

## CHAPTER 1

June 28, 1958 was her personal Independence Day. It was early on a Saturday morning, as they waited quietly in what seemed like an endless sea of people. Sunrays streamed through the train station's tiny windows, mixed with the steam engine's vapors to cast an eerie, yellowish light over what appeared to be hundreds of black people crowding the station—families waiting to board the northbound eight o'clock train. They stood anxiously by, knowing that finally they were going to be reunited with fathers, sons, and grandparents who years earlier had gone north to find work. She often heard folks say "They got plenty good jobs up north" and "Black folks is living real good up north." It really didn't matter to her where this train was going as long as it was leaving Alabama and taking her to her mother.

At the crowded station, she heard men telling teary-eyed children not to cry, that Daddy would be back to get them as soon as he found work. Women stood tall and strong, knowing that they would have to hold the family together, with or without their men. Many black men left the South never to be heard from again. She could see the pain in the faces of these men about to leave everything that was near and dear to them. They were leaving to make a better life for their families. The train pulled into the station like a cruel slave master coming to claim his goods, without regard for the pain and suffering his arrival may cause.

As she stood there listening to the people around her saying their good-byes through tears and uncertainty, she wondered how many of those men would ever be reunited with their families. She held on tightly to the stranger's hand, thinking that if she let go even for a moment, the stranger would disappear and she would be trapped in Alabama for the rest of her life. She couldn't

tell you the stranger's name, only that she was a tall dark woman, neatly dressed, soft-spoken and smelled of Ivory soap. She knew that the stranger was sent by God to rescue her and bring her back to her mother. Her name wasn't important; it was only important that she was going to be with her mother. She would have followed Lucifer himself if he promised to take her away from this place. The only thing that mattered on this day was that she was leaving.

Cynthia had been away from her mother for the past five years, shortly after her father died. Those were very uncertain times for her mother; and not unlike many families during those days, her grandmother stepped in. The extended family was critical to the survival of black people during those times. Many families were torn apart by death, unemployment and, in some cases, desertion. Sending children south to live with grandparents was very common, while the parents struggled to get back on their feet.

Everyone, including the adults, called her grandmother Mama. She was a short, round, dark-skinned woman who rarely smiled and always looked as if she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders. As Cynthia grew older she learned that Mama had witnessed the lynching of her husband and oldest son during the "Red Summer" of 1919.

Her grandfather was a large strapping man who worked from sunup to sundown to feed his family. On a stifling-hot August evening in 1919, a blinding light suddenly appeared outside her grandparents' bedroom window. Her grandmother knew that something horrible was about to happen. As she moved through the darkness, gathering her children, she saw a flaming wooden cross burning in the front yard. She later said her heart nearly stopped beating. She heard two shotgun blasts followed by hooded men bursting through the front door. Grandfather handed her grandmother a small brown burlap bag, which held all of his worldly possessions, then kissed her on the forehead before the intruders dragged him from the house. Family lore has it that his final words were "Iona, take care of my babies." Her oldest son, Willard, ran screaming from the house to help his father as his mother huddled in darkness with the other five children. There was nothing else she could do. She cried and

prayed throughout the night, and at the first sign of dawn found a ladder and cut her husband and son down as they dangled from a large tree. From that moment on, her grandmother rarely smiled; she would say, "Life ain't gave me much to smile about."

Her grandmother was a widow at an early age, with five young children to raise and only one hundred and three dollars given to her in a brown burlap bag. Using a combination of employable skills that included domestic work, washing clothes, and selling vegetables, her grandmother managed to support her family. She ruled her home and everyone in it with an iron fist. Her word was the gospel and no one ever challenged her authority, even when she was wrong.

Their meals were very basic, and she made sure that Cynthia was clean when she went to school and church. She followed the old saying, "Feed them and let them grow." Cynthia's memories of Mama are hazy, but she did recall that her grandmother went to church on the first Sunday of every month and wore a black felt hat, cocked to the side, with a feather in it. She looked as if she were the most important adult in the church. She carried herself that way. Her grandmother didn't hug and kiss, she didn't show emotion of any kind, she never told Cynthia that she loved her and she never talked about Cynthia's mother.

Although she was only five years old when she left her mother, Cynthia remembered her loving smile, her warm and tender hands, and her soft voice that tenderly sang to her every evening at bath time. Those were the most loving times of her life, and that memory was all she needed to know that she was loved. Alabama has never held any pleasant memories for her, but she remembered vividly the long, hot days and lying in bed at night listening to freight trains that ran along the side of her grandmother's house. The railroad was the lifeline that held America together. Sometimes the train was more than fifty cars long. She often heard groups of men singing and working on the nearby railroad tracks.

Her uncle told her that these men were working on the chain gang and would have to work until the white man freed them. He never told her what these men had done to be put on the chain gang. She would watch them sweating and straining

with picks and axes for many hours during the day under the hot Alabama sun.

There was always an older man in the group who would begin to chant and sing. The other men seemed to answer him. This chanting and singing was always in time with the picks and axes as they hit the cold steel of the railroad tracks. They sang for hours, and she often wondered what men working on the chain gang could possibly have to sing about, chained together at the ankles as they worked in the hot sun day after day.

The trains that ran on these tracks seemed to be endless and taunted her every evening as they chugged along. The sounds of the train caused her to make up a song that often put her to sleep at night. The only lyrics that stayed etched in her mind were "Get away . . . get away . . . get away," and she would sing this song over and over to the rhythm of the train. Her hopes and dreams were connected to one day getting on that train and getting away. It was then that she understood why the men on the chain gang chanted and sang their songs. Perhaps, like hers, they were songs of freedom.

She was not allowed to venture outside of the back and front yards. There were three things that she could count on every day in Alabama. They were the sun, the heat, and boredom. With this constant trinity, she quickly learned to use her imagination and entertain herself. Her imagination took her to places she had only read about, and she could get lost in those places for hours. She blocked parts of her Alabama experience from her mind for many good reasons; the most important one was that it would allow her to move forward and forget the past.

The crowd at the train station began to slowly move forward. She tightened the grip on her black angel's hand. She couldn't let her get away for fear that this would end up being just a bad dream. She felt a mild vibration coming from the ground, a sure sign that the train was getting closer. Soon she saw a large black engine coming toward them smoking and spitting bursts of steam from a large black tube on the top. It rolled slowly like a tired field hand after a hard day's work. Cynthia thought this must be what freedom looks like. Once the train entered the station,

the smoke lodged in the back of her throat; this had to be the taste of freedom.

When the train rumbled to a complete stop, a round black man stepped from the train and placed a wooden box on the platform next to the door. People were moving everywhere: porters carrying baggage, people scurrying to say their last good-byes and to greet those who were getting off the train. A tall black man wearing a black suit with a red vest stepped from the train, blew a whistle and shouted, "All aboard!" Her black angel held her hand as they stepped up to the handrail to board the train. When she touched the cool steel railing, she thought this must be the feel of freedom.

She ran to an empty seat and sat near the window. She wanted to watch Alabama move into her past. Her angel quickly grabbed her hand and led her to another section of the train and allowed her to sit near the window. Little did she know that her blackness would not allow her to sit in any coach of her freedom train. As the train pulled out of the station and slowly began to pick up speed, she watched Alabama move past her with increasing speed. She began to recognize a familiar sound, the rhythm and the chug of the freight train that ran past her grandmother's house. She bounced in her seat to the rhythm of the train and sang her freedom song: *Chugga, chugga, chugga, chugga, get away . . . get away . . . chugga, chugga, chugga, chugga, get away . . . get away.* Her angel smiled and tenderly patted her head as if she could feel her happiness. June 28, 1958, was the best day of Cynthia's life. That day she felt, saw, and tasted freedom.

Boston is a long way from Alabama, much farther than Cynthia had imagined. She felt as if she had been on the train forever. She saw wide-open sugar cane and cotton fields slowly change into smaller garden plots. Even the soil changed from red to dark brown.

Living in the South she had learned that talking to adults required deference and diplomacy. It didn't take much for adults to consider you "grown" or "fast." She was neither, just inquisitive. She wanted to know what was going on around her.

Her black angel seemed to be different than the other adults she had known in the South. She smiled often and made Cynthia

feel that she was pleased to be with her and Cynthia was not just a burden. Her black angel finally asked Cynthia why she had been so quiet; and Cynthia took that as her cue that her black angel was willing to listen. Like most ten-year-old children, Cynthia was full of questions, and her black angel patiently attempted to answer them. She told Cynthia that her name was Maggie and she was a close friend of her mother's. She had been visiting her family in Florida and agreed to pick Cynthia up on her way back to Boston. She said that Cynthia's mother had been working hard over the years to save enough money to send for her.

Cynthia asked her angel to tell her about Boston. She cradled Cynthia's head in her lap and told her about the occasional snow that would blanket the city between November and April of each year. She also told her that everything in the city was concrete, with an occasional patch of grass and trees. Then she told her about the trolleys that ran throughout the city on rails and hung from wires like puppets. Trolleys seemed to be the way that everyone traveled. The apartment buildings really caused Cynthia's imagination to take over. Maggie said they were tightly stacked one against the other, reaching as high as five stories.

When they finally arrived in Boston, there was a chill in the air. Cynthia's mother was waiting at the train station, holding a light blue sweater. No one needed to point her out to Cynthia. She would have known her anywhere—a petite, pretty woman with skin the color of gingerbread. When she saw her Cynthia grinned from ear to ear. She ran from the train right into her arms and thought that heaven could not be better than being in her mother's arms.

They held each other, and her mother cried. Cynthia was much too happy to cry and couldn't understand why tears fell from her mother's eyes. Her mother said that she had waited so long for this day and sometimes thought it would never come. Her tears were tears of joy.

They left the station and got into a big yellow taxi that brought them to Cynthia's new home. The streets of Boston were busy with traffic and filled with noises. Compared to Alabama, everything seemed to be moving fast. She held her mother's hand on the cab ride home and thanked God for hearing

her prayers. She knew then that nothing in life would ever be harder than being without her mother.

They pulled up to a large red brick apartment building nestled between a row of other buildings that seemed to be identical.

“You’re home,” her mother said.

They entered a dimly lit hallway and walked up two flights of steps to their apartment. It had a long hallway, and on the right was the living room. On each side of the hallway were the bedrooms. At the end of the hall was the kitchen.

In the living room was a large overstuffed sofa and chair that sat on what looked like large wooden animal paws. The floor was covered with gray linoleum that was covered with large red and white flowers. The sun was shining brightly through the three windows, which made the living room look bigger and brighter than it actually was. Everything was neatly in its place and smelled of pine and ammonia. It was clear that her mother had worked hard to make a home for her.

The apartment wasn’t what Cynthia had envisioned, but it was home and she knew that she would be happy there. She spent the next few days watching her mother, never more than four steps behind her, asking questions and getting acquainted with her new environment. She would wake up in the middle of the night, tiptoe down the hall to peek into her mother’s bedroom, just to make sure that she was still there.

In many ways, her mother was an extraordinary woman. She found good in every situation and beauty in all things. When others would talk about a bad situation, or an evil person, her mother would always chime in to say “We are all the Lord’s children” or “It will get better in time.” Most of her time was spent doing for others—cooking, cleaning, and taking care of everyone else’s needs.

She taught Cynthia how to evaluate every situation and to see the big picture. She told her that life was not always going to be fair and that it was important that she always have alternative plans, just in case.

“Cynthia, I want you to learn through my experiences. You have a chance to be all of the things that I only dreamed of,” she once told her.

Her mother was a constant giver and rarely put herself first, even when she needed to. Cynthia knew then that she wanted to be like my mother in many ways. She wanted her patience and her loving, caring ways, but she didn't want her tolerance of useless people. Her mother could not hold a grudge, and would always forgive and give what little she had to those she felt were less fortunate. Like many black women during those times, she worked in a factory downtown and didn't earn much money. Nonetheless, she managed to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Neighborhood residents acted as if they were in one big family. For example, when her mother was away at work, Mrs. Henry made sure that Cynthia followed all the rules. After school, Mrs. Henry would be waiting to make sure that Cynthia had a snack, changed her clothes, and did her homework before going out to play. Mrs. Henry was the neighborhood grandmother, sweet and loving, who didn't tolerate disobedience, and would give you fair warning before she got the switch.

Mrs. Henry came to live with her daughter, Ruby, and granddaughter, Vivian, after Mr. Henry died of pneumonia. Vivian was about eight years older than Cynthia and managed to always find time to listen to her problems, answer her questions, and help her adjust to living in the city. She spoke very softly and reinforced Cynthia's mother's lessons about being the best that she could be and always having plans B and C. Vivian was a pretty, brown-skinned woman with long dark hair. Many men in the neighborhood courted her, but she always found time for Cynthia.

From the age of ten to fourteen, Cynthia jumped rope, played other games, and ran every day, all day. She was so happy to have young people her age to interact with. The neighborhood children played Double Dutch, Hot Peas and Butter, tag, and her favorite game, Aunt Dinah's Dead. Aunt Dinah's Dead was an old southern game played by young girls in a circle. One young girl would stand in the middle of a circle and say "Aunt Dinah's dead." The girls in the circle would respond with "How'd she die." The girl inside the circle then reenacted the death with exaggerated moves while reciting, "Oh, she died like this." The girls in the circle would imitate the pose saying, "Oh, she died

like this.” After one or two poses, the game would end with everyone shaking their little bodies, clapping their hands, and chanting:

Oh, she lived in the country, had to get out of town,

’Cause she shook it, shook it, shook it when the sun went down.

To the front, to the back, to the side, side, side;

To the front, to the back, to the side, side, side.

It was common, on any warm day, to look out of your window and see young girls swaying to the rhythm of street games. Her neighborhood was full of children of all ages—brothers, sisters, and cousins—but very few fathers. She wondered where all the neighborhood fathers had gone, and finally decided that they must have died, just as hers did.

They were all poor, but most of them didn’t know it. It was a way of life; they didn’t have anything to compare it to. They entertained themselves with simple things—discarded cardboard boxes, bottle caps, and old milk crates.

In the summer they got together outside and found creative ways to entertain themselves. The young boys would overturn empty trashcans, boxes, plastic containers, and anything else that would make a sound. They used sticks and hands to develop a beat, and they would dance as if they had a full orchestra. Double Dutch had a rhythm; Hot Peas and Butter had a rhythm. There was a rhythm to everything happening in the street.

When she was fifteen, Cynthia began to take an interest in boys. Her mother made it quite clear that Cynthia would not be allowed to date until she was sixteen, and even then only on a limited basis. At sixteen she began dating Wesley, a pecan brown, well-mannered, neatly dressed young man. He had a quick chipped-tooth smile and often smelled of canoe cologne. He was a relatively shy young man. While the other boys were running around talking dirty and trying to touch the girls, Wesley usually stood on the sidelines and watched. Occasionally, he would apologize for the other boys’ behavior.

She couldn’t remember how Wesley became her boyfriend; he just was. He soon moved out of her neighborhood. They were both from families that did not allow young people to come and

go as they pleased, so they didn't get to see very much of each other, usually no more than once a week. They both had curfews. Wesley would come to her house and they watched TV together. There was always someone home; they were never left alone, but that didn't stop them from taking every opportunity to kiss, fondle, and rub up against each other. They would do that as often as they could. She remembered a song in the 1980s that had the line "hormones jumping like a disco." Well, that was she and Wesley, one big hormone.

She believed that Wesley still holds the world record for being able to unsnap a brassiere in less than ten seconds, with one hand. In the 1960s there was very little discussion about sex. There was no sex education in the classroom or at home. Parents refused to talk about sex and would make horrible assumptions about you if you asked. Most of the information that Cynthia had about sex came from unreliable sources—the street and her girlfriends.

She never had a problem making friends and fitting in. There were six of them who grew up in the same neighborhood and played together since the age of ten. Sharon, who was the oldest and seemed to know everything, would often control the conversations. Sharon lived with her mother and three older sisters. She was quick to tell them about the things she saw and learned at home while spying on her mother and siblings.

Tina, another neighborhood friend, was quiet and very sensitive. Her feelings were often hurt by their sense of humor. She was an only child. Her mother was a very pretty woman, always with a different man in her life. No man ever stayed for long.

Juanita was the fast one in our group. As early as ten she was chasing boys and was very aggressive about it. She had two younger brothers and was often left in charge of baby-sitting. When her mother allowed her to come out and play, Juanita was determined to have as much fun as possible in a short period of time.

Gwendolyn was a big girl for her age and wanted to become a singer. She also wanted to be in their group and would do whatever it took to fit in. She was definitely a follower. Gwendolyn

was the only one of them who had a father at home, at least they all thought that he was her father.

The bully in their group was Phyllis. She came from a family of bullies. Everyone in the Canter family had the reputation of being a fighter, including the mother and even the dog. Phyllis would only bully those who allowed it.

Cynthia floated in and out of the group. When the other girls were doing something she wanted to do, she was right in the middle of things; but if she wasn't interested, they knew not to count on her. She had never been a follower or moved by peer pressure. She never understood why the rest of the girls tolerated this, but they did.

Her body was maturing and she became more and more inquisitive about sex. She remembered one evening while she and Wesley were hugging, kissing, and rubbing each other, she had an urge to see what a penis looked like. She unzipped his pants and pulled it out. Once she got it out, she thought, *Oh my god! What the hell is this? What am I supposed to do with it?*

Like most young girls, her friends would get together to gossip. The next gossip session was scheduled for the next Thursday after school. She couldn't wait to get to this session. Finally, she had something to contribute. She saw a penis! Usually she was just a listener; the other girls were the ones having experiences and almost always had something to share. This time she had something to say. She saw it and she touched it.

As they sat around gossiping and telling stories, she told them her story and the room got quiet. "What you so excited about?" Sharon asked sarcastically. "You didn't get none." Everyone in the room laughed.

"What do you mean, I didn't get none?" she asked. What was she supposed to get, and how was she supposed to get it? She didn't have a clue.

Everyone in the room began to talk at the same time.

"If you didn't give him none, it don't count," Sharon barked.

"But you gotta do it standing up so you don't get pregnant," Juanita contributed. "But if you do it lying down, you got to jump up and down after, then you won't get pregnant," Sharon added.

This went on for a while, and the directions for “getting some” got more and more confusing. Cynthia couldn’t talk to her mother about sex, and there was so much that she wanted to know. She had to find someone older that she could trust to tell her the truth about sex. She decided that she could confide in Vivian, who would not judge her and who would tell her the truth. One day she waited for Vivian to come home from work, and she told her about her discovery and the conversation with her girlfriends. Vivian talked to Cynthia for more than an hour explaining sex and answering her questions.

Sex sounded like the most painful thing that a person could do; and to top it all off, you ran the risk of getting pregnant. Why would anyone want to do that? After Vivian explained penetration, Cynthia quickly excused herself. She then went into the bathroom, got a mirror and began to examine her vaginal area, trying to find the entrance that would be big enough to accommodate what she saw in Wesley’s pants. She didn’t find anything that could possibly stretch that big.

The possibility of getting pregnant was certainly the straw that broke the camel’s back. Early in life she equated babies with poverty, and she was determined not to be poor all of her life. She decided at that very moment that intercourse was much too risky. Vivian told her that if she was not ready to do it then she shouldn’t, and that she should not let anyone pressure her into it. She said, “If you want to remain a virgin, you can still have fun.”

She began to explain all of the other ways to enjoy sex without penetration. Cynthia listened intently, not wanting to miss anything.

Vivian concluded with this advice: “Don’t let him convince you to let him put the head in; that’s the most dangerous part. Don’t ever agree to have intercourse to prove that you love a man. If he loves you he will wait. This is your life. You must make the right choices for yourself. Don’t allow anyone to pressure you.” Wesley never pressured her for sex. She wasn’t sure if he had a better understanding of sex than she did. He never talked about it; as she thought back, she didn’t remember him being much of a talker about anything. One evening as he was getting ready to leave, they were doing what they enjoyed most—hugging, kissing,

and rubbing—and he quickly got an erection. She decided to experiment with one of the options to penetration that Vivian had given her.

She pulled his penis out again, this time she put her hand at the base and moved it out to the tip. She realized that it was even bigger than she originally thought. She pulled her skirt up and gently placed his penis between her legs, inside her panties. Wesley didn't object. He just went along with it and pulled her closer. She believed that she was a lot more aggressive than he was regarding sex. He slowly moved his penis back and forth between her legs and she knew that she was about to have a new experience. At this point they were both oblivious to everything around them. They were caught up in the moment, and she didn't want that feeling to end.

They continued this back-and-forth motion with increased speed as if this would be their last opportunity to have this feeling. They were both breathing faster and were lost in what she now knows as the pursuit of an orgasm. She really couldn't remember much, except the room started to spin, her knees got weak, and she had the most awesome feeling throughout her entire body. She had her first orgasm, and life would never be the same again. She was pretty sure that Wesley had as much fun as she did because of the evidence that was left in her underwear.

Over the next few months they continued to experiment without penetration. She knew that she was in love. It had to be love; nothing else could have made her feel that good.

Wesley came to visit her one day and astonished her with the news that he no longer wanted to be her boyfriend. He never really said why. She was devastated. What did she do wrong? Was she not pretty enough? Was it because she wanted to remain a virgin? What was it? For days she was confused, hurt, and needed to talk to Vivian. Vivian explained that the first love is the most unconditional love that she would ever have. She would eventually get over this. She would have to let him go and move on.

"Cynthia, whatever you do, don't try to keep a man when he wants to leave," Vivian advised her.

These were words that she would remember for the rest of her life. Moving on was the easy part. She never let go of those feelings of her first love. Shortly after their breakup, one of the young girls in the neighborhood came to her to express how sorry she was that she and Wesley had broken up. Carolyn said she thought Wesley and Cynthia were an ideal couple. Cynthia had seen Carolyn before, but she really didn't know her. She was a petite, brown-skinned girl who dressed in complete matching outfits, down to her purse and shoes. While most of them were struggling to put together stylish outfits, Carolyn seemed to do it with very little effort, and each outfit was always different.

She said that she wanted to be Cynthia's friend and, as a friend, she would talk to Wesley and help her get him back. It was a nice thought and an even nicer thing for a friend to do. She would see Carolyn and Wesley talking on occasion and felt secure that she was negotiating on Cynthia's behalf. Very soon it was apparent that Carolyn and Wesley were a couple. Cynthia had her first, last, and most significant experience with the treachery of a woman.

She didn't see much of Carolyn and Wesley after that. They all went on to different neighborhoods, different high schools, and different lives. She will always remember Wesley. Years later she would understand the significance he had on her life.

After high school, everyone seemed to scatter in different directions. Most of her high school girlfriends were pregnant by the age of seventeen. Cynthia had the reputation of being the oldest living virgin. They would still get together for their gossip sessions, and Sharon could not wait to share the latest news: Carolyn and Wesley got married. Although Cynthia acted as if it wasn't a big deal, deep inside she knew that Wesley would always have a special place in her heart.

Cynthia was the brunt of the virgin jokes. They would laugh and say "What are you saving it for? You can't take it with you" or "Your cherry is so far back up in you, it looks like tail lights." Everyone would fall on the floor laughing. Cynthia would laugh right along with them. It really didn't bother her. She knew what was best for her, and she was not prepared to risk being a poor unwed mother. It wasn't difficult to get a date. She dated all through high school. Unfortunately, after three or four weeks,

her dates would realize that sex was not an option and they moved on. Separation became easy and an expected part of her life. It really didn't faze her after a while. She learned to build pleasant memories in every relationship and move on.

During the first summer after high school graduation, she met Gregory. Gregory was a smart young man who had aspirations of playing college football. He was like a big Teddy bear with far more patience than any of the other young men she had dated. He was about five feet eight inches tall, with a dark complexion, and built like a NFL linebacker. Everything in his life revolved around getting to the gym in order to stay in shape. At eighteen, he was very proud of a sparse mustache that had finally begun to show. He believed it was the first sign of manhood.

Gregory had been accepted, with a football scholarship, to a small southern college and was scheduled to enroll in January of the next year. Cynthia and Gregory dated all through the summer of that year. In October they were engaged. She really didn't know why they made that move. They thought it was the right thing to do.

Gregory's mother was a very opinionated woman who expected everyone to see things her way. Cynthia spent much of her time avoiding her. She and Gregory both lived at home with their mothers. Gregory's father left when his son was about eight years old. After meeting Gregory's mother, Cynthia understood why his father might have left home. Gregory's mother was good at making you feel guilty if you didn't comply with her wishes. She played Gregory like a baby grand piano.

Gregory never pressured Cynthia for sex. He understood her desire not to be an unwed mother, and he also related to the concept of babies and poverty being synonymous. By Thanksgiving, however, his discussions began to shift toward sex. He gave her all the standard reasons why they should move forward.

It was Thanksgiving Day. Gregory's mother was going to visit family for the holidays, and she pressed Gregory hard to join her. Under normal circumstances Gregory would do whatever his mother wanted, no questions asked. This time he was adamant about not going along. As she headed for the airport, his mother pressed one last time. Gregory was a little snappy

with her for the first time. She shot Cynthia a resentful look. She knew what Gregory had on his mind. For the first time in their relationship, Cynthia and Gregory would be alone for four days. They got together on Thanksgiving eve and had their first sexual encounter. She found out that evening that Gregory, like her, was a virgin. He brought condoms and tried to set a romantic tone for the evening, but they lacked passion.

Their romantic holiday proved to be a case of the blind leading the blind. He continually told her how much he loved her, while pushing, pulling, poking, and groaning. It was over as quickly as it started. Her knees didn't get weak, and she didn't get that awesome feeling all over my body. There were no fireworks. At that moment she had a horrible thought, *What if Wesley was the only one who could make her knees weak?*

She could think of no good reason to continue having sex. It wasn't fun, and it certainly was not worth running the risk of getting pregnant. She knew that Gregory would not be happy with her decision and it would be only a matter of time before their relationship would end. He left for college in January, and by March she got her Dear Jane letter. In it he wrote that he had found someone who had an "appreciation for sex." In many ways she was relieved. She didn't know what sex should feel like, but she knew that it had to be better than what she felt that night in November.

As Cynthia grew older, she and her mother began to have more serious adult conversations. Cynthia's grandmother passed away quietly in the summer of 1968, and that somehow freed her mother to talk more about who she was and what she wanted.

Cynthia's mother had always wanted to be a schoolteacher. However, she yielded to her mother's decision that she should get married. Her mother decided who, what, when, and where. Cynthia's mother followed her directions. Although her life was different than she wanted, she did not regret the fact that she obeyed her mother.

"Cynthia, this is a new day," her mother said, "and I want you to be what you want to be. I don't want you to have any regrets in your life; and I don't want you to have to wonder if you could have been a success. Unfortunately, I can't do much to

help you financially, but emotionally and spiritually I will always be in your corner.”

While working on a secretarial job in the spring of 1969, Cynthia became overwhelmed with a feeling of failure. She had only a high school diploma, a half-assed job with no upward mobility, and she still lived with her mother. Living at home with her mother wasn't a bad thing. Her mother was still the sweetest woman in the world, but she was keeping company with a man that Cynthia felt had a very dark aura. He treated her mother well, but she didn't like the way he looked at her. There was something about him that she knew wasn't right.

Although she continued to work in her secretarial job, Cynthia couldn't shake the feeling of failure. She had developed a predictable pattern of taking the same train every day to downtown Boston, and reversed that pattern in the evening. Her life had become mechanical, predictable, and quite boring. It was clearly time for an evaluation. What did she want out of life? More important, how was she going to get it? She knew that she needed to have a plan and set some goals. This was the beginning of her “list of things to do.” There were at least five items on this list, and one was to get a degree. If she ever expected to escape poverty, she would need to get an education.