

Before I Say “I Do” Book 1

Chapter 1

I met Devon soon after my grandmother was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was as if God knew exactly what I needed.

I’ve been a church girl all of my life, and started attending Gerry Lane Church as a child. Always quiet and shy, I would typically sit there and not say a word. Our church was small, and we rarely had visitors. But one day, I noticed this new guy there with his mom, dad, and sister. I’d seen him a few times from the second row, but it never crossed my mind to approach him, or even wave hello from a distance.

“Raquel, you see that new guy back there?” Auntie tapped my leg. “He cute, ain’t he? You should get to know him.”

Without turning around, I knew exactly who she was referring to. I glanced over my shoulder, and saw Devon standing in the back of the church talking with some of the other young men. He was definitely fine. I decided Auntie was right. I needed to get to know him.

The following Sunday, I moved to the last row of seats to get closer to Devon. I wasn’t ready to say anything to him yet, but I wanted to see what I could find out about him. Of course, I also wanted to be sure he saw me too.

During praise and worship, I noticed he had a lovely singing voice. It was deep, and he sang louder than most of the men in there. That voice did something to me. Devon was also the best well-dressed man I’d ever seen. Always in a tie, crisp shirt, and slacks, his look was masculine and mature.

In my eyes, Devon was a real man. I wanted him to be mine.

I had been through some very short relationships in the past. I was ready to get back out there. I wanted to explore whatever the world had for me. Wasting more time isn’t an option.

I noticed Devon glancing at me a couple of times, but after a few weeks of flirting—eyes only—he still hadn’t said anything to me. Taking matters into my own hands, I suddenly got bold and gave him my number. He called me that same night.

He shared that he wasn’t looking for anyone, but he was glad that we had found each other. Even that first night was something special. From the start, we had a connection that I had never experienced before. I knew at that very moment that it was a bond that I wanted to have forever.

Devon and I talked about everything, our pasts, relationships, and families. He spent a lot of time taking care of his sick father, a retired, registered nurse. The way he looked

after his father—taking him to doctor’s appointments, paying his bills, and doing all of the grocery shopping—let me know how loving he was. Usually, women stayed in the house and did that kind of work.

We started dating quickly and spent a lot of days and nights together. When I was around Devon, I didn’t want him to leave and he didn’t want to go. I felt that I had finally met someone I was on the same page with. Devon’s parents loved me too and wanted us to get married. When he asked me how I felt about marriage, I told him it would be nice, but we had only known each other for three months.

I am not one of the Kardashians. I was not about to just up and marry him. I kept the thought in the back of my mind. I had to think wisely. I loved him, but I couldn’t rush into anything.

When I met Devon, I had a two-year-old daughter, Missy. From day one, she fell for him too. She clung to him like he was her biological father. He played with her all the time, and I had never heard her laugh as loud as she did when he came around. Seeing them together put joy in my heart.

Her father, Patrick, was not in her life like he needed to be. Like most women, I wanted a relationship with my child’s father. I tried to throw out hints about us being together after she was born, but he said that he wasn’t looking to be in a relationship. So I didn’t stress the issue. I wanted to try to make it work. Unfortunately, he didn’t. He got what he wanted from me, ran off, and moved to another state. To this day, he still lives there and hasn’t taken the initiative to move back to be closer to his child. Typical negro.

At first, Patrick’s absence from our lives bothered me. When I met Devon, I stopped caring. If he didn’t care anymore, why should I? Devon put my mind in a whole different place. Patrick wasn’t worthy of me anyway. Devon was.

Devon met my grandmother, but she couldn’t fully engage with him like I am sure she would have if she was in good health. When he introduced himself, she just looked up at him and rolled her eyes. In her mind, no man that has ever come around was good enough for me.

He knew my grandmother was all that I had, and if anything happened to her, I wouldn’t have anybody. Devon reassured me that I didn’t have to worry about being alone. He said he would be there. That put my mind at ease. I am sure Missy didn’t want him to go away either.

He was a real man. When he saw something that needed to be done, he did it—no questions asked. He took the initiative to cut the grass at my grandmother’s house. Until I met Devon, I swore real men were hidden in a cave somewhere, only coming out for a little while. If she’s lucky, a woman can snag one before he goes back into hiding.

Auntie called me twice a week to be nosey about what was going on with me and Devon. She saw how happy I was with him, and was excited for us too. She was the only person

in the family that I felt comfortable sharing my business with, which was good since nobody else in the family cared enough to ask.

“Has he bought up anything about marriage?” she asked.

“He has. Devon has been pressing the issue of us getting married ever since his mom brought it up. I could see her as my mother-in-law. She is really a sweet lady.”

“Go Raquel, Go Raquel, Go!”

Devon and I talked about marriage a lot. Whenever we did, his eyes got big and he was full of anticipation. That’s something special when a man is that excited about wanting to marry you. He made me even more eager about the idea.

Even with all of Devon’s suggestions about marriage, I still had not said yes. First of all, he had not proposed. He was just talking about us getting married. There’s a difference between talking about it and actually doing it. I needed to know he was serious. I wanted a ring and a real proposal.

The following week, Devon showed up at my door with bags of groceries.

“Did you eat yet?” He stood on the porch, looking adorable.

I shook my head no.

“Good. I want to cook for you.”

“Ok, well come in then.” I held the door open for him and he made his way to the kitchen.

I smiled, and couldn’t help but hear Auntie’s voice in my head.

Go Raquel, Go Raquel, Go!

I had a winner in this one.

“So where is your grandmother?”

“She has been in the hospital all week.” I said while I watch him take the groceries out the bag.

“oh no that's not good, I was hoping to meet her.”

“You are coming over here to cook in my grandmother’s kitchen; are you sure you want to meet her in that condition?”

“What condition?”

“My grandmother doesn't let anyone cook in her kitchen, even during her sick days she tries to take over as if no one can cook better than her”

“I can win her over with my cooking”

“If she was her you would not have made it this kitchen to win her over”

“I can charm all women, even the old ones.”

“Good luck, the most you'll get from her is the evil eye.”

“I came within the right week then”

“You sure did. So what are you cooking?”

“BBQ chicken and Collard Greens”

I place my hand over my heart. “Any piece of meat with BBQ sauce on it and served with collard greens is always two combinations that you can't go wrong with”.

“I was going to make the the potato salad too but It's store bought, I hope you don't mind.” “I had to cut corners a little bit.”

“I'm good with it as long as it taste good”

“I've had this kind before, it has a good taste.”

Devon stops cutting up the greens and turns toward my way. “Do you like soul food?”

“Of course I do, you took a fine time to ask me that. You are in the middle of cooking.”

“I just thought about to ask.”

“No you just assumed that just because I'm African American that I eat soul food too?”

“That is so stereotypical but I did think that though.”

Devon adds the greens to the water of boiling ham hocks. I lean against the kitchen counter to admire this man standing here causing this aroma to flow through the kitchen. He evenly distributed seasoning on each piece of chicken and placed it into the oven to bake. The 2 bottles of BBQ sauce were poured into a boiler to make his special sauce.

“You are making your own sauce?”

“Yeah the bottle stuff is okay but it's better when you do your own thing with it.”

“I dipped my finger into the sauce and he was right, it tasted so much better.”

“So while we are waiting on the food, tell me how was your day?” Grabbing Raquel's hand.

How was my day? No one has ever cared how my day has been. I was ecstatic to answer.

“My day went well. Thanks for asking. How was your day?”

“Same old. I took my dad to dialysis, came home, cooked dinner.

“You cooked earlier too?”

“Yeah”

“And you are cooking again?”

“Yep, why are you shocked?”

“There is no way I would cook twice in one day if I didn't have to.

“My dad is a diabetic too so I have to be careful with what I cook and how I cook it.”

What kind of man is this? God don't make them like this anymore.

Devon excuses himself from the table and checks on the collard greens.

“The collards are good to go, we just need a few more minutes on the chicken.” He baste the chicken with his BBQ sauce and popped it back into the oven.

Devon comes back over and takes a seat. “We will eat in a few minutes.”

“I can't wait.”

He grabs Raquel's hand again. “When I saw you at church I said to myself, Wow she is pretty but I had just got out of a situation and I wasn't sure if getting back into a situation was the right thing to do.”

“Please tell me why you are calling a relationship a situation?”

“When it's not going good, it's a situation.”

Raquel laughs because she knew there was some truth to what Devon had just said.

“I got it now.”

"I don't know about you but I'm tired of dealing with situations."

"I am too."

"Alright." Devon rubs his hand together. "We are thinking alike and that's amazing."

"You weren't the cause of the situation, were you?" Before I get all excited about this man that can cook, I needed to know.

"Devon Johnson no, not me."

A man will never tell on himself. He leaves it up to the new woman to find out on her own.

"The food should be done now." Devon looks at the chicken and pulls it out.

"It's ready." As I get up to fix my plate, he tells me to remain seated. He fixes my plate and puts it in front of me.

I start clapping at his food presentation. The food was not touching

"What are you clapping for?"

"Good job on the food presentation."

"Thanks I try my best to impress."

"Now let me see how your food taste"

"These are the crunchiest collard greens that I have ever eaten."

"I like my greens crunchy." Devon was eating so fast and Raquel was still chewing on the first bite a few seconds later.

"They do have a good taste even though it's taking me a long time to chew."

"You are going to have to get used to my crunchy collard greens woman." Devon and I looked up at each other at the same time and laughed.

We continued our conversation from earlier after dinner. The intelligence that flies out of that man's mouth makes him even more appealing to me. His dark skin and ball head complimented each other; 6 feet 6 inches of nothing but chocolate.

Devon pulls me in close to him on the couch.

"So Raquel, since you know now that I can cook, are you ready to get married?"

“After one cooked dinner and I'm supposed to say, sure let's go get married.”

He grabs tight of my hand and rubs the back of it, then looks deep into my eyes as if he is looking into my soul and says “I love you, I want you to be my woman forever.”

I almost quickly said yes, and then I caught myself when he opened up his mouth again and said “but you have to sign a prenup.”

He created a beautiful moment when he looked deeply into my eyes and killed the moment quicker than a bullet can kill.

“Devon really?” “From my understanding a person gets a prenup signed to protect the belongings that they had before they got married. So what belongings do you have?”

“I have a 2 bedroom house and a car.”

Raquel wanted to bust out and laugh but out of respect for his feelings she held it in.

“You drive a PT cruiser, trust me, I don't want it. Those cars look like mini buses.”

“Devon laughs himself.”

“And if I wanted to try to take a house from someone, it would it be a 2 bedroom house. It's not like you are a millionaire and have a mansion somewhere.”

“How can you be so cute and sassy at the same time?”

“I just stating the facts and if you think that I'm the type to come into your life and take something from you then we don't need to be talking about marriage.”

Raquel stares at him with absolute disgust. Her arms are folded and couldn't believe what Devon had just said.

“I'm sorry but my 1st wife took the first house in the divorce and I purchased the 2 bedroom house all by myself. I just want to have reassurance in my heart that I will always have my things.”

“Let me share something with you, any man that I marry has to trust me as I do him and if you don't trust me because of some crazy stuff that you have already been through in your first marriage then you are not ready to marry anybody right now until you get over your trust issues.”

“Why are you offended?”

“We are in the beginning of a new relationship. The slate should be wiped clean because your past had nothing to do with me. This home that we are standing in right now will

be left to me if my grandmother passes away so if you want me to sign a prenup then I should be getting you to sign one too.”

“I just want to marry you. If that's what it takes then I will sign your prenup. Get it together and I will sign it as long as you sign mines.”

Devon leaves the room. “I'll be right back.”

Devon goes to his car and walks back in with papers in his hand. He unfolds it and hands it to Raquel.

With a puzzled look on her face she replies “what is this?”

“The prenup.”

Raquel snatches the papers out of Devon's hand and goes through them only to discover that it's a 5 page prenup.

“5 pages Devon.” Raquel turns her body sideways to make sure she is looking at him to figure out if he is for real.

“Yeah it's 5. I had to include everything that needed to go in there.”

“You typed this up yourself.”

“Yes I did.”

“It doesn't take 5 pages to protect a house and a car.”

Raquel scans over the prenup closely and her eyes grew big.

“There is hardly anything in this prenup about your house that you are so scared of losing. I do see that this prenup states one hundred and one ways that you want me to have sex with you.

“What's wrong with that?”

“You need to get that kind of woman then because I don't so tricks. Just call me plain Jane. How did you come up with one hundred and one ways? Are you a sex addict? If so you need to let me know know because this prenup is speaking sex addict loud and clear.”

“See here's the thing, I was extremely bored with my 1st wife and I don't want to be bored the second time around.”

I took it as a serious joke because he joked all the time. There was no way he was serious.

“I know this is a joke Devon, but i'm going to go ahead and sign this stupid prenup because it's so stupid that it would not hold up in court and I love you back so there.

Raquel signs the prenup and hands it back to Devon. He had the biggest smile on his face because I had signed it. That prenup must have really meant something to him. He hugged me and said thank you.

I knew that Devon was a smart man with a degree in engineering, which meant that he had the potential to get a good job and support me and my daughter. I put that prenup out of my mind and carried on with our relationship.