

## Chapter 1

Anisha Blake had a love-hate relationship with Fridays. They symbolized the end of a hectic week at work but ushered in yet another dateless weekend. Seventy-eight weekends to be exact—not that she was counting.

Anisha tossed her briefcase on the bed and her keys on the nightstand. The blinking red light on the phone cradle caught her attention, and she picked up the cordless phone to enter the code and retrieve her voice messages.

“Hello. Sorry we missed you. We have an exciting offer . . .”

Anisha hit the delete button, stopping the automated voice before it could finish its spiel. *Stupid telemarketers*. She peeled off her suit jacket, plopped down on the edge of the bed, and kicked off her two-inch heels so she could massage the balls of her feet. She slowly worked her way up her body, kneading the sides of her thighs and twisting her waist, before rolling the knotted tension from her shoulders. She closed her eyes and wished for the luxury of a massage to release the stress from her body and mind.

Out of habit, Anisha picked up the phone to call her best friend, Sherri Dawson. Her fingers found the numbers on the dial pad without having to look.

“Girl, if I’m cooped up in this apartment one more Friday night, I’ll die,” Anisha said when her friend answered the phone. “Another Friday night in the house, and your girl might keel over.”

“Girl, don’t say that,” Sherri said. “The way things are going for you, you’ll be at the pearly gates next Friday begging for Saint Peter to let you in.”

“Very funny,” Anisha said.

“What’s your tally on dateless weekends now?” Sherri asked.

“Wouldn’t know,” Anisha said, stretching out on her bed.

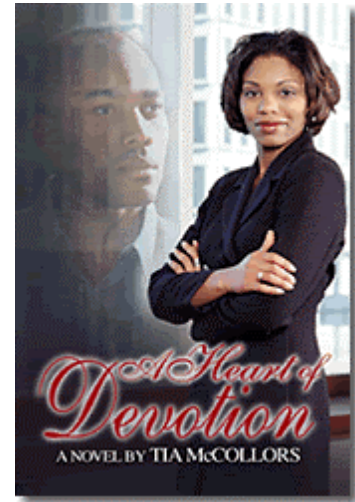
“Whatever,” Sherri said. “You know you can spit it out faster than your checking account balance.”

They laughed easily together, and shared more than the same sense of humor. After five years of friendship, they were like salt and pepper. One was rarely seen without the other.

Anisha turned over on her stomach and propped herself up on her pointy elbows. “If your social life was any better than mine, I wouldn’t have somebody to talk to every weekend, now would I?”

Anisha knew her quick-witted friend was gearing up for a comeback, so she armed herself with one of her own.

“Hey, if it wasn’t for my stint with Orlando—” Sherri started.



“Live-at-home-with-his-mama-but-still-never-had-any-money Orlando?”

“Well, at least I’m not tied with your record,” Sherri teased. “You’re the reigning queen, and you can keep the title.”

“Oh, I can see you’ve got jokes tonight. Keep on. I’ll remember that.” Anisha pushed herself off the bed and dumped her work clothes into her dry cleaning hamper.

“Well, you can always come over here if you want,” Sherri offered. “I’m in for the night, so we can order some pizza and watch a couple of movies. You know, the usual stuff.”

“That’s the problem,” Anisha said, pulling a tank top and a pair of gym shorts from her dresser drawer. “It’s the usual stuff. No offense, but it’s becoming a little too routine. You’re my girl and all, but not tonight,” she said, pulling the tank over her head. “Anyway, if I was going somewhere, I’d probably be too sleepy to move by the time I got dressed. Dudley & Associates made sure I earned every dime in my check this week.”

Anisha pushed her hair back with a headband and scrubbed the remains of the day’s makeup from her face while Sherri rattled on about her latest workplace drama. Anisha had never met Sherri’s coworkers, but if she ever had the chance, she was sure she’d be able to point each of them out. Given Sherri’s weekly updates, her office was a daily soap opera.

Anisha strolled into the living room and looked out the front window to the parking lot. A group of neighborhood kids were huddled together at the curb, their bicycles and scooters entangled in a metal heap beside them. Even their Friday nights were exciting, Anisha thought. She felt even more pathetic.

“Uhhh . . . hello? Are you even listening to me?” Sherri’s voice popped back into Anisha’s head. Anisha sensed her friend’s annoyance.

“My bad, girl. I was in those little kids’ business outside. What did you say?”

“Never mind,” Sherri said. “Anyway—so your mind’s made up? You’re staying at home tonight?”

“Yep. It’s just me and Jesus tonight,” Anisha said, yawning.

“That sounds like a plan, girl. See ya later,” Sherri said.

“Okay, see ya.”

Anisha shook her head and smiled at the thought of her friend. “That girl, I tell you,” she murmured softly. “What would I do without her?”

Anisha’s and Sherri’s paths first crossed at the church’s Singles Ministry picnic when they both took refuge under the same shelter to escape the pelting from a summer storm. Before the storm clouds rolled on, they’d already established a connection like lifelong friends.

Anisha went into the kitchen and scanned the spotless apartment as if a source of excitement would jump out and reveal itself. Though it was barely six o’clock, exhaustion had taken over her body. The thought of going to bed so early on a Friday evening was too depressing, so she grabbed the growing stack of mail threatening to spill from the basket on the kitchen counter. She slid the glass patio door open. The thickness of the humid air met her as soon as she walked outside.

Anisha slid the single chaise lounge closer to the small patio table and sorted through a week's worth of bills, junk mail, and magazines. She sighed as she flipped through each piece. She had grown weary of her mundane routine of life. She slaved all week and was so tired at the end of each day that she could barely function for the rest of the night. Much like tonight. She wasn't living life—life was living her.

Anisha enjoyed relaxation in the shade over the next hour and a half, watching as the setting sun cast a picturesque backdrop for the children still crowded at the curbside. She thumbed through the last mail-order catalog, then gathered the stacks of mail and went back inside. Like always, she resorted to watching a movie.

“Okay, what's on for tonight?” Anisha asked, searching the rows of movies lined on the shelves of the entertainment center against the wall. She rested her hands on her hips and stared at the massive collection of neatly arranged VHS tapes and DVDs lining the shelves.

*You couldn't have forgotten about Me already. I thought it was our night together. You can spend time with Me tonight and experience love no man can duplicate.*

Anisha slid a DVD into the player, sank into the plush pillows on the couch, and propped her feet on the glass coffee table. Barely thirty minutes into the movie, her eyelids grew heavy and begged to close.

*Quiet time. Intimate time. We need to spend some quality time together so I can show you what your life really holds. You promised Me tonight. I've been anticipating our time together.*