

(subplot)

husband, Isley Brian Keyes, was cheating on me.

"Oh, man, check out Ken and Barbie," Centavis howled as he let us in. "Jus' 'bout to do this liquor. Have some?"

Isley shrugged. "Why not?"

I requested lots of ice.

Centavis rolled his beady red eyes. "The girl don't want to get nice. Isley, whatchoo marry her fo'?"

Isley squeezed me around my waist. "Cause she good in bed, man." Centavis couldn't stop laughing as he handed me a short glass filled with ice chunks and rum.

"Damn, Ice Dog, you tellin' me somehin' I might want to find out!"

"Keep dreamin', Centavis. Isley don't share."

"Ain't Isley I want to know 'about. I want to know what you share," Centavis leered.

"I said, 'Really, Centavis, you need to learn some manners.'"

"Teach me, Ga-tina."

Isley's silence frustrated me and I rolled my eyes at the two of them.

"I'm going to talk to Keisha. I know she'll give me some intelligent conversation.

Keisha was spraying her thick jet-black Goddess braids with a sweet-smelling oil sheen when I entered their bedroom. It was the same deep blue and black as the rest of the apartment. Tall green stalks set in heavy blue ceramic pots—that were scattered around the seventh-floor apartment, guarded the four corners of their waterbed. A musky smelling incense burned slowly in a ceramic holder on the chest of drawers to the left of her three-mirrored vanity.

She stopped humming to the Vesta love song blasting from the stereo. "Hey, girl, with them damn stacks on, Manute Bol comes to yo' shoulders."

I snorted. "And with your stacks on, you and Tadoo still don't see eye to eye."

She laughed. "So whas up with you other than you and the Green Giant are twins?"

I let that one slide.

"Nothing other than the fact that your man is obnoxious."

Keisha laughed. "What you mean by that?"

"I should say that he and Isley are assholes."

"Oh yeah?"

I nodded. "Hell yeah...I know the two of them are frat blahblah but still....Isley lets Centavis get away with too damn much, girl. He is too damn nasty and I am tired of his little boy games."

"Oh come on now, Tina, girl. You know it's all in fun and games....'Sides Cents is a good mood....He chill...."

"Bull, Keisha. He's drunk and that 's no excuse because he acts this way all the damn time."

"You are really upset, Tina? Damn, Cents been talkin' to you like that for years....Why are you all swoll now?"

"I don't know....I guess it's all getting to me."

Keisha joined me on the cushioned window seat. "What you mean?"

I bit my lip. "Keisha, have you ever been....uh, suspicious and had no damn reason to be suspicious?"

"Suspicious? Who are you suspicious of?"

"Isley."

"Tina, you aint talkin' to me right....Go 'head on with what you want to say."

"I want toreally. But I just don't know how....I guess it's nothing, I mean, Isley loves me. He does. He said so."

Keisha finished her beer and reached for the pack of cigarettes on the vanity. "If you say so, Tina."

"I did say so."

"My husband, the man who promised to love, honor and cherish me forever last Valentine's Day, could be planning a rendezvous with another woman."

"Don't sound like you too sure."

I huffed at her that I was most certain of myself.

She nodded. "Uh-huh....Damn, I hope Cents stops somewhere 'cause I am hungry as hell."

I was grateful that she changed the subject. "Keisha, why don't you cook?"

"Cook? Are you mad, Tina? Why should I have to cook when I have a man who can take me out to eat?" She spritzed perfume behind her ears and between her cleavage. "Thas what restaurants are fo'. After three years at Golden Corral and Dizzie's, I want somebody to wait on me fo a change." / *character would*

"Uh-huh, well I hope his drunk ass isn't driving 'cause if you ride with him you'll have more than dinner to worry about."

Her Newport and two bottles of beer were a memory as she slid into her platform shoes and clipped on a pair of gold earrings.

Gently, she fingered the braids that circled her head. She looked like a cone with a swirl of chocolate ice cream on top.

"Tina, don't lecture....I am ret to go. How 'bout you?"

I followed her into the living room where Centavis and Isley were talking in hushed tones.

The empty bottle of rum sat on the chaise lounge like a forgotten child.]

"Man, I don't know 'bout dat....I mean how you 'posed to do dis?"

Centavis was saying before Keisha in-

terrupted him.

"Ya'll ready?"

Centavis jumped. "Baby Girl! Why the the hell you sneakin' up on me?"

"Taint sneakin'! Ya'll aint sayin' nothin' I want to hear 'bout."

"Hmpff."

"What is up, Isley?"

"Nothing much....You and Gatina finished chitchatting?"

I nodded. "Yeah....Did we interrupt you and Centavis?"

Isley shook his head. "No."

"G o o d ."

We exchanged tight smiles as Keisha discovered that the rum was also a memory.

"Damn! Whatchoo do, Cents? Put a straw in the bottle? I

am ret to get mine on and ya'll drink up everything fo' I can get to it..."

Centavis frowned as he put a bottle of beer to his lips. "Girl, you know you'll get yours later....We be ready when I finish dis."

"Haven't you had enough?" I asked. "Gatina, let the man just finish it, so we can go."

"In a hurry, Isley?" I wondered, giving him a sweet smile.

He shook his head. "No, but I'm tired of sitting around here."

Centavis wobbled up and patted his pockets. "Lemme find my keys....I think they in the room."

"I think you betta leave 'em in there. We can take Tina's car...Right, Tina, girl?"

"I think you betta shut up thinkin'....Go get my keys, Baby Girl."

"Centavis, baby-"

He gave her a swift kick to the ass that hurled her out of the room. "I think you betta go get them damn keys."

Isley looked at me, then, turned away. "Centavis, you..." Isley's glare cut me short.

I tried not to let it worry me but every five minutes I was checking the rear and side view mirrors of Isley's car.

"They gone be okay."

"You amaze me, Isley. So damn calm when you know you're wrong."

"Now what the hell does that mean."

"You should've stopped them."

"It's none of my business...It's none of your business. You know that Cents is

gone do what he wants to do."

"NO DAMN GOOD, ISLEY!!! Sometimes I think you're scared of him."

"This isn't what you want to do, Gatina."

"Do what?"

"You don't want to go there with that....This isn't what you want to fight about."

"Do you have something for us to fight about?"

"I don't want it to be a fight, Gatina. I think we can talk about it like grown folks instead of yelling like children."

"You are willing to take that risk, Isley?" Isley drove in silence until we reached the Warehouse District on waterfront's edge. Warehouses that onces bulged with tobacco during ancient auctions now housed restaurants and chic boutiques. La Nailz, the trendy nail salon, was a block over from the glitzy Nightlife. Vermena's, named for and operated by Isley's grandmother, was two doors down from La Nailz. River City considered having a business in the Old Tobacco center sophisticated.

"Isley?"

"You want to do this now?"

We cruised by people who had shed themselves of the rat race's combat gear for the camouflage of the night. Men dressed in the silk shirts and women with heads bombarded with hair spray mingled on the sidewalk. The thought that one of those women could be that faceless voice awaiting the arms of my husband haunted me until we found a park, and entered the club.

"Do you want a drink?"

I shook my head.

"Well, I need one."

I watched him weave through the bobbing crowd until he reached one of the three moving bars. The moving bars crept along so that the drunkest patron wouldn't fall on his ass while purchasing another drink.

"Girl, you need to get a life."

"Oh yeah?"

Keisha plopped into the iron-backed chair beside mine. She had this dreamy look on her face and a glossy look in her eyes. "Hell yeah. Who you lookin' fo'?"

"Y o u ."

She shook her head in slow motion. "Naw...You know where I am."

"How long have you been here?"

She shrugged. "I have no idea, Tinaaaaa.....Lets go get a drink." "What's your poison, Miss?" asked the bulky bartender.

"Club soda for me...and, Keisha, what about you?"

"Ahh, vodka and O.J. Simpson...I mean orange juice."

The bartender returned with our drinks. "Here you go...Hey, where's your friend?"

I turned around to see that Centavis had a strong grip on her....

FICTION continue on page 12

Describe scene

inner life of character

description Exposition - use of selective focus -