

CHAPTER ONE

Dr. Charlotte Tate tilted her head, uninterested in what she was listening to, even though her face said otherwise. It had to. Her 15-year career as a psychologist required its neutral expression as she sat across from one of her patients, Sarah Dickinson, a woman whose progress after a year and a half seemed to be moving at a snail's pace.

Dr. Tate shifted in her chair trying to reengage her attention back onto Sarah who seemed to be sucking the energy from the room with her long, drawn out talking. She checked the time on clock behind Sarah. *Fifteen more minutes of this. I'm going to have to cut this short. I can't take too much more of her today*, she thought to herself, taking a deep breath. She could feel her body drifting further into boredom with each word Sarah spoke about her broken relationship with her mother. Dr. Tate cleared her throat hoping it would cause Sarah to take a break, but it didn't.

"Have you tried talking to your mother, Sarah? Telling her exactly how you feel." Dr. Tate interjected.

"Every time I try she always brushes me off and brings up my sister and what she's doing or what her kids are doing. She doesn't care about me. She never has." Sarah wiped away tears. "I was the mistake. I was the child that wasn't supposed to be born. Sometimes I wish I never was."

For the first time in a year and a half Sarah had spoke words that hit Dr. Tate in a way she hadn't felt in quite some time. So much so that she leaned forward, wanting her to repeat her previous statement. "What did you say?"

“I said I was the mistake. My parents were satisfied with my brother and sister and didn’t want any more children. And oops, here I come. I was the accident.”

“I’m sure you weren’t a mistake or an accident Sarah. I’m sure your mother loves you very much.”

“Telling your child you wish she had never been born on more than one occasion is a great way of showing you love her.”

Dr. Tate looked at the clock again. “I’m actually going to end our session a little early today, if you don’t mind,” she said standing up.

“Ok. Sure.” Sarah took her co-payment from her wallet and handed to Dr. Tate as she stood up.

Dr. Tate took the payment and walked her over to the door. “See you next week.”

“Okay.”

“Take care.”

“You too, Dr. Tate.”

Dr. Tate watched Sarah until she got to the elevator doors and then went back inside her office, shutting the door. “Whew Lord! I don’t how much longer I can do this. I mean, damn, it’s been a year and a half and it seems like we’re getting nowhere.” She shouted, knowing that her office door had twice the thickness of standard office doors for patient confidentiality.

She felt her frustration level on the rise and sat down at her desk. *Calm down. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.* As boring as the sessions with Sarah usually were, she couldn’t shake the words Sarah spoke out of her head. *A mistake.* The same words her mother spoke about someone whom

she loved years earlier. She grabbed a yellow W.B. Mason pad from the drawer she had designated just for them. A back-up in case her iPad malfunctioned. She wrote:

September 8, 2011

10:00am

Sarah again! It has been a year and a half now since I began sessions with her and it seems as if she wants to talk more about her past than move on from it. I've given her numerous tools to help her move forward and it seems like she doesn't want to use them and it's beginning to become frustrating. And not even with just her. My career in general. Lately, I've been wondering if I even want to continue being in my profession. I feel stuck. Bored with it. It's been fifteen years and I still don't feel fulfilled.

But today's session with Sarah did bring you into my mind. Not that I haven't thought about you. I wonder about you. I wonder how you are, if you're married now, with any children of your own. I often think about looking for you, but like I said in my previous letters, I wouldn't know where, or how, to begin. There's not much I know about you. Let me stop, I'm starting to sound like Sarah. You've heard me say that too many times before. You know, I'll never stop loving you. You will always be in my heart. I love you, B.B.

Charlotte.

She slowly put down the pen looking at yet another written letter. It had been 31 years since she had last laid eyes on him and the not knowing him still hurt more than the events of the day he left. She folded up the short letter and placed it in an envelope and wrote the date on the front.

There was a tap on the door and her eldest sister Kenya peeked inside. “Hey Girl, you ready?” She asked walking in further, her curvy frame hugging by every inch of her gray business suit.

“Yeah, just let me grab my purse.” Charlotte dabbed the corner of her eyes with a tissue not wanting to smear her makeup, looking in the mirror on her desk. She was good. She grabbed her purse from the drawer and tucked the envelope inside. “Where’s Tamara?”

“She said she’s going meet us there.”

“Figures.” She closed the drawer and walked from behind her desk. “Ooh, I like that suit. Where’d you get it from?”

“Macy’s.” Kenya answered.

“I like it. It looks good on you.”

“Don’t it?” Kenya posed.

“I figured we’d go to Darryl’s since it’s closer.” Charlotte said.

“Good. Since my lunch time will be shorter than usual today.”

“Big case?”

“No, too many little ones.”

“I have to stop at the bank first if you don’t mind.”

“That’s fine.”

Charlotte locked the door as they stepped out of the office.

Charlotte walked into the Westinghouse Bank, its interior was old and wide like the banks used as sets in Hollywood gangster films. She smiled and waved to one of the associates she had

come to know well since she opened the account ten years ago. This account was private, one not shared with her husband. Its value too sentimental to shared with anyone, especially him. She walked up to the bubbly, brunette teller who greeted her with a big smile like she always did, reminding Charlotte of a Crest commercial.

“Need to make a deposit, Mrs. Watson?” asked Courtney.

“Yeah.”

The teller placed her “next window” sign on the counter and walked Charlotte past the gate guarded by two big security men. “How is everything?”

“Everything is well. How’s your little boy?” Charlotte asked as they walked into the vault room that housed numerous safe-deposit boxes.

“He’s doing good. Now that we got his diabetes under control, he’s doing real good.”

“That’s great,” said Charlotte

“Here we are.” The teller unlocked the case and pulled out the three long boxes and sat them on the silver table. Charlotte lifted the cover off of the first box and it was completely filled with envelopes. She took the cover off of the second and it mirrored the first. She lifted the cover of the third box and it was on its way to becoming like the previous two. Some envelopes had discolored over time. She took the envelope from her purse and placed it inside the box and stood there marveling at them all. She couldn’t believe how many she had written. Ten-thousand, three-hundred and ninety-nine letters. One envelope for each day of her life since 1980. They were her diary. Her story. And she hoped for the day when she would share them with the one person who needed to read them.

“All set?” asked the teller.

Charlotte cleared her throat. "Yeah."

She walked out and the teller covered the boxes and placed them back in the safe deposit box, locking it. Charlotte walked back through the bank questioning herself as she did after every deposit: Did she really want to find him after all these years?

"Everything okay?" Kenya asked standing up.

"Everything's fine. Let's go."

CHAPTER TWO

Boston • October 1979

Fourteen-year-old Charlotte Watson sat on the front cement steps of her brick tenement in the Orchard Park projects watching the neighborhood kids play in the courtyard. The section for which she, her mother and her two older sisters resided was the hangout, where the other residents within the multi-building housing development came to hang.

She continued to watch the children, most of whom she knew, play as a group of mothers, whom her mother called “loose lips”, sat on the stoop across from her discussing the word on the street.

It was a clear, warm, Spring-like day and Charlotte was shivering inside like the temperature was twenty below. She was scared, nervous, sitting there alone trying to imagine what her mother’s response would be to what she had to disclose. Her mother was a woman of conviction - strong and stern who believed in the word of God. She didn’t spread the words of the Bible to every set of ears that she came in contact with, but Sunday attendance at Twelfth Baptist every week was mandatory.

Charlotte looked down at her palms and rubbed them against her jeans trying to remove the perspiration. She wasn’t your average stereotypical teenage nerd. She was a non-glasses, beautiful, bright bookworm who wondered where her logic went when she decided to close her books one afternoon and open her thin-long legs to the Captain of the basketball team. She was the golden child. The one whose pedestal stood a little higher than her two sisters Kenya and Tamara at least in her mother’s eyes.

Kenya was a replica of their mother, but dark and tall like their father. Fierce. Smart. 5-foot-9 and 18 years old her curves were beginning to fall into the right places catching the attention of most, if not all, of the boys in her senior class, but between work, school and college preparation, she barely had time for the boyfriend she was seeing so little of now.

Charlotte let out a sigh of relief noticing that the car pulling into the parking lot didn't have her mother behind the wheel. The anticipation was dreadful. The mystery of not knowing whether or not her life was going to cease to exist was electrifying, but not in a good way.

Sixteen-year-old Tamara stepped out of the building slurping an orange popsicle and sat down next to her. Tamara was the second oldest and took pride in how she looked to herself and to others, loving the spotlight whenever it shined upon her. Spending more than the allotted time in the bathroom causing her sisters to bang and yell outside of the door for her removal. "Don't y'all know beauty takes time," she'd shout from inside the bathroom, leaving her sisters as steamed as she did the bathroom mirror after her long, over-the-top sung showers.

"Did Mama get home yet?" She asked slurping on the popsicle.

"No," said Charlotte coldly.

"What's wrong with you?"

Charlotte didn't answer, just let out a breath, hoping her sister got the hint to leave. She loved her, but Tamara's mouth was bigger than Grand Canyon and Charlotte knew her business would be all over the projects faster than a speeding bullet if she told her of her plight.

"Fine then. Keep it to yourself. I don't care." Tamara slurped on the melting popsicle. "Tell Mama I'll be at Paula's if she's looking for me."

Charlotte kept quiet as Tamara walked away. She closed her eyes at the sound of squealing car brakes in the distance. Her leg began and her palms began to sweat again. The sound of her mother's car brakes were distinctive. She slowly moved her eyes in the direction of the parking lot, terrified. Her mother exited the blue '73 Chevy Impala which her father left behind when he walked out, six year earlier, into the arms and the bed of another woman who was much younger than her mother.

Carol Watson was tired as she grabbed her bag from the back seat. Her day at the Department of Children and Families was long and difficult. She waved to the gossiping mothers on the stoop as she headed towards Charlotte. She was an average-heighted woman with a skin tone and the facial features that resembled actress Pam Grier whom most people that she was at first glance. She welcomed the comparison, at times, depending upon her mood.

Charlotte felt a piece of her life slip away with each step her mother took in her direction. Everyone and everything seemed to move in slow motion as she tried to keep her focus on the tree in the distance in front of her trying not to give off any hint of a problem. She swiped her index fingers under her eyes trying to remove any wetness as her mother walked up. Tamara, not far away, noticed their mother approaching her sister and quickly made her way back. Her nosy radar on high.

"Hey," said their mother.

"Hey Ma," said Tamara.

Charlotte remained silent.

"I said Hey."

"Hi Ma." Charlotte said lowly.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing.”

“Well, something must be wrong for you to be sitting here looking sad and...crying.” She lifted her head and noticed the dried tears. “What’s wrong? Come on, we’ll talk about it in the house. Y’all know I don’t like my business all in the street like some people around here.”

Carol looked back in direction of the mothers on the stoop and waved. Charlotte got up from the stairs and walked in, her mother and sister following suit.

“Where’s your sister?” asked their mother.

“At work,” said Tamara.

“I thought you were going to Paula’s.” Charlotte said in a disapproving tone not wanting her sister around.

“I changed my mind. I’ll see her later.”

They entered the piss-scented hallway of their building and journeyed up the two flights of stairs to their three-bedroom apartment, one of ten in the whole complex. Carol unlocked the door and they walked into the spotless apartment. Everything neatly in its rightful place. Quietly and quickly, Charlotte made her way to the couch, sitting down, wanting to gain distance from her mother. Carol locked the door and put her purse on the coat rack, dropping her keys in the dish on the small end table near the door.

“Okay, you’ve been very quiet a lot around here lately I noticed. What’s going on with you?”

Charlotte didn’t answer.

“You better answer me when I ask you a question.”

Charlotte's stomach churned as she worked up the little courage she could to answer her. She lowered her head scared. "I'm pregnant," she mumbled.

"You know I don't like it when you mumble. Come here."

Charlotte got up from the couch and walked over to her, body trembling.

"Now what did you say?"

Charlotte looked into her mother's eyes, tears streaming from her eyes. "I'm...pregnant."

"Ahhh!"

Carol's slap stung her face like a bee. Tamara stood off to the side in disbelief at the words that came from her sister's mouth and the slap that followed.

"How dare you? How dare you embarrass me and not to mention this entire family with this mess?! Huh!"

"I'm sorry."

"Shut up!" Carol screamed slapping her again. And again and again. Charlotte covered her face with her hands protecting her. "How could you, huh?! How could you do this to me?!"

"Ma! Stop!" Tamara shouted running over, separating them.

"Whose is it anyway?! Whose child is that?! That Keith boy?! Huh!"

"Yes." Charlotte cried.

"Did you tell him?! Does he know?!" Carol yelled trying to catch her breath.

"No."

"Good. Keep it that way."

"Ma...I'm sor—"

“Shut up! You’re an embarrassment! You better be glad you’re still standing. Now get out of my face!”

Charlotte cried herself into her bedroom and closed the door. Tamara stood next to their mother like a deer caught in the headlights still trying to wrap her mind around what had just happened.

“Do something with yourself.” Carol snapped at Tamara as she sat on the couch.

Tamara headed for the door.

“And you keep your damn mouth shut.”

Tamara didn’t respond.

“Did you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“I swear Tamara if you say any—“

“I won’t. Gawd.”

“You better not.”

Tamara walked out.

Carol held her head in her hands still in disbelief at the words that came out of her youngest daughter’s mouth. *I’m pregnant.* The words made her head ache. She was beyond pissed. She was storming mad. And hurt. *Why would she do that?* She thought. How could the child she favored a little more in her heart than the oldest two do this to her? Those words were the last things she wanted to hear from any of her daughters, especially her.

Carol sat back on the couch wanting to hurl something across the living room, but there was nothing she didn’t feel like replacing later. “Why me Lord? Why my daughter?” She leaned

forward rubbing her face with her hands. Her mother, Mae Anne, was right Charlotte was like her in more ways than one.