

JACQUII LEVEINE

Knocking  
FROM THE  
Inside

A MEMOIR VEILED IN NUMBERS



◆ K N O C K I N G ◆  
FROM THE INSIDE

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Jacquii Leveine

Afrodite Art  
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*This divinely-influenced creation you behold,  
Pays homage to my ancestors and their gifts bestowed,  
My angels who guided me along my life's path,  
My mother who inspired me to cultivate and share my craft,  
My girlfriends who wailed the sistahood blues,  
My male companions who've unknowingly been my muse,  
My coaches and mentors who modeled the successful climb,  
And all the psychics whose prophecies have led me to this exact space in time.*



*To everyone who's interacted with this work via thought, word, or deed, I  
thank you. May all the eyes capturing my deepest thoughts and minds tapping  
into my bookish abundance be sated with spiritual sustenance.*



*“Because at the end of the day, the miracle comes from within. You are your own miracle worker.”*

*~ Chris Ochun Capone*



## INTRODUCTION

*"We don't speak, we hustle. We are the meek with muscle. We are the hub--"*

I'M AN EXILE SETTLED IN A COLONY OF VOICELESS HUSTLERS.

My compatriots and I live on nebulous grounds located between consciousness and insensibility. I was banished to this land because at some point within the last nine years of my life I became a deaf mute.

Not the kind of deaf mute who involuntarily lives in stark silence with a landscape of experiences built upon sight, smell, and touch. That still would be too real, vibrantly full of excitement as the senses are heightened with new textures, bouquets, and expansive horizons.

No, this is the type of deaf mute disability that's self-inflicted. Somewhere along my path I rendered myself speechless, missing out on the colors of life that reside in sound--the sound of my own voice. My voice lost its joyous resonance. In turn, I lost my unabashed honesty. I lost my courage. I lost my fearlessness. I lost my sense of adventure. I lost myself!

It's almost as if I was sleepwalking the days by, in and out of wake. I'd awake to deal with the needs and wants of others or to ensure that my societal obligations were met. I'd sleep on *my* desires, *my* dreams, *my* truths, and *my* inner voice. In introspective reflection, my inner voice has been stifled for quite some time. I'm surprised and grateful it hasn't yet abandoned me, having been neglected for so long.

Instead, it stayed with me during times when I doubted it most, sometimes allowing me to go deeper into some dark and dangerous lessons and other times beckoning me to follow it out of the abyss. Despite either

of the paths chosen at any given time, it was always there to protect me. Not fully understanding and realizing my gift of what I now know is inner-sight, I didn't always trust it. I didn't trust myself. So, I ignored many red flags.

There isn't one root cause for my catatonic state. Rather, the causes are an amalgamation of sundry slights and self-disregard intricately woven into a complex, beautifully-flawed tapestry which hangs heavily over the core of my soul, concealing the real me. The real, authentic me that dwells in an unwavering acceptance of the dualities in right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, dark and light, yin and yang.

Sleepwalking triggered me to choose sides. If I was beautiful, I couldn't stand to look at the ugly. If I represented the light, I could never be dark. Of course, I was always in the right. No need to mention that other word because it was nonexistent in my disillusioned world ... *WRONG!*

Spiritual teacher Iyanla Vanzant would have referred to me as one of her *neck-down dead* clients. Meaning that I was devoid of real feelings from the heart. I intellectualized emotions of happiness, sadness, and pain, but from the neck down, I was numb. I was emotionally dead. I was out of touch with my life's pulse which resides in my heart and my stomach.

Throughout my twenties I walked around holding my breath, taking life in in short spurts and constricted sneezes, wondering why my cheeks were covered with pimples and my ribcage ached. I didn't know how to breathe down into the pit of my stomach, extending my ribs outwards, allowing my diaphragm to move up and down freely, engaging the central nervous system, standing in confidence and awareness. I thought sneezing softly was proper, poised, and royal. The raucousness of my naturally loud sneeze would frighten, overwhelm, and embarrass me.

Today I know I'm all these things--soft, proper, poised, royal, and raucously loud ... on purpose.

Life is such that we no longer ask direct questions. I can avouch that I rarely come out and expose my true self, nor do I ask too much of others because I

fear I may be treading on emotional landmines. Instead, I ask enough questions to tease a premature hunger.

When that hunger cries out for fulfillment, I resolve it to a partial feeding of my own incomplete perceptions. The spoonful, however, is never quite enough; for as a loveless lady, I often find myself limiting my mind and inner vision to whatever I *want* to know, accept, and see and exclude all else as irrelevant.

The story I'm about to tell is of my *own* truth. Although I encourage your perusal, it's more for me than it is you, a self-analysis which I hope will assist me in identifying past pathologies or patterns within my present and past lives. Consider it an open book examination of will and faith. It won't be pretty. Nor will it fit perfectly in a neat, shiny box. I aim for honesty and objectivity as I stand outside myself looking in like an astral traveler who's fully awake.

This narrative spans over a nine-year period from my thirty-fourth earth day through my forty-third. It's essential to note that I began to write these events approximately four months into my forty-second year on this physical plane. Depending on the time I finish channeling my written memoirs, I may very well be forty-three, completing the full nine-year interval, making my way into the next.

Through this journey upon which I'll again embark, I've come to learn and lean on the teachings of numerology. By dissecting my birthday and birthname, I intend to delineate a nine-year, numerological roadmap that demystifies two plaguing questions: Why do I consistently attract *this* type of man? How is my romantic partner a reflection of me?

I go by Jacquii Leveine. Jacqueline Noelle Leveine is the name my soul entered into a written contract with at inception. I was born on April 20, 1976. I'm an eleven life path.

As an eleven, I'm the poster child for Luke 12:48 verse, *To whom much is given, much is required*. I operate on a higher-octave vibration than my

lower base number two. My eleven life path calls on me to be a healer of people and mankind through words, the arts, and creative channels. As an old soul who's amassed a great deal of spiritual wisdom from past incarnations, I'm one of the universe's *wounded healers*.

The significance of the nine-year duration is in direct correlation to the second pinnacle cycle of my life path. There are four pinnacle cycles. Each cycle represents a time of profound transformation as I move from one phase of maturation to another. My first pinnacle cycle represented my youth, the cultivation of the *I* as my persona was shaped.

My second pinnacle, one of personal growth and honoring obligations, is preparing me for future life events through the perfection of my craft. My third pinnacle will emphasize my expansion of knowledge into new fields, home or abroad. The fourth pinnacle cycle will be a period of reflection, encouraging me to use the wisdom gained from my spiritual experiences to influence the tides of humanity on a grander level.

Each pinnacle cycle represents a life lesson and its corresponding challenge to be mastered within that specified timeframe. As an eleven life path, these are my four pinnacle cycles. I'll initiate my ascent from the windmills of my mind by propelling myself into the lesson and challenge of the second.

Pinnacle One	Pinnacle Two	Pinnacle Three	Pinnacle Four
Ages 0 – 34	Ages 35 – 43	Ages 44 – 52	Ages 53 – 81
Lesson	Lesson	Lesson	Lesson
6	7	4	9
Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
2	3	1	1

You see, in the former years of my second pinnacle, I lacked the spiritual awareness to ascertain my seven lesson number as a means to

develop my inner spiritual acuity, tap into my intuition and learn to trust myself. I didn't understand, nor did those in my circle, why I shunned social gatherings to spend time in quiet introspection, learning about metaphysics and the mysteries of the universe. This lesson summons me to probe deeper into questions pertaining to my life's purpose and direction, connect to the Divine through prayerful meditation, and perfect my craft.

Similarly, my three challenge number dares me to recognize my feelings and communicate them through various modes of self-expression, allowing me to speak my truth. The struggle within the three challenge is my use of self-criticism and self-doubt as tools that stifle my creativity and sense of identity.

Within each pinnacle is the personal year cycle. Personal year cycles begin at birth and cycle through nine-year intervals throughout my lifetime. Each year, from January to December, there's a personal year number indicating the lessons, opportunities, and experiences I'll come upon.

This book is broken down in parts. Each part represents a year of my life and the events which have transpired therein. Since this is a self-analysis, each year will correlate to my personal year number and its overarching vibration.

I begin this reflective quest at the end of my first pinnacle cycle which is a nine personal year of completion and endings. Each part thereafter will be within the second pinnacle cycle starting on the one personal year of new beginnings. I figure the most comprehensive way for me to understand my life experiences is for me to look at the numerical influences governing that specific period of time.

I look forward to the learnings, self-discoveries, and revelations that will be unearthed once all is said and done. For now, let's start at the beginning, which in this case, is all about endings.

Jacquii Leveine



◆ 2010 - END OF FIRST PINNACLE ◆

$$4 + (2 + 0) + (2 + 0 + 1 + 0)$$

$$4 + 2 + 3 = 9$$



## Nine Personal Year



Completion, dreams fulfilled, endings, inspiration, long distance travel. This cycle symbolizes a completion of sorts, either in your personal or business affairs. Your capacity to let go of persons, habits, negative circumstances, or conditions that you've outgrown will be strong. Develop the humanitarian side of your nature, learn to give more of yourself to others without expecting payment in return. Cosmically, you'll be rewarded if you do.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Strayhorn, 1997]



*"I need a bitter man.  
One who understands,  
That too much loving makes you hard.  
Only then will I let down my guard.  
Send me a bitter man.  
One without a plan,  
To make me his wife or his life.  
Cause he's used to the heartache and strife."*



# 1

**C**HILDBEARING IS AN OVERRATED PASTIME RESERVED FOR THE OBTUSE AND lonesome.

That was my spiritless New Year's declaration. Leaving no time for the fulfillment of lofty resolutions, January began with the conception of life. It should have been a joyous milestone marked by a celebration of fertility, showered with overwhelming maternal love and affection for the fetus growing inside me. Instead, it was a trimester consisting of a series of lonely, drunken nights consumed in a Merlot-induced stupor, curled up on my living room couch.

I never had a penchant for Merlot, but the heartburn was increasingly unbearable. It was the only sedative capable of soothing the incessant, annoying ache in my chest. I reconciled the discomfort by visually caressing the notion of a beautiful cinnamon-flavored baby girl with hair reaching her ripe shoulders.

Considering her father's own hair fell down to his ass and mine, although worn in a Caesar, was a wavy mix of East Indian, South Asian, and Carib, chances were great that my premonition was accurate. I had envisioned a *Dougla* baby version of myself.

In dark solitude I spent many nights debating her fate while her father Collin traversed his daytime hustle at the barbershop and his nighttime hustle between thick thighs and street life highs. He was my señor blues, a wondering, wandering guy with no one gal to lay his head by. I often asked myself why a woman would subject herself to such misery for the sake of birthing someone else? My honesty sounds crude, I know.

“You’re selfish!” Collin would frequently say to me. “How can you be such a beautiful woman and not want to share that with a child of your own?”

I’d say I was a woman of the world and didn’t see the value of limiting myself with mundane lifetime obligations. Over this we’d argue for many nights. He’d go to sleep angry and I’d be flippantly indifferent. That was my twenty-four-year-old self rebelling against his twenty-seven-year-old self. He already had a son from a previous relationship and I didn’t feel any urgency.

Ten years later I’d find myself lying alone waiting for him to bring me a shrimp roti. Each night this would seem like hours upon eternity. I was simply too tired from carrying the additional weight, too foggy with pregnancy brain, and too gassy to cook.

I loathed every minute of the wait. I hated being dependent upon a man whom I was smarter than. I came to learn that pregnancy didn’t fill my heart with a flood of adoration for Collin. Rather, it amplified my existing feelings of dislike and disdain for him to a heightened hormonal state. It wasn’t always like this, though. There was a time when we were sincerely, and happily, into each other in a crazed, viscerally impulsive kind of way.

Collin fell in love with me when I was twenty and still had my hair locs. We first saw each other at my friend Fabian’s barbershop where he worked as a barber. He was new to America, fresh from Trinidad and Tobago and I was a fiery Trini descendant who wore purple, yellow, and blue hair down to the middle of my back during a time when *dreadlocks*, a misnomer, was considered taboo, ripped jeans, and a pierced nose.

He’d sing the lyrics to all the roots and culture reggae tunes that played while he’d ogle me, sneakily, under half closed eyelids. His eyes were magical. They were big, beautiful, probing, and bright like those of the spider Charlotte in the book *Charlotte’s Web*. He was tall, about six feet, three inches, which always made him bend to get into and out of doorways and often made him extremely clumsy with anything surrounding him.

He was dark-skinned. A deep brown the color of cocoa beans. My girlfriends would oftentimes refer to him as the *nice looking darkie*. He was handsome. His features were neatly contained, with a small nose, full lips, and a gap-toothed smile concealed by a singular gold tooth. He was stylish.

I had a proclivity for fashion and putting clothes together in such a way that only I could wear. Like me, he had a style that others couldn't execute tastefully. I was seeing my boyfriend Noah at the time, and he and I were in a groove. So, our sightings would be brief. I'd go on to my man, and he'd go on to his wife.

As life would have it, my father passed in March of 1998. He was hit by a truck on the Priority Bus Route in Trinidad, which is a public transit roadway reserved for use only by buses, maxi taxis, and emergency vehicles. The accident severed his hip bone. He was healing slowly.

Unwilling to be an invalid for the remainder of his life, depending on my mother to be his caretaker, my father convinced the doctor to release him from the hospital under the guise of returning home. My father seized his early release as an opportunity to party and drank a whole gallon of Johnny Walker in commemoration of his fifty-fifth birthday.

The alcohol, coupled with the prescribed blood pressure medication, caused a heart attack, and my father died. The death was ruled a natural one. Trinidadians celebrate and surrender everything to the mercy of a bottle of rum, so no suspicion would ever be cast upon his death. I ruled it a suicide. He took the easy way out and chose not to fight, to confront his demons and come out the victor. For that, I was bitterly angry.

We were never close. In fact, I hated my father. He was a strange, tacit giant who hardly spoke but prophesized like a Buddha; hardly consoled, but mocked me like a toddler; hardly laughed with his family but was full of jokes with others outside us.

He was one of the misunderstood. I was too young and egotistical to realize that sometimes in this earthly incarnation the parent is really the spiritual student, and the child is the spiritual teacher. I regretted that I

didn't employ the actions my intuition begged of me to make things right between us. He left me a legacy of guilt.

As the saying goes, death, be it physical or symbolic, comes in threes. First was the death of my father; shortly after, Noah and I parted ways simply because we'd outgrown each other; and I, on impulse, decided to discard the old me to reinvent the new. I changed my first name to Jacqui.

Born Jacqueline, my mother first shortened my name to Jacque as a nickname. I completed my full schooling as Jacque Noelle Leveine. But upon my graduation from college, I added a unique variation to its spelling by discarding the *e* and adding an extra *i* to get Jacqui. Three months after my twenty-second birthday I officiated the name change through the court system in front of a judge, published it in a local newspaper, and reflected the new name on all my legal documentation. In essence, I initiated my own death and rebirth.

I continued on, in vowed silence and rebellion, to cut my hair off. I went to Fabian's shop and had him cut the majority of my locs into a closed-cropped curly afro, tapered and edged to perfection with six locs remaining in the front cascading along the side of my face, asymmetrically from shortest to longest. Once again, yours truly was pioneering a new look. I was styling between two worlds, occupying the past and future, unwilling to acquiesce to either.

I saw Collin watching me in stifled mourning under his captivating eyes, as he couldn't understand why I'd cut off my hair that had grown so long and beautiful. It wasn't his business to understand. With that new look I left the shop and his purview. Eventually, I cut all my hair off into a Caesar. Inspired by then singing group Zhané, I had found home on my head.

For two years I moved between barbers trying to find the right cut and fit. As result of too many late barber appointments, barber no-shows, and my favorite hairbrush being stolen by my then barber never to be relinquished, I ended up in Collin's chair. He had since moved from

Fabian's shop and found shelter in a shop on one of the busiest Caribbean streets in the heart of Brooklyn, Church Avenue.

Our courtship started out simple and sweet. He was patient. He was a great storyteller who had a way of drawing a visual picture with characters and dialogue so vivid it placed me in the middle of the scene. He had a sincere appreciation for life. He enveloped me with his humor, his transparency, and his eyes. Those eyes would indeed entangle me in his web, and oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we learn to diss Eve!

It was supposed to be about sex--that's all. "It's just a fuck thing," I declared to my girls. "I'll make him my fuck buddy, let him take the edge off."

A few months in I'd find myself cooking for him, making what Trinis called provisions--yams, dasheen, cassava, sweet potato, plantain topped with Callaloo, stew pigeon peas with pumpkin, and fried shark or curry king crab legs. Yes, your girl was going in! Not only would I cook these meals, I'd hand deliver them to the shop, where he worked, during the day, in front of the other barbers.

There were days when he'd sit on the back porch of my parents' home while I picked okra, tomatoes, and cucumbers from the back garden to prepare his meal. He'd talk, I'd laugh. He'd show me how to pick the okras before they got too big, too ripe, and too hard. He fancied that part of me. I was a city girl with a country girl's upbringing.

I catered to my man because that's what I grew up seeing in my home. I never had a problem with it. It made me feel like a woman, wanted and special. My heart would sing when he ate my meals with pure joy on his face, questioning if I really cooked or had someone else do it. We'd have beach hangs at Riis on the Rockaway Peninsula in the summer nights, he and I, with my *cousin* Tamia and his boy Lester. It was heaven.

The womanizing became an issue. I had severed my previous relationships prior to becoming involved with Collin, but he was still married. He claimed that he and his wife weren't compatible and didn't see

eye to eye. He said they argued constantly, and many nights she forbade him from leaving the house by laying her body on the ground in front of the door, like a barricade.

I was aware of his wife. Quite frankly, I didn't give a damn. It was the arrogance of youth. I felt unstoppable and fearless. He'd demonstrated on several different occasions his lack of respect for his union by choosing to spend his anniversary with me or taking me out on days he'd promise to be with her. There were days that she'd come to the shop and see me at his station, not needing a haircut, and would ask me to ask him to come outside to speak to her.

On one particular day we sat in the shop on the bench next to each other, skin to skin. She was a beautiful, voluptuous woman. She complimented me on my Marciano Guess jeans, I told her where she could buy them, and we continued on in silence with a world of thoughts telepathically transmitting between us. Overwhelmed by the incredibility of the situation, I called Tamia.

"Girl, I'm in the barbershop, and you won't believe who I'm sitting next to right now."

"Don't tell me it's Collin's wife?" Tamia asked, gasping in amazement.

"Girl, if I only turn my face to the left, I could kiss her," I replied all in earshot of his wife.

I was disrespectful! For me it was about nothing more than power--the power to control a man and render him so weak that he'd allow me to reign supreme over his castle as, technically, the mistress. I was his Empress, a hypocorism he'd given me. I was clearly queen and what I wanted or said went--unequivocally--no questions asked.

It was an ambush of sovereignty, and I enjoyed every minute of it. I relished in the adrenaline rush, the danger, and the risk of it all. In short, I was reckless. I had no regard for his wife's feelings, but let's be clear. I was no homewrecker! Their home was in complete spiritual disarray way before I entered the equation. My presence merely illuminated an already existing

breakdown in communication, connection, and trust. There were others! That was my main problem. It was one thing to have a wife and a mistress, but concubines? Hell no!

I found myself hunting him during my down time. After two years, I decided to leave my job with Verizon as a cable splicing technician. I left with a Master of Arts from Teacher's College, Columbia University in tow, courtesy of the company's financing.

With this newfound freedom, it was customary for me to pop into the barbershop on any random day at any given time, interrogating the barbers about his whereabouts. Of course, I didn't expect them to divulge his location, but they knew to call him advising I was on the lookout. Shortly thereafter, I'd receive my call; however, it became much worse when he started to drive.

I always had a car, so transport was solely on me. Not being able to track his movements when I wanted would send me into a bit of a manic fit. There was one girl in particular who really unnerved me. Her mannerisms were too much like mine. I'd come into the shop to get my hair cut or shaped up and she'd be hanging over his station in similar fashion as I. Her name was Geena. He claimed she was his *friend*, and they'd just *smoke* together. My intuition, or spirit, as I now refer to it, told me otherwise.

One night I drove to the barbershop to see him, but he wasn't there. I drove around the corner making my way back home and saw his car parked on Snyder Avenue, in front of the *smoking friend's* house. In a calculated rage, I called my partner in crime, Tamia.

"Girl, what are you getting into tonight?"

"Nothing. I'm just here," Tamia replied.

"Well, I just went to the shop to see Collin and he's not there. I'm driving around the corner and his car is in front of Geena's house. I'm about to park up and sit this shit out. You down?"

"I'm not doing anything right now, so come scoop me up," she said, excited about the night's new adventure.

I picked Tamia up from the block since we lived across the street from each other. Tamia and I had grown together since the age of eight and six respectively. Although there was no blood relation between us, we'd forged a childhood connection that aligned us as "cousins" of a kindred sort.

We went to the closest Dunkin Donuts, bought some tea and a box of donuts, and prepared ourselves for a stakeout.

Getting back to the perpetrator's location, I parked my then 2001 Nissan Maxima directly in front of his car. The windows of my car had 30% tints, so we had the visual advantage. We rolled the front seats all the way back, put on some stakeout music, sipped tea, ate donuts, and waited in the cut.

About four hours later, closer to 11:00 p.m., Collin came strolling down the block. This wasn't just any kind of stroll. This was a stroll somewhere between a skip and a bop. He was in a euphoric state of mind. During those times I was famous for wearing long vintage leather peacoats and high-heeled knee-high leather boots.

I opened that car door like a SWAT team swooping down on its suspect. In the fury of my movements, my leather coat flew up into the air like Nicholas Cage's in the movie *Face/Off*. I ran up on him so quickly it took some time for his brain to transition from experiencing pure happiness to processing absolute shock.

"Eh heh! Yeah! I caught your ass! Explain what you were doing at that chick's house now!"

"Jacquii, you really stalked me out here tonight? You really parked your car up to stalk me?" he asked, ducking his head down to get a clearer look through the tinted windows. "And you brought your soldier with you too?" The argument would continue for the balance of the night, carrying on into days of me giving him the silent treatment.

There were other similar instances of me running his car off the road in drag racing fashion. I was a terror, and he loved every minute of it.

“You’re silky and sugary!” he’d often tell me. “You don’t even know how much sugar you have between your legs.”

I didn’t. I couldn’t experience myself the way he did, but I could use it to my benefit. My vagina had him hooked, just like his penis had me. I guess we didn’t have anything else to blame but the sugar factory.

My life took a turn for the serious when I started to work for the New York City Department of Education as a technology teacher. I began working in 2002 and found myself moving quickly up the ranks. After two years, I was out of the classroom and into a staff development position. I worked on getting an Advanced Master of Arts from Hunter College in Education Administration.

In turn, my relationship with Collin was becoming too redundant for the modern woman and we parted ways as friends. I’d still go to him for haircuts, but the sexual nature of our relationship ended. At the ripe age of twenty-eight, I was dabbling in the pool of a white-collar suitor. Although this relationship had its own share of womanizing woes, it felt good to have a partner with whom I could be equally yoked.

He was way beyond me in his profession, but I had earned his respect outside the bedroom. I was experiencing a life of new possibilities, wooed by candle-lit dinner parties, Broadway shows, Sunday brunch, political debates, catered meals, and spa-quality bubble baths.

This too lasted about four years on and off. Like before, there were others. I couldn’t continue in the same vein, and this suitor wasn’t built or bred for the daytime drive-bys and late-night stakeouts. I had to conduct myself like the lady I was quickly becoming. I was remaking myself into upwardly mobile elegance and thus had to employ other strategies of self-preservation. I simply left. That relationship, although I mention it here briefly, shaped me quite a bit during my first pinnacle cycle. I had acquired a taste for the “silk, satin, Manhattan, intelligent spiel” and it was insatiable.

When I left, I did so for the familiar. It’s easy to fall into old rhythms and patterns because they’re already worn and molded in exactitude like

hand in glove. At age thirty-three, I had four degrees, my final one from New York University. I was making six figures as a Senior Project Manager. I was driving an Infiniti G35 after crashing my Maxima in a freak accident on the Belt Parkway. I moved from my place of eight years in Ditmas Park, Brooklyn to a swanky Crown Heights condominium, paying double the rent I was paying previously. It was apartment 2E!

"This apartment is fresh J! I can see myself in something like this," said my older brother Lucas as he and his then girlfriend Keisha helped me set up my TV for a cable appointment the next day. He walked over to the balcony which faced the back of my building onto a shared courtyard situated between an identical condo complex on the block behind me and owned by the same owners.

"This is the second floor, but this balcony is low," he remarked, looking out the window at the courtyard. "You're next to an empty lot. Someone can easily put a ladder up here and come into your apartment. Be careful with that. Don't leave the door or windows open when you're not home. But otherwise, this shit is fresh to death!"

Aside from the balcony, my condo had two bathrooms and three bedrooms, two of which could easily be converted into one. The walls were an intense white. The floors were white marble. The chef's kitchen was complete with two sets of stainless steel stacked stoves and two sinks. I thought the kitchen was designed for entertaining but later came to learn that, being in the predominantly Jewish Crown Heights neighborhood, the building owner purposely designed the units with two sets of appliances to adhere to the Jewish customs of separating dairy from meat.

The living room's décor was confined to a snug space resembling a white box. Upon entry, an ivory art deco leather couch hugged the left wall. It sat parallel to a large, black and sleek entertainment system. The two walls were joined by imposing floor to ceiling windows; ivory curtains hung, dressing them with scalloped edges, feigning some semblance of discretion.

A huge rattan chair with ivory cushions was positioned in front the glass wall mocking a French designed chaise lounge on the opposite side.

The chaise lounge was a *conversation love seat*, as it had two seats facing each other. I imagined, had there been another inhabitant, the dialogues on that particular sofa would've been intriguing with two sets of eyes ogling the other. Behind it were three ivory bar stools overlooking the kitchen. A black-lacquered upright piano was placed catercorner, seldom played.

The art work, a mix of wood carvings and Jazz scenes, blended in beautifully with the Ebony and Ivory theme, recessed, dimmed lighting, and Sade who streamed hauntingly through sunken speakers. In the middle of it all, laid the prototypical Picasso-esque floor rug, adding a wild splash of blacks, burgundies, browns, beige, and whites, attempting to make everything coalesce into one central piece.

The bedroom, decorated with an ivory leather platform bed, chaise lounge, and wireless speakers, was regularly perfumed with sandalwood incense, so music and woody fragrances were ubiquitous.

As a finished abode, its design was a juxtaposition of pulchritude and sterility. Simply put, it was cold! It was cold as the marble floors upon which I stood when I forgot to wear socks, penetrating the skin and freezing my internal organs. Cold like my heart that had its fill of hurt, magnificently adorned to the human eye, masked in perfection, and absent of homeliness. It epitomized barren beauty fit for an Ice Queen.

Collin was impressed with the come up and pictured himself enjoying a different life with me in this new space. I, however, found his Rasta singing, loc swinging, weed slinging mannerisms too plebian for the sophistication I was cultivating, his presence inapposite in my mausoleum of a home. His wife had since relocated to another state, taking his only son with her. His son wasn't her child, but she'd grown especially close to him and chose to raise him as her own.

We had an opportunity to make a life together, thus we attempted. One fateful night in January he asked a simple question, “Why don’t we try to make a baby?”

“You want to?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

After he ejaculated inside me, I put a pillow under my butt and bent my knees onto the bed so my body would slope downwards toward my head. I remember my girlfriend Halle telling me this was the easiest way to ensure that the semen would reach the egg. Instinctively, I tried it. Life was conceived.

The next morning I awoke in obscured panic. What the hell did I just do? What did I commit myself to? I asked Collin if he had any second thoughts about our plans and he assured me he was fine. I, on the other hand, wasn’t. I was meeting my mother that day for dinner and a movie in the city, but before I did, I made a pit stop at Duane Reade to pick up some Plan B.

We finished watching a movie in our preferred theatre on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway in the city and made our way over to an Indian restaurant named Café Spice along University Place. It was a quaint bistro recollective of olden South Asian style. We sat toward the back of the teeming eatery in a private booth under the crimson luster of a traditional Chinese lantern. Red and gold-trimmed drapes secured us from roaming eyes and invasive chatter, but did little to guard our nostrils against the stabile whiff of curry.

Dinner was a palate of dahl, tamarind, tandoori, saag, and biryani alongside Basmati rice, accompanied by gassy indigestion and bile-fueled stomach flurries. My mother loved Indian food. If you knew her well, you’d know to make sure to indulge her in all things that she loved, otherwise you’d suffer a tyranny of tongue-lashings filled with criticisms and complaints.

I loved her; a small but insanely strong woman who managed the vicissitudes of life with a steady, centered sense of self and integrity. She took no shit and spoke her truth at all times. She was fun-loving, affectionate, and laughed so loudly in movies that I'd often admonish her in embarrassment, only to have her scoff back at me in indignation.

Unable to focus on our dinner conversation, I excused myself to the restroom to tear open the Plan B box in an anxious rush. I swallowed the pill trying to wash it down my dry esophagus with my saliva. Returning to the table, I quickly gulped some water hoping the pill would land in the appropriate spot of my body that would facilitate the termination immediately.

Two weeks later, and no menstrual cycle in sight, I sat in my gynecologist's office with a positive test result.

"But I took Plan B," I told the doctor incredulously.

Dr. Michaels was a smart-mouthed Grenadian whose insults were so smooth I often didn't feel their sting until minutes after their delivery.

"Well, apparently, your Plan B reverted to Plan A because that fetus is alive and well," he said, laughing jovially. "Don't look at it as a negative. Life is a blessing, no matter when and how it's derived.

"I have a patient who was forty-five years old and, like you, took Plan B. She gave birth to a lovely baby girl who's now a child prodigy. She says it's the best thing that ever happened to her."

Dr. Michaels was bubbling with love and excitement. Any other time I visited him, he'd speak to me with the monotonous drone of a bored college professor, peering over his glasses, reading my yearly lab results. He'd end every report with, "Don't take too long to get pregnant now. You're getting older and it may be more difficult with age."

On this day, his long-awaited wish was granted. I was devastated.

Collin had gone out of state to visit his wife and son, over this, we were on the outs. We argued over the length of time he was staying. Amidst other

harsh words I ended the conversation with, “And you don’t have to rush back, because I’m not pregnant. There’s nothing over here for you!”

That was a time prior to these new events; a time when I rested all my faith in Plan B. Calling him with this news snuffed my ego.

“So first you tell me you’re not pregnant, and now you’re telling me that you are?” he asked with snarky sarcasm. “So what happened? You impregnated yourself or what?”

“Well, I took Plan B on the same day we had sex. The box said to take it within seventy-two hours for it to be effective. Since I took it within the window of time, I thought I was good. But the doctor told me yesterday that I’m pregnant, and the fetus is healthy and growing.” I was defeated in this battle.

“Okay, I’ll be back in Brooklyn next week. We’ll talk about it when I get back. Just know I love you, Empress.” I was still too confused to respond, so I disconnected the call.

I confided in my girlfriend Lorraine. I told her I was pregnant as a result of the condom breaking. The awareness of me making a conscious decision to have a baby with a married man was awkward. I knew when I eventually told my mother, and I dreaded telling my mother, I couldn’t tell her that truth. It was easier to alter a sliver of the story for consistency rather than juggle different versions.

“So the condom broke?” Lorraine asked in disbelief.

“Yeah, girl, you know I’m always complaining about the rough sex. Not that I mind the roughness. It’s just, every time he does it rough, the condom breaks. This time I got pregnant.” I lied.

“Hmm, so what’re you going to do?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t yet decided. I have to tell my mother. I know she’s going to flip when she hears this shit.”

“Yep, she will. But you can’t live your life aiming to please your mother. Yes, he’s a married man, but things like this happen every day. Life is a

blessing. Who knows? You were probably supposed to bring this life into the world for a reason.”

Again, talks of blessings and destiny. I was still uncertain. Collin was thrilled with the news when he came back. He wanted a baby girl, and he wanted one with me. For a while I went along with it. I thought things would be different between us, that we’d finally have a viably functioning home.

His resoluteness made me feel secure enough to break the news to my mother during one of our movie outings.

“Yeah, I knew you were pregnant,” she declared with motherly wisdom. “You ordered popcorn with butter. You never order popcorn or eat that nasty butter. And you’re moving slowly. Who’s the father?”

“Collin. I didn’t plan it. The condom broke!” I lied.

“Collin?” she yelled. “Jacqueline, he’s a married man.”

“I know, Ma, but he and his wife are separated. She lives in another state.”

“And? And that means what exactly? She’s still named WIFE!” Disappointment registered on her face with great emphasis on that word. “I can’t believe after all this schooling, all these accomplishments, you would lower yourself to get pregnant by a married man. You can’t talk about this child proudly in public. It was conceived in sin! Of all the men, all the men outside you could’ve laid down with, you choose one who’s married. I’d have rather you came and told me you were pregnant for Joe on the street corner instead of him, honest to God.”

My mother was never a religious woman. She’d send my brother and me to church on a Sunday with enough money for bus fare and collection while she stayed home to cook. On this day, I swore she was a bible-thumping Baptist.

“You have that child and I wash my hands of you. You’ll be on your own with that one. Don’t call me. I don’t approve. And don’t tell me no shit about the condom broke either.”

If you knew my mother, you'd know that she never made idle threats. What she said, she meant. It would be a cold day in hell before she'd breathe on me or my child. I knew this to be true. I had another conversation with Collin.

"So you're having second thoughts now?" He was upset by my emotional fluctuations. "Empress, you can't live by your mother's rules for your whole life."

"Yes, but she's the only one in my corner. I won't have the support I'll need to raise and take care of the child. This is my first. I don't know what I'm doing. I'll be alone!"

"No you won't. You have me and my mother. We'll help."

He uttered these words so convincingly I could feel him believing everything he said. I wasn't convinced. There's nothing like having your own mother around when you need her most. Until that point, she'd always been my cheerleader, my rock.

The tipping point was our first couple's check-in at the doctor's office. Knowing that Collin was always too busy with his street-side agendas, I prepped and reminded him days in advance. I texted him the address. I called him with the address. I talked him through programming the address in his Jeep's GPS. He was still late. He was so late, he missed the appointment. Even if he'd arrived five minutes into the meeting, Dr. Michaels would have forbidden his entrance. Dr. Michaels had a strict policy on tardiness.

Lorraine had accompanied me on a regular visit before I was pregnant and arrived five minutes late because parking by Long Island City Hospital was an impossible feat. He spent more time reprimanding her than he did reading me my results. Being the expectant father, I knew he'd have laced into Collin in a treacherously cutting type of way.

When Collin arrived, we only had time to eat Chinese food on Montague Street. We sat in that restaurant, and I was fuming. Fuming because I was already feeling alone and abandoned. Fuming because here I

was with this beautiful man who drew every woman's attention in the restaurant, and he couldn't even get to an appointment on time. I started to question the intelligence of the fetus. Would she get his intellectual genes or mine? That's when the resentment started to grow. When he dropped me off at my door that night, I confessed that I was strongly considering the abortion.

"You know," he said introspectively, "I thought this baby would bring us closer together, but it feels like it's only ripping us apart."

He asked me to take my time and give it more thought--for us.

Think I did. Lying curled up on my living room couch, waiting for my shrimp roti, I thought about the decisions I'd made. I thought about the potential pain I'd cause his wife, who wasn't physically able to have children of her own. I thought about the shame that would be inherently associated with my child. I felt the sizzle of the *S* branded on my chest.

I wore this *S* as a tribute to the shame--my very own scarlet letter. I'd let my mother down. I'd let myself down. I was depressed. I oscillated between coldness, abandonment, shame, and back again in reverse order. During my next doctor's visit, when the lab technician asked if I wanted to see the sonogram, I replied "No! Because I'm not keeping her!" I turned my head to the side and wept.

Dr. Michaels refused to perform the procedure. He was the shepherd of life, not the deliverer of death. He did recommend another doctor who was willing, Dr. Davis. My mother was especially happy with my decision to terminate the pregnancy. We'd made plans to go to Carnival in Trinidad two months prior, and she was excited to have me child-free as her company and sidekick.

Our original flight was scheduled to leave a few days before my surgery, so my mother went ahead. I had to reschedule my flight. Dr. Michaels didn't give me authorization to travel in fear I'd be at risk of suffering post operation difficulties abroad. Dr. Davis, however, assured me all would be

well and granted me the authorization I'd need to take a load off, literally, and enjoy myself.

Collin didn't go with me to the hospital on the day of the operation. We were at serious odds. He deemed me a mama's girl. I didn't have the energy to tell him the real reason for my decision. I called my trusty girlfriend Felise.

Felise and I met at Five Towns College where I was enrolled as an Audio Engineering major, and she a Music Business major. After a year of carpooling from Brooklyn to Dix Hills, Long Island in her car, Felise drove us to Manhattan one fateful afternoon and we both enrolled in CUNY. I ended up in City College and she in Baruch.

Felise was the kind of detail-oriented girlfriend who'd have all the particulars identified and dealt with in the middle of any controversy. She always saw to it that no stone was left unturned. She was patient with her girlfriends, not so much with men. If we were *Sex in the City* characters, I'd be Carrie and she'd definitely be Miranda. She was exactly who I needed for support at that moment, my weakest to date.

"Don't worry, lovey, you'll be taken care of and ready to go on your trip. But it's not too late to change your mind if you want to," she said, smiling mischievously.

"Felise!"

"I know, I know, I'm just saying," she kidded somewhat. "I'm just exploring all the options. I'll be here when you wake up."

There she was, ready to take me out to eat afterwards.

The next day I went to see Collin at the shop. I needed a haircut for my trip. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I feel much better now that it's over," I answered honestly. "I feel a sense of relief."

"Hmm, you feel better now?" he asked, looking at me underneath his eyelids in his customary way.

When I traced their trajectory, his line of sight wasn't on me per se. His eyes were trained at the ID band that I still wore from the hospital visit. He concentrated on it with laser-sharp focus almost as if he could bore a hole in it with his vision. Annoyance etched into his face. He was disgusted. The grotesque absurdity of me terminating his pregnancy and wining down low in the carnival-festive streets of Trinidad and Tobago was too much for him to handle. It was the ultimate disrespect.

To Trinidad I went, a few days after I'd originally planned. Dr. Michaels was beside himself, but Dr. Davis had already authorized the flight and faxed the airlines the documentation. To ensure that he wouldn't be subjected to another emotional ordeal orchestrated by my impulsive whims, Dr. Michaels put me on birth control.

Coupled with the influx of hormones remaining from the pregnancy, the birth control quickly widened my hips and engorged my breasts. I had the body fit for carnival season, but physically I couldn't keep up. The bleeding was especially heavy, and my movements were limited as a result. Needless to say, my mother had her company but not the kind she was anticipating.

When I returned home, Collin and I were distant. We tried to maintain a barber-client relationship, but it proved to be futile, because we suffered in silence. He'd attempt to vex me by inviting other love interests into the shop to converse over me while I sat in his chair. I'd yawn in boredom.

Later, I'd request half the hospital fees for the termination. It was an imposition made more out of spite than necessity. The termination was covered under my insurance plan. He initially gave me half of his half and refused to pay the latter. As far as he was concerned, he didn't sanction the procedure, so he wasn't going to finance it. In his mind, I decided, in isolation, to rid myself of his primordial seed which he desperately wanted.

Our final verbal altercation was so vicious, we both said things that were incorrigible. He disconnected my call. I called him back to announce

that if he ever hung up on me again, it would be the last time we'd ever speak. He obstinately disconnected the phone a second time. That one gesture would forever form a chasm between us too wide and too far to bridge with words.

A year later, I received word through the grapevine that another woman birthed a baby girl for him, and his wife and son moved back to Brooklyn.

Collin's love, existing in the purest form I'd ever encounter, haunted me in the years to come when I, in my deepest solitude, longed for the simplicity of his affections.

YOU'VE NEVER READ A MEMOIR LIKE THIS, but *you will* want to follow my nine-year road map which backtracks to the beginning of my story—year 2010.

I lie desolate on my living room couch, deciding the fate of my unborn child. My unilateral decision results in a vengeful breakup. In the fallout, I meet the alluring Siete Jackson in 2011. We're quickly enraptured. But he changes, adding another layer of complication. He slowly slips away, offering himself in small bites, feeding me cryptic riddles instead; and I find myself an unwitting player in my sociopathic lover's mind game.

*Knocking from the Inside* is my illuminating, character-driven debut that will take you to the crossroads where numbers, karma, forgiveness, and unconditional love meet before arriving at inner peace.



**JACQUII LEVEINE** is a writer, Jazz songstress, and numerologist. She was a senior director within the NYC Department of Education for seventeen years and a graduate professor of Instructional Technology for thirteen. She currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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