



**412 Paulson  
Avenue**

A Novel by  
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“It’s about time that you step out on faith,” Cindy said.

“It’s easy for you to say,” Terrance said.

Cindy moved closer to Terrance on the sofa and said, “It’s not easy for me to say it, and it’s not easy for me to confront things, but I do.”

“It’s different for you.”

“Are we going to do go down this path again, Terry?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Terrance said as he stood and walked to the old window. With a jerk, he opened the large window and sat on the window seal; he rested his feet on the fire-escape landing.

With a deep inhale and exhale, Cindy moved closer toward Terrance. Her thin arms rested around his neck. Her soft kiss on his head made Terrance close his eyes.

“All I am saying honey is that you’ve been a firefighter for many years now. It’s your time to shine. I think you are ready for that chief position,” she whispered.

“I’ve been ready.”

Cindy said, “So, go for it. Have some faith.”

Terrance paused before he answered, “I’ve been passed over twice. What makes you think this time will be any different?”

“I believe in you. You love what you do. All you can think about is what you can do better.”

“You make things sound so easy. You don’t get it do you? They will never give me that position as long as you are...I mean as long as we’re together.”

She pulled away from him. “You think everything has to do with us being an interracial couple. Really, I think you are the one with the problem.”

“What in the hell is that suppose to mean?” Terrance shouted from the window.

She opened the refrigerator, grabbed bottled water, and slammed the door shut. Now standing in the kitchen with Cindy, he walked closer to her, and said, “You’ve got this self-entitlement attitude that the world owes you something. Well, I’ve got to prove that I’m not just qualified, I’ve got to be the best, almost superhuman.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Cindy said.

“See, you don’t understand a damn thing.”

“I understand that every time we talk about moving forward with things—our relationship, with buying a home, with your fucking job—you’re always throwing up the fact that we are an interracial couple; so what!”

“No one is tapping you on the shoulder talking about leave our women alone.”

“How do you know?”

“You never said anything about it,” he said.

“I can’t say anything about us because you can’t handle it.”

“That’s bullshit!”

“Terrance, you can’t handle it. We’ve been together for three years, and I haven’t even met your father!”

“I don’t need this shit!”

“Go right ahead; walk away! You’re scared, Terrance.”

He leaped up the stairs, leading to the second floor. The anxiety that filled his chest briefly reminded him of that day when he thought the sunrise was God calling him into the light. He paced in their bedroom before opening the closet door to grab his gym bag. The jerk of the door caused Cindy’s variety of belt buckles to cling against each other.

“I don’t need this shit. I got enough pressure on me without her nagging me about shit. I’ve got to get out of here, throw a few punches.”

Three deep breaths always calmed him down. Terrance’s mother taught him to breathe deeply every time he woke up from a bad dream. He stopped short of walking down the steps, put his hands on his waist, and began to breathe deeply. He could feel the anxiety melting away from his neck, then to his stomach, and finally, out of his feet into the floor where he stood. He walked slowly down the iron-made steps.

Terrance’s and Cindy’s home was an old office building converted into apartments. When Cindy first saw the building, she knew it would be their home. Each apartment had a completely different structure, adhering to the uniqueness of an old building once occupied by a Pittsburgh steel company.

Out of three distinctive apartments, Cindy chose the one with the original stairs that were used as an emergency escape; the stairs led to the second floor where the two bedrooms were located. She thought Terrance would appreciate the authentic feel of the apartment, and she was right. There were oversized windows that faced the busy, outdoor shopping mall; many of the stores Cindy enjoyed going in. A combined office and living room partially separated with the original, red-brick wall became the place where Terrance felt most safe from the outside world. They often used the red-brick wall as a note board, leaving fun and loving messages for each other written in white chalk.

Cindy sat on the sofa listening to the silence. One of the many tall art pieces that filled their living room caught her eye. She thought her best work so far was the piece she just completed, and she titled it, “Worldly.” Its shape resembled a cactus, duplicating the many arms that extend from the single base. The differently sized points of the arms represented her idea of

being a world citizen, an idea that made Cindy feel proud. She closed her eyes and leaned back on the sofa. She hoped that her next creation would soon come from a place within her where creativity rested, awaiting her need for it.

Terrance walked by her with a gym bag hanging on his shoulder. He said, "I'm going to the gym," without stopping to kiss her. He always kissed her before he left the house.

"I may not be here when you get back," she said,

He stopped in his tracks and said without turning toward her, "Where are you going?"

"To my parent's house."

"Why?"

"You know it's been all about my sister moving out, having a new boyfriend, and my parent's desire to downsize their home. I'm going over there to help them."

"Yeah, I know."

"Will you turn and look at me?"

Terrance turned around and walked toward her; his gym bag fell on the hardwood floor, and he flopped down on the sofa next to her. Terrance looked at the red-brick wall and said, "Luv ur vanilla cream on my Kahlua." They began to laugh.

"Didn't maintenance come today?"

Cindy laughed harder, "Yes."

He rubbed his hand through her brown, shoulder-length hair. He said, "I love to smell your hair."

"I know you do."

"I'm sorry baby," Terrance whispered.

"No honey, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have pushed you."

“Cindy, you didn’t push me. It’s what I needed to hear.”

“I shocked you, didn’t I?”

They laughed.

Terrance said, “I don’t think you’ve ever yelled at me before.”

“I’ve been close,” she laughed.

He cleared his throat. “I’m...I’m...scared—

“I know you are. There’s nothing to be afraid of. We are in this love together.

Remember?”

Terrance looked at her brown eyes; he liked the way she smiled through them; their shape changed from oval to a slant when she smiled. He said, “We are in this love together.”

“I think we both need a little healing right now.” She began to caress the muscles that shaped his arm.

“Better than going to the gym to punch a bag.”

“I thought you would agree,” she purred.

She straddled Terrance, pulling her t-shirt over her head. His eyes rested on her small, round breasts. Lifting his head so that his eyes could meet hers, she said, “I love you.”

She looked into his squinted, dark-brown eyes and rubbed her two fingers over his thin mustache, his eyebrows and then over his chest, resting her hands under his t-shirt and on the fine hairs that felt like baby hair. His dark-brown complexion excited her.

“I thought you were going to your parents,” Terrance said.

“I thought you were going to the gym.”

She pulled Terrance’s t-shirt over his head. Arms wrapped around her waist, head resting on her fair skin, he gently kissed her breasts. Terrance felt more tension leave his neck; he

thought he had released all of it upstairs. Their hearts raced with anticipation, but they couldn't move forward. The silence revealed their forgiveness, and their love rested in their tight embrace.