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LOVE MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

THREE UNIQUE EMPOWERING STORIES



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AND ALMA COLLINS THOMAS

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From the LOVE, MARRIAGE, & DIVORCE Anthology

UNEXPECTED LOVE AFFAIR

by *LaQueisha Malone*

CHAPTER ONE

Deshay sat nervously at the little round table in the corner of Starbucks, which was her favorite spot to visit every morning before her shift at Say N’ Slay Hair Salon. She sat and enjoyed her usual hot white mocha Frappuccino and carrot cake. She didn’t have to be at the salon for another couple of hours, so she thought she would meet Felicia before going in.

Deshay and Felicia met their freshman year in college where Deshay, a Cosmetologist, studied Business Management and Marketing while Felicia studied Psychology. Deshay saw herself owning a franchise of salons and Felicia chose to be a Social Worker. They both were tall with high yellow skin tones. Deshay had natural waves that hung long down to the middle of her back. Her mother was white, and her dad was black. Felicia had more of an olive skin tone and even though she had a diva cut with her natural curl pattern she kept it tucked away under sew-ins and quick weaves. *Mixed Chicks* is what they called themselves.

Once a month they would meet up at the coffee shop, and afterwards, go shopping. This wasn’t their usual date and time to meet up, but Deshay insisted her friend meet her.

She fumbled through her purse until she stumbled upon the little gold box she had neatly placed in a zip lock bag. Her hands were sweaty and clammy as she rubbed over the plastic letting her fingers run over the grooves of the rectangle object. She inhaled and ignored the thought to get up and walk out. She had been waiting two weeks for this day. There was no turning back. It’s either speak now or forever hold her peace. Closing her eyes, she exhaled and depleted her lungs of air before returning her breathing back to normal.

“Hey, girl.” A loud voice came from behind her.

It was Felicia. Deshay stood and extended her arms to her friend. Even though it had only been four days since their last sit down at the coffee shop, Deshay needed her friend badly. She missed her. This conversation wouldn’t have been fitting over the phone.

“I’m so glad you came,” Deshay said embracing Felicia.

“Me, too. I can’t stay long, though. I have a meeting with a family in an hour. It’s so sad. Some of these kids today don’t stand a chance with these trifling mothers.” Felicia began to rant and rave. She sat her briefcase on the floor before sitting down. Frustration was written all over her face.

She went on and on about the families she had dealt with in the last few days. “I swear some people just shouldn’t be allowed to have kids.”

“Well, no need to ask you how your day is going, dang,” Deshay said with disgust. “I couldn’t be a Social Worker. I’d be in jail somewhere.”

“What about *your* job? I couldn’t be a Cosmetologist,” Felicia mocked. “All them whiny females wanting you to be their therapist. Uh-uh, you don’t get paid enough for that.”

“Touché,” Deshay said lifting her Frappuccino to her lips. “But don’t forget. You’re one of them same whiny females that sit in my chair every other month.”

“So what’s up? I know you didn’t call me here to go back and forth about our jobs, cause I can give it to you all day long.” Felicia laughed snapping her fingers.

She was right. That wasn’t the reason she was there. The reason was far more important than a job. Deshay braced herself for the kill of telling her friend a secret she had been harboring for weeks. Something she wasn’t sure she wanted to hear said out loud. As long as her thoughts stayed in her mind they were safeguarded, protected, and free. She knew the moment she repeated them she could never take them back...pretend she hadn’t said anything at all.

“You know Quan, and I have been together for a while now, and—”

“Awhile?” Felicia said interrupting. “Let’s try three months, but go head. Continue.”

“Three months or whatever,” Deshay reiterated. “But anyway, you know we’ve had a few minor problems or whatever—”

“Minor? Let’s try him cheating on you with your cousin, putting his hands on you, oh, and what about the baby he has on the way that he just so happened to forget to tell you about until the baby momma ran up on you in the salon. Who, by the way, he’s still sleeping with.” Felicia counted down on her fingers. She couldn’t stand Quan. She was all too happy to point out his flaws; building a case against him every time his name came up in their conversations.

“Oh, my God. Can I finish,” Deshay rolled her eyes. “First of all, we don’t know for sure that he’s still sleeping with his baby momma, and for the record, he slept with my cousin before we got together. I didn’t even know about it until he mentioned it to me once he found out she was my cousin. And far as him putting his hands on me, that was one time. See, this is why I don’t like telling you stuff. You’re always throwing it up in my face.”

“It’s the truth,” Felicia said with little concern.

“I know it’s the truth, but you don’t have to be like that. You’re my friend, and when I come to you for support, I expect that. As much as I’ve supported you, I think I deserve that much.”

Deshay was right. They had been through the thickest of the thick together, and anytime Felicia needed her she was there. “I’m sorry,” Felicia said as her entire mood changed. “It’s been a long week, and you’re right. I didn’t know it was this serious. What’s going on?”

Tears filled the corners of Deshay’s eyes, and her bottom lip began to quiver. She wasn’t sure if her emotions were driven by the harsh words of her friend or from something far more complicated within.

“Aww...Shay, what’s really going on?” Felicia said seeing the emotional state of her friend. “What has Quan done now? Cause I know, it’s him. Only he can have you this upset. Do I need to take him to church, and baptize him with the holy steel...make it rain bullets? You know I’ll do it.”

“No, Felicia,” Deshay interrupted. “And where you get a gun from anyway. Who do you think you are? One of Charlie’s Angels?”

“Girl, I had to after that incident a couple of years ago with one of the families I was dealing with. But that’s not the case,” Felicia shrugged off the questions. “You my girl, and you ain’t all swollen in the face for nothing. Now, what’s up?”

Deshay slid her package across the table. She watched intensively as Felicia carefully opened the zip lock bag and pulled out the golden box. The anticipation sent Deshay’s heart rate into overdrive. Soon her secret will be revealed. Just the thought of someone other than her, and the good Lord, of course, knowing what was in that box made her want to retract. It wasn’t too late to take it all back, grab the box and walk out of the door. But it *was* too late. Felicia had already opened the box and within seconds, it went flying back onto the table.

“How stupid can you be?” She said with a chuckle. Her eyes read disappointment. “You’re pregnant.”

Tears streamed down Deshay’s cheeks, and she hung her head with embarrassment. She was happy she was pregnant but hated her situation. She knew her, and Quan weren’t ready for a baby.

“Does he know?” Felicia asked.

Deshay shook her head no. She wanted to tell him. Matter of fact, she planned to do so tonight.

“Good.” Felicia quickly began thinking. “You can’t be that far along, so you still have time to get rid of it.”

Deshay jumped up from her seat. She wouldn’t do such a thing. She didn’t have the energy to deal with Felicia and her rudeness right now. She thought her friend would set aside her hate for

Quan long enough to be there for her. She was confused, lonely, and now friendless. Lost for words she pulled a twenty-dollar bill out of her purse, threw it on the table, and headed for the door.

CHAPTER TWO

Quan cruised down the street in his old-school orange and black Capris with his side chick Yandy laid back in the passenger seat. What was supposed to have been a quickie turned into an all-night love fest. He had lied to Deshay telling her he had to work a double so that she wouldn't have cause to worry why he was out all night. When he called her this morning while Yandy was in the shower, Deshay had told him she was meeting Felicia at Starbucks. He knew that meant she was probably going to be late going in. He knew that when Felicia and Deshay were together, it always resulted in hours of shopping and gossiping.

Quan and Deshay had been together for three months now. That was the longest he'd ever been in a relationship with a woman. Usually, he would play it cool, and when they began catching feelings he would drop them, but not Deshay. It was something different about her that made him give her whatever she asked for. When she told him she wanted a monogamous relationship, he said yes. When she asked that he move in and bring some of his clothes, again, he said yes.

He knew that being tied down to one woman wasn't what he wanted, but he was willing to try for her. Everything was going good until he met Yandy at a club. She was sweating him hard. She had a bold attitude that turned him on. They kicked it and had sex that first night. He swore he would never see her again until one day she came strolling out of the salon where Deshay worked. He was only there to pick Deshay up, but when their eyes met, he knew he was in trouble. Would she say something? Would she do something to make a scene? She did neither. She just looked at him with that look in her eyes, and he knew he had a ride or die.

"Baby, we can't keep doing this," he said.

"Doing what?" Yandy asked innocently, from the passenger seat.

"You know what. I can't keep spending the night at your house like this. My girl is going to trip when she finds out."

"You think I'm worried about your girl," she said, massaging her way up his thigh.

He wanted to resist her. He planned on letting her go, but he would be a fool to pretend her sex game wasn't needed in his life at the moment. He looked over at her in her painted on purple, gray, and black print leggings, and relaxed to her hypnotic touch.

Deshay had been distancing herself from him lately. It was causing his needs to go unmet, which Yandy was too happy to fulfill. His cell phone rang interrupting their groove. The name on the screen read *WIFEY*. He put his finger to his mouth letting Yandy know to be quiet.

"Hey, baby," he answered the phone. "I was just about to call you."

"Where are you? I need to see you right quick before I head to work," Deshay said through the other end. "Felicia and I had this argument, and I just need you right now."

"Is everything ok?" He said quickly removing Yandy's hand. "You sound like you've been crying."

He may have been a player, but when Deshay was upset it touched a part of him, he wasn't used to having touched. Yandy sensed she was about to lose, so she resorted to the one thing that usually always got her what she wanted. She began kissing Quan's dark chocolate neck and nibbling on his ear. She knew she had him when he began stuttering.

"You coming home tonight, or do you have to work?" Deshay asked.

Before he could speak, Yandy had covered his lips with hers. Her quick reaction caused him to swerve almost hitting a curve. He pushed her off of him and cursed.

"Hold on," he yelled into the receiver then he muted the phone. He pulled the car over to the nearest parking lot, and yelled, "Are you crazy?!"

Yandy disregarded his question as she took his hand and placed it between her thighs. She knew that was the only thing that would make him stay, and she was willing to play the game if it got her another night with him. He unmuted the phone to hear Deshay on the other end in a panic.

"Everything's fine. Calm down. You know how crazy these people drive out here." He laughed it off. "Baby, listen, I won't be home tonight. You see, my boss called, and I have to pull a double. I'll catch up with you in the morning when I get off, and we can talk about whatever went on with you and Felicia. Okay."

He ended the call without waiting for a response. Felicia and Deshay fighting was nothing new to him. It wasn't anything that couldn't wait until tomorrow. It probably had something to do with him, anyway. He turned his attention to Yandy, who sat in his leather seat half naked. Looking at her caused his body to respond instantly as he picked up where she left off.

CHAPTER THREE

Deshay was thirty minutes late to her station at Say N' Slay Hair Salon. She pulled into the parking lot and rushed inside.

"Good morning," she said heading towards the bathroom without taking notice of anyone.

She hadn't even paid attention to her boss, Bambi, who was yelling at her for being late and how much it was going to cost her. The truth is, she didn't care. If it wasn't for her needing the cash to pay her bills, she'd get up out of there and become a traveling stylist with Bonner Brothers, the number one leading hair company in the world. Couldn't just anyone get in...you had to be *the* one. And this Fall they were starting their Hair Showcasing Tour introducing some of the best hairstylists in the states. Kitchen Beauticians was the theme for the show this year. There would be one representative from all fifty states, and one grand prize winner will win \$50,000 to start their own Hair Salon. Casting calls for the representative spot in Arkansas were only three days away. Getting it together wasn't the problem, keeping it together was the issue.

Deshay hurried to the bathroom and shut the door locking it behind her. She stared at the swollen face that reflected back to her in the mirror. It was evident she had been crying, but she refused to give any of the nosey woman in the salon anymore of her business. She turned the water on splashing it on her face. She blotted her face with a towel and freshened up her makeup. *Keep it together Shay* she chanted in her head a couple of times before she heard banging on the door.

"Hurry up, Shay, you have customers waiting," her boss, Bambi, yelled through the door. "You know how I am about customer satisfaction. Get your butt out here now!"

"I'm coming! I'm coming," Deshay yelled back. "Just give me a sec."

Deshay gave her face one last look in the mirror and then looked down at her midsection. She was no more than six weeks pregnant according to her last menstrual cycle, but that didn't stop her from poking out her stomach, posing from side to side in the mirror. She laughed at her silliness and then flipped her hair.

"I make this look good," she said.

She opened the door to Bambi standing with her arms folded and tapping her foot. She really wasn't in the mood to deal with her boss, so she smiled when Bambi reminded her of the rules at Say N' Slay.

"I get it, and I'm sorry," Deshay apologized. "It'll never happen again. I promise."

"You and Yandy think y'all can come up in here whenever you feel like it. Uh-uh. Not on my time. Keep it up, both y'all sneaky behinds gon' be unemployed," Bambi said waving her *Marvel Iron* in the air.

Deshay was used to her boss going off about something, so she ignored it and put on her smock jacket and tied her apron. When she entered the floor, she noticed Yandy hadn't gotten her station together either.

"Hey girrrl," Yandy yelled in her most ghetto accent. "I see you late too, huh?"

"Yeah," Deshay laughed.

Yandy wasn't a curvy woman like Deshay. She was very thin and tall. Most people would say she should be a model or on someone's runaway. But Yandy wasn't on that; she wanted herself a baller. A high-roller. A fast money-maker.

Deshay stood behind her chair and motioned for her first client to come over to the wash bowl. It was Willie Mae Jones, an older lady in her mid-60's. Everyone called her Aunt Mae. Deshay had been doing her hair for a few years now and adopted her as her grandmother.

"Sorry, Aunt Mae, for the delay. I hope you can forgive me," Deshay said wrapping a cape around Aunt Mae's neck.

"Oh, baby, it's alright. We all get a little tired in the mornings when we baking." Aunt Mae winked at Deshay.

"What you talking about Aunt Mae, I don't do very much baking," Deshay laughed. "And when I do it's usually around the holidays."

"Aww...Mae you know Shay can't cook," Yandy yelled from her station.

"Yes, I *can* cook. You the one who can't cook," Deshay said trying to defend herself.

"Whatever," Yandy said tossing her long blonde weave over her shoulder. "I'm just saying my grandma always told me, 'The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.' Maybe if you cooked more, you wouldn't have all these problems with yo' man."

Deshay felt Aunt Mae grip her arm. She was ready to tear into Yandy, and pull all thirty pieces of track from her bald head. *Who does she think she is talking about what's going on in my house? She should be worried about finding her own man*, Deshay screamed to herself. She said a few other choice

words, but all in her mind. She had enough respect for Aunt Mae to let it slide for now. But *only* for now.

“Speaking of her man,” Aunt Mae said loudly. “He came by here while you were in the bathroom.”

“He did? What did he say?” Deshay asked.

“He didn’t say much of anything. He dropped off some trash and left.”

“Trash?” Deshay laughed. “Aunt Mae, what are you talking about?”

“Girl, you know Aunt Mae ain’t got it all. She just be running off at the mouth. I don’t even think she knows what she’s talking about?” Yandy interrupted their conversation.

Aunt Mae firmly gripped Deshay’s arm pulling her closer. “Baby, keep your friends close but keep your enemies even closer. Listen to what I say, chile.” She laid her head back in the wash bowl.

The words rang in her ears over and over. It was an unforgettable song she heard her grandmother say to Felicia their Sophomore year in college. She made a mental note to call Felicia and ask her about it once they were on speaking terms again.

By the time Deshay finished her last client, her head was spinning, and her stomach was nauseated from being around all those chemicals. Her back felt like it would break in two, and the sharp pains in her lower abdomen made maneuvering around a chore. Her appointment with her OB/GYN wasn’t for another couple of weeks. They said they couldn’t see her until she was eight weeks pregnant.

She was more than ready to see the first pictures of her little bundle of joy. Growing up she didn’t really have a close relationship with her father or mother. Truth be told, she didn’t know much about either of them. Her grandmother was granted custody of her when she was nine years old. Before that, she was always left at home alone.

After leaving work, she had to practically drag her feet into her apartment and threw her bag onto the kitchen counter. What a long day it had been. She couldn’t remember ever being so tired. She threw herself across the sofa and grabbed the remote, flipping through the channels. As usual, nothing was really on. She sat up Indian-style throwing the remote on the coffee table. Rubbing her stomach, she noticed how warm it was, and tears welled up in the corners of her eyes as she thought about the life that was being created inside her.

I promise never to leave you or forsake you. I promise to protect you at all cost, and love you unconditionally, she thought to herself. “I’m going to be the best mother I never had.”

Her cell phone rang interrupting her thoughts. She pressed ignore and curled up on the sofa holding a pillow. She wanted her moment to dream, to envision, and to wish for her unborn child. Within seconds, the phone rang again. Rudely she answered it.

“Hello!”

“How are you?” She heard Felicia on the other end.

“I’m good. Trying to sleep.”

“Look, I just wanted to apologize for early this morning. I’m really happy for you. You my girl, and I just would have rather you had your first child by a real man who was going to take care of you. And we both know Quan just—”

“Felicia,” Deshay interrupted. She really didn’t feel like hearing how messed up of a man Quan was. She knew that he wasn’t perfect, but what relationship is?

“I’m sorry, but I’m just saying,” Felicia continued. “You already know you’re going to be on your own raising this child.”

“Felicia!” Deshay shouted just in case she didn’t get the memo the first time. “I’m getting real sick and tired of you bashing Quan. No, he’s not perfect. Yes, he’s made mistakes. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were jealous because I have a man, and you don’t.”

The phone went silent. Deshay wasn’t sure if Felicia was contemplating what was just said or if she had hung up. The truth was the truth. It needed to be said. Felicia had been without a man for years. She had spilled her bitterness over to Deshay and her relationship, and Deshay wasn’t having it anymore.

“Look, I got to go,” Felicia said. Without waiting for a response from Deshay, she disconnected the line.

CHAPTER FOUR

Who does Deshay think she is? I'm single by choice, Felicia thought to herself, gathering files throwing them in her bag. She'd had plenty of men to come at her. Felicia may have been bitter, but she had good reason to be. These days the so-called men were actually little boys trying to fill grown men shoes. And nobody had time for that.

Felicia continued to straighten up her desk before heading home. It was well after seven o'clock, and whatever had not been done wasn't going to get done. It was no surprise that Felicia was still at work tying up loose ends on her cases. She had a special love for the children who needed her help, and she was going to do everything she could to make sure they had a good opportunity. She knew she couldn't help all of them, but it didn't stop her from giving it a try. She only wished someone would have been there to help her.

Growing up, Felicia was labeled a *ward of the state*. She never knew who her father was, and while she was in a residential treatment facility, for fighting and drug use, her mother had given her rights up. People were so judgmental back then. No one cared that at the age of twelve she was being molested by her mother's boyfriend. They saw Felisha as a trouble-maker, not a troubled child.

She was so thankful when she met Deshay's grandmother in the grocery store a few months after being released from the system at eighteen years old. She was working at Foot Locker barely making ends meet. Grandma Rose, which is what everybody called her, had a long, deep conversation with her at the mall on her lunch break. At that time, she didn't know Deshay, but Grandma Rose left something instilled in her about her history she would never forget. Felicia enrolled at the University of Arkansas that same day. Something she would never have dreamed was possible.

As a Social Worker, she felt she could save a life. She had been talking with one of her colleagues about providing a program to aide children between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four to prepare them for college. While she was out here trying to save the world, Deshay was running around love-sick after some little boy pretending to be a man.

Just as she was getting into her car, her cell phone rang.

"Hello," Felicia answered.

It was a call from her supervisor for an emergency removal. An emergency removal, as Felicia called it, was when a child needed to be removed from an unsafe environment during after-hours. She looked at her clock. It was seven forty-five.

"I'm on my way," she said writing down the address. She pulled out of the parking and headed down the highway. She was going to have to deal with Deshay later.

When she arrived at the Eastgate Terrace Housing Projects, the police were already there. The mother was very violent, and the children were crying hysterically. Felicia could hear the mother cursing and threatening the officers as she got out of her car.

"Ma'am," she said calmly. "Can I talk to you for a second?"

The outraged woman turned her frustration towards Felicia with arms flying and cuss words coming from her mouth a mile a minute. Felicia had learned a long time ago how to control her anger. She could take a lot more now than she used to. She kept chanting to herself; *she's angry at the situation, not you. It's all out of frustration.* One of the officers walked over to Felicia and gave her the rundown.

"We received complaints from the landlord that she wants this woman off of her property. She was evicted and has been sneaking back into the apartment. The landlord discovered the woman and her children when she was tipped off by a tenant. Once we arrived, the children were here alone, and the mother wasn't home. Be careful the house is filthy, and there is molded food all over the place. There is also no electricity." The officer said painting a picture.

"That pig lying," the woman said stomping their way.

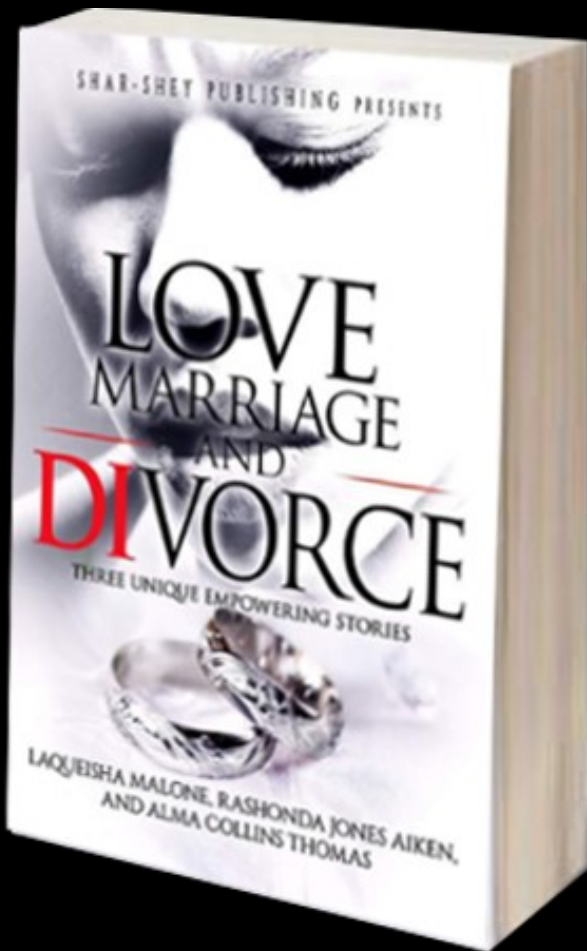
Felicia held out her hand for the woman to stop. She nodded at the officer indicating the conversation was over. She had heard enough. Like she said, *some of these mothers don't deserve to have kids.* This just further proved her point. Taking a deep breath, she calmly walked towards the red haired lady. She bit her tongue at the notion of being judgmental of the woman for wearing a red frizzy wig, some rainbow colored leggings with a white sports bra, and heels. She was no more than five foot six to Felicia's five foot nine, but more on a curvy side. Felicia shook her head.

"Ma'am. Ma'am." Felicia started. "Calm down—"

"Don't tell me to calm down," the woman interrupted. "You letting these pigs take my babies!"

Felicia tried again to calm the lady from her rage. She saw this all the time. Mothers not taking care of their responsibilities then want to show out when the government gets involved.

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