box in colors purple, red and green. There were six box glass vases with colorful water. There was also one tall clear vase that had flowers in the middle of the table with the color at the bottom of the vase. The sound of the waterfall gave a dramatic effect to each of the tables. The bride’s table had one and the bridal party had one. The

parents and immediate family had the other table. The guests couldn't stop talking about it.

“When the bride and the bridal party came into the ballroom they came in under a trellis that was lit up. You know, it had white lights wrapped around the wood with hanging plants and flowers suspended on it. There were also trellises pressed against the walls that had plant vines and flowers all over them. Everything was just so beautiful and surreal. It's basically the most awesome piece amongst every design I've created from my creativity. You know what? My manager got all the accolades. I enjoyed the wedding, but I wish someone noticed the hard work it took me to put a team together to make the bride and groom garden theme wedding a success,” she says and starts sobbing.

“Someone noticed, baby,” Starr says. “If not, your manager would not have chosen your concept to show the bride. She would have chosen another person's. Your time to shine will come. When a light shine bright, no matter where it is, even if it's under a rock, it will still shine and people will take notice. Believe me, baby,” Ma says and squeezes her hand a little, then she turns to Bella.

“Bella, what's going on with you?”

“I was at this boutique downtown. The owner loved my artwork, so she asked me if she could sell it. I told her how much I wanted for my work, so she added her price and I sold two of my pictures,” Bella says happily. “I also got Chip to ask one of his developers to put my art on their office walls and he did.”

Engrossed in the meal, Chip just nods and smiles, so Bella continues. “I am meeting with someone from a hotel to see if they would hang my pictures on their wall, and I have an art exhibit coming up.” She also tells them that people from the church are coming to see her art, and maybe buy some. She tells G. that the arts presentation would be in the church’s basement on Sunday after church around 4:00p.m. just in case he wants to come.

“Yes, G.,” Ma concurs. “I want you to come to church tomorrow before you leave. I’m singing this Sunday,” she announces with a bit of pride in her voice. “Our choir got new robes, so we will be marching down the aisle singing joyfully to the Lord!”

G. smiles, “What color are the robes?”

“We decided to go for purple and the sleeves are yellow,” Ma explains. “The colors look good on us.”

As they all listen with rapt interest as Ma starts fantasizing about Sunday’s service.

Pastor Treadwell would be on the altar—dressed in one of his well-tailored blue suits—smiling heartily at the congregation. Then the choir would start marching down, looking elegant in their purple and yellow choir uniforms. They would be singing melodiously with the band giving them lively beats. They would move their body to choreographed dance steps they had practiced over the week. The church would stand in admiration and start singing and dancing along.

Then Pastor Treadwell would jump up from the pulpit and start singing along. People would start speaking in tongues and glorifying God as the Holy Spirit sweeps across the congregation. Then testimonies would follow as the fire of the worship dies down.

Once the choir finishes, the congregation would be in the perfect mood for Pastor Treadwell to come and give them good news from the throne of grace.

“Ma, but that happens every other Sunday,” G. says, interrupting her daydream. Everyone starts laughing.

“Well, it would be nice to see you at the church,” Ma says, “but I understand if you can’t make it. I know you’re leaving in the morning tomorrow,” she sulks.

G. stretches his hand over to her side of the table and holds her hand. “Ma, you know I would like to be there, but since I can’t be, I will leave you with a check for \$100,000 for the family’s tithe and offerings.”

Starr’s eyes brighten. “Okay, son,” she says. “I’ll let the deacons know it’s from you. I’ll write it on the envelope.” A feeling of joy overwhelms her. She raises her hands methodically and says, “Truly, God is good.”

Everybody choruses, “All the time.”

After the meal, Chip says he’d be coming to North Carolina to look at G.’s new house, to ascertain what kind of work needs to be done on it. He also says that he would take the time to survey North Carolina, to know if it holds enough promise for him to consider moving down there.

At the end of the day, G. leaves, happy that even though he’s moving away from his comfort zone, he would soon have his brother, and one of his best friends around, to make life as warm as it has always been.

WALKING BY FAITH

The time is 5:00am, and G. is ready to start his road trip to North Carolina. As he throws his last suitcase into the trunk of his SUV, it hit him that everything was indeed going to be different. He stands hands at his side and looks at his house for one last time, wondering if he's going to miss it. As much as he is excited to start life anew, he knows that he would miss this small house that has become a very big part of him.

He had already put the house up for sale, alongside all the things inside it. Larry would sell them all off to whoever buys the house. A feeling of nostalgia overwhelms him as he opens the door of the car and enters the driver's seat. He remembers the nights he spent in this house with his friends, cooking out and playing around like kids with no care in the world. He shakes his head as the thought of his sudden financial transformation hit him, and his heart, once again, begins to expand in appreciation.

“God, so this is really happening,” he prays. “A sinner like me, as unworthy as I am, you deem it fit to

shower me with such blessings. I can't thank you enough. I can't even explain how my heart feels. I just want to say thank you again. Thank you for what you've done, and for what you're about to do. It's not easy leaving all this behind, leaving my life behind and starting anew in a strange land, but I'm following your command. Abraham followed your command. He relocated and you blessed him so abundantly that the world today still benefits from his blessings. I know that you're about to do the same thing in my life, and I'm just going to sit back and allow you to take the wheel. Take control Lord, in Jesus' name, Amen."

As he puts on his seat belt and turns on the music cd player, he hears Aretha Franklin singing "*Amazing Grace*." He hits on the *next* button on the CD player, the voice of Shirley Caesar starts singing "*Hold my mule, I'm going to praise him right here on my land!*" He pushes the button again and hears Hezekiah Walker singing "*Job's Song*." As he changes to the next song, TD Jakes voice rings out in his song with the Potter's House mass choir, "*Let's just praise the Lord.*"

Pulling out of the driveway and zooming out of the neighborhood, G. smiles at his playlist, knowing that with this amazing lineup of soul-lifting songs, it's going to be a wonderful ride.

Before the sun came up, G. was already several hours behind New Jersey. He waits at a traffic light and looks out through the window to see a couple talking and laughing in the next car. He remembers the last time he had a lady in his car like this, chatting and laughing heartily. It was one of his lady friends Ava. Ava was almost the perfect lady for him. Beautiful, funny but not driven. She was a receptionist at a law firm. However, just like the other ladies, something was off. We had very little in common. This time around, none of them were ready to move their relationship to the next level.

G. remembers when he told her that he was moving down south. She just laughed and assured him that he'd come back. "Down south is too slow, G. You can't stay there," she had said.

The traffic light turns green and G. drives off. He shakes his head and says, "Well, she had her shot," he shrugs, "and now, I'm leaving without any regrets."

"Welcome back G." Sandy greets him with her winner smile as G. walks into the hotel lobby.

"You're still as hardworking as ever, Sandy," G. compliments.

“Thanks G. I’m so happy to see you. Let me get you the best room in the house. We missed you around here. How long will you be with us this time?”

G. shakes his head as he hears that line again. He giggles and says, “I’m moving here, Sandy. Next stop would be my house when I’m moving into it.”

“That is great news, G. I know you will bring a lot of happiness to this town. Actually, you have already started with me. Guess how I got to work today?” she says playfully.

Interested, G. asks, “Tell me, how did you get here?”

“You know the money you gave me? Well, I used it to buy a car. Thanks G.”

“It’s my pleasure. You earned it,” G. says, feeling a little fulfilled that he has helped one person achieve her heart desire. “You made me feel very welcome here.”

Sandy types on her computer briefly and says, “Today, G. I got you on the top floor facing the front of the hotel.”

“Wow.” G. laughs. “What floor is that?”

“The tenth floor,” she announces, and calls on a room service staff to help him take his luggage into the

room. “And yeah, I saw Joy going to the office,” she adds to G.’s astonishment.

He shakes his head in amazement. “This must be a very small town for her to already know Joy is my realtor,” he thinks as he enters the elevator with the room service staff bearing his luggage.

G. settles into the room and walks to the balcony to check out the view. From there, he can get an eagle eye’s view of the downtown area around the hotel. “Wow, I am really here,” he says, running his hands across the smooth silver rails of the balcony. “This is the next chapter of my life; the chapter where I just want to live my life to please you, oh God.”

He quickly showers, dresses up and puts on his favorite cologne. Then he picks up his phone and calls Joy.

“Hello,” Joy’s excited voice rings out.

“Hello, how are you?” He walks to the window and moves the curtain a bit.

“I’m fine. It’s so nice to hear from you. I haven’t heard from you for a week now. How has it been back home?”

“It was fine. I had a lot to do,” he says. “What are you doing tonight?”

“Nothing really. Maya and I are going to sit up on my roof top to drink some wine, listen to some music and eat. What about you? What are you doing tonight?”

“I’m going to spend it with you and Maya on your rooftop,” he says with a naughty smile.

“What? Are you in town?” Joy asks excitedly.

“Yeah.”

“Wow! G., I’ve been looking forward to seeing you. When did you get here?”

“I got here about two hours ago. Sandy didn’t tell you?” he teases.

“What? Sandy knows?” Joy asks, laughing.

“Yes,” G. says, laughing along. “She gave me the best room of the hotel.”

Picking up the sarcasm in his tone, Joy laughs out loud. “Yes, that’s our Sandy.”

Joy yells out at Maya, and she runs into her office. “We are having company for our rooftop dinner.”

“Who?” Maya asks, looking puzzled.

“It’s G. He’s back in town”.

G. hears Maya scream out in excitement.

“G., Maya is happy. She’s here dancing around,” Joy says, laughing hysterically.

G. laughs. “You girls are funny. It’s 5:00pm now, so I’ll meet you at your office by 7:00pm. Would that be okay?”

“That would be perfect!”

Joy grins from ear-to-ear as she ends the call. She catches Maya giving her that knowing stare—the stare she always gives her each time they talk about G. As both their eyes meet, they burst into laughter.

“I’m so happy for you, Joy,” Maya says. “I haven’t seen you smile like this until G. happened. And I think he really likes you.”

“I think so, too,” Joy says, “but I don’t want to get too excited because he told me he is dating someone in New Jersey. Maya, but I can’t help the feelings I have for this man. I’m just so into him.”

“It’s okay, Joy. Just enjoy this while it lasts. I’m going to invite my friend, Miles, to join us, since it has just turned from a girls’ thing to a couple’s thing.”

“Wait, I thought you said you weren’t crazy about him?”

“Yeah, I’m not, but I don’t want to be the third wheel.” Maya says and laughs as she goes to the reception area to get her phone, to make the call.

As Maya leaves her alone, Joy starts contemplating how life would be with G. in this city. She wonders if he would want them to be together, or if he would still be interested in the lady he’s dating in New Jersey. He had thought that he would take a longer time before he returns to North Carolina, but here he was, surprising her and making her mind wander like a traveler lost in a desert.

She remembers what he said during their last dinner date. He had said that he would handle his issues of dating someone else, when he gets back to New Jersey. Now that she remembers it, she wonders how he went about it. Could it be that he ended the relationship, or he didn’t? She shakes her head sadly as it dawns on her that no lady in her right senses would want to let G. go. Even if the lady had wanted to end things with him, after the recent transformation in his life, any lady would have had to rethink and decide to protect her *territory*.

Sadness engulfs her as the fear of the unknown creeps into her heart. What if he has decided to move down here with him? What if she has convinced him to put the property up for rent instead of moving down here?

“Damn! I’m driving myself crazy.” She sighs and tries rechanneling her thoughts towards what she’ll wear tonight. As she mentally surfs through her wardrobe to decide on what to wear, she starts creating an imaginary image of G.’s girlfriend in New Jersey. She imagines that the lady must be so beautiful, smart, and exciting. After all, she lives in the big city where all the hustle and bustle is, while she, Joy, is just a southern woman who owns a small business in a small city.

“Okay, I’ll have to hurry home now to change,” Maya says as she returns to Joy’s office. “I think we should get some takeout food so there’ll be enough for everyone.”

“Yeah, I think so,” Joy replies absentmindedly.

“I’ll stop by at the chicken and barbecue place to get some takeout. You, stop thinking so much.”

“I’m not thinking,” Joy shrugs, a poor attempt at feigning indifference.

“I know you, Joy. I’m leaving now; just go upstairs and get dressed. I’ll be back at 7:30pm. That will give you both, time to catch up before I get back with my date.”

“You’re right, Maya,” Joy says as she gets up from her desk and walks towards the staircase.

The doorbell rings and Joy goes to her intercom. “Who’s there?” she asks, knowing that it could be no other person but G.

“It’s G.,” the visitor says in a deep baritone voice that instantly sends shivers down her spine.

She smiles and takes a quick look at her short lacy blue jumpsuit. It fits perfectly and hugs her body at the right curves. “Just a moment!” she yells and quickly runs to the mirror on the wall of the living room to check out how face, before she presses the buzzer to let him in.

The seductive masculine scent of G.’s cologne hits Joy as he enters the living room. He is dressed in T-shirt, a pair of black jeans, and an expensive-looking pair of Master P. black and white Moneyatti sneakers. He stands six feet tall, smiling broadly and holding a bouquet of flowers, and a wrapped grocery bag.

She falls into his arms, he gives her a hug and a peck on her cheek. After their embrace, he gives her flowers and dessert.

“How are you?” he asks.

“I’m fine. And thank you for these beautiful flowers and the dessert,” she says as she goes to put the flowers in a vase and take the cakes to the kitchen.

G. takes the time to look at her. He is stunned at how beautiful she looks, and once again, he tells himself that she’s the complete package. *She looks good, she smells good and she knows how to make you feel welcome. She’s a keeper,* he thinks as he walks towards the sofa to sit.

“Where is Maya?”

“Maya will be back with the food and her date. What would you like to drink?” she asks from the kitchen.

G. sits down in one of Joy’s fun swing chairs, and from there, he can see her in the kitchen. “I’ll have whatever you’re having.”

“Well, since you are closing in a couple of days, let’s celebrate with some champagne! I’ll just pop a bottle of champagne, pour yours in a glass and mix mine up the Joy-style way,” she says, laughing a little.

“Joy style?” he asks. “What’s that?”

“Well, I’ll pour my champagne in a champagne glass and mix it with a splash of some of my homemade

lemonade. Then I'll put in some grenadine ice cubes with a slice of orange on the champagne glass with a little brown sugar on the rim of the glass. That is the Joy champagne style."

"Hmm..." G. says. "That sounds so good. I would like to taste your "Joy-style champagne" also."

They laugh briefly.

"So, how long will you stay here this time?" she asks. Her voice suddenly becomes less excited.

G. gets up and moves to the counter that separates the kitchen from the living room. He sits at the counter in front of her. She tries to avert her gaze and tries to focus on the champagne she's pouring. He reaches out and holds her hand and looks into her eyes saying. "I've moved down here, Joy," he announces.

Joy drops the bottle on the counter. "Are you for real?" She looks up at him, searching for signs to show that he's joking.

G. smiles. "Yes, I'm serious."

"Is your girlfriend moving here with you?" she asks, not minding how silly she feels for asking this.

"No," he says. "We were just dating. I told you it was nothing serious. I told her I was moving and she felt

that my new lifestyle wasn't for her. She thinks I will be back."

He watches as her face brightens again, as if a glowing light has been turned on inside her heart. He smiles and continues, "To be honest, I thought about you while I was in New Jersey, and each time I did, it always put a smile on my face."

Joy tries to digest all he just said. She finds it hard to believe him. "Wait a minute, G., she just let you relocate with the money you won without insisting on going with you?"

"I didn't tell her," he says.

"Why?"

"I didn't want to complicate our relationship. I didn't feel safe sharing that with her. We were just dating. So, I told her that I decided to move. She told me that I would be back. That confirmed to me that she wasn't the one. So, I left and one of my best friends named Larry is taking care of selling my house. Later he will be moving down here with me also. You will like him. I'm giving him some land so he could have his own house built down here."

Joy is amazed. Joy finishes making their drinks and they both have a taste. “Hmm, it tastes good,” G. compliments.

Joy smiles. “Thank you. Now that’s Joy champagne style.”

G. asks to taste from her glass, and she let him. Moments later, G. switches into a serious mood. “I really like you, Joy,” he confesses. “This is going to sound crazy, but I find that I like myself better when I’m with you. You bring out a side of me that I didn’t know I had. I feel creative and alive. So, I want to explore more of that side of me. I want to be around you, to share this experience with you, since you bring it out of me. Can you handle me being more in your life, or am I coming on to strong?”

“No! No, you’re not,” Joy says. “I am so excited to hear you say this because I feel the same way about you.”

G. heaves a sigh of relief. “I was afraid that I was moving too fast. I don’t know what it is, about you that bring out the creative side in me even stronger than what it normally is.”

She smiles. “I love that you have chosen to fulfill some of your dreams here in this town. I love that you respect me and my ideas. I feel motivated and charged

up. I want to be a positive force that helps people make their dreams come true. I respect you and I care about what you think. I would love for you to be in my life more,” she says, making G. feel like a light has just been lightened in his heart.

“So, G., how would you describe our relationship?” she asks.

G. sips his drink again and says, “Well, I would describe our relationship as two people at beginning of something wonderful, rich and enjoyable? Let’s see where that takes us.” Then G. reaches his hands across the table and holds Joy’s hand and winks at her. She smiles.

Just then, the doorbell rings. “That’s Maya,” Joy says as she draws her hand away and goes to open the door.

Maya comes in with bags in her hand and puts them down on the counter. She’s in the company of a man, who just stands and looks around, admiring the beauty of Joy’s tastefully furnished apartment.

“Hey G., it’s so nice to see you,” Maya says excitedly. “This is my friend Miles.”

G. reaches out to shake Miles' hand. "Hi, nice to meet both of you," G. says.

Miles nods and greets him also.

"I hope everyone is hungry?" Maya yells and goes to the kitchen. She pulls out steak to put on the grill, seasons them, and puts them on the grill.

As Maya cooks, everyone else goes up to the roof top to hang out. Joy brings a tossed salad she had prepared earlier, and placed it on the table.

"So, G., I hear you are moving down here?" Miles asks as they both sit on the roof top drinking beer.

"Yes," G. says, "I have actually moved in as of today."

"Wow! So, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a school teacher," G. says.

"Oh," Miles bellows, sounding unimpressed.

"What about you, Miles? What do you do?"

"Oh, I work for the post office. I've been working there for ten years now. It's quite okay. I go in early and I get off at 3:00pm. My salary is decent, so I can't complain. Joy was my realtor. She found me a nice house that

I brought. I'm not married yet, and I have no kids. What about you?"

"Well, I'm not married either and I have no children," G. replies with a slight shrug.

Just then, Maya comes and sits down with them.

"G., how was your ride here?" she asks.

"It was pretty good. I took my time and I enjoyed listening to the music and I had a lot of time to think."

As G. is still speaking, Joy comes and joins in the conversation. "Maya, are you done with the steaks?" she asks.

"Yes, then let's go to the table. I just bought up the French fries."

"Your place is really nice, Joy" says Miles.

"Thank you, Miles," Joy says with a smile. "Are you working on putting the summer fair together with Maya?"

"Oh, no. I really don't understand why Maya is all over the place. She has a job and she owns property. I just don't understand why she doesn't slow down and see she has a man here that is ready to get serious. What do you think G.?"

G. laughs nervously. “Well, let me tell you this little story. There were two people sitting at the table eating. The first person got up and said, ‘I’m full.’ The second person looked at the first person and said, ‘I’m still hungry. I want to eat some more.’ Does the first person have the right to chastise the second person for wanting to eat more? Some people want more out of life than others do, and some are satisfied with what they have. So, the satisfied people get up from the table early. The dissatisfied people, on the other hand, stay at the table for more. Maybe the satisfied people should be looking for satisfied people and not for the dissatisfied people who want more.”

Miles looks at G. perplexed. He’s not sure how to take the story. So, he asks, “What’s wrong with the first guy being satisfied?”

“Nothing,” says G. “If I were him, I’ll just accept and respect the choices that people make for themselves. We are all different and we want different things in life. Then the question becomes, is this the right person for me? If the puzzle doesn’t come together seamlessly then the picture is not right. Can you see that?”

“I see it!” shouts Maya from across the table. “Up until now, I never saw it that way.”

“Sometimes you feel like you’re not enough for a person, but the truth may be that you’re not the right fit,” G. continues. “That’s why people look at couples and say I don’t see how they are together? It’s because the pieces of the puzzle don’t fit. So, the picture is looking crazy, and both of them are feeling crazy in the relationship because they are trying to make pieces that don’t fit, fit!”

So, Miles looks at Maya and says, “So, you think that it is better to be alone than to make the puzzle pieces fit?”

Then Maya says, “You can try to make the puzzle pieces fit but the picture will never look right or make sense.

Then Miles says, “Well, some parts of the picture already fit is good enough.”

“For who?” Maya retorts. “The first person that got up from the table and said they’ve had enough? Because I think that the second person at the table that wanted more to eat will keep looking until they find the right pieces that fit. Those are the couples that people say they look so happy together.”

“So, you think that happy people don’t have problems, Maya?” Miles asks with passion in his tone.

“No,” Maya replies with just as much passion in her tone. “If the pieces fit, they will be able to work it out, but if the pieces don’t fit. They have to walk away. It wasn’t meant to be. The picture never looked right. You don’t see that?”

“No,” Miles claps back. “I see a little bit of something beats a whole lot of nothing! You’re not always going to find your prince charming. For example, let’s say he doesn’t have a lot of money but he’s faithful. Are you willing to walk away from that?” Miles looks so tensed, as he tries to make his point.

Maya shakes her head methodically. “If we are not a team working towards a common goal as well as our own goals, how, can you just be happy with a person is being faithful? He’s supposed to be faithful, no doubt. Not having money, to me is not a problem. Money is something we can get with team effort. I want to respect a man’s hustle. I want to respect his talent and what he brings to the table and, I want him to respect me for my hustle and my talent and what I bring to the table. I guess a little bit of something means I’m getting up from the table still hungry. I’m not a happy person when I’m hungry.”

Then Joy and G. looks at each other. They’re both speechless, and do not know how to handle this brewing tension.

“Maya can you please come help me with the dessert?” Joy asks, interrupting the altercation.

“Yeah, dessert sounds good right about now! Right, Miles?” G. says, looking at Miles.

Then Miles looks at G. trying to figure out what he just said. “What?” Miles asks.

“Deserts,” G. repeats. “Let’s have some dessert.”

“Oh, yeah.” Miles nods. “Desert sounds good.”

As the girls leave to get the desserts, Miles tries to compose himself.

“So, G. Where are you staying?”

“I’m staying at the Spring Hotel,” says G.

“Oh, that hotel is really nice. I’m sorry I came out of character, G. I’m just trying to make a point. I got a good job. I bought a house. I got my American dream. I just want a woman who sees my value. I want to be the head of my household. I want a woman who can respect me, right the way I am today! I have something to bring to the table and it’s not an empty plate with an appetite!”

Just then, they see the girls coming back. “Smile,” G. whispers to Miles. “I want them to know we’re good.” Miles forces a smile.

“Are you guys ready for my favorite yellow cake with chocolate icing?” Joy yells as she walks over to the table.

“I have the ice cream,” says Maya, as she comes to drop the cups of ice cream on the table.

“Yes!” G. and Miles say smiling.

As they sit down to have dessert. Miles turns to Maya and says, “If I sounded like I’m angry with you, Maya, I want you to know that I’m not. I just get a little passionate about how I feel.”

Maya shrugs and says, “I’m sorry if I got a little animated when I spoke to you, I’m passionate about how I feel also. Can we just agree to disagree?”

“Sure,” says Miles. “We both know how we think about that topic so we can leave it right there.

G. winks at Joy. Finally, it seems they’re going to get back to having fun, as they had originally planned.

CLOSING DAY

It's bright and early. G. wakes up and hits the gym in the hotel-with a bubble of excitement in his heart. It's closing day!

"I can't believe this day is here," G. says as he enters his room and heads to the bathroom. He turns on the shower, and as the cold water from the shower splashes on his body, he begins to feel good about himself and optimistic about the future.

Now, gradually, my work is beginning to help people's dream come true, he thought excitedly. The closing is by 2:00pm, and it will be happening at Joy's office.

G. finishes up from the bathroom, and decides to call down stairs to request breakfast.

"Hello. Is this front desk?" he asks.

"Yes," a familiar female voice says from the other side. "Good morning, this is Sandy. How may I help make your day better?"

“Hi, Sandy. This is G. I would like to have some breakfast sent up to my room. Could you please switch me on to the restaurant?”

“It would be my pleasure G. Have a great day.”

I have got to do something special for Sandy. She is like sunshine when you speak to her, G. thinks. After ordering breakfast, he gets on the phone with his account officer. “Hey, Mike. Did you send the money over?”

“I will send it over at 1:00 pm. Your closing is at 2:00 pm.” It sounds like Mike is on the road, and G. imagines him wading through the congested traffic of the early morning rush typical of New Jersey.

“Look, I want it there in the title company’s account by 12:00 pm, so I can close. I don’t want any problems. I’d rather be early than late.”

“No, problem says Mike. It’s 9:15 am. I will text you when it’s done.”

“I want you to call me also, Mike. I want to hear your voice as well.”

“I’m on it,” says Mike.

G. hangs up.

There's a knock on the door. As G. gets up and walks across the floor to the door. The knock continues. "It's room service," a voice from behind the door says.

G. opens the door and takes the tray and tips the waiter as he leaves. After eating and dressing up, G. looks at his phone for any texts. "What time is it?" He looks down at his watch. It's 12:05. Just as G. starts to type a text to send to Mike, Mike's call comes in.

"Hey, Mike. I was just texting you."

"I thought you might be so I just called instead of texting you. The money has been sent to the title company, and then I spoke to the person who would be handling the closing.

"Good! I'll be leaving my room and start heading down to Joy's office."

"Congratulations G.," Mike says.

"Thank you, Mike. I'll holla back later.

It's 12:30 pm G. walks into Joy's office, floating on clouds. As he enters the reception area, Maya greets him. "Hello G. Please have a seat. The sellers and their realtor are already here. Please kindly wait here."

G. sits down and waits. *Oh my gosh*, he thinks. *I feel like I just won the lottery again. Where are my boys! They were supposed to be here with me to celebrate. Wait a minute, why don't I fly them here for as long as they want. I have money! I can do that! Yes!* G, the excitement in his heart keeps growing. As he pulls out his phone to call Jesse and Larry, Maya interrupts him. "G. they are ready for you to come in now."

G. jumps up and goes inside of Joy's office. "Good afternoon, G." Joy greets.

"Good afternoon, everybody."

"Please sit down. We have some documents that you need to sign and then we're done," Joy says.

After signing all the documents, Joy and the person from the title company says, "Congratulations," and Joy hands G. the keys.

G. wraps his hands around the keys and takes a deep breath. He sits there and tries to take in the whole experience. It all seems so surreal that he just feels like screaming out his lungs in excitement. But he tries to control the quick rush of adrenaline in his heart. Not knowing the right way to respond, he just smiles and looks at Joy saying, "Thank you for everything, and congratulations on your commission, Joy!"

“Thank you,” Joy says with a smile. Then G. gets up to leave. As he walks towards the door, he looks at Joy and says, “I’ll call you.”

Joy smiles and says okay.

As G. and the person from the title company leave, Joy calls Maya, and she comes in dancing.

Joy looks at Maya with a blank and expressionless face. Maya stops dancing, wondering if the deal didn’t go well. “What’s wrong?” she asks and Joy starts tearing up.

“I’m trying to take this all in, Maya.”

Maya sits down and says, “I know. It’s a lot to take in.”

“Maya, I just made \$135,000 in one deal! I can give you a \$10,000 bonus for working with me when I could not pay you. I can pay off the remaining \$50,000 from the loan I took for my home and business. I can do this from just this single deal. This is too much, Maya. This could only be God’s favor.”

“Yes, we are both blessed” says Maya, and then she starts laughing.

Joy gives Maya a puzzled look. “Why are you smiling?” she asks.

“I’m happy!” she screams and Joy starts laughing.

“So, why are you laughing now, Joy?”

“Because I just remembered what happened last night. What was that between you and Miles last night?”

“I know, right?” Maya flips her hair.

“I think he really wants more than a dating relationship, Maya. You both have strong opinions on how a relationship should be.”

“I know. I have fun with him until I bring up projects that I’m working on. It’s like I’m taking the spotlight off of him. So, should I dumb myself down so he can shine? I want someone whose light shines with mine. He’s a nice guy, but I need more. I want to be challenged. I want someone who gives me food for thought. I don’t mind him taking the lead as long as I can trust him and he knows what he’s doing. I don’t know if I will ever find someone who will understand me.”

“Yes,” says Joy, I understand what you mean. I am looking at G. and he seems to know where he is going. He just takes the lead like he sees where he’s going in his head. He’s not bossy.”

“No. He’s not,” says Maya. “He gets his points across with stories, and it just sinks in well.”

“Yes, you noticed that. He’s so uplifting and motivating. That’s what makes him seem like he’s so sure of himself, and that’s very attractive.”

“He’s a very confident man. What do you think he’s going to do with all of that land?”

“I’m not a 100% sure. He spoke about his friend that’s coming down to help him out with whatever he’s going to do. He did ask me about subdividing the land. Maybe he plans on selling some of the land.”

“To who?”

“I don’t know.” Joy shrugs. “But what I do know is that the title company wired my commission and I am going to check to see if it hit my account yet,” Joy says with a fresh burst of excitement.

Maya laughs. “Well, I need to meet a few kids who want to open up a stand at the summer fair.”

As Maya’s walks towards the door, she suddenly turns around and yells, “I got it! I got it!”

Joy, who was checking her account on her computer, looks up and asks, “You got what?”

“I will ask G. if we can we use his property to have the summer fair. This way, he can get introduced to the community and people can meet him.”

“Wow!” Joy says, “That would be a good idea. When are you going to ask him?” She looks down to continue checking her account.

“I was hoping you could ask him, Joy,” Maya says, and just then, Joy sees the money in her account. She gets up and screams in excitement.

“Yes! Yes!” Joy yells.

“Thank you,” says Maya.

“No, I meant yes, the money has hit my account.”

Then Maya looks at Joy with a pouty face. “Please, Joy.”

“Okay, Maya, but this is the last time. Next time you ask yourself.”

“Okay,” says Maya. I’m so excited and I’m happy your money is in your account. That means mine will soon be in my account soon.

They both laugh as Maya walks out of Joy’s office. “Let me know what G. says,” Maya yells from the reception area.

G. steps out of the elevator and heads towards the front desk to make reservations for Jessie and Larry. He had called them immediately after he got back from closing the deal. He had asked them to come over to see the house and celebrate with him tomorrow. He also called Chip, and he too, will be coming over tomorrow. He had made arrangements for them to get their flight tickets at the airport tomorrow, so now, he needs to arrange for their hotel rooms.

As the elevator door opens G. walks out and sees Sandy smiling at him from behind the front desk. “Hey Mr. G.” she yells as G. walks towards her. When he gets to the front desk, she says, “Congratulations on your closing today.”

G. looks mystified. “How did you know that, Sandy?”

“Oh, I just put two and two together. You left here this morning with a smile on your face then you came back wearing a bigger smile. Now, you’re at the front desk. Are you leaving us, Mr. G.?”

G. laughs. He loves that Sandy pays so much attention to details. “No, not yet, Sandy. I’m here to make

reservations for two of my best friends and my brother. They will be here tomorrow.”

“Okay,” says Sandy. “They will be here to see your new property, Mr. G.?”

G. looks at Sandy, curious on how she knows what’s going on. “Yes,” G. says reluctantly, and then decides to put her to test. “Do you know where the property I bought is located?”

“Yes,” she says, wearing her usual smile. “It’s that large property right outside of town. I’m just waiting for you to give the property a name.

G. shakes his head. “How do you know that Sandy?”

Sandy laughs. “Oh, there’s a ‘SOLD’ sign in front of the property.”

“Okay?”

Well, I heard Joy’s client bought the property and since you’re Joy’s client I figured you bought it.

“Right,” says G. Looking at Sandy in amazement. “Can you put the rooms up under my credit card number?”

“Sure, Mr. G.” Sandy starts typing away on her computer.

“How’s your car, Sandy?”

“It’s fine, Mr. G. I can’t thank you enough,” she says as she looks up from her computer and flashes her winner smile yet again.

“It’s okay, Sandy,” he says as he begins to walk away. I will give them the keys when they get here, Mr. G.”

G. just nods and as he gets back into the elevator, he considers that it would be good to get Sandy on his team, when he starts putting it together. Meanwhile, he has a long exciting night ahead of him. He had arranged to have dinner with Joy at the hotel’s restaurant by 7:00pm. He has cause to celebrate, and since his boys are yet to get here, there’s no better person to start the celebration with, than the lady who has suddenly become a shining light to his path.

At 6:45pm, G. goes downstairs to wait for Joy to meet him in the lobby. As he looks at the front desk, he notices that Sandy is not at work. He exhales. Finally, he can sit in the lobby and relax without chatting with anyone. As he sits comfy on one of the sofas in the lobby, he

looks around and realizes for the first time, how beautiful the lobby is. There are lots of bright shining light on the exquisitely designed ceiling. There are potted trees all around the corners of the wall and behind the large pillars. There is a waterfall built in the wall like a big picture. There are couches and chairs all over the lobby with small tables and music playing softly in the back ground. Apart from the immaculate white color of the ceiling, the color scheme in the lobby is blue, brown and beige with green plants and colorful flowers in large vases.

G. could hear the water falling gently, cascading down the black rocky background onto the bottom of the frame that catches the water. *This is living!* G. thinks. I can't believe this is my life now.

As he is about to start waxing poetic in appreciation, Joy walks into the lobby looking like a beautiful brown princess.

His heart misses a beat as he sees her. Her beauty is captivating. From her red scarlet summer dress, which embellished her hourglass figure to the way she walks towards him, like a pageant queen going to collect her crown, everything about her makes G. feel blessed to have her come out to have dinner with him.

“Hello, G.,” her voice sounds breezy, resonating with the sound of the rustling waterfall.

“Hello, beautiful,” he says. “You look so beautiful tonight. As always.”

She blushes a little. “Thank you.”

“Let’s go inside.” He points towards the entrance of the restaurant, and lets her go in first. The waiter finds them a seat at the booth near a large window that extends from the floor to the ceiling. From there, they can get a clear view of the swimming pool. Sitting in front of them is the restaurant bar, which has six televisions mounted on the walls, showing ball games from different TV stations.

Joy and G. look around the restaurant in admiration, settling in and enjoying the ambiance.

“Here you go, G.,” she says, handing G. a present wrapped in gold paper with a burgundy bow. The parcel is as big as the medium size box. She also gives him a small matching box. “This is a gift for you because you closed on your property today.”

“Thank you,” G. says, smiling and sizing up the package. “What is it?” He looks surprised.

“Open them,” she says, anxiously waiting. Then G. starts to open them like a kid at the foot of a Christmas tree. The first box has a G-shaped keychain inside of it. “Thank you,” he says. “This is beautiful.”

“The letter G. is made out of sterling silver for you to put the keys to your new house,” she explains.

He opens the next one, the smaller box and inside of it is a necklace.

“What?”

It’s a sterling silver key with a letter G. on it. He looks at Joy and feels like she’s gradually stealing his heart. “Thank you, Joy,” he says, looking her deep in the eyes. He gives her the necklace and asks if she can help him put it on.

Joy collects the necklace and goes around to stand behind him and put the necklace round his neck.

The waiter comes over. He had allowed them to settle in before they start to make their order. “May I get you something to drink?”

“Yes,” G. says. “I’ll have a beer.”

“I’ll have a strawberry daiquiri.”

“My pleasure. I will be right back with your drinks.” Then the waiter leaves and returns quickly with the drinks.

“Thank you again, Joy,” G. says.

“Thank you for trusting me to be your realtor.” Joy adjusts on her seat. “So, our community is having a summer fair in a couple of weeks. It’s for anyone who has a business or wants to sell food. We also play music to make the place lively. Maya is the one organizing it this time around.”

“That sounds nice.”

“So, Maya was wondering can we have the summer fair at your place.” She squints up her face waiting for his answer.

“That sounds fun. I love the idea! Hell yes! If it helps brings the community together, helps out small businesses, and people who want to start a business, then I love it!”

She’s overjoyed. “We will have children there also selling whatever they like,” she adds.

“Wow!” he says. “I love to see our youth on fire for business.”

“We will also have people dancing to music and a DJ on ground dropping the hits.”

This is the kind of things that interest G. By mere listening to Joy, he already imagines that it would be a business fiesta where people would make a lot of sales,

make new connections and come up with even more business ideas. “What do I need to do?” he asks, eager to key into this opportunity to impact lives.

“Well, you will need insurance and some porta potties which Maya has already taken care of. She also ordered multi-colored tents for the vendors. Now, how much will you charge us for renting out your property for the weekend?”

“Hmmm,” he says. “I didn’t think of that.”

“Well, we had to pay for a place to have the summer fair so you deserve to be compensated for letting us use your property,” says Joy.

G., once again, feels grateful for having this woman in his life. He looks at her in bewilderment, wondering why she has only brilliant ideas. “Well, what do you think is a fair price, Joy?”

“Well,” she hums, trying to give it a thought.

But then, G. interrupts. “Joy, it would be my pleasure to let Maya use my property for her summer fair for free. I want to be a part of this community and help any way that I can. Let Maya know that I would like to talk to her so we can go over the area that she would like to use for the summer fair.”

Joy smiles—that smile that always makes G. want to draw her close and hug her tightly.

“Are you ready to order now?” the waiter says, returning.

“Oh yes,” G. says. “I’ll have the steak medium. And she’ll have...”

“Same,” she says, still smiling and looking at him lovingly.

“Okay.” The waiter bows slightly and walks away.

“So, I must admit, this sounds exciting. Tell Maya that I’m in. Let’s do it!”

“I will let her know,” Joy laughs.

Their food arrives soon, and as they eat, he tells her about his brother and his two friends, who will be in town tomorrow. He can’t wait to introduce them to this wonder woman that has captured his heart.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

G. wakes up the next day, counting down the hours to the time his boys will arrive. Larry had called him earlier to tell him that he and Jesse ran into Chip at the airport, and that they'd be on the same flight.

He said the flight would leave New Jersey by 9:00 am and arrive at North Carolina at about 12:30 pm.

At 12:10 pm, G. was already at the airport, waiting.

Sitting in the lobby, G. pulls out his phone and checks the time, just like he has done four times in the past five minutes. He gets up and walks.

Looking around at the different destinations flashing on the display boards hung below the roof of the waiting bay. "Why am I so nervous?" he wonders, and glances back at his phone again. Now 12:20 p.m. He paces around a little more, before walking towards the seats to sit down and calm his nerves.

“Hi,” he hears a voice from behind say.

He turns around. “Hi,” he says, wondering if he had met the woman. “Are you waiting for someone?”

“Yes,” G. says.

“I am too.”

“Oh, that’s nice,” says G. as they take a seat at one of the benches. “What’s your name?”

“Oh, my name is Tampa.”

“Tampa?” The name sounds strange to G.

“Yes, like Tampa, Florida.” They both laugh. “My sister, her son, and daughter moved down here a few weeks ago. They hired a moving truck and it delivered all of their furniture to storage. They will be staying at my house. She just finished up the rest of her business and now they’re coming down here.”

“That’s great,” says G. “I just moved down here myself.”

“Oh, did you get a job here?”

“No, not yet.”

“My sister was promised a job and now the company is laying off people.”

“Wow. Does your sister still have her job?”

“No,” Tampa says with a sad face. “I feel so terrible because I talked her into coming down here and she listened to me. I helped her get a job where I work and now there is no job. Now, I don’t know what to do. It will be very crowded with my husband and my two children and my sister and her two children. My husband won’t want her and the kids to stay at our house too long. She finally decided to come down and now I just found out two days ago that there is no job. She has already quit her job and moved her furniture already.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” G. says. “Do you still have a job?”

“Yes, I have been with this company for fifteen years, but as it stands now, there is no job security. Look at Toys-R-Us and Kmart, all of those people are out of jobs. It breaks my heart. I don’t know how long it will be before I won’t have a job.”

G. stares at the lady compassionately. Then the lady smiles at him and says, “There’s the plane. It just landed.”

G. then turns around to see the plane, as people are already walking off the plane. He hurries off to the arrival lounge and looks around for his friends and brother.

He gets so engrossed in his search that he forgets about Tampa. Then he sees Larry, Jesse and Chip coming and he rushes down and gives them all a big hug.

“Look at you!” Jesse says. “You look good man!”

“It’s millionaire living!” Larry chimes in and they all start laughing. “Okay G. we’re here. Now, let’s go get that southern cooking!” says Larry.”

“Yeah, that sweet tea,” Jesse concurs.

“Wow, I can’t believe you did it and we are all here” Chip says, as they put their luggage into the trunk of the SUV and start riding off from the airport.

After about thirty minutes they pull into Grandpa’s Buffet. It looks like a big barn on the outside painted with the American flag on one side and a tall flag standing alongside the restaurant.

“Have you been here before G.?” Larry asks.

“No, a girl named Sandy told me about this place.”

“Who’s Sandy?” Chip asks.

“Oh, you’ll meet her soon,” G. says and they get into the restaurant.

After lunch they all head over to G.'s property. They all stand in awe as they see the old farm house and expansive land.

“What? All of this is yours, bro?” Chip asks, unable to believe his eyes.

“Yep,” says G.

“Wait till I tell Ma. She will not believe this.”

“Yo!” says Larry, this is crazy.”

“I’m trying to wrap my brain around this,” says Jesse, as he paces around at the property. “How, many acres is this?”

“200 acres.”

“Damn! We need a car to drive around,” says Jesse.

“Yeah, G., let’s gets some dirt bikes and ride around,” Larry says.

G. laughs. “That sounds like a good idea.”

They then walk down to the lake and stand by the banks.

“This lake is so big,” says Chip.

“Yes, it’s a few miles long,” says G. as they walk on to the gazebo built going around the lake.

“I can’t believe this,” says Jesse, “I think it has finally hit me that you are rich.”

“Yeah, me too says Larry and Chip.” “I can’t wait for the family to come down here” says Chip.

“So, who’s moving down here with me?” asks G.

“I am,” says Chip.

“Me too,” says Larry.

“What about you, Jesse?”

“I don’t know man. I don’t know,” Jesse says as he stares at the lake.

G. shrugs. Chip now asks that they go inside and take a look at the house. So, they all turn around and walk to the house.

Chip stands in front of the old farmhouse, imagining how magnificent it must have been in its glory days. He asks G. if he would like to knock the building down and build a brand new one—something befitting of his taste and class.

G. thinks for a moment, looking at the building. “You think it would be better to build something else?” he asks Chip.

Chip nods. “Yeah, something more modern.

“Okay, whatever you say Chip. That means you just found a job. When can you start?”

“I’ll be back in a couple of weeks. I need to get some of my guys to come down here with me.”

“Okay, I’ll pay for everything but I don’t want to go over a \$1,000,000; that includes the salary for the crew you hire, feed, and board.”

“I think I’d like to build a house on this land next to yours, G.,” Larry says.

“Yeah, I’d like to build a house next to yours also,” says Chip.

They all look at Jesse. He shakes his head. “I don’t know, man. I don’t know.”

“You know Ma is gonna want a house built by the lake also,” says Chip. “Maybe we can build Bryce and Bella’s gallery and venue here where people can have their weddings and birthday parties.”

“This is what I like to hear! I even have someone who will be doing a summer fair here in a few weeks.”

“Really?” asks Chip.

“Yeah. I want to be involved in the community. I want to start helping wherever I can.”

“Wow, G., you have a good heart” says Larry. “Most people don’t even think that way. They take their money and run.”

“I know, I thought like that at first. Then I thought of what God would want me to do. I asked him and he showed me the things I should do for others. He assured me that I’d be fine no matter how many people I help.”

“I’m proud to call you my brother,” says Chip.

Larry nods. “A fair sounds like a good idea. I’d like to help.”

“That’s good. I will introduce you to Maya and she will let you know what she needs for you to do.”

“Okay, G. Who is Maya?”

“Maya is the one who started the fair for the community. Maya’s company is called Market Place and the name of the fair is called Summer Blessings. It’s for people who would like to start a business or who have a

business but don't have the money to have a store. It's for people to make some extra money, and to get to know each other. It's for the kids to learn about starting a business. It's also an opportunity for gospel groups to play music and to perform."

"All of this in one day?" Larry asks."

"The fair will be on day one, and the churches choir will play the next day. It would all run for two days."

"What days?" Chip asks.

"Friday and Saturday. Everybody down here goes to Church on Sunday. "What?" says Larry.

"Yeah," G. affirms. They all laugh and start walking towards the SUV.

Larry, Jesse, and Chip look around as they get into the lobby of the Spring Hotel. They are all impressed by the architecture and beautiful design of the hotel. They all get to the counter and Sandy walks out to the desk.

"Welcome to the Spring Hotel," she says. "Here are the keys to your rooms. You'd find the room numbers attached to the keys."

"Thanks, Sandy," G. says. "Hey, fellas. This is Sandy."

“Hi, Sandy,” they all say.

“Hi.” Sandy waves as they all head to the elevator.

“Oh, so that’s Sandy, the one who suggested Grandpa’s Buffet?” Larry asks as the elevator starts gliding upwards.

Luckily for all of them, Sandy had made sure that she gave them all rooms on the same tenth floor where G’s room is.

After the guys have all settled into their rooms, G. goes into his room and calls Joy.

“Hello G.,” Joy voice chimes from the receiver. “Did you pick up everybody from the airport?”

“Yeah,” I did.

“G., I spoke with Maya. She was so excited that you agreed to let her have the fair at your property.”

G. smiles. Joy tells him that Maya will be having a meeting with the youth vendors and the adult vendors who will be selling things at the summer fair. During the meeting, she will give seminars on entrepreneurship. The meeting will be held tomorrow around 10:00 am. She will start with the young people; after which she will meet with the adults.

“Okay,” G., who has been listening intently, says.

“Where’s the meeting being held?”

“At my office; in the conference room.”

“Great. I will bring Jesse, Larry, and my brother, Chip, with me.”

“That sounds good.”

“So, how has your day been today?”

“Guess what!” Joy says excitedly.

G. tries to guess, but he gets it wrong twice.

“I had two closings today!”

“Wow! Congratulations!” G. says.

“Thank you. So, how was your day?”

“Well, let’s see. I went to the airport to pick up the fellas and I met a woman. She was waiting for her family to get off the same plane that the fellas were on. She just started talking to me about her sister and her sister’s children relocating down here. She had a job all lined up for her sister, but then they just started laying people off a couple of weeks ago. So, now her sister has quit her job a month ago and started to relocate down here a few weeks ago. Now, she has no job waiting for her. She was supposed to start next week. I asked her about her job and

she's not sure how long she will have her job before they also lay her off."

"Oh, wow this is what Maya's summer fair is all about—self empowerment."

"I wanted to help her sister, but I lost her when people started getting off the plane," G. says. They chat for almost an hour before he tells her that he needs to go down very soon, to have dinner with the guys.

In the morning, G. and his guys drive slowly to Joy's office. The guys take the time to check out and appreciate the calm lifestyle of the people who live in this small town.

It is nothing like what they're used to. The traffic moves quickly, people do not seem to be in a hurry like they do in New Jersey and other big cities. Larry and Chip are impressed to see the easy lifestyle here, and they get very excited to move down here.

As they walk into Joy's office, they see lots of young people going into the conference room to sit down and get ready to hear what Maya has to say. The sound of

“I got the power” is serenading them from speakers suspended to the ceiling in different rooms of the office.

There is so much energy in the air as the young people, sitting on their seats, move their body to the rhythm of the music.

As G. and his guys walk into the reception area, Joy comes out from her office, and is about to start going upstairs.

“Hello G.,” she greets and goes to meet them.

“Hello, Joy. This is Larry, Jesse, and my brother Chip.”

Joy says hello and shakes hands with each of them, then she asks them to relax while she calls the people serving food at the meeting to make sure the breakfast is out.

The fellas then make their way to the table where there is milk, tea, coffee, juice, cereal, all types of muffins, croissants and fruit.

“The young people have eaten already,” Joy says.

“Thank you,” says G. “I feel the positive energy. The young people seem to be pumped too.”

“Yes, all credit goes to Maya. I’m just here to support her.”

“Where is Maya?”

“She’s in my office finishing her PowerPoint presentation.” Just then, Maya walks out from Joy’s office, carrying her Apple laptop. “Oh, here she comes.”

“Wow, G., you’re here already. Thank you so much for helping us make this happen.”

“It’s my pleasure,” G. says.

“I am really grateful. I know Joy has spoken to you already, but after I finish speaking to everyone I want to talk to you.”

“Okay,” says G. “Good luck.”

Maya thanks him and walks into the conference room.

“Good morning, my favorite people! How are you?” Maya greets.

The young people give a thunderous clap to welcome her. Maya smiles and waits for them to calm down, and then she begins to speak. “It gives me so much joy to talk to you today about finding financial success and using the summer fair as one of your tools. First, I want to

talk to you about young people like yourself who have gotten started with their own business. How many of you have ever heard of Cory Nieves? When you get a chance, I want you to go to mrcoryscookies.com. How many of you ever heard of Mikaela Ulmer? When you get a chance go to meandthebees.com.

How many of you ever heard of Moziah Bridges? When you get a chance go to mosbowsmemphis.com. That's just to name a few of our black youths that have started their business!"

As Maya speaks, pictures of the people she's referencing flash on the PowerPoint screen beside her. At the same time, the young people scribble notes on their notepads.

"The next thing I want to talk to you about is income. I have a question for you. So, listen closely. If a person makes \$100,000 a year but has a debt of \$999,000 and another person who only makes \$20,000 a year and has \$5,000 in their bank account, who has the most money?"

The kids think for a minute, and then one of them yells out, "The one that has \$5,000 in the bank!" Other kids yell out the same, to concur with what the first kid said.

“That’s right,” Maya proceeds. “The one that only makes only \$20,000 a year has more money than the person who makes \$100,000 a year. So, I’m here to tell you, don’t focus on how much money you make, but focus on what you do with what you make. If you focus just on what you make, you will get discouraged and want to give up. So, you have to focus on what to do with what you make. Companies were not started to make their employees rich. They were created to make their owners rich. Some people get rich along the way, but most of the employees don’t.”

The kids nod passionately as the wise words sink into them.

“Here is one solution to finding financial success. Start your own business. That’s why you are a vendor at the Summer Blessing fair. For the people who want to be a vendor, but don’t have a lot of money to start a business; think out of the box! I know of some kids who found some rocks from their back yard and painted them a solid color, then in a different color painted a word on the rock and sold it! Some of the words the kid printed on the rock was ‘Pray,’ ‘Think Positive,’ ‘Mom,’ ‘Dad,’ ‘Teacher,’ and ‘Winning.’ They were inspirational words that people love to be reminded of. The rocks were free, but although the paint and paint brush cost a few dollars, the kid made way more than what they spent creating the

items. You are now in business! You are creative and resourceful. You are all entrepreneurs. You are the boss of your company.”

The audience claps again as the words of motivation spore them to excitement.

“The next thing I want to discuss is: what should I sell?” Maya waits for them to jot down the new topic. “Find a need! Then fill it. If you walked into a dark room where there are no windows and no light. What would you need? What would other people in the dark room need? If you were outside walking in the rain and you were getting wet what would you need? If there were a lot of people outside walking in the rain getting wet also, what would they need? No one wants to be in the dark; no one wants to walk outside in the rain and get wet. If you can find a solution to help these people out then you have found a need and, people will pay for your solution.”

She moves on to the next topic. “Who is my customer? Start with the people that are in the dark, who need the solution you found. After you have sold them lights, think of where other people may work or live in the dark - that may need the same solution. Not everyone lives in the city where everywhere is lit up even in the night. Consider this and ask yourself if there are people who live and work in the dark, who needs your solution.

Those are your next target customers! Now after you have found them, what's next?"

They all watch and listen to her with rapt interest. Maya can feel the passion in their heart and body language, and it gives her great joy that they're willing to learn.

"Once you find those people that need your solution," Maya continues, "send them your flyers about the fair where you will be selling your solutions to their needs. Put flyers on people's cars. Go to places where people live and work and leave flyers there. Be creative!"

Up next, she begins to talk about reinvesting into your business.

"If you make a profit from your business and you don't buy more inventory and pay for your table at the summer fair guess what happens?"

The kids seem to have no clue. They stare along waiting for the answer.

"You go out of business! So, you have to put money away so you can keep buying your solutions or inventory to people's needs so you can stay in business and make more money. And finally, how can I get rich from a fair?"

Have you ever heard of the name Bill Gates and his friend Paul Allen? They started their business in a garage. The last I heard it was only worth about \$25 Billion. Look up Bill Gate's business. It's called Microsoft!

Have you ever heard of this guy called Steve Jobs and his friend called Ronald Wayne?"

Some of the kids nod their head.

"Steve started his business in his adopted parents' garage. The only reason I said Steve was adopted is because that never stopped him or slowed him down! The last I checked, when Steve passed away, he left Tim Cook in charge to run the company. Tim, who is now the CEO has grown the company to a stage where it is now worth about \$1 Trillion. Look up Steve Job's business. It's called Apple. The garage represents their beginning. It was their stepping stone. This was their start that got them to the next level. The Market Place featuring Summer Blessings is our beginning. It's our stepping stone. You're bringing your product or your solution to the Market Place. This is where your product is tried and tested. This represents the seeds planted in the ground and producing a harvest. Now you are taking your harvest to the Market Place and this is where you begin. Your success starts this summer and you will be a blessing to the community. My company's name is Market Place and the name of the fair is Summer Blessings."

Maya looks around at the excited faces. “Thank you so much for coming out today,” she says. “Please make sure you fill out the forms that will let us know what you will be selling. We will let you know what section you will be in, and where you can find your table in that section. And please leave them on the desk as you are leaving.”

The kids give her a standing ovation as she turns around and leaves the conference room. Gradually, they start going off towards the reception area to leave their forms on the desk.

All this while, G., Chip, Jesse, and Larry were sitting in the back of the conference room listening and observing the children’s reaction to what Maya was saying. Jesse was very impressed with Maya’s approach with the kids.

Larry taps G. on the shoulder and asks, “G., who is she?”

“That’s Maya. She is Joy’s assistant and she started the summer fair.”

“Oh,” Larry says, nodding methodically, as if he just saw something so sweet that words can’t describe.

As the kids start heading towards the door, G. takes interest in one of the kids. He looks at the kid in

surprise. He leaves his guys and walk towards the kid. As he gets closer he realizes that it's Cedric.

“Cedric!” he yells and Cedric turns around and sees him.

“Mr. G.,” Cedric yells out. Then Cedric walks to G. and gives him a big hug. The boy then turns to his friend Mike and introduces G. as the teacher he had been telling him about.

“Hi,” Mike greets G. “Cedric told me that you're the reason why he's now good in math, and that he is going to make a lot of money in his cupcake business because you taught him.”

G. smiles and says, “Mike it was Cedric's hard work that made him good in math I just helped him out when he needed me.” He laughs and the kids join him.

“Mr. G. What are you doing here?”

“It's a long story,” G. says, holding the boy's shoulder. “What are you doing here? And where is your mom?”

“Oh, I'm here at the summer fair meeting, because I need to make a lot of money to buy my mother a house. Right now, she's at my Aunt Tampa's and uncle Lee's house. That's where we are staying right now.”

“Wait a minute, your Aunt Tampa?” G. is flabbergasted.

“Yes, she’s the reason why we moved to North Carolina. We’re staying with her right now. While my mom is looking for a job down here and I’m going to help my mom,” says Cedric. “Do you know my aunt, Mr. G.?”

“Yes, I just met your aunt at the airport yesterday.”

“Oh, then you met my mom? My Aunt Tampa went to pick up my mom.”

“No, I lost track of your aunt when people started getting off the plane. By the time I found the people I went to pick up, she was gone. I want to meet your mom.”

“Okay, Mr. G. I will let her know. I got a ride here with Mike’s mom. She is waiting outside for us.”

“Okay, well I will. I’ll follow you to your Aunt Tampa’s house. I really want to see your mom today.”

G. goes back to tell his guys that he will meet them at the hotel, then he meets Mike’s mom outside, and drives behind her, as they head to Tampa’s house. All through the drive, G. shakes his head in awe. It is indeed a small world.

SAVANNAH

They pull up in front of Tampa's house. Cedric gets out of the car and waves at Mike and his mom who also just pull into their driveway—right next door to their house.

“What's your mother's name?” G. asks Cedric as he closes the car door.

“Oh, it's Savannah Rose.”

“Right! Your last name is Rose,” G. says in sudden recollection.

They walk up the few steps to the door and Cedric rings the bell. The oak door creaks slightly as it gently swings opens to reveal a woman who looks very much like Cedric.

She smiles when she sees Cedric, but her face gradually creases into a slight frown, wondering why the stranger looks familiar.

“Hello,” she offers in greeting.

“Hello,” G. responds with a polite smile on his face.

“Mom, this is Mr. G. You remember? My teacher from New Jersey.”

Cedric’s Mom smiles genuinely as she opens the door wider. “Yes, I thought you looked familiar. I’m surprised to see you here. How are you?”

“I’m fine,” G. replies. “How are you doing?”

“I’m doing okay. Thank you so much for helping out my son in school.”

“It was my pleasure. I wanted to thank you for the card that you gave me on Cedric’s last day at school. I was so surprised by the gift inside.”

“Oh, it was nothing compared to what you did for my son. Please, come in and sit down,” she says as she steps aside for them to enter the house.

“Thank you.” G. slightly bows as he looks around the house.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

“No, thank you. Something extraordinary happened to me on Cedric’s last day of school which I want to tell you about.”

“Okay,” Cedric’s mom says with roused interest as they all take their seats.

“May I call you Ms. Rose?”

“Oh, you can call me Savannah.”

“Okay, Savannah,” G. says. “My story starts just after Cedric gave me your thank you card—which was beautiful by the way. I looked inside and realized that you put some money inside the card. I was genuinely surprised. I went out to look for Cedric to give the money back but he had already left. It was his last day and I didn’t know where you lived so I decided to keep it. On my way home, I decided that since it was a gift, I could use the money to buy some scratch-offs—something I never do by the way—which I did. Almost magically, I won.”

“Wow! How nice!” Savannah smiles, genuinely surprised.

“How much did you win Mr. G? \$1,000?” Cedric breaks in excitedly

“Cedric, that’s none of our business. I’m sorry Mr. G,” Savannah cuts in quickly.

“No, I want to tell you. I won a \$100,000,000.”

Savannah looks shocked. “Really? Oh, my goodness! That is beautiful! I’m so happy for you. Mr. G., you have really been blessed.”

“Yes,” G. replies with a knowing smile, “and I want to be a blessing to you three.”

“What do you mean?” Savannah asks, puzzled.

“I have a friend of mine who is into real estate. I want to bring you down to her office today and introduce her to you. Her name is Joy. I’m going to buy you a house.”

Savannah opens her mouth wide, now totally bewildered. “Really? Are you s-serious? You ca-can’t possibly mean it,” she stutters as she starts to shake.

“Yes.”

Cedric excitedly hugs his mom as she starts to cry.

“I know you will need a car down here too,” G. continues excitedly with a clever glint in his eyes. “So, after we go to see Joy, we will stop by a car dealership and you can pick any car you like.”

Savannah is both crying and laughing now. She can’t believe her ears.

Cedric keeps jumping up and down, totally giddy with excitement.

“I also bought some land and I would like to have a house built on it for you. You can keep the house that I

want to buy you, or you can later move into the one to be built when it's completed. I also know-

“Wait! Wait! Slow down! This is getting too much,” Savannah interjects, waving her hands, completely blown away.

“Oh, but I'm not even done yet,” G. says, his face beaming with smiles. “I also know that the job you were looking forward to doing didn't quite work out. So, I'm going to put a \$100,000 into your account so that you can at least have some money until you find a job. Where would you like to work?” he asks, looking at her.

Savannah looks at G. with tears running down her face. “Oh, Mr. G! I can't even think right now. I'm so overwhelmed.”

G. smiles even wider as he gently shakes his head.

“No, don't cry, Savannah. I should be grateful to you for your magical gift. I feel so much better now that I have been able to see you and talk to you.”

Cedric is now crying too. He is totally overwhelmed with the unexpected good news.

There is a sudden patter of footsteps on the stairs. Everyone looks up as Cedric's sister comes running down the stairs.

“Mommy, what’s wrong?” she asks. “Cedric, what’s wrong?”

“Mr. G., this is my sister, Tamala,” Cedric introduces her. “She’s going to sixth grade this year.”

“Tamala, remember Mr. G?” Cedric asks his sister.

“Yes,” she replies, nodding in recollection as she runs over to her mom.

“Well, he’s buying Mom a house and a car.”

Tamala’s mouth opens wide in total surprise as she looks at G.

“I won the lottery with the money that your mom gave me on Cedric’s last day at school,” G. explains, “and I wanted to bless her the way she blessed me.”

Tamala’s eyes start to water as she looks at G. in disbelief of his generosity towards them. It feels like a dream and she’s not sure what to believe.

“Thank you,” she manages to utter.

“If it’s okay with you, Savannah, I will like to take you to meet Joy right away.”

Savannah sniffs and wipes her eyes. “Yes, that will be okay.”

They all get into G's car and he drives towards Joy's office. On the way, Cedric excitedly fills Tamala in on everything G. told them.

While on their way, G. calls his friends to meet with him at Joy's office and they all agree.

When G., Savannah and the children arrive at the office, a van parks right behind them; G's friends are just arriving too. They exchange pleasantries as G. introduces them and they all go in together.

As they settle into seats in the reception area, Maya welcomes them all.

Then, she focuses on G. "I just finished my vendor meeting. Joy and I missed you. Let me inform her you are here," she says as she disappears down the office corridor until there is a sound of footsteps approaching and Joy comes into view.

"Hi, everybody. I'm Joy." She introduces herself to Savannah and the children with smiles—already familiar with G's friends. They exchange further pleasantries. Joy then leads them to the conference room where everyone takes their seats.

“Can I get you all anything to drink?” She asks the group but they all decline.

G. clears his throat and addresses Joy. “Cedric was my student and it was the blessing that his mom, Savannah, gave me that I used to buy my winning ticket.”

“Wow,” Joy exclaims looking between Cedric and Savannah as G. continues speaking.

“As a token of appreciation, I would like for you to find her and her children a house.”

Joy smiles, pleased with what she is hearing. “I would love to. When would you like me to get started?”

“Right away.”

“Okay. I will set up some properties for us to go see tomorrow. Is that okay with you Savannah?”

“Yes, that’s fine with me,” Savannah responds, looking at Joy.

Joy continues, “I just need your telephone number and I want to go over everything you would like to have in your house.”

Savannah looks towards G. He gives her an encouraging nod. She takes a deep breath and says, “I

would like to have four bedrooms and three bathrooms,” Savannah responds looking between G. and Joy.

“And a swimming pool,” Cedric chimes in much to his mother’s chagrin.

Everyone laughs.

“Cedric!” Savannah rounds on him in rebuke.

“Please leave him Savannah. A swimming pool is a good idea too. Maybe that’s Cedric’s contribution to your housing features,” G. says to her before she can say anything further. Everyone laughs out even louder this time. Cedric and Tamala smile at their mother who is getting over her initial embarrassment.

“Is that okay?” Joy asks G.

“Whatever she wants,” G. responds.

Joy promises to give Savannah a call about the properties and they also set an appointment to meet by 11:00 am the next day.

“Okay,” says G. “If that’s all, we have to go now. We have another appointment to make.”

As they all head back to G.’s SUV, Chip tells G. he would like to go with G. and Savannah’s family to the car

dealership. The other guys go to find something to eat. They all agree to meet back at the hotel.

Chip gets in the back with the kids, and Savannah gets in the front with G.

“Now,” says G., “what kind of car would you like?”

“Oh, I am grateful for whatever you get for me,” Savannah says.

“Mom you always wanted an SUV,” Cedric interjects.

“Really?” G. asks, suddenly interested. “Which one?”

“The Buick Enclave,” Cedric says as he drums on his laps excitedly, grinning from ear to ear. “Thank you, Cedric,” G. turns and high-fives him and Tamala.

Savannah smiles and tears up again. “I can’t believe this is happening to me.”

This time, Chip answers her. “You deserve it. You were thoughtful Savannah—even though you didn’t have much to give. Now, my brother is going to fill your cup until it overflows.”

“These are blessings from God,” G. chips in. “I’m just the messenger who is enjoying being used by God.”

Savannah profusely thanks G. again and again. Just then, they pull into the car dealer’s parking lot. As they all walk in, a salesman approaches them to take their request. G. informs him they came to buy a vehicle and he then asks Savannah what color she prefers.

“Burgundy with a cappuccino interior,” Savannah replies, feeling like a kid in a candy store as she and the children look around excitedly.

“We would like a burgundy coated Buick enclave with cappuccino interior,” G. tells the salesman.

The salesman tells them to look around while he checks if they have their required specifications. He comes back after a minute and tells them they have something that meets their exact specification.

“It’s new. We just got it on the lot last week. Someone is bringing it—Oh! There it is,” he says to them as the car pulls up in front of them.

Savannah cannot believe her luck. Her dreams are finally come true. “I can’t wait to tell Tampa. She will never believe this.” She and the children can barely contain their excitement.

G. tells Savannah to get in. She does.

“How does it feel?”

“I feel like I’m in a dream. I love it Mr. G!” she replies excitedly while rubbing her hand across the wheel.

G. asks the salesman if Savannah can get a temporary plate to which he replies that she can if the car is insured. He informs the salesman to keep the car off the lot that they’ll be back very soon to make the payment. Everyone piles into G’s car, and he drives them back to Tampa’s house.

On their way, G. makes calls to get money available to be wired to the car dealer. He also makes calls to get insurance for Savannah. As he pulls up in front of Tampa’s house, Savannah thanks him profusely as they get out of the car.

“Your welcome, Savannah. I will see you tomorrow. I will pick you up around ten in the morning for your house shopping with Joy.”

“Okay. Thank you so much, Mr. G. May God, continue to bless you.”

G. waves at her and the kids as he drives off.

He and Chip head back to the car dealer to settle on a price. After some bargaining, they agree to a price. G. informs the salesman he would wire him the money the next day and also get him a copy of the insurance.

“We would like the car delivered around three in the afternoon to this address.” G. gives the salesman one of Joy’s business cards and they return to the hotel.

When Tampa and Lee get home that night, they ask Savannah into the kitchen. Savannah goes in excitedly; she cannot wait to break the good news to both of them.

But immediately when she enters the kitchen, Lee goes off on her.

“I don’t know the best way to say this so I’m just going to say it. You and your kids need to be out when school starts. My house is too small for everybody to be here. Plus, Tampa and I have been arguing about this and it’s putting a strain on our relationship. I know that Tampa took it upon herself and told you to come down here and you listened to her.

“Now, look at you. Look at what you’ve done to your children. Tampa may not even have a job herself soon and this is added stress. Then all of that pressure falls on me. Summer is almost over. I’m giving you a few

weeks to find a place. Maybe you should go back to New Jersey and see if you can get your job back. Let your kids know they have to go. That's all I have to say."

Savannah feels totally embarrassed and insulted. Eyes filled with tears, she turns and looks to her sister. Tampa holds her head down and says nothing. Then Savannah, deeply embarrassed, takes a deep breath and says, "Thank you for letting me know how you really feel. Tampa, I don't want to get in between you and your husband. I see who makes the final decisions. I wish I had realized this before I made this decision to relocate here. Now, I'm totally embarrassed and humiliated sitting here and listening to you talk to me like I'm some loser."

Tampa lifts her head, overcome with shame. "I'm sorry. I will try my best to help you find a place to live."

Savannah shakes her head in bewilderment, pushing curls out of her eyes. "What is wrong with you? I'm your sister and they are your niece and nephew!" She shouts.

Lee, more furious than ever, rises to his feet, fingers pointing at Savannah. "And I pay the bills in this house! You're damn right I make the final decisions! Now, Tampa, it's late and I'm hungry. Y'all can start dinner."

While this is going on, Tamala and Cedric are going over their own experience with Tampa and Lee's children who want nothing to do with them.

Lee Junior is just starting high school. He has done nothing all summer than lock himself in his room, playing video games. He is interested in little else.

His sister, Tiffany, will be a sophomore in high school this year. She spends all of her time on the phone and hanging out with friends. She sees Tamala and Cedric as getting in the way. She often whines and complains to their parents about how crowded it is and how she can't have any of her friends over out of embarrassment.

"Tamala," Cedric whispers to his sister, "I will be so glad to finally leave here. I hear Mom cry every night when she thinks we're asleep. She's being treated like this just because she took a chance to give us a better life. Don't worry, everything is going to be all right."

"I'll be glad too," she replies. "I'm not happy here either. Tiffany doesn't talk to me."

Cedric gives his sister a hug. "I know. Lee Junior doesn't talk to me either. Don't worry. I'm going to make a lot of money from being a vendor at the Summer Bless-

ings Fair. Mr. G. said he's going to help us too. So, don't worry." He smiles as he consoles her.

"Okay."

Cedric kisses her on the cheek. "Don't worry. Things will get better for us. I have faith in God. And I'm sure Mr. G. will come through for us."

The next morning, G. wakes up early. He can hardly wait to pick up Savannah. He calls the guys and tells them he will meet up with them later in the day.

As the time to pick up Savannah approaches, he dresses up and steps out. He runs into Sandy in the elevator. They exchange pleasantries. She asks him how he and his friends are enjoying their stay.

"Oh! They're enjoying getting away," G. replies laughing.

Sandy smiles wide. The elevator gets to the bottom and they both step out.

"Mr. G.," Sandy calls before G. can move far, "I just thought to inform you that we are hiring here. Maybe you know someone who might be interested."

G. stops walking. He can hardly believe his luck. Then, he nods vigorously. “I will definitely keep that in mind, Sandy. Thank you and have an awesome day,” he says as he walks towards the parking lot to his car, thinking about how the job opportunity might suit Savannah.

“You too,” Sandy replies.

G. pulls up at Tampa’s house and Savannah is already waiting on the porch.

“Good morning,” Savannah says as she hurries down the stairs to get into the car.

“Good morning,” he replies just as she shuts the door and he zooms off.

He asks about the children and she responds affirmatively they are at camp. As he drives on, Savannah, her hands in her lap, looks at him.

“I just want to thank you for what you are doing for me and my children. I was so overwhelmed yesterday that I could not process it all.”

G. smiles and momentarily takes his eyes off the road. “It’s fine really. It’s just my way of showing appreciation for your thoughtful gift.”

Savannah nods her head. “I know but I really want you to understand what this means to me. You see, my husband left me when my daughter was five years old and my son was eight years old. I have been struggling since then, trying to pay the bills all by myself.

“I worked in the accounting department of a small company. But no matter how much overtime I worked, I just couldn’t seem to get ahead and I kept spending less time with my children.

“I couldn’t afford to pay for a tutor. I couldn’t withdraw my son from school because I was afraid of losing him to the streets. Then, you came along and saved my son. I was so grateful for it that the money I gave to you cannot sufficiently show my appreciation for your great help. Now, I got a son who still has a smile on his face because he learned how to persevere from you. That’s a gift that I could not give to him.”

Tears well up in Savannah’s eyes as she continues, “My sister, Tampa, called me up and informed me her company was hiring. She told me the standard of living was much lower here and she thinks me and my children would be happy here. So, I jumped at the chance.

“I felt like I was moving in quicksand in New Jersey. The harder I tried to move forward the more I felt like I was sinking. I was so disappointed in myself. I

don't know how I got here in my life. I did not envision my life this way.

“When we moved down here, the job did not work out as I expected. We have had to depend on my sister and her husband to take care of us—at least until I can find a job. I have never felt more humiliated in my entire life. I feel so trapped and embarrassed. I feel like people are looking at me like a failure with two children I can't take care of. I cry into my pillow every night because I don't want the kids to hear me, but I think they do. We all sleep in the same bedroom.

“Cedric would say to me, ‘Mommy, don't worry I'm going to make a lot of money so I can buy you a house.’ Tamala would help me fix my hair and help me with picking out my outfits so I could find a job. Those kids have been my source of strength.”

G. opens a compartment and gets Savannah a box of tissue to wipe her tears.

“Thank you, Mr. G. I'm sure that sounds like a recitation now,” she says, laughing through the tears even as she wiped them off.

“God is always on time you know?” She sniffs and continues, “My sister and her husband sat me down last night and told me that me and my children had to move

by the time school resumes. Her husband spoke very disparaging of us, but I was more shocked and hurt that my sister could not defend me and my children. Then I thought about it and I'm so glad that I don't live with a man who makes decisions for me. I'm alone with two children but I have my own mind, feelings and opinions." Savannah looks ahead, now calmer. "If I was in her shoes, I would have stood up to my husband, insisting that my sister won't go anywhere until she gets back on her feet and if that took a year so be it!"

"I'm so sorry," G. says, his eyes touched with concern.

"I hadn't even had the opportunity to tell them about your visit. I didn't do so because I suddenly felt like I had to protect myself from her and her husband. So, I told them nothing."

G. continued listened compassionately.

"I am so grateful to you G. You have brought me and my family so much hope. You, have given me my dignity back. I feel like I can hold my head up high now and get people's respect." She dabs at her eyes as they start to fill up again. "I know my sister probably meant well, but I feel people look down on you when you're not doing well. I don't want myself or my children to be a hindrance to anyone. This is why I was so excited about

your visit yesterday, but I told my children not to say anything to anyone until I know for sure we are not living in a dream.”

G., now close to tears, smiles at her. “Well,” he says, “this is a dream and it is about to come true for all to see. I’m sorry you had to go through that last night. I just want you to know how grateful I am to you for that seed. That was totally unselfish—considering the fact that you didn’t even have much yourself. It was a gift I wasn’t entirely sure how to spend it so I just decided to use it for something I never do. I felt I had nothing to lose because it was a gift.”

G. takes the last turn and pulls up in front of Joy’s office. He turns off the engine, takes his hands off the wheel and faces Savannah.

“I have so many dreams and I felt stuck as a teacher. I mean,” he says as he tries to clarify himself, “Don’t get me wrong. I love teaching but I felt like I was made to do something more and I couldn’t figure out what it was. I just didn’t want a mediocre life. I wanted to make a difference in people’s lives but I didn’t know how.”

“Savannah,” he calls her softly, “you rescued me from being stuck. I am just as grateful to you as you are to me. I don’t believe in coincidences. I believe that we

followed the principles that Jesus taught in the bible and that created something beautiful. We turned a negative into a positive—even if by accident. I didn't know that helping Cedric with his school work made that much of a difference. I did not realize the impact that it had on you. I am grateful that God has given me the opportunity to give you your dignity back because you deserve it. You have not given up on life and being a mother Savannah. I know it's not easy.”

He pauses, smiling wider than ever and continues, “Now, I want you to find the house that will put a smile on your face. So that when the children come home from the church camp, you can tell them that dreams come true and that they can keep dreaming too.”

“You have taken a ton of pressure off my shoulders,” Savannah says, wiping more tears off her smiling face.

“Tell Joy to call me whenever you guys are headed back to her office. I will see you guys then.”

“Okay.” Savannah comes down, waves at G. and walks into the office.

G. waits for Savannah to get inside before driving off. Feeling so emotional and humbled by his conversation

with her, he'd been struggling to keep the tears in. Now, he lets the tears flow freely as he talks to God out loud.

“Thank you, God, for Your mercy and favor! I give You all of the glory for the goodness that has come out of this gift You have given to me.”

After getting himself together, he calls Larry to confirm where the guys are. Larry informs him that they are all together, with Maya, waiting for him at his place so they can talk about the summer fair. G. tells them he had to drop off Savannah and he would soon be on his way after he makes one more stop at the car dealers.

At the car dealer's, G. takes care of every necessary detail. They tell him the car will be delivered to his specified location by 2 p.m.

I can't wait to see the look on Savannah's face when she sees her new car, he thinks, smiling to himself as he heads towards Larry's.

As he pulls into the garage, G. sees Maya and all the guys in the yard.

“Hey G.!” Maya shouts as G. gets out of his SUV.

“Hey, Maya! How are you making out?” G. says in response as he walks towards them. He hugs Maya and goes around greeting the guys.

“I decided I want the summer fair right in front of the house. Just facing the road, so it would be easy for passing cars to see and stop by. Plus, there is plenty of parking.”

G. nods slightly as he looks around and sees Maya’s point. “Yeah, I think you’re right. Good call, Maya.”

“Thanks.”

“I hope the fellas are helping you?” he asks, cracking a smile.

“Oh yes! They showed me where to set the tents up and where the food trucks should go. They also showed me where the DJ will set up their booth.”

“What? A DJ?” G. laughs out loud, looking from Maya to the guys with incredulity.

“Yes, we are definitely turning this fair up!” Maya responds excitedly. She continues, gesticulating with a dreamy look on her face—picturing the summer fair in her mind.

“The stage will be set up on this side of the fair for the gospel choir. The children tents will be on the other side of the adult's table. They will be selling candy, cookies, hair bows, balloons, books, and children-painted t-

shirts. Right next to them, there will be a booth for making up the children's face. We even have a guy who will be selling rides. He has a tractor-pulled cart. There's another guy with a wagon pulled by two horses for the kids and their parents to ride."

All the guys are now listening intently, smiling, watching Maya excitedly describe her vision of the summer fair.

"I think it's going to work," says Chip.

"I'm *so* excited about it." Maya continues, "And G., I'm so glad you're in support of this. I really appreciate all that you are doing for me and the community."

"It's not a big deal."

"It is to us," Maya retorts. "therefore, I brought some lunch. We can eat while we continue to discuss the summer fair. It's in the house."

G. shakes his head. "Oh! You didn't have to bother."

"It's not a bother. It was the least that I could do to express my appreciation since you all have been very supportive of me."

G. rises to his feet. "Let's go inside then. We can discuss while we eat." Larry cracks a joke about G.'s

love for food and they all roar with laughter as they move inside.

G. follows everyone inside and he sees the table filled with grapes, chicken and fries from the chicken shack, lemonade and some bottles of beer.

“Phew! Ain’t this something,” he exclaims. They all laugh again.

They settle down to eat; passing around food and beer, while cracking jokes about each other. After eating, they continue drawing plans on how to set up the summer fair.

Just then, G.’s phone rings. He answers it. It’s Joy, informing him that she and Savannah have just seen the last house and they are on their way back to the office.

“Okay, I am with Maya and the fellas. I will get to your office before you?” he asks jokingly.”

Joy laughs. “I will take the scenic route then,” she says.

“Okay. I will see you soon,” G. says as they end the call. He then turns to everyone and tells them he has to quickly get to Joy’s office and he would like them to join him. They agree to meet him there after they have taken care of cleaning up.

Before driving off, G. checks the time and sees that it's almost 2 pm—the time the car dealer scheduled for the car delivery. He puts a call through to the dealer and he is informed that the person delivering the car had already left.

“They should be there in about ten minutes.”

“Thanks,” says G. “I’ll be there in fifteen minutes. Please let them know I’m on my way.”

When he gets to Joy’s office, he is glad he arrived before Joy and Savannah. He walks around the office wondering why the delivery guy was not there yet. Just as he walks towards the back of the office, he sees the new Buick parked with a big red bow on it. He also sees the delivery guy standing beside it. He nods his head and smiles in approval. G. walks up to the delivery guy and thanks him. He then collects the car keys from him.

He goes back to his car and waits for Joy and Savannah to arrive. Just then, a van pulls up. It’s Maya and the guys.

“Hey! We are here,” Maya says as they pile out of the van. “What’s going on?”

G. smiles when seeing them. “Welcome guys! I have a surprise for Cedric’s mom.”

“The same Cedric that was at my meeting?” Maya asks, puzzled.

“Yes, he was my student. Well, it’s a long story I’ll fill you in later,” G. replies to her.

“Okay.”

Just then, Joy pulls into the parking lot. She and Savannah get down from the car and they greet everybody, exchanging smiles and small talk.

G. then walks over to Savannah. “I’m afraid, I’m not going to be able to take you back to your sister’s place,” he says with a well-disguised apology in his voice.

“It’s okay,” she replies, looking a little embarrassed. “I can take a cab home.”

“No, that won’t be necessary,” G. retorts with a smile as he holds up the key and presses a button. There’s a beep from the back of the office. “You can take yourself home in your new car. It’s in the back,” he says as he hands Savannah the keys.

Savannah’s embarrassment changes to disbelief and then surprise as she processes his words. With smiles on their faces, they all drag Savannah to the back of the office.

Her eyes fill up with tears as she sees the car.

“This is for me?” She asks, looking from the car to G.

“Yes, I told you I was going to get you the car,” G. replies smiling. “Here it is. Please, open it and tell me what you think of your new Buick SUV.”

Savannah, with tears in her eyes, first walks around the car, looking it over. Then enters the driver’s side. Her face wide with smiles, she puts the key in the ignition, starts the car and listens to the rumble of the engine for some time before turning it off. She steps out and gives G. a hug. “I can’t express how grateful I am for all that you have done. All I can say is thank you. Now, I can tell my sister that I have a car now.”

G., totally happy at her reactions, says, “You will soon be able to tell her you have your own house, too. Let’s go in and talk about the houses you’ve seen today.”

He then leads her towards the office with everyone trailing behind, their faces lit with smiles.

As they enter the reception, G. turns to the others and tells them to wait in the conference while he, Joy and Savannah goes over the house options in Joy’s office.

They all agree and continue discussing the Summer Blessings Fair marketing strategy while G. goes inside with the two women.

“So, how did it go today?” G. asks immediately they settle into their seats in Joy’s office.

“Well, it was so much fun showing houses to Savannah today,” Joy replies. “They ranged from \$250,000 to \$350,000.”

G. looks at Savannah and says, “So, which house did you pick?”

“I’m a little torn,” she replies, looking into a little folded note. “One house has a swimming pool that I will be responsible for while the other has a community pool that we will have to share.”

“You have it written down?” G. asks, laughing.

“As a matter of fact, I do.” She replies, grinning widely. “The one with a pool I’ll be responsible for...” she continues and gives a very detailed analysis of the two houses. G. occasionally nods his head, listening keenly to her and very impressed at her detailed report of the houses.

“...that one is \$250,000 and the first house is \$350,000. I will be very grateful for either of the two,” Savannah says in conclusion.

“Which one feels like home?” G. says to Savannah—now holding her hand.

Savannah bows and begins to cry uncontrollably. “I’m sorry,” she blubbers in-between tears.

“It’s okay,” G. continues. “You deserve this. It’s your turn. It’s okay to be happy. I got you. As long as God continues to bless me, I will bless you.”

Joy’s eyes also fill up with tears as she watches G. consoling Savannah, and there Joy starts to fall in love with him.

Savannah, in the midst of the sobs, looks up and says, “No man has ever made me feel this safe before. I didn’t even realize until now how unworthy I have felt about myself.”

G. fetches from his pocket tissue and wipes away her tears. “It’s okay, Savannah. You’ll be fine. Things are working out in your favor.”

Savannah takes some time to compose and calm herself. “It’s hard to make a decision about the houses because I feel like I’m asking for too much.” She starts

after regaining calm, “I don’t want to seem greedy or ungrateful.”

“You don’t worry about that. Which house do you want?”

She looks up at him and says, “The first house with the pool was really special. Being in it made me feel at home and it also felt like a dream come true at the same time. It’s the one that costs \$350,000.”

G. stands her up and gives her a long hug. He then looks at Joy and tells her to write up the contract for the house.

“It’s hers. Let the listing agent know this is a cash deal. We will close as soon as possible,” he tells her.

“I’m on it,” Joy says with smiles. She picks up the phone to call the agent and present G.’s offer. The agent informs her they will call her back.

G. looks at Savannah and asks her, “Do you want to ride your car back to your sister’s house to get your clothes so you can move into the hotel where I’m staying for however long it takes to close? I will also need your banking details so I can wire the \$100,000 into your account.”

“Oh! Thank you, Mr. G.”

“No, Savannah. It’s just G. We’re friends now. I told you I got you. You don’t have to worry anymore about you and your kids feeling uncomfortable in anyone’s house starting right now”.

Then, the phone rings and Joy picks it.

“Yes,” she screams out. “I will have the contract and proof of funds to you within an hour.” She hangs up and informs them that the full cash price offer has been accepted.

“Congratulations, Savannah!” She says and G. echoes her. Savannah—again overwhelmed by all that is happening—starts to shake and cry.

“For real?” She asks.

“Yes!” Joy and G. chorus in excitement. They laugh excitedly and both console Savannah.

After some time, G. tells them he wants to call Sandy at the hotel to confirm if there are any rooms available. Joy tells him not to bother, that she will do it in his stead. She then calls Sandy, finds out about room availability and books it for Savannah and her kids.

“G. will be up there soon to take care of the bill,” she says into the receiver. “Thank you.”

“What’s left to be done?” G. says to Joy after she ends the call. “Because I would like us to leave as soon as possible so we can eat lunch at the hotel and get Savannah booked into her room. You have my POF already, don’t you?” G. asks her.

“Yes. There’s nothing much except for her to sign the contracts which I will send out. Then, you can leave.”

Savannah signs all the papers of the contracts and the necessary paperwork. As she does this, G. winks at Joy over Savannah’s head and says, “I will see you tonight for dinner. Yeah?”

“I would like that,” Joy blushes and smiles in response.

They finish all the paper work, round up the other guys, and move straight down to the hotel.

Sandy is waiting at the reception when G. and Savannah enter the hotel.

“Hi, Mr. G.! Hello, madam. Welcome to the Spring Hotel,” she greets them pleasantly. “Welcome back Mr. G. - Joy called about a connecting room.”

“Thank you, Sandy. Yes, I asked her to.”

“I have just the perfect room for you,” she says with smiles. “I connected your card to the room. I hope that’s okay?”

“That’s just perfect.”

“Then, I will need to swipe your card so I can give you the key.”

G. gives her the card and she swipes it, and hands him both the key to the room and his card. As they walk towards the restaurant, Sandy calls to him.

“Mr. G., don’t forget we are hiring at here”.

Savannah looks from G. to Sandy with surprise. “I would be interested. I work in accounting. Do they need someone for accounting?” She quickly cut in with her response.

Sandy looks to her with a big smile. “I’m not sure, but fill out the application online and I will put in a good word for you.”

“Thank you very much... S-a-ndy,” Savannah says as she reads her name off the name tag. “I’ll really appreciate that.”

G. grins widely at Sandy and says. “You amaze me, Sandy. Thank you.”

“You’re both welcome,” Sandy replies to them.

Then G. leads her to the restaurant where they eat and continue conversing while waiting for the camp to be over to be able to pick up Savannah’s kids and give them the good news.

Savannah parks in front of the church where the summer camp is being held and goes inside to get the kids. Cedric spots her right away, calls Tamala and they both run to her.

“Mom, what are you doing here? Mike’s mom always brings us home,” Cedric says as they exchange hugs, both of them genuinely surprised to see her.

“Well, today, I’m bringing you home,” she says, smiling with joy. “Let’s go.”

When they get outside, Cedric and Tamala are expecting to find an Uber waiting but there are only parked cars with no one in them. Savannah, smiling, keeps walking ahead with the kids slowly trailing behind her—not sure where they are walking to. Then Savannah opens the car door, looks back and realizes they had paused and are looking at her with bewilderment. She laughs out loud.

“Come on. Won’t you get in our new car?”

“What!” The kids chorus in unison and then they run towards the car. Wide-eyed, they walk around it and jump inside, touching and admiring every inch of it.

“Mommy, I can’t believe that we have a new car. I didn’t know that when Mr. G. said he would get us a new car, he would fulfill his promise,” Tamala says, totally surprised.

“I told you. Didn’t I?” Cedric replies excitedly, leaning over from the back seat to run his hands on the dashboard. “Now we have our own car.”

“Yes, baby. I was praying that it would really happen, and it did. Look at God!” Savannah exclaims and they all laugh loud, really excited.

Savannah tells them to shut the door as she revs the engine, ready to drive off. Then, Cedric suddenly remembers he didn’t tell Mike that his mom was bringing them home. He quickly runs back inside to tell him.

As they pull up to the house, Tampa and Lee are not there yet. Savannah turns around and looks at them in the back seat.

“Listen to me and don’t ask me any questions. Just do whatever I tell you, I’ll explain later.” Cedric and Tamala look at their mom, paying rapt attention like soldiers.

“I want you both to go upstairs and get all of your clothes and bring them downstairs into the car. We are moving.”

The children look at each other and then back at their mother.

“No questions,” she says just as Cedric opens his mouth to speak. “I will let you know when to ask them.”

“Don’t leave anything behind. I will be getting my things also and put them in the car. If anyone asks you what you are doing, where you are going, tell them to ask me.”

Cedric and Tamala nod their heads in agreement, and run towards the house like they were used to Savannah giving out these kinds of orders.

They immediately go upstairs and start putting clothes into their suitcases. Savannah follows them and begins to pack her things as well.

Lee Junior, the only person in the house, is so busy playing video games in his room that he doesn’t know what was going on. Tiffany was—as usual—out with her friends.

Just as they finish packing and put all of their things into the car, Lee and Tampa drive in and enter the

house, totally oblivious of the Buick parked in front of their house with the children sitting in it.

Savannah sees them arriving through the window upstairs and comes down to welcome them. Lee walks in first. He looks around then at her and gestures with undisguised disgust.

“Hello, I don’t smell anything cooking. I’m hungry and I have been working all day while you’ve been sitting in the house all day doing nothing.”

“I’ll start dinner, Lee. It’s okay,” Tampa says as she walks in behind him. “I’ll start dinner. Savannah will help me out.”

“No, Tampa. I won’t be helping you,” Savannah responds abruptly. Just then, Tiffany walks in on the building tension. Savannah continues as she has their attention. “I realize that friends can be more like family to you than your own family. I also realize that we all want and need to be respected. That being in control of what happens to us in our world gives us a sense of accomplishment. It makes people look at and treat us with the respect that we so desperately crave. People who don’t have any accomplishments, achievements, or a salary that provides for them and their families tend to turn to controlling the people that are in their lives. This gives them a false sense of control over their world, they dictate

what happens in other people's lives, because they have no say in their own life. I came here to give my children a better life and I came here with a job that had been promised to me. I was not looking for a handout, not expecting to be disrespected and made to feel like I was a failure, or to be treated like I was now in your world to be dictated to like one of your children or worse your servant. I'm trying to build my children's self-esteem up and not have people tear it down. Because of the treatment and the condescending way, you have spoken to me and treated my children, I am leaving."

"Then get the hell out!" Lee shouts, visibly shaking with anger.

"I just tried to help you and the kids," Tampa says, trying to appeal to her sister.

"Let her go, Tampa!" Lee snaps at his wife. "She will crawl back to us to let her and her kids in again; they have nowhere else to go. I am telling you ahead of time. The answer is no!"

Tampa looks at Savannah sheepishly as she moves towards the exit and says. "Well, I didn't say you had to go today."

Savannah swirls around. "Tampa stop acting like you are in control of your world!" She snaps at her sister.

“You didn’t say I had to go today? Look around you. Lee is in control of you and your world. You have been living this way for so long, Tampa, you don’t even realize you have no say.”

“Mom, just let her go,” Tiffany blurts out.

“Tiffany, stay in a child’s place and stay out of grown people’s conversation,” Savannah snaps at her.

Tiffany turns and marches defiantly to stand next to her father.

“Just keep it moving,” Lee snaps at Savannah and then he walks to the door and slams it in her face, yelling at Tampa to fix his food.

Savannah stands there by the door, waiting for Tampa to reopen the door so she could prove her wrong, that she did have some control. But the door never opens.

Savannah turns around and starts to cry, both for her sister and at the realization of how powerless she had felt for the past couple of weeks. Now she and her children are free.

She wipes her tears, walks to the car, opens the door and gets into the driver’s seat.

“Mom,” Cedric calls her, concerned.

“We are moving to the Spring hotel until we close on our house.” She tells them.

“Thank you, Mommy,” Tamala says as she begins to cry, “I didn’t want to be there anymore. I wanted to ask you if we could run away,”

“It’s okay, baby,” Savannah says as she soothes the two of them. “We are going to be okay”.

“I heard Uncle Lee yelling, Mommy,” Cedric looks at his mom.

“It’s okay, baby. Sometimes people yell when they see they have lost, and their words don’t affect the person they are upset with.”

“Mom, did you tell Aunt Tampa where we are going?” Cedric asks.

“No, I’m not ready for them to know yet. However, I want you both to know that if you ever feel stuck, always have a plan. In life, you will have dreams and goals, but it is important to have a plan to get there. If plan ‘A’ doesn’t work, then have plan ‘B’ and ‘C’ if you have to, but don’t give up and don’t conform to an uncomfortable situation.”

“Sometimes, you have to be creative in how to earn money too.”

“Yes,” Cedric replies. “I’m going to make cupcakes and sell them at the summer fair. We are going to be okay, Mommy.”

“I will help you,” Tamala tells Cedric. They all smile.

“I’m so proud of both of you,” Savannah says as she drives off towards the hotel.

BLACK WALL STREET

Joy stands in the mirror admiring her figure in the white and blue cotton maxi dress she wore for the evening. She puts her hair in a ponytail with a bang and touches up her makeup. Her phone rings and she smiles. She loves that G. always is on time.

G. gets out from his car and goes around to open the door for her. As he opens the door and she get closer, they stand and hold each other's gaze for a moment. And then G. holds her hand, and brings her closer, then he kisses her softly on the lips. Her heart freezes. She snaps her eyes close and she returns the kiss gently.

"I've always wanted to do this," G. says, and Joy smiles shyly.

They get into the car, and G. drives off

"You make me so happy," Joy says as she can no longer control her smile.

"I feel so alive with you," he says. "I feel like we are a team. Thank you for understanding how important it was for me to make Savannah feel safe and secure. It

bothered me to see her feeling the way she was when I knew it was because of her gesture that I even brought those lottery tickets. You did a great job in finding her a house also Joy.”

“Thank you, G. You are a beautiful person and it seems like this money has brought out that part of you even more. I’ve never met a man like you before. You seem so sure of yourself and you take charge with love and tenderness. You make a woman want to follow you. I’m impressed. I enjoy being around you. You make me feel like we are a team. You listen to my ideas and you include me in your projects, and I love that. Thank you for that.”

G. smiles. “I want you to meet my mother and my sisters, as soon as I get the house together, they are coming down.”

“Wow,” Joy says. “I would love to. And I can’t wait for you to meet my family also.”

Then G. asks of Maya, and how she’s been preparing for the upcoming fair. Joy tells him that Maya has been spending a lot of time at G.’s house preparing for the fair. She had channeled the money she would have used in paying for a venue, into advertising on radio.

She has additional vendors who signed up from other towns. She erected all the tents and booths, and decorated the grounds with lights wound around trees and tents.

Joy described how Maya mounted a big banner at the entrance of G.'s property, welcoming people to the fair, and also fixed banners at every tent, which will let people know what is being sold in each session.

“She has been keeping Chip, Jesse, and Larry very busy, and they seem very happy,” G. says. “I’d like to ask you for a favor.”

“Sure, what is it?”

“Well, since Savannah is moving to the Spring Hotel, Cedric will need a place to make his cupcakes. Could he use your kitchen?”

Joy laughs. “You think of everything. Yes, he can use my kitchen.”

“Good. I will let him know,” says G.

Joy then looks at him with loving eyes, and says, “You would be a great dad someday.”

G. smiles and says, “Thank you, Joy.”

He drives into the driveway of the restaurant, parks at the entrance and goes to open the door for Joy. A valet collects the car key from him and proceeds to drive the car into the parking lot.

Savannah is still reeling in the bliss of her new home. This is a dream come true for her and her children.

After weeks of hard work, it is finally the night before the Summer Blessings Fair, and everyone is coming to celebrate at the Spring hotel.

As Savannah arrives out the venue, she sees her next door neighbor. “Hi, Mr. Goldsmith, it’s so good to see you out tonight,” she greets excitedly.

“Hi, Savannah, my new neighbor. What brings you out tonight?”

“Oh, my son is one of the vendors for the fair. We have been baking cupcakes all night.”

“It’s was so nice for Maya, G., and Joy to organize this appreciation party for the people who helped her put the venue together,” Mr. Goldsmith says, looking at the people standing around with glasses of champagne.

“What brings you out tonight?” Savannah asks.

“Oh, my wife and I are here having dinner in the hotel.”

“Oh, please tell Mrs. Goldsmith I said thank you for making me and my children feel welcome. We enjoyed the cake she baked for us.”

“I will,” he said with a smile. “And please, call me Frank.”

Just then Lee and Tampa are stepping into the hotel. They see Mr. Goldsmith, and walk towards him, to greet him. Lee is shocked when he sees that his boss is talking to Savannah.

“Is that Savannah? That’s my boss she is talking to.”

Tampa is shocked as well. “What do you think she is telling him?”

“I don’t know,” Lee says and hurries to catch up with them. “Hello Mr. Goldsmith, how are you tonight? This is my wife Tampa.”

“Hello, Mr. Goldsmith,” Tampa greets, looking at Savannah as though she’s privileged to know him.

As they greet and make their introductions, Lee stands taller than normal, and Tampa wears a kind of smile Savannah has never seen before- fake and abnor-

mal. Just as Mr. Goldsmith turns around to introduce Savannah to them, he sees his wife, Mrs. Goldsmith coming out into the lobby where they are all standing.

“Oh, that’s my wife coming,” Mr. Goldsmith says, and Tampa and Lee turn around to look at the elegant woman walking towards them.

“Hello, Savannah,” Mrs. Goldsmith calls with a cheerful smile.

“Hello, Rose. It’s nice to see you out tonight. I was just telling Frank to thank you for the cake that you baked for me and my children.”

“Oh, you are more than welcome,” Mrs. Goldsmith says, giving her a quick hug.

Lee and Tampa are dumbfounded. Their mouths hang open in shock, without having words to say.

Mr. Goldsmith says to Lee and Tampa “This is Savannah, our new neighbor. She just bought that beautiful house with the in-ground swimming pool just like ours next door to us.”

Savannah is enjoying this moment. She loves the look on Lee’s face, and the way Tampa casts her face to the floor when their eyes met.

Mrs. Goldsmith now asks her husband who the other two people are.

“Oh,” Mr. Goldsmith says, “This is Lee and his wife...I’m sorry what’s your name again?”

“Oh, it’s Tampa.” At this moment, Savannah can swear that Tampa wishes the ground could open up and swallow her. “Oh, Savannah, you bought a house next door to Mr. Goldsmith?” Tampa blurts.

Savannah looks at her, smiles and ignores her. “Well, Rose and Frank,” she says, acting as though she could no longer see Tampa and Lee. “It was nice seeing you. I’m going to my event now. Enjoy your dinner.”

“Yes, goodnight everyone. Come on, Rose.” Mr. Goldsmith holds his wife’s hand as they walk towards the restaurant, leaving Tampa and Lee standing alone and wondering if this is real, or if it’s all a funny dream.

Savannah walks into the event room just in time to hear G. speaking. “I just want to thank all of you for coming out tonight to celebrate all of the hard work that you invested into putting this fair together for this weekend. I want to thank my mom and sisters for coming down for this fair. They are sitting at that table over there.” G. points to the table where they are sitting. A

brief applause fills the room as they smile and wave at the audience.

“I like to start out by saying that with all the hard work and all of the mistakes that I have made in my life, I can’t believe I stand before you all today with the victory that God has blessed me with. Growing up my mom took us to church but she also gave me and my siblings these little jewels to live by—her little stories to teach us to think and to make good decisions. Some of them I learned really well after I made some heavy mistakes. Then I would think to myself, Oh, I see why she always said that. It all makes sense now. I want to thank Savannah. Her son was in my class and he needed some extra help in some of his subjects, and I was more than happy to help him. He’s a good kid. I saw his determination and I didn’t want to see that light go off inside of him. His mom Savannah who is sitting right over there.” G. points to where Savannah is sitting.

She waves and smiles at everyone. Tampa and Lee had followed Savannah into the hall. They are both standing by the door unnoticed.

G. continues, “She sent her son Cedric to school with a thank you card, and inside was a \$100 bill. She gave me this money despite the fact that she didn’t have much. She just made that sacrifice to show me how much she appreciates what I did for her son. I am forever grate-

ful to Savannah for that. I went on to purchase a couple of lottery tickets—something I never do—with the money that Savannah gave me. It’s funny how life can be. I felt disrespected when one corporate looking white guy jumped in front of me and bought the last lottery tickets I was going to buy. This feeling comes over me feeling that black people never have enough leverage in life to win.

“So, there again, I felt I had lost. Well, I ended up buying tickets I had no intentions of buying. Out of shame, standing in front of the guy that was selling the tickets, I bought the tickets that were way out of my price range. Feeling so defeated, I left the store without getting some magazines that I really went into the store to get. I just shoved the scratch-off tickets in my pocket and left the store. I didn’t think about them until the next day. This is where I think all what my mother has been teaching me with those little stories and wise sayings finally kicked in. Even though I was a teacher, I felt like a failure. I always felt I wanted to matter to people. I want to help people get to the next level. So, through the scratch-offs it become possible. I finally got a chance to do the right thing and I didn’t want to screw up. I reached out and met Joy who sold me the land that we are having the fair on. I want to thank Joy for giving me ideas that I would have never thought of. I want to thank Maya for bringing a community together and to show them what

entrepreneurship is all about. Maya just told me a little while ago that not intentionally, but purely by coincidence, all of the vendors happen to be black. This is happening on my land!” G. yells with a sense of pride, and everyone claps.

“Maya said, we have started a Black Wall Street on my land. For the first time, I’m starting to feel fulfilled. I am overwhelmed with love. I have somehow found myself around people whose mission it is to show love to one another through teaching, sharing, and setting examples to be followed. Here is where a lot of my winnings can go towards. I want to build on my land storefronts with the owners housing on top. This way we can encourage people to start their own business and have less overhead. You pay one mortgage and that will take care of your home and your business.

“Joy and I will be working on that project together with others. Thank you for your ideas Joy. I don’t want to take up all of your time, but I want to say this. We have to give a hand up because you never know that person may be in a position to help you out one day. We can conquer this with love and respect to one another. I don’t have to shame you into wanting success or humiliate you into wanting success. I was shown respect and I passed it on to the next person. I want to build and sell properties to people who need a chance.

“I got that chance and now I’m passing it on to you. I’m investing my money in people who want to start their own business. Doctors, lawyers, schools and I am naming the street on my land the Black Wall Street. Thank you for coming out. Thank you for all of your hard work in making this Summer Blessings Fair a success to be. Thank you for showing love even when love hasn’t been shown to you. Joy and I, with the help of my legal and financial team will be touch with you through your churches on classes to start your own business, and then how to qualify for funding for a store front and home on my land.”

At this point, Lee and Tampa ease out of the back of the room and start walking towards the restaurant where they had intended to go in the beginning. They both feel ashamed of themselves and the way Lee had treated Savannah. Tampa drags her legs along; it feels as though the floor is filled with mud and the mud is pulling on her legs, trying to pull her down for not standing up to defend her sister. Not knowing what to say to each other Tampa and Lee sit down and order their dinner. After eating for a few minutes, Tampa breaks the silence. “I asked my sister to come here to live and this is my house just as much as it is yours. It was not her fault that the company let go of the job that they had promised her. I allowed you to make her feel uncomfortable by not saying anything to you when you humiliated her. *No* more! I could

not see until just now who I had become, and I feel embarrassed and ashamed of myself. Our son just plays video games every chance he gets. That will stop also, and our daughter is too busy trying to be part of a group of girls that think that by staying in a mirror all day, she'll get herself to go very far in life. That has to stop. My sister is by herself with two children and her kids admire her. I want that from my kids and you.

Lee feels slightly defensive. He looks at her with accusing eyes and says, "This is who I am. No one has ever done anything for me. I was this way when you married me. I don't know how to be any other way. I work hard so I can put a roof over my family's head, not your sister's family. I was raised to believe that a woman is supposed to have my dinner ready on the table when I get home. What's wrong with that?"

"I work also! We should be a team. I feel foolish for accepting your way of thinking for so long. I have value just like you do. You needed me to buy this house with you."

Lee looks around, to be sure that their voice isn't audible enough to attract the attention of others. "I'm sorry, you're right. Thinking about all this now, I've realized that I'm being just like my father—someone who I never wanted to be like because of the way he treated my mother, me, and my brother. I don't want to throw away

all of the years we have been married. I want my family and most of all, I want you.”

With tears in his eyes for the first time in a long time, Lee lets himself see things from someone else’s perspective. Tampa holds his hand and reassures him. “As long as we work together to make a change for the positive, I will be there right beside you. I think we need counseling to get us started.”

“Okay, after we get started with the counseling, I want the kids to be there also.”

Tampa fights to hold back the hot tears accumulating under her eyelids. She blinks severally to keep the tears in, but her eyes betray her, and she feels the tears rolling down her face. She has never seen this remorseful part of him before. “Thank you,” she says, for lack of anything else to say.

Lee smiles. “Tampa, I want to apologize to your sister, Savannah.”

“Yeah. We both need to apologize to her.”

G. wakes up very early on the morning of the Summer Blessings Fair. He picks up his phone, and it’s

5:00am. He stretches, and instinctively, his hands press the speed dial he had set for Joy.

“Hello, G.,” Joy’s voice rings out. It sounds like she was already wide awake.

“Sounds like you’ve not slept a zilch.”

Joy laughs. “Well, I’ve been talking to Maya before you called. She’s already at your property. I’m so excited.”

“Me too. I will pick you up with breakfast in the car. Muffins and hot chocolate from the restaurant in the hotel.

“Sounds good. I’ll be ready to leave at 5:45am.”

Arriving at his property G. almost didn’t recognize it. As he gets out of the car with Joy, they see an arched wall with hanging plants and colorful flowers on it. Walking through there were big balloon type colorful lights hanging on strings wound from one side to the other. It is the kind of lights that are colorful by day and give out light at night. As they walked further, they see big orange and red flower pots. On one pot, it is written boldly ‘Welcome’ and on the next pot, it’s written, ‘To The,’ and then, on the next pot, they see ‘Summer Blessings Fair,’ stacked on top of each other with flowers cascading over the sides of the pots.

Looking around, they see big wooden crates and other colorful pots of plants with different flags next to them. Welcome flags, American flags, ‘Be Blessed’ flags, Smile flags, Summer Blessings Fair flags. They are all placed along the path to guide people to the place where the booths begin.

The first section is the adult section, selling all kinds of arts and crafts. Then the next section people are selling paintings. In the next section people are selling t-shirts, caps, sunglasses, pottery, signs, and housewares decorations. From there, there is a sign that lets you know you have entered the young people section. The booths are lined up on both sides of the walkway. There is a booth where they sold cupcakes.

“Hey, that’s Cedric’s booth. He baked those cupcakes at my house all last night,” Joy says cheerfully. There is also lemonade booth, a painted rock booth with some awesome words written on them. Like, Love, Peace, Happiness, Best Life, Blessed Life, Jesus and Summer Blessings Fair. A cookie booth, and also a book booth for one of the kids, who wrote a book.

In the next section, there are tables with colorful umbrellas and balloons of all colors arranged on the tables. On the umbrellas and balloons are written ‘Summer Blessings Fair.’ There is also the Fried Chicken and

French Fries booth, a Ribs booth, and booths where they sell all kinds of other foods.

Next to the food section, there's an area for the kids to play. Maya had put Hula hoops, balls, and jump ropes. She even had a person to paint their faces.

At about 9:00 am, people start coming in for the Summer Blessings Fair. By 10:00 am there are already over 100 people there, and many others still coming in. A few church buses from the neighboring towns are also amongst the lots of cars parked at the area mapped out to serve as parking lot.

Most of these people had come for the gospel concert that would start by 7:00 pm, just after the Summer Fair closes by 6:00 pm.

Standing and watching in awe as hundreds of people walk around the fair, buying different Items, G., Joy and Maya are too stunned to believe their eyes.

“Joy, this is a Black Wall Street!” Maya says excitedly. “We didn’t do it on purpose, but all of the vendors are black. There are people of color everywhere shopping and eating. The kids look so happy! I see people with smiles on their faces. I even invited a guy from the radio station, and he showed up. So, the radio station would be talking about our Summer Blessings Fair.”

“I’m so proud of you Maya.” Joy gives her a hug.

“Thank you Joy.”

Just then, they see Larry waving at them. He calls out, but they can’t really hear him because of the sound of music in the air. Maya waves back at him, and beckons on Maya to meet up with him, leaving Joy and G. standing alone.

“I think Larry and Maya are hitting it off,” G. says. “He looks very happy.”

“Yes,” Joy smiles. “And Maya seems very happy when she is around Larry.”

Then G. looks around and says to Joy, “Let’s do this for real.”

Joy looks at him puzzled. “Do what?”

“Let’s make this a real Black Wall Street. I will build stores with apartments on top and rent them out to people who want to start their own business. Then when their business is strong enough, I will sell the property to them. We can still have Maya’s fair here as often as she likes. I will make money from the rents and being a vendor for Maya’s fairs. I will help pay for the marketing.”

Joy smiles saying, “You want us to start a business together?”

“Yeah.”

“Then let’s do it!”

“Yes, let’s do it.” G. says, looking into her eyes. After holding each other’s gaze for a moment, they kiss passionately.

At Cedric’s stand, he has had a great day selling to numerous buyers who all wanted to have a bite of his delicious cupcakes. Savannah and Tamala are with him, helping him attend to his customers. As they finish attending to a family who bought a dozen cupcakes, they took some time to sit down, Cedric looks into the booth and see that he’s almost sold out.

“Mommy, thank you so much for your help. You and Tamala have really helped me. I’m almost sold out.”

Each cupcake cost him .25¢ to make and he’s selling them for \$1.50 per cupcake. He baked 100 cupcakes for each of the two days. Maya had given all the kids booths for free since G. didn’t charge her for the space. He spent \$25 for everything and made a profit of \$125.”

“I’m so proud of you Cedric,” Savannah says.

“Mommy, for the first time I really feel good about myself. I see all of the people’s faces when they come

back to get another cupcake. Their faces are all smiles. It's like I finally did something I can be proud of.”

As they're still talking, Tampa walks up to Cedric's booth and asks to buy a cupcake.

Surprised, Cedric looks at his mom, and she nods at him to go ahead. After paying for the cupcake, Tampa asks Savannah if they could talk privately.

Savannah and Tampa walk down the road that leads towards the lake. As soon as they get to a place where the sound of the music is not so loud, Tampa begins to speak.

“Savannah, I don't know when it all began, but I just got lost in being a wife and a mother. I stopped sticking up for myself for a long time. I didn't see it until the big fight we had a month ago. I want you to know that I'm sorry for not sticking up for you and the kids to stay. You were my sister before I ever knew Lee. I feel so embarrassed by my actions. My children have grown up thinking this is who their mother is. But right now, I have started making amends. I told Lee that he had to respect me and listen to what I have to say. I reminded him that our house is my house as much as it is his. Would you forgive me for the way I wronged you?”

Savannah shook her head slowly. “Tampa I won’t pretend that I was not deeply hurt. Do you realize that if I didn’t have G., I and my children would have been out on the street? It was God that programed everything to save us in a situation like this. And now, I am grateful I didn’t lose myself. It pays to show love and kindness to people. I showed love to other people even when things were not going well with me. I extended that love to G. for being kind enough to help my son Cedric. He was very bad with numbers before. You know, but he’s counting like crazy now.”

“Yes, I forgive you because you are my sister and I am grateful that you now see your value and you will make Lee see your value also.”

Savannah and Tampa hug each other, and with the joy of reunion, they both walk back to Cedric’s booth. On their way there, Tampa tells Savannah that she had spoken with her son and banned him from excessive video games and had talked her daughter into getting a job so that she’ll stay away from her friends who have been deceiving her.

Hanging around an ice cream booth, each of them eating from a frosty cone of ice cream, Larry and Maya seem like the happiest couple in town. Even from a thou-

sand miles, everyone could see the way they look at each other, and how radiant their smiles are when they're all alone talking.

“Maya, thank you for letting me to be a part of this Summer Blessings Fair. I will be here for the Fall Blessing Fair if you want me to.”

Maya smiles. “I really enjoy being around you, and a Fall Blessings Fair sounds like a great idea. Are you going back to New Jersey soon?”

“Yes, to get the rest of my things and come back. I'm going to help G. get his business off the ground and start my own. Maybe we can do a project together and makes some money.” He winks at her.

“Yes.” Maya smiles. “I would like that a lot.”

Larry's finger brushes against hers. He tries to observe her body language to see if she'd flinch, but she curls her finger around his, and holds his hand. Larry draws her closer, such that they face each other, their face just about two inches apart.

“These few days around you have been like sunshine,” Larry says, staring lovingly into her eyes.

Maya smiles saying, “And it seems like you brought the light to brighten the bleakness of my days.”

He kisses her softly on the lips. Maya holds on tightly to him and returns the kiss as if her life depends on it.

G., his mom, siblings, and friends walk around the fair checking out how the activities are going. Then they start walking around the portions that are still empty. Bella observes a particular spot that faces the main road and imagines how beautiful the place would be for her business.

“I want my gallery to be here,” she says. Her sister picks a place she would want to build her event center, and Larry chooses a space near the lake, and says he’d like to build his house there.

“I’m going back to Jersey City and I’m going to miss all of you guys,” Jesse says. “I can’t wait to tell that girl G. was dating that she made a big mistake.” They all laugh.

“It was her loss,” Larry says.

Somewhere in the middle of the crowd, Sandy and her mom walk around shopping and smiling. Sandy discloses to her mom that she would be working for G. very soon. G. had offered to give her a better paying job when he sets up his company, and she’s looking forward to it.

Miles walks up to Savannah to buy a cupcake. He admires her beauty as she gives him to cupcake. Unable to hold it back, he blurts, “You look as sweet as that cupcake you are giving me.”

Savannah blushes and gives him the cupcake. “Thank you.”

“So, are you from here?” Miles asks.

“I just moved down here.”

“Oh, I live in this city. My friend Maya put this fair together.”

“Oh, Maya is a beautiful person,” Savannah says.

“I don’ t have anyone to go to the gospel concert with after the fair is over. Would you like to come with me?” Miles stares at her flirtatiously. She blushes uncontrollably.

“Sure,” she says, “but my children will be with me.”

“I would like that,” Miles says, smiling at Cedric and Tamala.

At the end of the Fair, everyone buys their \$20 gospel concert tickets, which is meant for donation to the churches whose choirs were coming to sing at the con-

cert. Before the concert begins, Maya and G. goes up on stage to give a shout out of thanks.

Maya speaks first. She thanks G. for letting them use his property, and for helping out in every way he could. She thanks him for coming to their city to help make the place better. “Thank you, G.!” she yells. “And thank you everyone for coming out for this fair. We never planned it, but all the vendors here happen to be people of color. Practically, we have built a Black Wall Street.

They all clap, and G. climbs on stage amidst loud-cheers and applauses. “Thank you, thank you. I am so happy that this was a success. I knew that God brought me here to help our people here to achieve their dreams. Thank you, Savannah, for sowing the first seed of giving. Right now, it is my turn to give and give abundantly, and I’m encouraging us all to serve one another like we have done tonight. I am glad we have built this Black Wall Street, where we can all make our dreams come true. Thank you once again, and God bless you.”

As he finishes speaking, four kids roll a table to the front of the podium. On the table, there is an item covered with a beautiful flowery curtain. Cedric comes along and draws the curtain away, and G.’s eyes hang open in awe as he sees a giant cake with the inscription ‘Thanks, Mr. G., for making our dreams come true.’”

“Oh my God!” he sobs as tears of joy start rolling down his eyes.

Fireworks and loud applause fill the air as Joy, Maya, G.’s family and his friends, all come on stage to give him a big hug.

The End

