

Rain Storm

Prologue

And the Lord said to Hosea, Go take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.

Hosea 1:2

Cynda was nine when she decided to hate her mother. Standing over the coffin that held the body of the woman who gave birth to her and watching her grandmother sob and fall apart, Cynda whispered, “I hate you for leaving – for loving that man more than me.”

“Hush, child. It’s not right to speak so of the dead,” her grandmother scolded.

“It’s true, Grammy. She was a whore. The kids at school said so. Her pimp killed her because she gave it to somebody for free.”

The smack brought tears to Cynda’s eyes and sent her scampering to sit down and stay in a child’s place as Grammy instructed. Sitting in the back of the funeral home, Cynda listened as men and women openly discussed her mother.

“That Flora was some woman,” an old grey haired man said.

“Prettiest thing this side of Georgia,” a man with teeth so big he looked like he should be chomping down on a carrot said.

“That was before Romie turned her out,” a portly woman dressed in a long black dress added.

“I don’t care what Romie did to her. I still wanted to be with that beautiful woman. Something special about Flora – that’s for sure,” the carrot chomper said.

“Well all the special don’ been beat out of her now,” a pretty woman with greenish blue eyes said.

A baldhead man shook his head as he added, “I hope they give that good for nothing the chair.”

A mean-spirited laugh escaped the portly woman’s mouth. “For killing a whore? Get real,” she chuckled.

As Cynda got up, she wished that her grandmother could hear all her mother’s so-called friends. Maybe she’d back hand each one of them.

“Hey,” the portly woman nudged the baldhead man. “That’s her kid.”

“Look at the flawless amber skin tone and that long flowing hair. She’s going to be more beautiful than Flora ever would have been,” said the bald man.

“I hope she likes older men,” the carrot chomper said as his eyes danced over Cynda and his mouth watered in sweet anticipation.

The group laughed as though they were at a comedy club. Cynda ran out of the funeral home when she noticed the man with the big teeth leering at her. She knew what that look meant – knew she had to get away before he wanted to touch her. She ran down the street, around the corner, and she kept on running until she couldn’t remember where that awful place had been.

She smiled at her escape, until common sense halted her glee and caused her heart to pound. If she couldn’t remember where the funeral home was, then she wouldn’t be able to get back to her grandmother.

She sat down on the stoop of an abandoned house and began to cry. With tears cascading down her face, Cynda admitted the one thing she had refused to accept since they told her that her mother was dead. She was afraid. Afraid to grow up without her mommy. Afraid to be lost.

A chill went through her when a shadow appeared in front of her. Cynda prayed that the big teeth man from the funeral hadn't followed her. She tried to stop the tears. It wouldn't do to look like a big scared kid in front of a stranger. So she tried to wipe her eyes and look grown up. But the tears wouldn't stop rolling down her face, so without looking up she asked, "Why are you bothering me? What do you want?"

"I came for you," the stranger said.

Cynda looked up. At first all she saw was a glow – no, more like a big burst of light. She blinked, and as the light dimmed, this huge man stood before her. Cynda liked the blinding light better. She blinked again. This man was too big, too scary. As she scooted back a little on the stoop, all she could say was, "Huh?"

"You are lost. Are you not, little one?" the big scary man said.

"Why do you want to know? Why are you bothering me?"

"The Good Shepherd sent me."

Scrunching her nose, Cynda asked, "The Good who?"

The strange man sat down next to her. "The Good Shepherd. He sent me here to bring you safely home. You are lost, right?"

Cynda nodded. She saw no harm in admitting what a blind man could see. After all, she had been sitting on this stoop crying like she'd just gotten beat with three of Grammy's thickest switches.

He reached out his hand to her. “Well, come on, Cynda, your grandmother is frantic with worry.”

For some reason Cynda didn't fear this man as she did those bad men who leered at her during the funeral. “How do you know my name?” she asked while putting her small hand in his humongous one.

“The Good shepherd knows all.”

They walked around the corner and up a few blocks. They then walked around another corner and then the strange man lifted his long arm and pointed. Cynda looked down the road and saw her grandmother. She was pacing; looking more mad than worried. Cynda asked, “Why'd this Good Shepherd guy care so much about me?”

“The Good Shepherd loves all that belong to Him. And if one should get lost, He would leave all the others to go find that one and restore her to her rightful place,” the man assured her.

Okay, she didn't understand all that but, whatever. This nice man had brought her back to her grandmother and she was no longer lost. She opened her mouth to ask his name, but before she could get the words out her grandmother frantically screamed for her.

Flailing her arms in the air, Cynda yelled, “I'm right here, Grammy.”

Grammy ran toward her. “Oh, thank You, Lord. Thank You,” she said as she picked Cynda off the ground and swung her around. “I was so worried about you, Chile. Are you all right? How did you find your way back?”

“I'm okay, Grammy. I was lost but this nice man helped me find my way back.”

Her grandmother put her down and looked around. “What man, baby?”

Cynda looked around also. "I don't know, Grammy. He was right here. I promise."

She hugged her granddaughter again and as tears streamed down her face she told Cynda, "Maybe that was one of God's angels protecting you." She looked to heaven and prayed. "Lord, we let Flora get away, but if my precious Cynda should ever lose her way, please send another angel to lead her back to where she belongs."

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Cynda sat on the edge of the bed, swinging her leg, impatiently waiting for her last customer to get his pants on and leave her alone.

“Woohoo, I tell you what, girl, the half has not been told about the wonders of your pot of gold,” her customer said. His blood shot eyes greedily devoured her as he lay on his side, with a tattooed elbow propped under his thin body.

Great, a poet. Half smiling, Cynda threw his blue jeans at him and glanced at her watch.

“Oh, no you don’t. I paid for an hour and I’m getting my whole hour this time. I want to talk,” he insisted.

Rolling her eyes and rubbing her temple usually helped her customers understand that they had over stayed her endurance, but not the Poet. This knucklehead thought his words could sway her; make her change her mind.

The Poet walked around the bed, got on his knees in front of Cynda, and put his hand on her leg. “I want us to be together, baby.” Happy fingers traveled up her leg. “You don’t have to be out on these streets. Why don’t you let me get you a place?”

“You want your own personal whore, is that it?” she tilted her head and smacked her lips.

His hand stopped. He stood and turned his back on her. “It wouldn’t be like that, Cynda. I want to take care of you.”

She got off the king-size bed, squeezed into her red-leather skirt, and bent down to put on her stilettos. “What would your wife say about you taking care of me?” she asked her persistent customer.

“I don’t told you about bringing my wife into this.”

Cynda stood and straightened her mini. “Look, I’ve got to go. Why don’t you go home and spend some of this quality time with your family?”

“Why you always gotta talk trash?” he said, sucking his teeth.

“Why you always gotta act like a fool?” Throwing on her tank top she grabbed her purse. “Let me ask you this, how much money have you put aside for your son’s college expenses while you’re making plans to put me up?”

The Poet put on his pants, grabbed his hat and keys, then opened the motel door and turned back to face Cynda. “You know something? Beautiful outside and ugly inside is a horrible combination.”

“Whatever, man. Don’t overstay your welcome and you won’t see the ugly side of me.”

He rolled his eyes and then slammed the door behind him as Cynda sat back on the bed and took the money out of her purse. Between her three customers she’d earned a hundred and fifty dollars. Three years ago a trick wouldn’t have been able to look her way with fifty bucks. Back then she was racking in three to five hundred per trick. Back

then she did her tricking at four-and-five star hotels. Today she received her callers at the Motel 6.

Someone knocked on her door. Cynda quickly put her money back in her hand bag and prayed that she wasn't about to get robbed. Not today. She had something important to do with that money. Something real important.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Girl, it's me, Jasmine. Open up this door."

Cynda smiled. Her girl Jasmine was cool people. They'd gotten into some deep stuff that made them call on the name of Jesus. Well, Jasmine called on Jesus, Cynda would rather ask for Satan's help. As far as she was concerned, Jesus hadn't done Jack diddly for her, so why should she waste her breath.

Jasmine was just kicks; big fun all the time. Cynda opened the door and Jasmine floated in with her boyfriend, Cooper, straggling behind.

The two couldn't be a more awkward pair. Where Cooper was tall and lanky, Jasmine was short and well fed. Cooper's cheeks were sunken in, and his face always bore a frown. But Jasmine, that girl put life into the dullest party.

"Girl, I thought your last customer would never leave. Coop and I just finished selling our stuff and I had a little left over." Jasmine pulled a bag of weed out of one pocket and some rocks out of the other. "Let's get this party started."

Cooper rubbed his hands together. "lay it out and let's get to it."

Cynda held up her hand. "I've got to go, Jasmine. I can't get into this right now."

"What you talking 'bout. Girls like us are always ready to party."

"I've gotta get to Spooky's. Today is Iona's birthday."

Jasmine looked at the watch on her chubby wrist. “That girl don’t get out of school until three o’clock this afternoon. You’ve got at least an hour before you need to be over there.” She put the bags of temptation against Cynda’s nostrils and shook them. “What you gon’ do?”

Cynda hesitated. But with the bag still under her nose she couldn’t concentrate on what she had set her mind to accomplish that day. She inhaled and gave in to her desires. “Spread the stuff on the table,” Cynda ordered her friend, “I don’t have all day; I’ve got to get going.”

The frown on Cooper’s face reversed itself as he said, “That’s what I’m talking about.”

Jasmine shook her ample behind as she put the stuff out on the table. As Cynda watched her friend she remembered the time she asked Jasmine how come smoking crack didn’t cause her to lose weight like it did for most people. Jasmine had responded, “Them crack heads get so high that they forget to feed themselves, but I don’t care what I’m doing; a dinner bell always goes off inside my head.”

Cynda walked out of Motel 6 at five o’clock with ten dollars to her name. The money she had made earlier was supposed to go to Iona, her daughter, for a birthday present. Or better yet, a hundred would go to Spooky for benevolently housing her child, for which he charged her a thousand dollars a week to do it. She was going to spend the other fifty taking Iona out to eat and picking up a doll for her. But the money went up in smoke from her crack pipe.

Now she stood at Spooky's door shaking like a man headed to the electric chair. Spooky would kill her for blowing that money. Spooky wasn't just her babysitter, actually, he didn't baby sit at all; his loser of a wife, Linda did that. Spooky was Cynda's pimp. Cynda had lived with Spooky and his stupid, go-for-anything wife, until Spooky threw her out of his house a year ago and then refused to let her take her daughter with her. That way, even though he'd stopped housing and clothing Cynda, he was still able to pimp her because she had to bring him her money in order to see her child. She reminded herself for the thousandth time how unwise it had been to make a deal with the devil.

Cynda rang the door bell and waited. The devil's big, angry feet stomped toward the door and swung it open.

"About time you got yourself here. This girl has been waiting on you since she got out of school," Spooky growled at Cynda.

Cynda stepped past the crusty black/blue man who haunted the doorway and smiled at Iona. She was standing in the middle of the living room with one of them frilly white dresses that went out in the 80s. Linda tried her best, but the woman needed to get out more.

"Happy birthday, baby," Cynda said as she bent down in front of her daughter and hugged her. She hugged her real tight.

"What did you bring me, Mommy?" Iona said anxiously.

Closing her eyes, Cynda wished for leeches to suck out her blood while a lion clawed her heart out. Horrible mothers deserved deaths like that, didn't they? She opened her eyes and forced herself to look at her daughter's innocent face. Iona's excited eyes always reminded her of someone else; someone who didn't want anything to do with her.

Someone she'd rather forget. But her daughter looked more like him with every passing day. That smooth chocolate skin and those deep dimples were a signature from the man Cynda refused to think about.

"That's what Mama needs to talk to you about." Cynda nervously rubbed Iona's arms. "See, Mama doesn't have any money right now. I was hoping we could celebrate your birthday this weekend. I'll be able to take you someplace real nice then. Okay?"

"You don't have a present for me, Mama?" Iona asked in heartbroken disbelief.

Cynda's heart ached as the excitement seeped out of her daughter's eyes. Where were those leeches? Why didn't her heart explode after she put her daughter's birthday money in a crack pipe? A tear trickled down Cynda's lovely face.

"Don't cry, Mommy." Iona wiped the tear from her mother's face. "Auntie Linda gave me lots of presents. Do you want to see them?"

Auntie Linda was always showing her up. "Not right now, baby," Cynda said. "Why don't you get your hat and coat and let Mommy take you to get a slice of pizza?" It was only the eleventh of October but already windy in Chi-town.

Spoony grabbed Cynda by the back of her coat and pulled her up to face him. Snot drizzled from the hairs in his big black nose as he snarled at her. "Where's my money?"

Cynda turned to Iona. "Baby, go in the other room with Auntie Linda."

Iona didn't move.

"Where's my money?" Spoony asked again with his fist looming down on her. "I'm not going to ask you again, Cynda."

"I didn't make any money today," Cynda replied. She braced herself for the blow she knew would knock her across the room.

The first lick caused blood to trickle from her lip and knocked her against the black cocktail table. “Iona get out of here!” she screamed before Spoony took a handful of her hair, twisted it around his hand and then yanked it as he punched her in the eye.

Iona ran out of the room whimpering for her aunt.

“You think I can’t tell that you smoked up my money?” Spoony spat. He threw Cynda on the ground and kicked her with the pointy part of his boot. “It’s in your eyes, liar. They’re glassy.”

Cynda grabbed her rib and forced herself not to cry. “I just want to take my daughter out for a slice of pizza, Spoony. Why do you have to do this on her birthday?”

“She’s not going no where with you.”

“Let me have my kid, Spoony, please. That’s all I want from you.”

He opened the front door and drug Cynda toward it, kicking her in the ribs as he threw her out.

Just before slamming the door he told her, “Maybe I should call her daddy and get all that back child support he owes me.”

Cynda wanted to spit on him as she lay on his porch, bruised and battered. He always threw that up in her face, reminding her of the secret they shared, which was the reason she allowed herself to be pimped by this animal. He slammed the door in her face and she was tempted to just leave, never look back; just forget that Spoony the devil existed. But her daughter was still in there, and it was her birthday.

Cynda began to pound on the door and plead with Spoony to let Iona come with her, but her attempts fell on deaf ears. With tears streaming down her face, she stood and straightened her clothes. As she walked down the steps, a searing pain shot through her.

She sat down and lifted her shirt. Her chest was black and blue. Spoony messed up everything. Didn't he know that birthday's were important to little girls? She still remembered the last birthday she spent with her mother. She'd been left outside knocking then too.

"Mama, please let me in." Knocking harder on the door, Cynda said, "Come on, you know it's my birthday." Footsteps thudded toward the door. "Do you hear me, Mama? I want to open my presents now."

Flora wiped the sleep from her light brown eyes as she inched the door open. "Hey, baby," she said to her now nine year old daughter. You know I've got company right now."

"Are we going to have a party today?" Cynda asked, only concerned about her birthday and not the man her mother was entertaining inside.

Flora touched her daughter's smooth young face. "No, baby. Mama, has to work today."

"But we always have a party on my birthday. You always get me lots of presents."

Flora's head bowed low as Romie walked into the hallway. His big Jackson-five afro swayed this way and that as he stalked toward them.

He asked Cynda, "Are you bothering your mother? She's busy."

Cynda backed away from him. His cold black eyes terrified her. Cynda's mother made her call him uncle Romie, but Cynda's grammy told her that she'd never birthed no low-life animals, so he was not her uncle. "But it's my birthday," Cynda whined.

Romie grabbed her arm. "Come with me, baby girl. I've got a present for you."

“No! No!” Cynda pulled away from him and barreled into her mother, pushing Flora backward into the bedroom. The smell of must wafted in the air. “Don’t let him take me, Mama, please.”

Flora’s eyes widened as she looked from her daughter to Romie. There was a man in Flora’s bed. He sat up and pulled the cover over his naked body.

“What’s going on, Flora?” the man asked.

“Nothing Ralph,” Flora answered him. “Just go back to sleep.”

Romie barked, “You don’t have time to be fooling around with this child. You need to be making some money.”

Flora reached into the pocket of her robe and pulled out several bills. She threw them in Romie’s high-yellow face. “Is that enough money? Now can I please spend a few minutes with my daughter on her birthday?”

Fire flashed in Romie’s eyes as he smacked Flora. He then grabbed a handful of her long black hair and pulled her close to him. “Don’t make me beat you this morning.”

Flora put her hands up. “Okay, b-baby, calm down.”

He grabbed Cynda’s hand. “I am calm. You get back over there and handle Ralph. I’ll take Cynda with me.”

Birthdays stopped being special for Cynda when her mother stopped standing up for her. Today, she’d done the same for her daughter.