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Surrendering At The End Of The Circle

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Dedications

This eBook is dedicated to my dearest mother, EMMA, who, by example, is responsible for me being all that I am today, and to my precious children, JUICE, and RED, for believing in me and indulging in my choice to sacrifice the time, attention and comforts normally shared with them in order for me to follow my dreams.

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Special Recognition:

TO: Gator, Marleny and Marty- For being exceptional individuals; For sharing unadulterated love and; For spreading a feeling of well-being.

TO: All of those who started my journey with me but changed directions along the way; and those who sometimes wearied but walked with me anyway; and to those I love dearly, who did not live long enough to see this day.

TO: The Almighty-I thank God for taking everything out of my hands and leading me with His!

Surrendering is your choice to win by giving in. Those who never surrender, never change, and never find the end of the circle.

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Prologue

Cherry first heard the clamor of voices, then the radio. She knew what would happen next. “Where’s Curtis? Curtis!” Cherry Sharp hollered. Curtis was Cherry’s brother. He was having a party in the basement of their parents’ modest two-story home. He and two of his friends had just stepped outside for a breath of cigarette-free air. When Cherry couldn’t find Curtis downstairs, she ran out the back door, yelling, “Curtis! Curtis!”

“What’s up?” Curtis asked, impetuously approaching Cherry. Curtis was streetwise. Detecting and responding to urgencies had become a way of life for him.

“It’s going on again! The old man just turned his radio all the way up!” she screamed, changing her direction to re-enter the house the second Curtis acknowledged her s.o.s.

“Come on!” Curtis said to his buddies. All three rushed into the house and were on their way up a flight of stairs that led to a sitting room, situated outside of Cherry’s and Curtis’ bedrooms, when they were stunned by the sight of Cherry being carried by her father. Cherry’s face was buried in his chest and her body was being held rigidly in a vertical position that placed her ass in his face. One of her arms was dangling; the other was entangled with one of his. Her father had twisted her into a human pretzel.

“So you wanna get in the way, huh? Well, I’ll teach you!” her father quipped, descending the stairs with Cherry. Dismayed, he froze in his steps, nearly colliding with Curtis and his buddies who were on their way up. He had no idea Cherry had already alerted her brother to the drama. A commotion ensued. Cherry was jolted free from her father’s grasp by Curtis’ first crashing blow to their father’s groin. The three boys shoved Papa Sharp down the stairs and out of the house.

Cherry wasn’t concerned about what would happen outside. Instead, she struggled to stabilize her stupefied condition so that she could make it up the stairway, her knees failing her just as she cried out, “Oh my God! My God!” Stella lay motionless on the floor. Blood was oozing all about her eyes. Cherry began to wipe away at the blood as if they were tears. Cherry could barely see by now. Her own tears were blinding her before streaming freely down her face. “It’ll be alright, Mom. Everything’s gonna be alright.”

No matter how many times she’d lived through her father’s ritual of turning up the radio to drown out the screams of her battered mother, Cherry could never calm the nervous panic that gripped her stomach at the

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sound of loud music. Her mom was unconscious. Cherry was in a trance. For a brief moment she no longer saw gouged, swollen-shut eyelids. For a moment she remembered her mom's smiling eyes and wondered what manner of monster would beat life away from such a gentle woman.

Calamitous situations were commonplace in Cherry's life. By the age of seventeen, she'd experienced what she hoped would be the last of her melancholy days. She had absolutely no idea how challenging her tomorrow would be.

PART I VIRGIN DECISIONS

CHAPTER 1

Cherry started her life journey surefooted but her steps were misguided because she made major decisions with limited wisdom. Her decision to quit college after one semester ended the first of many journeys that brought about new beginnings. “What’s she doin’ home?” her father asked of her mom. “She’s pregnant ain’t she?”

“What kind of a welcome home greeting is that to give your daughter?” her mother asked.

“The kind of greeting she deserves. Miss thang ain’t good for nothing. Humph, ain’t good for nothing but.”

“Mom, don’t sweat it. The man don’t know me. Never have. I’m willing to bet he never will.” Cherry thought of her upbringing. Despite her mother’s efforts to instill in her certain morals, Cherry was no saint, but she prided herself on being decent. To escape from her father’s tyranny today, she began to *reminisce* on her college escapades, sagas of yesterday.

THE SAGA OF CHERRY AND THE PROFESSOR..... His kisses were hot, his embraces firm and his hands exploratory. Cherry toyed with necking before, but this first date on campus was different. So was the guy’s approach. He took his time to caress her mind and relax her with special conversation and then...

Cherry thought... “Damn! I can’t think! His moves are faster than my mind! I can’t stop! I don’t want to stop! Damn!” Enjoying the essence of the moment, Cherry continued, just when the professor abruptly stood up and asked...

“What the hell is about to go down here?”

Cherry looked at him dumbfounded, saying nothing, but thinking... “My jeans, my panties, and maybe my virginity? Hell, if I had to guess, I’d say all of the above.”

“Umph!” he said. He cupped her face in the palm of his hand and planted a kiss on her lips. That kiss made her imagination run wild, because she could barely feel it. Just as she decided to make him feel hers, she reached for him, but he wasn’t there. She opened her eyes to find that he’d stepped back and was just looking at her.

“Something wrong?” she asked.

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“You just told me you’ve never been touched. I find that hard to believe.”

“Okay, I did tell you I’ve never been touched. But, I never told you I didn’t want to be. Can you touch me?” Cherry uncrossed her legs, ran her hands down the inseam of her jeans and chuckled.

“Am I a joke?” he asked, his eyes covering her pose.

“Don’t trip. I was just thinking of how we’ve changed roles.”

“So what, you came here with a script?”

“No, but I did have certain notions before getting here. I gotta be honest, before getting here, I was shaky. And now here we are . . . me stretched out,” she said, easing out of her shoes and slowly placing her legs on his sofa, “and you’re standing there. Why are you just standing there?” she asked.

“You are a lot of woman, Lil’ Bit. A real firecracker,” he said as he kneeled.

Cherry rubbed her face against his until she found his lips with hers. Her tongue began to travel the nap of his neck. “Professor,” she whispered as her right hand squeezed the firmness in his pants. “Give me this and I’ll explode like a firecracker.”

“Ooh girl. You are dangerous,” he said, moving away from her.

“I don’t believe this,” Cherry said, sitting up and stroking her hair into shape while wondering, at the same time, how she’d become a good girl gone bad.

“I don’t either,” he said. “You’re smooth.” He could tell by her blank expression that he needed to explain his comment. “You have no idea what I’m talking about, do you?” She looked at him dumbfounded. He continued, “You really don’t know. Tell you what,” he said, sliding her shoes on, pulling Cherry to her feet and ushering her to the door. “Now is not the time for us.”

“Okay, we’re speaking the same language, but we’re not communicating. I mean, can or can’t we know each other?” Cherry asked.

“That’s just the point. I know you already. But Lil’ Bit, you’re not wise enough to know me. I’m supposed to leave in two days for England to finish my studies. I had every intention of knowing you and leaving. But wisdom tells me that if I touch you, I’ll be taking you with me.”

“Trust me. I have no intentions of going to England with you.”

“And, I have no intentions of taking the memory of you with me.”

“So, what is this? Hello and good-bye?”

“This is good-bye,” the professor said, planting a soft kiss on her forehead and an even softer one on her lips. “Umph. Umph. Umph,” he

said, letting his finger outline her lips. "You're good. And, you have no idea what you're made of. But, I'm gonna tell you something, that's what makes you dangerous. Dangerous with innocence, a bitch in time. Be careful, Lil' Bit. Some men have to win and hurt when they don't."

"Get serious. I'm not about to hurt anyone that I want."

"Listen to you. Just listen to yourself."

"Alright I give. I know what I said, but what did you just hear?"

"That you'll be good to me, as long as I'm who you want," he commented. "Is it me, or is there something wrong with that picture?"

Her reflection simmered in his eyes just long enough for her to reflect on his comment. "Professor, hear me. I have no intention of hurting you."

"I'm sure you're sure about that. With your innocent ass. It's funny to you isn't it?" he asked of Cherry's laughter. "Tell you something, Lil' Bit, innocence is tempting to a man, but hard to trap. And, that's no joke. One day, you'll begin to realize your worth. Like I said, dangerous with innocence, a bitch in time. Remember I told you that," he said, closing the door on their smiles.

Cherry left remembering nothing but the unambiguous urges he had teased into life. She abandoned her shy reserve from her high school years and carried these urges with her, especially when she sang with her nine-piece band that was booked for campus events. Her private desires became public expressions of an enticing entertainer. After one of her performances, she spotted a hometown, basketball player she'd secretly admired. Her small frame was considered skinny and unappealing then, but now it was garnished with personality and sex appeal. Somewhere between her wink and smile, he headed her way. "Hi, remember me?" she asked.

"But, of course." After a brief conversation, he invited her to his dorm.

"When?"

"How about Friday night?"

"We'll see. I'm supposed to be going to a frat pajama party. Might have to take a rain check. Here's my number. Buzz me."

On Friday her phone rang. "Oh, hi," Cherry said. "No, I'm not ready for the pajama party. I'm not going. You still want me to visit you at your dorm? Okay. Look for me. I'm on my way."

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“No you didn’t just tell someone that you weren’t going to the pajama party,” her roommate said.

“You heard right. I’m gonna visit that basketball player I told you about.”

“But what about the frat brother? How you gonna play him?”

“I’m not gonna play him, but I’ll be damned if I let him play me. Listen, I was shopping in the sportswear section for something to wear when I ran into a couple of girls. Found out lingerie was the attire. Don’t know what kinda party that was gonna be. I’ll tell him about himself when he calls.”

When she reached the dorm, she was asked, “So, how did brother-man take it when you canceled on him?”

“I never canceled,” she said, removing her jacket and taking a seat on his sofa.

“So, you just stood him up?”

“I had my reasons. You really wouldn’t be interested though.”

“Try me.”

“Let’s just say I’m more comfortable here than I would be there.” That’s what Cherry thought. Actually, she might have been safer had she attended the negligee-wearing pajama party because this guy preferred her butt naked. Somewhere between dotting touches and romantic kisses, he became forceful. “Wait a minute! No, stop! No!” Cherry found herself battling to keep all of her clothing intact. This guy’s personality was icy and he was showing little compassion, despite the initial conversation he’d given Cherry about how much he’d always admired and cared for her.

“What the hell did you come up here for,” he snapped. “You’re not leaving me like this. You’re gonna do something. You’re not leaving me hangin’, Bitch!” The ‘V’ at the neck of Cherry’s form-fitting knit dress was ripped, exposing her bra-less chest. Her stockings were torn, his wrists were bleeding from her scratches and soon, she was bankrupt of all spirit. Uncontrollable tears seemed to be the only consolation for her mental and physical exhaustion.

“Okay. Just relax a minute,” Cherry said between sobs. “I’ll do this. I’ll take care of you.” She delved into her first experience of satisfying a man. She caressed his bulk until her hands felt moisture, instead of firmness. “Hold onto that smile for a lifetime,” she said, heading for the door, “that’s the last one I’ll ever put on your face.”

“I could have just raped your little ass,” he said, his smile disappearing behind a smirk.

“Yeah, but instead, I raped you. Your loss, you bastard.” Cherry walked back to her dorm and was so pensive she couldn’t remember putting one foot in front of the next to make it there. The surprise of finding the guy she’d stood up waiting for her in her room was minimized by her drive to wash her hands at the bathroom faucet.

“I’ve been through here three times looking for you. Your roommate saw you coming this time, so she said for me to come on in. Hope you don’t mind. I even tried calling you several times,” he said, following her to the bathroom. “My frat brothers told me about the prank their dates played on you. You don’t just have to wear nightclothes to our pajama parties, Cherry. They knew you were fresh and wanted to punk you. I was trying to reach you to let you know what was up. Why didn’t you answer my calls?” he asked while trying to speak louder than the water she was now running in her shower.

“Bitches. That’s why I’ve always just had male friends all of my life,” she complained, walking past him as if he weren’t there. He caught sight of her torn dress when she removed her jacket.

“Where have you been? What happened to you? Are you alright?”

“Do I look like I’m alright? What do you care anyway? Just leave, will you.”

“Listen, Cherry, I don’t know who you have a beef with, but it shouldn’t be me. And, if I didn’t care, would I have asked? Would I even be here?”

“You? Care about me? The last thing I need is to be cared about again this night.”

“But I do care, Cherry.”

“Yeah, so you say. I’m not hearing you.” She closed the door behind him. Papa Sharp’s irritating voice snapped her out of reminiscent college days and gave her yet another reason to hear only the voices she cared to listen to.....

The above is an excerpt of pages 5-12 of the eBook. Continue to read more or [ORDER NOW!](#)

CHAPTER 7

It was a workday but Cherry stayed home because the office was her investment workshop. Her office symbolized success. At home she dealt with the reality that all of the investment deals that were in the pipeline were gridlocked from lack of funding. At home she could refuse to answer calls from people asking her for money that she didn’t have. At home she

could drink enough to view begging as negotiations with those she hoped had not yet lost faith in her. She called Uncle Charlie. “Hi uncle. You okay? . . . How’s everything going? . . . You don’t have it yet? . . . How long? . . . Alright, call me as soon as you know alright? Bye.”

“Who was that you were talking to?” Tony asked, helping himself to a drink from the bar when coming in and finding her hanging up the telephone.

“My uncle,” she replied instead of saying Walter’s uncle. “Can you pour me a drink?” Cherry asked, dialing Joe. “Hi Joe. How are you? . . . Listen, would it be a problem if I wanted to wrap up our business a few weeks later than planned? How much more? I can handle that. No problem. Thanks. You’ll hear from me then. Bye.”

“Who was that?” Tony asked.

“My banker,” Cherry replied.

“You’re on a first name basis with your banker?”

“Are you jealous?” she asked.

“Thought you knew. But, I’ll let him take care of business as long as I’m the only one taking care of you. Are we still on with the night club?”

“Everything’s fine, Tony,” Cherry lied.

“So what are you doing now?” Tony asked, handing her the glass of sudsy beer.

“I gotta juggle some figures. Recalculate things. Where you going?” Cherry asked, seeing Tony heading toward the door.

“I’m just gonna make a short run while you’re busy, Baby.” He laughed, “You’re looking lonely and I’m not even gone anywhere yet. Here. Hold this ‘til I get back,” he said, pressing a kiss to her lips.

“Where you going, Tony?”

“I’m going to give you something to put your mind at ease,” he said repeatedly laying an array of kisses on her lips and face. “Baby, it’s you that I love. You don’t have to keep up with me. Remember me? I’m the one that’s on your tail.”

“Player. Player,” Cherry said. “You’re a different breed though. They don’t make players like you on planet earth.”

“Stop juggling figures and juggle the word earth. Told you from the jump street I’m no playa’. I specifically told you where I was comin’ from.”

Cherry unscrambled the word earth in her mind before saying, *Heart. Earth re-scrambled spells heart.* Trapped in the romantic web he’d spun, she raised her eyes from her paperwork to hypnotize him into her

thoughts. He wasn't there! She had to laugh to herself when she realized he had left her . . . but left her smiling.

On a daily basis Cherry's creditors were calling. The only one she made it a point to speak with was Joe. With all others she disguised her voice, pretending not to be at home when she was home alone. When anyone else was there to answer the phone, she'd tell them to say she'd call back . . . but, never did.

Several more days than weeks passed without Cherry hearing from Uncle Charlie. Reluctantly she placed a call. "You don't have it yet? Is anything wrong? . . . You sure? . . . Okay, I'll try to be patient. Bye." Cherry hung up the phone then started drafting a new budget. Regardless to what she came up with, the figures kept dancing with the wrong partner, and what was worse she knew it was time for her to dance too. "Hi Joe. I need to talk to you . . . Not over the phone this time. I think I should come to see you . . . Sure, I'll be there."

When Cherry parked her car in front of Joe's house, she couldn't help but take inventory of her surroundings. He wasn't living as large as she. In that instant she understood that she was living beyond her means. He invited her in. "Thanks for seeing me here. I know you're a busy man. I won't take up much of your time. I ah, I don't have your money. The deal I was supposed to be closing on has hit a snag. If you can just give me a little more time, I'll be able to make it all right." Cherry waited for his response. He said nothing. "I'm gonna be honest with you," she said. "I don't know what's happening. I've closed on deals before and it's never been a problem. Give me a little more time to dig into it to see what's happening. If you could do that, I'd appreciate it. Really." Being frustrated from his continued silence, Cherry blurted, "I'm sure the amount I owe you won't make or break you."

"You can't count my money, Honey. I make my money by counting yours," he said.

Cherry had never been slapped that hard before with gentle hands. She bowed her head and mumbled. "I know that." When she again looked at him, she saw a man who actually made gold and diamonds look appealing to her instead of appalling. They sparkled so much more on him—a married man who had it all yet never once tried to seduce her. In him she saw a husband, a father, a dream. She saw a strong black man that she actually respected. "I know how you make your money. My whole world is falling apart and I came to you because I had nowhere else to go. Okay? I had nowhere else to go. Sure, I got choices other than you. I could intentionally be an innocent bitch—play a man, sell my soul, sell myself,

shit like that. But, I chose you because I perceived you were about business and that's all I want to do. I want to handle my business. Maybe you don't know it. But you seem to be the only professional left in this city who's still counting my money to the good, and you have no idea what I've been going through to make sure that I don't disappoint you. It takes a hell of a lot for me to call you when I know I'm not correct. I hate the thought of returning your calls when I know damn well that if I don't pay you money, you owe me grief. But, I call you. I beg and I beg. I don't dodge you the way I do everyone else that I owe. I respect you too much for that. I know you're strictly business so I know, whatever I got coming I gotta take it. That's the way it's got to be. All I can do is promise you that if I don't accomplish anything else in life, I'm gonna repay you because you were there for me when all of Gary chose not to be. If you give me time. If you let me I will pay you. Just give me a little more time. Please."

Suddenly, for the first time in her life, Cherry felt subservient. Here she sat in front of a man who had the right to control the entire situation. It bothered her that she had to praise him and beg him and even worse she actually had to speak from her heart and pray that he had one. She'd never felt so abased and nakedly, vulnerable in her life. She never knew vulnerability caused tears until they began to force themselves past her pride to fall from her cheeks. She never knew that crying could be humiliating until she found herself crying in front of someone who might not even care. His silence was no consolation to her. She started hearing harsh words that weren't being said. "*You're pathetic! Get your sorry, has been ass out of my face!*" He was so damned reserved and quiet that Cherry didn't know whether to walk out of his door or back out . . . ass first. "I'll ah, I'll call you. I'll call you," she said, sliding sideways to his door.

Cherry put her car in gear and it didn't dawn on her to count her blessings as she made it home safely without noticing the colors of the traffic lights that shot across the sky. The rose bushes, hobbling chipmunks and scampering squirrels weren't enough to catch her attention either as she pulled into her circular drive. But when she unlocked her kitchen door, her hopelessness and lowered self-esteem was overtaken by a voice that made her remember she was somebody.

"God, I love being here to see you walk through that door. These are magic moments," Tony said, hugging her.

"How'd you know a hug is what I could use right about now? A hug and some magic," she said.

“You want magic? How’s this for magic?” he asked, producing a Tony arranged bouquet of roses he clipped from the bushes she overlooked seconds ago. “Now that’s what I call magic,” he said because of her smile.

Cherry was glad Tony was there to make her feel something other than desperation. “I don’t know about you Tony,” she said, vasing the wild flowers, “but, to me pleasures come from knowing that we can build a life together as long as we continue to share everything that cost us nothing—our heart, our hopes, and our dreams. Just knowing that we have each other, isn’t that more important than having money? We’ll weather the storm ‘til the end . . . won’t we, Tony?”

“As long as you keep me, Baby. I love you. Don’t you know that? All we have is each other, and as long as we have each other we have it all ‘cause we’re a hell of a team and I’m not going nowhere. Huh? What’s that thought?” he asked as if reading her mind again. She was fighting tenaciously not to let the thought of money woes haunt her bliss. “Okay, you’re keeping secrets,” he said, allowing her to huddle with mental turmoil. “That’s alright. Keep it all in if you want to. I’ll let you. But, one day my words will be more important than your thoughts. Remember I told you that.”

Cherry counted down Joe’s loan payment due days until it boiled down to watching the clock and counting minutes. She called Uncle Charlie on a promise that was already three times late. Again he told her the money was not available just yet. Cherry had to admit to herself that something wasn’t right so that she could find out what was wrong. “Talk to me Uncle Charlie. What’s going on here?”

The rays of daylight that were gleaming through her window shed no light on the blackness that blanketed all of her hopes as she listened to his reply. “The banker advised me not to take out the loan.”

“Which bank? . . . NBD? Which banker? I do business with him all the time. I don’t understand why he would go out of his way to convince you to go against me. As if my credibility isn’t worth shit. I just don’t understand it . . . Alright just let me know as soon as you do. Don’t pull my leg on this Uncle Charlie. What the banker advises and what you do are two different things here. If you’re backing out, don’t bite your tongue. Let me know now. Even though now would be too late for me to do much about it, I gotta know. It’s important. More important than you know.”

Uncle Charlie called later telling her that he’d arranged the money, but it would take another three weeks. *Damn. I can’t go back to Joe playing my violin again. This time I have to avoid him.* Cherry

immediately recalculated the funding. Time had eaten up her portion for the nightclub purchase so she would have to deed a property to Uncle Charlie and the rest would go to Joe, late but eventually he'd be paid. Uncle Charlie would own one of her houses. Roy owned the other. She and her children could be homeless at any given minute. She had nothing. All she had were mental pictures of the humiliation suffered as she begged in tears for understanding and patience from Joe. By all accounts she was broke, busted, and trying hard not to be disgusted.

Cherry called the nightclub owner. "I can't go through with my offer. Unless, you allow me to change the terms we agreed on. I can structure things creatively under a contract. If you're interested, I can meet with you later. Say around 8:00?"

"The only way I'd be interested is if you left Tony out of the deal. I'll set you up to work with my nephew," the nightclub owner told her.

"Do I know him?"

"No, but I do."

"Let me think about that. I'll get back to you. Are you gonna be at the club tonight?"

"I'll be around."

"Okay then. I'll talk with you later."

It was late when Tony walked through the door—around 10:00. Cherry was already dressed to go out. She knew Tony wouldn't need to change clothes. He always dressed like walking out of the door was a special occasion. "Let's hit the streets, Tony," Cherry said with a kiss the moment he walked through the door.

"Where to?" he asked, making an about face.

"I don't know. Here, there. We'll decide on the way. I just need to get out."

"Tonight's your night, Baby," he said.

Cherry took him to the club, looking for the owner when they walked into the door. "Let's sit at the bar, Tony."

Cherry was about to introduce Tony to the owner when Tony said, "What's going on man?"

"Your world," the bar owner said.

"Naw, Brother. I'm standing in yours," Tony replied.

"Playa', if I had your hand, I'd cut off mine. Hennessy right? On the rocks?"

"And, a Miller Genuine for my Baby."

"You want that in a glass right, Cherry?" the owner asked.

"And, with a straw," she replied.

“Oh, you know my Baby?” Tony asked.

“Small world,” Cherry replied.

The men started talking between themselves. Cherry was listening to the conversation, but she didn't understand it. The owner was talking about 'stepping on it' and 'cutting it'. Tony seemed irritated and kept trying to change the subject. Finally, he whispered, “Let's get out of here, Baby.”

“What's wrong, Tony?” Cherry asked after he'd seated her and joined her in the car.

“He was talking about drugs, Baby. Making money. Pushing dope. That shit didn't have to be brought up in front of you.”

“Well, why was he talking about that with you? Is that what you do?” Cherry asked.

“It's what I used to do,” Tony said.

“This may sound like a stupid question. But, how'd you get involved with doing that?”

“Got involved because of one of my ex's. Her old man owns a nightclub. He's in the box.”

“And, you're not?” Cherry asked.

“That shit stopped when I stopped dealing with her. I never was the man.”

“Tell me about her. Tell me your secrets, Tony.”

“I will. Not tonight. Tonight's your night. Remember?”

Cherry was burdened with the fact that the nightclub venture was out. She couldn't very well tell Tony that she was going to go into business without him. Not after she'd built up his dreams on being involved. Maybe working with her as part owner of a nightclub was just what he was counting on to get away from a street hustle. Maybe that's what Carl meant when he warned her about Tony before saying 'maybe you're just what he needs'. “Alright, not tonight. I'm in no hurry. We're gonna be together a lifetime anyway.” He kissed Cherry then they enjoyed their evening out at other clubs before heading home.

Rolling up the private drive to her house was always an interlude to a peaceful refuge. Usually they were hugged together with Tony watching the road and with Cherry looking up at the stars. “This is such a beautiful night,” Cherry said. They were traveling the avenue that dead-ended into their private drive when Cherry noticed an orange glow in the night. The glow was shining behind their garage. “Tony, what's that light?” Cherry asked, lifting her head from his shoulder.

“What the hell,” Tony hollered. Rolling up the hill, around the rear of their garage, they found Leschar’s car flaming with fire!

They parked far enough away from the burning car to run into the house. Dunrico and Leschar were already meeting them halfway. “What?” Cherry asked them. “What happened?”

“We called the fire department. There’re on their way,” Leschar said.

“We don’t know what happened. We were just in here. The next thing we know we saw this bright light out there. The damn car was totally inflamed,” Dunrico said.

The fire department made sure that the flames didn’t spread to the garage or the house. The car was toast.

Cherry suspected she was the cause of this drama, but she wasn’t interested in trying to decipher everyone’s confusion. She feigned ignorance. Right along with everyone else she told the firefighters she had no clue as to why the car was torched. After the firefighters left, everyone except Cherry was trying to make sense of the catastrophe. The general consensus was that a jealous male friend of Leschar’s torched her car.

“Don’t worry about it,” Cherry consoled them all. “It’s just a car.”

Tony looked at her with a critical eye. He didn’t ask her in front of the children, but when they were alone he asked, “What’s going on? Tell me so I can be cool too,” he said.

“The car is gone. I’m here. Focus on that.” *Joe is sending a message. Damn!*

“So you’re just gonna leave it like that?” Tony asked. “I’d rather you tell me you don’t want to talk about it right now and tell me later. But you’re just gonna handle it yourself like you’re by yourself. Is that it?”

“Let’s just go to bed,” Cherry said.

Cherry was paid on the loss of the car. To most people that \$7,000.00 would have been gold. To Cherry it was putty. Putty that she could not mold enough for it to do all that she needed it to do. She cashed the check then went home and counted the money over and over again. She separated the different denominations into different piles. Each pile represented someone she wanted to pay. A visual juggling of the dollars forced her to deal with reality—the reality that she was too far behind with everybody to satisfy anybody. Cherry made up her mind to put it all back in one pile—the pile designated for self. She called her insurance agent and took out an insurance policy for over a million. She was now worth more dead than she was alive. She called Nathan. “Hey, Nathan. I’m going

to the Mardi Gras. How much is it for two people. Tony's going with me. My bags are packed."

Cherry started writing checks out of her accounts. Covering everyone as she had planned. Before long she found out that her plans had, once again, been taken out of her hands—checks were bouncing. The Courts had taken over her accounts—paying people that had judgments. Accounts for unimportant debt, for instance a health club membership, took funds that she'd earmarked for house payments.

Cherry immediately made a trip to the bank to close all of her accounts. When she pulled out of the bank's parking lot, she noticed a gray car pulling out behind her. That same gray car made the same turns she did for four lights straight. She made several senseless turns down side streets just to see if the car would take the same nonsense route. He did. She knew she was being tailed. She led her tail to a one way in, one way out, nursing home. When she pulled in, she went left. Her tail, seeing that left was a dead end, went straight. Cherry straddled parking lines and pulled out her gun—flashbacks from her past came back to haunt her...

Jacks Gun Shop in Porter County on U.S. 20...

"I need a gun," she told the store clerk.

"You need a gun or you want to buy a gun?"

"I need a gun," Cherry said.

"Well," he said, pulling out a couple. "This Derringer is nice . . . easily concealed. This twenty-two is lightweight . . . easy to handle."

"Both of them will get you killed," a customer said. Cherry looked over. She was pleased with what she saw. He stood better than six feet. His arm and chest muscles dared her to look any further. Afraid of how she might react if she did look any lower, she looked up. His jaw was square. He was sporting a smile that was nestled between a pair of plush dimples. His eyes looked at her deep. "Let us see that snub-nosed, thirty-eight, revolver," he told the sales clerk. Cherry smiled. "You have a pretty smile," he said, taking the gun from the sales clerk while looking at Cherry.

"So, why this thirty-eight?" she asked.

"Thank-you," he said.

"Excuse me?" she asked.

"I complimented you on your smile. You should say thank you," he said.

“I wasn’t being pompous. Actually, my mind was still on why I was smiling.”

“Why were you smiling?” he asked.

“Because, you used the word us. Let us see that thirty-eight, you said. Quite an effective way for you to automatically get involved with me.” He smiled. “You have gorgeous dimples,” she said.

“Thank you,” he said.

“No, thank you,” Cherry said. “So, why this thirty-eight?”

The above is an excerpt of pages 65-73 of the eBook. Continue to read more or [ORDER NOW!](#)

“Whatever’s clever,” he said ill temperedly. “Go ahead. Pack your shit why don’t you?”

Cherry’s lowering glass of beer froze in midair as her expression simulated the paralyzation of her mind with shock holding her tongue in abeyance—preventing her from speaking. *But, Tony. You taught me how to hold on tight. I can do it. I will do it. I won’t say another word. I won’t say I don’t need this shit and pack. Not again. I’ll go for a ride. There’s nothing here for me except a fight.* Cherry cranked Tony’s car and did a good job of driving with tear blurred vision through streets which provided no destination. She escaped peril as the resounding whistle of a fast approaching train jarred her into scurrying off tracks that lowered gates had been camouflaged amidst her distress and blinded by her tears. She spent the day with the birds in the park. Each one that flew away did so with part of her burden on its wings. At nightfall she parked in a secluded spot at the beach and watched the sky and water blend together under the fog. She had nowhere to go—nowhere she wanted to be. She found comfort in the night amongst vanishing stars and the sound of the ocean waves rushing the foreshore. Making sure her doors were locked, she laid her bulldog at her fingertips then rested with nature as her only companion until dawn. Getting out of the car, she stood and listened to the nearby tree leaves applaud her presence in the morning breeze then strolled bare-toed through the sand, letting daylight warm her tear swollen eyelids. After hours of meditating she was able to share her smile, along with her breakfast—a bag of popcorn she’d found in the car—with the seagulls. She even laughed at one of the gulls as she watched it go without eating in an attempt to prevent the others from enjoying the meal. *I know some humans who are just like you,* she laughed, watching the others devour ten kernels to his one simply by going to the next kernel while he

tried stopping another gull from eating. Knowing it had to be pretty close to the hour that Tony should be leaving for work, she reluctantly headed in a direction that at one time—as recently as yesterday—she would have hurried to take. She headed home. When she made it in, she looked at Tony and didn't know how to speak. She couldn't even say "hi". She'd found peace for herself but no peace for the two of them.

"So, you been with your nigga," he said.

"The last time I gave up some spite pussy I was married. I'm all grown up now. Spite pussy is not offered on my menu."

"Yeah, you've been with your nigga. Well I hope it was worth it. 'F' around on me, you're 'f'ing with the right one. I'll show you what I'm made of," Cherry heard him say as she closed and locked the bathroom door to his fit of rage.

She continued her integration with nature—her stint at the beach—by revolving underneath the waters of her shower, likening its wetness to the rain. She stayed there underneath its spray until the water turned cold. She stepped out of the shower and found Tony gone. But even though he was physically absent, he'd left her with words of ill intent. "I'll show you what I'm made of" he had said. Nervous tension came over her as she deciphered what he must have meant. She went to her purse, removed her bulldog, placed it underneath one of the sofa pillows, and sat with a disturbed mind while letting the television watch her for the rest of the day and on into the night. Instead of watching the fading stars this night, she watched for the reflection of Tony's headlights to shine through their apartment curtains. On a normal night, his car's headlights signified happiness. Tonight, their glimmer was taunting. She heard the tumblers of the door-lock shift and at a glance sized Tony's expression to be one of a man on a mission. It was no surprise to her that his callous entrance was followed by a verbal attack. "The upstairs neighbor said there's been a white car coming around here. Who is it?"

"I don't know anything about a white car, Tony," she replied.

Her adrenaline was at its highest because her anticipation of a confrontation was made real by his demeanor. "Who's been coming around here in a white car, Cherry?"

"I don't know anything about a white car, Tony," she replied. She continued to appeal to his senses although she knew that there was nothing she could say to discount his intent. "What makes you think that this person in this white car was here to see me? This is an apartment building, Tony. They could have been coming to see anyone."

“You think you can play a brother ‘cause you got a nice onion and because you got all this long pretty hair,” he said, entwining her hair with his fingers and snapping her neck until her eyes met his. She looked into the eyes of someone she didn’t know. “Let’s see if your nigga in the white car will want you after I’m through with you and all your long pretty hair,” he said, traveling down the hallway.

Returning with scissors, Tony momentarily slowed his stride when he saw Cherry turn her back on him to pull her bulldog from between the pillows of the sofa. Pointing it at him, she said, “I guess what you really want me to do is to go, Tony. That’s what you want isn’t it? I didn’t hear you yesterday and you just don’t want to say it again? Okay. I’ll make it easy on you. Just let me get my things. I’m gone. ‘Cause I’m telling you now, I’m not to take no ass whooping before I leave. You want me out. I’m out. Simple as that.” Tony stopped dead in his tracks, and then with silent tongue, evil eyes and grimacing lips, made motion of his faltering steps. He was confident that he had the upper hand because he’d emptied her gun of bullets while she was in the shower earlier that morning! It was time for him to give her an ass whopping that she would remember him by.

“Stop, Tony. You don’t have to show me what you’re made of. Just let me go. Don’t step to me. I’m telling you now. You don’t want to step to me.”

“Oh your ass is mine,” he bellowed with swollen chest and a steady approach. Cherry pointed the gun which hadn’t been discharged since the incident with Earl directly at Tony. She gripped the trigger before squeezing it. Just as she feared, the trigger was light. POW! A fiery flash bellowed from her revolver! “What tha....!” Tony lost the end of his sentence at the same time that shock took his steps away.

“Did you really think that I wouldn’t check my gun, Tony? Did you really think that you could outwit me by hiding my bullets in your old tuxedo? My stick is sharp, Tony. I’m in my head and your head all the time. Remember telling me that about myself when we first met? I’m ahead of you every time. Now if I wanted to hurt you, I wouldn’t have deliberately fired past you. All I want to do is to get my shit and leave. That’s all. You won’t get to show me what you’re made of. I won’t get to blow your face off with hollow points that Officer Friendly loaded in my gun. Not this day. But, that’s okay. Just let me get my shit and leave. That’s what you want anyway isn’t it? What’d you do? Promise your bitch that you’d make sure I’d be gone by a certain day? Okay. You got your way. This is the day. I’ll take my long hair and onion ass elsewhere.”

Tony backed away professing, “Don’t let me get my hands on you. I swear I’ll twist that smart ass head off your little short ass, body.”

“Your threats don’t mean jack to me. Having a pussy don’t make me one.”

Cherry moved several of her belongings towards the door then after entering the bedroom to gather more, slumped to the edge of the bed. Frantically her mind searched for a way to show tenderness instead of anger. *What the hell’s going on here? Why? Dear God how did we get so far apart? I was supposed to be helping him with the drugs; he was supposed to be helping me to stop running away. I don’t want this. I don’t want to go. I don’t want to lose the one I love. There’s got to be a way for us to dry each other’s tears.* For the first time in her life Cherry really wanted to try again and again until she’d gotten it right. The last thing she wanted was a final good-bye between her and Tony. She sat there with her head resting on the tip of her fingers. Wondering how they had ended up chiseling away at their dreams with such brutality. Tony entered the room. She grabbed her gun! After looking at her with reproachful disdain, he grabbed her clothes out of the closet. She followed him out of the room and was pained at the sight of an open door with all of her belongings on the opposite side of what used to be an entrance to a happy home. At that point she didn’t hear any of what he was saying. He must have asked her a dozen times for the keys to the apartment before his voice registered on her deaf ears. When he closed the door on her, she caught a whiff of his aura. He was coldly detached and arrogantly satisfied with his actions. She sat on the stairs in the vestibule, bundling up to prepare herself for the weather. Tony opened the apartment door and stepped in the vestibule hall. “Don’t come out here!” Cherry yelled, picking up her bulldog and pointing it at him. “Go back in there. Close that door. Leave me alone.”

After he closed the door, Cherry moved all of her belongings outside of the vestibule. She stood there surrounded by what was now her world—the outdoors and the chill of the night. She looked up. There was something in the twinkle of the stars that helped her swallow every tear that welled inside of her. Mindlessly, she followed her feet to the nearest pay phone where she called a friend—Earl’s friend, Maxwell. He was the last man she remembered that offered her compassion. She decided to call him even though she had previously sidestepped his show of affection. Her body’s natural drugs took over, automatically numbing her mind to her emotional pain. Sedating her entire system as if she were on morphine. Barely conscious, she managed a whispered, “My old man has put me out. I need you to come for me.”

“Cherry? I can barely hear you. Are you alright? Where are you? Cherry talk to me,” he yelled while she quietly tried to separate her voice from silent sobs. “Cherry talk to me. Where are you? Talk to me. Where is he?”

“I’m okay,” she replied, his voice jarring her into thwarting her faintness. “I’m at a pay phone near the apartment. My things.....” she stopped, feeling a whimper taking over her speech. After breathing deeply, she tried again to speak. “My things are on the.....” the end of her sentence was barred by a knot of tears that were now choking her throat.

“Are you trying to tell me that your things are on the street?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she whispered.

“What’s your address? Don’t worry about trying to give me directions. I’ll find you.”

“You wouldn’t be able to miss me,” she said. “I’ll be the only one sitting outside on top of the kitchen sink.” She hung up the phone and had an easier time calling and communicating with the local police department to request a safe escort away from the premises simply because she could live with the thought that their assistance would be a public service instead of a personal favor.

She sat in the night air on top of her cedar chest and rocked with the breeze that embraced her. A neighbor came out to see if she needed help and invited her in. “No thank you, I’ll be fine,” she whispered, dropping her eyes from his to avoid an emotional outburst of tears. The compassion in his eyes and gentleness of his voice was more than she could bear because he was offering her what she needed from the man she loved—from the man who’d callously introduced her to the world of the homeless. “I’ll be fine really,” she repeated, inviting him to leave her alone.

The night was so quiet that she heard the calls on the police car’s radio before she saw it pull into the parking lot. “Ma’am, would you like to sit in the car?” the policeman asked Cherry. If Cherry’s eyes weren’t blurred with the tears she was trying to keep from falling, she might have recognized that it was none other than Officer Friendly coming to her rescue again. Recognizing her, he asked, “You’re having your share of problems, aren’t you?” Cherry made herself comfortable in the front seat, watching him close the door he’d opened for her. “What’s the situation here?” he asked after getting back into the car and sitting next to her.

“There’s no problem. There shouldn’t be as long as you’re here. I’ve been put out by one man. I have another coming to pick me up.”

"You're not on the apartment lease here?" he asked.

"No."

"The man who's coming to pick you up. Who is he?"

"Just a friend," she replied.

"How close of a friend? Is he the other man?"

"There is no other man."

"Don't take it personally," he said, picking up on her mood of aggravation. "I just need to get a good picture of what's going on here in order to know what I'm up against."

Holding her tongue until calmed, Cherry responded. "The man who's picking me up knows about as much about my life as you do. I'm a pretty good judge of character. I know him through, well, I know a little about him. I sized him up to be a person with a good heart. I need help. So, I thought of him. I don't want him to get hurt helping me, so I called you to protect him. After tonight he won't have to help me and if all goes well, neither will you."

"What'd you ever do with my number?"

Cherry lowered her head and didn't respond. "You threw my number away, didn't you? Well, just in case things don't go the way you have them figured," he said, "here is my number again. If I'm not at this number, you can call the station for me. I really think all you need is a good man in your corner."

"Humph," Cherry said, running her fanned fingers across her bowed face. "Thanks," she said, squeezing her down-turned smile between thumb and forefinger in an attempt to wipe away the contortions of sadness.

"I don't need you to help me," Maxwell said, loading her things into his van. "You just get into the van," he said to her—noticing her looking at the window where Tony was standing with the vertical blinds crumbled back into his hands, staring at her with a coldness that chilled her tears. "You need to get into the van, Cherry. I'll take care of this," he said, separating her hair from the tears that were now streaming freely down her cheeks.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," she said, turning her back on her only dream—the dream of she and Tony being together forever—to get into his van. "If you don't want to, you don't have to go any farther than here," Maxwell said after making it to his place.

She absorbed his warm-heartedness and stretched a smile out of the muscles that had been overworked with sadness. "Where did you say

that shower was?” she asked, gathering the laundry fresh night wear and opening the packaging on the toothbrush that he’d given her.

Cherry stood there in the shower and likened every pulsating throb of water to the echo of her heartbeat. It was much easier for her to pat the dampness from her body than it was for her to dry her eyes of tears, but somehow she managed. By the time she climbed in bed and cuddled next to Maxwell, she was totally unemotional.

The following morning, she heard his voice, “Got a pot of coffee brewing. Would you like some?”

“No thanks,” Cherry said, wakening to a friendly face in a strange place. “Can I use your phone?”

“Make yourself at home.” Cherry made herself busy making calls—trying to find shelter—while he used the other line to do the things she remembered being her routine. He was checking his answering service for incoming calls. After he’d heard Cherry hang up with a couple of disappointments he asked, “Not going too good?”

“I haven’t been in touch with anyone for so long. One of my friends, Mathew, told me he is engaged now. He invited me to stay for a while, but I don’t think I want to put his happiness in jeopardy because of what’s happening with me. Another friend, Hawk, didn’t mind letting me know he’d be interested in more than a casual, platonic roommate and my ex, Roy. Roy was very coy.

“Well remember what I told you last night. You don’t have to go any further than here if you don’t want to. I’ve got room for you to live here with me and room for you to run your business.”

“Thanks,” Cherry replied, running her fingers through his long flaxen hair, gently tasting the pencil thin lips that rendered her such words of comfort. “Thanks, but I’ve rode the wings of angels all my life. This time I think I’ll just find out what will happen if I tough it out.”

“You’re setting yourself up for hard times that you don’t have to go through. You know that don’t you?”

“Yes, I know. It’s just that I don’t want my serenity to be based on your sweetness.”

“What would you do if you came into lots of money, right now?” Cherry didn’t answer. “Well,” he said, leaving her bedside, preparing himself for his workday. “I won’t need the van. I’ll be driving the Mercedes. You keep the van as long as you need to. Follow me to the gas station and I’ll fill it for you. Here’s my cell phone and pager number,” he said, returning from paying the gas station attendant. “I’m backing off and letting you do things your way, but call me if you need me. You promise?”

“I promise.” Cherry sat to watch him return to his Mercedes and drive away. She put his van into gear. *Well, Cherry. This is it. You’re orphaned by love, unsettled in life, and just told your angel that you want to bite the bullet. Where do you go from here?*

The above is an excerpt of pages 150-157 of the eBook. Continue to read more or [ORDER NOW!](#)

Cherry jumped back into the car. Her subconscious was the autopilot of the car because her conscious was strictly on Rico. Blindly, she pulled the car into oncoming traffic, nearly colliding with a motorcyclist who spilled to the curb to avoid being run over by her. Cherry looked into her rear view mirror when she heard gunfire. Pow! Pow! Pow! The motorcyclist was standing in the middle of the street firing directly at her. Cherry was driving so fast and was so far away when she got a glimpse of him that she couldn’t tell he was a white man because he was wearing a whole lot of black leather. To Cherry he was just a blur of a man who’d gotten in her way. She took the last turn she’d seen the police car travel. She slowed her speed, looking for signs of which direction to take. She braked when she saw and heard nothing. Silence filled the air. Despair filled her heart. Wheee-oooo! Wheee-oooo! Wheee-oooo! There were sirens sounding and coming from somewhere behind her. She pulled over thinking more police cars must be approaching. She had to fight to snatch her mind from hopelessness as she watched an ambulance pass. *They’re going for Rico. Hold me Jesus. Please, just hold me. If you just hold me. I’ll be alright. Just hold me.* Cherry followed the ambulance, pulling up on a scene that was enough to turn her whole life around. She saw two bodies lying on the ground. One of them was her son. Police tried to make Cherry part of the restrained crowd, but her triple dose of adrenaline strengthened her. She pushed her way through. There was nothing they could do. She ran to Dunrico, planting her knees in his blood, cradling his body in her arms and croaking, “Damn! Rico!” The white of Dunrico’s skin around his neck and seven of his eight fingers which had been shielded from sun tanning by the gold he wore was now colored with the red of his blood. He was completely void of jewelry. A reinforcement of officers stopped short of Cherry’s arms thwarting them away with waving arms and a three-sentence testimony. She whispered, shouted, and then whimpered the sentence, “He’s my son.”

Rocking Dunrico’s bleeding body in the bosom of her breast and wiping away the mix of his blood and her tears that dripped on his face after her kiss, Cherry promised Rico, “It’s gonna be alright. Everything’s gonna be alright. Can you hear me? We’re together. I’m with you. Everything’s gonna be alright.”

Surrendering At The End Of The Circle

One of the paramedics shared kind words to lessen the shove she received from another as they took over, “If you want us to save him, you have to let us take him, Ma’am. You should follow us to the hospital. Please, Ma’am.”

The paramedics took Dunrico . . . leaving Cherry with only the mosaic pattern of his blood under her feet, on the street. *Everything’s gonna be alright she reassured herself*, photographing that pattern in her memory. Cherry rode to the hospital in quiet desperation. She felt like the devil was hovering over her and she couldn’t hide. More than ever she wanted God on her side. She rushed through the hospital doors, trying to hold onto Dunrico’s hand. Doctors separated them . . . telling her to have a seat. “I’ll have a stroke before I have a seat!” she yelled, expecting them to understand. “Dear God,” she cried, trembling when they didn’t show any concern.

“Have a seat. We’ll talk to you as soon as we can.” The squeaky turn of the gurney wheel helped Cherry to fall apart. Every turn of the wheel took Dunrico farther and farther away. Once again, I’m not there for you. I’m not holding your hand. Everything’s out of my hands, again. How many times today am I gonna just sit back and watch you be taken away?

Cherry felt any minute she’d lose her sanity, so she had to reach out to somebody. She needed support. She called home. “Leschar? You have to get to the hospital. Rico’s been shot.”

“What? Did you say Rico’s been shot?”

Cherry didn’t mean to yell at Leschar. She didn’t even realize that Leschar was only trying to make sure she heard her correctly, because since Cherry was saying what she really didn’t want to say, she was whispering. Leschar kept insisting that Cherry speak up. It was just impossible for her to quietly repeat words that obviously neither of them wanted to hear. “Damn it! Can’t you hear! I said Rico’s been shot! He’s been shot! Damn it!” she shouted before sobbing and mumbling, “My son’s been shot up.”

Cherry sat in the waiting room with her head in her hands until the doctors came out. “He’s stabilized. You can see him now. But, I have to tell you he won’t be able to talk to you. He’s in a coma.”

They led her to Dunrico’s room. The first thing Cherry noticed were policemen standing outside his hospital room door. Walking past them, she entered and stood beside Dunrico. Before she could talk to him, Leschar walked in. “Mom?” Cherry looked around. She hugged Leschar like she wished she had hugged Dunrico before it was too late. “Is he okay?” Leschar asked.

“He’s in a coma,” she said.

“Why are policemen standing outside his door?” Leschar asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t know anything. I just know that my son is fighting for his life. I was with him when this happened. I could have prevented it. I should have. I know how the game goes. Saving his life was up to me. He didn’t deserve this,” she said, looking at Leschar behind tear glossed eyes. “My son is fighting for his life because of me,” she repeated. Leschar hugged her again. Cherry returned the hug, but walked away from her so that they could dry their

own tears. Making circles out of the squares of the floor tile, Cherry paced and paced. She looked in Leschar's direction and managed a tear-smear smile until she thought about parenting Leschar and Dunrico and wondering how old her aborted child would now be. *Dear God. Have mercy on me. Please forgive my trespasses.*

"It's not your fault ma," Leschar said in a delayed response to Cherry's comment that Dunrico was fighting for his life because of her. "God knows that you'd have done anything to save your own. God knows ma," Leschar repeated, not knowing that she was sharpening the sword of guilt that stabbed at Cherry for killing her own child in an abortion that no one knew about.

Instead of letting her conscious catch up to her, Cherry chased her conscious away with a 'no' shake of her head and 'get away from me' wave of her hand. Pushing Leschar away was enough to keep Cherry from standing side by side with her conscious. Now she could freely stand over Dunrico asking "Why?" with closed eyelids that bulged from the swelling tears that she refused to cry. "I know you can hear me," she said, holding his hand in hers. "You're not able to talk to me, but I know you can hear me. Please don't make me miss you," she said, kissing his hand. "Don't make me miss you," was the last thing Cherry requested of Dunrico before falling asleep at his bedside.

The above is an excerpt of pages 194-196 of the eBook. To read more [ORDER NOW!](#)

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