

## THE FIRST, THE LAST, THE ONLY

### CHAPTER I

“Will somebody please get that door?” Q screamed at the top of his lungs from the bathroom.

“All it takes for bells to go off in this house is for my behind to grace this toilet seat with the thought of a long peaceful meditation.” He muttered impatiently with the hopes that for once someone, besides him, would answer the door.

He wondered, “Who in their right mind would be out in all of this rain?”

Pellets pummeled the windows and the roof.

“Sounds like hail. I sure as hell hope we’re not being blessed with another one of those North Texas hailstorms.”

The doorbell rang again.

“So much for peaceful mediations!”

A groan escaped his lips as he closed the pages of *The Swimsuit Edition of Sports Illustrated*. He stood, zipped his pants quickly and hurried downstairs. By the time he got to the door his heart was pounding a million miles a minute.

“I don’t care if it’s Halle Berry herself standing butt-naked, she’s going to get a piece of my mind. On second thought, maybe not, if it’s Halle.”

He yanked the doorknob. The young man on the other side jumped as the door suddenly burst open.

Q was completely annoyed at the fellow standing eye to eye before him. He looked to be in his late teens, no more than twenty-one. The sheepish look on the boy's face brought no special endearment. If anything it annoyed Q even more.

Sure that he was there to sell him something he didn't need, it took Q by surprise when the lad swayed under wobbly knees.

"So much for the fearless salesman!" Q chuckled under his breath.

"What do you want?" Q demanded gruffly.

Cristobal stood dumbfounded. He couldn't believe he had finally come face-to-face with him. Except for a little gray around the temples and the hair on his chin, the man answering the door looked exactly like his mother had described.

Before Cristobal could stop them, words tumbled out of his mouth, "Yo estoy buscando un hombre quien es mi padre."

It was obvious from the look on the man's face that he didn't understand a word that Cristobal had just said. It was then that Cristobal realized that he had spoken in his native tongue.

He tried again muttering almost apologetically, "I look for mi padre, my father, King-Say Agua."

"Ain't no Kingsay Awk-wa here!"

Q slammed the door shut but not before a flash of the past entered his mind. There was something familiar about the young man at the door. And that name struck a chord that Q couldn't quite wrap his fingers around. Before he could step away from the

door, the chimes rang again. It was no surprise that the young man was still standing there.

“Look son, I told you there ain’t no Kingsay whatever here.”

“Please senor, me English no es very good.”

He paused in studied thought and grinned proudly blurting out the one sentence in English that he had been practicing to perfection all of his life.

“I look for my father. Here is letter.”

Cristobal shoved the yellowed envelope into Q’s hand.

“There must be some mistake.....”

Before he could finish his sentence, his eyes were drawn to the piece of paper in his hands. Q’s bottom lip touched his chin. He recognized the writing as his own. It was a letter he had long since forgotten to a woman he had pushed into the far corners of his mind.

Suddenly Q could feel her silky strands caressing his thighs as they made love for what would be the last time. It had been over twenty years and his body still responded as it had so many times in one of the few rooms atop Café Pussy in Valparaiso, Chile. Cecelia was as alive to him now as she had been then.

“Could it be?”

He wondered as he looked at his old Marine Corps address from his first deployment at sea.

“Now instead of my military record being my ace in the hole looks like it just might destroy me.” The thought caused his heart to lurch.

Desperation did nothing to thwart a flashback to that steamy night so many years ago. Cecelia's petite frame had straddled his long torso. Her black mane covered her breasts. Gently, Q pushed her hair behind her shoulders. The view of the perfect mounds on her chest topped with brown sugar tips had brought him close to releasing himself. Somehow he had managed to control his desire.

He lay back relaxing under the kisses that she breathed all over his body. Within seconds every hair on his body stood as erect as his manhood. Their bodies moved in perfect rhythm reaching a crescendo at the same time. Cecelia arched back until her head touched the bed. A moan escaped from her throat as she received his full length. Q felt the deep recesses of what made her a woman. He exploded. The odd feeling that life had just left him briefly crossed his mind. Cecelia's scream of passion quickly pulled his thoughts only to her. The caramel in her eyes melted with pleasure. Q could see that she had felt something different too.

Cristobal cleared his throat instantly awakening Q from his daydream. With trembling hands, slowly Q stepped aside motioning Cristobal to come in. He glanced up at the stairs. To his relief, they were still alone.

Cristobal paused staring up at the huge crystal chandelier in the foyer. His eyes drifted back down to Q. To Q's surprise, the young man matched him inch-for-inch the entire length of his six foot five frame. His wiriness reminded Q of himself in his younger, lighter days.

As if in a death march, Q led Cristobal into his study. The heavy desk between them might as well have been the Strait of Magellan, wide enough to see to the other side, but too far to reach across and touch anything.

Cristobal looked around the room. His eyes were drawn to the pyramid of colorful figurines behind King-say.

Q sat tall and straight looking regal in this space that he had meticulously decorated with Afro-centric pieces he had collected from all over the world.

Cristobal nervously ran his fingers over the intricate carvings of the dark mahogany desk.

“Hay bellissimo. Es muy viejo, si?” His eyes raised in admiration.

Q had just opened his mouth to say something when he heard the garage door open.

“Damn! Just my luck for Sara Grace to for once cut her shopping spree short. Can a brother get a break today!”

Though it was a cool sixty-eight degrees inside, sweat poured down his face.

“Sweetness, I’m home. You won’t believe all the great things I found.”

Sara Grace burst into the study before Q could get to the door. One look at Q told her that something was wrong.

Cristobal cleared his throat. Her eyes were drawn to him.

“Sorry for interrupting.” She apologized. “I didn’t know you had company.” She gathered her composure and stuck out her hand.

“I’m Sara Grace.”

Cristobal stood quickly to his feet bowing his head. He took her hand and kissed it.

“I Cristobal.” He announced proudly.

It was then that Q realized that he hadn’t even known the stranger’s name.

“What kind of name is Crystal Ball for a guy?” He thought contemptuously.

Q hurried around the desk and ushered Sara Grace out of the room. They stopped midway in the foyer underneath the chandelier.

“What’s going on in there?” Sara was startled by Q’s reaction.

“Baby, I can explain. Well, no I can’t. But maybe this can.” He handed her the envelope.

Sara carefully took the letter out. The ink was smeared with water spots—some looked very old, others looked fresh. At first glance, Sara thought the spots to be raindrops. After reading the letter, she knew that they were tears. Her breath caught in her throat.

“I don’t understand. What are you trying to tell me?” She choked the words out.

He explained while raising his right hand.

“Sara Grace, I swear to you, I had no idea, none, that I had a son in Chile. This is as big of a surprise to me as it is to you.”

“Q, how could this be?” She muttered teetering between shock and disbelief.

Q gnawed away at his nails. It was a habit that drove Sara crazy. She quickly reprimanded him.

“All right Q, don’t you start biting on those dick-skinners you call hands! Not now, brother, not now!”

Pacing up and down the floor, Sara was helpless. The words that were in her thoughts spilled out of her normally diplomatic mouth.

“I knew that as soon as you retired some of that craziness that you pulled was going to come out of the closet. Looks to me that your Marine Corps shit has finally tracked your ass down! All right Mr., I need some answers and I need them now.”

Sara demanded from Q while secretly thinking to herself, “I should have known that his driving wasn’t the only rotten thing about him.”

Methodically, she ran down the list of ports that Q had traveled to during his 20 years in the Marine Corps.

“I want to know what other pieces of yourself you’ve left around this world!”

Before Q could object, she was listing the countries. The look in her eyes dared him not to even think about not answering.

“Venezuela?”

“No. I didn’t get off the ship much. I had duty.” He answered patiently.

“Colombia?”

“Nope. Couldn’t get off the ship because of terrorists threats.”

“Panama?”

“Negative. Spent all of my free time with family. Besides, most of those women were ‘sistahs’ who spoke Spanish. The combination wasn’t good for my mojo.”

“Ecuador?”

“Nay. Those girls were young—jail bait—and butt face ugly, except for the ambassador’s daughter.”

A wide grin crossed Q's face as he pictured Leah's blue eyes delighting at every chocolate soldier that crossed her path.

Sara cleared her throat. The suspicious look was enough to sober Q up from his intoxicating thoughts.

His response left no doubt in Sara's mind.

"Hell no! Leah got herself pregnant by another Marine. It was a big mess. They had to keep it on the down low because she was underage. After what they put Sgt. Perez through, I knew I wasn't about to mess with no skirt in that country!"

"Peru?"

"Nah. All of the girls were getting done at the Marine House."

Sara gave him a puzzled look.

His explanation cleared up any confusion and doubts.

"The Marine House is where the Marines on Embassy duty live. Not long after I arrived, there was an investigation about inappropriate conduct at the Marine House. A lot of Marines were relieved from duty. To the last one, they were sent home with a dishonorable discharge."

"Uruguay?"

"Absolutely not."

By now Q was tiring of the exercise. He decided to keep his answers short.

"Brazil?"

"No."

"Puerto Rico?"

"No."

“Well I think that takes care of South America and the Caribbean?”

Sara threw a questioning eye Q’s way.

He breathed out in relief.

“Sure does!”

He wasn’t sure why but after going through the countries he felt exonerated. He realized that he really hadn’t been that cavalier after all. Compared to his buddies, he was a saint. He felt a little wounded knowing that his conquests didn’t quite live up to his embellished memories.

“What about Africa?”

Knowing how Q loved himself some big ass women, Sara prepared herself for the worse.

“Hell no! That place was AIDS infested when I was there.”

“How about Southeast Asia?”

Sara was determined to get to the bottom of this no matter how long it took.

“No kids in Thailand. As a matter fact, no kids anyplace else since I had a vasectomy before I went back out on any more deployments.”

Q had never seen Sara Grace so incensed. They had been married for almost three years and he had never once heard her curse. By now, she had shed the graceful façade that she shrouded herself in 24/7.

He thought indignantly, “Looks like my shit ain’t the only thing coming out of the closet.”

Q took Sara Grace by the hand and led her to the sofa in their family room.

She whispered breathlessly, “This might not be what we think. I mean how do we really know that he’s your son. You yourself have said that those women in port go from soldier-to-soldier.”

Her words received no welcome from Q. He snapped at her.

“For God’s sake, Sara Grace. Just look at that boy’s lips. He’s got those trademark Waters’ lips. There ain’t no lips on this earth like those Waters’ lips.”

Sara Grace had to admit that Q had a point. Cristobal did have those same juicy lips that had drawn her to Q years ago. She relished every moment that she got to suck on them.

Q was just about to say something else when Cristobal timidly peeked his head around the corner. Embarrassed, Q and Sara Grace invited him to join them. He plopped down between the two of them. His bottom sunk into the fluffy ivory cushions. He looked from Q to Sara Grace. The loving smile he gave them could have melted the ice at the North Pole.

Suddenly, the front door opened and then closed. The sloshing of wet sneakers meandered through the living room into the dining room and finally into the kitchen. The sound of a vacuumed space being opened filled the air as Deuce yanked on the refrigerator handle.

Q, Cristobal and Sara Grace watched the sixteen-year old as he went about stuffing his face with leftover meat loaf oblivious that his every move was being watched. Finally, Q cleared his throat.

Just as Deuce looked up to see them staring at him, Tremaine's feet could be heard pounding down the wooden staircase. Q counted the steps. When his youngest reached the bottom step, he chastised him.

"Boy, what have I told you about running down those stairs."

It dawned on Q that either T had leaped halfway down the stairs or he was being his usual sneaky self, eavesdropping on the landing. T refused to meet his father's stare as he rounded the corner and made a beeline to the kitchen.

Q yelled at him.

"Pull up those britches. If I catch you sagging one more time, boy, I swear I'm gonna' get medieval on your ass!"

Q shook his head in disgust.

"I wish to hell T's Mama would stop sending him 36 inch pants for his 28 inch waist. What should I expect though? She's a hood rat from way back. And to think she likes seeing our boys dressed that way! Serves me right for marrying her in the first place."

Q was lost momentarily as he tried to remember why in the world he had gotten involved with Adrienne anyway. It dawned on him quickly.

"Ass for days!" He whistled under his breath.

"Come back, Chibby!"

A desperate voice screamed upstairs followed by the thumping of feet on the chase. Within seconds, a small ball bounced wildly down the stairs with Monique in close pursuit. She was so intent on catching her pet ball she didn't realize she had an audience.

“Gotcha’!”

She looked up to find curious eyes on her. She recognized all the eyes except the ones that gave her a craving for a caramel apple. The sixteen-year old’s knees began melting from underneath her body.

The house was quiet for a change. The wind blowing through the trees sounded like low roaring waves hitting the shoreline of the Atlantic. The three teen-agers stared at their guest wondering what was holding up the introductions. Each shifted uncomfortably when no introductions seemed to be forthcoming.

Monique smugly inquired.

“Do you all have something you want to tell us?”

T chimed in with his best gangsta’ wannabe voice as he nodded towards Cristobal.

“Yeah! What’s up wit’ ‘dat!”

Q gave T a look that would freeze ice twice over.

“Son, for someone who’s never lived in the hood a day in his life, you sure are awfully ‘hoodish.’”

Q kept his last thought to himself, “Thanks to your mama, of course.”

Deuce was annoyed with the obvious immaturity of his siblings. He hurried over and extended his hand to Cristobal.

“I’m Quincy the Second but everybody calls me Deuce.”

Deuce’s smile lit up the room. With a melancholy look, he added, “I didn’t like being called Lil’ Q.”

Cristobal took his hand. “Me llamo Cristobal.”

The three youth were studying Spanish. This was among the very few things that they understood.

Monique coyly introduced herself next. As she looked at Cristobal, the lyrics from an old song played through her mind.

“Fever. You give me fever. Fever in the morning and fever at night.”

Beads of perspiration formed on her forehead like the ones that came from drinking some of Sara’s Jalapeno Pepper Tea. The burn slowly crept from the tip of her tongue to the tip of her toes.

T lingered back observing their guest with cool curiosity. He wondered how he would be able to use the information he was about to receive to finagle a few more moments on Play Station.

Q barked orders to the trio.

“Monique, put Chibby down and sit over there. Quietly please. And for once pay attention.”

The seriousness in Q’s voice told her that this was not the time to be her usual challenging self. She pouted her way over to the love seat and plopped down heavily.

Orders continued to stream from Q’s mouth.

“T, get your narrow ass back up those stairs and turn off that Play Station, TV, CD Player and hang up that phone with your cousin. Tell Daylight you’ll call him back. Don’t take a lifetime, Brother. For once move with a sense of urgency. Now, shake ass!”

Tremaine dashed up the stairs and was back down within moments. He sat on the floor nestled between the knees of Monique and Deuce.

Q cleared his throat and stood. He paced up and down in front of them for several moments without saying a word. The suspense of the moment stiffened the teens into sitting up tall and straight. Daring not to move, the three teenagers followed Q up the floor and down the floor with eyes only.

Sara cleared her throat. Q looked up as if seeing them for the first time.

“And that’s the way it is!”

He ended and plopped back down on the sofa.

Now they all looked at him in confusion.

“The way what is?” The three teens chimed in together.

Sara grew impatient.

“For God’s sakes Q, you had another one of your moments!”

Q was known for thinking he said something out loud when the conversation had only been in his head.

Q lashed out.

“I don’t know why y’all have such a hard time understanding me. You’ve gotta’ learn to listen better.”

His chastisement was for all of them including Sara.

Sara retaliated.

“Can’t understand what ain’t been said, Baby!”

She ended sweetly. The three teens nodded their agreement.

Realizing that Q was about to pop with stress, Sara gently caressed his hard apple bottom. He loved getting his “boo-boo” rubbed. It was an automatic stress reliever for him.

The three teenagers groaned, “Oh, not again, please!” They tired of the constant affection between their parents.

“Okay, here it is again!” Q finished leaving the three with their mouths dropped wide open.

## CHAPTER 2

Q was finally able to get all of the kids out of the house. After struggling through the language barrier with Cristobal, he found out that his newfound son loved playing NBA Live on PlayStation. He even played the game of basketball too. Q's chest puffed out.

“Apple don't fall to far from the tree.”

Discovering this small fact helped take some of the sting out of the announcement that there was a new, although older, addition to the family. Each kid had reacted differently.

T's first reaction was “Hope they don't think I'm givin' up any of my digs to this chump!”

Monique would have been more than happy to share her space with the handsome devil. She knew that would be out of the question.

As usual, Deuce stepped forward and invited his new big brother to share his room.

With that settled, eagerly the three had led Cristobal upstairs. Within moments, the four of them were engrossed in the basketball challenge of the century on PlayStation. Cristobal won game after game earning the respect and admiration of his younger siblings.

Before long they were downstairs begging for the keys to the Range Rover to take Cristobal to the neighborhood rec center for a “real” game of basketball. With one look from Q, they knew that there was no way they were going to get his pride and joy. They turned to Sara Grace. She handed the keys to her Mini Cooper to Q.

“Man, how are the four of us going to squeeze into that?” The three complained in unison. They knew that as their guest Cristobal would rate the passenger seat. That left at least two of them with their knees in their throats.

“Not my problem. It’s either the Mini or you can hoof it.” Q tossed the keys to Monique. “You’re in charge, Kiddo’. Don’t let these knuckleheads talk you into something foolish. Go to the rec center and the rec center only!” Q emphasized.

The last time they had let them loose with a vehicle, T had talked Deuce into driving them across town to play ball behind Lincoln High School located smack dab in the hood. Q had gotten a frantic call from Deuce when T had mouth off one time too many on the court. Lucky for them, Q had been in the area and was there within minutes. By the time he got there, one thug had pinned T’s arms behind his back and another had a broken beer bottle to his neck. Two other giant-sized thugs had Deuce pinned against the chain link fence.

Q jumped out of his black Range Rover swinging Yen Yiedee, a mahogany walking cane that had been hand carved by a Wagadou witch doctor during his tour in Monrovia, Liberia. The toothless man grinned with admiration as Q gave him his specifications. “Great medicine, great medicine.” He whispered as he drew his sharp blade along the mahogany.

Q had sat patiently, mesmerized as the stick began to take form. He extended his right hand to the old man. “My name is Q.” The old man repeated it politely as he bowed and cupped Q’s huge hand between his hands of sandpaper. “Me Diara.”

They were drawn into conversation over the week that it took to complete the job. Now every time Q looked at the stick he was reminded of the strength in the fingers, hands and arms of the toothless griot chanting as he worked to deliver his masterpiece. He handed the stick over explaining to Q that he had woven into every inch of the stick great medicine of protection for Q and his family.

Q was pulled from his thoughts of Diara by the moans and screams around him. He looked up to find that he and his boys were the only standing bodies for a two-block radius.

T and Deuce had looked on in shock as Q decimated thug after thug single-handedly, except for the help of Yen Yiedee. As each thug fell underneath the weight of Yen Yiedee, Q chanted, “Our well being.”

Unfortunately for the thugs, the well-being of Q’s brood had turned out to be to the detriment of those who would harm them.

T and Deuce stood looking at the aftermath thinking, “And this is the man that we piss off?” They vowed to themselves to never do anything else that might really piss off their father.

The incident had almost cost Q the election as each of the victims appeared on the local news. An hourglass with a circle in the center was forever imprinted on their bodies wherever the cane had landed.

Somehow, Jeremy, Q's campaign manager, had miraculously spun the episode to their favor. "What man wouldn't protect his sons, his family? Quincy Waters—Believes in Protecting Family at All Costs! Become Part of The Waters' Family--Vote Quincy Waters for State Senator."

Now that the house was quiet again, Q slipped into his office and made the call he had been dreading since this ordeal had begun. He had wanted Sara to be with him when he called but she had finally fallen asleep. At first, he was torn between waking her up or sitting through the call without the solace of her support. Remembering the look on her face, he quickly decided to make the call alone.

After a few rings, a cheerful voice chirped out a greeting that normally made his heart fill with joy.

"Waters' Campaign Headquarters. This is Gladys. How may I help you?"

Even Gladys' chirping couldn't take away the trepidation that spread throughout his entire body.

"Gladys, put me through to Jeremy, please."

Recognizing his voice Gladys became a bag of nerves.

"Right away, Mr. Waters, I mean Q sir."

He had been coaxing her for weeks to call him what everyone else did. The sixty something year old housewife turned receptionist was having a hard time making the transition. Tears welled up in her eyes as she kept fumbling around with her words and the buttons on the phone.

Finally in his most soothing voice, Q told her step by step how to transfer his call. From what he had gathered from Jeremy and everyone else calling his office, he was the

only one who had this effect on Gladys. Everyone else called her the songbird of his campaign chirping her melodious greetings to all who called.

Within moments, Jeremy was on the line.

“What’s up Q? Gladys said it’s urgent.”

Q heard the edge of concern in Jeremy’s voice.

“Better sit down man. This one is no joking matter.”

Q recounted the whole story to Jeremy who sat quietly long after Q had finished.

Finally he breathed out calmly, “Let me get back with you, man.”

Jeremy had the coolest demeanor of any man Q had ever met on any of the seven continents. Nothing seemed to rattle him.

As soon as Q hung up, Jeremy drew the blinds closed to his office. He turned off the lights, opened the bottom drawer to his desk and took out a pink feather duster. He swept it across his meticulously organized desk.

At the end of each stroke, he banged it on the desk and whispered, “Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!”

He repeated this ritual several times.

After several moments, he gently returned the feather duster to its’ lone space in the drawer. He opened his blinds and then walked out of his office as if nothing had happened. He needed time and space alone. This was big and would require every ounce of his finesse if they were going to be able to weather this storm. Q’s entire campaign centered around family and protecting it at all cost. Jeremy wasn’t sure how the surfacing of a long lost son that Q said he had no idea existed until today would play out.

Right now with only a few months left until elections, it smacked of disaster; worse yet, defeat.

### CHAPTER 3

With the kids out of the house, Sara walked upstairs to lie down. Her heart pounded with fear of losing Q as had almost happened in the not so distant past.

“Would he let this tart back into his life as he had done with Toni?”

Sara was pulled back to that time five years earlier.

Everything had been progressing beautifully between them, or so Sara had thought. They had spent another weekend wrapped in the warmth of each other’s arms. Sara couldn’t believe her good fortune in having found him. She had all but given up on finding a lasting love.

Six months before she met Q, she had realized that after being divorced for three years she was finally ready for her life partner. All of the men she had dated so far came nowhere close to fitting the bill.

As a last ditch effort, her constant prayer had been, “Lord, just send me who you want me to have.”

After all, God certainly couldn’t do any worse than she had done. All of the choices she had made up to that point had been, at best, disastrous.

As if by magic, early one Saturday morning, Q breezed into her life. Sara had been sitting out in the courtyard of Trabuco Hills High School, Home of the Mustangs,

waiting for Monique's basketball game to start. It would be Monique's first time playing on the Saddleback Valley Recreation Basketball League. At the last second, Sara had signed her up for it.

The large tree shaded her from the sun. Sara was totally engrossed in her book, *The Dream Giver*. A cool wind blew across the courtyard prematurely flipping over her page. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him for the first time walking up the steps towards her. Her heart had pounded so loudly that she thought for sure he had heard it. He walked by and gave her a quick nod of disinterest. Sara's breath caught in her throat. She was sure she was suffocating.

No man had ever had that effect on Sara before. He walked into the gym leaving Sara underneath the tree with her mouth hanging open and with a burning desire that was new to her. As soon as the door shut behind him, Sara jumped up and scurried into the gym. When she stepped inside, he was maybe five feet away. Her heart pounded so that her Adam's apple pulsed in and out. For fear of someone seeing it about to jump out of her throat, she covered it with her hand

Not sure what to say but sure she had to say something, Sara walked over and said the first thing that came to mind.

"You remind me of my brother."

This time, to her surprise, he responded with great interest.

"Oh yeah! Where does your brother live?"

"H-m-m," she thought as she watched his mouth form the words.

"What I wouldn't give to taste those."

His lips reminded her of juicy plums. Her eyes were glued to his lips as she responded dreamily.

“He lives in Friendswood, Texas. That’s a little town outside of Houston.”

Before she had barely finished the sentence, he exclaimed in recognition, “I know where that is. It’s one of the places that I’m thinking about living when I retire from the Marine Corps in about a year.”

“Really?”

Sara was flabbergasted. She gathered her composure.

“Wow! What a coincident! I’m thinking about retiring and living there also.”

He blinked in disbelief. Then a sudden spark of recognition lit his eyes. His heart leapt with hope.

“Maybe, just maybe, this is my prayer being answered.” He whispered to himself.

For the next few weeks they were together every chance they got. On their very first date, Q came clean with Sara.

“Look, Sara, I’m not looking to be somebody’s something to do. I’ve had plenty of chances for that. I’m looking for that one woman that I can spend the rest of my life with. If you’re of the same mind, let’s continue to talk. If not, let’s not waste each other’s time.”

It was music to Sara’s ears. She could hardly contain her joy when she sent a short prayer God’s way.

“Thank you, Jesus!” She whispered.

Q went on to tell Sara the story of his life and his most recent breakup with Toni. He had thought that she was the one. But when it came time for Q to return stateside from Hawaii, Toni refused to come with him. He had begged her, promised to marry her and finally left her in Hawaii. Q was so sure that he was over Toni that Sara didn't detect any semblance of regret or desire to return to that relationship.

When Toni showed up on Q's doorstep after a blissful weekend with Sara, Q was shocked. Just seeing her brought back those old feelings that he had been certain were gone. Within minutes they were in each other's arms. Within an hour, Q was calling Sara Grace to tell her how sorry he was for misleading her.

"Sara, I swear to you, I didn't know I still loved her until I saw her. I know this doesn't make it right. I know this is hurting you but right now I'm torn. I do love you but these feelings I have for Toni are still alive. I need time to think this through and figure my way out of this confusion. And I can't see you until I get this straight. Please forgive me."

Sara almost lost her cool façade but managed to hold on. All she could think about was, "Forgive you? I want to murder you!"

Instead she calmly told Q to take as much time as he needed.

"I did fine without him before. I'll done fine without him again. Won't I?"  
Doubts sieged her as she choked on her tears.

She hung the phone up and sank down onto her bed. The tears finally found their way to her eyes. She was unable to stop them from making her face a river basin.

"How could he do this to me? How could he have made himself my home and then yanked himself away without the slightest hint of warning?"

For a second she hated him. All of the love she felt for him flooded her heart, rolling in on the very next second. She covered her head with her pillow and cried.

“Why God? Why did you bring him into my life if you were just going to take him away?”

She spent the next few days wallowing in the void Q had left in her life. She cried on the way to work. Throughout the day, she closed her office door and boo-hoo’d her eyes out. On her way from work she cried even more. Crying was fast becoming a way of life for her. This went on for about a week.

Sara had done her usual crying routine driving to work. When she stepped out of her car, she was overwhelmed with the question she couldn’t seem to find the answer to.

She cried out and looked to heavens, “Why, Lord? Why?”

“Sara, this is not about you, girlfriend!”

Sara looked around to see who had yelled at her. She saw no one. Before she could reach the door, she heard it again only louder this time.

“Sara, I said this is not about you, girlfriend!”

Peace settled over her like a warm blanket. She finally felt the strength to release Q.

She reasoned to herself. “I guess it’s not just about me. Who am I to stand in the way of true love? Even if it’s not with me.”

Not even a few moments ago, the mere thought would have sent Sara into another crying spell. Now it seemed to comfort her. She rested in the solace of the thought. Then her heart filled with joy as she discovered that she had loved as she had never loved before.

“What an awesome feeling!”

She thought. Then she stopped and gave God praise.

“Thank you, Father, for letting me have true love at least once in my life.”

Sara realized then that her heart had reached a height of joy that could never be taken away; not by heartbreak nor by loss either. She smiled as her heart leapt with joy at the memory of that love. She knew then that she would be all right.

Sara’s luminescent smile returned to her face. She all but skipped through the rest of the day giving thanks to the Lord for her good fortune of having met Q and falling in love with him. She thanked God for expanding her heart far beyond its original borders. Upon realizing that her heart would never return to its old limits, she whispered over and over, “Thank you, Father, thank you.”

For the first time since their breakup, Sara began thinking of other things. Monique was tops on her list.

“Thank you, Father, for letting her be in Florida for the summer with her Dad. Thank you for not letting her go through this turmoil with me.”

A few more weeks went by. Sara still thought about Q. Whenever he came to mind, she said a prayer of thanks and released him quickly back to God. There was no denying that she still loved him but she was willing to let him go if that was what God wanted.

Her final good-bye to Q was on the night of her retirement party. She was determined to have the time of her life. As she stepped out of her car, Sara gazed up at the stars in the clear night sky blanketing Laguna Beach.

She whispered, “Good-bye my love. I release you forever.”

Faces from the past and present greeted her at the restaurant. After a wonderful dinner, the party moved to the nightclub on the second floor. Sara danced the evening away without a care in the world. By the time she got home, she hit her bed and fell fast asleep. She didn't get up at her usual 5 am time. Instead, she lazed in the bed until early afternoon.

Sara picked up her evening bag to place her things back into her everyday Dourke and Dooney handbag. She noticed her cell phone had several missed calls. To her surprise, Q's number registered on it. Her fingers shook as she checked her voice mail. Her body shook as she listened to her message.

"Sara, I love you. I'm sorry for all that I've put you through the last few weeks. I'm ready to come home. Please take me back. Before you decide, read my email."

Sara couldn't believe her ears. She replayed the message again. Then she turned on her laptop and read the email message. Now she couldn't believe her eyes.

"Could it be true?"

It was. They had been together now for several years. For the most part, Sara had put the whole "Toni" thing behind her. This situation with Cristobal had made those old insecurities creep back into her mind.

She vowed then and there, "I'll welcome his son with open arms, but I'll be damned if some other woman is gonna' come up in this house and take any piece of my man!"

**CHAPTER 4**

“I knew it! I should have followed my instinct years ago when I thought I had a piece of me out there. Shit! The only thing that could be worse now is if Cecelia comes knocking on the door. Damn, I didn’t even ask him about her. All I need now is Baby mama drama from another country. Hell, I don’t have skeletons coming out of the closet I have whole damn families.”

Q’s thoughts were driving him mad.

He settled back in his favorite chair and closed his eyes.

“I need to call Jeremy. I’m not hiding and I’m sure as hell not running from this. I’m gonna’ do what’s always worked for me—Stand and be a man!”

Q stood at attention and briskly walked over to the telephone. He had just grabbed the receiver from its cradle, when it rang. It startled him. Q caught the receiver just before it hit the marble floor. Quickly gaining his composure, he saw from the caller id that it was Jeremy.

“Hey Jeremy.”

“Q, I was just thinking about this new development.”

“Excuse me!” Q interrupted him.

“This isn’t a development. This is my son! I’m sure of it!”

Jeremy could not get a word in edge wise. Judging from the stress in Q's voice he thought it best to be quiet and let him get out whatever he needed to say.

Q took a quick breath and continued.

"Anyway, Man, we need to talk about this. I'll be there in a few."

Q suddenly remembered that it was Jeremy who had called him.

"Sorry, Jer. What did you want, Man?"

"Nothing that won't hold for a few moments. See you in a couple of ticks."

Q grabbed his keys and yelled to Sara, "I'll be back in a little while! Gotta' meet with Jeremy!"

He tried rushing out the door before Sara had a chance to dig in. He didn't quite make it.

"Wait up, Mister! Well, what are the sleeping arrangements going to be around here? Do you want us to wait for you for dinner or do you want to go out to eat as a family?"

Q's forward motion stopped instantly. It dawned on him that he had let the kids out of the house without any idea of who they would say Cristobal was. He tried to remain calm but beads of perspiration popped out on his forehead.

"Sara, call the kids right now and tell them not to say anything to anyone. Tell them I said to get their asses home right now!"

He paused. "The last thing I need is for an illegitimate son to be plastered across everybody's flat screen on the six o'clock news."

"Don't worry, Baby. Go do what you gotta' do. I'll take care of the home front."

Q breathed out with relief. He knew he could count on Sara. A long slow kiss told her how much he appreciated her.

Sara stood breathless for a moment after he released her.

“How did I get so lucky?” Looking deep into her eyes, he whispered.

“How did I get so blessed?”

She whispered back and then whacked him across his butt.

“Now be on your way man! You’ve dragons to slay and not a moment to spare.”

Moments later, Q pulled in front of the storefront that served as his campaign headquarters. His timing was perfect. Jeremy was just walking out. He opened the door to the Range Rover and they rode off in silence.

A few blocks down the road, Q broke the ice.

“Any ideas yet on how to handle this?”

Jeremy hesitated. Q was intensely private when it came to family issues. Jeremy wasn’t up to fighting Q on this. His mouth had opened to tell Q that they had to come clean when Q began talking.

“Man, I need to come clean with this. I can’t be a man and turn my back on my own son, now can I? Besides, problems like this can’t be run away from. As soon as you stop running, they’re right there waiting for you.”

Now it was Jeremy’s turn to breathe out a sigh of relief.

“I’m glad you said that, Man. I do believe that coming clean quickly is our best course of action. The question is how do we break the story?”

A victorious smile slowly crept across Jeremy’s lips.

“Remember that cute reporter that reminds you of Allison Stewart from CNN?”

“Man, how could I forget Jade Bush? Bam! If it weren’t for Sara Grace, that young lady would be in SERIOUS trouble.”

Jeremy was lost in the uneasy thoughts he had been having about Q. He never had imagined himself ever being attracted to another man. But there was something about Q that tantalized his senses.

Jeremy quickly pulled himself back to reality.

“Judging by the way she was looking at you, Q, you’d be the one in SERIOUS trouble.”

They both took a few moments to laugh and then Jeremy turned his attention back to business.

“Why don’t we let Jade break the story? She’ll become the latest news “Phenom” and maybe just maybe give us a little gratitude to boot!”

“I like it.”

Q nodded his approval but not before teasing his friend.

“Looks like I ain’t the only one that was looking at her fine ass!”

Jeremy flushed red thinking, “Man, if you only knew! The only fine ass I’ve been looking at is yours.

He mustered out in a serious tone.

“This is strictly business. We make this deposit with Jade now and it’ll be like taking stock in our own media company. We will own her, especially once you win this election. We’ll give her first rights to your exclusives. In return, she’ll remember the investments we’ve made in her career. If we ever need to make a withdrawal, so to speak, we’ll have a media person in our back pocket.”

“I’m liking the way you think, Man.”

Q and Jeremy touched fists in the “Brotha’s” dap. The touch sent tingles down Jeremy’s spine.

It was times like these that Q had to do a double take just to make sure that Jeremy was white.

“Man, you sure you don’t got some coffee in your cream?” He teased his long-time buddy.

“No, but I sure would like to put some of my cream in your coffee.” Jeremy dare not let his face betray his thoughts.

Instead he confided, “And Yeah Q, I wouldn’t mind tappin’ that fine ass of hers!”

He relished in the thought that Jade would make a fine substitute.

“Hell, I’m just finding out about ass you had years ago, Playa! And I thought we were tight. Members of the “No Secrets” Club, right?”

The car grew silent except for John Legend singing “Ordinary People.” Both men were lost in their own worlds. The song ending was their cue that their brief escape was over.

“Okay Jeremy, so when do we get started?”

“The sooner the better! I’ll make the arrangements. I think the interview should be done at your house?”

“Why the House, Man?”

“Q, your whole campaign is centered around strong family ties. What better way to show it than letting the community into your home with your family?”

“I see your point.”

“You remember the dog and pony shows you use to do in the Marine Corps. This is no different. We will control every aspect of information that goes out from now on with this. By the way Q, I’m going to need to speak with your “latin love child.”

Q raised a brow.

“Come on, Man. Really, what do you know about this kid besides he showed up on your doorstep? Did he know you were running for office?”

Q pondered the senselessness of the question.

“Of course not, Man! How would he know?”

“I’m just trying to protect your interest. Depending how things go with your latin love child...”

Q interrupted Jeremy before he could finish his sentence.

“Look, Man, his name is Cristobal. Just start calling him by his name, okay!”

Jeremy threw his hands up in the air.

“I surrender. I can do that. But Q, there are serious questions that need some serious answers. For instance, where is Cristobal’s mother? Is she going to be showing up on your doorsteps in a few days?”

Q shuddered at the thought. His imagination ran wild thinking of Sara and Cecilia together under the same roof. The results would be nothing short of the Pompeii explosion in ancient Greece. He could see the headlines.

“Dallas blown clean off the map!”

Jeremy pulled Q back to the present.

“On the other hand, your new found son has just put you over the top with the Hispanic community. Hell, the more I think about it, the more I like it! Before, you just

had your adoptive father who had Spanish ties! If we play this thing right with Cristobal, you'll be LEGIT with the Hispanic community.”

“Man, I don't know that I feel right about using Cristo like that!”

“Q, don't start having a stupid attack on me now! It's either use Cristo or be used by everybody who doesn't want to see you in that Senate seat. Are you with me, Man?”

It didn't take Q long to see truth in Jeremy's advice.

“Yeah, Man. I'm with you.”

## CHAPTER 5

Noises downstairs aroused Sara from a deep sleep.

“What now?” She thought.

Her eyes squinted open just wide enough to see Q enter into the room. The bed dimpled slightly under his weight. He leaned forward. The love in his heart was transparent on his face as he watched Sara lying there.

“Kids should be here soon.” Sara whispered groggily.

“Soon?”

The smile at the corners of his mouth telegraphed his intentions. His lips brushed down across hers. His face rested inches from hers. They lay there for several moments breathing each other in and out. Soon they were intoxicated on the simple sweetness of their essence. Passion swept them away into a land of their own. They remained in each other until the moment of cataclysmic explosion.

In his next breath, Q rolled onto his back. They both drew in the fragrance of their love deeply into their lungs. The aroma of their sex was an elixir to their minds.

“How much do you think we could market this for?” Q breathed.

“Priceless.”

Sara melted in sheer satisfaction.

“Damn!” Q sat up and looked at his watch.

“Sara, we have a press conference here, at the house, in less than two hours.”

Sara recoiled. The only thing she cherished more than her family was their privacy. She did everything she could to keep their lives normal. Her love for Q had driven her to make more concessions than she had ever dared to imagine. It was his dream to be in politics not hers. She would have been perfectly happy for him to remain as the Principal of DeSoto High School.

“Q, you promised.”

The betrayal she felt was hard to hide in her voice or her eyes.

“I know, Baby. But I never expected to have the events of today when I made that promise.”

Sara turned and whispered.

“Whatever.”

There was no point debating the issue. Time was ticking fast. Before she could get another word out, the doorbell rang.

“Wonder who that could be? I hope not another son.”

Q pulled his clothes on quickly and rushed to the door.

“Come on in, man.” He called up the stairs.

“Sara, honey, it’s Jeremy.”

Sara breezed down the stairs. She and Jeremy embraced.

“Always a delight, Sara Grace.”

“Ditto.”

Sensing tension in the air, Jeremy’s face reddened in a light blush.

“Did I come at a bad time? I can come back.”

“No, not at all.” Sara offered with more cheer than she felt.

“What can I get you to drink, Jer?”

“The usual.”

His face lit in admiration as he saw Sara shaking up his usual martini.

He was surprised as she poured two glasses instead of the usual one.

Sara held the other glass in her hand in a toast.

“Here’s to families and sons unbeknown.” An almost malicious giggle wafted through the air.

Jeremy shifted uncomfortably as her words mingled in with the clinking of glasses.

“Well, I sense a bit of hostility.” He braved.

“Hostility?” Sara breathed out incredulously.

“I wouldn’t call it hostility. More surprise by the days events.”

“That’s understandable Sara. Are you sure you’re going to be able to get through a press conference?”

He pondered out loud as he looked towards Q for direction.

“Do I have a choice?”

Sara looked him dead in the eyes.

Jeremy cleared his throat.

“Q, is this going to be a problem? Maybe I should give the two of you a moment alone.”

The silence in the room was stifling. Q and Sara stared each other down.

Q finally cleared his throat, “Sara, are we clear on this now?”

“Crystal as Swarovski.”

Sara smiled with calm clarity. In three gulps, her martini was gone.

“I guess I’d better lay out some appropriate clothes for the kids before they get here. Q, you and Cristobal are about the same height so I’ll just pick out something for him from your closet. It may be a little big but that’s how the kids are wearing their clothes nowadays anyway. ”

With that, Sara excused herself and disappeared up the stairs.

Not long afterwards, the three teens rushed into the house with Cristobal in tow.

“Dad, you’re not going to believe it! We hooped out everybody at the rec center. Guess we won’t be hearing no more crap about being the Prinp’s crew.”

T had barely finished his sentence when Monique chimed in.

“Yeah! Cristo was beyond phenom!”

She rattled on amorously.

Deuce gave his older brother a proud dap on the fist. Cristobal blushed under all the admiration.

“Well, I’m glad you all had a great time. But now I need you to settle down and get serious. In a little while, a reporter is going to be coming over to interview us. At that time, we’ll be breaking the news about Cristobal.”

Q paced nervously before continuing.

“I’m expecting each of you to listen to what Mr. Jeremy is going to tell you and then do exactly as he tells you. Am I clear?”

They each nodded including Cristobal though he wasn’t quite sure what he was agreeing to.

T waved his hand excitedly in the air.

“Yo’ Dad! Tell me it’s gonna’ be that fine honey, Jade Bush, that’s comin’ over.”

He grabbed his crotch like he’d seen guys do on BET videos.

Q paused before speaking. His calmness raised even the hair on the back of Jeremy’s neck.

“T, I’ll tell you this. If you come down here with some of your ghetto bullshit, I swear you’ll never touch another Play Station game as long as I have breath in my body.”

The glare in Q’s eyes put them on alert.

“Now go upstairs and change. Sara Grace has laid out what you’re to wear. And I don’t want to hear a thing about what she’s picked out for you.”

The three teens and Cristo made their way towards the stairs. Q called after them.

“And T, boy, if you come down here with that grill in your mouth, it won’t be long before you’ll find it down your throat. Am I clear, son?”

“Yeah Dad, crystal!” He ran up the stairs.

The doorbell rang. Q looked at his watch. It was too early for Jade and her crew. Jeremy stopped him before he reached the door.

“I hope you don’t mind but I took the liberty of getting an interpreter to work with us and Cristobal.”

“Mind? Good thinking, Jeremy.”

Q patted Jeremy affectionately on the shoulder. The touch reminded Jeremy of his earlier misguided stirrings for his friend.

Q opened the door to find the cutest chocolate drop of a woman staring up at him. He was mesmerized by the black eyes and deep dimples setting off a smile of beautiful white teeth. She extended her hand.

“Hello, I’m Kendra Usher.”

Jeremy stepped out of Q’s shadow rescuing his speechless client.

“Q, Kendra is the interpreter that I told you about. She’ll be working with Cristobal and us this evening.

Q swallowed hard. This would definitely be a test. One thing he found irresistible was a beautiful, chocolate woman. If he wasn’t careful, Kendra could spell real trouble for him. He lowered his eyes and invited her in.

“Welcome. May I offer you something to drink?”

“No, I’m fine. You have a lovely home, Mr. Waters.”

Kendra admired the rich yet eclectic elegance of her surroundings.

“Thank you. Please call me Q. Everybody else does.”

Sara Grace breezed into the room. Jeremy quickly made the introductions.

“Mrs. Waters, I was just telling your husband how beautiful your home is. Who’s your decorator?”

“Decorator? Child, please! This is a just a collaboration between me and my sweetness.”

Sara lovingly slipped her arms around Q’s waist and stared up at him in complete adoration. He brushed her forehead with a loving kiss, lingering long enough for his breath to drift down to her nose. His eyes teased her with the blissful time they had spent together that very afternoon.

Jeremy cleared his throat. Sara turned her attention back to their guest.

“Please call me Sara Grace. Everybody else does.”