



Chaos, Crisis & Opportunity

By Barbara Gordon



Introduction

Sisterhood is a legacy and a sacred trust between women. It is a tradition that is passed on to future generations. Young sisters are taught how to be sisters through the examples set for them and through the corrective guidance provided by older women. Women of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life, enjoy relationships with *sister-friends* as an important way to keep their lives stimulated through positive emotional contact and responses.

It is often times difficult for women to come together. Women are complex individuals; and yet, experience proves that a woman's life is better when she walks through it with a *sister*. Every woman needs a sister to love, and to be loved by. The experience is simply not the same as having a "good girlfriend" or a faithful male best friend. It's more, much more. There are some things in our life that can only be shared and understood by a like-minded woman connected to us through that positive and spiritual bond called *sisterhood*.

This tale of the Sister Circles, a series of Possibility Tales, "Chaos Crisis and Opportunity," introduces the concept of sisterhood to those not fully acquainted with it. This tale illustrates the strength established in such connections—a strength not easily broken, a strength that involves you, your sister and The Lord.

This is the story of the Sister Circle from the beginning, when the BAPs were young. It is the first in a series of possibility tales about five young women who, despite having their every need taken care of, discovered the journey of life is easier and infinitely better when the walk is made with "a sister".

Preface

Regina Anu Harrison was no ordinary urban kid from Jersey. She was strong, proud and possessed a sense of herself seldom obtained by women twice her age. Her spirit was warm and generous, and her insight into people was great--perhaps greater than even her intellect—and her I.Q. qualified Regina as a MENSA.

Nothing Sunya, Regina's mother, did could keep Regina from venturing out into her urban neighborhood. It was like that from the child's earliest years. Consequently, she knew everyone, knew where everything was located and how everything functioned; and everyone knew and liked her. Even though there were lots of other little black kids around, Regina became the neighborhood novelty—the cute little black girl, with the long swinging braids, who was so smart.

The Asian man who owned the Seven-Eleven store on the corner of the block where Sunya Harrison operated her import-export gallery taught Regina to speak Mandarin. Over the years she had become quite good at it. In turn for her lessons in Chinese, Regina often helped Mr. Chung with his inventory. She developed an interest in many things Asian and by the time she was eleven had organized an annual March “Free Tibet” Day. This caught the attention of a Hindu man whose family ran a small grocery store around the corner. He was so impressed with her industry and how much she seemed to know about everything that he cultivated a friendship between Regina and his daughter Pila. Pila became Regina's best friend.

People's reception of Reggie made Sunya proud and sometimes it made her feel afraid. The streets of Newark had changed from the way they were when Sunya first arrived with an infant daughter in her arms. She could see in Newark what was now true in many large

urban cities, little Black girls were prey for opportunists—no fathers to protect them, no longer their father’s treasure. Single parent mothers were being forced to teach their daughters to fear who they are and what they are because of the dangers and hardships it ultimately brings to them. Sunya knew she couldn’t hide away a spirit like Regina’s nor could cover up Regina’s physical beauty. And, she knew all the reasons she had to be proud of her daughter were the same assets that would bring the child trouble, competition and unwanted attention.

The apartment building on the south corner of the small business district, where Sunya ran her gallery and down the street from where Regina spent most of her daytime hours, was nothing more than a front for an illegal drugs manufacturing operation. It confused Sunya that the police said they couldn’t do anything about the building occupants, that there were no code violations being broken. The people who went in and out of the building were frightening—they looked like the “bad men” characters on television, the drug dealers, the drug users, driving expensive but illegally parked cars. Their presence was chasing away the clientele who would come to the business district from all over the area to experience its free-flowing multi-cultural mix of shops and events.

Recognizing both her daughter’s potential and the potential for harm, Sunya felt the completion of her daughter’s adolescent years would be handled best by an old friend. So, without even consulting Regina, Sunya picked up the phone and called her old friend at the Whitfield-Clairmount Institute. The Whitfield-Clairmount, a boarding school, was one of the nation’s most elite schools for girls. It taught every aspect of social refinement, academic accomplishment and enrolled girls from only the best families—there was no chance of Regina even being exposed to social deviants.

“You know, we once talked about it,” Sunya said into the phone. Tears filled her eyes as she spoke. “I never thought I would want to part with her. It is hurting me to even speak to you about it.” But Sunya had just seen a big man wave a gun in the face of a young girl,

then backhand her. She heard the angry man order the girl to “go get my money.” Nothing on earth could make Sunya allow her precious child to become a young lady in the presence of corruption and vice.

“It’s okay,” Sunya’s friend assured her. “This is a good time for the change. You are doing the right thing. She’ll be a princess among other princess’ and will be better prepared for it when the time comes for you to tell her who she really is.”

“I know, I know,” sobbed Sunya. “It’s just that I’m going to miss her so much. She’s my whole world.”

Sunya told Regina that this wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity had come available and that she was “the winner of a magnificent academic award.” Always eager for adventure and the opportunity to try new things, off to the Whitfield-Clairmount Institute Regina went and her mother never really told her why.

It has been said “You can take the girl out of the city and she’ll still be a city girl. You can take the girl out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the girl.” Along that same line of thinking— you can transport rich African American girls from the glittering suburbs of the nation’s well-to-do communities to the lush wooded land of central Connecticut, drop them in the middle of one of those look-a-like uniform-wearing upper-class private schools, and they will still be BAPs. Black American Princesses. Add in one urban-looking, supposed scholarship recipient from New Jersey, and no matter how you attempt to describe the result, the outcome will be *chaos with crisis pending*.

But chaos, the Chinese say, is nothing more than the place where great dreams begin. Crisis by definition is a turning point. That is why, in Chinese, the symbol for crisis is the same symbol as opportunity.

Chapter One

Sabrina pulled her satin pink sheet over her head, as she turned her body to face the wall. She had a headache and just wanted to go to sleep. If she tried hard enough she wouldn't be able to hear the Bob Marley tunes Reggie was playing again. It wasn't as if she didn't like Reggae music; she found it tolerable, in the right setting. Lately, however, Reggie played the darn stuff every time she entered their room. While Sabrina was no expert on nationalities, she was willing to bet Regina Harrison was not even related to any Island people, so there was no rational reason why a fourteen year old girl would be such a die-hard fan of Reggae.

Actually, Reggie wasn't all that crazy about Reggae. She played that particular type of music non-stop to irritate the girls in the next room. They had gone to a great deal of trouble to let it be known that they were opposed to everything about Reggie, and playing the same song until it became annoying was only one of the ways Reggie chose to strike back.

When the class advisor introduced Reggie to her new classmates, the woman made a point of saying that Regina Harrison was the only new ninth grade student admitted to Whitfield-Clairmount Institute that year. Without coming right out and saying it, the tone of Ms. Lasher's voice indicated that it was a very big deal that Regina Harrison had been singled out for admittance. She maintained a solid straight "A" grade point average throughout her educational career, and, to her credit had successfully accomplished *several* large and complicated community service projects benefiting the disadvantaged people in her neighborhood. As a result, Reggie was the first person other than Oprah, Michelle Obama, and Ellen Degeneres to be featured on the cover of O Magazine. The looks on her classmates' faces reflected boredom and disinterest—that is until the princess named Julia began

to make snide remarks in response to the accolades. “Yes, I’d say she looks like she belongs in service.”

Reggie heard what the girl said, but she was not sure of what it meant. “Was she making a crack at my community service experience?” she innocently wondered.

But there was no mistaking what Julia meant when, in response to Ms. Lasher’s description of Reggie’s most financially successful project, she heard the girl say, “Please, just hand her an apron and let her take our food orders.” Reggie’s community garden had feed a lot of low income seniors and provided paychecks for the disadvantaged teens who tended the garden.

Her long cornrow braids, the beads she sometimes added to the ends of her braids, snow white leather gym shoes, the brown leather bomber jacket she saved one whole year to buy, the way she spoke, had all become subjects of verbal attacks from the stuck up princesses of *too-much-plush*. It didn’t seem to matter to the girls that Reggie was a brilliant scholar. It didn’t matter that the hair-do on her head was an exact and expensive copy of the way Alisha Keyes wore her braids, and that the diamonds that graced her earlobes were real! But neither did it help when Reggie generously offered to assist them with their homework during study period. Nothing she knew to do worked to make Reggie fit in.

Except for the three mean-girls who shared the room next door, no one seemed not to see Reggie at all. She felt invisible most of the time. After four weeks of trying to get a handle on what did impress and motivate these *wanna-be royalty-types*, Reggie gave up. Tired of being snubbed, put-down and ostracized, Reggie adopted the philosophy she learned on the streets of Newark. Fight back and hit ‘em hard before they even figure out what’s going on.

She was sorry that her tactics would no doubt bother or bring undeserved trouble to her roommate, Sabrina Covington. Sabrina, who they all called “Rina,” was the only one of the freshman girls who

had been remotely interested in Reggie or nice to her. In her naiveté, Reggie believed the other girls' stand-offish attitude was due to the incident that occurred on her first day.

A slight problem resulted when Reggie arrived at school after the room lottery had been carried out. With only fourteen girls to house, it had worked out nicely that there were two girls to each room on the freshman floor. By the time Reggie came everyone had their belongings moved into the room that they wanted, had seen their maids put the finishing touches on the decorating, and had sent the maids home. Reggie arrived a day late—and by taxi.

With braids swinging, mis-matched luggage and absent anyone to assist her, the beautifully brown-skinned Regina Harrison of Newark, New Jersey, arrived unfashionably late on the campus of the exclusive Whitfield-Clairmount Institute—a world in which all the light-bright princesses had long flowing hair and colored contacts. The reception Reggie received was not the one she had expected. The excitement that glowed in her eyes when she first entered the building quickly faded into what the people of Newark would have recognized as “becoming truly pissed off.”

Ms. Ferndale, the Head Mistress, and Ms. Lasher, the lead freshman advisor, weren't sure what to do.

In all their considerable years at Whitfield-Clairmount, they could not remember any student missing orientation or the room lottery. Reggie was assertive, slightly emotional, and in a voice that was far too loud for conversation in the main lobby, she announced to the adults in charge, “Hey! I showed up on the day I was told to. Alright? *And*, I got the letter to prove it. Alright?”

Sure enough, a mistake had been made and had been made by the clerical support person at the institute. The letter stated Reggie was to report to the campus on the date she arrived.

While Ms. Ferndale and Ms. Lasher stood scratching their heads and trying to figure out how they could resolve the situation without making it punitive for the other girls involved, Rina came forward and spoke up. One might have supposed that she kept her voice low because of the growing number of girls who had come into the main floor foyer to see what was going on. But it was not so. Sabrina Elizabeth Covington, the only child of Congressman Saul Covington of Maryland, always spoke in a low, well-modulated tone. It was how she had been raised. She calmly, respectfully and gently suggested that an extra bed could easily fit in the large corner dorm room she shared with another girl named “Rae.”

Reggie had been impressed. With one statement from this thin, little slip of a girl, the two older women were bowing and scraping and tripping over their words in agreement. They even helped Reggie carry her luggage to the elevator that would take them up to the freshman floor. Once there, lead by Rina, the smiling women carried the luggage into Rina’s room.

Rina was quick to assure them that while three twin beds would fit into the room if they wanted, she knew Rae would be more comfortable in the room next door where she would be with her friend Yolanda, whom she had known forever, and Yolanda’s cousin Julia. Rae simply and pleasantly said, “That’s true,” raised her regal head, long straight hair swinging, and without even acknowledging the grown-ups left the room immediately. There was absolutely no expression on Rae’s face—no surprise, no offense, nothing.

Reggie found herself smiling—and not because she was about to get the chance to get settled. She smiled because now she knew for sure there were indeed little BAPs, they were not an urban myth. Little Black American Princesses were indeed real, not just characters on television shows. Reggie felt fortunate to share a room with one. Instinctively she knew she would like Rina. Reggie loved power.

Likewise, even from the beginning of their relationship, Rina knew she was going to sincerely like Regina Harrison. It was a small, but significant, incident occurring in their room that brought Rina that assurance. It happened after dinner on Reggie's first day at school, as she worked to unpack and put away her own clothes. She pulled several rolled posters from her suitcase and lovingly smoothed them out, as she looked about her side of the room for the perfect place to hang them. She pulled tape and a pair of scissors out of the same suitcase, causing Rina to wonder what else was in there.

Rina watched in fascination as *this girl*—a girl as young as herself—accomplished what she thought only adults could do. Adult servants trained to do that sort of thing. Having an eye for how colors play off each other, Rina couldn't help but notice that the warm, happy colors in the posters matched the hot pink-orange-golden sunset colors in Regina's bed spread. She also noticed that several of the books Regina had placed on her desk had the same color book covers. Coincidence? She thought not.

Reggie noticed Rina looking at her artwork. "Nice," Rina said simply. Then she got off her bed and walked over to read the sayings on the posters Reggie had just hung. Reggie didn't want to, but she watched Rina's face as she read. Reggie couldn't believe it—the Queen B was obviously impressed. Reggie didn't want to care what Rina thought, but she did. It was evident from the first, and especially so in the dining hall a couple of hours earlier, Rina was important to whatever was going on around the institute. Everyone seemed to need her approval. "Very nice," Rina said again, and this time she smiled warmly into Regina's eyes. "I've never seen posters as wonderful as these."

Unrestrained appreciation gushed out of Reggie. "I'm so-o-o glad you like 'em," she said. "They're my most favorite possessions in all the world. That's because me and my mom made 'em. She did the artwork and I put the sayings together. I'm a nut for philosophy..."

“Oh, my gosh!” squealed Rina. “I can’t believe this! I thought I was the only fourteen year old in the world who got into philosophy. *And I live for art...*” Rina surprised herself by her own outburst.

“Shut the noise,” said Reggie, and she let out a loud laugh. She was so relieved to know that she and the Queen B had something in common.

Rina was momentarily struck silent. She hadn’t heard any noise and listening hard she still didn’t hear any. Confusion registered on her face. When Reggie looked at her, and recognized, she had confused her roomie, she said, “Hey, relax. I wasn’t telling you to be quiet or anything like that. Shut the noise means the same thing as your squeakie ‘Oh, my gosh’. That’s all.”

“Oh,” was all Rina said and within a split nano-second, the queen of all the princesses regained her composure and continued the dialogue where it left off. She lifted the comforter-skirt on her bed and showed Reggie. “See,” she said, “I’ve got everyone who is anyone, and most are first editions.”

Reggie dived onto the floor and slide towards Rina’s bed. “Shut the noise--,” she began, but finished with an “OMG!”

Rina chuckled softly, having recognized a quick learner when she saw one. Reggie’s “Oh My Gosh” was spoken in perfect “rich girl speak,” with just the right inflections.

Reggie began pulling out books from the oh-so-neatly arranged book rack that was built into the frame of the beautiful white Oak bed. She examined them at the speed of light. Laughing she called them by name, and talked to them like they were old friends.

Rina turned to re-read and study the wording on Reggie’s posters. As she read each one, she felt more sure that this new girl was special, and definitely not like any of the other girls at the institute. For a moment, a long moment, Rina didn’t feel quite so alone. God had sent her someone who didn’t think the only interesting subjects of conversation were Dior and Gucci fashions or news of which family

was vacationing where. Rina had been a student at the institute since she was eleven years old, and she was bored by her peers' pre-occupation with money, status and the lives of other people in their social circles.

After a few minutes of quiet, Reggie's loud voice interrupted Rina's thoughts, and she could be heard to say, "And another thing, you've got to stop calling me Regina. The name's Reggie."

Rina's smile was big and bright, as she nodded her consent. Although it didn't seem to make logical sense, the boy's name seemed to fit her new roommate. Rina thought Reggie was a pretty girl--her dimples were to die for and the street tough demeanor Reggie put forth was just enough to be charming. But, Rina had to admit the nickname was genius. It turned her into a unique girl—a *cute "tomboy" type*—named "Reggie."

Rina's genuine affection for Reggie showed. The other girls were very much aware of the budding friendship, although you wouldn't have known it. For good manners dictated that they did not look too long or listen in on other people's conversations. The two went everywhere together and could always be seen talking animatedly. With Reggie, Rina found there was always something new and interesting to analyze or debate. She had the most outlandish way of looking at the world—and Rina loved it. They began to wear their uniforms the same way, with shirt tails hanging out over the plaid skirt. Rina added a couple of braids to her long paige-boy hairdo.

Anyone who knew Rina could see she was somehow different since her friendship with Reggie began. It was more than her outward appearance. She felt free to do the things she wanted, to say what was on her mind and in her heart. And, although Rina never verbalized it aloud, she felt Reggie was the sister she never had, the sister she always secretly wished her parents had.

While Sabrina Covington was always politically correct and always appropriately friendly to everyone, it quickly became obvious that

what she shared with the new girl she never had with any of the other girls before. And, that was the real reason for their dislike of Regina Harrison.

It was the reason Reggie's notebook disappeared in class when she went up to the instructor's desk to clarify an assignment. When the notebook reappeared it was on the front lawn, strewn about in 100 pages that Reggie had to pick up. It was the reason Reggie's meal card requested three entrees for the evening meal, and when the server brought them to Reggie's table everyone could hear someone making an "oinking" sound. It was the reason why one morning, following her shower, Reggie could not find one pair of panties to wear; not a single pair. It was the reason why during mail call Reggie received a letter from "Uncle Remus" who lived in "Hog Hollow, Alabama."

And, it was the reason why a real, live hamster popped out of Reggie's curler basket one night when she reached for the silk cap she used to cover her long braids at nighttime. Although Rina bravely tried to help her capture the hamster, they both were afraid of it. Al, the building custodian, had to be summoned—long after hours—to scoop up and dispose of the little creature. Al was at other times a pretty cool guy, but he must have told someone about the incident because by lunchtime the next day Reggie received a written note from Mrs. Ferndale stating she was expected for afternoon tea the next day. Oddly it was the second note she received in the same day. The first note was handwritten and it contained a simple message, "I'm praying for you."

Always honest, Rina told Reggie "afternoon tea" was an upscale way of saying detention conference. So, Reggie believed the person who was praying for her was doing so because she really was in big trouble.

Frustration and humiliation had prompted Reggie to begin the campaign in which she fought back. She hadn't discussed what was going on with Rina, although she was sure Rina knew all about it. Everyone

was talking about it. But, it was her fight and she could handle it. She had been to summer camp, too!

She knew how to play all those stupid little retaliatory games. She had no trouble short-sheeting Julia's bed or putting black shoe polish in Yolanda's shampoo bottle and itchy cracker crumbs in Rae's bed. When she heard Julia say how much she detested Reggae music, and knowing Julia's bed was on the other side of the wall where Reggie's stereo was, there was little else Reggie could do but take advantage of the opportunity to further irritate Julia—the worst acting one of the three.

When Reggie saw Rina turn over in bed, and she noted it was after ten-thirty at night, Reggie turned the volume down on the CD player. She didn't, however, turn the music off.

Chapter Two

The campus of Whitfield-Clarmount Institute was breath-taking, it was the kind of place that would take your breath away no matter what season of the year it was. Settled between gently-rolling wooded hills, the boarding school resembled a small village. It consisted of five main buildings, a small strip mall and a large horse-riding stable, all picturesquely arranged within an impeccably landscaped clearing that was surrounded by dense forest. It was an unusually pretty day, the sky a brilliant shade of blue, the air balmy. The colors of the trees were a mixture of dark greens and reds, as they were just beginning to turn; and the flowers from the summer hadn't died out just yet. Students were walking to and fro, some gathering in the center courtyard between the two dorm buildings.

Reggie sat on a grassy hill looking down over the entire scene, a scene that felt surreal and strange—a wonderful strange, however. It wasn't that she didn't like it here. She did. She liked the school, the landscape and a lot of the students. Like that girl, Rae. There was something about her cool, calm reserve that Reggie really liked. Nothing moved her. Although she hung with Julia and Yolanda, it was always as if she was not really with them because she didn't participate in their stuff (mischief). Unlike Julia, Rae was actually smart. Reggie could see the big fat red "A's" she got on her math assignments because she didn't sit too far behind her.

Reggie couldn't help but wonder what things would be like if she and Rae and Rina had shared a room. "Three is a cord not easily broken," Reggie remembered someone said that once.

Finally, Reggie stood up and walked down the hill to her three o'clock tea appointment with Mrs. Ferndale. It was time to face the music. After ten years of going to school, today marked Reggie's first time being in trouble with a school's administration. Knowing that took some of the beauty out of looking at the campus. It was what had kept

her from getting a good night's sleep—and Reggie could always sleep. She had prepared a short, but thoughtful, commentary about how much being at the institute meant to her and how she'd like to finish what she started. Hopefully, the Headmistress would listen.

When she arrived in Mrs. Ferndale's office she was surprised to find the Headmistress sitting among a group of comfortable chairs tastefully arranged in the front of her desk. A low coffee table held a beautiful tea service and French pastries. "Come on in," graciously said Mrs. Ferndale. She motioned with her hand for Reggie to sit down, and then she began to prepare two cups of tea.

"Well, what do you think of your new temporary home?" asked Mrs. Ferndale, conversationally.

But Reggie couldn't find her voice. In fact, if she could have seen the look on her own face at that moment...well, it was hilarious. Reggie simply didn't understand. She was at a tea, a real tea! This couldn't be a detention conference. She wasn't aware of it, but her head was slightly shaking—"No, no," her thoughts was screaming.

"Regina. Regina," said Mrs. Ferndale. "Are you all right, dear?"

"I don't know what's going on," Reggie blurted out. "Rina said I was going to a detention conference. And detention is when you're in trouble. But, but, you have food here. Nobody serves food in detention. So, I don't know what's going on. But—I came to apologize."

Mrs. Ferndale put down the spoon she was using to stir sugar into the tea. She was such a calm person that it almost seemed as if she moved in slow motion. "Please relax, Regina. You're not in any trouble. Sabrina has never been to a tea with me, so she only told you what she believes to be true." Then the woman smiled as if she had a secret, and said, "You see, I let the students think that tea with Mrs. Ferndale means their in big trouble. It's the only drama-reduced way I have of controlling the students here. We don't do detention at Whitfield-

Clairmount. There's never any need to. Our students are on the honor system, and they don't break the code."

Reggie said nothing, but she thought plenty. She thought about all the nasty, dishonorable things the *terrible three* had done to her since she started at this school. She didn't say anything to the Headmistress about the *beef* she had going on with the girls. And she wouldn't—because she was not a rat. The only thing Reggie did was to sit straight up in her chair and look directly at Mrs. Ferndale. That's what she always did when her mother was chastising her.

Mrs. Ferndale repeated herself, "So, my dear, how are you enjoying being here so far?"

Looking at the Headmistress, Reggie decided she thought the lady could be pretty because her face looked young, but the hair around her face held a lot of gray so she knew the woman was old. Reggie was thinking frantically, and doing the best she could to relax. It was hard. She had been so scared of what her punishment would be...

"It's kinda cool," answered Reggie. "It's not like being in New Jersey, but it's all right."

Mrs. Ferndale only smiled. Whitfield-Clarmount was more than all right. Add in a few more dress shops, a couple hundred good-looking boys, and a teenage girl would find heaven on earth. Everything young women wanted was here, including freedom. Money and privilege provided a small salon with spa, designer dress shops, a café for socializing, a library, a rec center with a bowling alley and movie theater, and the freedom to enjoy it all at will. The institution's honor system was such that the Headmistress and the teachers trusted that all the young ladies would always be on their best behavior and would always choose to do the right thing. No one ever broke the code of honor. There was no reason to.

“I’m aware that the girls have treated you harshly since you came, Regina,” began Mrs. Ferndale, pausing to allow that announcement to sink in. Compassion lit her face and Regina decided she *was* pretty, very pretty. No longer did Mrs. Ferndale’s huge forehead and pointy chin make her face look awkward, her face was shaped like a heart! It only took an instant for Reggie to realize that the woman’s real beauty came from within, and Reggie could see it shining from her eyes. “You’ve done nothing wrong. In fact, we’re so very glad to have you here and so are the girls, believe it or not.”

Reggie didn’t believe her ears. She couldn’t believe the Headmistress didn’t know about all the little tricks she had pulled on the *terrible three* over the past two weeks. Neither did she believe that any of the girls liked her but Rina. But she said nothing, because her mother taught her to listen when grown-ups were talking—and especially when they were talking about you.

Then, Mrs. Ferndale did the strangest thing of all. She got up from the chair where she was sitting, across from Reggie, and she moved to the seat next to her. She gently took Reggie’s hand in hers and said, “We have all had moments when people deeply hurt us or betray us or pick on us for seemingly no reason, and we ask ourselves why it happened to us. When we can’t determine the answer, we usually decide to strike back. We try in our own way to fight the pain that has been caused. You see, our hearts desperately need the relief we feel when we can justify the cause of the pain. Because once we know why or how it was caused we won’t do it again. We feel that if we can fix it, maybe we will never get hurt again. But that’s highly unlikely. You see, *female-drama* is inevitable in the lives of women.” Again, the woman paused to allow what she said to register in the mind of the girl she knew was capable of understanding the meaning behind the words.

“I’m going to tell you something about women of privilege, Regina. I realize you came from a good background, but you also came from the

urban environment of New Jersey where all things most frequently are equal. The young ladies you're dealing with come from their own separate world. The rules are different in their world."

With that said, Mrs. Ferndale began to talk. "Too often women of privilege, whether young or old, have never experienced the warm embrace of sisterhood. Oh, they sometimes come to experience friendship, they tend to think of it as having friendly feelings towards someone else. But sisterhood..." The older woman's voice softened and she looked sad. "We, women, are such complex individuals, and as such we do better in life when we walk through it with another female connected to us through that positive and spiritual bond called *sisterhood*. Every woman needs a sister to love, and to be loved by. The experience is simply not the same as having a "good girlfriend" or a faithful male friend. It's more, much more. There are some things in our life that can only be shared and understood by another woman which whom we have that special bond."

Mrs. Ferndale handed Reggie a cup of tea. "Drink," she said, gently. "It's a special brew. I get it from Kenya." As Reggie lifted the cup to her lips, Mrs. Ferndale asked with emphasis, "You *do* know Kenya, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Reggie. "It's in Northern Africa." Then Reggie's eyes took in the decorations that filled Mrs. Ferndale's office. She realized they were mostly Afro-centric objects. One piece of artwork—a cross-shaped copper gong—held Reggie's attention. She not only liked its deep amber color, but she liked that it looked both like a cross and a small person with a big head at the same time. Its head was shaped somewhat like Mrs. Ferndale's.

Mrs. Ferndale seemed to enjoy the fact that Reggie liked her sculpture, but she didn't arrange the tea to discuss art. There was more she wanted to share with the young girl, and so she said, "Building a sisterhood requires work, Regina. Especially when that sisterhood is to be established among the privileged. They get the part about female

-drama because it's entertaining. We've all seen the teenage movies about the mean rich girls. Of course, mean girls are everywhere. But establishing a sisterhood among the privileged is harder because the girls involved don't really need each other. ”

Reggie's attention quickly returned to her Headmistress, not out of interest; but because being respectful necessitated she pay attention. “Yes, ma'am.”

“Oftentimes the sister initiating the bond is like a farmer tilling ground that has never been worked before. Especially when the effort involves the privileged. It's a process that requires time and different approaches. But if you use your heart, you can make it happen.” The woman droned on for several more minutes before she finally stopped talking.

A few minutes of silence went by, during which Mrs. Ferndale sipped her tea. Reggie just sat there and watched her. Finally, Reggie said, “I'm sorry, Mrs. Ferndale. It's not that I wasn't listening, but I don't understand why you're telling me all this.”

Mrs. Ferndale did mean to, she didn't want it to, but a heavy sigh escaped her lips. For some reason she had really come to believe Regina was the one to make a difference at Whitfield-Clairmount. It was a good school. It had everything going for it but—heart. The girls were simply there, they didn't care that they were there. Even worst, they didn't really feel anything for each other.

“Regina, you want to become a part of these girls. I know you do. I'm simply telling you to think outside of the box, the usual, and use your heart. Since you will inevitably decide one day to win them all over, because that's your nature, I'm suggesting the effort you put into this project could be used to create a sisterhood. Something even better than friendship. Turn those girls into your sisters and you'll never have any more problems with them.”

Reggie didn't mean to, she didn't want to, it sounded somewhat disrespectful. But a chuckle escaped her lips. The chuckle turned into a low laugh when she heard Mrs. Ferndale say, "Remember that, like love, sisterhood is patient, kind, and it perseveres. There may be times when that girl, who is most needed for your life, will be the one that you have to teach how to be a sister."

Reggie laughed out loud at that. "Is she nuts?" thought Reggie. "Turning some of those girls into friends, sisters, would be like trying to train a boa constrictor to be nice." But as she laughed something inside of her, a tiny spark, was lit. To make the situation better *was* something that she wanted.

As Regina enjoyed her laugh, the Headmistress rose and stood with a genuine smile on her face. She was satisfied. She had talked until Reggie understood. Then she leaned down and gave Reggie a little hug and said, "It seems I've kept you a little longer than anticipated. The girls are probably just sitting down to dinner. Go, join them. Go and kick some butt."

"Okay," grinned Reggie. She felt happier than she had been in a long time. She had Rina and now Mrs. Ferndale was on her side. "Mrs. Ferndale, how did you know I would want to devise a plan to make those girls my friends?"

"Because you're so much like your mother," replied the woman as she walked back behind her desk and reached for the pile of phone messages she now needed to work on. "The only thing she hates worst than defeat is conflict."

"You kno-o-w my mother?" wailed Reggie, taking on all the characteristics of a female about to go into full "drama" mode.

"She's my best friend," answered Mrs. Ferndale calmly. The Headmistress waved goodbye, with emphasis, and added, "Thank you for coming to tea. *Goodbye.*"

Reggie had no choice but to leave, so she didn't see the Headmistress as she sank back into the cushions of her chair. Mrs. Ferndale let out her own suppressed laughter. She was so tired. But not too tired to reach for the phone and let Sunte know what her dear little girl was up to at boarding school.

Chapter Three

Reggie entered the dining room wearing the glazed expression of someone returning from an alien kidnapping. “Are you all right?” Rina asked as she hurried over to where Reggie stood just inside the entry way.

Reggie’s mind had yet to calm itself. She could see, she could hear. But everything looked different, seemed different, the sounds in the room were much too loud. She managed to turn her head toward Rina, give a little smile, and assure her that, “I’m fine. I don’t think I’ve ever been better.”

“You look completely spaced out,” remarked Rina. “Get it together or these girls will think you’ve been caned or something. They enjoy imagining the worst has happened.”

The girls looked about the room, and it was true. All eyes were still on them. Expectant eyes. Wondering eyes. Tea with Mrs. Ferndale didn’t happen often. The last girl that had tea with Mrs. Ferndale was Rae, and that was two years ago. Because the girls didn’t know what tea with the Headmistress involved, and because most of them had never been invited to tea, they made up stories about it being a punitive measure. While everyone knew there was a war going on between Yolanda, Julia and Reggie, no one could know how Reggie was punished for having a pet in her room unless Reggie told it. The girls were hoping for some sort of indication as to whether or not that punishment was physical or not.

There was so much going on in Reggie’s head, thoughts were spinning and swirling. She didn’t even hear Rina talking to her. Rina assumed the blank look in Reggie’s eyes was due somehow to the tea and what *must* have been a punishment, so she began to do her “Rina-thing”—offer encouraging words. Positive, helpful, insightful words.

But words Reggie couldn't hear for the new thoughts crowding her mind. Somewhat amazing thoughts.

Mrs. Ferndale told her that the girls were a challenge—about the size of a large dragon. When Reggie's eyes had widened with fear, Mrs. Ferndale told her that this dragon had a gift in its mouth. She said all Reggie had to do was to tame the dragon and the gift would be hers. A corny thought, but when Mrs. Ferndale explained thinking of befriending the girls in this way would be empowering, Reggie could immediately feel that it was so. Throughout the talk the Headmistress had cautioned Reggie to remember that if she goes into this new situation thinking like her old self, she would remain who she was, she would remain unchanged and so would the situation. A new self was required in a new situation, in the new world of the socially privileged. Mrs. Ferndale assured Reggie the gift of the girls' friendship would be well worth it one day.

Thinking of the situation as a large dragon that she knew she was capable of confronting gave Reggie confidence. It made her look about the room at the collection of plush princesses with caution, but not cowardly. She didn't know where the next attack was coming from, and because she was expecting it she wouldn't be caught completely off guard. She was able to look at the other girls with genuine interest and find a level of comfort. Rina was watching Reggie's face as the thoughts in her head settled, and the confidence that comes when one feels in command filled Reggie's eyes.

"Each girl," Reggie thought, "was a potential friend. The things they knew, the talents they had, if they were willing to share them with her, would be like receiving gifts." Armed with those thoughts—the new philosophy—Reggie took Rina by the arm and stepped courageously away from fears, old ways and old habits.

With Reggie taking the lead, the girls walked over to the table where Julia, Yolanda and Rae sat with a couple of other girls. Reggie said "Hey" to all the girls at the table and directed her attention to Rae.

“Rae,” she said, “Would you mind having dinner with me and Rina? I mean just this once. I have some things to discuss with you.”

About three seconds went by before Rae spoke, and when she did, her face was expressionless. The tone in her voice was bland. “Sure. That’s not a problem. But…” With a wave of her arm, Rae extended the invitation for Reggie and Rina to join their table. “Why not sit here, ladies?” Rae asked. “There’ll be no objections,” she added without even looking around.

Yolanda, who was sitting across from Rae and next to Julia, said, “That’s right, *Reggie*. There are no objections.” There was extra inflection placed on Reggie’s name, “Sit down and tell us about your tea with Mrs. Ferndale.”

Reggie purposefully did not look at Julia. She knew objection or disapproval would be written all over Julia’s face. Reggie and Rina pulled out chairs at the end of the eight-foot long table and went through the effort of sitting down. The buzz in the dining room was loud, with the conversation speculating as to why Reggie was returning from tea to join her adversaries. Most believed an apology was forthcoming.

Reggie and Rina could hear Rae say, “Forget it, Yo. She is not going to tell you what happened at her tea.”

Rae had spoken up to Yolanda and that surprised Reggie. She always thought of Rae as the mousey type, but today she seemed to be asserting herself. Reggie found herself unable to take her eyes off Rae, as she was waiting for the girl’s facial expression or tone of voice to change, to match the assertive statement she had just made. In the meantime, Rina continued doing her “Rina-thing,” maintaining the peace.

“What we need to discuss is Saturday evening,” said Rina, looking about the table as if she were chairing a meeting. “Has any consensus been reached as to how we get our fair share of the cupcakes?”

Everyone chuckled, except Reggie. Cupcakes? She loved cupcakes. Concern flashed inside her as thought there was the possibility she might not get some.

“Not really,” responded Yolanda, as she picked up her fork and began to attack the asparagus on the plate the server placed before her.

“Excuse me,” Rae could be heard to say. “Once again, I’d like to remind everyone that we all begin to eat together after we’ve said Grace.” No one put up an argument and Yolanda, looking somewhat bored, put her fork down. Without even so much as a turn of her head, Rae said to Julia who was twisting her face into a mimic of Rae, “Julia, this won’t take long and, yes, the process is necessary.”

Reggie burst out laughing. She didn’t know Rae had it in her. She couldn’t see how Rae could possibly command anybody with that awful dry, monotone way she had of speaking. When all heads at the table turned to see why Reggie was laughing, she said, “It’s cool. We pray at home.”

“Look around you. You’re not at home,” snapped Julia.

Reggie was always quick with a comeback. Sitting with her adversaries in the new situation made no difference. She was still Regina Harrison, the girl who refused to be intimidated. “Yeah, I’m not lost. I know where I am. Especially since I pray whenever, not just at mealtime. Helps keep me grounded.”

“Are we to believe it was praying that helped you survive the Tea,” continued Julia, who wanted more than anything to stick to the subject of Reggie’s conference with Mrs. Ferndale.

“Maybe so,” chuckled Reggie. All eyes were on her and oddly, all eyes with the exception of Rae’s, held a hint of concern—or was that compassion. “All I know is that I did pray a long time before I went in there. Didn’t sweat blood, but I did say ‘Lord, if it be possible let this cup pass from me!’”

Everyone at the table laughed because they were familiar with the Bible reference. Of course, they all knew going to Tea could be nothing like the sacrifices the Lord made on the Cross. Julia, as was to be expected, only grimaced. She was not swayed in the least by Reggie's charm, and she did not find it amusing when people made jokes out of anything that came out of the Bible.

When the laughter ended, Rae said, "Let us pray." And they did. The rest of the meal continued with the girls artfully baiting Reggie into discussing the tea, and with Reggie neatly sidestepping the issue. But there was a lot of laughter in the attempt—and in the end there was a lot less tension between them all.

Later that evening, Reggie didn't turn on the Reggae music as she had done for the past two weeks. She decided not to irritate the girls in the room next door, and to allow poor Rina a reprieve. Reggie could tell from Rina's tense body language, as she lay facing the wall with a sheet drawn over her head, that the repetitious music was annoying. But Rina, ever the Queen of Correctness, assuming Reggie played the music out of some of need would never mention her discomfort. Even though it was no fun to make Rina suffer, Reggie had been caught up in doing battle, and there had to be some casualties during a battle. But now—Reggie had decided the approach to winning the war would be different.

Just before the ten-thirty lights-out, when all the other girls had finished in the bathroom, Reggie went in to shower in private. That was the habit she formed for herself. Private time, her alone time. It was what she always had at home. Here in boarding school it seemed there were few opportunities to be completely alone with oneself or with one's thoughts. And as she lathered her body with a delicious smelling bar of sandalwood soap, Reggie thought about the day. Great strides had been made today, and she was now willing to believe it was indeed possible to *tame the dragon*.

As she was finishing up in the bathroom, Rae came in wearing white and pink polka dot pajamas. Reggie smiled warmly when she saw Rae—and not because her pj’s were adorable.

“Hey, thanks for having my back at dinner,” said Reggie, and she extended her hand in a truce-like gesture. Rae didn’t accept Reggie’s hand, but she did step closer and said in the monotone voice Reggie was later to come to love, “I don’t shake hands with my sister. I greet her with a hug. You’ve been to tea, you’re my sister.”

Then Rae, the quiet one, the one who always seemed to follow, took the lead. She stepped right up, and without any hesitation, she hugged the new girl. Reggie felt like it was Christmas. Rae’s hug was a welcomed gift.

“I’ve had your back all along,” Rae said quietly. “You were never as alone as you thought you were. The Lord always provides help whenever you’re going through something. Its usually a person.”

“That was you who wrote the ‘I am praying for you’ note, wasn’t it?”

“I’ve been praying for you since you first arrived,” Rae simply stated, as a matter of fact. Again she spoke quietly. Her voice was so soft, and yet, so powerful. “And you’ve always been in the company of the Holy Spirit. He’s been looking out for you. He’s your real protection.”

Reggie decided in that moment it wasn’t power she heard in Rae’s voice. It was that what she said was profound. Rae was profound. Quite, plain, never-reactive Rae? For the first time in a long time, Reggie didn’t know what to say. She had heard of the Holy Spirit. She wasn’t totally ignorant. Her mother made her go to church. To think that the Holy Spirit was even aware of her was enough to render Reggie speechless.

Rae could tell that the ballsy friend from New Jersey didn’t know what to say. “One day I’ll tell you more about Him.” With that said Rae went to bed.

Chapter Four

Tormenting Reggie was still fun for Julia, but only Julia. Everyone else had given up on it. Reggie was cool, way cool and seriously funny. They liked the things she said, the way she said them, and the way she rationalized her perspective. Reggie called it “Mother Wit.”

Rina explained to everyone over dinner the next day, “Reggie is a serious student of philosophy, somewhat like myself. Only, I follow the dictates and analysis of modern western philosophy. Reggie, I believe, is more Sufi in her beliefs.”

“All that sounds really good,” snarled Julia. “But do you even know what you just said and are we supposed to be impressed?”

Rina chuckled softly, “Of course you are. I’m fourteen and I read philosophy books for a hobby. That’s impressive.”

There was laughter, and in the middle of it Reggie could be heard to say, “Okay. Okay. Rina’s right. I am more like a Sufi. I think all philosophy has its merits. I love a lot of that Far Eastern stuff, like the Tao and a little of the I Ching. And, I think Hazarat Ilyat Kahn is the stuff, and he was a Sufi.”

“The only philosophy I believe in is in the Bible,” Rae interjected, matter-of-factly. “The rest of that stuff is pagan and a lot of the time it is primitive and it has its roots in some serious evil.”

“Oh, my goodness,” wailed Julia, and her head flopped back on her neck. Totally bored by the conversation, she looked ready to past out. “Can we change the subject? We all might mess around with some of that weird stuff, but we all only believe in the Bible.”

“Certainly,” replied Rina, folding her dainty hands on top of the table and looking every bit like a committee chairperson about to make an announcement. She would have, only—Reggie chose that moment to look over at Julia and decide to “crack” on her.

“Julia, you look just like an unhappy Raggedy Ann doll!” said Reggie, a lot too loudly. “Why so glum?” she asked. Reggie followed the unnecessary comment with a loud laugh, with several of the other girls joining in.

Julia didn’t care. She just rolled her eyes up to the ceiling and wished for her dinner. She hated waiting.

“Regina,” said Rina, sharply. “We do not pass insults at the dinner table.” In a lower voice she added, “Neither do we aggravate Julia on Wednesdays. You can torment her tomorrow.”

“Wednesdays are difficult days,” Yolanda offered before Reggie could ask. Her voice was also lowered. “It’s a lot safer around here if we simply feed Julia and take her upstairs until its time.”

“Time for her parent’s phone call,” Rina hurriedly explained before Reggie could ask. Reggie didn’t seem to get the point that now was not a good time to harass Julia no matter how much fun it was.

“Well,” interjected Reggie before anyone else could cut her off, “my rag doll was always my favorite doll. I loved her, loved her floppy hairdo. All those fluffy curls.”

Julia cut Reggie a dark look, reached into her pocket and pulled out a hair band. Looking straight into Reggie’s eyes, she pulled the mass of riotous curls hair into a pony tail. She lifted one eyebrow, as if to say to Reggie, “Now what?”

Reggie just smiled--warmly. To herself she thought, “I can’t wait until that girl grows on me.” It hadn’t happened yet. Of course, it had only been two weeks since they began speaking to each other.

Rina tried once more to get everyone’s attention. “I’d like you all to come by our room—mine and Reggie’s--after dinner, if you can. I would love for you to see the posters Reggie has hung on her side of the room.

“Posters?” whined a girl who didn’t ordinarily sit at “their” table. “Why would we want to see posters?”

“It’s okay if you can’t make it,” Rina assured the girl, smoothly and quickly, dismissing her presence as she did. To the others at the table she said, “Rina’s mother did the original artwork. The sayings aren’t original, but the striking visual interpretation certainly is.”

“So, your mother’s an artist,” offered Yolanda, as her contribution to the conversation Rina evidently wanted to start.

“Not really,” mumbled Reggie. “She owns a gallery and for something to do we sometimes paint with oils on canvas.” Then Reggie blurted out, “Oh, good. The servers will be at our table next. Their right over there. I can’t wait to eat.”

All the girls at the table smiled, including Julia, when Reggie announced she couldn’t wait to eat. She did it every day at every meal. She was the hungriest person they had ever met, and yet she was tall and thin—didn’t have an extra ounce of flesh on her person. Julia watched as Reggie dove into her food as if she hadn’t been fed all week, and she couldn’t help but wonder if Regina Harrison wasn’t the starving daughter of a starving artist. Not that Julia cared, but that would explain the girl’s appetite.

Later that evening, in imitation of the adults in their lives, the princesses-of-posh all lifted wine flutes filled with sparkling seven-up in toast to Reggie’s beautifully done posters. The posters really were special, they were good enough to print and sell. The girls spent at least twenty minutes complimenting Reggie on not only the composition of the pictures in the posters, but also on how the colors in each worked in harmony with the colors in her bedding ensemble. It was all really pretty, bright and gay, uplifting.

“The colors are you. They match your vibrant personality,” commented Julia. Although no one said one word about it, everyone took note

that Julia spoke directly to Reggie, and without any sarcasm in her voice. A first.

Reggie was just about to response—no doubt with the kind of sassy quip she usually turned lose on Julia—when the phone in the next room rang. All heads turned to look at Julia who froze in place, at first. Then she darted off, squealing “I’m com-i-in-ing!” as she went.

Yolanda, Rina and Rae were looking at each other in relief with small polite smiles on their faces. The smiles Reggie had seen them wear when they were sharing the same thought about something, thoughts Reggie as a person who had come lately to the friendship had no possible way of knowing about. So, Reggie was confused, and confusion made her forget about other people’s right to privacy. After all this was no regular occurrence. Julia seldom ever showed any animation. “So, what’s up with that?” she asked. “Why does a phone call from Julia’s parents make everyone so nervous? You’re all looking around like some big secret is about to be exposed, and she practically flew out of here. She wasn’t even walking.”

It had become the habit of the friends to allow Rina to offer any needed explanations. She did so very well, she did so diplomatically. “Julia’s parents are continents away, as they usually are. But they have this arrangement with Julia. They call every Wednesday no matter where they are or what’s going on. Because of time differences Julia is never really sure of when the call will come. That’s all.”

“Oh, I can see that,” replied Reggie, her head bobbing in thought. “Yeah, I understand her anxiety. All I have to do is pick up the phone and I can call my mom any time I want. Heck, I can take a cab and go home.” And then, as suddenly as she had spoken, Reggie was quiet. For the first time in her life Reggie thought about what it must feel like to not be able to talk to the loving woman who was the center of her universe. It suddenly dawned on her that boarding school meant separation from home and family. “What about you, Rina, can you

talk to the Congressman anytime you want?” asked Reggie, her voice softened by concern.

“I can call. Most of the time I have to leave a message. He is, after all, busy helping to run the nation,” answered Rina. She knew that Reggie was getting it, that she understood what was happening with Julia. “But he always, always calls back and usually within 30 minutes or so. Now, mom. She is always on alert. The rule at our house is ‘if Sabrina calls, find me, and find me a phone.’ It has always been like that. Parental connection by phone. That’s all.”

Reggie had a blank look on her face as she explored what that kind of parenting looked like. It was new to Reggie. She had never seen or heard of anything like that before. In her neighborhood, everybody’s parents lived at home with them. In her neighborhood, everybody went to the school in their neighborhood.

Yolanda, in an effort to clarify Rina’s experience as the accepted norm, added, “My dad’s the same way. Always busy, and always available. The by-phone part is just the way it is. How else would we get to communicate with each other? Writing letters is certainly too slow. We could use our faxes to contact them, but talking with a parent is personal stuff.”

Still, the look on Reggie’s face said she was thinking but not necessarily understanding. Reggie was raised by a single mom, a kind woman who gave her daughter all of her attention, and love. As for her father, well, Reggie didn’t have one. She knew other kids who had them, but she had never known one and so she didn’t miss what she had never had. She had Auntie Peg and her husband Marlon, her mother’s best friends and business partners. She had Pila, her best friend, and Pila’s family. But her moms—the woman meant everything to Reggie, everything. She couldn’t imagine her life without her mom being available to her at any and all times.

Then Rae made her input. “My parents are both evangelists of this huge mega church. They have over fourteen thousand members in their congregation, a full-time staff of forty three, and if you can imagine it, about five hundred requests per day from the church members for some kind of assistance. So, I understand when I don’t hear from them every day.”

“Yeah,” was all Reggie could say. She looked sad. Her mood was no longer elevated and it showed. Reggie understood why Julia was so mean. The girl didn’t feel loved by the significant others in her life! Geez.

Rae continued, “But I still feel very close to my parents. Every morning one of them leaves me a message on my voicemail, and it always includes the scripture they are reading that morning. When I read it I feel like I’m right there with them, having a talk with them.”

“Yeah,” Reggie said again. “It’s just that I never thought about why we’re all really here. In this school, I mean. I thought it was about getting a higher quality education. That’s what my mom told me. But—I’m starting to think it might be because our parents are too busy to raise us.”

Yolanda frowned. Rae stood still. Rina spoke up. “That not true. Our parents are raising us. They’re very much involved in raising us. We *are* here to get not only an academic education, but an education in those areas that refine us—social graces. We make acquaintances here that last a life time. People of quality, world changers, industry starters, maybe even the first female president. We go home to our parents when we’re not studying or socializing, and because of our time away from home our interactions with our parents are good—really good.”

“What in the world? Interactions? Really?” Reggie’s glass clinked as she sat it down on the cherry wood desk—something the other girls

never would do. They'd take the time to find a coaster or a napkin. She grabbed the pillow off her bed as she sat down, and hugged the pillow to her chest as if she was using it as a shield. "Where did you get the word 'interactions'? We don't have interactions with our parents. We have relationships. We have good times. We have shared events. We have memorable moments. We have quiet time when it's just them and us. We have special moments with them that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives..."

"Unfortunately," said Rae, "it's not like that for everybody. Lots of girls here at Whitfield-Clairmount don't have the attention they deserve from their parents. That's why I tell as many of them as I can get to listen to concentrate on Psalms 27:10. It says *when my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.*"

And suddenly Julia was standing in the doorway. No one was sure when she returned to the room, but all heard her speak. "No, we don't all have available parents, Regina." Her voice was quiet and steely. Kind of scary. "We have designer one-of-a-kind clothing, expensive things, skilled servants at our beck and call, we have each other, and we have this school which is more of a home to most of us than the houses our parents provide. Don't get it twisted, we all have loving and caring parents. We don't, however, all have parents that consider us their number one priority. Some of us have parents that think a ten-minute phone call and the promise to send something from wherever they are is an adequate amount of attention to give."

With that said, Julia sat down on the corner of Rina's bed, folded her arms and looked deeply into Reggie's eyes. That moment between them lasted longer than a few seconds. It was no mere glance. In that moment they looked into the other's soul...where there was a meeting of the mind. The other girls knew they dare not interrupt. With her words, Julia let Reggie know what happened during the long awaited telephone call. With her eyes, Julia let Reggie know how empty and angry she felt.

Finally, and quietly, Reggie said, “A wise older woman recently told me in life we don’t get to pick our family, but we do get to pick our friends. If we’re lucky, very lucky, sometimes our friends become more than acquaintances that we have a lot in common with. They become more like ‘sisters’ to us, that special relationship, that special person you can count on through thick and thin, who does not judge, who answers the call, who helps you carry whatever baggage you’re dealing with.”

Reggie paused instinctively, and her words sunk in. She didn’t really know where the words came from. They sounded a lot like something said during her tea with Ms. Ferndale. But she could feel the meaning behind the words spoken, it warmed her soul and gave her courage. She looked around at the other girls and they were all still standing mesmerized, their eyes on her and glowing with that same warmth. They, too, seemed to feel the deeper meaning of the words. Julia didn’t show any emotion, but she experienced a deep feeling as she listened to Reggie’s words. She had parents, extended family, no brothers or sisters. No one she was really close to but her cousin Yolanda, and now Rae and Rina. Maybe Reggie?

Preceding from nothing more than instinct, Reggie did something she was to wonder about even years later. Looking again at Julia, sitting there with her arms folded across her chest and her feelings closed off, Reggie stood up. She took two steps to the center of the room, and with her eyes still on Julia’s face, she held out her hand like sports teams do when they are forming a huddle. “Julia, I offer you more than my friendship. I commit myself to you as a sister, and I vow to be a true sister-friend no matter what is going on.”

Julia didn’t move a muscle. So, Rina stepped forward and covered Reggie’s hand with hers. “I vow to commit myself as a sister to all of you.” Then Yolanda did the same, and she said “I vow to commit myself as a *sister-friend* to all of you.” Rae covered Yolanda’s hand with her own, and said, “I commit myself as a sister-friend to all of

you.” With her free hand, Rae beckoned Julia to join the group. She did.

Moving slowly Julia walked to the center of the group, looked Reggie into the eyes, and with a half-smile said, “I, too, commit myself as a sister-friend to all you. Even you, Miss Regina Anu Harrison, the hip-hop scholar from New Jersey.” Julia moved to lay her hand over Rae’s, but Reggie stopped her.

“I don’t toss hands with my sister,” said Reggie. She stepped to Julia in the same way Rae had stepped to her late that night when they were alone in the bathroom, and she said, “I greet my sister with a hug. And, know this, you were never as alone as you may have thought you were. I’ve had your back the whole time!”

The girls squealed in delight and hugged. All the girls did the girl-squeal. Reggie didn’t even know she could do it...squeal like she saw a mouse and jump and down at the same time. But, all the girls hugged and hugged, genuinely and sincerely. In fact, the hugging went on for almost fifteen minutes. It felt so good to let down the guards, to openly accept one another just as they were, to set all the confusion and chaos aside. An opportunity had presented itself to end the girl-war, and they took it.

The only thing that interrupted the hugging and the misty-eyed thing they had going on, was when Reggie suggested everybody drop to the floor and share a little about themselves. While the girls had always assumed they knew everything there was to know about each other, that night after taking the vow of sisterhood, there was a sharing of those things deeply felt, “their secrets.”

It may be supposed that the friendship between the five was sealed that night because of the sensitivity and courage Reggie demonstrated in reaching out to Julia. But that is only partly true. Actually it was the *Rae lecture* given at the end of the evening which made the important difference in the lasting quality of their relationships.

Chapter Five

The sister-friends stayed up later that night than the week night-curfew allowed. They were, for the most part, quiet. So, nobody knew they were still awake. The conversations they had were low and soft of tone, and would have been no matter what time of day they were shared. They talked about their inner most secrets, the issues on their hearts, and those were not matters to be spoken of with loud voices.

The secret-sharing only got out of hand once. Yolanda had asked everyone to share what was their best physical trait. She went first and was unashamed to admit, what everyone already knew, her unusual golden hair was her greatest physical asset. Yolanda's mother was a Geechee who lived on Kiawah Island off the coast of South Carolina. As it happens with the mixed ancestry of the Gullah Geechees, Yolanda's hair was naturally dark golden blonde. Being both a natural blonde and an African American got Yo a lot of attention.

Reggie answered that her eyes were her best physical trait. Her eyes were like perfect slanted almonds, dark gray in color, with long thick eyelashes. "Yeah, those eyes are pretty terrific," agreed Yolanda, to whom physical attributes were of great importance. "I bet you use them a lot. Batting those eyelashes could get a girl out of serious trouble. I hope you know how to use them." The girls all laughed.

Rae felt her skin was her greatest physical asset. "I have the good fortune not to have pimples. Not a one. I've never had one. And I won't have to shave either. I don't have hair growing under my arms or on my legs." The girls found it hard to believe that was all Rae felt she had going for herself in the physical department.

"Look at those long ballerina legs," said Yolanda.

“I like your hands,” said Reggie. “Your fingers are perfectly formed. Long and slender. Your hands are so pretty when you’re wearing rings I pay more attention to your fingers than the rings.”

“You’re quite pretty, simply stated,” said Julia. “You’re the right height, your weight’s in proportion to your height. Your cheeks glow. Your eyes shine. Just go get a hair-do and stop wearing your hair just hanging there, and watch the fellows take notice big time.”

Rae blushed. The other girls howled. Leave it to Julia to put it out there—to simply speak the truth. “I am so not interested in the boys taking an interest in me,” responded Rae. In an attempt to deflect the attention of the group from herself, Rae turned to Julia and asked, “What about you? We haven’t heard from you, Miss Thing.”

What could Julia say about herself? What could anyone say other than Julia Diane Denison was the most strikingly beautiful girl in the world. She turned heads, male and female, everywhere she went—she always had. Someone said there was no such thing as perfection, but that someone had not seen Julia. The mix between her Native American mother and her half-African, half-Italian American father had produced a person who looked like “the best of all people.” Her skin tone was the color of a golden peach, with lips that were a pink peach. Her hair was long, wavy, thick and silky. She was of a height and build that made her look good in all her clothing—in all of anybody’s clothing. She was perfect. On those rare occasions when she smiled, and the smile reached her jet-black eyes, they glowed like black diamonds.

“Okay,” said Yolanda, “spill it. What your greatest physical asset?”

Julia looked around at the circle of girls sprawled out in the floor space between the room’s two beds. Taking the time to look at each directly, with a twinkle appearing in her own eyes, she lifted her pajama top and shouted, “I have these!”

“Ah-h-h-h!” screamed Rae. Rina gasped and covered her eyes. Yolanda started to laugh, a coming from the gut laugh...very loudly

and very not-so-lady-like. And Reggie, well Reggie stared and pointed...at first. Then she screamed, pointed and shouted, “Boobies, her boobies! She thinks her boobies are her best asset!”

Julia sat back on her haunches and laughed at the girls. They had taken the news like drunken monkeys...they were falling all over the place. Some screaming as if in pain, the others laughing like they were watching Bernie Mac on TV. “Okay, okay, hold it down,” warned Julia. “You’re going to wake up this place. That’s three demerits, remember that.”

When it was much quieter, Julia looked into embarrassed eyes, and said, “Well, you took that just the way I knew you would.” She paused, then continued, “Everybody reacts to my chest. I don’t know why, but it’s the one asset that I have that gets me attention. I can go into Ms. Cherry’s office to ask a question about scheduling, and she looks up, but not at me. She looks at my chest. When I go into the kitchen to ask Cook to prepare me something special, she looks at my chest as if it holds some point of reference for her. And, don’t mention what happens when I’m standing in front of a member of the opposite sex. They stare, actually stare at my chest! Then they give me whatever I want. I get free entrance into the movies, library fines overlooked, the biggest desserts when I order at a restaurant. The list goes on.”

She let all that sink in, and then ended the explanation of her announcement by saying, “I think a person’s best asset is the one that gets them the most positive results.”

Rina sat there, her head shaking ever-so-slightly in disbelief. Yolanda’s hand still covered her mouth. Rae looked totally disgusted. So—Reggie spoke up. “Geez, Jools. You got big boobs. I’ve never seen such big boobs on a fourteen year old kid. But they are, after all, only mammary glands, not tools you can use to obtain stuff.”

“What did you call me?” asked Julia, the pitch of her voice was high and shrill. She couldn’t believe what she heard!

The sudden silence in the room was as confusing to Reggie as the question. “Oh, I’m sorry. I’m not calling you anything. I was expressing my opinion of your opinion...”

Julia interrupted. “No, you called me something. It only sounded like fools. Only...you called me Jools!”

“Oh, gee,” sighed Reggie. She was in trouble with Julia, again. And so soon after their truce. “I’d never call you a fool. Gee, I’m sorry...I was thinking as you talked that you saw your breasts as tools—and I guess, somehow, the words overlapped in my mind. I’m so sorry...”

Reggie looked around for support from the other girls. But—Yolanda was doubled over, laughing silently. Rina’s shoulders were shaking as she held in her giggles. Rae, who usually only managed a somber smile or two, was grinning so hard all of her teeth were showing. Reggie knew she’d have to handle this oops all on her own. She turned to face Julia—a Julia who was wearing her own big smile.

“Jools,” everyone heard Julia said. “Is that Jools as in *Julia with the tools*?”

Sheepishly Reggie lowered her head and offered what she hoped sounded a lot more appealing, “How about Jewels? You know, j-e-w-e-l-s.”

“Naw-w-w!” laughed Yolanda. “You had it right. *Jools* is so perfect. The name fits. She has used her boobies as tools that make fools out of men ever since she grew them!”

Rina stopped laughing long enough to add, “Now we can stop calling them boobs and refer to them as ...Julia’s jewels.”

“Julia’s magnificent jewels,” added Julia. “Wanna see them again?”

“No-o-o!” screamed all the other girls at once. Enough was enough.

“Jealous, huh?” smirked Julia.

“No, Jools. Not exactly,” said Yolanda. “We’ve all started to grow our own. We’ll catch up very soon. At least that’s what my mother told me I could expect would happen this year.”

“Well, dear Yoyo,” Julia replied, “I won’t argue with mother-wisdom when all I know about the subject is what I learned from our kitchen maid when I was nine and they first started to grow. They were sore at first, hurt a little.”

“If I’m going to be Yoyo, you’re going to be Jools,” stated Yolanda. She liked nicknames, especially “Yoyo” because it was the endearment her father called her.

“Jools is easier to live with than Julia,” said Julia. “Julia has always sounded so much like a stately old lady’s name.”

“Then it’s done,” proclaimed Rae. “Secrets shared, names chosen, and midnight approaching. So, let me say something and then we can all call it a night. ‘Cause I’m sleepy.”

Reggie watched as the other girls arranged themselves quickly on the floor. Jools sat down, Rina and Yolanda sat up straight. Then Rina turned to Reggie who was still perched on the edge of her bed, “It’s a Rae lecture. She gives them from time to time. You’ll enjoy what she says. Come, sit down here with me.” Rina patted a space on the floor. So, Reggie sat in it.

“I want to thank you Reggie for being willing to reach out to Julia, *Jools*, with your compassion, especially because Jools hasn’t been welcoming to you and because she needs as much compassion as she can get. But know this everybody—my conversation is not about Jools. She’s perfect just as she is and you’ll come to feel that way by yourself without my help.”

Then, looking around the small circle of sister-friends, Rae explained, “I wanted to make sure you all were aware of what happened here this evening. It was and it wasn’t about Reggie and Jools. They were

acquaintances who share friendly feelings do things together because ... well, mainly because it's no fun to do them alone. But what we've established tonight is sisterhood, a special bond between women."

Rae looked directly at Reggie who earlier in the evening had been surprised by Rina's use of a word most other fourteen year olds couldn't spell—"interactions." She pointedly said, "I use the word *establish* on purpose. Because that is what we did here tonight." Reggie did not speak. She simply and solemnly nodded her understanding. So, Rae continued.

"My mom taught me that a sister-friendship requires agreement in thought and deed, sister-friends value the same things. What each of us values most is that Jesus Christ is our Lord. As followers of Jesus Christ we are to be the salt of the Earth, we are to live lives that are examples of what it means to follow Jesus. If we do something significant, no matter how small, even acting alone we can make a difference in the lives of others. But—if we do something together, combined strength like the granules of salt in a box, *we can change the world*. It was God who brought us together. Because we are stronger *together* than we will ever be acting apart.

God expects us to '*be kindly affectioned one to another with love; in honor preferring one another*' as it says in Romans 12:10; and we must always stop to '*consider how we may motivate each other to love and good works*' as it says in Hebrews 10:24. If we do nothing with our lives but believe, nothing too earth-shattering will happen to us. We can expect the enemy or his demons to come against us if we decide to do something important for the cause of Christ—the Great Commission. But we should not worry about attacks that will come against us because God has provided as a means through which He can support, strengthen, and love each of us. He has given us this Circle of friendship. We have each other and we have the Lord. We have all we will ever need for victory in this life."

And so it was.

“Princesses of Posh” have problems too, like every other woman. Many of their problems can neither be resolved with money or are the result of money, have little to do with their ethnicity, or anything else that is physical. This is true for every woman. Real princesses, the daughters of the King of Kings, triumph over the challenges they met in life because God, in His faithfulness, will turn the problem to the good for them that love and obey Him.

The Circle of Sisters Possibility Tales are illustrations of God’s goodness and might in the lives of women today. There are five tales in this series, the individual story of each of the young women in this Sister Circle. Enjoy them all!

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