

FROM
Happiness By Any Means
A Novel

BY ALICIA PERRY

PROLOGUE

“Can you hear me?” asked the paramedic, wiping a mixture of sweat and blood from Taylor’s forehead with a towel. “Squeeze my hand, if yes.”

Taylor tasted the saltiness of her tears and a faint taste of blood. She desperately wanted to speak, but her thoughts couldn’t translate into words. Accustomed to wealth in the billions, that provided posh mansions, luxury cars, and Louis Vuitton and Versace, she realized, while lying motionless on the cold streets of Brooklyn, that her life had taken a drastic turn for the worse.

How did I get involved in this? Help me.

Her words died away in her throat, and the roaring sirens filled up her ears. She could feel the blood rushing around inside her body. Her heart was thumping, and her spine was jelly. She closed her eyes.

“I think we’re losing her!” yelled the paramedic.

No. Help me.

CHAPTER *One*

In a drug-infested section of Brooklyn, New York, Bruford Davis, known in the streets as Bru, tossed a brown paper bag filled with two bricks of cocaine on the pool table. He didn't like the movie playing on the television and the shady folks watching him with razor-sharp eyes. He was a highly known black drug dealer from Queens who kept his eyes open and when sober, his mouth closed. The junior street hoodlums purchased cocaine and heroin from him. The Colombian cartel, "Llanos", owned him.

Bru stared at Nevi, a local neighborhood gangster who used his bar to cover his drug dealing enterprise. The money wasn't coming in as fast as Nevi would've liked, so he needed Bru to supply him with the goods now. And he'd surely give him the money back later.

"I'll have the money Wednesday," Nevi said.

Bru shook his head. "No, that's four days from now."

"I don't have the money, man."

"Yo, I ain't going for this buy now, pay later bullshit," Bru said, taking back the brown paper bag.

Nevi stared at him through dark Fendi shades.

Bru noticed the look on his face. "I don't care!" Bru yelled, holding the brown paper bag in his right hand and a Smith and Wesson in his left one. "Yeah, I'm that black son-of-a bitch whom everyone loves to hate!"

Nevi just continued to stare at him, and then silently left the room.

Bru sat at the bar glaring at other goons patrolling him. He soon noticed Nevi's lady friend, a brown-skinned half Asian and half black petite woman, wearing nothing but a lace camisole with a pair of Levi 501s. She winked a couple of times at him. Bru smiled thinking—*what if?* She possessed everything he liked—a big, voluptuous bottom—large and impressive. She bent down twisting her

curves and winking. He nodded his head, showing his approval. *Nevi's lady is one pretty lady*, Bru thought, but she couldn't compare to his boss's lady, Vanessa, whom he'd personally nicknamed Silky Legs. Bru had a crush on Vanessa since the day his boss introduced them.

One night under a gazebo, when Bru and Vanessa had sneaked off alone and the moon hid behind the clouds, he looked into her eyes. "Vanessa, you'd put Tina Turner to shame. Varicose veins free, your legs are brown like flowing fondue chocolate."

Vanessa laughed covering her smile, her common little habit.

Bru remembered the day when his Colombian boss, Marco Bolívar, had brought Vanessa to their New Jersey estate. Her eyes danced at the heavily guarded, twenty acre compound. He could tell by her expression his boss had won her over. Four years ago, he had that same look in his eyes after being exposed to Marco Bolívar, a man whom at twenty-one was second in command—under his father—of one of the biggest illegal drug operations in the world.

Later That Evening, Bru left Nevi's bar and slid into a black limousine where his boss Marco and Vanessa were seated drinking champagne. In the coolness of the limousine, Bru grabbed an XXL magazine off the leather seat and skimmed through the pages. Every now and then, he would peep at Vanessa and envision her bare, silky legs and bottom, thrusting against his body. He could picture her nipples firm and ripe in his hands. Wishing his fantasy was reality, Bru rubbed the back of his neck and glanced in the air. "Damn," he mumbled, thinking, wanting. He knew if he had Marco's billions he would have Vanessa eating out the palms of his hands.

"I'm ready to go shopping," Bru heard Vanessa say. He noticed Vanessa puckering her lips. The shiny wine-colored lip gloss spread evenly across them, turning him on even more.

Marco pressed a small white button on a panel next to him. He placed his mouth against the limousine's intercom.

"Stop at Tiffany & Company."

"Yes sir," a deep voice replied through the speaker.

Vanessa swallowed a couple of Uppers she retained from her Gucci purse. "I'm going to purchase you something nice, darling," she said, batting her eyes at Marco.

Marco looked at her awkwardly. "What're you going to purchase me? I already have everything I could possibly want."

Twirling her hair away from her face, she laughed loudly. "You'll see!"

The limousine continued cruising through the streets of Manhattan to arrive at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street. It pulled up to the VIP entrance of Tiffany & Company. The driver opened the door and Vanessa slid out. Marco remained inside the limousine sipping red champagne, watching her leave. She bent over and pulled him by the arm. "Honey, aren't you coming?" she asked.

"No," Marco said, "I'll be waiting in the car. I have to speak with Bru. You do understand?"

Vanessa narrowed her brown eyes and made her voice softer, almost girlish. "I assumed we were going shopping together."

Marco avoided her eyes. "I'll be in the limousine, okay?"

Vanessa wondered if she had done anything wrong. His face protested her goodness. Not asking any more questions, she delicately kissed him on the lips and sashayed through the automatic doors, waving goodbye.

Marco watched her leave, and then he buried his head in his hands. "I'm sick of Vanessa," he admitted.

Bru stared at him, puzzled. "What?"

"I don't love her anymore. She's so obsessed with her looks and size, and she's way too old for me."

Bru placed both forefingers at the corner of his mouth. "I thought you wanted to marry her. She's only thirty-one."

Marco reached for an unopened bottle of champagne. “You thought wrong,” he said. “Where did you get that silly idea? I want someone around my own age.”

“She’s got a nice body on her.”

“I don’t care. It’s over.”

CHAPTER *Two*

Apartment C served as refuge for the Hawkins family from the cold and cruel streets beyond its walls. Constructed in the late 1960’s, there were hardly renovations, none suitable for 1994. Dull beige paint colored the aged walls. Black-spotted mildew bled through the baseboards because of faulty pipes that were never fixed or replaced. The only toilet, shared by five, rocked from side-to-side when used. Given that the plumbing system was outdated, the toilet would often overflow, causing a nose-burning stench in the air.

Tonight, something appeared different about the Hawkins’s apartment. Except for the noisy feet of rodents, the interior was exceptionally quiet. The upstairs neighbors weren’t stomping their feet as normal. The television was off and so were the lights.

Taylor stumbled to the kitchen window. Her legs were barely usable. *Spivey should be in jail*, she thought. She drew back the curtains. Her eyes, swollen from tears, searched the block. The streets were filled with people walking them and drug dealers standing on the corners selling dope.

Taylor embraced herself, thinking. She knew on Wednesday evenings her mother, Lola, worked part-time at a nursing home in Harlem. But where were her sisters, Kimberly and Sabrina? Her sisters hadn’t brought forth their usual gasps and stares during the beating.

In the bathroom, Spivey sat on the edge of the bathtub, thinking. Spivey should have known out of three of his daughters that one would give him trouble. His mother had cursed him with it. She had told him, before she died, that he’d have a child that would give him hell like he’d given

her for so many years. Several run-ins with the law and several first-class tickets to jail, kept his mother pacing the floors at night over him. The longest stint behind bars occurred after Spivey had stabbed a man in the jaw for slapping him over a card game. Spivey felt that if the man was tough enough to slap him, he was tough enough to take a blade to the face. The man lived to tell the story, and Spivey served two and a half years in prison due partially to leniency from the judge.

Now, in his late thirties, Spivey was determined that none of his children would end up in trouble, faced to live life behind bars. Still, sometimes when observing Taylor, watching her careless attitude towards life, he just wasn't sure what the future held for her.

Taylor Slowly Walked to the battered couch covered with blue pillows. She tossed the pillows to the floor and with ease, slid on top of the couch. Lying there, staring at the chipped ceiling, she recalled the moment when she stepped into apartment C later than normal, all because a horny man wanted her goodies for free.

Spivey had removed his steel-toe boot.

"I can explain, Daddy!" Taylor had cried.

"I don't want to hear it!" Spivey had yelled. "I work hard all day long and you don't appreciate the sacrifices. You bitch!"

Taylor had pushed at the boot with both hands. Her eyes were expanded like a deer shocked by headlights. "Daddy! No!"

Spivey had ignored his daughter. Like a mad person in an insane asylum, he had struck her with his steel-toe boot. Her screams had blasted the block, sounding like rescue sirens headed for the next emergency.

Neighbors who had heard Taylor didn't bother to investigate or help. They were accustomed to chaos in the Projects. It was normal to hear screams and gunfire.

Spivey Still Seated on the edge of the bathtub, repeatedly punched the side of the bathroom wall with his rough fist. There were a lot of things he hated. One of them was having to raise three girls in a poisonous fog of danger and disparity. Graffiti-decorated walls, urine stained hallways, dirty needles, and broken crack pipes were a part of everyday life for him and his small family. He knew beating some common sense into Taylor's thick head might save her life in Colonial Heights Projects, commonly called "The Ward". The Ward was nothing to take lightly, especially after he had witnessed a little girl's raped and mutilated body laying flat on the boiler room floor. To Spivey, she had looked to be around his youngest daughter's age.

Although it had happened two years ago, the scene still haunted his dreams like a spiteful ghost.

In the living room, curled in a fetal position, hurting from her injuries, Taylor embraced a warm sofa pillow. After a few moans, she cried herself to sleep. An hour later, a faint voice awoke her.

In the radiance of the moonlight, on the living room's window ledge, her father sat as though he were in pain, back hunched over, dark circles covered his eyes. "I don't want to see you dead in them streets," he said to her.

Taylor watched her father through frightened eyes. A cigarette that was shedding ashes dangled from his chapped lips. She didn't say a word.

Spivey rose from the window ledge and walked over to their apartment door. He opened it. Then the door slammed as it always did on his way out.

Taylor rose off the sofa. Painfully, she walked up the staircase then stepped into the bedroom that she shared with her two sisters. Taylor noticed her reflection in the dresser's mirror. Her eyes nearly popped out of her head, witnessing what her father had done to her. Red bruises the size of watermelons paraded up and down her arms. Tears started pouring down both sides of her face, like droplets of rain. Taylor slid under a thin blanket and crawled into the center of the bed with cold dirty feet.

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By Alicia Perry

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