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After soaking in the tub for nearly thirty minutes, Sonya slipped into a pair of silk pajamas, grabbed a glass of wine, and started to sit down to finish reading her book. Before she could remove the book mark her phone rung.

"I see y'all made it back," said Linda her nose next door neighbor and close friend. "I just called to let you know that I have all of your mail. I'll be leaving town tomorrow, so make sure you come by and get it tonight or early in the morning."

"Thank you so much Linda. I will come over in the morning. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing fine, but that's not the important question. Your situation is much more important. How was the trip?"

"Girl it was great. We have got to go to lunch this weekend so that we can catch up. The cruise was awesome."

"I'll bet it was. I have got to get a man; I am so tired of spending my weekends walking around Super Target and Walmart with my mother."

"Linda, you could have a man if you wanted one, you're just too picky."

"Yeah girl, maybe you're right. Look I didn't call to talk about my sorry love life, let's talk about you and Quincy. Sonya, I am so happy to hear that the two of you are doing better. You know I've always felt that y'all were the perfect couple."

"Linda, we've been through a lot, but we're still hangin' in there. I love my husband. The trip to Hawaii was what we needed. We even worked hard – and I mean hard – at having a baby."

"Are you serious? The last attempt left you devastated. I thought you said that was the last time?"

"I know I did, but I feel like I owe it to my husband to try again. He doesn't ask for much. He's a great provider and an all around good man. I feel it's my duty as his wife to at least try to give him a child. At this point, I know he's dying to have a little boy that can carry on the family name."

"I hear what you're sayin'. I'm just concerned about you. I don't want to see you hurt again. Maybe you should think about adoption."

"We looked into adoption, but Linda, many of those adoption agencies are a pain in the ass. They want to do all kinds of background checks, house inspections, counseling sessions...it's crazy. The last time we met with an agency it was a mess. Quincy became so angry with the counselor that he slammed his fist on the table and walked out of the meeting."

"What happened?"

"Girl, the adoption counselor came into the room wearing this little *hoochie* mama outfit; smelling like she just smoked a carton of cigarettes. She could barely formulate a sentence without stumbling over her words.

Halfway through the meeting Quincy got frustrated with the woman's condescending tone. He looked at her and asked, "*What makes you qualified to*

judge us? You don't have enough professionalism to wear appropriate clothing to a meeting such as this, but you think you are qualified to decide whether or not we are capable of raising a child. You smell like you just smoked ten cigarettes, yet you have the audacity to question whether or not our home is fit to raise a child in! This shit is a joke - I'm outta here."

"No he didn't?"

"Yes he did! He stood up and walked out. We haven't been to an adoption agency since."

"I've heard similar stories about some of those agencies," said Linda.

"Girl, it's easier for a terrorist to sneak a nuclear missile into this country than it is for a good family to adopt a child. That's why so many celebrities go over seas to adopt a child - there isn't as much red tape."

"I hear you Sonya, but they have to be strict or else the child may get adopted by a bad family."

"I'm not saying they shouldn't screen applicants, but damn Linda, they go overboard. There is so much red tape involved that people like Quincy and I just decide it's not worth it. In the end, the only people getting hurt are those kids waiting to be adopted. That's why there are so many children sitting in those agencies waiting on a family - especially little black kids."

"I agree. Some of those kids end up waiting around for years. They get caught up in that foster care system and that's when they get subjected to all kinds of emotional drama."

"Exactly! You know I spent my childhood as a foster child. I wouldn't wish that life on any kid. Hold on, the doorbell is ringing...I don't know who it could be at this time of night."

Sonya darted to the front door and peered through the peep-hole.

"Linda, it's Ann - Quincy's former assistant," she whispered.

"What does she want? Damn, she won't give y'all a break. Didn't he fire her last week?"

"Yeah, he did. I don't know what she wants - let me call you back."

Sonya opened the door. Ann stood there crying profusely holding her three year old baby Hallie. The child was sound asleep; oblivious to her mother's emotional state.

"Ann, you're soaking wet! Come inside and dry off."

"I brought Hallie - I hope you don't mind."

"No problem, come in."

Ann walked inside the foyer of the huge home. Her eyes darted from wall-to-wall in search of something or someone. Finally, her eyes settled on the top of the huge spiral staircase that ascended up like the stairway to heaven.

Ann started crying harder. Her tears implied that the sight of the staircase evoked some hurtful memory that she kept buried deep inside, but it wasn't the sight of the staircase that provoked this outburst. Nope the stairs had nothing to do with it. An inanimate object couldn't evoke that kind of emotion.

Her pain was caused by the image of Quincy standing at the top of the stairs looking down like some type of false idol or god. The look of disdain for her that he possessed at that moment was the antagonist...